

SAINTS OF ITALY
LEGENDS RETOLD BY ELLA NOYES
ILLUSTRATED FROM THE OLD MASTERS



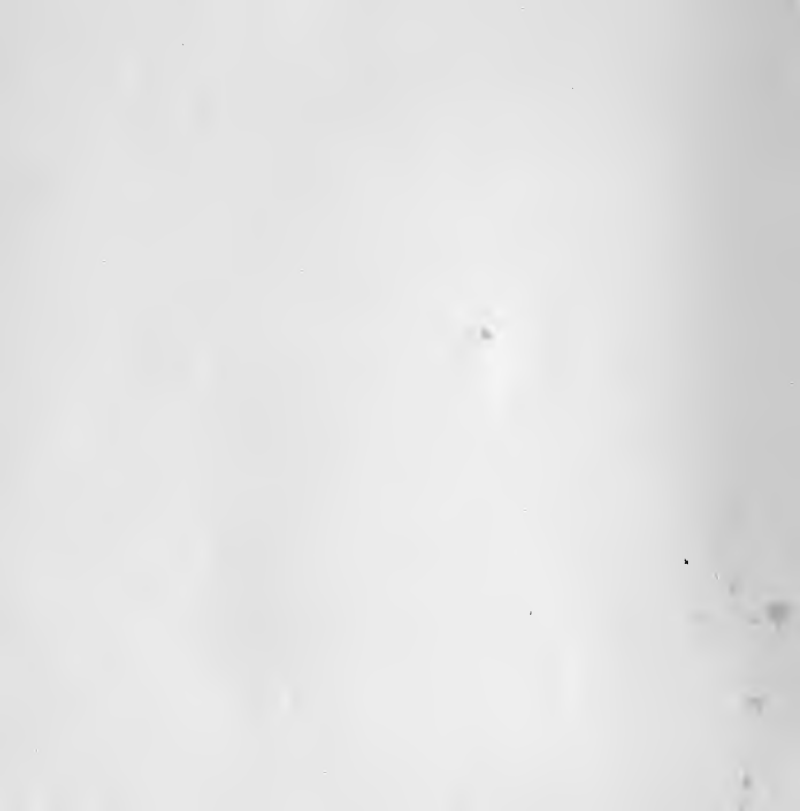
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SAINTS OF ITALY

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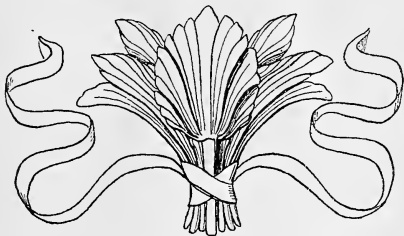
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SAINTS · OF · ITALY

LEGENDS RETOLD BY
ELLA·NOYES

ILLVSTRATED FROM FRA ANGELICO
AND OTHER OLD MASTERS
BY DORA NOYES



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To

JOAN AND HUMPHREY HADDEN

INTRODUCTION

MANY of you, doubtless, know well the pictures, in our National Gallery in London, by Fra Angelico, and the other great painters who are called the Old Masters. But the greater number of their works may only be seen in Italy, and this little book is brought out chiefly in the hope of giving you an idea, by means of its illustrations, of a few of those in the Italian galleries and churches. Some of our illustrations are taken from Fra Angelico, others from Simone Martini, Pietro Lorenzetti, Spinello Aretino, Lorenzo Monaco, Pesellino, and Niccolo da Foligno. Fra Angelico was a Dominican monk. His name was Giovanni, but because he was so sweet-souled and painted pictures of such exceeding beauty and purity that they made him seem to be visibly acquainted with the

very angels of Paradise, his friends and companions called him Angelico. The other names of our list, though not so universally famous as his, are all written in immortal characters on the great roll of the 14th and 15th century artists. At that time Art was almost wholly devoted to the service of religion, and Fra Angelico and his brother painters spent their lives in producing beautiful altar-pieces for churches and chapels, and in decorating the walls of monasteries and public buildings with pictures of religious subjects. An altar-piece consisted very often of a picture of the Virgin and Child, surrounded by saints and angels, and underneath a series of little pictures, called predelle, illustrating the life of the saint to whom the altar was dedicated. Many of our illustrations are taken from these predelle, others from frescoes—that is, paintings on walls. Now, though in certain qualities, such as colour, composition, and decorative effect, the work of these early artists has never since been surpassed or even equalled, they either wanted the perfect knowledge of the human figure which their successors afterwards

INTRODUCTION

attained, or they cared nothing for absolute realism, so that many of these scenes are depicted with a quaint simplicity which seems almost comical, till, having looked long and well, we come to understand a little the genius of the painters and their sincere, deep souls.

I hope you will go yourselves some day to Italy, and get to know and love the originals of our illustrations, and all the others too. Then, perhaps, the legends which I have given here will help you to make out the subjects of some of the pictures, so that you will not pass them by dissatisfied, as so many people do, who have not leisure to find out the stories for themselves in the old books, and who say to one another with a hasty glance at a picture, "What can that be about? What are those two little men doing to the one with the black leg?" or, "Why are those three little women lying in bed? and what is the young man putting in at the window?" etc., etc. The legends themselves, many of which are, of course, well known, will not be read, I hope, without interest, though we are not to believe in all the marvels

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related in them. Moreover, men's ideals have changed greatly since the days when they thought that holiness might only be attained by terrible self-inflicted pains, in the solitude of a desert, or the deathlike quiet of a monastery. Yet the virtues, which are so brightly apparent in our saints—love of God, kindness towards all His creatures, constancy, and the ardour of the strong heart battling for mastery over itself—are, as much now as then, the noblest qualities of the human spirit.

ELLA NOYES.

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THE FIVE COMPANIONS

IN the time of the Emperor Diocletian there lived in the city of Egea an honourable and God-fearing woman named Theodata, who daily observed the commands of the Lord, but her heart was ever sorrowful, because she had no child, and her husband reproached her. When she had borne her trouble patiently for many years, God at length granted her heart's desire, and she became the mother of two fair sons, whom she named Cosmo and Damiano. They grew up full of grace in mind and body, and resembled one another as closely as two lilies that bloom together in a field, going ever side by side in the ways, and bearing themselves with like gentleness and meekness. Their mother brought them up with great care in the Christian faith, and when they were old enough caused them to be taught the art of medicine, wherein they attained, in a short space, marvellous skill, for they were able to restore the blind, the deaf, and the dumb, and heal every manner of infirmity, drawing all bitter humours from the human body. They would take no reward from rich or poor for what they did, that they

THE FIVE COMPANIONS

might obey the will of the Lord, and impart to others freely that gift which He had so freely bestowed upon them.

The fame of the brothers was quickly noised abroad, and a certain sick woman named Palladia, who had spent all her substance upon physicians, and profited little by them, hearing of the twins, immediately ran and threw herself at their feet, beseeching them to come and visit her. They, seeing her faith, went with her gladly, and entering into her house, straightway made her whole. After they had all given thanks to God together, the brothers departed, but as Damiano was stepping forth the woman caught him by the sleeve, and, showing him a little bag containing three eggs, besought him to accept it. He refused, and turned hastily away; but Palladia called after him, and adjured him loudly in the Name of the Lord to take her gift, whereupon he returned and carried it away. When Cosmo saw what had been done he was much troubled, judging his brother to have sinned, and he refused to lie beside Damiano that night, and in his wroth cried out that neither should they be buried in the same sepulchre when they were dead. And it came to pass that as Cosmo was sleeping apart, the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Wherefore art thou angered with thy brother, scorning this treasure which the woman gave him? Thou mayst ask no reward for thy works, but she offered this gift in My Name, wherefore My servant Damiano took it." Then Cosmo awoke,

THE FIVE COMPANIONS

and, calling his brother, told his dream and asked Damiano's pardon, and they wept on each other's necks for joy that the Lord was not displeased with them. And when they rose up in the morning, they feasted merrily on the eggs.

So great were the wonders wrought by the twin physicians that many, seeing them to be Christians, were converted to the faith. Among these were three brothers, Anthino, Leontio, and Euprepio, who, abandoning the pleasures of the world, accompanied the twins wherever they went, assisting them in their good works. Not only did the Five Companions minister to human beings, but likewise to sick and suffering beasts. One day they met a merchant with a camel, which was so enfeebled by the diabolical arts of a sorcerer that it had sunk upon its knees and was unable to rise, and its eyes beginning to roll, it appeared on the point of death. Its master stood weeping beside it, knowing not how to bring himself and his merchandise to the journey's end. The Companions comforted him, and crying in a loud voice, they commanded the devil, in the Name of the Lord, to depart out of the camel, and immediately the beast rose upon its feet and moved forwards as strong and well as before.

About this time the Emperor Diocletian, inflamed with malice against the Church, ordered a persecution of the Christians throughout his dominions. Then Lysias, the Prefect of the province in which the Companions lived, sent officers to spy out

THE FIVE COMPANIONS

the Christians and bring reports concerning them; and they returning, told him of Cosmo and Damiano, how they went about in all the cities and villages, healing the sick and casting out unclean spirits, so that the people, seeing these things which they did, believed in Him who is called Christ, and refused to sacrifice to the gods. Lysias directed the officers to go and lay hold upon the holy brothers, which being done, Cosmo and Damiano were brought into the judgment hall, and stood before the Prefect with joyful countenances. He, looking upon them angrily, said, "What is this that I hear, that you go about persuading the people to fall away from the worship of the gods?" And he asked their names, and who were their companions, and commanded that Anthino, Leontio, and Euprepio should also be led before him, who, being summoned, came gladly with the officers. Then Lysias ordered them to tell him what gift the goddess Fortune had bestowed upon them, which enabled them to perform such wonderful cures. Cosmo answered boldly, "We know not the goddess Fortune, for we are Christians, and in the Name of the Lord we do our works." At this the Prefect was very wroth, and told them to sacrifice immediately to the gods, threatening them with torments if they refused to obey; but they cried out one and all together, saying again and again, "We scorn thy torments, and are not afraid. Do thy worst, but never will we call by the name of God deaf and dumb idols which are but stones and brass." The Prefect then

THE FIVE COMPANIONS

ordered that they should be bound and tormented, and the executioners, seizing them, inflicted upon them scourgings and many grievous pains; yet the Companions faltered not, but sang in the midst of the torments, saying, "Lord, thou hast been our refuge from one generation to another. Before the mountains were built or the round earth was made firm, Thou wast and for ever more shalt be. Have mercy upon us, and free us from the power of the devil and his son, Lysias the Prefect." Praying thus, they remained unhurt, and called upon the judge to prove them with yet more cruel pains, if it were possible to devise any, so that he might perceive that nought could prevail against them, Christ being their help.

At last Lysias bade the executioners desist, and unbind the Saints. He said to them, "I thought by means of these mild sufferings to have persuaded you, but now I perceive that you are resolved to persevere in your disobedience, therefore I shall not suffer you to live any longer." Turning to the officers, he said, "Take Cosmo and Damiano, and bind them in chains, and cast them into the sea; but their companions shall be preserved alive and thrown into a deep dungeon, for, being young, they may yet consent to return to the gods."

Then the holy brothers, exulting and crying, "Take heed, for shortly you shall see the power of the Lord revealed in us," bade a tender farewell to the others, and submitted themselves

THE FIVE COMPANIONS

joyfully to be bound and led away. As they went they sang again, saying, "Though we walk in the midst of the Valley of the Shadow of Death, we will fear no evil, for Thou art with us, Thy rod and Thy staff shall comfort us;" and again, "Thou hast anointed our heads with oil, and with the cup of Thy New Testament hast Thou inebriated us; Thy mercy shall follow us all the days of our life, and we will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." And they came to the seashore, and the officers took and cast them into the sea. Scarcely was this done, when lo! the angel of the Lord appeared in the sky, and with swift wings flying down, broke their bonds asunder, and led them up unhurt out of the waters.

The officers and all the people, seeing what was done, wondered greatly, and ran and told the Prefect, who, sending for the Saints, said to them, "By the great gods Hercules and Jove, I adjure you to tell me by what magic power you are able to despise torments and vanquish the fury of the sea. Teach me your secret knowledge, and I will follow you to the ends of the earth." Cosmo and Damiano answered, "We have no magic power. We are but simple Christians, and in the Name of Christ we bring to nought the wiles of the Evil One." Lysias exclaimed, "In the name of my gods, who are the gods of Rome, I will follow you." When he had said this, immediately the angels sent two evil spirits, which set on

THE FIVE COMPANIONS

him, and beat him unmercifully about the head and face, till he cried out to Cosmo and Damiano, "I beseech you, good soldiers of Christ, pray to your Lord to deliver me from these demons;" and they prayed, and the demons straightway left him, whereupon Lysias, blinded by his wickedness, said, "See now how much the gods are angered against me, for they sent evil spirits because I would have forsaken them." The brothers answered, "Thou wilt not understand, O foolish man; but know that it is God who has chastened thee; and put not thy trust in deaf and dumb idols, the work of men's hands." Then the judge was moved to great anger, and crying, "I will not endure thy blasphemy any longer," he caused them to be imprisoned with their companions, while he considered how he might compass their destruction. And they ceased not to sing night and day in the dungeon.

After three days Lysias sent for all five, and asked if they still persisted in their madness; and they cried out, "Thou vile enemy, we are Christians and witnesses for the truth unto the end, and we will not consent to deny the Lord of all, who made us when as yet we were not. Now do thy vengeance upon us." The Prefect, hearing himself thus defied, fell into a dreadful rage, and ordered his people to bring faggots and make a great fire; and the executioners took the Companions, and flung them into it. And behold!

THE FIVE COMPANIONS

they walked about in the midst of the fire as if they were in Paradise, and kneeling down, they glorified the Lord, singing, "To Thee will we lift up our eyes, O Thou that dwellest in heaven." Suddenly the flames leapt out on either side, and, catching the executioners and many of the multitude that stood around, scorched them so that they died. But those holy ones stepped out unscathed, neither was a hair of their heads touched by the fire.

The Prefect, astounded and half persuaded to believe, accused them again of using magic arts, and when they indignantly denied, menaced them with further torments if they would not obey the will of the Emperor. "We scorn thy Emperor," they responded. "We have a heavenly King, who is Christ the Lord."

He then ordered them to be fastened to stakes and stoned, but the stones, missing the Companions, fell back upon the executioners and crushed them; and Lysias, full of wrath at seeing his officers wounded and put to shame, called for four companies of soldiers, and ordered them to shoot at the Saints with arrows. The soldiers drew their bows, and shot till all their arrows were expended, but they could not touch their victims, and the arrows rebounding, slew great multitudes of impious people who had run together to that place.

At last Lysias, seeing all his malicious devices baffled, and



THE FIVE COMPANIONS IN THE FLAMES.

After Fra Angelico.



THE FIVE COMPANIONS

vexed almost to the point of death, commanded that their heads should be cut off with a sword. The officers led them away to the place of execution outside the city, and as they went they sang for the space of a whole hour, saying, "Good is it to trust in the Lord, and to praise Thy Name, O Lord Most High, for Thou hast magnified Thy mercy upon us." And when they were come there they all knelt down, and stretched their hands towards the east, and raising their eyes to heaven, glorified God in their hearts. Then for the space of another hour they said, "Amen, Amen," and the executioners approaching, cut off their heads; and so in peace they gave their souls to God.

Then pious men came and took up the bodies of the Saints, and remembering that Cosmo had said that he would not be buried with his brother, they were puzzled to know how and where they might lay their bodies separately. Now, the camel whom the brothers had healed of its sickness, happening to be in that place with its master, all at once stepped forward and began to speak with a human voice, saying, "Men of God, who have seen many signs and wonders done by these holy martyrs, not only on men like yourselves, but likewise on us beasts who serve you, hearken unto me, who am sent to tell you that you shall not part the bodies of Cosmo and Damiano, but shall lay them in one sepulchre together." Then all those who followed the funeral procession were astonished, and praised God who deigned

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to reveal mysteries by the mouth of dumb and irrational creatures ; and they did as the camel had said, and buried Cosmo and Damiano in one grave, and their three companions beside them.

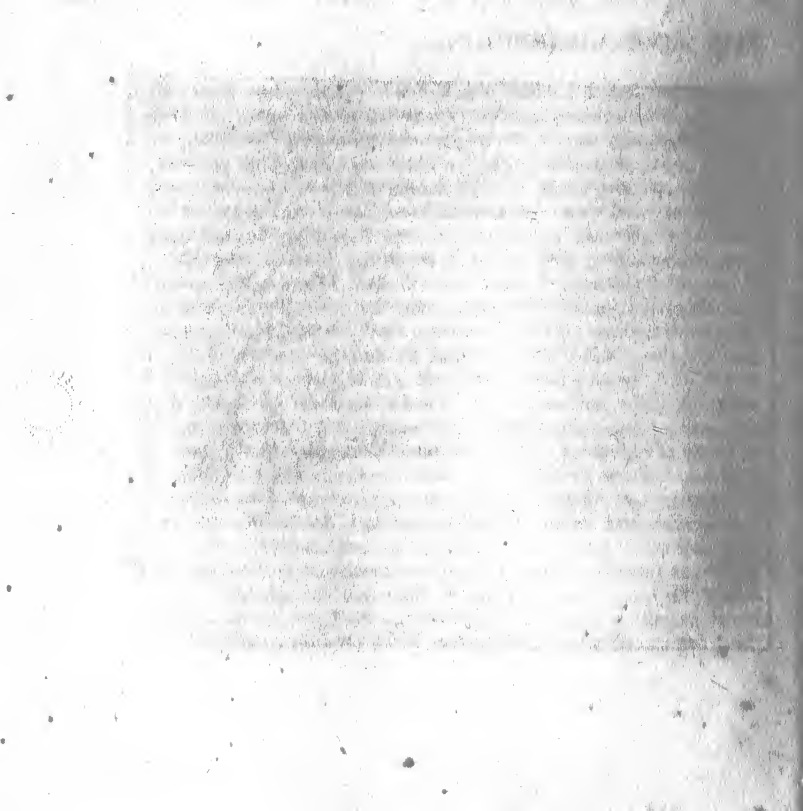
Now, this was done that those twin brothers, who were united by one spirit and one faith, might rest together in peace till they should be called to celestial glory.

After a time many pilgrims came to visit the sepulchres of the Saints, and especially those that suffered with divers diseases, for on touching the tombs they were made whole. And these holy martyrs became famous throughout the whole world, and were held in great reverence, many beautiful churches and sanctuaries being built in their names to the glory of God, and often were they seen to appear and heal the sick. Many years after their death it happened in the great city of Rome that a certain pious man, the sacristan of a church dedicated to Cosmo and Damiano, was afflicted with a deadly disease, which was consuming his leg so that he endured intolerable torment, and was like to die. One night as he lay sleeping in the sacristy, the twin Saints appeared at his bedside, bearing unctions and bandages. They knelt down and felt his leg, and turned it this way and that, and when they had well seen how grievous was the evil, one said to the other, "Where may we find flesh, brother, so that, having cut out the diseased part,



THE MIRACLE OF THE SICK MAN'S LEG.

After Fra Angelico.



THE FIVE COMPANIONS

we may fill up the place that is left?" The other answered, "In the cemetery out yonder lies an Ethiopian, who has been buried this very day. Let us go and take flesh from him to supply what is needed here." They vanished, and presently returned, carrying between them the leg of the Moor, and cutting off the diseased limb of the sacristan, fixed the other in its stead; then, having carefully oiled and bound the wound, they took the sick leg and joined it on to the body of the Moor. When the sacristan awoke in the morning he marvelled to feel no pain, and, putting his hand to his leg, searched in vain for the usual wound. Then he took a candle and looked closely, and was beyond measure rejoiced to find his limb whole and sound, and, seeing that it was not the leg which he had had before, for this one was black, he understood that a miracle had been wrought upon him, and full of amazement and joy, ran forth to relate to the neighbours how San Cosmo and San Damiano had healed him in his sleep; whereupon they all assembled together in the church and gave praise to God.

In the same city there was a good man named Malcho, who took note of all the wonders done by the holy martyrs. One day he said to his wife, "Let us go to the Church of San Cosmo and San Damiano." She went with him readily, and being come there, he told her how he was compelled to take a journey into a far country, and bade her reside beside the church, adding, "And

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this shall be the sign, that when the Lord willeth, I will send for thee in the names of the holy brothers." Thereupon he set forth, and after a few days the Evil One, changing himself into the semblance of a man, came to the woman and said, "Behold, thy husband has sent me from a certain city, to bring thee to him." She, not willing to go with a stranger, answered, "Thou hast not given me the sign, without which I may not accompany thee, but if thou wouldest have me believe in thee, take hold of the horn of the altar, and swear that thou wilt do me no harm." And the devil swore, saying, "By the virtue of San Cosmo and San Damiano, I will present thee safe to thy husband." Then she went with him.

When they were now come to a secret place, the Evil One took hold of her to throw her from her mule and kill her; whereupon she raised her eyes to heaven, and cried in a loud voice, "O God of Cosmo and Damiano, send thy servants quickly to deliver me from this wicked devil, for I followed him, trusting in them." Immediately there appeared in the sky two horsemen, shining like the sun, attended by a multitude clothed all in white. The prince of darkness, beholding them, vanished instantly, so that the Scripture might be fulfilled, which says, "He has dug a pit, and fallen into it himself;" and the servants of Christ took the woman and brought her back to the church, saying to her, "We are

THE FIVE COMPANIONS

Cosmo and Damiano, in whom thou didst trust, and therefore have we hastened to thine aid."

Many other marvels, which it would take too long to relate, were performed by the holy brothers, and likewise by their three fellow-martyrs, and they blessed the labours of all physicians and surgeons, to the advancement of the art of healing, and to the glory of God, to whom be honour and praise for ever and ever. Amen.

THE GOOD BISHOP

THERE was once a noble and wealthy couple, to whom, after many years, a son was born. They gave him the name of Niccolo. When he was but an hour old, the nurse began to wash him in the bath, and, to her exceeding wonder, the helpless babe knelt up of himself in the water, and, lifting his little hands, gave praise to God. She marvelled yet more when on Friday, the day whereon our dear Lord suffered His Passion, the infant refused to eat more than once, weeping and turning away his head in disgust when she would have had him take food a second time. These things being told to his parents, they were greatly astonished. And they called to mind how it is written, "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise." As he increased in years he showed forth many other signs of God's grace, and grew up a thoughtful and devout youth. He was goodly of countenance, and had long golden hair; his speech also was very pleasant, so that men were wont to stop him in the public ways, that they might look on him and hear him

THE GOOD BISHOP

speak. His heart was full of loving-kindness ; he grieved over the sick and sorrowful, and would not rest till he had done all he might to ease their distress. Now, there was in the city a certain merchant who had lately lost all his goods in an unlucky venture on the seas, and was brought to great poverty. He had three fair daughters, and was sorely troubled on their account, for without giving them marriage portions he could not get them husbands, and he had no longer any bread wherewith to feed them. One afternoon the damsels, being very hungry, came to him and said, "Father, suffer us to go into the street and beg bread, else we must all perish of hunger." But he, being ashamed, forbade them, and commanded them to go to bed, that sleeping they might forget the pains of emptiness. He himself sat down on a stool, and leant his head upon his hand, pondering with a heavy heart. Now, his sad plight had been told to Niccolo, and that very night the kind youth came beneath the window of the house, bearing under his cloak a lump of gold ; and he lifted himself up upon tiptoe, and threw the gold softly in through the bars, so that it fell at the merchant's feet, and then he ran off as fast as he might. The merchant was astonished and overjoyed at this unexpected gift, and, picking it up, went forth in haste to buy victuals for his household. He bestowed the remainder of the gold upon his eldest daughter, and shortly after married her, amid great

THE GOOD BISHOP

rejoicings, to a good man of his acquaintance. Then Niccolo came again and threw in a second lump, and yet a third time he did likewise. Now, the merchant was resolved to discover who he might be who came in such a hidden manner, so he lay in wait in a dark place outside the house, and the third time, as Niccolo was departing, he ran after him, and, seizing the good youth by the cloak, compelled him to reveal himself. Then, falling down on the ground, the happy father desired to kiss the feet of the young man; but Niccolo prevented him, and, raising him up, adjured him that he should tell no man this thing. And the merchant returned to his home, and there being now portions for the two younger maidens, he sought earnestly among his acquaintance for husbands for them; and very soon each in her turn was married to a worthy man, and lived happily ever afterwards.

Now, it came to pass that the bishop of that city died, and the prelates and priests throughout all the country assembled together to appoint a new shepherd for the flock. And there was a certain bishop among them who was exceedingly holy, and all men supposed that the choice should have fallen on him. But this good man heard a voice which spoke to him in the night, and bade him place himself next morning before dawn at the door of the church, and take him who should be the first person to come there, and consecrate him as bishop.



**S. Niccolo
throwing
the gold
in at the
window,
to succour
the poor
maidens.**

*

**After Fra
Angelico.**



THE GOOD BISHOP

It happened by the secret operation of the Lord that Niccolo rose very early that morning, before any other of the city, and went, according to his wont, to the church. As he was about to cross the threshold, the bishop took hold of him and asked, saying, "What is thy name?" Niccolo, full of the innocence of the dove, bowed his head and answered, "Thy servant's name is Niccolo." Then the good man summoned all the others, and they led Niccolo into the church, telling him that he was chosen to be the bishop. The young man, greatly astonished, declared himself to be utterly unworthy, but they refused to listen to him, and compelled him to seat himself upon the episcopal throne. Being now bishop, he continued to walk in all virtue and humility, bearing himself with equal kindness towards every man, whether great or small; he reproved the guilty, and taught wisdom to all who came to him. And he began also to do many signs and wonders, so that the fame of him was spread far and wide.

It happened one day that a certain ship was exceedingly tossed by a tempest, and the sailors, fearing they must have perished, cried out, saying, "Niccolo, servant of God, if these things be true which men tell of thee, haste now to help us." Straightway a man, wearing the garments of a bishop, appeared in their midst and said, "Ye called, and behold, I am come." And he instructed them how to manage the ship in the storm,

THE GOOD BISHOP

and very soon a great calm arose, and he was seen of them no more. And being come safe to land, the sailors went up into the city, and entered into the church. Then when they saw Niccolo, those among them who had never been there before knew immediately that this was he who had succoured them in their distress, and they all knelt down and gave thanks to God for their deliverance.

Now, when Niccolo had been a short while bishop, there came to him certain persons from a country not far off, complaining to him that, being Christians, they were cruelly persecuted by the rest of the inhabitants, who were still held fast in the bonds of heathenism, worshippers of the false goddess Diana. The good bishop immediately rose up and went himself to the place, where he sought out the sanctuary of the goddess, destroyed her image and temple, and converted the people to the faith by his wise and kindly words. And after he had abode there a few days he returned to his own city. Now, because of this thing, the Evil One was sorely vexed against him, and made a kind of oil so potent that the flame of it was able to consume stones, and could not be quenched by water. Then, taking the form of a pious old woman, the devil entered into a ship wherein were certain pilgrims, who were on their way to visit Niccolo, and said to them, "I would that I also might go up with you to see the holy man, but I am not able; wherefore,

THE GOOD BISHOP

I pray you to take this oil and anoint with it the walls of his dwelling in remembrance of me." The pilgrims consented, and took the oil. And when they were come soon after to another port, they met one like unto the good Niccolo, but they knew not who it was, and he asked them, saying, "What did the woman say, and what did she give to you?" And they, astonished at the question, answered and told him; and he said, "Lo, this is the wicked Diana, and that ye may know that I speak true, take the oil and throw it on the water." They did so, whereupon a great fire burst up upon the sea, and burnt with great fury, contrary to the laws of nature. The pilgrims marvelled greatly, and, continuing on their way, came at last to the city, and were brought into the presence of the bishop. And when they saw him they fell down and said, "Now we know that it was thou who spakest to us at the port, and delivered us from the snares of that devil." And they gave glory and thanks to God.

And after Niccolo had ruled his flock for many years with the utmost wisdom and loving-kindness, and was grown old and infirm, the Lord at length called to Himself His faithful servant. Niccolo, knowing his hour was come, prayed that angels might be sent unto him, and presently a multitude, all in white, with wreaths of roses on their heads, alighted round his couch, and folded their radiant wings. Then he bowed his head, comforted,

and began to sing, saying, "Lord, in Thee is my hope," and after a little while he said, "Lord, into Thy hands I commend my spirit," and, falling back, he sighed and passed away.

Then pious men took his body and laid it in a sepulchre of marble, and built over it a beautiful altar. And multitudes came to visit the sepulchre, and many wonders were done there. Now, it came to pass, many years after, that a certain man borrowed a large sum of money from a Jew, and took an oath upon the altar of San Niccolo that he would pay it as soon as he was able. But a long time passed, and the man did not restore the money, and when the Jew asked for it he confidently affirmed that he had already paid it. Then the Jew called the debtor before the judge, who commanded him to swear solemnly that he had paid the money. Thereupon the crafty man took a hollow stick and put the money inside it, and leaned upon it as if it had been a staff; then being summoned to swear, he asked the Jew to hold the stick, and having in this manner given him the money, he went and took an oath that he had paid what he owed, and afterwards demanded the staff again of the Jew, who gave it back to him. Then that fraudulent fellow went out, and being overcome by slumber, lay down at the cross-roads and slept, and presently a waggon passed over his body and killed him, and, breaking the stick, scattered the gold over the ground. The Jew, hearing this, ran to the place,

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and immediately saw how he had been deceived. The people who had assembled there would have had him take up his gold ; but the Jew, being a good man, said, "Not so ; I will not take it, except the dead be restored to life by the intercession of the holy Niccolo, and then will I myself become a Christian." And immediately, to the astonishment of all, the dead man opened his eyes, and rose up alive and well. Falling at the feet of the Jew, he implored forgiveness with much weeping ; and the Jew raised him up and pardoned him. Then they went together to the altar of San Niccolo, and gave thanks to God ; and shortly afterwards the Jew received Baptism.

And there was another Jew, who, observing the miracles which were done by the saint, made an image of him and set it in a chamber of his own house. When he had occasion to go forth he would say to the image, "Niccolo, I commit all my goods to thy care ; guard them well, for if I find aught missing when I return, I will lay vengeance on thee, and beat thee soundly." One day, whilst he was absent, some robbers came and carried away everything out of the house save the image only. When the Jew returned, and saw himself thus despoiled of his goods, he cried out in great anger to the image, "Holy Niccolo, I put thee in my house to preserve me from robbers. Wherefore hast thou not kept better watch?" And he took it and smote it cruelly, and cast it away all battered and

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broken. Then a strange thing came to pass. The robbers, having hidden in a deep cave, known only to themselves, were that same night engaged in counting their stolen treasures by the light of a wood fire, when suddenly a man stood in their midst, covered with bruises and bloody gashes. They looked on him amazed, and he spoke, saying, "Wherefore should I suffer such sore beatings and pains because of your sins? Behold how my body is torn; behold my blood flowing! Now go and restore all, else shall your crimes be discovered, and ye shall be delivered to the tormentors, and be hanged upon the gallows." They said, "Who art thou that speakest to us in this manner?" He answered, "I am Niccolo, the servant of the Lord; and now hath the Jew beaten me because you stole his goods." He vanished, and the robbers, wondering and greatly afraid, went straightway to the Jew's house, where they beheld the broken image, and understood the words of Niccolo. Then they gave back everything to the Jew, who was beyond measure astonished and joyful, so that he soon afterwards received Baptism. And the robbers went to the church to implore pardon of God for their sins, and from that time forth they forsook their evil courses, and lived honestly in the sight of all men.

A certain man had a son whom he loved dearly. He was accustomed to celebrate every year with great solemnity the feast of San Niccolo, the day being also the birthday of the

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child. Now, when the boy reached his seventh year, the father prepared a sumptuous banquet, according to his wont, and bade many guests to the feast. In the midst of the laughter and revelry a knock was heard at the door, and a pilgrim presented himself, asking for alms. The host bade his little son carry some bread and wine to the stranger. The child, being curious, like all of his age, watched the man as he sat and eat upon a bench in the courtyard, and presently, looking down, said to him, "Thou hast strange feet, Master Pilgrim, for when I saw them but now I thought they were the hoofs of some animal. I prithee of thy kindness show them to me again." The pilgrim said, "If thou wilt go with me to the fountain at the cross-ways yonder, fair babe, I will wash my feet before thine eyes, and then will I also remove my hood and show thee the pretty ornaments which I wear on my forehead." The child agreed gladly, and put out his little hand, but the stranger kept his own hidden in his bosom, so the child laid hold of his cloak, and they went together to the fountain. After a short space the father looked round, and not seeing his son, sent servants to seek for him, but he might nowhere be found. Then a neighbour came running breathless into the hall, and cried, saying, "Thy child lieth dead in the fountain at the cross-ways, for, being on a housetop a little way off, I saw one like unto a pilgrim come thither with the boy, and when he

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cast off his mantle he was a horrible demon, with cloven hoofs and hands like a vulture's claws, and on his forehead there were two hideous horns. He took the innocent babe, and strangled him, and threw him into the water." The father, tearing his hair with grief, caused the boy's body to be fetched and laid in an upper chamber, and he knelt down beside it, and wringing his hands, cried out, "San Niccolo, San Niccolo, dost thou reward me thus for all the honour I have done thee?" And as he spoke the child stirred on the bed, and presently opened his eyes, as if he were waking out of a sweet sleep. The father seized him in his arms, and saw that he was indeed alive and well. Then was there great joy and thanksgiving throughout the house. They questioned the boy of what had happened to him, and he remembered nothing, but thought that he had been on a long journey in a pleasant land, and that a venerable man with a bishop's mitre on his head had led him back to his father's house. So they knew that the Lord had sent San Niccolo to deliver him from the Evil One.

Another man, who had no children, and greatly desired a son, earnestly besought the saint to pray for him to the Lord, vowing to offer up a gold cup upon the altar if a child was granted to him. Soon after his wife bore a son, and when the boy was come to the age of six years the father caused a gold cup to be made in accordance with his vow. The vessel

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being finished, he was so pleased with the beauty thereof that he kept it for himself, and thought to redeem his vow to the saint with one of silver instead. Now, as he and his household were crossing the sea to come to the city of San Niccolo, the father bade the child fetch him some water in the gold cup, and as the boy leant over the side of the ship to get water, he fell in with the cup, and was swallowed up by the waves. The father continued on his way, sorrowing very grievously, and being come to the shore, he went to the Church of San Niccolo and offered up the silver cup upon the altar. But the cup fell back on to the ground with such violence that it was as if it had been flung down. A second time the man set it on the altar, and it was hurled yet further away; and again a third time, when it seemed to rebound like a ball, and fell at the other side of the church. Then all there began to ask one another what this thing might mean, and they perceived clearly that the saint rejected the gift. Whilst they stood there wondering, the lost boy suddenly appeared in their midst, bearing in his hands the gold cup. He related to them how San Niccolo had come down out of the sky, and snatched him up from the deep waters and borne him in his own arms, where the boy had fallen into a deep slumber, and, awaking, found himself where he now was. Then the father rejoiced greatly, and embraced his child with tears of

thanksgiving. Convinced of his guilt in keeping the more precious vessel for himself, he knelt down in deep humility before the altar, and, taking both the gold cup and the silver one, he offered them up together to the saint.

They tell, also, how a certain nobleman's son fell into the hands of the heathen, and was given up to the Sultan, who appointed him to serve at the royal table. One day, as he knelt beside the monarch and offered the wine-cup, he called to remembrance that it was the day of the Feast of San Niccolo, whereon it was the custom to hold high festival in his father's house. Overcome by his thoughts of home, he sighed deeply, and tears came into his eyes, whereupon the Sultan asked him why he was sad, and when the child told him, that cruel man said jestingly, "Let thy San Niccolo do what he is able for thee, thou shalt yet remain here as my slave." Immediately a great wind arose and rushed through all the halls of the palace, shaking it to its very foundations; and the boy was seized away before the astonished eyes of the monarch, and borne swiftly through the air, over mountains and seas, to the house of his father, where he was welcomed with the utmost wonder and joy.

These, and many other marvels, were wrought by the good San Niccolo, and in especial he succoured children, as you have seen, for he loved them and compassionated their distresses more than all others. For this cause boys and young maids

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throughout the world paid him much reverence. It is said that in certain countries of the north, to this very day, the little ones hang their stockings by their bedsides on the night of Christmas Eve, and when all eyes are fast closed in sleep, the kind saint comes silently in and fills each stocking with everything that the heart of its owner most desires; but those of naughty children he heaps up with rubbish, rags, and old bones, and such like. If this be true, I know not, but I counsel you all to see for yourselves when next the joyful feast of Yule comes round.



THE FAMINE

IT happened in a certain year that the country where the good San Niccolo was bishop was visited by a grievous famine, and all the grain in the city having been consumed, so that no bread was to be had anywhere, the people began to be in sore straits. Niccolo, grieving for their distress, distributed all his own stores among them, and when there was nothing more left he became sadly perplexed, for he knew not how to relieve their sufferings. He prayed continually to God for succour. One day it was told him that three ships, laden with

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grain for Constantinople, were come into the port of the city. He rose, and went down to the harbour, and commanded the captains of the ships to unlade and deliver to him a certain measure of wheat, sufficient to feed his people. But they refused, saying, "We dare not do it, for the grain was measured at Alexandria, and must be rendered up in full to the Emperor." Then said Niccolo, "Fear not, for of a surety the Lord will replenish your sacks." And after a little the excellence of his speech prevailed with them, so that they did as he required. And continuing their journey, they came at length to Constantinople, and when they unladed the ship they were rejoiced to find the number of the sacks of corn complete as when they had set out from Alexandria, and in each sack the full measure of grain. Now, this was the Lord's doing. And of the grain they had given to the good bishop, he distributed abundantly to all of the city, and there remained over and above enough wherewith to sow the ground for another year.

Having thus happily delivered the city from its trouble, Niccolo set forth on a journey into the country round about, wishing to see how the people fared. And there was everywhere great scarcity, and men in their hunger were become cruel, each one snatching what he might for himself, heedless of his neighbour's want, so that Niccolo found much occasion to reprove them. When he was come to a certain village, a poor woman,

who was a widow, met him and fell at his feet, weeping bitterly, and implored him to give her back her three young sons, who had disappeared, and she did not know where to find them. Niccolo said, "How may I restore to thee thy sons, good woman? Without doubt they have wandered into some forest in search of food, and are fallen dead of hunger." But she cried, saying, "Nay, for I had victual enough, and my children were not an hungered, but were fat and well liking." The good bishop comforted her and continued on his way to the inn, where he entered in and commanded the host to serve him with supper, expecting that a little bread and water at the most should have been brought. But the innkeeper set before him a dish of roasted meat. "What is this, fellow?" said Niccolo. "How comest thou by this meat, seeing the dearth is so sore in the land?" The innkeeper, bowing low before him, answered, "It was told me that the holy bishop was about to enter into my house, whereupon I took the kid that remained to me alone of all my flocks and killed it that I might have meat for thy refreshment." But Niccolo perceived by the countenance of the man that he lied, and said, "Bring me to thy larder." The innkeeper began to shake in all his limbs, yet not daring to refuse, he went before the holy man with the candle in his hand, and led him into the courtyard. Here were set three tubs, full of salted meat. "What do I see?" cried Niccolo.

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“Thou wicked one, and murderer of helpless babes. This is not the flesh of kids, but of children.” And he prayed to the Lord with a loud voice to deliver the innocent, and immediately the pieces of meat began to stir in the tubs and join themselves together and became three little live boys, who sprang up before the eyes of all who stood there. They knelt down before the bishop; then seeing the innkeeper standing there, they began to weep and be sore afraid; but Niccolo comforted them, and bade them tell everything that had befallen them. Then they related how the man had met them in a wood and had cunningly persuaded them to go with him to his house, and had there bound and killed them, and made them into meat for the strangers which should come to the inn. Then the wicked fellow was terrified beyond measure, and fell at Niccolo’s feet, imploring mercy; but the good bishop answered sternly, and sending for the soldiers, delivered him up to be carried before the magistrates and punished as his iniquities deserved. The three children were restored to the woman, who rejoiced over them with so great tenderness that the beholders were moved to tears, and joined with one heart and mind in glorifying God, “Who causeth the widow’s heart to sing for joy.”

THE THREE PRINCES

IT came to pass that the people of the country round about that city, wherein San Niccolo dwelt, rebelled against the Emperor, who sent forth three great princes, with a large host, to subdue them. Now, the heart of Niccolo was sorrowful because of the rebels, for they were poor and ignorant folk, and he feared their chastisement would be heavy. Seeing far off, from his window, the three captains pricking across the plain on their chargers, at the head of a great procession of horsemen and foot-soldiers, with banners floating and trumpets sounding, he sent messengers to bid them to come and eat meat in his house, for he hoped to persuade them to deal mercifully with their enemy. The princes consented gladly, having heard men speak of the wonders which were done by the good bishop, and desiring greatly to see him. And they ascended to the city, and entered into his house. It happened that the judge of the city, a harsh and unjust man, had secretly condemned three innocent young noblemen to be beheaded that very evening, pretending that they were traitors, in league with the rebels.

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Now, as Niccolo was sitting at meat with the princes, there came one running, with dishevelled hair and marks of frantic haste, and falling down before the good bishop, told him of the execution, which was even then taking place, and implored him to come and deliver the innocent. Niccolo, filled with righteous indignation, rose up without delay, and praying his guests to go with him, hastened to the market-place. There, in the midst of a multitude of people, who had run together to witness the woeful spectacle, they beheld the three victims, kneeling down, with their eyes bound and hands tied behind their backs, and the executioner, a horrid, squint-eyed fellow, in the very act of lifting his axe to smite the neck of the eldest. Niccolo, crying loudly, "Hold!" fell upon the executioner, and snatching the weapon from his hand, threw it far away over the heads of the bystanders. Then he tenderly loosed the captives each in turn, and led them away unhurt, amid the joyful applause of the multitude, whilst the soldiers, who had been sent to guard against the escape of the prisoners, looked on astounded, and dared not hinder him. Afterward Niccolo went to the palace of the judge and rebuked him with great severity in the presence of the princes. The miserable man, filled with shame, knew not how to excuse himself, and at length fell on his knees, and shedding abundant tears of repentance, besought pardon for his sin, which the saint deigned to grant. Now, all these things were observed

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with no small wonder by the princes, and they kept them in their hearts. Having taken leave of the good bishop, they went forth with their army, and reduced the rebellious people to submission without shedding blood, and afterwards returned to the Emperor, who gave them much praise and honour.

When a long time had passed, these three princes fell into disgrace, being falsely accused of high treason by some wicked men, who coveted their possessions. The Emperor, in a great rage, caused them to be thrown into a dreadful dungeon, and commanded that they should be put to death in the night. The captives learned their condemnation from the gaoler, and became very sorrowful, not knowing how they might be saved. At length they called to remembrance Niccolo, and how they had seen him deliver the innocent men, and they knelt down and invoked the succour of the good bishop. In that same hour of the night, when all was dark and silent in the great palace, a man stood beside the Emperor in a vision, and said to him, "Wherefore art thou provoked to anger against the princes, and hast condemned them to death, who have done no evil against thee? Arise, and command that they be set free, else shalt thou perish beneath the sword of thine enemies and be eaten of wild beasts." The Emperor asked, saying, "Who art thou, that darest to enter in here in the night and speak so boldly to me?" The saint answered, "I am the Bishop Niccolo." Then the Emperor

San Nic-
colo.

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Alter Fra
Angelica.





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awoke, and, calling his guards, sent for the prisoners ; and when they were come he asked them, saying, "What magic do you use, that you have caused me to dream so strange a dream?" They answered that they were not magicians, and were innocent of all offence against him. Then he said, "Know you a man called Niccolo?" When they heard this name, they raised their hands to heaven and prayed aloud to the Lord to succour them by the help of the saint. Then the Emperor bade them tell him all things concerning Niccolo, and, having listened attentively, said, "Behold, I set you free. Go in peace, and give thanks to God, who hath given you your lives in answer to the prayers of His servant."

THE HERMITS OF THE DESERT

IN the silence of the remote and uninhabited parts of the earth, there is a great desert of sand, called by men of old times, the Thebaid. Hither, some two hundred and fifty years after the sweet Son of God had gone up into heaven, came a Christian youth named Paolo, fleeing from the cruel persecution of the heathen. His parents being dead, the husband of his sister, a hard and avaricious man, had betrayed him to the magistrates, hoping to inherit his riches if he were put to death; but Paolo, aided by his sister, had escaped to the wilderness. He was fifteen years of age, beautiful in person, learned in all the wisdom of that age, and loved God exceedingly. Not knowing where he might find shelter, he wandered on through the burning sand, fainting with weariness and tormented by thirst. At last he came to the foot of a rocky hill, and, seeking carefully, found an aperture closed by a heap of stones. Peering in between them, Paolo saw that it led into a deep cavern, and, lifting away the stones, he made his way in and lay down to rest awhile in the cool shadow. When he was

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somewhat refreshed he rose up, and, following the windings of the grotto, came suddenly into a great chamber, open to the sky, where beneath the leafy shade of an ancient palm-tree, sprang a fountain of exceeding clear water, which, incessantly bursting up through an aperture in the earth, was received into a stone basin, and its overflow sucked back into the ground by another channel. It is believed by learned men that this was the secret place, where, many ages before, the famous Queen Cleopatra had been used to meet her warrior lover, the great Anthony. The youth Paolo, to whom it seemed that God Himself had led him hither, knelt down and gave thanks ; then, taking up his abode, he dwelt there in solitude from that day forth, feeding on the fruit of the palm, and clothing himself with the leaves. He passed his time in prayer and the singing of hymns, and those rocky walls, which had once resounded to the songs of feasting and earthly love, now heard, night and day, only the sound of God's holy praise. Thus his life passed slowly away, and nigh upon a century went by ere the habitation of this pious hermit was made known to his fellow men, in what manner will be told hereafter.

About twenty years later, a young man sat one day upon the bank of the great river Nile, pondering many things in his mind. He was a monk, named Antonio. Being left, on the death of his parents, in possession of great riches, he had

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heard the clerk read one Sunday in church that portion of Scripture wherein it is written how Christ bids the young man sell all his possessions and give to the poor, and follow him. Antonio immediately went out and fulfilled the word of the Lord, distributing his wealth to the poor; then, taking the habit of religion, he began to lead such an exceeding holy life, and to teach with so much wisdom and sweetness, that men flocked from all parts to listen to him. After a time he began to be troubled, because their veneration inclined his heart to pride, and they left him no leisure for prayer and meditation. For that cause he had fled from the monastery, and was resolved to seek solitude in the wilderness. But now, being come to the great river, he hesitated to cross and venture into the unknown country beyond. So, betwixt longings and fears, the hours passed, and all at once he heard a voice above him, saying, "Antonio, whither dost thou go, and wherefore?" And he, wondering and yet not afraid, answered boldly, "Because the people will not leave me in peace, I desire to go into the wilderness. I pray thee, teach me what I ought to do, and give me courage that I may overcome my fear." The voice answered, "If thou wouldest go into the wilderness, and reach a place where it is possible for man to dwell, thou must endure hard and bitter toil. Yet, if thou dost verily desire peace, go." Antonio said, "Who will show

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me the road, for I am ignorant of those regions." The voice indicated a caravan of Saracens, who were wont to come down into Egypt with merchandise, and who were at that moment approaching the river, on the way to their own country. Antonio ran to them joyfully, and asked them if they would guide him into the desert, and they consenting, he joined their company.

After journeying three days and nights they came to the edge of the wilderness, and there, the Saracens taking another direction, Antonio parted from them, and went on by himself. And now he began to be assailed with all manner of strange temptations, for the enemy of mankind was resolved, if he might, to draw him back into the world. First, a bar of silver was thrown on the path, as if it had been dropped, but Antonio, knowing the craftiness of the Evil One, withheld himself from picking it up, and said, "How comes this silver in the desert? The way is solitary, there are no footmarks of travellers, neither could it have fallen from a load of merchandise, for the owner would have missed it, and returned for it. This is thine artifice, O Evil One. May thy silver go with thee to perdition." Immediately the bar of silver turned into fiery smoke, and vanished. Shortly after, he spied a great heap of gold, lying in the road. Fearing lest he might be lured by the shining beauty of the metal from his search for the true riches, which are of

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heaven, he began to run very fast, like one escaping from fire. When he had gone a long way, he grew exceeding weary, and looking about for some place where he might repose himself, saw, far off, a mountain, towards which he bent his steps, and, arriving at last, was refreshed by the sight of a wide space of verdure round the foot of the mountain, overgrown with a few neglected palm trees, and moistened by a stream of sweet water. He drank eagerly of the stream, and, ascending the mountain, found thereon a ruined castle, full of venomous beasts and reptiles, which fled with a horrible hissing when he stepped within, as if unable to endure the presence of the holy man. He made his way betwixt the fallen stones, and came upon a little stone chamber, which was still whole, and here he determined to make his dwelling. He had brought with him bread to serve him for six months, and on this, with a little water, he set himself to endure the pains of a solitary life, trusting, that when his food was consumed, the Lord would show him a way to procure more.

Now, the castle was haunted by evil spirits, who dared not enter in any more, because of the sanctity of the new inhabitant. But they came continually with a great tumult and fury, and all night long knocked at the door, crying out with human voices, "Wherefore dost thou intrude thyself into the habitations of others? Withdraw thyself, thou mayst not dwell here, for we

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will drive thee out by subtlety." Antonio, taking no heed of them, but continuing his prayers with a tranquil countenance, they went discontented away. One night the saint was keeping vigil, and had left the door of his cell open for the very great heat. Suddenly he perceived around him a multitude of wild animals, as if all the beasts of the wilderness were gathered there. But when, with horrid distended jaws, they came towards him, he knew them to be demons, and addressed them thus, "If God suffers you, I am willing that you shall devour me; but, if you are sent by the Evil One, avaunt! for I am the servant of Christ." This said, with one mingled roar of terror they fled incontinently.

The devil, seeing these wiles to be useless, sought to prevail by more insidious means, tempting the hermit to impatience and vain longing. He was sitting one day outside his cell, and his soul was filled with weariness, and there was a great confusion and trouble in his thoughts, so that he cried out to God, "Lord, I desire to be at peace, but my thoughts will not suffer me, being evil. What shall I do in this tribulation, and in what manner may I be saved?" And getting up, he walked a little way, and saw one like unto himself, sitting and working; and Antonio, watching, saw him rise up from work and pray, then again, after a little space, sit down and plait palm-leaves, and afterward return to prayer. Then he knew that this was

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an angel sent by the Lord to correct him, and he heard the voice of the angel say, "Do thus, and thou shalt be saved." Whereupon he took much comfort, and from that time set himself to follow the manner of life shown forth by the angel, occupying himself continually in prayer and work.

Now six months had passed away, and the stock of bread was exhausted, so that Antonio was compelled to support himself upon the few dates afforded by the palm trees. One day, to his great joy, the Lord sent some merchants, who had lost their way in the desert, and, after reposing a while in his dwelling, they gave him a supply of bread and departed on their journey. Some time later they came again, bringing with them messages from his brethren in the world, and a bag of seed, and some implements wherewith he might till the ground. Thereupon Antonio, carefully searching round the mountain, and finding the place to be apt for cultivation, made haste to dig and sow, and in a short space there came up wheat, which, when it was ripe, he gathered in and made himself bread, rejoicing and praising God that he was able to live by the labour of his own hands in the wilderness. And now his abode and his holy life becoming known by means of the merchants, many persons, notwithstanding the toil of the journey, began to visit him, and Antonio, distressed because he had nothing wherewith to relieve their fatigue when they

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arrived, set himself to cultivate a few olive trees on a little plot of ground that he might have some oil to give them.

But the wild beasts, coming out of the desert to drink at the stream, devoured the harvests of the saint, and laid waste his garden. Antonio catching them one day, reproached them thus: "Wherefore do you do me evil, seeing you suffer no harm by me? Go hence, and in the Name of the Lord refrain from taking that which is another's." Who would believe it? The animals, as if struck with fear, molested the garden no more.

Antonio having thus penetrated the trackless wilderness and made the waste places habitable, other pious men began now to arrive, desirous to become his disciples and to follow his holy example. They made cells for themselves on the mountain, and aided him in tilling the ground, and he taught them willingly, imparting to them the treasures of his grace. But all lived solitary, each in his cell apart, and when they met to work, kept silence, only on feast days permitting themselves any discourse together. And in process of time a fair garden grew up around that mountain, a garden of beautiful trees and plants, and likewise of sweet and righteous souls. The hermits not only subdued the stony ground and their own hard hearts, but even the savage beasts, taming their wild natures to gentleness and obedience. For this one found a young bear, whom

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he reared and taught to sit up and beg for food, and that other, having caught a panther, bridled it and rode thereon; and he that was called Hilario, having occasion to go on a long journey, took with him a wild ass, which carried him with perfect patience. Even the horrid crocodiles, which will swallow a man whole if he come in their way, submitted themselves meekly to the bidding of these pious hermits, for one of them, named Pachimo, being on a certain day under the necessity of crossing the great river, compelled one of those hideous monsters to bear him on its back, and swimming swiftly across, it landed him where he desired.

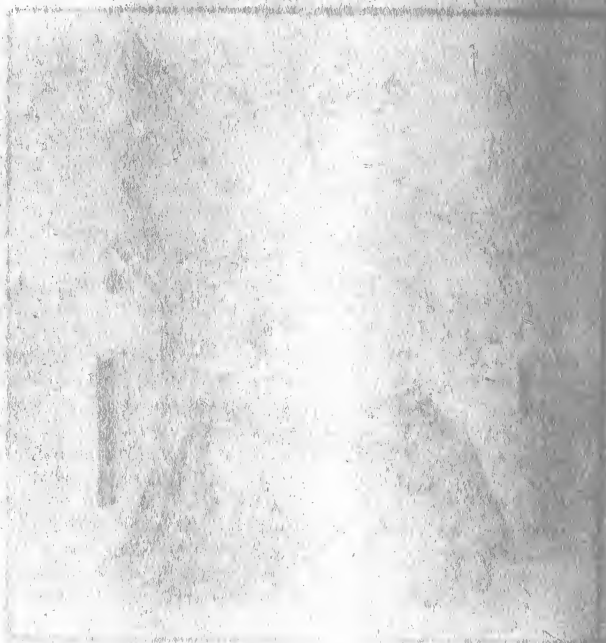
Yet their life in the desert was very hard and difficult, so that many, coming thither, grew quickly faint-hearted, and returned to the world. There came one day a certain Paolo, a husbandman, exceeding benevolent and simple in his ways, who, being abandoned by his wicked wife, desired to become a hermit. He went to Antonio's cell, and knocked at the door. The saint, letting him in, asked, "What seekest thou?" Paolo said, "I desire to become a hermit." Antonio answered him, "An old man of sixty years like thee cannot become a hermit. Return to the fields, and earn thy bread, giving thanks to God." Paolo said, "If thou wilt teach me, I can learn." Antonio answered again, "I tell thee, thou art too old, and canst not become a hermit. Go; or else, if it pleases thee,



The Hermit teaches the Bear.

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After Pietro Lorenzetti
(from the picture of the
Hermits in the
Cattedrale,
Assisi,
Florence.)



THE HERMITS OF THE DESERT

betake thyself to a monastery, where there are many brethren, who will guide thy foolishness. For I live here alone in this cell, oftentimes eating only once in fifteen days. This is too hard for thee." With these words he put Paolo out, and keeping the door fast shut, did not go forth for the space of three days. On the fourth day, Antonio opened the door and stepped out, and seeing Paolo still there, cried, "Go hence, old man; wherefore dost thou vex me? Thou mayst not abide here." Paolo said to him, "Thou canst not compel me to go elsewhere; here will I die." Now, Antonio perceiving that he had brought nothing with him, neither bread nor water, and had now fasted for four days, marvelled much at his constancy, and fearing lest he might die, suffered him to come in. Then Antonio said, "Thou mayst have thy desire, if thou wilt do all that I bid thee." Paolo answered, "I will obey all thy commands." Thereupon Antonio, wishing to prove him, proceeded to set him such hard tasks as only a man in the strength of youth might accomplish. But first he said, "Stay now in this place until I return, and I will announce to thee my will." Going out, he watched Paolo through the window, who remained motionless there for the space of seven whole days, being tormented well-nigh to death by the great heat. At the end of the seven days Antonio entered the cell and bade him come forth; then, soaking some palm-stalks in water,

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he gave them to the old man, saying, "Take these, and weave a rope, as thou seest me do." And they sat down together to weave, and Paolo worked until the ninth hour, and wove with very great labour fifteen yards of rope. When Antonio saw his work, he made as if he were not pleased, and said, "Badly hast thou woven; undo it, and weave it afresh." And now it was the seventh day that Paolo had fasted, and the hottest season of the year. Antonio did this, thinking that he would not be able to endure and would return to the world, but Paolo took the palm-stalks and undid what he had done, and wove it again, this time with greater toil, because the stalks were wrinkled from the previous weaving.

At length Antonio, seeing that he did not demur, nor turn away his face, and was neither cast down in spirit nor enraged, began to have compassion on him. The sun being now low in the heavens, he said, "Old man, wilt thou eat a morsel of bread?" Paolo answered, "If it seemeth right to thee, O Father." Then Antonio bade him prepare the table, touched by his humility. Paolo obeyed, and Antonio brought bread, and put on the table four small loaves, weighing six ounces each. He then chanted a psalm, which, when he had done, he sang over again twelve times, and afterward repeated a prayer twelve times, that he might once more prove Paolo. But the old man was in no wise discouraged, but prayed with as much readiness

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and alacrity as Antonio himself. This being finished, Antonio said, "Seat thyself at the table, and look at the food, but do not eat till evening." When even was now come, and Paolo had not yet eaten, Antonio said, "Arise now, and lie down to sleep," and the old man, quitting the table, did as he was commanded. In the middle of the night, Antonio woke him up to pray, and he continued at his orisons till the ninth hour of the day. The table having again been set, towards sunset, when they had sung and prayed as on the evening before, they sat down and ate. Antonio, having consumed one little loaf, left the other before him untasted; whilst the old man, eating slowly, was still occupied with the first one which he had taken. When he had done, Antonio said, "Old man, eat yet another loaf." Paolo said, "If thou eatest, then will I, but if thou eatest not, neither will I." Antonio said, "One is enough for me, for I am a hermit." And Paolo, "It is enough for me, who wish to be a hermit." Rising up from the table, they again said twelve prayers and sang twelve psalms, and afterward slept, and waking in the middle of the night, sang hymns till day.

Some brethren coming to visit Antonio, Paolo asked what he should do. The saint said, "Serve the brethren, and speak no word till they be gone on their way." Three days having passed, and Paolo not having opened his lips, the brethren asked

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him, saying, "For what cause dost thou keep silence?" And he not answering, Antonio bade him, saying, "Tell the brethren wherefore thou art silent," whereupon he spoke and told them. Another day, a jar of honey being given to him, Antonio said, "Break the jar, and spill out the honey." And he did so. Then Antonio said, "Take up the honey in a shell, lest it soil the floor." Again Antonio ordered him to draw water all the day long. Then the saint, seeing how ready he was to obey, said to him, "Brother, if thou art able to continue to do as thou hast done, thou shalt remain with me." Paolo said, "I know not if thou canst show me yet harder things, but that which I have seen thee do, will I do readily, and will labour not less than before, God being my help."

Then Antonio said, "Lo! now art thou a hermit," and he gave him a little cell at three or four stones' throw from his own dwelling, and there Paolo lived, perfecting himself in all religious exercises. And this Paolo was afterward known by the name of Paolo the Simpleton, to distinguish him from that other holy Paolo, who was all this while living in his grotto, unknown to any man.

Now, many years passed away, and Antonio having reached the great age of ninety, began to be somewhat uplifted in spirit, judging that there was none other hermit so old and so perfect as himself. One night, when all was quiet, it was revealed

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to him in a vision that there was another of far greater goodness, who had lived in complete solitude for the space of a hundred years, and Antonio was bidden to take a long journey and seek out this hermit. When day broke, the venerable man, supporting his infirm limbs on a staff, set out without delay, and being gone some little way, stopped short, not knowing what direction to take. It was now high noon, and he was cruelly tormented by the burning sun: yet he would not turn back, but said, "I believe in the Lord, who will show me His servant, as He has promised." Scarcely had he spoken, when he spied coming towards him a creature, half man, half horse, such a one as the poets used to call Centaurs. Antonio, fearing evil, armed himself by making the sign of the cross upon his forehead. Then he cried out boldly, "Hark, thou unhappy one. Tell me in what region dwells the servant of God." The wild man, in I know not what strange broken manner of speech, and with hideous gnawings and clashing of teeth, sought with his horrid hairy mouth to utter friendly words, and extending his right hand, pointed out the road, then taking swift flight into the surrounding wilderness, vanished from Antonio's eyes.

The venerable man, much amazed, and pondering in his mind this thing which he had seen, went on his way. Soon after, as he was passing through a rocky valley, he saw sitting on a stone a mannikin, with an enormous hooked nose and a

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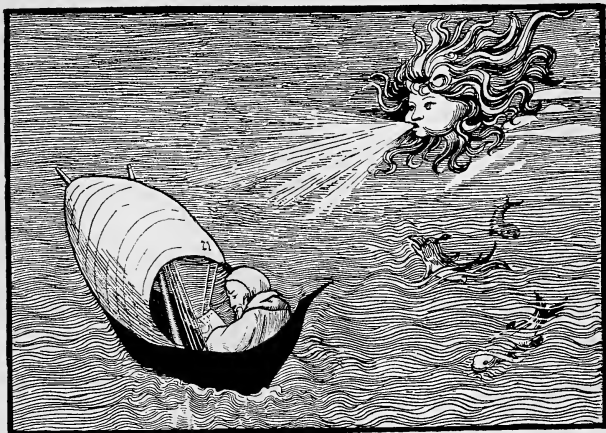
forehead furnished with sharp horns, and a body which ended in goat's feet. Terrified by this spectacle, Antonio summoned up all his trust in the Lord, and proceeded cautiously past the strange being, who put out its hand and offered him some fruits of the palm, as if in pledge of peace. Then Antonio stepped nearer and interrogated it as to what manner of thing it was, and the creature made response, "I am a mortal, one of those dwellers in the wilderness whom the people, deluded by many errors, worship, calling us Satyrs and Fauns. I am come to thee, from my fellows, to beseech thee that thou wouldst pray for us to the God of all, whom we know to have come down from heaven for the salvation of the world, for His sound is gone forth into all lands."

At this, abundant tears flowed down the cheeks of the aged traveller, because of the exceeding gladness of his heart, hearing Christ thus glorified and Satan put to shame. He answered the creature as well as he might with words of sweet comfort, and, grasping his staff, continued on his journey.

After a time he came to a great river, full of crocodiles and venomous reptiles, and seeing a little empty boat lying close to the bank, he went down and entered therein, and put up the sail. But there was not a breath of wind to drive the boat, and the saint was much perplexed, when suddenly he perceived a great round face just above the surface of the

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water. Antonio regarding it in astonishment, it began to speak, saying: "I am known to the heathen by the name of Zephyr,



S. ANTONIO CROSSES THE RIVER.

After Pietro Lorenzetti (from the picture of the Hermits in the Thebaid), Uffizi, Florence.

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and am come to blow thee across the river." Thereupon it puffed out its cheeks, and up sprang a gentle breeze, which filled the sail and wafted the boat softly to the other side, while the crocodiles lay idly on the water, watching the saint with their jaws closed. Antonio having stepped on shore, the Zephyr cried, "Pray for me and my brethren to the Lord," and straightway vanished. The saint, thanking God heartily for this marvel by which he had been delivered out of his straits, moved on once more. At length he reached the edge of a desert region, more wild and desolate than any he had yet passed through, and, seeing many traces of the feet of wild beasts in the sand, and around him, as far as eye could penetrate, the great stretches of the wilderness, he knew not what to do, nor which way to turn his steps. Meanwhile the day faded, and he was all alone, yet he knew that the Lord would not abandon him. He knelt down and prayed all night long amidst the surrounding darkness. In the first dim light of dawn he spied a wolf, panting with thirst, creep by and disappear at the foot of a rocky hill near by. Following its track, he found the place where it had entered, and saw that it was a cavern, and he began to peer in betwixt the stones which closed the entrance, but his sight was hindered by the dark shadow within. Thereupon, the extremity of his need casting out fear, with hesitating step and beating heart he

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moved aside some of the stones, and entered cautiously. He had gone but a little way, stopping many times and listening if he could hear any sound, when he perceived through the dreadful gloom a little light far off, and going eagerly towards it, struck his foot upon a stone, and made a noise. The holy Paolo, for this was indeed his dwelling, had opened to let in the wolf, that it might drink at the fountain, but now, hearing the noise, he shut the door again, and fastened it with a heavy bar. Then Antonio, at last reaching the door, sank down on the ground and besought the hermit in vain, even unto the sixth hour, to let him in, saying, "Who I am, and wherefore I come, I will tell thee fully. I know I am unworthy to look upon thee; nevertheless, until thou show thyself to me I will not go away. Thou receivest wild beasts, wherefore shouldest thou repel men? I sought thee long, and have found thee; open, I pray. If thou wilt not hear me, I will lay me down and die at thy gate, and then wilt thou be compelled to bury my body."

At length Paolo answered from within, "What manner of man is this, who entreating, menaces and rages while he weeps? Art thou vexed to the point of death, because I will not open to thee?" Thus, smiling and with kindly words, he threw wide the door, and they joined in an embrace, and each saluting the other by his proper name, they knelt down and

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gave thanks to God together. Then, after a holy kiss, Paolo sat down with Antonio, and began thus: "Woe is me! He whom thou soughtest with so much pain is consuming away in uncared-for old age. Alas! thou seest a man flourish, and within an hour he is dust. Verily I beseech thee of thy loving kindness to tell me in what manner the race of men lives now, whether new roofs rise in the old cities, and whether any of those still exist who have cast off the errors of darkness." Antonio told him as well as he might, and while they were still holding discourse, a raven alighted and sat on a bough of the palm tree, and presently, flying gently down, it laid a loaf of bread before them. When it had flown away, "Behold," said Paolo, "God has sent us wherewithal to dine, for He is indeed loving and merciful. It is now sixty years that I have thus by means of the raven received every day half a loaf; now because of thy coming, the Lord has doubled the supply for His servants." Then, giving thanks, they sat themselves down upon the margin of the glassy fountain, and a contention rose betwixt them which should break the bread, for Paolo desired to give the honour to his guest, but Antonio, in his humility, would not accept it. At length they agreed each to take an end of the loaf and pull towards himself; which, being done, the bread broke, and an exact half remained in the hand of each one. After they had eaten, they bent down and

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drank a little water from the fountain, and, having offered up the sacrifice of thanksgiving, they passed the night in prayer and vigil.

When day returned, Paolo said to Antonio, "I knew that thou didst dwell in the wilderness, brother, for the Lord had promised to send thee to me. For the hour comes in which I must fall asleep and be with Christ. Then shalt thou bury my body, returning dust to dust." Antonio, hearing this, wept and groaned piteously, and besought Paolo to suffer him to stay with him now, and, if it might be, accompany him through the Valley of the Shadow of Death; but Paolo answered, "Not so, brother; thou mayst not ask that which thou wouldst for thyself, but what is expedient for others. Thine example is needed upon earth, therefore must thou yet a little while bear the burden of the flesh, following the Lamb. And now, I say, depart quickly to thy dwelling, and that mantle which the holy bishop Athanasius gave thee bring back with thee to wrap my body." He asked this, not because he cared greatly that his dead body should be clothed, for too long had he worn only the leaves of the palm, but that his brother might be spared the sorrow of seeing him die.

Antonio, marvelling that Paolo should know of this mantle, since he had lived all his life in the cave, was filled with a great awe, so that he dared not gainsay the holy man, but

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kissing his hands and feet, departed straightway. On the long and painful journey Antonio's courage did not fail, though his body was weak with fasting and broken by the weight of years. Gasping and exhausted, he reached his hermitage and took down the mantle, and without tasting food, set off and returned by the same way, thirsting to see Paolo once again, for he feared lest, whilst he was absent, the saint should have yielded up his spirit to the Lord.

When the second day had grown light, and Antonio was gone some three hours on his way, he saw Paolo in a vision, between bands of angels, and choirs of apostles and prophets, shining with a whiteness as of snow, ascend into the heavens. And immediately falling on his face, Antonio threw sand upon his head, and lamented bitterly, crying, "Wherefore dost thou leave me, O Paolo? Wherefore dost thou depart so early and without farewell?" Then he rose and ran with so much speed the remainder of the way that it was as if a bird flew. Entering the cave, he saw the saint on bended knees, his head lifted, his hands stretched upwards, as if praying; but Antonio, going closer, and hearing no sound of breathing, began to weep, understanding that the soul had fled, and it was only the body of the holy man which prayed thus to God, in whom all live.

Then Antonio wrapped the body in the mantle and carried it forth, chanting hymns according to the rites of the Church.

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And he was much troubled, because he had no spade wherewith to dig a grave, and he said to himself, "To return to the hermitage and fetch a spade would be too long, yet if I remain here I am no better off. Nevertheless, I will stay beside Paolo, and, if needs be, lying close to Thy warrior, O Lord, I will give up my life." As he was thus thinking, lo! two lions came running up out of the wilderness, their manes flying out on the wind, on seeing whom Antonio was at first terrified; but crying to the Lord, he was comforted, and they became like doves in his eyes. The lions, going towards the body of the aged man, crouched down and fawned upon it, waving their tails, and then laying themselves down at the feet, they roared with a dreadful noise, plainly lamenting in their own manner. Afterwards going a little way off, they began to scrape the ground with their paws, throwing up the sand eagerly, till they had dug a hole large enough to contain a man, and then, with heads down, and making a motion with their ears, as if asking thanks, they came to Antonio and licked his hands and feet. And he, pouring himself forth in praise of Christ, whom even dumb animals glorify, cried, "Lord, without whose knowledge not a leaf is loosed from the tree, nor sparrow falls to the ground, Thou knowest what these have done." Then he bent his aged shoulders beneath the burden of the body of the saint, and laid it in the grave which the lions had dug, and heaped

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up the earth upon it in a mound, after the usual custom. On the next day he took the tunic which Paolo had woven for



THE LIONS DIG SAN PAOLO'S GRAVE.

After Pietro Lorenzetti (from the picture of the Hermits in the Thebaid), Uffizi, Florence.

himself of the palm leaves, and returned to the hermitage.

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And he assembled his disciples, and unfolding the tunic before them, he told them all things concerning the holy Paolo, with deep humility, beating himself upon the breast and bewailing his own sinfulness. He bade them be lowly of heart, not puffed up with their own righteousness, but patiently and in all meekness to endure affliction, after the example of that blessed man. And from thenceforth, on the solemn feast-days of Easter and Pentecost, he arrayed himself in the garment of Paolo, counting it more honourable than the most gorgeous vestment. When, not long after, the aged Antonio was himself suffered to depart to the Lord, his disciples took the tunic and laid it in a fair wrought coffer within a beautiful church, where it was preserved for many ages with the utmost veneration, in memory of those two holy hermits.



THE FUNERAL PROCESSION OF SAN RUFINO.

After Niccolò da Foligno, Duomo, Assisi.

SAN RUFINO

YOU have often heard how the Roman emperors, blinded by their heathen pride, tried to overcome the Church of Christ, and afflicted His children with cruel pains. Now, at the time when Valerian sat upon the throne of the Cæsars, there lived a certain great lord in Rome, named Rufino, who was a Christian. He had one child, a youth so beautiful that all who looked on him loved him. The young gallants of the city vied with one another for his friendship, and unless graced by his fair presence no feast or revel was

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thought complete. But the boy, instructed by his father in the Christian doctrines, was baptized at the age of fifteen, and thenceforth renounced the pleasures of the world, and gave himself wholly to thoughts of heavenly things. His friends were vexed when he abandoned their company, and their love changed into bitter enmity. They accused him and his father to the persecutors. The two Christians, learning their peril, fled and hid themselves in a secret place beneath the house of a kinsman, in whom they put entire trust; but the demon of avarice overcame their host, so that he took the reward offered by the magistrates for the discovery of Christians, and brought the soldiers to the hiding-place. These cruel men dragged forth Rufino and his son, and drove them roughly into the presence of the Governor, who caused them to be thrown into the terrible dungeon which is called to this day the Mamertine Prison, where, two centuries earlier, the holy Apostle Peter had himself suffered imprisonment. They lay for many days fast bound, within a chamber partly hewn out of the living rock and partly fashioned of that ancient Roman masonry which is adamantine as the mountains themselves. Here no light could enter, neither the sun by day nor the moon by night. Nevertheless, the captives were in no wise cast down, but continually on their knees made orison to God, and sang sweet hymns of praise.

Then the Governor, willing to spare their bodies if only he might destroy their souls, called to him two beautiful singing girls, the most celebrated in that great and gay city. He bade them put on gorgeous raiment, and take their lyres and go to the prison. There, with dancing and merriment and all the arts of the world, they were to charm and allure the captives, till they should forget Christ, and consent to worship the heathen gods. "For peradventure," said he, "though the father be not moved, the youth, being of a tender age, when the soul loves pleasure and soft living, may be persuaded to obey."

The women, whose names were Appollinea and Nicea, went forth from the Governor, and bound garlands of roses on their brows, and decked themselves with jewels and bright garments; then, surrounded by a gay and laughing multitude, they went through the streets, singing and jesting on their way to the dark and mournful prison. But when they were come there a strange awe seized them, their songs fell silent on their lips; their fingers slipped from the strings of the lyres, and trembling, they knew not wherefore, they followed the gaoler; while through the damp and horrid passage pierced the faint, clear voice of the child, singing hymns to Christ. They came to the dungeon, and the gaoler threw open the door. Suddenly the nostrils of the two women were filled with an exquisite

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odour, and their eyes blinded by a great light which illumined all the place, far exceeding the brightness of the sun at noon-day; and in the midst thereof knelt the Christians, shining whiter than newly fallen snow, and their faces were like the angels in heaven. Appollinea and Nicea fell to the ground speechless with amazement, and lay there a long time afraid. At length, rising up, they ran to Rufino, and, kneeling down before him, bewailed their sins, and besought him to teach them of truth and salvation, "for henceforth," they said, "we will be the handmaidens of Christ." Lifting them up tenderly, Rufino spoke to them words of comfort and hope, and presently bade them return to the Governor, and take no thought of what they should say, but speak fearlessly as the Spirit should move them. They did as he commanded, and God put words into their mouths, so that these two women, standing before the Governor, witnessed boldly of Christ and eternal life, and spoke scorn of the heathen gods, affirming them to be demons and idols, deaf and dumb images of stone.

Now, there were standing there two soldiers, lovers of Appollinea and Nicea, who, hearing the women speak, asked them, saying, "Can this be true which you say, that there is another life after death?" and they answered immediately, "Yes, else should we fear to lose this one, who now dare to speak these words before you all."

The Governor, enraged that the instruments of his cunning should have been thus turned against him, commanded his officers to take Appollinea and Nicea, and torment them and put them to death. Forthwith they were carried to a place without the city wall, where they endured all their sufferings with joyful countenances, and stretched their necks meekly beneath the sword of the executioner, who cut off their heads. Then the two soldiers, who were called Silo and Alessandro, came and wept sorely over their dead bodies, and, lifting them up, carried them to the dark and secret subterranean passages, known as catacombs, which the Christians had pierced under the city, that they might have a place wherein to hide their dead from the sacrilegious hands of the heathen, and chant over them the sacred rites. There, in two narrow beds cut in the rocky walls, were laid to rest those faithful women, who had offered up their youth and beauty for the glory of Christ. This being accomplished and the funeral hymn sung, Silo and Alessandro hastened to the dungeon and sought out Rufino, that they might ask him concerning the truth, and soon afterwards they were baptized.

Now, the Governor, astonished by the constancy of the women and the faith of the two soldiers, began to inquire within himself what this new religion might be. Then Silo and Alessandro spoke to him of Christ, and of the many signs

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and wonders whereby His truth was made manifest. In the hall of the Governor's palace lay a poor man, a paralytic, begging alms of the passers-by. "Look now," cried the soldiers; "if your gods are able to make this paralytic to rise up and walk, we will believe on them. But if not, then will we call upon our God, and He will show forth His power upon him." The Governor answered, "So let it be."

And he summoned all the philosophers and wise men of the heathen, and they came with their long beards and grave robes, and, standing round the poor man, vehemently invoked Apollo, and Jove, and the Sun, and all the deities of their vain worship. Yet the paralytic, looking upon them with piteous eyes, was in no wise the better for their cries and entreaties, but lay there helpless as before. At length their voices failed, and they grew weary. Then Silo and Alessandro stood forth, and called upon the sick man in the name of the Lord to rise up and return to his own home. Immediately the paralytic sprang to his feet, and, leaping and running, went to his house, whilst all the people ran beside him, shouting with wonder and joy, and the philosophers hid themselves, ashamed. Thereupon the Governor, filled with amazement, questioned the soldiers further concerning their faith, and they told him all things gladly. Then he assembled his officers and servants, and, accompanied by a great following of horsemen

and foot soldiers, he went through the streets of the city in the sight of all the people to the prison, whence he drew forth Rufino and his son, and brought them with great honour and rejoicing to his palace. And after listening to their words he and all his people were converted and baptized.

These things being reported soon after to the Emperor, he was very wroth and sent and beheaded the governor, who died joyfully for Christ. A new judge was appointed, who was inflamed with fury against the Christians, and oppressed them without pity. Rufino, deeming it idle to remain there, where the Church was like to be utterly destroyed by this wicked man, called his son and friends together, and, girding up their loins, they departed from the city.

They journeyed far, by many a waste place and flowering valley, by mountains and great rivers, through numerous cities and villages, a happy band of pilgrims, sending forth their songs of praise on the summer air, and teaching the people everywhere of Christ. The son remained behind the rest of the company in one of the cities and there converted many to the faith. After a time he was seized by the magistrates, and condemned to be shot to death with arrows. All who beheld him suffer, and marked his radiant countenance, were moved with pity for his marvellous beauty, and wondered greatly at his patience, and many were thereby brought to glorify God.

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Meanwhile, Rufino and his disciples came, after much wandering, to a very fair city, called Assisi, which is set like a garland upon the brow of a little hill. Here, where the governor was well-disposed towards the Christians, Rufino resolved to dwell, and becoming quickly beloved of the people, he was ordained their bishop, and ruled over all the faithful of those parts with great wisdom for many years. But, after a time, the good governor died, and there arose a wicked man in his stead, who knew not Christ. He laid hold upon Rufino and commanded that the old man should be cruelly put to death, bidding the officers tie a heavy stone about his neck and cast him into the river, which flows far down beneath the city walls, at the foot of the hill. The soldiers led him away, and all the people followed, lamenting grievously that he was to be taken from them, and though he exhorted them to rejoice in his constancy, they would not be comforted. Then the officers flung him into the river, and with hands uplifted to heaven, he sank immediately beneath the water. His disciples sought long for his body at the bottom of the stream, but in vain, and they returned at length with sorrowful hearts to the city.

Many years after, when the Church had emerged from her tribulations, and the world had embraced the gospel of Christ, it came to pass, that a certain poor man was labouring one day in the vineyards, hard by where Rufino had been

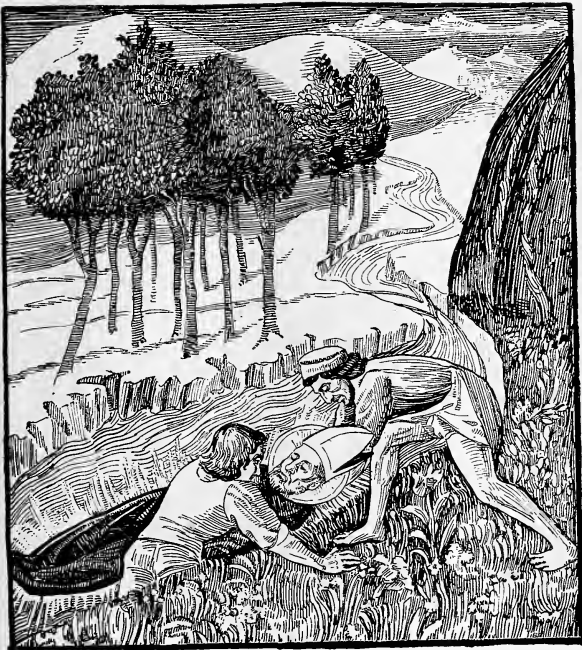
martyred, and being overcome by the heat, went down to drink at the river. He was astonished to perceive beneath the water a shining light, and being much perplexed to know what it might be, he went and told the bishop, who immediately rose up and, with a large company of persons curious to behold the wonder, set out in solemn procession to the river.

When they were all come to the place, led by the husbandman, they saw the light and were amazed; and whilst they stood there looking, an object rose up through the shining water and floated slowly towards the surface—which, when they saw more clearly, they perceived to be a head, crowned with a mitre, with a heavy stone tied about its neck, and following the head was a body clothed in episcopal vestments. Marvelling exceedingly, the people began with reverent zeal to bring it to the shore, and soon the long-lost body of the holy Rufino lay upon the ground before their astonished eyes, as beautiful and uncorrupted as on the day when he suffered martyrdom, his garments clean as unspotted snow, his reverend white beard flowing softly along his breast. Then all present, overjoyed at this great wonder which was come to pass, fell down and worshipped God. They kissed the hands and feet of the holy martyr, and any that were afflicted with disease were straightway made whole, while upon every sorrowful heart came the balm of perfect consolation. It was resolved to bear

The Body
of the
Saint
appears in
the River.

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After Piccolo
da Foligno,
Duomo, Assisi.



1951

SAN RUFINO

the body to the city, and there bury it with sacred ceremony. So they took two young oxen that had never felt the yoke, very fair beasts, with grave eyes and wide-spreading horns, and harnessed them to a car, whereon they laid the holy body; then, with solemn chant, the long procession of priests and monks and people, carrying torches and scattering incense on the air, set forth with the car in their midst and wound slowly up and up the steep ascent, between the vineyards and olive gardens. Now, when they were come where the road divides in two, and were about to take the path which leads to the city, the oxen suddenly stopped short, and, planting their feet firmly in the ground, would not move. The multitude lifted the car out of the deep ruts, and, putting their shoulders to the wheels, strove to push it forward, whilst others urged the oxen with cries and blows, but all in vain. A great noise and confusion arose, and, amidst the clatter of voices, all at once they became aware that there stood among them a very tall old man, with long white hair, whom none of them had ever looked upon before. He lifted up his hand, and silence fell upon them. Then he spoke, saying, "Your labour is but lost, that seek to move the car. But now ye shall leave the oxen to go whither they will, and there where they stay their feet ye shall lay the saint and build a church over the sepulchre." When he had finished these words, they saw him no more. Then

they did as he had told them, and, ceasing to guide the oxen, they were astounded to see the ignorant and irrational creatures move their slow limbs and, turning away from the direction of the city, set forward on the opposite road. The people followed wondering. The beasts went on some way, and at length stopped in a waste and difficult place on the side of the hill. Now, it seemed impossible to those foolish men of little faith to build a church here, for they said, "How may the foundations be dug on this steep declivity, and the building be hindered from slipping down the hill." For though they had witnessed great wonders, yet did they still misdoubt the power of the Lord, Who has created the heavens and the earth, and is able to remove the mountains and empty the seas at His will. So they said, "Let us lift the body from the car and carry it ourselves to yonder fair and level place on the top of the hill." And they did so, and they laid the holy martyr in a coffin of stone, beautifully wrought by the hand of the carver, and began to build the church, according to the word of the old man. Then a strange thing came to pass. For that which the builders accomplished by day, was each night undone, and though a watch was set, the evil-doer might not be apprehended. Whether the watchman fell asleep, overcome by some mysterious heaviness, as often happened, or whether he kept awake with

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eyes fixed upon the building the livelong night and saw no man come near it was the same, each morning the work was found ruined and the builders wrung their hands in despair.

Now, when this had befallen many days following, the bishop assembled all the people and said, "Brethren, it is manifest that this is the Lord's doing, and not man's. We have sinned against Him in that we have disobeyed His will, which He spoke to us by the dumb animals and by the mouth of the old man. Now, therefore, let us subdue the stubbornness of our hearts, and endeavour humbly to build in that place which the oxen pointed out."

Then they carried back the body of the saint, and having dug out a level space with much toil in the hill-side, laid the coffin there and set anew to the work of building. And here where they had thought to have had such a heavy task by reason of the inconvenience of the ground their labour was so easily accomplished that the church seemed to spring up, like a flower in the night. When it was finished, it was consecrated with great solemnity, all humbly acknowledging the folly of being daunted by difficulties in performing the will of the Lord and joining with one heart and voice to glorify Him Who is able to subdue all things under His feet.

THE SOLDIER OF GOD

THERE was a certain count who had been a valiant captain in his youth, and was held in much honour by the Emperor. He had one son, named Martino, and being of a proud and ambitious spirit, he was resolved that the boy should become a soldier like himself, and seek after the wealth and glory of this world. But Martino's nurse was a pious woman, and talked to the child often in secret of Christ and the holy martyrs who had given their lives for His sake, till Martino was inflamed with longing to serve God and fight, like them, against the powers of darkness. When he was fifteen years of age the Emperor sent messengers to the count, bidding him bring his son to the Imperial Court, that he might be enrolled in the army. The count commanded the boy to make ready for the journey. Then Martino fell at his father's feet, and with sighs and tears earnestly imploring forgiveness, he declared that he could not be a soldier, but desired to renounce the world and become a hermit. The count was mightily vexed and enraged, and when Martino persisted in

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his refusal, he caused him to be bound in chains and set upon a horse, and in this manner, heedless of his prayers and protests, carried him by force to the Court. Here the boy was unbound, and led by his father into a splendid hall, where, upon a throne, sat the Emperor Constantine, clothed in purple robes, with a wreath of laurel on his brow, and surrounded by the nobles and minstrels of the palace. Because of the love which he bore to the count, the monarch received them with much kindness. He looked very favourably on the fair and noble countenance of the youth, who prostrated himself at his feet. Bidding him rise up, he called to the attendants to bring sword and spurs, and graciously deigned to descend from his seat, and with his own hands gird the sword about the loins of the young soldier, whilst a page fastened the spurs to Martino's feet. The youth, in no wise dazzled by this worldly honour, lifted his hands to heaven, and with tears streaming down his cheeks, called aloud upon the Lord to suffer him still to serve Christ, even though he must unwillingly follow an earthly master.

And the Lord was merciful to Martino, so that his soul suffered no harm from the soldier's calling. He could not be persuaded to live after the evil manner of his companions, but kept himself from pride and bloodthirstiness and luxury. Instead of a train of idle riotous attendants, he would have

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but one servant, choosing an honest, faithful fellow named Giacomo. On the first day, when Martino returned from his duties, Giacomo knelt, according to custom, to take off his master's boots, but, to his great wonder, he was lifted up and placed upon a stool, and lo! the master himself upon his knees removed the servant's boots, and carrying them away, cleaned them together with his own. Then he bade Giacomo sit down to meat with him, and ever after they took their meals together, and any good thing which the young lord had he shared with the servant. In like manner he bore himself with kindness and humility towards all men. His comrades laughed at him, but loved him, nevertheless, for his gentleness. He was very compassionate, and gave away everything that he possessed to the needy, not even keeping back his own raiment, till at last there was nothing left to him except his simple soldier's dress and cloak.

Martino had been sent with one of the Emperor's armies to guard a city in a far-away country of the North, and it being now winter-time, the snow lay deep on the ground. He rode out one day, wrapped closely in his cloak, yet shivering for the exceeding bitterness of the cold, and coming to the gate of the city, beheld a poor man standing there, wholly destitute of clothing, and imploring the aid of the passers-by. But they all hurried on without heeding him, save only Martino, whose



The Em-
peror girds
San Mar-
tino with
the Sword.

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After Simone
Martini, San
Francesco,
Assisi.



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heart swelled with pity for the beggar's woeful condition. He knew not at first how to succour the poor man, seeing he had himself nothing but the garments on his body. Then, without thought for his own needs, he took his sword and, slitting his cloak into two halves, gave one to the naked man, and wrapped himself as best he might in the other. Proceeding on his way, he was pursued by the derision of all who saw him thus strangely attired; yet were there a few who, marking his joyful countenance, were abashed and smitten with shame for the meanness of their own souls. Martino, caring nothing for the gibes and jests, gathered the remains of his cloak about him, and felt less cold than before, for the kindness of his heart warmed his blood with a pleasant glow.

That same night he lay sleeping on his narrow bed, and there came to him a wondrous dream. He thought the chamber was full of a great multitude of angels in white raiment, with garlands on their heads and holding harps of gold, and that beside his bed, clothed in the remnant of a cloak, stood One more beautiful than the mind of waking man could conceive or his tongue tell. And He looked upon Martino. The young soldier was filled with awe, and, covering his face with his hands, wept for the gladness of his heart. And presently he heard a voice, sweeter than all music, say, "Martino, this robe which I wear is thine." Again it spoke to the company of

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THE DREAM OF SAN MARTINO.

After Simone Martini, San Francesco, Assisi.

angels, saying, "Behold my servant Martino, who hath clothed Me with this robe." For the Lord was mindful of His words which He had said on earth, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, ye have done it unto Me."

Then all vanished, and the chamber was again dark and solitary. Martino, awaking, pondered long on this vision, and rendered up praise to God upon his knees. He was in no wise puffed up by the grace which had been shown him, but

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continued thenceforth to live in the same humility, only he desired more and more to give his life to Christ. But this might not be as yet, and for two more years he served as a soldier. At the end of that time it came to pass that the Emperor Julian, who had succeeded to the throne, drew together all his hosts from the four corners of the Empire, and was about to lead them himself against the barbarians. Before setting out he assembled the soldiers, and distributed gifts among them. When Martino was called up to receive a gift, he stood forth and spoke, saying, "Hitherto, O Cæsar, have I served thee faithfully, but now I am become the soldier of God, and it is no longer lawful for me to take thy gifts or to fight earthly battles." Then the Emperor was very wroth, and declared that Martino was a coward, and wished to shirk the battle; but the young man lifted his head proudly, and cried out, "Dost thou accuse me of fear? Nay, then, to prove my faith and my truth I will stand unarmed in front of the battle line to-morrow, and, with the sign of Christ's Cross for my sword and shield, I will rush upon the enemy." The Emperor bade the officers keep him fast bound till the next day, and see that he then fulfilled his bold vow. But very early in the morning the barbarians sent ambassadors to sue for peace, and thus did the Lord prevent the battle, and deliver His servant out of peril, giving the Romans a bloodless victory for his sake.

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The Emperor, having made peace, loosed Martino, and suffered him to depart from his service. The youth, joyfully putting off his military habit, went straightway to a very holy bishop to seek instruction, and shortly after became a priest. Now, his father and mother were still held in the bonds of heathenism. Martino was warned in a dream that he should go and save their souls, and immediately set forth to visit them. His way lay across the mountains, by rough and solitary paths, and as he paced tranquilly along, reading his book of devotions, he suddenly heard a great noise, and lo! a band of robbers came plunging down the rocks, and laid hold upon him. One of them raised his axe to smite him, but another, who seemed to be in authority over them, seized the murderer's arm, and hindered the blow as it fell, crying angrily, "Hold, thou fool; seest thou that this is no common wayfarer?" And he led Martino to a place apart, on pretence of searching him, and there began to inquire privily who and what he might be. Martino answered, "I am a Christian." The robber then asked him, "Art thou not afraid?" Martino answered mildly, "Why should I fear? I know I am safe, for the Lord is with me in this tribulation. I grieve only for thy peril, lest, by continuing in thy crimes, thou forfeit the mercy of Christ." Then he preached the word of God to the robber, who, penitent and ashamed, fell on his knees and besought

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Martino to pray for him. The holy man gave him comfort and good counsel, and after they had talked long together he was conducted by the robber along a hidden path through those difficult regions, and brought in safety to a secure and frequented road, where the repentant man, prostrating himself to the earth, kissed Martino's feet, and bade him farewell with tears of thankfulness. The traveller accomplished the rest of his journey without adventure, and, reaching the home of his parents, succeeded in opening his mother's eyes to the truth, but his father continued to abide in darkness and in the shadow of death.

Martino remained a while in his father's home, till one day, as he was praying in his quiet chamber, there came a noise and violent knocking at the door, and without stood messengers sent by the people of a certain city to entreat him to be their bishop. The young man, greatly astonished, would have refused the honour, but they led him to a window and showed him a great multitude who had accompanied them from the city, and who, when they beheld Martino, immediately fell on their knees and clamorously besought him to grant their desire. Thereupon going forth, he suffered himself to be set upon a white mule richly caparisoned and garlanded, and they conducted him in a triumphal procession amid the joyous singing of hymns to the chief church of the city, where he was consecrated bishop.

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From that time forth Martino ruled his flock with so much wisdom that his name was lauded far and wide, and many came from distant parts to visit him, thinking to see a grand and stately prelate, clothed in magnificent vestments and attended by a train of followers. But they found instead a man of lowly aspect, wrapped in a garment of camel's hair, and over it a shabby black mantle, who went through the streets quite alone or accompanied by one or two simple monks. Yet his countenance shone with so much grace and loving-kindness that the visitors were compelled to fall down and hide their faces, ashamed, feeling themselves to be in the presence of an angel of paradise.

It came to pass about this time that many false prophets arose, and the devil went about the world in various guises, seeking to deceive the unwary. On a certain day Martino was rapt in prayer, when suddenly a purple light filled the cell, and in the midst stood one clothed in a royal robe, wearing a crown of gold and precious stones on his head, and on his feet shoes adorned with needlework of fine gold. His countenance was wreathed in smiles. Martino, astonished and dazzled, gazed at him long in silence. At length the stranger spoke, saying, "Martino, testify who it is that hath visited thee. I am Christ, come again on earth, and have manifested myself to thee first of all." But the holy man still regarded him,

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and spoke no word. Then he insisted, saying, "Dost thou not believe the witness of thine eyes? Behold thy Lord." Thereupon Martino, filled with the spirit of truth, said, "My Lord cometh not clothed in purple and with a crown of jewels on his head, but meek and lowly, with brow wounded by the thorns, and with the marks of the nails in His hands and feet. So only shall we know Him." And he returned calmly to his prayers, and the stranger, uttering a hideous shriek, vanished in pestilent fumes, being none other than the Evil One himself.

After this the devil sought no more to deceive the saint, and Martino continued to grow in the grace of God and the love and veneration of men. He spent much time in visiting the sick and comforting the sorrowful, and, because he loved all living creatures, he frequently succoured beasts and birds that had need of his help. Once, as he was returning from a distant part, there met him a cow with a demon seated upon her back, goading her to madness. She ran violently upon the holy man, desiring to gore him with her horns, but he lifted up his hand and immediately she stood stock still. Then the saint cried out to the demon, "Begone, thou horrible being, and cease to torment this innocent creature." Immediately the evil spirit left her, and she came and licked the hands and feet of the holy man, as if to thank him. He gently bade her return to the herd, and she obeyed and trotted off

with the meekness of a lamb. Going on a little farther he met a company of hunters with their hounds pursuing a hare, which, panting and exhausted, was fleeing before them. It seemed every minute that she would be seized and devoured by her bloodthirsty pursuers. She darted backwards and forwards many times, and at length, perceiving no shelter in the wide plain around, she ran and laid herself trembling at the feet of the saint. He lifted his finger, and immediately the hounds stopped short, with their cruel red tongues almost upon their prey, and dared not touch her. Martino bade the little creature rise up and flee, and he held the hounds still spell-bound till she had sped far away and hidden herself in a safe place.

Again, on another day he came with his followers to a river, and beheld a large flock of birds hovering over the water and diving down to catch the fishes that were sporting in it. Their cruel greed vexed Martino, and he cried out to them, "Wherefore are ye so gluttonous, O hard-hearted creatures? Leave the fishes in peace, and betake yourselves to yonder desert region." And lo! to the astonishment of all, the birds rose up like a dark cloud, and flew far away in a long string, uttering wild cries as they went, and the little fishes danced joyfully in the sunny pool, as if desiring to give thanks to their deliverer.

In this manner, by his kindness towards man and beast,

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his patience, his exceeding love and wisdom, Martino made himself so beloved that when, in the fullness of time, God gathered His servant to Himself, the whole city was filled with lamentation and woe. Great multitudes of men, women, and children, weeping bitterly and casting dust and ashes on their heads, accompanied his body to the burial-place, and prostrated themselves around while the monks sang solemn chant and dirge over the sepulchre. For many hours the rites endured, and when at last all were fully accomplished the people rose up and went sorrowfully to their own homes, and ever afterwards they and their children and children's children cherished with the utmost love and veneration the memory of the holy Martino.

THE SAINT AND THE TYRANT

IT came to pass in the days of the holy San Martino that the Emperor set up over the city a governor named Avitiano, who was a cruel and bloodthirsty man, and ruled the people harshly. One day, after a victory over the barbarians at a great distance, he returned home in triumph, dragging after him a long train of captives, loaded with chains and sorely wounded by the blows of the soldiers who drove them along. Avitiano gave orders to the officers to slay them every one on the morrow. The prisoners stood round in the market-place, with cast-down looks, many weeping piteously, when Martino happened to pass by, and was filled with compassion for them. He hastened to the palace of the Governor, where, night being now come, all were asleep and the doors fast barred and bolted. When, therefore, he might not enter, Martino stretched himself upon the threshold; and as the horrid tyrant lay on his bed in a deep sleep, suddenly an angel stood beside him and smote him, crying out, "Sleepest thou, presumptuous man, while the servant of God lieth at thy

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threshold?" Avitiano awoke, and called, terrified, to the guards, "Martino is at the gate, and I fear he may suffer harm. Go quickly and undo the bars." But the servants would not go, confidently affirming that no one was there, for they supposed their master to have been mocked by a dream. Avitiano returned to his slumbers, but again the angel smote him with greater violence, and he sprang up, trembling with fear, and declared that certainly Martino stood at the door. The servants being still unwilling, Avitiano himself went forward to the outer gate, and, throwing it open, found Martino lying there stiff with cold. The saint looked at the tyrant without speaking, but his countenance was so full of reproach and sorrow that the miserable man was overcome by remorse, and fell at his feet, crying out, "Why hast thou so dealt with me, O my lord? I know what thou requirest of me. Depart, therefore, quickly to thy bed, I beseech thee, lest thou die, and the wrath of God consume me on thy account, and I will perform all that thou dost desire." Then, Martino being gone, he summoned his officers, and commanded them to set the prisoners free in the morning, and suffer them to go to their own homes. And this thing being noised abroad in the city, the people rejoiced greatly and praised God.

From thenceforth Avitiano dealt more mercifully with his subjects, fearing to be again rebuked of the holy man. Yet

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he could not wholly overcome the hardness of his heart, and many times fell back into sin, and spilt innocent blood. One day he sat in his hall meditating a terrible revenge on a certain person who had offended him, when Martino chanced to enter, and began to blow with his mouth very vehemently, so that the wind reached the tyrant, who cried out, amazed and angry, "Why doest thou thus, thou holy man?" thinking that the saint wished to insult him. Martino answered, "I blow not at thee, but at him of horrible aspect who leans over thy shoulder." Avitiano glanced behind him, greatly alarmed, and lo! an enormous demon, which had been seated at his back unseen by any save the saint, made itself apparent to all present, and flying up with a screech, vanished. The evil spirit being thus gone out of him, the tyrant was entirely changed; his soul melted with compassion for the offender, whom he immediately forgave, and from that time forth he ruled the people righteously, defending the good and punishing the evil with justice and mercy.

THE JOURNEY OF SAN MARTINO

SAN MARTINO, seeing his flock grievously oppressed by a heavy tax, resolved one day to go to the Imperial Court at Rome and persuade the Emperor to remove the burden from their shoulders. Now, it was many days' journey to Rome, and the saint was become old and feeble. Nevertheless, grasping his staff, he set forth alone and on foot. After he was gone a little way, there met him a waggon full of soldiers, drawn by a long string of mules. The beasts, beholding this strange old man in his hairy garment, swerved aside in fear, and entangling the reins, they began to stumble and kick, and fell into great confusion. The enraged soldiers leapt down and threw themselves upon Martino, and in their blind fury set to belabour him cruelly with whips and staves. The saint endured their vengeance with such meekness that, deeming him to despise it, they redoubled their blows, till he fell well-nigh lifeless to the ground. Then they left him, and some monks, who had followed Martino at a distance, came running hastily, and lifted the bleeding man upon an ass, and,

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supporting him in their arms, led him speedily away. Meanwhile the soldiers returned laughing and singing to the waggon, and the drivers called to the mules to start. But the animals remained stock still, as stiff as brazen images. The drivers shouted and yelled; the rocks rang with the sound of their whips. The soldiers ran into the woods, and cutting great cudgels from the trees, beat the mules till they fell down themselves utterly exhausted. All in vain; the beasts stood as if rooted in the ground, and heeded not the clamour and blows. At length the men began to be afraid, for they perceived this was a miracle, and remembering him whom they had so cruelly scourged in that place, they said one to another, "This man must have been a god or a devil." Then a traveller passing by told them that it was the holy Martino himself, and they perceived with shame the evil which they had done. Weeping and throwing dust upon their heads, they ran after the saint, and, overtaking him, cast themselves at his feet and acknowledged that they deserved only to be swallowed up alive by the earth, or stiffened into immovable images like their beasts. But they besought him to have mercy and pardon them. Martino, pitiful towards all sinners who repented, after a while raised them up, and bade them go in peace and sin no more. And departing they came again to the waggon, and this time the mules moved off at once, without

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waiting for the word of command, and brought them happily to their journey's end.

Meanwhile the saint, having rested in the house of a poor husbandman, and being quickly healed of his wounds by God's mercy and the loving care of the monks, rose up to continue his journey. After a space he came to a monastery, where he spent the rest of the day in sweet discourse with the abbot and brethren. Night being now come, they brought him to a chamber where a fire had been kindled in the stove, and a heap of straw prepared for his bed. The saint, vexed at such softness and luxury, cast the straw hastily aside, and lying down upon the hard boards, covered himself with a piece of sackcloth. Now, some of the straw fell upon the stove and ignited, and about midnight the holy man, waking out of a deep slumber, found himself encircled by flames. Forgetful of the Lord, he ran in terror to the door and shook it vehemently, but could not open it because of the heavy bar which he had drawn on retiring. Meanwhile the flames ran about all over the floor, and reaching the saint, began to catch his garment, so that he well-nigh swooned and fell down in the midst of them. Suddenly he bethought him to pray, and cried out with a loud voice to the Lord for succour. Immediately calm came upon his soul, and he laid himself down tranquilly in the flames, which licked his body all over without doing him the

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least hurt. The monks, alarmed by the smoke and the crackling, came running in haste to the chamber and burst open the door. And they beheld the holy man in the middle of the fire, sleeping as sweetly as if he had lain on a bed of roses. The fire now faded quickly out, and Martino awaking, told them of his want of faith, and of God's mercy towards him, and exhorted them always to put their trust in the Lord. And they gave thanks together, and the next day he continued on his road to Rome.

At length, with aching limbs, the aged saint drew nigh to the great city, and saw far off her multitude of marble temples and palaces, shining upon her seven hills. Then it was told to the Emperor that Martino was coming to demand a grace of him, and, being unwilling to grant it, he commanded that the saint should not be suffered to enter the palace. The old man, turned away from the gates after his long and bitter journey, departed very sorrowful. He went to the house of a friend, where, clothing himself in sackcloth and scattering ashes upon his head, he spent night and day in continual prayer. On the seventh day an angel stood beside him and bade him go boldly to the palace, for the doors should open to him of their own accord. And Martino arose and went to the palace, and lo! the doors split open, though untouched by mortal hand, and he walked forward without hindrance through many vast halls, till he came to the presence-chamber, where the

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Emperor sat upon his throne. Valentinian, seeing him approach, was filled with rage, and began to gnash his teeth and to cry out upon his servants for having allowed Martino to come in. He would not rise from his seat to receive the holy man, who stood humbly waiting at a little distance. All at once, to the consternation of those around, flames began to issue from beneath the chair of the monarch and to lick the royal person, wrapping him in smoke, so that he was compelled to rise up in haste, lest he should be burnt. Perceiving this thing to be the Lord's doing, Valentinian was smitten with shame, and came and threw himself upon the neck of the saint, weeping and asking his pardon. Martino forgave him tenderly, and, the fire having been extinguished by the guards, the Emperor led him by the hand and set him upon a seat beside his own, and inquired of him concerning religious matters, listening gladly to his words.

Soon the queen, hearing that the holy man was in the palace, came running hastily to greet him. Throwing herself down before him, she kissed his feet and watered them with her tears. All day long she stayed beside the saint, hanging upon the precious words which fell from his lips. Then, going secretly to the Emperor, she besought him that he would suffer her to minister herself to their guest at the evening feast. And when they were all come to the banqueting hall she led

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Martino to a place she had herself prepared for him, and with her own hands brought him food and poured wine into his cup. All the time of the meal she stood meekly beside his seat, preferring rather to be the handmaiden of the servant of God than to recline in the chief place as empress by the side of her husband. Thus, in the presence of all the nobles and chief officers of the Court, was great honour done to the saint. And, after a little space, the Emperor, having promised to free the people from the tax, according to the desire of Martino, suffered him to depart in peace to his own city.



SAN GALGANO KNEELS BEFORE THE SWORD.

THE MARVELLOUS SWORD

THERE was in the city of Siena a wealthy young nobleman, named Galgano, who lived riotously and kept the company of careless and wicked men. It chanced one day that he was crossing the great square of the city, with a large following of friends and servants, when there met him a certain knight called Ugolino, who bore him a secret grudge and loved to vex

THE MARVELLOUS SWORD

him. This man began now in foolish sport to mock Galgano, for the fashion of his sword, which had a plain cross hilt. "Look you," cried Ugolino, to the bystanders. "Now will he cheat the devil and turn friar, for he wears the cross at his girdle." Then the youth, who was of a quick spirit and very prone to wrath, answered hastily, that cross it might be, but it could yet do devil's work, and snatching it from its scabbard, he plunged it into the breast of the knight, who fell to the ground, and, uttering one long sob, died.

Then arose a loud clamour and noise of tongues, and the dead man's servants came and lifted him up, and carried him with great lamentation to his house. But Galgano, casting a disdainful look at the still body, went on his way, surrounded by his companions, and feasted and played the livelong day, and sang wild songs far into the night. His friends departed one by one to their homes, and he was left alone, and being far from his house and very weary, he entered into the shop of a wool-stapler, and casting himself down upon a heap of fleeces, fell into a deep slumber.

As he slept he thought he was in a beautiful chamber together with his mother, the lady Dionisia, and by his side still hung the bloodstained sword. Suddenly there stood before them a warrior of very glorious appearance, winged with golden plumes, and his body clothed in armour of glittering scales.

THE MARVELLOUS SWORD

And in his right hand he carried a drawn sword, of very clean steel, and his face was so fair and terrible that the youth fell to the ground abashed. And he knew that it was the Archangel Michael. Then he heard that heavenly one ask Dionisia, with much instance, to give him her son, that he might make the youth a knight, and she, all joyful, bowed her head and consented. And it seemed to Galgano, in his dream, that he himself rose up very eagerly to follow this gracious prince; but suddenly the angel's eye fell upon the bloodstained sword, and he lifted his finger and bade the youth stand still. Then Michael spoke again in clear tones, saying, "Thou wearest already the sword of my Master at thy side, but I perceive upon it the marks of thy brother's blood. Behold, my Lord hath need of pure hearts and clean weapons. Thou canst not follow me." Thereupon heavy shame and sorrow filled the heart of the youth, and an exceeding bitterness of longing after that glorious knighthood, which he had lost by his sin. He would fain have flung himself at the feet of the angel, but he could not move, for the sword at his belt held him back with its cold and cruel weight. Michael gazed at him with stern, sad eyes, and vanished. Then Galgano awoke, and seeing the sword by his bedside, he wept bitterly all night long.

Very early in the morning he rose, and mounting his horse, went home, and seeking his mother, he revealed to

THE MARVELLOUS SWORD

her his dream and the evil he had done. Dionisia, who was a widow, and had no other child but this one, lamented sadly over his fresh crime, and implored him with tears to repent and lead a new life, that he might yet receive that heavenly knighthood. Galgano went out from her presence with a troubled heart. From that time forth he forsook his old ways, and went about with downcast eyes and bowed head, carrying ever the bloodstained sword by his side, and mourning heavily for his transgression. He ate little, and passed all his nights in prayer and weeping. He cared no more for his golden hair, which once had shone like the rays of the sun, the roses faded in his cheeks, and all his beauty consumed away, like a garment fretted by the moth. His friends, supposing him to be attacked by melancholy, plied him with merry tales, and proposed to him new sports and pleasures; but the youth fled from their company, and sought out instead the poor and the sick, whom he humbly endeavoured to succour. But his soul was ever heavy with despair, for he felt his sin to be too grievous for pardon.

After he had lived in this manner for two bitter years, he lay asleep one night on the hard floor, as was now his custom, with the sword still buckled to his side. Then the Archangel, once more stepping down from his place in the heavenly host, stood before him, and this time, calling him by name, bade him rise up and follow. All at once the burden was lifted from the

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young man's heart. He leapt to his feet, no longer embarrassed by the sword, which now seemed light as air, and walked all joyfully beside the angel. And Michael led him into a dark forest, through which they proceeded by a narrow path, where the thorns and briars tore Galgano's feet; but he heeded them not. Presently they came to a precipice, from the brink whereof a dizzy bridge was thrown to the opposite side, over a deep abyss, while far beneath, beside a fierce rushing torrent, there was a mill-wheel turning very swiftly. When he saw the bridge, and heard the water roaring, and the ceaseless beat of the wheel, Galgano shrank back afraid; but the angel, taking him by the hand, led him safely across, and brought him into a beautiful meadow, where a thousand flowers of divers colours refreshed and comforted the weary youth with their sweet odour.

He would fain have tarried here awhile; but his guide went ever onwards, till they were come to a little mountain, encircled by flowery hedges, which the angel climbed up with swift, strong steps. Galgano followed after, slow and breathless, for the ascent was very difficult. At the top stood a beautiful chapel, and they entered in at the open door. Immediately a blinding light smote the young man's eyes, so that he knew not where to look. For there, on a great high throne, sat the Son of God Himself, and He was whiter than the whitest snow. And round about the throne stood the twelve apostles, and they did

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Him homage. The angel led Galgano to the foot of the throne, where he fell on his face ashamed, for he knew those merciful eyes were upon him. And presently he heard a clear voice speaking, which said, "Fear no more, Galgano, but be of good comfort, for the Lord hath heard the sound of thy much weeping, and now will thy repentance be accepted, and henceforth shalt thou serve Him, and do His work." The voice ceased, and when, after a long space, the youth dared to lift his eyes, he was alone, in darkness.

Then he woke up with a glad heart, and as soon as it was day, he sought his mother and made known to her his resolve to abandon the world and all his worldly possessions, and to seek out a solitary place where he might serve God night and day. But to part from her child was too hard and bitter a thing for the weak mother's heart, and she wept upon his neck and implored him not to forsake her. Finding she was not able to prevail with him by her entreaties, she dismissed him from her presence, and rising up in haste, betook herself to a neighbouring nobleman, who had a beautiful daughter, named Cecilia, and obtained the promise of the maiden's hand in marriage for her son. When she returned and told Galgano what she had done, he was sorely perplexed, for this damsel was very dear to him, as his mother well knew; but remembering the sin he had committed, and the wonderful vision, he struggled long against the

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allurement. But Dionisia did not cease to importune him, and at length he yielded to her wish that he should visit the maiden.

As he rode on his way, he turned aside to enter a lonely chapel, which stood in the midst of a little grove of trees, and kneeling down, he listened to the chanting of the priest before the altar and prayed for help to do the will of God. Then he mounted again, and turned towards the little city where Cecilia dwelt. But his horse stopped short, and, heedless of whip and spur, refused to move, whereupon the youth, marvelling greatly, left the reins on its neck, and suffered it to follow its own will. Suddenly a great splendour shone out before him, and from the midst thereof stepped forth the angel Michael, who took the horse's bridle and led it by ways unknown to Galgano to the top of a little mountain, all covered with the golden flowers of the broom, and bidding him dwell there and build a little habitation, wherein to praise God, straightway departed, and was seen of the young man no more.

Galgano leapt from his horse, and kneeling down under the wide sky, gave thanks to God that he was come thither. Then he rose and took the bridle from the animal, and suffered it to browse on the fresh pasture of the hill. He took off his gay cloak and richly adorned garments, till his only covering was a long smock, such as the peasants wear, and he laid the clothes aside in a little heap to be given to the poor. But the

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sword, with which he had so grievously offended God and his neighbour, he determined to bury deep in the earth, that it might never more do harm to living creature. Taking it by the hilt, he thrust it with all his might into the ground, and it struck upon a solid rock, wherein it entered more than halfway up, as into softest wax, and there stuck so fast that no man was ever able, from that time forth, to draw it out. The youth fell upon his knees amazed. And behold! Now was the sword become a cross, and his bloodstained weapon changed into the symbol of love. Galgano clasped his hands in adoration before it, and afterward kissed and embraced it with tears of joy. After a long time he rose up, and all at once he heard a loud rustling in the forest below, as of a mighty tempest, and on every side resounded the roaring of lions and tigers, and the bellowing of bulls. Then a multitude of wild beasts, with glaring eyes and foaming, bloodthirsty tongues, hanging out of their mouths, rushed from the wood and surrounded the young hermit, as if to devour him. His horse, which was feeding near by, seeing them approach, ran to its master of its own accord, and stood ready for him to leap upon its back, and flee to his home in safety. But Galgano, knowing the apparition to be a wile of the evil one, made the sign of the cross, whereupon the whole host of monsters turned and fled with the utmost speed, and the sound of their hideous cries reached more

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and more faintly to the ears of the youth, and soon ceased altogether.

Night now began to fall, and Galgano, having supped off a few wild herbs and drunk of a springing fountain, began to consider how he might shelter himself from the cold of the mountain air, for it was the winter time. Having neither axe nor knife, he broke branches of the broom with his hands, and carried them in bundles to the rock where the sword stood, that he might build a habitation. But each time that he was gone to fetch more wood the evil one came and carried off his sticks, and scattered them all about, and the new hermit, finding his labour was made vain, became downcast, and at length, when it was now quite dark, he gave up the task, and went and knelt down before the sword. Then the little trees which stood around seemed to whisper awhile over his head, and presently they bent their tops towards one another, and weaving themselves together made a little roof to shelter him. The youth, perceiving this to be the doing of the Lord, gave fervent thanks; then, lying down on the hard ground, with a stone for his pillow, he slept sweetly till dawn, when, awakened by the song of the birds, he rose up and joined his morning hymn to theirs. Presently there came by a poor man, who was gathering wood upon the mountain. When he saw Galgano kneeling before the sword he was afraid, supposing

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that it was a spirit, but venturing nearer he recognized the youth, who was well known to him. Not daring to address him, the fellow was about to pass on, when Galgano called him, and charged him to give the bundle of garments to the poor, and afterward to go to the Lady Dionisia, and bid her wait no longer for her son's return, and to refrain from grieving, and he sent her a ring from his finger, to give to the damsel, his promised bride, in remembrance of one whom she must never see again. Whilst he talked with the peasant, his horse came up, and suffered itself to be caught, and the youth, caressing it for the last time, committed it to the man to take to a certain good priest. Then the peasant departed, and went and did as he was bid.

Now, when Dionisia heard her son's message, she became very sorrowful, and resolved to go to him and compel him to return home. She fetched the beautiful Cecilia, and arrayed her in gorgeous robes, and decked her hair with pearls; then mounting a palfrey, she caused the maiden to be set upon another, and led her, amidst an honourable company of relations and friends, to the mountain, guided by the peasants. When they were come to the top she left Cecilia with the rest of the company, and, going forward alone, she found her son, and fell upon his neck, and, weeping bitterly, besought him to come home. The youth sought to comfort her, though he could not

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yield to her will, whereupon she grew angry, and threatened him with her sore displeasure. Galgano sighed, and held his peace. Then Dionisia turned and called the maiden, who advanced and stood before the young man, appearing more beautiful than the full moon at midnight. But Galgano kept his eyes fixed upon the ground, not daring to look upon her. Then, in a low voice, he began gently to upbraid the women, and to show forth the vanity of earthly things, and the enduring joy of the heavenly life, till they were both moved to tears, and agreed to renounce their desire and leave him for ever. And when they had bid him a last farewell and embraced him many times, they departed to their own homes.

Then Dionisia sent masons from the city to build a little chapel and cell for her son, and here Galgano dwelt from that time forth, close to his sword, in continual prayer and adoration. Multitudes came to visit him, and he gave sweet counsel to all in distress and difficulty, and to the sorrowful consolation. Moreover, when he heard of any sick persons in the country round about, he would descend from the mountain and minister to them in their need, so that his name was blessed far and wide. And it came to pass after a time that a certain great city, at many days' journey from his dwelling, was visited by a terrible pestilence, and Galgano was warned by the angel in a dream that he should go and succour the people in their

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trouble. He set forth very early one morning, staff in hand, walking barefoot, and clothed only in a poor shepherd's dress. And Michael went before him all the way, and brought him safely to the city, where Galgano abode many days, tenderly caring for the sick, whose friends had fled from them for fear of the malady, and with his own hands burying the dead bodies which lay in heaps in the streets. At length the plague was stayed, and Galgano, worn and faint with much labour, rose up to return home.

Now, the abbot and sacristan of a monastery not far from the mountain were envious of the fame of Galgano and the reverence in which he was held, whereas they themselves were despised for their unworthy lives. So they took counsel with a wicked priest to drive the hermit from his dwelling and destroy the cell and the sword; and one morning, not knowing he was absent, they armed themselves with iron bars and spades, and set out boldly to the mountain, encouraging themselves with jests and oaths as they went along. The priest, when he reached the little stream at the foot of the mountain, perceiving the water to be but an inch deep, cried out, laughing, "May I be drowned here to-day if I do not drive away Galgano, and root up the sword." The abbot, glancing round at the serene and cloudless sky, said, "May the lightning strike me dead to-day, if I do not the same, and more also."



THE ARCHANGEL GOES BEFORE SAN GALGANO.



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Then it came to the turn of the sacristan, who added, feeling very bold and lusty, "And may the wolves gnaw off my arms, if I do not wrench the sword from the rock, and compel that hypocritical fellow to fly."

Being come to the top, these mad and unhappy men ran to the hut, and, finding it empty, they supposed that Galgano must have hidden himself. Without let or hindrance they began to smite the sword with the iron bars and to try and dig it up. At length it yielded to their blows, and broke into three pieces, but the point remained immovably fixed in its place. To lose no more time, they left the sword, and, lighting a fire, burnt down the hut. Then, highly pleased and satisfied with themselves, the miserable creatures thought to return triumphant to their homes. But suddenly the sky darkened with heavy clouds, the thunder rolled and crashed, and the terrible lightnings flashed forth. Then, struck with terror, the evil-doers began to flee, but scarce was the abbot gone a stone's throw from the ruined cell when a thunderbolt smote him, and he was stretched dead on the ground. The priest, flying at full speed, came to the stream, and in leaping across it fell into the swollen waters, and was miserably drowned. The terrified sacristan was now beginning to repent of his wicked deed, when a pack of wolves ran out of the forest, and, falling upon him with cruel fangs, tore off his arms from the

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shoulders ; but, nevertheless, he remained alive, and, fleeing home to the monastery half dead with fear, he related all that had passed. Then many people, hearing of this thing, went to the mountain, and seeing the burnt hut and broken sword, and the bodies of the abbot and priest, they wondered exceedingly, and before long they found the arms of the sacristan in the wood, untouched, which being restored to him, the penitent man tied them with a cord round his neck, and carried them in this manner till his death in remembrance of his sin.

And now Galgano, journeying home, footsore and very weary, came at length to his mountain. From far off he perceived the smoke of the fire which had destroyed his dwelling, and, hurrying onwards, he climbed up and arrived breathless at the place. When he beheld the broken sword and a heap of smouldering ashes where his cell had been, his distress was very sore, and he wept bitterly. But presently his trust in God returned. He searched diligently among the ruins, and found the pieces of the sword, which he carried to the rock where the other part remained, and humbly besought the Lord to join them to the rest. Then he set them one upon another in their right places, and behold ! they were immediately united into one whole, and the sword appeared again in the form of a cross, as if it had never been broken.

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Thereupon Galgano, beyond measure joyful, knelt down in his old place, and gave abundant thanks to God.

The relations and friends of the saint, hearing of his return, flocked to visit him, and to behold the sword which had been made whole. Then they caused another hut to be built, wherein he dwelt in the same manner as before. But now his body was become very weak, and his only desire was to die and be with his Lord. One evening, when he was yet in his youth, as he was kneeling before the sword, there came a voice from heaven, which said, "It is enough, Galgano; greatly hast thou wearied thyself, sufficiently hast thou battled on the earth, and now, within a few days, thou shalt wear the victor's crown." Then a heavenly consolation filled the heart of the saint, so that all who came to look on him thereafter were astounded, for he seemed no longer a worn, pale hermit, but a beautiful youth, as of old. The roses bloomed afresh in his cheeks, and his long hair, falling upon his shoulders, shone once more like fine gold. After a few days he fell ill of a fever. Growing ever worse, he knew that his hour was at hand, and one evening he knelt before his sword, and, unseen by mortal eye, passed into eternal life.

SAN BENEDETTO

THERE was a holy man, whose name was Benedetto, which is to say blessed, and rightly was he so called, being abundantly blessed by the grace of God. From his earliest youth he had the mind of a sage, and, though rich and of noble rank, cared nothing for earthly things, looking upon the flowering garden of the world as an arid desert. His parents brought him to Rome, that he might address himself to liberal studies; but, seeing how many were led by profane learning into vice, he withdrew himself hastily from the path of knowledge. Troubled, moreover, by the evil lives of his companions, he resolved to abandon his home and possessions, and seek a habitation far from the busy ways of men, where he might lead a life pleasing to God. So, bidding farewell to his parents and friends, and accompanied only by his old nurse, who loved him tenderly, he departed from the city, and went forth into the wilderness.

After a journey of some days they came to a place where,

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close beside a church, dwelt a company of pious men and women, who lovingly compelled them to stay their weary feet and abide with them. Benedetto was at first well pleased to dwell there. He exercised himself continually in prayer and meditation, watching far into the night, fasting three times a week, and on the other days partaking only of bread and fruit. One day the nurse, having borrowed a vessel wherein to cleanse some corn, that she might make bread, incautiously let it fall, and it was broken in two pieces, whereupon she began to weep bitterly, not knowing how she might restore it to her neighbour. The pious and kind-hearted youth, pitying her grief, took up the two pieces, and with eyes full of tears began to pray, and when he rose from his knees he was astonished to behold the vessel whole and sound, so that no man could have discerned that it had been broken. Going up to the nurse, he gave it into her hands with sweet words of consolation. This thing becoming known to all in that place, was had in great wonder and esteem, and the people took and hung the vessel over the door of the church, that all men might see to what perfection of grace the boy Benedetto had attained, beholding his prayers thus marvellously answered.

But Benedetto longed to suffer for Christ's sake, rather than to be praised for his goodness, and that life which others would have judged too hard to be endured, he despised for its

overmuch comfort and ease. His discontent increasing, one night, when his nurse lay fast asleep, he rose from his bed and, bidding her a silent farewell, took his staff in his hand, and went forth from that place. He wandered for many days in the wilderness, suffering hunger and thirst, and wounding his feet upon the sharp rocks, till at last he came to a desert country, where an abundance of clear water poured forth from a lake, and flowing down in a river, watered all the plain beneath. Here he met a monk named Romano, who gave him food and drink, and then led him to a secret place in the mountain beside the lake, where there was a deep cave. Benedetto hid himself in the cave, and lived there in solitude, serving God, unknown to any man except Romano. This gentle monk, who lived in a monastery not far off, stole secretly out each day, and carried to his friend a little bread, which was all he could spare from his own scanty meal. And because there was no path from his cell to the cave, which was overhung by a great rock, Romano was used to let down the bread in a basket by a long rope from the top of the rock, and he tied a little bell beside the basket, that at the sound of its ringing Benedetto might come forth to receive the offering. One day, as Romano was performing this act of lovingkindness, the Evil One, moved by envy at the sight of his charity, appeared in the form of a horrible

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bat with a man's head, and throwing a stone at the basket, broke the bell. Romano, terribly frightened, continued, nevertheless, to bring the bread at the accustomed hour; and the Evil One, vanquished by his constancy, molested him no more.

After three years had passed away, a certain priest, who dwelt at some distance, was preparing for himself a feast wherewith to celebrate Easter, and mixing and compounding the delicacies with much care, when an angel appeared and cried, saying, "Thou preparest good things for thyself, and the servant of the Lord yonder is tormented with hunger." The priest, wondering greatly, rose, and taking with him the food, set forth to seek the place pointed out by the angel. After wandering a long while over steep mountains, and through valleys and rough ways, he came at last to the cave, and found Benedetto sitting on the threshold. They embraced one another tenderly, and knelt down to pray, and afterwards had much sweet discourse together. Then the priest said, "Arise, let us eat, for to-day is the feast day." Benedetto answered, "For me it is indeed a feast day, seeing thou hast come to visit me." But he knew not that it was Easter Day, for so long had he dwelt apart from men that he had lost count of the seasons. The priest said, "Verily, to-day is the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord, therefore it behoves thee to leave off from fasting,

and for that cause am I sent unto thee." And he related how the angel had appeared, and continued, "Now let us enjoy together the gifts of Almighty God." Then Benedetto rejoiced greatly, and gave praise to the Lord, and the priest having meanwhile spread the feast, they sat down and ate; and on the approach of night the priest rose, and bidding the holy man farewell, departed and returned to his church.

Soon after this a company of shepherds came that way, and, seeing something moving among the thick bushes, they took it to be a wild beast, but on approaching nearer they were amazed to find it was a man, clothed in the skins of animals, and of such a sweet and gentle aspect that they were compelled to kneel down and entreat his blessing. Benedetto spoke to them holy words of exhortation, and so tamed their wild and savage hearts that many of them forsook their evil ways and were turned to piety and grace, coming often to the cave to seek comfort and advice from the holy man. In this manner his name and his sanctity became noised abroad in that country, and many began to visit him. God was thus pleased to relieve Romano from the labour of feeding the saint, for Benedetto was now abundantly provided by the gifts of the faithful, who, bringing him food for his body, received in return bread for their immortal souls.

A little way off dwelt a community of monks who lived a

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careless and evil life. Their abbot being lately dead, they were desirous, from a spirit of pride and vainglory, to have a saint for their father, and came and besought Benedetto to rule over them. He refused them many times, declaring that his ways would not agree with theirs. At last he yielded to their importunity, and with great ceremony and rejoicing they brought him to the monastery. But when he began to govern, and would allow none to depart either to the right hand or to the left from the narrow path of righteousness, the monks began to rage together, and each to accuse the others of having proposed him for their abbot, so offended were they by the uprightness of his rule. Alas! hard it is for the evil to make themselves new hearts, and to walk in the ways of the good. At last they took counsel together to kill him, and one day they mixed poison with his wine. When the cup was offered to the holy father to be blessed, according to the custom of the monastery, he stretched forth his hand and made the sign of the cross, whereupon the cup split into fragments. Benedetto, perceiving that it had contained a deadly potion, since it could not endure the sign of life, rose with placid countenance and tranquil mind, and, assembling the monks, spoke as follows :—

“ May the Almighty God have mercy upon you, brethren! Wherefore did you desire to do me this evil? Said I not rightly that your ways and mine would not agree together?

Go and seek an abbot like unto yourselves, for me you may have no longer."

So saying, he rose, and, taking his staff, went out from them and returned to his cave, where he lived in his beloved solitude once more, with his eyes turned night and day to the silent heavens above him.

But he might not enjoy undisturbed peace, for the Evil One, envious of the increasing virtue of the saint, sought every occasion to tempt him. One summer evening, as Benedetto was sitting outside his cave, refreshing his brow in the sweet-scented air, a little blackbird began to tease him, fluttering round his face, as if it would have him take it in his hand. He, fearing it to be of evil omen, made the sign of the cross, and straightway the bird flew off. And immediately a terrible temptation assailed him; for the devil caused to appear a beautiful maiden, whom Benedetto had known long ago in the world; and she stood there gazing at him with sorrowful eyes, as it were beseeching him to return to her. And the holy man was filled with such an exceeding great love and longing that he almost resolved to abandon the hermitage and return to the city. Terrified at his own weakness, he rose hastily, and wandered about all night among the rocks and the thickets, wounding himself grievously upon the savage thorns; yet he could not drive her image from him. At last, when the first cold light

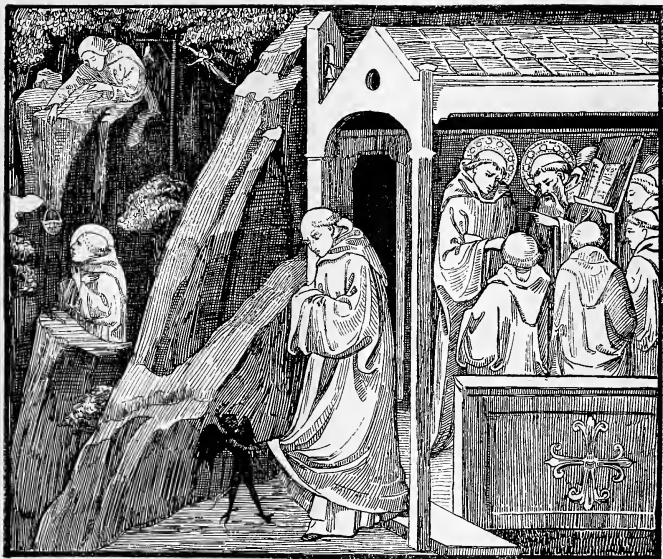
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of dawn appeared, he fell exhausted on the ground, and she vanished. From that day she came no more; and the Evil One, overcome by his constancy, ceased to vex him.

Time went on, and the fame of the saint grew ever greater, so that multitudes came to visit him, and many abandoned the world and congregated near his dwelling, that they might profit by his teaching. Noble and religious persons from the city of Rome flocked thither bringing their sons to him to train up in the fear of God. He built twelve monasteries round about that place, and appointed twelve abbots to rule over them, giving them a set of laws for the guidance of the monks. Now, in one of the monasteries there was a young brother who would never stay at his prayers—for scarcely had the monks begun to pray but he would go quietly out and wander about with his mind full of vain and worldly longings. When he had been often admonished by his abbot without result, he was brought to the holy Benedetto, who rebuked him sharply and bade him amend his behaviour. But for two days only did he keep the command of the holy man, and on the third, falling back into his old habit, he stole out of the chapel at the hour of prayer. This being told to Benedetto, he said, "I will myself come and correct him;" and he rose and went to the monastery. The monks beginning to pray as usual, he watched carefully, and saw a little black boy enter and pull the restless monk by the

edge of his garment, and draw him out of the chapel. Benedetto calling the abbot and a brother named Mauro, whom he trusted greatly, said to them, "Do you not see who it is that draws forth the monk?" and they answering "No," he bade them pray that their eyes might be opened. The next day the same thing happened, and this time Mauro saw, but the abbot remained blind. At the conclusion of prayers the saint went out and discovered the guilty brother standing against the wall. Then Benedetto took him and chastised him with rods, and drove the evil spirit out with abundant stripes, so that from that moment the little black boy came no more, and the monk remained each day motionless in the chapel praying with his companions.

The brothers from one of the monasteries on the top of the mountain complaining to the saint that they were compelled to make a painful and perilous descent to the lake whenever they had need of water, Benedetto comforted them, and bade them come to him again next day; and that very night he ascended the mountain alone with a young boy named Placido, and prayed on the top till dawn. Then, setting three stones there for a sign, he returned home, and bade the brothers go up the mountain, and when they came to the rock whereon were set three stones, to dig a hole. They did as he commanded, and immediately the hole was filled with fresh water,



SAN BENEDETTO IN THE CAVE, AND THE INATTENTIVE MONK.

After Lorenzo Monaco, Uffizi, Florence.

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which flowed forth in such abundance that there was enough for all the monasteries.

And the saint performed many other wonders. One day he gave an iron instrument, such as the people use for reaping, to a poor man named Beppo, bidding him cut down a certain thicket which grew on the shore above the lake. Beppo began to hew with all his might, and suddenly the iron sprang out of the handle of the instrument, and fell into the water. The man coming with woeful visage to relate his misfortune, the holy Benedetto rose up, and went with him to the lake, and taking hold of the handle, held the end thereof in the water, whereupon the iron rose up from the bottom, and entered of itself into the handle, and the saint restored it to Beppo, saying, "Behold the sickle. Now return to thy labour, and grieve no more." On another occasion, the child Placido went to draw water, and incautiously letting the bucket fall in, fell in himself after it. The strong flood seized him, and he was drawn from the shore with the swiftness of an arrow. Benedetto, shut within his cell, was miraculously made aware of what had happened, and calling Mauro in great haste, said, "Run, run, Brother Mauro, for the child is fallen into the water." Now mark this marvel which came to pass. For, hurrying at the bidding of the holy man to the place where the boy had been swept away, and thinking himself to be still

on dry land, Mauro ran over the surface of the water, and, taking Placido by the hair, returned with all speed the way he had come, drawing the child after him. As soon as he touched the ground his understanding returned to him, and he perceived, to his exceeding great amazement, that he had walked upon the water, and, leading Placido by the hand, he went and told Benedetto. The saint rejoiced over the rescued boy, and gave much honour to Mauro, judging the miracle to have been done because of his obedience, but Mauro said that it was not so, for he had not known what he did, and that Benedetto had himself endued him with the power, by commanding him to save Placido. In the midst of this loving contention, each desiring to give the praise to the other, the child interposed, saying, "When I was being drawn out of the water I saw above my head the face of the holy father, and I believed it was he who was bringing me forth." Thus was judgment proclaimed by the mouth of a babe, and the merit given to him to whose virtue it was due.

Benedetto dwelt for many years in the cave, but the time came when he was to quit it and go forth to fight battles against the heathen and the powers of darkness, and his departure came about in this wise. The priest of a neighbouring church, Florentio by name, filled with envy of the saint, began to speak evil of his life, hoping to persuade the

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people not to visit him, and, finding these wiles fail, sent him a gift of poisoned bread, with the purpose of killing him. Now, a crow out of a wood close by was accustomed to come at the hour of dinner and take food from the hand of the saint, and Benedetto, knowing full well what was concealed in the bread which Florentio had sent, took and threw it on the ground before the bird, saying, "In the name of the Lord, carry this to a place where no man shall find it." The crow, opening its beak and extending its wings, began to flutter and hop round the bread, plainly meaning to tell him that it desired to obey, but was not able. The holy man bade it fear nothing, and perform his command, and the bird, after hesitating a long time, at last took the bread in its beak and flew away. After three hours it returned, flying heavily, as if very weary, and ate greedily from the hand of the saint, so that it was evident that it had flown a great distance and accomplished the task.

The holy father, giving thanks to the Lord for having preserved his life, began to grieve deeply that Florentio's mind was kindled against him, and he called his monks together and gave into their care his chapel and all he had built, and, taking only a few brothers, went forth to seek another habitation. No sooner had he thus withdrawn himself from the hatred of his enemy, than it pleased God to smite that wicked man in a fearful manner, for he was standing

upon his housetop when they brought him news that Benedetto had departed, and he began to exult exceedingly, when suddenly that portion of the roof whereon he stood, though all the rest of the house remained unshaken, fell with a great crash, and he was destroyed beneath the ruins. Benedetto had scarce gone ten miles on his way when Mauro came running after, with a joyful countenance, and cried, saying, "Turn back, O father, for the priest who persecuted thee is dead." Whereupon the holy man began to weep and lament grievously, sorrowing for the death of his enemy, and because his own disciple had dared to rejoice, and he rebuked Mauro, bidding him do penance for his revengeful spirit.

Knowing that it was the Lord's will that he should quit the cave, he did not turn back, but journeyed onwards for many days, till he came to a high mountain, where, hid within dark groves of trees, stood an ancient temple, and within it an altar whereon the ignorant people made sacrifices to Apollo, after the customs of the heathen. Benedetto and his followers broke the idol, overthrew the altar, and burnt down the trees, and for this they suffered much persecution from the inhabitants, who strove to drive them away with sticks and stones; but the soldiers of Christ fought and endured manfully for their faith, and, after a time, the gentleness of Benedetto softened the hard hearts of the people, and they began to listen to his words.



**The Devil
sits on the
Stone.**

*

After Spinello
Aretino, Sac-
risty, San
Miniato,
Florence.



SAN BENEDETTO

The saint, compassionating their benighted condition, resolved to stay there and convert them, and he began to build a chapel in the place where the temple had stood, and habitations for the monks close by. The evil one, vexed at being driven from his old haunts, sought every occasion to annoy Benedetto and hinder the work. One day he sat himself upon a stone, which the monks were about to raise to its place in the wall, so that by no effort could they move it, till they cried to the saint, and he coming and making the sign of the cross over it, the devil flew away with a horrible screech. Another time the enemy overthrew a wall and crushed a young monk, so that not one bone of his body was left whole. The saint bade the weeping brothers bring the dead boy to his cell, and putting them all out, he shut the door and prayed earnestly, whereupon the boy was restored to life as strong and sound as ever. Continually, in the night, the devil would appear to Benedetto, with flaming eyes and mouth, raging horribly, and lamenting with a loud clamour, saying, "Benedetto, Benedetto;" and the servant of God making no answer, he would cry, "Maledetto" (which is to say, cursed), "not Benedetto, wherefore dost thou persecute me?" and forthwith disappear with a hideous groan; but the saint, putting all his trust in God, feared him not, and persevered in his work, till a beautiful church and monastery rose in that place.

Benedetto had a sister, whom he loved dearly, named

Scholastica, who, like him, had dedicated herself to the service of God. Their parents being dead, he brought her to the mountain, and made her a dwelling not far from his own, and, in course of time, many pious women abandoned the world, and gathered about her, and the saint himself visited and taught them. There came among these from the city of Rome three women of noble birth, who had so imperfectly cast off the bonds of worldly vanity, that they could not refrain their tongues from gossip and slander, but chattering all day long, instead of giving themselves to prayer and meditation, they provoked their companions to wrath. This being told to the saint, he immediately sent and bade them correct their tongues, lest evil should befall them, but they persisted in their evil speaking, and in a short time all three died, and were buried in the church. Their nurse being present during holy service, was astonished to see them rise every day from their graves and go out of the door one by one, as if unable to endure the Word of God, and, remembering how they had disobeyed the servant of God, she ran to him, weeping bitterly, and implored his help. Benedetto went to the church and prayed earnestly before the high altar, and blessed their graves, and from that time they were no more seen to rise—whereat all the women marvelled greatly, and took heed to control their tongues and to behave with modesty and meekness.

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Years went on, and the holy man began to be filled with the spirit of prophecy, so that he was able to foretell the future and read the secret hearts of men. One evening, at the vesper hour, he was partaking of food, and a young monk named Paolo stood behind him holding a lamp. The spirit of this brother began to swell with pride, and he said to himself, "Who is this man that I should stand behind him as he eats, and spend myself in serving him?"

Benedetto immediately turned round and rebuked him, saying, "Open thy heart, brother. What is it that thou sayest to thyself?" Then he called Mauro and Placido, and commanded Paolo to give them the lamp and to go out and remain idle during that hour. Paolo went out and wept bitterly, and being afterwards questioned by the brothers, he told them everything, and they were filled with a great awe, perceiving that nought could be hid from him, who was able to hear even unspoken words.

Now, shortly afterwards, a terrible visitation fell upon the land, for Totila, the King of the Goths, came down with a mighty host and ravaged all the country round about, slaying the inhabitants, and burning their cities. Hearing men speak of the great prophet Benedetto, he determined to visit him, and halting his army a little distance away, sent messengers to the monastery to announce his coming. The servants having

returned, and told him that Benedetto was ready to receive him, it entered the perfidious mind of the King to try and prove whether the saint were, indeed, a prophet. Calling his chamberlain, he bade him put on the royal robes, and take with him three nobles of high rank, who were wont to wait closely upon the monarch himself, together with a great following of horsemen and servants, and to present himself before the saint as the King in person. When the chamberlain arrived at the monastery, he was brought with great honour into the presence of the servant of God, who, as soon as the false king was come near enough to hear, cried, with a loud voice, "Son, put off thy robe, for that which thou wearest is not thine own." Immediately the chamberlain and all his followers fell terrified to the earth, and, rising up, they dared not approach the holy man, but fleeing as fast as they could, returned to the King.

Then Totila came himself, and seeing Benedetto from far off, placed upon his lofty seat, he was afraid to proceed, and humbly prostrated himself to the earth. Three times the holy man spake, saying, "Rise," yet Totila dared not lift his head. Then the saint rose from his seat and deigned to go himself to the monarch, and raising him up, he rebuked him severely for his evil deeds, and foretold what should befall him, saying, "Much evil thou doest, much evil hast thou done. Henceforth thou shalt refrain from iniquity. Thou wilt shortly enter Rome,

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and afterwards cross the sea, and reigning nine years, in the tenth thou shalt die." The King, amazed and terrified at these words, humbly implored Benedetto to pray for him, and took his departure. And everything came to pass as the saint had foretold, for from that day Totila was less cruel, and soon after he besieged and occupied Rome, and crossed the sea to Sicily, and in the tenth year of his reign he lost both kingdom and life.

Much time passed away, and the saint grew old in years and in grace. And a great famine visited the land, and the people in their hunger came and besought the holy man to help them. He gave them everything he could, till nothing was left for himself and the monks but a little oil in a glass vessel. Then there came a poor man, who begged exceeding piteously for some oil, and Benedetto bade them give him the portion that remained. But it was not done as he commanded, and when the saint inquired about the matter, the brother who kept the larder excused himself, saying that it could not be spared from their own needs. Then Benedetto was wroth, and ordered them to take the vessel with the oil and throw it out of the window, that nothing might be saved by disobedience. Below the window there was a precipice, and at the bottom many sharp rocks, whereon the vessel fell, yet, to the astonishment of all, it was not broken nor the oil spilt out. Thereupon the

servant of God told them to pick it up and give it to the poor man, according to his first command, and he rebuked the disobedient brother before them all. Then they knelt down and prayed. Now, there was set there a great jar, with a tiny drop of oil at the bottom, and as the holy man prayed the oil began to increase and bubble up in the jar, and rising and rising, at last it overflowed the brim, and inundated all the pavement where it stood. Thereupon Benedetto left off praying, and the oil immediately ceased to flow. Then he took that same monk aside and admonished him long in secret, bidding him consider the mercy of the Lord and be of greater faith.

Scholastica was, like her brother, growing old, and began now to feel her end approaching. The day came on which Benedetto was accustomed to visit her, and he rose and went down to her dwelling, with Mauro and Placido, and spent the whole day with her in prayer, and praise, and sweet discourse. When the shades of evening began to gather round them, they sat down to eat, and the hour growing late, the pious woman said to her brother, "Do not leave me this night, I beseech thee, but let us talk till morning of the joys of the heavenly life."

He answered, "What is this thou askest of me, sister? I may in no wise abide out of my cell."

And the sky was so serene, that not a cloud could be

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seen. Scholastica, hearing her brother's words, clasped her hands upon the table and bent over them, as if in prayer—and when she raised her head there broke forth such a terrible tempest, with thunder and lightning and pouring of rain, that, on issuing forth, neither the venerable saint nor the monks were able to stir their feet for the mud upon the way. Benedetto, returning to his sister, said, "God has given thee thy wish, sister. What is this that thou hast done?"

She answered, "Behold, I prayed to thee, and thou wouldst not hear me; I prayed to my God, and He has heard me. Now, if thou canst, go forth and leave me."

Then Benedetto, seeing he might not return to the monastery, stayed with her, and they passed the whole night in vigil, with holy colloquy, and in the morning he departed. Three days after, the saint, being in his cell, with his eyes raised to heaven, saw in a vision his sister's soul, in the form of a dove, issue from her body and penetrate to the uttermost heaven. Thus was it made manifest to him that she was dead, and, rejoicing in her glory, he gave thanks to God, and sent and fetched her body, and caused it to be laid in the sepulchre which he had prepared for himself.

Not long after, knowing the hour to be at hand when he

should be called to join his sister in heavenly glory, the holy Benedetto began to prepare to quit this sorrowing world. He called all the brothers round him, and foretold to them the day of his death, and they, falling on their knees, wept bitterly, and besought him not to leave them. Then he comforted them with sweet and loving words, and exhorted them to continue in faith and obedience to God after he was gone. Six days before that one on which he was to die, he bade them make ready his sepulchre, and soon after fell into a grievous fever. On the sixth day he was borne by the brothers into the chapel, and there, supported by their arms, he breathed his last.

That very hour two of his disciples, being upon a journey, saw in a vision a shining as of innumerable lightnings, and in the midst thereof a golden pathway stretched from the cell of the saint up to the farthest heaven, and the holy Benedetto passed over the path, and was received out of their sight. Full of astonishment, they ran in haste to the monastery and told what they had seen, and thus it was made known to all that the servant of God had obtained the reward of his long patience and obedience. Then, with chanting and prayer, they took the body and laid it in the sepulchre within the chapel, and for three days and nights they ceased not to keep watch there, continually praising and glorifying God that He had been pleased to deliver His servant from the

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tribulations of this present world and receive him into celestial glory.

And the funeral rites being fully accomplished, they returned to the monastery, chastened and comforted in their souls, and resolved henceforth to walk with God's help in the steps of the blessed Benedetto.

THE SAINT OF THE WHITE ROBE

ON a certain summer morning, long ago, a youth named Romualdo, of a noble family of Ravenna, rose early to follow the chase. He rode forth on his favourite steed, followed by his hounds, and holding before him on the saddle a brachet, which he loved well, and when he breathed the fresh air, and heard the song of the birds, he too began to sing for the joy of his heart.

Soon the hounds roused a stag, and Romualdo went merrily in pursuit. The flying beast disappeared into a great forest of pine trees. Romualdo followed after, but as soon as he had entered the forest, a spell laid hold upon him; he forgot the stag, and, slackening his bridle, fell into deep thought. For here, in the dim light and the solemn silence, all the noise and confusion of the gay city died away in his ears, and it seemed to the awe-struck youth that God Himself was walking amidst the trees. His heart swelled with love and adoration, and there came upon him a great longing

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for the joys which are not of this world, and the peace which passeth all understanding. In vain the brachet whined upon the saddle, and the hounds, springing up and licking his hands, sought to reawaken in their master the zest for the chase. He heeded them not, but wandered on in this manner for hours, till the sunbeams, slanting betwixt the stems of the trees, smote his eyes, and announced to him the lateness of the hour; whereupon, with a deep sigh, he turned his horse's head towards home.

As he paced slowly and pensively on his way, Romualdo perceived in an open green space, at a little distance, two knights in converse together. Suddenly one of them secretly drew his sword, and lifting his arm, smote the head of the other with a mighty blow, so that he fell violently from his horse to the ground. Then leaping down, the assailant bestrode his victim, and was about to smite him a second time, when a loud cry was heard, and the youth Romualdo flung himself from his horse, and dashing aside the weapon, knelt down to succour the wounded man. But immediately, with one strange dreadful stare at the compassionate youth, the knight gave a great gasp and died. Then a rough blow from the hilt of a sword fell upon Romualdo's shoulder, and an angry voice cried, "This is no matter for thy meddling, boy; let that carrion be, and follow me." And the youth was filled with grief and

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horror, for now he perceived the murderer to be none other than the count, his own father, to whom long ago the dead man had done some slight injury. Weeping bitterly, he smoothed out the stiffened limbs tenderly upon the sward, and rose to follow his father, who rode off with a laugh of scorn. For this count was a proud and wicked man, swift to anger, and very pitiless. Many a time the gentle youth, who loved all creatures great and small, and hated cruelty, had bewailed in secret the evil deeds of his father, and now was he more grievously afflicted than ever before by the treacherous deed which he had witnessed. Surely those glassy eyes, he thought, had cried to heaven for vengeance on the slayer. As he pondered sorrowfully on this thing, he let the reins fall loose on his horse's neck, and the creature began to loiter and to pluck the grass by the wayside. The count, galloping furiously ahead, was quickly lost to sight, and presently Romualdo found himself quite alone, with his dogs, in a little valley, through which ran a stream. Weary and thirsty, he dismounted and drank, and the day being now well-nigh spent, and his heart very heavy, he laid himself down upon the ground and fell asleep, with his horse standing beside him and the dogs couched at his feet.

He was awakened very early by the sound of a sweet, quavering song, and, looking up, he beheld, a little way off, an

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old hermit, who was singing a psalm, as he picked herbs upon the hillside. The youth turned away his eyes, and, remembering all his sorrow, he began to weep. Presently the old man approached and asked him, saying, "My son, wherefore art thou sorrowful? What evil hast thou done?" Romualdo answered, "I grieve not because of my own transgressions, for which I may repent, but I know not how to atone for the sins of another." And he wept again very bitterly. Then the old hermit said quietly, as if to himself, "The Son of God died for the sins of all," and went on his way. Immediately a sweet consolation and hope came to the youth, and he remembered him of the mercy of the Lord. He resolved to put his trust therein, and to pray night and day that his father might be brought to acknowledge his sins.

Much comforted, he rose up and rode home. He delayed not to seek the count, and declared to him that he was disgusted with the world, which was full of unkindness and bloodshed, and desired to retire to a monastery, and there succour the poor and sorrowful, and pray for sinners. Now, the old warrior hated monks, and despised the things of God. He was resolved that his son should follow in his own footsteps, and hearing him speak thus, he fell into a great rage, and when Romualdo would not renounce his purpose, he called his servants and bade them throw the youth into the

THE SAINT OF THE WHITE ROBE

deepest dungeon of the castle, and bind his hands and feet with heavy chains. Romualdo submitted cheerfully, and when night came, he slept peacefully in his horrid cell, with a smile upon his face. And about midnight the fast-barred door suddenly flew open, and an angel stood beside the prisoner and touched him on the shoulder. He sprang up, amazed, and the fetters fell from his hands and feet. At the angel's bidding, he followed him out of the dungeon, and by a secret passage and stairway to a gate in the castle wall, which opened to them without touch of mortal hand. Then the angel left him, and Romualdo stood looking about him, wondering and joyful, scarce able to believe that this which had come to pass was true. After he had given thanks for his deliverance, he perceived, a little way below him, a horse, held by a servant, and, descending, found it was his own dear steed, and Pietro, his faithful foster-brother. He uttered a cry of gladness, and inquired of Pietro how he was come there, and Pietro related how a venerable man, whom he had never seen before, had met him that afternoon, and bade him very solemnly to be without the castle at midnight with Romualdo's horse, and he, all eager to help his young lord, had obeyed the command. Then Romualdo embraced Pietro, and bade him farewell, and, springing upon his horse, he set off and rode all night long, and till noon the next day, when he came to a famous monastery. The abbot

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and monks issued forth from the great gate to meet him, and when Romualdo made known to them that he was come to dwell among them, they received him very gladly into their brotherhood.

Romualdo abode here a long time, ministering to the sick and needy, and teaching the ignorant in the country round about. But though he fasted, and prayed continually to God to soften his father's heart, he could not forget that bloody deed, and longed in vain for the peace and joy which had been revealed to him in the forest. Moreover, the good abbot shortly died, and another was set up in his stead, who governed the community foolishly, and suffered the monks to go astray into sin. This was very grievous to Romualdo, and he upbraided the erring brothers, and instead of repenting, they were provoked to anger by his words, and plotted to do him evil. Now, it was his custom to rise from his bed at midnight and pass silently into the church, where, kneeling before the high altar, he would watch and pray till dawn. In the cloister, between his cell and the church, there was a deep pit, which was covered over with a heavy flagstone. One night the wickedly disposed monks removed the stone secretly, hoping that he would fall into the pit. Now, in the monastery, there was a poor dog, which was beaten and kicked by everybody, save only Romualdo, who cared for it and gave it food and kind words, so that the creature loved him, and came often to lick his hands. On this same

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night, the good brother rose as usual. When he was come into the cloister, and was stepping along carefully in the darkness, his foot struck against something big and soft, and stooping down to feel with his hand, he discovered it was the dog. He bade it move aside, but it would not obey, and when he would have stepped over its body, it rose up and growled fiercely. At length Romualdo was compelled to take another way to the church. When he returned at dawn, he beheld, with astonishment and horror, the yawning pit, and the peril which had beset him. And understanding how the Lord had delivered him from the snare of his enemies in a marvellous manner by means of the poor dumb beast, he knelt down and gave fervent thanks, and afterward called the dog and caressed it with great kindness.

He now determined to abide no longer with these malicious brethren. He assembled together a few of the monks, who were of like mind with himself, and one morning, very early, the little company, shaking the dust of that habitation off their feet, went forth, followed by the faithful dog, to seek a holier dwelling-place. They wandered for many days, and one evening they reached a solitary glen among the wild and barren mountains, where, having satisfied their hunger with the scanty herbs which grew around, they lay down to rest beside a rushing stream. And there Romualdo was visited by a wondrous dream. For, as he reposed on the hard ground, not knowing that he was

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asleep, he beheld a high ladder, set up between earth and heaven, such as that whereon the patriarch Jacob saw in his vision the angels ascending and descending. And up the ladder figures were mounting by twos and threes, clothed all in white, and they shone with a dazzling radiance, so that he looked upon them with great awe, supposing that they had been angels. And all at once he perceived that their faces were the faces of his own dear brethren, who had followed him into this wilderness. When he woke up he pondered long on the vision, and in the morning he related it to the monks and declared that this and none other should be the place of their future habitation. And with one accord they joyfully agreed, and gathering together wood and stones, they set to work and built a number of little separate cells, one for him who was to be their head, in the midst, and one for each of themselves. Moreover, Romualdo caused garments to be made of spotless white woollen stuff, and he and his disciples put off the black habits which they had worn in the monastery, and went from that time forth clad in pure white robes, like unto the monks whom he had seen in his dream.

And now Romualdo dwelt peacefully in this new abode, and continued to do good to all. And he ceased not to pray for his father, but many a time he watched till dawn upon the mountain-side in fervent supplication. One night, as he knelt in the starry darkness, a great joy came into his soul, and he

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heard a still voice which whispered in his ear that his prayer was heard, and his desire accomplished. The next day, at sundown, he was sitting at the threshold of his little dwelling, when he spied far off a poor old man, who was toiling up the mountain, stumbling and falling often on the sharp rocks. Moved with compassion he went forward to meet the pilgrim, who sank to the ground when he saw the saint, and would not suffer himself to be lifted up, but kept his face hidden, as if ashamed, and kissed the feet of the good brother again and again, shedding abundant tears. At length he said, in a trembling voice, "Thou holy man, dost thou not know who it is that humbleth himself before thee?" Then Romualdo saw that this poor weary pilgrim was his own father, the once haughty count. He bent down, and taking him in his arms, embraced him very tenderly, rejoicing over him with an exceeding great gladness. After they had wept on one another's neck for a little space, Romualdo led the old man to his hut and gave him to eat and drink. And the count related how the brothers and sons of the man he had slain in the forest had surprised him and his household in their sleep one night, and had done great slaughter upon them, and burnt down the castle, and how he himself, with a few others, had fought their way through the foe and escaped. And one by one his followers had abandoned him, and he had wandered destitute



SAN ROMUALDO WELCOMES HIS FATHER.



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and hungry, till at length he found shelter in the hut of a poor shepherd in the mountains. There in his poverty and despair he perceived that the vengeance of God was come upon him for all his evil deeds. He resolved to do penance for the remainder of his days, and set out to seek his son, whom he had once persecuted and now yearned after, desiring that his tottering steps might be guided and supported in their new path. And here, after many long days and much bitter suffering, he had found him whom he sought. Romualdo listened very earnestly, now weeping for his father's pain, now laughing for joy because the old man was come to him at last. And in due time he received him into the little fellowship of monks, and clothed him in a white robe, like unto his own. Then father and son knelt down before the altar, and joined together with heart and soul in one glad hymn of praise and thanks.

THE END

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