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.

Chapter VII

THE STIGMATA

PIERO GAMBACORTA'S invitation to Catherine to go to Pisa was declined, but only for the time being. It was received 'with affectionate love' and aroused a new hope in her heart that Pisa might be another field of spiritual labour, where the Crusades might also be preached. 'I shall be ready to obey the command of the Primal Truth, and yours also', she replied to Gambacorta. Meanwhile she asked herself repeatedly whether or not God wished her to go there, and this concentration of thought was already a way of preparing herself for the answer.

But in her spiritual Family there arose discordant voices. 'There were some to persuade, and some to dissuade her.' Fra Bartolomeo Dominici, who had been in Pisa a few months earlier with Fra Tommaso da Siena and had spoken a great deal about her there, was probably favourable—and his opinion had much weight with Catherine; Fra Tommaso della Fonte, more sensitive to the petty gossip of the devout Sienese, with a rather timid outlook circumscribed by the life of the city, was probably averse to her journey. As for Fra Raimondo, he hints at the disagreement among Catherine's disciples, without giving his own view; but, considering his character, we may be sure that, in spite of some lingering uncertainty, on the whole he approved of Catherine's mission. Indeed, as soon as she told him of the vision in which she had received from the Lord a peremptory order to go to Pisa, he willingly gave her his permission to go.

The date of her departure for Pisa is not known, but we know that Fra Raimondo, who accompanied her there, was still in Siena on January 20th, 1375, so her journey must have taken place after that date. At Pisa, Catherine and her women companions were lodged in the house of Gherardo de' Buonconti, who

belonged to an old Pisan family, living near the Church of Santa Cristina, and near also to the Gambacorta Palace, in the 'Chiasso dei Facchini' ('the Street of the Porters') in the Kinseca quarter. The three Dominicans who accompanied her, Fra Tommaso, Fra Bartolomeo and Fra Raimondo, probably stayed in the Dominican Priory in the city. Catherine spent her first weeks in Pisa in prayer, meditation and study. She wrote at this time to Sano di Maco: 'We have never yet left Gherardo's house; we shall go out when the time comes that God has ordained'. The numerous visitors, rich and poor, old and young, learned and ignorant, who flocked to her as soon as it was known that a Saint had arrived in Pisa, must have informed her of the conditions and needs of the Pisans.

Poverty and suffering ravaged the city. Since 1371 famine had weakened bodies and souls, and, a few months before Catherine arrived, the plague had decimated the population. Pisa was now a poor, shrunken Republic, and what pride the citizens still had was but the memory of the greatness and power of their distant past. Industries had decayed, trade had dwindled, the fine arts were languishing for lack of the creative spirit. The Government, the shipbuilders and the traders tried to encourage commerce, strengthening their connections with Egypt, Tangier, Morocco, and North Africa in general, but the profits were insignificant. The establishment of firm trade relations with Florence helped the Pisans to eke out a living, but brought no wealth. Pietro Gambacorta ruled the state very wisely; he was an intelligent and able administrator, a moderate man of firm principles, loyal to his friends and allies; but he could not restore to its former greatness a Republic of such shrunken dimensions, short of men fit to work or fight, with a countryside that yielded little produce and was frequently laid waste and looted by mercenary Companies. A bold foreign policy of wide range was unthinkable, when Pisa was threatened on all sides by more powerful states. A policy of peace with all was the only one that could enable the city to preserve its own autonomy and a certain independence, and such was, in fact, the policy desired by the Pisan shipbuilders and merchants, and practised in so far as he could by Gambacorta. There was no other way of preserving their state: hence 'the moderate and conciliatory attitude of the Pisan Government—even at the

most difficult moments it aimed at softening the harshness of disagreements between other states, and proposing agreements and councils to avoid war whenever possible', as Pietro Silva observes in his volume on the Government of Pietro Gambacorta in Pisa. Besides being opportune and necessary for Pisa, this policy was also humane and beneficent for the other states. The Pisans wanted peace so as to be able to increase their trade and wealth, but Gambacorta's own activity in favour of a general peace in Tuscany and Italy had also a loftier purpose, because it corresponded to his ideal of harmony among peoples, which he desired to bring about immediately, if only partially, by binding Florence and Pisa in a common covenant with all the other states. This plan, even if doomed to failure, showed his magnanimity of soul. His opinion, therefore, when it came to negotiating treaties or forming leagues and alliances, was always listened to with respect.

It is not known when or how Catherine met the Lord of Pisa, or of what they spoke together, but it is clear that in Pisa she found herself in a magnificent observation post for studying the political field. It was probably here, guided by the advice of Fra Raimondo da Capua, who must have been all eyes and ears to observe the politics of the various states of Tuscany and the rest of Italy, so as to see whether they were favourable or hostile to the Holy See—and thanks to the moderate counsels of Piero Gambacorta—that she made up her mind about her future line of action in defence of the Church.

She was burning with zeal to preach the new Crusade, and Pisa, linked with the Holy Land by memory and tradition, seemed a propitious field for her endeavours. The Pisan galleys had fought bravely against the Mahomedans, and won glorious victories, in token of which their churches were still hung with standards snatched from the Saracens. The memory of Calvary was always present to Pisan folk, because their own cemetery, the Campo Santo, contained the earth that Archbishop Lanfranchi had dug from the hill of Calvary in 1188, and brought home to Pisa in fifty-two ships. Propaganda for the Crusade might well be popular in Pisa, and Catherine believed that with the help of God she might induce the citizens to take part in the holy expedition. But the time for that was not yet; 'we shall go out when the time comes that God has ordained'.

During these first weeks in Pisa, she continued to receive visitors, console the sad, encourage the disconsolate, infuse faith and hope in all who saw her, and, above all, exhort them to love and pray: 'Let your hearts and souls burst with love', she wrote at that time, and her spiritual life, enriched with new experiences, became ever more vigorous. Fra Raimondo tells us of two miracles she performed at this time: the cure of a young man, twenty years of age, presented to her by her host Gherardo de' Buonconti, and the miracle of the 'vernaccia' wine. The former, although not confirmed by other writers, rings true: the youth had suffered from a fever for eighteen months, perhaps a nervous fever, and one already on the wane, for we learn that 'although at the moment the fever had left him, yet till then it had been continuous', and it had left him pale and wasted; Catherine spoke to him and induced him to purify his soul by repentance and confession; then, laying her hand on his shoulder and thus imparting to him the power she received from God, she convinced him of his recovery, and cured his bodily weakness.

As for the other miracle: one day Catherine was so exhausted after an ecstasy that Fra Raimondo and Gherardo de' Buonconti feared she was near to death. To revive her strength, as she would not swallow even a little sweetened water, Fra Raimondo thought of bathing her wrists and temples, as was the custom, with wine called 'vernaccia'. Gherardo at once sent a servant to a friend to beg him for some of this wine, but his friend replied that he had not had any of it for three months; to prove this, he took the servant into his cellar, showed him the cask of vernaccia, and took out the stopper. Immediately, to his great surprise, the wine gushed out, fresh and abundant, overflowing on to the ground. When this was described to Gherardo and Fra Raimondo, they declared it was miraculous, and the story got about so quickly that for some days it was the chief subject of conversation all over the city. Not everyone heard of it with joy; some were reserved in judgment, others denied the miracle, some used the story to make fun of Catherine. She herself became aware of this when, going through the streets to visit the Apostolic Legate, who was passing through Pisa, she heard the cry: 'Who is this woman, who drinks no wine, but fills an empty cask with miraculous wine?' At first she did not understand the jest. When she learnt

the cause she became very sad and, weeping, turned to God and complained of being mocked; and, as she had never asked for the wine, now, so as to give no further cause for mockery, she asked God to dry up all the wine that remained in the cask. 'The Lord heard her prayer and, as if He could not bear her grief, performed the second miracle that was, to my mind, greater than the first', adds Fra Raimondo, very ingenuously.

In our own day everyone sees the inconsistency and the triviality of this story, and its contradictions. In fact, all the first part might be simply the result of an error on the part of the friend who had the wine: he thought it was finished and, instead, there was some left. The second part shows how annoyed Catherine was at hearing herself made responsible for a miracle she had not worked, and which, moreover, exposed her to ridicule. Her irritation and rebellion are understandable. It is unnecessary to analyse here the somewhat fragile details of this miracle or to underline the futility of the whole story—which does no credit to Fra Raimondo's judgment.

Catherine seems to us much more admirable when, during these months at Pisa, a Dominican novice, Baronto di Ser Dato, introduced to the cult of Catherine by his own Master, Domenico dei Peccioli, the author of the 'Cronaca del Convento di Santa Caterina in Pisa', came to her to be set free from a disease that the doctors had not been able to cure. The boy spoke with the frank confidence of his sixteen years, while Catherine looked at him with her characteristic gentle smile. Then she said: 'My little son, your infirmity will be useful to you, and help you to save your soul; if you were cured of it, you would sin very much. You will bear this infirmity all your life, but it will not prevent you from working assiduously for the good of your Order.' Here we see the real Catherine, humane and loving with all, knowing that even the friends of God must observe certain limits, and therefore unwilling to perform miracles for their own sake, or just to strike the imagination of men.

On the 1st of April, 1375, in the Church of Santa Cristina in Pisa, where she was wont to spend long hours at her devotions, Catherine underwent what is usually considered a most outstanding experience in the life of a Saint: she received the Stigmata. It is useless to re-open a debate that lasted for centuries,

about the authenticity of her wounds. Officially, the favourable verdict came only in 1630, through the mouth of Urban VIII, and the Office of the Sacred Stigmata of St Catherine of Siena was not ordered until the eighteenth century, and then by Pope Benedict XIII.

Until that day polemics had been harsh and the battle furious; there were dramatic ups and downs of triumph and despair. Frequently, instead of an impartial enquiry, it was a struggle about the honour, or rather, a point of honour, of a religious Order, and judgment was more or less swayed by passion. The Franciscans would not admit that anyone else, especially a woman, had received the Stigmata in the same way as St Francis; the Dominicans wanted to set their Sienese Saint on as high a pedestal as the Saint of Assisi. Peoples took sides and fought to defend their glory rather than the truth; and acrimony was greater than love. The common people also were engaged, clamouring for protectors and defenders, demanding fresh examinations and amassing piles of documents. The diatribes of friars and lay folk became ever more fierce: what had been a Dominican honour and glory became the honour and glory of Siena and Tuscany. A most serious dispute was threatening—but in the end the Franciscans had to retire in good order, and accept, unwillingly enough, the Dominican and Sienese victory. Even today, some Franciscans deny that there has ever been any other stigmatic but St Francis, thus excluding St Catherine of Siena.

One must admit also, that there are eminent ecclesiastics, trained in historical and scientific research, who deny the reality of Catherine's stigmata, because they were invisible. It is true that it would be impossible to prove their existence scientifically, because Catherine alone felt and saw her wounds, and those who, later on, bore witness to them, were her friends and disciples, who believed and repeated what she had told them. As Pietro De Bongnie wrote in his work on stigmatisation in the Middle Ages, 'the witness of friends and familiars, of devout souls who form a faithful and, too often, a blind bodyguard around the stigmatised, cannot be used to support a scientific conclusion'. It is also true, however, that if in Catherine's case we lack objective proofs, or testimony external to her own group, by which the authenticity of her stigmata may be established, nevertheless her

own experience cannot be set aside, and it must be recognised that for her these wounds that she felt painfully in her flesh were the fruit of ardent desire, and for her were very real.

Fixed in her mind was the image of St Francis, when

'. . . on the harsh rock between Tiber and Arno,
From Christ did he receive that final imprint',

and, at least from 1370 onwards, she had longed to receive the same grace. Like Elizabeth of Spalbeek, she had already felt in a vision the pain caused by the crown of thorns that Jesus had worn; like Margherita Colonna, in another vision she had felt the piercing of one of the nails of the Cross; but to have in her own body the very wounds of her Bridegroom was a proof of supreme love, and therefore she ardently desired it. She remembered St Francis, and always saw him as she had gazed at him countless times in paintings that represented him on the mountain of La Verna, in the act of receiving the Stigmata. 'One day, while she was in Pisa, in the Church of Santa Christina, virgin and martyr, having fallen into an ecstasy after Holy Communion, as she was wont to do, she had begged her Bridegroom for this grace with intense devotion and fervour, and those about her saw her place her hands and feet in the same attitude as that in which the Blessed Francis is usually painted when receiving the sacred stigmata. After remaining thus for some time she came to herself and returned home. Then those of her followers who had seen her in ecstasy and wished to know why she had held her hands and feet outstretched so long, in this unusual way, asked her about it privately; she replied: "O my children, give thanks with me to God who does not disdain the petitions of the poor, but receives and grants their humble prayers". Then she told them she had long besought the Lord for this grace, and that, during that very morning, after praying for it most fervently, she had received her reward.' So, for the rest of her life, she bore the sacred wounds, which filled her with new energy and new enthusiasm for the cause of God. In the past she had had clear proofs of the presence of Christ in her, but there had also been times when she had felt nothing but aridity, discouragement and spiritual emptiness—when she had been a prey to doubts and agonising fears; from now onwards her certainty never faltered; bearing in her own body the wounds of the Crucified she was sure of her Bride-

groom's perfect love. She rejoiced even when the invisible wounds gave her pain; like that other great lover, St Francis, she had 'realised' the sufferings of Golgotha, and could now repeat with St Paul: 'I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me'. 'From that time forward, as if, through her Saviour's grace, assured of His presence within her, in spite of all her daily sufferings, in all her actions and labours undertaken for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, she seemed stronger and happier.'

We have quoted the words of Fra Bartolomeo Dominici rather than those of Fra Raimondo da Capua, because the former seems to describe more clearly the central motive of Catherine's stigmatisation. Fra Bartolomeo was not present at the time, but he may have heard all about it shortly afterwards, from those who were present, or from Catherine herself. The excellent knowledge he had of her soul, and his sense of proportion in observing and judging her spiritual development, enabled him to understand the event better than Fra Raimondo, who loved to linger over his descriptions, which sometimes he did not hesitate to embroider. From Fra Bartolomeo's account it is clear that Catherine had constantly present to her mind the vision of St Francis receiving the stigmata, as she had seen this represented in paintings, and that she longed for a similar grace for herself, as her love for Christ Crucified became more and more fervent.

These intense meditations on the stigmata and her longing to receive them herself might lead one to suppose that hers was a case of auto-suggestion leading to hallucination. To refute this scientifically it would be necessary to study the whole process of stigmatisation, and even this would not lead us to sure and unanswerable conclusions. From the scientific point of view, it is an insoluble problem. Dr Jean Lhermitte, of the Medical Faculty of the University of Paris, concluded his study of the medical problem of stigmatisation (October 1935) with these judicious words: 'The process of stigmatisation appears to be utterly unintelligible and inexplicable. In truth, there exists no psychological process that in the least resembles stigmatisation which, when genuine, belongs to a special category of its own, responding to some mechanism that absolutely eludes scientific analysis.... And we affirm that there is no such thing as psychological or diapsychological stigmatisation; there is only a stigmatisation that is

at the same time extra-psychological and extra-physiological.'

It would be ridiculous to believe that Catherine was guilty of fraud in spiritual matters, and therefore we must take her word for it when she says she received the stigmata, even if she alone felt and saw them. Once we have abandoned a purely negative attitude and accepted stigmatisation as extra-psychological and extra-physiological, we are free to admit that a special grace of God corresponded to her ardent desire to feel what St Francis had felt. It is not illogical to suppose that if his love for Christ enabled the little Poor Man of Assisi to receive the Stigmata, the same love for Christ may have led to the same result for the Saint of Fontebranda. If mystical stigmatisation is understood as God's answer to a sublime love, what valid reason can be produced for acknowledging the stigmata in one real Saint and denying them in another Saint, equally real?

Why should we believe that in the whole story of mysticism St Francis alone received the sacred wounds? No one questions his greatness; certain qualities of his make him even more beloved than any other, but the greatness of these others is in no way diminished by this. Once we have accepted mystical stigmatisation, it follows that every mystic who reaches a certain level of holiness is capable of receiving it, St Catherine, therefore, as well as the Assisan Saint. It may be objected that St Francis' wounds were visible, and Catherine's were not—but does that matter? Must we therefore judge her to be guilty of unconscious deceit, when she declares she feels and sees her own stigmata, that give her such joy and pain? Her character, life, work and writings prove her sincerity and her balanced judgment. We accept her own account, and believe that in the Church of Santa Cristina in Pisa on April 1st, 1375, while in ecstasy after her communion she was contemplating Christ on the Cross, she really felt impressed upon her flesh the five wounds of the Crucified, thus becoming not only His bride in love and joy, but His bride in pain also, sharing with Him the sufferings He endured for the salvation of men.

In Pisa Catherine's fame spread as rapidly as in Siena, and here also it aroused enthusiasm and disapproval. She spoke urgently and impetuously to sinners, caressingly to the afflicted, as one inspired to the faithful. Giovanni Dominici, many years after her

death, remembering her as if she were still present, described her to his mother: 'In Pisa in 1375 I saw her speaking to some sinners, and her words were so profound, impassioned and powerful, that at once they transformed the black pot into a clear crystal goblet'. Bartolomeo Dominici says she was besieged by those in need of help and comfort, and supplied their just needs, with acts or words, to the extent of her power. 'A multitude of both sexes flocked to hear her, and some, out of devotion, knelt before her and kissed her hands'—a spontaneous expression of gratitude and affection, which, however, did not fail to scandalise some of the Pisans. They saw her accepting such homage 'as if she were a great personage', and accused her of vanity. Vague murmurs circulated in the city and then found tongue. Even Fra Raimondo, on hearing these complaints, was perturbed and doubtful, disapproving of her behaviour on these occasions. One day he said to her, in Fra Bartolomeo's presence: 'My mother, do you not see with what great reverence your visitors treat you? Why do you not forbid this, seeing that many folk are scandalised and complain about this, thinking you take pleasure in it? Is it not possible also, my mother, that a certain vainglory may be aroused in you by so much honour and veneration?'

Catherine replied: 'By the grace of God, I neither notice, nor take pleasure in, the reverent behaviour of others towards me. In those who come to me I study the state of their souls, and thank the divine goodness that has sent them to me, and I pray that those hopes and desires through which He inspired them to come to speak to me may be fulfilled in their souls. Moreover, I cannot understand how any creature, knowing herself to be a creature, can be vainglorious.' With these words she cut short a rather trivial disagreement with her spiritual directors.

But she had to withstand the opposition of other worthy men. We know of two incredulous Pisan teachers who went to see her: Giovanni Gittalebraccia and Pietro degli Albizzi. One was a physician, the other a jurist: both very well known in Pisa. Like Fra Lazzarino, Fra Gabriele da Volterra and Fra Giovanni Terzo, they hoped to test the maiden's knowledge and expose her ignorance, and be able to boast of having put her to shame with their searching questions—accusing her of contradictions and perhaps even of heresy. Fra Bartolomeo's account does not give us enough

data to judge of their talents or dialectical prowess. He quotes only one of their questions: 'When God created the world he said: "Let there be . . ." and it was done; how can this be if God has neither mouth nor tongue?' This was a common enough objection at that time and is found in most medieval tracts, but it does not indicate much subtlety on the part of Catherine's interlocutors. Her reply is interesting in its simplicity and sound common sense. After having wondered why two Doctors should go to a wretched woman to ask for explanations of passages of Holy Scripture, which she should instead ask of them, she apologised for improvising her reply, which was as follows: 'What does it matter to me, and of what use is it to know how God, who is not corporeal but pure spirit only, created the world with His word? On the other hand, it is useful, nay, necessary, for me and for you to know that Jesus Christ, the true son of God, took on human nature for our salvation, and suffered and died for our redemption; this is what I need to know, and believing this and meditating on it, my heart is inflamed with love for Him who first loved me.' These words are characteristic of her practical mind: from the Christian faith she needed to draw, not subjects for dispute and controversy, but spiritual power for herself and for all. Such a conviction, calmly and firmly expressed, must have shaken and moved the two academic teachers, both accustomed to so-called exhaustive explanations and subtle distinctions. In fact, after hearing her they wept and were converted; in his enthusiasm Messer Pietro degli Albizzi went so far as to beg Catherine to be godmother to his as yet unborn child, and Catherine consented.

The onlooker most scandalised by Catherine's popularity and the veneration that surrounded her was the very mediocre poet, Bianco da Siena. He was full of delicate feeling, and often mistook his aspiration after ideals for their fulfilment. He was all ardour and desire, and indulged in a perpetual wistfulness. His verses were imitations of the Christian Latin songs of the Middle Ages, and full of feeble reproductions of the poetry of Jacopone da Todi, here and there reminiscent also of the 'dolce stil nuovo'. He was a facile, but not an original, versifier, adapting from others all he found useful, without much discrimination, feeding his imagination with ideas of the sweetness of union with God, but without seeking this union for himself. We do not know whether

he ever met Catherine. Certainly he had no close acquaintanceship with her. While he was a Gesuate at Città di Castello someone told him that she had become famous and was much praised. He was indignant: how could a holy woman remain continually with the multitude, and accept praise and honour? The world and sanctity were irreconcilable. He himself, a disciple of Colombini, mortified himself in seclusion, and gave himself over to meditation; and could admit of no other way to holiness. If Catherine really wanted to become a Saint she should leave the world, the devil's domain, which so easily induces to sin, and, retiring into solitude, refuse all praise. He decided to put his warning into verse form and send her an epistle in rhyme. The verses flowed easily and sincerely, if without beauty. He urged her to be on her guard, lest she lose the divine grace she had been granted. Many spoke of her, calling her a friend of God, but she must beware of taking pleasure in being praised, because this was all part of the devil's wiles. Praise, fame and honours presented grave dangers for the spiritually minded, and might bring about their fall. Praise encouraged vanity, and vanity led to falsehood. All this prophesying and these lofty spiritual flights exposed her to great danger. She should follow his example. He had chosen 'scorn and mockery and shame, poverty and sickness, and a way of life that seems despicable'. She also should become very humble and descend to dwell in humble places, if she wished to take shelter from the storm and be illuminated by divine light.

He sent this epistle to Catherine, who received it in Pisa when she was absorbed in preaching the salvation of souls and preparing herself to speak for the Crusade. The letter first fell into the hands of Fra Raimondo, who spoke of it with great indignation to Fra Bartolomeo. The two debated whether to show the verses to Catherine or not, and finally concluded it would be better for them to reply to Bianco themselves, to rebuke him severely for his rash judgment, and tell him he knew nothing about the life of the spirit. In their discussion the two friars had raised their voices, so that Catherine, who was not far away, heard them and wanted to know why they were so excited. They told her, and she desired to see the letter, which was then read to her. As soon as she had heard it all she gently reproached them for their wrath, saying: 'You should join with me in thanking the author of this letter,

who so frankly and sweetly warns me, for the good of my soul. He is afraid I may be led astray from the ways of God, and he prudently sets me on my guard against the wiles of my enemies. Therefore, both you and I should be very grateful to him for his kindness.' Fra Raimondo, forgetting that he himself had at one moment feared that all this reverent homage might induce thoughts of vainglory in her, insisted that he should write to Bianco, and Fra Bartolomeo Dominici tells us that Catherine rebuked him for this persistence, and forbade him to do so, looking at them 'darkly' (*torvo vultu*) as she did when she was displeased.

If Bianco da Siena had known Catherine better he would not only have refrained from sending her a reproachful letter, but he would have sought her friendship. If he had known her letters he would have felt himself in spiritual harmony with her, and would have been glad to find therein expressed with clearness, brevity and force, those very conceptions that were the constant themes of his own meditations and songs. But for him they were a far-away mirage, while for her they were an hourly experience. If he had been able to observe her closely, in her unresting labours, he would at once have chosen her as his teacher, as did all who approached her with a desire to make progress in the life of the spirit. Even when far away she never forsook her disciples, but prayed for them and wrote to comfort, warn and instruct them. Even during her laborious Pisan sojourn she found time to write to her spiritual Family and friends. Only six of her letters of the first three or four months at Pisa have come down to us: three to Sano di Maco, two to Fra Bartolomeo Dominici, and one to Bishop Ricasoli. All these letters were such as to arouse love and excite enthusiasm. In her letter to Bishop Ricasoli she clearly expressed for the first time her ideas about the corruption of the high ecclesiastics, and the necessity for reform. She drew a comparison between the spiritual shepherds of olden times and those of her own age. The shepherds of old 'acted like good gardeners and workmen, placed in the garden of Holy Church as if strengthened by this mother, they worked in the wind and weather of many battles, to uproot vices and plant virtues. With no thought of themselves they tended the fruit that they bore to God; they were without self-love, they loved God for His own sake, because

He is the highest good and worthy of love, and themselves for God's sake, giving the glory to God and their labour to their neighbour, and they loved their neighbour for God's sake, not regarding what they themselves might get out of him, but only what God might use and enjoy.'

Today, instead, she said, many of the shepherds are selfish, venal, impious, friends of the devil more than of God, exploiting their sacred office for the sake of rich gains. The church has become a market: 'They love with a mercenary love, they love themselves for their own sakes, and God for their own sakes, and their neighbours for their own sakes; they abound so much in this perverse love—which should rather be called mortal hatred, since death comes of it (alas! I say it weeping!)—that they do not stop at corruption, nor hesitate to buy and sell the grace of the Holy Spirit. They see the robbers who steal the honour of God, and they let them steal, alas! and do not hang them as a punishment; they see the infernal wolf bearing the sheep away, and shut their eyes so as not to see him.' This bitter assertion leads her on to preach with even greater urgency that man must try to conform to Christ, and this can only be done through charity.

Bishop Ricasoli must have been rather faint-hearted, for Catherine begs him earnestly: 'Draw near to this sweet mother Charity, who will take from you all fear and narrowness of heart, and give you strength and breadth and freedom of heart, strengthened and made one with God, one with Him because God is charity and he who is in charity is in God, and God in him'. Her own heart was so full of love that she could not imagine a Christian, and especially a minister of God, as being without charity, because, as she wrote to Sano di Maco: 'Love is not without faith, nor faith without hope', since 'Man has no faith or hope except in what he loves'. The fortunate mortal who possesses all three has 'three columns that hold and guard the rock of our soul, so that no wind of temptation, no injurious words or flatteries of creatures, or earthly love—not even of bride or children—can bring it to the ground; in all these things he shall be supported by these true columns'. Christ Himself suffered the torment of the Cross because He loved; else had it been impossible; 'neither nail nor cross nor stone could have held God Man bound to the Cross, if His love for man had not held Him there'. Through love we

know ourselves to be wanderers and pilgrims here below, weak and therefore in need of support; and what support can be better than the Cross, which will bear us through all storms into a sure haven? Is it not love that makes us seek and find in the life beyond the bed of divine truth, whereon the soul may rest and sleep'? That is why charity must be welcomed with joy; that is why 'I invite you to enter a peaceful sea, through this most powerful charity, this deep sea of love'.

Catherine had used this image of a peaceful sea before, but it had been a formal or literary figure of speech, whose full meaning had been as yet unknown to her. Now, at Pisa, she had seen the sea, and reflected upon it; in fact, she had been profoundly moved. She wrote: 'This is new to me now—not that the sea is new, but it is new to me in the feelings of my heart', so that St John's 'God is love' could from that time on be conceived only as a deep sea. God, love, the sea are three terms that become bound up together in her soul, and merge into one inspiring and stirring conception.

Among the many and growing cares that kept her busy at Pisa she did not forget the needs of her beloved nuns of Montepulciano, and she begged Bishop Ricasoli for alms for them, and asked Fra Bartolomeo Dominici to procure help for them from Soderini. In her letter to Fra Bartolomeo she also showed her anxious expectation of the Pope's return to Italy: 'Our Christ-on-earth comes soon, from what I hear; therefore I beg and constrain you to come as soon as you can'. She expected this event in the immediate future. Had not the Pope accepted the two galleys that the Pisans had offered him that year? She was already hoping to see the Pope very soon and speak to him of the Crusade, so dear to them both, which she was preaching so zealously.

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As soon as the news got about in Tuscany that the Cardinal Legate, Guillaume de Noellet, had at Bologna, on June 4th, 1375, signed a year's truce with the Visconti, and that therefore the English mercenaries, commanded by Sir John Hawkwood (Giovanni Acuto) had been dismissed, there was widespread apprehension in Florence because of the truce itself, and in the other cities because of the dismissal of the Company. Pisa was

particularly frightened, because Hawkwood still had outstanding debts to collect there, and because the Pisans 'had not kept their promise to give him a castle'. They feared the Company might attack the city. It was a year of grave famine for Pisa; an invasion of mercenary soldiers might reduce them all to starvation. Moreover, the Republic was impoverished, and could not scrape together the gold that Hawkwood would certainly claim. Not the rulers only but all the citizens were terrified. The records of the English Company in recent years, even when it had wintered with them on friendly terms, were of evil augury for the Pisans. Probably Villani and Sozomeno exaggerate when they describe the moral and material losses caused to the Pisans by Hawkwood's Company in 1363, but there must be a groundwork of truth in their account, because naturally a band of soldiers, especially if mercenaries, tries to get all it can even out of a friendly state—gold, women, provisions. And the conduct of the Company in 1369, while on friendly terms with Pisa, had certainly been reprehensible; in fact, it had indulged in 'its favourite occupation of looting the territory, stealing corn and cattle, putting the peasants to flight, ravaging, destroying and burning'.

Naturally, the citizens were in anguished suspense under this new threat of seeing their countryside ravaged, their women dishonoured and their houses destroyed. Therefore the rulers of the Republic tried to strengthen their bonds of friendship with Florence, asking for her help, and the two cities sent their respective ambassadors together to Hawkwood's headquarters in Bologna, in the hope of averting the imminent danger. But Hawkwood would have nothing to do with general pacts; he insisted on treating with every Tuscan city separately. This was bad news for Gambacorta, and so the citizens of Pisa lived in fear of the coming invasion of the English Company. The onslaught came very soon. Sardo, the Pisan envoy at Hawkwood's headquarters at Bologna, tells us in his 'Cronica Pisana' that it came on June 28th, but it may have been earlier. In an anonymous 'Cronica' we hear that soldiers of the English Company appeared in the Pisan countryside on June 25th, and we presume that some detachments of the Company entered Tuscany in advance of the main body, and ravaged and destroyed while they awaited the arrival of their Captain who, with the pick of his troops, came

rapidly down through Prato, and reached Pisan territory about June 28th.

In those days of suspense Catherine shared the anxiety of the Pisans and, animated by her constant desire to help the afflicted, she tried to find some way of being useful to them in this predicament. By the people of that age a Saint was regarded as an all-powerful being who, through spiritual contact with God, could find remedies for even the worst state of things here on earth. The prayers of God's friends had measureless power to convert consciences, transform material substances, or alter the course of events. So in moments of general panic they invoked a miracle, and prayed to all the Saints, living and dead, imploring them to arrest the course of history, or even to reverse it. We do not know whether they begged Catherine to pray to God for the safety of the Republic, and also to intercede with Hawkwood to beg him to spare the Pisan countryside further ravage and looting. In any case, out of Christian charity, she determined to seek contact with the Condottiero. Gambacorta himself may have encouraged her to do so, and Fra Raimondo may have given his approval, but when we read Catherine's letter to Hawkwood, in which she presented and recommended Fra Raimondo da Capua, who was to be the interpreter not only of her own wishes, but also of those of Gambacorta and the citizens of Pisa, we feel that it is the spirit of charity, and not a political purpose, that moves her to write.

She was not familiar with the various political motives of that time, nor did she know the mind of Hawkwood. She had certainly heard him spoken of with fear, and sometimes with terror, when he was drawing near to Siena to impose the payment of thousands of florins, or to spoil the fertile countryside; and she may have known of his constant interventions in the affairs of Tuscany and of Italy, and of the services he had rendered to the Papacy; just as she had heard of some of his most resounding victories—but it certainly never entered her head that he was an instrument in the hands of the Cardinal Legate, Guillaume de Noellet, whose intention was to make use of him to hold the threatening anti-Papal power of Florence in check. If she had known this, she would have justified Hawkwood's conduct, even if she did not approve of it, as being in conformity with ecclesiastical policy. But even Fra Raimondo himself failed to see the real meaning of events; he

also judged of these as they appeared to the minds of the people of Pisa.

The danger was certainly great for everyone, and Catherine felt it as such, and wished to avert it. The English Condottiero, although apparently implacable, had a soul like other men, open to hatred and cruelty, certainly, but also capable of love and pity. Had he not suffered enough in his life as a soldier of fortune, and could he not now therefore be softened and converted by good Christian words? So she wrote to him: 'O dearest and sweetest brother in Christ Jesus, would it not be well for you to think a little of yourself, and consider what pains and hardships you have suffered in the service and pay of the devil?' (Here we seem to catch an echo of the popular judgment on Captains of Companies.) Catherine had heard it said that John Hawkwood had promised the Pope to go and fight for Christ in the Holy Land; why should she not remind him of this? 'Now my soul desires that you shall change over and take up the pay and the Cross of Christ Crucified, you and all your followers and companions; so that you may be a Company of Christ, and fight against the infidel dogs that hold our holy place, where the sweet Primal Truth dwelt and suffered anguish and death for us.' The Crusade was now preparing; why did he, a Christian, fight and persecute other Christians, 'members bound together in the body of Holy Church'? He had promised to be a Crusader. Why did he still hesitate? Why wage war in this land? Now was the time 'to seek after virtue'. He should leave these Pisan folk in peace, and prepare to fight for Christ, thus showing himself 'a manly and true knight'.

Fra Raimondo, the bearer of the letter, may have been told to elaborate the chief points, and persuade the Captain to embark for the Holy Land, thus leaving the Pisan Republic in peace. No document tells us of this, but from the letter of the Sienese Ambassadors to their Signoria, on June 27th, we learn that Fra Raimondo was accompanied by a certain Borgognoni and a Knight, both clothed as Gesuates; and since Borgognoni 'had been a man of evil life, and was very clever at negotiation', it is natural to suppose that he was added as a companion to Fra Raimondo in the hope of agreeing with Hawkwood on some definite arrangement about Pisa. The mission, however, failed. It is true that we find

affixed to Catherine's letter of presentation a note affirming that Fra Raimondo, before leaving the camp, 'received from all the officers and from the said Messer Giovanni, a solemn promise on the Blessed Sacrament that they should go away, and notwithstanding this he had made them write it also in their own hand and seal it with their seals'—but all this is simply a gesture of chivalrous courtesy towards a friar and a woman known as a Saint. In actual fact, the English Company remained near Pisa, looting and devastating, and Hawkwood never had the slightest intention of going on a Crusade. Perhaps he smiled good-naturedly on reading Catherine's frank, ingenuous letter, and thought with a certain envy of the simplicity of religious souls. A captain's business was a very different kettle of fish, and pledges to a Company could not be honoured without funds. He had no pity for the Pisans; he made their envoy wait till July 2nd, and then came to an agreement with Maccaione and Agliata by which the Republic was to pay 30,500 florins, 2,500 to be paid in one day to his chief lieutenants, 12,500 within ten days, and the rest later. 'The English abstained from burning and taking prisoners and slaves, but not from other depredations, until they passed on to Volterra', towards July 8th, as we learn from Temple-Leader, who attributes such restraint to the prompt payment made by the Pisans. It would, however, be reasonable to suppose that a slight attenuation of his demands, and the relatively good behaviour of his soldiery, were due to Catherine's letter, which probably led Hawkwood to reflect that there are some enviable religious souls in the world.

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After having arranged with Fra Raimondo about his visit to John Hawkwood, and dictated his letter of presentation and recommendation, it seems probable that Catherine returned to Siena at least for some days. There is no certainty of this, but some indications suggest it, and the editor of the recent complete collection of Catherine's letters, Dupré-Theseider, is inclined to believe that towards the end of June 1375 Catherine was again in Siena. From her native town she wrote the most human and perhaps the most beautiful of her letters. This is not the place to

re-examine the events and dates to which this letter to Fra Raimondo refers, nor can we precisely identify Niccolò di Toldo—the young noble of Perugia whose condemnation on June 4th, 1375, aroused many protests, including one from the Cardinal Legate of Perugia, Gerard du Puy—as the youth sentenced to death, with whom Catherine was so intimately concerned. In truth, for our study of Catherine's soul and apostolate, these details have very little significance; what matters is the event itself, with its rarely delicate and personal colouring, which eluded Fawtier completely, so that he cast a doubt over the whole episode—thus showing a lack of understanding of one of the most salient traits in all Catherine's life. If the event itself is undeniable, so also is the testimony of Fra Tommaso da Siena, who tells us he was present himself at the execution; and that the name of the man executed was Niccolò di Toldo. He gives no special prominence to this detail, but recounts it, in the 'Leggenda Minore', with the same fidelity as when he relates the other miracles wrought by Catherine, amongst which he quite frankly includes this one. If we find him guilty of exaggeration in the Processo it is because there he affects a more solemn and elevated style, and so becomes bombastic and fatuous. In this case the fact that most arouses our own sympathy is that a young man was condemned to death for having merely spoken slightingly of the Government. Our imagination is aroused, and the youth at once acquires almost a tragic or heroic character—but Tommaso da Siena, like all the Sienese of his age, did not attach much importance to this; in fact he only mentions it in passing: 'for some words he had incautiously uttered, about the State, he had been sentenced to execution'. This phrase might have been deliberately cast into an aside, so to speak, by a consummate writer, but not by Fra Tommaso; from all we know about his thought and phrasing, we deduce that in the 'Leggenda Minore' he related what he knew, filling up gaps left by Fra Raimondo in the 'Leggenda Maggiore', and adding any other information about Catherine that he thought might be of interest. He is more concerned with events than with names, and although names are necessary to his account, they have no personal interest for him; he might just as easily have given any other name, but Niccolò di Toldo, as far as his knowledge went, was the hero of this drama. An impartial examination of the existing documents

gives us reasonable grounds for supposing that the condemned man, whose soul Catherine saved, and Niccolò di Toldo, were one and the same man.

But let us turn to the letter Catherine wrote to Fra Raimondo da Capua, the fundamental document from which Fra Tommaso and others took their material for their own accounts.

Catherine went to visit a condemned man, whose case was not unknown to Fra Raimondo. 'I went to visit him whom you know.' Finding him disconsolate, agitated and full of wrath, she pitied him profoundly and began to explain to him the nothingness of this life and the immensity of the love of God. She spoke as one inspired. Something new was born in the condemned man's heart; he was secretly moved, first by a revulsion of feeling, then by a strange sense of well-being. His wrath subsided, his rebellious thoughts grew calmer, his distress was soothed. Even his fear of approaching death lessened, and he felt like a child held in wondering admiration in a world of enchantment. He forgot his natural attachment to life, and responded to a strange elusive power that was working in him. He was held fast in Catherine's spell. Gradually love rose in his heart like a radiant dawn; he was transformed. As he listened to her words they seemed to drop glittering to the depths of his soul; little by little he yielded to the overwhelming flow of love. Catherine became his whole world; through her alone he wished to love God; 'the measureless and passionate goodness of God led him sweetly on, creating in him so much affection and love in the desire of me in God, that he could no longer stay without Him, and said: "Remain with me, and do not forsake me, and so all must needs go well with me, and I shall die content", and he held his head against my breast.'

The day for execution came; the condemned man confessed, heard Mass, received Holy Communion—how long since he had last received it! Catherine gazed at him with joy; she thought of the blood that he would soon shed, and of her own blood that she longed to shed for Christ; she was almost intoxicated with joy: 'Take comfort, my sweet brother, for soon we shall be at the marriage feast'. He wanted her to be near him in the last moments of his life, and she promised to go before him and await him there at the place of execution. This promise filled him with joy, and he turned to Catherine, saying: 'Will the sweetness of my heart

await me at the place of execution? I shall go there joyful and strong, and it will seem to me a thousand years before I come, thinking that you are waiting for me there.' Here was a miracle of transubstantiation indeed, a miracle of love, human and divine. Catherine was jubilant; she went before him to the place of execution, where, without heeding the crowd that had gathered there, she knelt down before the block and prayed. Then she stretched herself out on the block, as if to feel the anguish and the hope of the man who was shortly to pass out from this life at the hands of the executioner. She invoked Christ and Mary, and prayed that she might feel the power of God operating, not only in her, but also, and mightily, in him. He would be there in a moment; she wanted him to be able to offer himself tranquilly for the terrible sacrifice. She prayed for light, peace, and serenity for him; she freed herself from the world of the senses, soared aloft, reached the divine, begged, implored, strove to obtain this boon. And then 'he came, like a meek lamb, and seeing me began to laugh with joy, and wanted me to make the sign of the Cross over him. When I had done this, I said: "Now to the wedding, sweet brother of mine, for soon you will be in eternal life". He laid himself down very meekly, and I stretched out his neck and bent over him to remind him of the Blood of the Lamb; he said only: "Jesus" and "Catherine", and as he uttered these names I received his head in my hands, closing my eyes in the divine goodness and saying: "I will".'

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In July 1375 Catherine, again in Pisa, was full of fervour for the Crusade. Her enthusiasm was warlike; she demanded a struggle to the death against the infidel, and a generous spilling of blood. Blood excited her strangely; she cried out at the mere thought of it, as if some primaeval instinct were thus satisfied. Yet her desire for blood was not morbid, nor was it a Bacchic fury. Blood was for her the symbol of Christ; it purified and redeemed. It is for us disconcerting to read: 'I desire blood, and in blood I slake, and shall slake, my soul'. The expression is crude, and it would be cruel if blood were not for her the image of Christ, and therefore full of cleansing and sublimating power. In fact, for Catherine it

signified dedication, sacrifice, renewal, because through the Sacred Blood are destroyed 'man's perverse love for himself', and every other servile love, and in it are found truth and light. It is the Blood that melts all coldness and imparts grace; we feel it throbbing when we contemplate Christ on the Cross. It is Blood that flows eternally in heaven and on earth, its warmth producing life. In no way does it pervert or darken the soul, but induces it to love, being itself the fruit of love, and teaches a serene and just contemplation of mankind and the world. Even when Catherine is aware of the odour of real blood, this is so spiritualised in her thought that it gives her a sense of interior peace. When, after the execution of Niccolò, she writes that her soul 'rested in peace and quiet, in such an odour of blood that I could not bear to rid myself of the stains of his blood, that had fallen upon me', it is because she firmly believes that the blood shed by a Christian in a state of grace acquires a supernatural power, and is mingled with that of the martyrs, and with Christ's own Blood, to build up the temple of God on earth. So, in Siena, receiving the dead man's severed head in her lap, she asserts: 'I believe the first stone of the Temple has already been laid'. The idea of the Crusade was fixed in her mind, and she was sure that the blood spilled like red gems upon her white habit was a foretaste, so to speak, of the blood that would soon be shed in the East by Christians fighting against the infidels. Simône da Cascia puts it crudely when he says that she rejoiced when she saw her white robe sprayed with blood, but this crudeness is softened when we bear in mind the symbolic meaning she attached to blood. And this helps us also to overcome our dismay when we read the many passages of effusive joy that the idea of blood suggests to her.

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The Curia at Avignon was well aware of the great danger which the Mahomedan power represented for Christendom, and saw the necessity of a Crusade, but was uncertain about the degree of enthusiasm which such a Crusade might arouse. Before, therefore, undertaking such a grave and hazardous task, it was necessary to ascertain the intentions of the faithful with regard to the 'holy

expedition', and to try immediately to obtain numerous promises of help from men who would most solemnly declare themselves ready to fight for the cause of Christ, or willing to give large sums towards the cost of the expedition. Gregory XI could only declare the Crusade if he were sure of having at his disposal thousands upon thousands of enthusiastic Crusaders, and abundant means. '*Nos enim si viderimus in hac parte multitudinem populi christiani et facultates sufficientes, aliaque opportune concurrere, indicemus passagium generale vel particulare si et prout reputabimus expedire, et consuetam indulgentiam, gratiam et privilegia concedemus.*' In these lines of the Papal Bull of July 1st, 1375, given at Villanova of Avignon, we clearly see that Gregory, although he desired the Crusade himself, was doubtful of the consent of Europe, and therefore invited the religious Orders and the Papal representatives to direct propaganda in favour of the expedition, so as to be able, later on, and according to the results obtained, to decide for or against the undertaking. This suggests that the plan of the Crusade had received only a partial welcome in the Church.

Catherine heard of this Bull while in Pisa, for it had been sent directly to Fra Raimondo da Capua, and to the Dominican and Franciscan Provincials. She did not linger over a careful study of its spirit or letter, but took it at once as the announcement of a great and imminent event, and rejoiced accordingly. The dream of so many years seemed about to be realised. The Blood shed by Christ now claimed the blood of the faithful. Now was the time to suffer, fight and die. There was not a moment to be lost—it was necessary to run, to fly to the nuptials, and atone for Blood with blood. The Crusade was about to become a reality, before her longing eyes. There, in Pisa with Fra Raimondo, she began an intense and active propaganda, writing to queens, prelates, highly placed personages, acquaintances, friends and fellow Tertiaries, inviting all to go overseas. Men in the height of their strength must enlist as warriors, the affluent must give their wealth to the sacred cause, she herself and her own friends, in a 'happy band', must run to unite themselves to the Word of God! 'And I invite you all to these nuptials, that is, to shed your blood for Him, as He shed His for you; that is, I invite you all to the Holy Sepulchre, there to offer up your lives for Him.'

Meanwhile, in Pisa, Fra Raimondo expounded, discussed and

explained, but the spirit that inspired him was Catherine's. From the letter she wrote to Bishop Ricasoli (Letter XXXVII in the Dupré-Theseider edition) we learn of Fra Raimondo's busy days, spent dealing with questions of the Crusade with the nobles who came to see him, and from her letters written during the summer of 1375 we see with what zeal, enthusiasm and unswerving confidence she worked on men's consciences, now gently, now with violence, urging great and humble alike to join in the holy expedition.

Her letters written at this time are full of the tact and finesse so often found among the simple folk of Tuscany. First she develops a train of thought of particular interest for the purpose she has determined on. She begins by asserting spiritual truths that are of general application, then follows this up with a meditation on the worthlessness of human nature, that may, nevertheless, acquire worth when it is plunged into Christ. We ourselves are unworthy and despicable, but if we sacrifice our lives for our Saviour, we become rich and great in virtue. We must therefore defy our natural cowardice and cast our bodies aside so that our souls may triumph. In very truth, all that counts is the soul, saved and united to Christ; human life becomes real life only when it is spent in the cause of God. The divine voice calls to men to enlist in a great undertaking, one that puts to the test the intensity of our Christian love. Let us answer the call at once; now is the time for the faithful to show that they have firm intentions, daring and generosity. The voice of Christ rings out imperatively: let Him not appeal in vain, lest the future of Christendom be indeed dark. The Crusade is now being prepared. Christ-on-earth is about to proclaim it, and wishes to know who are to be the Crusaders, the heroes of the Church, the future martyrs. Blood is required, let blood be given! Is it not a duty for all to enlist in the Redeemer's army?

Thus, with appeals now delicate, now stern, often eloquent, always rousing and affecting, sometimes subtle, sometimes ingenuous, but always sincere and frank, she reached her initial and fundamental objective: the Crusade. Often it was merely referred to in two or three lines in a long letter; but even when introduced almost as an aside, it crept into her correspondent's mind. In this way, with tact and wisdom, she furthered the purpose that lay so near her heart. She rejoiced at every affirmative

answer she received; the waters were being moved around her, her friends had taken the cause to heart; she was receiving significant promises of help. 'Know that this Friar Jacomo, whom we sent to the Governor of Sardinia, with a letter containing news of this holy expedition, has graciously replied to me that he wishes to come himself in person, and will provide, for two years, ten galleys and a thousand knights with three thousand foot-soldiers and six hundred crossbowmen. Know, moreover, that Genoa is all astir, offering him men and money.' These are minor details for us, onlookers so far removed in the centuries, and they may have been of slight importance for the Holy See, but for Catherine they were events of primary significance, and led her to suppose the Crusade was already almost in being. 'The time seems shortening, because of the willingness of the creatures.' These testimonies of consent gave her such delight that she felt as if all corporeal bonds were broken and she were free to live in the infinite. 'I feel as if my soul, at the very thought, were freeing itself from my body', she exclaimed, writing to her friend William of Fleete, but she did not let this exultation lessen her energy or restrict her activity. 'Now let us run, my children, and brethren in Jesus Christ, let us stretch forth our sweet and loving desires, constraining and praying the divine goodness to make us soon worthy; and here it behoves us to be guilty of no negligence; but to be always pressing on, and exhorting others to do the same.' To Don Giovanni de' Sabbatini she wrote, in a burst of enthusiasm: 'O how blessed will be my soul, when I see you and the others running like men in love, to give their lives away, with not a glance behind!'

Her joy knows no bounds when she receives an affectionate reply from the Queen of Naples, Giovanna d'Anjou. She writes to her at once, on August 4th, 1375, to express her delight. The Queen of Naples is ready 'to give her substance and her life for the glory of Christ's name'. What a lofty and inspiring example! No time must be lost; the Queen must inform the Pope of her intention, and thus he will see the necessity of declaring the Crusade without delay, and she will find the Christians 'most willing' to follow her. The Holy Spirit has inspired her decision; she must make full use of it, and not draw back now, for any reason. In fact, why should she not set herself at the head of the holy

expedition? 'As you have the title of Queen of Jerusalem, so may you be head and promoter of this Crusade, so that the holy place may no longer be possessed by those base infidels, but taken into honourable possession by Christians, *taken by you as your own.*' This exhortation was evidently given on the spur of the moment. Catherine can hardly have seriously thought of setting Giovanna of Anjou at the head of the Crusade. Even if the thought occurred to her, surely she should have realised the reception such a proposal would have had in the Curia, and at the various princely courts of Europe? But Catherine was not politically minded and therefore never asked herself such questions. She thought only of her immediate purpose. Among the great ones who had answered her appeal, there was no one greater than Giovanna; hence her proposal to give her the leadership of the Crusade, without reflecting whether this was feasible or not. She may have been pleased to find a woman, of such importance in the courts of Europe, who in that moment gave signs of having more sympathy, decision and daring than the other princes, and showed herself a warlike Christian, and therefore worthy to lead the expedition. But, in any case, Catherine's proposal was neither well thought out nor definitive. Probably, if Queen Elizabeth of Hungary, to whom she also wrote urging her to take part in the Crusade with her son Louis, had replied with warm consent, she would not have hesitated to acknowledge Louis of Hungary as leader of the expedition, as Gregory XI had done two years before.

A few weeks later, Catherine wrote again to the Queen of Naples, in a rather different tone; perhaps she had heard the reports and criticisms current in Italy about the Queen's moral conduct, or perhaps she had begun to doubt the sincerity of her fervour, not only for the Crusade, but also for the Church. She now insisted, very openly and pressingly, on the need for 'quelling the senses', and for 'silencing sensuality', perhaps an indication that she had now received information, previously unknown to her, about the Queen's sensual nature. The heartfelt appeal she now made to Giovanna, to come to the help of the Church with wealth, and men, and advice, suggests a slight apprehension about her perseverance in her intentions, and was perhaps an attempt to strengthen her loyalty. New events of great importance for Italy, for the Papacy, and therefore for Catherine, were now at hand.

Catherine heard of these happenings from the people she met every day, and from the various Religious who visited her, or whom she visited, particularly from the Dominicans who were attentive observers of the politics of the Papacy, and of the other Italian states. Pietro Gambacorta also probably gave her precise information, and was not averse to hearing the Saint's counsels and general reflections on the course of human events. After June 1375 came wretched days for Pisa. After Hawkwood's unwelcome visit, which impoverished the city financially, there arrived, on July 22nd, a letter from the Florentines informing Pietro Gambacorta that a certain Abbot, *sub nomine pastorum ecclesiae perfidia solita*, backed by the English Company which was in the Pope's pay, was plotting against his life, and the order of the city. The warning was false, but at the time it gave rise to anxiety and distrust, and perturbed Gambacorta greatly. Two days later Florence announced that she had entered into a league with Bernabò Visconti, always feared and opposed by the Pisans; on July 28th Florence declared that Galeazzo Visconti also had joined the league. This announcement too was false, but was believed at that time, and new fears, uncertainties and griefs were aroused by the thought of so powerful an alliance. Moreover, Florence invited the other Italian cities, and especially those of Tuscany, to join the new league—an invitation that implied the threat of force to compel them to come in. The anti-Papal league completely upset the balance of power in the Italian states that had lasted since 1371, that is, all the time that they had been loyal to the Church, a balance that had meant well-being, security and peace for Pisa. This upheaval would certainly be calamitous. Gambacorta was much perturbed by all this because he wanted to remain a faithful ally both to the Church and to Florence. How could he, without a plausible reason, oppose either of these two powers? All his foreign policy had until then been based on this 'sincere adherence to the Florence-Church league in opposition to the Visconti forces that were trying to overrun Tuscany'. How could he make such a moral and political volte face without grave danger for the Republic? The Florentine rulers were upsetting all his plans for peace. Not only was his own ideal of harmony between states preferable for the good of the whole of Tuscany, but a war against the Pope—and if events took their course such

seemed inevitable—would bring ruin to many Italian cities, and economic disaster to Pisa, if she were involved in it, with, in all probability, the loss of her independence. Gambacorta and the rulers of Pisa spent days of anguished suspense.

When Catherine learnt that Florence had set herself at the head of a league against the Church, she was amazed and grieved, but her grief was different from that of the rulers of the Pisan Republic. The behaviour of the Florentine angered her, but not for political reasons; she did not care about preserving a balance of power, or grieve for the collapse of political ideals. She suffered for a human and religious motive, because she saw that the Florentine rulers were disturbing the tranquil piety of the Tuscan people, were failing in respect and devotion to the Church, and were in revolt against their spiritual Father. She did not enquire about the immediate or remote reasons that had induced Florence to make war against the Church, nor did she make a distinction—so difficult for a fervent Christian of her time—between the temporal or spiritual power, a distinction that was just beginning to dawn in the minds of some Florentines. For her all schemes for the expansion and strengthening of the State, and for its supremacy at the expense of the Church, were absurd and wicked; a Christian government that sought to arouse hatred of the Papacy was inconceivable, since the Church represented absolute and eternal values and the salvation of peoples; whoever cut himself off from her fell sick, and whoever turned against her became a rotten member. True Christians were obedient and devoted; they always followed their Mother the Church, came to her help when she was in danger, and defended her in her need. Since threats and dangers were now menacing her, it was more than ever their duty to assist her. Rebellion was contagious, and therefore princes and peoples should be forewarned. She wrote to Queen Giovanna of Naples: 'A child is really stupid and mad if he will not come to his mother's help when the rotten member turns against her. I want you to be the faithful daughter, always eager to assist your mother.' The mother is the Church, the rotten member Florence.

But the news Catherine received became more and more disconcerting; on August 14th, in Florence, had been set up the Government of the Eight, who were to direct the future war against the Church. 'All men of ripe age and judgment, already

experienced in the exercise of other important offices of the Republic, sincere patriots, all of one mind in hating the tyranny of the captains of the political parties; for all these reasons, although they were at first elected for one year only, they were later confirmed in office for the duration of the Government; and as popular enthusiasm had nicknamed them the eight Saints, so this name was given to the war they directed', Gherardi tells us, giving the names of the eight Magistrates.

The setting up of this Government in Florence must have been a severe blow for the Pisans, because it destroyed their last hope of avoiding a dreaded war. When Catherine heard of it, she was terribly depressed, and wrote: 'Now is the time for crying and weeping, and grieving; this happens in our time, my son, because the bride of Christ is persecuted by Christians, false and rotten members'. Now all must pray God insistently, weeping and sighing, imploring Him 'not to despise the tears and sweat poured out before His countenance'.

However, even in the midst of such dire events and disquieting news, Catherine neither lost her inner serenity nor feared for the future. If persecution came, God had permitted it, and therefore there was need of it. Moreover, there was much evil in the Church, and a certain purification would be useful. So she turned her gaze from a negative vision of the present and future, and turned towards the positive and actual. Poetry as fresh as the smile that lightens a child's face after tears sprang from her heart: 'My soul rejoices and is glad, because there amid the thorns is the fragrance of the rose that is to be'. She can lose heart only for a moment; she knows that God is with the just, with His Church. She has startling proof of this as soon as she thinks of the results already obtained in favour of the Crusade—so many people have written to her and declared their readiness to sacrifice themselves and their possessions to win back for the Church the sepulchre of Christ! There is no room for doubt, only for joy; grief is there, to be sure, and such as to pierce the soul, but there are joys also, and these surpass all pain. 'Again, I rejoice and exult at the sweet results that have been brought about in Christ-on-earth, because of the holy expedition, and I rejoice again at what has been done, is being done, and shall be done, through grace divine.'

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For some months after this July, Catherine was a little less ardent in preaching the Crusade, although the ideal remained constantly in her mind. In the letters of this period that have come down to us, written to her disciples and friends, she hardly refers to it again. She is absorbed in other preoccupations and duties. The apparent inevitability of war between Florence and the Papacy, the formidable threat to the Church presented by the Florentine pact with the Visconti, the moral and spiritual causes of what might develop into a general catastrophe, the need for the Pope's return to Rome, her own duty to the Church in this crisis—all these questions were pressing upon her and absorbing all her energies.

Meanwhile, she undertook diplomatic missions to Pisa and Lucca, cared tirelessly for the sick and needy, conversed with folk in high office, and visited the Carthusian monasteries of Calci and Gorgona. Nevertheless, after speaking of the Crusade with the Ambassador of the Queen of Cyprus, she could not restrain her joy and wrote to her Tertiaries: 'The affairs of the expedition prosper more and more, and the glory of God increases every day'. As soon as she heard that the Giovanniti were preparing an expedition overseas her old fervour returned, and she wrote to the Count of Monna Agnola and his companions: 'Now I believe that God is inviting you to pursue and achieve your own perfection, giving you such a hunger for the salvation of the infidels. Methinks he wants you to be the first warriors to confront them, since this is now the beginning of the holy expedition. The Holy Father first sends out the holy militia of the Church, and then whoever may wish to follow them.'

We find an outburst of fervour in the letter she wrote to Bartolomeo Smeducci di San Severino, full of her anguished realisation of the corruption of the clergy. Already, in her letter to Bishop Ricasoli, some months earlier, she had spoken of corruption amongst the priests; now her judgment is more searching and more precise. Most probably the incessant propaganda of the Florentines against the Court of Avignon and the ecclesiastics in general, and the subtlety and skill with which they exposed the degeneration of the Church, together with the widespread criticism she must herself have heard of clerical immorality, caused her to meditate more insistently on the wounds of

Holy Church. Indeed, no one could deny the vices of the clergy. Immorality, avarice, pride, simony reign 'in the bride of Christ, in the prelates who care for nothing but pleasures, honours and great wealth', she wrote to Berengario, the Abbot of Lézat, who had asked for her advice and judgment on the Church. She went on: 'The great ecclesiastics think of nothing but eating, and fine houses and fat horses. Alas! that what Christ purchased on the wood of the Cross should now be spent on prostitutes!' Was it to be wondered at, then, that such behaviour on the part of high ecclesiastics caused members of the Church to become rotten? And what was there strange now about the Church being persecuted? Was persecution not a logical consequence of the unworthy behaviour of the leaders? Even this quarrel between Florence and the Church was due to the corruption of the clergy. All material evil was always caused by a spiritual disturbance—therefore it was necessary to analyse the real causes of the evil, and cure these first of all. Reform must begin in the highest spheres; if Christian life could be seen in these restored in all its splendour, then the masses too would purify their lives, and no one would give further heed to Florentine propaganda, nor would the children rebel against their Father, but peace would reign in the whole world under the rule of Christ-on-earth.

This conception of Church reform became ever clearer to her, and as she believed that purification must begin from above, she decided that the Pope must be the first to reform himself. He was too tender and anxious about his own relatives, and showed too much gentleness and mercy to the prelates. 'Too much pity is very great cruelty.' He should correct with severity but without harshness, and root out even the smallest evil.

Justice was needed, for mercy lost its meaning unless it were based on justice, a loving but not a lax justice, which would not permit personal advantages at the expense of others, nor act for the profit of the moment, but for the greatness and welfare of all. Only by means of justice could the Church fulfil its proper function in the world. All must be ordered according to justice. Therefore, 'when the time comes for the appointment of priests and Cardinals, flattery must have no voice in it, nor wealth, nor simony'. Then, turning more directly to the Abbot of Lézat, the Apostolic Nunzio in Tuscany, she exhorted him to speak to the

Pope, to persuade him to be severe with himself, with the Cardinals, Legates, and all the high officers of the Church; to prevent those iniquities that defame the daughter of Christ, and appoint Cardinals and priests of holy life. 'Beg him, when you can, to look for virtue, and a good and holy name in a man. Let him not look for gentle birth any more than for wealth: it is virtue that makes a man noble and pleasing to God.'

All this reform was certainly imperative, but impossible to bring about in a short space of time; it was a long and difficult labour requiring tact, robust energies, and lively sensibility. It was necessary for a majority in the Church to feel its urgency and demand it. But that could not happen until the evil had reached its climax. 'To remedy this it will be needful to pull everything down, even to the foundations.'

In any case, a crisis was at hand, and the Florentine war against the Papacy might be the means of arousing the Church to a knowledge of its own evils and even a means of remedying them. When she lifted her eyes above the present contingency and considered the Church in her eternal function, she saw that the Church was whole; her present state of decadence and impurity was therefore only temporary. The Church must be and should be pure.

Of the events of her day Catherine knew only of some particular happenings, related sometimes with inexact information, and mingled with popular rumour and more or less partisan opinion; but her perceptions were keen and she was able to draw her own conclusions, based on her own firm religious principles. She was accustomed to destroy within herself all elements extraneous to her religious life, and to seek clarity and harmony, and she applied this method to external life and to history, reducing it all to a harmonious and rhythmical process. Thus, what was painful and tragic became an integrating part of what was joyful and loving and prepared the triumph of the good. As in the individual man sin is a sign of weakness, so the agitations of peoples and the troubles that fall upon them and seem to crush them serve, in reality, as a means of re-birth.

This clear-sightedness enabled her to understand that the implacable war waged by Florence against the Church was only an episode, and one that would in the end lead to the strengthening

of the Church in Italy, and its greater glory. Thus, in her simplicity, she could judge certain events of her own day just as we can judge them now after so many centuries of history and criticism. The labour we daily devote to the study of documents and sources leads us to no better results than those she obtained by the observance of a few sure and certain principles, and expressed, as if by magic, in a few brief words. Her serenity in the present and hope for the future prevented her from living in fear of sad, painful and dread events. She knew that although each event has its own particular significance, nevertheless it plays its part in the great plan for man's salvation. We may condemn grave iniquities, and loathe them, yet, nevertheless, we may see that they are necessary for the unfolding of history. Therefore the clash of interests and passions left her indifferent, because she saw all these as details of a cosmic process intended by God. She suffered and shuddered for the sins of individuals, sometimes inveighing against them like a figure of tragedy, but before the unfolding of the universal life of man she showed the immobility of a Greek statue. This is the two-sided nature of the apostolic soul, which shares in the individual life and suffers with it, but observes with indifference the development of the whole vast process of history.

She is sure that the Church is divine, and must ultimately triumph, but meanwhile she must not remain inert. She must collaborate with Providence. Hence the need to combat evil, which will one day assuredly be conquered, but now is still a force to be reckoned with, and therefore opposed. For example, Florence undermines the prestige of the Church, ill-treats priests, sows distrust and revolt among the peoples subject to the Holy See, and persistently spreads anti-Papal propaganda; therefore her efforts must be met and opposed with faith, sincerity, truth, purity, and a constructive spirit.

Some of the accusations against the clergy are true; this must be acknowledged and a remedy must be found. It is true that most of the Papal Legates are French, she says, and yet wield power in our country, exploiting our cities and impoverishing our people to their own profit; corruption is rife at the Court of Avignon; worldliness has taken the place of spirituality; but all these reasons, and others one might add, do not justify rebellion against the

Church. Not opposition but reform is required. Catherine herself desires reform and preaches it everywhere. If all would do likewise, instead of stirring up the people and inciting to war, the clergy would be forced to mend their way of life, and the rulers of the cities would have to rule with justice for the good of all. Then Florence would no longer have to send, as a token of homage to the rebellious cities, red standards with the word '*Libertas*' inscribed in silver thereon, for the heart of every Christian would bear the word 'liberty' written in letters of fire. If there were even a little love between men, there would be no revolts. Therefore covetousness, hatred, vanity, sensuality, lust for power—all these must be destroyed; the Church must be loved, and the Pope, the father of all, obeyed. Then all would live in perfect concord. The kingdom of Christ must be extended in this world, and instead of envy, jealousy and hatred, men must seek unity and love, and set off like a band of brothers to fight the infidels.

These were Catherine's ideas, and she furthered the Papal cause by propagating them. But she wanted to do still more. She was then in Pisa, near to Lucca. Both these cities were loyal to the Pope, but Florence was threatening and flattering them by turns, endeavouring at all costs to detach them from their allegiance and include them in the anti-Papal League. She conceived it to be her duty to speak with the rulers of both Republics, and urge them to resist the Florentine requests. We have no sure proof that she received this mission from the Pope, and it seems more probable that she acted according to her own wish, on the advice of Raimondo da Capua, or of other Dominican leaders, and perhaps on that of the Archbishop of Pisa. These prelates must have been quivering with indignation at the behaviour of the Florentines, and it would be natural for them to think of sending Catherine, who was so well known by fame in both these cities, to try to deter their rulers from joining the League. The results of her mission were mediocre. Pietro Gambacorta was already on the Papal side before Catherine treated with him officially. He loved the Pope, and he loved peace, and had been doing his best to resist the persistent requests of Florence, his neighbour and ally. He was determined, at least, to remain neutral between the two parties. His conversations with Catherine were certainly cordial,

for he admired her holiness and eloquence. He probably revealed to her the political difficulties that beset him, informed her of the most important events of the day, and explained to her his own plans and aims, based on a general understanding with the Papacy. He had, in fact, more than once requested Florence to form a league which might include the Papacy also. It may safely be concluded that the advice Catherine gave later on to the Pope, to invite the rebels to make a general peace, was suggested to her by Gambacorta in these days. It was certainly good advice. Since August the Pope had been sending Bull after Bull to the Florentines to explain his own intentions and conduct, to eliminate misunderstandings, to deny accusations, and recall them to filial obedience; it would have been a wise, as well as a daring move, to take the initiative in promoting a real and genuine peace.

Catherine must have felt reassured by Gambacorta's words; she had great confidence in him, and thought him much more powerful than he really was—so she wrote to the Elders of Lucca that they were to have no fear, because 'the Pisans, your neighbours, as long as you persevere and remain firm, will never fail you, but will always help you and defend you, even to the death, from whoever might seek to harm you'. These words reveal her ignorance of the political and military weakness of the Pisan Republic, which was, materially speaking, incapable of supporting Lucca, and also show her ingenuousness with regard to Gambacorta's position, for he could not afford to come to blows with Florence. She had interpreted his assurances in an absolute sense, without realising that the assurances of politicians are always conditioned by times and circumstances, and are never such as to pledge the future unconditionally. Catherine thought that Pisa would court destruction rather than give in to the League. She presupposed in others her own vigorous character, and imagined them faithful to their ideals, even at the cost of life itself.

Meanwhile, Gambacorta, quite understandably, while assuring her of his loyalty to the Pope, sent his ambassadors to Florence to begin negotiations about joining the League. After all, he still hoped for the formation of a general league which should include the Pope. In acting thus, he was therefore acting with cogency—a cogency, however, that ended in his giving up his own plan and

joining the League unconditionally, concealing in his heart the secret hope of reconciling Florence to the Church.

Catherine had less confidence in Lucca. She went there, perhaps encouraged to do so by Gregory XI's letter to the Lucchesi of August 10th, on September 14th or thereabouts, accompanied by her Dominican directors and disciples; and in Lucca she inspired with her own zeal a group of Mantellate, and spoke to the Elders of the City, urging them to resist. She had no great hopes of them, knowing their hesitancy and their ambiguous behaviour. In the letter she wrote to the Elders later on, she made use of spiritual weapons to try to prevent the Lucchesi from joining the League, but the Lucchesi were afraid of the crossbowmen of Florence. She promised them the Pope's moral support, but what they needed were a militia and money. Her words were grand and fine: 'He is powerful, our gentle God, He will and can keep us safe from the hands of our enemies, provided that we care for His honour, and the honour of Holy Church, which is our honour too—for the soul receives no light but through the Church'. But what would fine words avail if Lucca were conquered by the Florentines, and reduced to slavery? That is why the Lucchesi pointed out to her that the Pope, Head of the Church, gave them no 'comfort', meaning that he sent them no material help, such as might preserve their safety. If Pisa and Lucca were to fall a prey to the League, would that not be a worse misfortune for both cities than if they were to belong to the League?

In fact, Catherine knew little of the political manœuvres and tricks that the Florentines, on the one hand, and the Pope and his Legates on the other, were employing to reduce each other's fighting capacity, so that her frank, sincere words were sometimes wasted in causes that were other than she thought. Nevertheless, her influence on the rulers of Pisa and Lucca was beneficial, if slight, and may have contributed morally to the fact that the two Republics held out for several months against the appeal from Florence. For a certain time her advice was listened to because it coincided with the interests of the two cities, but later on it was ignored. Pisa and Lucca joined the anti-Papal League unconditionally as soon as they realised that refusal to join would have dire consequences. But neither city actually rebelled against the Pope, nor held very closely to Florence. Catherine was disap-

pointed but not cast down. When about to yield to discouragement she would hear within her soul the solemn promise: 'This sweet and holy bride shall live for ever'. Florence could do no harm to the Church. The anti-Papal League and the war certainly presented grave dangers, but they could not destroy what was eternal, and the Church is eternal.

On the other hand, there were far more threatening evils already on the horizon—still far away, but soon to be at hand. Schism itself was imminent. Fra Raimondo asserts that Catherine always feared it, but his desire to represent her as a prophetess leads him into exaggeration. Our information all goes to prove that although Catherine knew that the evils threatening the Church were growing more powerful, she still had no clear idea of the possibility of schism.

Fra Raimondo received the news of the revolt of Perugia about the 22nd of December, 1375. At once, he ran in great distress to Catherine, who was then staying in a hospice near his monastery, to give her the sad news, and decide what they should do. He was upset and agitated at the thought of the dreadful effects these events might have on the temporal power of the Holy See and on the prestige of the Church, which was now at stake. He wept desperately as he related what had happened, and Catherine listened coldly. All at once she turned to him, saying: 'It is too soon to weep—this is nothing but the beginning; what is happening now is honey and milk to what will happen later'. Raimondo was astounded to see her indifference in the face of such terrible happenings. To him the fall of the temporal power, which seemed imminent, meant disaster for the Church. States were defying the Papacy, rebelling against the Holy See, reckless of excommunications—what could be worse? But Catherine's thought were of a loftier order. In those days she was meditating profoundly on the moral evils of the Church, and considering how widespread they were, and how ruinous. And since the corruption of the clergy must be extirpated, she knew already that a drastic reform would bring about quarrels and revolts in the Church itself. The thought of real and actual schism was still far from her mind.

Against a reforming Pope, and God was sure to send one, the first to revolt would naturally be the Cardinals and high ecclesiastics, because of their immorality; therefore she could easily foresee that there would ensue 'a great scandal for all Europe, and the whole Church of Christ would groan under it'. This for her was the future danger for Christendom, and before it the importance of the little Florentine war, and the limited and wavering rebellion of Central Italy against the Pope, fell into the background.

Fra Raimondo's amazement passed all bounds; he could not comprehend her dispassionate way of judging; but she understood the anxious and disconsolate soul of her director and friend, and tried to encourage him, pointing out that life is made up of contrasts: 'through what is contrary to virtue we acquire virtue', from shadows comes forth the light, from death comes life, from evil good; this is an inevitable law, and just as the soul 'in adversities achieves perfection without knowing it', so it is also with states, with the Church, with all mankind. Fra Raimondo is lost in preoccupations about material things. He must gather his strength together, re-enter his own soul, and prepare to fight the evil in the world. He belongs to the militia of Christ: therefore his task is to save souls, without caring about worldly matters, and detaching himself from all earthly ties. He has one duty only: to look to Christ, and work so that 'the sweet and holy bride of Christ shall live for ever' on earth.

Catherine left Pisa to go back to Siena towards the end of 1375. In her own city she found her Family. To be re-united to them, surrounded by their affection, able once more to raise and guide them in the ways of God, gave her joy—but it was a somewhat narrow field of activity for her now that she was used to dealing with folk in high position, and giving advice about the affairs and conduct of states. Moreover, she was unhappy in Siena because on November 27th the city had joined the anti-Papal League. These days were therefore days of inner concentration, meditation, grief, prayer and apostolate.

The conversion of Stefano Maconi occurred about this time. He was an elegant and accomplished young noble, of the same age as Catherine, and a boyhood friend of Tommaso da Siena. When he first met Catherine he took no interest in religion or the Saints. His character was mild, and he grieved over the feud between his family and the Tolomei and Rinaldini, and would willingly have made peace. But the Tolomei and Rinaldini refused to consider

any peace proposals. Stefano needed affection and was disconsolate when it failed him. He was kind and sensitive, and sought understanding and serenity. He took pleasure in the various forms of entertainment of that day, and rejoiced in his friendships. His qualities of practical wisdom, sound judgment, and easy eloquence brought him success, first in secular office, and, in later life, in various religious charges. All his life he was very constant in his loves, and never wavered in loyalty to his relatives, his friends, Catherine, and the Order of St Bruno, while he consistently opposed the anti-Popes and the schismatics. When he became General of the Urbanite Carthusians, 'he tried to re-establish unity in his Order' and in the whole Church. In her letters to him Catherine often exhorted him to have more manliness and more ardour of soul; his own letters reveal him as neither a vigorous writer nor a man of strongly-marked personality; all his thoughts were pervaded with a certain melancholy, which in the end found peace in the practice of humility and the love of God.

Until the beginning of 1376 he knew scarcely anything about Catherine. Her fame was generally known in Siena and throughout Tuscany, and his friends and acquaintances had certainly spoken to him of her extraordinary spiritual powers—but he was not then interested in spiritual greatness. His main preoccupation was the hatred borne by the Tolomei towards himself and all his house, and the problem of how to placate it, or seek reconciliation. He asked his friends for advice and support, but in vain. Finally someone advised him to go to Catherine, and his friend Pietro Bellanti, whom Catherine had already reconciled to his own enemies, offered to take him to see her. Maconi expected to find a woman ascetic, quick to judge and rebuke, rigid and scrupulous, with a forbidding manner. Instead, he found himself talking to a serene, frank woman, friendly and impulsive, from whom there seemed to flow a tide of warm affection that engulfed him. Catherine welcomed him with open arms as if he were a brother come from a far land, in need of the enthisuasm and the help of a beloved sister. He was touched and fascinated; he listened reverently to her words and left her presence rejoicing. She had promised him all the peace he desired, and had said she would take all his trouble upon herself; in return he must confess, become virtuous, raise himself to God. She asked nothing more of him.

Maconi must have thought to himself that Saints and miracles were real after all—nevertheless, a slight doubt may have lingered in his mind. She had made him a joyful promise: could it be fulfilled? And very soon he had a striking proof of her power. 'Events proved the truth of the virgin's words, because, through her mediation, I made peace with my enemies, who first resisted with all their might, and then had to yield to Catherine's will, and the force of her prayer; one may indeed call it a miraculous peace.' This was exterior peace, and was not enough for Catherine—not enough for Maconi, either, for he returned to visit the Saint, and felt his inner life gradually transformed. Catherine, who had read his soul and understood the natural goodness of his character, first begged him to act as her secretary, and later took him with her to Avignon, and kept him with her in Florence.

In 1379 he joined her in Rome, and stayed there till her death. All his life he was devoted to her; it was at the behest of his dear Mother that he became a Carthusian. He translated the 'Dialogue' into Latin, and always remained a loyal Urbanite both as a simple Carthusian and as General of the Order. Reverently collecting all Catherine's letters, and diffusing a knowledge of her various writings, he did all he could to increase her fame. After her death his affectionate heart turned to his fellow Caterinati, especially to Pagliaresi, whose fine poetry he admired. Towards the end of his life, detaching himself more and more from the things of this world, he tried to live in communion with Christ, and with his thoughts fixed on Catherine he longed to be re-united with her. 'Our Holy Mother waits for us, and calls us, so that we may arrive quickly, leaving the dead to bury their dead, while in all virtue we follow Jesus Crucified.'

In the midst of her apostolic labours Catherine continued to meditate over the evils that beset the Church, the uncertainties of the time, and the need for prompt reform. Her experiences in Pisa and Lucca had convinced her that the reform must begin with the Papacy itself. Then it would be easy for the Pope to reform the rest of Christendom. Until now she had been warning the children of the Church, a warning which was needed but not sufficient, since so many troubles were due to the Father himself. She now resolutely turned to him, revealing to him the extent and profundity of the ills that were undermining the Church, and

begging him to apply the needful remedies, that were in his power. She wrote directly to the Pope, frankly and clearly. We find again the same observations and criticisms that were contained in the epistle to the Abbot of Lézat, though now they are worded with more reverence. We hear the bell tolling, but also the warrior's bugle-cry—words of dread and loathing, others that console and exalt. Sometimes Catherine seems to bow herself to the dust, then all at once she raises her head high, with the dignity and authority of a prophet. She feels herself to be nothing, but a nothing that has found its all in God, and therefore can judge, warn and command. The safety and greatness of the Pope and the Church depend on the clergy renouncing their selfishness, luxury and corruption. Fire and the sword are needed to cure and heal: 'If the wound is neither burnt with fire nor cut with the sword, but only smeared with ointment, not only will it never heal but it will go rotten, and will often result in death'.

Direct and certain means must be used against the evil that is destroying the Church: 'Alas! Alas! my sweet father, this is the reason why your subjects are all corrupt, full of impurity and wickedness, alas! (I say it weeping) how dangerous is this canker worm!' He himself, the Father of all Christians, must first give up all selfishness, and immoderate affection for his own relations and friends, and attachment to things of this world; he must imitate Pope Gregory the Great, a man like himself, but who thought only of the good of souls, and loved God not for his own sake but for God's. He must follow after spiritual things, and then temporal things would not fail him. The sacred fire within him must destroy that other fire of selfishness and all other passions. He was the Vicar of Christ and must follow manfully in His footsteps. He must first purify himself, and then set about cleansing the Church. 'Do not be perturbed because cities and states rebel against you and the Florentines wage war on you. Do not be afraid of anything that may happen in this stormy weather that has fallen upon you, that is, do not fear these rotten members that have rebelled against you. Fear nought, for divine aid is at hand.' He must choose Cardinals, bishops and priests of unblemished character and profound spirituality, unlike those he had recently appointed, and he must straightway declare the Crusade, for which all Christians must be ready to give their lives. In fact, the

Crusade should be the kernel of his politics: 'Make peace with those who rebel and fight against you, invite them all to a holy peace, so that the whole force of the war may fall upon the infidels'. He must come among his faithful in Italy: 'Come, come now to console the poor little servants of God, your children. They wait for you with affectionate and loving desire.' She tells him about her own efforts to hold back Pisa and Lucca from joining the League at the instigation of Florence, and explains how threatening the future appears. She begs him to write to the two Republics at once, and give them all the encouragement and strength he can.

When Gregory XI received this letter he must have admired Catherine's frankness, her love for the Church and her profound faith. He liked to be told the truth, knowing that almost everyone tried to hide it from him. When he was informed of the revolt of Viterbo and Perugia he exclaimed: 'I never found anyone who would tell me the truth, except the Lombards'. Now Catherine's frank letter came to please and console him. He believed in the revelations of the Saints and admitted the superiority of mystics, and therefore her words had a special weight with him, and perhaps strengthened his own purpose to return to Italy and reform the Church. Catherine was right in indicating the weakness of the Papacy, and in demanding a remedy; but as a political counsellor she was ingenuous. He also wanted to return to Italy, and had long proclaimed this desire to the whole Christian world; he also desired the Crusade, and had issued Bulls to that end; he also hoped to reform the clergy and the Church, and had already made some attempts in that direction; but these were great problems that could not be solved from one moment to another.

How was it possible to proclaim an immediate Crusade? Any war, even a holy war, must be planned psychologically, financially, politically, in every smallest detail, to avoid a disaster like that of the Second Crusade, inspired by St Bernard. To go campaigning in the Holy Land required a great expenditure of money, many ships, well-trained armies and the co-operation of rich and powerful peoples. Catherine knew only of what was happening in her own neighbourhood, and even if she could count on some thousands of Italian Crusaders, ready to fight the infidels, they were not, as Gregory had been informed, of great military worth.

It was ingenuous on her part to think that if the Pope offered peace to his enemies, they would at once flock to fight for the 'holy expedition'. His return to Italy, also, although right and necessary, was not a thing that could be done in a hurry. As Pope he had obligations, not only towards Italy, but towards the whole of Europe, and he could not in that moment leave France and Italy to tear each other to pieces, without trying to intervene as a peacemaker. However, Catherine was a real Saint, and it behoved him to take some notice of her words; she was eloquent and profoundly religious. Her exhortations were inspired and full of persuasive power. In very truth she was of service to the cause of Christ and could be of even greater service in the future. We can guess that these thoughts were in Gregory's mind, but whether or not he replied to Catherine's letter we do not know.

Meanwhile, believing that Gregory XI was a weak man, as was commonly supposed among the Dominicans of her group, Catherine persevered with her requests and warnings to the Pope, writing to two great personages of the Curia: Nicola 'de Romanis' da Osimo, proto-notary and secretary to the Pope, and Jacopo da Itri, the Archbishop of Otranto, whom she knew personally, and who had informed the Caterinati of the imminent return of the Pope to Italy, and of the beginning of the 'holy expedition'. After appealing to both of them to cleanse themselves in the Blood of Christ, to be full of virtue, and willing to sacrifice all for the cause of God, she repeated, more or less, the same ideas she had expressed to the Pope: they must persuade him to return as soon as possible to Italy, make the Crusade a reality, and reform the clergy.

Meanwhile, she received disquieting news from Lucca—the city had decided to join the anti-Papal League. Great was her disappointment. She had always been a bit doubtful about the Lucchesi—but she had entertained some hopes of the success of her own mission among them; now all seemed lost. She wrote to the Elders a letter, mostly a sermon on human blindness, in which she insisted on the immortality of the Church, which is eternal and indestructible because God gives her light and power. Then she appealed directly to the Lucchesi: 'My very dear brothers, and sons of Holy Church', to urge them to persevere in loyalty to the Pope, and to refuse to follow those devils the

Florentines, who would lead them to damnation. Until now, she says, they have been strong and persevering and obedient to Holy Church, and she has rejoiced at this: but 'now, hearing the contrary, I am greatly cast down'. She warns them that although they say they take this step for the sake of peace, they will find the greatest war and ruin that they ever had—for body and soul. 'Now do not be guilty of such ignorance, but be true sons and persevering. You will know that if the Father has many sons he will leave his inheritance only to the one who remains faithful to him.' Returning to the initial theme of her letter, she says: 'Man is a blind man, needing the light, and the light is Christ. We must therefore go in search of this light, and I pray the supreme eternal Truth to fill and robe your soul with light, so that I shall not be afraid of your doing the contrary of what I now pray and order you to do in Christ's name, that is, to act otherwise in the future from the way you have acted in the past.' Her letter and appeal apparently were of no avail; but Catherine had the satisfaction of knowing she had done what God required of her. She had reminded the Elders of Lucca of their Christian conscience, and of their duty as sons of the Church.

This was a period of great sadness for Catherine. Things were not turning out as she had hoped. She meditated on all this, seeking for the cause, and found it in herself. She was the guilty one; because of her sins there was so much evil in the world: 'have mercy on my wickedness, my dear daughters, that is the cause of all the evil done in the world, and especially of offences against the sweet bride of Christ', she wrote to her Sienese Tertiaries, perhaps after an unsuccessful visit to the Elders of Lucca. It was a moment of disappointment and grief. She had failed in her intent, and God had withheld His aid because she had not the faith that moves mountains; the fault was therefore hers alone. She was lacking in faith because she was not pure enough; she was a sinner, still far from God. She must make a greater sacrifice of herself, a more complete cleansing and drowning in the Blood of Christ.

When a mystic believes himself guilty of all the evil in the world, he has risen above the universe and is, as it were, on the farthest rim of a circle whose centre is God. The light of life proceeds from God, but passes through him, and so when he sees

outside the circle nothing but darkness he blames his own soul for hindering the light from shining to illuminate the whole world. Such a thought might become an obsession and lead to despair; but the mystics remain serene, because almost immediately afterwards they are again aware of the light and life within their own souls, made transparent and luminous through divine action. So their optimism and joy return: 'I am sure, and I comfort myself with this, that His Providence will not fail. And already I seem to see His Providence beginning to appear.' Thus, serene and confident, Catherine took up her task again.

One of her women disciples wrote to her from Lucca saying she was grieving because her sweet Mother had left the city. Catherine answered at once, rebuking her for her attachment to creatures: 'I do not wish you to have love for me, or for any creatures, but only for God'. She must consider the life of Christ. Did He not abandon all He held most dear on earth to save mankind? Detachment from peoples and things is the first duty of the pilgrim in spiritual life. Therefore she must not feel the need of Catherine's bodily presence. 'Now I want you and the others to love me in this wise. Think of me only to give the glory to God, and give your service to your neighbours.' She herself was but an instrument in the hands of her Creator, and her work must be praised or condemned according to His purpose. They must turn to the Cross, by which she stood. 'Only there must you look for me, and for any other creature.' It was a good thing that she had left them, for otherwise they might not have sought for God alone, but might have clung too closely to her person, at the cost of their own perfection. However, they must not doubt her love. 'Do not think that because my body goes away from you, my affection and solicitude for your salvation grow less; for rather they increase when I am absent from you.'

To Bartolomea di Salvatico, also a Lucchese, and a recent convert, she writes to confirm her in the three fundamental Christian virtues: hatred for sin, love, through the grace of Christ, for all creatures and created things, patience to endure all hardship and pain. To possess these three virtues is to possess God, and whoever has God 'can feel no bitterness, for He is supreme delight, sweetness and joy. And that is the reason why the servants of God ever rejoice.' And she advises her to follow the Magdalene, the teacher

of all the faithful, who had no thought for herself, but wished wholly to follow Christ.

* * *

Meanwhile, the quarrel between Florence and the Papacy was growing more bitter and dangerous. Today it is easy to accuse the Florentines of a lack of political judgment in under-estimating the power of the Holy See. In fact, the knowledge of their own intellectual and material superiority, and the pride this knowledge gave them, prevented the Florentines from estimating correctly their own powers of resistance to the Papacy. They were full of self-confidence, supreme in art and letters, sure and proud of the great wealth they had amassed by their industry and commerce, clever in business, showing great talent in a variety of professions, easy and eloquent orators—why should they not aim at leadership in Italy? Did they not, more than any other state, deserve the political overlordship? But their ambition was opposed by the Papacy, and therefore they began subtly to undermine the Papal power, believing that, as soon as the temporal power of the Church collapsed, Florence would be able, directly or indirectly, to govern the greater part of central Italy.

The achievement of this purpose, that they saw ever more clearly before them, required careful planning to ensure their success. They began by exaggerating the weaknesses of the Papal government, and the ill deeds of the Legates, and exploiting the frictions and disagreements between the people and clergy, and they incited the Papal lands to revolt, and tried to mobilise Princes and states against the Papacy. The innate irony of the Florentines had plenty of scope, for the high ecclesiastics presented a good target for ridicule and mockery. With deliberate cunning they fanned into a blaze the discontent that was already smouldering, and offered help to all and sundry, promising independence and liberty. In the Romagna, in Umbria, the Marches and Tuscany, the Florentines already formed a sort of camouflaged army, or 'fifth column', ready to rise against the Legates and fight them resolutely when the hour for action came. Thus in central Italy the policy of Florence seemed triumphant, and she rejoiced when she heard of unrest, revolts and insurrections against the Papacy.

These men of the City of the Lily acted guilefully and with

subtle tact. They never came out into the open, for they did not wish to be accused of inciting the Papal cities to rebellion for their own ends. They did not declare themselves anti-religious, or anti-Papal, but proclaimed their desire to oppose ecclesiastical policy, as being a policy of Frenchmen for Frenchmen, and therefore alien and harmful to the Italian states. They tried to initiate a nationalist movement that might even include the Church. It does not seem likely that they contemplated setting up a National Church, as Dupré-Theseider seems inclined to believe. Writing about this in his book on the Popes of Avignon, he bases his conjecture on the writings of Marsili, who certainly refers to such a plan, but without much support from other Tuscan historians.

Then came what the Florentines, posing as victims, thought an opportune moment to attack the Papacy with precise accusations. The Pope had refused to send the corn which Florence needed; the Legate of Bologna had sent Hawkwood to loot and devastate Tuscany to weaken Florence; the ecclesiastics had plotted the betrayal of Prato, as was proved irrefutably by the Treaty which consigned Prato to Hawkwood. The Pope was evidently determined to break the power of Florence and then subdue her with all the rest of Tuscany.

Today historical criticism has dismissed these accusations as false and absurd, but in those days they were on the lips of all, and inflamed the imaginations of the Florentines. While making these open accusations, Florence was also building up a defence system that might (and, in fact, did) at the opportune moment become a means of aggression. She formed an anti-Papal League with Bernabò Visconti, and then with promises or threats induced various Tuscan cities to enter it. She was preparing arms and combatants.

Meanwhile, the Republic received good news: the Papal States were in revolt against their rulers and joining the Florentine League. From November 18th, 1375, with the insurrection of Viterbo, to March 19th, 1376, with the revolt of Bologna, Florence had every reason to exult over the continual defections from Papal rule. The 'great bell to announce a great festivity' rang out frequently, and enormous bonfires were lit amidst general rejoicing.

The temporal power of the Papacy seemed about to collapse.

The prestige and authority of Florence were increasing. What, the Florentines boasted, could the Legates do now, driven out of their cities and fortresses? What could the Pope himself, Gregory XI, do? He was weak and hesitant, and remained in distant Avignon, busied with questions other than that of Italy. It was to the advantage of Florence that he should remain where he was, and gradually accustom himself to the sad reality of the loss of his temporal power; then the astute and powerful Republic might be able to include him within her own political orbit, as a useful instrument of her own power.

This political ambition was but a dream. The Florentines, cold, calculating, wary, mercilessly critical of their own actions and of everybody else's, for once made a mistake. They succeeded in their campaign against the Curia, they knew how to sow hatred against the Pope, and arouse a desire for freedom in the peoples subject to him, they were able to initiate an anti-Papal movement that seemed powerful enough, and form a League of Republics and cities that, at least in the beginning, held firm; but they underestimated the latent strength of the Papacy, a strength that was ready for active intervention. Misunderstanding the character of Gregory XI, they also mistook the intentions of foreign states; they did not propitiate the Emperor and they did not smooth out their own internal divisions. All these mistakes became evident as soon as Gregory XI began to act in his own defence, and they proved the cause of their final disaster. One must admit that the Pope was patient for many months. Instead of taking vigorous action, he tried persuasion. In his numerous Bulls he explained, humbly requested, almost apologised. He counselled obedience, invoked unity, submission, peace. He asked the Legates to punish the officials who were guilty of maladministration; he wanted to come to an agreement with his subject peoples, and invited them to wait for his return to Italy in the near future, when he himself would see that they were dealt with justly. All this was a subject of mirth for the Florentines, and they went on more boldly than ever with their work of undermining Papal prestige and feeding the revolt. But towards the end of 1375 Gregory XI changed his attitude and became harsh and severe; in the last days of December he accused the Florentines of usury, and declared they were fomenting rebellion in the Papal States. He imposed a fine of

thirty thousand francs on the Florentine merchants residing in Avignon. Florence protested and intensified her opposition. Gregory remained firm: the levy was paid. Meanwhile the Pope collected funds for the war, now imminent, and opened negotiations to take the Company of Breton Mercenaries into his pay.

* * *

Queen Giovanna of Naples and the Republic of Genoa, wishing to relieve the tension, sent ambassadors to Florence with proposals for peace, which the Signoria refused. On February 11th, 1376, Gregory solemnly accused the Florentines and ordered the Signoria to appear for trial in Avignon on March 31st. The Signoria showed no sign of wavering or fear, but with characteristic astuteness, while still continuing their adverse propaganda, they sent letters to the Pope, before the trial began, recommending the representatives they sent to defend them, and appealing for his clemency; they wrote also to the College of Cardinals to remind them of their 'ancient and uninterrupted devotion and affection for the Church', and to Cardinal Corsini of Florence to beg him to speak in favour of his own city, and 'not make himself guilty of ingratitude towards his native land', and to other Cardinals, Religious and rulers, asking them to defend the Florentines before the Pope. They professed themselves devoted children of the Church and of the Pope, and declared that Gregory's misunderstanding of them was due to the false and wicked accusations which envious minds had poured into his ears; they attributed the responsibility for the insurrections in the Papal States to the ecclesiastical officials, whom they described as: '*oculi et cor ad avariciam et ad sanguinem innocentem effundendum et ad cursum mali operis*'. The Pope was unmoved; on the 31st of March he had the accusations read out in the Consistorial Court. The defenders of Florence did all they could to deny these accusations; but their eloquence and their arguments fell to the ground. All their attempts to avoid excommunication failed. The Pope, tired of the hostile activity of Florence, wanted to make an end, and demanded an exemplary punishment. The condemnation was solemnly read: excommunication, Interdict, confiscation of wealth. The Florentines were to be shunned, and their house

burnt. The city was outlawed; the property of the citizens was anyone's prize. A sentence to strike fear into the heart! The power and wealth of Florence were to wither in a spiritual, moral, economic and financial desert. The defenders of the Republic must have trembled with apprehension. It is said that the eloquent orator Barbadoro, once he realised their cause was hopeless, appealed to the Crucified for justice and help, against the injustice of His Vicar on earth, and this appeal, although rhetorical and bombastic, showed his concern and fear for the future of his country.

Florence now began to feel some difficulty and opposition. The Emperor ordered her to cease from stirring up rebellion in the Papal States; Naples opposed her instead of coming to her aid; neither Venice nor Genoa would support her openly; Rome refused to join the League; Hungary was hostile. Bernabò Visconti, her greatest ally, helped her as little as he could, 'to spare Lombardy the evils of war, and, to his own advantage, to let the full burden of the war fall on the Republic'.

Even the members of the League began to weaken. As Mirot says: 'Each ally aimed at increasing his own territory before his neighbour could seize land they both coveted. Each thought of his own defence, and Florence had not sufficient authority to compel private rivalries to give place to the common interest. The League broke asunder almost as soon as it was formed. From the day on which the Pope announced his return, and declared Florence to be beyond the pale of Christendom, the Florentines could count defections from the League as rapidly as before they had counted the adherences.'

Internal dissensions were now formidable. The 'war' party had not realised that from the very beginning it should have weakened the 'peace' party, that of the Guelphs. This party was so strong that 'while the Signoria were conducting hostilities against the Pope, they could not defend themselves against the Party Captains, and their followers', 'because', adds Machiavelli, echoing the Chronicles of that time, 'in the Party the Captains were so arrogant that they were held in more reverence than the rulers themselves; so much so that no ambassador came to Florence without having a mission to the Captains'.

How could Florence, amid such uncertainties and hostilities,

and with the prospect of economic disaster before her, hope to obtain a victory over the Pope, who had powerful spiritual forces at his disposal, was defended by the Emperor and various foreign states, and was moreover, everywhere supported by thousands of priests and friars?

At this dramatic moment Catherine came into contact with the rulers of the Florentine Republic. In January or February of 1376 she had written to her friend Niccolò Soderini, who had been elected Prior for those two months. It should have been a letter of congratulation, but it was one of warning instead. Catherine is absorbed in the thought of the anti-Papal League which in those days seemed very formidable, and a great deal of this letter may be said to consist of variations on the theme: '*Lega, legare, legami, legato*', words which she repeats more than twenty times. Now that Soderini is one of the Rulers, he must help his fellow citizens to bind themselves to Christ, and hence also to His Vicar on earth, for Church and Christ are one. What are these dreams of Florentine greatness, and this fear of losing power? 'We are fools, for we ruin ourselves through our lust for greatness, and, for fear of losing our position, we take on and do the devil's work, inviting other creatures to do the same evil things that we do ourselves, like the devil himself, for when they were angels, those that fell bound themselves together and rebelled against God, and through their desire to climb higher fell lower.' They were mistaken in thinking they had been attacked by the Pope; instead, it was they who had attacked him; nevertheless, he was such a kind father that he not only forgave them but invited them to make peace. They were to go to him and bind themselves to him with manly and virtuous hearts, if they wished to share in the Blood of Christ. They must strive for peace. 'Try to make peace and union between yourselves and Holy Church, to save yourselves from dire peril, you and all Tuscany with you. Methinks war is not so sweet that we must all needs accept it, if there is any way out of it. Is there anything sweeter than peace? To be sure, no!'

This letter must have shaken and moved Soderini, arousing in him feelings and thoughts that were latent, if dormant, in his soul. But it was not yet the right moment to show his own mind. Just then all seemed still to favour the Republic, the Signoria were continually victorious, the power of Florence was increasing,

enthusiasm for the war had now spread among the people, and anyone who spoke in favour of peace was considered a traitor. Only when Florence was plunged under the Interdict and excommunication, and the first baneful effects of these were felt, only then did the Guelph party begin to work more insistently in favour of peace. Perhaps Soderini then remembered Catherine's letter. She had spoken of the Pope as a kind father who would invite them to make peace. Peace had now become a mirage for many, and every day more necessary for Florence, as more and more people had begun to understand. But who could take the first steps to bring about a reconciliation with the Pope without compromising the Government of the city? Why not Catherine? She enjoyed the Pope's esteem and corresponded with him. It would be well to invite her, and to make use of her mediations. She was a Saint, and therefore more able to save Florence than anyone else. The letter Soderini had received from her was perhaps of good omen. Perhaps he spoke of her to his friends in the Party, or to some of the Priors.

This would fit in with Fra Raimondo's assertion that, when the Florentines began to feel the economic effects of the Interdict, 'they were obliged to seek peace with the Pope through the agency of people who they knew were acceptable to him. They were told that the holy virgin, whose sanctity was known to him, was high in his favour.' Soderini may also have spoken of Catherine with the Dominicans of Santa Maria Novella, who were in close touch with the Guelph Party, and so there may have been a group of people in authority, anxious to make peace with the Church, who considered Catherine to be the most suitable person to beg Gregory XI to use mildness and clemency in his dealings with Florence. It was urgently necessary to put a stop to the economic ruin now threatening, and to spare the city further evils. It was thought best to send the Pope, in Catherine's name, a trustworthy person who could explain to him the circumstances in which the Florentines found themselves, and the Saint's own wishes—and who could be better fitted for this mission that Raimondo da Capua, an intimate friend of Catherine's, much esteemed in his Order, and highly thought of also in the Curia? So Fra Raimondo was sent as unofficial ambassador to Avignon. In Catherine's name he was to appeal to the Pope's compassion, and prepare the ground

for a possible future reconciliation. Fra Raimondo writes: 'They ordered me first of all to go to the Pope on behalf of Catherine, to endeavour to mitigate his wrath'. We infer that he was sent by the heads of the Guelph Party, in agreement with the Dominicans. The Party constituted a state within the state, and had the power and authority to send Fra Raimondo to the Pope on a special mission of importance for Florence, without however pledging the city directly by deeds or words.

Catherine heard all about this, and gave her consent. Her letters often show her desire to see the Pope and speak to him, and she may have thought that this would be a propitious time to do so. Fra Raimondo would present himself to Gregory XI in her name, and the Pope might perhaps ask to see her. When her spiritual director, accompanied by Fra Giovanni Terzo, Fra Felice da Massa and others, left for Avignon at the end of March, he carried with him a letter from Catherine presenting and recommending him to the Pope.

This letter sought, indirectly, to further peace between Florence and the Holy See. The Pope must be 'the instrument and cause, through divine grace, of the pacification of the whole world', but he could achieve this only by reforming the clergy, returning to Rome, and preaching the Crusade. These are the three recurrent themes of all her letters, but in this one her language is more vigorous than in the preceding letters, and denotes her growing scorn of those prelates who are 'stinking weeds, full of impurity and greed, swollen with pride', who must be uprooted, because they 'poison and befoul' the garden of the Church. Her thoughts turn wistfully to the primitive Church. Perhaps these rebellions and defections are a means of recalling the Church to its pure origins. Perhaps God had desired this war 'so that Holy Church might return to her former poverty, and be meek and humble as she was in that holy time, when, caring for nought but the glory of God and the salvation of souls, she occupied herself with spiritual and not with temporal matters—for since she had begun to care more for temporal than for spiritual things, all has gone from bad to worse'.

These are not mere echoes of Franciscan thought, so widely diffused at that time, but are also spontaneous and direct judgments of her own. She esteemed and counselled poverty, but,

unlike St Francis, never made it the absolute centre of life. She admired the primitive Church but did not consider it was necessary to return to its practice, as the more or less Protestant reformers insisted later on. She believed the Church must purify herself, and become more spiritually minded, but she did not deny her historical evolution. The revolts and wars of her own day were due to moral causes; the real teaching of the Church had been neglected or destroyed because wicked ministers had so sucked her blood that 'she had become quite pale'; the Pope must therefore take wide, comprehensive and energetic action, so as to bring about 'a great peace out of war, and a great concord out of persecution'. He must not be enraged because of the recent insurrection of Bologna, and he must not desist from his purposes of peace; she, Catherine, was hard at work putting things to rights. She wrote confidently to the Pope: 'those fierce wolves'—the Florentines—'will put their heads in your lap like meek lambs, and beg for your mercy'.

A few weeks later she wrote again to Gregory XI, repeating her appeal, and defending the Florentines more warmly than ever, imploring him to forgive them. The phrase: 'I know that all agree that they have behaved badly', and her persistence in accusing the corrupt ministers of the Church of being the direct cause of the war, lead us to suppose that she had been in consultation with the leaders of the Guelph Party. It is as if she were repeating accusations she had heard in the mouths of Florentines —but she gives them a spiritual, not a political significance.

Anger and war do not work the salvation of men, she wrote to the Pope. Only love and mercy can save them. Christ acknowledged this when He came down to earth, and you, His Vicar-on-earth, must acknowledge this too. 'O my most holy and sweet Father, I see no other remedy and no other way to win back again your little sheep, that have run away like rebels from the fold of Holy Church, like disobedient rebels to you, Father. So I pray you, in the name of Christ Crucified, and I beg you to grant me this boon—to conquer their malice with your kindness.' He must love and forgive, and he would see the grateful Florentines defending the cause of Christ. They would become Crusaders, she was sure of it; they had assured her they were 'ready to give their lives for Christ'.

Catherine had not realised she was dealing with politicians who were ready to promise everything to achieve their own purpose. They had understood that the Crusade was her darling project, and so they glibly assured her that Florence would take part in the Crusade as soon as peace was made with the Pope. This promise had the effect of increasing her efforts in pleading their cause—which was all they wanted. Catherine is afire with enthusiasm as soon as she writes of the Crusade: 'Raise the standard of the most holy Cross, Father, and you will see the wolves become lambs. Peace! Peace! Peace!' She has a moment's doubt; will the Pope accept her advice? He has suffered such injuries that he must have justice, must even have just retribution; but there is a way out for all: she is willing to be the expiatory victim. 'But if you wish to have vengeance and justice, visit these on me, wretched and miserable as I am, and give me all the punishments and pains you wish, even to death. I believe that the scandal of my own iniquities has caused many defections, and grave troubles and quarrels. Therefore, wreak on me, your wretched daughter, whatever vengeance you will. Alas! Father, I die of grief and yet cannot die.'

However much Gregory XI admired her outburst of love and her spirit of self-sacrifice, he must have reflected somewhat ruefully that wars cannot be terminated in this way, nor political quarrels smoothed out. Catherine, meanwhile, more and more enthusiastic for her own ideas, insisted that at all costs peace must be signed between Florence and the Pope, because only after this could the Crusade be proclaimed.

On the first of April she had a vision that she describes, with great joy, in a letter to Raimondo da Capua. The Primal Truth told her that the purpose of the present persecution was the renewal and exaltation of the Church, and that as Christ scourged the merchants in the Temple and drove them out, so the venal and corrupt prelates were now scourged by persecution, and, in the future, would be driven out of the Church, so that the Church might become pure again. Her desire took on a vivid form in this vision. She saw Christians and infidels enter the wounded side of Christ, and among them she saw herself accompanied by St John the Evangelist, and St Dominic. Then Christ laid the Cross on her shoulders, and put in her hands an olive branch to offer to Christians and infidels. Catherine rejoiced, seeing the whole world converted to Christ, and at peace for ever. What more could she desire? Her dream had become reality, and her task here below was completed; now at last she might die: 'I languish with this desire'.

She was certain that this was a prophetic vision—her will fastened itself still more closely to her purpose—the world (that is, Florence and the Papacy, for other European peoples and their wars did not interest her) must be reconciled, the Pope must return to Rome, and the Crusade must be proclaimed. She herself would be the means of achieving all this: so her vision had assured her.

The Easter of the Resurrection of Christ was at hand—a time of peace. The Signoria must make peace with the Pope. She wrote to them: 'And so I desire, with very great longing, to see you behave as true children and not as rebels against your Father, not turning your backs on the testament of peace, but seekers after peace, bound together and united in the bond and love of burning charity'. If they wished to continue in their revolt and war against the Pope they would be ungrateful and impious children. 'I wish to celebrate Easter with you, an Easter of reconciliation, so that you may be peaceful children, not rebellious against your head, but obedient subjects even unto death. You well know that Christ left us His Vicar, and left him as a remedy for our souls; we can have no health outside the Mystical Body of Holy Church, whose Head is Christ, and we are His members; and he who disobeys Christ-on-earth, who stands in the place of Christ-in-Heaven, shall have no share in the Blood of the Son of God.' They had persecuted the Vicar of Christ; therefore 'you have fallen into death and hatred, and into God's displeasure'. How could they be raised up again? They proffered excuses which were worthless. They accused the prelates, the rulers of the Church, representing them as wicked monsters; she also admitted that individually there were bad shepherds, but what of that? Has God not commanded that even if the Pope and the rulers of the Church were devils incarnate, we should still owe them obedience? Obedience 'not to them as themselves, but, through obedience to Christ, as Vicars of Christ, who command us to do this'. Instead of wasting themselves in this unworthy war, they should spend their energies in greater causes; instead of massacring other Christians, and

rebelling against their head, they should humiliate themselves devoutly before him; then, out with their swords against the infidels! 'Arise and run to the arms of your Father, who will receive you kindly if you will but do so, and you will have peace and repose spiritually and temporally, you and the whole of Tuscany, for when the standard of the Holy Cross is raised the whole weight of the war will fall upon the infidels, and if you do not set out now to make a good peace, you will have a worse time, for you and all Tuscany, than ever our fathers had. I tell you all this because I love you and suffer for your present misery, and I am ready to do all I can for you, and I do so joyfully; do you wish me to help you? It would be well to see each other and to speak. My love for you and my grief for your present trouble would more easily be expressed by word of mouth than in a letter. If through my means anything can be obtained, for the glory of God, and the reconciliation of you and Holy Church, I am disposed to give my life, if need be.'

This offer of mediation must have pleased the Signoria. There were among them some already anxious for peace, and others who would have done anything to avoid the consequences of the Interdict, now painfully evident. As she had offered her services, she might be of use to them. In any case, she could be a means of gaining time, and calming the Papal indignation. In Avignon at that time was the Company of Breton Mercenaries, a great source of anxiety—they were fifteen hundred lancers, and eight thousand armed men. If they were to march against Florence the city would be in grave danger, but the Saint might beg the Pope to postpone their departure. When all was taken into consideration, Catherine's offer was worth accepting.

We do not know whether Catherine was already in Florence when she wrote to the Signoria. The vision took place in Siena, and she probably wrote to them from her own city. Some of the Signoria, with some Guelph friends, probably invited her there. Possibly Fra Raimondo is right when he says the Priors issued forth from one of the gates of Florence to meet her; probably, however, it was not the Priors themselves, but persons in authority, and perhaps some ex-Priors. Certainly there was a meeting, official or not, and one sees why it was considered necessary. The discontent with the war felt by some sections of the Florentine

populace, the hardships caused by the excommunication and Interdict, the spectre of commercial failure and bankruptcy, the defection of some cities from the League, the hostility of the rest of Europe, must have persuaded the rulers of the Republic to avail themselves of the help of anyone who might be able to come to their assistance. Catherine was a holy woman and corresponded with the Pope; she might easily assuage his anger and persuade him to be merciful, and so might help to create an atmosphere more favourable to future negotiations. If she succeeded in her preparatory work, the real ambassadors could at once be sent, and they would more easily then be able to negotiate a peace.

With such intentions before them, the Signoria who interviewed her naturally accepted all her demands. Catherine wanted the Florentines to prostrate themselves before the Pope and beg his forgiveness and mercy, so that she could offer them to their Father 'as dead children'. They agreed. She asked for a free hand to treat their cause. They granted this. She demanded that, when peace was made, they should take part in the Crusade. They willingly consented. It cost them nothing to concede, verbally, more than they had the power to give, or even more than they could approve of—since their concessions and promises had no binding power for them, but were expedient at that moment.

As soon as Catherine got to know that after her own departure, the real ambassadors of the Signoria would leave for Avignon, she became a little suspicious, and asked for her 'letter of credentials, to prove that we have conferred together about all this', but they replied that they believed in her alone, and therefore trusted in her only: 'we do not believe that this can be done by any other hand but that of a servant of God'. She was convinced by this reply, which cleverly flattered her religious feelings. Being unused to political skirmishing, she was not on her guard, and therefore the ambiguous meaning of the phrases deliberately used by the statesmen did not arouse her distrust; she did not notice that they were making use of her without in any way pledging their Government's support. She was trustful, believed in men's words, and therefore considered herself an official ambassadress sent by Florence to the Pope, while the Florentines used her merely as a means to procure a more favourable reception by Gregory XI.

Meanwhile, without the slightest doubt about the mission

entrusted to her, Catherine was glad to be going at last to Avignon, to speak with the Pope. After her conversation with the Signoria, she wrote to Gregory XI: 'Methinks the divine goodness is changing the fierce wolves into humble lambs. And so I am coming to you at once to place them in your lap.' Then, taking heart from the fact that the Pope had asked her advice about his return to Italy, she firmly admonished him: 'If the Florentines have given up their pride, and have so humiliated themselves that I can offer them to you, begging for your forgiveness and mercy, you also must give up your self-love and forgive them. You must be manly in forgiving, not held back by any servile fear. Does the good shepherd not set on his shoulder the little sheep he has found, to bear it back to the fold? You must do the same, for I am sure you will receive them as a father, notwithstanding the insults and injuries they have wrought against you.' In this way alone the war would end, and the Pope would be free, and all Christendom with him, to fall upon the infidels.

While she cannot forbear to plead with the Pope for this insistent dream of the Crusade so dear to her heart, yet in her enthusiasm she does not forget the anxious request of the Florentines, that the Pope should keep in Avignon the Breton mercenaries that were to have marched on Florence. 'Those people you have taken into your pay, to send them here, keep them there, and see they do not come, as they would remedy nothing but mar all.'

Then, with a joyful heart, she gathered her strength in God to acquire the necessary energy to fulfil her new and difficult mission. She was happy. She chose those of her disciples that she wished to accompany her on her journey; gave the necessary instructions to her friends and followers, and prepared to set out, fortified by the memory of her prophetic vision.

Chapter VIII

AVIGNON

CATHERINE arrived in Avignon on June 18th, 1376. She brought with her a numerous Family, which was joined by other disciples who were already in the city. They were in all twenty-three heralds of God: a spiritual force capable of converting the world. The city was gay and beautiful, but Catherine disdained it. 'Avignon, la sonneuse de la joie . . .',† the city of the ringing belfries, gave her no joy; she was absorbed in the thought of her approaching colloquy with Gregory XI, and neither saw nor heard anything of her surroundings.

Together with her Family she was lodged, by the Pope's commands, in a beautiful house where, as Maconi tells us, there was a chapel 'beautifully adorned', which probably means covered with frescoes. As soon as she arrived Catherine sent word to Gregory XI that she awaited an audience. Perhaps she sent Pagliaresi to him, armed with a letter that has come down to us, in which no mention was made of any other conversations previously granted her by the Pope, and in which she respectfully requested an interview: 'I would rather tell you this by word of mouth than in writing', she said; then she tactfully alluded to the subject, so dear to his heart, of the return of the Holy See to Rome, and she urged him to make peace between all Christian folk, so as better to be able, later on, to make Christians of the infidels, in holy warfare.

Not many days elapsed before the Pope received her. On June 29th, in a letter to the Eight of the War Party in Florence, she

† 'Avignon, la sonneuse de la joie,
Qui l'une après l'autre, élève les pointes
De ses clochers tout semés de fleurons'
Frédéric Mistral: *Le Poème du Rhône.*
Chant VIII, LXIX: *à Horizon*