

THE VENERABLE BATTISTA VERNAZZA
1497-1587

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'A LINK BETWEEN THE ENGLISH MARTYRS AND THE FLEMISH MYSTICS'



VENERABLE BATTISTA VERNAZZA is probably only known in this country to members of the religious Order to which she belonged and to those who have read Baron von Hugel's *The Mystical Element in Religion*. In it he studies the spiritual and mystical life of St Catherine of Genoa, as illustrating his theme, and to her life he adds notices of considerable length on two of her friends and disciples: Ettore Vernazza and his daughter Battista, whose spiritual life Catherine greatly influenced, and in both of them Baron von Hugel finds affinities and contrasts with the character and supernatural experiences of the saint. No one undertaking even a brief sketch of Battista's life could overlook his valuable work, but it is written from a special point of view, as showing forth the outcome of St Catherine's spirit on those two disciples of hers though he recognises that 'they are in no sense simple copies of her', and that their lives are in themselves worthy of record; indeed the life of the Venerable Battista, consulted for this sketch, bears the title: *Una Gloria di Genova*¹ and her father, Ettore, was both a man of eminent holiness and one of the most prominent citizens of Genoa, where in 1867 a statue was erected to his memory, as a public benefactor.

He was a lawyer, belonging to a noble family of the Genoese Republic, and Lord of Vernazza, Arvenza and Cogoleto, three villages situated in its territory. His wife, Bartolommea Ricci, was of the illustrious Florentine family of that name, which gave St Catherine Ricci to the Church.

It is to Battista that we owe a life of her father, written by her when she was 84 years of age. She tells us of the holy and happy married life of her parents, saying she had never heard one word of dissension exchanged between them, and she dwells gratefully on their care to bring up their children in piety, mentioning especially the examples of mortification given by her father . . . a mortification which her mother lovingly sought to moderate. The esteem in which Ettore was held by his fellow citizens led them to elect him as Chancellor of the 'Serenissima Republica'. He possessed a large

¹ By C. Antonio Boeri.

fortune and was one of the founders of the hospital for incurables in Genoa.

But his interest and his charity were by no means confined to his native city. On his visits to Rome he was painfully impressed by the number of beggars and by the misery which contrasted with the magnificence of the court of Leo X, and at Naples, perhaps the most pleasure-loving and most beautiful of Italian cities, he was especially struck by the wretched state of the prisons and the neglect in which criminals condemned to death were left, without any organized help and with no one to administer spiritual aid as they went on the way to execution. For all these evils he instituted remedial measures, and on his return to Genoa he formed with three companions 'The Company of St John the Baptist Beheaded', of which the aim was to take to heart in every way the welfare of prisoners, he and his friends accompanying them to the scaffold. Ettore's own death was to be that of a martyr of charity. But enough has been said to give an idea of the influence the life of such a father must have had on his children: an influence in which he was seconded by their saintly mother.

The eldest of their three daughters was born on April 15th, 1497, and the god-parents were two great friends of her father: St Catherine Fiesca-Adorno, and a learned lawyer, Dottore Tommaso Moro, after whom the child was christened Tommasa, a name she was later on to change to that of Battista. Her education and that of her two younger sisters Catetta (no doubt so called after her god-mother St Catherine) and Ginevrina, was such as was given to high-born ladies of the Renaissance, a period marked by a strong intellectual impulse and a passionate enthusiasm for the classics.

Besides Latin, Greek and in some cases mathematics, girls were expected to be proficient in music, to play the harp or the lute and to sing *canzoni*, sometimes of their own composition.² Among her various studies, religion, literature and music seem to have had Tommasa's preference and all through life she retained her taste for them. A story has come down to us of a little encounter she had with a music-master when but 10 or 11 years old, which shows that she had very early a decided will of her own. He had picked up a

² We have an example of Tommaso's composition at this time:

*Santissima mea Diva
Questo meo cor ricevi;
Che quando al sole apriva
Le luci ai giorni brevi,
Insin d'allor jè voto
Con animo devoto
Non mai, Madre adorata,
Esser da Te sviata.*

Do thou, most holy Queen divine
Receive my heart, I pray,
For lo, when first these eyes of mine
Opened to life's brief day
Promised with love on fire that e'er
That heart should own thy sway;
Wherefore, sweet Mother, hear my prayer
Let it ne'er from thee stray.

rumour of a great marriage in prospect for her and ventured to congratulate her on it, but her answer demonstrated her full consciousness that her own will would be the ultimate factor in this matter, and her determination to use it in all freedom. She may have known how her beloved god-mother, whose heart had been set from the age of 13 on entering among the Canonesses Regular of the Lateran in the convent of our Lady of Graces (St Maria delle Grazie), had been put off on account of her youth and at 16 had been given in marriage, against her will and for purely political purposes, to Giulano Adorno, of the great Guelph family of the name. The marriage, most suitable from a worldly point of view, had been a cause of intense suffering to Catherine. There was no fear that either Ettore Vernazza or Bartolommea would require such a sacrifice of their children. Their own married life was singularly blessed and Ettore's grief was great and sincere when his beautiful young wife was taken from him by death early in 1509, leaving him with three little girls, the eldest of whom had not attained her twelfth birthday.

There was no relation whom Ettore could ask to undertake the management of his household and the care of his children; and for him there could be no thought of giving them a step-mother. His own wish was to leave the world entirely and, placing his children under the care of nuns, to enter among the Canons Regular, but he was most disinterestedly advised by one of them to continue the life of active charity he was already leading. Nevertheless Ettore resolved to withdraw from the world at least in some degree, retiring to rooms in the hospital for incurables, where he devoted himself more than ever to their welfare.

His two eldest children he placed in the convent of St Maria delle Grazie, there to be educated as became their station, and the little Ginevrina he confided to the Cistercian nuns of the convent of St Andrew just outside the city gates, so that all three were within easy reach of their father. Possibly the separation of Ginevrina was because the Canonesses did not receive such young children. Ettore gave written directions stating that the child was to be free at the proper age 'to choose either to serve God in religion or to marry according to the rank of the testator', and due provision was made for her in either case. Later on she entered among the Cistercians, taking the name of Sr Maria Archangela.

Of these children Tommasa was the best able to understand what the loss of her mother meant and her grief was extreme, but like St Teresa of Avila, she turned to her heavenly Mother and exclaimed amidst her tears: 'O Mary, I have lost my mother—do *thou* be henceforth a tender mother to me'. Already she had conceived the desire to give her life to God in religion, though she had not men-

tioned her wish to her parents for fear of paining her mother; but probably she had confided her secret to Catetta, for the two little sisters were at one in their aspirations. We must remember how far more advanced both physically and mentally are the children of the south than those of our northern clime. Betrothals and even marriages between mere children were not infrequent at the period, especially among princely families.

Tommasa now spoke of her wish to St Catherine who was delighted to hear that this child, in whom she saw some reflection of herself, thought of entering the convent in which she had so longed to consecrate her own life to God.³ 'O happy child', she exclaimed, 'on whom God has looked with so much favour—whom he chooses for his bride in that very monastery which I was not found worthy to enter. He calls you and you answer to his call. I now transmit to you the lesson I have been taught: let Jesus be in your heart, the remembrance of eternity in your mind, the will of God in your every action, and above all, love—all love to God who is all LOVE'.⁴ Thus encouraged by her god-mother, the child spoke to her father who gave an unhesitating and even joyful consent. We hear of no such objections on the score of tender age as had been made in the case of St Catherine, objections which the nuns no doubt regretted having ever raised.

In 1510, on the feast of St John the Baptist, patron of the company formed by her father for the relief of prisoners, Tommasa, now 13 years of age, received the white habit of the Canonesses Regular of the Lateran and took the name of Battista. It was one of St Catherine's last joys on earth, for she died twelve weeks later on September 15th. Catetta followed her sister's example and became Sr Daniela, but we do not know at what date. She is mentioned in her father's will, made in 1517, as being a member of the community of St Maria delle Grazie. In that will he states that he has already given to his two daughters in that monastery 3000 Genoese pounds and has provided 200 pounds for the furnishing of their rooms, their habit, etc.

Before giving an account of Battista's religious life we will quote

³ It was in the church of St Maria delle Grazie that Catherine had the spiritual experience which she calls 'conversion'. It was the grace to give her heart entirely to God after five years of a more or less worldly life in which she had tried to find some compensation for the want of happiness in her marriage. It is sad to think that the Canonesses were obliged to leave this church so full of hallowed memories when the suppression of monasteries took place under Napoleon in 1810. The convent has been converted into dwelling-houses and the church was used as a theatre. The nuns first found refuge in a Dominican convent, but in 1822 Archbishop Lambruschini assigned to them that of Sancta Maria di Passione, where they still carry on their life of prayer and praise.

⁴ *Una Gloria di Genova*. C. Antonio Boeri.

what she tells us of the death of her father, and reading it we can realize the thrill of filial pride with which, at the age of 84, she recalled and handed down to posterity the story of Ettore's heroism:

'The plague being very severe in Genoa', she says (it was in 1524), 'he came to visit me and said to me: "I am determined in no manner to forsake the poor. Do you think I had better go about on horseback or on foot?" "Oh, Father", I said, "we are coming to the feast of the Baptist, and are at the highest heat, and you are determined to go amongst them!" And he said: "Is it my fate to hear such things from you? How truly happy I should be if I were to die for the poor". Then I, seeing so much fortitude in that holy soul, said to him: "Father, go". But he was not content with looking after the Lazaretto. I think he scoured the country far and wide. And hence he caught the infection. On the eve of the feast of the Nativity of St John the Baptist, June 23rd, he confessed and communicated; and in three days he fell quietly asleep in the Lord.'

We have followed the translation of Baron von Hugel and must add a few of his words of comment: 'Rarely', he says, 'has so noble a finish been so nobly told. High on horseback he goes forth, the strong, sound-bodied, wholehearted man, deliberately sure of finding and bringing heaven, wheresoever pure love may be wanted and may joyously appear . . . joyously fruitful, amidst the very ghastliness of death . . . he himself had cast himself down and away into that deep common fosse, amongst the many thousands of his ever-obscurer and now disfigured friends and fellow dead'.

Though no miracles have been attributed to Ettore Vernazza and the Church has not enrolled him among her canonised saints, we can but think of him as a martyr of charity, and perhaps the daughter's 'Father, go' demanded an act as heroic as the self-sacrifice of the father.

But we must return to the days when Battista entered the Canonesses Regular. We have a detailed description of her person in the life by Boeri, who declared it is the word-portrait given by Dom di Negro, who had known her. She was of middle height, well-proportioned, the hands and feet small, her complexion exceedingly fair, forehead broad, eyebrows finely pencilled, and her eyes of a light colour, nose rather long, and lips full, and her whole aspect expressive of gentleness and of a joyous sunshiny nature.

The daughter of Ettore Vernazza and the god-child of St Catherine must have been joyfully welcomed by the nuns. Among them were many whom she knew, though Limbania Fiesca, sister to St Cath-

erine, was already dead.⁵ The lists of those professed at St Maria della Grazie contain the names of the most illustrious Italian families: Giustiniani, Colonna, Spinola, Doria, Pallavicino, Imperiale, Malaspina, Della Torre, etc. The Community was fervent and in it Battista found all she had hoped for: the life consecrated to divine praise, the Rule of St Augustine, based so entirely on charity, the spirit which counts those 'richer' and 'more happy' who are able to bear a fuller share of privation; the liberty of spirit which urges those who are bound to the Rule, to observe it 'not as slaves under the law but as free-born under grace'; all was congenial to the novice, who found her ideal so perfectly expressed in the life she had embraced. 'Rarely indeed', says Baron von Hugel, 'can a woman have been more emphatically in her place than Battista during her 77 years at St Maria della Grazie'.

From the very beginning of her religious life she seems to have laid self aside, so that the word of Isaias might have been applied to her: 'If thy own will is not found to speak a word . . . then shalt thou be delighted in the Lord'. She was a lover of silence and recollection, but ever ready to forego her own desires in order to serve her sisters. Endowed with both spiritual and mental gifts of a high order, and also with many of those minor talents by which pleasure may be given to others, possessing great charm of manner, and that capacity for love which elicits love, and moreover a judgment far beyond her years, it is not to be wondered at that she won love and confidence so that her company was often sought and her counsel asked by those older than herself. She began to realise her power, to take a natural satisfaction in the affection given her, and to allow it to occupy her heart and mind in a way which she felt to be incompatible with the complete surrender of her heart to him who was calling her to live for him *alone*. There was a struggle: in her commentary on the *Pater Noster* she looks back on it and exclaims: 'Thou knowest, my only God, how long I tried to bargain with thee, wanting to keep a divided heart; but thou who art omnipotent didst vanquish me'. And again: 'In my youth there was a combat between thee and me . . . between thy love for me and my ingratitude towards thee. And yet deep down in my heart thou knowest that I found comfort in these words that seemed to be said within me: "His Majesty is stronger than thou. . . . He will be the Victor".'

⁵ Limbania was one of the foundresses of the convent, which was approved of by Nicholas V in 1451. She was named after St Limbania, a young virgin who, according to a legend, came from Cyprus in a small sailing vessel, and after a miraculous journey, landed at Genoa, where she entered an Augustinian convent and lived a life of extraordinary penance and contemplation.

Battista's struggle reminds us of the difficulty St Teresa felt in giving up too numerous visits to the parlour, where she took pleasure in conversing with the many over whom the very beauty of her character had given her an ascendancy. Like Teresa, the Augustinian novice used her power to lead souls to God, yet for her too there was something in her intercourse with them that at this phase of her spiritual life impeded the upward flight of her soul, which God was calling to close union with himself and to the renunciation of all that was lower than himself. 'Nothing pleases me except my God', she was to write later on, 'and it would be grievous to me to embrace, even for one single hour, anything but him'. Like St Teresa too, once she had made her sacrifice, her soul was inundated with consolation and she advanced rapidly in the way of perfection. '*Exultavit ut gigas ad currendam viam*', says her biographer. From her childhood she had an intense devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, and when she was being taught any work, such as embroidery, in which she afterwards excelled, she would exclaim: 'Oh, when I am grown up and can do my work alone I shall take it to the church and work at the feet of Jesus'. In the convent she was constantly found there; as soon as she was free from other duties she hastened to the church, so that it might be said of her that she had chosen it for her dwelling place (*puo dirsi di lei aver fissati la sua mansione diletta a piè de' santi altari.*)

It is recorded in the annals of the first convent of Carmelite nuns in France that the French novices were astonished to see some of the old Spanish nuns establish themselves with their spinning-wheel before the altar, evidently absorbed in prayer during their work. . . . (a custom which it cost them much to abandon). We do not know if Battista was able to fulfil her childhood's wish to do likewise, but we are told that she spent long hours before 'Gesù Sacramentato', and when asked how she occupied her time, she would answer: 'I adore him, I bless him, I make reparation to him for all the injuries he has suffered for love of us'. The hours between the midnight Matins and Prime were spent by her in prayer. Her thoughts were so centred on God that when she came from a parlour, or left business demanding attention, on her return to the church she was at once free from distracting thoughts, or any remembrance of the affairs which had occupied her. 'Our thoughts are precious to the Lord', she would say, 'and must all be given to him'. 'For the thought of a man shall give praise to Thee; and the remainder of the thought shall keep holiday to Thee' (*Ps. 75.*) To keep God ever in her thoughts she adopted several little practices which she carried out faithfully and with the liberty of spirit which marked her spiritual life. Thus as she sat down to table she would raise her eyes to Heaven with an aspiration towards the heavenly food given us in the Holy Eucharist and in the Word of

God, saying: 'Panem *supersubstantialem* da nobis hodie'; meeting her sisters in the cloister or on the stairs, she would greet them with the words of St Augustine, who would have those who follow his Rule live with 'hearts uplifted': 'sursum cor habeant'. Another means to keep her heart 'in touch' with God was the constant reading of the Sacred Scriptures; she always carried in her pocket a copy of the New Testament, and when she had charge of the kitchen and it was her duty to distribute the portions for the refectory, she would, in spare moments, read a sentence or a paragraph which would minister food for her soul. Her writings later on show how she had impregnated her mind with the Scriptures; she not only studied them, but 'pondered them in her heart' in order to discover the secrets of the works of her Lord and Master, scrutinising with eyes illuminated by love all his actions, that they might become the models of her own, re-reading them that his words might be to her springs of life and light.

So during these earlier years she prepared her soul for the greater graces, the clearer illuminations, which were to be bestowed on her, for at this period we do not hear of the ecstasies, the miracles, the spirit of prophecy, which illustrated her later life, but we are told of her charity, her readiness to serve others, her love of prayer, recollection and silence, her detachment from her own will, her perfect obedience and her extraordinary fidelity to Rule, outstanding even in such a fervent Community as that of St Maria delle Grazie.

At the age of 30 she was appointed Novice-Mistress, an office for which she was eminently suited; perhaps this could not be better proved than by the fact that it was said of her that her exactitude in every point was all that could be expected of the most fervent novice, for she never presumed an exception from any point of Rule, even when her multiple duties, her large correspondence (she was consulted on all sides), and as time went on, the infirmities of old age, seemed to demand some relaxation from the strictness of observance.

Two or three instances exemplifying her spiritual guidance have come down to us. On one occasion a novice asked her to pray that she might acquire the virtue of humility. 'Yes, I will pray', was the answer, 'but do you seek *love*; if you find it, humility will follow, for one who loves seeks the glory of the Beloved, rather than her own'. To another who came to her troubled by scruples and in great anguish of mind she said: 'Leave reflection of all this to me . . . do you rest peacefully in God'. One of her daughters desirous of being taught some 'spiritual exercises' for the time of thanksgiving after Holy Communion ventured to ask Battista how *she* spent the time, but the answer was brief: '*Tenui eum, nec dimittam*'; 'I have found my Beloved and I hold him close pressed to my heart, never to let him go'. 'Oh, sisters,' she would sometimes say, '*Gesù è sempre pronto*'

... Jesus is ever ready . . . we can unite ourselves to him at every moment . . . we have but to will it'.

Her zeal for the divine Office and her musical talent enabled her to train others in the chanting of the divine praises, and it was a task she loved; she was all solicitude, all attention for everything connected with the canonical Hours and she would have every phrase, every word perfectly rendered. She had both a good voice and keen musical perception and knew how to inspire enthusiasm for the Plain Song and for the duty which must ever be paramount in the life of a Canoness Regular: the service of the choir.⁶ In the early part of the 16th century the elaborateness of the polyphonic music had reached a pitch which nearly caused its complete banishment from churches, and though it was no doubt in use at St Maria delle Grazie on feasts, we can imagine that Battista must have welcomed the changes introduced by Palestrina, whose Mass of Pope Marcellus was written in her life-time. It is pleasant also to hear that she would sometimes play the mandoline to recreate her novices. These were years of peace in the quiet cloister, but outside its walls there were constantly increasing troubles both in Church and State.

Italy was at that time the theatre of the struggle for supremacy between Charles V and Francis I. The very year in which Battista became Novice Mistress witnessed the sacking of Rome by French troops under the Constable of Bourbon. During these wars Genoa changed hands more than once and in 1522 it was pillaged by the Imperialists who remained its masters. Its great citizen, Andrea Doria, took the side of the French and defeated the Spanish in 1524, but four years later, finding that the promises made to the republic were not being fulfilled, he turned to Charles V and in another naval battle defeated the French who were driven from the state. Doria then restored the old republican form of government, of which his abilities and the confidence of his fellow-citizens made him the real leader, but the haughtiness of his nephew, Giannettino, offended the proud Genoese families, so that the republic was soon the scene of internal dissension. In 1547, Gian-Luigi de' Fieschi, who was an hereditary foe of the Dorian clan, headed a conspiracy. After a banquet given in one of the Fieschi palaces, the city was surprised at night by cries of 'Fiesco' and 'Libertà', while bands of armed men invaded the streets. In the ensuing disorders both Gian-Luigi and Giannettino lost their lives, but Andrea remained master of the situation and took

⁶ A writer who, in 1906, visited St Maria di Passione (the convent to which the community of St Maria delle Grazie passed in 1822) attributes the perfection with which the divine Office is still chanted by the Canonesses to the tradition established by Venerable Battista Vernazza in the sixteenth century.

a bloody revenge on the conspirators. He was himself assassinated in 1560 by one of the Gonzaga family.

The daughter of Ettore Vernazza cannot but have taken a deep interest in the fortunes of the state her father had served so well, and the fate of the Fieschi would naturally affect the god-daughter of St Catherine. The monastery of S. Maria delle Grazie seems to have escaped all injury and Battista, in a letter written in 1576, tells how 'with regard to possessions, quantities of these were sent out of Genoa; great masses of them were deposited in the monasteries . . . and yet never was even a trifle taken. On this latter point, we of this convent can bear witness. For although so much property and money was brought to the Monastery delle Grazie, that it became difficult to move about the house because of the quantity of cases and stray boxes deposited there, nevertheless not even to the poor carriers who brought them was the slightest violence done, although they had to pass through all those drawn and raised swords; nor was a single word said to us nuns, who appeared in the gateway to receive the goods.'

The letter in which this passage occurs was written four years before Battista's admirable account of her father's life and death, but in it, as in the 'Life', her filial pride for her noble father is shown, for she attributes the moderation of the people, at the time of the episode she is recounting, to the improvement in the social and moral standard of the citizens of Genoa, due to Ettore's work among them; for that work had been philanthropic in the best and highest sense of the word, not only by exercising charity and conferring benefits during one of the most troubled periods of the Genoese Republic, but by fostering self-respect and regard for the public good.

Battista tells us how at a time 'when men went about the city with their swords drawn and erect and spoke injurious words to those of the opposite party, yet the women went and came to visit each other and frequented Mass whether they belonged to one party or the other; and the greater number of gentlewomen went out of Genoa, accompanied by their daughters, passing through the very midst of the city and going down to the wharf to get on board their boats, and yet never was any discourtesy shown them'.

But during the long period of Battista's life (1497-1587) far greater issues were at stake than the welfare of Genoa or even than the question of the supremacy of France or Spain, and as a devoted daughter of the Church, nothing touched her so deeply as the purity of the Faith. It was the age of the great religious revolts which was to tear so many nations from Catholic unity—the age of Luther, Zwingly and Calvin—and not even Italy escaped unscathed from the flood of infidelity.

We know that many earnest souls were troubled and bewildered by the rigorous views of the French 'reformer', and the subtle disputes then current on such subjects as Justification by Faith. We might mention the learned and saintly Colonna, the devoted friend of our Reginald Pole, towards whom she acted the part of a mother during his exile, while he in return became her spiritual director, saving her from the perplexity raised in her mind by the Calvinistic preaching of Bernardino Occhino who had at first been looked on as a true and devoted son of the Church. Battista's love for souls and zeal for God's glory (and indeed they are one) is thus expressed in a prayer in which she protests that she finds an incomparably greater joy in petitioning that his Majesty may fill the whole earth and that all may be one in him than in praying for herself. 'And', she concludes, 'not only do I desire that all should have what I so thirst for, but that to those more capable than I of promoting thy glory, thou shouldst give thy graces more abundantly.' We can imagine the sorrow with which she saw her god-father, Tommaso Moro, the friend of her father and her god-mother, St Catherine, lapse into heresy. He who at her baptism had professed the Catholic Faith in her name, now wrote to her repudiating the Church's teaching on several points of doctrine, including the Real Presence, Public Prayer and Psalmody and Religious Vows . . . all indeed which she held dearest and to which she had consecrated her life. Her answer was a masterly one: 'There is in it', says Baron von Hugel, 'a successful, very difficult combination of filial respect and of lofty reproof; and there runs through all the argumentation a sort of legal hard-headedness, entirely in its place on the lips of the lawyer's daughter in dealing with her lawyer correspondent.' We will only give the passage concerning vows: 'According to my humble judgment, that thing cannot be called slavery which a soul elects for itself, by an act of free choice alone, and with a supreme desire. And in this matter you really can trust me, since here I am, living under the very test of experience, and yet I have no consciousness of being bound to any obligation, so little indeed, that if I had full licence from God to do all those things of which I have deprived myself by vow, I would do neither more nor less than what I am actually doing; indeed no taste for anything beyond these latter things arises within me. How then do you come to give the name of servitude to that which gets embraced thus with supreme delight? Perchance you will say: "Not everyone is thus disposed". My dear sir, he who does not find this inclination within him, let him not execute it. Neither Christ nor his Church constrain anyone in this matter'. In Battista's Life by Boeri we are told that Tommaso read the letter in the presence of one of his heretical friends, who seeing him greatly moved as he perused it

and tears starting to his eyes, begged him to read no more of what might disturb him in the beliefs he had adopted, but he pleaded in vain, and soon after Battista had the joy of knowing that her god-father had returned to the Church and that in his old age he embraced what he had once regarded as 'slavery', becoming a priest and entering the Order of Canons Regular. The letter to her god-father was written while she was Novice-Mistress and still comparatively young, for at the age of 40 she was appointed Procuratrix and it is said that in spite of the difficult times, she so managed that the community suffered neither want nor privation during her tenure of that office.

(To be concluded)

REVIEWS

THE MANIFOLD MASS AND THE INVISIBLE CHILD. By C. C. Martindale, S.J. (Sheed and Ward; 5s.)

Not the least intriguing feature of a new book by Fr Martindale is its dedication, and this latest book which is, in spite of the lengthy title, rather a short book, has two dedications. This is not mere caprice on the part of the author for he has given us two books in one and, of course, each must have its own felicitous dedication.

The obscurity of the long title is resolved when one realises that the conjunction is uniting the titles of two separate and quite different books. The first, *The Manifold Mass*, is written in the form of a play, but a play to be read. It is a charming whimsy to which the author, happily, gives us the key, for at times the flights of fancy are somewhat bewildering to a less poetic mind. 'St Gertrude relates', Fr Martindale tells us, 'how she watched our Lord celebrating his own High Mass in heaven. We, in our small way, shall consider ourselves permitted to see not only through stone or wooden walls, but into minds of all sorts, and even, to some degree, into the minds and actions of the heavenly court itself. Mass is manifold, and offers itself through creation, nor certainly do we forget that part of that creation is the sacred humanity of Christ.'

When the curtain rises we hear the hymn of the worship of the solitudes in which the mountains, the snows and the fir trees sing the praises of the Creator. This hymn is filled with lovely poetic phrases, the title itself, the snows 'unrippled seas of crystal', and the trees 'unconquered, unregarding the shattering shocks of time'. This is the prelude to a festival Mass in the Austrian Alps and to its solemn counterpart in heaven. There is much Austrian *gemütlichkeit* among the simple peasants and, on the celestial plane, a certain frivolity among the little angels. However, it is all very charming and helps us to share a little in St Gertrude's vision.