

Chapter IX

INTER ODIA CARITAS

SHORTLY after the Pope's departure Catherine herself and her Family set out from Avignon to return to Italy. On September 12th Fra Raimondo da Capua had received the Pope's gift to Catherine: a hundred florins for the expenses of their return journey. It may be wondered why Gregory XI did not invite Catherine to return by sea with him. Several explanations are possible; none is sure. Perhaps he did invite her, and she declined the invitation; or perhaps he did not wish her to travel in his own party, lest she should be too gravely shocked by the immorality of the Court; or again, because being Italian, of humble birth and a great enthusiast for the return of the Holy See to Rome, she may have been unpopular with the higher clergy; or—and this seems the most plausible supposition—because Gregory XI considered her work for him now accomplished, and wished her to use her energy in the saving of souls and in propaganda for the Crusade, his own daring project, in the countries through which she would pass. Catherine may have remained in Avignon in continual prayer for him until she heard he had gone on board his ship on the River Rhone, and even after this she may have wished to linger a little in the city to please Neri di Landoccio, who enjoyed his stay in Avignon and was reluctant to leave the city: 'I beg you for the love of Christ Crucified not to do as you did in Avignon, where you were unwilling to make any preparations for our departure', his friend Stefano Maconi wrote to him months later.

Catherine and her disciples travelled through Toulon to Varazze, which they reached on October 3rd, and then went on to Genoa. We hear of her performing miracles in all these cities, but those who report them seem unreliable witnesses. In Genoa

the Saint and her Family were the guests of the noble lady Orietta Scotti, between whom and Catherine there arose a friendship that we find still flourishing at the end of 1378, or at the beginning of 1379, in the sad days of the schism, when Catherine wrote to Orietta a letter that was like a hymn to patience.

We cannot trace all Catherine's activity in Genoa, but we know that she met the monks of San Girolamo della Cervaia, on the mountain above Portofino, for later on she wrote to them all, or to their Prior, very edifying letters. She cured her own disciples, Neri di Landoccio Pagliaresi, Stefano Maconi, Fra Giovanni Terzo and Fra Bartolomeo Dominici as soon as they fell ill, more or less seriously, of the plague. Pagliaresi was on the point of death, to the great consternation of all his fellow disciples, who, led by Stefano Maconi, appealed to Catherine to intervene when the doctors gave up hope of his recovery. She seemed somewhat unwilling, but yielded to Stefano's entreaties, and prayed insistently to God for the youth's recovery. He recovered. Shortly afterwards Stefano himself showed symptoms of the plague, but was cured by a few words from Catherine.

At Genoa Catherine had news of her mother Lapa, who was distressed at her daughter's protracted absence. She heard also, perhaps, of the foolish talk there had been in Siena, among Dominican Sisters of the Third Order, and certain clerics too, about her prolonged wanderings. So she wrote to her mother lovingly, but with characteristic firmness, authority and confidence: 'You know I have to follow the will of God; and I know you want me to do this. It was His will that I should make this journey, which has not been without its own mysterious and useful rewards. It is His will that I have obeyed, and not the will of any man, and whoever says the contrary is false.'

There is no proof, historically speaking, that she met Gregory XI in Genoa. He had disembarked there on October 18th, with some members of his Court, and remained there for some days, not only to rest after his voyage, but to dedicate himself at once, and without delay, to the affairs of Italy. He received the Duke of Brunswick, husband of Queen Giovanna of Naples, and the Count of Virtù; he spoke to the Doge and the rulers of the Genoese Republic. The voyage had exhausted him because for sixteen days, between Marsilles and Genoa, the weather had been

wild and stormy. Winds and tempests had unleashed their fury, as if the very elements were protesting at the Pope's departure from Avignon. Many times the ships had had to put in for shelter at the nearest port; the Cardinals and prelates were full of dismay. Nevertheless, Gregory's determination to push on to Rome had never faltered. He needed the help of this noble Genoese Republic, which welcomed the returning Pontiff with such effusions of joy. He wanted the Genoese to co-operate with him in the plans he was about to put into execution; and, with this desire uppermost, he began at once his talks with the rulers of the State. He made considerable demands. According to Mirot, he requested that the King of Cyprus' brother, held a prisoner by the Genoese, should be set free; he wished the Republic to enter into a League with him; he asked for a loan of two hundred thousand florins, and two hundred crossbowmen; he demanded the expulsion of all Florentines from Genoese territory. These demands were all necessary for the prestige of the Papacy and the success of his Italian policy; but they conflicted with the political and commercial interests of Genoa, and were therefore refused. This was Gregory's first political setback, and came as soon as he landed in Italy. Although he was saddened by it, his hopes of restoring strength and greatness to the Papacy in Italy were undiminished. Many of the Cardinals wished to return to Provence, and it seems that in a Consistory held in Genoa they voted for this, but Gregory would not listen to them, and persevered in his intention to continue the journey to Rome.

In Genoa, in fact, he was not at all the wavering and broken-hearted Pope that some writers have loved to present. The testimony of Fra Securiano da Savona, the only source for this period, is far from reliable. It is coloured with a cheap romanticism and evidently written with the intention of capturing the popular imagination. Gregory is described as a timid man, crushed by adversity, who visits Catherine secretly by night, imploring her to give him strength to perform his Papal duties. Various later biographers, basing their accounts on this source, have concentrated their searchlights only on Catherine, who alone at this juncture, according to them, commands, decides and triumphs. But their too obvious apologetic intention is not really complimentary to her at all: she has enough strength and courage in

herself without needing to be contrasted with a weakling Pope. Moreover, Gregory's character was very different from that attributed to him by these writers, who show a lack of literary honesty in making him appear other than he really was. It is certainly true that he believed in divine revelations, as he showed in his dealings first with St Brigid of Sweden and later with St Catherine; but once he was convinced that a certain line of conduct was in accordance with the will of God, nothing could prevent him from persisting in his intention. On various occasions he showed that he felt himself to be a King, as well as a Pope, and knew how to rule his Court. We must presume, therefore, that the account of the secret nocturnal interview, described by Securiano da Savona and amplified and emphasised by later biographers, originated in a misinterpretation of the prayer composed by Catherine in Genoa—a prayer that the Pope might not yield to the persuasions of some of his Cardinals, and return to Avignon. This prayer was at once known to some of the Saint's admirers, and was perhaps sent on to the Pope himself. It was a fine eloquent prayer, but couched in general terms, inspired by the news that was then rife in Genoa about the dreadful voyage the Papal Court had endured, and the unwillingness of some of the Cardinals to continue the journey. The note preceding the prayer determines its place and circumstances; otherwise we might think it had been composed elsewhere and at another time. There is nothing in it to indicate Gregory's state of mind beyond a reference to his 'tardiness', which might displease the Eternal Charity; but ever since Catherine had taken to writing to the Pope she had thought and said quite plainly that he was tardy. It is true that in this prayer she warned Christ's Vicar 'not to be frightened by any adversity', but this has no particular reference and need not necessarily be connected with the journey to Rome, nor even with the opposition of the Cardinals and prelates at that moment. It might refer to all the struggles which Gregory, as a man and as a Pope, had to face, and would have to face in the future.

Although, from the historical point of view, no valid arguments or witnesses can assure us that this interview took place, nevertheless we may follow a faint tradition and believe that the Pope did meet Catherine, in the midst of the intense political labours of those days. He may have granted an interview to her

and her interpreter, Fra Raimondo, and if so he probably treated them both affectionately, remembering that Catherine's eloquence in speech and writing might be of the greatest service to him in the furthering of his Italian policy. All this remains in the realm of pure conjecture, however, for the Saint's biographers and travelling companions tell us nothing about it.

Gregory left Genoa on October 26th, and about ten days later Catherine left for Pisa, where she arrived towards the end of November. From Pisa she sent Stefano Maconi to Siena, to his mother, who was anxious about her son's protracted absence, while she received the visits of her own mother, Lapa, and of Fra Tommaso della Fonte, and other disciples who had come from Siena.

In Pisa she must have heard a lot of talk about the very recent ceremonial welcome that Gambacorta, accompanied by his sons and numerous Ambassadors and prelates of Pisa and Lucca, had offered the Pope when he disembarked at Leghorn. It had been a sumptuous festival, with abundant gifts of wines, calves, sheep, poultry, bread, preserves and wax offered to the Pope, the Cardinals and the ships' captains.

The Pisan Republic had wished to signify its attachment to the Holy See in no uncertain manner. Catherine must have rejoiced on hearing that the Pisans and Lucchesi, although still members of the anti-Papal League, openly showed their affection for the Papacy, and so indicated a certain detachment from their ally Florence. Gambacorta, in conversation with the Pope, pursued his idea of peace between the Tuscan cities and the Holy See, and hinted at the advantages that would accrue from a possible reconciliation between the Pope and Florence, but Gregory XI 'did not wish to hear even a word about that'—which must have distressed Gambacorta. Speaking of this later on to Catherine he tried to persuade her to second his efforts for a speedy peace. But Catherine, during her short stay in Pisa, was chiefly occupied in preaching the Crusade against the infidels, the reform of ecclesiastical morals, and the need for all men to steep themselves in the Blood of Christ—although she never neglected any occasion to find out the attitude of the population towards the supreme Pontiff.

At Pisa she received wistful appeals from her 'little son', Stefano Maconi, who felt lost and melancholy without his 'most

sweet Mother', and impatient requests to return at once to Siena because he missed her so much, and because her other disciples also were anxiously awaiting their Mother. This anxiety, thought Catherine, was not worthy of true Christians. Stefano was evidently still attached to the world of the senses, while he who lives in Christ is not bound by any human affection. How could she abandon her labours for the salvation of souls, and interrupt her efforts to promote the welfare of the whole Church, just to run to him because he felt lonely? He who feels lonely has not Christ in himself, but is only on the threshold of spiritual life. Therefore the Saint wrote to her disconsolate disciple a letter full of affectionate warning, pointing out to him that he did not yet show the true spirit of Christ: 'You are only at the beginning', she told him, that is, preparing the ground whereon, later, Christ may build: a hard labour, in fact, the hardest, if truth be told; 'think that the laying of the foundations is the worst toil of all; once the foundations are laid the building is soon completed'. When the foundations were firm he would become another man, 'able to do all things', no longer attached to the world of the senses; and all melancholy longing for people and things would disappear. Now he was 'weak and fragile as regards the senses', but afterwards he would become strong, and in place of his own will he would put the will of Christ. He must then steep himself in the fire of divine charity that he would find in the Blood, and in the Blood he must drown and kill all will of his own. In this way the inner conflict that agitated and grieved him would be composed and, in the newly-found wealth of his interior life, he would desire nothing outside himself. Then he would be 'strong and persevering', overcoming the weakness of his own sensuality, 'and bitterness will taste sweet to you and warfare bring you peace'.

We do not know exactly when Catherine returned to Siena—perhaps towards the end of December, or at the beginning of January 1377. Her own city does not seem to have taken much notice of her, although naturally her Family welcomed her with great rejoicing, and in religious circles she must have been held in even more reverence than before, because of the rumours that she was responsible for the Pope's return to Italy. She took up once more her apostolic work. Spiritual conversation, prayers, preach-

ing, colloquies, helping and advising all who came to her, and reconciling mutually hostile families—these were her daily tasks. Amidst this continual round of duties she did not fail to keep herself informed, especially through Fra Raimondo, of all that concerned the Pope's journey, and the reception he received in the lands of the Holy See. Nor did she wish to lose all personal contact with Gregory XI, and whenever the chance occurred she sent him a letter by the hand of a friend or a devout person who had business with the Curia.

The Pope had arrived at Corneto on December 6th, and had been welcomed by a rejoicing crowd 'three miles long', who had gone to meet him, waving olive branches and singing the *Te Deum*. It was a triumphal arrival: the keys of Rome were presented to him, he was hailed as the bearer of peace, and was entreated for mercy—yet he was not able to continue his journey to the Eternal City as he had hoped. It was necessary first that agreement should be reached between the 'Banderesi',† or Governors of Rome, and the Cardinals of Ostia and Santa Sabina, the Pope's envoys. These negotiations were difficult and took several weeks to arrange, so that Gregory had to stay at Corneto till January 13th, 1377. Catherine's letter reached him there, brought to him by Tommaso di Guelfuccio. It was a characteristic epistle: as Christ's Vicar Gregory must be stalwart in travail and adversity. He must bring peace to Christians 'in whatever way your conscience will allow you'. He must wage war on the infidels. But the passage in Catherine's letter that must have touched the Pope most was that concerning Siena. It was true, she said, that the city had joined the Anti-Papal League, but not of its own will; there were hundreds and thousands of Sienese who disapproved of the pact, although they had been forced to accept it. And since they grieved over it now, Catherine entreated the Pope to pardon the poor city: 'where they look to you as to a Father, hope in you, believe in you. Be loving with this wretched little city, which has always been a child of Your Holiness, and has been constrained by necessity to do things that displeased it. The people think they were obliged to do so. You yourself must excuse them to Your Holiness, so that you may catch them with the bait of love.'

† The Banderesi (Bannerets) were the military leaders of the various 'rioni' or wards of Rome, and the real rulers of the Republic. The Pope was merely their titular Prince.

In these days a weighty matter occupied Catherine's thought. She had gathered around her numerous men and women disciples whom she dominated completely, but who were not linked together by any close bond. At her death they would probably be dispersed; perhaps there would be no one to continue her work. Why should she not found a convent for women, an exemplary convent after her own heart? Already some months previously she had written to the Abbot of St Antimo: 'I should like, in so far as it is possible for you to help me in this, to find a suitable place where I could found a real and good convent, and place therein two good Superiors, for we can already lay our hands on many members for it'. It is natural for an apostle to desire to have disciples who can, in a certain sense, give continuity to his thought and action, to wish to draw together into a harmonious community people of differing character, temperament and feeling, to fuse their wills into one common aim, that is, the salvation of souls and the spiritualising of the world. To enable darkened and deafened souls to become clear and expressive, and to raise them from earthly to heavenly ways is, one might say, an essential aim of a servant of God. After all, this is the purpose of the various monastic and conventual rules, to continue, in every place and every age, the slow spiritual transformation of men, to spread the Christian faith, and make the power of prayer and love an ever present force.

It is true that the written Rule may become with the passing of time a formal instrument tending to maintain a merely external character. To avoid this danger some of the Saints tried to engrave in their disciples' hearts a spiritual Rule that could be handed down with unimpaired vigour, but unwritten Rules become enfeebled in the course of generations, and in the end are lost to memory. The written monastic Rules have a cohesive power which, even when slackened with age, lasts longer and is more powerful.

We do not know that Catherine thought of transmitting her own ardent faith through a Rule conceived by herself—or whether she had in mind the foundation of a convent *sui generis*, which should increase and spread in the whole world, so as to become later on a real and active religious Order. She may have hoped for this, but it was not a dominating purpose, for when she

decided to found a convent, it was to be of the Dominican type, a convent of strict observance, but without new or particular features. Her own character did not fit her to be a foundress of convents, like St Teresa of Avila. Although she herself submitted to the Rule of the Third Order of St Dominic, she felt within her, more intimate and more powerful, the Rule given her by Christ Himself. She was a great Religious, and a humble one, but at the same time she wished to be free and independent within the ambit of the Catholic faith—and when she believed a course of action to be right and good and willed by God, there was no Rule that could prevent her from carrying it out. This is magnificent Christianity, but not meant for the majority of souls, who always need the help of external laws, and are glad to have tasks assigned to them from without. Catherine was an out-and-out individualist; perhaps that is why she did not succeed in founding a convent of a permanent character.

On her return to Siena with greatly increased fame, very many people went to her to beg for her counsel and spiritual help, and she obtained some remarkable conversions. Among these was that of Nanni di Ser Vanni de' Savini. The 'Leggenda Minore' tells us he was a man 'chock-full of worldly prudence, tightly held in the devil's snares, and full of hatred for almost everyone'. The Republic had made use of him for delicate missions, as when he was sent in 1366 to Sir John Hawkwood to dissuade him from his intention of invading and devastating Siennese territory; in 1368 he was one of the Twelve rulers; in 1371 he was so actively opposed to the Commune that he was fined five hundred florins; after this he lived in close association with the Salimbeni, hated and opposed by many in Siena. He was hard-natured, restless, turbulent and vindictive. His shrewdness and capacity for intrigue often enabled him to outwit his enemies and aroused their fear. Although he was so quarrelsome, violent, selfish and irreligious, he always kept in touch with Religious, and it was, in fact, on William of Fleete's advice that he went to see Catherine. It is true that this visit took place at a time when he was gravely threatened by the Commune of Siena, and when his very life was in danger. He may have had a presentiment that he would not survive the adversities that were about to overwhelm him. Or perhaps his troubled soul felt the need of a word of peace and light: he was tired of the continual

struggle, and sought a little inner tranquillity. He may even have been curious to discover what he could of the secret power of this Saint of whom so much was told. The fact is that he came to Catherine, listened to her words, and then opened his heart to her and became converted. Before he was arrested by order of the Podestà, either out of spontaneous gratitude, or in reply to a request from Catherine, he gave her a fortress of his at Belcaro, in a half-ruined condition because three years previously, when in the possession of the Salimbeni, it had been dismantled and in great part destroyed in an uprising against that family. Here the new convent was to arise. Catherine busied herself at once over this project. First of all she begged for Papal permission. While in Avignon she had perhaps revealed to Gregory her intention to found a convent of strict observance, and he may have given her his encouragement; now it was no longer simply an intention—the land was there, ready to be built on; the money for building could easily be found; the future nuns were there already. Gregory sent her a Bull authorising her to build or institute her convent, and named as his Commissioner for the purpose Giovanni di Gano, the Abbot of Sant' Antimo, Catherine's friend and confidant. He also granted the convent a dowry of up to two thousand florins. No sooner had Catherine received the Pope's consent than she set about obtaining permission for the Commune of Siena. The Republic would not allow fortified places to change hands without official permission. Therefore Catherine presented an instance to the 'Magnificent Defenders of the People and City of Siena', begging to be authorised to receive as a gift the ruined fortress of Belcaro, and to build therein a convent for nuns. These authorisations were discussed and granted on January 25th, 1377.

This new form of activity required of Catherine energy, prayerfulness, shrewdness and decision. From what we know of her we can be sure she concentrated all her powers to achieve her new purpose: to find the money required for building, to supervise the labour, prepare the arrangements for conventual life, choose the Superiors to leave in charge during her own absence, and the new nuns, postulants, and lay Sisters. Did she desire her convent to initiate profound reforms among Dominican Sisters, reforms which might be extended later on to the Friaries of the Dominicans, and to other Orders also? Did she dream of remaining there,

at Belcaro, amongst her fellow Sisters, imparting to them her own ardent and lively faith, and preparing them to carry on her work after her death? Or was her time at Belcaro a sort of retreat, necessary to prepare herself for her approaching end? She may have desired to commune more closely with God, and the new convent may have seemed to her an excellent place for a spiritual retreat. Some psychological evidence may be adduced for all these suppositions, but none of them is supported by any factual proof. All we can affirm is that she had a convent built (or at least partially built) and that nuns were gathered there, and it was consecrated and received the name of Santa Maria degli Angeli. We know that she tried to draw to it more nuns, such as the Contessa Benedetta, daughter of Giovanni d'Agnolino Salimbeni, and that when she was far away she always recommended the convent to her 'children'. 'I recommend to you the Convent of Santa Maria degli Angeli. And do not take any notice of my own absence! Nay, good children try to do even more when their mother is not there, wishing to show the love they have for her, and to win her approval.' On April 16th, 1377, she wrote from Belcaro to Gregory XI urging him to make peace and to forgive his rebellious children, and at the same time she told him that the convent he had granted to her had been inaugurated. In giving this news she is full of joy and lively gratitude. But Catherine was by nature not merely a contemplative; nor was she a nun in the strict sense of the word. She was continually communing with the divine, but she needed to work among men, to speak with them, warn and help them. The work she could do in a cloister was of too limited a nature. Her new community, composed of disciples who revered their Mother and hung on her every word, failed to satisfy her longing for wider activity, now that she was accustomed to live in the midst of the most varied folk, speaking with the Pope, with Cardinals and Princes, with lay disciples too, and conversing about civil and political as well as religious problems. Belcaro would be for her a place of rest, not a permanent home. She was not intended to 'stay put' in a convent; her 'temperament' was not suitable for an abbess; she needed ceaseless activity, and her field of action was with crowds invoking her aid, and with rulers of the State or of the Church, teaching them to live their Christian faith. She loved meditation, continual prayer,

and solitude, but her life had to contain these and something more. With her, action and contemplation had to alternate harmoniously. Her ecstasies were more blissful if she could diffuse love among men, and work for the visible progress of the Church. Not for her the strict timetable of the cloister, nor a restricted circle in which her thoughts and actions must revolve. She sacrificed herself for others, but without set times and places. She needed to know at first hand the sufferings of the world, and to offer herself every day in sacrifice, as she moved among people who sinned and suffered. 'The cell of self-knowledge' was the refuge of her soul; but the cell was not bounded by walls, she bore it with her at every moment of the day and to the most varied places. Although she had her own intimate and secret rule, yet she had to be absolute mistress of her own time. And as she was a real apostle she did not think that others should come to her, but that she should go to them. This profound need of social life prevented her from staying long in the convent of Belcaro, and letting it circumscribe her thought and activity. On April 25th, 1377, she was in Siena, according to Raimondo da Capua, and four days later she was visiting the monks of a Cistercian monastery, probably that of Maggiano; then she was travelling about the Siennese province, and lingering in the Valle dell' Orcia. We hear of her at Montepulciano, Castiglioncello Trinoro, Rocca a Tennenano, the Abbey of Sant' Antimo, and Monte Giovi. A large group of disciples accompanied her; besides fellow Tertiaries there were Fra Tommaso della Fonte, Fra Bartolomeo Dominici, Fra Raimondo da Capua, Fra Matteo Tolomei, and among the laymen Neri di Landoccio, Malavolti, Gabriele Piccolomini, and Pietro di Giovanni Ventura. Her apostolate was on a grand scale; she pacified the Tolomei and the Salimbeni, preached peace and love to all, exorcised the possessed, cured the suffering, and restored faith to those who had lost it. She converted two poets, Giacomo de' Cavalieri and Anastagio di Ser Guido da Montalcino, who from that time onwards extolled her in mellifluous verse filled with silvery haloes, pearly shadows and roseate visions. She passed through the Valle dell' Orcia like an envoy from God, stirring all who listened to her profound words, learnt in rapt contemplation of her Creator.

Nevertheless, this mission of hers, though great and holy, was

like other missions of other and lesser Saints; in her life it may even be considered as a sort of interval, before her resumption of more characteristic activity. The letters she wrote in these months to the Tolomei, the Trincei, the Farnese, and the Belforti are noble and inspiring, full of spiritual strength, but add nothing to her greatness in our eyes. She herself was aware that her work of pacification and redemption was of a local and limited character, and so, although she poured into it all her ardour of soul, she kept her gaze fixed on the greater work she was anxious to promote: the pacification of Italy, the proclamation of the Crusade, and to crown all, the reform of the clergy. She longed to be near the Pope: 'I have a great desire to be in the presence of Your Holiness. I have many things to speak about; I have not come to you, because of the many tasks, good and useful for the Church, that I have had to perform. Peace, peace, for the love of Christ Crucified, and no more war—for there is no other way.' Tommaseo interprets this as a gentle refusal of an invitation from the Pope to go to him in Rome—thus attributing to her a certain self-confidence or arrogance with regard to Gregory XI, of which she showed no trace. Instead, her words should rather be understood as an offer and a request at the same time: she had expressed herself in a similar way in Avignon. It was a delicate way of asking for an interview with the Pope. When she says she has not been to Rome because of the many tasks undertaken for the good of the Church, she does not mean: 'I have too much to do here, to think about going there', but rather: 'I am working for the good of the Church, and of my own will I do not wish to interrupt this work; but, nevertheless, if Your Holiness commands it, I will at once leave everything to come to you.'

In the Valle dell' Orcia she did not neglect the affairs of Italy, but prepared plans and treaties for the triumph of the Church. 'Catherine sent me . . . to Rome to Gregory XI with some excellent treaties . . . if they had been understood—for God's Holy Church', said Fra Raimondo da Capua. We do not know what these treaties were, or for whom they were intended, or what was their scope. We presume that Catherine and her friends were thinking along political lines as well as simply preaching the salvation of souls. And this was natural. Whoever preaches 'Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God' preaches an absolute

rule of life, and therefore a certain way of dealing with other men, that is, a social system: hence a political system, too. It is not possible to separate secular from religious life when religion rules the soul. Only when religious feeling declines do men begin to feel aware of a social conscience as distinct from the religious conscience, and independent of this. It is true that Christ said: 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's', but when we believe that the whole world must be ruled in a Christian way, that the Church is the perfect human organisation and that the Pope is supreme Head of all Christians—then it is not possible to separate the religious world from the ethical, political and social spheres. 'A 'totalitarian Catholic' like Catherine could not conceive of the State being outside the Church, nor admit that there could be Christian governments independent of Christ's Vicar, or, worse still, in revolt against him. She was therefore quite sincere when she wrote to the Lords Defenders and the Captain of the People of the city of Siena. 'I came for nought else but to feed on souls and snatch them away from the clutches of the devil.' Here, as in the letter, written about the same time, addressed to Salvi di Messer Piero, she rejected the accusation of political activity, because for her there was no such thing as politics apart from religion—for she identified the one with the other. Christ was the universal King, and she acted in His name. The world at peace, the triumph of virtue and love—these were what Christ desired, and she, His bride, had the duty to preach them to all and in every place, even at the risk of displeasing some rulers. She had in view not the material greatness of single states, but the spiritual greatness of all Christendom: 'So my fellow citizens think that through me or through my companions, treaties are made; they tell the truth for, without knowledge, they speak prophetically; for I will do nothing else, and I want my companions to do nothing else, but defeat the devil and rob him of the mastery that he has assumed over man because of mortal sin, and I want to take hatred out of man's heart, and reconcile him with Christ Crucified, and with his neighbour. These are the treaties that we are busied with, and anyone who is with me also.' Comparing this passage with what Fra Raimondo tells us about the treaties suggested by Catherine and taken by him to the Pope, we deduce that she considered political treaties as a part, or conse-

quence, of the Christian way of life, and in fact she could not conceive of politics divorced from religion.

On the other hand, it was natural also for the Signori of Siena, which officially belonged to the Anti-Papal League, to get alarmed at the reports of Catherine's apostleship. Was she not preaching that all Christians must be subject to the Pope? And did not her sermons in praise of peace and love imply condemnation of the Sienese government that had sided with Florence, and therefore condemnation of the war against the Pope? Moreover, she was accompanied by men of political interests such as Raimondo da Capua and the Abbot of Sant' Antimo, whose only purpose was to bring about a Papal victory over the League. Siena, like Florence, distinguished sharply between religion and politics, and therefore feared and opposed all that might in any way support the Papacy, which, according to them, was dominated by French prelates, and therefore hostile to Tuscany and the rest of Italy. Such a different way of looking at religion and the State meant there could be no mutual understanding between Catherine and the defenders of Siena; hence the Sienese suspicion and distrust of her, and their remonstrances, couched in temperate and prudent terms.

Warnings and remonstrances were of no avail; she went on undaunted, with her plans for a Christian peace, in pursuit of which she despatched Fra Raimondo to Rome with the above-mentioned treaties, and with the intention, perhaps, of arranging interviews for her with the Pope. She wished to speak with Gregory XI. Nearly a year had passed since her last audiences with him, and in the meantime there had been grave and painful events. Francesco di Vico had defeated the Papal troops. The war was claiming numerous victims, and, as at Cesena, many innocent lives. In Tuscany the people were becoming discontented, and suffering the consequences of the Interdict; in Florence those who longed for peace, in opposition to the inexorable War Party, were growing more numerous every day. The cities and townships of central Italy lived in constant dread of the approach of the mercenary Companies of Fortune; in Bologna, in March, there had been cries in the streets of 'Death to the Florentine traitors!'; on the other hand the Church lacked unity, brotherliness and serenity, and was still ruled by selfishness, ambition, and the greed

for wealth. Catherine had long meditated on these evils and had received in God a clear vision of the remedies to apply; she wanted to tell the Pope of these, and she wanted him to listen to her and follow her advice, as he had done in Avignon.

This time, however, she met with ill success. Fra Raimondo was received with cold hostility by the Curia, and the plans, conceived by Catherine, which were to have given peace and prosperity to the peoples, neither moved the Pope nor aroused his interest. Fra Raimondo was very disappointed, and in his distress told the Saint about his disillusionment, confusion and dismay on hearing the Papal Court express ideas so completely contrary to those he and his 'Mother' thought excellent. But Catherine was not distressed at this news, nor did she lose one jot or tittle of her faith; she saw all this hostility on the part of the Curia as the work of the devil, who wanted to undo the good that they, by inspiration from God, tried to do. They must not be cast down; on the contrary, they must fight and overcome all opposition. Fra Raimondo must take heart, strengthen his own belief, and trust in Him who can do all: 'I have heard . . . that you have had great difficulties, and that your mind has been clouded with sadness through the illusions and deceits of the devil, who wishes you to take right for wrong, and wrong for right; and he does this to prevent you from pressing on to your goal. But take comfort, for God has provided, and will provide, and His providence will not fail you. See that in all necessities you have recourse to Mary, and embrace the Holy Cross; and never let your mind be confused, but see that you sail over the stormy sea in the little boat of divine mercy. I know that from both Religious and lay folk, even within the mystical body of Holy Church, you have received or suffered from persecution, or the displeasure and indignation of the Vicar of Christ, either for yourself, or for me. Do not oppose all these creatures, but bear all with patience, departing thence at once and retiring into your cell to examine yourself with a holy conscience, thinking that God makes you worthy to endure, for love of the truth, and to be persecuted for His name's sake, with real humility deeming yourself worthy of the punishment and unworthy of the fruit. And all the things you have to do, see that you perform them with prudence, with God always before your eyes; and what you have to say or do, say it and do it before God and before

yourself, and with the help of most holy prayer. Then you will find the teacher of holy clemency, the Holy Spirit, who will pour into you such a light of wisdom that you will be able to discern and choose what will be to His honour. This is the doctrine that is given us by the sweet primal Truth, providing for our needs with measureless love.'

All at once, however, the letter changes tone; Catherine is no longer writing to Fra Raimondo but to the Pope himself. She has a moment of fear or anguish; has she perhaps been rebuked by Gregory, or threatened, or entreated in one way or another not to busy herself any more in Church affairs? We do not know, but her heartfelt appeal to the Pope leads us to believe this was the case; 'And to whom shall I run if you forsake me? Who would come to my help? To whom could I flee if you drove me away? My persecutors persecute me and I flee for shelter to you and to other sons and servants of God.' She goes on to say that if he refuses to receive her she will flee to Christ, who will welcome her in spite of all her sins; and if Christ welcomes her, the Pope too, His Vicar, will have to receive her, and so they will go forward manfully together, striving for the good of the Church. 'In the Church is my watch-post and my station as sentinel and warrior; in the Church I wish to end my days, with tears, sweat and sighs, and give my blood, and the very marrow of my bones.' Only in the Church could she feel free and unhindered, whatever might befall her; 'and if all the world drove me out, I would not care about it, resting with tears and patience on the bosom of the sweet Bride'. Her faith in Christ never falters, she is sure her place is in the Church, she trusts the Pope; nevertheless a little bitterness remains in her soul: 'I felt disappointment for the injury done to the Church and for your disappointment', she wrote later on to Fra Raimondo, who, soon after his arrival in Rome, had been appointed by his Superior Prior of the Minerva Church, and so could not return to his Mother, as he wished. Catherine felt this disappointment, but was not saddened by it; it was necessary to pass through this to find sweetness and solace. In fact, the bitterness must be fully savoured to be useful: 'rejoice in suffering, for the Truth has promised us refreshment after sorrow'.

Catherine had recourse to ever more constant prayer and self-study. One ardent desire she had never been able to see gratified:

her desire to write. When the heart is full to overflowing, what better relief is there than to write to those who love and understand? Catherine had several secretaries at her disposal, ready at her call; they admired her whole-heartedly, but in certain moments her heart shunned all intermediaries. However intimate and sympathetic a secretary may be, one cannot reveal to him all the hidden thoughts of the soul. There is a spiritual shyness which bids us confide only to the written word the outpourings of the heart. An intermediary cools our inspiration, lessens our ardour, weakens our expression. There is always something that we are ashamed to reveal to a third person, even to a loved disciple, especially when our thoughts or affections are turned to another. Naturally, therefore, Catherine wished to learn to write, and for several years she watched the formation of letters and words, trying to acquire the necessary skill to be able, without the aid of secretaries, to pour out the flood of her enthusiasm and transmit directly the fervour of her faith. Naturally she was overjoyed when she found she could indite her first letters. She wrote to Fra Raimondo: 'This letter, and another that I sent you, I have written with my own hand at Isola della Rocca, with so many sighs and tears that my eyes could not see for looking—I was so full of wonder at myself and at God's goodness, considering His mercy towards His creatures that have the gift of reason, and His providence that is so abundant for me; for, in His mercy, as I was deprived of this consolation through my own ignorance, He has of His providence granted me the gift of being able to write; so that when I came down from the heights I might have some outlet for my bursting heart. Not wishing to withdraw me yet from this life of shadows, He has taught me this art in a wonderful way, as the teacher does to the child, showing him by example. Hence, as soon as He departed, with the glorious Evangelist John, and Thomas of Aquinas, I, still sleeping, began to learn.'

Her expression: 'so full of wonder at myself and at God's goodness' aptly describes her state of mind when she began to write. For her and for her companions it was miraculous, or the unexpected result of a long and constant preparation. We do not know whether she wrote her first sentences during a vision, but this may well be true, as she had a most powerful capacity for assimilation, and things she had closely observed had a way of

reappearing to her, sublimated or magnified, during her ecstasies and visions. She tells us herself that she had an aptitude for writing; and so the forms of letters, syllables and words that she had read over a period of several years had been impressed on her mind, and now seemed to spring to life as she wrote; as her pen expressed her thoughts her hand seemed to be guided by a will other than her own. As she wrote and read over again what she had written, she rejoiced amid her tears. At last, when her heart was full and needed an outlet, 'not to burst', she could, without the help of intermediaries, write to someone who would understand her, freely expressing what God had suggested or revealed to her.

In 1377, perhaps during the second half of May, Fra Raimondo went to Rome, sent there, as we have seen, by Catherine, with the 'treaties' which both Catherine and her faithful adviser hoped might serve as a foundation for a firm peace between the Holy See and Tuscany. But he was the bearer of other information also. Towards the end of April, or at the beginning of May, he had had in Siena a conversation with Niccolò Soderini about the question of war or peace for Florence. Soderini was proposing to overthrow the 'Eight of War' and set up a government favourable to peace in their place. All the Florentines, said Catherine, or at least all those worthy of the name, want peace; there are only four, or, at the most, six powerful rulers who ruthlessly impose their will on all others; why should they not be cast out of the government? They are evil-minded, enemies of the common good; it would be a meritorious act to depose them. But to do so it would be necessary for the Guelph party to combine with certain citizens of good will. To whom was Soderini referring when he spoke of *'aliqui ex bonis civibus'*? Perhaps some of the Signori themselves, who privately opposed the war, but openly voted for it in their Council meetings. Soderini seems to be asking for the support of the Dominican Order in favour of a more energetic and determined propaganda in Florence, in order to inspire with courage those citizens of good will of whom he speaks. What could give them greater courage than the conviction that they were working for the cause of God? Who could better arouse such a conviction than the Preaching Friars? It may even be that Soderini, in this suggestion, was aiming at getting Catherine herself to come to Florence, in support of his plan. In any case, he had recourse to

Fra Raimondo because he knew him to be a prudent and capable politician, who enjoyed the esteem of Gregory XI, and was well thought of by the Curia; he was sure he would find some way of strengthening the Party in Florence, and so furthering the peace that all desired.

We do not know what was Fra Raimondo's answer; but in all probability he promised to take up this matter as soon as he arrived in Rome, whither he was bound. Certainly he did not turn the proposal down: 'Having heard this', he writes, 'I kept it to myself, but when I came to the Vicar of Christ, to whom I was sent by Catherine, I reported to him all that I had heard from that man'.

Gregory XI was feeling the worse for the climate of Rome, and was displeased with the way things were going in Italy. He had given up the delightful life of Avignon to come to Rome, because he hoped to restore the temporal power of the Church; he had believed that, once he arrived in the Eternal City, all Catholics would not only rejoice but would rally round him to support him in the great ecclesiastical reforms he wished to carry out. But now he had already been in Rome for several months, and riots, insurrections and rebellions were breaking out just as before. In fact, in the City of the Martyrs itself the strife was becoming more and more dangerous. The writer of his *'Prima Vita'* tells us that Gregory was terrified and dismayed, seeing himself deceived and cheated by those who had assured him that as soon as he set foot in Rome a sign from him would pacify all Italy. Instead, what did he behold? Ever more defections and rebellions, while even those who until a few months before had been tranquil and submissive now began to fall away from him. Moreover, the State was in a bad way financially; his own health was failing; the Florentines were out to arouse new enmities against him and to strengthen his old foes, and meanwhile they strove to defeat his militias and to bribe their Captains. The Republic was determined to oblige him to accept a dictated peace. Wherever he turned he saw nothing but obstacles and iniquity. He was naturally distressed and despondent. His state of mind is seen in the letter he wrote to the Florentines, in which he compared the advantages of the life in Avignon with the difficulties, anxieties, cares, hostilities and struggles he had to contend with in Italy, and in Rome itself. He

was irritable; even trifling worries made him indignant and harsh.

Fra Raimondo therefore came to him at an unfortunate moment. Gregory XI loved and revered Catherine as a Saint, not as a political thinker; the suggestions she sent to him—in other circumstances he would have smiled at them good-humouredly—angered him now that he saw the inconsistency of the prophecies about his return to Rome. Fra Raimondo enjoyed no better fortune with the Curia, for most of the members of the Papal Court were enraged at having left the calm and serenity of Avignon for the confusion, uncertainty and anarchy of Rome.

However, even if adversities had soured Gregory's temper, they had no power to overcome him. He had faith in the justice of his cause and believed in a future peace for all Christendom. Although his body was ailing and his heart well-nigh broken he gathered all his energies to restore the fullness of the temporal power. He was a man of faith and a wise politician, and through faith and wisdom he was able to achieve, at least in part, his immediate purpose. The *bonus et purus aër* of Anagni restored his health, so that during his summer sojourn there he was able to work assiduously for the good of the Church. Pastor says: 'Little by little events began to turn in his favour, thanks to his wise policy of generously rewarding the faithful, harshly punishing the impenitent, and graciously forgiving the repentant. He succeeded in reconciling the wealthy city of Bologna to the Church (in a Bull of August 21st) and in drawing over to his own side Rodolfo da Varano, the supreme leader of the Florentines.' It may be added that Lucca and Pisa had never wished to impair their own good relations with the Papacy, and Siena itself was always timid and wavering. The Florentines now realised that their city no longer showed the unity and solidarity of the preceding year, and they decided to send their Ambassadors to the Pope to ask for a reconciliation. It was not that the rulers desired peace, but they wanted to show their own good will to the populace, now restless and longing for peace, so as to be able to throw the blame for the failure of their peace effort on the Pope, who, they would say, proposed unacceptable conditions.

The anonymous Florentine Diarist wrote, as if with a sigh of longing: 'It is said they will arrive at an agreement for peace; please God it may be so!'—and he wrote this on June 13th,

when reporting the arrival of the Florentine Ambassadors at the Papal Court at Anagni. And Stefani Marchionne di Coppo asserts that in the year 1377 in Florence 'the war was becoming unpopular and money not easily forthcoming, while the leaders of the Guelph party were inciting the people against the Eight Rulers who wanted war and not peace—so that whoever sided with them (the Guelphs) went in great fear and danger'.

While staying at Anagni the Pope once more felt fatherly towards Catherine, and received Fra Raimondo in a more friendly manner. In October he gave him a letter for Catherine which Fra Raimondo sent to her in the Valle d'Orcia, together with one from himself. Catherine rejoiced at receiving both these letters, whose contents are unknown to us. Probably, the Pope gave his ill-health as a reason for not having written to her for so long. She says: 'So, having read the letters and understood all, I begged a serving-maid of God'—she means herself—'to offer up tears and sweat to God for the Bride and for the ailing Father'. Her joy at receiving the letter from her 'sweet Father' was so great that she was plunged into ecstasies and visions. She described these later on in a letter to Fra Raimondo, written in her own hand (No. 272 of Tommaseo's edition), which contains at least in part, as Dupré-Thésider has recently demonstrated, the animating idea of the 'Dialogue'.

Possibly Gregory XI had begun to consider making use of Catherine's eloquence to persuade the Florentines to rebel against the Eight of War and insist on their rulers making peace with the Holy See. Soderini's proposal to Fra Raimondo, which he had reported to the Pope, must have made him reflect on the good results that might be obtained in this way. Who better than Catherine could spread political propaganda under the form of religion? Who could more eloquently preach in Florence the necessity for making peace with the Holy See, without incurring the anger of the government and being persecuted? It was clear now that the war would never be brought to an end by force of arms alone, and Gregory XI was aware of this; nor could he hope to win by diplomatic means, for the Florentines were always watchful, astute, ready to counter-attack or even to take the initiative. At the end of October, moreover, the troops of his Captain, Rodolfo da Varano, had been beaten by the Condottieri

of the anti-Papal League and pursued up to the walls of Camerino, so that there was great jubilation in Florence where the banners snatched from their enemies were carried amidst great rejoicing through the streets. Another means must therefore be sought to beat down the power of Florence. During the summer months Gregory had had some political successes, and on his return to Rome the oath of allegiance that he received from the Ambassadors of Foligno and the peace he was able to sign with the Prefect of that city, Francesco da Vico, were proof of this; but he needed to find a way of overthrowing the Florentine government, the source of all the recent troubles of the Holy See. He was attracted by the idea of forming in Florence a considerable nucleus of people faithful to the Papacy and working for its cause. If he could succeed in this he could see the possibility of preparing a peace in the near future. In August he had sent to Florence two Friars: the Franciscan Lodovico of Venice and the Augustinian hermit Giovanni of Basle. In November Giovanni of Basle had gone back to Florence again; but Catherine could, much more easily than these, spread an active and profitable propaganda because of the high esteem in which she was held in the city. With this design probably already decided upon, Gregory, on his return to Rome, invited Fra Raimondo to dine with him and expounded to him his plan: 'They have written to me that if Catherine goes to Florence I shall have peace'. And to Fra Raimondo, who impulsively volunteered his own services for the new mission, he replied that he must decline his offer because the Florentines would ill-treat him, while Catherine, a woman revered by many in Florence, would not be exposed to grave danger; moreover, she would be able to speak with a freedom not granted to others. Perhaps the Pope forbore to say that neither Fra Raimondo nor any other Dominican follower of the Saint possessed her power to move hearts and arouse enthusiasm for the Church.

Thus, while Catherine was spending Advent at Rocca d'Orcia, her new mission in the Church's cause was being decided in Rome. This was rather a sad time for her. As her exterior activity became more limited she delved ever deeper into the depths of her soul, examining her own being and her own work and finding nothing of much value there. 'My life is of little use to others; rather is it painful and burdensome to all creatures, far and near, because of

my sins.' A desolate state of mind, like the desolate winter landscape of Rocca d'Orcia, where she felt 'the winds beat in from every side'. She looked at herself, then at Christ, and measured the dividing gulf. She contemplated humanity in travail and realised she could do very little to alleviate the misery of men. Yet she knew she must continue to share the sufferings of others, and atone for the sins of all with her own sufferings. With these thoughts in her mind her heart became aflame with desire, and a prayer burst from the depths of her soul, a prayer that sings itself like a hymn: 'So may my sufferings be my food, my tears my drink, my sweat my ointment! May my sufferings nourish me, heal me, give me light, give me wisdom, clothe me; may my sufferings strip me of all spiritual and temporal self-love. . . . May God in His pity grant me to live in anguish for the love of virtue, and in my suffering to offer Him my sad and anguished desires for the salvation of the whole world and for the reform of Holy Church.'

It is not too fanciful to suppose that Catherine's prayers were answered in Gregory XI's plan to send her to Florence. While the Saint was longing to be of use to her 'sweet Father' he was giving the order to send her to defend the Papal cause, not as an Ambassador, for she would certainly have been outwitted by the cunning Florentines, but as a Religious, to stir up the already unquiet consciences of the Catholics of Florence, strengthening their desire to submit to the Interdict and put their trust in their Holy Father.

Catherine arrived in Florence some time in the early spring of 1378. She had men and women disciples with her, and began her work at once, with all her energy.

The city had a wretched appearance in those days. The grey atmosphere of the streets and hills accorded well with the sadness the citizens felt. Even the sunlight that lit the olive groves and brushed with gold the *pietra serena* of the palaces could not warm their mournful hearts. The self-confident, bold and aggressive spirit that Catherine had noticed in the Florentines two years before had almost disappeared. The city was in distress and overhung by a dreadful threat; the future was obscure. The economic and spiritual ruin of the Republic, which few had foreseen the year before, was now clear to all, and most of the citizens openly

depreciated the war. Two years previously they had discussed peace proposals with Catherine and had asked her to speed the negotiations with the Pope, but, as we have seen, their proposals and offers were insincere, and intended only to further their own political aims; in those days they were sure of victory, even hopeful of an overwhelming triumph; now they were doubtful of winning the war, and nearly everyone wanted peace. Catherine's labour, therefore, was on a fertile soil. Her appeals and warnings found a widespread welcome and consent, and her hope of concluding a peace with the Pope was echoed in many hearts. Discontent with their rulers, and especially with the Eight of War, grew apace. The movement for peace acquired more power and authority every day. Verses invoking peace began to circulate in the city:

'Peace, by God, and naught but peace,
Peace alone, for war is evil for Florence,
Peace to restore this land,
Peace we ask for, for love of peace!'

The verses are uncouth but they express very clearly a sturdy popular demand for peace, and for this reason are quoted by the anonymous Diarist of Florence, as representing not the cry of a solitary, but the prayer of a whole people that longs to be freed from the sufferings of war. Gone were the days when political speeches urging the people to further efforts found a ready response. Now even the pealing of bells, the display of banners and lighting of bonfires that announced the news of every victory of the armies of the League, which once filled the city and its surrounding countryside with joy and excitement, produced only a passing mood of exultation and hope. The drying up of trade and industry, the increase of poverty, and the spectre of worse to come, the hourly struggle against the difficulties caused by the war, had the effect of plunging the people back once more into an even greater dejection. In their distress they turned to God, begging Him to touch the hearts of their rulers and incline them towards peace: 'Peace! we ask God for peace; the Lord grant us peace, that we may go in peace, and put peace in the hearts of those who disdain it!'

There was then a general desire for peace, which the Interdict had greatly helped to foster, for as soon as this ban was declared

the Florentines were seized with a sort of religious frenzy, as if they wished to prove that they were fervid Christians even without the Divine Office. In the churches hundreds of men and women sang the 'Laudi' with joy; every day endless processions passed through the city streets, bearing relics of the Saints, with hymns and music; vast sums of money were spent on candles and sacred books; thousands of people, of all ages and classes, scourged themselves in public; everyone was fasting, praying and performing works of piety. Conversions were numerous, asceticism became fashionable, a zeal for salvation seemed to arise spontaneously. 'And again many young nobles and rich men were moved, or became converted, and built themselves cells at Fiesole, and gave alms, and then fasted and prayed and slept on straw and on the naked ground. They converted sinful women and attired them and took them also to Fiesole and gave them alms, and restored convents; in this way many rich youths were not ashamed to despise themselves and forsake the world, and to go begging for the poorer converts.'

This form of religious enthusiasm had also a political background, for the Florentines wanted to prove that even in their excommunicated city they still practised their faith with fervour, and the Interdict had not prevented them from being good Catholics. As Stefani Marchionne di Coppo observed: 'It looked as if they wished to defeat and humiliate the Pope, while remaining obedient sons of the Church'.

With the passing of months the apostolic fervour of the citizens became dulled, and their *alleluias* became *misereres*. The processions were even more numerous than before, but no longer rejoicing. Now the faithful implored the intercessions of Mary and the Saints and clamoured for the Divine Office. Prayers and scourgings were no longer witnesses to a robust faith which persisted even without the aid of Masses; they had become sacrificial offerings for peace. The desire to 'defeat and humiliate the Pope' by showing their religious fervour, unabated despite the Interdict, was no longer there; in the year of grace 1377 they implored God to inspire the Pope to give them peace, 'praying Almighty God to open the heart of the Holy Father, Messer the Pope, that he may show mercy to us sinners, and that it may please Him to send to him and to us holy peace'.

The desire for pardon is already timidly showing its head. The Florentines hope the Pope will offer them peace—they do not want to have to beseech him for it. They are, however, for the first time showing that their consciences are uneasy about their behaviour with regard to him.

The lack of divine services is disturbing to them and leaves a painful gap in their lives. Growing distress irritates and depresses them. They try to propitiate God, with many mortifications; the 'Flagellants' become more and more numerous; the opposition to the war grows ever stronger. The Signoria realise that Florence is in grave danger. What better means could be found of restoring tranquillity than by giving them back their Mass and sacraments? The government therefore orders all the priests to officiate and the citizens to attend divine worship. This is a violation of the Interdict. Schism now looms on the horizon, and perhaps the Pope fears it. In any case, he condemns the Florentines and orders all the priests—with the exception of two, who are to remain to baptise the newly born—to leave the diocese; a great number of priests and friars choose to obey the Signoria rather than the Pope, and continue to say Mass, to communicate, to give blessings, and to preach the Florentine cause. The Pope can do no more than use threats or, better, avail himself of the intervention of the Saints to re-establish the significance of the Interdict. Catherine, whose eloquence softens the heart, persuades the intellect, and fills the soul with holy enthusiasm, is sure, he thinks, to make the Florentines respect the Interdict, and will be able to remind the priests of their strict duty as priests of Rome, arousing in them a greater spirit of sacrifice and a real attachment to the cause of the Church. With this purely religious aim in mind, as well as the political purpose already alluded to, Gregory XI had sent Catherine to Florence.

She found support from the Dominicans of Santa Maria Novella, from the Guelph Party, and especially from Soderini. The Party was endeavouring to seize power from the Eight of War, so as to make peace with the Pope—an aim of which Catherine could only approve. It is true that the Party did not always act for the general good of Florence—in fact, some of its leaders were out to achieve their own ends for motives of personal ambition or vendetta; but Catherine's own straight forward-

ness and simplicity prevented her from suspecting crookedness in others; to her it was inconceivable that in such a grave struggle as this between Florence and the Holy See, there should be anyone who pursued any other end but that of the common good, and the triumph of the Church. She believed what the Party leaders told her, attended their meetings, approved of their plans, and urged all who heard her to put an end to the war. She never perceived that she had become, in a certain sense, a Party tool. She took the Guelph leaders for friends and supporters, and never doubted their sincerity or loyalty. She had found new disciples who loved her and whom she loved. There was Giannozzo Sacchetti, brother of the poet Francesco Sacchetti, and himself no mean versifier. He was obsessed by the fear of death, and in some of his poems seemed almost to express a presentiment of his own tragic end. He found in Catherine's words and prayers consolation for his tormented soul.

He wrote: 'Grief weighs me down so heavily that I am cast down like a man worn out and beaten by Fortune'. But the energetic Catherine knew how to rouse and encourage him, and dissipate his sadness with love, which increased his faith and filled him with joy. He was a real poet, but dwelt too much on his own sorrows. Perhaps his disorderly life made him desperate at times, but he felt the need for renewal. . . 'I wish to return to my divine Creator—in a new ship, with a new rudder'. She taught him to seek after God, who would fulfil all his longing. There was a trace of morbidity in the pleasure he felt in the contemplation of his mistress's beautiful body, decomposed and corrupt in death. Funereal thoughts disturbed and weakened him; he needed the gleam of faith and the flame of love. Catherine wanted him to be a poet, a healthy, vigorous poet—and she gave him some of her own ardour and inspiration: 'Drown yourself in the source of love, if you seek for love'. By her side Giannozzo lived a new life. Full of love like a mother, full of understanding like the dearest of friends, terrible sometimes in warning or advice, she guided and ennobled him. He needed her look, her word. Left to himself he did not always see clearly, he fell easily into intrigues, became weak, uncertain; with her help he acquired clarity, strength, will-power, courage. She loved him as if he were her child, and did all she could to pluck the bitterness from his heart, and spiritualise his art and his life.

Barduccio Canigiani, too, became in these days her disciple and was soon her beloved son. He was very young when he first knew her, of frail constitution and with a tendency towards consumption, but his heart was generous and he could love with rare constancy. Raimondo da Capua, who knew him well, describes him as being 'adorned with all the virtues'; and Giovanni of the Cells, whose disciple he was before he met Catherine, writing to him on the occasion of the Saint's death, treats him as if he were an angel on earth: 'Come to your brethren', he says, 'who await you with great longing; for they believe they will be receiving an angel when they receive you'. He was the son of Pietro Canigiani and the brother of Ristoro, both prominent Guelphs who met Catherine during her visit to Florence. They supported her in her political mission, proclaimed her sanctity and her great virtues throughout the city, and remained in correspondence with her after her departure.

As far as we can tell from the scanty facts we know about him, Barduccio shared more in Catherine's religious life than in her political activity. He followed her to Siena and to Rome, was always very close to her, and helped her by acting as her secretary, always drinking in her words and moulding his own soul according to her teaching. Only in the atmosphere she created around her could he breathe at his ease; by her side he shared her overflowing love and found a new motive for living. Therefore, when his Mother died, he lost some of his inner poise and gave way to profound distress; he felt 'like a puny child, left orphaned through the death of so great a mother'. The intense sensibility of his soul induced a languor which fostered incipient consumption; very soon the disease got a firm hold of him and he began to decline; in little more than two years after Catherine's death Barduccio, too, entered his grave. It was a happy death, however; his biographers tell us that when he was dying he began suddenly to smile, and it seemed to the onlookers as if he saw his Mother drawing him to herself.

Catherine found much support from the friars of Santa Maria Novella, and especially from the wise and learned young Dominican Alessio Strozzi. He pleaded her cause and urged all his relations—they were numerous and influential—to follow her advice and defend her from the attacks of her enemies; even in the most

difficult and dangerous crises he never abandoned her for a moment, and did his best to placate the wrath of her adversaries.

Catherine, therefore, among so many old and new friends, felt protected and aided while she delivered her eloquent message. She cared nothing for the accusations of her enemies or the insults of the rulers, who described her as a 'hypocritical and wicked woman'. Her mission was sacred: to make peace between Florence and the Pope she was ready to do all, bear all, dare all, even death.

Gregory XI had hoped for good results from Catherine's efforts in favour of peace, but his shrewdness as a politician made him aware that propaganda alone, even that of a holy and venerable woman, would not bring about peace with Florence in a short time. And he wanted peace as soon as possible. In November 1377 he had proposed to the Florentine Government, through Fra Giovanni of Basle, a meeting of representatives of both sides at Viterbo or Piombino or Pisa, in order to negotiate. When, however, many weeks had gone by without any result, he sent Ambassadors to Bernabò Visconti 'to negotiate peace, for us and for them', says the anonymous Florentine Diarist. This new move might seem surprising: why should the Pope, who had shown himself so hard and resolute with Florence, now become so merciful as to take the initiative in offering peace? It was not for the sake of any material gain, nor was it through weakness; it was, we believe, because his religious conscience prevailed over his political sense. His health was rapidly failing, and this also was an inducement to think more of spiritual than of merely political issues. He had dreamt of restoring the Papal State to its former power, and for this he had come to Rome, renouncing the pleasant seat of Avignon. He desired also to eliminate discords among Christians, and promote peace between the peoples; he wanted to root out the heresies that were fed and fostered by these quarrels between the Holy See and other governments; he hoped to reform the clergy and to proclaim a great crusade for the conversion and conquest of the Mahomedan world; but, after several years of rule and innumerable efforts, he saw that he was still far from his longed-for goal. His strength was declining. Why should he not at least eliminate the war with Florence, that had been and still was the cause of so many troubles, with a magnanimous

gesture? By so doing his own prestige might suffer, but what of that? It would be for the good of the Church. Peace would bring her considerable benefits that in all probability he would not live to see, but that did not matter to him. The greatness of the Church came first, his own political prestige could easily be sacrificed.

Possibly he remembered some phrases from letters that Catherine had written to him: 'It is better to give up the gold of temporal matters, rather than lose the gold of spiritual matters. Do then all you can, and when you have done all you are justified before God and before the men of this world. You will beat them more easily with the rod of kindness, love and peace than with the rod of war, and your spiritual and temporal losses will be restored to you. . . . It seems that God shows no other way; I see no other way in Him, except the way of peace. Peace, peace then for love of Christ Crucified! Do not consider the rudeness, blindness and pride of your children. With peace you will draw the sword and the rancour out of their hearts and all their quarrelsomeness, and you will bind them together.' In another letter we read: 'in whatever way your conscience will allow you to make peace'—a phrase that may have dwelt unobserved in the depths of Gregory's soul, to reappear more vividly during moments of reflection on his pontificate, on the greatness of Christ and the wretchedness of men. It may be that, knowing he was near to death, he desired to imitate Christ more closely than before, and become more loving and more merciful to all. 'I want you to be a tree of love grafted on the Word of love, Christ Crucified', Catherine had told him; was not this indeed his true task as Vicar of Christ? 'Let your kindness conquer their malice and pride', she wrote again. He knew she was right: he resolved to be kind.

Bernabò Visconti consented to be a mediator for peace, and during the first ten days of March 1378 he gathered together at Sarzana the Cardinal of Amiens, the Archbishop of Narbona and the Bishop of Pamplona, who represented the Pope, Pazzino degli Strozzi, Alessandro dell' Antella, Simone di Rinieri Salviati, and Benedetto di Nerozzo degli Alberti, Ambassadors for Florence. There were also observers sent by her allies, and representatives of Naples, Venice and France. It was a real Congress, presided over with tact by Visconti. Agreement was reached

fairly rapidly: Florence and her allies were to pay the Holy See eight hundred thousand florins. Regarding the restitution by Florence of the Papal lands and ecclesiastical property sequestered, the annulment of measures passed against the Inquisition, the raising of the Interdict and other matters there was much discussion and a conflict of opinions, but all the States alike needed peace and were trying hard to reach a fair conclusion when the news came that on March 27th Gregory XI had died. Immediately the negotiations were suspended and the Congress dissolved; the Ambassadors departed: 'The Cardinals departed, leaving everything in confusion, and the Ambassadors went away, and Bernabò also went away to Naples'. The plans for peace had suffered shipwreck once more.

The news of the Pope's death was received with joy in Florence: 'Great bonfires were lit in Florence and the country around'; the hope at once arose that a new Pope, friendly to the Republic, would be elected. As soon as it was known, on the 12th of April, that Bartolomeo Prignano had been proclaimed Pope, all felt more tranquil and satisfied: '. . . and he is a Neapolitan and said to be friendly to us, and those Limousin† Cardinals have been passed over. Amen!' wrote the Florentine Diarist. But what thoughts, what emotions were Catherine's when she heard of the death of her 'most sweet Father'? We may be sure that, whatever her hopes or fears, she remained calm, placing all her confidence in God. She rejoiced when she received reassuring, perhaps even joyful, news from Raimondo da Capua.

During his stay in Rome Fra Raimondo had become a political figure of a certain importance. He was familiar with some of the Cardinals, enjoyed the confidence of various leaders in Rome, was invited to take part in the City Councils and was consulted by the 'Banderesi', the Governors of Rome, on the best way of obtaining from the Conclave a Pope to their own taste. He was convinced that the Church needed an Italian Pope, a strong and religious man; strength was all-important. So, as soon as the name of Bartolomeo Prignano was murmured as '*Papabile*' in the Curia, even before the Conclave commenced, he was very pleased: 'I like him because he is a good man and an Italian, but I think him

† The Limousin province (the territory around Limoges) still formed part of the possessions of the English King in France.

somewhat soft and remissive', was his first judgment, which showed how little he knew the future Pope, and proves also how greatly he desired a Pope of strong will. Soon after his election praises of the new Pontiff were ringing through Rome: 'The Church of God will be well governed'; 'It is more than a hundred years since the Church has had such a shepherd'. Anecdotes were repeated representing him as energetic, solicitous for the good of the Church and jealous of his personal prerogatives. It was said, for example, that he found letters of Gregory XI directing that the sum of four hundred francs from the Papal treasury should be spent as a ransom for Gregory's brother, held prisoner by the English. Urban VI withheld this sum because he said the money belonged to the Church and could be spent only for the needs of the Church. He was said to be prudent, shrewd, expert in worldly business, and mindful of religious principles. Fra Raimondo could desire no one better. He soon became his enthusiastic admirer, and imparted his enthusiasm to Catherine. 'You sent me this news telling me to rejoice and be glad; and I have had great joy of it', she replied to him.

In Florence also a flattering picture was drawn of the new Pope: had he not already called to order the Limousin and French Cardinals, who had wanted him to dance to their piping? 'Since God has granted me the grace of being made Pope', he told them, 'I intend to be Pope', and he said also: 'I intend to stay in Rome, and to make Cardinals here in Italy, and I intend to make peace, and not for money'. This was an implicit condemnation of the policy of Gregory XI and aroused joy in the Florentines, exhausted by the war. These phrases, whether the Pope ever uttered them or not, excited the popular imagination and enlisted sympathy for the erstwhile Archbishop of Bari, now Vicar of Christ. If Catherine heard them she must have rejoiced; and perhaps it was then that she thought of sending Neri di Landoccio to the Papal Court so as to have another trusted friend there, besides Raimondo, who might approach the Pope on her behalf. She was keenly interested in all he did, and observed his actions with fervent affection: 'according to what they have written to me from Rome it seems that he (the Pope) has begun his work in a manly manner, and is out to win souls'. She judged him to be a religious Pope, felt him to be of one mind with herself, and hoped that he would co-

operate with her to bring about peace with Florence. 'And since I know his holy will, I am hopeful, if my sins do not stand in the way, that soon we shall have peace', the peace she yearned for. The behaviour of the Florentine priests had grieved her very much; the Religious and the secular priests and, more than all, the Franciscans, not only had ignored the Interdict but were trying to convince those of God's priests who were good and obedient to the Holy See, to celebrate the Divine Office, while they urged the faithful to attend divine services. They were pusillanimous friars and priests, said Catherine, servile of soul, given over to the pleasures of the senses, vain and timid; and they were responsible for the schism that was fast approaching: 'Alas! alas! I die of grief and yet cannot die when I see the falseness of those who should be glad to die for the truth.'

Hence the need for a radical reform which should begin with the higher clergy, because they were the most observed by all; once these were reformed, the good effects would soon be seen in the lives of the humbler clergy. Holy Cardinals were needed to make Christendom one and whole, and enable the Crusade against the infidels to be proclaimed—for she still saw the urgent necessity of the Crusade also. She continued to preach these favourite ideals which she would have liked to implant in the mind of Urban VI, but she judged the time had not yet come to write to him directly. She therefore begged Cardinal Pietro di Luna to speak to the Pope: 'And tell him manfully that he must reform the Church by means of saintly and good pastors, in charity and in truth, not with words only, for if he were but to say, and not do, it would be a bad business'.

Meanwhile, important changes were taking place in Florence. From March 20th till May 20th certain friends and disciples of Catherine were Captains of the Party: Tommaso Soderini, Ristoro Canigiani, Stoldo Altoviti, Alessandro Buondelmonti and Benedetto Peruzzi. They tried by every means to induce the Signoria to make peace. On the first of May Salvestro de' Medici was elected Gonfaloniere of the Republic, 'a man not without ambition, but honest and a sincere lover of his country'. As Gonfaloniere of Justice, he insisted on observance of the Interdict, and suspended, to a certain extent, the confiscation of ecclesiastical property; and Ambassadors were appointed to go to Rome to

render homage to the new Pope and negotiate a peace. Catherine began to see her hopes fulfilled: 'The dawn has come; for the darkness of all those mortal sins, that were committed in publicly saying and hearing Mass, has been lifted, in spite of those who would have prevented this, and the Interdict is being observed', she wrote to Monna Alessa: 'And already I think I see the dawn appear; for our Saviour has enlightened these people who have raised their heads from the perverse blindness of the sin they committed in forcing the celebration of Masses. Now, through divine grace, they observe the Interdict and begin to turn towards obedience to their Father.'

The mission she had so generously fulfilled in Florence was bearing excellent fruits, but she was afraid of over-estimating her success; it was true that her apostolate bore the impress of God, and that divine grace was working through her; but she was not yet sure of achieving her purpose. To her mind everything depended on herself. Her own sins could still hamper, or even destroy, the best beginnings. She herself was the arbiter of the Florentine destiny. The political and economic questions of the hour had no significance for her at all; she, she alone, by her purity, could win from God the desired peace. To be sure, any observer of the conditions of Florence and of the Papacy at that time could also, without the help of religion, prophesy peace in the near future. The Florentine finances were exhausted; the Government of the Eight needed external peace to be able to curb the continual abuse of power by the Guelph Party, which caused much discontent among the citizens and sapped the strength of the State. Her allies had now become a dead weight for the Republic; they were tired of military victories which led to no decisive triumph; they had almost ceased to take any active share in the Florentine war. The propaganda against the Pope had naturally lost its appeal now that the Pope was an Italian. Moreover, Urban VI was asking for much less as war compensation than his predecessor had demanded, thus making negotiations and agreements much easier. The Florentine dream of dominion was melting away, and the Pope himself, threatened by the conduct of his Cardinals, who 'had begun to cherish plans of revolt against him', desired a speedy peace. It was easy to predict peace in the near future. But Catherine was not concerned with such con-

siderations; for her, peace was bound up with religious questions, and the accomplishment of peace would be the result of the sacrifices of Saints. Everything in this world depended on God, and the good that men desired could only be obtained by prostrating themselves before the immensity of divine power, and allowing the spirit of Christ to take possession of their souls. She had sounded the depths of her own soul, and judged all earthly things, by the light of truth she found therein. It was clear to her that the Vicar of Christ had nothing to gain by the war with Florence. It was in fact a stumbling-block to the spiritual progress of the Church. The war must therefore be stopped, especially as a very grave danger was now threatening, one that must be faced with all available energy. She had indeed received news from Rome that some of the Cardinals were conspiring against Urban VI; this might be the beginning of schism, which would be a real disaster, because it would lead to at least partial ruin of the Church, and the decay of spirituality. It was news that gave her 'intolerable pain', and heartbrokenly she appealed to Cardinal Pietro di Luna to warn the Pope that he must delay no longer but make peace at once with Florence, 'for it would be too hard to have to fight within and without'. She foresaw the difficulties that the Papacy would find in having to carry on a war on two fronts, and trembled at the thought: this present war was nothing in comparison with what must be avoided at all costs.

While Catherine saw the necessity of peace for the Florentines, and, even more, for the welfare of the Holy See, she hardly noticed that in Florence the Party, as the Guelphs were called, with its tyrannical interference in municipal affairs, was sowing the seeds of future riots and troubles, more painful perhaps even than those caused by the war which was now languishing and near its end. According to Maconi, she did intervene to try to curb the overweening power of the Guelph leaders, but only when they had already stirred the people to revolt. The truth is that during her busy days in Florence she had not been able to give a purely religious character, as she would have wished, to the cause she defended; the men of the Party made use of her very cunningly, so that in the end the people considered her as one of their group, and accused her of dabbling in politics. For this reason, on June 18th, as soon as the quarrel between the

Signoria and the Party came to a head, the Signoria were as bitterly opposed to her as they were to the Guelph leaders. She was the friend, and had been the guest, of Soderini. Pier Canigiani had been collecting money 'from all the artisans, men and women' to buy stones and timber to take up to the 'foot of the slope of San Giorgio' to build there a house for Catherine. She had taken part in the Guelph meetings, and warmly exhorted the people to disobey the orders of the Signoria. Her religious preaching was therefore but a means to disguise political aims against the government, and her sanctity was feigned. In this way various prominent Florentines judged her harshly, calling her a dangerous hypocrite; and when a revolt broke out against the Guelph interference in the conduct of State affairs, the rioters burnt the houses of the Soderini, the Canigiani, and other leaders of the Party, and attacked some Dominican monasteries. They also sought out Catherine's house 'at the foot of the slope of San Giorgio' to take their revenge on her and put her to death. This is an episode of secondary importance in the history of Florence at this time, but it is significant in the life of Catherine, as it is the first time she had to face the threat of death. Among those who went to seek her was one man, more furious than the others, who advanced with drawn sword, probably blaspheming, towards the group of 'Caterinati' who stood around Catherine, praying there in the garden under the Costa San Giorgio. Seeing him, she was at once fearful for her Family, and called to her would-be assailant who was asking which of the women was Catherine: 'I am she. Take me and leave this Family alone.'

Her austere, emaciated looks, the decided tone in which she pronounced these words, her luminous gaze, and perhaps also the presence of various people who might have defended her, calmed the fury of this reckless man. Probably he felt isolated, because his companions, if he had any, had remained behind, inactive; his assurance failed him; perhaps he felt remorse. In any case, he gave up his purpose and retreated. Catherine's gaze may have followed him, wondering, as he went away. She rejoiced and grieved at the same time. She had longed for martyrdom, and now just when her desire was about to be fulfilled, the hand raised to strike had been withdrawn. It was God's will: 'Is it my sins that make me unworthy to shed my blood?' she thought. The sensation of

imminent death had given her indescribable joy: 'for I never yet had felt such mysterious joy'. But the great boon had been denied her; she had been near to martyrdom, but she was still alive and whole. 'My heart was melting for the love and desire I had to lay down my life.' But she was not worthy to cement with her blood one stone of the Mystical Body of the Church. Therefore her 'desire was blissful and painful', and her gaze full of sadness as she watched the retreat of the man who might have been her murderer: sadness because in death she would have found real life. 'Therein was the sweetness of truth, therein was the joy of clear and pure knowledge, therein was the joy of the sweet providence of God; therein was the joy of new martyrdoms, predestined, as you know, by eternal Truth. The tongue could not relate all the good that my soul felt.'

After a few days of burning and sacking and murders, the search for the Guelphs and their possessions ended, but there was still the fear of new riots and new forms of tyranny. Catherine's disciples, somewhat intimidated, advised their Mother to return to Siena, but she refused, saying it was her duty to stay in the territory of the Republic until the news came of a peace between Florence and the Pope: a peace which she said was sure to come. But as it was not prudent to stay in the house that had been attacked, she was advised to change her dwelling. This was impossible for the moment, because her admirers, even her disciples, were afraid to receive her in their houses, or to hide her. At last was found 'a worthy God-fearing man, who intrepidly received her in his house, but secretly, because of the fury of the people and the insurgents'. In hiding, Catherine did not feel at her ease, accustomed as she was to full liberty of action and preaching; moreover, she did not like shunning danger in defending the Church's cause. In the house of her disciple—he was perhaps the tailor Francesco di Pipino, with whom and with whose wife Monna Agnese she afterwards kept up a close epistolary correspondence with the purpose of strengthening them in the religious life—she felt rather too much restricted in her movements, so she decided to leave the city to take refuge in 'a solitary place, still within Florentine territory, where hermits were wont to dwell'. We can only guess the name of this place. Some writers believe it was Vallombrosa, others think it was the Camaldolese hermitage

of Santa Maria degli Angeli, at that time in the environs of Florence; others again think she was at the Convent of San Pietro at Monticelli, also very near the city. The traditional supposition is that she sought shelter at Vallombrosa, and that her meetings with Giovanni of the Cells took place in wild woodland country, and their conversations under the blue vault of the heavens. The Blessed Giovanni must have felt himself engulfed in the torrent of divine love that flowed from Catherine, which explains the very human cry of woe uttered by this hardened ascetic, accustomed to his own self-sufficiency among the rocks and stones, when he heard of Catherine's death: 'How ever shall we live any longer, now that our Mother, our consolation, is dead? What else remains for us to do now, but mourn our desolate state? It is a sorrow that finds no solace in the songs of the woodland creatures, in the high solitude of the mountains, nor even in the contemplation of sacred things. It is an endless woe: 'I weep for myself, orphaned and abandoned, for the joy of my heart that has been reft from me; therefore my eyes are darkened and dimmed with tears; and in truth there is no remedy or consolation.' His grief makes him see the whole Church weeping and the earth mourning; only the heavens hold high festival because the soul of his friend and teacher has been received by angels' hands. It is touching to find this old man, who had been so happy in his solitude, and so content with his austere thoughts and the denial of all affections, suffering and weeping broken-heartedly for a human being—a Saint indeed, but human. His lamentations indicate that his intercourse with this friend of God had been of recent date—it might well have been at this time, the end of June 1378. This is, however, merely a sentimental and romantic conjecture, not to be accepted as historical fact. We must await the discovery of some new document that may lead to a solution of the problem of where Catherine found shelter during these stormy days. In any case, it is pleasant to think that nuns and monks were found of sufficient courage to receive the Saint in so difficult a moment, when the lives of her hosts might easily be endangered. We do not even know how long she stayed in this 'solitary place'—she must have been impatient to return as soon as possible to Florence, tormented by her longing to see peace established.

In her temporary home she probably heard of the stern measures

that the Government of Florence had adopted against her friends of the Party. She grieved over this and wrote a comforting letter to Soderini. He had lost his house and wealth and had been outlawed by the Commune: these were painful blows, but he must not be cast down or allow himself to doubt divine providence. It was a hard trial to which God had submitted him; he must bear it with fortitude. All that does not directly affect the soul, that is, 'wealth, honours and state, pleasures, health and life itself and all other things that are not really our own, have been lent us for our use; when it pleases the divine goodness they may be taken away from us'. He must firmly believe this, and consider the loss of his house and goods as a medicine for his soul. She knew well that her friend had been punished in this time of tribulation without fault on his part—but that was a reason the more for being patient, 'for patience is the marrow of charity', and charity is founded in Christ. If he had charity he had Christ; moreover, when he arrived in 'our city of Jerusalem, that vision of peace', he would receive the guerdon he had deserved on earth.

In a hermitage the soul rises nearer to heaven, but the agitations of men are far away, as are the great social movements. Catherine, who was essentially an active person, needed to preach, to strive, and to win the cause of peace between the whole Republic and the Holy See. She wished to return to Florence, and as soon as she heard that calm had been somewhat restored, she hastened back there to continue her work of pacification. She found lodging once more in Piazza del Grano, in the same house, it seems, where she had been sheltered a short while before; 'at first she was in hiding there, because of the rulers, who seemed to hate her', but as soon as rumours of a possible and approaching peace spread through the city, and the bitter tempers were softened, she took up once more her public work.

As soon as she arrived in Florence she wrote to the Pope. She had known Bartolomeo Prignano at Avignon, but only slightly; as soon as he was elected Pope she wished to establish closer contact with him, so she sent to the Papal Court some of her own disciples to strengthen her relations with him. She may have desired to write to him before, but had not thought it wise to do so, for reasons unknown to us. Now the times were grave; persecution of the Pope's supporters was bitter in Florence; worse

evils still must be prevented. The most useful thing she could do was to write to Urban begging him to make peace at once. Her own disciples may have requested her to write this, to avoid new persecutions of the Guelphs, or she may have been led to do so by her knowledge of the growing desire for peace of the Florentine people. But the war, the revolutions, the tribulations, the difficulties which Florence and the Church and, one might say, the world (as she knew it) were suffering, had moral causes of infinitely greater importance than merely political or economic considerations. 'Iniquity abounds ever more among your subjects', so that 'the world cannot endure it any longer'. The reason was to be found in the conduct of the priests who 'abound in wretched and wicked vices, so that they infect the whole world'. The pride, sensuality, corruption, simony and avarice of the ministers of the Church were the real cause of the general dissolution. This was a conclusion she had reached several years previously, and she had ceaselessly proclaimed it, with but mediocre results; but now she would insist on it to the Pope, who had serious intentions of reform, and was energetic, and seemed to be a true Vicar of Christ.

So she wrote to Urban VI, repeating to him the ideas she had already often expressed in her letters to Gregory XI and the great ones of the Church. She urged Urban to be 'a true knight and a just shepherd', ready, at the risk of his life, to act manfully in the reform of the Church 'uprooting vice and planting virtue'. The moment had come for him to fulfil the 'longing desires of the servants of God, who die of grief and cannot die'; deeds, not mere words, were needed now; he must cleanse with severity not unmingled with love, and without any servile fear. He must begin by appointing bishops, 'a band of most holy men', and Cardinals who would come to his aid because they were themselves aided by God. It was the evils of the Church that produced all other evils, and the war with Florence was a consequence of these. Poor Florentines! they were little black sheep that had strayed from the fold; but they had not deserved too much severity. 'Be kind', she pleaded with him, 'give them peace, offer them mercy even if it might seem to you, most holy Father, that they did not ask for it in a pleasing way or with heartfelt sorrow for the faults committed, as they should do, and as Your Holiness would like them

to do.' In those days, it was true, there had been grievous persecution of the Party, but this was a transitory evil; tranquillity had now returned, and all invoked his forgiveness. 'Be generous, and you will receive from the sick man all he is able to give you; in fact, you will see that the Florentines will later on be better children than the others.'

Meanwhile, she had heard something about Urban VI's violence towards his Cardinals and other Religious, who thought differently from himself. Fra Giovanni Terzo wrote to her that the Pope had been annoyed with Fra Bartolomeo Dominicini because the friar had frankly told him his opinion about some mistakes he had made; Catherine immediately wrote to Urban again, interceding for Fra Bartolomeo, and taking upon herself the consequences of the fault of her beloved son and father in God: 'He, through his fault, and because of his scrupulous conscience, grieved and angered you. . . . I beg you, for love of Christ Crucified, to punish me for any pain he may have caused you; for I am ready and willing to accept any discipline and correction that may please Your Holiness.'

The days passed swiftly, crowded with events, mostly sad ones. The Church was now threatened with schism, and Urban ran grave risks in allowing the war with Florence to continue. He was at Tivoli, somewhat wrathful with the Sacred College, but good-tempered with the Florentine Ambassadors, who also longed for peace, fearing revolts in their own city. Both the Church and the City of the Lily were about to be torn asunder by internal hatred, and had a clear foreboding of this. Peace was as indispensable for Rome as it was for Florence: the negotiations proceeded smoothly.

Catherine did not bother her head with political necessities, and trusted in the efficacy of the letter she had written to the Pope, and hoped God would grant her prayers. She was sure peace would come, and come soon. In fact, on July 15th a messenger from Rome arrived in Florence announcing the forthcoming peace; three days later there arrived on horseback the courier bearing the olive branch with letters for the Signoria from the Pope and their Ambassadors. The olive branch was placed in the window of the Palace, and the great bell rang to summon a Council. There were no more doubts: peace was made. The rejoic-

ing was great; the people sang, shouted, called out blessings. It was the greatest festival and perhaps the most heartfelt, the most overwhelmingly joyous, that had been celebrated for many years. When night fell, torches and fires were lit; every corner of the city, even the dreariest, wore a festive air. Joy filled the hearts of old and young, of the strong and of the sick, of serious, thoughtful men and of the most carefree, of the poor and of the rich. For some hours, at least, the Florentines were one great family, kind and generous in their joy. They ate and drank and exulted. The trumpets sounded shrilly, and the bonfires, burning on the Piazza della Signoria and in other parts of the city and countryside, proclaimed and spread the joyful news. Peace was a gift of such inestimable worth that the people valued it only when it had been lost. Now everyone could tranquilly attend to his own business, industry or trade, that had been suspended and ruined for two years, and work for his own good and that of his family and the State. Everyone could freely receive the Sacraments and hear Mass. There was every reason to rejoice. Those who had a shred of piety thanked God, praised the Pope, and exulted to share in the mysteries of the Church. Catherine, like everyone else, heard the glad tidings and her heart overflowed with joy. She had put part of her soul into that peace: 'God has heard the cry and the voice of His servants, who have for so long cried before His face, and the wailing they have for so long raised over their dead sons', she wrote at once to Sano di Maco, and to the other children of her Family. When she saw the city given over to joy, she was reminded of Biblical images; this peace was like a resurrection; it was a victory over nature. The Florentines had come 'from death to life, from blindness to light. Oh my dearest children, the lame walk and the deaf hear, the blind eyes see and the dumb speak, crying with a great voice: Peace, peace, peace! seeing themselves once more children in the good grace and obedience of their Father, with their hearts at peace. . . . Rejoice, rejoice my dearest children. . . . Rejoice, exult in Christ, sweet Jesus! Our hearts must overflow at the sight of the great and infinite goodness of God. Now peace is made, despite those who would have prevented it. The infernal devil is defeated.'

Her happiness was not to be enjoyed to the full: it was soon cut short. No sooner were the festive torches extinguished, and while

the ashes of the bonfires still smouldered, civil war was already preparing. On July 20th, 'at eleven hours of the day, there was an uprising in Florence'. Once more came days of rioting and devastation. The lowest and poorest classes of the population were determined to have a share in the government, and to take by force what had not been granted to them. They armed themselves, attacked the Palace of the Podestà, took over the government and elected a Signoria of their own: it was the triumph of the 'Ciompi'. The Guelphs were again threatened and in danger; the popular fury had turned against the Party, not because the Guelphs had wanted peace with the Pope, but because they had abused their power, and because they were nobles and 'fat' bourgeois.

Catherine was distressed and disillusioned. The peace she had acclaimed with such enthusiasm had not entered into the hearts of the Florentines. They had desired peace only to have a greater liberty to hate, rob and kill each other. They were factious and destructive. She had not taken any interest in the social struggle between the greater and lesser Guilds, or in the desires and claims of the *popolo minuto*; she had ingenuously believed that when peace came the Florentines would become very pious and ask for nothing else but to live in blissful tranquillity. She was astounded to see that instead of this they were now attacking and murdering each other, immediately after they had been congratulating each other on the proclamation of peace, and the arrival of the olive branch from Rome. She was dismayed. What could she do now amid such confusion, and with so little good will apparent around her, in high or low circles? Perhaps her friends and disciples advised her to leave the city because she also was in danger. We know nothing of her actions or thoughts during those last days in Florence, but the fact that she left her 'Book' and the Papal privileges in the house of her host Francesco di Pipino—soon afterwards she was to send for these—leads us to suppose she had to flee from the city. Gardner thinks she went away on the 2nd August; Joergensen believes she arrived in Siena in the first week in August; we have no document to prove this. When she left Florence, the peace for which she had striven for so long had been achieved, and her mission was concluded. The divine grace had answered her prayer. She understood now that it would not be possible for her to pacify the animosities that were devastating

Florence; she could not bridge the profound divisions between class and class, or transform into benevolence the hatred felt for the Guelphs. She herself was hated, and probably in danger. Why should she remain longer? 'Now it seems that the devil has sowed so much, and so unjustly, in their hearts against me that I do not wish they should add injury to injury, for the more they add the worse their own ruin would be.' Was it perhaps to avoid a still greater shame and evil for Florence, that is, the divine wrath, that she went away?

However, whether she waited until the announcement came that the Pope and the Florentine Ambassadors had definitely signed the peace, on July 28th, or whether she left before, is of no interest; if she was in Florence during the riots of those days we do not know what her movements were. What interests us is her state of mind when she wrote: 'To the Lords Priors of the Guilds and the Gonfaloniere of Justice of the City of Florence'. The letter was written from Siena, but perhaps she added some lines she had dictated when on the point of leaving Florence.

There is an odd divergence between the past tense used in most of the letter, and the present tense we find towards the end. It is not a case of a swift passage from one to the other, such as we often find in Catherine's letters, nor is it careless syntax; it is as if she were thinking and writing in two different periods of time. First we have: 'I set out, by divine grace . . .' and later on: 'I go away consoled because there has been accomplished in me what I set myself in my heart to do when I entered this city. . . . I depart sad and grieving because I leave this city in such trouble.' These last words are too precise for us to believe that she is thinking back in her imagination to Florence, while her body is in Siena; and when she says 'this' city, she must be writing in Florence. Perhaps she dictated these few lines to send them to the Signoria by way of farewell and warning, and then, having to leave in haste, instead of sending them, she took them with her to Siena, and added them to the letter she wrote there, without bothering to make the tenses agree, or to change 'this' city into 'that'.

In any case, this letter shows the anguish of her soul and her bitter disillusionment in Florence, the city she loved so much that she thought of it as her own. Instead of rejoicing at being

readmitted to the fold of Holy Church, instead of thanking God for the blessing of peace between Father and children, the Florentines went on with their riots that caused so much injury and anxiety. They should have waited, contritely, to have their Masses restored, and to prepare solemn processions of thanksgiving, but instead they preferred to take up arms; they were steeped in hatred, howling with rage, hurling themselves upon the innocent. Catherine, turning to the rulers of the city, who had lately assumed power, wrote: 'You Signori, who have assumed the government of the city, you would like to reform everything, substituting class for class, but you only care for your own selves, and you are not thinking of the welfare of the citizens as a whole; you are partisans, and that is why you cannot put the greatness of your city first. You have no love for others, and this makes you powerless. You are unjust, and so you do harm. . . . You wish to reform your city, but I tell you that you will never gratify this desire of yours unless you succeed in casting aside all hatred and rancour of heart, and self-love, so that you care not only for yourselves, but for the common good of the whole city.'

This is a Catholic view of politics—and can be found in Aristotle; Catherine has got beyond her usual simplicity and is urging the government not to aim at the well-being of one single class of citizens, but at the well-being of the whole city. The new men who had seized power were hot-tempered, inexperienced, and in a certain sense childlike; to be able to achieve lasting results, of real use to the state, riper men were needed, experienced, just and disinterested. For example: 'You Signori', she tells them, 'are sending prominent people into exile, without realising that "citizens departing never yet built a firm city"'. They were lacking in love and understanding; indeed, if they did not acquire these, together with justice and faith in Christ, they would be unable to reform their city, or keep it in peace. 'I hoped to tell you all this by word of mouth, for the honour of God and your own profit, but as I have heard that you are against me, and I do not wish to draw down on your heads the guilt of persecuting me, I have come away, and what I intended to tell you, if I had been able to visit you, I tell you now by letter. I have left your city very sadly, nevertheless: what can be done through me for your salvation shall be done by me willingly till my death, in spite of

all visible and invisible devils, who wish to hinder every holy purpose.'

The Priors of the Guilds and the Gonfaloniere of Justice, busy as they were in their own schemes of reforming the Florentine Republic, and full of enthusiasm for the political results obtained by the *popolo minuto* and the 'Ciompi', must have paid small heed to this letter. Perhaps when they read it they shook their heads compassionately, with some relief to think that Catherine was no longer in Florence, where she might have stirred up discontent and incited the people to rebel against them.