

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*

informed them that she had already spoken with the Holy Father. This interview was indeed necessary for both to understand each other's endeavours in the pursuit of their common aim.

They admired each other. Gregory believed in Catherine's inspiration and in the revelations she received from God. She believed in his fatherly goodness, unselfishness, modesty, liberality and purity of intention. She was simple and spontaneous, ready to fling herself into any danger for the sake of others; the Pope was thoughtful and careful, instinctively shunning danger. Catherine rose above the world of the senses and implored counsel and guidance from the Infinite; Gregory XI stood squarely on his rights and judged according to law and justice. She was optimistic and full of enthusiasm, but easily deceived, while Gregory, used to political manoeuvres, was distrustful of flatteries and promises, and always wary and reluctant to make a decision.

He was kind to Catherine. She came out of the interview jubilant: 'I have spoken with the Holy Father; through the goodness of God, and his own goodness, he listened to me graciously, showing a fond love for peace; he was like the good father who does not think so much of the wrong his son has done to him, as of the repentance he has shown—so that he may show mercy towards him. My tongue cannot describe the satisfaction he felt.'

As a matter of fact, Catherine had been somewhat disconcerted by certain judgments the Pope had expressed on the Florentines' behaviour, and his declaration that he could not just then proclaim the Crusade, because he had no leader ready to put at the head of it, must have perturbed her considerably. In his presence she had felt unable to contradict him, but afterwards, when she thought it over, it seemed to her that Gregory was not sufficiently strong-willed, and appeared almost to linger contentedly over the obstacles that prevented a rapid and energetic course of action. So she wrote him a letter rather in the style of an inspired judge: 'O my most sweet Father, first of all you have been made Pope to correct all the wickedness that goes on in the Church; and, if you do not feel capable of doing this you should give up the triple crown. Secondly, you must make peace with the Tuscans; punish them as much as they deserve, but make peace with them. Lastly, declare the Crusade without delay. I know well that this seems to you now an impossible thing to do, but it is needful that

you give full authority to those who beg you to be allowed to make this holy expedition. I tell you all this, not on my own behalf, but constrained to do so by the sweet primal Truth. . . . I would willingly have said this to you in person, so as to satisfy my conscience, but I did not do so; so now I write to you instead. However, I am always here, obedient to your command, and when Your Holiness wishes to see me I will come willingly.'

Meanwhile she began to speak with Cardinals, prelates, princes, aristocrats, courtiers, statesmen and clerics, talking to all of Christ, and trying to find in them trusty support for the causes she was defending: 'It is through the grace of our sweet Saviour that we have come here', she wrote to Sano di Pietro.

But various unpleasant rumours from Florence reached her ears: the Signoria had levied a tax on all the clergy. Those who informed Catherine of this were Cardinals favourable to peace, and therefore not a suspect source; it was best, therefore, to write at once to Florence, to the 'Eight of War', to warn them of the ruin they would bring upon themselves if they acted in this way: 'This news of you will spoil all the good seed I have sowed for you'. She was pleading their cause for peace, she told them, and had already spoken with the Pope, who was so well-disposed towards her that when she took her leave he had said that if matters stood thus, as she had described them, he was 'ready to receive you as children and to do with you what seemed best to me'. Could anyone wish for more? They must not be deceitful, therefore, but must show, in word and deed, that they desired peace. If they did otherwise, 'you would bring shame and mockery on me, for nothing but shame and confusion could come of my saying one thing and your doing another'. She ended by saying she was awaiting with confidence their Ambassadors, to come to an agreement with them.

She waited patiently, reflecting sometimes on the Pope's words: 'Believe me, Catherine, the Florentines have deceived you, and will deceive you again; they will not send Ambassadors; or, if they do, their mission will be inconclusive'.

At last the Florentine Ambassadors arrived in Avignon, and Catherine's heart rejoiced. At once she sent for them, to inform them of the excellent results she had obtained in their favour, and to decide with them what steps to take to win the longed-for

peace. But the Ambassadors curtly replied that she had no authority to treat with them; they were accredited to the Pope, not to her. This time Gregory XI had prophesied truly. Catherine realised this at once and acknowledged it. They had deceived her in Florence, and she grieved over this: 'I have felt a great bitterness over this offence to God and injury to yourselves', she wrote to Buonaccorso di Lapo, and she added: 'As the peace between Florence and the Holy See is necessary for the proclamation of the Crusade, I shall continue to do what I can, even unto death, for the honour of God and for your peace, and to remove this obstacle to the sweet holy expedition overseas'.

From that moment she abandoned the Florentine cause; other cares absorbed her, and all her eloquence was employed to induce the Pope to return to Rome, and prepare the Crusade, which had become dearer to her than life itself.

She was not happy in Avignon. The corruption of the city disgusted her. All great capitals are corrupt, but Catherine considered the central seat of the Church should be the home of purity. Instead, it was the abode of luxury, intrigue, scandal, greed and sensuality. Here was no Christian way of life. If she had known Petrarch's lines on Avignon, in his 79th Sonnet—

'De l'empia Babilonia, ond' è fuggita
ogni vergogna, ond' ogni bene è fuori
albergo di dolor, madre d'errori . . .'

('Babylon, whence all shame has fled
And all true virtue,
Hostelry of grief, home of all errors . . .')

she would have quoted them to the Pope—but she was not versed in poetry. She told him that the Court of Avignon, that ought to be a Paradise full of heavenly virtues, was instead a gutter of hellish vices, whose stench sickened the air around. Gregory was astonished to hear her utter such a severe judgment after only a few days' sojourn in the city, but she explained that while still in far-away Siena she had smelt the foul odour of the crimes committed at the Papal Court. In fact, in Siena she had often heard painful stories of the worldly lives of the Cardinals and prelates,

and had heard Avignon called an infernal Babylon by all classes of people. She could not know that what had happened in Avignon was what has happened and still happens in all cosmopolitan cities. All kinds of adventurers had flocked to the city, prostitutes had settled there, and fortune-hunters of all kinds, unscrupulous profiteers and violent and hot-tempered soldiery, anxious to be taken into the Papal pay. Clerics were there also, begging for offices and benefices, insinuating and importunate.

Money flowed abundantly, and encouraged every kind of luxury and vice. The agreeable climate and the attractions of court life drew crowds of idle rich and *dilettanti*, and men of the world. The Pope's patronage of the arts attracted painters and men of letters, and since the city was, after all, the central seat of Christendom, there were also there people of austere religious life, and scholars, and wise and pious folk. The population was a most varied mixture, and the city the most cosmopolitan of the age. The sacred and the profane, austerity and self-indulgence, grandeur and pettiness, elegance and filth, refinement and vulgarity, were all there together. The work of God and the work of the Devil were intermingled.

While Catherine passed her severe judgments on the city, its inhabitants probably considered her an insignificant provincial woman, or, at the best, a merciless ascetic. Many other ascetics had visited Avignon—in 1374 Milec of Kromerize had been there, preaching about the coming of anti-Christ, and the urgency of Church reform—but their apocalyptic voices had soon died away without leaving an echo in the pleasant life of Avignon. What could the 'beghina' of Siena hope to do? But Catherine was a great Christian and rightly demanded that the Papacy should uphold strict morality and purity of life. The Pope was, it is true, a ruler of a temporal kingdom, but above all else he was the ruler of the Church in which the morality taught by Christ should be supreme. There could be no compromise. The Church must return to its primitive purity. If Avignon was a stumbling-block, the Pope should abandon the city—yet another reason why he should return to Rome.

Only a few people took any notice of Catherine in Avignon. These were, first of all, her own fellow citizens, employed by the Curia, then the Tuscans and Italians, who venerated Saints, and

with whom she could speak in her own tongue. When she conversed with the Provençals or with the French she had to have an interpreter, and this made her talks less intimate and less frequent. Her disciples, however, spread the fame of her extraordinary life and of the diplomatic mission entrusted to her by the Florentines; Gregory XI also no doubt extolled her intellectual and spiritual qualities.

Soon after her arrival three very eminent prelates went to see her—possibly sent by the Pope. At first, by way of introduction, they expressed their surprise at finding a woman employed as Ambassador by the Florentines in such a delicate and important matter as the cause of peace; then they came to what mattered most to them—an examination of her faith. The interrogation was long and detailed: the results favourable to Catherine. Probably she told them she was acting under direct orders from God Himself, and perhaps she spoke as a prophetess, imparting to these dignitaries some of her own flaming ardour, so that when Giovanni Terzo at one point intervened to support Catherine, they said they preferred to listen to her. Stefano Maconi, reporting this interrogation, leaves us to infer that she spoke with confidence and humility, with precision and with charity, quoting facts and events, explaining everything clearly and without reserve. The few questions that Maconi records are insignificant; obviously others were put to her, more searching and more profound; but Catherine in her simplicity, founded on the Catholic faith, and with her own clear and charitable activity to speak for her, passed the ordeal successfully. The doctrinal test must have been the subject of talk by members of the Curia, for the next day Maestro Francesco, a Siense physician in attendance on the Pope, observed to Maconi that if those three priests, the most learned of the whole Curia, 'had not found Catherine well grounded (in her faith) this journey to Avignon would have been the worst journey she had ever made'.

The external events of her life during these weeks in Avignon, all recorded by her early biographers, are of secondary importance. On one occasion she revealed the sinful life of the mistress of one of the most eminent prelates. This woman came to see her with a great show of piety and compunction, but Catherine could not bear to touch her and kept her face averted. Fra Raimondo, who

was probably acting as interpreter, was surprised at this and asked her for the reason. The Saint declared that from this lady, who looked so respectable, there emanated such a pestiferous stench of sin that it was unbearable. Fra Raimondo, on making certain enquiries, received information that confirmed Catherine's judgment.

In the Pope's own family there was great curiosity about the Siense mystic. Gregory's sister became her devout admirer, but his niece Élise, the wife of Robert de Turenne, acted otherwise. One day she came with a group of curious onlookers to see Catherine in an ecstasy, and, refusing to believe her insensibility to physical sensations, she pierced her foot with a large pin—the same test that many people had applied to Catherine in Siena—inflicting such a wound that Catherine was lame for several days after.

Her disappointment at finding herself so rudely set aside by the Florentine Ambassadors was painful—but not overwhelming. The work she still had to do for the saving of souls required strength, energy and determination. In the letters she wrote to the Pope from Avignon we no longer find the half-wistful, half-exultant appeal for pardon and peace for the Florentines, but there is still the hammer-like insistence on the necessity of his return to Florence, and of the proclamation of the Crusade. She continued to pray for peace with Florence, but this was no longer the main object of her activity. She must have heard of the appeals presented to the Pope in favour of the Florentines by Benedetto Gambacorta, the Pisan Ambassador, and by the Ambassadors of Lucca, of the Pope's rejection of these appeals, and of his reply: 'Like Christ, I, His Vicar on earth, love peace; but it is my duty to offer it to the contrite of heart, not to those who refuse to make just restitution. Let the Florentines restore the lands of the Holy See and compensate for the grave losses they have inflicted; then the Church will at once receive them in her motherly embrace. For me to act otherwise would be like giving an encouragement to sin.'

Catherine approved of this dignified and severe reply, because it agreed with her own wish that Florence should receive pardon only after begging for it humbly from the Father of all Christians. She did not seek any further contact with the Florentine Ambas-

sadors who were now, according to Cristoforo da Piacenza, 'panting after peace'—she abandoned them to their own efforts, probably convinced that their official parleys with the two Cardinals, chosen by the Pope to treat with them, would bear no results.

Meanwhile she spoke with Cardinals, bishops, prelates of all ranks, enlarging her political horizon. Until now she had been occupied solely with the relations between the Tuscan cities and the Holy See; now she turned her attention to the Hundred Years' War, and other questions concerning France. She spoke with French princes, wrote to some also, and admonished them, and sent a letter to Charles V, King of France. Her religious status was officially strengthened; on July 1st Gregory granted her the privilege of possessing a portable altar, with permission to have Mass celebrated in any suitable place, if necessary even before dawn; on August 17th he confirmed Raimondo da Capua as Catherine's spiritual director, a post already assigned to him by the General of the Dominican Order.

The relations between Gregory and Catherine became, spiritually, more intimate. He believed in her revelations, and when in difficult moments he needed a sign from God to indicate his way, he sent messages to the Saint, begging her to implore illumination from God.

Somebody told him that he would be killed if he returned to Rome. This threat perplexed him temporarily, and at once, through Fra Raimondo da Capua, he begged the Tertiary to pray for him and to find out the will of God in this matter. Catherine prayed 'before and after Holy Communion', but saw in the future 'neither death nor any other peril', so she wrote to him that the real danger for him lay in listening to these evil counsellors; therefore he must not draw back, but put his plan into action. 'Let there be in you such a fire of charity that you may not hear the voices of incarnate devils; nor listen to the advice of perverse counsellors, grounded in self-love, who, as I understand it, want to frighten you, telling you that you will be killed; they say this to frighten you off your project.' But he must banish all servile fear: 'I tell you, on behalf of Jesus Christ, most sweet and holy Father, that you must not fear for any reason whatever; come confidently, put all your trust in sweet Jesus Christ; for, when you

do what you must, God will be for you, and no one shall stand against you. . . . Take up the weapon of the most Holy Cross, which is the safeguard and the life of Christians; let those speak who will, and hold fast to your holy purpose.'

There has been much discussion about the character of Gregory XI, and the influence Catherine had over him. This is not the place to continue this discussion, but nevertheless it seems necessary to stress the fact that Gregory was not at all a weak man, as he has been sometimes represented. Certainly he had neither the energy of Gregory VII nor the powerfulness of Innocent III, nor had he the ambitious will of Boniface VIII, but he was a just and tenacious man. Some historians have failed to understand him, mistaking his sense of justice and his long-suffering patience for weakness, and his constancy and firmness for obduracy. He was very frank, he disliked sudden decisions, he reflected at great length about questions concerning the State and tried to avoid violent clashes, but when it behoved him to act he acted wisely and struck boldly and authoritatively at the Church's enemies. He was a perfect example of a Christian law-giver and politician, judging all things not by a personal standard of his own, but according to the law of Christ and the welfare of men. He loved peace more than glory, and justice more than power. He was not a genius, nor had he an original message to deliver; as Pope he had some defects, but his righteousness was an example to all, and his dignity praiseworthy. He played his part in the making of peace between France and England, between the Empire and Hungary, and between Bavaria and Savoy; he forced the Visconti to observe truces and make a peace, he subdued the power of Florence, succeeded in winning back the Church lands, and crowned all with his own return, and the return of the Curia, to Rome.

It is true that every time Gregory XI fixed a date for his departure from Avignon a series of events prevented him from carrying out his plan; but to postpone is not to desist, and his purpose always remained firm. In fact, he saw more and more clearly the urgent political and religious necessity for the return of the Holy See to Rome. Already in February 1375 Cardinal Orsini, when replying to the Duke of Anjou, who in the name of France and for the sake of the Church was urging Gregory to stay in Avignon, had frankly expounded the political motives that

obliged the Papal Court to transfer itself to the Eternal City: 'What lands has the Pope in France? In Italy, instead, he has many provinces, and all the property of God's Church; his own land is therefore Italy, and if Italy is divided and torn by rebellion and strife, the fault is that of the former Popes who forsook her for so long. When was it known that a prince could rule his subjects well from a distance? Let the King of France try going away from his own lands and possessions, and he will soon see defections and strife in his State. Hence the urgent need of our return to Rome. Only by so doing will the Pope re-establish his authority in his own lands.' Just about the same time Gregory XI had explained his own intentions intimately to Giovanni di Cario, who had tried with many arguments to persuade him to stay: 'How could I stay if God wills me to go? Last year I did not obey God's will, and I fell ill and was near to death; it is my duty to go to Rome, for the natural seat of the Church is there.' This profound conviction enabled him to hold to his resolution, strengthened as it was, moreover, by political reasons of primary importance, that Gregory could not afford to ignore. His return was sure to win back the rebellious States, the Florentines would be forced to come to terms, and then he would be able to devote himself to the realisation of his dearest project, the Crusade, and the reform of ecclesiastical morals. Therefore, in 1376, he gave orders that preparations should be made in Rome for his return, and at Avignon for his imminent departure.

It was, however, a grave matter to leave for ever a city where the Papacy had resided for nearly three-quarters of a century, during which time vast, vital and deeply rooted interests had grown up between the Curia and Avignon. These could not be wiped out at a blow. The Pope felt bound to his own land; the Cardinals were, for the most part, Limousins or French; there were close ties with the King of France; many of the prelates were French or had French connections. Avignon had become a wealthy and luxurious city under the Papal rule; life was gay, and no one lived in fear of revolts or civil strife. What would become of Avignon without the Popes? Rome, deprived of the Head of the Church, had fallen into decay, spiritually and materially, had lived on her past glory, and in the hope of the Pope's return, as a means of regaining some of her lost dignity; nevertheless, she had

splendid traditions behind her, and it was natural she should wish to become rich and great again, under the Papal rule. But once the Papal Court had left Avignon, what hope could the city have of ever becoming anything but a small provincial town, whose sole boast would be that of having given hospitality to the Papacy for seventy years? The King of France would no longer be able to influence the Holy See as he had done during its long sojourn in Avignon. Finally, the Pope's parents, brothers and sisters, and all his other relatives who owed their authority and wealth to him, were naturally averse to the idea of his departure. Opposition arose from almost everyone, high and low, at this threat to Avignon, and every expedient was resorted to, to induce him to desist from his purpose. Some tried to dissuade him with eloquent and imploring words, others tried threats. Some foretold a sinister future in Rome, others went so far as to prophesy apocalyptic disasters. They all tried to intimidate him, invented plots against him, or plans to poison him, and foretold catastrophes for the Church. It was pointed out to him that Italy was in revolt, and therefore it would be impossible for the Curia to function there. Urban V also had gone to Rome, but, sadly disillusioned, had been forced to return to Avignon which was, after all, the ideal land for the Vicar of Christ. Those who did not dare to speak or write openly, insinuated whispered fears, or distressing news, or wrote to him anonymously. Gregory's determination remained firm, but the growth of the opposition naturally perturbed him. The step he was about to take was very grave; he felt it to be his bounden duty. But could he be sure it was really God's will? His own feelings might be deceiving him. The advice and arguments, the fiery speeches, even the threats of those who sought to dissuade him, were prompted by material interests—but they might also be a means which God was using to avert a disaster for the Church. He was seized by religious scruples that worried and agitated him. He lost his self-confidence, entrusted his life to God, and implored Him to reveal His will. He needed the sure vision of a Saint, and begged Catherine, the seer, to enlighten him.

His own Cardinals were now opposing him. They wrote to him that before making any decision involving the Church he must seek the advice of the Sacred College, and they quoted Clement IV, who always took counsel with his Cardinals before

acting, and followed their advice even when their wishes were contrary to his own. This was an attempt, already made several times before in the history of the Church, to limit the authority of the Pope and increase that of the College of Cardinals. Gregory understood the gravity of this request, and informed Catherine of it, begging her to pray over it and seek light from God. Catherine judged the Cardinals' letter very severely, and urged the Pope to take rapid and energetic action. 'Alas! most holy Father, they quote Pope Clement IV to you, but they do not quote Pope Urban V, who, when he was in doubt about a decision then consulted his Cardinals, but when the matter was clear and manifest to him, as it is to you about your departure, of which you are quite convinced, he did not ask for their advice, but followed his own plan and did not care even if they were all against him.' She reminded him that he had already once followed his Cardinals' advice, which was diabolical, and the revolts in his own lands were the consequence; he must not linger now, but hasten to depart. The Cardinals were prejudiced by their attachment to 'honours, positions, pleasures', and wished to deceive him; he must now turn the tables on them by means of a holy ruse; he must pretend to be prolonging his stay in Avignon, and instead he must leave at once. 'Go, go without fear.'

In this letter we see the prompting hand of someone who had known Urban V intimately, and this was perhaps Raimondo da Capua. Gregory must have felt relieved when he received her advice, sharp and decisive as a sword. A herald of God now assured him, in God's name, that his decision was necessary and just.

However, those who sought to deter him did not give up the struggle lightly. Aware of his strong religious feeling, they knew that the words of a Saint would have more power over him than anything else; they hoped in this way to neutralise his will, or at least to make him defer his departure. A 'Saint' who, as far as we know, preferred to remain anonymous, wrote warning him that if he went to Rome he would find there the poison that would end his life. Gregory himself must have doubted the sincerity of this letter, for he sent it at once to Catherine.

A few days previously she had found words of scorn for the Cardinals—now she seemed to have a tongue of fire to burn and

demolish the pseudo-Saint. Who is it, she says, who is writing to you now? He robes himself in sanctity, but he is a poisonous man, a devil. He acts towards you as the devil does with the soul, when 'under the guise of virtue and pity he pours in poison. . . . So methinks this devil incarnate is doing, for he has written to you under a guise of pity and with the fame of sanctity, that is, he writes as if the warning came from a holy, just man—and instead it comes from those wicked men, the devil's counsellors, who are out to destroy the well-being of Christian folk, and the reform of Holy Church, lovers of themselves, seekers after their own good.' Do you want a proof that this fellow is not a Saint? Consider the chief argument he uses to deter you from your proposal: he urges you to have a care for your life, which he says you would lose if you went to Rome. Now, a real Saint attaches no importance to material life; and since he affirms that to return to your own natural seat is a good, holy, and spiritual action, how can he, immediately after, advise you not to attempt such a thing, for fear of bodily harm? For the good of souls and for love of Holy Church we must be ready even to die, and 'it is not the habit of God's servants, for any corporal or temporal injury, even if life itself were at stake, to be willing to abandon spiritual activity; for if they had done so, no one would ever have arrived at his end, for it is the perseverance of good and holy desire in good works that is crowned with glory, as it deserves, and not with confusion'. I assure you, she goes on, that in the ways of holiness, this fellow is less than a child; let him go to school and study his trade. He is, moreover, a simpleton; in fact, he tells you to send trusty men to Rome, who, if they search in the shops there, will find the poison intended for you. What a wonderful discovery! Have the apothecaries in Avignon no poison? In all the cities of the world there are apothecaries that sell poisons, and naturally they are to be found in Rome too. But I tell you that this writer is 'the sower of the worst poison that has been sowed in Holy Church for many a long year, for he wants to prevent you from doing what God requires of you, and what you must do'. The real poison for you and for the Church would be to follow the advice of such an evil counsellor. But you may not, you must not withdraw from your intention, because such a withdrawal 'would cause a scandal, and a temporal and spiritual revolt, if men found in you falsehood

where they looked for truth; for once you have announced and determined your course of action, if people were to find the contrary, there would be the gravest scandal, disquiet and error in all hearts'. He advises you to live 'rather among the infidels and Saracens than among the people of Rome or Italy'. And what does he know of Italy? Catherine, the Italian, is inspired by love of her native land to express herself with an image which is full of the poetry of the maternal instinct: 'Methinks he wants to do with you, as the mother to her suckling child whom she wishes to wean. She puts something bitter on her breast, wishing him to suck the bitterness before the milk, so that for fear of the bitter taste he may give up sucking, because the child can be dissuaded by a bitter taste more easily than by anything else.'

The milk, in Catherine's metaphor, is the grace of God which will surely follow the Pope's return to Rome, and the bitterness comes from the more or less adverse events that may occur before he arrives in the Eternal City. 'And I pray you, on behalf of Christ crucified, not to be a timid child, but manly. Open your mouth and swallow the bitterness for the sake of the sweetness that comes after.' Drastic action, and such as God wills. 'I insist also that the writer of that letter is no Saint; it was dictated by the servants of the devil who live in the Curia near to you; but you will leave Avignon, and so you will find peace, repose and quiet of mind and body, and you will be able to set on foot the Crusade and reform the Church. May I see you? Could you grant me an audience? I am about to depart, but first I would like to see you again.'

This letter must have been very welcome to Gregory XI, because in it she expressed the will of God about his departure from Avignon. If she showed also some lack of understanding of his own scruples, he paid no attention to that. Catherine entered into ecstasies, spoke with Christ, saw the unfolding of human destiny through the eyes of God: that was enough for him. And now this seer and prophetess asserted, with absolute confidence, that his will was in conformity with Christ's; he felt his affection for Catherine and his confidence in her revelations increase.

During her stay in Avignon Catherine met many people, both Religious and lay, of outstanding importance; one of these was the Duke Louis of Anjou, who had been asked by his brother, the

King of France, to dissuade the Pope from returning to Rome. This prince played a part of some significance in the history of France and of Italy, using his intelligence in the service of his country, and his shrewdness to further his own ambitious schemes. He was a valiant soldier and an eloquent speaker. He loved his own land and eagerly co-operated with his brother in his efforts to consolidate his kingdom. He desired a kingdom for himself, even if it had to be a small one, but nevertheless he did not neglect French interests. As Lieutenant General of the Languedoc, he administered the province wisely. His wife was the daughter of a Saint, and he himself was on very friendly terms with Pope Gregory. Although cold and calculating by nature, he was not alien to enthusiasms. His religion was somewhat formal, but he was not insensible to promptings that seemed to be the voice of God. Rarely frank himself, and not always loyal, yet he recognised and appreciated frankness and loyalty. Thirsty for power, he intrigued to obtain it, and when he had obtained it he died without achieving glory.

Catherine certainly influenced him considerably, partly because she was so different from himself. Her way of speaking, so spontaneous and so inflamed with heavenly zeal, attracted him; at least for some weeks Louis of Anjou was her devoted admirer. We do not know whether she succeeded in kindling in him a flame of love, or at least of holy ambition, for the Crusade, but she may well have done so. He was above all a warrior, and when Catherine urged him, with all the persuasive and impulsive words at her command, to place himself at the head of an undertaking so glorious as the Crusade, she may have flattered his ambition for power and glory. Even the most frigid and calculating statesmen may be at times won over to attempt daring plans. They fail to see the difficulties always inherent in grandiose undertakings, and, conscious of their own energy and will-power, feel confident of success. Louis of Anjou, the schemer, may have sincerely believed, for a time, in the possibility of a Crusade led by himself. Certainly the idea of the holy expedition was not now very popular in the Courts of Europe, and the various princes were indifferent about it; yet Louis was, at least for a time, moved to express faith in it. After all, was it not possible for Gregory XI to rouse the Christian world, and for Catherine to fill rulers and populations with

enthusiasm for the campaign against the infidels? It might become an undertaking of gigantic proportions, supported by general enthusiasm, and he would be the 'condottiero', the conqueror; then at last he would have a kingdom and perhaps a greater one than Majorca, to which he was laying claim. Thus the Crusade stimulated his ambition and his ambition encouraged his belief in the Crusade. While this confidence lasted, which was but for a short time, he asked Catherine to write a letter to Charles the Wise, King of France, to invite him to make a speedy peace with England, so as to free himself from further anxiety on that score, and be able to support with all his might the Crusade, of which Louis would be the leader. And he also begged Catherine to go with him to Paris to convince the King of the necessity of the holy expedition.

While the Duke of Anjou became an admirer of Catherine, she believed she had found in him the man she had long been looking for, the military leader of the imminent Crusade, and in her joy she wrote at once, characteristically, to Charles V: 'Methinks that your brother, the Lord Duke of Anjou, will undertake, for Christ's sake, the labour of the holy enterprise', and also, with joy, pride and confidence, to Gregory XI: 'I know that I believe you said, when I was in the presence of Your Holiness, that a princely leader was necessary; otherwise you did not see how the thing could be done. Here is the leader, Holy Father! The Duke of Anjou is willing, for love of Christ and in reverence for the Holy Cross, with loving and holy desire to take up this labour, which seems light to him because of the love he feels for the holy expedition; it will seem most sweet to him, provided that you, my most holy Father, will be pleased to appoint him. Alas! for sweet Jesus' sake, do not delay any longer before you put into effect your holy desire and sweet will! Know, know how to use the gifts and treasures of Christ, that he sends to you now, while you have still time.'

It was then August 25th and in the Papal city the preparations for departure were so advanced that a few days later, according to Cristoforo da Piacenza, no matters of state were any longer discussed in the Curia because everyone was too busy getting ready for the journey to Rome. The Pope's mind was obviously made up, and this was at last recognised by the King of France

and his representatives, who gave up their opposition. Madame Denis-Boulet shrewdly observes that by this time Charles V, having been victorious in his war with England and unified most of France under his rule, had no longer any absolute need of the Pope in Avignon, and so made merely formal protests. 'I wonder whether the King of France, and the ecclesiastical dignitaries who opposed the departure, really thought they could prevent it with their theatrical show of opposition. Gregory would have dishonoured himself for ever if at the last moment he had yielded to such arguments. Possibly, they merely wished to prove to the population of that region that had battered upon the Papal Court, that up to the last moment they had done all in their power to prevent the Pope from leaving.' Nevertheless there is no doubt that, even if Catherine was not responsible for changing the intentions of the French King's representatives, she helped to persuade the Duke of Anjou to desist from his mission; he became, indeed, so favourable to Gregory's decision that he even lent him 60,000 florins for the journey to Rome. Of course he may have done this so as to bind the Pope more closely to himself, and to ensure his support in the achievement of his own ambitions. But it may also be that the Angevin prince was really moved by Catherine's words, and so in all sincerity supported and aided the Pope's return to Rome, for the good of the universal Church.

Catherine accepted the Duke's invitation to go to his castle of Roquemaure 'to console his wife, the Duchess', says Bartolomeo Dominici. This 'consolation' probably refers to the Duchess Marie's longing to have a son, and a son was born to her in October of the following year. Catherine remained in the castle for three days, and must have edified her hosts by her religious life, clear as daylight, her ecstasies, her almost ethereal way of living and her continual prayers. Louis of Anjou himself admired her greatly. In the frequent and familiar talks he had with her he could not but feel how close was her union with the divine. He was fascinated by her, and would willingly have escorted her to Paris, to see his brother Charles V, to try to interest him in the Crusade—but Catherine declined this invitation. Although the holy expedition was so dear to her heart, and the King of France's part in it might prove decisive, yet she would not go so far from Avignon, lest the intrigues and snares of the Court might become

dangerous, and the insistent appeals to remain might influence Pope Gregory. She felt she must stay near the Pope, ready to oppose any further postponement of his journey to Rome. The departure was now very near; twenty-six galleys and four hundred and twenty-six ships were at Marseilles awaiting the Pope and his Court.

Gregory had decided that he would leave Avignon for ever on September 8th; the date was postponed again. Catherine must have trembled—but the delay was brief. On the 10th or 11th September the Pope wished to canonise John III, Duke of Brittany; on September 12th there was to be a public Consistory during which he would bless the whole Court and solemnly declare the transference of the Curia from Avignon to Rome. By now even the most optimistic prelates had lost all hope of the Pope remaining in Avignon. The various and cunning arguments by which they had sought to dissuade him had been vain, and the obstacles placed in his path had proved useless. The French King's brothers had ceased their opposition, the Cardinals were busy packing; but the city was agitated, irritated, disconsolate and still determined to hold on to the Pope. His own relations besieged him with anguished prayers to remain. Where reasons of state had failed to move him perhaps the tears and despair of parents, brothers, sisters, nephews might avail. Gregory XI seems to have been almost on the point of yielding. His grief at leaving his own land, and the distress of his dearest kin, must have sapped his moral strength; yet he could not now withdraw. 'Whoever does not leave father, mother, brothers and sisters for love of Me is not worthy of Me': the words of Christ seemed engraved on his soul; he resisted all prayers and subdued his own emotions. But he felt terribly alone; he needed a final word of certainty. For the last time he sent for the Sieneese Saint, to listen again to her inspired words. He wished once more to strengthen his resolve by hearing that his return to Rome was according to the will of God. He called her to him. We know very little about this last interview but, according to Bartolomeo Dominici, when the Pope asked her if it was right to persist in going to Rome in the face of so much opposition, Catherine at first hesitated to reply, excusing herself by saying that it was not seemly for a poor little woman to give advice to the Pope. To which he answered: 'I am not

asking you for advice, but for a revelation of the will of God'. Then Catherine reminded Gregory XI of a vow that he had made at the time of his election to the Papal throne. No one knew of this, except a very few people in whom he had confided. At once the Pope thought that if Catherine knew of it, it must be by direct revelation. It was therefore his absolute duty to depart, and nothing must be allowed to stand in the way of his decision.

On September 13th, to Catherine's great joy, Gregory XI left Avignon for Marseilles, where the galleys awaited him, ready to set sail for Italy.