

Thesis Approved

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THE LIFE OF SAINT GREGORY THE GREAT

VITA SANCTI GREGORII MAGNI

BY

PAUL THE DEACON

A TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY

BY

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A THESIS

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INTRODUCTION

This translation of the Vita Sancti Gregorii Magni of Paul the Deacon was made at the suggestion and under the direction of Doctor Leo V. Jacks, head of the Classical Department of the Creighton University Graduate School. An interest in the life of this illustrious pontiff had been awakened in the translator by the excellent course in the Correspondence of Saint Gregory the Great which Doctor Jacks presented during the summer session of 1947. The translation was made from the Migne edition, the Vita Sancti Gregorii Magni of Paul the Deacon being contained in volume LXXV of the Patrologia Latina. Paul wrote this Vita between 770 and 780. It is a significant work, agreeing as it does with the writings of Saint Gregory and his contemporaries and setting forth the life of this great Churchman in a manner that is dignified and clear as well as historically correct.

The facts about Saint Gregory's life seem to have been taken mainly from his own writings, from the Historia Ecclesiastica of Bede, and from the Historiae Ecclesiasticae Francorum of Gregory of Tours. Another possible source is the life of Saint Gregory by an anonymous monk of Whitby, usually referred to as the S. Gallen. Life. Dudden, the foremost modern authority on Saint Gregory, thinks that sections 23-28 which deal with the saint's miracles, are almost certainly an interpolation of some pious

copyist. Dudden bases this opinion on the assertions of Grisar and Bethmann, who otherwise consider Paul's biography a careful composition, the accuracy of which is generally reliable.¹

The Breviary hymn for the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist, which follows this introduction, is attributed to Paul the Deacon.² The first stanza of this hymn is of special interest to musicians since the underlined syllables were those chosen by Guido of Arezzo for the syllable naming of the notes Ut, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La.

In the translation the letters of the alphabet indicate Paul's references to the Bible. The Arabic numerals refer to the translator's explanatory notes on matters in the text which seemed to call for elucidation. These matters are explained briefly in the commentary. Finally, there is a bibliography containing the names of the works consulted in the preparation of the notes and of the section on Paul the Deacon. The bibliography also lists the dictionaries and grammars used in making the translation.

It is the hope of the translator that this little study may contribute something, however small, to the general fund of know-

¹F. Homes Dudden, Gregory the Great: His Place in History and in Thought (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1905), I, xii.

²Matthew Britt, The Hymns of the Breviary and Missal (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1922), pp. 256-7.

ledge about Saint Gregory the Great, who ruled the Church from 590 to 604 and who was in reality a great figure in the world of his day.

HYMN FOR THE NATIVITY OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST*

composed by

Paul the Deacon (720-799)

UT queant laxis resonare fibris
Mira gestorum famuli tuorum,
Solve polluti labii reatum,
 Sancte Johannes.

Nuntius celso veniens olympos,
 Te patri magnum fore nasciturum,
 Nomen, et vitae seriem gerendae
 Ordine promit.

Ille promissi dubius superni,
 Perdidit promptae modulus loquelae:
 Sed reformasti genitus peremptae
 Organa vocis.

Ventris obstruso recubans cubili,
 Senseras Regem thalamo manentem:
 Hinc parens, nati meritis, uterque
 Abdita pandit.

Sit decus Patri, genitaeque Proli,
 Et tibi compar utriusque virtus,
 Spiritus semper, Deus unus, omni
 Temporis aevo.

*This hymn is found in three manuscripts of the eleventh century in the British Museum and in the St. Gall manuscript, No. 387, also of the eleventh century.

PAUL THE DEACON

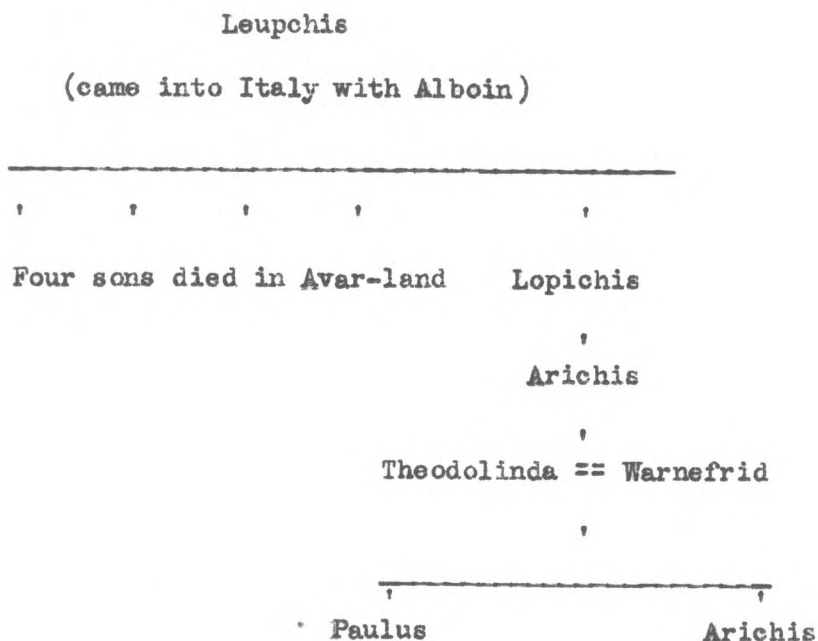
Paulus Diaconus, also called Casinensis, Levita, and Warnefridi, was one of the historians who stood midway between the writers of classical historiography and the medieval chroniclers. He is considered the best historian of the Lombards.¹ Thompson and Holm consider him an admirable poet as well.² In his history of the Lombards³ he mentions as the first of his ancestors Leuphis, who came into Italy in the year 568. After living many years in Italy he died, leaving behind him five young sons. They were swept by the tempest of the Lombard invasion from Friuli into Avar-land. Here they were held in captivity for some years. Finally, the youngest, Lopchis, decided to return to Italy and regain his freedom. He arrived there after many hardships, but he found no trace of his ancestral home, only a vast tangle of thorns and briers. Clearing these away, he discovered a large elm growing within the old enclosure of his home. In this tree he hung up his quiver. Some of his relatives and

¹Hartmann Grisar, S. J., History of Rome and the Popes in the Middle Ages, ed. Luigi Cappadelta (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1912), III, 152.

²James Westfall Thompson and Bernard J. Holm, A History of Historical Writing (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1942), I, 169.

³Paulus Diaconus, Historia Langobardorum, Patrologia Latina XCV (Paris: Migne, 1849), col. 152.

friends helped him rebuild his house and acquire a wife. Lopichis was the father of Arichis, Arichis of Warnefrid, and Warnefrid, by his wife Theodolinda, had two sons, one of whom was Paul the historian, and the other his brother Arichis. Hodgkin illustrates this genealogy as follows:⁴



Paul was probably educated at the court of King Rothis at Pavia under the direction of Flavianus the grammarian.⁵ He learned Latin thoroughly, as his writings testify; and, according to Thompson and Holm, he had some knowledge of Greek.⁶ By 763 he

⁴Thomas Hodgkin, Italy and Her Invaders (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916), VI, 56.

⁵W. Wattenbach, Deutschlands Geschichtsquellen (Berlin: Wilhelm Hertz, 1893), I, 165.

⁶Thompson and Holm, op. cit., p. 168.

was residing as a scholar at the court of Duke Arichis of Benevento.⁷ But when the Lombard kingdom collapsed before the onslaughts of Charlemagne in 773, Paul's political career was cut short and he retired to the monastery of Monte Cassino. Here he lived as a monk and was ordained deacon. Here, too, he probably spent much of his time in research and composition. In 781 he was summoned to the court of Charlemagne at Aix-la-Chapelle to join the circle of eminent scholars who resided there. He was considered the most learned of the poets and bards at Charlemagne's court.⁸ After 787 he was again at Monte Cassino, where in all probability he died.

Paul's first literary work was done while he was still at Benevento at the request of the Duchess Adelperga, daughter of Desiderius, the last of the Lombard kings, and wife of Arichis. This work was the Historia Romana, an amplified and extended version of the Roman history of Eutropius, whose work Paul continued independently in Books XI to XVI, up to the time of Justinian.⁹ It went through many editions and was frequently consulted during the Middle Ages, but it is now of no value. His next work, a history of the bishops of Metz, Liber de Episcopis Mettensibus,

⁷W. Wattenbach, op. cit., p. 168.

⁸F. J. E. Raby, A History of Secular Latin Poetry in the Middle Ages (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1934), I, 197.

⁹Patricius Schlager, "Paulus Diaconus," The Catholic Encyclopedia, Special Edition, Vol. XI, 1911.

extending to 776, gives a circumstantial account of the family and ancestors of Charlemagne, especially Arnulf.¹⁰ Paul's most important historical work was the history of the Lombards, Historia Gentis Langobardorum, in six books. Although it has many defects, especially in the chronology, this unfinished book, embracing only the period between 568 and 744, is still of the highest importance. It sets forth in lucid style and simple diction the most important facts about the Lombard people and has preserved many ancient myths and popular legends. The numerous manuscript copies, excerpts, and continuations extant prove that this work was in constant use until the fifteenth century.¹¹

In addition to these historical works, Paul wrote a commentary on the Rule of Saint Benedict and a collection of homilies. Both of these have been preserved only in revised form. Several letters, epitaphs, and poems are still extant and have been edited by Dümmler in Monumenta Germaniae Historica.¹²

Paul used a variety of sources, including Pliny, Secundus of Trent, Gregory of Tours, Isidore of Seville, Venerable Bede, biographies of Churchmen, the theological writings of Saint Gregory the Great, information he had picked up on his travels,

¹⁰ Paulus Diaconus, Liber de Episcopis Mettensibus, Patrologia Latina, XCV (Paris: Migne, 1849), col. 699-722.

¹¹ Max Manitius, Geschichte der Lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1911), I, 270.

¹² Ibid.

oral traditions, and legends. "He had little critical power in sifting and assessing the mass of source material, and he was especially uncritical in his treatment."¹³ His style, however, is invariably clear, fluent, and unpretentious. His Vita Sancti Gregorii Magni reflects wide reading and deep study. It is corroborated in its principal statements by the writings of Paul's predecessors, especially Saint Gregory himself, Gregory of Tours, and Venerable Bede.

¹³ Harry Elmer Barnes, A History of Historical Writing (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1938), pp. 62-3.

II

THE LIFE OF SAINT GREGORY THE GREAT

VITA SANCTI GREGORII MAGNI

1. Gregory began his life in this Roman city,¹ the son of Gordianus² and Silvia,³ born of a senatorial family that was religious as well as prominent. Felix,⁴ a priest of this apostolic see, a man of great virtue and a glory of the Church in Christ, was one of his ancestors. But Gregory exalted this inheritance of great nobility by his character and enhanced it by his virtuous deeds. Moreover, as was later shown in public, not without a certain remarkable presage was such a name chosen. For Gregory, taken from the Greek language, in our tongue means a watchman or one keeping watch. Indeed, in this very sense he watched over himself while, by clinging to the divine precepts, he lived in a praiseworthy manner. He also watched over his faithful people while, by means of his abundant teaching, he showed them the way they were to reach heavenly joys.

2. In liberal studies, that is, grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic, he was so well instructed from his boyhood that although at that time the study of letters still flourished at Rome, he was considered second to no one in this city. He attained while still young mature judgment, listening attentively to the conversation of his elders, and if he could grasp anything worthwhile by hearing it, not carelessly forgetting it but rather committing

it conscientiously to memory. And even then he drank into his thirsty soul the streams of doctrine which afterwards at the proper time he poured forth from his eloquent mouth. During the years of youth, when this age was wont to follow the ways of the world, he devoutly began to live for God and to strive towards the heavenly fatherland with all his heart.

3. But while for a long time he resisted the grace of conversion and after he had been inflamed with heavenly desires considered that it would be better to wear secular garb and to devote himself to the present life, at least in appearance, many worldly cares began to engross him so that he was held back not only in appearance, but, as he himself asserted, also in actuality. At length when, after a long time, on the death of his parents he was free to dispose of his own possessions he revealed what had previously been in his mind; and what he was already in the sight of God he also showed himself in the sight of men. As soon as he could he distributed everything to charity so that being poor he might follow Christ who had become poor for us.

4. Then, building six monasteries in Sicily,⁵ he gathered there brethren who would serve Christ. He built a seventh monastery⁶ within the walls of this city in which he himself also lived a regular life in strict discipline with many brethren of his society under the rule of an abbot. To these monasteries he assigned from the income of his estates whatever was necessary for the daily sustenance of those living there; and the remainder

with all the property of his home he sold and gave to the poor. And that prestige which he had in the eyes of the world he used solely to obtain the glory of celestial happiness by the aid of divine grace. And he, who formerly had been accustomed to walk through the city wearing a silken robe and shining jewels, afterwards, in a mean garment as a poor man, ministered to the poor.

5. Soon after he had changed his worldly dress he sought a monastery⁷ and fled empty-handed from the shipwreck of the world. Here such a great grace of conversion began to operate in him that even from the very beginning he could be reckoned among the number of perfect souls. Also, he practiced such abstinence from food, such watchfulness in prayer, and such rigor in fasting that he could scarcely sustain his life. Moreover, he suffered continual bodily infirmities, and he was especially disturbed by that malady which in the Greek language doctors call syncope; in his sufferings he was so tortured by bodily pains and so annoyed by frequent gaspings for breath that almost every moment of every hour seemed to be his last.

6. But what he had been in the monastery, where he lived with praiseworthy zeal, we can learn from his own words spoken after he had been placed in the pontificate when he was conversing tearfully with Peter,⁸ his deacon: "Indeed my unhappy soul, afflicted with the cares of office, remembers how once it was in the monastery, how all things were passing beneath it, how it rose above the things that surrounded it because it was accus-

tomed to think of nothing but heaven, because even while captive in the body it had already transcended the barrier of the flesh by means of contemplation, because it desired death, which almost everyone considers a penalty, as the very beginning of life and as the reward of its labors. But now because of the pastoral office it bears the burdens of worldly men; and after appearing so beautiful in peace it is soiled with the dust of earthly cares. And so I ponder on what I endure, I ponder on what I have lost. And what I endure becomes more grievous when I think of what I have lost. For, behold, now I am assailed by the waves of a great sea, and in the ship of my mind I am tossed by the blasts of a real storm; and when I recall my former life as though with eyes cast behind my back I sigh for the shore that is in sight; and, what is yet more grievous, while I am borne along buffeted by immense waves I am scarcely able now to see the port which I have left." He had become accustomed to repeat these things about himself, not boasting of the attainment of virtue, but rather weeping at the lack of it, which he had always feared he had brought upon himself by his pastoral office. But although he said such things about himself from a motive of great humility we can well believe that he lost none of his monastic perfection because of his pastoral office, but that rather he reached, by his labors for the conversion of many, that perfection which he had once attained in the tranquillity of solitude.

7. The following discourse will tell how this holy man

ascended to the office of deacon and afterwards to the fulness of the pontificate. The Roman pontiff⁹ who was then in charge of the Church, seeing how rapidly Gregory was scaling the heights of perfection, withdrew him from the monastery and raised him to an office of ecclesiastical authority and employed him as one of the seven deacons¹⁰ to be his own secretary. Not long after, to maintain ecclesiastical authority, he sent him as a delegate¹¹ to the city of Constantinople. Yet, although residing in a worldly palace,¹² he did not interrupt his pursuit of the spiritual life. For many brethren, attracted by his genuine holiness, followed him from his monastery. This occurrence seemed to happen by divine dispensation so that by their example he might be bound to the placid shore of prayer as though by an anchoring cable. And while he was tossed in the incessant storm of worldly cares he found, as it were, in the bosom of these companions, the refuge of a safe harbor from the mighty waves of business. And indeed after he was withdrawn from his life of monastic tranquillity that ministry might well have slain him with the sword of preoccupation. Yet, among them, through the consolation of assiduous reading the atmosphere of daily compunction grew. Therefore, by their company he was not only fortified against worldly influences, but he was also more and more attracted to the exercises of the spiritual life.

8. He was first timidly requested and then urged by these same brethren and especially by Leander,¹³ a venerable man, the

bishop of Seville, who had come to Constantinople at that time as a legate in behalf of the Visigoths,¹⁴ to elucidate the book of holy Job, which was obscured by many mysterious passages. Nor could he decline that labor which charity and fraternal love assigned to him for the benefit of many. And how that same book is to be interpreted as a letter, how it is to be referred to the sacraments of Christ's Church, in what sense it is to be applied to each one of the faithful--these things he explained in a remarkable series of thirty books. In these books he discoursed so well about the virtues and vices that he seemed to treat of these matters not in words alone but in some way to clothe them with visible forms. Whence it is not doubtful that he portrayed the perfection of his own virtues and efficaciously revealed their effects.

9. While he was still stationed in that kingly city with the gracious help of Catholic doctrine he opposed at its very inception a new heresy that had arisen there about the state of the resurrection. Eutychius,¹⁵ the bishop of that city, was teaching that our bodies in the palpable glory of the resurrection would be lighter than wind or air. Hearing this, both by reason and by the example of the Lord's resurrection he proved it was contrary in every way to the teaching of orthodox faith. For the Catholic faith holds that our bodies, raised up in the glory of immortality, are indeed subtle through the effect of spiritual potency but palpable because of their nature according to the

example of the Lord's body about which, after being raised from the dead, He Himself said to His disciples: "Touch and see that a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see me to have."^a In the profession of this doctrine venerable Father Gregory so strove against the rising heresy and his initial attack so weakened it with the help of the pious emperor, Tiberius Constantine,¹⁶ that afterwards there could be found no one who would pose as its champion.

10. Some time after the venerable levite Gregory returned to Rome the turbulent Tiber¹⁷ flooded, and its waters flowed through the city walls and lay over a great part of the region, destroying the walls of many ancient houses. Also, because of this violent rush of water, the granaries of the Church were overturned and many thousands of measures of wheat were lost. Then a multitude of serpents with a dragon in the form of a strong ship descended through the trough of this river into the sea, and the suffocated beasts were cast up on the shore among the salty waves of the turbid sea. There followed a foot disease, which they call inguinarium. Coming in the middle of the eleventh month according to what we read in Ezechial, "Begin from My sanctuary"^b --it struck Pelagius,¹⁸ the pope, first of all and soon killed him. After his death there was such an epidemic among the people

^aLuke, 24:39.

^bEzech., 9:6.

that, as they died, the homes of the city were left vacant far and wide. But, since the Church of God could not exist without a leader, although blessed Gregory resisted with all his strength, nevertheless the entire populace elected him. He strove to escape from this office, he insisted that he was entirely unworthy of such an honor, he feared that the glory of the world, which he had once renounced, would in some way ensnare him under the pretext of ecclesiastical rule. So it came about that he wrote a letter to the emperor Maurice,¹⁹ whose son he had baptized, attesting and pleading with many prayers that he would never give assent to the people and accept this position of honor. But the prefect of the city, Germanus²⁰ by name, waylaid his messenger. Seizing him and taking the letters, he sent to the emperor the petition which the people had drawn up. But he, thanking God for the friendship of the deacon, because he had found him deferring the place of honor as he had wished, gave the command to him and ordered him to be installed.

11. And when Gregory consented that he might be blessed and a pestilence was destroying the people word was sent to them to do penance in this manner: "Beloved brethren, it is proper that the scourge of God, the very approach of which we ought to fear, we should at least fear when it is present and known by experience. Let sorrow open for us the way of conversion and let the very punishment we suffer melt the hardness of our hearts. For, as the prophet testified: 'The sword has entered even to my

soul.'^c Behold all the populace is struck by the sword of divine wrath and one by one the people succumb to sudden death. Nor does languor precede death; but, as you observe, death itself escapes the delays of languor. Each one who is struck is snatched from life before he can turn to thoughts of penitence. Think, therefore, how he arrives in the presence of the severe judge when he has had no time to atone for what he has done. Individuals do not perish alone; all fall together; houses are empty, parents see the burial of their children, and their heirs precede them in death. Let each one of us, therefore, take refuge in tears of penance while there is time to weep and before we are struck down. Let us bring to mind whatever sins we have committed, and let us atone for them by weeping. Let us come into His presence in confusion and, as the prophet admonishes, 'Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to the Lord.'^d To lift up our hearts and hands to the Lord is to increase the earnestness of our prayer by the merit of good works. He gives assurance, He gives confidence to our fear Who tells us by the prophet, 'I will not the death of a sinner, but that he be converted and live.'^e Let no one despair because of the enormity of his crimes, for a three days' penance washed away the sins of the hardened Ninivites and the converted thief merited

^cJer. 4:10.

^dLam. 3:41.

^eEzech. 33:11.

the reward of life in the very sentence of death. Let us change our hearts and presume that we have received what we have asked. The judge more speedily grants the petition when the soul has corrected its evil ways. Therefore, in the peril of so great an affliction let us persist in constant prayers. For that importunity which annoys men pleases the judge of truth because the good and merciful God wishes that pardon should be exacted from Him by prayer, and He will not be angry as much as we deserve. For He says by the psalmist: 'Call upon Me in the day of trouble and I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify me.'^f He is therefore Himself a witness that He desires to have mercy on those who pray. since He warns us to pray. Thus, dearest brethren, with contrite heart and works of penance from the very dawn of the fourth feria let us hold a sevenfold litany devoted to tears so that the strict judge, when He considers punishing our faults, may Himself spare us from the sentence of damnation." And we thought this exhortation of blessed Gregory should be inserted into this little book so that we could show how perfect was his preaching from the beginning.

12. Therefore, a large number of priests and monks and people, both men and women of every age, came on the appointed day to beseech God according to Gregory's order because the pestilence seemed to rage as a divine judgment; and while the people

^fPs. 85:7,9.

raised suppliant voices to the Lord, within the space of a single hour eighty men fell to the ground and died. But the high priest did not cease to pray for the people lest they themselves should cease praying, and the pestilence subsided because of the divine compassion.

13. When the future high priest still prepared a refuge for flight a guard was set for the city and watches for the gates until, as the sacred office demanded, in him the divine will was fulfilled opportunely and gloriously. He persuaded some merchants to convey him from the city in a basket. Then he hid himself in the woods for three days until the Roman people, after fasting and prayers, found him on the third night by means of a column of light shining on him from heaven. Gleaming straight through the night from the height of heaven down to him, it showed the searchers the answer to their prayers. In the nearby city a certain anchorite²¹ saw angels ascending and descending on him through the aforesaid column. He was happy and recognized the sacred sign as that ladder which holy Jacob saw in his sleep, affirming that it represented the house of the Lord, which is the Church, and that the very temple of God was hidden therein. So, at last the elect and chosen one of the Lord was found, captured, dragged, and led to the basilica of the blessed apostle Peter and there consecrated in the pontifical office and made pope of the city.

14. When he had been asked by John,²² bishop of Ravenna, why a man so well qualified should wish to decline the pastoral

office, impelled by this question he composed an excellent volume called the Pastoral Rule.²³ In this he showed clearly what type of man should devote himself to the government of the Church, how pastors should live, with what prudence each individual should hear them, and with what earnestness men should ponder daily on their own frailty. He also composed forty homilies on the Gospels, which he divided into two codices of equal size. In addition, he produced four books of dialogues²⁴ into which, at the request of Peter, his deacon, he collected as an example for posterity the praises of the illustrious holy persons who had lived in Italy. In these books of instruction he showed the virtues with which one should be imbued and also interpreted the wonders in the lives of these holy persons as the reward of their virtues. He also pointed out in twenty-two homilies²⁵ that the first and last parts of the prophet Ezechial, which seem rather obscure, hold an abundance of inspiration. Moreover, he wrote several other things and also many letters²⁶ which, due to the brevity of my study, I have neglected to mention individually.

15. What is to be especially admired is the fact that he could write so many volumes since, during almost his entire youth, as his own words testify, he suffered from continuous internal disorders. Every hour and every moment he endured a weakness of the stomach and slow but continuous fevers. Frequently he gasped for breath, and his weakness seriously affected his walk. But amidst these sufferings he anxiously reflected that according to

the Scriptures, "Every son who is received is scourged."⁶ When he was rather hard pressed by present evils he felt more certain about the hope of eternal life. Moreover, he wore himself out in ordered vigils over the city and was continually solicitous lest it be taken by an enemy. Perils of his sons, reported from here and there, also incessantly vexed his mind. But, harrassed as he was by so many and such great trials, he never indulged idleness, either serving the needs of his children or writing something worthy of the Church or, by means of the grace of contemplation, dwelling on the mysteries of heaven.

16. When from nearly all parts of Italy many who feared they would be slaughtered by the Lombards²⁷ fled to the Roman city, he showed his customary solicitude for all and ministered to their corporal and spiritual necessities. For a merciful love had so taken possession of his soul that he not only met the needs of those near him but also bestowed the help of his bounty on those far away. Even to those servants of God who dwelt on Mount Sinai²⁸ he sent whatever was needful. Though other pontiffs worked to build and adorn churches with gold or silver, he trod upon these things and, as though they did not exist, kept his mind entirely free from money. And he was careful to administer sedulously whatever funds he could obtain and to give them to the

⁶Heb. 12:6.

poor^h so that his horn should be exalted in glory and so that he might be able to say truthfully the words of holy Job: "The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I comforted the heart of the widow. I was clad with justice: and I clothed myself with my judgment, as with a robe and a diadem. I was an eye to the blind, and a foot to the lame. I was the father of the poor: and the cause which I knew not, I searched out most diligently."ⁱ And a little farther on: "If I have eaten my morsel alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof: from my infancy mercy grew up with me: and it came out with me from my mother's womb.^j

17. It was due to his piety and generosity that the nation of the Angles was snatched from the teeth of the ancient enemy by preachers whom he sent there and was made a sharer in eternal liberty. For, since he who clings faithfully to God always climbs by means of His plentiful gifts to higher things, while that holy man with ardent zeal strove to gather the souls of the faithful singly the good Lord enabled him to convert the whole nation of the Angles at one time. It was generally conceded that the circumstances of this conversion were divinely arranged. On a certain day when the merchants who had recently arrived offered

^hPs. 112:9.

ⁱJob, 29:13 ff.

^jJob, 31:17,18.

for sale many articles collected in the Roman forum and when many had gathered from here and there to buy these articles, it happened that Gregory, before he held the pontifical office, was passing through the forum and saw among other things children set up for sale.²⁹ These children had milk-white bodies, lovely faces, and hair that was almost white. When he spied them he asked, so it is said, from what region or what land they had been brought. It was reported that they came from the land of Britain, all the inhabitants of which shone with such beauty. Again, he inquired whether those same islanders were Christians or whether they were involved in pagan errors. He was told that they were pagans. Then, heaving a deep sigh from his inmost soul, he said, "Alas! What a shame that the author of darkness possesses such lightsome countenances and that such beauty of face covers a soul sick and devoid of spiritual joys." Then he asked what was the name of their race. It was answered that they were called Angles. And he said, "That is well, for they have an angelic appearance and such as they ought to be co-heirs with the angels of heaven." Next he asked, "What is the name of the province from which they were brought?" It was answered that they were called Deiri,³⁰ since they were of that province. And he said, "How true! Deiri, rescued from wrath and called to the mercy of Christ. The king," he asked, "of that province, what is he called?" It was answered that he was called Alle.³¹ And he, alluding to that name, exclaimed, "It is right that the praise of God the Creator be sung

in those regions."

18. When he approached the pontiff of this Roman and apostolic see and asked him to send some missionaries to the nation of the Angles in Britain so that they might be converted to Christ, he asserted that he was ready to perform this work himself with the help of the Lord if only this arrangement were satisfactory to the pope. At first the pontiff did not assent to him at all; but, conquered by his indefatigable prayers, he finally gave in. So, concealing his plan to depart from the citizens (because, of course, if they had known it, they would not have agreed to this arrangement) as quickly as possible he hastened on his way with the apostolic benediction.

19. Meanwhile these occurrences came to the attention of the people. With one accord all, urban or suburban, anyone who could go, divided themselves into three groups and set out for the Church of Saint Peter, clamorously shouting to Pope Pelagius: "Alas, your apostleship, what have you done? You have offended Saint Peter, you have destroyed Rome, you have not so much sent Gregory away as expelled him." Violently alarmed by these shouts and greatly fearing the people, he hastily sent after him and commanded him to come back to Rome as quickly as possible.

20. After he had completed a journey of three days, however, that same man of God, Gregory, as is the custom of travelers, was resting about noontime in a certain meadow in company with some of his associates while others stood nearby or were occupied with

necessary tasks. As Gregory sat reading a locust came and settled on the page he had just turned. Blessed Gregory, noticing that it remained quietly in the place where it had alighted, began joyously to play upon its name as if to explain this presage to his companions. "The locust (locusta), let me say, can be said to mean 'stay in this place' (loco sta)." And he added, "We cannot continue our journey unless we hurry. Quick, arise and saddle the beasts and let us hasten as fast as we can toward our destination." But while they were talking here and there to one another and complaining to him, the messengers arrived, their horses sweating and they themselves almost exhausted. Immediately, and with great haste they gave him the letters they were carrying. Having read them, he said, "So it is, comrades, as I foretold. Let us quickly return to Rome."

21. Therefore, because of this command and because his devout plan had been frustrated, as soon as he became pope he accomplished his long-desired project by sending others as missionaries and by supporting them himself with his exhortations, prayers, and offerings. He directed to this same island those servants of God, Mellitus, Augustine, and John³² with many other God-fearing monks. Within a short time they converted the king who lived in the capitol of the island and with him his people. To them God gave such miraculous powers that the words of faith, which they preached with their voices, they confirmed with efficacious signs. And so it happened that after a few years other kings of this

island, with their subjects, accepted the faith of Christ our Lord. In his books of Morals³³ Saint Gregory treats of the conversion of this nation and also of the prodigious miracles which were worked there. He says, "Behold the language of Britain which has up until now been gnashed by the teeth of barbarians, at last has begun to sing Hebrew words in praise of God. Behold the once turbulent ocean, now subdued, serves the feet of saints; and its rough movements, which earthly princes could not conquer by the sword, have been allayed by the fear of God and the words of simple priests. And he who, when he did not believe, feared troops of fighting men, now that he does believe fears the words of lowly men. For since the strength of divine knowledge has been infused into him by heavenly words and also by manifest miracles, he is restrained by the power of God so that he fears to act amiss and with all his heart he longs for the joys of eternity." In order that Gregory might truly be called an apostle by the Angles the divine goodness enabled him to promote this work. For even if he does not seem to everyone to be an apostle, nevertheless to these people he is, for they are the sign of his apostolate in the Lord.^k

22. It is superfluous to ask whether a man of such undoubted merit impressed people by miracles³⁴ because he, who by his own merits showed evidence of his virtues, could also through the kindness of Christ when an opportunity arose easily work miracles.

^kI Cor. 9:2.

So, lest satisfaction be lacking to those who with the Jews seek visible signs as proofs of sanctity and so that edification may be given to those who seek to ascend to higher things by the example of the saints, I think certain things should be told which the Lord accomplished through him to stir us up and to strengthen our tepid souls and (as may be said) perhaps also to manifest our infidelity rather than our ignorance.

23. There was in this Roman city a certain noble matron, who was wont through zeal and devotion to make offerings and on the Lord's day to come to church and present to the pontiff the materials for the holy sacrifice. On a certain day when, according to her custom, she approached in her turn to receive Communion from the pope, he held out the morsel of the Lord's body and said: "May the body of our Lord Jesus Christ avail you for the remission of all your sins and for life eternal," and she smiled. When the man of God saw her smile, he withdrew the holy Communion and placed it separately on the altar and told the deacon to watch it until all the faithful had communicated. Then, when the sacred mysteries were completed, blessed Gregory questioned her, saying, "Tell me, what were you thinking of that you should smile when you were about to receive Communion?" and she said, "I recognized that portion as a part of the offering I made with my own hands and gave to you. And when I heard you call it the body of the Lord, I smiled." Forthwith the holy pontiff preached a sermon to the people and exhorted them humbly to implore the Lord that

to strengthen the faith of many He would show to the eyes of flesh what this unfaithful woman should see with spiritual insight. After they had prayed he himself together with the people and this same woman arose and all looked towards the altar, composing themselves to behold the heavenly spectacle. Gregory lifted up the particle of the Lord's body and in the sight of all the people and the woman herself discovered that the tip of his finger was stained with blood, and he said to the woman: "Learn, I say, now whether to believe the truth or at least a witness: 'The bread which I give is My flesh, and the drink indeed is My blood.'¹ But the Creator, foreknowing our weakness, by that power which enabled him to make all things from nothing and also to fashion a body for Himself from the flesh of a virgin through the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, changed bread and wine mingled with water, though these retained their own appearances, into His body and blood for the Catholic sacrifice of expiation and through the sanctifying power of His Spirit." Then he ordered all to beseech God to change the most holy mystery into its pristine form; thus it would be possible for the woman to pick it up, and this also was done. Therefore, the much talked-of woman, gaining greatly in holy religion and faith, was sanctified by participation in the sacrament of the Lord. And all who had seen this miracle grew more fervent in divine love and orthodox faith.

¹ John, 6:51.

24. Moreover, a certain nobleman, noble according to the inheritance of the flesh and very powerful in kingly magnificence, in his own way and through intermediaries had gained an acquaintance with the apostolic see and by frequent letters of his own as also by the letters he received from Saint Gregory he had been thoroughly imbued with veneration for God and the Saints. He sent by strong and devoted messengers very worthy gifts to the apostolic see and asked that relics of the blessed apostles and martyrs be sent to him. The holy pontiff received his delegates honorably and graciously, delaying them for some time and visiting with them the tombs of the holy apostles and the cemeteries of the martyrs. There, according to an ancient custom, he celebrated Masses and consecrated the relics for veneration, always having the aforesaid delegates as his companions while he explained the lives of those whose relics were sought. One by one, he divided the consecrated clothes over which the sacred mysteries had been celebrated and put them, piece by piece, into separate boxes. When these had been secured by the seal of his apostolic authority, he entrusted them to those who had requested them for ecclesiastical use. But after they had gone for some days on their way curiosity undermined the manliness of their leader, and he told his companions that they had foolishly undertaken the hardships of such a journey since they did not know what precious things they carried to their master. Gradually, due to the increasing clash of arguments and the additional sug-

gestions of his comrades, the apostolic seals were broken and the boxes opened. In each one single pieces of cloth were found. Immediately they returned to Rome in indignation and approached the archdeacon, complaining, "And why did our apostolic lord so depreciate our master who had hoped to obtain great favors from him that he should wish to delude him and to betray us into this dishonor and offense? Indeed we thought we carried away from here the bones of apostles or relics of martyrs such as would have been proper for a man like our master. And we sought these relics from a great sea after a very long and difficult journey. Yet little pieces of clothing were given to us, as though we could not find rags ourselves. And unless caution had counselled us to learn what we were carrying so stupidly we would have approached our master and would undoubtedly have deserved his wrath and the loss of his favor." The archdeacon answered them with a modest rebuke, asking them why they had been so presumptuous as to break open the apostolic seals. Then he exhorted them to return and to deliver honorably what they had received for their master. But they did not heed his admonitions and even approached Pope Gregory. When he had heard what they had done, he bore their stupidity very patiently and instructed them to take part in the holy rites of the Mass. When he came to the place for the sermon, he urged the people to implore the favor of God's saints so that he might be worthy openly to show God's power and so that these incredulous and ignorant men might recognize this power. When

this prayer had been made, he took from him who had desecrated the relics a small knife; and, placing a piece of the clothing of Saint Peter upon the altar, he punctured it and cut it through the middle. From it immediately blood gushed forth and stained the whole piece of cloth. The aforesaid legates and all the people, seeing this stupendous and mysterious miracle, fell prone on the ground, adoring God and saying, "Wonderful is God in His saints; the God of Israel will Himself give strength and fortitude to His people; blessed be God."^m And when there was silence in the presence of these manifestations of faith Saint Gregory said to those who a little while before had brought these venerable relics:

"Know, brethren, that in the consecration of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ relics are blessed in honor of His apostles or martyrs to whom they are especially assigned when libations are offered on the most holy altar and that the blood which was poured out in the name of Jesus Christ enters these clothes." And all who saw were edified in faith. The boxes again having been sealed, he turned over to them the incomparable gifts of his devotion, and they returned joyfully to their master to give him the gratification of his desire. He received the precious possessions of the saints reverently and enshrined them honorably for veneration. Through them the Lord has deigned to work more miracles even to the present day for the praise and glory of His

^mPs. 67:36.

name than in the Church of Saint Peter.

25. Then there was at Rome a very wealthy citizen who was weak in his religion and was full of vice as well as of riches. When his wife failed to please him he obtained a divorce from her contrary to the teachings of our Savior. This occurrence, of course, could not escape the notice of Saint Gregory because both the magnitude of the evil and the prominence of the persons concerned easily exposed it. Saint Gregory, by many very sweet admonitions and by references to the terrors of divine judgment, wisely and zealously hastened to persuade the wretch to forgive his wife and receive her back since he could not be separated from her except by death or common consent. But, motivated by diabolical stubbornness, he perversely disregarded Gregory's warnings. Then Gregory, by right of his apostolic authority separated him from the Church by a ban of excommunication until he should conform. Scarcely heeding this excommunication and piling up sin upon sin, the man hired two magicians and bargained with them for a generous amount of money to use their powers for his vindication. Since they did not know Saint Gregory by sight, when on a certain day he walked in procession according to his custom, they stood by and asked that he be pointed out to them as he came along. They were told that he was the only one riding, a mark of his dignity, and that he had a group of ecclesiastical men preceding and following him. When they saw him, by the power of the evil spirits they caused his horse suddenly to be alarmed.

At once Saint Gregory, having invoked the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and made the Sign of the Cross, drove the demons away from his horse. Then he looked back in the direction of the magicians, and as soon as he looked at them they were struck blind by these same demons and fell back. So the man of God knew that their wickedness had caused this disturbance, and he ordered them to be brought to him. Having been interrogated, the wretches revealed their intentions, and the holy pontiff answered: "You ought to be blind forever, lest, seeing, you should attempt to return to your former wickedness. But, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, working through Saint Peter, may you be freed from the power of the demons." Immediately they were cleansed of the demons; and, since they believed, they were bathed at the font of salvation. Because they had been condemned to permanent blindness by the order of Saint Gregory, they were provided for from the patrimony of the Church.

26. Moreover, a certain tyrant threatened with almost unbearable importunity the peace of the holy Roman Church and cruelly destroyed its possessions and property. When he was reproached by mediators from the pontiff he raged madly against his superior, so much so that he approached to plunder the city. As he came, Saint Gregory met him and spoke to him. And due to the divine goodness there was found such force in his words that the tyrant apologized humbly to his apostolic superior, yielding to him straightway and promising to be a devoted son of the Roman

Church. Afterwards, when he was very weak and was dying, he asked for the prayers of the venerable pope and in answer was told that the Lord would grant him time to do penance. And the pope was solicitous that he should eat nutritious foods so that he would convalesce better. Obeying the pontiff's injunctions, he recovered and lived more devoutly for the rest of his life.

27. Also, this same priest, who was very fervent and acceptable to God, on a certain day proceeded through the forum of Trajan,³⁵ which he knew had been built in an extraordinary manner. And he viewed the monuments of Trajan's clemency, especially that memorable one which commemorates the fact that when this earthly prince surrounded by a group of soldiers once was going on an expedition he had met a very old widow. She was worn out with old age as well as with sorrow and poverty, and he was stopped by her tears and wails. "O most loyal Prince Trajan, behold here are men who have killed my only son, my support and my only comfort. And, wishing to kill me along with him, they refused to pay me any restitution for him." Being in a hurry, he said to her as he passed on, "When I return, tell me this, and I shall render you full justice." Then she said, "Master, and if you do not return, what shall I do?" He listened to this plea and ordered the accused to be brought before him. Nor, when it was suggested by everyone that he hasten the business, did he move a step from the place until he had arranged that the widow be paid from his purse whatever was decreed by law. And, at length, by prayers and tears

of supplication, sorrowing over his misdeeds and moved by inward mercy, he freed the accused from their praetorial bonds not so much by his power as by his devotion and leniency. Then the venerable pontiff, moved by grace, began with tearful sighs and suppliant words to quote these prophecies and evangelical maxims: "Thou, O Lord, hast said: 'Judge for the fatherless, defend the widow; and come, and accuse me.'ⁿ And elsewhere, 'Forgive, and it shall be forgiven you;' be not unmindful, I beseech Thee, that I a most unworthy sinner, on account of the glory of Thy name and of Thy most faithful promise in the case of this devoted man do humbly implore Thy clemency."^o And, arriving at the tomb of Saint Peter, he prayed there for a long time and wept and was, as it were, overcome by sleep and rapt in ecstasy in which he learned through a revelation that he had been graciously heard. And lest in the future he should presume to seek favors for anyone who had died without holy baptism he was deservedly reproved. In this connection he was allowed to be asked certain things by inquisitive people of imperfect faith and more things by those who believe the truth when it is spoken faithfully. And he was allowed to explain that the things which are or seem impossible to men are easy to God.^p In this act of divine goodness and power, neverthe-

ⁿIsa. 1:17.

^oMark, 6:27.

^pLuke, 18:27.

less, it seemed desirable that his opinion be honored and be disputed by no one.

28. Finally, we have learned that it was told by a reliable and virtuous man, one deservedly very intimate with our revered father on account of his piety and talents, that when this same vessel of election and dwelling place of the Holy Spirit was interpreting the last vision of Ezechiel a veil was hanging between him and his secretary. Because the saint was very silent for a long interval the scribe pierced the veil with his stylus and, looking through the opening, saw a dove whiter than snow perched for a long time upon Gregory's head with its beak in his mouth. When the dove removed its beak from his mouth, the holy pontiff began to speak and the scribe applied his stylus to the wax tablet. When again the medium of the Holy Spirit was silent, the scribe again put his eye to the opening and saw Gregory in prayer with his hands and eyes both uplifted towards heaven and the beak of the dove again in his mouth. Then, by a revelation of the Holy Spirit, he discovered the scribe and, by right of his apostolic authority, seriously charged him not to tell anyone about the wonderful miracle that he had witnessed. Meanwhile the secret was guarded, but after the death of the saintly priest, motivated by the envy of certain persons who disparaged the holy man and said that he had been presumptuous and had himself spoken about these heavenly mysteries, the scribe faithfully related all the things he had seen.

29. After the aforesaid venerable pontiff had passed to the Lord a terrible famine³⁶ was raging not only in the Roman city but in all the regions around. He who had succeeded to the pontifical office³⁷ opened the granaries of the Church to those who had money but closed them to those whom Saint Gregory had fed through his monasteries or deacons or hospices with church funds. These latter, impelled by hunger, began to importune the pontiff, saying: "Apostolic Lord, those whom our father, your predecessor Saint Gregory, strove to feed until this time let not your holiness allow to perish with hunger." The same man, hearing with vexation their clamorous shouts, answered: "Even if Gregory to his praise and glory was solicitous to care for all the people, we cannot feed them all." When he answered these words again and again to the shouting people Saint Gregory appeared to him three times in a vision and mildly rebuked him for his negligence and stubbornness, threatening him because of his lack of mercy. But he neither changed his attitude nor was willing to refrain from detraction nor extended his hand in bounty. Therefore, Saint Gregory appeared to him for the fourth time and looking sternly and threateningly at him, struck him on the head and he died shortly afterwards as a result.

These things have been told briefly about the life and works of Saint Gregory.

To conclude, as long as this world lasts, Gregory's well-merited praise will increase since without doubt it is due to him

and to the holy apostles that this Roman state continues to exist and that the Church of the Angles is fruitful in new offspring and that because of his teachings throughout the whole world many long lost in sin have been converted to the love of Christ and that certain good men influenced by him have earnestly sought the heavenly fatherland. This very holy pontiff, after reigning gloriously in the see of Rome and over the apostolic church for thirteen years, six months, and ten days, was taken from this life and was transferred to an eternal abode in heaven. He was buried in the Church of Saint Peter the Apostle,³⁸ before the altar, on the twelfth of March in the kingship of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

III

COMMENTARY

1. Abbot Snow, in his scholarly life of Saint Gregory the Great, states that the palace of Gordianus, who was a man of senatorial rank and considerable wealth, stood on the Clivis Scaurus, a declivity of the Coelian Hill, about one hundred and twenty yards from the Colosseum. Here, according to the Abbot's account, Saint Gregory was born about the year 540, three years before the death of Saint Benedict.¹

2. Abbot Snow also maintains that Gordianus was a descendant of the Anicii, a family which was noted in Roman story and which had given saintly heroes to the Church.² This statement is open to question, however, since Gordianus is not mentioned in the rather lengthy list of the Anicii given in the first volume of Pauly-Wissowa's Real-Encyclopaediae.

3. Concerning Saint Silvia, Saint Gregory's mother, the Acta Sanctorum states:

Inter sanctas mulieres quas generatione filiorum
salvandas apostolus praedicavit, praecipuum locum
tenet sancta Silvia, sancti Gregorii Magni mater.
Cujus sanctissimae mulieris cultum valde antiquum,
sed currentibus saeculis pene oblivione obrutum.

¹Abbot Snow, O.S.B., Saint Gregory the Great (London: John Hodges, 1892), pp. 25-6.

²Ibid., p. 26.

Clemens VIII Pontifex Romanus instauravit, illato sanctae Silviae nomine in Martyrologium Romanum ad diem 3 Novembris: Romae sanctae Silviae, matris S. Gregorii Papae.³

4. According to Batiffol, this Pope Felix, great-great-grandfather of Saint Gregory, can be only Felix III (483-492), formerly the priest Felix who it is known, had been commissioned by Pope Saint Leo to repair the basilica of Saint Paul. He had formerly been married, and we have the epitaphs of his wife Petronia, of his daughter Paula, of his son Gordianus, and of his daughter Aemilianus.⁴ For a confirmation of this opinion, see the Vitae Romanorum Pontificum, I, 253.

5. Gregory of Tours, Saint Gregory's contemporary, says of the seven monasteries founded by Saint Gregory:

Hic enim de senatoribus primis, ab adolescentia devotus Deo in rebus propriis sex in Sicilia monasteria congregavit; septimum infra urbis Romae muros instituit.⁵

Dudden says that the six monasteries in Sicily may probably be identified with the monasteries of Saint Hermas, of Saints Maximus and Agatha, of Saint Theodore, of Saint Hadrian, the Praetorian Monastery, and the Nunnery of Saint Martin.⁶

³Carolo DeSmedt, Gulielmo von Hooff, et Josepho DeBocker, editors, Acta Sanctorum, Novembris (Paris: Victor Palmé, 1887), I, 658.

⁴Pierre Batiffol, Saint Gregory the Great, translated by John L. Stoddard (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1929), p. 10.

⁵Gregory of Tours, Historiae Ecclesiasticae Francorum, Patrologia Latina, LXXI (Paris: Migne, 1849), col. 527.

⁶Dudden, op. cit., I, 106-7.

6. This monastery was in Saint Gregory's ancestral home on the Clivis Scauri. It was "an old house several times rejuvenated and large enough to install there a moderate-sized community. Gregory put his monastery under the patronage of the apostle Saint Andrew, brother of Saint Peter."⁷

7. This, according to Dudden, Snow, and Batiffol, was the monastery of Saint Andrew. They all follow the statements of Gregory of Tours and John the Deacon.

8. John the Deacon, in his life of Saint Gregory, also mentions Peter the Deacon:

Caeterum prudentissimus rector Gregorius, remotis a suo cubiculo saecularibus, clericorum sibi prudentissimos consiliarios familiaresque delegit, inter quos Petrum Diaconum coetaneum suum, cum quo postea disputans, quattuor Dialogorum libros composuit.⁸

9. This Roman pontiff was probably Pelagius II. Neither Gregory of Tours nor Paul the Deacon gives the name of the pope, though Paul seems to imply that it was Pelagius II. John is generally an inferior authority to Paul; but the fact that he deliberately corrects Paul in his Sancti Gregorii Magni Vita may imply that he possessed some further information on the point. The fact that there was some doubt as to the name of the pope who ordained Saint Gregory supports Dudden's contention that the ordination was

⁷Batiffol, op. cit., p. 19.

⁸John the Deacon, Sancti Gregorii Magni Vita, Patrologia Latina, LXXV (Paris: Migne, 1849), col. 92.

in 578, since in this year both Benedict and Pelagius held the pontificate; and it might easily have been forgotten whether Saint Gregory was promoted by Benedict early in the year, or by Pelagius in the latter months.⁹

10. At this time the seven deacons of Rome were eminent ecclesiastics who shared the counsels of the pope and were charged with the superintendence of the seven regions of Rome.¹⁰

11. Pope Pelagius II sent Saint Gregory as apocrisarius or nuncio to the Bysantine court. Abbot Snow asserts that Pelagius trusted to Saint Gregory's rank, talents, business capacity, and sanctity to influence the Emperor Tiberius and to take advantage of any favorable turn which might promote the interests of the Church in Constantinople. In the year 578, according to Snow, Saint Gregory left his peaceful home on the Coelian and sailed for the imperial capital, accompanied by several of his monks.¹¹

12. "The luxury of old Rome, transferred to Constantinople, had become more voluptuous and enervating from the wealth, climate, and customs of the East. Into the splendor and magnificence of the court, into apartments provided in the palace of Placidia, a magnificent adjunct of the magnificent imperial palace, came Gregory in his coarse habit to pray, to fast, to study, and to

⁹Dudden, op. cit., I, 120.

¹⁰Ibid., I, 121.

¹¹Snow, op. cit., p. 49.

continue the monastic routine of St. Andrew's."¹²

13. Saint Gregory's most intimate friend was the saintly Spaniard, Leander, archbishop of Seville. Leander had come to Constantinople to further the interests of his convert, Hermenigild, the Catholic prince of Spain, who had taken up arms against his Arian father, King Leovigild. During his stay at Constantinople the famous archbishop was Saint Gregory's constant companion. The tastes and interests of the two men closely corresponded. A theologian, a controversialist against the Arians, a writer of discourses on the Psalms, a musical composer, a student of the liturgy, a charming letter-writer, an enthusiastic admirer of the monastic life, Leander was a man after Saint Gregory's own heart.¹³

14. The Visigoths in Spain were a small minority and were rapidly Romanized. The conversion of King Recared in 587 from Arianism to Roman orthodoxy accelerated the process of Romanization. Visigoth speech gradually disappeared, and the current vernacular was of Latin origin. Roman organization and tradition survived among the Visigoths to a marked degree.¹⁴

In endeavoring to save his country from Arianism, Leander showed himself an orthodox Christian and a far-sighted patriot.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Dudden, op. cit., I, 155.

¹⁴William L. Langer, "Visigoths," An Encyclopedia of World History (1948).

Exiled by Leovigild, the Visigoth king, he withdrew to Byzantium from 579 to 582. It is possible, but not proved, that he sought to rouse the emperor Tiberius to take up arms against the Arian king. In any case, the attempt was in vain. He profited, however, by his stay at Byzantium to compose important works against Arianism. There, also, he became acquainted with Saint Gregory.

15. Eutychius, the patriarch of Constantinople, had been nominated by Justinian in 552, deposed by the same arbitrary authority in 565, and restored to his see by Tiberius.¹⁵ For a further discussion of this controversy, see Book I of Bede's Historia Ecclesiastica, Book XIV of Saint Gregory's Moralia, and Book I of the Sancti Gregorii Magni Vita by John the Deacon.

16. All the historians, both Greek and Latin, speak in the highest terms of the Emperor Tiberius Constantine (578-582). Tiberius was reputed to have been gentle, compassionate, generous, and brave, gifted with personal beauty and engaging manners. His popularity was universal. He took the side of Gregory in the controversy with Eutychius on the condition of the risen body.

Tiberius was brought up by the Emperor Justin II, whom he succeeded. It was during his reign that the great influx of Huns and Slavs in the North and East and that of the Lombards in the West began seriously to threaten the Empire.

17. Of this flood Gregory of Tours, the contemporary of

¹⁵Dudden, op. cit., I, 142.

Saint Gregory, writes:

Anno igitur quintodecimo Childeberti regis, diaconus noster ab urbe Roma cum sanctorum pignoribus veniens, sic retulit, quod anno superiore mense nono tanta inundatione Tiberis fluvijs urbem Romam obtexerit, ut aedes antiquae diruerentur; horrea etiam ecclesia subversa sint, in quibus nonnulla millia modiorum tritici peiere. Multitudo etiam serpentium cum magno dracone in modum trabis validae, per hujus fluvii alveum in mare descendit; sed suffocatae bestiae inter salsos maris turbidi fluctus, littori ejectae sunt. Subsecuta est de vestigio clades, quem inguinariam vocant.¹⁶

18. Pelagius II was the son of Winigild, a Goth. He was an excellent priest, though not equal in talent and political gifts to Pelagius I. After a pontificate full of afflictions and anxiety, principally because of the Lombard threat, he was carried off by the terrible pestilence which, in the beginning of 590, ravaged the city of Rome.¹⁷

19. The Roman Emperor Maurice ruled in Constantinople from 582 to 602. As soon as Saint Gregory was elected pope he wrote to Maurice, begging him to annul the election. Later, when Saint Gregory was pope, his organization of resistance against the Lombards displeased Maurice, though the government at Constantinople did nothing to protect Italy. Further trouble was caused by the tyranny of Romanus, the imperial exarch at Ravenna. Saint Gregory protected the Italians against him. But the exarch and the

¹⁶Gregory of Tours, op. cit., X, I.

¹⁷Grisar, S. J., op. cit., III, 61.

emperor protected the bishops in Northern Italy who still kept up the schism that began with the Three Chapters quarrel. The assumption of the title of ecumenical patriarch by John IV of Constantinople caused more friction. All the foregoing explains Saint Gregory's unfriendly feeling towards Maurice; and it also helps to explain his ready and friendly recognition of Phocas, which has been alleged by some to be a blot on the great pope's career.

20. The words of Gregory of Tours (X, I) are "Praefectus urbis Romanae Germanus ejus anticipavit nuntium." Is Germanus a proper name or does it mean "brother of Gregory"? Does "ejus" therefore depend on "nuntium" or on "germanus"? This is a point which we have no means of deciding.¹⁸

21. This story about the anchorite can scarcely be historical, although Paul and John both tell it. It is, of course, true that Saint Gregory wished to avoid the dignity of the papal office and even planned to go into hiding. But his project of flight was never carried out. Gregory of Tours writes that he was seized and carried off and dragged to the Basilica of Saint Peter and there, having been consecrated to the pontifical office, was given as a pope to the city. The event took place on September 3, 590.¹⁹

22. When Saint Gregory became pope, John, a Roman by birth, was Bishop of Ravenna. He was a man of medium height and digni-

¹⁸Hodgkin, op. cit., V, 298 (note).

¹⁹Dudden, op. cit., I, 221-2.

fied presence, stout but not fat, with curly grey hair. He was a zealous preacher and was given to good works. To him Saint Gregory dedicated his Pastoral Rule. Later, the two had a heated controversy about the wearing of the pallium.²⁰

23. Saint Gregory's famous Liber Regulae Pastoralis was written about 591 and dedicated to John, archbishop of Ravenna. John had reproached Saint Gregory with an attempted flight on the eve of his election to the papacy, an act that Saint Gregory undertakes to justify, after the manner of Gregory of Nazianzus and Chrysostom, by explaining the sublimity and difficulty of the ecclesiastical office; in the second section the manner of life incumbent on the shepherd of souls; in the third section, larger and more important than the others, the character and manner of pastoral teaching; the fourth and last section, consisting of one chapter, reminds the ecclesiastical shepherd that he should practice daily the habit of self-recollection. This book of Saint Gregory met with universal approval; it was translated into Greek by Anastatius II, patriarch of Antioch, and into Anglo-Saxon by King Alfred of England.²¹

24. In 593 Saint Gregory, worn out with worldly cares, had withdrawn to a lonely place where he complained about the unhap-

²⁰Ibid., I, 436-7.

²¹Otto Bardenhewer, Patrology, translated by Thomas J. Shahan (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1908), pp. 652-3.

piness he felt at not being able to devote himself to the salvation of his soul in monastic peace and retirement. In his solitude he is visited by the deacon Peter, a friend of his youth, to whom he makes known the secret cause of his melancholy by recalling the example of many holy men in former times who had abandoned all earthly concerns to seek only the perfection of their spiritual life. Peter pretends not to know that there had lived in Italy so many holy men through whom God had performed miracles; at his request Saint Gregory begins to relate some of their lives and miraculous deeds, partly from his personal recollections, partly from the evidence of trustworthy witnesses. The first and third books introduce to us a number of saintly Italians endowed with miraculous powers, all of them otherwise unknown to us, apart from a few distinguished persons like Paulinus of Nola. The whole of the second book is devoted to the miracles of Saint Benedict of Nursia. In the fourth book Saint Gregory dwells with pleasure on those miracles that prove the survival of the soul after death. This work, so thoroughly characterized by the contemporary faith in the miraculous, was transcribed and translated with such rapidity that it was soon a household book in all parts of the Christian world.²²

25. The Homiliae XL in Evangelia are probably Saint Gregory's

²²Ibid., p. 653

sermons on the gospels for the Sundays and holydays during 590 and 591. Twenty of them were dictated by the saint to a notary and read to the assembled people. The other twenty were delivered by him in the churches of Rome and taken down by tachygraphers. His admirers soon published them against his will. Afterwards, he made a new collection of these homilies in two books. To this edition of the forty homilies is usually added the powerful penitential discourse quoted by Paul the Deacon in Chapter XL of his Vita.²³

26. More than eight hundred of Saint Gregory's letters are extant. They are arranged in fourteen books corresponding to the fourteen years of his pontificate. Written in a clear and undorned style, they are addressed mainly to the nobles and ecclesiastics of the time and contain a wealth of information about the administration of the Church.

27. In his relations with the Lombards Saint Gregory was both a peacemaker and a patriot. Through all the weary years of his pontificate peace was the greatest desire of his heart. To secure this he labored incessantly. Undaunted by Lombard treachery or Roman coldness, he pressed both friend and foe with ceaseless solicitations until his purpose was achieved. Yet, eager though he was for peace, Saint Gregory did not wish to purchase it by ignoble concessions. He would not break faith with the Emperor,

²³Ibid., p. 654.

though the Emperor rewarded his patriotic efforts with ingratitude and insult; nor would he yield to a barbarian master the city, which was still to him the mistress of the world. There can be little doubt that, during these years of struggle, the fate of Rome depended on Saint Gregory alone. It rested with him to decide whether the city of the Caesars should yet be the home of classical tradition, the abiding light of Europe through centuries of intellectual darkness, or whether, as the seat of some ignorant Lombard duke, it should gradually pass into decay and insignificance. Had Saint Gregory chosen the latter alternative, it is impossible to conceive what would have been the subsequent history of Italy and the European world. But, true Roman as he was, Saint Gregory made the choice, and thereby has established an enduring claim upon the gratitude of the race.²⁴

28. Saint Gregory sent beds and clothing to Saint John Climachus, abbot of Mount Sinai, for the pilgrims who sought that sanctuary.²⁵ See also Saint Gregory's Epistles, V, 38.

29. It was during his residence as a monk in the monastery of Saint Andrew that Saint Gregory took that memorable walk through the Forum, in the course of which he saw, exposed for sale, the fair-haired and fresh-faced Yorkshire lads, whose angelic beauty

²⁴Dudden, op. cit., II, 41-42.

²⁵Count De Montalambert, Monks of the West (Boston: Thomas B. Noonan and Company, n.d.), I, 406.

suggested to him the mission to the Angles and the hope of rescuing from hell the heathen inhabitants of Deira and of teaching the subjects of King Alle to sing Alleluia.²⁶

30. The Deiri were inhabitants of Deira, an Anglican kingdom which emerged in the second half of the sixth century and extended from the Tees River to the Humber. After a long conflict with its northern neighbor, Bernicia, both were united in the seventh century to form the kingdom of Northumbria.

31. For the story about King Alle see also Venerable Bede's Historia Ecclesiastica, II, columns 79-81 of the first section and columns 81-86 of the second section.

32. The head of the mission was Augustine, who held the office of prior in Saint Gregory's monastery on the Coelian. He was a man of commanding presence and lofty stature, a head and shoulders taller than any of his companions. He had been thoroughly trained in the monastic discipline, was well versed in the study of scripture; and on his zeal and judgment the pope believed he could rely. Augustine and his companions sailed for England in the spring of 597.²⁷

Mellitus left Rome in the summer of 601. He later became the first bishop of London.²⁸

²⁶Hodgkin, op. cit., V, 291.

²⁷Dudden, op. cit., II, 105.

²⁸Ibid., II, 123.

John sailed with Augustine and later became abbot of Saint Augustine's Monastery at Canterbury.²⁹

33. This voluminous work, entitled Expositio in Librum Job sive Moraliu Libri XXXV, was begun by Saint Gregory while he was legate at Constantinople, but not finished until after his election to the papacy. In the dedicatory epistle to Leander, archbishop of Seville, the author says that he will expound the Book of Job in a triple sense: the historical, the allegorical, and the moral. He is all too brief and sparing in the historical elucidation of the text, though the deeper speculative or contemplative sense is treated with some fulness. On the other hand, the practical application of the text of Job is carried out so exhaustively that this work was recognized at once as the thesaurus of moral theology.³⁰

34. Sections 23 to 28, which deal with Saint Gregory's miracles, are rejected by Grisar and Bethmann as almost certainly an interpolation by some pious copyist. Otherwise, they consider Paul's biography a careful and accurate composition.³¹

35. In Saint Gregory's time there existed in Trajan's Forum a relief representing a woman supplicating the Emperor; and to this group a story had become attached, to the effect that on one occasion Trajan, when setting out to battle, had delayed in order

²⁹Ibid., II, 105.

³⁰Bardenhewer, op. cit., p. 653.

³¹Dudden, op. cit., I, xii.

to give audience to a widow who prayed for justice. Saint Gregory knew the story and was touched by the goodness of the prince. After Saint Gregory's death in 604 a legend grew up, apparently in the English church, that the pope had "prayed" or "wept" so earnestly for the soul of the Emperor that he had procured its release from the torments of hell, though at the same time he was divinely warned never again to presume to pray for anyone who had died in paganism. This legend is regarded with grave suspicion by John and is, of course, unconditionally rejected by later Catholic theologians.³²

36. This story seems to be derived from Chapter 28 of the Life of Saint Gregory by an anonymous monk of Whitby. John the Deacon makes no direct allusion to Sabinian, Saint Gregory's successor. According to his account the famine occurred in the very year of Saint Gregory's death, when a hostile party, taking advantage of the general distress, spread reports that Saint Gregory had wasted the property of the see. The fury of the people was roused, and, since Saint Gregory himself was out of reach, they determined to burn his books. Then Peter the Deacon tried to dissuade them from the sacrilege, affirming that he had very frequently seen the Holy Ghost, in the shape of a dove, hovering over the doctor's head and inspiring his writings. This statement he further affirmed with a solemn oath. Then, taking the Gospels in his hand, he ascended the ambo and asked God to take

³²Ibid., I, 48.

his life in testimony of the truth. He then repeated his declaration and died.

37. Of Sabinianus, Saint Gregory's successor, the Vitae Pontificum Romanorum states:

Sabinianus, natione Tuscus, de Civitate Ulera, ex patre Bono, sedit annum unum, menses quinque, dies novem. Eodem tempore fuit fames in civitate Romana gravis. Facta autem pace cum gente Langobardorum, et jussit aperire horrea Ecclesiae, et venundari frumentum populo per solidum unum tritici modios triginta. Hic in ecclesii beati Petri apostoli luminaria dedit. Quo defuncto, funus ejus ejectum est per portam sancti Joannis, et ductum est foris muros civitatis per montem Mulvium. Qui et sepultus est in ecclesia beati Petri apostoli, die 22 mensis Februarii. Hic ecclesiam de clero implevit. Hic episcopos fecit per diversa loca numero sex viginti, et cessavit episcopatus menses 11, dies 26.³³

38. Saint Gregory was buried in the portico of the Basilica of Saint Peter, in front of the sacristy. Two centuries after his death, his namesake, Gregory IV, removed his body within the church to an oratory near the new sacristy and covered the tomb with panels of silver and the back wall with golden mosaics.³⁴

Subsequent translations took place in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and the remains now rest beneath the altar in the chapel of Clement IV.

Saint Gregory's epitaph, composed by Peter Oldradus, arch-

³³ Vitae Romanorum Pontificum, Patrologia Latina, CXXVIII (Paris: Migne, 1849), col. 663-4.

³⁴ John the Deacon, op. cit., IV, 80.

bishop of Milan, and secretary to Adrian I, is cited by Bede.³⁵ It consists of sixteen hexameters and contains one famous phrase, the designation of Saint Gregory as "Consul of God." Following are the lines which contain this phrase:

HISQUE DEI CONSUL FACTUS LAETARE TRIUMPHIS
NAM MERCEDEM OPERUM IAM SINE FINE TENES.

³⁵ Venerable Bede, Historia Ecclesiastica, Patrologia Latina, XCV, (Paris: Migne, 1849), col. 80.

CONCLUSION

The Vita Sancti Gregorii Magni of Paul the Deacon agrees with the writings of Saint Gregory and his contemporaries, notably Gregory of Tours. It agrees also with the Historia Ecclesiastica of Venerable Bede and with the anonymous life of Saint Gregory by a monk of Whitby. It presents, moreover, a good example of medieval hagiography and is comparable to the life of Saint Gregory written by John the Deacon, another monk of Cassino, about the middle of the ninth century.

Paul the Deacon's use of the literary amenities of his age and his uncritical attitude towards his material indicate that he was guided by the medieval mode of thought which accepted unquestioningly the current accounts of incredible marvels. Yet, in spite of his uncritical attitude and his ready credence, Paul has left us a biography of Saint Gregory the Great that is for the most part reliable and worthy of our consideration.

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