

of an Italian sunset, to produce a lasting impression even on the dullest heart.

From the Loggia del Paradiso, another Cortile on a higher plane extends to the door of the church. This magnificent structure, than which few, if any, richer exist in Italy, is noted not alone for the beauty of its interior, but for its interesting history as well. The Temple of Apollo which St. Benedict, as already mentioned, converted into a Christian Church, was destroyed by the Longobards in 589. On its ruins a new church was erected, which was consecrated by Pope Zachary a century and a half later. This second church shared the same fate as the former, being destroyed by the Saracens in 884. Twenty years later a third church was constructed which was enlarged and embellished towards the end of the eleventh century, but the terrific earthquake of 1349 left it a heap of ruins. It would not be unreasonable to suppose that all these misfortunes would dishearten the monks and make them give up the idea of building any more churches in a place so unfavourable. Not so, however. In a few years they again set to work, but the building erected this time was so unstable that 300 years later it threatened to fall. Without waiting for it to do so, they pulled it down, and Fausaga, a celebrated Spanish architect, built on the same site the church which stands there to-day. It was consecrated by Pope Benedict XIII, in 1727. The great door which opens from the upper courtyard is made of marble covered with plates of bronze. On its surface is written in inlaid letters of silver the names of all the possessions held by the Abbey in 1066, in which year the door was made in Constantinople. Above it there is a Latin inscription recording the foundation and subsequent vicissitudes of the monastery. The decorations of the interior of the church are beautiful in the extreme. The floor is of Florentine mosaic; the paintings of the dome and of the arched ceiling are the works of the best masters; and the glistening walls and columns are covered with the richest and rarest marbles. The altars are all made of marble, or rather of many pieces of different kinds of marble, neatly chiselled, and set into one another with such precision that they form a variety of pretty figures which seem as if they all grew naturally in the one stone. The walls and

columns are ornamented in the same way. Pictures representing vases full of flowers, bunches of fruit, and figures of every description, are formed entirely of pieces of different kinds of marble, and all so perfectly that not even the finest lines are wanting. Many of the inlayings which represent flowers and fruit, are of mother-of-pearl which is lavished in profusion on the altars and columns. Under the centre of the dome lies the tomb of St. Benedict, over which is built the High Altar of the Church. The design of this altar is attributed to Michael Angelo, and needless to say it is a masterpiece. Neither pains nor money were spared on it, the finer parts being artistically worked in alabaster inlaid with amethyst and other precious stones. The antependium was originally formed of one plate of silver, on which were figures delicately wrought with the chisel, but this costly ornament was carried off by Napoleon in 1799.

Behind the altar is situated the choir, where the monks assemble to recite their office or to assist at mass. As the rest of the church is famous for its works in marble, so is the choir for its carving in wood which occupied 7 artists for the space of 44 years. The 82 seats or "stalls," which are arranged in a double row around the three sides of the choir, and the panels which cover the walls to the height of 15 or 20 feet, are formed of black walnut carved in every variety of pattern. Viewed even from a distance, this work cannot fail to please the eye; but it is only when examined closely and in detail, that its latent beauty becomes manifest. The arm-rests of the stalls are each supported by a handsomely formed statuette, and on the arm-rest itself reclines the figure of an angel. It is especially remarkable that each one of these many figures has a posture, and expression of features totally different from all the others. The panels which form the backs of the upper row of seats are exquisitely carved, showing in *alto-relievo* the figures of animals, fruit, flowers and foliage of every description. In the centre of each panel there is a little niche in which, carved in walnut, is the bust of some illustrious Benedictine. Fluted columns with ornamental bases divide the stalls from each other, and support a beautiful cornice which forms the upper part of the wood-work. It would be difficult to say how