

VENERABLE BATTISTA VERNAZZA (II)
1497-1587

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'A LINK BETWEEN ENGLISH MARTYRS AND FLEMISH MYSTICS'



It was only after her fortieth year that Battista Vernazza began to write her spiritual experiences—the special interior graces conferred on her from time to time; it has been thought wonderful that she could find time for this in the midst of the many exterior duties her new office implied, but it may well be that the very fact of their distracting nature made her the more anxious to refresh her soul by this spiritual work. She continued to write during the rest of her life in spite of other absorbing offices, for she was only relieved of the Procuratorship to become successively Mother Vicaress and Abbess. Her writings fill six large volumes and consist of colloquies, spiritual treatises and dissertations—notably one on the *Pater Noster* and (for she retained her love for poetry) twelve *Spiritual Canticles* treating of the mystery of our Lord's life and four on divine love, also five sonnets; and to these must be added her letters. Among them are those to Tommaso More and some to her confessor and spiritual director, Padre Collino, and lastly her *Life* of her father.

Baron von Hugel speaks of her writings as 'evinced throughout a fine Christian-Platonist breadth of outlook and concentration and expansion of devotional feeling' and as 'having much of that unfading freshness which appertains to the universal experiences of religion, wherever these are experienced deeply and anew'. Boeri quotes the praises given them by such an authority as Father Possivinus, S.J. who says that Battista wrote on prayer and the spiritual life *per divina comunicazione*. Father Giacinta Parpera calls her, in his life of St Catherine, 'a miracle of the century'; others do not hesitate to declare that she was 'guided by the Holy Spirit', 'illuminated by the supreme light of the Holy Spirit, so as to write works on mystical theology in a manner which exceeds the power and the understanding of a woman'. But we will give only a few extracts, choosing such as illustrate her love of God rather than her learning. They are beautiful in their simplicity and seem to have been written under the influence of the touch of God communicating himself to a soul grounded in humility and stretching out to meet him who stoops to the lowly and unites himself to their weakness in the strength of his divine love.

Every now and then she breaks into spontaneous ejaculations rising from a heart overpowered by the knowledge of the greatness of God's love and the depth of her own nothingness. Writing on the words: *Venite et audite et narrabo omnibus qui timetis Dominum quanta fecit animae meae*, she exclaims: 'Oh love—it would take long indeed to tell of all the ineffable courtesies of thy divine Heart, in which I hope to enter and to take up my abode for ever. To say all in one word, my dear Love, thou hast ever done more good to me than I can understand and I have ever served thee unworthily. Thou hast always called me to be entirely thine and I have never yet given thee an undivided heart'. Or again, after thanking God for the 'unmeasured love' he has shown her in spite of her unworthiness, she cries out to him: 'But I know for certain that I want only thee—no other than thee—thou art the perfect satisfaction of all the desires of my heart—Love, give thyself to me'. Yet in spite of her recognition of her own unworthiness and of having offered God a 'divided heart', her love constrains her to say: 'But because as thou knowest, Life of my soul, my greatest natural inclination was to love, to be loved and praised by creatures, when I sought to taste anything but thy Goodness, thou wouldst suddenly afflict my soul with anguish. There was no company, however good it might be, but if I took too great natural pleasure in it, thou wouldst reprove me for it. Thou didst will that those I loved should cleave to thee and not to me, and when I sought to keep them there was war between thee and me. Thou has done me this favour, my Joy, to will that in all I should delight in thee alone in utter freedom and purity of heart'. As she wrote these words, Battista was evidently recalling the time when, in her noviceship, she had taken too great satisfaction in the affection given her by her companions.

How perfectly she attained the purity and freedom of heart which God required of her, we may see from her account of a special grace received in one of her communions: 'On 17th November 1554, having before Holy Communion a great desire to die to all things, I prayed with all my heart that God, in the most perfect manner possible, would slay me and unite me with himself. And in so doing I renounced into his hands all myself and everything existing under heaven, while electing God anew as my only Love, my only Solace, my only Comfort, and my *all*. And I refused to accept every consolation arising from such interiority, however holy the latter may be, except in as much as the consolation arises whilst the interior is distinctly occupied with God, and does not turn its gaze upon itself or upon any other beloved object. Even if I could enjoy all this quite justly, till the day of judgment, I renounce it all. Nothing pleases me except God. And if I were assured (which God forbid) of going

(to abide) under Lucifer, still would I will, neither more nor less than my God alone. And it would be grievous for me to embrace even for one single hour, anything else but him. After this Communion I remained with a most intense impression of renouncing, with regard to all things, and to all moments, all myself and every other thing that is lower than thee; and with a determination to keep 40 days of silence, depriving myself during them, as far as my own will and inclination went, even of such reasoning as turned on religious subjects. And acting thus, by means of thy grace alone, I arrived in my inner heart at having no other actions left except those of adoring thee and praying for all men'.¹

In her account of some of these special graces Battista soars to great mystical heights. In December 1554 she writes: 'I communicated and I experienced within myself the most tender colloquies of thy Majesty, which said to me: "The time will come when thou must be so occupied with me—with my divinity, my infinity, my glory, that if thou shouldst so wish thou wouldst be unable to break off this preoccupation".' And there are passages on God's knowledge of himself, his generation of his Son, his infinity, his immanence, his transcendence, which are in accordance with the Dionysian teaching, followed by the Victorines and other Augustinian mystics of Battista's own Order, notably of Blessed John Ruysbroeck. But to whatever heights Battista rises we always find in her works the moderation, the clear-sightedness, which we should expect from the daughter of such a man as Ettore Vernazza, who united sanctity and high idealism to the qualities of a statesman and the acumen of a lawyer.

A letter written to Donna Andronica in 1571 gives so striking an illustration of what has been said that we will quote some passages from it. Donna Andronica had been left a widow with several children still needing her care, but she had conceived a strong desire to leave the world and enter the religious life and consulted Battista on the matter. In her answer the venerable Prioress, now 78 years of age, comments on the words: 'I have come to cast fire on the earth and what will I but that it be enkindled?'; 'What else', she says, 'is this communication of his infinite love than the planting within our minds of his own intrinsic, incomprehensible delights? His Majesty in his infinite courtesy, takes his delights in abiding with the children of men. He wills, I say, that set in motion by the intense potency of this infused fire, we should place in return all our delights in his Majesty; and then, to speak according to our human fashion, his

¹ The translation of this passage and of the letter of Donna Andronica is that given by Baron von Hugel.

unmeasured love attains to its intent. In this correspondence lie hidden away delights beyond comprehension, considering that it is his own goodness that comes down (into us) as he demonstrates when he says: "We will come to him and make our abode with him" and that he raises us up beyond all measure in such wise that of the increate Heart and of the created one, there is made, by the operation of him who says: "The Father who is in me worketh", a single, most secret and inestimable union'.

The letter is a long one and continues on this high level; towards the end, coming to the question of Andronica's vocation she says: 'I have taken up my pen with a desire that you may be wholly and entirely devoted to the Lord, with a whole-hearted abandonment. I do not mean that you should abandon the care of your children; on the contrary, I wish that you should give the greatest care to them, both within and without. For the within, by desiring whole-heartedly that they may be joined (cleave) to God, with all they are; and for the without, by helping them studiously to avoid everything that leads to sin. Indeed, according to the little light God deigns to give me, this alone appears to me necessary, that your Ladyship should observe the counsel of St Paul where he says: "that we should walk worthily in the vocation in which we are called" (Eph. IV, i). Now you are called to the government of your children. Hence I pray you to study how you are to act, that you may be able to render a good account of it to God. You will remember how our Christ, on the point of going to his death, renders an account to his eternal Father concerning those whom his Father had given into his charge, saying: "Of them whom thou hast given me (in charge) I have not lost one".'

'Consider, my very great friend, how that our great God, being infinitely perfect, or in better terms: Perfection itself—all that we can do for him is to come in aid to his dear images to his beloved children, as the Lord shows in Matt. xxv, 40: "That which ye shall do unto one of my least, ye shall have done it unto me". I know well that you desire to withdraw yourself from all the cares of the world in order to be able to occupy yourself entirely with God. But do you not know that "charity seeketh not the things that are her own", that is her own utility? That desire which your Ladyship has for herself, let her have it equally for her children. Are we not obliged to love our neighbours as ourselves? How much more our children? That step in perfection of entirely abandoning all things, your Ladyship cannot take without great damage to your neighbour—damage I mean to souls. Remember how full of perils is the period of youth; I beg of you with all possible insistence, for God's sake, to have a greater care of these young souls than of yourself, since the necessity is greater. But pray indeed to his Majesty that he may

give you grace so great as to enable you to abandon all things entirely. . . . Here is the point in which all perfection consists. And I will pray for this, in union with yourself. I most certainly desire, for my part, that your generous heart may have no other delight but God. And do you convert that human consolation which men are wont to take in their children into a great desire that they may cleave to God, that they may not offend him and that they may bear his Majesty in their hearts. And from such a course of action, various advantages will follow. First, I think you will be most useful to your neighbour; and lastly your Ladyship will have carried off a great victory over your own self.'

We have quoted these passages at some length (though with omissions) because they give an admirable example of Battista's way of dealing with souls; the reasoning is cogent and we cannot doubt that it had the desired effect, convincing her to whom it was addressed, where for her lay the greater perfection, without leaving any sting of disappointment, so clearly is it shown that to do God's will is indeed for each individual soul the 'better part'.

We cannot wonder that the advice of the holy Prioress of St Maria delle Grazie was sought by many. The intercourse with those who came to her for spiritual counsel, showing their confidence and veneration in a way which in her youthful days would have interfered with the entire donation of her heart to God, no longer presented any danger, for such intercourse was purely in and for God. Her own desire was to pass unnoticed and to hide from all eyes what might attract esteem, fearing, says her biographer, 'to lose the smile of God' (*Di perdere il sorriso di Dio*).

Though ever ready to help the troubled or tempted and to draw holy souls nearer to God by communicating to them something of her own clear vision and burning love, she was most reticent concerning her own intimate relations with God. A well known priest, having heard that singular graces were conferred on her, came to Genoa hoping to receive some account of them from her own lips; but after a prolonged conversation he declared that it would be less exhausting to do a day's hard digging than to get her to divulge the heavenly favours bestowed on her.

It must be owned that visitors were sometimes indiscreet in their demands on her. On one occasion the Infanta of Spain² was sent by the Empress, her mother, to ask the holy Prioress of St Maria delle Grazie for her advice and prayers. Before leaving the princess begged for some object belonging to her that she might keep it as a precious remembrance. Battista, surprised at the request, excused herself saying that as a religious she had nothing of her own to dispose of,

² Probably the Infanta Juanita, daughter of Charles V.

but the Infanta so insisted that one of her ladies took by force the girdle and little cross worn by the Prioress, whose confusion was great when she left the parlour and met her sisters, who wondered at her heightened colour and the disappearance of cross and girdle. We are not astonished to hear of her spontaneous exclamation: 'Oh, sisters, if I could begin my religious life again I would hide myself in a hole'.

Frequent requests for her prayers were made, as to one powerful with God, but she showed no self-consciousness and made no protestations of her unworthiness, saying in all simplicity: 'Our Lord has promised to give to those who ask, so let us pray with great confidence'. When her confessor ordered her to add some account of herself to that of her father, she wrote as little as was consistent with obedience and that with the greatest repugnance, for, as she said, she knew herself to be only *una ladroncella* (a little thief) of the glory of God, to whom she had nothing to offer but her sins.

The accounts of her religious experiences, from which some extracts have been given, were never intended for publication; they were written under a strong impulse of the spirit of God and, like St Teresa when she wrote her *Way of Perfection*, Battista may have thought of their being of use to her own spiritual daughters, who kept them precious, the MSS being still preserved in the convent of St Maria di Passione.

Padre Gasparro Scotto, the secular priest who had found it such hard work to draw from her any relation of her supernatural graces, became her director and during her lifetime he printed, unknown to her, some of her *Discourses*, but the first edition of her works only appeared after her death in 1602.

Apart from the self-revelation furnished by these writings (a revelation more valuable than any outward testimony) we have evidence of those gifts by which God is wont to set his seal on the sanctity of his servants; thus both prophecy and miracles are recorded of Battista.

To Donna Isabella Casanova she announced that her little girl of three years old would enter religion and she also foretold the vocation of a boy of the Doria family who became a Capuchin, while to Donna Violante Centurione she predicted the birth of a son. She possessed moreover the power of reading hearts, and on one occasion she warned one of her sisters of a fault that could have been known to God alone.

She was often found in the choir rapt in ecstasy, her eyes fixed on the blessed Sacrament and her face glowing as from an inward fire. The nuns remarked that this always recurred on the feast of Pentecost to which she had a great devotion, preparing herself for it by

a rigorous fast on the nine days between it and the Ascension, also especially dear to her. On both these feasts she is said to have appeared 'inebriated with divine love' (*ebbria del divin'amor*) and received special graces.

In 1555 she wrote: 'On the Lord's Ascension Day thou didst say to me, my Love, that up to this point I had walked by faith, but that now thou wast determined to give me direct assurance (*certezza*). And on my asking what thou wouldst operate within me, thou didst affirm that I should ever possess thee in my heart.'

Her fasts were at all times frequent and severe, going far beyond what was prescribed by the constitutions. On Good Friday she would touch nothing but bread and water and even for this she waited until after three o'clock in the afternoon, when she would say: 'My Lord no longer suffers'. Like all great lovers of the Crucified she not only accepted but sought eagerly for some share in his sufferings; she made for herself a hair shirt interspersed with thorns, which must have caused acute pain at every movement and we hear of her performing in the service of the sick those extraordinary acts of mortification of which we have examples in the lives of the saints, but from which our modern fastidiousness recoils; it was the more meritorious in Battista, because, as her sisters bore witness, she was a great lover of cleanliness; they also tell how she would pay long visits (never betraying the least sign of being inconvenienced) to a sick sister, the nature of whose malady made others find it difficult to bear the atmosphere for even a short time.

During the Carnival days, which in Italy at that period were days of almost unbridled licence, she redoubled her prayers and penances and would exhort her sisters to make reparation with her and to obtain the conversion of sinners. These two intentions were present to her at all times and she prayed especially for religious who were not fervent in the observance of Rule and for priests who were wanting in zeal for souls. Every day she interceded for all priests who had celebrated Mass that morning, asking that they might ever offer it with perfect purity of heart and ardent devotion and that if any might have desecrated the Mass by sacrilege, he should quickly recognise the greatness of the sin and repent with all his heart.

Her devotion to the Passion was deep and tender, and as she wrote or worked she would cast loving glances on the crucifix, often taking it in her hands, kissing the five wounds as she exclaimed with tears: 'Oh Love, Love how dear thy love for me has cost thee'. A sister who witnessed such a transport asked her to kiss our Lord's feet for her when she should first meet him in heaven, to which Battista gladly assented saying that it would surely be pleasing to him who had once uttered the reproach: 'Thou gavest me no kiss'.

It was also her custom to pray long hours prostrate on the ground in remembrance of our Lord's prayer in the Garden.

But lovers of Jesus in his Passion (*Gesù appassionato*) are not content with devout practices, however fervent, nor even with self-inflicted pain; they crave for a share not only in his suffering but also in his abasement. No startling humiliation is recorded in the life of Battista, but all through its long course we find her ever cultivating, in her interior life and in her relations with others, the humble disposition of heart from which heroic acts spring as flowers from congenial soil.

She lived in difficult times when the city was sometimes in the throes of war and under foreign domination or, more often still, torn by intestine factions and the offices she filled as Procuratrix, Vicarress and especially as Abbess of a numerous and impoverished community laid on her duties which it was not always possible to fulfil to the satisfaction of all. Criticism and blame were sometimes reported to her or even addressed to her personally, but her peace of heart and gentle calm were unalterable, nor would she allow even her friends or her daughters to resent any such words. Nothing could ruffle her serenity, nor did either her voice or expression ever betray the slightest trouble or annoyance; 'and', says Boeri in his *Life*, 'she joined to gentle patience the most splendid generosity towards those who showed her disrespect or contempt. Every manifestation of the divine will was to her a source of inward joy: 'God's will is my heaven', she would say. She saw that will very specially in all that could humble her; so, looking on those who criticised her as the instruments of that will, there could be no resentment towards them in her heart. It seemed as if she drew sweetness and ready forgiveness from the wounds of Christ which she so frequently kissed. She herself was ever ready to ask pardon of any whom she feared to have hurt, and even as an octogenarian, looked up to as the mother of all, she would make humble reparation to anyone whom she conceived herself to have disedified.

In her writings she often breaks out into exclamations of heart-felt abasement, entirely free from all taint of the concentration on self that apes humility. Hers was that heart too full of the thought of God's greatness to be over-occupied with its own littleness; her humility was modelled on that of God's Mother, rising from the contemplation of its insufficiency to magnify the all-sufficient Love which ever chooses to do great things in and for souls who with Mary have said their *Ecce ancilla . . . fiat mihi*.

In 1553 she had received from our Lord the promise that a great grace would one day be hers and some years after she said to a sister with whom she was intimate: 'Thank God with me that he now

grants me to be always occupied with the thought of his glory, his divinity, his infinity, to drink my fill at the very source of grace and to receive the kiss of the Bridegroom'. 'Mother', said the nun, 'surely such joys must be heaven on earth'; and to these words Battista made a sign of assent. Yet her longing for the unveiled vision of God made her frequently exclaim: 'When shall I appear before the face of my Lord?' or she would dwell lovingly on the words: 'Daughters of Jerusalem I adjure you to tell the Beloved that I languish for Love', and she expresses the ardour of this desire in the following lines:

Per darti un guardo, amor, darei la vita.

Lasciarmi un po' veder tuo divin Cuore

Veggio il nulla e il mio Ben veder non posso

To cast one glance on Thee, Love, I would give my life.

Let me catch one glimpse of Thy Divine Heart.

I see that which is nothing, and my supreme Good I cannot see.

Amid such words as these and her recognition of the 'great things' God had done for her, comes the humble acknowledgment of her own nothingness: 'I find a cause of joy in the fact that my nothingness can never attain thy perfect praise. I will rest content in that nothingness; for if I were anything in myself, thou wouldst not be my ALL'. And again: 'Take from me all that I love and draw them and the whole world to thyself, but tell me, I beseech thee my Love, that the long-wished for time has come when my heart shall be full of thy Majesty, thy divinity, thy infinite glory. Increase my love, establish me in thyself, for thou knowest that I am but weakness and misery unless I am centred immovably in thee. I will hide myself in the wounds of Christ. I have no desire for anything but God; neither love nor honour have any charms for me.' And once more the humble cry: 'Oh my only hope, I have always lived at thy expense'.

One of the greatest joys of her life was the leave for daily Communion, now so easily granted, but not accorded to this saintly soul till she was already stricken in years. *Della santa comunione era 'famelica'*, says her biographer. Among the more special favours she had received from God, she counted as one of the principal the being enabled, even in serious illness, to rise to receive her Lord. In extreme old age (for she lived to be ninety) when her mouth and throat were so parched as to cause burning thirst, she would refuse to drink in order to communicate. 'His Majesty, in his infinite courtesy', she had once written, 'takes his delights in abiding with the children of men, and he desires that these delights should proceed from both sides, so that as he takes his delight in us by his own intrinsic natural goodness, he wills that we in return should place all our delight in his

Majesty, and then to speak according to human fashion. His unmeasured love attains its intent'—and Battista would not frustrate him of his 'intent' by missing the divine rendezvous.

The last days of her life were full of suffering and she was sometimes obliged to keep her bed for weeks or even months together, but there was no failure either in the high courage or the virile mind she had inherited from her father. When undergoing intense suffering, her throat was on fire and open wounds on her body caused pain which wrung the hearts of those who attended her, she would answer their anxious inquiries as to what might relieve her by the words: 'Let God who is good in all he does have his way . . . the pain is not so great, but I am all too sensitive'. The one solace she would ask of her sisters was that they should read to her from the works of St Augustine, Tauler and Blossius and from the *Imitation of Christ*.

In her ninetieth year, says Boeri, like a pilgrim who as he nears the end of his journey feels his ardour increase and hastens his steps, so Battista pressed forward towards the goal, and her love of suffering seemed to grow stronger with each new call on her endurance. All that was bitter became sweet to her and she would repeat: *Superabundo gaudio in omnibus tribulationibus meis*. She avoided speaking of her sufferings. Once, after a crisis during which her attendants had called the Confessor, fearing she would pass away, she was asked: 'Are you not weary of the pain, Mother?' She replied as one suddenly recalled to the thought of self: 'I? . . . not at all . . . if the Lord wishes it, so do I'.

One day she told her sisters how in her youth she had heard a preacher say that if the desire of seeing God were to be sufficiently strong and continual in a soul, it might be exempted from passing through Purgatory and go straight to the Presence it had so longed for, for sins are cancelled rather by love than by fear according to our Lord's words: 'Many sins are forgiven her because she hath loved much'. The nuns would sometimes reproach her tenderly for seeming to wish to leave them: 'Are we then nothing to you, Mother?' one of them said, but in their hearts they knew she loved them and felt for their sorrow, and like St Martin, she would not refuse the burden. When they asked her to remember them in heaven she answered humbly: 'I do not know what my lot may be, but I trust in God . . . and if I find mercy in his sight, I shall indeed remember you' . . . and she begged their pardon for the 'disedification' she had given them, with a simple genuine humility which touched all hearts.

On the feast of the Ascension she asked for Holy Viaticum and it was brought to her at midday; after receiving it with great joy, she begged to be left alone, and remained all that day as one on the

threshold of heaven, her eyes raised as if in contemplation of the great mystery to which she had always had so great devotion; the Blessed Sacrament was her last nourishment for from that time she took nothing.

On Friday Extreme Unction was administered and once more she asked the Community to forgive the imperfections of her life among them and the defects of her government. She then exhorted them to the strict observance of silence, recollection and charity. Seeing two of the nuns who had served her most lovingly in her hours of pain and her sleepless nights, she said: *Vos estis quæ permansistis mecum in tentationibus meis*. The night between Friday and Saturday was her last; not long after midnight she turned to her Confessor and asked him to remember her in his Mass. Then taking her Crucifix in her hand, she gave it a last kiss and uttered the words: *Exivi a Patre et veni in mundum; iterum relinquo mundum et vado ad Patrem*, and with a happy smile on her lips she went forth to God.

It was on the 9th May, 1587, and she was in the 91st year of her age. The nuns with one impulse pressed forward to kiss her feet as if venerating a saint, and, as soon as the news of her death spread in the city, crowds of every rank and condition came to pay their tribute of devotion to the body exposed in the church, to touch it with rosaries, and to beg for any object she had used or touched. The sacred remains exhaled a sweet fragrance and it was demanded that the burial should not take place for a fortnight that the people might satisfy their devotion, during which time the body remained flexible, showing no sign of corruption. Miracles soon confirmed the general belief in the sanctity of the servant of God. Donna Angela Imperiale was cured of a dangerous illness by having Battista's veil placed on her head, and another member of the same family was restored to health by drinking from a cup used by the holy Mother. A woman named Veronica, who had been long suffering from a terrible wound in the knee and from acute pain in her neck and the back of her head and was moreover blind, was entirely cured by making the sign of the cross with a lock of Battista's hair.

But perhaps, better than by a list of such miracles, is her sanctity attested by the effect of her life and holy death on the Community in which she had passed so many years. It became, we are told, a veritable 'heaven on earth', all its members vying with one another in the practice of the virtues they had witnessed in their Abbess. It seemed indeed as if her intercession had obtained for them that fire of divine Love which she had ever striven to kindle in their hearts.

In 1636 Urban VIII signed a Decree for the introduction of the cause of the servant of God, Battista Vernazza, an act which, by

custom, authorises the use of the title 'Venerable'. Five years earlier her body had been found still incorrupt and had been removed to a recess near the Lady Chapel. On the tombstone is a long Latin inscription, of which we quote only the closing words, purporting to be addressed to the reader by Battista herself:

EGO ENIM, QUUM INTER HOMINES ESSEM
 IAM TUM IN DEO SEPULTA ERAM:
 XIII ÆTATIS ANNO E MUNDO IN CHRISTI AMPLEXUS ABII
 LXXVII ANNOS ISTHIC CUM ILLO EGI:
 SILENTIUM MIHI SCHOLA; SOLITUDO GYMNASIUM,
 JESUS MAGISTER ERAT.³

The last two lines are an admirable summary of Battista's life. During the 77 years spent with him who had called her so early to his own, that life had been in very truth 'buried with Christ in God' and while governing her Community in times of stress and storm, or helping the many souls who in their troubles sought her counsel, her inward life had been spent in the School of Silence and Solitude, listening to the teaching and exercising herself in the imitation of her Master, JESUS.

³ But I while still among men
 Was already hidden in God.
 In my 13th year I left the world for the embrace of Christ.
 Seventy-seven years have I spent here with him.
 Silence has been my school; solitude my discipline,
 Jesus has been my Master.