Chapter VI

HER DISCIPLES INCREASE

CATHERINE'S arrival in Florence passed unobserved. Some of her biographers have indulged their imagination, describing her as immersed in sad thoughts on the journey from Siena to Florence; others say she was pursued and besieged by the faithful and the curious. It has even been suggested that the Florentine countryside and the flowery fields of May through which she passed induced a more serene sense of communion with God—as if she had never had occasion to rejoice in Siena beneath enchanting skies and amid fields in flower. These are but flights of fancy, for we have not a single word from Catherine or her friends and contemporaries to tell us of her thoughts on this journey. Judging from what we know of her, we presume that on this occasion too she showed confidence and serenity. Her chief desire was probably to reach Florence as soon as possible, so as to open her heart to the Dominican Fathers—among whom she had friends—and with the help of Christ who dwelt within her, to show them the sincerity of her faith and works. Had she not always spoken, written and acted under the direction and with the approval of Dominican theologians? She had nothing to fear, and welcomed the investigation and trial.

We know very little about this trial, which attracted very little notice. About five hundred Religious had arrived in Florence from all the Dominican Provinces, to attend the General Chapter of the Order, which opened on the day of Pentecost, May 21st, and was presided over by Elia Raimondo of Toulouse, who had been General of the Preaching Friars since 1367 and who 'enjoyed in the Order and in the Church a high reputation as a scholar and wise administrator'. The Chapter was held in the Priory of Santa Maria Novella, in the Guidalotti Chapel, now the Spanish Chapel.

It is uncertain whether Catherine was examined by the whole General Chapter, or by a special section. Fawtier rightly points out that her case was not of general interest, so it may well be that Elia of Toulouse entrusted the examination and conduct of the trial to those members who best knew Catherine, and so were most fitted to judge her. According to Borghigiani, grave accusations had been levelled against her: 'there were not lacking at that time evil livers who did their best to discredit St Catherine of Siena's holiness with malicious inventions, inspired by the envy and hatred they bore to all God's works; therefore this Saint was called to the present Chapter to give an account of herself and of her progress in the ways of God'. This is all very general, and reads like an eighteenth-century echo of some pages of the 'Leggenda Maggiore', neither more informative nor more exact than this.

Borghigiani prepared his 'Cronica Annalistica del venerabile Convento di Santa Maria Novella di Firenze' during the second half of the eighteenth century, and made great use of Biliotti's account, and of several other MSS and printed works—and for all that concerns Catherine he must have set great store by the 'Leggenda' of Raimondo da Capua, although he 'had not been able to see the original parchment sources'. His 'Cronica' is therefore useful and important, but neither complete nor precise. He himself tells us that it was composed 'in odd scraps of time left over from the various occupations of a Religious', and 'written with difficulty and with ageing sight'. This admission is no doubt partly due to a sentiment of humility proper to a Religious, and we believe him when he says that he 'spared no diligence, even at the cost of great labour, to establish as far as possible the correct and true series of chronological events, and the legitimate succession of Priors. . .'. Nevertheless, the 'Cronica' is neither exhaustive nor very exact, and concerning Catherine's trial in 1374 reveals nothing to satisfy our curiosity. Perhaps Fra Domenico Sandrini, who in 1731 wrote the 'Vite dei Frati di Santa Maria Novella, celebri in santità', is telling the simple truth when he says that 'Catherine was called to Florence to give an account of herself'—a phrase that Borghigiani repeats in his 'Cronica'—'as the Order wished to be well informed and certain about her spiritual life, because of the many stories of miracles

performed by her'. We may also believe Fra Sandrini when in his 'Breve Notizia di quindici sante e buone donne dell' abito della Penitenza di San Domenico', written in 1720, he asserts that Catherine's case was subjected to a very long examination. No one tells us what interrogations Catherine had to undergo, or how she replied, or defended herself; we do know, however, that one of the most important personages present at her trial was favourable to her. This was the Dominican Angelo degli Adimari, whom we have already noticed in Siena in 1352.

Adimari was a learned scholar of exemplary life, much esteemed in the Order. Inclined towards mysticism himself, his soul 'had much affinity with the Saint's'. During the years he spent in Siena 'he had been a witness of all that had happened to the Saint before she entered the Third Order', and in that time, as also later on when he was in other friaries, he reflected much on her experiences, and from what he had himself observed, and from what other Dominicans reported to him, he had formed a favourable conception of the spiritual life of the Saint now under examination.

It is more than probable that he sought her out as soon as she came to Florence—spoke to her, and questioned her, and in this way, investigating her intentions and ideas informally, made up his mind about her. She certainly spoke to him with her usual characteristic frankness and ingenuousness, holding nothing back. Thus Adimari may have been able to observe her spiritual growth, her undoubted fidelity to the Church, and her self-dedication in Christ's cause. He may have himself experienced the burning heat of her charity, and the charm of that enchanting smile that never left her, even amidst atrocious moral and physical suffering. He must certainly have felt an increased admiration for his penitent of former years; and when he enquired into her life and thought he could find nothing there that was dangerous to the Order or to the Faith, nothing but the strictest orthodoxy and true holiness. The answers he received to his questions may have echoed explanations he himself had given her, or had repeated in his own sermons in Siena. There was no doubt that, spiritually, she was a creature of the Dominicans, and must therefore be defended at all costs. No one in the Chapter knew her better than he did, or could better judge her. Therefore he was the first to

give the necessary information, and was at once believed, for 'there was no one else who could give so clear and impartial an account'.

The Order seems to have been satisfied with Adimari's defence of Catherine. After all, it was only necessary to know what sort of spirit animated her, and when it was ascertained that she was strictly orthodox, faithful to the Church and full of love for God and His creatures, what else could be desired? In the world her actions might still be criticised, and she herself slandered, but what did that matter once a philosopher and theologian of the Order, such as Adimari, denied the accusations and reassured the Order about her holiness and orthodoxy? If her enemies still wished to discredit her they were free to do so—but the Dominicans would now take up the defence of their Tertiary.

Fawtier's supposition that Catherine's innocence was not completely recognised by the Chapter seems absurd; if such had been the case the Dominicans would have ordered her to desist from all activity, and to remain in seclusion at home, meddling no longer in Church affairs; and if even the slightest suspicion had still remained, they would have asked her to withdraw for a time into a spiritual retreat. Generally speaking, the decisions of religious Orders are prompted by great, or even exaggerated, prudence, and the Dominicans, given their pre-eminent position in the Church, could not afford to take risks. The result of the trial suggests that Catherine's gifts were clearly set in evidence, and that her judges realised the importance, present and future, of her apostolic ardour, and of her eloquence in speech and writing. Realising also how useful her work would be to the Dominican Order and to the whole Church, they gave her as a spiritual director a friar who enjoyed great esteem in the Order and who, besides being deeply versed in mysticism, was cultured, sympathetic, and also a man of political acumen: Raimondo da Capua. Fawtier rightly points out that 'the appearance of Raimondo da Capua as her spiritual director marks a change in St Catherine's life', and that her activity, under his direction, became more important, because she began to take part in the political events of the age. All this came about because the Dominican Chapter of Florence had understood her genius, her eloquence, humility and spirit of self-sacrifice, and admired her wise judgments on men

and events, and the enthusiasm which inspired her to preach a reign of peace and love on earth.

Catherine stayed on in Florence for some weeks after the end of the Chapter, while her fame, increased by its decisions, spread abroad through the city, and everyone wanted to see her, speak to her, invite her home, beg for her prayers, her help, her advice, and find out how she lived, taking the measure, with due reverence, of her spiritual power. 'Hearing of her fame I desired to know her and have her friendship. Several times she came to my home, and when I understood about her life I wanted to know all about her', says the anonymous author of the 'Miracoli', who tells us that she had dear friends with whom she stayed in Florence. If we think of her immersed as always in her apostolic work we can hardly believe that she also 'wanted to know what was happening at the Palazzo Vecchio, who were the men most prominent in political life, what was planned and plotted in those secret haunts, and the why and wherefore of the widespread discontent manifest to all'. To believe this is to distort the figure of the Saint, and make of her a sort of political agitator running here and there to find out about the aims and plans of the Florentine Government, about secret plots, quarrels among the rulers, and the hatching of revolts. She is described as setting herself at the head of a group of Florentines, who were pursuing political aims under the guise of religious activity. 'In a month Catherine found herself the leader of a numerous and distinguished spiritual family—not only of noble ladies, but of men also—many of whom were in the government, or were leaders of the Guelph party, such as Soderini, Canigiani, Bonaccorso di Lapo, Giannozzo Sacchetti' and others. This picture of her, drawn by Padre Taurisano, seems very fanciful. It is quite possible that Catherine met Soderini and other political figures at this time, as she met the Bishop of Florence, Angelo Ricasoli, but if she did she probably spoke to them of the salvation of their souls, and of their need to bathe in the Blood of Christ—not of political matters. She may have heard talk of the most urgent problems that faced the Republic—but in the course of conversations not deliberately sought for that purpose. She was a mystic, not a woman with a bent for politics, and she busied herself with the kingdom of Christ and no other; the only cause in this world

that had power to move her was that of the Crusades—certainly not that of the internal affairs of Florence.

However, Padre Taurisano, in his generous zeal, would like to endow Catherine with all possible gifts, including political ability; and so he presents us with a Catherine who, in May and June of 1374, in Florence, reveals most powerful political talents and a great curiosity about the internal and foreign policy of the Republic. According to him she was a genius, and therefore possessed prophetic foresight; and, knowing that two years later she would return to Florence charged with a political mission, she wanted to make a thorough preliminary study of the administrative, political and diplomatic machinery of the Florentine Republic to avail herself of this knowledge later on.

All this is purely imaginary, and has the opposite effect of what Taurisano intended, diminishing her figure rather than adding to its glory. Her life was bound up with Christ, and Florence, like everywhere else, was for her but a spiritual training ground, her one aim, here as elsewhere, being to persuade men to care about their own salvation. The only Government that interested her was the Papal government, and that only because the Pope represented Christ on earth. When her religious and apostolic mission was concluded, 'St Catherine left Florence on St Peter's day of the year 1374, and went back to Siena, where there was a great mortality because of the plague'.

Between May and October 1374 the pestilence raged in Siena, not so destructive as in 1348, but still full of terrors; everywhere were signs of desolation and death. As soon as she got back to her city Catherine set about visiting, tending and comforting the stricken, and, when necessary, composing the bodies of the dead and burying them. In the city where she was known as a miracle-worker it is easy to imagine how much she was in demand to help the sick, especially the poorest of these, neglected by the doctors and by the more timorous of the clergy. Catherine went ceaselessly from house to house, from one hospital to another, bearing comfort and faith to all, and to some healing and life. She was always serene: 'I often saw the virgin visiting the plague-stricken, cheerful as ever', says Tommaso da Siena, and this serenity must have been a great consolation to the sick, who were very often forsaken even by their nearest kin. Catherine, nurse and

priestess, was hailed with blessings wherever she went, and invoked as Saints are invoked. At her coming the eyes of the wretched sufferers filled with hope. She did not spare herself in her labours for the physical and spiritual health of those poor folk. When, the body being past saving, she succeeded in saving the soul, she rejoiced at having saved the immortal part. No one knows how many cures she worked; we hear she saved the Rector of the Hospital of Mercy, Messer Matteo Cenni, one of her admirers, and the hermit Fra Santi da Teramo, a friend of Petroni and Colombini and later on her own disciple, and Fra Raimondo da Capua and Fra Bartolomeo Dominici. A careful analysis of the witnesses of all her cures might induce some doubt as to the gravity of the disease from which some of them suffered; but that does not lessen the value of Catherine's apostolic work; we know that she placed her hands on the head or brow of the sufferer and besought the help of God; whether it was her own faith, or the faith the sick had in her, or some powerful influence that she imparted, or the direct action of God—who can can tell? In any case, the cures were real.

The plague proved especially fatal to little children, among them some of Catherine's own family, six children of her brother Bartolomeo and one daughter of her brother Benincasa. Catherine was not perturbed about these innocents: their little souls would take wings and fly to God. Rejoicing over her children that had died, she composed their lifeless limbs and buried them with her own hands, repeating over each one: 'This little one I shall never lose'.

During these months of plague Catherine gave herself no rest and lived only to bring spiritual and material aid to those infected with the dread disease. She ceaselessly exhorted her fellow Tertiaries, disciples and friends to do likewise. Few, at least among the Dominicans, followed her: only Fra Tommaso della Fonte, Fra Bartolomeo Dominici, Fra Raimondo da Capua, and Fra Simone da Cortona. Fra Simone tells us that 'the younger friars refused to accompany the priests who were visiting the sick, because of the fear of infection; but I went willingly, led by my affection for my beloved Mother, for they took me to her after I had visited the sick, as if to reward me for my labour; a reward that, because of my love for her, seemed to me magnificent'. This confession

shows the attraction that Catherine wielded over some souls, but makes it clear that the younger friars were far from understanding their duty as Christians, and corroborates what we read in the 'Leggenda Minore', that 'many of the Religious had left the city for fear of mortality'. Even Fra Raimondo da Capua himself might not have braved the danger of death for love of his fellows if Catherine had not been there to spur him on. It was 'through her exhortations' that he became 'very anxious and busy about the spiritual health of those who fell ill and died so quickly', says Tommaso da Siena in the 'Leggenda Minore'; but we can see in the very remarks that Raimondo himself makes in the 'Leggenda Maggiore', about the plague and his own duty as a priest, that the maiden's words and actions influenced him deeply. 'I reflected that Christ can do much more than Galen, and grace more than nature; seeing, moreover, that many fled, and that the souls of the dying were therefore bereft of counsel and help, through that charity which teaches me to love the souls of my fellows more than my own body, and also because the maiden persuaded me to do so, I firmly resolved to visit, console, and instruct as many as I could.' As Catherine's exhortations were the mainspring of his activity, and of that of his brethren, during the plague, he might with more frankness have attributed the chief responsibility to her —but self-love has a way of re-appearing even when we think we have plucked it out.

Raimondo da Capua was, from 1374 onwards, the most important figure in Catherine's 'Family'. He co-operated faithfully with her for several years, as her friend encouraging her to enter a wider sphere of political activity, and as her disciple receiving from her precious instructions for his spiritual progress. He acquired a profound knowledge of her, for she revealed her whole soul to him, and later on he was to write her 'official' life, from which all other biographers, even those who affect to despise his sincerity, have drawn their material. Descending from the great family delle Vigne, famous for its lawyers, and especially for Pier delle Vigne, who had held

'. . . Ambo le chiavi
Del cor di Federico',†
(Both the keys of Frederick's heart)

† Pier delle Vigne, of Capua, was Chancellor to the Emperor Frederick II.

he was born at Capua, we believe about 1330. He studied Canon Law at Bologna, where in the first half of the fourteenth century, there were learned Canonists such as Giovanni di Andrea, the friend of Petrarch and of Gino da Pistoia, and Giovanni, the son of Rolandino dei Calderini. It was in Bologna that he joined the Dominican Order, and he stayed there for several years to complete his theological studies. In 1363 we find him the confessor and spiritual director of the Dominican Nuns of Montepulciano, and here he began to write the Legend of St Agnes de' Segni, showing his own leaning towards hagiography, and a clear understanding of mysticism and sanctity, even if it was not based on first-hand knowledge. By April 20th, 1366, the Legend was finished. The next year he was nominated Prior of Santa Maria sopra Minerva in Rome, and when Urban V arrived in the Holy City he went to pay homage to him—at least so Cormier, though without documentary proof, informs us. A few months later he gave up his position as Prior, preferring to dedicate himself to teaching and preaching. On August 30th, 1373, he was in Florence, and may have been there during the General Chapter held in May 1374. He had certainly heard of Catherine, and had probably met her. He may have heard of her while he was at Montepulciano, for he writes: 'While I was there (at Montepulciano) . . . I was always glad to welcome the friars who came to see me from neighbouring Priories, and especially those already known to me. One day there came to see me, from Siena, Fra Tommaso, the virgin's confessor, and Fra Giorgio Naddi, now a teacher of theology, for mutual solace in spiritual conversation.'

It is not necessary to continue with his account of the miracle that befell the two friars on their way back to Siena, when they were seized by brigands and threatened with death, which they escaped only by Fra Tommaso invoking Catherine's help. What matters more is his report that the three friars were talking about spiritual matters which gave them such consolation. We are naturally led to suppose that Tommaso della Fonte, a man of no great learning or spiritual depth, and certainly with no mystical experiences of his own to relate, may have been talking about the extraordinary things that were happening to Catherine, which he learnt about from day to day, and which filled him with wonder and sometimes with disquiet. There was no one better fitted than

Fra Raimondo to advise him in his spiritual direction of this holy woman, for he had made a special study of the life of the popular Saint of Montepulciano, and had had great experience as a spiritual director of nuns. He was the right person to give an opinion on Catherine's visions, her second sight, her extraordinary fastings, and her union with God. One may presume, therefore, that Catherine was the subject of their talks, and that in this way Fra Raimondo heard about her mystical experiences. And Catherine had certainly heard of Raimondo da Capua even if she did not know him personally—as we see from the letter, already quoted, that she wrote during Lent of 1372 or 1373 to Fra Bartolomeo Dominici, while he was preaching in Asciano, in which, speaking of the 'holy expedition overseas', she wrote: 'and of the good news that Fra Raimondo sent me'. The text here is obscure. It may be 'sent me' or 'sent you', but in either case proves that Fra Raimondo was known to her, directly or indirectly.

In 1374 the General of the Preaching Friars nominated Fra Raimondo as Reader of Sacred Scripture at Siena, and Director of Dominican Studies, with the special charge of supervising Catherine and her fellow Tertiaries, and directing their activity for the greater glory of the Order and Christendom. We have no document to tell us of the first meeting between Catherine and Fra Raimondo, but we know, thanks to Padre Taurisano's researches, that the new Dominican Reader was in Siena on August 1st, 1374, that is, during the worst of the plague and famine, when Catherine was sparing no effort to aid the sick and suffering. On his arrival he must have found her absorbed in her care for others. His description of this epidemic in Siena shows signs of his own uncertainty, hesitation and fear. He had never before come into direct contact with so virulent a plague; his life until then, as a teacher and preacher, had been tranquil, and under his own control. Now all at once, he found himself surrounded by pain, despair and death, and naturally it was not easy for him to take a decisive step. Every day he saw this young woman, whom it was his duty to supervise and direct, careless of her own danger, living in the midst of the stricken multitude, entirely dedicated to her self-imposed task of healing their bodies, when possible, and zealously saving their souls; moreover, those of his own fellow friars who were most faithful to Catherine, Fra Tommaso della

Fonte and Fra Bartolomeo Dominici, were accompanying and helping her. What could he do? What ought he to do? Although but lately arrived in the city, his own mission was delicate and of great importance; could he stay apart in a friary, like other Dominicans? Would it be right to put himself and his own safety first? Catherine's example and words exhorted him to busy himself in the service of others. She was wont to say that he who had Christian charity—and she wrote this the following year to Fra Bartolomeo Dominici—lacked for nothing because he had 'a fiery robe to protect him from the cold, food lest he perish of hunger, and a bed for his fatigue'. Moreover, Fra Raimondo belonged to an active Order, and his inertia at such a moment might bring shame upon it. But to visit the sick meant he might die at any moment, and this threat, which he had never had to think about before and now overhung him at every turn, left him by no means indifferent. Finally, his sense of duty and, above all, Catherine's own example, roused him and decided him to visit the sick wherever and however they were. 'I was obliged to risk my life to minister to the souls of my fellows', he tells us, and this 'obliged' is very revealing. When he wrote this he was an old man, but as he recalls this chapter of his life, he seems to have before his mind those hours of fear that he had had to live through, and to feel again, very vividly, the effort he had made to conquer his own timid and hesitating nature. Once resolved, he went about day and night seeking out and comforting the sick, as was his duty, but since he possessed neither Catherine's energy nor her enthusiasm (he was physically also somewhat delicate) he often went in search of rest and calm to the hospital of Santa Maria della Misericordia. In any case, this apostolate shared with Catherine increased his admiration for her, and he became her devoted disciple when he saw her, in the name of God, heal some of his own friends. He himself, feeling one night the symptoms of the plague in his own body, ran at once to Catherine, to ask her to heal him, which she did at once.

When he first came to Siena he had felt a slight scepticism with regard to her. 'I want you to know, beloved reader, that at the beginning, when I heard her praised and had begun to know her, I was rather incredulous. . . . I tried in every way and by every means to find out whether her actions were inspired by God,

whether they were true or feigned, because I reflected that we were in the era of the third beast clothed with the leopard skin, by which is meant hypocrisy, and that in my time I had found some of these beasts, especially among women, who are so cunning, and are more easily seduced by the fiend, as happened to our first mother.' This scepticism was natural, but cannot have lasted long. Cormier tells us that as soon as Fra Raimondo undertook the spiritual direction of Catherine he 'exercised a constant watchfulness over her whole life'—which was only right—but also, 'a strict censorship of her slightest imperfections, a habitual and deliberate scorn of her visions and revelations, while taking continual pains to mortify and humiliate her'—this was for a long time the policy of this enlightened and prudent director. If this is so, and we may infer it from the assertions of Fra Raimondo himself, it is difficult to see how he found the time to do all this—or do anything more than watch her carefully, conscientiously and assiduously. Catherine left Florence on June 29th, 1374, and arrived in Siena at the beginning of July, at the height of the plague; she must have begun at once her day-and-night care of the sick. We have documentary evidence that Fra Raimondo was in Siena on August 1st, so he may have arrived in July and had some conversations with Catherine immediately, but short ones, so as not to hinder her apostolate, so much needed in those days. He may have been a little uncertain about her in those first days, and sceptical about her supernatural life, and he may even have considered her care of the sick as a routine work of mercy, such as every Tertiary of the Dominican Order was bound to undertake. But this state of mind cannot have lasted long, because the words he used when asking her to cure Matteo Cenni of the plague were full of admiration and trust: 'Mother, will you allow this man, who is so dear and precious to us, to die now?' And when Catherine replied: 'Am I God, to save mortals from death?', Fra Raimondo retorted: 'You may say that sort of thing to others, but not to me, for I know your secrets, and I know that God grants you all you ask of Him'. There is no diffidence or scepticism here, nor was there when, shortly afterwards, as has already been mentioned, finding himself infected with the plague, he showed complete confidence in the Saint's miraculous healing power. These two cures may be ascribed to August and September,

since in October the plague had almost died out in Siena; so it is difficult to see when Fra Raimondo can have had the opportunity to show 'for a long time' the disapproval, scorn and scepticism of which Père Cormier speaks. Moreover, Fra Raimondo boasts of having understood Catherine at once, unlike her other directors, and therefore had sanctioned her long fastings and frequent Communions, and had not questioned her visions and ecstasies.

It is wisest to conclude that the first conversations between the two were probably marked by a certain coldness and curiosity on his part, and perhaps by some incredulity, until he had had occasion to know the extent of her good works (and he must have seen this during the plague) and her absolute faith; this period may have coincided with his own uncertainty as to whether or not he should dedicate himself to the care of the sick; but very soon he was won over by the spiritual strength that emanated from her, and from then on, observing her at work, became her ever more devoted disciple. However carefully he watched over her he could discover nothing heterodox, and had to admit that she was possessed by a superior strength which came from God.

This interpretation is in harmony with the spirit of the 'Leggenda Maggiore', which is one long confession of faith in Catherine. It was perhaps Fra Raimondo's rapid and intelligent understanding of Catherine's spirituality that led to their firm and profound friendship, strengthened by constant mutual admiration. Fra Raimondo instinctively recognised in Catherine the woman of lofty intellect, the great saint and tireless apostle; Catherine admired his intelligence, tact, breadth of understanding, and straining after perfection. She knew he was rather timid and hesitant, and fond of a quiet life, and she was always mindful of him in her prayers, never failing, when need arose, to exhort him to act bravely and with courage. He had clear and decided views about the Crusades and about Papal politics, and although his political gifts were not brilliant, he had a sure political instinct about all that concerned the Order and the Church. Urban VI, on becoming Pope, called him his own 'head, eyes, mouth, tongue, hands and feet', which shows that his activity within the Church was considerable. Moreover, the intimacy he enjoyed with several personages of the Court at Avignon is a sign of the

esteem in which he was held in Papal circles, and of the weight attached to his words.

Without doubt Catherine admired his political wisdom, and it is logical to conclude that in this field she followed the instruction and advice he gave her. In fact, he opened out to her new horizons and new possibilities of action, for her intelligence was always ready to seize upon vast plans to promote the triumph of Christianity. He supported the Crusades, shared the wish of the Curia that the Captains of the Mercenary Companies should leave Europe in peace and go and fight for Christ against the Mussulmans, prayed for the reform of the Church, and maintained that the true seat of the Papacy was Rome and not Avignon. These were all conceptions and needs that she herself had seen, howbeit more dimly, and that conversation with her spiritual director, who was also her friend and disciple, served to clarify and strengthen. Thus Catherine and Fra Raimondo were both working for the same ends, and aided each other with a mutual exchange of ideas, energies and counsels. Fra Raimondo's ideas, passing through Catherine's mind, acquired strength and inspired her to action on a great scale.

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Neri di Landoccio de' Pagliaresi, whose life the Saint transformed, was a devoted disciple and did much to spread her fame. He used to insist upon his friends visiting her, so sure was he that, when they heard her moving words and felt the power of her spirit, they would become ardent Christians. His heart was very sensitive, and he suffered from the separation his conversion had caused between himself and his friends. He was anxious to re-establish his former intimacy with them, provided this could be done through all sharing in that love of Christ that his 'little Mother' aroused in all hearts. After much insistence he succeeded in leading to Catherine's cell his friend Francesco Malavolti, a rich young Sienese, proud, capricious and sensual, who loved gay society and, still more, women, dancing and gambling. This elegant and carefree provincial noble went from one amusement to another, as did many young men of the 'spendthrift brigade' of that day, luxurious, refined and pleasure-loving. He was fond

of Neri, and admired his delicacy of feeling and his straightforward character, but was rather irritated by his friend's repeated invitations to go and visit Catherine. Why should he go to see her? He was quite content with his Siena,

'Di leggiadria, di bei costumi piena,
Di vaghe donne, d'uomini cortesi',

(Full of graciousness and beautiful manners, of beautiful women and courtly men)

and did not want to be the object of gloomy preaching, or be shown his sins and the necessity of conversion.

It was well known that the Dominican Tertiary talked in this way to her visitors, and he had no mind to listen to it. But Neri di Landoccio had no intention of letting him go, and gave him no peace. At long last Francesco Malavolti consented to visit the Mantellata, he says, out of courtesy to his friend, but probably with a certain curiosity also to see close at hand this woman who was so much extolled, and whom he would willingly have deceived. He went resolved to ward off any rebuke Catherine might utter on account of his dissolute life, and was determined to give her a sharp reply if she asked him to go to confession. It happened, however, that as soon as he entered her cell and saw her face he felt a strange sensation; he himself tells us, 'such terrible awe took hold of me, and such violent trembling that I nearly fainted. God changed my heart in such a wonderful way that, resolved as I had been never to confess my sins, after her first words I went at once to a confessor, and from that day forth something new came to pass in me, so that I was no longer my former self.' This is an avowal that proves how great was Catherine's power over souls, and how well she knew how to bind people to her. Francesco often went back to see her, and she, lovingly and delicately, was able to touch the secret chords of his nature, and to hold him bound with silken threads. He was good-natured and generous, ready to make heroic resolves, which he found difficult to carry out, because the habitual indulgence of his senses drew him back again and again to his love-making and gambling. But women, amusements, and gambling no longer satisfied him as before, and pleasure had always some taste of bitterness and pain, and so, as soon as disillusionment cast a gloom over him, Francesco would return to Catherine who, always full

of understanding for human weakness, welcomed him, advised and encouraged him and gave him her prayers. She well knew his fickleness of heart and grieved over it; one day, in fact—some years after he had first begun to follow her—she wrote to him: 'You cost me so many tears, so much sweat and bitterness'. Yet she loved him and thought him worthy to belong to her Family, calling him her 'darling' because she knew he had a kind and generous heart. She believed in his final salvation. 'You often come to me', she said to him once, 'and then, like a restless bird, off you fly again to your various vices; fly where you will, now, but in the end, with the Lord's help, I will catch you in a noose so that you will flutter your wings no more.' One day, in fact, he ceased to flutter—somewhat late in life, to be sure. In 1388 he joined the Olivetan Order, and became a good monk; the noose had been well flung and held firm.

About this time Catherine's Family received other young converts. Neri di Guccio degli Ugurgeri and Niccolò di Bindo Ghelli, friends of Francesco Malavolti, had taken to mocking him because he had been caught in Catherine's net, and assured him that, in his place, they would have turned the tables against her. He took them at their word and invited them to go with him to see her. They agreed to go, resolved to resist any of her coaxing words, and ready to ill-treat her if she tried to convert them; but when they came before her and Catherine told them what she thought of them sternly and vigorously, they were dumbfounded, and declared themselves ready to do all she desired.

Out of all these faithful and enthusiastic folk who had gathered round her, some of them followed her so closely as to form a real 'Family' that acknowledged her as Mother. Besides those we have already mentioned we find Luigi di Luigi Gallerani, to whom she wrote an affectionate and encouraging letter, Nigi di Doccio degli Arzocchi, who met her through the Pagliaresi, to whom she wrote in 1380 expressing her gratitude for his guidance and encouragement, and also the wool merchant Sano di Maco di Mazzacorno, with whom she carried on a close spiritual correspondence, and Niccolò di Mino, called Cicerchia, and Gabriele di Davino Piccolomini, whose admiration for her found expression in his book, the 'Ricordi', now unfortunately lost, and

Tommaso di Guelfaccio, who was, according to Feo Belcari, one of the 'Nine'. This man, greedy, sensual and worldly, was converted by Colombini, became a strict Gesuate, and later, a fervid follower of Catherine. All these differed very much in temperament, gifts and intelligence, yet every one wanted to be the child of such a Mother. None of them showed exceptional talent; all trusted their saintly leader. None of them was capable of great spiritual flights, but they all had a share in her spiritual life. All these Caterinati formed a compact group, with a clearly defined character and one aim only: to be ruled by the love of God, which Catherine practised and preached. They knew that their spiritual and moral weaknesses were no secret to her, and so they opened their hearts to her like children. They wished to drown themselves in the Blood of Christ, but how could they do this unless she, the Saint, immersed them? They needed to see her, hear her, be near to her, receive encouragement and comfort from her, to climb more easily to God. All wanted to be the closest to her care, and were greedy even of the crumbs that fell during her spiritual banquets. When she was in ecstasy they contemplated her, ready to seize upon the least word she uttered—that they might hear it echo in their hearts, for weeks, months, years. They would watch her expressive face and rejoice or grieve as an angelic smile or look of sorrow appeared on those features so wasted by fastings and prayers.

All these children were dear to her; she shared in their activity and thought, grieved over their faults and was willing to make atonement for their graver sins. For all of them she had the right word ready at the right moment, for the need of that particular case. Sometimes she had to open painful wounds, but her lancet was delicate, and she was always ready to bind the wound with the thread of love. Although so much in demand by all, she forsook none of them in trouble, but looked after and encouraged every one. They often caused her fears and anxieties; she wept over them and offered herself as a sacrifice to God, who knew how insistently she strove with Him for the salvation of their souls through Christ's transforming power. By her side each felt loved and protected, and acquired such confidence as to believe himself capable even of heroism.

If we think of those gatherings in her cell, when she spoke in

the midst of her faithful, we are reminded of the disciples of Jesus on the day of Pentecost. This was a lesser Pentecost, it is true, but here also there was a welling up and outpouring of spiritual streams, and a new apostolic fervour for the service of suffering humanity, in an atmosphere of enthusiasm and joy. Catherine knew how to make clear to a man's heart what usually lies hidden in the depths of his being, and requires laborious and painful self-searching to reveal. She had spent whole years in searching for her own soul and getting to know the divine in it, and so she knew how to touch the most delicate strings of the heart, to teach her disciples how to examine themselves and become aware of the almighty power of God within them, and be set on fire by the flame of the Holy Spirit.

Ser Cristofano di Gano di Guidini was another who could not resist Catherine's spell. He was a skilled notary, who had been one of the fifteen Defenders of the Republic of Siena in March and April of 1373 and 1374. He was a very clear-sighted thinker, accustomed to political and business life, not at all given to enthusiasms. He was a cultured man, and liked to interrogate and listen to the opinions of others, and then follow his own ideas. His friends Neri di Landoccio and Nigi di Doccio took him to Catherine. He went to her cell more from curiosity than from devotion, but as soon as he found himself in her presence and she spoke to him, he was struck with wonder: 'I heard from her about God *quae non licet homini loqui*'. He could hardly believe that a woman could talk in that way, and yet he heard her with his own ears. Her words were so burning and spoke so directly to his soul that he turned pale. After the first visit he went back again; he thought that perhaps seeing and hearing her again might lessen her effect on him, and lead him to modify his opinion; instead, his liking and admiration grew. He became one of her followers: 'for when I had had experience of her holy teaching and counsel I found that God had touched my heart to despise the things of this world'. He remained for the rest of his life one of her faithful disciples, translated the 'Dialogue' into Latin, had her portrait painted in the Cathedral of Siena, and also in a vineyard he possessed at Armaiuolo, and, out of 'reverence', had two of his daughters called by her name. The 'Memorie', written long after Catherine's death, are still full of grateful emotion and reverent

enthusiasm for her 'through whose prayers I have received much grace from God'.

* * *

We have only two letters of Catherine's dating from the second half of 1374. Each is written to a great figure of that time, Piero Gambacorta, Lord of Pisa, and Cardinal Jacopo Orsini. The letters are mainly occupied with religion but they have social and political importance because of the authoritative positions held by those to whom she wrote. The letter to Piero Gambacorta is a reply to one Catherine had received from him and the ladies of his family, and perhaps also from a group of pious folk, inviting her to go to Pisa, where she was already known by fame. Fra Bartolomeo and Tommaso da Siena, who had been in Pisa a few months before, had probably done much to make her extraordinary life known to the citizens, and the Gambacorta family, always in close touch with Florence, may have heard about the favourable result of her trial before the General Chapter of the Dominicans during May. Raimondo da Capua tells us that 'when the plague was over many men and women, religious and lay, and particularly some nuns of Pisa, having heard of the Saint's great fame, burning with the desire to see her and hear her wonderful doctrine . . . begged her in letters and messages to deign to come to Pisa'. Perhaps Catherine had already declined other invitations from admiring Pisans before receiving this letter from Gambacorta, and it may even be that the people had recourse to the Head of the Pisan Republic in the hope that she could not refuse his invitation. On the other hand, Gambacorta's letter may have contained some personal confession, or a request for advice for himself. One can gather little from Catherine's reply. She says she is very grateful for the invitation which she is sorry to have to decline, on account of her delicate health and because it might cause a scandal if she went travelling about too much. There had already been murmurs about her journeyings in the province of Siena, and she did not want to rouse comment again. However, she believed that, if it was the will of God, she would be able to go to Pisa later on, and would do so very willingly. The rest of the letter is all taken up with religion. We must detach ourselves from the world and become

like Christ. We must overcome sin and acquire the mastery over ourselves, over our wrath, and our own faults; we must study and know ourselves so as to recognise our own nothingness, that real righteousness may be born in us, and love and the knowledge of God. Sin cuts us off from life, that life to which we cling when we follow in Christ's footsteps; it is our duty to keep our eyes fixed on the righteousness of God, so as to punish the sin that is in us, 'and especially when you find your own sin you must punish it and mortify it as much as you can; and see that you do not close your eyes to it, for if you do this you will be severely rebuked by God'. Dupré-Theseider adds the note: 'she is perhaps alluding to a vice or an evil personal inclination of Gambacorta's, of which she had knowledge, either by hearsay, or from himself'. Probably Catherine is not thinking of any particular fault of Gambacorta's, but rather appealing to the Lord of Pisa, who is a man like other men and therefore subject to sin, 'to punish faults wherever they are found', a warning she might have given to any other person.

The letter to Cardinal Jacopo Orsini has a more precise intention, and one which had more importance for her. In September 1371 the Cardinal, passing through Siena, had received a great welcome, and Catherine may have heard about him, or even seen him, though we have no evidence that she knew him personally. In 1370 Orsini was Cardinal Protector of the Republic of Siena at the Court of Avignon, and therefore Catherine may have considered that he, better than anyone else, would acquaint the Pope with her wishes, wishes that were shared by many Religious of that time, by some members of the Curia, and by the Pope himself. She asked the Cardinal to beg the Pope to keep his promise to return to Rome, and also to persuade him to reconcile France and England, and then, with the united forces of Christendom, launch a powerful Crusade against the infidels. And as she had before this urged the same Cardinal not to sleep, but to 'graft himself on to the tree of the Cross', and be a strong champion of the Church, she may have hoped he would become a paladin of the Crusade that was so dear to her heart, and in support of which she had already written, in March of the same year, to the Pope. This letter shows great energy and frankness. Several of her favourite themes return in it: notes that she sounds insistently to induce men to understand and to seek redemption. They must

never trust in themselves, but look to Christ by whom 'life was grafted on to death', when He 'ran as if enamoured to the shameful death of the Cross', in which 'so much warmth of love is seen, and such sweet and gentle teaching, full of life-giving fruits'. She has no fear about freely showing the distinguished Cardinal all her thoughts, and placing before him, with due respect, his own responsibility. 'Are you not placed as a mirror in Holy Church, where lay folk may see themselves?' In all things, then, he must be clear and limpid, he must love his enemies, render good for evil, and acquire strength by becoming one with Christ. Advice, warning and rebuke are merged in a single appeal to rouse himself and reflect upon his religious duties. Catherine had begun working upon the souls of members of the Curia, and whether she knew it or not, was preparing the ground for her future work.

Her visitors became ever more numerous. Events had combined to render her famous: the confidence placed in her by the Order of Preachers in the Chapter of Florence; her indefatigable care of souls and bodies during the plague in Siena; her correspondence with highly placed civic and religious personages; her ever growing fame as a miracle worker. It was not only the derelict and forsaken who ran to her for a ray of light or a word of comfort: it was also all those who believed in the progress and triumph of the spirit, and wanted her to help them to deepen their spiritual life. 'Very many Religious also', says Fra Bartolomeo Dominici, 'went to her, and she comforted them one and all, and edified them wonderfully, so that when they took leave of her they always begged to be allowed to come again. And they were not only the young and ignorant, but also the old and learned, many of whom were marvellously changed for the better by her.'

Not all her visitors, however, were well-intentioned. Among the Religious of Siena there were many who doubted her sincerity and orthodoxy, and thought her fame an artificial creation of the Dominicans. Her greatest critics were, somewhat naturally, Franciscans. We have seen what happened to Fra Lazzarino da Pisa. He certainly became a Caterinato, but his conversion and the great trust he had in her did not suffice to allay the distrust and aversion that others of his brethren felt for her. She was 'an ignorant young woman, who goes about seducing simple folk

with false expositions of Holy Scripture, and sends their souls to Hell, and her own soul too', thought and said some theologians renowned in Siena and in their own Orders. The Provincial of the Friars Minor, Fra Gabriele da Volterra, and the Augustinian hermit Fra Giovanni Terzo were among these. The former, according to Fra Bartolomeo Dominici, was 'very famous in all Italy for his learning and eloquence'; even his enemies acknowledged his great oratorical gifts. '*Nolite decipi in sui rotunditate sermonis*', says Coluccio Salutati; and, comparing him to the sirens, he puts the Sienese on their guard lest 'with the honeyed sweetness of his speech he deceive you, and put you to sleep with his songs, and at last, when you are sleeping, strike and kill you with his spiky tail'.

Fra Gabriele occupied various important ecclesiastical positions, including that of Inquisitor in Siena. He was a Doctor of Theology, but very presumptuous, a Franciscan, but living a life of luxury. In politics he was inclined to grovel to those in authority. When in 1378 he was recalled from exile, he wrote to the Rulers of Siena to thank them, but was so forgetful of his own manly and priestly dignity as to offer himself, body and soul, to these victors: '*Animam tamen et corpus vestre simpliciter offero potestati . . .*'. There is certainly no sign of Christian or Franciscan feeling here; the Friar served men more willingly than he served God, and if he was still like this several years after having known Catherine he must have been still more of a flatterer, and more greedy for fame and honour before he knew her. Irritated by the constant talk in Siena about this woman, who was moreover a Dominican and defended by the Order of Preachers, and who wrote to Cardinals and Heads of States and grew more famous every day, he decided to put to the test her knowledge and interpretation of the Scriptures, and find out the nature of the fascination she exercised over so many people. Giovanni Terzo, also a Doctor of Theology, was at one with him in wishing to examine Catherine's patristic and scriptural learning, for they both thought that if she did possess such knowledge it could not have come from God. They decided to go to visit her. Fra Bartolomeo Dominici wastes few words on the subject of this visit: 'on hearing Catherine speak Fra Gabriele's heart was changed, and, after that, he often visited her with much devotion'. Perhaps this conciseness of

style is due to his reluctance to describe a scene very similar to that which he had already recounted about Fra Lazzarino da Pisa. Or he may have forgotten the details, or thought the conversion less important than that of Fra Lazzarino, and so not worth dwelling on at such length. We do not know his motives for describing it so briefly. But Malavolti, who, with many other disciples, was present at Fra Gabriele's visit, describes it very fully. Catherine was addressing the faithful who were already in her room when all at once she was silent, and then, with radiant face and eyes turned to Heaven, began to speak, saying among other things: 'Blessed be Thou, sweet and eternal Bridegroom, who drawest souls to Thyself in so many different ways!' Those words at that moment surprised her hearers, and Fra Tommaso della Fonte, his curiosity aroused, then asked her: 'What does that mean that you said just now? Tell me, and let us all understand.' She replied: 'My Father, before long you will see two large fish enter the net', and would add nothing else. The curiosity of her friends and followers was increased and they were all waiting in suspense when suddenly one of Catherine's women companions entered the room and announced the arrival of the learned Gabriele da Volterra and Giovanni Terzo, each accompanied by a confrère. Catherine moved to welcome them, but almost at once they appeared in the doorway of the cell and crossed the threshold, begging those present not to stir, because they had nothing private to say. They sat down and then turned directly on Catherine, asking her the most difficult questions. It looked like a serious examination of her orthodoxy, as if they were trying to confuse her, frighten her, and make her fall into contradictions. Perhaps they wanted to gather from her lips some material they needed to be able, later, to accuse her of heresy. When they had finished their questions Catherine remained for some time as if in a trance —her visitors and disciples began to feel some anxiety as they waited—then, coming back to herself, she turned to the two Doctors and upbraided them, telling them their vaunted learning was harmful to those who professed it, and of very little use to anyone else. The quotations they had made, passage after passage from the Saints, did not prove that they understood what was the kernel of the Christian religion—they had stopped at the outer rind. With this wealth of quotations from theologians and Fathers

of the Church they wished to be admired and praised by a public that did not seek for the profound truth of the spirit; their hearts were fed on ambition and vanity, but she implored them, for the love of Christ Crucified, to forsake dead learning and seek for the living and active wisdom that dwells in the love of Christ.

These were fine words, but not unusual for a servant of God, and much below Catherine's normal spiritual level; however, she must have uttered them with such warmth and conviction, and with such inspired accents, that she shocked and alarmed the two Doctors, who began to feel their own guilt. Sometimes, in those in whom we least expect it, occur these upheavals of the soul, and from stupor, confusion and pain arise impulses of love which, for a time at least, render the spirit like purest flame. Such a radical change of conscience came about in that moment in Fra Gabriele; at once he gave up the luxurious furnishings of his three cells, and distributed all the books and precious objects he possessed, leaving himself only his Breviary; and after this he came frequently to visit the Tertiary of Fontebranda.

Giovanni Terzo was converted, too. He had not lived sumptuously like Fra Gabriele, and so his renunciation of worldly goods was less dramatic. But as his soul was very sensitive to religion he became more and more attached to Catherine and was often at her side as an admiring helper. It was probably through him that she came to know some Augustinian hermits in the Selva del Lago, or Lecceto (the ilex wood), who became her faithful friends and followers: Father William of Fleete, Fra Antonio of Nice, and Fra Felice of Massa.

The anonymous author of the 'Miracoli' wrote before October 10th, 1374: 'In the Selva del Lago' (the wood by the lakeside) 'four miles from Siena, dwells a community of Augustinian hermits, amongst whom is an English Father who is called the Bachelor of the Selva del Lago, and he has lived there for more than twelve years. He is a man of great learning, a venerable man, very holy and a great lover of solitude. He often goes to live in the depths of the forest in caves that he has made himself in dark almost inaccessible places, and there he takes his books, to flee the society of man. And according as he wills, he goes and comes from the church to the wood and from the wood to the church. He is a man of ripe counsel, a friend of God, a great example; he

speaks very little and only when necessity obliges speech. He had never seen Catherine, nor she him, but they had instinctive knowledge of each other through the Holy Spirit, so that each talked of the other's doings, with the greatest possible solemnity and reverence.'

This spiritual acquaintance became personal some time towards the end of 1374 or the beginning of 1375, and so began a close friendship between Catherine and the Augustinian hermit. It is not clear whether it was about this time that Catherine visited the hermitages of Lecceto. According to Giovanni di Ser Mino she actually stayed there, but although this is quite possible we cannot ascertain the date of this visit.

Among the Augustinians there were some opposed to Catherine. We have already seen how the Doctor of Cambridge, Giovanni Terzo, was prejudiced against her before his conversion. Two years later we find Fra Ruffino, called by Giovanni of the Cells a 'Master of vain and worldly philosophy', and Giovanni da Salerno accusing her of heresy. Some of the hermits at Lecceto also must have been opposed to her. Otherwise it is difficult to explain the silence of Fra Filippo degli Agazzari about her. His 'Assempri' were compiled in 1397, after the 'Leggenda Maggiore' had been written, and when many of Catherine's miracles had been accepted by Religious and quoted as examples. Fra Filippo, who set out to show that miracles not only happened in ancient times, but happened also in his own century, never mentions her name. We conclude that he did not consider Catherine's miracles were among those 'of which I have had no doubt in my mind, and about which I am sure I have been told the truth'. To be sure, Filippo's temperament was the very opposite of Catherine's. He was a hard, unyielding monk, very easily scandalised. He saw nothing but death and perdition for mankind, and in the world only corruption and darkness. On a very minor scale he showed certain spiritual qualities reminiscent of Tertullian or St Peter Damian. His mind was closed and contained in a few conceptions, and he attacked fiercely, often with more violence than strength, men and behaviour that were not to his own taste. He was incapable of searching the depths of the human soul, and finding that wonderful flame which is in all men, hidden below the

darkness, the flame that Pascal, who often shuddered at the thought of the utter wretchedness of man, was thrilled with joy to discover. Books such as the 'Disprezzo del Mondo' ('Scorn of the World') must have served Filippo for his daily bread, and his normal tone of voice was that of the *Dies Irae*. He had no warmth of human feeling, no understanding of the conflicts and dramas of life, no way of measuring evil with the measure of love. He must have found Catherine incomprehensible. Compare his words: 'Would to God it might happen thus to all wretched women' (that is, to burst, as a young bride had burst through having worn too tight a dress, so as to appear 'more beautiful and dainty') 'who think of nothing else but themselves and the adornment of their cursed filthy bodies, who nourish their putrid flesh for worms to eat, and their souls for devils . . .' with these of Catherine's, written to a prostitute: 'Do yourself holy violence; raise yourself up out of this wretchedness and filth. You will see that Christ has prepared a bath of Blood to cleanse you of the leprosy of mortal sin, and all its impurity, in which you have lain so long. Your gentle God will not disown you.' Such opposing characteristics as are shown here indicate that Catherine and Filippo could not speak the same language.

Father William of Fleete, called the Bachelor, whose portrait we have seen vividly drawn in the 'Miracoli', was of a very different character from his confrère Fra Filippo. Reflection induced him to consider Catherine's activity with sympathy, and contemplation led him to recognise in her a spiritual sister. The 'reverence' he felt for her before he knew her personally became veneration once he had known her. She had reached lofty heights of contemplation, but she had also the practical activity that he lacked. She translated every impulse of love into generous works of charity, whereas he could not venture outside the spiritual field. Her energy was unusual and superior, as he realised when they met. He preferred to meditate in the seclusion of the forest of Lecceto, or in his caves; whereas she spoke to hundreds of people, raising them from the lowest depths and bearing them from Hell to Paradise. While he loved to dwell among the ancient trees, invoking the descent of the Holy Spirit upon himself, she, inspired by the Spirit, suffered and struggled

to transform consciences. When meditating in the forest he liked to feel himself becoming one with Nature, while Catherine, often in agony, steeped herself in the Blood of Christ, and offered herself to atone for the sins of others. His heart was touched as he watched the leaves, the flowers, the trees, the fantastic lights and shadows of the forest, the worms, the birds with their songs, now gay, now mournful, and all the wild life of the greenwood, that passed him by, or paused as if spell-bound, to gaze at him in fear or curiosity; he loved all this and found joy in it. Catherine, meanwhile, seeking for pain and hardship to purify herself in suffering, plunged into the fray to convert men and rout devils.

Because of this diversity of temperament and identity of spiritual aims, William of Fleete admired Catherine, and according to Cristofano di Gano, touched her habit with reverence and devotion as if it were a consecrated thing. 'He used to say to us: "You don't know her, or who she is; the Pope should be grateful to be one of her children; she really has the Holy Spirit in her." '

Catherine had a great affection and regard for him, too, recognising in him a great contemplative and a man of God. The hermit's experience was precious to her in her spiritual pilgrimage, and when she confided in him she could be sure of his understanding her. Her friend the Bachelor was learned, moderate in judgment, and well-balanced in character; he devoted himself to God, strove after perfection, and understood and practised Christian charity. Like Catherine he was in favour of the Crusades, like her he was strict with himself but full of understanding for others' weakness. He also desired the moral reform of the clergy, but was no fanatical ascetic. He was one of the band of God's eager heralds.

When a critical edition of all William of Fleete's writings has been published, we shall better be able to study him, and to ascertain with greater precision how much mutual exchange of spiritual wealth there was between these two great souls. What we know at present is barely enough for guesswork, but we may be sure that a great deal of the Augustinian teaching that we find in Catherine's work came to her through her friends, the hermits of Lecceto, and especially from Father William. Whatever their mutual influence may have been, we know this, that Catherine

loved him so dearly that, when dying, of all her disciples she chose this Englishman, who had been living at Lecceto since the 8th September, 1359, to entrust to him the care of her spiritual Family.