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"IRISH MESSENGER" SERIES.

CP937

LIFE OF
St. Catherine of Siena.

3RD EDITION. 25TH THOUSAND.

"IRISH MESSENGER" OFFICE
5 GREAT DENMARK ST., DUBLIN.

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LIFE OF ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA.

"Star differeth from star in glory."

AND so those lovely beams of light that flash across our earthly skies, when the saints are given to us for a while to work the Master's will, shine softly or brilliantly, or with a world-wide radiance, according as our needs and the needs of the universal Church appeal to the Heart of God for such beacons to the better land. The cry of the perishing soul, the wistful entreaty of the wanderers, the supplications of the angels who crave the aid of a human voice and a human hand to aid them in their silent ministry, rise up to the Throne of Mercy, and then the decree goes forth and the chosen ones are called from their obscurity like the stars in the depths of the night, and, like the stars, "with cheerfulness they shine forth to Him Who made them."

Little doubt there can be in which rank we
A "Lily shall place the glorious lily of the Dominican
among Order, whose spiritual beauty wins our long,
Thorns." admiring gaze, when we name the hallowed name
of St. Catherine of Siena—"the seraphic bride of Christ,
the peacemaker of Florence, the ambassadress of Pope
Gregory, the counsellor of Pope Urban, the martyr for the
unity of the Holy See, the lover of God and man, the friend
of the poor, the tender mother of a spiritual family—
Catherine, with her rare genius refined, spiritualised and
perfected by divine illumination—Catherine, with her wise
and graceful words, her sweet attractive presence—we open
our very hearts to receive her into them and to enshrine
her there not as a saint only, but as a mother and a friend."

Siena—"the city of the Virgin"—was holding festival on Ladyday, 25th March, 1347, when Lapa Benincasa gave birth to twin daughters—Catherine and Jane. The latter died the

same day. Lapa was a good, thrifty woman, and her husband, Giacomo, was so pious, patient and charitable that he was greatly loved by all who knew him. Thirteen children survived out of a family of twenty-five, and they lived happily and peacefully in a prosperous home, for Giacomo, though only a dyer, was what is called "a substantial tradesman," and had a nice little country seat in addition to his town house.

A Child of Grace. The delight and recognised pet of the household was Catherine, whom they generally called "Euphrosyne"—joy. As soon as anyone conversed with her, sadness was dispelled from his heart. Already the grace of God claimed her, for when she was only five years old the place she loved best was the church, and the prayer she constantly repeated was the "Hail Mary."

Her biographers agree in giving testimony to a vision with which she was favoured when she was only in her seventh year. "Looking towards the Church of San Dominico, Catherine one day saw in the heavens a majestic throne, set as it were on the gable end of the church; on it was seated our Divine Lord in pontifical robes and crowned with a rich diadem. Beside Him stood SS. Peter and Paul and John the Evangelist, with others, in white garments. Our Lord looked on her with most enchanting tenderness and gave her a solemn blessing. For a long time the child was wrapped in ecstasy, and from that day, says the author of the '*Miracoli*,' there grew up in her a certain carefulness of soul and a dread of committing sin as far as was possible at her age. And ever, as she grew in years, there increased in her this anxiety, and she bethought her what means she might take to offend God less. . . . And she was always seeking to be alone, that she might say her prayers in secret."

In the Dawn of Life. And then—as always—ardent love longed to suffer for the Beloved, and the child denied herself every little delicacy, and fasted, as she saw her elders fast, perhaps more rigorously, and made a little discipline, which she used with all her childish strength. After a while the longing for freedom of intercourse with God led the little one to wish for a home in some desert place, where nothing would interfere with her devotions. She actually did set out in search of such a spot, and, again, miracles marked her as a future saint. The chronicler says: "She found a sort of cave under a shelv-

ing rock, and there, in the fervour of her prayer, she was lifted up to the height of the cave, and continued so until, at the hour Our Lord was taken down from the cross, she began little by little to descend. At the same time it was made known to her that such was not the life she was destined to lead, and she obediently returned to the city, being borne part of the way on a little cloud."

She was hardly seven years old when she determined to consecrate herself to God by a vow of perpetual virginity.

From that day, says Father Caffarini, she considered herself bound to a life of perfection and a continual warfare with nature. Moreover, in the quality of Spouse of Our Redeemer, she felt herself bound to great zeal for the salvation of souls, and, hearing that St. Dominic had founded his Order expressly for the conversion of sinners by prayer and preaching, she grew warmly devoted to the holy founder, and envied those who wore the habit and followed the rule of the Friars Preachers.

Dust Spots. She was standing now on the threshold of girlhood, and Lapa's pride in her beautiful daughter led her to be displeased and uneasy at the dislike Catherine showed to dress and society. Her eldest sister, Bonaventura, to whom she was greatly attached, persuaded her to be a little less rigid, and to yield so far as to pay a little more attention to her toilette. Very short was the gratification of her friends, for Catherine's delicate conscience soon accused her loudly of infidelity to grace, and she mourned over this fault to the end of her life. "I knew well what my Lord Jesus Christ required of me," she often said, "and still I set aside His wishes for the sake of pleasing a creature." With a fervour of contrition that we, who are not saints, can hardly realise, she begged the model of penitents—St. Mary Magdalen—to intercede for her. Her humility was rewarded by the assurance "thy sins are forgiven thee."

This renewed fervour incensed her family—mother, father, and brothers joining in the vexation. To prevent her application to prayer, they agreed to dismiss the kitchen maid, and employ Catherine in the lowest drudgery of the house. And when, with the sweetest patience, she busied herself in these tasks as diligently as though she were only a servant, her submission was met by sour looks and bitter words. A very old record of her speaks thus: "She had this conceit with herself that her father represented in the house our Saviour, Christ, her mother, our Blessed Lady, her brothers

and sisters, the apostles and disciples. The kitchen she imagined to be the innermost Tabernacle of the Temple, where the principal sacrifice was offered up to God, and so she went about her work with a glad heart." Never a murmur, never a complaint, till one after another gave way, yielding to her gentle obedience, and ere long they all confessed, "she has conquered."

Vocation.

Just as she had been restored to her proper position, the Will of God with regard to her future was made known to her. One night, in a dream, she saw the founders of all the existing Religious Orders, foremost among them St. Dominic, with a lily in his hand. As she turned to him with a look of great love, he drew closer, and held out the habit of the Third Order, saying, "Daughter, be of good cheer; fear no obstacle; you shall one day wear this habit." Encouraged by these words she made an earnest appeal to her father and mother, begging them never again to turn her from Him to Whom she had vowed her lifelong service. So touching was her entreaty that Giacomo interrupted her; "Dearest child," he said, "from this day no one shall hinder you—follow what you have vowed. Only pray for us to your heavenly Spouse that He may lead us, too, to the better life to come."

Love of Penance.

And now, finding that no one ventured to interfere with the workings of the Holy Spirit, Catherine entered on that marvellous course of penance, which ordinary souls would look on almost with dismay. She chose for herself the smallest room in the house, lighted by one narrow window, set high in the wall, so that it was reached by a few brick steps, the remains of which may still be seen. Gradually she retrenched her food and shortened her sleep, till the former consisted of bread and raw herbs; and the longest rest she took at night was about half an hour. Then, nature gave way, Catherine's robust health was exchanged for wasting delicacy, and so worn-out an invalid did she become, that she let her mother take her to the hot baths outside Siena. There, however, her thirst for mortification seized her, and she managed to have the sulphurous water flow on her from the spout while it was scalding hot. A dangerous illness followed, during which Catherine besought the Mantellate (as the Sisters of the Third Order were called) to receive her into their number. The first answer was that, as the members did not live in

community nor keep enclosure, great prudence was necessary as to those who were admitted, and, therefore, they had limited themselves to widows or women of mature years, in whom the world would see nothing but what was grave and wisely regulated. They could not, they said, accept a girl so young and attractive as Catherine was. But austerity and the teachings of eternity had wrought a striking change in the once very lovely and engaging child of Siena, so, as Catherine could not leave her bed, she asked the seniors of the Mantellate to "come and see" her. They did, and they were satisfied; the beauty of earthly youth had faded for ever, and the spiritual charm that henceforth distinguished her would only arrest the eyes of those who, like herself, were aspiring to the heavenward road. Her reception of the holy habit of St. Dominic took place in the church of the saint commonly called *Della Volte*.

"From this hour," said the humble Saint, "I must die to the world and give myself to God." The laws she laid down for herself surpassed in strictness those of any Religious Order, especially as regarded poverty, silence and prayer. Her home was so close to the Dominican Church that she could hear the bell tolling. She watched in prayer while the friars were sleeping, and when she heard the matin bell she was accustomed to say, "Lord, until now the brethren slept, and I watched for them in Thy presence; now that they are rising to sing Thy praises is the time for me to take my rest."

**"Think of
Me, and I
will think
of thee."**

Our Lord Himself deigned to instruct her in the ways of the spiritual life and to guard her from illusions and snares. She was never out of His presence. "There was not a part of the church which she frequented which was not marked by some sensible manifestation of His watchful tenderness. Her little chamber and the garden attached to her father's house were all filled with memories of this intercourse. On her lips and in her heart there was nothing but Jesus; in the streets she walked with Jesus; her eyes were set to look on Jesus only; never were they open out of curiosity to behold any objects except such as would lead her to Jesus; and thus it was that she was so often wrapped in wonderful ecstasies and abstractions of mind."

"Think of Me," said our Divine Lord to her, "and I will think of thee." She never wearied of repeating these words, on which she grounded her treatise on Divine Providence.

"A soul that loves God," she often said, "ends by forgetting herself and all other creatures." All her disciples remarked how often she turned to the subject of "holy hatred of self," and how she reminded them of St. Bernard's words: "Destroy self-love and there will be no more hell." She taught them that the warfare with our passions is unending, and that far from being confined to beginners it must be carried on by those who have advanced far in the ways of perfection.

In every affliction her comfort was found in long, loving meditation on the Passion of Christ, and this meditation was fed by reading the Gospels. **Her Spirit of Prayer.** the book she prized beyond all others. Vocal prayer also entered largely into her devotions. Her favourite ejaculation was, "Lord, I am a sinner; have mercy on me." This aspiration was constantly on her lips when she was dying, showing plainly that it was the habit of her life.

"Her prayer, though sublime, was simple and practical. She never ceased to pray for the virtues," writes Caffarini. "true and perfect charity, fortitude and purity of heart. She continually used the prayer of petition, asking particular graces for herself and others and persevering in her requests for a long time. 'Lord,' she would repeat, 'I will not stir from Your Feet until Your goodness has granted me what I desire.' But she often said she dared not pray in such a manner unless she felt that what was asked was in conformity with the Will of God."

Caffarini tells us that it was by degrees, ascending as it were by steps, that Catherine attained at last the highest degree of contemplation, and then, too, he says, "When she came out of her ecstasies she spoke with so wonderful an understanding of divine things that she seemed to know more than the wisest doctors. But all her illumination was from God."

"Proud souls," she wrote, "may read much and turn over many books, but the pith and marrow of them they never taste. They wonder to see the simple and unlearned possessed of a clearer knowledge than they in spiritual things, but the humble are enlightened by grace, the true source of knowledge."

This was a period of extraordinary consolation and bliss for Catherine. We read of her looking **Songs of Angels.** up to the blue heavens at night and being greeted with a sudden chorus of the most exquisite melody, filling her soul with the joy of Paradise. Or again we find her gazing in ecstatic delight on the wreath of

dazzlingly, spotless lilies brought to her by angel hands. One day, while she was telling her confessor that she had been allowed to hear the singing of the heavenly choirs, and that those who loved most ardently on earth were the sweetest choristers in heaven, she paused as if to listen. "Father," she exclaimed, "do you not hear with what a high, sweet voice the blessed Magdalen sings in the heavenly choirs?" And then she remained silent as though her bodily ears caught the blessed harmony above.

She wrote afterwards in her "*Dialogues*," "All the affections and powers unite in perfect souls to produce one harmonious sound like the chords of a musical instrument. . . . All the saints have touched this organ and drawn forth musical tones. The first who sounded it was the sweet and divinely loving Word, whose Humanity, added to His Divinity, made sweet music on the wood of the cross. And all His servants have learned of Him, as their Master, to give forth the same music, some in one way, some in another, Divine Providence giving to all the instruments on which to play."

Many times she was mystically washed in the Precious Blood, and we may say she was singled out among the saints to spread devotion to that sad yet unspeakably glorious gift to sinful man. Her letters always began:

"I, Catherine, servant of the servants of Jesus Christ, write to you in His Precious Blood." Often, when she thought herself alone, she cried aloud: "O Fire! O Blood!" And those who heard her "knew that she was contemplating the fire of divine love which is kindled by the Blood of Christ."

A Season of Anguish. Then came a season of such spiritual anguish, such incessant struggles with the tempter, such desolation in the midst of her hard conflicts, that her brave heart trembled at the thought that these temptations might be hers till death. But one day, with a supreme effort, she uttered this courageous defiance to the enemy, "I have chosen pain to be my comfort, and therefore it will be pleasant and delightful to me to bear all these afflictions for the love of my Lord and Saviour, as long as it shall please His Divine Majesty." "Immediately," says her biographer—Mother Francis Raphael—"the unclean spirits fled away, and a marvellous and beautiful light shone round her, in the midst of which stood our Saviour Jesus Christ, in the form He wore when He hung upon the Cross." "Mine own daughter, Catherine," He said, "seest thou not what I have suffered for thy sake? Think it not much, there-

fore, to suffer for Me." And as He called her closer to Him, with many tender words, she said, like St. Anthony, "O Lord! where wert Thou when my heart was so vexed with these terrible temptations?" "Daughter," He answered, "I was in thy heart."

"O Lord!" she asked, "how is it possible Thou couldst dwell in a heart filled with so many evil thoughts?" "Tell Me, daughter," He deigned to reply, "did these thoughts cause thee grief or delight?" "Ah! my Blessed Lord," said Catherine, "the heaviest grief and agony." "Who, then," said her Comforter, caused you to feel that sorrow? Who, but I, Who abode in the centre of your soul. I—now that you have fought your battle—I will be ever in your heart more openly, and will visit you oftener and more lovingly than before." Probably it was then St. Catherine adopted the use of the versicle, "O Lord, incline unto my aid," and the other invocation, "Enlighten my eyes that I may never sleep in death." The latter she wrote on a tablet, which she hung at the head of her bed.

**The
Spouse of
Christ.**

But this life of calm, ecstatic retreat was about to close, and a career of singular and laborious toil for God would summon His elect one from scene to scene in the midst of the world from which she had fled. Illumined with His joyful light, chastened by trials, crowned with victory, it remained for Catherine to be perfected in her spousal faith. This was the object of her prayer, and the prayer was wondrously granted. On the last day of the carnival, as Catherine was devoting her whole soul to atoning for the offences of the thoughtless and sinful of Siena, she heard the divine voice of her Beloved: "Because thou hast forsaken the vanities of the world and hast set thy love on Me, I am determined this day to make a solemn feast with thee, and to espouse thee to Me in faith."

"As He was yet speaking there appeared the most glorious Mother of God, St. John the Evangelist, St. Paul and St. Dominic, and after these the prophet-king, David, with a musical instrument in his hand, on which he played a canticle of indescribable sweetness. Our Blessed Lady came forward and took Catherine's hand, which she held towards her Divine Son, asking Him to espouse His bride to Him "in faith." He, with a most entrancing look of love, consented, and taking a ring which was set with four precious pearls, and a lustrous diamond, put it on the third finger of her right hand, saying: "I here espouse thee to Me, thy

Maker and thy Saviour, in faith, which shall continue from this time in thee unchanged, until the time shall come of a blissful consummation in the joys of heaven. Henceforward act courageously, for thou art armed with faith, and shall triumph over all thy enemies." Then the vision disappeared, but the ring—visible to Catherine's eyes alone, remained on her finger. Thus had God prepared her for the divine work He was about to entrust to her, and when the instrument was perfected the word was spoken that called her to a new manner of life."

**Contem-
plation
and
Action.**

Our Lord revealed to her that He had chosen her—a "weak woman"—to "confound the strong," and that she was to hold herself in readiness to go out into the world at His own appointed time. Meanwhile, she was to leave the retirement of her little cell, and act in all things as the rest of the family did. So Catherine seemed to be given back to her home circle; but to live as others did was well nigh impossible to her. She busied herself in domestic occupations, often contriving to do the greater part of the servants' work, because such tasks left her mind free to attend to God, and her hands were just as skilful, even when she was absorbed in ecstasy. The only indication of these ecstasies was, that an exquisite fragrance seemed to steal round her, and it was communicated to whatever she touched, the bread she made, &c. We have this on the word of her confessor, Father Caffarini, who was a frequent visitor at her father's house. He noted, too, the gentle brightness of her manner, the appealing sweetness that won affection all through her saintly life. Little children and the sick poor both called out her tenderest feelings. She owned that if she yielded to her inclinations she would always have the former near her, especially her little nieces and nephews; and her attraction for the destitute sick was amply proved by her attendance on two bedridden women, one a pitiful mass of disease, the other a leper. We may not enter into the details of her heroic charity, neither can we do more than mention the words our Blessed Lord addressed to her, after the death of one who had been led to Him by Catherine's untiring patience. He showed her this soul, all resplendent with light. "Daughter," He said, "is not this a fair and beautiful soul, which, through thy care, has been recovered from the enemy? Who would refuse to suffer somewhat for the winning of so noble a creature? . . . I have shown it to thee that henceforth thou mayest be more earnest about the winning of souls, and induce others to do the same."

**The
"Saint"
of Siena.**

The fame of Catherine's sanctity was spreading through Siena. The poor were speaking of the miraculous increase of bread and wine, when the distribution of charity was left in her hands, and the crowning miracle could not be hidden. Lapa, her mother, died, apparently without the dispositions that would secure her eternal happiness. Catherine's agonized prayer went up to the throne of grace, and, while she was yet praying, her mother rose up alive and well, in the presence of several witnesses.

Such were the preludes to what may be termed Catherine's *public life*, to which we now turn our eyes. Revolution after revolution had destroyed the peace of the Sienese. The rule of "the Twelve" magistrates had been overthrown. "The Reformers," who succeeded, shared the same fate. And then the Emperor, Charles IV., who had been invited as a mediator, thought it a favourable opportunity of making himself master of the territory. His troops, however, were speedily routed by the indignant citizens, and he was obliged to withdraw, after an ignominious defeat. Catherine's brothers, being of the party of the defeated Twelve, were in hourly danger of death, until she, in obedience to a divine inspiration, bade them follow her to a place of safety. Clad in her Dominican mantle she passed with them through the midst of their enemies, and all these, in deference to the Sister, allowed the brothers to go by unhurt. Still more respectful salutations everywhere greeted her, as the whisper went round, "She is our Saint."

It was the year 1370, memorable for Siena, most **Another** memorable for Catherine. Father Dalgairns, of **Heart.** the Oratory, shall tell us why. He writes: "O blessed Catherine of Siena! the Lord came in a vision, and took her earthly heart away. All at once she was surrounded by a wondrous radiance, and saw her Saviour bearing in His Sacred Hands a living Heart, beaming with light. The Saint fell down upon the ground, trembling. Jesus came near her, opened her side, and placed the Heart in her bosom, saying: 'Daughter, I have taken away thy heart, and have given thee Mine, that thou mayst live by It for ever!'"

"What wonder, then, that the most convincing eloquence flowed from her untutored lips when she harangued the magistrates of Florence, or astonished the Cardinals with her untaught theology, or persuaded the hesitating Pontiff to quit sunny Avignon for the malaria and the ruins of Rome.

"So fortified, Catherine was prepared for a series of supernatural communications, on which, beautiful as they are, we

have not space to linger. St. Paul, St. Mary Magdalen, our Blessed Mother herself, came by turns, as St. Dominic's holy daughter lay on her sick bed—a sickness unto death—from which she was commanded to rise, by miracle.

“ ‘ Daughter,’ spoke the great Physician, ‘ thou must go abroad into the world to win souls; thou shalt go from city to city, as I bid thee; thou shalt live with the multitude and speak in public; I will send some to thee, and send thee to others, according to My pleasure—only be thou ready to do My Will.’ ”

“ No marvel then that the love of souls became her glorious passion—a love so rapturous that she was wont to pray ‘ that God would place her in the mouth of hell to prevent sinners from going thither.’ ”

The first who was given to her prayers was Andrea de Bellanti, who had resisted the entreaties of parents and priests alike, to make his peace with God, in the throes of death. Hardly had the cry of his despairing friends called out Catherine's intercession, when the sick man craved for a confessor. “ I see my Lord, Jesus Christ,” he cried, “ commanding me to confess, and near Him is that Mantellate whom they call Catherine.” Ere the day closed Andrea left this world of sin, penitent and pardoned.

Next the whole city declared that Catherine's prayers softened the hearts of two wretched criminals whom she saw going to execution, for at the lifting up of her hands to heaven, the curses on their lips were changed to sobs of contrition and acts of the purest love.

“ People began to resort to her,” says Father Bartholomew, “ coming from distant parts of the country to see and speak to her.” Foremost among them was Donna Onorabile Tolomci, the head of the noblest family of Siena, distinguished, moreover, by having given fourteen saints to the Dominican Order. Her heart was breaking over her four children, all carried away by the influence of the world. That baneful influence soon disappeared under Catherine's gentle pressure. The two girls joined the Order of Penance, and left behind them a reputation for sanctity. James, proud and passionate, was transformed into a model husband and father, and Mathew became a Friar Preacher.”

A Catherine's frequent visits to the Hospital of La Scala brought her in contact with a pious Confraternity established there, which was called “ **Spiritual Family.** ” “ the very life and centre of Siena.” These noble and charitable men yielded to none in their reverence for Catherine; her advice soon became their mainstay, and thus

the foundation was laid of that famous "Spiritual Family" that gathered round the "Doctress of the Precious Blood."

Already the Mantellate were acknowledging her sway, and there are records of her injunctions to them concerning religious retirement, silence, zeal for souls, combined with the faithful fulfilment of their domestic duties—for Catherine always held these lowly offices in particular esteem. Her first confessor, Father Thomas della Fonte, feeling himself incapable of retaining the direction of so exceptionally favoured a soul, resigned his charge into the hands of Father Raymond of Capua. Both these venerable men regarded themselves as the disciples of their penitent, and encouraged others to profit by her unconscious teaching. Father Thomas Caffarini—"Good Master Matthew"—the Rector of the Misericordia, and his friend, Francis Lando, availed themselves of the gift that God had bestowed on Siena, and to this list was soon added Neri di Landuccio dei Paglieresi—"a man of good family, well skilled in letters, and a writer of graceful verses." He afterwards accompanied Catherine on her apostolic journeys, and was one of the three noble youths who acted as her secretaries, when her correspondence began to supplement her oral instructions.

Neri brought several of his friends to share her counsels. Noted among them were Gabriel Piccolomini, a man of splendid enthusiasm who longed for the proclamation of a second crusade, that he might march against the infidels. This longing struck a responsive chord in Catherine. She told him to strike hard at his spiritual enemies with the sword of patience, to put on the breastplate of true charity, and the vermilion coat of arms of Jesus Crucified. "I want you to understand," she said, "which are the best weapons. Begin to make use of them while you are among Christians, that they may not be rusty when you are summoned against the infidels."

Then came Fra Santi, from his little oratory outside the city. After whom we find the names of several of the hermits of St. Augustine, as visiting Catherine. Their Prior, Master John Tantucci, sought her acquaintance in a different spirit; for he and Brother Gabriel di Volterra, of the Friars Minors, waxing indignant at an unlettered woman's growing empire over the holy and the wise of Siena, went to her house with the purpose of arguing with her on her doctrine, and putting her to shame. "But the Holy Spirit gave His handmaid such wisdom and strength that she would have been able to overthrow ten thousand of these Masters of Theology had they been there."

"Wonderful to relate," says the chronicler, "these two great pillars were forthwith cast to the earth." Not only did

they confess her infused knowledge, not only did they proclaim themselves ready to be numbered among her disciples, but they ever after led lives of such humility and poverty that those who saw the change confessed the power of the "right hand of the Most High."

**The
Crown of
Thorns.**

The beginning of the year 1372 was marked by the bodily sufferings which were appointed to trace in the virginal soul of Catherine a more vivid resemblance to the Man of Sorrows. Sharing, first, in His corporal torments, she was also to share in His abjection. Jealousy made its way among those who would have been glad to share the honours paid her, and calumny was soon at its deadly work. Her daily Communion was forbidden, and the sacristan had orders to desire her to leave the church whenever she prolonged her prayers. But shortly after, our Divine Lord appeared to her, holding in His pierced hands two crowns—one of gold, one of sharp thorns. "Daughter," He said, "thou must needs be crowned with these crowns at different times. Shall it be the crown of gold in this life, or in the life to come?" "Lord," replied Catherine, "long since I resigned my will to Thine, and I have no choice but Thine; but if Thou dost desire me to choose, then, Lord, let me bear both crosses and thorns for Thy love, as Thou hast borne them for me." And, so saying, she pressed the thorny crown on her head with such violence that, for months after, the throbbing pain gave her no rest, day or night.

After a visit to the Master General of the Dominicans in Florence, Catherine returned to Siena shortly before the plague broke out. "Never did she appear more admirable than at this time," says Caffarini. "She was always with the plague-stricken; she prepared them for death; she laid them in the grave. I myself was witness to the joy with which she tended them, and the wonderful efficacy of her words wrought many conversions."

**A
"Valiant
Woman."**

The fame of Catherine's heroism during the plague spread round Italy. "Called to a special work, and a wholly exceptional mission, she was designed by God to carry His Name before princes and nations. And that mission she began among her own people, for she was a true Italian, as well as a true Dominican." The citizens of Siena came to her, revengeful, blood-stained men, glorying in the legacy of hatred handed down from father to son, but they went away from her trembling with a sense of a mightier Power above, or

melted into unwonted softness at the long unheeded remembrance of the Crucified. Enmities were laid to rest, and the bitterness of years was healed by the virginal presence of "La Beata Popolana."

Among the objects of her special tenderness were the victims confined in the public prisons, some justly, others unjustly. No record could number those to whom she brought earthly hope or heavenly comfort, when hope of earth was gone.

Look at her accompanying the young knight of Perugia to the scaffold, where he was to die for some political crime. She had gone to him in his prison, and brought his soul back to Christ, and had been present at his first and last Communion in the dungeon. Then, as he was about to die, she knelt like a guardian angel at his side, and whispered "Go to the everlasting nuptials." With her own hands she laid his neck on the block, and when the deadly blow fell she received the bleeding head into her arms. "At that moment," she says, "I saw the Man God collecting this blood, all instinct with holy desires and warm with love. What joy to see the goodness of God wait for this poor soul as it quitted the body, and mingle the criminal's blood with His own! She looked unblanched upon the scene of cruelty, which once would have made her heart sink within her, because Christ had given her His own thirst for souls, and she came there to save one."

**Rome
and
Avignon.** Pen and tongue would fail to describe the evils that followed the transfer of the seat of Papal Government from Rome to Avignon. Never was there an act more disastrous in its consequences than that, which was effected by Clement V., and permitted for many years to go on, as he ordained by his successors. Urban V. returned to Rome for three years, and while fully convinced that the step was a wise one, he yielded to the entreaties of his French Cardinals and the Court of France, though he only went back to Avignon to die. To guard against the possibility of his views being followed, the French party in the Sacred College elected Peter de Beaufort-Turenne, with the title of Gregory XI. Loyal and true, Gregory was also gentle even to timidity, and, besides, his mind was taken up with one project—namely, to organise a crusade against the infidels, who were threatening to spread through Europe. This desire formed the first bond between the Pontiff and Catherine, whose heart was responsive to any advance from the soldiers of the cross. Still, her most anxious solicitude was for the peace of unhappy Italy, torn by factions, and a prey to unscrupulous adventurers. Gregory's attempts to stem

the wild torrent of crime by excommunicating the notorious Bernabo Visconti, Duke of Milan, led that incarnation of profanity and cruelty to treat with the "Blessed Maid of Siena" that she might do him the service of reinstating him in the opinion of men. Hoping that something might be gained by compliance, the Pope, at Catherine's intercession, allowed Cardinal d'Estering to conclude a truce with Bernabo. Thus was Catherine drawn into the vortex of worldly dealings, and the history of the succeeding months relates her correspondence with Queen Joanna of Naples and the Queen-mother of Hungary, on the subject of the crusade.

The Stigmata. That her union with God remained unbroken in the midst of the turmoil around her is evident from the fact that it was just at this period that Catherine received the Sacred Stigmata. "Our Lord appeared to me," she told her Confessor, "fastened to His Cross, and from His sacred wounds five blood-red rays were directed towards the same parts of my body. But when I prayed that these wounds might never be visible to others, the colour of the rays changed to pure light, which rested on me without impressing any exterior sign." After her death, however, many persons saw and revered the mysterious Stigmata.

In 1375 an insurrection broke out in Florence against the authority of the Sovereign Pontiff. "Fling off the yoke of the *foreigner*" was the cry. "Every man who takes up arms against the Church is the friend of Italy"—a clear proclamation of the root of the rebellion, showing that the Popes, residing in France, were counted *foreigners* in the eyes of the Italians. A letter from Catherine to the Pope soon pointed out the danger, as well as her anxiety regarding the appointment of "bad pastors and bad governors," Gregory's mildness sometimes leading him into concessions on this point he should not grant.

As if some little comfort were due to the Saint, the dearest of her "disciples" was given to her during these days of strife. This was Stephen Maconi, a handsome, talented youth, pure and innocent as a child, and with a child's light-hearted gaiety. Being a good linguist and a ready writer, Stephen was chosen by Catherine to accompany her and her companions on the journeys which were imposed on Siena's sweet peacemaker, and the universal counsellor.

Her first journey was to rebellious Florence, which had been placed under an interdict. Though the citizens themselves had implored her to go to them, it was no easy matter to soften the hearts and guide the wills of the contending

parties. Yet, Catherine's extraordinary influence at last won the cause, and she wrote to Gregory with overtures of peace, but pressing on him three important measures—the conclusion of peace, his return to Rome, and the proclamation of the Crusade, as the best means of employing all ruthless and fiery spirits in one common conflict against the foes of Christendom.

In the The next request from the Florentines was that
“City of Catherine should have a personal interview with
the the Holy Father. Therefore, she set out for
Popes.” Avignon in June, 1376. We may not linger on the picture of the “City of the Popes—the home of the arts, and the centre of a luxurious civilisation, with its soft, delicious climate, where many of the highest dignitaries of the Church seemed to forget that life had any more serious end than enjoyment.”

Gregory “was a man fitter to be loved than feared.” and lacked the necessary force of character for a ruler. It was “from the poor dyer's daughter of Siena that he was to imbibe the courage requisite for the great undertaking before him.” “He could not be insensible to her irresistible charm,” “and he probably felt the power of that great soul, the strength and grandeur of which one of her disciples described by saying, ‘You could not look at her without trembling!’” “Almost the whole Court,” says Father Bartholomew, “rose up against her; nevertheless, their minds soon underwent a wonderful change, so that they who were at first her persecutors became her greatest benefactors.”

Catherine's negotiations on behalf of the Florentines were frustrated by the duplicity of the envoys, who took the management of the affair into their own hands, and consequently the peace was not concluded. But a more boundless triumph was reserved for the meek ambadress, owing to whose fearless, yet most respectful remonstrances, the decisive step was taken of Gregory's return to Rome. The opposition of the Cardinals, the vacillations of the Pope's own tremulous will, all gave way before the steady fortitude of the lowly daughter of Saint Dominic. One day Catherine presented herself at the palace. “Holy Father,” she said, “how long will you delay the execution of your vow to return to Rome?” Startled at Catherine's knowledge of a secret, that was hidden in his own breast, Gregory at once gave the orders for departure, and, passing over the prostrate body of his aged father, who had thrown himself across the threshold of that well loved home, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, silencing the voice

of nature, answered in the inspired words, "They shall tread upon the asp and basilisk—the young lion and dragon they shall trample under foot."

Catherine left Avignon the same day, taking the road to Toulon. The Pope and his attendants proceeded to Marseilles.

Over the homeward journey we must not pause, though it was marked by many blessings to those who sought her aid. Her stay at Genoa was almost one long discussion with Masters and Doctors of Theology, who were continually attracted by the reports of her infused science. One and all finally declared that she was surpassed by none in her stores of spiritual wisdom. Thus, shedding love and light wherever she trod, she returned to Siena about the time of the entrance of Gregory into Rome.

Her next concern was the foundation of a convent, for which she chose the title of "St. Mary of the Angels." She did not reside there, but she frequently visited it, and imbued its inmates with her own spirit—devotion to the Precious Blood, fostered by Communion. "No one at that time," says Father Dalgairns, "promoted frequent communion as this saint did. It was literally her *Bread of Life* during her prolonged fasts, and now she need never hunger in vain for that Divine nourishment since the Pope had given her permission for an oratory in her house, where Mass was daily celebrated. Her life of miraculous power and Divine favours went on all the while. Never for one moment was it interrupted; never was her power with God exhibited on a more marvellous scale." And this, especially, in the case of the demoniacs who were brought to her, and whose cure confirmed her dominion over the spirits of evil.

The passions of men were her most determined antagonists, and pages might be devoted to her unwearying endeavours to bring the obdurate Florentines to a sense of their duty to the See of Rome, while nearly as much time was spent in consoling the over-weighted Pontiff, who still turned to Catherine in every fresh distress. But his burden was about to be lifted, and his cross was about to be raised from his worn-out spirit, for on the 27th March, 1378, the news came that Pope Gregory had entered into his eternal rest. With all possible speed the tiara was placed on the head of Urban VI., who immediately addressed himself to the reform of the abuses that had crept in among the clergy. In his dealings with the turbulent cities of Italy, his zeal may not have always been under control, for St. Catherine's first letters to him are chiefly entreaties to temper justice with mercy.

During the season of rest which was now hers. **Writings.** Catherine resolved to "put into writing some of the secrets of the spiritual life which she had learned in her long hours of communing with God." This book was called "The Dialogue," as her usual manner of dictating it was to hold as it were an ecstatic converse with God, while her secretaries took down her words. The treatise is divided into four parts—"Discretion, Prayer, Divine Providence, and Obedience." "She tells nothing new, but she tells the old truths in words strong and massive," and "she writes like one who has the gift of *seeing souls*."

Her "Letters," however, are even more celebrated, with their sublime guidance, never departing from the common sense that rendered them fitted for so many different paths in life. She often dictated three letters at the same time, turning from one to another of her secretaries, and frequently seeking inspiration from heaven. Rich in wisdom, exquisite in their musical phrasing, perfect in style, the letters of the "Daughter of the People" have claimed a place for her in the literature of her native land by the side of its most gifted sons.

This interval of tranquillity was broken in on **Urban VI.** by a summons calling her to Rome. Pope Urban's rule had given rise to great dissatisfaction among the Cardinals and the Hierarchy. A man of noted austerity of life, he was intolerant of the luxury and effeminacy that sullied the lustre of priestly and episcopal virtues. No one mourned more bitterly than Saint Catherine did over the decay of poverty and unworldliness among those who should be the "salt of the earth." Yet she sometimes endeavoured to moderate the reigning Pontiff's open denunciation of his unworthy assistants, though she rejoiced at his fearless action in the cause of God. His stern and unbending character veiled the anguish that prompted his outbursts, and few gave him credit for the entire devotion to his flock which animated him. Slowly but surely, the opposing party drew more adherents to their side, and, then, to their everlasting disgrace, an assembly was held, which, by the mere force of will, imposed an anti-Pope on Christendom, in the person of Cardinal Count Robert of Geneva, who assumed the name of Clement VII. He was a man who embodied in himself all the vices of the ecclesiastics of the day, and, too late, a better spirit was awakened in some of the Cardinals, when they realised the outrage done to the See of Peter. "I hear," wrote Catherine to Urban, "that these incarnate demons have elected an anti-Christ, whom they have exalted against you,

the Christ on earth." And at once her busy pen was at work, urging all those who could wage war against the schism to be firm in their allegiance to the lawful Pontiff. He—feeling of what inestimable value her presence would be—desired Raymond of Capua, Master General of the Order, to invite Catherine to Rome. For a moment she hesitated, knowing that accusations were brought against her for her frequent journeys, and fearing to give scandal to the weak, therefore she begged that the command might be given formally in writing. "Bid her come," replied Urban, "in the name of holy obedience," and at the word she set out without delay. Thus it was she directed her steps to the capital of Christendom, which was to be illuminated by the last rays of her earthly existence.

Catherine entered Rome on the 28th November, 1378.

Super-human Eloquence Urban's orders were that she should repair at once to his Palace. After a long private interview he desired her to address the assembled Cardinals on the schism. Her life-long love for the Church of Rome found vent in such a flow of eloquence that Urban, turning to the listeners, said: "How contemptible were we to give way to fear. Does she not put us to shame! Is not Christ more powerful than the legions of war?"

With superhuman prudence Catherine busied herself in trying to tone down the asperities of temper that would defeat the good effected by the Pope's undoubted saintliness. She advised him to bring men of learning and piety from every part of Italy to Rome. Some of her friends hastened to his side, but some on whom she relied declared themselves unable to cope with the fierce passions that were raging, and withdrew into stricter seclusion. She—weak woman though she was—toiled and prayed as one who needed no mortal support. Her letters would fill volumes—thoughtful, closely-reasoned, masterly expositions of the lamentable consequences of the strife, and always redolent of the perfume of holiness which was inseparable from Catherine. It was she who, when recourse to arms was inevitable, sustained the soldiers of Christ against the troops whose leader was "surely Satan," and it was she who, when victory crowned the people of God, directed the public thanksgiving.

A Victim of Expiation. "The joy caused by this triumph was of short duration," and the disaffection was again in full play. One resource alone remained to Catherine. She could offer herself as a holocaust for the sins of the guilty, and the perseverance of the good.

She was given to understand that her prayer had prevailed. "In fact, from that moment the popular sedition gradually calmed down, but the Saint, like a pure victim, had borne the expiation. . . . The small amount of food she had hitherto taken caused her such suffering that it became impossible for her to touch it, and though consumed by a burning thirst she was unable to swallow as much as a drop of water." She told Raymond of Capua, "It seems to me I am to crown my sufferings, by a new kind of martyrdom." "It was the completion of her course; the sublime consummation of her holocaust."

The shadows of death were fast closing round the Saint, though by an astounding miracle her sufferings entirely left her every morning at daybreak, so that she was able to rise, and go hear Mass at St. Peter's, walking easily like a person in perfect health. On the third Sunday in Lent a great change took place, and from that day she lay motionless for eight weeks. Father Bartholomew arrived in Rome on Holy Saturday, and writes thus:—"I found her lying on boards, surrounded by other boards, so that she seemed, as it were, in a coffin. 'Mother,' I asked, 'how do you find yourself?' I was obliged to put my ear close to her lips to catch her faint whisper that 'all was going on well, thanks to our merciful Saviour. I suffer gladly,' she added, 'for the deliverance of the Church!'"

Soon after, Stephen Maconi, who was in Siena, distinctly heard these words, "Make haste to Rome; her departure is at hand." He set out that day. "When he entered her beloved presence the sight of her wasted form and transfigured face told him the end was near. 'Thou hast come at last, my son,' she said. 'God will not fail to make known to thee His Will. Go and confess thy sins, and prepare with thy companions to give thy life for the Sovereign Pontiff, Urban VI.'"

**On the
Starry
Threshold** "They who know what it is to watch by the death-bed of one of God's servants will recall the quiet house, the sense of Divine and angelic presence in that chamber from which all thoughts of earth, all clamour of human passions, all regrets, all resentments, all desires—save one—were banished. They will realise the hush that must have fallen on the little family as they stood round the bed of boards, and beheld the wasted form of their mother, 'whose face' (says Caffarini) 'shone like the face of an angel.'"

With a last effort she bade them gather round her for a parting exhortation. The words were the echo of her life—the study of the love that rises to God by self-abnegation, faith and obedience; prayer, continual mental prayer; sweet, steadfast, all forgiving charity; trust in the tender provi-

dence of the Lover of the Poor, and entire devotion to His Church. "I promise you," she said, "that I will be more perfectly with you, and of greater use to you than I could be here, for I am leaving a land of darkness to pass into the true Eternal Light." She told them that Our Lord once said to her, "Many live as to the body in their cell, and with their affections in the world, but I will that thy cell should be the knowledge of thy sins and thy infirmities. Hollow out this cell in thy heart, and abide there in compunction. He who will do so will attain perfection, for wheresoever he goes and with whomsoever he speaks he will still remain retired, solitary, and enclosed."

The narrative of her "Transito," or last passage, is taken almost word for word from a writer who is supposed to be Stephen Maconi.

A "On the Sunday before the Ascension, being the 22nd April, it seemed to us that she was about to fall into her agony. With much humility and devotion she made a sign to the priest that she desired the absolution from all her faults. Shortly after receiving Extreme Unction, she seemed to be enduring a grievous assault from the powers of darkness, till at length she began to say, 'I have sinned, O Lord! have mercy on me,' more than sixty times. Then she said, 'O God! come to my assistance. O Lord! make haste to save me.' Once, as though answering some one who accused her, she said, 'Vain glory? Never—but the true glory of Jesus Christ.' Suddenly her face changed, and, from being dark and troubled, it became joyous and angelic, shining with such sweet serenity that it was a delight to look on her. Her dim eyes kindled, and became resplendent. She fixed them on the Crucifix, and began to pray aloud, 'Mea culpa! O Eternal Trinity! I have often and miserably offended Thee by my ignorance, negligence, ingratitude, and many other faults. O Eternal God! Thou hast constantly invited me to oblige Thee by intense, loving, and crucified desires, and with humble, faithful prayer, to grant the salvation of the world and the reformation of the Church; and I, wretched that I am, have not responded to Thy call, but have slumbered on the bed of negligence.' Of these and many similar faults did this most pure dove accuse herself. Then she turned to the priest—Master John, the Augustinian—and said, 'Absolve me, for the love of Jesus Crucified, from these sins which I have confessed before God, and from all others which I do not remember.' And he did so. Then she said, 'Give me Pope Urban's indulgence.' For like a soul athirst for the Precious Blood, she seemed to seek by what means it might be poured over her soul in yet greater abundance. Her wish was granted, and, keeping her eyes always fixed on the Crucifix, she began once more to pray.

“The end drawing nigh, she made a special
The Ever- prayer for the Church and for Pope Urban, whom
lasting she declared to be the true Vicar of Christ. And
Home. with greater fervour she prayed for all those
 whom God had given her, using many of the words Our Lord
 spoke to His Eternal Father, imploring, too, that every hard
 heart might be softened. She blessed us, and all who were
 not present, till, feeling the approach of her deliverance, she
 said—‘Blessed Lord, Thou callest me to come to Thee, and
 I come, trusting not in my own merits, but only in Thy
 mercy, which mercy I ask in virtue of the Most Precious
 Blood of Thy Son.’”

“At the last she exclaimed several times—‘O Precious
 Blood! O Precious Blood!’ Then, gently murmuring the
 words—‘Father, unto Thy hands I commend my spirit!’
 and, bowing her head, she gave up her soul to its Maker.”

“Her death took place on the Sunday before-named, being
 the Feast of St. Peter, Martyr of her Order. And we kept
 her precious body until Tuesday evening, during which time
 it remained of devout and angelic beauty, and emitting a
 sweet fragrance. *Deo gratias.* Amen.”

“She had passed to her Spouse. The combat was over.
 The three and thirty years of labours and sufferings had been
 crowned with a loving martyrdom for the Church, and she
 had gone to her reward.”

The body was conveyed privately to the Church of the
 Minerva, to which “the whole population of Rome came
 spontaneously,” says Father Raymond. The following days
 appeared to be spent at the gates of heaven, so numerous
 were the visions of the Saint, the cures wrought by her, the
 petitions, the thanksgivings, the loud hymns of praise,
 mingled with the tears of sorrow for the sins that had sent
 their sharp darts of agony into the heart that had spent
 itself for sinners.

The voice of the world that celebrated her glory could
 not be silenced, and the reception of her relics at Siena was
 surrounded by all the magnificence the city could bring for-
 ward to reverence their spotless Virgin Flower. Therefore,
 when Pope Pius II. concluded the process of her canoniza-
 tion, he did but ratify the prayer and homage that went up
 to heaven from the hour she arose to everlasting bliss—when
 the mourners round her cried aloud—

“Beloved Mother, St. Catherine, pray for us, now, and till
 you lead us home. Amen.”