VINTAGE **MAUGHAM**

Catalina

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About the Book

Crippled sixteen-year-old Catalina is the one person unable to join in the festivities of the Feast of the Assumption. But then she has a vision of the Virgin, and is miraculously cured. In the dark days of the Spanish Inquisition, such a claim to blessedness has serious consequences, especially when Catalina seems more inclined to obey her heart than the demands of the Church.

The last of Maugham's novels, *Catalina* is a romantic celebration of Spain and a delightfully mischievous satire on absolutism.

About the Author

William Somerset Maugham was born in 1874 and lived in Paris until he was ten. He was educated at King's School, Canterbury, and at Heidelberg University. He spent some time at St. Thomas's Hospital with the idea of practising medicine, but the success of his first novel, *Liza of Lambeth*, published in 1897, won him over to letters. *Of Human Bondage*, the first of his masterpieces, came out in 1915, and with the publication in 1919 of *The Moon and Sixpence* his reputation as a novelist was established. His position as a successful playwright was being consolidated at the same time. His first play, *A Man of Honour*, was followed by a series of successes just before and after World War I, and his career in the theatre did not end until 1933 with *Sheppey*.

His fame as a short story writer began with *The Trembling of a Leaf*, subtitled *Little Stories of the South Sea Islands*, in 1921, after which he published more than ten collections. His other works include travel books such as *On a Chinese Screen* and *Don Fernando*, essays, criticism, and the autobiographical *The Summing Up* and *A Writer's Notebook*.

In 1927 Somerset Maugham settled in the South of France and lived there until his death in 1965.

ALSO BY W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

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W. Somerset Maugham

CATALINA

VINTAGE BOOKS
London

1

It was a great day for the city of Castel Rodriguez. The inhabitants, wearing their best clothes, were up by dawn. On the balconies of the grim old palaces of the nobles rich draperies were spread and their banners flapped lazily against the flagpoles. It was the Feast of the Assumption, August the fifteenth, and the sun beat down from an unclouded sky. There was a feeling of excitement in the air. For on this day two eminent persons, natives of the city, were arriving after an absence of many years, and great doings had been arranged in their honour. One was Friar Blasco de Valero, Bishop of Segovia, and the other his brother Don Manuel, a captain of renown in the King's armies. There was to be a *Te Deum* in the Collegiate Church, a banquet at the Town Hall, a bull-fight and when night fell fireworks. As the morning wore on more and more people made their way to the Plaza Mayor. Here the procession was formed to go out and meet the distinguished visitors at a certain distance from the city. It was headed by the civil authorities, then came the dignitaries of the Church, and finally a string of gentlemen of rank. The throng lined the streets to watch it pass and then composed themselves to wait until the two brothers, followed by these important personages, should enter the city, when the bells of all the churches would ring out their welcome.

In the Lady Chapel of the church attached to the Convent of the Carmelite nuns a crippled girl was praying. She prayed with passionate devotion before the image of the Blessed Virgin. When at last she rose from her knees she fixed her crutch more comfortably under her arm and

hobbled out of the church. It had been cool and dark there, but when she came out into the hot breathless day the sudden glare for a moment blinded her. She stood and looked down at the empty square. The shutters of the houses round it were closed to keep out the heat. It was very silent. Everyone had gone to see the festivities, and there was not even a mongrel dog to bark. You would have thought the city was dead. She glanced at her own home, a small house of two storeys wedged between its neighbours, and sighed despondently. Her mother and her uncle Domingo, who lived with them, had gone with all the rest and would not be back till after the bull-fight. She felt very lonely and very unhappy. She had not the heart to go home, so she sat down at the top of the steps that led from the church door to the plaza and put down her crutch. She began to cry. Then suddenly she was overcome with grief and with an abrupt gesture fell back on the stone platform and burying her face in her arms sobbed as though her heart would break. The movement had given the crutch a push, the steps were narrow and steep, and it clattered down to the bottom of them. That was the last misfortune; now she would have to crawl or slither down to fetch her crutch, for with her right leg paralysed she could not walk without it. She wept disconsolately.

Suddenly she heard a voice.

'Why do you weep, child?'

She looked up, startled, for she had heard no one approach. She saw a woman standing behind her and it looked as though she had just come out of the church, but she had just done that herself and there had been no one there. The woman wore a long blue cloak that came down to her feet, and now she pushed back the hood that had covered her head. It looked as though she had indeed come out of the church, since it was a sin for women to enter the house of God with uncovered heads. She was fairly tall for

a Spanish woman and she was young, for there were no lines under her dark eyes, and her skin was smooth and soft. Her hair was very simply done with a parting in the middle and tied in a loose knot on the nape of her neck. She had small delicate features and a kindly look. The girl could not decide whether she was a peasant, wife perhaps of a farmer in the neighbourhood, or a lady. There was in her air a sort of homeliness and at the same time a dignity that was somehow intimidating. The long cloak concealed the garment underneath, but as she withdrew her hood the girl caught a brief glimpse of white and guessed that that must be the colour of her dress.

'Dry your tears, child, and tell me your name.'

'Catalina.'

'Why do you sit here alone and cry when all the world has gone forth to see the reception of the Bishop and his brother the captain?'

'I am a cripple, I cannot walk far, Señora. And what have I to do with all those people who are well and happy?'

The lady stood behind her and Catalina had to turn round to speak to her. She gave a glance at the church door.

'Where have you come from, Señora? I did not see you in the church.'

The lady smiled, and it was a smile of such sweetness that the bitterness seemed to fade from the girl's heart.

'I saw you, child. You were praying.'

'I was praying as I have prayed night and day since my infirmity fell upon me to the Blessed Virgin to free me of it.'

'And do you think she has the power to do that?'

'If so she wills.'

There was something so benign and so friendly in the lady's manner that Catalina felt impelled to tell her sad

story. It had happened when they were bringing in the young bulls for the bull-fight on Easter Day and everyone in the town had collected to see them being driven in under the safe conduct of the oxen. Ahead of them on their prancing horses rode a group of young nobles. Suddenly one of the bulls escaped and charged down a side street. There was a panic and the crowd scattered to right and left. One man was tossed and the bull rushed on. Catalina running as fast as her legs would carry her slipped and fell just as the beast was reaching her. She screamed and fainted. When she came to they told her that the bull in his mad charge had trampled over her, but had run wildly on. She was bruised, but not wounded; they said that in a little while she would be none the worse, but in a day or two she complained that she could not move her leg. The doctors examined it and found it was paralyzed; they pricked it with needles, but she could feel nothing; they bled her and purged her and gave her draughts of nauseous medicine, but nothing helped. The leg was like a dead thing.

‘But you still have the use of your hands,’ said the lady.

‘Thanks be to God, for otherwise we should starve. You asked me why I cry. I cry because when I lost the use of my leg I lost the love of my lover.’

‘He could not have loved you very much if he abandoned you when you were stricken with an infirmity.’

‘He loved me with all his heart and I love him better than my soul. But we are poor people, Señora. He is Diego Martinez, the son of the tailor, and he follows his father’s trade. We were to be married when he was finished with his apprenticeship, but a poor man cannot afford to marry a wife who cannot struggle with the other women at the market place or run up and down stairs to do all the things that need to be done in a house. And men are but men. A man does not want a wife on crutches, and now Pedro Alvarez has offered him his daughter Francisca. She is as

ugly as sin, but Pedro Alvarez is rich, so how can he refuse?'

Once more Catalina began to cry. The lady looked at her with a compassionate smile. On a sudden in the distance were heard the beating of drums and the blare of trumpets, and then all the bells began to ring.

'They have entered the city, the Bishop and his brother the captain,' said Catalina. 'How is it that you are here when you might be watching them pass, Señora?'

'I did not care to go.'

This seemed so strange to Catalina that she looked at the lady with suspicion.

'You do not live in the city, Señora?'

'No.'

'I thought it strange that I had not seen you before. I thought there was no one here that I did not know at least by sight.'

The lady did not answer. Catalina was puzzled and under her eyelashes looked at her more closely. She could hardly be a Moor, for her complexion was not dark enough, but it was quite possible that she was one of the New Christians, that is to say, one of those Jews who had accepted baptism rather than be expelled from the country, but who, as everyone knew, still in secret practised Jewish rites, washed their hands before and after meals, fasted on Yom Kippur and ate meat on Fridays. The Inquisition was vigilant and, whether they were baptised Moors or New Christians, it was unsafe to have any communications with them; you could never know when they would fall into the hands of the Holy Office and under torture incriminate the innocent. Catalina asked herself anxiously whether she had said anything that could give rise to a charge, for at that time in Spain everyone went in terror of the Inquisition, and a careless word, a pleasantry, might be a sufficient

reason for arrest, and then weeks, months, years even might go by before you could prove your innocence. Catalina thought it better to get away as quickly as possible.

'It is time for me to go home, Señora,' she said, and then, with the politeness that was natural to her, added: 'So if you will excuse me I will leave you.'

She cast a glance at the crutch that was lying at the bottom of the steps and wondered if she dared ask the lady to fetch it for her. But the lady paid no attention to her remark.

'Would you like to recover the use of your legs, child, so that you can walk and run as though you had never had anything the matter with you?'

Catalina went white. That question revealed the truth. She was no New Christian, the lady, she was a Moor, for it was well known that the Moors, Christian only in name, were in league with the devil and by magic arts could do evil things of all kinds. It was not so long ago that a pestilence had ravaged the city, and the Moors, accused of having caused it, confessed on the rack that they had done so. They perished at the stake. For a moment Catalina was too frightened to speak.

'Well, child?'

'I would give all I have in the world, and that is nothing, to be free of my infirmity, but even to regain the love of my Diego I would do nothing to imperil my immortal soul, for that is an offence to our Holy Church.'

Still looking at the lady she crossed herself as she spoke.

'Then I will tell you how you may be cured. The son of Juan Suarez de Valero who has best served God has it in his power to heal you. He will lay his hands upon you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, bid you

throw away your crutch and walk. You will throw down your crutch and you will walk.’

This was not at all what Catalina expected. What the lady said was surprising, but she spoke with such calm assurance that the girl was impressed. At once doubtful and hopeful, she stared at the mysterious stranger. She wanted a moment to collect her wits before she asked the questions that were already forming themselves in her mind. And then Catalina’s eyes nearly started out of her head and her mouth dropped open, for where the lady had been there was nothing. She couldn’t have gone into the church, for Catalina had had her eyes fixed on her, she couldn’t have moved, she had quite simply vanished into thin air. The girl gave a great cry, and more tears, but tears of a different kind, coursed down her cheeks.

‘It was the Blessed Virgin,’ she cried. ‘It was the Queen of Heaven, and I talked with her as I might have with my mother. Maria Santissima, and I took her for a Moor or a New Christian!’

She was so excited that she felt she must tell somebody at once, and without thinking she slithered down the stairs on her backside, helping herself with her hands, till she got her crutch. Then she hobbled back to her home. It was not till she got to the door that she remembered there was nobody there. But she let herself in, and discovering she was hungry, got herself a bit of bread and some olives and drank a glass of wine. It made her drowsy, but she sat up determined to keep awake till her mother and her uncle Domingo came back. She couldn’t think how she could wait to tell them her wonderful story. Her eyelids drooped and in a little while she was fast asleep.

2

Catalina was a very beautiful girl. She was sixteen, tall for her age, with breasts already well developed, very small hands and feet, and before she was crippled walked with a sinuous grace that charmed all beholders. She had eyes that were large and dark, shining with the glow of youth, black hair naturally curling, and so long that she could sit on it, a brown soft skin, cheeks of a warm rose and a red moist mouth; and when she smiled or laughed, which before her accident she did often, she showed very white even small teeth. Her full name was Maria de los Dolores Catalina Orta y Perez. Her father, Pedro Orta, had sailed for the Americas to make his fortune soon after she was born and since then no news had been heard of him. His wife, Maria Perez by birth, did not know if he was dead or alive, but she still hoped that one day he would return with a coffer full of gold and make them all rich. She was a pious woman and every morning at Mass said a prayer for his safety. She grew angry with her brother Domingo when he said that if Pedro was not long since dead he was living with a native woman, or perhaps two or three, and had no intention of leaving the half-caste family he had undoubtedly produced to come back to a wife who had by now lost her youth and beauty.

Uncle Domingo was a sore trial to his virtuous sister, but she loved him, partly because it was her Christian duty, but also because notwithstanding his grave faults he was lovable and she could not help it. She remembered him too in her prayers, and she liked to think that it was due to their efficacy and not only to the fact that he was getting on in years that he had abandoned at least the worst of his

wild ways. Domingo Perez had been destined to the priesthood, and at the seminary of Alcalá de Henares, whither his father sent him, took minor orders and received the tonsure. One of his fellow pupils was Blasco Suarez de Valero, the Bishop of Segovia, whose arrival in the city that day the inhabitants were celebrating. Maria Perez sighed when she thought how different the careers of the two had been. Domingo was a bad boy. He got into trouble at the seminary from the very beginning, for he was headstrong, turbulent and dissipated, and neither admonition, penance nor beating served to tame him. Even then he was fond of the bottle and when he had had too much to drink would sing lewd songs that were an offence to his fellow seminarists and to the masters whose business it was to instill into their young minds decency and decorum. Before he was twenty he had got a Moorish slave with child, and when it appeared that his misbehaviour must be exposed ran away and joined a troupe of strolling players. With them he wandered about the country for two years and then suddenly turned up at his father’s house.

He professed repentance for his sins and promised to amend his ways. He was evidently not meant by Providence to enter the priesthood, and he told his father that if he would give him enough money to keep him from starving he would go to a university and study law. His father was eager to believe that his only son had sown his wild oats, and indeed he had come back mere skin and bone, so it did not look as though the life he had led had been an easy one, and he let himself be persuaded. Domingo went to Salamanca and stayed there for eight years, but he pursued his studies in a very desultory fashion. The pittance he received from his father obliged him to live in a boardinghouse with a group of other students and the food was only just sufficient to keep them from dying of hunger. In after years he used to regale his boon companions at the

taverns he frequented with stories of the horrors of that establishment and of the cunning shifts they were put to to supplement their meagre fare. But poverty did not prevent Domingo from enjoying life. He had a glib tongue and charm of manner, and he could sing a good song, so that he was welcome at any entertainment. It may be that the two years he had spent with the strolling players had not taught him to be a good actor, but they had taught him other things that now came in useful. They had taught him how to win at cards and dice, and when a young man of fortune came up to the University it did not take him long to scrape acquaintance with him. He constituted himself his guide and tutor in the ways of the town, and it was seldom that the newcomer was not a good deal poorer for the experience he acquired. Domingo at that time was a personable fellow and now and then was lucky enough to excite the passions of women addicted to venery. They were not in their first youth, but in comfortable circumstances, and Domingo thought it only just that they should relieve his necessities in return for the service he rendered them.

The period he had spent as a strolling player had inspired him with the desire to write plays, and every hour he could spare from his amusements he devoted to this occupation. He had considerable facility, and besides writing a number of comedies, would often indite a sonnet to the object of his profitable attentions or write a set of verses in honour of a person of note which he would then present in the hope of receiving in return a present in cash. It was this knack he had for stringing rhymes together that finally led to his undoing. The Rector of the University by some ordinance he had passed had aroused the anger of the students, and when a set of indecent and scurrilous verses at his expense was found on a tavern table it was hailed with delight. In a very short time copies were passed from hand to hand. It was bruited abroad that the author

was Domingo Perez, and though he denied it, it was with such complacency that he might just as well have admitted it. Kind friends brought the verses to the attention of the Rector and at the same time told him who had written them. The original copy had disappeared, so that Domingo could not be convicted by his handwriting, but the Rector made discreet inquiries which convinced him that this bad and dissolute student was responsible for the insult. He was too astute to bring a charge that might be hard to prove, but, determined on revenge, took a more subtle course. It was not difficult to discover the scandal Domingo had caused as a seminarist at Alcalá, and the life he had led during the eight years he had spent at the University was notoriously profligate; Domingo was a gambler and it was well known that gambling was a common source of profanity; witnesses came forward who were prepared to swear that they had heard Domingo utter the most horrid blasphemies, and there were two who had heard him say that to believe in the Articles of Faith was first and foremost a matter of good breeding. This in itself was enough to make him a proper subject for inquiry by the Holy Office, and the Rector put the information he had received into the hands of the Inquisitors. The Holy Office never acted in haste. It collected evidence with secrecy and care and until the blow fell the victim seldom knew that he was suspect.

Late one night, when Domingo was in bed and asleep, the alguazil knocked on his door and when he opened it arrested him. He gave him just time to dress and pack his scanty baggage and his bedding roll, and conducted him, not to prison because he was in minor orders and the Inquisition took pains to avoid scandal to the Church, but to a monastery where he was incarcerated in a disciplinary cell. There under lock and key, allowed to see no one, allowed to read nothing, without even a candle to light the

darkness, he remained for some weeks. Then he was brought up for trial before the Tribunal. It would have gone hard with him but for one fortunate circumstance. Not long before, the Rector, a vain and irascible man, had quarrelled violently with the Inquisitors over a question of precedence. They read Domingo's verses and laughed with malicious delight. His misdeeds were evident and could not be passed over, but they perceived that by tempering mercy with justice they could put an affront on the indignant Rector that he would resent but would have to bear. Domingo admitted his guilt and professed repentance; he was then sentenced to hear Mass in the audience chamber and to be exiled from Salamanca and the immediate neighbourhood. He had had a fright. He thought it well to absent himself from Spain for a while, so he went soldiering in Italy and spent some years there gambling, cursing when the dice or the cards played him false, fornicating and drinking. He was forty when he returned to his birthplace, as penniless as when he left, with a scar or two which he had got in drunken brawls, but with many recollections to entertain his idle hours.

His father and mother were dead and his only kin were his sister Maria, abandoned by her husband, and his niece Catalina, then a pretty child of nine. Maria's husband had dissipated the dowry she brought him on marriage and she had nothing but the little house in which she lived. She supported herself and her daughter by doing the difficult and skilful needlework in gold and silver thread which decorated the velvet cloaks of the images, images of Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin and patron saints, that were carried in the processions of Holy Week, and the copes, chasubles and stoles that were used in the ceremonies of the Church. Domingo had reached an age when he was ready to exchange the adventurous life he had led for twenty years for a settled one, and his sister, wanting the

protection of a man in the house, offered him a home. When this story opens he had been living with her for seven years. He was not a financial burden on her since he earned money by writing letters for the illiterate, sermons for priests who were too lazy or too ignorant to write them for themselves, and affidavits for suitors before the law. He was ingenious also at making out the genealogies of persons who wanted declarations of purity of blood, by which was meant that for at least a hundred years their ancestors had not been tainted with Jewish or Moorish blood. The little family would thus have not been so badly off if Domingo had been able to break himself of his bad habits of drinking and gambling. He also spent good money on books, chiefly volumes of verse and plays, for on his return from Italy he had taken once more to writing for the stage, and though he never succeeded in getting anything produced he found adequate satisfaction in reading his compositions to fellow topers in his favourite tavern. Having become respectable he resumed the tonsure, which was a safeguard amid the perils of life in Spain at that time, and dressed in the sober habiliments which became a scholar in minor orders.

He grew very fond of Catalina, so gay, so vivacious and so pretty, and watched her grow into a beautiful girl with a satisfaction in which there was nothing of desire. He took her education upon himself and taught her to read and write. He taught her the Articles of Religion and attended her first communion with all the pride of a father; but for the rest he confined his teaching to reading verse to her, and when she was old enough to appreciate them the plays of the dramatists who were just then getting themselves so much talked about in Spain. Above all he admired Lope de Vega, who he declared was the greatest genius the world had ever seen, and before the accident that crippled her he and Catalina used to play the scenes they most admired.

She had a quick memory and in course of time knew long passages by heart. Domingo had not forgotten that he was once an actor and he taught her how to say her lines, when to be temperate and when to tear a passion to tatters. He was by this time a skinny, loose-limbed man, with grey hair and a lined yellow face, but there was still fire in his eyes and resonance in his voice; and when he and Catalina, with Maria their only audience, acted a striking scene, he was no longer a withered, drunken, elderly ne’er-do-well, but a gallant youth, a prince of the blood, a lover, a hero or what you will. But all this ceased when Catalina was trampled by a bull. The shock kept her in bed for some weeks, during which the surgeons of the town did what their poor science suggested to bring life back to her paralyzed limb. At last they admitted that they could do nothing. It was an act of God. Her lover Diego no longer came to the window at night to make love to her through the iron grille, and it was not long before her mother brought home the rumour that he was going to marry the daughter of Pedro Alvarez. Domingo, to divert her, still read plays to her, but the love scenes made her cry so bitterly that he had to stop.

3

Catalina slept for some hours and was awakened at last by the sound of her mother bustling about in the kitchen. She seized her crutch and hobbled in.

‘Where is Uncle Domingo?’ she asked, for she wanted him to listen to what she so urgently wanted to say.

‘Where do you suppose? At the tavern. But if I know him he’ll be back for supper.’

As a rule, like everyone else, they had their only hot meal of the day at noon, but they had eaten nothing since morning except a hunk of bread spread with garlic that Maria had taken with her, and she knew Domingo would be hungry; so she lit the fire and set about making the soup. Catalina could not wait a minute longer.

‘Mother, the Blessed Virgin has appeared to me.’

‘Yes, dear?’ Maria answered. ‘Clean the carrots for me, will you, and cut them up.’

‘But, mother, listen. The Blessed Virgin appeared to me. She spoke to me.’

‘Don’t be silly, child. I saw you were asleep when I came in and I thought I’d let you sleep on. If you had a nice dream all the better. But now you’re awake you can help me to get the supper ready.’

‘But I wasn’t dreaming. It was before I went to sleep.’

Then she related the extraordinary thing that had happened to her.

Maria Perez had been good-looking in her youth, but now in middle age she had grown stout as do many Spanish women with advancing years. She had known a lot of

trouble, two children she had had before Catalina had died, but she had accepted this, as well as her husband's desertion, as a mortification sent to try her, for she was extremely pious; and being a practical woman, not accustomed to cry over spilt milk, had found solace in hard work, the offices of the church, and the care of her daughter and of her wilful brother Domingo. She listened to Catalina's story with dismay. It was so circumstantial, with such precise detail, that she would not have been unwilling to credit it if only it hadn't been incredible. The only possible explanation was that the poor girl's illness and the loss of her lover had turned her brain. She had been praying in the church and then had sat in the hot sun; it was only too probable that something had gone awry in her head and she had imagined the whole thing with such force that she was convinced of its reality.

'The son of Don Juan de Valero who has served God best is the Bishop,' said Catalina when she finished.

'That is certain,' said her mother. 'He is a saint.'

'Uncle Domingo knew him well when they were both young. He can take me to him.'

'Be quiet, child, and let me think.'

The Church did not look with favour on persons who claimed to have had communication with Jesus Christ or His Mother, and discouraged these pretensions with all its authority. Some years before a Franciscan friar had caused a great to-do by healing the sick by supernatural means, and so many people had resorted to him that the Holy Office had been obliged to intervene. He was arrested and never heard of again. And through the gossip of the Carmelite Convent for which she did work now and again Maria Perez knew of a nun who asserted that Elias, the founder of the order, appeared to her in her cell and conferred singular favours upon her. The Lady Prioress had

forthwith had her whipped until she confessed that she had invented the story to make herself important. If then friars and nuns suffered for making such claims it was only too likely that the Church would take a serious view of Catalina's story. Maria was frightened.

'Say nothing to anybody,' she told Catalina, 'not even to Uncle Domingo. I will talk to him after supper and he will decide what had better be done. Now in heaven's name clean the carrots or we shall have no soup to eat.'

Catalina was not satisfied with this, but her mother bade her be quiet and do as she was told.

Presently Domingo came in. He was not drunk, but neither was he sober, and he was in high spirits. He was a man who liked to hear himself talk and, while they had supper, for Catalina's benefit he held forth loquaciously on the events of the day. This affords a suitable opportunity to tell the reader how it came about that the city was in a turmoil of excitement.

4

Don Juan Suarez de Valero was an Old Christian, and unlike many of the most noble families in Spain whose sons, before Ferdinand and Isabella united the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon, had married daughters of rich and powerful Jews, he could trace an ancestry unspotted by misalliance. But his ancestry was his only wealth. He owned a few poor acres a mile from the city near a hamlet called Valero, and it was to distinguish themselves from other persons called Suarez rather than to give themselves importance that he and his immediate forebears used the hamlet's name as part of their own. He was very poor, and his marriage with the daughter of a gentleman of Castel Rodriguez brought him little to enlarge his circumstances. Doña Violante bore her lord a child every year for ten years, but of these only three, all sons, survived to adolescence. They were named respectively Blasco, Manuel and Martin.

Blasco, the eldest, from his infancy showed signs of unusual intelligence and fortunately of piety as well, and so was destined to the priesthood. He was sent at a suitable age to the seminary of Alcalá de Henares and in due course attended the University. He took his degrees of Master of Arts and Doctor of Theology at so early an age that it was evident he could look forward to high distinction in the secular clergy. Promise of high preferment was made him. But on a sudden, saying that he wished to live out of the world so that he might devote himself entirely to study, prayer and meditation, he announced his intention of entering the monastic order of the Dominicans. His friends sought to dissuade him, since the rule was austere, with a

midnight office, perpetual abstinence from meat, frequent disciplines, prolonged fasting and silence; but nothing served and Blasco de Valero became a friar. His gifts were too great to be ignored by his superiors, and when it was discovered that besides a fine presence and great learning he had a voice both powerful and melodious, and a fiery eloquence, he was sent here and there to preach; for St. Dominic had been ordered by Pope Innocent III to preach to the heretics and ever since the Dominicans had been noted as missionaries and preachers. On one occasion he was sent to his old University of Alcalá de Henares. He had by then a considerable reputation and the whole city flocked to hear him. His sermon was sensational. He put forth all his resources to convince the vast congregation of the importance of preserving the faith in its purity and of utterly exterminating the heretics. In tones of thunder he commanded the laity, as they valued their souls and dreaded the rigour of the Holy Office, to report whatever came to their notice that might savour of the sin and crime of heresy, and he impressed upon them in menacing words that it was the religious duty of each one of them to inform against his neighbour, the son against his father, the wife against her husband, for no ties of natural affection could absolve a son of the Church from conniving at an evil which was a danger to the State and an offence to God. The result of the sermon was satisfactory. There were numerous delations and in the end three New Christians, convicted of having cut the fat off their meat and changing their linen on the Sabbath, were burnt; a goodly number were sentenced to perpetual imprisonment, with confiscation of their possessions, and many more were scourged or subjected to penalties pecuniary or otherwise.

The friar’s forcible eloquence had made so deep an impression on the authorities of the University that he was shortly afterwards appointed Professor of Theology. He

protested his unworthiness and wished to be excused from accepting this responsible position, but his superiors in the order commanded him to undertake it and he was obliged to obey. He acquitted himself of his duties with credit, and his lectures were so popular that though he lectured in the largest hall at the disposal of the University, there was not enough room for all who wanted to listen to him. His reputation grew to great heights and after some years, being then seven and thirty years of age, he was made Inquisitor of the Holy Office in Valencia.

Though still sincerely conscious of his unworthiness he accepted the post without demur. Valencia was a seaport where foreign ships, English, Dutch and French, often put in. Their crews were not seldom Protestants and so were proper objects for the Inquisition to deal with. Moreover they frequently attempted to smuggle in prohibited books, such as translations into Spanish of the Bible and the heretical works of Erasmus. Blasco de Valero saw that he could do much useful work there. But besides this, there were great numbers of Moriscos at Valencia and in the surrounding country; they had been forcibly converted to Christianity, but it was common knowledge that with the great majority their conversion was but skin deep, and they adhered to many of their Moorish customs. They would not eat pork, they wore in their homes clothes which they were forbidden to wear, and they refused to eat animals that had died a natural death. The Inquisition, supported by royal authority, had succeeded in stamping out Judaism, and though the New Christians might still be regarded with suspicion it was becoming more and more rare for the Holy Office to find occasion to prosecute them. But the Moriscos were a different matter. They were industrious, and not only was the agriculture of the country in their hands, but all the trading; for the Spaniards were too idle, too proud and too dissipated to engage in menial pursuits. The