

R E V I E W S

SAINT CAMILLUS*

No one in our generation has done more to make the saints known, and therefore loved, than Father Martindale. In every age the catalogue of sanctity expresses afresh the life of divine grace, taking possession of men and women, and children too—kings and the beggars at their gates, hermits and mothers of families, missionaries who have converted nations and unimportant persons who have no memorial but their own holiness: in a real sense the history of the Church is the history of her saints. For the Incarnation is not only a truth of Faith, to be believed: it is an event whose meaning is re-enacted in the life of every *alter Christus*.

'In this hour, then, when so many thousands of—dare I say?—"innocent sinners" are being hurled into the next world, or crawling into it in agony, may St Camillus pray especially for the battlefields, and for the famine and pestilence that stalk in the wake of war. And may we, who all of us are sick, be ever more vitally incorporated into Christ, in whom alone is everlasting health'. The words from Fr Martindale's Introduction express the relevance of Camillus to the world we know. Not only the impressive work of charity he established, the Order of the Ministers of the Sick, which, nearly three centuries before the International Red Cross was established, brought precisely that symbol, in its redemptive meaning, to the care of the suffering wherever they might be. But the man himself, who under God made this possible, he, the soldier of fortune, the gambler, the Franciscan who failed: Camillus stands out against the world of pain and suggests the Christian's answer. All that is most intimately his; the providential failures of his early efforts to serve God, the imperious demands of his ultimate vocation, and most of all his own bodily suffering, constant and unmitigated—all this is a special gift of God's, designed to make Camillus a perfect instrument of charity. Christ has come to dwell in him, and only now can he serve Christ in the persons of those who suffer.

The crowded background of sixteenth-century Rome, with its maze of ecclesiastical bureaucracy, its unimaginable splendours and miseries, might seem to obscure the single-minded soldier whose only concern was to serve God through the sanctification of pain. There were the usual objections. Fantastic that priests should give themselves to the squalid work of a hospital ward: others could do it better. Intrigue at the curia, misgivings even among his own followers, appalling casualties. (When Camillus resigned his

* *Life of Saint Camillus*, by C. C. Martindale, S.J. (Sheed & Ward, 8s. 6d.)

Generalate, 170 of his 400 or so subjects had already died in the exercise of their special vocation). But Camillus remained serene; he had no fear for his Order. 'God will cause men to be born strong enough to help and defend it'.

Camillus's purpose was a simple one. 'I intend that never must the care for the spiritual as such be separated from the care of the body'. His Order was designed for the sanctification of its members, 'but always in the person of servants of the sick, and of the sick themselves'. He did a heroic amount to improve the material conditions of hospitals, transforming with practical enthusiasm cumbrous institutions into places of efficient and hygienic treatment. (He insists on each patient having a good nightcap—'so that they may not be as they are, with nothing on their heads'!) Yet merely natural virtue can achieve as much, or more, as witness the sterilised perfection of many modern hospitals. But there is more to sickness than a disease to be cured. It is, however mysteriously, a gift of God's. and, as Fr Martindale justly remarks, 'where nursing has become a profession instead of being a vocation, you will *not* get that spiritual contact between nurse or doctor and patient which is infinitely more important than administration of drugs'.

And here perhaps is the special importance of St Camillus for our time. He reminds a world that is desperately sick where the solution for its sickness is at last to be found. No amount of technical skill or hygienic devotedness can reach beyond the physical pain which reflects, so sharply, a disorder yet greater than its own. The confident assurances of the psychiatrist, even, leave far more unanswered than they explain. Such a book as Dr Moran's recent *In My Fashion* reveals very clearly how pitifully inadequate is the modern certainty of 'cure'. The legacy of disaster, even in the physical order, can never be fully redeemed except in the light of God's will—and Calvary is inherited too.

The modern Red Cross, we are told by its historian, 'has no religious significance'. Indeed, 'the plain red cross on a white ground was officially authorised because it was realised that it must be clearly distinguishable from a distance'. St Camillus included a cross, worn on the right side of the cassock, as part of the habit of his Order. It was to be 'lion-coloured' or tawny, to suggest the wood of the Cross of Calvary. In time it became simply red, and, for the Camillans at least, this cross is the whole explanation of their work—the renouncing of self and the following of Christ, and him crucified. Here, then, is suffering made redemptive; here is the 'problem of pain' answered. Fr Martindale's book, written with his vivid awareness of what is human—and therefore most immediately lovable—in Camillus, is very much a tract for the times, and puts us once more deeply in his debt.

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