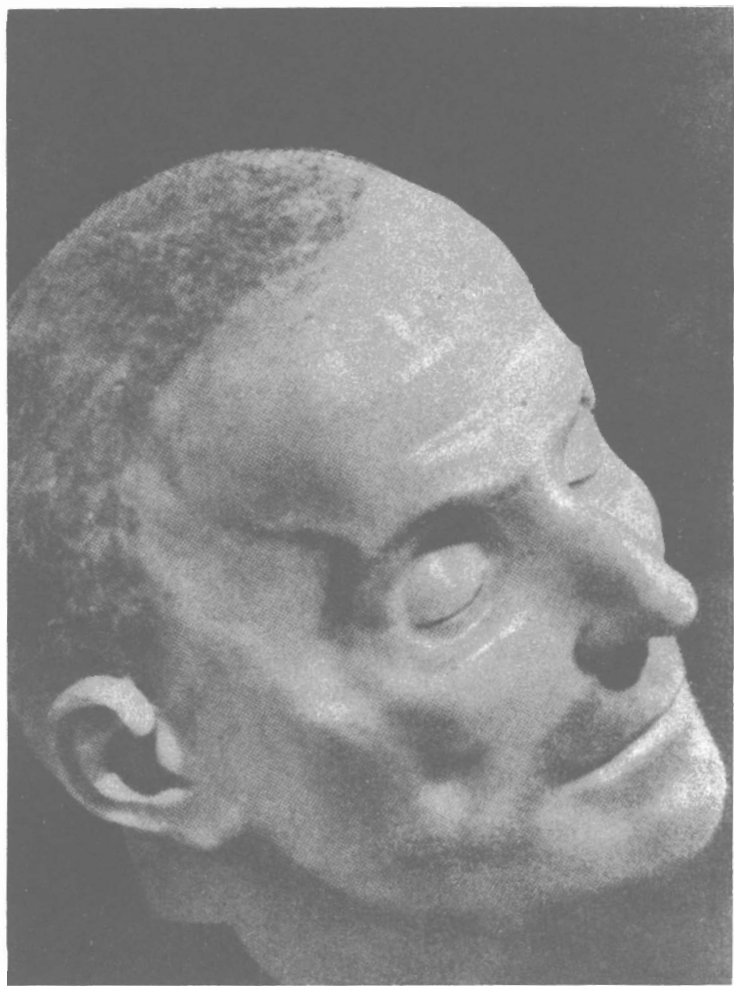


**LIFE OF SAINT CAMILLUS**







From the death-mask of St. Camillus preserved in his room.

LIFE OF  
SAINT CAMILLUS

by  
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NEW YORK  
SHEED & WARD

1946

FIRST PUBLISHED 1946  
BY SHEED AND WARD, INC.  
63 FIFTH AVENUE,  
NEW YORK, 3

DE LICENTIA SUPERIORUM ORDINIS  
MARTIN D'ARCY, S.J.  
PRAEP. PROV. ANGLIAE

13 Dec. 1945

NIHIL OBSTAT: EDOUARDUS CAN. MAHONEY, S. TH. D.  
*Censor deputatus*

IMPRIMATUR: E. MORROGH BERNARD, VIC. GEN.

WESTMONASTERII, DIE 8 MAII, 1946

## INTRODUCTION

WHEN I was first asked to write a Life of St. Camillus for Denmark, I feared I might not find here sufficient material for a book which, while short, should yet be 'scientific' and up to date. But the Camillan Fathers of Aalborg most kindly sent me literature in French, Spanish, English, German, Italian and indeed American, which convinced me that while much yet remains to be done as to the history of the Camillan Order, nothing substantial is likely to be discovered hereafter about the Saint himself.

St. Camillus de Lellis lived a life of extreme publicity. Witnesses to his work and character were innumerable. He might have been canonised at once after his death had not Urban VIII (1623-1644) insisted upon new and stringent rules about canonisation. Hence the official examination of Camillus's career (1618-1629) produced masses of information else unhoped-for; 31 MS. volumes and a multitude of other documents were the result; and, almost more important, Prospero Lambertini, afterwards Benedict XIV, by his intensive study of the 'process' of Camillus, was inspired to write his magisterial work on Beatification and Canonisation. One may say that that 'process' is a watershed in the history of Canonisation.

Fr. Sanzio Cicutelli was for 25 years a companion of Camillus and possessed an enormous dossier of what concerned him even before the Saint died. In 1615 he produced his biography which was re-edited four times before his death in 1627. He had however to omit much for fear of offending many still alive; nor could he use the material accumulated during the Process of Canonisation. Fr. Dolera in 1742, and following editions, incorporated

his and more, and the method of merely *padding* Ciccattelli's work continued to our own times, thereby dulling not a little (I feel) his vivacious style. Nor could his work fully satisfy modern standards of criticism. In fact, hardly any serious research seems to have been attempted till the advent of Fr. Mario Vanti, M.I. This scholar has indeed deserved well of St. Camillus. His *Life of the Saint* (1929) utilised all that was already known but also a great deal of unedited material; and as time went on he made many discoveries of manuscripts written by the Saint himself, and much that enabled him to correct Ciccattelli himself on points, e.g., of chronology. His monographs on the hospitals of Santo Spirito and San Giacomo, on the Plague at Milan in 1630, and other works, display a massive erudition, a treatment of his material which is at once sincere, sober, and yet light-handed and transfused with a sense of humour refreshing to meet with anywhere, but not least in the *Life of a Saint*. The same qualities are met with in the Camillan magazine *Domesticum*.

For the sake of brevity I seldom refer to authorities, but may say here once and for all that I rely almost wholly on Fr. Vanti as to what concerns directly St. Camillus; as for the period or what preceded and followed it, I have used the standard books or notes I had previously taken. Nor have I tried to write what is 'edifying': if a Saint is truthfully portrayed—even his imperfections or 'eccentricities' undisguised—he provides the edification without impertinent comments by the author.

I feel that this book should, in some sense, express my gratitude not only to St. Camillus (whose birthday, I like to reflect, is also mine) but to so many hospitals that I have known either as patient or as visiting the sick there. My first priestly experience was in the Incurables' Hospital at Donnybrook, Dublin; and during the previous



war many of my happiest hours were spent in military hospitals. And again, I have to thank so many surgeons, doctors or nurses who have ministered to me personally, or whose cheerful self-sacrifice I have so much admired. Certainly I would wish that all of them should have the added grace of the Catholic Faith; for there is a Catholic way of looking at life and still more, at death; and if it is happier to live in a Catholic atmosphere, it is almost necessary to die in one, if that tremendous act of Death is to be accomplished with full spiritual satisfaction. And St. Camillus would assuredly have agreed that the Sacraments of the Sick are more likely to be administered if a hospital staff is not afraid to tell the dying that they are gravely ill. 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.

C. C. Martindale, S.J.  
Copenhagen; 1943-45.

P.S.—The last sentence has been left unaltered. These pages were published in Danish (Arnold Busck), in the translation kindly made by Fru Benedicta Berggreen and Count Christian Holstein-Lövenörn, somewhat before this publication of the English original in London. We thank all who co-operated in this.



## PART I

### I

THE Apennines, marching southwards through Italy, reach the Adriatic north-west of Rome, and the province of Abruzzo may be said to be wholly composed of these mountains, plunging in precipices or sinking by soft valleys into the Umbrian plain on the one side, and on the other to the sea. The towns, crowning masses of rock, look still like the fortified citadels that they mostly used to be, yet the loveliest vegetation softens all the contours—the deep pure green of fig-trees: the bronzed and purple-flushed foliage of vines: the dark and austere dignity of cypresses piercing upwards through the silvery mist of olives. The Abruzzesi were the descendants of those sturdy Samnites who bowed the Roman necks under the Caudine Forks, and I am convinced that even to-day they retain something of that special heredity, the more so as their territory is away from the great roads that led armies or commerce up and down Italy from time immemorial.<sup>1</sup> Italians differ very much among themselves, though all of them possess that unique endowment of “Italianità” which has been of such incalculable service to civilisation. I had once for friend a chauffeur from the Abruzzi: like his compatriots he was shrewd, yet child-like; cool, and yet fiery; something of a philosopher and very much of an artist . . . yet with all this he seemed to me to possess exactly that special quality that I expected: there was a certain added simplicity, robustness,

<sup>1</sup> Since I wrote this, circumstances have changed. Armies have marched all along the Abruzzi coasts and into the Abruzzi mountains. Pescara, even Chieti, are no more unknown names.

independence such as you might observe in Westmorland or Brittany, though alas, in England you would nowhere look for just that "culture" which is due to the immemorial Italian tradition—*Italianità*.

In the 9th century, Saracen pirates used to infest the coast and, so it is said, destroyed a town there, Buca. The inhabitants fled up the Apennines, and settled on a hill-top some 1,000 feet above sea-level and made a new town, destined to be called, as now, Bucchianico. The town lies some way south of the Abruzzi capital Chieti. In the 15th century, the great gate of S. Urbano, flanked by four medieval towers, had formed part of a Benedictine monastery, and here Braccio di Montone, a famous condottiere, established himself to repel the attacks of another such adventurer, Muzio Sforza, and thus and by other deeds of valour the little town earned from René of Anjou, king of Naples, within whose realm it lay, the title of 'brave and loyal'. The second most noble family of Bucchianico were the De Lellis (a name spelt in many different ways): there was a legend that they had descended from the magnificent Roman clan of the Laelii, and presumably had found their way into these remote mountains when Totila, king of the Goths, sacked Rome in 546, and dispersed the patrician families far from the capital. It cannot be claimed that these traditions have much reliability; still, it is always pleasant to observe what is continuous, and after all, the Lellis must have got their name somehow. In 1239, at anyrate, Ugo de Lellis emerges as a famous warrior under the Emperor Frederick II, that mysterious man, 'Stupor Mundi', after whom the whole world went gaping. From then on, the name of the Lellis recurs more and more often in history, and we could collect a long list of lawyers, prelates, poets, statesmen, who lent glory to the family. Of these I will mention only two—Simone De Lellis of

Teramo, who in three Councils—Pisa, Basel and Constance—worked towards the healing of the Great Schism; and Theodoro De Lellis (1428–66), destined to be Cardinal, who had often acted as Nuncio for the Holy See, and on being sent by Callixtus III to Rouen did almost more than anyone to rehabilitate the memory of St. Joan of Arc and to pave the way for that canonisation which our own days have witnessed.

About the beginning of the 16th century was born Giovanni De Lellis, who left his native town of Chieti to establish himself at Bucchianico where he possessed lands. Here he fell in love with a young noblewoman, Camilla De Compellis, and married her there probably in 1525. She was tall, gentle, most modest and simple, and most generous with her alms. Her life was almost necessarily a retired one, since her husband was constantly away. Like his father and uncle, and half the men of his dreadful period, he was insanely in love also with war. His military career began with the battle of Pavia in 1525; he took part with the Bourbon duke in the sack of Rome in 1527. Disgraceful as was this event, we cannot put responsibility for its excesses on the shoulders of any subordinate. There is no evidence that Giovanni took part in the rapes, lootings, and other horrors of the sack: many gave witness not only to his courage, but to the respect in which he was held—he was a “good Christian, feared God and justice, and went to Mass every morning.” It remains that you must expect a good many anomalies in a 16th century soldier! After the sack of Rome, he shared in the defence of Naples: then (1530) in the siege and taking of Florence; from 1535 to 1538 he took part in the third war that made northern Italy miserable, and again in the fourth, when he had to cover the retreat of his associates which he did with honour. This was in 1544, and afterwards he took part in the war

between Philip II and Pope Paul IV, and finally received the command of 500 men to defend the Adriatic coast against Turks and pirates.

Meanwhile, a son, Giuseppe, had been born to him and Camilla, but he died in childhood. The years passed, and it looked as if they were to have no heir. Suddenly, when Camilla was all but 60 years old, white of hair and wrinkled, she felt she was again to become a mother. She had a dream in which she saw her baby, his breast signed with the cross, and followed by a troop of children similarly signed. Strangely enough she interpreted this dream pessimistically. She thought she would give birth to a future bandit, destined to spread terror and death everywhere, and that the children following him stood for his executioners. They tried to console her, and indeed she had other dreams, telling her that her son would be a saint. As the time for his birth approached, she deserted the nearer churches that she loved, and hid herself in little shrines a mile or two away.

1550 was a Year of Jubilee for the whole Church, and May 25 was a specially great feast at Bucchianico, being the day sacred to St. Urban, patron of the city.

Camilla resolved to hear 'at least a low Mass', and during it, as she adored Christ in the Holy Eucharist, she felt her hour was coming. She returned home and began to suffer most terrible pains. One of her companions, with characteristic 'supernatural realism', said that as the child had clearly been miraculously conceived, let him be miraculously born—let her go to the stable that he might lie, like his Saviour, on the straw. Camilla went there, and her son was forthwith born<sup>1</sup> just as the

<sup>1</sup> This stable was changed into a chapel in 1716. We regret the loss of its original appearance, exquisitely simple and dignified as is the new architecture. However, at its side are the stones and brickwork of a much older structure, showing short sturdy pillars and round arches. This is the front of his home.

Elevation of the High Mass was being made. The people, pouring out to watch a military review, instantly heard the news, and from that moment Camilla became called 'Madonna Elisabetta', and men asked what manner of child this should be. As for Giovanni, he was so enchanted that he jumped about all over the house; and when Camilla remonstrated mildly—they were really too old for such an exhibition!—he asked how she could object to his dancing around, "seeing that we have such a big son that we could send him to school this very day!" And indeed the child grew up to be just on two metres and 10 centimetres tall—over 6 ft. 6 in. And his shoulders and chest were broad in proportion: he was dark-complexioned, with dark brown hair and practically black eyes. His death mask shows an extreme aquiline delicacy of feature that I had hardly expected.

Two days after his birth, the child was baptised, and was called Camillo after his mother.<sup>1</sup> The small boy was vivacious and quite beyond the control of his mother: his father, of whom Camillus was at once afraid and fond, could keep him in order while he happened to be at home. But nothing could hold Giovanni for long from his military duties or pleasures; Camillus was startlingly young when he took to playing cards, which afterwards became a perfect frenzy. He kept running away from school, and, says one witness whom it is almost difficult to believe, as an extreme measure he was at last turned out of the house. But he must soon enough have come back, for he himself confessed that 'towards the end of this time' he began to feel a certain liking for pious works—not indeed for helping the sick, but for shepherding pilgrims who might apply for shelter in his home. But

<sup>1</sup> So far as I can see, this is a solitary departure from the baptismal names of his paternal pedigree. Obviously it was given after his mother.

alas, his mother died, in 1563, aged almost 73, and having seen no sign of the fulfilment of her dreams. They gave him a tutor: the tutor could not manage him. His father, then commandant of the fortress of Pescara, used to come to Bucchianico, but not often enough to keep an eye on Camillus: the boy reached adolescence with the reputation of being gay, fantastic, sharp-witted, and very clever at reciting pastoral poems, for which he had an excellent memory.

In 1567, now aged 17, he went off with a friend to enlist with the Venetian forces against the Turks. Unluckily for him, orders arrived from the Spanish Viceroy in Naples to suspend the recruiting. But it was not long before all the great Christian Powers together with Venice joined together for what was nothing less than a crusade against the intolerable devastations due to Turkish assaults: these were a real risk to the whole of eastern Europe. Giovanni, though now an old man, went off with Camillus and two nephews—after all, he had to do something! His mad extravagances and passion for gambling had ruined him: Camillus was all too good a pupil. But in Ancona, father and son fell sick. They began to retrace their steps; however, at the fort of San Lupidio near Loreto, Giovanni relapsed, received the Last Sacraments, and died. As for Camillus, he was destitute. His father could leave him nothing but his sword, his dagger, and his honourable name. Further, he had far from recovered: he suffered from a recurrent ague. A sore opened on his left leg: this became better; but the infection broke out next upon his right foot and ankle: the irritation maddened him and he made it worse by scratching it and using violent remedies. The sore place began to suppurate, and throughout his long life not only proved incurable, but very soon became worse and worse. This sickness, the



exact nature of which must ever remain mysterious, proved a governing factor in his life.

On his way home, he had hobbled as far as Fermo, and there happened to see two Friars Minor passing by. He suddenly felt how utterly without order his life was compared with theirs . . . impetuously he resolved and even vowed to become a Franciscan. He went straight to the friary of S. Bernardino at Aquila, where a brother of his mother's was Guardian, and stated his case. The wise old man saw in Camillus's petition the effect of his disillusionment, since everything had gone wrong for him, and of his depressing illness. And from his life hitherto into a friary was too big a leap. He blessed and encouraged and dismissed him. Camillus felt better, but still had to wear bandages round his leg which he felt disgraceful for a soldier so noticeably well-built as he. He decided therefore to seek a definite cure in the famous hospital of San Giacomo degli Incurabili at Rome.

We are here confronted with a grave difficulty. All previous authors, relying on Cicutelli, say that Camillus entered San Giacomo in 1569, left it the same year, enlisted with the Venetians against the Turks and went to Zara in view of the war being officially declared against the Turks on Feb. 11, 1570. He proceeds to say that a period of violent military activity was followed by a period of inaction which was very bad for discipline; and indeed, Camillus, in a fury over some gambling incident, was on the point of fighting a duel when a sergeant-major stopped him. And further, that in the summer of 1571 he was sent to Corfu for garrison duty and at the same time the great Christian fleet arrived there to prepare to sail to Lepanto. Camillus could have gone there, but lay prostrate between life and death owing to an epidemic of 'naval typhus', dysentery,

which was decimating the Venetian forces. The Last Sacraments were administered to him, and he recovered.

Now Fr. Vanti (*San Giacomo degli Incurabili*, 1938, p. 55) makes it perfectly clear that Camillus went first to San Giacomo in 1571. He has consulted the *Libro degli huomini*, i.e. the register of sick persons admitted to the hospital and finds that Camillus was admitted on March 7, 1571; on March 30 he was sufficiently well to need no more treatment, but stayed on as 'garzone', or servant, for a small salary which is duly recorded as paid month by month till Dec. 31, after which there is no more mention of him. (There are two slightly unusual details in these records—first, Camillus's surname is mentioned, 'de lellis' (sic); as a rule, the surnames of admissions were *not* written in these records: and second, the cause of his departure is not mentioned though as a rule the reason of departure *is* given—in Camillus's case, this was for charity's sake, the reason being that his mania for gambling when he ought to have been doing his proper work had exhausted the patience of the officials. Camillus was, then, at San Giacomo from March 7, 1571 to Dec. 31 at any rate. Moreover, Cicatelli gives evidence against himself, for he says that at the end of Camillus's first stay there he was dismissed by the Maestro di Casa, the Neapolitan Angelo. But from the beginning of 1568 till March 1571 (when he died) the Maestro di Casa was Don Francesco Pecorella. He was succeeded, from August to the end of 1571, by, precisely, the Neapolitan Angelo Melvio, so none of Camillus's military activities, as related by Cicatelli can have taken place when he says they did; and Camillus was absent from Lepanto not because he was lying sick at Corfu, but because he was then serving at San Giacomo.

Were it worth asking *why* Cicatelli made his mistake we might find a reason in the fact that during 1569 two

men called Camillus were admitted to San Giacomo as patients; one was 'son of John Baptist of Milan' 'with a sick leg', who came in on Aug. 15: but our Camillus entered in March, and his father, though called John, was not John Baptist, and though long ago he had served at Milan among other places, he was definitely from Bucchianico. The other Camillus was 'son of John Paul of Rome', who entered in May for the 'wood-water' treatment (see below) and left in a fortnight. But *if* Cicutelli consulted the records of San Giacomo, he might just possibly have jumped to the conclusion that the Camillus who entered 'with a sick leg' in 1569 was the Saint. But I think it more likely that Camillus told him that he had enlisted in the 'League' (against the Turks) without defining *which* League he meant. For there was a second League, recruiting for which was strongly urged by St. Pius V who did not want the fruits of the victory of Lepanto to be lost. This recruiting took place in Rome between Dec. 1571 (exactly when Camillus was dismissed) and Jan. 1572: Pius wished 5,000 men to be enlisted. Why Camillus chose to enlist with the Venetians rather than in Rome, we cannot tell. But that Camillus fell sick of dysentery in 1572 and not in 1569 is certain also because Corradi in his *Annali delle Epidemie* tells us that that epidemic broke out in Zara in 1571 and continued in the Venetian army till 1572. Next year, to the disgust of the Pope, Venice concluded a separate peace with the Turks and Camillus was demobilised. The problem of chronology is thus solved.

But my difficulty is this—All agree that Camillus left for Ancona to sail for Venice in 1569: all agree that his second enlistment took place after he left San Giacomo, i.e. at the very end of 1571. But hardly had the father and son reached Ancona than they fell sick and Giovanni died. Camillus came back via Fermo to Aquila where he

stayed with his uncle for a 'few days'. 'Then' he went to Rome. But have we not thus at least a year about which we know nothing? Even supposing that Giovanni died towards the *end* of 1569 and that Camillus did not start south quite at once, we cannot give him more than about a month for getting from Ancona to Fermo and thence to Aquila where he stayed 'a few days'; allow him another month for getting to Rome; this seems to leave at least a year during which we know nothing about him. Did he wander about Italy getting work when he could? Did he spend months in Rome, getting always more ill and at last resolving to go to San Giacomo? I cannot see what to answer.

His sojourns at San Giacomo were so important, as was indeed the place itself, that I must give at least a very brief sketch of its history, basing myself almost entirely on Fr. Vanti's monograph, *S. Giacomo degli Incurabili di Roma nel Cinquecento*: Rome 1938, and on his references there. The name was derived from the assumption that venereal disease was incurable. Owing to its vast diffusion after the discovery of America (1492), it became practically endemic in the Spanish and French soldiery and spread appallingly in Italy after the long sojourn of Charles VIII's troops at Naples (1494-1496). Hence besides the name syphilis derived from an astounding poem, thus entitled, by Girolamo Fracastoro (1539), it was variously called the American, the Neapolitan, the Spanish (and in Italy of course) the French disease, and the 'leprosy of St. Job.' Its enormous spread was largely due to the new paganism of the times; and the Missal contained a Mass *contra morbum Gallicum* till the reform of Pius V. The misery that this occasioned was unspeakable, because of the disgust it inspired, its extreme infectiousness, the bewilderment of doctors, and the lack of hygienic safeguards. Leo X in 1515 gives an appalling account of these

sufferers in Rome "to which the poor sick, suffering from incurable disease, stream together from all parts of the world". The use of mercury and cauterisation was known: but deaths from the simultaneous application of these were so numerous that their application was at times forbidden: by the second half of the 16th century, however, it was no more thought that the disease was incurable though the name remained. The first foundation for "incurables", was that of Genoa (1499), due to that heroic pioneer, Ettore Vernazza, himself the disciple of St. Catterina Fieschi-Adorno, a woman in her time far more remarkable than Florence Nightingale. By 1523, other such hospitals had been opened in Rome, Bologna, Savona, Naples, Vicenza, Florence, Brescia, Venice, Padua, and others, to mention only Italy.

A hospital had been opened in Rome by Cardinal Giacomo Colonna and put on firmer foothold in 1339 by his kinsman Cardinal Pietro Colonna: in 1451, Nicholas V entrusted it to the Society of 'Our Lady del Popolo', and some fifty years later this was replaced by the 'Company of Divine Love' to which the future Leo X and very many Cardinals and great men of Rome belonged. In 1515, when he was Pope, he erected it into an Arch-hospital, making it head of all 'Incurables' hospitals everywhere, and in a superb and most pathetically realist Bull defines that by 'incurables' are meant all *who suffer from diseases*, the French disease included. The constitutions of the Naples hospital give an appalling list of the diseases to be attended to. Leo assigned to it 4 Guardians with a council of 12, half to be Romans, half non-Romans; two Auditors to control its finances, and 4 Visitors, who should seek out suitable cases within Rome itself. But, as I have said, he insisted that the sick flowed into Rome from all sides and made

a pitiable spectacle dragging themselves about the city in their little vehicles, repelling rather than attracting help by the hideous sight and stench of their diseases. Between 1515 and 1520 the whole hospital was transformed and its little church was rebuilt on an octagonal plan and called Our Lady Gate of Paradise. In it Camillus was to say his first Mass. The hospital was constantly enlarged, notably by Cardinal Salviati in 1600 and by Gregory XVI in 1842, so not much of the original structure remains, though you still can see the numbers, in certain rooms, that were over the beds and some 'sanitary niches'. The terrible sack of Rome in 1527 had destroyed innumerable good works, including the Company of Divine Love; yet the population of Rome constantly increased, and with it, the number of sick, many of whom, who could not be accepted by ordinary hospitals because of the appalling nature of their disease, were frightened to enter San Giacomo precisely because they considered themselves incurable and thought that to enter it meant to die there. A whole series of splendid engravings, beginning from 1551, allows us to follow the architectural development of San Giacomo; but though Salviati, when he built his magnificent church there, respected the original little church which remained on its right, Comporesi, between 1842 and 1849, pulled it down for the sake of symmetry or perhaps because he wished to build new quarters for some of the hospital service. Hence so little remains of the original structure that we will but say that it was admirably designed and ventilated: the great ward for men ran right across from the Via Lata to the Strada di Ripetta and the parallel one for women seems to have been almost as long: the great façades at either end corresponded. There were other wards and large gardens or orchards between the main buildings and beside them. The arms of the Hospital represented a

sick man in his little carriage, doing homage to his Patrons, Our Lady and St. James.

The only problem that remained was: Could the intellectual, moral and spiritual level of the staff be kept up to the requisite standard? The answer is: Not for long at a time. Hence a constant need of reform, never unattended to. However, an interesting episode in the history of San Giacomo was due to the discovery of the wood *guaiaco* (*Guajacum officinale*) now no more much used. This was an ancient Indian remedy imported into Spain from America by the Spanish doctor Consalvo in 1508 and obtaining its maximum celebrity in Italy between 1520 and 1530. Ulric von Hutten having experienced personally the extreme utility of the 'Wood-Water' or wood-syrup (*Acqua di Legno*) made from it, sang its glories in a pamphlet called *De guaiaci medicina et morbo gallico* (1519). He called it the 'sacred' wood, and everywhere it became known as the Most Holy American Wood, granted by the mercy of God for the succour of humanity: Frascatoro, in the third canto (!) of his poem, acclaimed it as the Hope of Mankind, the new Glory of the World. Doctors experimented with it, quacks played tricks with it—it became very nearly a panacea though the purpose of its original application remained dominant. Still, Paolo Manuzio used it to cure his bad eyes and catarrh: Tasso was recommended to use it for his 'melancholic humour': a Messina priest obtained a special pontifical indult, valid for ever, to make use of it in curing cases of the Gallic sickness and all ills proceeding from it, accepting a modest fee from the rich, but serving the poor gratis, and exhorting all alike to confession. The details of the cure were appalling—you were violently purged, fierce perspiration was provoked, a strict diet was imposed, the wards were kept hot to suffocation-point—you can imagine why patients described

the 'cure', which lasted usually forty days (though Cardinal de' Medici in 1534 had fifty) as a Lent, if not a Purgatory. . . . Enough to say, just here, since we are keeping to what concerned Camillus, that it was not till 1636 that the value of the cure was seriously doubted and then suspended; it was renewed, with improvements, after Innocent X (1644-1655), but it was most intensively applied between 1569 and 1602, which was just the period of the transformation and vast development of the hospital, chiefly due to Salviati and the group surrounding him. It was he who largely financed the administration of the very expensive Wood-Water. Such was the influx, moreover, of patients, that beds had to be borrowed from Santo Spirito, the Lateran, the Consolation, the Trinità dei Pellegrini, the Brothers of St. John of God in the Tiber Island and elsewhere. Flocks of attendants had to be organised during the time of special preparation which lasted usually from February to May. Doctors wore blue overalls; nurses, red. The Rules of the Hospital for this period are very entertaining: a woodcut at the foot of one page shows a gambler being hoisted on to a man's back and flogged under the eye of a judge: further, a group is being rebuked for playing cards.

To this hospital, then Camillus came and was admitted as patient on March 7, 1571. The inventory of his clothes shows that he arrived with a tunic of old black cloth, a shirt of white linen, stockings of white cloth, socks of the same. Hat and shirt in a pack.

On March 30 he became a servant in the hospital, for his board and lodging and about 2s. 6d. (three lire relatively in modern Italian money) a month. In May, he was among those charged with preparing the Acqua del Legno. At the end of December he had exhausted the patience of the Superintendent, and was turned out. Cicatelli's MS. 'life' says: "he was an appalling hot-head



(*di molto terribile cervello*), constantly quarrelling with one or the other of the servants. And also because being so obsessed by card-playing that he would often desert the service of the sick and go off across the Tiber to play with the Tiber boatmen". The Superintendent had constantly rebuked him for this but had never obtained the slightest improvement: finally, having found a pack of cards under Camillus's pillow, he turned him out. Even apart from this general irresponsibility and quarrelsomeness, gambling was a sufficient reason for dismissal. It was now that he re-enlisted, went to Zara and then Corfu, and there fell desperately sick of dysentery. However, he recovered and saw service. He took part in the assault by land and sea of the Turkish stronghold of Barbagno, having sailed thither under fire: the final assault cost the attacking forces much: they went quite mad not only with rage but with the fearful hunger they had suffered: they dug the livers out of dead Turks and devoured them. Camillus relates this himself, but acknowledges that he revolted against this cannibalism and lived on grass and horse-flesh.

On March 1, 1573, Venice to the dismay of Rome, concluded a separate peace with the Turks. Camillus, now unemployed, returned to Rome and accepted the pay of Spain, Philip II planning an attack on Tunis. Meanwhile he had amassed not a little money. Needless to say that almost at once he lost it all—even his cloak ('that relic of nobility'). He met a boyhood friend from Bucchianico, and implored him not to mention his deplorable condition. Indeed, he got himself enrolled in the company of a certain captain named Fabio, so famed was it for its high play. He was sent with three other companies to the reinforcement of the fortress so well known to us now as La Goulette; but the commandant disdained this help and the soldiers sailed back to Palermo,

and thus escaped the appalling sack of that fortress by the Turks on Sept. 24. At Palermo he lost anything that he had recently accumulated, and on his way back to Naples, very nearly lost also his life in violent gales, which so terrified him that he renewed his vow to become a Franciscan. That was on Oct. 24, 1574.

At Naples, storm and vow were alike forgotten. He gambled away his sword, his dagger, his powder-flask and his coat—perhaps consoling himself that in this same city, before sailing for Africa, he had lost his very shirt, and had had to take it off in the very street. Afterwards, over the stone bench on which the gamblers had been sitting, a 'very quaint' picture was erected, representing the future Saint thus stripping himself. A lamp burned before it, and mothers used to come and pray there for their sons, Camillans anyhow in the sense that they were mad for play.<sup>1</sup>

It was November, and despite rumours of wars in the Balkans and perhaps in Africa, there was no real hope of more fighting till the spring. Camillus, with a fellow-soldier, Tiberio, wandered north and reached Manfredonia. Here they had no choice but to become thieves or beggars. Though to 'beg' he was bitterly 'ashamed', he could not steal, and on Nov. 30 began to ask alms at the door of the main church. His remarkable physique, the nobility of his features, and certainly the tragedy of his expression, attracted a certain Antonio di Nicastro, who asked him if he would like to earn at least some food. Would he do some work for the Capuchins? Camillus, taken aback, said he must ask his companion. Antonio agreed and made an appointment at his home, when he should hear his decision. Tiberio would not hear of it, and dragged Camillus away, much against his will. As they proceeded, Camillus remembered his vow, and

<sup>1</sup> I hold that attempts to soften down this story are not successful.

asked himself whether this offer had not been God's way of leading him to fulfil it. They were approaching Barletta, and asked some muleteers whether they would find work there. The answer was a categorical No. Camillus, desperate, felt he was under no more obligation to his friend, despite their promise to stick together. He rushed back the twelve miles they had travelled from Manfredonia, and arrived there before daybreak. Antonio, patient man, welcomed him and escorted him to the Capuchin Guardian, who dismissed a disloyal servant, and entrusted Camillus with two mules for bringing stones, water, lime and so forth to a building in course of construction. You can hardly, today, form a guess of what it meant to the young nobleman—as he felt himself despite his career and circumstances—to accept this servile task. Accept it, however he did, grace and starvation driving him. He considered, moreover, that in undertaking this mean task for Capuchins he was sufficiently fulfilling his vow—so much so, that when the friars, distressed to see him shivering in the bitter cold of mid-winter, offered him some of the rough serge they made their own habits of, he passionately refused it, lest it should somehow trick him into joining the Order.

A terrible fortnight passed during which he constantly thought of running away. On Dec. 13 he decided that anyhow he might ask for a day off. By chance, he was refused and given extra work. He flew into a tempest of rage, biting his very hands in fury, and made off without leave. The Capuchins, who understood him better than he did himself, persuaded him to return, and offered him a scudo—5 lire,—a month. He accepted—partly because, in his entangled motives, he foresaw earning enough money to enable him to return to war and to gambling. Whereupon Tiberio came back and actually joined Camillus for a time at his work, but soon

enough considered it too exhausting and beneath him. He tried to persuade Camillus to leave it, but this time he held good, though maddened by the continual mockery of children, who jeered at the ex-soldier who still wore rags of his uniform, including the sash of his dagger which he would not be parted from.

The building came to an end. The Capuchins, however, pleased with Camillus's honesty and undoubted nobility of character despite his violent temper and what they knew of his gambling-sickness, for it was nothing less, kept him in the service of the convent. One day they sent him to a friary some 12 miles off to buy some wine. The eve of his return, the Guardian took him aside, and, in a vine-covered arbour, spoke to him about God, and sin, and how, when evil thoughts beset him, he must 'spit in the face of the devil'. All that was best in Camillus awoke: he saw "How much I ought to do for the service of God and the salvation of my soul". Next day, perched on his mule with two wine-skins slung on either side, he returned, and on the way a real conflict declared itself within him. And a certain moment came when his soul was broken up. He flung himself off his mule on to the rocky road, and burst into floods of tears at the clear sight of what his life had been. It was Feb. 2, 1575, feast of the Purification, which he was ever afterwards to call the day of his conversion.

When Saul was struck from his horse, he heard the vision of our Lord say to him: "It is hard for thee to kick against the goad". Now that has no meaning save that for long, and not just for a moment, he had been feeling the divine onslaught. You cannot kick against a goad for one moment only, still less, find it 'hard' to do so. That implies a long-drawn experience. When did Saul begin his real, though unconscious, resistance to grace? Possibly from the very moment when he, like the

others, saw the face of Stephen 'as it were the face of an angel'. Probably that is why Saul, the most sensitive of men, flung himself so passionately into the persecution of the Christians. So long as they so much as existed, his whole way of life, his whole habit of mind hitherto his innermost self, were being challenged. Hence what I believe to have been his mixture of fury and agony when he watched the faces of the Christians whom he dragged out of their homes to death, or disaster. Saul must always have been a saint at heart, else he could never have been such a sinner.

Hence we must affirm that never so far have we seen the true Camillus. On that Feb. 2 no totally new Camillus was created and substituted for the old one. There had always been a nobility of character, a contempt for the mean and unworthy—a contempt too for himself when he saw himself constantly being a mere victim, *unable* to conquer the frenzy that kept reducing him to ignominy. But that would not have been enough. I must here mention a strange fact. Throughout his reckless, most abandoned youth, it seems quite certain that he had kept himself chaste. Not that he was not tempted, probably as violently as he was in every other way. Else why should he have so treasured those words: "When you have evil thoughts, spit in the devil's face"? For treasure them, and use them when counselling others, he for ever did. It does not seem to me enough to say a man may be so possessed by one vice, that the whole of his 'lower self' may sufficiently pour itself out into and through that, as when you may meet a man who is a habitual and seemingly hopeless drunkard and yet lives a perfectly chaste life. I think Mat Talbot is an example of that; I mean, of a man who combined drunkenness with chastity. One might have thought that Camillus just expended the whole of his passionate life in gambling.

But no. He had the most unbridled temper, and men who let themselves go to fits of fury are not likely to control themselves in other ways. They probably yield to the fierce instinct of the moment. Fr. Vanti thinks that his innate sense of 'nobility' may have saved him. Is this probable? It was the habit of that period precisely (and alas of others) to assume that nobility of birth exempted you from any sexual self-control, and indeed, that you exhibited your prowess by your amorous conquests. One might more easily argue that Camillus was and to the end remained fundamentally a *hard* man, and was often a very rough man. Yet I have never noticed that physical, temperamental, or athletic 'hardness' has in any way checked a man from yielding to 'soft' sins, even though he may have refused to himself any habitual self-indulgence.

Two reflections occur to me. It is noticeable in the lives of Saints, and indeed in those of ordinary men, that to have preserved personal purity, even if not from the very highest motives, has much facilitated new spiritual perceptions later on. Certain clouds are not there: there is less drag towards animality. This is in a sense but natural; yet in the spiritual sphere the fact is so marked that we are less amazed by the great change that came about in Camillus, however various may have been the stimuli that actually brought it to a crisis. On the other hand, we wish to emphasise, if only in order to encourage those who know that their life has not been sinless, that the great sinner has often become the great saint, and one may almost say that to be great in the one direction a man must be *able* to be great in another. And we would certainly prefer the man who has sinned violently to the man who simply from flaccid 'neutrality' has never done anything very wrong—so far as the likelihood of his becoming *first rate* in the service of God or man may go.

In short, we have known those who have carefully guarded their purity either because of a mysterious instinct, or deliberately, tediously, against strong, recurrent, maybe continuous temptation, to have preserved a sort of limpidity of mind enabling them very quickly to 'see God', and, seeing Him, to love Him with all their heart—their heart had had one element within it which had always been undivided. And we have known others who behaved as badly in the matter of purity as Camillus did with his uncontrolled savage temper and his reckless gambling, of whom we felt absolutely sure that in reality they were somehow 'good men'—*we* could not see *why*, but we knew that God could, and were sure He did.

The old Guardian at San Giovanni Rotondo, then, was perfectly right in feeling no less sure that Camillus, despite all appearances, was really a strong, noble and exalted character deep within himself.

## II

Camillus, in whom the 'new'—that is, the 'real' self had, by the grace of God triumphantly emerged, full of gratitude, of horror for sin and resolve never to commit any more the slightest venial sin (nor, so far as he could tell, did he, though every characteristic of his special temperament survived), and to do penance as a Franciscan, went as rapidly as he could to Manfredonia, flung himself at the Guardian's feet, and implored the astounded man for leave to join his Order. The Guardian, though overjoyed, said he must consult superior authority. Camillus, himself overjoyed even by this concession, flung himself into all the hardest work of the house, and embarked on a career of penance so severe that the Guardian himself felt sorry for him and begged him to mitigate it.

At last the leave was given: the wound on the right foot seemed no reason for hesitation. He was sent to the town Trivento, at a considerable distance, to begin his noviciate. He went on foot. On his way, he had to cross a river. He began to ford it, when he heard a voice crying out: "Don't do it! don't do it! do not cross!" It was dark and he could not see whence the voice might come, save that it seemed high up. He prayed, and slept in the riverside scrub. Next day two Capuchins, also on the way to Trivento, met him, and said that he would certainly have been swept away by the water. And indeed, Italian torrents, in the summer, seem often very shallow if not almost waterless, and yet, in the middle, the current streams ferociously. He felt his guardian angel had saved him.

At Trivento, he took the lowest place of all: his flamboyant insolence seemed utterly to have disappeared, Long years later, his novice-master, grown old and blind, still remembered how all used to speak of him as the *Frate umile*—the humble Brother. But a thunderbolt fell from the clear sky. Either because the rough Franciscan habit rubbed against his foot, or for some other cause, his wound re-opened and became angry and caused him intolerable pain. Superiors had to tell him that he could not remain a novice so long as it was like that, but added, that should it entirely heal over, he could be re-admitted. They parted with deep regret from a man who would have been in despair had he not felt that much more penance and sacrifice of self-will was required of one who had spent so many years of dissolute life. He left for Rome, hoping to gain the Jubilee indulgences of 1575, and to seek re-entrance to San Giacomo, bringing, presumably, letters of recommendation from the Capuchins, else it is at least doubtful if he would have been re-admitted after his previous eviction!



The records of the hospital in fact show that he was thus re-admitted on Oct. 23, 1575, being sick of the leg, and possessing a black tunic, a vest, thick white drawers, a hat and a shirt. He remained as patient till Nov. 18 and next day once more became a servant there, holding down his job till June 20, 1579. Indeed, he did better than hold it down. On Feb. 28, 1576 till April 24, he was sick and received no pay, being attended to gratis. On May 22, he had recovered and was appointed 'infirmarian' with a somewhat increased salary with servants under him. Here he remained till Sept. 14 of that year. Then, we do not know why, he himself returned to being a servant, till March 22, 1577. And from that date till June 20, 1579, when he left the hospital, he held the office of *Guardaroba*, and, judging by the frequent recurrence of his name on the books, he acquitted himself with exceptional merit. If this position implied the supervision of the whole of the material effects of the hospital, it was certainly a responsible one. During his stay there he underwent a severe inguinal rupture, though whether this has to do with the illness above mentioned, involving his being put to lighter work when he had sufficiently recovered, and then sent back to being a servant when he got still better, I can see no evidence. Anyhow the rupture caused him grave suffering to the end of his life.

Not only he certainly did his work in San Giacomo to perfection, but he was intimately concerned in becoming a man ever more according to Christ, and for that, knew that he needed direction. Now Rome in that year 1575 was full of Saints, but not all of them lived there. The true apostle of Rome was St. Philip Neri, founder of the Oratory (d. 1595). I know of very few Saints to compare with this extraordinary man, though St. Francis de Sales (d. 1622) had something of his wonderful charm, and

St. Vincent de Paul (d. 1660), much of his bonhomie. But Francis was a great nobleman, and Vincent an organiser on an enormous scale and in constant touch with the Court: Philip was at his ease, of course, with men of every rank from royalties to the poorest, but he was so in his homely, bluff yet gentle and most amusing way. (I permit myself an occasional smile at the thought of Philip's encounters with the stately Spaniard, Ignatius of Loyola. Ignatius loved him, and he Ignatius: but I don't know what the Jesuit Founder thought of Philip's habit of seizing hold of people he talked to by some button of their dress and twisting it about while he talked till it came off.) This fascinating Saint, then, of whose immeasurable influence in Rome Camillus must have heard long before this, was sought out by him on the grounds that "I, who have been so great a sinner, have need of a great Saint!" Philip welcomed him, and evidently, in a flash, understood the young man perfectly. Camillus was 25, but old, I think, for his years: Philip was 60, but in a real sense still a boy. The Saint heard Camillus's confession weekly and allowed him Communion on all Sundays and feast days—much, at that time.

But it had never occurred to Camillus that he was to remain at San Giacomo. His wound seemed to be healed—permanently, he hoped. He went to St. Philip and reminded him of his vow, and said he wished to return to the Capuchins. Philip advised him not to try that life again. Camillus insisted: his vow weighed heavy on him; he wished for more opportunities of penance; perhaps he was still rather obstinate about taking advice. Philip smiled, and told him that he would certainly come back . . . his wound would not stay healed. Camillus was unmoved, and reminded the Capuchin superior of his promise to take him back: he was accepted and went to Tagliacozzo in the Abruzzo for his new novitiate.

Everyone was delighted with this young giant, whom they at once named Brother Christopher, remembering the hero of legend who had carried Christ on his shoulders across the torrent and had all but sunk beneath the whole world's weight. His life gave nothing but extreme edification to the Friars. All the more severe was the blow, when the wound re-opened, grew angry, and began again to suppurate. The decision of Superiors rhymed indeed with what he recognised as inevitable: he had to return to Rome, resolved, this time, to devote himself for ever to the sick. Philip laughed, and said the fatal words: "I told you so . . .", but received him back most gently among his penitents.

He returned thus yet again to San Giacomo in mid-October 1579. Not only were all delighted to see him, but he was very soon appointed to the extremely important position of *Maestro di Casa*, or "General" Superintendent. The appointment certainly took place in October, though it should normally have done so in December: however, the post was vacant, and Camillus was judged the proper man for it. He retained it till September 1584 (and possibly was honorary *Maestro* still later). Immediately he began to study, feeling the need of a more liberal culture than had hitherto been his. The "General" Superintendent had to supervise the entire 'family' of a hospital, doctors included. 'Guardians' kept him informed of all that happened down to the smallest detail. He had to keep three Books, called the Superintendent-General's Books. The first kept an exact record of the name, home, wages etc. of each of the servants. The second was entirely concerned with finances—gifts, sales, acquisitions, and so forth. The third contained records of the daily expenses. There are three 'Camillan' books covering the whole of his tenure of office. The first and second were happily discovered by Fr. Vanti

in the State Archives of Rome, in 1937. The third Book begins on Aug. 31, 1581 and ends on Aug. 28, 1584. Its existence was known, but after being exhibited in 1911, the book was lost: it was hunted for in vain, till in 1926 it was discovered quite by chance on the then Superintendent's table. From March 1934, Fr. Vanti could examine it at leisure. These books, though their contents are but of secondary interest, are almost entirely in Camillus's own handwriting—small and regular and relatively clear: there are also a number of other documents drawn up or signed by him.

In these are reflected the *official life* of the Saint: though the Maestro was exhorted to show himself, in that life, with paternal charity towards all, having an eye for everything like a good and diligent father of a family, behaviour not always to be met with in officialdom. In so far as the records are financial, I need say but little, save that they reveal Camillus's absolute honesty. When himself in need of money (thus he had not the patrimony needed for ordination, nor, rather later, enough money to get him to Bucchianico), it was not from the hospital that he borrowed. Alms for the hospital had to be sought. The Maestro provided those who asked for them with closed collecting boxes opened weekly or at least fortnightly. These were either carried about the city and even into the country, or could be seen, fixed, in churches, public offices, the antichambers of Cardinals themselves. That of Sta Maria Porta Paradisi had a marble carving above the slot for coins—a sick man, naked save for a bandage or two and a hospital-cap, with hands joined, and squatting in his tiny chariot with wooden wheels: beneath the slot is carved: "Alms for the poor patients of the Incurables" (*Elemosina per li poveri Impatati* (the *ti* had to be squashed into a space above the line) *dell Incurabili*). Here too are marked all gifts in kind and all legacies. Camillus, I may

add, negotiated *barter*s very effectively with Jews who applied to do business with him. In short, I have to say that Camillus showed himself an amazingly acute as well as faithful business man.

At this point we need to say that while the biographers use many generalities about his penitential life, and relate a few instances of his selfmortification, such as, that he would not go to the window to watch processions; that he kept a skull on his table when he ate, and insisted on his measureless self-sacrifices for the sick, we find it difficult to picture that life in any detail unless we build up our idea from lines here and there in documents such as we have mentioned.

Thus two patients were to be sent to the baths at Viterbo. A letter, written in the name and probably at the dictation of Camillus, recommends the men to the charity of the Superintendent there. Enough to say that it begins by recalling that all hospitals are as a rule united (that is, are prepared to co-operate), and all tend towards charity, and then begs the Superintendent to show special kindness to these men, one of whom is Spanish and cannot walk. Camillus insists again and again on this notion of reciprocal charity, from which he knows the patients are going to profit. He takes by no means a merely official nor merely 'clinical' view of them. It is worth insisting on this, because in the hospital itself affectionate nursing fell grievously short of the proper standard. There was no trained permanent staff of nurses or 'servants'. The original confraternity of the Divine Love had, as we said, disappeared. In 1529, the Capuchins had tried to do what they could, and also the Jesuits, but neither of these was a specifically nursing Order and each had a vocation of quite a different sort. Hence the Hospital was staffed by an ever-varying crowd of servants, changing every month, composed of men who took the work on pre-

sumably because they had to, and, in that case, loathing their disgusting task and quite without 'charity' for the sufferers. Camillus himself devoted every moment that he could to the personal care of the sick: he got leave from St. Philip Neri for a priest to come to hear confessions every week; he ensured the giving of religious instruction whenever it was necessary—and when it was not!—he kept a close watch on the behaviour of the servants, but after two and a half years he could not but own that he had been defeated. This (Aug. 15, 1562) was when it occurred to him that a special Religious Society should be created, for the care of the sick, who should serve them not for pay, but as tenderly as a mother nurses her own sick children.

But both before and after this he had to weather many storms.

He was haunted by the memory of his vow to enter the Capuchin Order. St. Philip gave him reason after reason against it: nothing could move him. He went to Fr. Giovanni Maria di Tusa, then in Rome, and begged him yet again to accept him. The Capuchin categorically refused, and at long last wrote out a very kind, very firm document stating that since Camillus was suffering, as had been absolutely ascertained, from an incurable disease, the Capuchin Constitutions made it impossible for him to enter that Order: and indeed, he had already been admitted into it twice, and had had to be dismissed for the above reason. As for the vow, the mere fact that it was impossible of fulfilment dispensed Camillus from it. You would have thought that that settled it. But no. Camillus began to think that his vow had been made at the sight of two Friars Minor of the Observantines, not of the Capuchins. He applied to the Observantines. They did not answer in a hurry, but doubtless made enquiries, and then refused him. Even so, he was not

satisfied till they too had given him a written document giving the cause of their refusal.

Lest anyone think that I mean merely that the service of hospitals was what we should call very rough, very 'unsatisfactory', I must allude to Cicatelli and other contemporary witnesses, and to wood-cuts. But I must premise that what is described refers (especially the last part) to times of plague, when all organisation broke down. But even in ordinary times, the most well-intentioned hospital-authorities had to employ whom they could find—even banished criminals, even men who were condemned and put to serve in hospitals precisely as *punishment*. Hence, spiritually, you may imagine that the Hospitals were in a terrible condition. "The great part" of the patients had been allowed to die without the sacraments, and unassisted: there had been the very bad practice of ordering men to go to confession the moment they arrived, maybe half delirious with fever; dreadful indignities were inflicted more directly on the Blessed Sacrament, which was given to men who could not swallow, or were violently coughing, or being sick, by terrified priests rushing round in a panic lest they should become infected. The material side of hospitals had been in its way as bad. Men were left without food, or without drink when in a high fever: they were known in their desperation to drink slops, or oil from lamps, and worse. Their beds remained untouched, however weak the patients were, so that they rotted in their own filth. They used to struggle to rise, fall out of bed, and hurt themselves sometimes fatally and die on the floor. Brutal attendants would tie them to their beds, or hit them, or jeer at them.<sup>1</sup> Quite a long list could be made of instances

<sup>1</sup> I wish to avoid any appearance of pharisaism by saying that I have myself known one lunatic asylum where the warders used not only to make cruel fun of the inmates but were often guilty of malpractices with as many of them whose mind was too weak to enable them to exert resis-

of men being carried to the mortuary when not yet dead, either because the assistants did not trouble to make sure whether the dying man really was dead, or because they wanted to get rid of them. Camillus personally once found (not at San Giacomo) a man among the corpses on the mortuary with blood flowing from a wound in his head, due to being thrown violently down among the dead. He helped to carry him back to his bed: he died only three days later. I repeat, this state of things is to be regarded not as normal; it arose when a whole city or countryside was in a state of panic and disorganisation: but the normal condition had been, and still was, bad enough. And to what I have said must be added the fraudulent compacts too often made between hospital officials and the caterers; and even, the more or less culpable negligence shown by doctors and nurses. Therefore Camillus, on the alert, night as well as day, had occasion again and again to rebuke such delinquents, and not very seldom to dismiss them (as he himself had been dismissed), and in fine realised that any improvements he might make in the actual system could only be palliatives: the system itself must be changed.

Still, until a substantial change could be made, he did what he could. In a sense the most difficult, and in another the most easy, reform concerned the spiritual life and the Sacraments. Helped by St. Philip and others he ensured the regular weekly administration of Holy Communion with all decency and devotion. He himself prayed with those who received it, and, with true Italian simplicity, cried aloud his homage to the B.

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tance and whose accusations would anyhow not be believed. This is of course exceptional: but it proves that because, today, hospitals and asylums are kept rigorously clean, the moral aspect of the situation may remain practically what it was. A base-minded man will seize his opportunities; and the very sight of the weak constantly tempts the cruel to be more cruel still.



Sacrament itself, as it went to and fro in the wards. Every week, though still a layman, he gave 'instructions to the staff, having always for theme (as St. John in his old age had), the Charity of Christ. His example—the way in which he met new sufferers at the door, washed their feet "in tepid water", devoted himself primarily to the very worst cases, tending "with his bare hands" those whom no servant was willing to approach, such was the reek of their illness, all this was an inspiration to the staff, and Camillus grouped those who were free and prayed with them, as Communion-days became more frequent, in a little chapel. St. Philip had already banded together a certain number of well-born young men and even older men who were willing to visit hospitals regularly, and above all to pay for, and even prepare, and even administer, good and proper food to the sick. Camillus did the same; and his spirit became more and more widely known. Religious Orders, accustomed to send their young men, especially novices, to visit hospitals, and the Jesuits in particular whose novices had always to spend a month in hospital service, began to choose San Giacomo, for Camillus's sake, as the place to which they should go, though Camillus, discreetly, used to distribute these ardent young ministrants also among other hospitals. Fr. Pescatore S.J., the novice-master of St. Aloysius, used simply to hand over his novices to the layman Camillus and allow them to stay at his hospital day and night and did not even visit them to see how they were getting on. "When they are in the hands of Signor Camillus", he said, "I put my faith in him, and remain at home. For I know him, and regard him as a man of holy life."

It is then not astonishing that Camillus, whose mind was now equally occupied with the idea of the religious life, and the idea of serving the sick, should have combined the two and begun to picture a Religious Order

devoted to the Service of the Sick. The best of present arrangements was too precarious, too haphazard. A specific training in both religious life and service of the sick, in view of a specific form of life, was essential. This idea came to its full blossoming, so to say, round about the feast of the Assumption, August 15, 1582. At once he communicated his idea to his special little band. No more did he pass the nights in prayer, and multiply his penances in solitude. These men would meet in a special room for prayer, and—what will upset our modern prejudices, for penance. They flogged themselves and fasted and wore hair-cloth. Now, after a while, in that secluded room, was to be found a certain Crucifix.

It may not have become clear, so far, that Camillus was animated not merely by pity for his fellow-men, nor even by some abstract idea of God and His services, but by an intimate and personal love for our Lord, Jesus Christ. Of course, no one who knows the history of the Church, and in particular that of the Middle Ages and indeed the Renaissance, would suppose that men, hitherto, had been *capable* of dissociating humanitarian work, or worship of God, from the Name, work and example, and appeal of Jesus Christ. In Camillus's case, that which does not require to be explicitly stated none the less reveals itself as it were by accident. When he left the Capuchins for the second time, he had already resolved to "follow his beloved Crucified at all times and in all places and in all adversities". And I might ask—How could any man, obsessed by the wish to be a Franciscan, have been other than continuously conscious of St. Francis, in whose very flesh the stigmata of the crucifixion appeared? When he re-entered San Giacomo, he resolved to "give himself in all and through all to the service of *Jesus Christ* crucified in His most living image, the Sick". It was friends who, to please him and his little

band, had a Crucifix carved—by an artist unknown to us—and this became, undoubtedly, a sort of magnetic centre of his life. It was two metres tall, including the Cross. The Christ is 90 centimetres. The original cross, being too small for the figure, and having become worm-eaten, was replaced in 1742 and again in 1930. The cross is absolutely simple: the figure, though renaissance, is exquisitely refined, tender, and dignified. The head reposes on the right shoulder. When I refer to St. Camillus's Crucifix, this is what I allude to.<sup>1</sup> In the presence of this Crucifix, five men, on the staff of the Hospital, promised to follow Camillus in life and death, in prosperity and in toil. Prosperity, I may say, was far distant.

Naturally this little group became known, talked about, and objected to. Biographers at first put down Camillus's difficulties to the act of a servant who, not having been asked to join the group, was angry and resolved to ruin it. He denounced Camillus as making a plot, as conspiring for some insubordination, as aiming at making himself sole head of San Giacomo, as allowing in consequence the sick themselves to suffer from inattention. We agree that some of those who had wished to become General Superintendents of the Hospital were jealous of Camillus. We admit that he was summoned to answer the charges made against him, and then was given no chance of explaining himself, but was told outright that he must disband his little group and get rid of his 'oratory' . . . as if there were not plenty of churches in Rome without his making a pretend-church in addition. But I am clear that there were those who really thought that Camillus was an ambitious revolutionary, aiming at a sort of dictatorship, though this becomes clearer later on. Meanwhile, on the pretext

<sup>1</sup> See M. Vanti: *Il Crocifisso di S. Camillo de Lellis*, a monograph issued in Rome, 1937. .

that he had not unfurnished his 'oratory' quickly enough his enemies had entered it, pulled down the Crucifix, and pushed it behind a door. Camillus was indignant. He decided to offer his resignation and to go elsewhere. He went to the "Do-Good-Brothers" (the society of St. John of God) and offered his services. My feeling is that neither because of his never-healing leg, nor yet because they feared to quarrel with San Giacomo, but because they felt sure that he had a vocation of his own, they refused him. Camillus thus found himself, after all his efforts, seemingly reduced to nothing, and understood that whatever he was to do in the future, must be God's work, not his.

He was, in a sense, when making such applications, still kicking against the pricks. On the very night when he found the Crucifix taken down he had transported it to his room and prayed long before it. He went to sleep and dreamed that it said to him: "Don't be afraid, O man of small soul: go ahead, for I will help you and be with you". He woke up, and told his disheartened associates, and they resumed their united prayers, no more in the dismantled oratory but in the hospital church, of which one of them was sacristan and held its keys. Thus when others went for walks or made their siesta, these men nourished their resolve in the presence of God.

Cicatelli places immediately after this dream a different yet to some degree similar vision, intended to encourage Camillus who was "suffering immensely" from "new and more tormenting difficulties", which drew from him "most bitter and painful lamentation". But it is impossible to see what events can thus be described until what we shall have to say about Camillus's relations with St. Philip. To my mind (and indeed to Fr. Vanti's, though he does not permit himself to change the date normally assumed for the second 'vision'), Cicatelli not unnaturally

remembered and wrote about the second vision because the first was fresh and present in his mind; and as for the 'difficulties', I expect Camillus could foresee from the outset that they would arise; and that they did in fact arise in a slow crescendo till they reached a climax, and the new divine encouragement was needed. I venture therefore to relate the second and psychologically more interesting experience when I think that it more probably occurred.

Though Camillus carried on with his work as Maestro with his usual exactness, it could not but be obvious that there was a party within San Giacomo that was hostile to him, though as we shall see the real authorities, even if they were to disapprove of his plans, remained personally his good friends. He asked himself if he could possibly stay there. He consulted a friend, who consulted his confessor, Fr. (afterwards Cardinal) Tarugi, and both agreed that Camillus would do well to leave, and thus be more free to gather round himself a devoted group of friends who, with him, could serve the sick and even the plague-stricken when necessary. The plan seemed good to him, but he waited. Gradually he came to feel that such a group of men, like himself, laymen, but with home ties of various sorts, would be inadequate for the really needed work. They must be, he felt, fully detached—in a word, men vowed to personal poverty and willing to provide a whole-time work without remuneration. And also, seeing that as laymen they could not do what was by far the more important part of that work—the spiritual part; the hearing of confessions; the instructions; above all, the administration of the Sacraments of the Sick and Dying—should not such men be priests? Should not he himself be ordained? <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The dismantling of the Oratory took place after Aug. 15, 1582. Mgr. A. Salviati was then guardian prelate. He became Cardinal somewhat later, and Mgr. Cusano succeeded him at San Giacomo on Dec. 28, 1583. We cannot therefore deny that the Oratory was dismantled by

Camillus had begun to improve his general education directly upon becoming Maestro. But now that he foresaw the priesthood, he realised that he must refresh especially his Latin. That he knew some is clear because he had been able to teach some of his friends the Little Office of our Lady: this was more significant than the Litany of Loreto which, we learn, he also said with them. The first instruction was given by a chaplain of the hospital, who died in June 1580. Another priest took on his Latin education, and Camillus was to be seen even in the streets, Latin Grammar in hand. After a while, he was able to go to the Roman College, which had been founded by St. Ignatius in 1551. When Camillus went there, very famous men were teaching there—Vasquez, Suarez, St. Robert Bellamine. But philosophy was not for Camillus, who was placed in the lowest class—this bearded man of 32 and over  $6\frac{1}{2}$  feet tall—among boys of 12 and 13. After all, St. Ignatius had done exactly the same thing: Ignatius too had been a soldier; Ignatius too had limped to the end of his life. Camillus could afford to smile at the gibes of little boys who kept saying that he had arrived late. But a Jesuit teacher there stopped them, and explained what great things Camillus was doing—what greater things he certainly would do in the Church of God. Besides this, he attended classes given in the house of Virgilio Crescenzi to the sons of that patrician. The Jesuit Fathers did all they could for him, and in 1583 he was judged fit to receive minor orders. True, the reforms of the Council of Trent, concerning ecclesiastical education, could not be put into operation at once, and it is startling to hear not only that in special cases examiners

Salviati's order or with his approval, for Camillus had already told him about his plan of leaving the hospital. Hence it is clear that his desire to leave was due, not to the dismantling, but to his inability to reform the place. The plan had indeed been maturing during the last two years of his stay there.

had to be contented by a test in the knowledge of that Council's Catechism, but that Camillus was examined about the Life of St. Nicholas of Myra, whom he loved because of his great charity and work during a plague. It remained that Camillus to the end said he had never studied theology and knew how to talk only about 'charity', and that he had to ask a lawyer who was reading out some deed in Latin to "put it in Italian, because I don't understand Latin any too well". But then, no normal man does or ever will understand legal documents; and, the Apostles were not so very learned, nor was St. Philip Neri, nor was St. Ignatius. Yet we are assured that they became good priests,

On the day when he went with his friend Francesco Profeta to San Giovanni in Laterano all jubilant to receive the tonsure, it was discovered that the 'dimissorial letters' received from Chieti, vouching for his suitability for the priesthood, lacked an essential clause. He had to return—yet he was not cast down. He assured his companion that God had let him know that the day would not close without the matter being put right. He went to the Hospital, prayed before a crucifix that stood in the middle of a ward, and immediately met an old friend of his from Chieti itself, who said that he could himself supply one of the two needed signatures and that he knew a priest in Rome who could supply the other. So the completed document was produced that night. He had already put on ecclesiastical dress on February 2, 1583, anniversary of his conversion; and he received the tonsure and then the rest of Minor Orders from Bishop Goldwell, the only surviving English Bishop of Mary Tudor's times, and Bishop of St. Asaph, and on three successive Sundays in the sacristy of San Silvestro in Monte Cavallo, a charming church of which half remains.

But a new anxiety beset him. Camillus had given all

the money he received as Maestro di Casa to the Hospital itself or to his teachers: but to be ordained, a priest had to be able to provide some evidence that he could support himself decently. Virgilio Crescenzi was trying to find him a 'benefice'; but the matter dragged. However, one December evening of 1583, Camillus met, in the courtyard of San Giacomo, a gentleman called Fermo Calvi. Though it was pouring with rain, they began to talk: Camillus found himself explaining his situation. Calvi promised to pray for him. But at home he thought he ought to provide Camillus with a patrimony himself. He returned, and promised him a gift of 500 scudi, which would amount to about £125 of our money, indeed, granting that money was then worth four times our own, a sum of £500. Camillus, enchanted, went to the proper official, only to be told that more was needed. Fermo added 100 scudi, sufficient to produce, it appears, 36 scudi a year, £9 (36) a year. Camillus was therefore ordained subdeacon and deacon during the Lent of 1584, and priest on May 26, the Saturday after Pentecost. He then made a fortnight's retreat, the details of which were known to none but St. Philip, who never divulged them. And at last, on June 10, 1584, he said his first Mass in the church of Our Lady Porta Paradisi, with a few of his special friends around him, and also Calvi, who gave him a chalice, a missal, three chasubles and other necessities for Mass. Camillus, on his side, gave Holy Communion to his generous benefactor. It is pleasant to recall that when Calvi grew old and lonely, Camillus assigned him three rooms in the Maddalena (of which below) and gave him affectionate hospitality till he died on August 16, 1612, assisted, in this last passage, by Camillus himself.

Despite their apprehensions that Camillus might still want to leave San Giacomo and perhaps in order to keep him there, the Guardians of the Hospital appointed



him chaplain of the little church called "la Madonnina dei Miracoli", which stood on the bank of the Tiber not far from the Piazza del Popolo. It had sheltered the first community of the Capuchins, founded by B. Matteo da Bascia (1529-1530) and contained a famous miraculous picture of Our Lady and the Holy Child. When Salviati built his great church for San Giacomo, he transported the picture thither: it is venerated in the second chapel to the right as you enter. A copy was placed in the Madonnina, which became famous in its turn, and was taken to the present church of Sta Maria dei Miracoli in the Piazza del Popolo itself when the old church was pulled down. It seems incredible that Camillus should continue, not only doing full time as Maestro, but also his studies, adding to this such work as was needed—perhaps not much—at his church. From his point of view, however, it was a first step out of the Hospital: and by asking two of his friends to stay with him in the tiny house he hired, he actually began to create his first Community. These two friends were Bernardino Norcino and Curzio Lodi. Bernardino entered the Hospital as servant on September 4, 1580, having done hard work previously as wood-man, and also as servant in the Roman College. He held various offices in the Hospital but left it finally in November 1584 to put himself entirely at the disposal of Camillus. He was a very simple and devout man, who won the highest opinions wherever he went and had been thought a mainstay of the Hospital. His spirit of prayer led him to great heights of holiness. Curzio Lodi came to Rome from Aquila and was a penitent of St. Philip's and indeed gave witness at the process of St. Philip's canonisation. It was Philip who sent the young man to San Giacomo as a servant, and in fact he replaced Bernardino when he ascended to the post of guardaroba. This was in 1582. It is interesting that Camillus, when he began his foundation,

asked Curzio for a little money he had brought to Rome with him and had deposited in the keeping of the Hospital. Curzio took counsel from St. Philip, who did not approve of this. However, Curzio's affection for Camillus won the day and he made the money—and himself—entirely over to the new enterprise. I mention this tiny incident to show—as we shall see much more clearly later on—that holy people do not always see eye to eye, and that holy 'directors' are not tyrants and do not *force* their penitents to take their advice.

After his ordination, Camillus asked leave for himself and Curzio to return for a while to their home-land, the Abruzzo. He resigned, meanwhile, his office of Maestro di Casa, and, while he was warned to make his leave as short as possible—it lasted in fact only about a fortnight—he fixed no definite end for it. However, he advised Bernardino to retain his post, but if possible to transfer himself to the Madonnina together with a third, the priest Francesco Profeta, from Catania. He had entered San Giacomo on July 17, 1582, and became sacristan and confessor to the Hospital. He in fact definitely joined Camillus early in March, 1585. Camillus's return to his home as priest naturally astounded those who remembered only his earlier reputation, and still more the fact that having found he possessed, after all, some small property there, he sold it, and gave the proceeds to the poor.

On August 1st they were back in Rome and went straight to the Madonnina where they were soon joined by Bernardino: Profeta was however involved in a lawsuit and could not come yet. Here on September 15th, Octave of the Nativity of Our Lady, Camillus gave the "clerical dress", i.e. a short cassock reaching the knees and a black cloak, to his two friends, and, at the foot of Our Lady's altar, their Institute was born.

Fr. Vanti rightly lays emphasis both on the annoyance

that Camillus's plan occasioned within the Hospital, and also, upon the extreme fairness of those authorities (if not of all their subordinates) towards him. Mgr. Salviati, when he first heard of Camillus's aspirations, disapproved of them not only because of the prospective loss to the Hospital, but because he thought Camillus impetuous and hot-headed. Afterwards, not only did Camillus obtain him for the Cardinal Protector of the new Congregation, but the Cardinal himself declared openly that it was the work of God. Mgr. Cusano succeeded Salviati in 1583 and strenuously opposed any idea of Camillus's that might involve his leaving San Giacomo, precisely because he esteemed him and Bernardino so highly. Later on, he said to Camillus: "Do you remember how often I tried to prevent your attending to that absurd society of yours? Somehow God has disposed and changed these things!" And we could quote many other witnesses, from Guardians, lower officials, doctors and surgeons to the enormously high opinion in which they held Camillus. The testimony of servants has its particular interest and pathos, and of infirmarians who were begged by Camillus to let him dress his own leg—the sick needed them more than he did. Yet in a sense these witnesses repeat themselves: save in the one case of the angry servant (p. 33), I can find no more than vague statements about a kind of 'party', which made things uncomfortable for Camillus, and this was very natural: he in his way made things uncomfortable for them, simply by insisting that work must be done properly, and with charity, and because a superb example of disinterestedness is always exasperating to those especially who seek little else but their self-interest. True, the authorities were distressed at the thought of his leaving San Giacomo, and even disbelieved in his projects—how could a man, "idiota e senza lettere", as we often

hear—an unlettered man of no standing—hope to found and control a new religious society of so exacting a sort, especially when the whole idea of new foundations was seen with grave disfavour by the Holy See ?

I will mention two incidents only that belong to this period, to show what an impression Camillus made on his contemporaries. A man lay in the Hospital whose leg was to be amputated next day. The instruments were all prepared and under his bed. Camillus sat with him that night, and talked to him till he went quietly to sleep. Next day the leg was perfectly well. 35 years afterwards, a man who saw Camillus in the street, began to call out : “Viva il padre Camillo !” “What is the matter, brother ?” said Camillus. “Don’t you remember, father, the grace that I received from God through you ? You cured my broken leg by means of prayer when I could find no remedy.” Camillus told him to keep quiet : it was God who had cured him. The man cried out that if he lived to be 100 he would always call out “Viva padre Camillo !” Camillus turned to Fr. Gens, who related the episode, and said : “It was 35 years ago that it happened and he still remembers it !”

The other episode throws light on the times. Late on April 26, 1583, the Chief of Police, Gian Battista della Pace, entered the palace of Lodovico Orsini who, despite the severe orders of Gregory XIII, gave shelter to bandits there. The Orsini insisted that in their house they were privileged. There was a fight, and three nobles were killed, one of them Lodovico’s brother. The Orsini vowed vengeance, and so did the people, who worshipped the family that protected their lawlessness. It was feared that the horrors of the Sack of Rome would repeat themselves. The Chief of Police fled : so did his men. Two of them rushed to San Giacomo and begged Camillus to hide them, which he did. The mob demanded, waving

bloody swords, that they be handed over to them. Camillus implored them to have mercy on men who had fled to the House of God and of Mercy. They refused. Camillus withdrew to the church and prayed. When he felt sure he had been heard, he came out, and offered himself in exchange for the two soldiers. The mob was instantly quelled and went away quietly.

Camillus had managed to extricate himself definitely from his charge of Maestro: Curzio felt no obligation to return to the Hospital: Bernardino had removed to the Madonnina, though we do not know what reasons he alleged. Naturally Mgr. Cusano felt all this acutely, and possibly in the hopes that he might persuade Camillus to return did not deprive him of the chaplaincy of the little church. But Camillus did what could hardly have failed to convince Cusano that his hopes were futile. He went to his old room, and took away the Crucifix. He carried it, bareheaded at noonday, through the streets to the Madonnina. People knelt, wept, and called their friends to the windows. And he solemnly installed it in his new dwelling.

But the climax was, that Camillus declared that he and his companions would now work at Santo Spirito, another great hospital that we must describe in a moment. Camillus had seen quite clearly that matters would be awkward if the three companions, intending to attract yet more, tried to remain at San Giacomo where already that kind of kingdom within a kingdom had been attempted (though in a far vaguer way) and had been forbidden and dissolved. But had he already been negotiating with Santo Spirito? There is no record of it that I know of: but how could he guess that he would be welcome there? One might almost have expected that the authorities would have declined to welcome men whose very presence might give grounds for ill feeling between them and those

of San Giacomo. Be that as it may, Camillus's intention reached the ears of Mgr. Cusano. He was genuinely furious. What criticism of San Giacomo was not implied by all these men wishing to leave it? Of what intrigue had not Camillus been guilty, not only by not making it clear long before what he intended to do, but by taking away with him the very best men of the staff? Cusano in fact attacked Camillus, one day, in the hospital courtyard, in the presence of several others, and called him a revolutionary, and accused him of very great harm to the whole work being done for the sick. For my part, I think that Camillus had not wished to say anything definite till his own mind was perfectly clear about what he intended to do; I think that this accurate vision of the future and consequent fixation of plans came gradually. That he was to form a society of priests and others devoted to the exclusive care of the sick, had long been clear to him: but exactly when, and where—no. I think he felt it would be better to state only what he knew for certain, and when he knew it, and then to do it outright. This is the opposite of Newman's method, judging by the famous incident of the "grey trousers" which, with no word spoken, were meant to indicate to his visitor that he was renouncing the Anglican ministry. *If* Camillus did 'hint' at what he knew for certain, I think that this was just as contrary to his disposition as it was in harmony with Newman's, and that his hints were never due to an instinct (Italian or otherwise) for intrigue, but quite possibly to a real fear of provoking the explosion that now had come.

Yet this was not the worst. Cusano went to Philip Neri and implored him to use his authority to prevent Camillus from leaving his post at San Giacomo and taking Cusano's best men with him. Philip said that he always had tried to dissuade Camillus from founding what

Cusano called this grotesque Society, and that he knew nothing of these last steps of Camillus's. He said he would do his utmost to persuade the men to go back. Soon after this, Camillus arrived, terribly depressed by the attack of Cusano, and hoping for some word of comfort from the Saint, who, after all, realised fully what the service of the sick implied since he sent his own men to hospitals. Philip might have retorted that he always forbade them, precisely, to make any sort of *society*, or in any way to mix themselves up with the government of hospitals. Camillus might have answered that that did not touch the essential question, which was, whether or no such a society were *needed*? The proper work could not be done—still less could the desperately needed reforms be carried through—by precarious visits, however charitable. As it was, Philip simply told him to go back. Camillus was on the rack. He kept hearing an interior voice bidding him to go forward; and here was the one voice which he trusted in the world of men telling him to go back. He implored the Saint not to be astonished at what he had done, because he felt himself *violently* moved interiorly to do something more than look after *himself*. Philip then took the drastic measure of refusing to hear Camillus's confessions any more, or to direct him. "Go", said he, "to Fr. Talpa." And the same was to hold good for Curzio and Bernardino. Talpa was a man whom Philip called his "right arm"; he was exceptionally prudent, very zealous, an admirable spiritual director, and highly esteemed by St. Charles Borromeo and Cardinal Baronius.

All the same, the blow was terrific. Writers struggle to find reasons why St. Philip administered it. Philip wanted to test Camillus's humility: to mortify him: to check any exaggerated affection for himself or trust in him that Camillus might have: to resign his care for Camillus to a

man whom he judged still wiser than he himself was. I think that all this is perhaps far-fetched. Surely St. Philip honestly thought that Camillus was not the man to found a new society; that he was doing what all acknowledged to be a very good work where he was and that it was perverse to destroy it for the sake of an undeveloped plan of disputable value, and that Cusano was really being treated badly. We will not say that Philip felt piqued by Camillus's professing to be directed by him and then going flatly contrary to his direction, but that he considered that it was not much good his continuing to give him advice if it was obstinately disregarded over a considerable space of time, in a matter which concerned not only the whole career of this young man, but charity if not sheer justice in regard of others. Let someone else try what he can do with him. And after all, St. Philip may have thought, I *may* be wrong. Fr. Talpa is very prudent and I am—rather eccentric.

I deliberately wrote that last word. Before I protect myself for doing so, perhaps we might remember that neither Philip nor Camillus had yet reached that full perfection to which God was calling them. Philip had nearly ten more years to live, and Camillus thirty; much was to happen during that time, and we cannot possibly be saying anything against the achieved sanctity of either if we suppose that Philip *may* have felt a little irritated by the obstinate resistance of his penitent, especially as in the end he had given his 'advice in the shape of an order': or if we suppose that Camillus might have told both Philip and Cusano more exactly what he had, in the long run, become clear he was going to do. Hence, given human ways of thinking and feeling, we can say that both were almost wholly right, and each, perhaps, not perfectly so. From Philip's point of view, Camillus was genuinely making a serious mistake and being obstinate about it:



Camillus was sure he was doing right, and kept rather more quiet about the final steps than he need have done—for instance, he did not make it *clear* to Cusano that he and Bernardino and Curzio, at anyrate, were not coming back, and that probably Profeta would soon be leaving. And Cusano was most forgivably distressed at losing four of his best men at once, without even having been clearly warned that he was doing so nor having been clear that he must at once seek substitutes. He was wrong in getting so angry publicly, but an Italian, in such circumstances, may well be absolved if he expresses himself with volubility if not violence ! There is here all the material for a first rate three cornered tragedy—the clash between three very good men all of them very nearly quite right, and unable to see how they *could* be wrong ! And one cannot deny that St. Philip was at times startling—eccentric ! he did not move at all in the curves that might be expected of the ordinary man.

I can then quite imagine that he realised how delicate was the case of Camillus, and that it might be wise to hand him over to a man supremely known as ‘prudent’. Nor at that time, was the office of confessor sharply distinguished from that of director as it usually is now. Anyhow, he will have felt that if Camillus was bent on defying his direction in a way which Philip thought *wrong*, Camillus had better seek not only another director but another confessor.

The blow remained terrific. All these men were accustomed to regard Philip as the very anchorage on earth of their spiritual lives. Never to have approached him was one thing: to have been accepted and then rejected, that surely was another ! With Fr. Vanti, I am much inclined to think that this is when Camillus had his second preternatural communication connected with his Crucifix. The former one had been explicitly a dream: this time he was

awake, and saw the Figure detach its arms from the cross and reach them lovingly out towards him. And the divine voice said to him, almost as before: "Why distress yourself, a man of little soul? Go on with your enterprise, for I will help you, seeing that this work is Mine, not yours".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Those who have always lived in a Catholic atmosphere and tradition will probably accept this narrative without much reflection, as they do most of such phenomena in the lives of Saints. Others will probably at once regard it as a hallucination. However, even the Italian *Vita* feels that some comment should be made upon it. It is, of course, mere *a priori* dogmatism to say that no such experience *can* be supernatural in origin. For our part, considering the event independently, we are forced to say that Camillus seems the least likely of men to have hallucinations. He was a man of extremely well-balanced brain—'an iron-clad head'; Salviati used to call him. Visions and the like play little or no part in his history: he perfectly well distinguished between his previous experience, which was a dream, and this one. His resistance to adversity was amazing: the amount of work he did despite really dreadful physical pain was no less astounding. It is interesting, too, that Camillus immediately told his friends about his dream, but not about this vision—not even to his close friend, Philip Biazzi (though he, in time, heard about it from others). Cicatelli, in his first edition (1615) does not mention it, for it was then, in fact, not known. But three men, worthy of belief because of their holiness of life, swore in their 'depositions' (in 1622, 1625, and 1626) that the Saint had yielded to the earnest request of the Flemish Fr. Gens to be told of the origin of the new Institute, and that he then related his experience to them, binding them to strict secrecy: after his death, this promise no more held good. We cannot of course give the adhesion of faith to this or to any ecclesiastical miracle, for these form no part of revelation. Nor need we even fear to ask what may have been its 'mechanism', so to say. Fr. Dalla Giacomo rightly says in *Domesticum*, July 1922, p. 146, that 'the Author of physical nature has infinite numbers of possible ways of modifying and transforming it'. I see no quite insuperable difficulties in the way of a wooden or plaster figure being made to move, become *apparently* animated, and speak. It may be sophistication on my part to feel that aesthetically I should not like that—*if* only because in this case the crucifix was much smaller than Camillus. Nor can we say that God might not have acted directly on Camillus's physical organs of sight and hearing so that he *thought* he saw and heard what really he did not. But would this not be perilously near to creating an illusion in him? But I should find no difficulty in God's having acted directly on his mind, and made him so vividly conscious of our Lord's love and care for him and of the certainty that his vocation was of divine origin and not due to himself—"You did not choose Me—I chose *you*"—that the direct, intimate, spiritual consciousness overflowed upon his imagination and senses, which is in inverse of the ordinary process in which a sense-experience precedes the idea which the mind forms by means of it. The same problem arises when the Saints 'see' other Saints,

Any how, it is good to know that Camillus loved and honoured and sought counsel from Philip so long as the latter lived, and Philip never lessened in the slightest his affection and esteem for Camillus: as for Camillus's spiritual sons, they charmingly spoke of Philip as their 'holy Grandpapa'—for had he not been 'Father in the Lord' to their Founder?

## III

Camillus and his little band now transferred their activities, as they had proposed, to the Hospital of Santo Spirito. A note on its history may be permitted.

Ina, king of the Anglo-Saxons, had instituted an asylum for English pilgrims on the right bank of the Tiber between—to make its position easily understood—the Castle of St. Angelo and St. Peter's. The quarter therefore took the name of 'Sassia', and the hospital when confided to Guy de Montpelier and his Brothers of the Holy Ghost was called Santo Spirito in Sassia. It was Innocent III, that mighty promoter of hospital-work throughout Europe, who actually summoned Guy to Rome to supervise what was to be the ideal world-hospital—*Hospitium Apostolicum* or simply *Nostrum*, as it was so called, and, since laymen and not only religious were to share in the good work there, instituted a Confraternity of the Holy Ghost in the same year. This Hospital did indeed reproduce itself throughout Europe.

or Angels (for all these are discarnate). It is interesting that St Bernadette, at Lourdes, felt that she saw Our Lady 'with her eyes', but heard her voice 'here', in her 'heart'.—The option is this—Did Camillus's experience have its origin outside himself, i.e. from God? or did it arise wholly from some psychological disturbance within himself? Given his character, his vocation, and the Church's seal set upon his sanctity, I have no doubt that God, in a way known to Himself and never ascertainable by us, initiated a process in the Saint which set the *whole* of his body-soul personality 'in movement', so to say, so that he saw, heard, felt, thought, and *knew* in exactly the way which he needed and profited by at the time.

Earlier buildings having been burnt down, the actual edifice was constructed by order of Sixtus IV in 1471. It is extremely dignified, and is grouped around a central hall. In the middle the roof rises into an octagon turret or quasicupola, under which is the main altar of the hospital.

The fewness of the Santo Spirito religious made it difficult to find a superior with all the requisite qualities from amongst them, though Innocent III had wished that they should rule it for ever. Popes tried various experiments as the centuries passed: finally they resigned themselves to appointing the men they thought most fit to govern it. It seems to me necessary, if we are to see Camillus as an *organic* part of its history, very briefly to outline the career of his great predecessor in the reform of Santo Spirito—Bernardino Cirillo (see once more M. Vanti—*Un humanista del Cinquecento in funzione di riformatore*: Rome, 1936). He was born in May, 1500: both his parents died before he was twenty: the first part of his life was distracted by his desperate attempt to pursue his studies, and to assist his family. Ordained in 1526, he was granted various small ecclesiastical posts. A brilliant lawyer, civil and canonical, he was called to many high offices by no means to his taste. In 1556 he was appointed Canon of Sta Maria Maggiore and almost at once became head of Santo Spirito. The real point of his life is that he was a true humanist—he was steeped from youth up in Plato and the Neo-Platonists (even Iamblichus), in the Aeropagite, Pica della Mirandola and the rest, and he had Marsilio Ficino for tutor—and yet was no neo-pagan. He really did believe that the new birth of ‘letters’ and the arts could render immense services to the Church and to religion, as indeed they might have, had they not been so grievously mis-used.

In 1556 Paul IV appointed a prelate as governor who

at once fell sick. But his predecessor died and Cirillo became temporary Governor. He hated his task. It was impossible to live there, he said, without oneself falling sick: the eye sees nothing but the wounded and the vision of death; the ear hears nothing but cries and groans, and nostrils and even taste are horribly assaulted. However, in October, 1556, the Pope definitely appointed him Governor, and with true obedience he devoted himself wholly to his work. He was therefore in the curious position of controlling not only the establishment, with its vast properties and revenues, but a congregation of religious to which he did not belong. This apart from the violent rivalries which surround the Apostolic See, was enough to ensure his future being storm-tossed. Paul IV was himself a tempestuous man: and when he died, Pius IV (1559) began to receive endless criticisms of Cirillo, all based really on his having been too friendly with the Caraffa, so dear to the previous Pope. He refuted these without much difficulty. It may, however, have been his close friendship with St. Charles Borromeo which saved him from being dismissed. Meanwhile his influence was great also outside the Hospital, and his advice was welcomed at Trent, whose Council resumed and completed its work during that Pontificate. In 1565 the Dominican Pius V, the very day after his election, summoned Cirillo back to high office in the papal court, and while himself so austere, enjoyed the open and genial talk of Cirillo who also effected great economies in the Vatican. But this position was lost when Gregory XIII came to the throne (1572), and Cirillo spent practically the rest of his life defending his financial, moral and spiritual governorship of the Hospital.

His duties had been enormous. On arrival, he spent three months disentangling the situation. He felt he must first put order into its finances, even to satisfy justice, let alone

efficiency. The properties possessed by Santo Spirito had been enormous: but those, for example, near the sea and in theory most prosperous, were exposed to piracy and pillage: whole areas were reduced to sterility by ignorance and indolence; maladministration, speculation and fraud had reduced the Hospital to a fearful state of debt. The labyrinthine accounts of all this can still be studied. Indeed, he had first to get the accounts properly drawn up, and every source of income examined. The practice of granting indulgences with the duty of giving alms to the hospital annexed, had, in this case too, given rise to such pestilent abuses that Cirillo, seeing that he could not rectify them, boldly got Pius V to suppress all such indulgences, though, of course, he had to make good the lost income himself.

The inhabitants of the Hospital were, naturally, the patients and the staff. The former consisted of (i) the sick: (ii) infants cast away by the destitute at birth, in reliance that some establishment such as this would rescue them: and (iii) girls who had grown up there, and were to be educated and taught simple work, till they could be married off. The children had a sort of nursery school of their own. Not all patients stayed very long—they might be suffering from wounds, or fevers, especially in summer, like malaria. Many who should have come, did not, feeling hospital to be a disgrace: or others came out of laziness: others, because destitute. In 1549–1550, 10,000 sick were cared for, of whom (incredible as it sounds) 9,028 died, either because they came too late, or because resistance had been exhausted by malnutrition if not starvation, but also, alas, to the forgivable shortcomings of science, and to the disgraceful inadequacy of the nursing and even medical equipment. The staff consisted of religious, male and female; doctors and their assistants, and various sorts of servants. Idle to give

statistics: enough, that when Cirillo arrived, none of these groups sufficed even numerically to do their work properly. On paper the organisation was excellent—kitchens, laundry, bakery, pharmacy etc. etc., had but the human element been adequate. Cirillo had to reform all this in detail, and provide much more with much less income: he succeeded at least materially—diet, linen, woollens ended by being excellent: medicines were as copious as they were curious; the barber had no rest day or night, nay, nor on Sundays, so occupied was he with blood-letting. And Paul IV appointed a notary for the Hospital and ruled that all local legal cases, matrimonial, spiritual, criminal, should be dealt with inside the Hospital, lest the inmates should suffer from their seclusion.

Cirillo had to turn next to the actual edifice. Admirable drawings show us both the outside and the inside of the Hospital (1577, 1585 etc.), and the vast ward of St. Sisto with its 300 beds. Cirillo was indeed fiercely criticised by men who spent fortunes on their private palaces, for building too 'sumptuously'. Anyhow, build he had to, and he built in the *best* tradition of his time, and in a way that he thought proper to the 'perfect hospital' and to the Holy See which wished it to be a model. The church had indeed begun to be rebuilt from the foundations in 1538: Cirillo completed its 'decoration'. Its lovely little campanile was restored, its three bells re-cast and a fourth added, Paul IV authorising Cirillo to use cannon for this. Pius IV stopped further building in connection with Santo Spirito and even St. Peter's. But Cirillo, observing that the whole place was ruinous and that the kitchen had collapsed, 'without so much as asking the Governor for permission', got leave from St. Pius V to begin again. The Pope gave him for architect Giovanni Lippi (Nanni Bigio), sadly famous for having succeeded (for some time) in getting himself substituted for Michel-

angelo in the building of St. Peter's. Cirillo took him up the campanile and explained to him his comprehensive plan which included the preservation of the old buildings of Sixtus IV. No vandal he ! Work then began with the the house for the older girls: then came the hospital itself and the palazzo of the Governor, which was what earned him the sharpest criticisms. He did not live to see his work completed: but we cannot rebuke its far-sightedness, its width of outlook, its combination of sense of actual requisites with respect for the past. The true Humanist !

But all this was as nothing to his *moral* responsibility. He began by restoring public worship in the church to some sort of dignity: even so, it remained erratic. The condition of the orphan girls had sunk to a deplorably low level. He at least raised it much. Worst was the degradation of the Order of the Holy Ghost. Even had it wished to, it could not have done its work properly, so had it shrunk. It had quite lost the religious spirit, and languished till, after endless efforts to reform it, it had to be suppressed by Pius IX in 1847. But Cirillo had at least succeeded in getting subordinates appointed such as he could esteem as they esteemed him. St. Philip and the Jesuits welcomed his reforms. The record of the Apostolic Visitation of 1574 goes into every detail, yet its adverse criticisms are very few. The appalling thing is to compare it with that of 1585. For lack of space I cannot even summarise it. *All* is condemned—the disgraceful condition of the church and of worship; the condition of the sick, beds, doctoring, spiritual assistance even of the dying; the luxury of the Santo Spirito Prior and the futility of the rest of the Order; the perfectly appalling death-rate of infants (out of 3,503, 2,672 had died); the deplorable character of the far too few wet-nurses—and above all the degradation



of the official 'Brothers', nearly all of whom observe none of their vows, but "are scandalous and incontinent".

Was then Mgr. Cirillo a purely personal and not a creative force? Perhaps. Or, more truly, he laid foundations on which others, like Camillus, could build. True, we may discount his sarcastic and most amusing letters *about* the Hospital; but we see that in letters to *persons* he really does try to persuade, not to intimidate. It has been said that his friendly but rather caustic laughter did less to heal than St. Philip's gentle, gay yet very firm-lipped, smile. Well, so long as he lived, we find few of the disorders that existed before and after him, and that is much. He was never jealous. He begged St. Philip and his men to undertake the 'reform' of the Hospital. The Saint refused. The significant change was to be due to St. Camillus, who arrived, a new man, in Rome, the year when Cirillo died. The first thing to see is that Cirillo could not possibly have lived a *continuous* life through the contradictory reigns of Paul IV, Pius IV, St. Pius V, and especially Gregory XIII, and that Camillus did not enter on a field of action where nothing yet had been done. Our Lord Himself did not appear without having had His Baptist; and it is instructive to see how many Saints (St. Francis Xavier: St. Peter Claver: St. Vincent de Paul . . .) had had their forerunners. Cirillo died, almost blind, and most worthily of his honourable, high-hearted and self-sacrificing career, on June 19, 1575.

Life, however, at the Madonnina proved impossible. The room (about 14 ft. beneath the actual street-level) was on the Tiber and constantly full of mist. Camillus and Curzio fell gravely ill: work had been too heavy; food, too scanty; sleep, too short. Curzio was taken to the hospital of San Giovanni, where the Prior gave him his own room. Camillus was taken back to San Giacomo, and was given his old room where he lived as Maestro di

Casa. Did they think that his enterprise had proved itself impossible, and that he had returned to remain for good? Anyhow, the moment he was better, he returned to work at Santo Spirito, but decided he must find new lodgings. He found a house in the Via delle Botteghe Oscure, so-called because the dark vaults of the shops were those of an ancient theatre. This street lies behind the little church of St. Stanislaus, in the tiny 'piazzetta' half-way down the Via dei Polacchi going from the piazza Morgana to the Via delle Botteghe Oscure. Unluckily the rent was 50 scudi a year, and half had to be paid in advance. Camillus possessed not even that half. He prayed, and then, with his naïve aplomb, on meeting an acquaintance, Pompeo Baratelli, told him his plans. Baratelli put his hand in his pocket and presented Camillus with 30 scudi on the spot. On the first of January 1585 the three companions took up their abode in the new house. They hoped now to increase their numbers. One applicant had been received at the Madonnina, but had left, appalled at the hardness of the life. Even at Santo Spirito it was terribly hard. Camillus wished that he and his friends should take up all the hardest tasks: if the servants found patients too disgusting to be treated by them, the phrase was current: "Let us leave this muck to Camillus": and it was here that some time later he found the living man in the room into which the dead were 'tossed'. None the less, men began to join him, though not for some time could they reach a round dozen.

But they began to get known. Baratelli promised them all the bread they should need: bequests and other gifts began to reach them. They found themselves called to private houses, where the danger of men dying unattended was so great. The new house was so close to the Gesù that Camillus asked St. Philip if his companions and he might not choose confessors from among the Jesuits:

Philip approved; the new director was Fr. Ottaviano Capelli, who facilitated the Camillan priests' saying Mass in the Gesù, the others going there for the Sacraments or sermons. If the weather was very bad, or time too short for even that small journey, they went to one or the other of two nearer churches. The first sorrow was the death of Bernardino Norcino, that well-loved, most simple and most spiritual of the earliest Three. He had foretold the purchase of the Mother House and Church of St. Mary Magdalen, and also, had assured Rodolfo Aquaviva, S.J., that he would die a martyr, as indeed he did. He was buried in the Jesuit vault in the Gesù, having died on Aug. 16, 1585. Curzio Lodi too became so ill that he had to go home for two years to recover.

But already Camillus wished to give a name and firmer shape to his little Company. It was popularly known at first as the Company of Camillus: but his modesty revolted against that. For a brief while, it was called the 'Servants of the Sick', a name used in the rule: but at the end of April 1585 the title 'Ministers of the Sick' was settled on, because other groups were using the word 'Servants', or because Camillus liked to adopt outright the word 'minister' so familiar from the Latin of the Vulgate. We, however, cannot but find it easier to use, in English, the word 'servant'. This expression: 'Ministri degli Infermi' lent itself to pleasantries . . . children ran after them calling out: 'Ministri dell' Inferno!'—the earliest MS. life delightfully says that this was undoubtedly due to the Devil, who—proud spirit!—could not bear that men called by so base a name should win such triumphs over him, and tried to make them abhorred so that they should not be called to the dying. As a matter of fact, they became named, in many parts of Italy, the Fathers of the Good Death, or of Beautiful Death; so too in Spain and South America. In Sicily it became proverbial

that you could not die without the help of a Crucifer, or Cross-carrier as they were there called: indeed, so earnest was the help of these men at the bedside of the dying, that Sicily even created a proverb: if a petitioner was too pressing, they said: "You are as insistent as a Crucifer at a death-bed!"

The fact that the little Company received its name of 'Ministers' as early as April-May 1585 suggests that the 'Rule', which still has that of 'servants' at its head was written before that, and maybe had been begun before Camillus even left San Giacomo. He did not write fast; he could not write much at a time; he certainly prayed long before composing so much as a paragraph. The original text of the "Rules of the Company of the Servants of the Sick" was lost, and recovered quite recently in the Secret Archives of the Vatican. It falls into two parts, not accurately separated, and indeed the rules, though numbered, as it were melt into one another. At first, Camillus speaks of the formation of the interior life of the 'Servants'; then, of the character their work must have. This rule, to my mind, expresses Camillus's character very well. It is unlike any other such document though you can see how carefully he had studied the Jesuit rules (it is said that possibly he had read about the society created by Bernardino de Obregon formed in Spain in 1522: it spread rapidly but never was papally approved. It is thought too that he inherited one or two phrases from the Rule of the Religious of the Holy Spirit). One inspiration pervades this collection of rules—Charity: but *real* charity, that loves men because it sees Christ in them: and one object is aimed at throughout—the service of the sick; all sick people, at all times and in every place.

In consequence of this ideal, a very wide liberty is left to the conscience of each. Thus if the needs of some sick man require it, a Brother may omit even Mass on days of

non-obligation: when they eat at home, there is a certain amount of fasting and abstinence; but if they are serving in a hospital, they must eat what is put before them: they must eat and pray together *when possible*. These ideas are to be found, for example, in rules 8, 9, 10. Another point on which Camillus insisted even more strongly than the almost dangerously broad subordination of the external 'religious' life to the needs of the sick was poverty. We need not look for an explanation to his early love for the Capuchin spirit (not that he ever lost it); the Jesuit rules were just as emphatic. St. Ignatius would have wished his religious to have done the whole of their work, teaching included, gratis: and he was obstinate that they should receive no ecclesiastical honours unless directly ordered to by the Pope, and should, so far as possible, keep out of all financial affairs so far as could possibly be managed. The real reason for this was the historical fact that prelacies were ambitiously sought for the sake of their revenues, and rich prelates risked turning simply into grand princes. The history of the Hospitaller Orders in particular gave a terrible example of what happened when such Orders grew rich. Again and again their houses became exempted from episcopal control, and the superiors of such Orders found themselves receiving vast legacies, controlling enormous estates—all lavished on them by benefactors really anxious to assist the work for which the Order had been founded. The temptation to increase such wealth and to live luxuriously was too much for human weakness. The headship of the Santo Spirito Hospital, for example, became so overwhelmingly desirable a post that hardly a bishopric was more valuable. The 'Commendatore' of that hospital had actually power of life and death within his vast territories: meanwhile the actual work among the sick was handed over to paid servants with the results that we have seen. After a

reform in 1371 its religious began to follow the Rule of St. Augustine and were able to accept all sorts of benefices—provided they were at least in minor orders. Therefore many received these, but went no further, drawing revenues, that is, but incurring no responsibilities. When the Holy See again and again tried to bring them back to the observance of their vow of poverty, they appealed to some “immemorial dispensation” which freed them from it. Pius IX had to suppress them altogether in 1847. Other such decaying Orders had of course been suppressed before. This preoccupation about poverty runs over into the second group of Rules (27–51: especially 28, 44 and 45); Camillus insists even more strongly than St. Ignatius that financial or other material obligations are completely forbidden to the Brothers: and that if in spite of everything bequests are made, they are to be given to the hospital in which the legator dies. And (34) he is determined that his men shall not appear to be reformers and critics in the hospitals where they serve; and wished them not to notice the defects of management they might notice—any reform that comes about must be the fruit of their unbounded charity.

I do not remember that any other rule for men speaks of charity as ‘maternal’—‘fatherly’, of course, often. But Camillus wishes the Brothers to ask for ‘motherly love’ every day, and to nurse the sick as a mother might nurse her only child who was ill; and Sixtus V in fact incorporated that word into his approbations. He enters into details—how they must help the sick to eat, holding their heads up, encouraging them; how they were to lift the patients gently without shaking them: and how they must study each case, and be present when the doctor visits each, and have periodical conferences concerning the needs of the sick, and learn how to make beds and cleanse the patients if they are in danger or too weak to

sit up, and to hand in a daily accurate account of the patient's day to the doctors. In the last rule, he foresees that others may have to be written if the Holy See sanctions the development of the Company into an official 'Congregation'. It was to do so: but in 1613 a completely new set of rules was sanctioned and introduced into the great hospital of Milan where on Feb. 13, 1595 Camillus had been able to install his own Religious instead of the paid staff. He hoped that these rules would serve for other hospitals too, and indeed they did, in proportion as he introduced his Religious into Naples, Florence, Genoa, Ferrara and Viterbo, besides Milan. These second rules, composed after eighteen years of experience, seem to me much less naïve than the former: they, retain, however a certain charm which I feel as definitely 'Camillan' as I feel the 'Franciscan' spirit and fragrance to be something quite unique and recognisable.

It can be justifiably said that Camillus, without troubling his head about historical precedents, really did initiate a *reform* within the Catholic Church in what concerned the service of the sick. Without doubt the earlier, medieval orders and hospitals had begun very well. But, as we saw, they had deteriorated till they reached a depth below which nothing sank more low save the incredible degradation of eighteenth and early nineteenth hospitals and nursing. Camillus gradually withdrew as many hospitals as he could from the old bad form of government. He infused a spirit of charity, nay, of holiness, into the ministrations of his spiritual sons and descendants which lifted that service into quite a new sphere of value spiritual and bodily. He *trained* his children both in their conscience towards God and their conscience towards their fellow-men, and also, by observation and experiment, their intelligence. And in a true sense he anticipated the modern recognition of the inseparability of mind and

body, so that the cure of either should go far towards the cure of both—but if the mind be disregarded, the cure of the body becomes infinitely more precarious. Only, herein, if he was anticipating this modern recognition, he was only applying the practice of Christ, and the immemorial Catholic doctrine of the union of spirit and flesh in one person.

Gregory XIII, mild almost to weakness-point, died on April 10, 1585. A stronger Pontiff was demanded, and most assuredly granted in the person of Sixtus V. Sixtus, who had started life by keeping pigs, and became a Franciscan, ended by a brief reign of five years on the loftiest throne of the world. His volcanic yet always righteous energy transformed the city of Rome—hope that the cupola of St. Peter's could ever be finished was quite abandoned: Sixtus, in two years, set it completed on the desolate drum—and regenerated the organisation of the Church itself. Camillus thought he had better obtain the sanction of this Pope for his Company. This must be sought through some Cardinal. He knew none. As usual, he prayed, and then waited to 'meet' one. One day, he descried in the courtyard of a palace Cardinal Lauro (best known from his episcopal see as Mondovi). He humbly, yet serenely and with perfect aplomb approached him, and told him what he wanted. The Cardinal listened, surprised, amused, then deeply impressed. He, who might well have become later on Pope himself, went to Sixtus who was pleased and referred the matter duly to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, he showed him a copy of the rules which he 'happened' to have on him. Some members of the board were reluctant to approve: new religious congregations

<sup>1</sup> This Congregation discussed all such subjects as might lead to a clash between religious orders and the Ordinary of the place where they might be.



were undesirable. Mondovi, however, appeared in person: opposition disappeared: on March 18, 1586, Sixtus issued a brief containing many 'tacit quotations' from Camillus's rule, and approving the Company which was to work always with the approval of ecclesiastical authority, without vows (though of course anyone was free to take *private* ones), and to have the right to ask for alms wherever he wished, without further local permission.

On April 20, Camillus assembled his little band who at once elected him Superior. The election was obvious, especially as few of them were priests. It has been well said that this merely meant for him being more than ever the servant of them all: and at once he went out with another priest to beg—collecting one loaf and some crusts, and 'many insults'. But the preceding events had interested the great officials of the Church in Camillus and Sixtus wanted to see him. Camillus was taken to the Vatican and the Pope studied him intently. Sixtus assuredly, as Napoleon professed to, "se connaissait en hommes"—could sum up men. He saw a very strong man who had been strong enough to obtain mastery of *himself*.<sup>1</sup> He then said he would in all ways befriend him. Camillus next, with his irrepressible simplicity, asked the Pope for leave for his Religious to wear a 'red' cross on the right side of their cassock and cloak, to distinguish them from all other groups of 'Clerks Regular', or clerics living under rule. The Pope agreed, asking Camillus to send him an *aide mémoire* on the matter. A great number of religious Orders had worn a cross on their habits—the Trinitarians, occupied with rescuing slaves: the Crociferi, chiefly de-

<sup>1</sup>I must be forgiven if I recall that most striking scene when Aloysius Gonzaga, into whom the whole heredity of that frightful clan had flowed, knelt at the feet of the Pope who had been a swineherd and a Franciscan and was very nearly the Hildebrand of his brief reign, and asked but to renounce all coronets and money-bags. Sixtus enquired if really he understood what he was undertaking. The young Saint said Yes, and the Pope blessed this youth of 'twisted iron' and sent him to his vocation.

voted to pilgrims (these had proved too decadent to survive and were suppressed by Alexander VII in 1656): all sorts of 'Hospitaller' Orders like the Knights Templar; and in fact the badge of Santo Spirito displayed, beneath the Dove, a double-barred cross made, when worn on the dress, of white cloth. Camillus asked for a cross that was not precisely red, but 'lion-coloured', or *tané*, i.e., the rare heraldic tincture *tenné*, i.e., tawny. Thus, said he, it would be more like the wood of the Cross. As time went on, the cross became larger than what Sixtus had granted, and the colour more vivid—in fact, it settled down to being quite simply red. Into details of size we need not enter, but simply register the suggestion made by a religious of a different Order that the Camillans should wear a dress entirely of the *tenné* colour. This startling suggestion was naturally turned down. The Cross was officially granted by a Brief of June 26, 1586, and on the 29th, feast of SS. Peter and Paul, Camillus with seven companions went to St. Peter's wearing it.

The crowds were quick to notice it. Who were these men? Jesuits back from India or the Holy Sepulchre? Well—anyway, the Knights del Sasso, of the Rock, a sort of vague pun upon *Sassia*. Above all, they wished to know why it was worn on the right breast, and not on the left, according to custom. They were told that it was done just to distinguish it from other crosses, and lest, when the right-hand folds of the cloak were drawn across the breast, the crosses should be hidden. And also, to alarm the Devil. When worn on the left, the cross represented a shield: on the right, it became a sword. But as Camillus said, it indicated that his Society was a society of the Cross, that is, of toil, suffering and even death, for none could live in it without thus entirely renouncing self and following Christ, and Him crucified. Of the further history of this symbol, we speak later on (p. 171).

Only one more event need be mentioned before we consider the origins of St. Camillus' society as sufficiently dealt with. The Society continued to grow: the tawny cross was recognised in the streets and kissèd. Among the recruits was a most brilliant Sicilian, Biagio Opertis, born in 1561 and received by Camillus in November, 1586: he was already a priest and something of a genius and most versatile. This makes it the more remarkable that he was also very prudent and something of a curb on Camillus's ardent impetuosity. Meanwhile the house in the Street of Dark Shops had grown too small, especially as it contained no chapel and with an increasing number of priest associates they had inconveniently to seek an altar in the churches round. On the vigil of the feast of St. Mary Magdalen, Camillus passed by the church dedicated in honour of that Saint in the Rione Colonna near the Pantheon. He went in to gain the indulgence, and thought that the church would be very suitable to his Society, though it was in a deplorable state of deterioration. Negotiations were successfully through: even the public authorities came to his aid: in December the Camillans were able to take possession of the church and the adjoining houses, which bit by bit were adapted to the use of a Community. Hither, too, came Fr. Curzio, fully convalescent, and Fr. Profeta, who had been extricated from his lawsuit. There arrived, too, a certain Juan de Adamo, a Spaniard, who had come to Rome to get a new Spanish community intended to nurse the sick in hospitals approved in Rome. Everyone persuaded him to join Camillus. He remained perplexed till one day he took from his pocket a little white cross that he had brought from Spain—and lo! it had turned red. This settled him. From December 1586, therefore, Camillus took over St. Mary Magdalen's (which we shall call more briefly the Maddalena) and the church and the house

have remained ever since the centre of the Society of Servants of the Sick.

The Society therefore had been founded, and its habitation had been chosen and occupied. Henceforward, we have to look towards growth, and outward spread.

#### IV

Camillus foresaw development *ad indefinitum*, because he wanted the service of the sick in private houses to be pressed forward: for if the Hospital was like an 'inland sea', work in private houses was like an ocean without shores. He can hardly however have failed to realise that its dangers were much greater for the unformed or unstable. First of all, he himself abdicated the hearing of the confessions of his associates. It is always unwise for a superior to hear his community's confessions, for it may be hard to keep the knowledge of what is actually said in confession absolutely separated, as it must be kept, from knowledge or surmise obtained in other ways, e.g. by avowal outside the confessional, by legitimate information, by sheer intuition, or observation. But he himself thought he was scrupulous and might do harm to consciences: and Philip Neri had to tell this intransigent and ardent man, who measured others by himself, that he was forming apostles, not hermits, and ought to go more gently. He appointed, therefore, a confessor for the house, and a priest who should supervise the year of 'noviciate' before an applicant might be admitted to make what was called his 'profession', though of course no vows were taken. The candidate made a protestation, in the form of a prayer, that he wished to spend his life in poverty, chastity and obedience and in the service of "our sons and my brothers," the sick. After this, Camillus

gave him the cross, while the brothers sang: "He that will follow Me, let him renounce himself, and take up his cross, and follow me", and: "Far from Me to boast save through the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world is crucified to me and I to it". Camillus was firmly convinced that he himself walked in the common or ordinary paths, and did not want his disciples to be sentimental or extravagant and wished that while their whole lives, in one sense, in and out of the house, should be prayer, yet that that prayer should not be made for the sake of heavenly sweetness, nor was a prayer satisfactory which "amputated the arms of charity". One ought always to have one's coat on, to go out to do charity. So while he was pleased if his men learnt this or that from books, his own books were ever first and foremost the sick and the dying. He wrote, in large letters, over one of the doors in the house: "Brother, if you do a bad thing with pleasure, the pleasure passes and the badness remains: if you wearily do a good thing, the weariness passes, and the good remains." We must definitely see in Camillus a Saint proper to the period of Action. The history of the religious life has not always equally esteemed activity. Camillus was clear that his vocation and that of his Order was: the service of the sick. *But*, the sick man, to be served Christian-wise, must always be "the Sacrament of Christ": the veil of Jesus. This was the explanation of his quite extraordinary influence over men: and, of his no less amazing intuition of their thoughts and inner movements. When he perceived that a soul would be responsive, or needed stimulus, he simply laid his hand on the man's head: that seemed to suffice. In fact, it became almost a joke: young men ran away, it was said, lest Camillus should thus touch them, and lest they should feel they had forthwith to renounce the world and self: but, better, when in temptation,

men constantly found that it sufficed that Camillus should trace the cross on their forehead, or lay his hand upon their head, for the too-strong attraction to be vanquished.

After a while, he appointed a group of three priests and six Brothers who should meet usually twice a week, to discuss the needs of the moment and give him advice. One counsel which pleased him much was that the sick in prisons should be specifically remembered.

After the opening of the Maddalena, a certain Dr. Mira of Naples, (afterwards bishop and archbishop) used to say Mass there, and was lost in admiration of the new Society. He had spoken to an Oratorian of Naples, Fr. Borla, a true disciple of St. Charles Borromeo and of St. Philip Neri, and indeed of his own archbishop, the B. Paolo d'Arezzo. He wished to reform all the hospitals of Naples, and in view of this had invited the Brothers of St. John of God to go there. Even they were insufficient. So now the Camillans were to go there. It will be impossible to describe all the new foundations in detail. Enough to say of Naples (then under Spanish rule) that it had seemed impossible so much as to interest the soft, seductive and yet most miserable city in its hospitals, and yet, throughout the history of Italian sanctity you will perceive two main fields fertile in Saints—Turin and the north; Naples and the south. In this very year (1588) the "Regular Clerics Minor" were welcomed there with their founder, the very noble Neapolitan, St. Francis Caracciolo: the Servites, the Theatines, the Oratorians, the Do-Good Brothers, St. Gaetano of Vicenza and St. Andrew Avellino were all working there or soon would be. A true reform was in progress and a fair number of distinguished and wealthy persons recovered hope and helped it forward, notably Donna Giulia delle Castelle, whose generosity earned her the right to be thought of as Mother of St. Camillus's Congregation there.

Fr. Opertis was the first superior of the new house—the first of four that the Camillans were to possess there, including the noviciate. Their first work lay in the ‘Incurables’ hospital, founded in 1517–1519 by Vernazza (see p. 11): St. Gaetano had worked there in 1533; yet it had languished and sunk incredibly low. The apparition of the Camillans blew into a blaze all sorts of smouldering fires: a witness says that he remained stupefied at the sight of so many noble persons, right up to the Viceroy and the Cardinal Archbishop, who began to minister in most intimate ways to sick persons near whom he did not see how anyone could bear so much as to stand, let alone to feed them, to make their beds, and to clean their tongues. These layfolk formed groups among themselves who divided up the work, and did away with “that mountain of fear and panic” which barred the way to the ‘Incurables’ even in the case of the most devoted. The Camillans further assumed the care of the Annunziata hospital: but above all, towards the end of 1588, new Spanish troops had arrived in Naples. They were in an appalling state, and put for quarantine into Pozzuoli. The Viceroy implored Opertis to succour them. He set aside five men for this. It was out of the question to leave the sick in galleons dripping with infection: the Camillans carried them in their arms to the Incurables’ and afterwards removed all the soldiers from the ships into a special building. Most of them had no resistance left and died: three of the Camillans themselves succumbed, and practically all, many more than the original five, for substitutes had to be found, fell sick.

In February, 1589, Camillus returned to Naples—did he look, with grief and gratitude (he will forgive us if we look also with a smile . . .) at the stone bench where he had gambled away his shirt in that ‘other life’ already distant? Perhaps he was too intent upon the

future and the work to be done forthwith ! Anyhow young men rushed to his succour: he accepted twelve young candidates in a single day, one of them being that Cicutelli, who, constantly at his side, became his first biographer. Men were drawn to him in different ways: on the whole by the example alike of the Founder and of his disciples. One, having wandered into a hospital to see how the Camillans behaved there, saw an old Father trying to persuade a young man to eat. The patient kept his food in his mouth and then spat it all out into the old man's face. He, on his side, smilingly encouraged the sick lad and gave him the kiss of peace. At times, of course, neophytes left, or had to be sent away: others, tempted to do so, were encouraged by Camillus and obtained, by his all-night prayers, their perseverance. Here is one curious case. One of the twelve we mentioned, the priest Cesare d'Agostino, fell sick of some frightful infection that they half thought was 'leprosy'. In his profound despondency, he was visited by a 'most kindly' Brother, Stefano da Modena, who did all he could to persuade him that his joining the Camillans had proved a mistake; that he would never get well there, and had better go home. Cesare, profoundly distressed, sent for Camillus and asked how he could have sent and made use of Stefano for such a task. The Saint was astonished and then sent for Stefano that Cesare might hear from his mouth how he had been absent from the house for eight whole days and that the visitor could not have been he. The illusion was assigned forthwith to the devil: not for us either to affirm or to deny it.

In the spring of 1589 Camillus had been 'superior' of his society for three years. The brothers met, and re-elected him. And at this time Cardinal Paleotti of Bologna implored Camillus to send men there too. He refused, for lack of numbers, a lack itself due to the difficulty of



finding the necessary small 'patrimony' for priests. The Cardinal suggested: "Why not try to get the Congregation elevated to being a Religious Order with solemn vows, which would enable Religious to be ordained 'with the title of Poverty'," i.e. committing the Order itself to support them? Camillus hesitated. The Cardinal anyhow insisted that a beginning should be made at Bologna. Camillus went: but the enterprise failed: the Hospital would not accept him, and the two priests who came with him were too few for adequately nursing the sick in private houses. However, Paleotti continued to urge his point, and finally Camillus felt his doubts dissolve, and threw himself with characteristic ardour into drawing up a draft-rule for the future 'Order'—Mondovi and other experts examined and corrected this draft. Sixtus V was pleased with it and sent it to the Congregation of Rites. Cardinal Aldobrandini (afterwards Clement VIII), Father (afterwards Cardinal) Toledo, and St. Philip were against the solemn vows: these rendered the dismissal of unfit subjects more difficult. Cardinals Mondovi, Paleotti and Sfondrati (afterwards Gregory XIV) said that this objection would lie against all Religious Orders alike: anyhow dispensation was *possible*. The favourable decision seemed imminent, when Sixtus V died. All was put back into uncertainty.

Anyhow, in August, 1590, an obscure but terrible epidemic broke out in the quarter of Rome where the ruins of the Baths of Diocletian stand (part of them are now the Church of Sta Maria degli Angeli: the ruins of the Baths extend over a space of 420 by 380 metres and were built by some 40,000 slaves, most of them Christians). The whole district was stiflingly packed with workers sent for by Sixtus V from Lombardy, Liguria and Naples to develop the wool and silk industries. The over-crowding was dreadful; and when the season became abnormally

hot, broken into by torrential rain, and the flooding of the Tiber, the epidemic began to rage, with unparalleled fury. The population of Rome, which under Gregory XIII (1572–1585) had risen from 90,000 to 140,000, had sunk by the beginning of 1591 to 116,698; and naturally the numbers of sick who did not actually die must have been colossal, Camillus began, of course, by organising the distribution of food, and by searching out the sick—for often an entire family would be stricken, and helplessly remain unknown and most likely add to the frightful reek of the city by dying and remaining unburied. Food was distributed not only in the houses but down whole streets, hundreds of yards long. It must certainly have been startling to see the huge Camillus, climbing through windows when doors were blocked; escalading the ruins, reaching the very roofs, in his search for sufferers, and all this, you remember, always in great pain from his unhealing wound and the heavy iron band that he always had to wear to compress his hernia: but what startled people even more was his astounding success with babies. Often he had to take them from dying or infectious mothers, and after the first wails, he always managed to quiet them and even to make them drink fresh milk from two goats that he took around with him; and that strange world was almost more impressed when he met a Cardinal, no less, who affably enquired how the sick were getting on; Camillus said laconically: “They’re getting better”: the Cardinal continued his enquiries—“Oh, most illustrious my Lord” exclaimed the poor man, “I beg you for the love of God not to go on talking to me: I’m already late with this medicine that I’m taking to a man.” And off he went, leaving the illustrious one stupefied with admiration. But Cardinals and Sixtus himself were often at Camillus’s side as he made his rounds, and were deeply touched alike by his force and his tenderness.

Alas, Sixtus himself caught the infection and died but a few days later.

The blow was severe, but the new Pontiff, Urban VII, promised whole-hearted help. "The treasures of the Church", said he, "exist but for the poor." Alas, he too died hardly a fortnight after his election. The following conclave lasted two months: Cardinal Sfondrati, another friend, became Pope as Gregory XIV. But famine had added itself to plague, and the vile practices of profiteering by conscienceless grain-merchants had made things wickedly worse. Howling mobs patrolled Rome, or flitted like ghosts around the walls: and as winter approached, you would see those who but recently had been perishing with thirst and chewing the last remaining blades of grass, crawling into dung-heaps in the hopes of warmth. Camillus had for a long time organised an immense soup-centre at the Maddalena, where he first—as always—began by distributing the hot food and a little cup of wine, and then washed the sick and listened to the special woes of each, and, when possible, lifted their thoughts also to spiritual things. But now he had to collect all the old clothes he could, and get such cloth as he might, and, with a staff of fifteen tailors, made, or re-made, clothes for these shivering creatures, whom, if he met them in the street, in bitter cold or rain, he would cover with his own cloak and bring them home. Finally, albeit he knew that he was cheated, not least by men having gambled away what he had given them, and then coming back for more . . . perhaps he remembered his own past days when he had to go shirtless, in no case would he merely rebuke them, but reminded himself, and his critics, of the presence of Jesus Christ in them, and then did what he could for them.

One feature of his charity that profoundly impressed his contemporaries was this—the enormous Roman ruins

—the Forum, the Colosseum, the Palatine, the Baths of Caracalla and many another, are full of mysterious pits, caverns, labyrinthine corridors and secret vaults. Hither streamed a throng of sick who were most of them also desperate criminals. And hither, by day and by night, came Camillus with eight of his strongest men, and four litter-carriers, and himself carrying a sack containing brandy and first-aid necessities, heralding his approach by the cry: "God save you, you sons of God!" anticipating thus the panic into which any unknown footsteps threw such men—and such panic is, how often, but the prelude to murder. Even he had to hold his breath lest he should be too sickened by the reek of these horrible recesses. And into such a state of nervous paralysis had sickness and starvation not seldom reduced these living skeletons, that he might have to force their teeth open in order to give them a mouthful of food and drink. The new Pope, a man of learning and piety rather than of practical energy, felt overwhelmed by the situation and handed over most of the control of Rome to his nephew Cardinal Paolo Emilio Sfondrati; but despite all food-rationing the situation got out of hand, not least because when an attempt was made to allot the homeless to hospitals, and, in particular, to the hospice for the destitute created by Sixtus V, they fought against this infringement of their 'liberty' and either rioted or hid from the soldier-police who had to be sent to excavate them. Camillus tried to get in first; nothing stopped him. Once, when he had found eight such men lurking outside the Porta del Popolo, he persuaded them to come back to Santo Spirito: one fell exhausted by the way: Camillus held up a grand carriage full of noblemen and demanded, for the love of God, to put the dying man into it. The gentlemen got out, and Camillus, with his eight deplorable clients, rode triumphantly back to the Hospital. It was dreadful to

