

she, to make every effort that you may not merit hearing, one day, this severe sentence of the Supreme Truth, who will judge you : " Cursed are you, because you have kept silence."

To another she wrote : " Fear nothing, act vigorously. Let others see that you are a firm column which no wind can shake. Speak boldly, fearlessly, tell the truth concerning whatever appears to you in accordance with the glory of God, and the honor of the Church. We have but one life, but we should expose that one to a thousand deaths."

When Gregory XI pronounced the sentence of interdiction against Florence, where the Apostolic Nuncio had been flayed alive in the streets, and then buried whilst still breathing, consternation was great among the people, for, in spite of all, their faith was still lively.

The partisans of the peace begged Catherine Benincasa to intercede for them with the Holy See.

Catherine accepted the task, and journeyed to Avignon where the Pope still resided. So touching were the prayers of the Saint, that the Pope said to her during the first interview. " In order to show you that I sincerely desire peace, I place the entire negotiation in your hands; only be careful of the honor of the Church."

The sojourn of the Popes at Avignon had disastrous consequences.

Rome, abandoned for seventy five years by her Pontiffs, sometimes supplicating, sometimes menacing, had in vain multiplied her embassies. In vain had Dante and Petrarch, in poetic accents, conjured the Head of the Church to return, and put an end to the sad widowhood of the queen of Nations, by allowing himself to be touched by the tears of his forsaken Spouse.

That which neither Rome nor the two great poets of Italy could effect, was obtained by the humble virgin of Siena, in spite of the intrigues carried on in the court of Avignon, and in spite of the efforts made by the King of France, who, to retain the Pope, had sent him his own brother, the Duke of Anjou. " Why leave the country ? Italy was on fire. . . . Rome was nothing but a desert, inhabited by savages who were dangerous and turbulent."