

# THE OWL.

Vol. V.

OTTAWA UNIVERSITY, JANUARY, 1892.

No. 6

## MONTE CASINO.



NEAR the foot of the Apennines there once lay an ancient city overlooking that part of the *Campagna Felix* of the Romans, which is watered by the little river Liris. The history of its origin, like that of so many other cities of Italy, is hidden from us by the mists of antiquity. It was called by the early Sabines, *Casca* (which signified ancient), by the Romans, *Casinum*: and from the Italians of to-day it receives the name of *Casino*.

Three centuries and a half before the Christian era, the Romans, during their war with the Samnites, took possession of this city, and having declared it a Roman colony, peopled it with 4000 legionary veterans. Finally it developed into a *Municipium liberum*, and had its priests and its pontiffs, its duumviri and its senator, as may be gleaned from the various inscriptions found in the vicinity. On account of its charming site and its salubrious air, it became a favourite resort for the rich families of Rome, the ruins of whose villas still mark the spot where once the city stood. Very shortly after the advent of St. Peter to Rome, the Gospel of Christ was preached to the pagans of Casinum, probably, as some maintain, by St. Peter himself, who introduced Christianity into the neighbouring town of Atina. Be this as it may, it is certain that their conversion took place at a very early period, for at the Lateran Council in 487, St. Severus was present as Bishop of Casinum. But near the end of the fifth century the barbarians who then swept over Italy, visited and pillaged this ancient city. From that time Casinum rapidly sank, and before many decades its inhabitants had again lapsed into ignorance and

idolatry. Then it was, in the year 529, that St. Benedict, fleeing from his enemies at Subiaco, came to Casinum and preached the Faith to the benighted inhabitants whom he soon converted to the worship of the true God. On the summit of the lofty cone-shaped mountain which rises above the city, was the ancient citadel, and also a rich temple dedicated to Apollo. The gods of this temple were destroyed by the newly enlightened people, and the building itself was converted into a Christian Church under the patronage of St. John the Baptist. Beside the church St. Benedict founded a monastery, which was soon filled by those of his disciples who had followed him from Subiaco and from the other monasteries which he had founded in the vicinity of Rome. For these pious Monks a code of rules was written by St. Benedict, and soon the little company grew into a distinct monastic order. Such was the beginning of the great Order of Benedictines, and of the famous monastery which bears the name of Monte Casino.

The town of Casino which lies about a mile east of the ruins of the ancient city, is situated near the line of railway which connects Rome with Naples. The depot is but half a mile from the foot of the mountain whose lofty summit is capped by the immense quadrangular building which forms the monastery. Two roads lead up to it. One is a carriage road made only five or six years since, by which the traveller can arrive in two hours, after traversing the mountain on every side, and passing once completely around it. The other is the ancient road which runs in a zigzag manner up the southern side, and reaches the summit after a distance of 3½ miles. This highway, for such it may be called, was constructed in the 16th