

and even contradict it. In these circumstances it is urgent to investigate what is essential and unchangeable in the life of the Christian religion, to be able to disengage it more safely from out-of-date religious sensibility, without running the risk of injuring, by this disentanglement, features of Christianity which are authentically Christian and unchangeable.

It is no doubt justifiable to say, from the historical point of view, that the renewal of religion taking place in our day is the *fulfilment* of the endeavour begun, but in some sense spoilt, at the Counter-Reformation. The endeavour partly miscarried because the intention of the Counter-Reformation, which was to save the pure marrow of Christianity from the religious sensibility of the *end* of the middle ages, was too one-sidedly *anti-Reformation*, and therefore lacked a conscious affirmation of the *totality* of dogma, as a positive synthesis. This synthesis cannot be made by adopting one-sided positions. It involves assimilating something, without losing anything. It is in this synthesis that our review is trying to collaborate, by integrating itself in the tradition of the Church's life under the direction of her *magisterium*.



## ST HYACINTH MARISCOTTI

P.C.C.

**S**T HYACINTH MARISCOTTI could be called the patron of back-sliders or the saint of the second chance. A study of her life would do much to 'confirm the weak knees' of all those of us who are so prone to say, 'Sanctity is not for me'.

Born at Vignarello in the papal states, of a noble and wealthy family, in the early seventeenth century, young Clarice Mariscotti was sent to Viterbo to be educated in the Franciscan convent. She was not remarkable for her piety and probably suffered from having a sister who was a nun in the same convent. Doubtless the sister also suffered, and one can readily imagine that the friction between the reproachful piety of the one and the misdemeanours of the other may have had unfortunate repercussions

on a difficult temperament, giving rise to Clarice's later behaviour.

The incident that set the light to the powder-keg was the betrothal of her youngest sister to a very eligible young nobleman, Clarice being passed over. Her tears and tantrums and bad temper made her so unbearable that when she announced her intention of flouncing off into a convent, her family were only too glad to give the project their blessing and a hearty push to expedite it. She went back to the Franciscans at Viterbo and what induced them to endure her at all, let alone admit her to profession, unless it was pressure from her noble family, is beyond conjecture.

For ten years Sister Hyacinth, as she became, did not enhance the convent with the fragrance of her virtues. Quite brazenly she claimed all the dispensations and privileges she considered were her right by reason of her exalted rank and the wealth of her family. She kept her personal maid to attend her and the desert of her cell blossomed like a hot-house for orchids. The rest of the community were scandalized, but it seems likely that they must have ceased talking about her and betaken themselves to prayer as the only remedy.

A devout Franciscan friar came one day when Sister Hyacinth, suffering from a slight indisposition, had retired to her cell. Not feeling inclined to make the effort to get up to go to confession, the daughter of the Mariscotti summoned the friar to her bedside. This holy man was more shocked at the luxury of her surroundings than he was abashed by the exalted personage who inhabited them. He seems to have given her a rousing hell-fire sermon and Sister Hyacinth was so impressed that she set about reforming herself.

The exaggerated fervour and imprudent zeal she brought to the task defeated their own ends, and she began to slip back into the old ways and the last state was almost worse than the first. There can be no doubt that some of her sisters in religion were holy women who spared no sacrifices, though these may have been hidden, to win her back. Did they see the inherent though latent qualities in her, or did they just persevere in trying to behold 'Jesus only' in this veritable thorn in their flesh? Whatever the answer may be, their patience and forbearance were eventually rewarded.

Sister Hyacinth was stricken with a very severe illness. She rose from it a changed, a revolutionized woman. And this time there

was no going back. The account of her rigours and mortifications is alarming; constant fasts, disciplines to blood, long vigils and hours of prayer. Yet with all her severity she attained to a balance and equilibrium remarkable in one with such a tendency to extremes. Her discretion and sound judgment in spiritual matters were renowned even outside the convent and her advice to all those seeking guidance was highly practical. When her opinion was asked about someone who had a great reputation for union with God, and a notable gift of tears, she said that she would first like to know how far this soul was detached from creatures, humble and free from self-will even in holy things. Then she would be ready to believe that the delight this person experienced was from God.

She was made mistress of novices and the one-time delinquent, the scape-grace school-girl, the lukewarm luxury-loving nun of the past became a skilful teacher of young souls. The flame of her devotion rose phoenix-like from the ashes of her self-love. How well she was qualified to warn her charges of the dangers of tepidity and laziness only she herself could truly know. The woman who had flown to the convent in a fit of jealous pique with no thought of living a true religious life, had been openly disobedient, surrounded herself with creature comforts, escaped every hardship and had no thought for anyone but herself, was now heard to say: 'The sort of people who most appeal to me are those who are despised, who are devoid of self-love and have little sensible consolation. The cross! The cross! To suffer! To suffer and to persevere bravely in spite of the lack of all sweetness and relish in prayer. This is the true sign of the spirit of God.'

The love of her fellow-men kept time with her love of God. In Viterbo two confraternities were established through her influence for the relief of the sick, the aged, the poor, and impoverished gentlefolk. Her community were not enclosed religious and it must have been an incredible sight for Viterbo to see a lady of the noble house of Mariscotti out on assiduous begging tours for the necessary funds.

She died at the age of fifty-five on January 30th, 1640. Beatified by Benedict XIII in 1726, she was canonized in 1807 by Pius VII. The bull of canonization states that 'her mortifications were such that her life was a continued miracle'. While it is not very likely that many of us could aspire to deserve such an encomium in this

century of debilitated physical and nervous constitutions, there is no one who could not aim at this: 'Through her apostolate of charity she won more souls to God than many famous preachers of her time'.



## A SERMON BY SERLO OF SAVIGNY

*preached in chapter to the Monks of Fontenay*

*Translated by JOHN HIGGENS, O.S.B.*

*Serlo was Abbot of Savigny in Normandy from 1139 to 1153 when he retired to Clairvaux; he died in 1158. He was a contemporary and admirer of St Bernard; and it was no doubt largely owing to St Bernard's influence that in 1147 Serlo submitted the whole group of Savigniac houses to the Cistercian Order. Among these were several in England, including Buckfast and Quarr. Serlo had a reputation as a preacher. Of his thirty-four sermons known to survive—not all of them, however, are complete—the greater part were included in the sixth volume of the Bibliotheca patrum Cisterciensium, edited by Tissier in 1664. The rest remain apparently still in manuscript. An exception is that translated here, which was published by Dom Wilmart in the Revue Mabillon, tome XII (1922), pp. 26-38. The following is a rather free rendering of the Latin. A third section on prayer seems to be wanting. Perhaps time ran out and it was never delivered.*

'SERVE ye the Lord with fear, and rejoice unto him with trembling' (Ps. ii, 11).

Good men should be exercised in three ways: in bodily labour; in attentive reading; in devoted prayer. Bodily labour afflicts the flesh; attentive reading instructs the mind; devoted prayer brings one to contemplation.

In bodily labour we suffer tribulation, but are not distressed; we are cast down, but perish not; bearing about in our body the mortification of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our bodies (2 Cor. iv, 8-10). For Christ's sake we endure these things, in labour and painfulness, in many watchings,