

Sauonarola.



FRATE HIERONYMO SAVONAROLA.
(From a Painting by Fra Bartolommeo.)

SAVONAROLA,

The Florentine Martyr.

A REFORMER BEFORE THE REFORMATION.

BY

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SAN MARCO, FLORENCE.

LONDON: S. W. PARTRIDGE & CO.,
9, PATERNOSTER ROW.

There's a light about to break,
There's a day about to dawn :
Men of thought, and men of action,
Clear the way.

TO
MY EARLY AND VALUED FRIEND,
MISS DOUGLAS,

I Dedicate this Book,

IN REMEMBRANCE THAT TO HER I OWE THE
SUGGESTION WHICH LED TO ITS
BEING WRITTEN.

ELIZABETH WARREN.

OCTOBER, 1880.

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SAVONAROLA.



Introductory Chapter.



“Wondrous, unparalleled, nay Divine, is it, that the Church, which is ever being attacked, has ever endured.”—*Pascal*.

“The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”—*St. Matt.* xvi. 18.



THE Reformation of the sixteenth century was not so much a re-formation of the Church as her restoration to the old faith of the Primitive Church. The Protestant Reformers did not call on the Church to receive any new dogmas ; they simply desired a return to the faith of that best and purest age which followed immediately upon the life and death of our Lord and the teaching of His disciples. “The great plea of” (Protestant) “England,” observes Dr. Newman, in his “Apology,” “is antiquity ; of Rome, Catholicity.”

Very early in her history error crept into the Church. Gradually, but surely, the enemy sowed tares among the wheat, until doctrines and observances, not recognized by the Primitive Church, and therefore not in the only true sense Catholic, were taught as part of the faith of Christ. Such were the invocation of saints and angels ; the worship of the Virgin Mary ; the adoration paid to the elements in the celebration

of the Lord's Supper ; the celibacy of the clergy, and the seven sacraments.

The removal of the seat of Empire from Rome to Constantinople, early in the fourth century, materially advanced the supremacy of the See of Rome. It might seem, indeed, as if Constantine designed that act for the express purpose of allowing Latin Christianity to grow to its full height, without danger of coming into collision with the civil government, "To give," as Dante expresses it, "the Shepherd room." "Latin Christianity," says Dean Milman, "was, in fact, the Roman Empire again extended over Europe by a universal code and a provincial government, by a hierarchy of religious prætors and a host of inferior officers, each in strict subordination to those immediately above them, and gradually descending to the very lowest ranks of society ; the whole with a certain freedom of action, but a constrained and limited freedom, and with an appeal to the spiritual Cæsar as the last resort."

Step by step the Papal power made progress. Early in the fifth century, the lineal descent of the Pope from St. Peter was pronounced a tenet of Christianity. But it was not until after the siege and capture of Rome by Alaric—the most fatal blow, as it might have seemed, to Roman greatness, but in reality that which tended directly to the spiritual supremacy of Rome—that her bishop was acknowledged "the one visible head, needed for one visible body."

About the middle of the ninth century, the famous Isidorian Decretals came to light, which gradually but surely changed the whole constitution and government of the Church. These Decretals consisted of about one hundred letters, professedly of the early Popes, decrees of councils, and a multitude of other documents ; but they were all forgeries ! Had they been genuine they would have sanctioned any assumption of authority put forth by the Pope ; and the reigning pontiff, Nicholas I., welcomed them as a mighty help in support of his claims, which, for largeness of pretension, exceeded all that

had been urged by his predecessors. Rome had no part in this gigantic fraud, but she scrupled not to use the means thus placed within her reach, to further her own aggrandisement.

It is generally conceded that the Papacy reached its highest pitch of splendour under Innocent III. Henceforth the Bishops of Rome reigned supreme over the laity as well as the clergy of the Latin Church. And what followed? A rapid decay of learning—the little that remained was possessed by the clergy, and it was but little. Real learning gave place to superstition. The Bible unread, left the minds of men ready to fall in with every folly and false doctrine. But “knowledge is power.” They who can read and write *must* rule over those who can do neither; and so the supremacy of the clergy was but the natural result of the ignorance of the laity. Corruption, both of morals and doctrine, quickly followed. The enormous wealth and power of the clergy led to pride and arrogance; while their lazy, luxurious lives left them a ready prey to every corrupt lust.

But even in those dark days, men, here and there, were to be found, who from the narrow windows of their cells watched for the dawn of a new day. Such were Paulinus, of Aquileia, in the days of Charlemagne; Wycliffe, in England; Huss and Jerome, who perished in the flames at Constance; and Savonarola—whose story we are about to write—who met the same fate at Florence. These, and many others, groping their way out of darkness, sought to free themselves from the yoke of priestly bondage, determined to own no authority in matters of conscience but the written Word of God.

Italy produced many such witnesses. It is a remarkable fact in her history that she resisted the supremacy of the Church of Rome after the most remote churches of the West had submitted to it. And cannot this be accounted for? The Pope, as seen from a distance, might seem to bear the stamp of Christ's Vicegerent; but in Italy he was too well known. A closer view dispelled the illusion. Not until the

eleventh century was Papal ascendancy established at Milan, the capital of the diocese, and the consent of the clergy given to receive their orders from Rome, and this not without a struggle on the part of both clergy and laity.

One of the brightest lights in the Middle Ages was Claude, Bishop of Turin. By birth a Spaniard: he was ordained to that See in 823. The contest about image-worship then raged fiercely, and Claude, outstripping the French divines and the Iconoclast Emperors of Constantinople, removed from his diocese, not only all images and crucifixes, but whatever else seemed, to his enlightened mind, to savour of superstition. Claude had learned to call things by their right names, and openly designated image-worship, idolatry. "My adversaries," he said, "have not abandoned idols, but have only changed their names." Relics and pilgrimages, he called "foolish vanities;" the doctrine of the merits of saints and their power to intercede, "useless fables." Pressing on to the Papal chair itself, he declared, "he is not to be called Apostolic who merely occupies the Apostle's seat, but he who fulfils the functions of the Apostle." Claude wrote commentaries upon various parts of Scripture. His teaching, drawn from that pure fountain of truth, was eminently practical. "If," he used to say, "a man does not himself persevere in the faith, the righteousness, and the truth in which the Apostles persevered, he cannot be saved." And by universal testimony, he is said to have practised what he preached, "taking heed unto himself" first, and then "to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost had made him overseer, to feed the Church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood."

Papal aggression steadily gained ground in Italy, and with it sloth and immorality among the clergy, and especially at the court of Rome. Very early in the twelfth century this state of things proclaimed the necessity for reform in the Church, no matter how hazardous might be the attempt.

It was then that Arnold of Brescia, a man of deep learning,

arose to demand a thorough ecclesiastical reform—that “nothing should be left to the ministers of religion, Pope or Bishop, but spiritual authority and a subsistence derived from the tithes and voluntary contributions of the people.” This would have been a return to the ancient constitution of the Church, under which the bishops did not possess either legislative, administrative, or judicial power—all three essential attributes of sovereignty; and when the clergy were “ensamples to the flock,” instead of aiming to be “lords over God’s heritage.” Reformation, less than this, would not have satisfied the monk of Brescia. For this he toiled and prayed, and died in the struggle. In 1139, being condemned by the Second Œcumenical Synod, assembled at Rome under Innocent II., he fled to Zurich, and there preached. Thus he broke up the ground for the seed of the Gospel to be sown, four centuries later, by Ulrich Zuingli. Upon the death of Innocent, Arnold returned to Rome. That city was then rocked to and fro by the disputes between the new Pope and the Emperor. The reformer deemed this a fit moment to strike a blow for civil and religious liberty, and earnestly implored the people not to let it slip, but at once, and for ever, throw off the yoke of priestly tyranny, and revive the ancient authority of the Senate. But the times were not ripe for so bold a step, and he who had called for it had to fly for his life. He was caught and crucified, after which his body was burned at the gate of St. Angelo. Many lived to teach his doctrines, and, before fifty years had passed, the cry for reform was more vehement than ever.

About this time—the close of the twelfth century—companies of Waldenses, driven from their homes in Languedoc and Provence, crossed the Alps and settled in Lombardy. A few years later some had even reached Rome, where a furious persecution, under the joint authority of Pope Gregory IX. and the Emperor Frederick II., broke out against them. As “heretics” no mercy was shown them; wherever they were found utter destruction was the portion meted out to them.

But, like Israel of old, these persecuted ones grew and multiplied ; the place soon becoming too strait for them, they asked for and obtained a poor, thinly-inhabited district in Calabria. Soon a flourishing colony arose, valleys "smiled with wavy corn," vines clothed the hills, flocks and herds fed in rich pastures. Such unwonted prosperity excited the envy of their neighbours ; and the priests, seeing that the new settlers practised no Romish ceremonies when burying their dead, that no images decorated their churches, no holy places invited the faithful to go on pilgrimage, raised the cry of heresy against them, and demanded their extermination. But their landlords were by no means anxious to expel them, seeing that they paid their rents regularly, and had, moreover, by patient industry, greatly improved the land ; so for the present the priests were foiled in their purpose. The Waldenses were left in peace, and not seldom did they afford shelter to their persecuted brethren in Piedmont and France, until they themselves were sent forth homeless by the iron hand of Rome, which came to pass in the sixteenth century.

It is an interesting fact connected with the Vaudois valleys that, when literature revived in Italy in the early part of the fourteenth century, it was there the first gleam of light appeared. Barlaam, a monk of Calabria, was the first to revive, beyond the Alps, the memory, or at least the writings, of Homer. He it was, too, who taught Petrarch Greek ; while Boccaccio owed his knowledge of that language to a pupil of Barlaam.

This revival of letters received a powerful stimulus by the importation of Greek manuscripts into Italy, after the fall of Constantinople, 1453. The Greek Church had never sunk so low in ignorance as the Latin ; and when learned Greeks arrived in Italy with those precious treasures saved from the ruins of their country, they rekindled the flame lighted by Petrarch and Boccaccio, above a hundred years before, but which in the succeeding age had been let to die out, or nearly so.

But the "New Learning," as it was called, would have been powerless to awaken Europe had it not been that, simultaneously with it, there arose those two great reformers, the invention of printing—about 1440—and the manufacture of paper. Early in the fifteenth century, a coarse paper, made of linen rags, was in use in Oxford; and when it became sufficiently cheap to serve literary purposes, immediately there followed, as a matter of course, the printing press. Then book followed book in rapid succession, as the desire for knowledge increased with the facility for acquiring it.

With many, indeed, of these "Humanists," as these enthusiastic students of classical literature were called, this desire did not extend beyond the deciphering of an old manuscript—a commentary upon some classical author, some masterpiece of heathen genius—and, for the most part, the revival of literature in the fifteenth century was as heathenish as can well be imagined, especially in Italy. Nevertheless, the New Testament in the original tongue being brought into Italy along with the Classics—not only in separate manuscripts, but in palimpsestes—let in a flood of light which made darkness visible. Thus it was that, with the revival of literature, came the call within the Church for reformation, as the conviction that the Latin Church had grievously declined from the standard of truth and purity upheld in Scripture deepened in the minds of many, whether among the laity, monks, or secular clergy.

Often before, as we have seen, had that call been heard; diverse were the voices, varied the characters, of the callers. The troubadours of the Middle Ages had borne their part; Danté, the weary exile from Florence, had learned to question the infallibility of Popes and General Councils. Over and over again he maintains the Divine authority of Scripture:—"The works," he says, "that followed evidence their truth." And again: "That all the world should have been turned to Christian, and no miracle been wrought, would, in itself,

be such a miracle, the rest were not an hundredth part so great."

Fired with indignation against Romish fables and superstitions, he exclaims :

"E'en they whose office is
To preach the gospel, let the gospel sleep,
And pass their own inventions off instead."

Petrarch and Boccaccio are even more severe, but we need not quote them.

"Nothing, however, sung or told in satire, verse, or prose, against the court of Rome," remarks Dean Milman, "can equal the exquisite malice of the story of the Jew converted to Christianity by a visit to Rome, because no religion less than Divine could have triumphed over the enormous wickedness of its chief teachers—the cardinals and the Pope."

These satires against the clergy, especially the monks and friars, were translated into various languages, and freely circulated throughout Europe, down to the dawn of the Reformation. And when that day arrived, and no poet who desired popularity could venture on such a theme, it was taken up by anonymous writers, who often inserted passages from Danté, Petrarch, and Boccaccio into their pieces. Other writers there were who exposed these evils in a graver style, more suited to their subject, and, strange to say, not one voice was raised to defend the Popes and their government of the Church.

Three General Councils, of Pisa, Constance, and Basle, assembled to deliberate upon this weighty subject of Church reform ; but they effected nothing, save to prepare the Church for that mighty deliverance yet to come. One and all, their object was to choose the right man to fill the Papal chair, and, having chosen him, to frame laws by which he might be kept from going wrong. They did not see that the root of evil was having a Pope at all, acknowledging a man as the supreme head of the Church, instead of Christ the Lord, and Him

alone. In truth, there was no real Reformation until that wrought out by Luther, which was not merely a protest against evil, but the restoration of the pure faith of the Gospel—the open acknowledgment that Christ is all things to His Church—God over all—blessed for ever.

These witnesses for truth against error, these upholders of Scriptural doctrine against superstition and cunningly-devised fables, had no thought of separating themselves from the Church, against whom they so fearlessly testified. To their apprehension the Pope was, as it were, two distinct personages—one spiritual, the other temporal; and while they hesitated not to condemn, with unmeasured reprobation, the latter, they regarded the former with deepest awe and reverence as the representative of God upon earth. “To such minds the idea of schism was abhorrent; they did not see the incongruity of two personages—the one so corrupt, the other so holy—meeting in one; nor were they clear-sighted enough to perceive that the majority might really be those in schism, if the few were those holding the truth; not unnaturally, therefore, they dreaded to think that by over-zeal, even in the cause of truth, they might sever themselves from the body of Christ.”

Savonarola, the Florentine martyr, largely shared this fear. In studying his character, it ought to be borne in mind that the doctrines against which he, and Huss, and Jerome of Prague, and many others, whose names are in the Book of Life, protested, as contrary to Apostolic teaching, had not, as yet, been pronounced dogmas of Christian faith; and, therefore, these reformers all in good faith affirmed their orthodoxy, while yet holding and preaching doctrines utterly opposed to the Church of Rome’s teaching and manner of living.

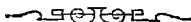
This state of things originated the famous Council of Trent, 1545. It was assembled for the special purpose of drawing up a Confession of Faith, which should contain all the Articles which the Church required her members to believe. Amongst these were many doctrines contrary to Scripture, and unknown

to the Primitive Church. Rites and ceremonies, also, which had been previously observed as matters of custom, were then formally established, and pronounced an essential part of Christian worship. Henceforth the non-observance of any of these Articles should—the Council decreed—be followed by excommunication.

It was *then* that “novelties” were endorsed as the Faith of the Church. No doubt there had been a gradual preparation for this formal departure from the faith of Apostolic days and those which immediately followed. Little by little, truth had become overlaid with error, until doctrines, which had never been heard of previous to the ninth or tenth century, were set forth as part of the true faith of Christ.

The Council of Trent stereotyped these novelties. On January 1st, 1547, it passed a decree defining, *for the first time, the Articles to be henceforth binding upon the entire Church.* From that date no one holding doctrines at variance with those Articles could, consistently, remain a member of the Church of Rome, or maintain his orthodoxy while holding those doctrines; but, as we have said, previous to the Council, there was no inconsistency involved in such a course of action.

Thus we can understand how it was that reformers before the Reformation could, while openly avowing anti-Romish doctrines, yet remain within that Church, and style themselves her faithful children. Savonarola was one of these, otherwise inexplicable, characters.



CHAPTER I.

Childhood and Youth.

Without love and without God, the way is terrible ;
The wind moans in the street—
The whole world is desperately sad.

LENAU (*translated from the German*).

WHEN Martin Luther was passing through Naumburg to attend the Diet at Worms, a priest, forcing his way through the crowd, presented to him a portrait of the Italian martyr Savonarola, accompanied by a letter exhorting the German Reformer to fight manfully for the truth, to stand on the Lord's side, in the full assurance that strength would be given him by God. Luther, taking the portrait in his hand, gazed long and steadily at it, then he kissed it, and, turning to those around him, said, "That man was, indeed, a faithful servant of Jesus Christ." Luther never failed to pay this testimony to Savonarola whenever his name was mentioned in his presence.

It is the story of this Reformer before the Reformation, concerning whom there has been more vehement controversy than has fallen to the lot of most of the great men of history, we are about to write. While some have styled him the "Luther of Italy," not a few represent him as a wild and dangerous fanatic, who used the gifts to which he laid claim—those of prophecy and the privilege of holding immediate intercourse with heaven—not for holy purposes, but to gratify personal ambition, and excite the Florentines to revolt against their rulers, civil and ecclesiastical.

The character of Savonarola is indeed very difficult to comprehend ; but the purity of his life has never been denied, even by his bitterest enemies ; while his contemporaries acknowledge him to have been a man of rare intellectual power, and one of the best theologians of his day, as well as a firm defender of civil and religious liberty.

In the eighteenth century, even the name of this remarkable man had become almost forgotten. But in 1835, Rudelbach, a German writer, rescued it from oblivion. He published Savonarola's life for the special purpose of giving a detailed statement of his doctrinal views, accompanied by a list of his works, the study of which would, he promised, repay any amount of labour thus spent. Rudelbach's work was welcomed as affording abundant testimony that Luther was right in regarding Savonarola as a reformer before the Reformation ; and the interest thus excited strengthened, as, one after another, the books to which he called attention were studied by men capable of appreciating them. These writings have thrown a marvellous light upon the character and inner life of their author, the prior of San Marco. They have made it clear to every unprejudiced mind that, though his persuasion that he was endowed with supernatural gifts often led him into extravagance, no selfish consideration stained the purity of his motives. The one object of his life was to bring about the reformation and freedom from political tyranny of the Church, which he loved even in her degraded state. Though for a time the favourite of Lorenzo the Magnificent, Savonarola never asked a favour at his hands ; rather was it declined when offered. It was this singleness of purpose, pursued steadily to the last, that imparted dignity to his entire life, and gave him an influence so marvellous over his fellow-men.

Girolamo Savonarola was born at Ferrara, on the 21st of September, 1452, just thirty years before the birth of Luther.

His family originally came from Padua; but about the year 1440, Girolamo's grandfather, Michele, removed to Ferrara at the express invitation of Nicholas, third Prince of Estè, the renowned patron of literature and the arts.

Girolamo was the third of seven children. His father's name was Nicholas. His mother—Helena Anna—was descended from the ancient family of Buonacorsi, of Padua. She was a woman of great strength of character, and deep and tender sympathy. Fervently devoted to her son, he ever looked to her for comfort in dark and troublous days. This loving intercourse between mother and son is evidenced by many letters which remain.

Marvellous stories, upon which, however, little reliance can be placed, are related of the boy's life at home, while authentic details of those days are few and without much to interest. He does not seem to have been an attractive child. Reserved, serious, a lover of solitude, amusements, suited to his age, had no charm for him. His biographer, Burlamacchi, says, "His delight was to be alone, employing himself making little altars and performing acts of devotion." And yet, his disposition was calculated to make friends and keep them too; and he himself tells us that, while yet a boy, he made up his mind not to enter a monastery—a decision, however, which looks as if, even then, the matter had been pondered over in the depths of his heart.

The highest hope of Nicholas and Helena for their son was to see him following the profession of his grandfather, who, both at Padua and Ferrara, held a high reputation as a physician, and as professor of the physical sciences. Michele himself, with whom the boy was a great favourite, warmly entered into their views, and undertook to educate him for the medical profession. But the old man died at the age of seventy-nine, leaving his grandson to be educated by his father, who was by no means equal to the task. He was now ten years of age, and attended the public schools in Ferrara, in which city the

study of philosophy, which had lately begun to revive in Europe, held a prominent place. Young as he was, he was soon absorbed in the works of St. Thomas Aquinas and of Aristotle, which were considered in those days essential to the right preparation for any profession. Deep as these were, Girolamo soon mastered them. St. Thomas was his especial favourite. Day after day found him meditating over his works, until his mind became so excited that he could with difficulty turn to other and equally important studies.

But even in those early days truth, in its purity and for its own sake, was the object of his search, while he turned with disgust from writers who, under the name of truth, "set forth their own notions and conceits." "They do not please me," he would say, as he closed the book. This close and ardent application to study bore fruit in later days. The habit he then acquired of reasoning out his subject until it became, as it were, a part of himself, was of immense value to him when called upon to discuss controversial and knotty points with learned and subtle disputants. Nevertheless, the time came when Savonarola looked back upon the days and hours he had devoted to those studies as time lost. Recurring to them, he was often heard to say, "I was then in the error of the schools, and studied with great assiduity the dialogues of Plato; but when God brought me to see the true light, I cast them away." In those dark days Plato was almost worshipped, because those who professed to teach Christ lived in forgetfulness of Him. But, "Of what avail is Plato," Savonarola asks, "if a poor woman, established in the faith of Christ, knows more of the true wisdom than Plato?" words which recall to mind those of our own poet—

"She knows, and knows no more, her Bible true,
A truth the brilliant Frenchman never knew."

It was not likely that the laborious life of a physician could be an attractive prospect to Savonarola, whose mind, restless

and speculative, was ever starting aside from the path of study more especially needful for a medical student ; and soon arose within him a conflict between his own wishes and those of his parents. Painful to his loving nature was this clashing of desires, but he could not silence it. As time rolled on, his increasing dislike to medical study made him resolve to abandon all idea of following his grandfather's profession ; while the thought of devoting himself to a religious life, which seems to have at that time occupied his mind, suggested to him a refuge from the world, which he hated for its exceeding wickedness.

He must in very deed have lived a solitary life in gay Ferrara—the magnificent capital of the Estè—with its one hundred thousand inhabitants. Not that Savonarola was by nature an ascetic. Far otherwise. His heart ever beat in sympathy for those around him ; but a mind, so sensitive as his, so keenly alive to the corruption of the age, could be understood by few—appreciated by fewer still—in those days when vice and luxury reigned supreme.

Along with his beloved Aquinas he now read his Bible ; and for recreation, if such it can be called, played mournful airs upon the lute, and wrote verses, in which he poured forth the sorrows of his heart. In his poem, “*De ruina Mundi*,” written in 1472, he complains, “The whole world is in confusion, every virtue has disappeared—no shining light appears, none are ashamed of their sins.” If it were not for his confidence in the overruling Providence of God, the aspect of the world would, he says, have “driven him to despair :” the sight of “sceptres passing into the hands of pirates, religion turning her face earthwards, crawling in the midst of worldly loves and grovelling cares,” was more than he could bear.

For such an one the charms of the Ducal Palace, the resort of the light-hearted citizens of Ferrara, had no attraction ; nor could his parents induce him to pay its brilliant halls a second visit. For he had been once there, had walked through those gorgeous saloons, beneath which hundreds lingered out a living

death in noisome dungeons, into which no ray of Heaven's light could penetrate. The clanking of chains, the groans of the tortured below, the voice of music and of laughter above—to him the contrast was too terrible. Sad and weary he left those halls, to weep alone over misery he could not alleviate.

One ray of hope, which might have brightened into happiness, now flitted across his path. It was but for a moment, and, vanishing, left him more desolate than before. Adjoining his father's house there lived a Florentine exile—Strozzi—with whom Savonarola became united in the closest bonds of sympathy and friendship. Strozzi had a daughter, and thereby hangs a tale. Savonarola loved her with all the ardour of his nature, and, doubting nothing, told his love. With scorn it was rejected. A Strozzi could not ally herself with a Savonarola! He had believed her true, and, disappointed, felt himself deceived, and bitterly resented the affront. But this brought no healing to the wound, and now, feeling more than ever as one alone in the world, he bathed afresh the altar steps with tears, crying—"O Lord, make known to me the way in which I am to guide my soul." Did the thought, already pondered over, of entering a convent suggest this prayer for guidance? And is it to this possibility he alludes, when, shortly after, he says, "There is still a hope which does not entirely abandon me. Thus it is that in the other life it will be clearly seen whose soul was gentle and kind, and who elevated his wings to a higher style." Was that "higher style" religious life within a convent, which seemed to the fervent Florentine, as it did some years later to Luther, to be the very gate of heaven? Day by day this yearning after monastic life gained strength. He mentioned it to no one lest it should be frustrated, for well he knew that his parents would oppose it. It was, however, Savonarola himself tells us—"A single word," in a sermon preached in Florence by an Augustine monk, in 1474, which irrevocably fixed his choice. What that "single word" was he never divulged to mortal man.

Relieved from harrowing suspense as to his future life, Savonarola, shortly after that memorable sermon, returned to Ferrara. But as he drew towards home, the prospect of soon leaving it, and for ever, sorely troubled him. Thoughts of father, mother, friends, all that had made life dear to him, crowded in upon his soul. Then began the struggle between the flesh and the spirit, which in vain he tried to hide. The quick eye of his mother detected something wrong—a grief hidden from her, and therefore the more grievous and hard to bear. Her look of enquiring love was too much for *him* who had never before kept from her one thought of sorrow or of joy. Savonarola durst not meet that look again; and, for a whole year, he so mastered his feelings as never for one moment to bring it back into his mother's face. "If," he said, long afterwards, "I had then laid open my whole mind, I believe my heart would have broken, and that I should have renounced my intention to become a monk."

Savonarola's life in his father's house came to an end on the 23rd of April, 1475. That evening, as he sat by his mother's side playing a mournful air on the lute, she suddenly exclaimed, "My son, this is a sign that we are soon to part." Hearing, as though he heard not, Savonarola, with trembling hand, continued to play, but he ventured not to raise his eyes from the ground. The next day was the festival of St. George, a great holiday in Ferrara; and upon that day, as soon as his father and mother had gone to the festival, Savonarola left his home for Bologna. He was then twenty-three years of age.

His profound admiration for St. Thomas Aquinas, "the glory of the Dominican Order," had decided Savonarola, from the first, to become a Dominican monk.¹ So, upon reaching Bologna, he went direct to the convent of St. Dominic, and, thinking the meanest office within its walls almost too high an

¹ A *Domini-canis*, or the Lord's watch-dog, as the monks of that Order loved to regard themselves.

honour to aspire to, he humbly prayed to be admitted as a servant, that thus he might "do penance for his sins;" and not, with the expectation then so prevalent, to pass from secular employment to that of the cloister.

The step so long looked forward to with mingled hope and dread having been taken, Savonarola had a difficult and painful duty to fulfil. He must write to his father, and account for his sudden flight, which, his own heart told him, had filled his home with sorrow. But what could he say? Had he one word of comfort to offer? Not one which his parents would feel to *be* a comfort. This he very well knew. And yet he must write the truth—the whole truth—yes, and at once, before he laid his weary body down upon the hard pallet—before another sun should rise upon the world he had left for ever. Difficult, most difficult was the task; but delay would not make it easier or the duty less imperative, and Savonarola, nerved by this thought, and by the loftiness of his purpose—the purity of his motives—retired to his cell, and with all the tenderness of a loving son wrote to his father.

In this letter, in which he tried rather to induce his parents to take a right view of the step he had taken than to justify his own conduct, Savonarola expressed himself as one whose mind was thoroughly at peace, convinced that the path he had chosen was the right one. And yet he acknowledged that his "pain, misery, and grief," at leaving those so dear to him, were "most heavy and severe." "My hope is," he adds, "that the wounds will soon be healed, and be followed, even in this world, by the consolation of God's grace, and in the next, by glory." The date of this letter is, Bologna, April 25, 1475.

Savonarola alluded in his letter to "a tract" written by himself, which, he said, his father would find "upon the books in the window." Its subject was, "The Wickedness of the Times," which he described as "like those of Sodom and Gomorrah." "But," he says, as if the future unfolded itself

before him, "already we see signs of famine, and pestilence, and inundations which will proclaim God's wrath." "Part again, O Lord," he implores, "the waters of the Red Sea, and drown the wicked in the waves of Thine indignation."

This tract was, until lately, thought to be lost; its chief value lies in this:—It evinces that, from the first days of his missionary life, Savonarola foresaw, or thought he foresaw, the judgments about to fall upon Italy, and cherished the hope that an extraordinary mission for the reformation of the Church might be committed to himself; even that he (like Moses) might be the instrument in God's hand for making a way for the ransomed of the Lord to escape the bondage of spiritual Egypt.

His father found this tract, and upon it he wrote these sad lines:—"I remember how, on the 24th day of April, which was St. George's Day, in the year 1475, my son Girolamo, then a student of arts, being intended for the medical profession, left our house and went to Bologna, and entered the Dominican Convent, intending to remain there and become a monk, leaving me, Nicole Savonarola, his father, for my comfort, nothing but these writings."

CHAPTER II.

Disappointed Hopes.

“In darkness there is no choice. It is light which enables us to see the difference between things.”—*Augustus W. Hare.*

ACCOMPANIED by Ludovico, a young Dominican, to whom alone the secret of his flight was known, Savonarola entered the convent at Bologna. The only books he brought with him were his Bible and Prayer-book. The monks gladly welcomed him, and almost immediately he was appointed instructor of the novices, a very responsible office, which Savonarola accepted with regret. But simple obedience being, to his mind, one of the strongest evidences of progress in spirituality and advancement towards perfection, he yielded to the call of duty, and devoted himself with untiring energy to his charge. It would have been his delight to study the Scriptures with these young men, to lead them to God, of whom they were almost utterly ignorant; but his experience at Bologna was akin to that of Wycliffe, years before, at Oxford. Aristotle was preferred to the Word of God, and his superiors obliged him to devote many hours daily to lecturing upon subjects which he regarded as mere “vanities.”

To signify that he had left the world and become a new creature, Savonarola's name underwent a change upon receiving the habit of his order. Not entirely discarding his baptismal name, Girolamo Maria Francesco, the Prior merely withdrew

the two latter names, leaving the first to recall the memory of Jerome, one of the early fathers of the Church.

From the day that he entered upon monastic life, Savonarola, with rigid faithfulness, kept the three vows of his order—chastity, obedience, and poverty. So holy was he among his fellows that Fra Sebastiano da Brescia, an eminent ecclesiastic, who was his confessor for many years, declared his belief that he had never committed a mortal sin. "Of which purity," says Burlamacchi, "his admirable commentaries on the Holy Scriptures and the angelic visions, and especially that of the blessed Virgin granted to him, abundantly evidence." His manners were frank and affectionate, at times rough, but so animated, so earnest, that his hearers listened, awe-struck, to words which bore no trace of hypocrisy. His simple, unfeigned humility towards his brethren, whether superiors or inferiors—so rare a virtue in the convent—drew all hearts to him. So absorbed was he in the contemplation of heavenly things, that he seldom spoke; when he did, his words flowing from a heart filled with love towards God and man, charmed, and not seldom, profited his hearers. True to the life he had chosen, he, from the first, surrendered everything calculated to excite his affections, and "this sacrifice," Burlamacchi says, "was never so painful as when he felt called upon to part with some holy book or image of a saint."

He regarded the vow of poverty as a privilege, not a hardship, nor did he ever forget the "rights of poverty." He seems to have had an intuitive love for the poor—"the suffering members of Jesus Christ"—and esteemed poverty as in itself a help to spirituality. To his loving, tenderly-loving heart the poor were most dear, even as he believed them to be especially dear to God.

Savonarola went far beyond his brethren in stern asceticism. He was soon so emaciated by fasts and vigils—for the days upon which he allowed himself food would have been deemed fast days by many of his brethren—that as he glided through

the cloisters it was as if a shadow rather than a man crossed your path. Sleep was to him almost a stranger—short intervals between long and painful vigils, when his weary frame sought rest upon a sack of straw and a blanket, was all that he allowed himself. A few articles of clothing, and one or two religious books, composed all his earthly goods ; and yet Savonarola had no special love for want and misery. On the contrary, he was keenly alive to the beautiful in nature as well as in grace. This is evidenced by passages in many of his sermons, in which he uses whatever is lovely in Scripture imagery—diamonds, sapphires, golden zones, white robes—to set forth the beauty of the Church, a beauty now dimmed and tarnished, but a Divine beauty to which he fondly hoped to be the means of restoring her. The extravagant eccentricity which characterised the religion of some monks he never admired or tried to imitate, and in his writings he always placed bodily austerities far below the graces of the Spirit in real value. But, in accordance with the spirit and practice of his times, and of those in all ages who have sought by withdrawal from the world and estrangement from objects of sense, to obtain nearer fellowship with God ; as a means to this end, Savonarola was an ascetic, and of the strictest type, “toiling to the utmost with a deadly sincerity,” as Luther expresses it, “to bring his heart and conscience to rest and peace with God.” How strange that so diligent a Bible student did not perceive that Christ, by His first miracle, and the sanction of His presence at the marriage at Cana of Galilee, placed Himself in direct opposition to this spirit of asceticism.

Savonarola expected when he entered the convent to find himself amongst angels rather than men. Could he have looked for less from those who had voluntarily renounced the world and all that the heart of man clings to, to devote themselves to God ? But he was miserably disappointed. The vices which had so grieved his spirit in pleasure-seeking, God-forgetting Ferrara, appeared to him even more glaring at

Bologna, when practised beneath the hood and cowl of the Dominican. In vain he sought for even one brother such as he had pictured to his imagination. All bore the stamp of men living without God *in* the world, while professing to have, for His sake, separated themselves *from* the world.

Savonarola wept bitterly as he pondered these things. His obligation, too, to teach secular learning to the exclusion of Scripture, unceasingly troubled him, and with a heavy heart he performed his task, "endeavouring," he says, "as much as possible, to avoid useless and vain questions," and to "leaven his lectures with the simplicity of Christian faith." When free to choose his subject for private study, he turned with delight to the Scriptures, which were to him as "rivers of water in a dry land." His poem, "De Ruina Ecclesia," written shortly after he entered the convent, abounds in references to Scripture, especially the Apocalypse, so full of symbol and imagery. The poem is a dialogue between the writer and the Church :

"Where," he asks, "are the saints, the love, the purity of past days?" And the Church, taking him by the hand, replies—

"When I saw proud ambition penetrate to Rome and defile everything, I retired and shut myself up in this place, where I spend my life in tears."

She then shows him the wounds she has received in the house of her friends. These draw from Savonarola a passionate appeal to the saints in heaven to pity her distress. "But who," he asks, "has brought matters to this state?" And the Church, pointing to Rome, replies, "A deceitful and proud harlot." Then Savonarola exclaims—

"O, that I could break those soaring wings."

The Church in rebuking tone answers, "Weep, and remain silent; this to me seems best."

This poem is considered the best of Savonarola's poetical

works; but it has been justly said that, Italy lost no poet by his elevation to be her greatest preacher.

In the spirit of holy obedience Savonarola "weeps" and is "silent." "Silent," for a time, while fasting and prayer and the instruction of the novices absorb his thoughts. But the fire kindled within his soul could not be quenched, and like burning jets of lava, the oft-repeated cry burst forth, "O God! that these soaring wings—wings that carry only to perdition—could be broken." Can we wonder at that cry which death alone could silence? Perhaps it is not beyond the truth to say that at no period of the civilized world—since the birth of Christ—was it in a worse, a more degraded condition. The scandalous lives of the Popes—Sextus IV., Innocent VIII., and Alexander VI.—in whose days Savonarola lived, are but too well known. Their vices, and the misery these entailed upon the people, weighed down his spirit.

The special mission of the Dominican order was to preach the Word of God to the faithful scattered abroad. In 1478, Savonarola was promoted from the office of instructor of the novices to that of preacher, for which his spirituality of mind and profound knowledge of Scripture peculiarly fitted him. We know nothing about those early sermons, not even what impression they made upon those who heard them. The Day will declare it.

After seven years' residence in the convent of Bologna, Savonarola was sent, in January, 1482, on a mission to Ferrara. Wishing to secure his heart against the attractions of home, he visited his parents but seldom, his old friends not at all; vainly imagining that, by crucifying affections which God has implanted in every human heart, he was fitting himself to be an effective preacher of truth and righteousness. From the slight allusion to his sermons of this date, by his biographer, it would appear that they attracted little attention. To his mother he lamented that in his case the saying proved true—"A prophet has no honour in his own country." It is difficult to account



for this indifference, for at no period of his life was Savonarola deficient in natural eloquence. Undoubtedly in his earlier days his manner and delivery were bad, and a natural defect in his articulation may have offended his fastidious hearers. Probably, too, the intellectual power and refinement of thought which characterised his sermons could not be appreciated by those accustomed to either dry, scholastic disquisitions, or strains of coarse, vulgar familiarity. Yet, even then, there is proof sufficient of the influence which he exercised over those with whom he came in contact, even upon apparently trivial occasions. For instance, going one day by water from Ferrara to Mantua, he rebuked the blasphemous language of some soldiers in the boat; and with such effect that several of them acknowledged their fault, and with tears implored his forgiveness.

During this year—1482—a terrible war, which owed its origin mainly to the ambition of Venice to add to her territories, and to the extravagant desire of the Pope to increase the power of his nephews, threw all Italy into confusion. In this war the Venetians took the lead, and besieged Ferrara. After two years of strife, which divided Italy into two hostile camps, a treaty of peace was signed by Naples, Florence, Milan, and Venice. The Pope sent no envoy, nor had he been consulted upon the subject. When the terms of the treaty were made known to him, he refused his signature, saying, “The treaty you announce to me is one of shame and disgrace.” The next day he was attacked by gout; shortly after which he died from grief that war had ceased throughout Italy!

Before this terrible war had actually begun, most of the Dominicans in Ferrara were ordered to leave their convent, “St. Maria Dei Angeli.” Savonarola was sent to Florence, the city destined to be the scene of his most brilliant and most suffering days. Bidding farewell to his native place for ever, he crossed the Appenines, and, reaching Florence, went straight to the Convent of San Marco.

CHAPTER III.

Convent of San Marco.

“ Oft expectation fails, and most oft there
Where most it promises.”

SHAKESPEARE: *All's Well that Ends Well.*

THE Convent of San Marco, situated near the Porta San Gallo, in Florence, was for a long period the most powerful monastery in Tuscany. In Savonarola's days it was surrounded by extensive pleasure grounds, part of which is now a botanic garden. It had been built and beautified by the Medici family. In the early part of the fifteenth century it was almost in ruins, and only remarkable for the scandalous character of some monks of the order of San Silvestro, who then inhabited it. In 1436 the elder Cosmo de Medici obtained permission from the Pope to remove these monks, and to place the convent in charge of the reformed Dominicans of the Lombard congregation. The first public library established in Italy was that by which Cosmo enriched this convent, and which before very long rivalled, if it did not surpass, the far-famed library of San Lorenzo.

While learned men came from all parts of Italy to study these precious volumes, their admiration was scarcely less attracted by the exquisite paintings and frescoes which adorned both the church and convent. The finest works of Fra Giovanni di Fiesole, better known as Fra Beato Angelico, because of the purity of his life, though he has never been canonised, were

expressly executed for this convent, in which he had watched, wept, and prayed. Those conceptions of angelic beauty which, M. Angelo said, he had "borrowed from heaven to enrich and elevate the earth," were painted upon its walls; while upon the upper corridors and friars' cells might be read the sacred story, traced by other and not less gifted hands, of our Saviour's birth and passion. The Annunciation, by Cavallino, is especially beautiful. The expression of the Virgin's face, so calm, so heavenly, still retains its freshness; not that style of beauty generally seen in her pictures, rather that of thankfulness, combined with profound humility, upon receiving the Angel's communication. Angelico's masterpiece, the Crucifixion, is in the ancient chapter-house; also many pictures of saints and martyrs, grand in their simplicity.

Fra Angelico painted sacred subjects exclusively, and never for money. They who desired to possess one of his works were obliged to apply for it to the Prior of the convent, from whom he received the order or the permission to execute it. To him painting was an act of religion, the expression of faith, hope, and adoring love, which filled his heart and guided his pencil. We read that, in order that his work might be in some measure not unworthy of Him for whose glory it was undertaken, it was ever his habit to ask the blessing of God before he began it. And when an inward assurance that his prayer was heard had been granted, he never felt at liberty to deviate in the smallest degree from the inspiration then conveyed. Many visitors to San Marco have been struck by the pathetic expression in the countenances of the bystanders at the Crucifixion, the Taking down from the Cross, and the Entombment, in Angelico's pictures. But this cannot surprise us, for we also read of him that every time he painted these subjects he wept as if he had been present at those scenes of love. It was this deep sympathy with Christ in His sufferings that is reflected in those marvellous pictures.

Frescoes and paintings by the not less celebrated Fra Bar-

tolomeo, who, led by the irresistible influence of Savonarola's history, entered San Marco two years after the martyr's death, also adorned the convent. Guirlandajo painted a picture for the refectory. The celebrated Crucifix by Giotto, who was the first to give to the Divine Sufferer the expression of holy resignation, instead of that of mere physical agony, was placed in the nave.

These masterpieces of the old Italian masters have ever attracted the lovers of art to San Marco, while for many, and especially of late years, the convent now possesses a peculiar interest, with its old memories of Savonarola lingering within its walls. His cell, larger than most of the others, and consisting of two chambers, remains nearly in the condition in which it was left on that day when he went forth to meet his cruel death. For there were not a few who loved the monk, and for his sake preserved his chair, the couch oft watered by his tears, the robes of which they stripped him, his portrait also, taken in days long past, when to paint his likeness was the highest honour to which the artist could aspire. Was this portrait Bartolomeo's celebrated work which represents the great preacher thundering from the pulpit, his hands raised to heaven as he prophesied of coming judgment? We know not. The picture now exhibited in the convent is very indifferent as a work of art, though not without character and force of expression.

After the martyr's death years passed away, in which his name became almost forgotten. But now that admiration for Italy's greatest orator and theologian, and sympathy for his cruel fate, no longer excite hostility or derision, Florence delights to show, amongst her most precious relics, these memorials of her martyred son, and points to the inscription over the door of his cell—

"Has cellulas

VEN. F. HIERONYMUS SAVONAROLA

Vir Apostolicus

Inhabitavit."

which was placed there shortly after his martyrdom, as an evidence of the love his convent bore him. That this inscription should have escaped the destructive hand of his enemies—the Medici—appears unaccountable. It has been suggested, as the cause of this tolerance, that perhaps the Prior's Republicanism, attended as it was with the most uncompromising sacrifice of worldly interests on his part, was too little attractive to make it likely that many would be induced to follow his example.

Savonarola loved Art as well as any Medici ; and in Nature he delighted to see shadows and symbols of spiritual life. "No one," it has been observed, "entered more fully than he did into St. Paul's words—'There are, it may be, many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification.'" At San Marco this love for the beautiful was fully gratified, whether within the convent by works of sculpture and paintings, which almost seemed to speak, or when in his lonely walks, at Fiesole, he paused to admire a delicately pencilled flower at his foot, or some glorious scene just opening to his view. Then sitting down in some secluded spot he would take his Psalter from his pocket, and, turning over its pages, seek some appropriate text for every scene, every object, whether of mountain or plain, which to his well-tuned ear, declared the glory and the love of God. Thus delighted, and in his own soul edified, Savonarola cherished the hope that at San Marco, after all his wanderings and disappointments, he had found that holiness and peace after which his soul yearned. But these hopes proved vain. In not one of his brethren could he trace a likeness to the holy saint Antonino, whose name was perpetually on their lips, and in whom, as the founder of several charitable institutions in Florence, they professed to glory. Pained to the heart, Savonarola shrunk from association with false brethren—professors, but not possessors of truth,—and, as he saw men rush from vehement discussion upon virtue and the immortality of the soul, to the indulgence of every

evil passion, a feeling of scorn—almost disgust—for secular study arose within him. “To what good, to what purpose has it ever tended?” he would ask himself. “Of what value is the philosophy of Aristotle, this prostration of the intellect to paganism which makes the Cross distasteful?” He found none to sympathise with these thoughts and feelings. Not one could he induce to study the Scriptures with him, Biblical Latin being considered impure, and calculated to injure the taste. So entirely was God’s Word—especially the Old Testament—neglected, that a monk much respected in San Marco gravely asked, “What possible good could be derived from the knowledge of events so long since accomplished?” But this ignorance in a monk need not surprise us. Not many years later, Rome, in the person of her Pope, Leo x., boasted that “the fable of Jesus Christ” had “served her in good stead.”

Savonarola preached his first sermon in Florence in the church of San Lorenzo, in Lent, 1483. The attempt was a complete failure—at least, so his audience deemed it. Great things had been expected from the new preacher: his acknowledged learning and piety, his fine expressive countenance and graceful figure gave promise that his sermons would not fail to interest and attract. But the tones of the preacher, harsh and thin, offended his hearers. His language, too, was considered “dry and scholastic;” his gestures, “rude and awkward.” At the second sermon fewer attended, at the third fewer still, “scarcely five-and-twenty lingered in the vacant nave.”

And that Lent, while San Lorenzo was deserted, crowds flocked to Santo Spirito to hear the Medici favourite—Mariano Gennezzano—whose “sonorous voice, choice sentences, and noble language” enraptured and enslaved. But Mariano has long since been forgotten, except as the opponent of Savonarola, who will ever be remembered—and with deeper and more fervent interest—the better he is known and understood. That he should now be cast into the shade by one

whose attraction for the Florentines, consisted quite as much in the perfection of his dress as in his eloquence, was intolerable to his friends. Girolamo Benivieni, who had lately become his disciple, was ready to blame Savonarola himself as the author of his own unpopularity: his manner, "so wanting in grace," he said, naturally made his doctrine, though "true, useful, and necessary," distasteful to his hearers. "Elegance of language," replied Savonarola, "must give way before simplicity in preaching sound doctrine." Yet he keenly felt his unpopularity: it was a deep trial to him—one by which, had his spirit been less earnest, he would have been utterly crushed. Sometimes, indeed, the thought struck him that he had better give up preaching in public, and confine himself to the instruction of the novices in San Marco. But how, then, should he carry out the main object of his life? that work to which he had consecrated himself. The idea, entertained one moment, was, the next, rejected. He must not be conquered by natural defects; but would labour to subdue them, and, if baffled, rise above them, for silent he could not, would not be. He must preach against the prevailing iniquity of the Church and the world, whether they would hear, or whether they would forbear. Were not the Florentines, he said, "like the Hebrews of old, ungrateful, stubborn, and rebellious?" Should he not, in the name of the Lord, declare war against them? From Old Testament history he had learned that God often employed man as His instrument for inflicting punishment upon His own people, and, as he meditated over these things, he earnestly prayed that God would thus use him—that the rod of Divine vengeance, sent for the purifying of the Church, might be placed in his hands.

The philosophy of the times had led Savonarola to believe that "an inward consciousness" would be the sign granted that his petition had been accepted. This "inward consciousness," the natural result of ardent hope and strong desire, soon revealed to him that his prayer had been heard and granted.

Marvellous visions, as he believed, attested the truth of this conviction. While conversing, one day, with a brother monk, the heavens seemed to open before him, and, gazing into their depths, he read the dread announcement that wrath against Italy and the Church had gone forth from the presence of the Lord; and as he stood, awe-struck, a voice from afar commanded him to declare to the people that which he had seen. "Oh, that my voice could reach to the ends of the earth," was Savonarola's reponse; but to his earnest call to repentance, the Florentines turned a deaf ear.

Upon the death of Sextus iv., which occurred during this year, the difficulty of coming to a decision, as to his successor, threatened the Church with schism. Savonarola thus implored for her Divine protection:—

"Oh, look with pity on Thy Bride,
Amidst the storms of life,
What blood must flow, unless with might
Thy Hand shall stay the strife.
Thou, Who in mercy always doth delight,
Let not Thy handmaid be reduced once more
To silence, as in her poverty in days of yore."

Bad as Sextus had been, his successor, Innocent VIII., was infinitely worse. His court soon became the shelter for every species of vice, and thoughtful men awoke to the conviction that reformation in the Church was sorely needed. Some there were who hoped to obtain it; but help from the See of Rome towards that reformation was impossible, so long as the court of Rome continued to be the very centre of iniquity. Machiavelli, contrasting the hideous vice of Italy with the comparative purity of Northern Europe, observes, "The nearer a people dwells to the Roman court, the less religion it has. Were that court set down among the Swiss, who still remain pious, they, too, would soon be corrupted by its vices." Guicciardini, upon reading these words, remarked—

“Whatever evil may be said of the Roman Court must fall short of the truth.”

As days grow darker, Savonarola fasts, mourns, and prays all the more earnestly. Prostrate before the Lord he implores His aid as, day by day, he bathes the altar steps with tears. The tempest raging within his soul might have unhinged even a less sensitive mind than his, had he remained comparatively inactive at San Marco. Happily for him, he was now sent to preach the Lent sermons at San Geminiano, a mountain village not far distant. Feeling more at ease there, amongst simple-minded peasants, than at Florence, he at once declared, “upon the authority of Scripture,” “The Church will be scourged, then regenerated, and speedily:” words then, for the first time uttered, but oft-repeated afterwards in the Duomo of Florence; and, not upon “the authority of Scripture” alone, as *now*, but as a *direct revelation from God* Himself to the preacher.

Old Testament history furnished facts sufficient, upon which to ground his general assertion, that Divine wrath would inevitably fall upon a guilty Church: a conviction burnt into the preacher’s soul by frequent meditation on the character of God’s dealings with Israel; from which he argued that He would, in like manner, deal with Italy and her Church. And now, at San Geminiano, feeling sure to carry his audience with him, his courage rose, his utterance became more free, his language eloquent and convincing, as he prophesied of coming judgment, and saw, in the rapt attention of his hearers, that he had but expressed their own forebodings—the fears which agitated the trembling hearts before him. And while this sympathy between Savonarola and his audience refreshed his spirit and calmed the tumult of his soul, it strengthened him for future work, and he returned to San Marco to resume the quiet office of lecturer to those who had neither heart nor understanding to appreciate him.

The following year, when on a mission to Lombardy, Savo-

narola preached a course of Lent sermons at Brescia. No trace of former infirmity marred his utterance, as with a voice of thunder he "shook the souls of men," bringing thousands to their knees; then, closer and closer to the pulpit, by his impassioned earnestness. Then, leaning over the pulpit side, and stretching forth his hands—"hands that were like an appealing speech"—he spoke to them words never to be forgotten, making them weep and tremble at his pleasure.

His subject was from the Apocalypse—the four-and-twenty elders standing before the throne. His mind, absorbed by the troubled condition of Italy, the wickedness of both clergy and people, he could think and preach but of impending judgment, and in words which trembled under their heavy import, he foretold that Brescia would, ere long, be attacked; that blood would flow through the streets; husbands would be seen weeping for their wives, wives for their husbands, parents for their children, children for their parents. These things, he prophesied, would be witnessed by some then living; it might be by some then listening to his solemn warning. Awed by his own words—issuing from "the deep tarn of his heart, dark with its own depths and the shadows hanging over it"—Savonarola paused. Then looking around, he raised himself in the pulpit, and gathering his strength together for one word of comfort and of hope, he called upon all before him to repent, to turn to the Lord, and He would assuredly have mercy upon them. From that moment Savonarola was, to the people, a prophet of the Lord. He knew it; and by prayers more abundant, fastings more frequent, laboured to be worthy of the high calling to which he verily believed God had called him.

Twenty-six years after this war upon Brescia had been denounced, six thousand of its inhabitants lay dead in the streets, slaughtered by the ferocious soldiery of Gaston de Foix. But some remained, and these recalled to mind the sermons preached in Lent, 1486, by that marvellous friar, Girolamo Savonarola, who nine years afterwards joined the noble army of martyrs.

Shortly after leaving Brescia, Savonarola attended a chapter of the Dominicans at Reggio. Prince Pico della Mirandola was also there. He was only twenty-three years of age, but possessed an amount of learning scarcely attained in those days. These two young men had never met before. Savonarola's bodily presence was not, at first, calculated to command attention; not until he spoke did he attract; then the spirit, which *is* the man, shone out in every gesture, every movement. Prince Pico watched the grave, gentle-looking monk sitting apart from his brethren. The face with cowed head rising above the black mantle and white tunic fascinated him. He could not withdraw his gaze from that delicate frame: the high forehead deeply furrowed, the blue eyes of unearthly brightness, soft, yet penetrating, and shaded by long auburn lashes; the hands so emaciated that, held before the light, they seemed transparent; and as he watched he loved the man. But it was when Savonarola rose to take his part in discussion, when his countenance became excited, and his eye darted fire, then it was that the soul of Pico became knit to that of the speaker in bonds which death alone could sever. From that day, wherever the Prince of Mirandola went, in whatever society he found himself, the mighty eloquence, the intellectual power of his friend, were the theme on which he loved to dwell.

Savonarola spent four years in Lombardy—years of earnest preparation, to be followed by years of work and triumph. In January, 1490, he went to Genoa to preach during Lent, and then returned to Florence. While on his way to Genoa, he wrote to his mother a letter so overflowing with tender love, that we transcribe the greater part of it:—

“HONOURED MOTHER,—

“The peace of Christ be with you. I know you must be surprised that I have not written to you for so many days, but that has not been from any want of thought for you, but from the want of a messenger, for I could not meet with

any one going about this time from Brescia to Ferrara, except one of our own people who arrived here after the Feast of the Nativity, with which I was so much engaged that I quite forgot to write, which I very much regret. . . . I can well imagine that you have been in much tribulation, and so far as my frailty will enable me, I pray to God continually on your behalf. I know not what more I can do. If I could in any other way help you I would do so, but I have voluntarily given myself to be a slave for the love of Jesus, who, for the love of me, made Himself man, and took the part of a slave to set me free. I therefore in all things seek the glory of the liberty of the sons of God, and do as much as in me lies to serve Him. I fear His condemnation were I to do otherwise. He has given me a talent, and I am bound to use it in the way most pleasing to Him. Be not, therefore, displeased, my most dear mother, if I go far away from you, and if I go about preaching in various cities—as I do it for the salvation of many souls—preaching, exhorting, confessing, reading, and giving counsel. I do not go from place to place for any other object, and am moreover sent by my superiors to perform that work. You ought, therefore, to take comfort that God has condescended to elect one of your offspring to be placed in so high an office—a calling for which I myself cannot be too grateful, and in which I find by ample experience that I benefit my own soul, as well as that of others, incomparably more than I could have done at Ferrara. . . . Therefore, my most honoured mother, grieve not on my account, for the more I do that which is pleasing to God, so much more will my prayers for you prevail. I thought to write a few lines to you, but my love has made my pen run on, and I have laid open more of my heart to you than I had any thought of doing. Know then, finally, that my heart is more fixed than ever to devote soul and body, and all the knowledge which God has given me, for the love of God and the salvation of my neighbours; and as I cannot do it in my own country, I will do it elsewhere.

“This day, so soon as I have dined, I proceed to Genoa. Pray to God that He may lead me thither in safety, and enable me to bring forth much fruit among the people there. Remember me to my uncle, aunt, and cousins. May the grace of God be with you, and keep you from all harm, for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Written in Pavia, in haste, on the day of the conversion of St. Paul the Apostle.

“Your son,

“FRATE HIERONYMO SAVONAROLA.”

CHAPTER IV.

Unexpected Popularity.

—◆—
“Preach, as if you ne'er would preach again,
And as a dying man to dying men.” BAXTER.
—◆—

HAVING spent four years in Lombardy, Savonarola, at the express invitation of Lorenzo the Magnificent, returned to Florence. This recall was at the instigation of Prince Pico, whose enthusiastic admiration for his friend could not else be satisfied. Little could Lorenzo calculate upon the result yet to follow that recall—the establishment in Florence of the man who should prove the most powerful enemy of the Medici.

Matured in thought and experience, Savonarola resumed his lectures in San Marco. To his astonishment he found himself popular. The estimation in which he was held by Pico had procured him a name; and not a few learned Florentines craved permission to attend his lectures. This was reluctantly granted, and in the cloister garden, shaded by damask roses, the friar expounded his favourite book—the Revelation of St. John. Day by day his audience increased. Soon, the garden could not contain half the people who flocked to him, and the disappointed prayed him to lecture henceforth from the chapel pulpit. His reply was, “Pray to the Lord for me.” A Saturday or two later he announced: “To-morrow I will speak in the church. There will be a lecture and a sermon.”

That “to-morrow” was 1st August, 1491. The church was crowded. Many of the most intellectual men in Florence

pressed in to hear the famous preacher, the friend of Prince Pico; yes, that despised monk, from whom, in disgust and derision, they had turned away four years before.

With the crucifix in one hand and the Bible in the other, Savonarola entered the pulpit. Called, he believed, as by a voice from heaven, to spare neither old nor young, rich nor poor, learned nor unlearned, he preached that day what he has himself called "a terrible sermon." With the authority of a prophet of the Lord, he proclaimed the approach of a great crisis in the Church—a day of Divine vengeance which should arrest the impenitent. "Every thing," he said, "tends to that end,"—the measure of iniquity, "full to overflowing," the moral condition of the Church, "appalling," "doctrines of truth" neglected, while "fables of astrology and soothsaying take their place even in the minds of the clergy." The excitement caused by this sermon was immense. But Savonarola knew Florence—fickle, ungrateful, Florence—too well to be over-elated by one day's success; perhaps the next might leave him to preach to empty benches. Bearing this in mind, and with the desire that any good effected by his sermons might be permanent, he now resolved to publish his discourses. With few exceptions, all previous to this period have been lost; but from this date (1491) an abundant store has been preserved.

As his hearers multiplied by hundreds, thousands, Savonarola was driven from the convent chapel to the Duomo, the church of "Santa Maria del Fiore." There, too, he declared, in tones of triumphant certitude, "The day of vengeance is at hand," while the people, fascinated, though awe-struck, eagerly listened. Then, choosing the right moment, and lowering his voice, he spoke of mercy in the midst of judgment. The coming chastisement was to be inflicted, "that Italy and the Church might, purified by the furnace, rise to a holy and happy state." He paused, then, kissing the crucifix, he pressed it to his heart, and spoke, in soft and loving accents, of Him who died, that penitent sinners might live. For seven

years from the date of that sermon, Savonarola was master both of the pulpit and the people.

His popularity alarmed Lorenzo, and he sent five of the principal Florentines to expostulate with him, and advise more moderate language. "I am fully aware," replied Savonarola, "that you have been sent to me by Lorenzo. Return to him, and tell him from me to repent of his sins, for that the Lord spares no one, and fears not the princes of this world." "Take care," rejoined the messengers, "that your bold words do not bring you into exile." "Do you threaten me with banishment?" retorted Savonarola. "Go, tell Lorenzo that, though I am a stranger, and he the first man in Florence, it is I that shall remain, and he must soon depart." This answer was prophetic.

As the Magnificent's opposition increased, Savonarola (not from personal fear, but lest his mission should thereby be hindered) thought it right to confine his preaching within the limits of moral precepts and general principles of religion, while abstaining altogether from prophetic announcements. But this self-imposed restriction was soon discarded; he found it impossible to restrain himself from the utterance of any thought which he believed to be the voice of the Spirit within him. He tells us that upon one occasion he wrote his sermon on Friday, and "determined" not to touch on prophecy; but lo! the entire of Saturday and the following night he was "much troubled in mind by reason of that decision." Sunday came. At daybreak, worn and depressed, he rose for prayer, and while on his knees heard a voice saying to him, "Fool that thou art! dost thou not see that it is God's will that thou shouldst keep in the same path?" The consequence was, that "I preached," said Savonarola, "a tremendous sermon." It was, in fact, in the belief that a Divine mission had been entrusted to him, and in liberty to proclaim that which he regarded as truth, that the friar's strength lay. Shorn of that, he became weak as another man.

He had been only a year in Florence when he was made prior of San Marco. Upon such an appointment it had long been the custom for the newly-elected prior to do homage to him from whom it had been received. Savonarola refused to conform to this custom. "I regard God," he said, "as the Author of my election; let us, therefore, go into the chapel, and return thanks to Him." This greatly offended Lorenzo. "See, now," he said, "here is a stranger come into my house, who will not deign to visit me." And yet the Magnificent had no desire to go to open war with the Prior; he would rather win him by gentle means. Savonarola saw through these, and when Lorenzo walked through the convent garden, he kept within his cell, and thus escaped the snare. Disappointed, but not hopeless of succeeding, Lorenzo sent his chancellor to drop rich gifts into the alms-box. Opened shortly afterwards, the Prior doubted not whence came the gold and silver pieces, and with scorn rejected them as an unholy bribe, "as a piece of meat thrown to a dog to silence his bark at the approach of robbers."

And now Lorenzo, who had long been failing in health, grew weary of resisting one who was too strong for him—one, moreover, whom he could not but respect—and he ceased to oppose him, either in public or private. His own popularity, too, began to decline from the time that the Florentines, instead of finding enjoyment (as before) in the public spectacles, which he unceasingly provided for their amusement, turned to religious services, under the guidance of Savonarola, as a better manner in which to spend their time and their energies.

The admirers of the Medici speak in glowing terms of the peace, splendour, and prosperity which reigned in Florence during the last three years of the life of the Magnificent. The splendour was, however, but glittering show, the peace, a dull submission to despotic rule which it were vain to resist. Civil liberty had altogether perished in Florence, the Republic which had done, and suffered, so much to obtain it.

CHAPTER V.

The Magnificent and the Prior.

“ Now conscience wakes despair
That slumbered, wakes the bitter memory
Of what he was, what is, and what must be,”

MILTON.—*Paradise Lost.*

IN the early spring of 1492, Lorenzo, the Magnificent, lay dying in his enchanting villa at Careggi, three miles from Florence. The doctors having pronounced his case hopeless, left him to prepare for a speedy appearance into the presence of God. But this preparation was not so easy a matter as they probably thought, or as Lorenzo himself used to think, if, indeed, he had ever given a passing thought to eternity. But now, brought face to face with death, he trembled very exceedingly, and recognised the importance of making sure of an interest in the next world, now that the present was slipping from his grasp.

But in a book, not much read in those days, these words had long before been written :—“ There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked ;” and the dying prince now found them true. Why did Volterra so fill his thoughts—disturb his dreams? Why did the cries of the widow and the fatherless ever ring in his ears? Why did the gold and silver, of which he had robbed them to replenish his exhausted treasury, seem to “eat his flesh as it were fire?” Why? Because that same Word of God had declared that thus it should be. He had sown “the wind,” and was reaping “the whirlwind.”

His friends, Pico, Politian, Ficino, did their best to soothe

his troubled spirit, reminding him, in accordance with the teaching of his day, that "the necessities of his position" were an abundant excuse for aught that he had done which did not, as he lay on his deathbed, appear to him to have been *well* done. But Lorenzo was not cheered by that comfortable doctrine, so he sent for the ministers of religion—long neglected and despised—and received from them the Sacraments of the Church. He had never doubted the efficacy of these ordinances to give peace, but they failed to comfort him now in this hour of extremest need. Why? Because he very much doubted the priests at whose hands he received them. How could he tell whether they were true men or false? Often had he boasted that no man had ever ventured to utter a resolute "No," to him. Could he, therefore, now believe, upon the assurance of any man on the face of the earth, that his sins were forgiven?

Yes. There was one man, and only one, whom he felt certain would tell him the truth—that man was the prior of San Marco. If *he* should assure him of forgiveness, the dying prince would believe him, and die in peace. So, in hot haste, a messenger was despatched for Savonarola. "Make haste, delay not," were his orders as he rode out of the courtyard at Careggi. The Prior, little expecting such a summons, at first hesitated to obey it; but when assured that Lorenzo lay at the point of death, and that he earnestly desired to confess to him, he at once started for Careggi. Reaching the villa, he found Prince Pico sitting by his friend. Pico immediately withdrew, and the confessor approached the dying man. In a weak and trembling voice Lorenzo said there were three things which lay heavy on his conscience, and for which he implored absolution: the merciless destruction of Volterra, the appropriation, to himself, of money intended as marriage-portions for the daughters of its citizens, and the shedding of innocent blood in Florence after the Pazzi conspiracy. Savonarola spoke to him of the tender compassion and mercy of that

God whom he had offended. "But," he added, "three things are necessary, before you can hope for the pardon of your sins." "What things, father?" asked Lorenzo, looking steadily into his confessor's face. "In the first place," he replied, raising his left hand with three fingers extended, while, with the forefinger of the right, he told off the three requisites as he named them—"in the first place, it is necessary that you have a strong and lively faith in God." "That I have, most fully," answered Lorenzo. "In the second place," continued the confessor, "it is absolutely essential that you restore, or leave directions to have restored, all that you unjustly took away." This was an enormous demand. For a moment Lorenzo hesitated, then he assented to it by a movement of his head. "Lastly," continued the stern Dominican, drawing himself up to his full height, "you must restore liberty to the Commonwealth of Florence." With intense anxiety Savonarola waited the reply to this, he well knew, most hard requirement. But there was none. The dying prince turned his face to the wall and remained silent. He could not, even to save his soul, cut off his right hand, or pluck out his right eye. Therefore the friar left him unabsolved, and returned himself to Florence. Shortly after this Lorenzo died (April 8th, 1492).

His death was much lamented in Florence. Many, even of those who had been galled by his government, regretted his death, because they knew not but that his successor might prove more tyrannical. Others, and especially the populace, mourned his loss when they remembered the amusements he had so abundantly provided for them; while literary men, and lovers of art of all classes throughout Italy, regarded his death as a public calamity.

Lorenzo was succeeded by his son Pietro—"a fool," as his father designated him. From the first, Pietro's incapacity for government made him unpopular, and soon, an opposition party was formed, consisting chiefly of those who, in his father's days, had been fast friends of the Medici.

The Pope, Innocent VIII., died July 26th, and without delay a conclave of twenty-three cardinals met to elect his successor. The election was carried by bribery, votes being sold to the highest bidder. The infamous Roderigo Borgia gained the day. For a moment it seemed likely that his most powerful rival, Ascannio Sforza, might be the successful candidate; whereupon a mule, laden with gold, was led into the courtyard of his palace, which at once settled the matter to the satisfaction of those most concerned in the shameful transaction. The new Pope received a letter of congratulation from Henry VII. of England; but old King Ferdinand wept when he heard the news—a thing he was never before seen to do, and said to his Queen: “A Pope has been elected who will bring ruin upon Italy and upon all Christendom.” And now that heavy clouds darkened the political horizon, thoughtful men whispered, one to the other, that the Magnificent had “died too soon”—that Pietro was no match for the times, when Italy, “the garden and paradise of the world, was fast turning to a hell upon earth.”

The troubles now about to flood Italy “were not,” it has been observed, “so much owing to the special wickedness of one man, or of a number of men, as to the inevitable operation of certain principles then universally held as sound and indisputable.” The idea which then prevailed, that “he who possessed the land was the natural and God-appointed ruler of those living upon that land,” naturally led to the belief that “a nation, as an estate, was subject to all the rules, and changing of hands, to which other property was liable. This, indeed, was the general belief—that the sovereign had a right to bequeath his kingdom as he would other property—how, and to whom, he would, “under the same conditions and limitations.” In the disputes which now arose in Italy, Naples and Milan played a prominent part. We shall not enter into the subject, except to say that they led to a secret treaty between Charles VIII. of France and Ludovico il Moro, Duke of

Milan, by the terms of which Charles was granted a free passage into Italy both by Lombardy and Genoa.

The religious as well as the political atmosphere of Italy was now dark in the extreme. The present Pope, Alexander VI., was the worst of all the popes, and that is a bold word. His scandalous immoralities and injustice, "more notorious," says Hallam, "than could be paralleled in the darkest age that preceded," startled Europe. And as his character developed, the veil woven by religious zeal was rent asunder, and the hideous features appeared without disguise—features, indeed, which had characterised other popes of that period; but, in one respect, Roderigo Borgia stood alone—vices, by others indulged in secret, were by him practised publicly.

And now, as matters grew worse and worse, not a few recollected that these woes had been foretold by that great preacher of righteousness, the Prior of San Marco, whose marvellous sagacity had enabled him, by careful observation of passing events, to predict those yet in the future. And as his popularity increased, the estimation in which he was held by others reacted upon himself, deepening in his inmost soul the conviction that, the gift of prophecy (which he had learned from St. Thomas Aquinas, "is sometimes given to a man *for the benefit of others*, as well as for the enlightening of his own mind") had been, indeed, entrusted to himself. The Old Testament prophets (the food by which he strengthened himself for his work) Savonarola read and re-read with increased appropriation of their import to himself and to the times in which he lived; and now, again, he saw visions and dreamed dreams which, to his fervent and over-excited mind, seemed to reveal to him things not made known to the uninspired.

About this time it was that, while preaching an Advent sermon, he saw the heaven open, and a hand suspended in mid air, and in the hand a drawn sword, upon which was written, "The sword of the Lord upon the earth and speedily."

As he gazed, awe-struck, soft words fell on his ear—mercy would be remembered in the midst of judgment ; pardon extended to the penitent. Then the voice deepened, and in solemn tones declared, that sure and terrible would be the doom of the impenitent. Scarcely were those words uttered, when, “all of a sudden, the sword turned towards the earth, the air became dark, showers of swords, and arrows, and fire descended, and fearful thunders shook the heavens, whilst war, pestilence, and famine desolated the earth.” As the vision vanished, a voice was heard commanding Savonarola to tell the people what he had seen and heard, that by timely repentance they might find shelter in the day of the Lord’s vengeance. This vision was considered so symbolical of Savonarola and of his doctrines, that representations of it were afterwards engraven upon medals.

Shortly before the death of Lorenzo, the Magnificent, Savonarola had, in the presence of three Florentines of note, predicted his death, and also that of Pope Innocent and Ferdinand, king of Naples. Two-thirds of the prophecy had already come true, when the remaining third was fulfilled on the 23rd of January, 1494, by the death of old King Ferdinand. The prophet often alluded to this well-attested fact, in proof of the reality of his prophetic powers. Not that there was anything remarkable in the fulfilment of the prophecy ; Lorenzo’s health had long been shattered by a course of life not calculated to prolong it ; the Pope had for years been, as many thought, on the brink of the grave ; and Ferdinand had, even then, reached the ominous age of threescore years and ten. Nevertheless, the death, both of Lorenzo and the Pope, occurring so soon after the prophecy had been uttered, combined with the fact that Lorenzo sent for the Prior when on his death-bed ; and the yet more marvellous fact that he had been denied absolution, served, amazingly, to increase Savonarola’s popularity, and to place him in a position to play his part in the political history of Florence just about to open.

Shortly after Lorenzo's death, Savonarola preached a course of sermons at Pisa, and the following year he preached during Lent at Bologna. Not unnaturally, the monks of San Marco attributed this repeated absence of their Prior to the dislike felt for him by Pietro de Medici, and this increased their distress. Savonarola wrote thus to comfort them :—"I always keep in mind your tender love, and often speak of it to my friend and much-loved son, Fra Basilio. We are very solitary, like two turtle-doves waiting for the return of spring to retire to a warmer climate, where we used to live among the joys and flowers of the Holy Spirit. But, if you feel so sad that you cannot exist without me, your love is but imperfect, seeing that it is God who has removed me from you."

The popular opinion respecting his preaching at Bologna was rather unfavourable. "He is only a simple man fit to preach to women," was whispered from one to another as they left the church. Yet numbers came to listen, and amongst them the wife of Giovanni Bentivoglio, Lord of Bologna, a tyrant whose very name struck terror. This lady came frequently, and always late, followed by a retinue of ladies, gentlemen, and attendants. Their noise and clatter, as they walked up the church, disturbed the congregation, to the infinite annoyance of the preacher. For some Sundays he merely paused in his sermon to allow time for the commotion to subside. At length, one morning, when the disturbance was at its height, he thus addressed the offender :—"My lady, you would please God, and give me great satisfaction, if you would come at the beginning of the sermon, so as not to disturb me or my hearers." No amendment followed this request—on the contrary, her ladyship's next attendance in church was more noisy and with unusual pomp. Then Savonarola could no longer restrain himself, and, as she walked to her accustomed place, he called aloud—"It is the devil who comes in to interrupt the worship of God." Infuriated at the insult, the incensed lady ordered two of her attendants to arrest the preacher in

the pulpit. For this they had not courage, or rather, should we not say, God protected his faithful, though (upon this occasion) misguided servant? Still bent upon taking his life, she sent two men to assassinate him in his cell that same evening. The porter of the convent, distrusting their appearance, refused them admission, and, telling them to wait outside, informed Savonarola of their desire to see him, and of his own fears respecting their intentions. "Admit them," he replied; "my trust is in the Lord." The assassins entered, and for a moment gazed on their intended victim. "What is your business?" he asked. Awed by his resolute, commanding manner, their courage fled, and they stammered out, "Our lady sends us to your reverence, to say she is ready to supply you with whatever you may require." "Return my thanks to your lady," he said, and they withdrew. They could not touch a hair of his head, because his hour had not yet come. Henceforth, this lady and her attendants thought it prudent to avoid annoying such an one as Savonarola.

When Lent ended, he left Bologna. Lest, however, it should be thought that he did so from fear of personal injury, he announced his intention at the close of his last sermon. "This evening," he said, "I shall leave Bologna with my walking-stick and wooden flask, and shall sleep at Pianoro. If any one has anything to say to me, let him come before I leave. My death will not be celebrated at Bologna."

That evening he did set out for Florence, accompanied by his friend, Fra Basilio. The discontent of the people under Pietro's government, and Pietro's marked hostility towards himself, sorely troubled the Prior as he drew near the city, not knowing what should befall him there. Weary and foot-sore he pursued his way, when suddenly, as nature was about to sink, he was granted a vision to strengthen and encourage him. In this vision a man appeared to the tired, overwrought traveller, and accompanied him to the gate San Gallo of Florence, and then departed with this note of warning—

“Remember, that thou doest that for which thou hast been sent by God.”

Was this indeed a vision? Or was it the result of physical weakness which enfeebled the brain, and caused imaginary objects to assume the form and figure of reality? Whatever opinion may be entertained respecting this strange incident, it is unreasonable from it, or from any number of similar incidents, to stamp the character of Savonarola as that of a mere enthusiast, a dreamer of dreams, and nothing more. Luther, Knox, and Columbus also saw visions, and dreamed dreams, yet history has not thus misrepresented them. The incident is related by Burlamacchi, Savonarola's biographer, and one of his most constant and attentive hearers. There seems to be nothing strange in it, when read in the light of the times in which Savonarola lived, and of the Church to which he belonged. The visions stated to have been seen by him were only dissimilar—in respect of the object for which they were granted, and the use he made of them—to the many thousands recorded in the lives of the saints, every one of whom had his vision, dream, or miracle to relate—gifts, all of them, which the Church of Rome professes to be ordinary gifts of her grace imparted to those in communion with her. But, besides this, who can affirm that (although the age of miracles has now, and had then, passed away) God might not, upon special occasions, if so He pleased, manifest His purposes, and even Himself, in a way different from His ordinary dealings with the sons of men.

CHAPTER VI.

Extracts from Sermons.

“What thou art in the sight of God, that thou truly art.”

Thomas à Kempis.

S AVONAROLA was, indeed, something more than a dreamer of dreams ; and now, on his return to San Marco, he put forth all his energy to stem the torrent of practical abuses which threatened to destroy the convent.

San Marco had lately been restored to its original position, as centre of the Tuscan congregation, which was dependent only on Rome ; Savonarola, its Prior, could not, therefore, be removed from Florence, except by the Pope. And now, with a sense of freedom and security not before enjoyed, he set himself to work a thorough reformation of the convent—a reformation sorely needed. Discipline had become so relaxed, and, as a necessary consequence, morality had so declined, that at one time Savonarola had thought of retiring, with a few of his brother-monks, to a solitary mountain, where they might live as hermits. The mountain for this retreat had actually been selected, the woods ordered to be cut down ; but before this order had been obeyed, Savonarola happily took a more sober, practical view of his position, and the duty to which, as a reformer both of Church and State, he believed he had been called. To remain in the place of God’s appointment, and endeavour to work a reformation *there*, now seemed to him the path of duty, and he remained at San Marco.

Let us, however, for a moment look into the would-be hermitage which had so charmed the imagination of the Prior. In appearance it was to be plain in architecture, quite unadorned, no show of grandeur or ornament either within or without; "a place where sincere and royal poverty would not disdain to dwell." The cells were to be small, the windows and doors without bars of iron or locks; for the hermits, under the immediate protection of God, need fear no thieves; and indeed their poverty might well shield them from such intruders. The church, especially the choir, was to be free from fine wood or carved work; the pictures few, and of the most chaste and unpretending style; the vestments of plain woollen or linen fabric; the sacramental vessels inexpensive; one bell, and that a small one. In short, every part of the building was to be of the plainest description. A trusty porter was to keep the gate. When strangers asked admission, he was to inquire, "Are you simple folk?" If they answered, "We are," they were to be admitted. If not, they must withdraw, for none but simple folk might enter that abode of poverty and love. The more talented of the lay brethren were to learn useful arts, such as sculpture and painting, which could be pursued in silence, and thus prove favourable to meditation. The friars themselves were to be entirely devoted to preaching, as became men of their order. A few of the more gifted were to be trained for missionary life and work. This was the kind of convent over which Savonarola would have chosen to preside had the liberty of choice been granted him.

But now, that thought abandoned, Savonarola, confident that God would guide his steps and carry him through all difficulties, entered upon his arduous labour as a monastic reformer. His desire was, he tells us himself, "not to make hermits, but good, religious men, who should lead holy lives, and be ready to shed their blood for the salvation of souls." Bright hopes gilded the future, when, corruption subdued, faith rekindled, and love intensified, he and his friars should

go forth and conquer a world for Christ. Then should Constantinople restore Jerusalem to the faithful, and the religion of Christ be spread throughout the East. These were his hopes. But, for a work so holy, fit implements must be found—godly, self-denying men—not such, as were too many around him, who, while naming the name of Christ, did *not* depart from iniquity. The reformation he aimed to accomplish must be a thorough reformation; the vow of poverty must be revived; the last words of St. Dominic, “Be charitable, preserve humility, practise poverty with cheerfulness;” and that terribly awful malediction, “May my curse and that of God fall upon him who shall bring possessions into this order,” must no longer remain a dead letter. These words, inscribed upon the cloister walls of San Marco, must again be heard. “They must,” echoed the Prior, as, wrapt in thought, he walked those cloisters, and from time to time rekindled his enthusiasm, as he gazed on Angelico’s picture of St. Dominic, until he almost heard that awful curse fall from his lips. For that curse *had been incurred*. Possessions, enormous wealth, had been brought into the convent. The vow of poverty had been again and again broken. And what of the other vows, had they been kept? They had been, one and all, broken times without number.

Voluntary aid had of late years been withheld from the convent. In order to supply this deficiency, Savonarola established schools for instruction in the fine arts, sculpture, painting, architecture, and illuminating and copying of manuscripts. Lay brothers, and even friars who had not talent for these studies, were given suitable employment, often of a menial character, that thus their superiors might be left free to carry on their especial work—the cure of souls and the education, spiritual and intellectual, of the novices. As a help to the right interpretation of Scripture, Greek, Hebrew, and other foreign languages were taught in San Marco. These studies, the Prior fondly hoped, would yield much fruit when he and his friars entered upon their gospel mission to the East.

In study, and in strictest self-denial, Savonarola ever took the lead. He was, in truth, the living model of the principles he professed. His cell was more poorly furnished, his raiment coarser, his bed harder, than those of his friars; if severe towards them, he was more so towards himself. And thus, not driving his brethren before him, but beckoning them to follow, reformation made progress, and the convent rose rapidly in reputation. Many of the first citizens of Florence now sought, as the highest favour, admission within its walls; while neighbouring convents were anxious to unite themselves with San Marco, by becoming members of the Tuscan congregation. To this latter demand, Savonarola, wishing to walk circumspectly, and not give his enemies just cause of complaint against him, referred the decision to the Pope, as not being within the compass of his own authority. Gladly would he have welcomed all the Dominicans of Tuscany round San Marco. He was, however, disappointed in some instances. In Pisa, only four out of forty-four friars consented to the union; and at Siena, while making a tour to effect this special object, the magistrates ordered him to leave the city. He withdrew, and returned to Florence, where he was received with expressions of cordial, fervent sympathy.

A course of sermons on Psalm lxxiii., preached during Lent about this year, are considered amongst Savonarola's best. They contain a complete statement of the doctrines which he desired to photograph upon the hearts of his hearers. Thus we see that it was during the early years of Roderigo Borgia, the worst of Popes, that in Italy, the citadel of Popery, doctrines were preached and joyfully received, which, five-and-twenty years later, were proclaimed by Luther, Zuingle, Calvin, Knox, and other leaders of the Reformation. Is not this fact adequate to give to the name of Savonarola an undying interest! And it is remarkable that it was while he was preaching "faith in Christ as the gift of God for the salvation of every believer," that the Spanish Inquisition revived,

“that accursed tribunal,” as the Spaniards now call it, by the help of which Ferdinand and Isabella carried on their military operations according to the fashion of those dark times, when “priests governed politically, and princes ruled ecclesiastically.” And this, as already stated, had long been the condition of Italy, as well as of other parts of Europe; the Church and the State were not only united, but amalgamated, the Pope being temporal prince, as well as head of the Church. But the breaking up of this state of things was already at hand, brought about by political changes, when Savonarola entered upon his career as the dauntless denouncer of “princely priests and priestly princes.” He did his work without fear or favour of man; and God honoured him, using him as the breaker up of the fallow ground—the forerunner of a more enlightened class of labourers.

A few extracts from the sermons just alluded to will be read with interest:—“Faith is the gift of God, therefore my children, do not follow those who say, ‘If I were to see some miracle—some one rise from the dead—I would believe.’ Such persons deceive themselves, for faith is not a thing in our power, but is a supernatural gift—a light transmitted from above into the mind of man; and whosoever would receive this must inwardly prepare himself and humble himself before God.” . . . “But why, thou mayest ask, why are some elected and others not? The things of faith, my son, thou must search after by the light of faith and in the way which Scripture points out; further than this, thou must not go if thou dost not wish to stumble. Who art thou that repliest to God? Hath not the potter power over the clay to make of the same mass one vessel to honour, and another to dishonour. In the elect God shows His mercy, in the reprobate His justice. But if thou askest me, wherefore has God predestinated this man and not that? Why is John elected rather than Peter? My answer is, ‘It is God’s will, and there is no other answer to be given.’ Origen, who would go beyond these limits, said

that predestination depended upon merits in another life anterior to the present. Pelagius said that it depended on one's merits in this life. According to these heretics, the beginning of well-doing was from ourselves ; its consummation and perfection from God. But the Scriptures are most clear. They tell us, not in one place, but in many, that not only the end of good works, but their beginning, comes from God. And thus, in all our good works it is God who works in us. It is, therefore, not true that, through pre-existing works and merits, God gives us grace, and that by them we are predestined to the life eternal, as if works and merits were the cause of predestination. As we have said already, the will of God is the sole cause.

“Tell me, St. Peter ; tell me, Mary Magdalene, why are ye in Paradise? Ye have sinned as we have done. Thou, Peter, who hadst been witness of the Son of God, conversed with Him, heard Him preach, seen His miracles, and, with two other disciples, beheld Him transfigured on Mount Tabor, and heard the Paternal voice ; notwithstanding all this, thou afterwards deniedst Him to a low-born woman ; and thou wast again restored to favour, and made head of the Church, and art now in possession of eternal bliss. From whence hast thou derived all these blessings? Confess that thou owest them—all thy salvation—not to thy own merits, but to God.”

Speaking of love, Savonarola observes :—“Great and powerful is love, for it can do all things, prove all things, overcome all things ; nothing is done without the impulse of love. And so, charity is the greatest love among all loves, for it performs great and marvellous things. It fulfils easily and pleasantly the whole of the divine law, because it is the measure and the rule of all laws. . . . He who has this law of charity directs himself and others rightly, and rightly interprets all laws. . . . Take the example of Christ who, moved by exceeding charity, became as a little child, and made Himself in all things like unto the sons of men ; suffering hunger, thirst, cold, heat, and

sorrows. What led Him to do all this? Love. At one time He conversed with the great, at another with publicans; and He led such a life that all men and all women, little and great, rich and poor, might imitate Him, each according to his own measure and according to his own station. . . . Charity bound Christ to the Cross, charity raised Him from the dead, made Him ascend into heaven, and thus work out all the mysteries of redemption. This is the true, the only doctrine, but in these days preachers tell us only of vain subtleties."

No class of men were so sternly rebuked as the clergy. "Why," Savonarola asks, "do they tickle the ears with Aristotle, Virgil, Plato, and Plutarch? Why do they not, instead, teach that alone in which is the law and the spirit of life? The Gospel, my Christian brethren," he often said, "must be your constant companion. I speak not of the *book*, but of its *spirit*. If you have not the spirit of grace, although you carry the whole volume about with you, it will be of no avail. And how much more foolish are they who go about laden with briefs and tracts, as if they kept a stall at a fair."

CHAPTER VII.

The Bible Student.

—◆—
“The diligence of the righteous works slowly but surely.”

Schiller.

—◆—

SAVONAROLA adopted and carried to extreme length the doctrine taught in his day—that Scripture may be interpreted according to not only its literal, but also its spiritual, moral, allegorical, and analogical senses. By this mode of interpretation the Bible had almost ceased to be regarded as a record of real events: it had become, rather, a storehouse of texts to be used in theological warfare in defence of, or in opposition to, any doctrine or purpose, without reference to the original meaning of the passage of which such and such a text formed a part. But while he held fast this theory of “the manifold senses of Scripture,” his appreciation of the Scriptures themselves was far, very far, in advance of his times. It is told of him that he had learned the entire Bible by heart: that there was not a text which he could not find at any moment. And this knowledge was not merely head knowledge. By constant study and prayer, God’s word had become to him as the voice of its Divine Author, revealing deep things to his soul. And as he read and pondered over the Word, it was his habit to jot down on the margin of the page the various “inspirations” granted to him. These notes, which may still be seen in many of his Bibles, were written solely for his private study. From these, numbers of his sermons were prepared, for Savonarola never

doubted the correctness of any interpretation, however wild or extravagant, which "the manifold senses of Scripture" allowed to a text or passage.

As a general rule, the Bible—"The Sword of the Spirit"—was the weapon with which he fought and won the battle as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come. For every thought which arose within his mind, every abuse he would correct, every event, however extraordinary and unexpected, he believed to be at hand, the Bible, as he interpreted it, provided a text. But while this was his general rule, there were occasions, and not few, when, carried away by excitement and religious fervour, he preached, as undeniable truth, that which had been revealed to him by vision, without at the same time, bringing Scripture authority for his statements; and, bearing in mind his highly imaginative temperament, his ascetic life, and protracted vigils, it is not surprising that, brought up in a Church which maintains that miraculous gifts still exist within her communion, Savonarola, under the conviction that he himself was a partaker of those gifts, should have allowed his imagination to overpower his judgment. The Bible, too, as he read it, instead of serving as a check to these excesses of fancy, rather stimulated them.

His sermons prove this to have often been the case. Believing the state of things in Italy to have been prefigured by the words and even the events of Old Testament history, he unhesitatingly applied passages in which God's wrath is denounced against the wicked, to that land and to its people. For Judah, Israel, Ephraim, he substituted Florence, Italy, Rome; and, assured that "the same judgment tracks the same vices still," he hurled the most awful denuncements of Divine judgment against those places which, either by vision or by dream, he had seen marked for destruction. As he said himself, his words were "as the hail which destroys all who have no shelter." It would appear, indeed, that in the Florentine reformer, this one idea of Divine judgment being the means by

which sinners should be brought to repentance—the world improved—was always predominant. He did not see that the Gospel, preached with simplicity, and brought home to the heart by the Holy Spirit, is the only effectual means to that end; nor did he himself clearly perceive that love is the distinguishing characteristic of the Gospel of Christ. Therefore it was that in his earnest longing for the conversion of the wicked he turned most frequently to the terrible scenes of Scripture history as the best suited to his purpose. The flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Pharaoh and his hosts drowned in the Red Sea—these, and others similar, were his favourite themes.

This application of Old Testament history and prophecy to modern times was but a step to the belief that he himself, to whom God had made known the interpretation, was invested with the authority of a prophet. But in claiming to himself this gift, Savonarola distinctly affirmed that it was “from God, and God alone,” as “God alone beholds future and contingent things.” He rejected, as Satanic, all arts of divination, and especially astrology, against which he wrote a treatise. His love for the Bible made him earnestly desire that all, both clergy and laity, should study it; that it should have free course, and be glorified throughout the length and breadth of the land. “People of Florence!” he exclaimed in one of his sermons, “give yourselves to the study of God’s Word. The first blessing is to understand it. Let us publicly confess this truth. The Scriptures have been locked up. Their light has been almost extinguished, set aside, left in the dust.”

While God’s judgments were undoubtedly *the* burthen of Savonarola’s preaching, other subjects were not altogether lost sight of. One of the most remarkable passages to be found in his writings occurs in his twenty-second sermon on the Book of Job, in which he condemns, on the authority of the New Testament, that system of Mariology so especially dear to Italian Roman Catholics:—“You may,” he says, “perhaps

enquire why, since the Virgin is in highest degree to be praised, I so rarely preach about her : and I, first beg to ask *you* why the Holy Spirit has, in so few instances, made mention of her in the Scriptures, and why the primitive saints preached not, or but little, about her? And should you say that, in these days people are more devoted to her than were those primitive saints and fathers, I should deem such an answer nothing to the purpose, nor even credible : for we see that the Apostles, who so much loved and honoured her, have made little or no mention of her in their writings. How did this happen? The Apostles have not written about the Virgin, because *our salvation depends on faith in Christ*, and they who were wholly bent upon this point *preached nothing but Christ*. Besides, in consequence of the great light they had from God, their views were wholly fixed on Him, and not on the creature. Favoured with that great light, the Apostles had no need to have recourse to such a topic to excite people to faith : yet they did not the less feel for her the greatest love and reverence. Besides, had the Apostles recorded the praises of the Virgin, and dwelt on her profound humility, her immense charity, and her other boundless virtues, people would probably have read *the Gospel of the Virgin* more than *the Gospel of the acts of Christ*, and would have *made a Divinity of her*, and have regarded her as such. The devotion of people towards the Virgin is very great ; even wicked men have a greater fear and dread of blaspheming her than any other being. Since, then, the object of the Apostles was to praise and exalt Christ, and to prove that He alone is God, and that He, and He alone, is the Messiah who came to save the world, I, like them, have attempted, as you well know, for many years to preach according to the Scripture ; and since the Scripture makes little mention of the Virgin, it has not been my habit to speak much of her.”

Faith was not to Savonarola a vague, lifeless principle. His definition of it is clear, and, in sermon after sermon, he stated it. “ In faith,” he said, “ everything depends on appropriation.

Not only must we say, 'Thou art King, O God,' but 'Thou art MY God and MY King; MY God whom I desire, and MY God in whom I trust.' That great doctrine of the Reformation, justification through faith in the righteousness of Christ, he held fast. "Every confidence in ourselves," he declared, "is false; that confidence is just, and none other, which is based on the sufficiency of Christ Jesus; for His merit is boundless, and of boundless power; its source is in the Godhead; it comes from that might which abideth in Jesus without measure." What marvellous light is here shining in darkness!

With the conviction ever present to his mind that a violent death awaited him, and probably at no distant period, Savonarola thus nerves himself and his hearers for the trial:—"Ask the martyrs whether it was good for them to adhere unto God. Had not their faith and constancy been sustained by His grace, they could not have endured their inconceivable sufferings. This it was which rendered them proof against the nails, the rack, the gridiron, and the flames. Since it proved thus good for them to adhere unto God, it must be equally good for you and for me." Then, in a strain of lofty exaltation, he exclaims:—"Thou, Lord, art my Supreme Good, without admixture of evil: Thou art my Joy without sorrow; my Strength without weakness; my essential Truth without error! Thou, Lord, art my All in All! Thou kindlest the affections into love, and Thou canst purify all the powers of the mind and heart. It is, therefore, good for me to draw nigh to God; and in the end of all things Thou, O God, wilt glorify the body as well as the soul, by raising it up incorruptible and immortal, spiritual and impassable. Yes, it is good to draw nigh to God, and on Him to rest all our hopes—not on earthly possessions, money, power, or worldly reputation—not on friends or relatives; for, 'Cursed is the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm;' but, 'Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is.'"

The habit of those times to decide vexed questions of philo-

sophy, not by the investigation of facts, but by isolated texts of Scripture, or by a quotation from some old author, was sternly opposed by Savonarola as the abuse of both time and Scripture. "The doctors and preachers of the present day," he complained, "whose duty it is to awaken the dead in sin to newness of life, know not how to set about it. Instead of this—their duty—they amuse their hearers with curious questions and subtleties, or with fine similes and brilliant quotations from Aristotle and Virgil, Ovid and Cicero, or from the beautiful poems of Danté or Petrarch, which, used for such a purpose, are strains of death; for, instead of reviving torpid souls, they tend to lull the living into a deadly slumber." "O my God!" he exclaimed, "what can equal the infatuation of those modern teachers and theologians who thus attempt to explain the great doctrines of salvation by authorities derived from pagan authors! Of them and of their teaching it may well be said: 'But Israel doth not know.'"

When we consider the dark days in which his lot was cast, does not Savonarola's insight into spiritual things surprise us? Taking these words of Jeremiah for his text: "After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts," he applies them to illustrate the transforming influence of the Gospel of Christ. "The latter times," he says, "are those of the Messiah, who should communicate the grace of His Spirit to His disciples." "And St. Paul," he adds, "writes thus to the Corinthians, 'Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men.' 'Written,' he goes on to say, 'not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.' And to the Romans he writes thus:—'The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.' That is to say, the written law is the law of life written on the heart, when it instrumentally imparts life by uniting the soul to Jesus Christ in faith and love." "It is well," he tells the Florentines, "to carry about this Gospel-

I do not mean the written Gospel, though it *is* well for you to carry this about reverently ; but if you possess not the grace of the Holy Spirit, carry as many printed copies as you will—nay, even all the four Gospels—they will avail you nothing.” “Still more deluded,” he adds, “are they who carry about their necks multitudes of texts by which they hope to be saved, and think that, no matter how much evil they do, God is bound to protect them on account of these charms. Deluded that they are !”

Savonarola had learned these things from God’s word. But along with these, he held fast to others which the Scriptures had not taught him. The Prior of San Marco was not a thorough reformer ; to the last he was held in bondage by many Romish errors. His belief in the doctrine of purgatory is evidenced by his sermon preached upon the death of his friend, Prince Pico, besides other of his writings. His belief in the efficacy of prayers to departed saints was undoubted. Some have affirmed of him that he had been heard to say that Christ, himself, had ordered that His mother, the blessed Virgin Mary, should be worshipped. If it be so, such a statement is strangely at variance with his condemnation of Mariology already quoted, and with the marked omission of the Virgin’s name, with that of her Divine Son, in the benediction with which he closes his letters to various members of his family.

Inconsistencies in his views of truth ought not to surprise us. And surely, his love for the Lord Jesus Christ, his reverence for God’s Word, his fervent desire to win souls for Christ, stand out bright and clear, both in his writings and in his every-day life. If he failed to attain to that fulness of the measure of Christian truth to which Luther attained, and we deny not he *did* so fail, it must not be forgotten that he lived before Luther, that his lot was cast in darker days, and in the most iniquitous land, under the worst of Popes. “Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity,” are words comprehensive enough to embrace Girolamo Savonarola.

CHAPTER VIII.

Reformation in Literature and Art.

“If I do this, what further can I do?”

“Why, more than ever. Every task thou doest,
Brings strength and capability to act.

He who doth climb the difficult mountains
Will, the next day, outstrip an idler man.”

BARRY CORNWALL.

THE fifteenth century, the last of the Middle Ages, was emphatically an age of progress and transition. The capture of Constantinople by the Turks (1453), so lamented as the sure precursor of the downfall of Christianity, led to the revival of literature, and thus proved a blessing in disguise. But while this revival was most useful in *helping on* the Reformation, it would have been powerless in itself to effect that grand movement. For, in fact, the New Learning not seldom took the form of a new heathenism within the Church. This was especially its aspect in Italy—the most corrupt portion of Christendom—the land also which, for a long while, surpassed all others in devotion to classical antiquity. That which was ancient—in other words, heathenish—commanded the admiration of the Italian “humanists,” as these were called, to the exclusion of all else. And what followed? While remaining within the Church, they lived without God in the world: even the semblance of Christianity they cast away; heathenish in their lives, they openly denied the immortality of the soul, the judgment after death. It was easy to tell the source from which they drew their inspiration.

Savonarola saw the evil, and earnestly protested against it. From his first coming to Florence he detected this impress of paganism in everything. "Men of noblest minds," he says, "openly avowed themselves infidels—by their manner of life, their sentiments and actions—in their convents, as well as in their schools." This state of things sorely troubled him, and now, as Prior of San Marco, he set himself to work a thorough reformation in every branch of literature. It was a gigantic task, but, in firm reliance upon that Divine aid which he believed could never fail him, he determined to act with the authority which his office conferred on him.

But it is an injustice towards Savonarola to represent him as an indiscriminate assailant of ancient literature. The conflict upon which he now entered was not one between an ignorant fanatic, on the one hand, and the march of intellect on the other. He was, at least, as well acquainted with the classics as any of his contemporaries. His desire was not to exclude these from the schools, but to check that enthusiastic study of them which, while promoting artistic and other material improvements, led also to the corruption of Christian faith and morals. Believing Holy Scripture to be the basis of all true education, he, both publicly and in private, rebuked those teachers who "poisoned the mind by exclusively directing attention to the fables of Greek mythology and the heroes of ancient Republics, while Scripture was kept in the background." To counteract this evil, he suppressed some "private but corrupting books." "Why?" he indignantly asked—"Why should Livy and Thucydides, who only wrote the history of the past, be allowed to occupy the whole attention of students, while Jewish historians of the Old Testament, who, along with the history of the past, combined the figurative history of the future, are totally neglected?"

Savonarola's vivid imagination, which led him to perceive a spiritual meaning in everything, gave him a peculiar facility in teaching, whether in quiet, familiar talk with a friend, or when

occupying the pulpit or the professor's chair; and now, while exhorting Florence to beware of intellectual idolatry, he brought passage after passage of Scripture to strengthen and enforce the prohibition. The command to Isaac, not to take a wife from the daughters of Canaan, he regarded as a prophetic warning to Christians not to seek truth in heathen writings. The Jews, who loathed manna in the wilderness, and sighed for the fleshpots of Egypt, taught, he said, the same lesson, inasmuch as they prefigured those who, having God's Word at their command, neglected it for the study of Pagan philosophy. The study of Scripture, both the Old Testament and the New, was the ruling passion of his life; and when he recommended it to others his words came home with power to the hearts of many, and, in some cases, proved a savour of blessing. "Believe," he said, "believe in the all-sufficiency of the Word, and in the wisdom of Christ, who has left you His precepts so clearly expressed that no human wisdom is required to explain them. It has been said that logic and philosophy confirm the soul in faith, as if the superior light needed to borrow lustre from the inferior." . . . "Go into all the schools of Florence; you will find professors paid to teach logic and philosophy, and instructors for all the Arts and Sciences, but NOT ONE to undertake the teaching of Holy Scripture." . . . "Dost thou not perceive, vain philosopher," he asks, "that in resting faith on the profane sciences, thou degradest it? Call to mind David going against Goliath; lay aside the weighty armour of profane study, and arm thyself, after the example of apostles and martyrs, with a lively and simple faith." . . . "Oh, Florence!" exclaimed the impassioned preacher, at the close of one of his sermons, "deal with me as thou wilt. I have mounted the pulpit this day to tell thee that thou wilt not destroy my work, because it is the work of Christ. Whether I live or die, the seed I have sown will not the less bear fruit. If my enemies are powerful enough to drive me from thy walls, I shall not be grieved; I shall find some desert where I can

take refuge with my Bible, and enjoy repose which thy citizens shall not be able to disturb."

The evil effect of the exclusive cultivation of classical literature pervaded all branches of education. In the study of Art, pagan models were set forth as the standard of excellence, instead of those which had been, as the faithful believed, executed under direct inspiration; and, what was even far more degraded and degrading, the most objectionable characters were often selected by artists for their models. Consequently, their works were sensibly deteriorated. "Madonnas, Magdalens, and saints were picked up" anywhere, and, by the transforming power of paint, they became "holy, humble women, even saints in glory." The injury to those called upon to worship before such pictures can be imagined. Savonarola shuddered at the thought. It had not been always thus. "We painters," wrote a pupil of Giotto, "occupy ourselves in tracing saints on the walls and altars, in order that, by this means, many may, to the great despite of the demons, be drawn to virtue and piety."

In carrying out his reformation, Savonarola, impressed by the conviction that "extreme danger justifies extreme measures," required newly-converted parents, as a first pledge of their fidelity, to part with every object which could, even in a remote degree, be conceived impure. He reminded them that Aristotle had, by the light of pagan philosophy alone, discerned the danger of allowing the eye to become familiar with such objects. But he knew well that the putting away of impure things did not necessarily result in any purifying of the heart—that the cure must be wrought within; for, out of the heart proceed all manner of evil. Therefore with all the energy of his soul, he exhorted his hearers to strive after *inward* purity, that, the fountain being cleansed, the streams which flowed from it might be pure also. As might have been expected, fierce opposition followed these efforts. Priests there were who even refused absolution to those who attended the Prior's lectures. Their hostility was known to him; but though he did not

count upon much fruit of his work and labour of love in his own day, he hoped for much from those who were yet children. His simple, loving heart delighted in children—"the innocent and cherished portion of his flock." Earnestly did he entreat these to remember his words; not to let them slip away unheeded, but to see that they bore fruit when he himself should be no more. Sometimes he reminded them that in their hands might yet be placed the government and guidance of their country, the education of a generation yet unborn. Then, turning to mothers, he would exhort them to watch over their children as mothers only could watch; while he warned fathers that their duty it was to provide the best education for their sons; not to neglect the study of Horace, and Virgil, and Cicero, but to place, also, in their hands the best books of St. Jerome and St. Augustine, "in order that youth might not receive a lesson of paganism without at the same time acquiring a knowledge of Christianity, and he thus simultaneously taught eloquence and truth."

Martin Luther was intensely fond of music. He used to say, "He who despises music, as all fanatics do, will never be my friend." His hymns did the Reformation cause good service; these penetrated where his sermons and other printed works could not gain entrance. "The whole people," wrote a Romanist of that day, "is singing itself into this Lutheran doctrine." Music and poetry have, undoubtedly, in all ages exerted a secret and invincible power over the human heart, whether for good or for evil. Chrysostom, in one of his works, exhorts "all men and women, and little children, to sing the Psalms of David as a means of associating themselves with the company of angels."

Lorenzo de Medici did more than any of his contemporaries to corrupt Florence through the medium of music. His ballads, composed expressly to be sung at masquerades during the Carnival, were so abominable that no one would now dare to sing them in the public streets; and yet, so depraved was the

taste, so low the standard of public opinion in that miscalled "Golden Age," that men ventured to say that the "Divina Commedia" of Danté was inferior to the "Canti Carnascialeschi" of Lorenzo de Medici!

To check this torrent of evil, Savonarola proposed to restore to the Church those simple, expressive chants bequeathed to her from time immemorial, such as the "Veni Creator;" while, to allure the people from Lorenzo's rhymes and ballads, he gave them sacred songs composed by himself, and adapted to popular music. Well aware of the difficulty of the task he had undertaken, he trained choirs of children to sing "the sweet melodies which, as a perfume, had been bequeathed by their pious ancestors," thus hoping to win their listeners into the right way. He was at first fiercely opposed, but undaunted, he pursued his way, neither turning to the right hand nor to the left. His hope of future blessing as the fruit of his labour, sustained him under the many trials which beset his path. And he was not disappointed in his hope. Success, beyond his most sanguine expectations, was granted him; success, which seemed to his grateful heart as "a miracle of Divine mercy, almost an anticipation of heavenly reward." Perhaps there was nothing in which his marvellous influence was more perceptible than in the change of public opinion upon this subject of Art and other branches of education. With children, Savonarola could do almost anything. He used to say that "a child protected from sin until of age to exercise self-judgment acquires so great a purity of mind and heart that the angels of heaven delight to converse with him."

And now, under his gentle sway, Florentine children, heretofore so bold and rough, yielded to his every wish, attended his sermons, joined heart and soul with him in devotional exercises, chanting hymns of praise to God, and singing those pure, sacred songs which were yet, their teacher fondly hoped, to bring back an older generation into the paths of peace and holiness.

CHAPTER IX.

Charles the Eighth Invades Italy.

Treason doth never prosper, what's the reason?
Why, if it prosper, none dare call it treason.

SIR JOHN HARRINGTON.

CHARLES VIII. of France, having recently made peace with England, Austria, and Spain, now accepted the invitation of Ludovico il Moro, Duke of Milan, to invade Italy, and assert his claim to the crown of Naples. This claim on the part of Charles had been the subject of political discussion for ten previous years, and, if not settled by negotiation, was sure to result in war.

Childish in character, Charles looked forward to this expedition as "a sort of chivalrous pleasure-jault on a large scale." Nothing was talked of at the French court but the wealth of the Italian provinces—wealth which would, no doubt, fall to the victorious French; while the Pope would not fail to bestow rich benefices upon those whose arms heaven had blessed. So, with joyful heart, Charles started for the Castle of Montils, near Tours, and proceeded to Lyons. There, however, he paused to amuse himself; and soon all the money—and it was but little—he had collected for the war was spent, and he had no resource left but to borrow from wealthy bankers.

This alacrity on the part of Charles was more than Il Moro had expected or desired, and he began to doubt the wisdom of the step he had taken. From more than one quarter he had

been warned not to invite Charles to enter Italy. Henry VII. of England wrote an earnest letter, setting forth the danger of forming an alliance with a power whose "lust for extending their sway, and conquering the dominions of others, was too manifest to need demonstration." But Ludovico was deaf to warning and remonstrance, and now regret was unavailing; he could not retrace his steps.

Strange to say, while Italy—the country to be invaded—encouraged the invader, France, the king and his court excepted, was, from the first, against the enterprise. Nevertheless, Charles crossed the Alps, and entered Turin on the 5th of September, with an army such as Italy had never before seen—a splendid infantry, "thirty-six cannons upon carriages, each carriage having four wheels" (a new thing in those days); while hundreds of gallant cavaliers, supplied by the nobility of France and Scotland, swelled the ranks.

As rumour after rumour preceded the invaders, Charles was compared by some to Charlemagne, by others to Cyrus; and this state of public excitement rose almost to frenzy under the amazing influence—both in and out of the pulpit—of the Prior of San Marco, who, during the next four years, occupied the foremost place in Florentine history.

In truth, Savonarola was the only man who could control the passions of the people. A loud "Amen" was their response to whatever he uttered in those days, when he held the reins and turned the people which way he pleased. His own enthusiasm—so hot, so fervent—was shared by all who came within the magic circle of his influence; what he said, they firmly believed, so marvellous was his power. On each successive saint's day, Savonarola preached from the pulpit of the Duomo. Noah building the Ark was his subject—an ark to be composed, not of gopher wood, but of those virtues, the absence of which had brought Florence to her present degraded condition. Sermon after sermon the preacher, plank by plank, built up the Ark, in which such as should be saved were to find refuge.

The flood he had foretold long before at Brescia, was, he declared, now about to burst upon the ungodly.

What the nature of the coming judgment was to be, the preacher did not as yet indicate ; and as each sermon closed without the wished-for—and yet sorely-dreaded—details, excitement rose to almost frenzy. Savonarola tells us that he felt as if held back by some superior power from defining what should be the character of the flood which he foretold. Day by day the people, by hundreds and thousands, flocked to the Duomo to learn this, and went away disappointed. Many coming in from the country had to travel all night, and when morning dawned, were found at the city gates waiting for admission.

Was Florence prepared for war? No, she was not. The Medician rule had rendered her essentially unwarlike, and as reports reached the city, representing the invaders as “infinite in numbers and of gigantic stature,” her heart died within her ; for were not these reports as a running commentary upon those strange sermons to which, for months past, she had been listening? The flood of waters ! Was it not fit emblem of avenging wrath and purifying mercy ? and as such, the divinely indicated symbol of the French army—that scourge, whose coming Savonarola had proclaimed years before. Behold its fulfilment at the door ! Thus reasoned, not the wild enthusiast alone, but learned and cultivated men, the deepest thinkers in Florence—the most intellectual of Italian cities. For the preacher’s firm belief in his Divine mission had cast its spell upon his hearers ; it was to them, as to himself, a great reality, and they awaited, with shuddering awe, the fulfilment of his prophecy—the flood about to descend upon the guilty land and yet more guilty Church.

The arrival of Charles at Turin was not known in Florence until the 21st of September. That day was a memorable day, both for Savonarola and his audience in the Duomo, which was even more densely crowded than usual. Such was the

anxiety to hear him, that every place **was** occupied for hours before service began. At last the great orator appeared. All was silence and attention as he ascended the pulpit. With a calm gaze he looked around, and marked the ill-concealed trepidation which pervaded the vast multitude. After a moment's silence, suddenly, and with a loud voice, he cried, "Behold! I will bring the waters over the earth." That announcement was as a thunder-clap, filling every heart with terror. Prince Pico, who was in the church at the time, said afterwards that, as he listened, a shudder ran through his entire frame, and the hair of his head stood on end. Savonarola tells us that he himself was not less moved than his hearers. In their terror the people pressed towards the pulpit, as if to implore protection from him whose words had so appalled them. All his prophetic utterances had hitherto proved true—the princes whose death he had foretold, had all three descended into the grave—and now the avenging sword he had foreseen was already at the gate. And not only in Florence, but all throughout Italy, every eye turned to Savonarola for help and counsel, and thus the party by whom he was supported became, as by a stroke of magic, masters of the city.

There were three political factions in Florence—the "Piagnoni" (weepers)—fast friends of Savonarola and zealous advocates for liberty—were the most powerful. United, as one man, to procure the restoration of the Republic, and stern opposers of the popular vices, they exercised a powerful influence during the remaining history of the Florentine Commonwealth. These Piagnoni were easily recognised; their dress peculiar, their manners stern, they advocated the strictest discipline, as their name indeed implied. Day after day, their sombre processions deepened the gloom of the city. The weapons of their warfare were spiritual—prayer, and the sermons of their leader, Savonarola.

The "Arrabbiati," or "the frantic," formed the second

party. These were aristocrats, and indulged in the most abominable vices. Their aim was to establish an oligarchy, and they were equally hostile to the Medici and to Savonarola and his followers. Their hatred of the latter was the more bitter, because of their strict standard of morals and their democratic views.

The Medici and their friends—called the “Bigi,” or grey—formed the third and weakest party. Of these three factions, the first and third generally united in opposing the second, while this latter party dreaded the first more than the third.

By slow and sure degrees, Charles reached Rome; and as intelligence of cruelties perpetrated by his troops preceded him, Italy awoke to a sense of danger. With a “fool” at her head, Florence had good cause to tremble, and many cherished the hope that the days of Pietro, as Lord of Florence, were drawing to a close. These hopes soon gave birth to schemes by which to drive him from Florence, as the increasing necessity for wise and energetic measures brought out to view his utter incapacity for government. Though fierce and cruel by nature, he was unable to take a grave view of any subject. Even in those days of extremest danger to Florence and to himself, he was often seen playing at ball in the streets!

This playing at ball, however, came to an end when news reached the city that “the terrible Frenchmen,” and yet more “terrible Swiss,” were at her very gates. The pent-up wrath of months past burst forth fiercely against the incapable ruler, who now at length saw the peril which threatened him from without, and the greater peril of an exasperated populace within the city. Trembling and panic-stricken, Pietro looked this way and that for shelter from the coming storm, but could see none; and, seized by a judicial folly, he took that fatal step which to the full revealed the extent of his incapacity.

What was this step? and what suggested it to the mind of the “fool”? He remembered that when his father, Lorenzo,

was at war with Naples in 1491, he obtained access to King Ferdinand, and thus obtained peace for Florence and security for himself. Pietro thinks he cannot do better than follow his father's example, and gain an audience from Charles. So, without delay he, accompanied by a few friends, rode to Sarzana, where Charles had halted. He there asked for a safe conduct, which was readily granted; and then at once waited on the king.

Charles was prepared with his demands; and Pietro, frightened to death, granted them. Pisa and Leghorn were ceded without one word of remonstrance. Well satisfied with himself, the traitor returned to Florence, having made up his mind to offer, as apology for his baseness, the declaration of the French king, that, "upon no other terms than those named and accepted, would he promise that his troops should traverse Tuscany, not as foes, but as friends."

But, did Pietro think this apology would be accepted? What! if he were questioned concerning the terms upon which he had made so great a sacrifice? Were they honourable? such as Florence would be justified in accepting, in those days of her decline, truly, but not, as yet, of her degradation? These were weighty questions; but they signified little to him, who thought only of his own personal safety and relief from present terror.

It was on the 8th of November that Pietro arrived at the Palazzo Publico, to give an account of his negociation. On his way thither, he became, in some degree, aware of the tone of public opinion towards himself. During his absence discontent against his government had risen to a fearful height. To have left the city in her extremity was an act which nothing could justify. Not one of his friends had a word to say in his defence; while the majority of the citizens openly declared that, if despotic rule had been barely tolerable under Lorenzo, the Magnificent, it was utterly *intolerable* under Pietro, the "Fool"! And now, some of the leading men changed sides,

and, from having been "creatures of the Medici," became bitter foes to him who bore that name. It was but a few days previous to Pietro's return to Florence that Luca Corsini, during a discussion upon the state of the city—nominally a free Commonwealth, but really the victim of despotic tyranny—started to his feet, rushed "furiously," says Guicciardini, to the great bell in the piazza, that "jealously guarded bell-ropes," which could in a moment send dismay, insurrection, and revolution, booming over the city. So it did then; in a few moments the Piazza was filled with multitudes excited to frenzy, ready to restore liberty to Florence at any cost. Had Pietro heard of that day?

Making his way now through the excited crowd, he reached the Palazzo. The Signory heard his tale of duplicity in silence. To that august body the details did not appear to call for thanks, and they thanked him not. Pietro left their presence, ill at ease in his own mind, and with anxious forebodings respecting the future. The following morning he summoned five hundred horsemen to his aid. But the day had gone by when troops could command quietness in Florence. Every member of the Signory declared hostility to the "fool," while the infuriated citizens thirsted for his blood. Baffled in every attempt to arrest the leading malcontents, Pietro, escorted by his mounted body-guard, rode to the great gates of the Palazzo, where the Signory were assembled. Finding them closed and barred, he commanded them to be opened. But this order was not the "Open, Sesame" of past days. No authority invested the Medici name—once "the crushing heel of all opposition." Friends of the father had become enemies of the son; and now, while some of the Signory kept watch behind the doors lest they should be forced from without, Pietro was informed that there was no admission for him; unless he "pleased to enter alone by the postern," the great gates would not open to him—no, never. Thinking discretion to be the part best suited to him at that moment, Pietro returned to the city.

Scarcely had he reached it, when he heard the startling intelligence that the Signory had, to a man, declared him "a rebel and an outlaw." In despair he mounted his horse, and passing through the San Gallo gate, while cries of "Popolo," "Liberta," rent the air, galloped away to Bologna. His brother Giovanni, then Cardinal of Nemours—afterwards Leo x.—the most popular of Lorenzo's sons, unwilling to believe that all was lost, addressed the people from the street, amidst a shower of stones flung from the windows and tops of the houses. But all efforts to stem the torrent were unavailing, and Giovanni was glad to follow his brother to Bologna.

CHAPTER X.

An Unwelcome Guest.

“ And there was mounting in hot haste,
Or whispering with white lips—
‘The foe! they come! they come!’”

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage.

SAVONAROLA was not in Florence at the moment of Pietro's flight: he had been sent some days previously to Pisa to learn the intentions of Charles respecting Florence. Before he left the city he preached in the Duomo, and closed his sermon with these words of encouragement and of warning:—
“The Lord has heard your prayers; He has caused a great revolution to end peaceably. He, alone, has come to the help of the city, then abandoned by all other helpers. Watch, and you will see the disasters which will befall other cities. Persevere then, oh people of Florence! in good works and in peace. If you wish the Lord to persevere in His mercy towards yourselves, be merciful to your enemies; unless you are so, the chastisements, now preparing for the rest of Italy, will fall upon you. The Lord saith unto you, ‘I will have mercy!’ Woe to those who disobey the command.” After the sermon, Savonarola set out for Pisa on foot—his usual mode of travelling.

The ambassadors sent forward to accompany him into the presence of Charles, reached Pisa the day before he did. Admitted into the Royal presence—they, in the name of the Republic, informed Charles that Florence would treat him as

a friend if he would so treat her. An evasive reply was returned; the king declined to bind himself to any line of conduct, and refused to sign the treaty presented to him.

The ambassadors having failed, Savonarola, alone, waited upon Charles. Clothed in the garb of Prior of San Marco, and with the open Gospels in his hand, he made his way through lines of armed men. The king, surrounded by his generals, received him courteously, and Savonarola, pointing to the Book he held, said, in a voice of calm authority—"Great King, thou minister of Divine justice, the mercy of God has long borne with the grievous sins of Italy, graciously waiting for her repentance. Despite the most sacred obligations, she has lifted up her meretricious and adamant face till, at length, the hour of Divine vengeance is at hand. To His unworthy servant now before thee, He revealed, more than five years ago, His purpose of reforming the Church by means of severe chastisement. From that time to this, that servant has never ceased urgently to call the people to repentance. Men of all classes will affirm this assertion. Few believed the words spoken, while multitudes derided them. At length, thou art come, O King! as the minister of God—the minister of justice: may thine arrival prove to us altogether propitious! But, most gracious King, give ear to my words and apply them to thy heart. The unworthy servant of God, to whom these things have been revealed by the Holy Spirit, admonishes thee that, after His example, thou must in all things incline to mercy, but, most of all, towards the city of Florence which, although it labours under a heavy load of transgression, contains many true servants of God of both sexes. For their sake thou must preserve the city, that we may with a more quiet mind pray for thee, and render God propitious to thee in this expedition. Therefore, O King! be warned to defend the innocent, the widows and orphans, and all who need and deserve mercy; but most of all that thou protect those devoted to Christ in nunneries, lest, through thee, sin should super-

abound, and the strength granted to thee from on high be turned into weakness."

The character of Charles (as drawn by Guicciardini) was not calculated to encourage Savonarola to expect much attention from him: "Rash, unstable, uncultivated in mind; young and good-natured, but one who never thought of the consequences likely to result from any step, however unwise, he chose to take, still less did he regard a promise, whether voluntarily given, or extorted from him." And yet the Prior of San Marco *did* indulge the hope that his words had made an impression on one "unstable as water." Accustomed to influence large masses of people,—so that they saw with his eyes, heard with his ears, believed what he believed,—could Savonarola doubt his power now?

But his words fell unheeded on the dull ear of the French king. Equally unsuccessful as his brother-ambassadors had been, no entreaty could prevail to induce Charles to sign a treaty promising security to Florence. All he would engage to do was, to "arrange everything when he reached the great city." This was not much to reckon upon; yet Savonarola returned to Florence not without hope that good would result from his mission. He reflected with satisfaction upon the astonishment with which Charles had heard himself designated, "the Rod of God;" and having left Pisa immediately after the royal interview, he was not aware that astonishment had given place to indifference, in the mind of the king.

At last, on Sunday, November 17th, Florence threw open her gates for Charles to enter as "a friend." His entry was on a scale of magnificence such as that city had never before witnessed. And yet many a French cavalier felt ill at ease amidst the splendour of which he formed a part. The Florentines too, dearly as they loved a show, would have enjoyed such a spectacle, as the present, more in any other city than Florence—the "well-beloved." And as they gathered at the corners of the streets, and with anxious eye watched the

Frenchmen passing through them, mutterings, here and there, were heard which boded no good to the strangers should the populace gain the upper hand.

And yet, marvellous to relate, the arrival of Charles and his hosts took place without any breach of the peace. The king himself was extremely courteous in manner. When two of the Signory were taking their places—one at each side of his horse, thus to lead him through the city, according to the etiquette of those days, Charles declined the honour. Some hinted that, fear to trust himself to those of whom he knew nothing, prompted the refusal. And in truth danger, though unseen, surrounded the king and his army. Large bodies of armed men lay hidden in the churches and monasteries, ready to rush out at the slightest provocation.

It is not easy to account for the want of caution on the part of Charles, in marching with his army through a city trained in all the intricacies of street-warfare—a city too, whose citizens he feared even more than they feared him. Such temerity was probably owing to the prevailing belief that he and his army were acting under the immediate guidance of God, who having hitherto prospered their arms would assuredly continue to do so.

Passing over the Porto Vecchio, Charles reached the Duomo, where he paused to attend Divine service. Then, remounting, he soon reached the Palace of the Medici, where magnificent preparations had been made to receive him. Dazzled by splendour such as their eyes had never before gazed on, the invaders felt, more keenly than they cared to express, the contrast between the civilization of Italian life and the comparative dullness and poverty of “*La belle France.*”

But now, a report spread through Florence that Pietro, the detested tyrant, was at the gates ready to rush in, followed by a host of armed men. Instantly, the great alarm-bell was heard all over the city, calling warriors to spring out of the very earth, as it were, while the streets swarmed with citizens,

and barricades were erected as if by magic. On that day the Frenchmen had their first experience of city barricades—their first, but not their last! The rumour, however, which gave rise to this excitement was false, but the effect it produced did good rather than harm, by showing the strangers something of the temper of Florence when necessity called it forth.

Angry discussion was going on at the same time between Charles and the Signory. First of all, he demanded for himself large sums of money in consideration of his poverty; as if it were reasonable that Italy should defray the costs of her own invasion. Then, he desired the recall of Pietro, and his re-installment as first citizen of Florence—notwithstanding his late treachery. For himself, he claimed the sovereignty of the city, and the establishment within her walls of a body of men to represent himself and govern in his name. Charles made these demands upon the ground that “a conqueror has a right to make what terms he pleases with a conquered people.” Which assertion, assuming as it did that Florence had been conquered, was received by the Signory with a burst of indignation.

It was no new thing for Florence to free herself from unwelcome intruders by the payment of money, and now, the large sums asked by Charles were freely promised. But the Florentine Commissioners thought it prudent, at the same time, to draw up a paper containing the terms upon which they engaged to fulfil that promise. This paper, however, did not meet his approval, and a fresh agreement, framed by his Majesty's advisers, was laid before the Commissioners. This document, containing the king's ultimatum expressed in most offensive language, put forth demands too exorbitant to be debated even for a moment. Stung to the quick, the Commissioners ventured to remonstrate; but Charles, interrupting them, exclaimed that, if his terms were not accepted, he should order his trumpets to sound. At these words Capponi, one of the deputies, formerly ambassador at the court of France,

flamed with rage. Starting to his feet he seized the obnoxious paper from the hand of the secretary, and tearing it in pieces cried out—"Sound you your trumpets, and we will ring our bells!"—proud words which have become immortal! Wonderful was the effect they produced. The Assembly, struck dumb with astonishment, remained silent for a moment. Capponi was leaving the room when he was recalled by the king. His Majesty did not like that threat about the ringing of bells, he had not forgotten the effect produced in the city by the ringing of *One Bell*, and hastened to take off the hard edge of his words, saying with a smile, "Ah, Capon ! Capon ! you are a wicked Capon !"

At length the terms of agreement were arranged. We shall not enter into their details, but merely state that they were signed by the contracting parties, in the Duomo of Florence, on the 26th of November. Fifty thousand ducats were immediately paid into the king's treasury, and he, on his part, promised that within two days he would leave the city and proceed on his way to Rome.

CHAPTER XI.

The Popular Preacher and Political Adviser.

“A noble aim,
Faithfully kept, is as a noble deed,
In whose pure light all virtue doth succeed.”

THE King of France has enjoyed his luxurious quarters in Florence too thoroughly to be in any hurry to pursue his way across the Apennines in the depth of winter, and the Florentines begin to see the mistake they made in giving him so cordial a reception. All classes long for his departure. Indeed, ever since his arrival a feeling of suspicion and insecurity has been abroad. Shops have been closed, business suspended, for the French soldiers, billeted upon private houses, were for ever getting into collision with the townspeople. It was impossible that this state of things could continue; and yet day after day slipped by, and Charles showed no signs of departing. So, once again, as a forlorn hope, the Signory requested Savonarola to ask audience of the king, and entreat him to leave their city. He obeyed without a moment's hesitation. Making his way through guards of soldiers, he addressed Charles in the lofty style of one who believed he had a message to him direct from God. “Most Christian prince,” said the Prior of San Marco, “thy delay here is causing serious mischief to the city and the enterprize in which thou art engaged. Thou art losing thy time, forgetful of the task imposed on thee by Providence, to the grave detriment both of thy spiritual welfare and thy worldly glory,

Listen now to the words of the servant of God : go on thy way without further delay. Take care thou dost not bring ruin on this city, and the anger of the Lord on thyself." Long afterwards, when alluding to this interview with Charles, Savonarola said, and said truly,—“ I spoke to the king as not one of you would have dared to speak, and by the grace of God he was appeased. I said things which you yourselves would not have endured, and he heard them patiently.”

Charles left Florence on the 28th of November—two days after the Prior's visit—at three o'clock in the afternoon. The joy at his departure was unbounded. Multitudes crowded the churches to thank God from the very depths of their hearts for the removal of that scourge which, whether for good or evil, had sorely chastened them.

Florence was now her own mistress, and the necessity for constructing a form of government, lest she should destroy herself, when every man felt himself at liberty to do as he pleased, became imperative. Now, again, all turned to Savonarola for guidance. He who had saved the city from being deluged with blood after Pietro's flight ; he who had sent away Charles and his detested soldiers ; he, the inspired orator, and he alone, could steer the barque of the State into safety. Reading these thoughts in the troubled looks of his audience in the Duomo, Savonarola, with permission of the Signory, preached a course of sermons upon the form of government suited to the present emergency. “ This he did,” says an old chronicler, “ without the presence of women and children, who, to very little purpose, often occupy places which should be filled by a more learned audience.”

Having stated the leading arguments in favour both of monarchical and popular government, the preacher earnestly recommended the latter as best suited to the character of the Florentines, and most in accordance with the cherished traditions of the Republic. But, naturally, the aristocratic party hesitated to trust the fortunes of the city to a government

popular on the broadest possible basis, as that the Prior recommended. Yet, to oppose his will, even had it not been backed by that of the people, would have been fraught with peril.

Into the political debates and tumults of that period we cannot enter. Savonarola never wavered in his conviction that "the only form of government adapted to Florence" was "a civil and general one." "Woe be to thee, Florence," he exclaimed from the pulpit, "if thou place at thy head one who can rule supremely over thee ; with chiefs such as these, cities must be ruined by all possible evils. Tyrant is the name of one who leads a wicked life ; more wicked than all others is the usurper of others' rights—the destroyer of his own soul and of the souls of the people. Therefore, the first law you should make is this—that no one man shall ever have a right to place himself at the head of your city ; otherwise you will build upon a bed of sand. Such men seek to rise above others, and know not how to maintain civil equality ; they are the worst of all."

"O my people," continued the impassioned orator, "you know that I have never willingly meddled with the affairs of State, and do you believe I should do so now were it not that I see a necessity for me to look into them to the saving of your souls? You are not willing to believe it, but you have seen that my words have come true—that they did not proceed from my own will, but came from God. Listen, then, to one who is seeking only your salvation. Pacify your minds, attend to the common good, forget your private interest, and if by such a course you reform your city, it will be rendered more glorious than it has ever yet been. Thus you will commence the reform of Italy, and spreading your wings over the world, bring about the reformation of all nations. Remember, that the Lord has given clear signs that He desires a renovation of all things, and that you are the people selected to begin the good work. But you must obey the commands of Him who

calls and invites you to turn to a spiritual life." "Open, O Lord," exclaimed the preacher, as he closed his address; "open, O Lord, the hearts of this people, that they may know the things that are in me; things which Thou hast revealed and communicated to me."

While placing things spiritual in the foreground, Savonarola did not lose sight of practical duties. "Cease from strife, love as brethren," he often implored his audience, and recommended that "public prayers should be offered up to the God of peace and holiness." All practical matters connected with the State passed in review before him. One and all needed reformation, and wherever he detected error, he unsparingly condemned it. Respecting taxation, his desire was, "to levy taxes solely on property, and thus put an end to loans and all arbitrary imposts." This was his advice to magistrates; then, addressing the people, he implored them to be steadfast in loving and rendering assistance to their fellow-citizens. "A son," he said, "is under such obligations to his father that he never can do enough for him. So I say to you, your country is your common father, and, therefore, you are bound, every one of you, to help it; and were any of you to say, 'I have gained no benefit from it,' you would speak ignorantly."

These discourses made such an impression upon the Signory, that they frequently consulted the preacher both in San Marco and in the Palazzo. From this time he was known in Florence as "Il Frate," and men of all classes bowed to his authority. So great was his popularity, that many of the best shops in Florence remained closed until after his morning sermon. The true character of a man is best discerned in times of trouble. Savonarola, thus tested, was not found wanting. No self-seeking on the one hand, no fear on the other, tempted him to swerve from the path into which conscience directed him. Uprightness of heart and conduct, self-devotion—which springs from self-forgetfulness—these were points in the character of "Il Frate" which could not be assailed.

But, in common with his contemporaries, he was ignorant of the fundamental principles of civil liberty, and of the means by which alone it can be secured. His life, previous to and since he had become a monk, was not calculated to give him much insight into such matters. And now that the position into which his prophetic power, even more than his burning eloquence, had brought him, demanded a knowledge of active, practical life, and some experience, too, in the details of civil government, he was not equal to the post. We cannot attempt to enter into either the cause or the extent of his failure as a political guide and ruler. This much is evident, that "he unwittingly so used the power which his own ability and the circumstances of the times had placed in his hands, as eventually to frustrate his own objects, and bring dishonour upon the cause dearest to his heart."

Let it not, however, be forgotten, when his failures are remembered, that up to this period of his history, Savonarola's influence had been exclusively for good. Hatred against tyranny, vice, and oppression, combined with love for all mankind, which burned so steadily in his own breast, had kindled a corresponding flame in many who came within the circle of his influence.

Hitherto, Savonarola had been so occupied by public preaching and private study of Scripture that, except in connection with religion, he had not meddled with politics. But now at the end of this year (1494), his sermons began to be avowedly and directly political. Not that they ceased to bear upon the subject of religion; that, they never did. Never did Savonarola cease to enforce the necessity for general and individual reformation of life, as essential to the establishment of a durable form of government.

It would appear from some passages in his writings that, at this period of his history, he had occasional misgivings as to the consistency of mingling in the turmoil and strife of political life, and, especially, of entering on that subject in the pulpit.

However, he soon satisfied himself that in this he was but "yielding to the manifest will of God." "I have spoken to God," he says, "in my own language; I have said, Lord, I confess that Thou art just, good, almighty, and that Thou art my God: that Thou hast created me out of nothing, who am but dust and ashes, yet will I speak to Thee with confidence, for Thou hast been crucified for me. Pardon me if I am too familiar in my speech: Thou, Lord, who directest all things well; Thou hast deceived me; Thou hast betrayed me, worse than man was ever betrayed. For though I have prayed, long time, that Thou wouldst grant me such grace, that I might never be compelled to the government of others; Thou hast made me just the reverse; Thou hast drawn me, little by little, into the snare; if I had seen the snare, perhaps I had not been what I am. I have done as the moth, which desires the light; when it sees the candle burning, not knowing that it burns, it singes its wings. Thou hast shown me Thy light, in which I rejoice greatly, and having told me, that it was well to make manifest that light for the salvation of men's souls, I have plunged into the fire, and burned the wings of contemplation. I have entered into a vast sea, and, with great desire, I long for the haven, and I see no way to return. Oh! my sweet haven, shall I ever find thee more. Oh! my heart, how hast thou suffered thyself to be taken away from so sweet a haven. Oh! my soul, look where thou art; surely we are in the midst of a deep sea, and the winds are adverse on every side. Lord, I say unto Thee, as Jeremiah said, 'Lord, Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived; Thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed; I am a derision daily; every one mocketh me. For since I spake I cried out, I cried violence and spoil, because the word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me and a derision daily.' And again, I will say with Jeremiah—'Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me, a man of strife, a man of contention to the whole earth.' I would go to the haven, and I find not the way; I sought rest, but I found no

place of rest ; I would be in peace, and speak no more ; but I cannot, for the word of the Lord is as a fire in my heart. His word, if I utter it not, burns my marrow and my bones. Well then, Lord, if Thou wilt that I navigate this deep sea, Thy will be done !”

The introduction into Florence of a “Monte di Pieta” now occupied Savonarola’s attention. He earnestly implored all classes to combine to promote it. “Let the women,” he said, “enrich it by their superfluities ; let every one present an offering, and let it not be of farthings, but of ducats.” There was urgent need of this “Monte di Pieta.” One had lately been established at Perugia, which proved a great blessing to the poor. In Lorenzo’s time, an attempt had been made to open one in Florence, but it had failed. After overcoming many difficulties in the way of this scheme for the common good, Savonarola had the joy of seeing it carried out under the sanction of government.

Thus, in the course of one short year, many important laws and regulations had been passed, all tending to the establishment of freedom in Florence ; and this had been effected without the shedding of one drop of blood. The most important of these were, the changes in the system of taxation, by which the poorer classes were relieved ; the abolishing of usury by the “Monte di Pieta ;” the granting permission to the citizens to carry arms ; the passing of a law for a general amnesty ; and the establishment of the Grand Council—the darling of the Republic. To celebrate this victory of Liberty over Tyranny, and ensure its being never forgotten, a statue of Judith slaying Holofernes was executed by Donatello, and erected in the most prominent position in the city. It now stands within a portico adjoining the palace, to which position it was removed upon the downfall of the Republic.

CHAPTER XII.

Preaching, Praying, and Working.

“If a great change is to be made in human affairs, the minds of men will be fitted to it: the general opinions and feelings will turn that way. Every fear, every hope, will forward it.—BURKE.

MANY of the greatest historians and statesmen of Italy have regarded the new Constitution of Florence, founded by Savonarola as—if not the very best that could be framed, yet the very best for Florence under her peculiar political circumstances. To understand fully the part which he took in constructing it, “we must,” says Signor Villari, “follow, step by step, the formation of the new Constitution, and read, at the same time, the sermons which he preached day by day during that period. And when we follow the debates (which may still be read in the manuscript journals of the proceedings, preserved in the Florentine archives of the Signory in the Palace), and find the citizens there using the Friar’s very language, adducing his arguments in his own words, to such an extent that it might be supposed that their speeches were mere repetitions of his sermons; then, and then only, are we made adequately, aware of the degree in which this one man had become the informing soul of the whole people.”

Marvellous, indeed, was the work accomplished by that “one man,” and how much of it was the result of his preaching and of his prayers,—who can tell? Reviewing the changes brought about by the new Government, he says in his sermon,

preached April 1st, 1495 :—"When I saw that a change in the Government was about to take place, and considered that it could not be accomplished without great scandal and effusion of blood, I determined—being inspired to that end by God—to begin to preach to the people, to exhort them to repent, that they might obtain the mercy of the Almighty." And in September of that year, preaching on St. Matthew's day—he said : "I began, and with all the strength that God had given me, I exhorted the people to confess, to fast, to pray. This having been willingly done, the goodness of God changed His avenging sword of justice into forgiveness ; and on the 11th of November, the State and Government were miraculously changed, without bloodshed, and without any other disturbance having been committed in your city. And you, O people of Florence ! having to accept the new Government, I showed you what sort of Government was most suited to the nature of the Florentine people, and proposed four things that you ought to do :—first, to fear God ; secondly, to love the common weal of the city, and strive for that, rather than that of individuals ; thirdly, to establish peace between yourselves and those who had been your rulers in the former Government." Trust in the Lord, and do good, was the burden of this discourse.

The new laws, written in Italian (instead of Latin, as was the custom previous to the expulsion of the Medici) were, in many instances, extracts, almost verbatim, from Savonarola's sermons.

At the close of 1495, the state of Florence was such as to call forth the highest praise on behalf of Savonarola and the Government he had framed. Machiavelli, the doubting, penetrating, Florentine secretary—one by no means likely to overestimate a character so incomprehensible to him as that of the enthusiastic, imaginative Friar and Prophet—not once, nor twice, but many times, speaks of "the learning, prudence, and purity of his mind, breathing divine virtue." "Of such a man," he says, "one ought never to speak but with reverence."

But it is from Guicciardini that we learn the true estimation in which Savonarola and the new government were held by the wisest men of the day. "Such was the love of the Florentines," he says, "for the liberty conferred on them in 1494, that no arts, no soothings, no cunning devices of the Medici, ever sufficed to make them forget it." "You are under a heavy obligation," he assures Florence, "to this friar who arrested the tumult in good time, and accomplished that which, without him, could only have been obtained through bloodshed and the greatest disorders." . . . And again, in warmest terms, he praises "the prudence, the political genius" of Savonarola—"the saviour of his country." There are modern writers, too, of eminence, who have, after much careful examination of the subject, arrived at the same conclusion as that of Machiavelli and Guicciardini. Francesco Forti—a man deeply learned in the institutions of his country—says, "The reforms introduced by the friar constituted, perhaps, the most just government that Florence had ever enjoyed while it was a Republic. Italy can boast of few men greater than he, and perhaps of not one equally great in the political history of the Florentine Republic."

And what was the temperament of Savonarola's mind, now that his efforts for the welfare of Florence had been crowned with success? The brilliant future of which he prophesied, he always declared to be "conditional." "If you do not turn to the Lord," he often said, "the joyful will be changed into sorrowful auguries." And now, that no sign of repentance met his eye, hear his sad forebodings of coming evil. "I am wearied, O Florence, by my four years of unceasing discourses, which have done nothing more than exhaust myself while labouring for you. In addition to this, I have been afflicted by the thought, never absent from my mind, of the scourge that I see approaching, and by the fear and alarm of the dangers to which it will expose you. I therefore pray to the Lord continually on your behalf."

That he should himself die a violent death was the conviction of his soul. Often did he allude to it; and now, just as he had established the Great Council—that measure which he had called for as being “the will of God”—and when thousands crowded to the Duomo, expecting to hear a triumphant hymn of praise and thanksgiving—what *did* they hear? This simple allegory. . . . “A young man, leaving his father’s house, went to fish in the sea; and the master of the vessel took him, while he went on fishing, far into the deep sea, from whence he could no longer descry the port: whereupon, the youth began to utter lamentations. O, Florence,” said the preacher, looking fixedly at his audience, “that youth is now before you in the pulpit. I left my father’s house to find the harbour of religion; taking my departure when I was twenty-three years old, in pursuit only of liberty and a quiet life—two things I loved beyond all others. But when I looked upon the waters of this world, and began by preaching to gain some courage and find pleasure therein, the Lord led me upon the sea, and has carried me far away into the great deep where I now am, and can no longer descry the harbour. Shoals are on every side. I see before me the threatening tribulations and tempests, the harbour of refuge left behind, the wind carrying me forward into the great deep. On my right, the elect calling on me for help; on my left, demons and the wicked tormenting and raging. Over above me, I see everlasting goodness, and hope encourages me thitherward; hell I see beneath me, which, from human frailty, I must dread; and into which, without the help of God, I must fall. O Lord, whither hast Thou led me? That I might save some souls to Thee, I am myself so fixed that I can no more return to the quiet I left. Why hast Thou created me to live among the discords and contentions of the earth? I once was free, and now I am the slave of every one. I see war and discord coming on me from every side. But do you, O my friends, have pity on me. Give me flowers. Flowers are good works,

and I wish for nothing more than that you should do that which is acceptable to God."

Too agitated at this moment to proceed, Savonarola paused, saying, "Now let me have some rest in this tempest." Then, with renewed energy, he continued, "But what—what, O Lord, will be the reward in the life to come to be given to those who have come victorious out of such a fight? It will be that which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard—eternal beatitude! And what is to be the reward in this present life? 'The servant will not be greater than his Master,' is the answer of the Lord. 'Thou knowest that after I had taught I was crucified; and thus thou wilt suffer martyrdom.' O Lord! Lord!" he then exclaimed, with a voice that echoed through the church—palling every heart in the vast multitude before him—"grant me this martyrdom; let me quickly die for Thy sake, as Thou didst die for me. Already I see the axe sharpened. But the Lord says to me, 'Wait yet awhile, until that be finished which is to come to pass, and then thou shalt show that strength of mind which will be given unto thee.'" There was a pause before the preacher spoke again. Then he said, "Praise the Lord for His goodness!" and continued his sermon.

CHAPTER XIII.

Papal Hostility—Carnival of 1496.

“E'en they whose office is
To preach the gospel, let the gospel sleep,
And pass their own inventions off instead.”—*Dante*.

WE retrace our steps to consider, more in detail, the temper of Rome towards Savonarola during the past year, 1495.

Early in January, Alexander VI. became more than usually excited by the Prior's sermon on the imperative necessity for reformation in the Church, which he compared to a fig-tree, which, “in its early days, produced abundant fruit and no leaves; after a lapse of years, as many leaves as figs; and later still, leaves alone.” And not only was this tree fruitless, “its overshadowing foliage injured the neighbouring plants”—a melancholy state of things, which seemed to move the preacher's heart to its very depths. “You cannot doubt,” he said, gazing stedfastly at his hearers, “that the gardener would cut down so useless a tree, and condemn it to the flames.” Then, dropping the parable, he exclaimed vehemently, “Thus it is with the Church. In primitive times she produced abundant fruit, and, as it were, no leaves; but she has grievously degenerated, and now bears leaves only: fruit none;—in other words, outward ceremonies abound, pomp and luxury are everywhere seducing men into every path of error. As the thick foliage of the barren fig-tree injures the

adjoining plants, so the prelates of the Church corrupt others by their evil example. But this state of things will not," he said, "last for ever. The Husbandman—that is, Christ—will come and cut down the tree, renew and reform the Church." Here the preacher paused. Then, in deeper tones, he said:—"When Pope Innocent VIII. died, I was laughed at for declaring that the Church must be reformed. But at that very time a vision was granted me. I beheld a black cross suspended over Babylonian Rome, on which was inscribed: 'The wrath of the Lord.' Swords, lances, arms of all kinds gleamed around that cross; while hail, devouring lightning, and hot thunderbolts fell around. Then I saw another cross: it was of gold, and reached from earth to heaven. It hovered over Jerusalem, and bore this inscription: 'The mercy of God.' A serene, limpid, and pure atmosphere surrounded it. From that vision I learn that a reformation of the Church is not only needed, but at hand."

The immediate result of this sermon, so far as the preacher was concerned, was an order from the Vatican, commanding him to preach during the coming Lent at Lucca. This order was, however, withdrawn, at the request of the Signory, and Savonarola remained at Florence.

His old enemy, Mariano Genezzano, was then at Rome, and gladly seized the opportunity, which his near neighbourhood to the Pope afforded, to feed the flame, which daily waxed hotter and hotter in the breast of His Holiness, against the audacious advocate of Church reform, whom he designated "the tool of the devil." Upon the 25th of July this detested one received a letter from the Pope, which began thus:—"Much-loved Son,—Health and apostolical benediction. We hear that, among all the labourers in the Lord's vineyard, you show the most zeal. This greatly delights us, and we give praise for it unto Almighty God. We have also heard that you affirm that your declarations concerning future events do not proceed from yourself, but from God; and therefore, in

accordance with the duties of our pastoral office, we desire to converse with thee, and thereby know more especially what is pleasing to God. Therefore we exhort you that, in the spirit of all holy obedience, you come to us without delay, who will receive you with love and charity."

Before he answered this crafty letter, Savonarola preached a farewell sermon in the Duomo, warning his hearers of the dangers threatening the Republic, not only from the "Arrabbiati," but also from Pietro de Medici, whose restless brain was plotting a scheme by which to return to Florence.

The church was full to overflowing. Weary and sad, Savonarola ascended the pulpit. He had many things to say, all more or less painful, and fraught with peril to Florence—the "well-beloved." Charles VIII. had left Italy without having fulfilled the mission to which, as the preacher verily believed, God had called him—that of being, first, the scourge, and after that, the regenerator of Italy. This was a terrible blow to the prophet, and gave, he well knew, encouragement to scoffers, and unbelievers in the reality of his Divine mission, to meditate evil against him; while, through his fall, they trusted to ruin the Republic. Full of this thought, Savonarola girded himself for conflict, and, though weak and tottering as he mounted the pulpit-steps, he had no sooner begun his sermon than he felt "animated as by a sudden gift of the Spirit."

Fearless denunciation of vice, and prophetic announcement of coming judgment, were, as usual, the prominent subjects in this remarkable sermon. Expecting that his "tongue" would "soon be silenced," he desired once more to deliver his own soul by a declaration of truth not pleasing to his hearers, many of whom he knew to be "troublers of the peace of Florence." Having touched upon various practical matters, Savonarola thus took leave of his audience:—"My people, when I am in this pulpit, I feel myself to be in a sound state; and if, when I leave it, I should continue to feel as I do when I am here, I should continue strong. But when I leave this, I must

attend to my health, and on that account it will be some little time before I see you again, as I must try to get cured of my complaint. If I live, I shall resume preaching. I believe I must rest for a month unless your prayers should restore me sooner. During my absence Fra Domenico will preach. I will certainly return, if I am alive. . . . And now I must conclude, for I have preached so much that I am quite exhausted, and have shortened my life by many years." "Well, then, friar," he abruptly asked, "what reward do you wish to receive?" "I wish for martyrdom. I am willing to undergo it; I pray for it daily," was the ready reply.

His answer to the Pope's letter, to which we have alluded, was written three days after this sermon. It is too long for insertion. A few extracts will show the tone and spirit which pervaded the whole letter. Savonarola assured the Pope that he had long desired to visit Rome, "especially" that he might "tread the threshold of the Apostles Peter and Paul, and be able to worship their relics and blessed images." He reiterated his earnest desire "to obey the command of His Holiness, who deigned to call a poor worm into his presence." "Many obstacles," he said, "stood in the way of the accomplishment of this desire, causes which all must acknowledge to be reasonable." And chiefest among these, he felt his "bodily infirmity and agitation of mind brought on by over-exertion for the welfare of the State." In short, "agitation of mind" had "so materially injured his health of body," that he "avoided any increase of labour," and, in obedience to the command of his physician, had "determined to give up preaching and all severe study for a season." Then, alluding to dangers which had at various times beset his path, he added: "Although I place my trust in the Lord, I considered that I ought not to appear to tempt Him by neglecting due caution; even as it is written, 'If you are persecuted in one city, fly to another.'"

While pleading these reasons for delay, Savonarola hopes he may yet be able to visit Rome in accordance with the Pope's

desire. In the meantime he tells him of a "little book" he has lately written, which "will give all needful information concerning the subject-matter of his preaching," those "coming events which would bring ruin on Italy, and in the end the renovation of the Church." His object in publishing this book (dated "from the Convent of San Marco, the last day of July, 1495") was that the world "might see and judge for itself, by the light of those coming events," whether or not he had been a true prophet.

Whether Savonarola was aware of it or not, his friends at Florence had good reason to wish to detain him amongst them. The plots of the Arrabbiati, and open attempts, also, to take his life, had justly alarmed the "Piagnoni," while they utterly mistrusted the Pope's expressions of goodwill. Indeed, they doubted not that, if the Friar started for Rome, he would, if not murdered on the way, be thrown into the dungeon of St. Angelo the moment he entered the Eternal City. Savonarola's illness, which pleaded his excuse for remaining at San Marco, was a cause of sincere rejoicing to his friends. And now, for a time, matters proceeded quietly, but early in September a communication from Rome reached the friars of "Santa Croce," which alluded to Savonarola as "a certain friar, Girolamo, a disseminator of false doctrines." When alluding to this strange document not long before his death, Savonarola characterised it as "full of abuse," and, besides, containing "eighteen mistakes." "Why," he asked, "was it addressed to the Monastery of Santa Croce while intended for San Marco?" And why did it speak of "a certain Girolamo," as if he were not well known? There were other "trifling errors," which he cared not to specify. "So," added Savonarola, ever anxious to shield the character of the Pope, "you see that His Holiness must have been misled by calumnies concerning me, or there could not have been such a change in his briefs." How true it is that "Charity thinketh no evil."

But in truth Alexander vi. had a reason—a cruel reason—

for the "mistake" in the address of his brief. The friars of Santa Croce—a Franciscan convent—were on bad terms with those of San Marco, and the Pope knew that it would serve to strengthen his own interests could he increase this mutual ill-will; therefore it was that he addressed to Santa Croce the brief intended for San Marco. Savonarola, at the time, took no notice of the communication. The following October he resumed his pulpit ministrations by preaching "three tremendous sermons," in which he exhorted the Florentines to rise as one man in defence of liberty. The effect produced by these sermons was felt in the Medician camp. Pietro's attempt to return to the city proved a failure.

The increasing hostility of the Pope was a grievous trial to the Prior of San Marco. To be obliged to take his stand against the head of the Church was abhorrent to his inmost soul, as it was in later days to Luther. A very tangled net had to be unravelled ere the simple-minded Friar could see the path he ought to take. One thing, at all events, was clear to him. He must not, by word or deed, bring reproach upon the Church of Christ—the Lamb's wife. Therefore it was that he now (on the 4th of November) obeyed a peremptory order from the Pope to abstain altogether from preaching.

Forbidden to preach, Savonarola had the more leisure for meditation upon the many subjects which pressed upon his heart and conscience. And now an idea, which had for some time floated in his brain, began to assume shape. It was a fact—known to all—that the election of Pope Alexander vi. had been carried by bribery; in the opinion, therefore, of many earnest men, his election was null and void. These earnestly demanded the assembling of a council to depose him. The chief mover in this was the Cardinal of San Pietro in Vencola, (afterwards Pope Julius II.). He feared not to declare Borgia "an infidel and heretic," and had more than once urged upon Charles VIII. the duty of calling a Council with a view to his deposition. At the time Charles seemed rather to like this

proposal, and we learn from Guicciardini that when he passed through Rome eighteen cardinals were closeted with him, discussing this subject and the necessity for Church reform, Julius himself being one of that assembly. However, as was the way with Charles, he disappointed those who placed faith in his promises; and the much-to-be-desired Council was not summoned.

Savonarola had himself often written to Charles upon this subject, reminding him of the high mission entrusted to him by God. In each letter he addressed the king in the character of "the Prophet of the Lord," reminding him that he had foretold his coming into Italy; his successes and disasters; and this, when "no one else was thinking upon the subject." And now he warned him, in the name of the Lord, to change his conduct and fulfil his promises to Florence, "lest the Lord should recall His choice of him, and select another to be His minister of justice." It so happened that the Dauphin of France died just at the time this letter reached Charles. The bereaved father felt the blow acutely, but he did not regard it as a verifier of Savonarola's prediction; and, therefore, it did not lead him to obey him—as "the messenger of the Lord."

In the midst of these trials and conflicts, Savonarola found time to write a letter to his mother, to comfort her upon the death of his brother Borso. In all the world there was none other so dear to him as his mother, and his letter is full of tender, loving sympathy. Alluding to public matters, he says: "I feel sure that my death is not far distant, and I would that your faith were so strong that, like that holy Hebrew woman of whom we read in the Old Testament, you might look with dry eyes upon your son's suffering and martyrdom before your eyes." "My dearest mother," he adds, before closing his letter, "I have not thus written to pain you, or in forgetfulness of your grief, but that, if it should happen to me as I expect, you may be prepared for it all."

His health now began to improve, and he longed to return to the pulpit ; but "until permission came from Rome" he would "wait patiently." Looking around for employment, he found it ready at hand—prepared for him by his enemies—"the Arrabbiati." Thus his antagonist became his helper ; and in this way. The Carnival of 1496 was approaching, and the Arrabbiati made arrangements to ensure its being celebrated with the unrestrained festivity and indulgence of vice of the Medici days, when the whole city was one scene of sensual gratification. This was their intention ; Savonarola roused every energy of his soul to frustrate it, at least in respect of the part the children usually played at it. Not for one moment did he contemplate the doing away with Carnival amusements. He knew full well that neither laws, nor doctrines, nor magistrates could do that. The children especially looked forward all the year to that season as their time of highest enjoyment. It was their habit, for days before its celebration, to traverse the streets in groups—like the May-children in England—begging "quatrine" for their evening festivities. The most popular of these was the bonfire, lighted in the Piazza, round which they danced, singing, as they whirled in mad excitement, the most abominable rhymes. The evening closed by a game of throwing stones in the streets, which killed one or more passers-by every year. The citizens, and even the Signory, had often tried, but in vain, to put a stop to this silly and dangerous amusement. The children had it all their own way ; no threats of punishment could terrify them, no entreaties induce them to give up their cruel sport. Thus it continued, until Savonarola took the matter in hand. Could not he do that which all others had failed to do ? Had he not already effected what had for ages been counted impossible ? Thus the Friar reasoned with himself, and feeling strong in the conviction that the effort was called for, he determined to work out "the children's reform."

And, first, he had small altars erected in the principal streets,

around which the children were to stand, and ask money from the passers-by ; money—not to be spent in feasting, but to be given to the poor. Well pleased with the novelty of the thing, the children gladly fell in with this arrangement. Finding them so far tractable, Savonarola told them that the songs they used to sing must not be sung again ; but that he himself, and others, too, who loved them, had written holy songs for them to sing at the Carnival. This, too, pleased the children ; and so it came to pass that, without difficulty, the reform was carried. There was no throwing of stones that year ; no unseemly feasting ; the 300 ducats, collected in the streets, were distributed amongst the poor ; the children—the last day of the Carnival—carried the money, the fruit of their obedience and self-denial, to the institution for the benefit of “the poor ashamed to beg.”

As a matter of course, some objected to this novel mode of spending the Carnival. But what of that ? Such objectors would have opposed anything in the path of reform suggested by Savonarola. But none could deny that in carrying out “the children’s reform,” he had accomplished that which, to all others who had attempted it, had proved an impossibility.

CHAPTER XIV.

Prince Pico della Mirandola.

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“Friendship is soothing comfort.”—*Schiller*.
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THE Pope's permission for Savonarola to resume preaching reached him in Lent 1496; and about the same time His Holiness, in accordance with the advice of a learned Dominican bishop, offered him a cardinal's hat if he would moderate the tone of his sermons. “Come to my next sermon, and you shall hear my reply to Rome,” was the Friar's dauntless reply; and the following Sunday, “with a voice, thundering akin to lightning,” he exclaimed from the Duomo pulpit, “I will have no hat, but one dyed with my blood.”

Day after day crowds thronged the church to hear that voice which the thunders of Rome had failed to silence, except for a short season. Hundreds who sought admission could not obtain it. Besides men and women, crowds of children came to hear *him*, whose influence they had acknowledged—children who had collected money for the poor, had sung his hymns, had given up throwing stones, because he told them not to do so; told them that God loved them, and that *therefore* they ought not to grieve Him by doing that or any other wrong thing. Seventeen rows of steps, leading up to the first row of windows, were erected for these children. There they sat, silent and attentive; and often the preacher, turning to them, spoke words which they could understand—words which some of them never forgot.

But this zeal for God's honour, and the good of his fellow-men, only made Savonarola more hateful to his enemies. Many a plot was laid to assassinate him on his way to the Duomo; but armed friends guarded him; the blow aimed at him must first lay them low. Very devoted were these friends, for their friendship arose not from flesh and blood relationship, but from the union of heart with heart, spirit with spirit.

Throughout his life Savonarola had proved friendship to be indeed "soothing comfort." In his struggle for liberty and truth, he had the sympathy of men like-minded with himself, some of whom had long been his earnest disciples; men in whom the ideals of their master's mind seemed to have found realization.

What a fast friend was Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, the "Phoenix of genius," as he was called. His first meeting with Savonarola was the turning-point in his life. Suddenly checked in his career of worldly honour and ambition, by the influence of the Prior's life and conversation, Prince Pico, the ardent aspirer after universal knowledge, was transformed into the humble inquirer after truth, as it is revealed in the Bible. Speaking one day of his inner life to his nephew, while walking in an orchard in Ferrara, Pico said, his "secret purpose" was "to give away all his goods to the poor, and taking the crucifix as his companion, walk about the world barefoot, and in every town and castle preach Christ." And this, he said, he desired to do "from love to Christ Himself." "Two things," he often said, "must never be forgotten—that the Son of God died for men, and that they themselves must die shortly." These sentiments of Prince Pico are peculiarly valuable, as giving an insight into the mind of his teacher. Writing to his nephew upon the subject of prayer, he says:—"When I speak of prayer, I speak not of that which consists of many words; but of that prayer which, in the secret chamber of the mind, in the privy closet of the soul, with very effect, speaketh unto God. I care not how long or how short thy prayer be, but

how effectual, how ardent. . . . Let no day pass thee, but that once at the leastwise thou present thyself to God by prayer, and falling down before Him flat to the ground, with an humble and devout mind, not from the extremity of thy lips, but *out of the inwardness of thine heart*, cry these words of the prophet—‘The offences of my youth and mine ignorances remember not, good Lord! but, after Thy goodness, remember me.’”

How true are these words with which the letter concludes! “What thou shalt in prayer ask of God, both the Holy Spirit which prayeth for us, and eke thine own necessity, shall every hour put into thy mind; and also, what thou shalt pray for, thou shalt find matter enough in reading of Holy Scripture, which that thou wouldst now (setting fables and trifles aside) take ever in thine hand, I heartily pray thee—these hath in them a certain heavenly strength, quick and effectual, which with marvellous power transformeth and changeth the reader’s mind into the love of God.”

And in the beautiful “Prayer of Picus Mirandola to God,” are these lines, taken from an old English translation:—

“that mighty love
Which able was thy dreadful Majesty
To draw down into earth from heaven above,
And crucify God, that we, poor wretches, we
Shall from our filthy sin yclensed be!”

And these:—

“That when the journey of this deadly life
My silly ghost hath finished, and thence
Departen must,
“He may Thee find
In Thy Lordship, not as a lord, but rather
As a very tender loving Father.”

Prince Pico died the very day that Charles VIII. entered Florence. His life had been short—only thirty years. Savo-

narola was with him at the end, and preached his funeral sermon in the Duomo.

When aware that death was near, Pico's one request was for permission to be buried in the holy garb of a Dominican monk. At first, Savonarola hesitated to grant it; not until a special vision revealed to him that he ought to give that coveted privilege, could he be prevailed on to permit the remains of his much-loved friend to be laid within the precincts of San Marco. There they lie, by the side of Angelo Poliziano, who died that same year.

Artists of every kind, architects, sculptors, painters, even engravers, contributed, each in his vocation, to swell the ranks of Savonarola's friends and admirers. The celebrated painter, Fra Bartolomeo, the last of the elder painters of the first Italian school, was only twenty years old when he began to attend Savonarola's preaching. For eight consecutive years he was to be seen, ever in his place in the Duomo, listening with rapt attention to words which left an impression never to be effaced from his mind. Bartolomeo was especially celebrated for the exquisite beauty of his Madonnas. The religious enthusiasm of his character fitted him for sacred subjects, and the Friars of San Marco employed him to paint a fresco in their church representing the Last Judgment. He was engaged in this work when Savonarola preached one of his tremendous sermons against the iniquity of the times. Sparing no one, he denounced the Pope, the Medici, the luxurious Florentines, and the profaners of Sacred Art. Sorely perplexed by the sermon, Fra Bartolomeo, in a fit of despondency, laid aside his pencil, not even to his "Last Judgment" would he consent to add another touch. Not that his conscience could accuse him of having sinned, as did others, by his paintings. His natural love for the pure and beautiful, forbade his acquiring that pagan style in Literature and Art which had been diffused throughout Italy by the school of Padua, and was encouraged and fostered by the Medici family. Yet, in conformity with the fashion of the

day, several of his pictures were of the character condemned by Savonarola. The great painter, under the influence of the still greater preacher, entered heartily into his desire for reform in all branches of Art, and as evidence of his sincerity, destroyed all his drawings which could not, without a blush, meet the scrutinizing eye of the holy Dominican. Bartolomeo was one of those five hundred citizens who, in defence of Savonarola, made their way into San Marco the day that the "Arrabbiati" besieged the convent, demanding, with horrid cries, the deliverance of the Prior into their hands. Grieved to the heart at the cruel treatment, the terrible torture and subsequent death of his beloved friend and guide; art and fame, henceforth had no attraction for Bartolomeo. For years he never touched his pencil, and buried his talent in a convent. At the end of four years his superiors commanded him to resume painting; he obeyed and from that date became known as, "Fra Bartolomeo di San Marco," or simply as, "Il Frate."

We might name others, artists of various classes, who were devoted, not only to Savonarola, and to the doctrines taught by him, but who were also, as a natural consequence of the ascendancy which he had gained over them, desirous to promote that reform in Art which he had set himself to accomplish. Many of those friends would have shed their blood in his defence. After his martyrdom not a few of these, feeling almost as if light and hope had perished with him, resolved, as they wept at his cruel death, to lay aside their pencil for ever.

In the days of his popularity the best artists prayed permission to take the Prior's likeness, whether on canvas or in marble. The finest work of the first engraver of intaglios that Italy ever produced, is a bust of Savonarola, which may still be seen in Florence; and Baldini, the celebrated painter and illustrator of Danté, engraved his work, "The Triumph of the Cross," with an amount of care which he had never bestowed upon any other work.

Even Benevieni, the Platonic poet and friend of the Medici, published an earnest defence of Savonarola and of his doctrines. Raphael, too, had a high admiration for his character, and ten years after his death, when Julius II. was Pope, he honoured the martyr's memory by placing him amongst the most celebrated characters of the Romish Church, in his famous fresco of the "Dispute of the Holy Sacrament," now in the Vatican.

Michael Angelo was an earnest listener to the great preacher in the Duomo ; and though he never sympathized with him in his sweeping condemnation of what he termed "Paganism in Art," he admired his eloquence, both in the pulpit and as a writer, and warmly shared with him his love for civil freedom.

CHAPTER XV.

Sermons on Amos and Zechariah.

It is not enough to believe what you maintain. You must maintain what you believe, and maintain it because you believe it.

Archbishop Whately.

UPON the 17th of February, 1496, Savonarola began his famous course of Lent sermons on Amos and Zechariah. It was a solemn occasion. He knew these sermons would add tenfold fury to the wrath of the Pope, who even then thirsted for his blood. He knew also, that the "Arrabbiati" hated him for his incessant call for reformation. The Signory knew this, too, and sent officials to keep guard while the Prior passed through the streets. At the appointed hour he left his cloister-cell for the Duomo; his body-guard instantly gathered round him, and he reached the church in safety. Thousands were there awaiting him. Slowly, and apparently with difficulty, he ascended the pulpit; but once "enthroned," as George Herbert would express it, no weakness betrayed itself. Looking around with stern gaze, his eyes "flashing like live coals," he paused for some seconds, while his breathing, audible throughout that great building, told how deeply he was moved. Then he began in the form of a dialogue:

"Tell us, Friar, why you have been so long in a state of repose, and have not come out to help your soldiers?"

"My sons, I have not been in a state of repose; I have been in the field, and have been engaged in defending a rock,

which, if it had been thrown down, you, perhaps, would also have been destroyed. But now, by the grace of God and your prayers, we have been saved."

"What then, Friar? Have you dreaded the being put to death?"

"Most certainly not, my sons. If I had been afraid, I should not be here now, for my present danger is far greater than the former."

"Have you, therefore, had some scruples of conscience about preaching?"

"Not I."

"Why, then, did you stop? We have heard that a sentence of excommunication has been received, and that you have been commanded not to preach. Have you read that sentence?"

"Who sent it? But, supposing it to be as you say, do not you remember that I told you that if it did come, it would have no effect, and would be of no service to those wicked ones who are full of lies?"

"What has been the reason, then, Friar, that you have kept us so much away from you?"

"I will tell you if you will listen to me patiently."

In the course of his explanation, Savonarola said that, seeing opposition increasing against "an insignificant man, not worth three pennies," he began to think that perhaps his "tongue might have been led astray"—that he might not have "looked well to his words and ways." He therefore "considered them one by one, looking only to the question of faith," as "questions of grammar and logic no longer belonged to his office." And the result of this examination was the conviction that his "way had been perfectly clear," because he had "believed and taught what the holy Catholic Church believes."

Savonarola made this declaration, fully persuaded that the doctrine which he preached, though so unsavoury to the Pope, was that of the true Catholic Church. And he boldly maintained that he was not bound to obey the commands of

ecclesiastical superiors—not even those of the Pope—“if they were contrary to charity or to the Gospel.” He did not, he said, “believe that the Pope would wish him so to do.” But were he to do so, he would say to him, “Thou art not a good shepherd; thou art in error.”

Referring to his own peculiar circumstances, and to the Pope's command to him to come to Rome, he said he did not consider himself bound to obey a command which “the whole city, down to the simplest maiden,” knew proceeded from “political hatred.” If, indeed, he believed that his leaving Florence would be “for the good of the city,” then would he willingly go. But this he did not believe, and therefore he “would not obey the order of any living man” to stir from his post. Then, foreseeing that his words would be misrepresented, he exclaimed: “O ye who write such lies to Rome! tell me, what will ye now write? Ye will say of me that I said we ought not to obey the Pope, and that I myself do not intend to obey him. But *that* I have not said. I have written what I have spoken, and you will see that I cannot unsay it.”

In this sermon Savonarola touched upon all the topics he meant to consider at length in this, his most celebrated course of sermons. Throughout them all he exhibits a fearless independence of mind rarely met with, especially in those days of spiritual bondage to ecclesiastical authority.

Indeed, all he had ever said was as nothing compared to the “words of fire” which fell from his lips this Lent. For instance: “I ask thee, Rome, how is it possible that thou canst still exist? By night the priests are sunk in the lowest depths of vice; the next morning they read mass and celebrate the Sacraments. All is venal at Rome; every position put up for sale; even the blood of Christ to be had for money!” Then, turning to the people, he said: “Ye are corrupt in everything; in your speaking and in your silence; in what you do and what you do not do; in your belief and your unbelief. You declaim against prophecy; yet some one tells you a

strange dream, and you believe in him. You fast on a certain Saturday, at a prescribed hour, and you do so under the belief that you will thereby be saved. I tell you the Lord desires not either certain days or certain hours, but that *in every day of your life you should flee from sin*. But you, on the contrary, are good in one hour of the day that you may be wicked the rest of your lives. See," continued the stern preacher, "see what took place during the last three days of Holy Week. Then were to be seen such running after indulgences and pardons; some one way, some another; some kissing the image of Saint Peter, some that of Saint Paul; some this saint, some that; such coming and going, ringing of bells, decking out of altars, and adorning of churches; all this for three days before Easter, *but no later!* God is indifferent to these your doings, because *ye will be more wicked after Easter than ye were before.*"

In another sermon he asks: "What if I should ask you to give me ten ducats for the poor; you would not. But if I were to say: 'Lay out an hundred ducats on that chapel of San Marco,' you would. Yes, for the purpose of putting up there your armorial bearings! not for the honour of God. Look round the convents, and you will see their walls covered with coats-of-arms. Looking up at what is over the door, I fancied I should see a crucifix, and it was a coat-of-arms! Again I look up, and again a coat-of-arms meets my eye. Nothing else is to be seen. I observe drapery, and conclude it covers the painting of a crucifix, but I find a coat-of-arms. These, these are your idols to whom your sacrifices are offered up."

As usual, each sermon prophesied of coming evil. Alluding to the pestilence, which he repeatedly declared would desolate the city, the preacher exclaimed: "Be assured that there will not be enough people left to bury the dead, and there will be no means of having numerous burials. There will be so many deaths in the houses that men will go through the streets crying with a loud voice, 'Who has any dead? Who has

any dead?' And people will come out from their houses, saying, 'Here is my son—here is my brother;' and another—'Here is my husband.' Then they will go through the streets calling out, 'Are there no more dead? Who has any dead?' And so thinned will the population be, that very few will remain."

Throughout Lent the burden of Savonarola's preaching was—"Woe! woe to the land because of its iniquity. Alas! alas! Fly from the land of the North—that is, from your vices, and turn to Christ. Behold, there comes a time of darkness, when He will rain fire, flame, and stones; and there will be a time of storms. I have placed you between four winds, saith the Lord, that is, between prelates, princes, priests, and wicked citizens. Fly from their vices, and unite together in charity; deliver thyself, O Sion, that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon. Fly from Rome, for Babylon means confusion, and Rome has confused all Scripture, has confounded all vices, and has thrown everything into confusion, Fly, therefore, from Rome, and turn to repentance."

Two of these sermons were preached upon the completion of the new hall for the great Council, and were exclusively devoted to political matters. Though the erection of this hall had been superintended by the celebrated architect, Cronaca, it had progressed but slowly, until Savonarola spurred him on to greater speed by these pulpit addresses. From that moment, Cronaca's activity became so remarkable that it became a saying among the people—"The angels have come to assist him." It is observable that all who bore any part in the erection of that hall were adherents of the Friar. M. Angelo was one of those first consulted about it; and the celebrated painter, Fra Bartolomeo, contributed the Altar-piece.

The building being finished, 1,753 persons assembled in it upon the 25th of February, and, at once, proceeded to elect the new Signory. Great was the Prior's joy at this solemn event. Alluding to it in his sermons he severely censured the

party-spirit which had heretofore "contaminated elections," and in particular, the habit of distributing handbills through the city, denouncing such and such persons as not fit to be elected. "You ought not," he said, "to pay any regard to those handbills. If you have good reason to consider this or that candidate a bad man, say so *openly*; declare your opinions frankly, that such a person is not the right man for the office. If, however, he be a right man, elect him."

In Florentine elections, a black bean was favourable, a white, unfavourable to the candidate. In reference to this mode of voting, Savonarola said, "I hear that some in the Council have said, of a party-man, 'Let us give him a black, or a white bean,' *according as he belongs to this, or that party*. And, what is still worse, I hear that there are some who say—"He is a friend of the Friar, let us give him a black bean." How is this? Is this the lesson I have taught you? I have no friend but Christ, and him who does what is right; do not, therefore, act thus; for that is not what I would do; and, by following such a course, you will immediately create divisions. Let the elector give his vote to him whom, in his conscience, he believes to be a good and prudent man, as I have, on other occasions, told you." In this, as in every other part of Savonarola's history, we see a noble, unselfish desire to promote the general welfare of the Commonwealth. No self-seeking, no personal consideration marred the purity of his motives.

The success which attended these sermons led Savonarola to believe that similar results would attend any plan for reformation which he might adopt. And now, Palm-Sunday being at hand, he made arrangements for a procession of children, which should walk through the streets of Florence, each child bearing a small red cross in one hand, and, in the other, an olive branch. Eight thousand boys formed that imposing spectacle. The future painter, Ridolfo Ghirlandajo, is believed to have been one of that vast multitude of boys upon whom Savonarola built his hopes of a bright future for Florence. The

clergy, and monks of various orders, in full canonicals, followed the boys, and after them came an immense multitude of citizens—men and women, old and young, rich and poor. Young girls, robed in white, with snowy garlands encircling their heads, and accompanied by their mothers, closed the procession. And ever as it moved along, hymns were chanted, patriotic songs were sung, while the city bells poured forth their merry peals until the air rang again.

The children having reached the Duomo, Savonarola addressed them upon subjects suited to their comprehension. Many shed tears that day, as he closed his discourse by a fervent exhortation to the people of Florence to accept Christ as their King. As he descended the pulpit-stairs, the congregation dispersed, the children again walked in procession, stopping in the Piazza to sing a hymn on the future prosperity of Florence; after which they carried to the office-bearers of the Monte di Pietà, the collection made that day in the Duomo.

It was about this time that Savonarola in one of his sermons declared his conviction that the Church should stand firm to all eternity; while everlasting destruction awaited those who, by word or deed, brought dissension into the Church. In our Lord's words, "Thou art Peter, and on that rock (Pietra) will I build my Church," he recognized the undoubted authority of the Pope. "Nevertheless," he added, "we are not bound to obey all his commands. If they are in evident contradiction to the laws of charity contained in the Gospels, it is our duty to resist them, as St. Paul resisted St. Peter." Bold words, which the preacher would not have dared to utter, had he not believed (in common with many Catholic divines of authority) that the election of Pope Alexander VI. was null; and for the cherished hope that, before long, a Council should assemble which would root out of the Church many of the evils by which she was contaminated. Then, alluding to his own death, which he felt persuaded was not distant, he asked abruptly, "What

will be the end of the war you are keeping up? If you ask me what the general end will be, I answer, "VICTORY!" But, if you ask what will be the end to *me*, in particular, I answer—"DEATH." *Death*, but not *Extinction*—Death first; Resurrection after. Rome shall not quench this fire, as she will try to do; if she quenches it for a time, another, and stronger, will break out. . . . I am but an instrument in the hand of the Lord—therefore, I am determined to fight to the last."

Signor Villari, speaking of Savonarola's sermons on Amos and Zechariah, says, "Whole pages demonstrate, that in other circumstances and with other subjects, their author would have been the greatest of Italian orators. There is a boldness, a fire of eloquence in his sentences which is quite original. His language is entirely so; and in the very manner in which his ideas are conceived there is a power wholly his own. His illustrations are given with a force—it may almost be said, with a degree of violence, so as quite to overpower the imagination of his audience. If to all this we add the effect of his voice and gestures, we can understand the great enthusiasm of the Florentine people. The impression he produced this Lent was greater than in all previous years; and the fame of those sermons spread everywhere; the rage of his adversaries rose to a climax; the devotion of his followers amounted to fanaticism; the princes of Italy protested; the Pope was furious; and it seemed as if the Vatican itself trembled under the thunders of his eloquence."

CHAPTER XVI.

Sincerity of Purpose—Weakness of Judgment.

“Water cannot rise higher than its source, neither can human reasoning.”

Coleridge.

IT is difficult, almost impossible, to learn from Savonarola's writings the exact point of view from which he regarded his prophecies and prophetic mission in general. It would appear that sometimes he predicted future events by a process of simple reasoning; the study of Scripture, combined with a deep sense of the corrupt state of the Church, leading him to form such and such “conclusions,” as he termed the results of those meditations. At other times he appears to have believed that by “celestial visions,” granted to him in the solitude of his cell, or, it might be, in the pulpit, the future was revealed to him. At such seasons “an inward fire,” he used to say, “consumes my bones, and forces me to speak.” Carried away, as it were, by an unseen hand, heaven appeared to open before him, and voices, unheard by others, made known to him what God was about to do. So mightily did these revelations affect him, that, when imparted to him in his cell at night, they were sure to banish sleep; and all the day following, weariness and exhaustion overpowered his frail body. If, on the contrary, the vision appeared to him while in the pulpit, there was no limit to the wild excitement, the tumult of exultation which filled his soul. Words fail to describe the effect of his preaching at those times of ecstatic rapture—men and women of

all ages, the rich and the poor, artisans, poets, philosophers, “sobbed aloud,” we are told, “until the very walls of the Duomo echoed their wailings.” In the note-book of one accustomed to take down the Friar’s sermons, these words may still be read:—“At this place I was so overpowered by weeping, that I could not go on.” There were moments, too, when the preacher was so affected himself that he was obliged to pause for some time before he could proceed with his sermon, and it was no uncommon thing for him to be confined to bed by serious illness after one such discourse. The conviction, ever before his mind, that he should die a violent death, and that soon, no doubt gave to his preaching a special, almost a supernatural, power. As a dying man, he spoke to dying men of death, judgment, and eternity.

Savonarola was familiar from his youth with the thoughts of his favourite author—St. Thomas Aquinas—on “the co-operation of angels,” and on “the nature of the Old Testament prophets and their visions.” While yet a boy, he himself had his visions and dreams, which, acting upon his exquisitely sensitive temperament, left him shaken and agitated in mind. And when, in later years, St. Thomas gave place to the Bible, and the Friar found that, after hours spent in prayer and the study of that Book, his dreams and visions multiplied; he began to regard these as direct inspirations from God, sent to him through the intervention of angels, even as, according to St. Thomas, the prophets were inspired. Having made up his mind upon this point, there was not a dream or imagination, no matter how strange, “for which,” says his biographer, “Savonarola did not find a parallel in the Bible. Thus fascinated, he often passed whole nights on his knees in his cell, a prey to visions, by which his strength became more and more exhausted, his brain more and more excited, and he ended by seeing a revelation from the Lord in everything.”

In those days there lived in San Marco a friar—Salvestro Maruffi—a somnambulist. Owing to an illness in childhood,

Maruffi was, while under the influence of somnambulism, a prey to strange visions and mysterious sounds, as of men conversing together. It is a curious fact that, while Maruffi himself attributed these visions and voices to his own bodily infirmity, and always termed Savonarola's revelations "follies," the Friar placed implicit reliance in the dreams and visions of the somnambulist, and warned him "not to slight so great a gift from God, but rather to ask Him to make them clear to him." His intercourse with Maruffi confirmed Savonarola in his belief that his own visions were heaven-sent. Thus everything—natural character, physical temperament, study, prayer, the daily life he lived—all conspired to encourage in him a faith, as blind as it was fervent, in the supernatural. In his "Dialogues on Prophetic Truth," these visions are collected together in a mass of hopeless confusion, which it were vain to seek to unravel. Savonarola, however, makes this declaration concerning visions in general:—"They come," he says, "direct from God, and are imprinted by the angels on the intellect, and not on the affections, without having the effect of securing the salvation of man."

What weakness we discern in all this! But is not the sincerity of the Prior of San Marco as strongly marked? For instance, in his dialogue between himself and an allegorical personage, who represents "the gift of the Spirit," he indignantly replies to the question, "Have you ever feigned to be a prophet, in order the more easily to persuade the people of the truth of your doctrines?" "To try to deceive the people by bringing in the name of God would be a grievous sin. I know the purity of my motives. I have worshipped the Lord in all sincerity. I seek to follow Him. I have passed whole nights in prayer. I have spent my health and my life for the good of my neighbour." In another passage alluding to his visions, he says, "It is not possible that the Lord should deceive me. His light is truth itself—a light which helps my reason and directs my steps."

“But what,” asks one of his allegorical objectors, “what is the ground of your certainty that the ‘revelations’ granted to you are a reality?” A most difficult question! How could Savonarola meet it? How explain by *human* arguments that *supernatural* power had been given to him! A miracle, and that alone, could do this; and the time might come when he should be called upon by his enemies to perform a miracle in proof of his Divine mission. And so persuaded was Savonarola that if so solemn a moment should arrive the called-for miracle would be wrought, that no uneasy thought on that head ever crossed his mind. This seems most strange. But is there no possible explanation for a state of mind which appears inexplicable? It cannot be denied that some of the Friar’s predictions were fulfilled; especially remarkable was that most unexpected event—the invasion of Italy by Charles VIII., following as it did the great preacher’s repeated announcement that a terrible scourge was at hand. For a mind constituted as his, each fulfilment of his predictions could not fail to add strength to his conviction that his insight into the future was by direct revelation from God, and thus the way was prepared for his reception, in the same spirit of blind belief, of other revelations, however mysterious and contrary to all human calculation they might be.

Besides, as it has been suggested, “has it not often been observed that, in times of public interest and excitement, thoughtful men, especially those of a religious turn of mind, have seemed to be endowed with an almost superhuman sagacity, which has enabled them, by careful observation of passing events, to foresee and therefore foretell that such and such results would inevitably follow, and this without any dishonesty of purpose or desire to lay claim to supernatural power?” Can we, then, wonder, and especially bearing in mind the character of Savonarola and of the times in which he lived, that he should have believed himself to be endowed with prophetic powers? We cannot. Neither can we doubt

that it was in all honesty of heart and purpose that he was wont to appeal to this or that fulfilment of his prediction in proof of his Divine mission. Highly nervous and imaginative as he was, and often led away by excitement, "is it surprising," it has been asked, "that he indulged in delusions to which even the hard-headed sons of England and of Scotland—Knox and Wycliffe—were not strangers?"

Be it remembered that it is because of his moral rather than his intellectual power, that Savonarola has been called—and truly called—a great man. Surely he was a grand and noble character. In an age of almost unexampled depravity, he, with his whole soul, abhorred that which was evil—cleaved to that which was good. His earnest search after truth ever led him upwards and onwards, though his mind, trammelled from infancy by Papal superstitions, bore to the end the stamp of such evil training. We have seen that even in youth he loathed the impure atmosphere around him; and this in itself was a marvellous fact, testifying to his innate love for purity and truth. This seeing of things invisible to others—surrounding evil, and its antidote—Divine truth—led him, in the greatness of his love for the Church and for Florence, to attempt a reformation both civil and ecclesiastical. Having discovered truth, he could not enjoy it without longing that others should share it with him; the possession of it was to him as a command from heaven to proclaim it throughout the length and breadth of the land.

Throughout his entire life, from first to last, we find this high and holy aim kept steadily in view. To attain it Savonarola was ready to suffer any loss, to sacrifice to that ruling passion of his soul, all to which nature would have clung; gladly would he do this could he but lead Florence to forsake the evil and choose the good.

CHAPTER XVII.

Popularity increased and Trouble likewise.

“ No one in mortal sin hath, in the sight of God,
A true dominion over any of His creatures.”

St. Augustine.

THE great preacher's fame had now reached its height; his sermons on Amos and Zechariah were translated into the Turkish language by the command of the Sultan, in order that he might read them himself. In Germany, too, they were eagerly read, and Savonarola tells us that “many believed in the truths they contained.” They found their way also into France and England. It is not improbable that Colet (afterwards Dean of St. Paul's)—an Oxford reformer of 1498—may have heard those sermons preached in the Duomo. There is scarcely any doubt that he was in Italy in 1496; and, if in Italy, could he have failed to visit Florence, were it only that he might come face to face with the Prior of San Marco? Two Oxford students—Grocyn and Linacre—had already visited Italy between 1485 and 1491, and returned to England “saturated,” we read, “with the new learning” recently brought from Constantinople. These Oxonians were friends of Colet, and, no doubt, often talked with him about their visit to Italy and all that they had heard and seen there, and especially in Florence, the very centre of learning and art. It is even within the bounds of possibility that they may themselves have listened to Savonarola's first sermon in the Duomo, for that sermon was preached August, 1491—the year that Grocyn and Linacre left Italy.

Colet records this concerning himself, that, while at Oxford, before he visited Italy, he had "devoured" "Cicero" and "ardently studied Plato;" but that, while in Italy, he "gave himself up" to the study of Holy Scripture. What led to this great change he omits to mention, but Erasmus, his intimate friend, tells us that, when speaking to him of his visit to Italy, Colet mentioned having there "become acquainted with certain monks of true wisdom and piety." The supposition that Savonarola may have been one of those monks has certainly no historic testimony to rest upon. But, nevertheless, if that supposition be correct, it is most interesting to think that the return of the future Oxford reformer to England, with his mind "fully made up" to devote himself to the preaching of the Gospel of Christ, may have been owing, in part at least, to his having come into direct contact with the great Florentine preacher.

At home those sermons on Amos and Zechariah increased his popularity tenfold with his own party, the "Piagnoni"; while, on the other hand, they caused his enemies, the "Arrabbiati," to regard him with a more intense hatred. The most absurd reports against him were believed and widely circulated; for instance, that he, the Republican Friar, had made friends with the detested Pietro, so that henceforth, Florence would be ruled, not by one tyrant, but by two! Stanzas like this—

" O ungrateful people,
Thou art misled by a cry,
And follow a guide
Full of hypocrisy"—

were sung through the streets by the "Arrabbiati;" to which sentiments the Friar's friends from among the middle classes often replied by short treatises rather more to the point. One of these writers signed himself—"I, John, who am neither gentleman nor lord, but a Florentine tailor."

The Italian princes bitterly complained that Savonarola had preached his sermons against them. Il Moro, Duke of Milan, was one of those deeply injured princes. And, indeed, if his character, as drawn by himself, had been a true likeness—had he been “a man of blameless life”—his case was a hard one. To Il Moro’s remonstrance, and that of others similarly aggrieved, Savonarola replied: “I allude to all persons, and not to any one individually.”

But no potentate was so furious as the Pope—the infamous Borgia. When reminded by the Archbishop of Pistoia that he had given Savonarola permission to resume preaching, he abruptly exclaimed: “Well, well, we shall not now talk about Friar Girolamo; there will, ere long, be a fitter opportunity for doing so.” To hasten matters, shortly after, he summoned a Consistory of fourteen Dominican theologians to look narrowly into the character of Savonarola’s doctrines, and of his conduct; and this he did in the hope of finding ground for accusation against him. With one exception, the fourteen Dominicans pronounced him guilty. The principal charge they adduced was, that he had been the cause of all the evil which had befallen Pietro de Medici! What a proof did this afford that the Consistory had not been assembled from an honest desire to discuss theological questions—that the spirit which directed them was bitter political hatred!

Probably the refusal of Florence to join the Holy League (concluded at Rome in July of this year, 1496) may have increased that hostile feeling. The contracting parties were—the Pope, Alexander VI.; Maximilian, King of the Romans; Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain; Henry VII. of England; the Signory of Venice; and Il Moro, Duke of Milan. The special object of the League was, “the maintenance of the rights of the Holy Roman Empire and of the Papal See, and the defence and preservation of each of the contracting parties.” On the 31st of July it was solemnly published in the Church of San Marco, in Venice, when high mass was celebrated by the

Patriarch ; bells were rung and bonfires lighted for three days. It was also published at Rome and at Milan on the same day as in Venice.

From this League Florence stood aloof, determined to adhere to the French alliance. It was a perilous decision, and brought her and her adviser—Savonarola—in as guilty of conspiracy against the united interests of Rome, Naples, Milan, and, above all, of the Pope himself.

In the middle of political tumult and intrigue the Friar found time to write treatises upon doctrines which he desired to bequeath to generations yet unborn. He also published a commentary upon the 80th Psalm. His sermons now became few and far between, but very lengthy. In May of 1496, he preached upon the books of Ruth and Micah. Sometimes one discourse occupied many hours. "Here we are still, and have not fled," were sometimes his first words upon entering the pulpit. "I cannot," he often said, "exist without preaching, and am come here in obedience to Him who is Prelate of prelates and Pope of popes." Then, with deepest earnestness, he would beseech the Lord to send down His Holy Spirit upon the Church, even though it should be by means of "a scourge, which, by correcting the Church, may reopen the way to a wide diffusion of grace and of the Spirit."

About this time he, at the request of the Signory, preached a political sermon before the magistrates and chief citizens assembled in the Great Council. After a short review of his past life, he proceeded to answer the many false charges brought against him. "If I have condemned vice," he said, "I have not given personal offence to a single individual ; if I have interfered in your affairs, if I have prevented quarrels, or calmed people's minds, I did it to the honour of God. My enemies go about crying : 'The Friar wants money ; the Friar has secret correspondence ; the Friar wishes for a Cardinal's hat.' I tell you that, if such were the case, you would not now see me with a ragged cloak." Then, addressing the

Invisible, he said : " I wish to glorify myself in Thee, and in Thee alone, O my God. I wish neither for mitre nor hat. I only desire that which Thou hast bestowed upon the saints—death ! "

After this preamble, the preacher declared his conviction that the best hope of maintaining the new Government lay in " full liberty being secured to each member of the Council to state his opinions fully and freely." " There can be no useful discussion," he said, " without this liberty ; " therefore, to secure it was, to him, a matter of deepest moment.

The " Great Council," which he had been so instrumental in instituting, has now been two years in existence. Since its formation many changes—partly caused by the invasion of Italy by France—have passed over the Republic. These changes called for a sure and safe guide to steer Florence through the peril and difficulty attendant upon them. And, naturally, Savonarola, who before had guided the beloved city through even darker times, was looked to for counsel and wisdom. Fully alive to the responsibility of the position, he at once, and heartily, accepted it. Florence was at that moment in a perilous position. Her alliance with France had made her obnoxious to all the rest of Italy. The " Holy League " seemed inclined to make her its prey, in revenge for her refusal to join it, while the wrath of the Pope burned against her with increased intensity—the destruction of the Republic, and the re-installment of Pietro de Medici as his vassal, being the darling object of his ambition, even as hatred against Savonarola was the ruling passion of his mind.

In September, the convent of San Marco received a letter from the Pope concerning " one Fra Girolamo, a friend of novelties, and a disseminator of false doctrines," who had " reached such a pitch of insanity, that, without offering the slightest proof, either by miracle, or any special testimony to be found in Scripture—such as the canonical books would require—he had proclaimed himself to have been ' sent by

God, and to have direct communication with God.'” If we credit the Pope’s statement, all this had been met by “great patience” on the part of His Holiness, in the vain hope that the guilty one “would repent and amend his ways, and show due submission to the Holy See. In conclusion, the Pope’s letter placed the case of the “contumacious friar” in the hands of the Vicar-general of the Lombard congregation, and commanded him to “submit meekly to his authority”—to go wherever he might be ordered, and in the meantime to “abstain altogether from preaching in public and in private.”

This brief re-united San Marco with the Lombard congregation. Savonarola saw at a glance the design of this union of convents. Each step of the way was clear to him. If the congregation of San Marco were dissolved, his authority as Prior would of necessity cease; and if, in obedience to the Pope, he left Tuscany, he should inevitably fall into the hands of His Holiness. To the Pope’s letter he therefore sent a plain and explicit reply. He “regretted” that the Holy Father “had been so deceived respecting him.” Concerning his doctrines, he affirmed that he had “always acted with submission to the Church.” Respecting prophecy, he said: “I have never absolutely stated that I was a prophet, although that would not be heresy; but I have certainly predicted many things, some of which have come to pass, others will, in time. Besides, it is known to all Italy that the scourge I predicted has already commenced; and that, by means of my words alone, the peace of Florence has been preserved, without which her misfortunes would have been much greater. But, to remit our cause,” he goes on to say, “to the Lombard congregation is to abandon us to our adversary; for the controversy between the two congregations is known to all.” In conclusion, Savonarola prayed the Pope to grant him “an answer and full absolution;” and repeated his assertion that he was “willing to submit” himself and his writings “to the correction of the holy Roman Church.”

The Pope's reply, issued on the 16th of October, did not press the union of the two congregations. But why this forbearance? No doubt he had learned to appreciate the firmness of the man with whom he had to deal, and saw plainly that the Friar would neither dissolve his congregation nor leave Florence. So, discretion being the better part of valour, the Holy Father, after an expression of "joy" at the "recovery of the lost sheep," added: "We have, in other letters, manifested our grief for those tumults in Florence of which thy sermons have been the chief cause; for in place of preaching against vice, and recommending union, you announced future events—a thing sure to create discord, especially in Florence, where the seeds of disunion and faction are so thickly sown." For these reasons the Friar had been "pressed to come to Rome;" but now that "good hope is entertained" that he will "yield due obedience to the Roman Church," the Pope declares himself to be "greatly rejoiced and fully persuaded" that his "beloved son has erred more from over simplicity than from an evil mind." Soft words! followed by the reiterated command to "abstain from all preaching, public and private," so that none might say that his church had been "turned into a conventicle." Ere he closed his letter, the Pope expressed his earnest longing to behold his beloved son within the holy city, and promised him a joyful reception. "All antecedent briefs" were declared "suspended," that the Friar might be able to "attend in quiet" to his "spiritual health."

Savonarola knew how to value the paternal tone of this letter. He trusted it not. Scarcely had it been received when a very different document arrived from the Florentine ambassador at Rome. According to it, the Pope "toiled night and day" to compass the Friar's death. Can we wonder at this? for, so long as Savonarola lived to thunder from the pulpit against tyranny in general, against the tyrant Pietro, in particular, who was known to have a secret understanding with

Rome, and was, in fact, living within her walls ; just so long as *he* lived and preached, the Republic could not be destroyed. The spirit of liberty, which he had evoked long before, and still kept alive in many a heart, forbade such a possibility.

But had Alexander vi. forgotten that Savonarola had not preached since his Bull of September 16th commanded silence ? that he now promises pardon for all the past on the sole condition of perfect and continued silence ? Naturally, Savonarola thought long and anxiously over this Bull. Should he disobey it, and thus appear to bring scandal on the Church ? The idea was abhorrent to his soul. Therefore, while "longing to place himself at the head of his soldiers," he refrained, though it was pain and grief to him. Silent he had been, and silent he would continue, at least for the present. "I know," he said, writing to a friend, "I know the root of these insidious proceedings ; I know that perverse citizens are their author. Wishing to re-establish tyranny in Florence, they have entered into agreement with potentates in Italy. To further that end, they wish to kill me ; I dare not walk out without a guard of armed men." Nevertheless, "for conscience sake," he would "obey, rather than commit a venial sin."

Maximilian, King of the Romans, now threatened to invade Italy at the invitation of Milan and Venice, who hoped thus to force Florence to accept the proposals of the "Holy League." Want of money for the enterprize saved Italy from such a catastrophe. With unfeigned joy Florence received this intelligence. Reading it by the light of Savonarola's prophecies, the citizens regarded the abandonment of the projected invasion as "a Divine mystery," the manifest Finger of God ! The efforts made, however, to meet it had been gigantic ; money, soldiers, all necessary means whereby to repel the enemy had been raised. But famine followed in their train. Day by day food became more scarce, while adverse winds drove back ships freighted with corn destined for the relief of the starving.

Can Savonarola now keep silence? Impossible! Urged by the Signory, and by the compassion which burned within him, he set the Papal mandate at defiance, and once again mounted the pulpit of the Duomo to exhort the perishing for lack of bread to bear their trial patiently, sustained by that hope of coming good which upheld his own soul. For six weeks he had not addressed Florence. How changed his audience! How many vacant places! How many faces, pale and wan—faces of the young as well as the old, the rich as well as the poor—told of want, starvation, misery! The preacher saw and felt it. But his sermon was not one of condolence. He knew that among his listeners were many of the Arrabbiati—"disaffected ones"—who had scoffed at his prophecies, and now rejoiced in the misery which reigned around. To them, the sight of tender women and little children dying by the roadside had been "pleasant." To their ears the cry, "Bring out your dead," had been "as music." And why? Because the presence of pestilence and famine would serve to convince the people that the prophet, who had promised prosperity to Florence, had deceived her.

But upon what terms had this "prosperity" been promised? Terms which Florence had not fulfilled. She had not repented of her evil doings; and now, as often before, Savonarola sternly demands repentance. "This," he said, "must be your first work." Then, leaning over the pulpit, he continued in the form of a dialogue:—

"Is your mind clear, Friar?"

"I reply that my mind is clear, and that what I have foretold will come to pass, even to the smallest iota."

"Thou art clear, then; of what?"

"That tribulations are near; that thou art contending against Christ. And I know that the good promised to Florence will come, and that the wicked will be tormented both in this world and the next."

Then, he reminded them of the day when the revolution was

accomplished and they became free, and of the departure of Charles VIII. at his request. "Believe, then, in my words," he solemnly added, "and put your trust in the Lord." The sermon continued in the same strain to the end. The earnest longing of the preacher was to see "the whole city turning to God." The "Frateschi" left the Duomo much comforted. The "Arrabbiati," hardened rather than softened by the Friar's discourse, departed, to meditate fresh mischief against him.

Two days after this sermon, the joyful news reached Florence that ships laden with corn, thought to have been lost, had reached Leghorn. And now, even the "Arrabbiati," confessed that Savonarola had this time proved himself a true prophet; he had promised help, and help had come.

The supply so opportunely received, was not very great in itself; but its moral effect in raising the spirits of the people was of the utmost value. Savonarola returned thanks to Him to whom thanks were due, for this great mercy, and exhorted the people to moderate the extravagance of their joy—not to be "so easily overcome either by joy or sorrow."

The day following was the anniversary for visiting the graves of departed relatives and friends. Savonarola seized the opportunity to preach upon preparation for a tranquil death. "Death," he said, "is the most solemn event which can befall man. It is then that the devil has his final struggle with us; it is as if he were playing a game of chess with us, and was watching the moment of death to give us check-mate. He who gets the better of him then, has won the battle of life. "My brethren," he continued, "we live but to learn how to prepare to leave this world—to have a happy death." Before leaving the pulpit, Savonarola advised all present to keep near their beds, "a picture calculated to remind them of the solemnity of death." This sermon was published, and went through several editions. It was illustrated by engravings, executed by the best artists of the day, representing scenes such as the

Friar had recommended as suitable to prepare the soul for death.

This season of trial passed, Savonarola returns to silence; but, too late to shield him from a fresh outburst of Papal wrath, accompanied by demands upon San Marco, which he, as its Prior, determined to resist; and yet so unwilling was he to believe anything prejudicial to the Pope, that in his reply he supposes his unjust demands were made "through false and deceitful information." Nevertheless, setting his face as a flint, he deprecates the being "terrified by threats of excommunication," to do that which would be "poison and perdition to his own soul and to the souls of his brethren." "We must resist," he says, "if we cannot prevail to have the demand withdrawn. We must do as St. Paul did, who when Peter was come to Antioch withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed." Thus, open war was declared between the Pope and the Friar. Before the end of November, Savonarola resumed preaching.

Thus closed the year 1496, the year which witnessed the climax of the great preacher's popularity. When his public ministry began, in 1489, he prophesied that it should continue for eight years. Is it likely that that prophecy will prove correct? Judging by the signs of the times it does not appear improbable. At least, it is not likely the predicted time will be lengthened. The words which head this chapter—words first uttered by St. Augustine, had been lately echoed by the Prior of San Marco. Some who heard them, and believed them to refer especially to the Pope, had transmitted them to Rome; the infamous Borgia heard of them. Too well he knew that whether intended to apply to him or not; they did so, emphatically. Friends and foes of Savonarola alike, looked to his death as all but certain, and, moreover, not far off.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Humiliating Disclosures,—Carnival of 1497.

“How poor, how rich, how abject, how august,
How complicate, how wonderful is man!”—*Young.*

SAVONAROLA is now hard at work trying to finish his “Triumph of the Cross.” To gain the more leisure he appointed Fra Domenico to take charge of the spiritual matters connected with the convent. But Domenico was a poor substitute for the master whom he deeply revered. His sermons, chiefly a reiteration of that master’s prophecies and denunciations, were coldly received. It was one thing for the Prior of San Marco to speak that which he himself firmly held to be truth—quite another, for his disciple to make those statements second-hand. Therefore, it was that Domenico had to withdraw from a post which he was unable to fill.

The Carnival of 1497, a season long remembered in Florence, is at hand. The wealth of that city, in those days, was not surpassed—probably not even equalled—by that of any other in the world. The Medici, whose reign of splendour began at the close of the fourteenth century, were emphatically, “Prince Merchants;” their court shone conspicuous, as the most brilliant scene of mediæval life in Italy. But, while unequalled in the refinement of art and intellectual culture, the Florentines were debased by luxury and enslaved by vice. Fully alive to this, the great preacher has never spared them; day by day he has called them to repentance. His longing desire was to move

thousands ; his loving heart mourned over the city in her degraded state, and yearned to see her turning to God. No half measures—as he understood them—would satisfy him ; nothing short of a thorough change of life—the outward demonstration, the unmistakable evidence of a work wrought within the heart—such a demonstration, and of a character to excite the imagination, and stir the very depths of Florentine excitability, he now demanded. “For full fifteen hundred years the like had not been seen.”

The time fixed for this demonstration was the Carnival—that great religious festival of the Middle Ages, to which princes and nobles—mingling with actors, rope-dancers and clowns—gathered from all parts of Italy. It was at the Carnival (years before) that the glittering many-coloured Harlequin and his partner Columbine, made their first appearance. Punch and Judy, too, had their origin in the Italian puppet-show, so celebrated at the Carnival. It was there, too, that dancing, feasting, and all kinds of amusement were at their height in Florence, and therefore it was that Savonarola selected the Carnival—of all seasons of the year—for his “demonstration.” Having the previous year succeeded in carrying out “the children’s reform” at the Carnival, he hoped to do even greater things now.

Vasari, in his “Life of Bartolomeo,” tells us that, among other kinds of revelry during the Carnival, “it was the custom to make bonfires in the squares on the evening of Shrove Tuesday, and, according to ancient practice, dance around them, men and women, hand in hand, singing songs.” This custom suggested to the Friar the idea of having all articles, how valuable soever they might be, which were calculated to minister to luxury and worldliness, consumed in those bonfires. To carry out this idea he enlisted in his service a band of youths under the guidance of Domenico. For days before the Carnival, these boys, “dressed as angels,” traversed the city, calling at door after door, and in supplicating tones asked for

“vanities,” the “accursed thing,” for the great *Auto da Fé*. Many complied, while others thought the Prior’s youthful police very unwelcome intruders. Marvellous was the amount of trinkets, ornaments, money, false hair, collected for the huge bonfire in the Piazza, where an immense scaffolding representing a pyramid, was erected, and then filled with fagots, around which were fifteen tiers of shelves to receive the objects to be destroyed. “And so it came to pass,” continues Vasari, “that, as Savonarola, day after day, declared from the pulpit of the Duomo, that it was wrong to keep things calculated to injure young persons, the citizens brought a vast quantity of pictures and sculptures of evil tendency—many of them the work of great artists, and books and lutes and song-music, so that the loss was very considerable. Fra Bartolomeo carried thither all his studies of designs from the nude; and Lorenzo di Credi, and many others, who were called “*Piagnoni*,” did the same.”

“Books of bad tendency, especially those of Boccaccio and Pulci, were heaped, pile upon pile, on the shelves of the doomed pyramid, and, side by side with them, were the offerings of women,—costly shawls from India, rouge pots, essences, bottles of orange-flower water, and perfumes to no end. While their husbands and brothers added their quota in dice, and dicing tables, chess boards, harps and all kinds of musical instruments, playing cards, with magical and superstitious books of incredible quantities.”

The amount of valuable property thus consumed may be, in some degree, estimated from the fact, related by Burlamacchi, that a merchant from Venice offered twenty thousand florins (nearly equal to so many pounds sterling) for the heap. His offer was rejected; and his portrait, placed on the top of the monstrous figure intended to personify Carnival, was burned together with it. The conflagration took place at night, while the excited mob danced round the burning pile to the sound of trumpets. “So that,” says the historian Nardi, “upon that occasion the boys had a Carnival festival sufficiently magnifi-

cent and devout, in place of the inveterate custom of the populace to amuse themselves on that day with the stupid diversion of throwing stones, and other still more damnable practices of this our depraved generation."

These extravagances were followed by others of a most painful and humiliating character. When Savonarola condemned worldly amusements as being contrary to the mind of God, he spared that of dancing, which he thought might be consecrated to His service. To this end, he employed the best poet of the day to write what he miscalled "sacred words," to be sung to popular airs, while the people danced. Strange to say, the friars of San Marco came from their cells into the Piazza, and danced with the citizens "in monstrous rounds, formed of one friar and one layman alternately, all joining hands."

How humiliating to read of these extravagances! to see how a man of deep learning, and full of zeal for the honour of God, and for the highest good of his fellow-men, was led by monkish fanaticism to regard as an act of piety that which was really a burlesque on religion. It could not be but that such an outrage on common sense and true piety must, eventually, lower Savonarola in the judgment of the more sober-minded and discerning amongst his followers. And so it did. From this time the tide of popular favour turned against him; his political power began to wane. But his own confidence in the reality of his mission, as being direct from God, never abated, and to the end, notwithstanding these extravagances, the Prior of San Marco stood forth undaunted, as the champion of Church reform and the enemy of Papal usurpation.

During Lent he finished his sermons on Ezekiel. "Woe to the Church because of her iniquity," was still the burden of his cry. "It is by riches the Church has been corrupted." "But is it true," he asked, "that the Church should not have temporal possessions? By no means . . . not absolutely; just as the mariner does not, absolutely, desire to throw his wealth

into the sea, but solely to escape shipwreck. So, we say that the Church would be better without riches, because thereby it would be in closer union with God. I say to my reverend brethren: 'Keep fast by poverty; for when riches enter a house, death follows after.' Those who have usurped ecclesiastical property," he added, "let them give it up to the Church of Christ, if they would be considered good pastors. In other words, let them give it to the poor, setting canons at defiance. Say what you will, charity will always be my first canon. I tell you that it should be a fixed rule with you that no canon can be in opposition to charity. If it be so, it is no true canon."

Did Savonarola believe that a purely ecclesiastical reformation could stem the torrent of universal corruption in Christendom? He distinctly stated the contrary. "Faith," he said, "is necessary to restore youth to the heart. What means this war that has been stirred up against me? It means this—that I have brought to light the corruption of the wicked. But I shall do as Friar Jacopone did in the Consistory, who, on being told that he must preach on some subject, turned round and repeated three times: "Your sins are so great that I am amazed the earth does not open her mouth and swallow you up!"

With terrible and increasing distinctness, Savonarola seemed to see the "shadow before" of some event—a crisis in the strife: a revolt of Christendom against the "profligate Church" to whom the Lord had given "beautiful vestments," of which she had "made idols," while God, the giver of every good gift, was dishonoured. "For what," he asks, "does the harlot Church say herself? (Listen, and I will tell you.) '*He who has money may enter and do what he lists.*' But what saith the Lord? 'Behold, I will stretch forth My hand, and will come upon thee, thou degraded one.'"

In tones of unmitigated severity, he accused "priests and friars" of having, by their "bad example, driven the people into

the sepulchre of ceremonies." "I tell you," he said, "this sepulchre must be broken up; it is the will of Christ that the Church be renovated in the spirit." . . . "We ought," he repeatedly said, "to pray for this renovation. Write to France, to Germany, to all places, that the Friar tells them, to pray to the Lord that He may come to them. Up then! Send out messengers. Jesus Christ has many servants, who keep in concealment, and weep over this disease."

Alluding to the expected Papal excommunication, he said: "As for me, I pray Thee, O Lord, that it may come quickly. 'What, have you no fear of it?' you ask me. Not I, for they wish to excommunicate me *because I do no evil*. Let this excommunication be carried aloft upon a spear, and let the gates be thrown open to receive it. I will answer it, and if I do not excite your wonder, say of me afterwards what you please. I shall make many faces on every side grow pale, and will send forth a voice that will make the world tremble and be moved. I know, full well, that there is one at Rome who is daily striving to injure me. But he is not actuated by zeal for religion, and does it solely because he is sunk in servility to mighty and great lords."

Savonarola here alludes to his old enemy, Mariano Genziano, of whose secret plots to destroy him he was well aware. This is, perhaps, the only instance in which the Prior descended to personalities in his sermons. He afterwards regretted having done so, and apologised for having so distinctly alluded to an individual. The sermon from which these extracts have been taken was, in many respects, a remarkable one; it closed with these words: "Some say, 'The Friar has given in, and sent one of his followers to Rome.' I can tell you the party at Rome does not do my bidding; and, if flattery had been my habit, I should not at this day be in Florence." (Does Savonarola here allude to the offer of a Cardinal's hat made to him the previous year?) "But, O Lord," he continued, "such things form no part of my desires. Thy Cross

is all I wish for ; cause me to be persecuted ; I ask this favour of Thee, that I may shed my blood for Thee as Thou didst shed Thine for me." After a pause, he continued : "Meanwhile, my sons, cast away doubt, for we shall surely have the support of the Lord." Thus did this faithful, though often sorely mistaken, servant of God seek to strengthen himself for the great conflict upon which he had entered. And now, while threatened with excommunication, he laboured unceasingly to have a general Council assembled.

Towards the end of April, while the discontent and irritability of the people were heightened by famine and the plague, Florence was startled by a fresh attempt of Pietro de Medici to force his way back into the city. He had many friends within her walls, and, best of all, the chief magistrate was an old partisan of his house. Nevertheless, the attempt was a signal failure, and Pietro, disappointed, retraced his steps to Rome, where he sought to solace himself by the indulgence of every sinful passion by which the body and soul of man can be defiled.

The new Signory of Florence, lately appointed, is bitterly hostile to Savonarola. A few of its members have banded together to compass his death ; but, as yet, his popularity forbids the success of any attempt to take his life, even had the warrant for his death been procured. And during these days of strife and tumult, he, who was the object of venomous hatred on the one hand, and of fervent love on the other, remained secluded within San Marco. Silenced for the present, forbidden to preach either in public or in private, and often disturbed when engaged in prayer, or when instructing his brethren, he found comfort and refreshment for his mind in preparing his sermon for Ascension Day, which was close at hand. He was "determined" to preach on that day—4th of May, 1497.

CHAPTER XIX.

Tumult on Ascension Day.—Wrath of the Pope.

“He is not to be called apostolic who merely occupies the apostolic seat, but he who fulfils the functions of the Apostle.”

Claude, Bishop of Turin, (8th Century).

AND he *did* preach. The evening before Ascension-day, some of the “Arrabbiati,” assisted by priests of their party, forced their way into the Duomo, and spread the skin of an ass over the pulpit, into which they drove sharp nails with their points upwards. These spiteful acts failed to satisfy the more violent of Savonarola’s enemies, whose desire was to take his life, or, at least, seriously injure him, and so by the aid of a maker of fireworks a plan was contrived by which the pulpit and its occupant might be blown up in the middle of the sermon. Upon second thoughts, however, this was abandoned on account of the injury such a catastrophe would bring upon hundreds of innocent persons assembled in the Duomo.

Suspecting mischief of some kind, the Prior’s friends earnestly entreated him to give up his intention to preach on Ascension-day. With noble indignation he replied, “I cannot, through fear of man, leave the congregation without a sermon on the day upon which the Lord commanded His disciples to go and spread His doctrines throughout the world.” To this answer his friends had not a word to say : so they left him to prepare his sermon, while they made arrangements for his protection.

And first—very early in the morning—they repaired to the Duomo, cleansed the pulpit, drew out the nails, and planed the woodwork. At noon they escorted Savonarola to church, and found an immense crowd already assembled—friends and foes mingled together. The “Compagnacci”—dissolute aristocrats in perfumed garments; the “Piagnoni,” in simple attire, looking as if they had come to worship, formed a striking contrast.

The sermon was unusually calm, dignified, and free from invective. After some remarks upon faith, which the preacher said—“can do all things, overcome all things, and which regards the life on this earth with indifference, being secure of that in heaven”—he started in his usual style—“The times that were foretold are now near at hand, when it will be seen who is truly devoted to the Lord. The wicked believed that they could prevent my preaching this day, but they know that I have never failed, from fear of man, to do my duty. There is not on earth the man who can boast that he has seen me so fail; I am quite prepared to lay down my life for my duty. O Lord! free me from those adversaries who call me a seducer; set my soul free, for my body I have no fear; I call the Lord, the Virgin, the Angels, the Saints to witness that things revealed by me come from God; that I have received them by Divine inspiration, in long protracted vigils, for the good of this people who are now plotting against me.” Then, addressing those he designated “the good,” he said—“ye are sad when ye should rejoice. Tribulations are approaching, there will be a war of excommunications, of swords, and of martyrdom. The days of trial are come; it is the will of God that I should be the first to meet it. . . . There are those that say I am no prophet; but they do all they can to fulfil my prophecies. Once again I tell you that Italy will be laid waste by barbarous nations; and when they make peace with one another, destruction upon destruction will be the fate of perverse Italy. But do you, ye pious, offer up your prayers, and the Lord will help you. And now ye evil minded”—at these words a murmur of

disapprobation was heard throughout the Duomo ; but taking no notice of it, Savonarola exclaimed, " O Lord, be not angry with them ; forgive them, convert them, for they know not what they do." Then, addressing the disturbers of order, he said—" Ye wicked ones, ye think ye are in conflict with the friar, while ye are warring against God. Therefore, I fight with you, not from any ill-will I bear towards you, but from the love I bear to the Lord. Why turn ye not to the Lord that there may be peace ? ' Friar,' thou wilt say, ' thou oughtest not to be preaching, for the Signory has forbidden thee.' ' That is not true,' I reply. ' Neither ought I to abstain from preaching through fear, or at the command of man. I shall be silent only, when I have reason to fear that my sermon might do harm.'"

As these last words were uttered, a tremendous crash was heard. The church doors flew open ; the people fled for their lives ; no one knew what had happened. It seemed as if the Duomo, shaken to its foundations, were falling to pieces. The " Compagnacci" were the ring-leaders in this tumult ; every kind of noise ; the beating of drums ; knocking about of benches, was resorted to. The disorder was indescribable. Two of the chief magistrates rushed towards the pulpit, hoping to seize the preacher, upon which one of these received a blow in his face from one of the " Piagnoni"—an indignity never before offered to one holding his office.

In vain Savonarola tried to be heard. Holding aloft the Crucifix, he cried aloud—" Trust in this ; fear nothing !" Then falling on his knees he remained a moment in silent prayer. The tumult having a little subsided, he descended from the pulpit ; the " Piagnoni" gathered round him ; then, raising their swords, spears and crosses aloft, they escorted him to San Marco.

In the quiet convent-garden, Savonarola finished the sermon which had been so cruelly interrupted. He observed, " The later the hand of the Lord shall come upon the wicked, so much the more severe it will be, in rendering to each man

according to his works. The wicked will not believe, they will not hear, but they shall be overthrown in the ditch they have digged for themselves; they are sapping the foundation of a wall which will fall upon them. But," he exclaimed—"I will sing praises unto the Lord, I will depart joyfully from this life!"

This sermon made a great noise throughout Italy. Every one expected that it would lead to important results; they were right in so thinking. That Ascension-day sermon was the beginning of the end; dark days were, indeed, fast approaching. "Be not disturbed by persecutions"—the Friar exhorted his followers, "but rather rejoice in them; not a drop of blood has been shed, for the Lord, knowing our weakness, has not let us be tried beyond our strength; and as temptations and tribulations multiply, He will give faith, virtue, and courage for greater things."

To prevent the recurrence of another such sermon as that on Ascension-day, the Signory issued a proclamation forbidding any friar to preach. Immediately after this step had been taken, they thought to procure sentence of banishment against Savonarola; but receiving a hint that such a measure would not be tolerated by Florence, they contented themselves with the assurance that the Papal Excommunication would soon arrive and fulfil all their desires. Meanwhile, the Pope was kept fully acquainted with the aspect of affairs in Florence. The tumult on Ascension-day; the manifest and increasing weakness of the Friar's party, and the strength of his enemies—all were known to him, and impressed him with the conviction that the moment had arrived when the sentence of Excommunication might be safely published against "the tool of the devil—the curse of the Florentine people."

Seeing the storm gathering, Savonarola wrote a mild and dignified letter to the Pope. He "lamented" that "the Holy Father" had "never listened to him." But, on the contrary, had "lent a willing ear to lying accusations and misrepresenta-

tions of his sermons." Before closing his letter, he resumed his declaration of submission to the Church, and persisted in affirming that he had "never preached any doctrine contrary to that of the Holy Fathers, which, he said, his "Triumph of the Cross," would certify to the whole world."

How little the writer thought, when he penned this letter on the 22nd of May, that, already, the threatened Excommunication had gone out against him ! But before it reached Florence it had to encounter many difficulties; messenger after messenger, to whose care it had been committed, failed to deliver it, thinking, as it appeared, that it was unsafe to meddle with it. A month had almost passed before the Bull reached Florence, and then many of the clergy refused to publish it. Why ? Because it had not been entrusted to "an apostolical commissioner."

In this Bull the Pope, in his usual mysterious style, alluded to "a certain Girolamo Savonarola, as we have been told—the Vicar of San Marco." Then, referring to his disobedience in not keeping silence when commanded, his Holiness affirms that "with great benignity" he had "accepted his excuses." But now, they to whom the Bull is sent are "commanded" that, "on all festivals and in the presence of the people they shall declare that same Fra Girolamo to be excommunicated, and to be held as such by every one, *inasmuch as he has not obeyed our apostolic admonitions and commands.*" And further: By this Bull "every" one "was" prohibited, under the like penalty, from rendering him any assistance; having any communication with him; expressing a word in his praise; "*inasmuch as he is excommunicated and suspected of heresy.*" "*Suspected of heresy!*" Is this all the Pope can lay to his charge? Have we not here additional evidence that the political and not the religious character of Savonarola and of his teaching was the true ground of papal hostility against him?

Savonarola obeyed this mandate so far as to refrain from preaching for some time. Nevertheless, he wrote "a letter

against surreptitious Excommunication, to all Christians and the beloved of God." The design of this letter was to defend the writer's character, and the doctrines which he taught, while, at the same time, it contained his re-asserted determination to submit to "the judgment of the Church." A second letter quickly followed, in which Savonarola proved, by long extracts from Gerson (under whose wise guidance the revolution, after the great Papal schism, had left the Pope the *constitutional*, instead of the *absolute* monarch of the Church)—that "an appeal from the Pope to a general council was not only allowable, but a duty." "Nor will a Christian be guilty of sin," he said (again quoting Gerson)—"when, in order to avoid an unjust excommunication, he avails himself of the secular power. It is very right to be humble and courteous to the Pope; but when the end is not gained by that humility, then a *courageous liberty must be resorted to*." To these quotations Savonarola added these words—"All this comes admirably in support of our cause; nevertheless, so great is the ignorance of man in the present day, that many believe, not only that we ourselves, but also all those who come to the convent—are under excommunication. Others, yet more ignorant, declare that it is necessary to avoid all intercourse with those who frequent our church. Such persons know not that Martin v. declared in the council of Constance (and it was confirmed in that of Basle), that "the faithful are not obliged to avoid those who have been excommunicated, unless these have been expressly named in the sentence."

The Bull was solemnly published in Florence on the 22nd of June, in the presence of a large assembly of clergy, minor friars, monks—black, white, and grey. The bells were tolled, tapers were lighted, the Bull was read; then the lights were extinguished, and for some moments there was stillness, as of death; and then "the slow, shuffling tread of monkish feet was heard departing in the dim silence."

The boldness of the Friar in declaring the Pope's Bull

unjust, and therefore invalid, added tenfold to the anxiety of his friends; for the belief that the Church was “a living organism, instinct with Divine power to bless and to curse,” was in their minds fixed and unchangeable. And yet, there were a few who, knowing little of Church traditions, and caring less, centred their Church beliefs in Savonarola, and in him alone. To his authority these were content to bow; and now, in his excommunication, they saw nought but “the assault of alarmed selfishness, headed by an infamous old man, once called Roderigo Borgia, and now lifted to the pinnacle of infamy as Pope Alexander vi.”

To these few independent spirits, Savonarola presented himself as one standing alone—sustained by the grand energies of his nature, and by his faith in God, the Unseen, the Judge of all men—against an unlawful exercise of ecclesiastical power.

Friends and enemies were alike intent, the one to injure, the other to support him. About this time it was that the brothers of San Marco sent to the Pope a paper in his defence, signed by two hundred of their Order. On the other hand, on the day of San Giovanni, the Augustine and Franciscan monks declared they would not defile their garments by worshipping in company with the friars of San Marco; whereupon an order was issued, desiring the latter and the Dominican monks of Fiesole to remain within their cells.

It was not long before the Bull of Alexander vi. bore fruit. Having silenced that voice which had ever preached holiness of life, licentiousness revived within Florence, and in one short month the days of Lorenzo the Magnificent—days, the memory of which caused even the most profligate to blush—had come back. Strange to say, the Signory elected throughout this year were friendly to the Friar. In vain they tried to have his sentence of excommunication recalled. “Your Holiness,” they said, addressing the Pope, “could not confer a greater favour on the Republic, especially in this time of pestilence,

when censures bring with them danger of so grave a kind upon the souls of men, than to set this good and most religious man free."

Failing with the Pope, the Signory had recourse to a most unworthy expedient. The Cardinal of Sierra, afterwards Pope Pius III., was in debt. He owed five thousand crowns. What if he could be persuaded to procure the recall of the Bull, if Savonarola would, on his part, absolve him from that debt! The Cardinal willingly gave his promise; no thought of the injustice of such a transaction troubled his conscience. But what of Savonarola? How did he regard the proposal? He at once rejected it with scorn. Writing to a friend, he said, "I should consider it by far the greater censure to have purchased my redemption at such a price."

About this time the Duke of Candia—the Pope's eldest son—was assassinated by night, and his body thrown into the Tiber. The wild wail of the bereaved old man was heard, we are told, in the streets around the Castle of St. Angelo. Savonarola, the excommunicated Friar, wrote a letter to the bereaved father—a letter, not of sympathy and condolence, but of solemn warning and exhortation to repentance. How characteristic of the Friar! The things of time were ever, in his mind, cast into the shade by those of eternity.

The plague was now slaying its thousands. In Florence, the average deaths were seventy a day. Though forbidden to visit the sick in the character of a minister of religion, Savonarola in his own convent did, as its Prior, what he could to relieve and comfort those entrusted to his care. Taking no thought for himself, he remained at his post when others fled to their friends outside the city walls to escape the infection. Savonarola was indeed well pleased to send away the younger friars and novices, and among these his own brother, Marco Aurelio. He delighted to sit by the sick-bed, and read portions of Scripture to strengthen the weak and fearful. His favourite portions were the Lamentations of Jeremiah and the

histories of Jonah and Samson. Writing to a friend at this time, he said, "I do all within my power to shield my friars from this peril. We must trust in the Lord for safety, and not in flight. Some of the friars here die joyfully, as if they were going to a festival. Those who help me in the care of the sick are well." And again, a little later, he wrote :—"Some number the daily deaths at one hundred. One sees nothing but crucifixes and dead people. We ourselves, thanks be to God, are well. I have not left Florence, although I have sent away above seventy of our brethren, for I am not afraid, and I am desirous to soothe those in trouble."

This terrible disease began to abate about the beginning of August, and shortly afterwards it quite disappeared. Once again all was astir within the city—the shops and counting-houses, the theatres, all places of public resort were as thronged as before. Once again, too, the Convent of San Marco was thrown open to the people. On the 15th of the month the festival of the Madonna was celebrated within its walls, by public and solemn thanksgiving to God for His great goodness in withdrawing the plague from the city.

CHAPTER XX.

Trial of Bernardo del Nero and his Accomplices.

“O Liberty! Liberty! How many crimes are committed in thy name!”

Madame Roland.

IT was at this time that a mystery, which had sorely puzzled the wise heads in Florence, was solved, to the great satisfaction of some, the sore distress of others. It had been more than suspected that, at the time of Pietro de Medici's last attempt to return to Florence, there had been a secret correspondence between him and some men of high position and character in the city. Who these traitors were was not known. But now, just as the plague was at its height, it all transpired by means of a letter from Lamberta dell' Antella, who had been exiled to Rome because of his attachment to the Medici. This letter was to a friend in Florence, in which Lamberta promised that, if he were provided with a safe-conduct from the Signory, he would come to Florence and divulge important matters of fact.

The safe-conduct not being granted as speedily as Lamberta expected, overtures were set on foot with a view to purchase his secret from him. Impatient, however, of delay, he, in an unguarded moment, ventured to pass the frontier of the Florentine Commonwealth. The result was his immediate arrest. Carried to Florence, he was at once put to the torture, and forced to reveal all he knew—and he knew a great deal.

When his disclosures were made public, Florence stood aghast at the names placed on the list of conspirators:—Bernardo del Nero, Nicoli Ridolfi, Lorenzo Tornabuoni, Gianozzi Pucci, and Giovanni Cambi—five of her best and noblest, arraigned for treason! These were at once arrested. Their position was perilous in the extreme. Letters had been discovered which proved that Bernardo del Nero, while he held office as chief magistrate, had been aware of Pietro's schemes for his return to Florence. Equally grave and distinct were the charges laid against Pucci and Tornabuoni, for they themselves had corresponded with Pietro, by which means he was duly informed how matters stood towards him in Florence.

To bring these men to trial was a task of immense difficulty and importance. Their high social position; their character, hitherto of unspotted integrity, made it no easy matter even to suppose them guilty. To evade the painful duty, the "Eight," whose office it was to judge and pass sentence upon State prisoners, referred the case to the Signory. That body threw back the odious task upon the "Eight," and, in consideration of the importance of the issue at stake, allowed them the assistance of twelve other citizens to help them to discharge their duty with fidelity.

This Board of twenty pronounced the five prisoners guilty of high treason. The twelve then retired, and left the "Eight" to pass upon them sentence of death. These, however, dreading the odium sure to follow, tried to throw the responsibility upon the Signory. Once again that august body steadily rejected the hateful task. The suggestion was then made to refer the case to the Great Council. To this the prisoners' counsel vehemently objected, on the ground that State prisoners should alone be tried by the Signory. Nevertheless, the Signory remained firm in their resolve not to take the matter into their hands. All the prisoners' counsel could obtain from them was, that the case should be tried, not by the Great Council, but by a new body of two hundred chosen for

that express trial. This was an important point gained. Some time must elapse before these two hundred could be nominated, and, meanwhile, the present Signory, who would be out of office before the month had expired, might, they had reason to hope, be replaced by friends of the accused.

This very heterogeneous body of two hundred was at last complete. Francesco Valori—the man who, if Bernardo del Nero were “put away,” would undoubtedly be the first man in Florence—was one of that two hundred. In weighing the various motives which led to the nomination of that body of men, Guicciardini does not say one word to lead to the belief that any of them were chosen because of their peculiar fitness for the solemn duty to which they were called; quite the contrary.

Several boards of magistracy composed this assembly of two hundred; and at once the Signory decided that each board should debate the matter in hand, separately, and then declare its decision. The result was an almost immediate sentence of condemnation. The prisoners' counsel were all but in despair, and vehemently asserted that the real sense of the assembly could only be reached by each individual member voting by himself. For this they pleaded, with all the earnestness they could put forth. Keenly alive to the peril of the accused, they yet hoped that pity—pity for Bernardo, the old man of seventy-five; for Nicoli Ridolfi, not much his junior; for Tornabuoni and Pucci—popular young men, brilliant orators, listened to with rapturous applause at every meeting where the first citizens of Florence met to discuss subjects of common interest. They hoped that pity for such men—pity, too, for Florence herself, should she imbrue her hands in blood so pure, so noble—would prevail; that not a man of the two hundred would be found willing to take upon himself the odium of being the first to record his vote for—death.

Valori saw and felt the position. But “jealousy is cruel as the grave,” and nerved by the conviction that were Bernardo

“put away,” he himself would be first man in Florence, he boldly stepped up to the table where sat the Signory, and in a voice heard throughout the whole assembly, gave his vote for “death.” The rest of the two hundred, with but a few exceptions, “followed their leader, like sheep over a hedge.”

All seemed lost, until it was remembered that, in accordance with a law passed in 1495, from every capital sentence an appeal must be made to the Great Council. That appeal was, therefore, now demanded by the counsel for the accused, with what result, who could foretell?

There was not a shadow of doubt that the law was in favour of the appeal. But the populace were against the accused, and with wild cries declared that the Republic was in danger, and “justice must be done.” It was evident that the condemnation and speedy execution of the prisoners could alone satisfy Florence, and therefore, yielding to the popular clamour, the Signory refused permission for the appeal. At this crisis letters arrived from Rome, affording fresh proof of the prisoners’ guilt. If one ray of hope had been left, it was now extinguished. Death, and without delay, was unanimously decreed.

And yet, to carry out this sentence was by no means easy. As each vote for death was recorded before the Signory, it was accompanied by the usual formula—“Nevertheless, we shall approve any determination which it shall seem good to your Lordships to take.” These words, though they really meant nothing, made the Signory hesitate to take the lives of these five men. The day—a day, too, of fierce excitement—was nearly spent; every one felt wearied out—to-morrow would be soon enough to do the deed. So thought the Signory. Not so, however, thought Valori. To him the present moment was all-important. Seizing the balloting-box, he struck it violently on the table, crying out: “Let justice be done! Let justice be done! or there will be trouble here!” There was a moment’s silence. Then he, whose office it was, handed round the balloting-box to his colleagues. Five voted for, three

against, the execution of the sentence. Disappointed, but not deterred, Valori again rose, and so intimidated the dissentient voters that, "one after another, they did as he bade them."

During this tumultuous scene, the five prisoners—bare-footed and in chains—were led by their counsel into the midst of the assembly, in the hope thus to excite a feeling of pity for their terrible position. Could it indeed be that men, hitherto loved, honoured, and respected, were to be sent to the scaffold? It was even so. Not a sigh was heaved, not a word of compassion was uttered in that vast assembly; though many amongst them had, in happier days, held social intercourse with the prisoners! Unpitied, the five condemned men returned to their cells, and, the historian tells us, "their heads were struck off at midnight."

The Republican party gained a considerable increase of power by the result of this trial. Medals were struck with Savonarola's image on one side, and on the other that of Rome, over which a hand and dagger were suspended.

Where was Savonarola, and how engaged, during the trial which convulsed Florence from the highest to the lowest of her people?

He was in the convent of San Marco, correcting the proof-sheets of his "Triumph of the Cross." We do not find it mentioned in history that he took an active part, either for or against the accused. He himself says, speaking of Bernardo del Nero: "I did not advise his death. I should have been glad had he been sent into exile;" and, alluding to Tornabuoni, he says, "I recommended him, though coldly, to the mercy of Valori." Machiavelli and Guicciardini both state it as a fact, that Savonarola had been the instigator of the law, which required that those condemned to death for offences against the State should have the right of appeal to the "Great Council." They also affirm that he was the principal obstacle in the way of that right being granted to the prisoners. Villari denies both these statements, and, on the contrary, affirms that Savonarola had been the opposer of that law; and he adds

that even had the Friar wished to interfere, for or against the prisoners, the fact that he himself was under the ban of excommunication, and that negotiations were being carried on at that very time to have that ban recalled, would have rendered his efforts powerless.

That Savonarola persuaded himself the welfare of the Republic demanded the sacrifice of Bernardo and his fellow-prisoners can scarcely be doubted. What, in his eyes, was the death of five Medicians compared to the danger to the Commonwealth, should the tyrant Pietro return to stifle liberty in Florence, and foster corruption in the Church? He had often (and, we believe, in all honesty of heart) declared himself ready to die for the establishment of Christ's kingdom upon earth. Can it be considered strange that he should deem the removal of others a small matter, if so be that end might thereby be promoted? Nevertheless, what the Friar's real feelings were—whether he had any misgivings of conscience as he sat within his cell, correcting his proofs, and heard, from hour to hour, of the struggle, for life on the one hand, death on the other, that was being carried on within a few paces from his convent—cannot now be known.

CHAPTER XXI.

The Triumph of the Cross.

“The preaching of the Cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”—1 *Cor.* i. 17.

SAVONAROLA'S chief work, “The Triumph of the Cross,”—he himself tells us in the introductory chapter,—was written “to defend the glorious triumph of the Cross against the impious volubility of the Sophists and wise men of the world.” The work is a rational defence of Christianity, unassisted by any appeal to authority or tradition. That such a work, by a Dominican monk, should have appeared in the fifteenth century—“the age,” as it has been called, “of authority and intellectual servitude”—is a remarkable fact, a proof that the writer was far in advance of the times in which he lived.

Savonarola was fully alive to the difficulty of the task he had entered upon. “It is,” he says, “an enterprize beyond my strength, but I hope God will aid me in a work in these days so useful, and to His glory.” “To examine and expound the truth of faith by natural reason” was the object of the book. “Not,” says the writer, “that faith needs to depend upon proofs;” for, says the Apostle, “faith is a gift which God bestows on man through grace alone, lest any one should boast.” His design was rather “to confirm those who hesitate, and dispose them to receive the supernatural gift of faith;” and at the same time “to arm the faithful against the assaults of impiety.” With respect to the objection sometimes urged,

that "faith has no merit when it is demonstrated by human reason," Savonarola replies: "The prince of Apostles exhorts us to do this when he says, 'Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope which is in you.' Therefore," he continues, "as we wish in this book to proceed only by reasoning, we shall invoke no authority, but proceed as if it were only necessary to believe in our own reason and experience. Reason," he says, "proceeds from things visible to things invisible; for all our knowledge is derived from the senses, which know that only which is extrinsic; the intellect penetrates the substance of things, and from what it reveals we rise to a knowledge of things invisible and of God. Now, as philosophers endeavour to find God in the marvellous and invisible operations of Nature; so we, in the visible Church, seek to find the Invisible and Supreme Head of it—Jesus Christ. As philosophers collect together, as in a picture, all the operations and all the existences in creation, the better to recognise in them their Divine Author; so we desire to bring together all the visible works of Christ and of His Church in one single image, in order that their Divine nature may the more easily be seen to shine forth."

This "image," so often brought forward in Savonarola's sermons, is a mystical chariot traversing the world in triumph. "Let us picture to ourselves," he says, "Christ seated in this chariot, borne in triumph, yet crowned with thorns, and showing, after having conquered the pains of death, the sacred wounds of His pale and bleeding body—the arms with which He has subdued the world and led captivity captive. Let there shine on His head a triple sun, representing the Holy Trinity; let that radiant globe shed an ineffable splendour over Christ and His Church; let Christ bear in His left hand His cross and all instruments of His passion, and press with His right hand the books of the Old and New Testaments. Let apostles and preachers march immediately before the chariot as if they were

drawing it—preceded by patriarchs, prophets, and an innumerable crowd of Old Testament saints. Let the multitude of the faithful and of the martyrs surround that triumphal chariot, and around them holy doctors with their books open in their hands, followed by an immense multitude of every rank and nation—Jews, Greeks, Latins, barbarians, learned and ignorant of every age—applauding the triumph of Christ. And behind this triumphal chariot, let there be seen the enemies of Christ, the persecutors of His Church; the emperors, kings, princes of the mighty of this age; the sages, the philosophers, the heretics, and the wicked of all nations and tongues; slaves and free, men and women. And near this crowd let there be the relics and the idols of the gods, reversed and destroyed; the heretical books given up to the flames, their impious dogmas confounded, and their false worship reduced to nothing.”

We can only give a few extracts from this remarkable book. Respecting “Worship,” Savonarola says, “Every form of religion has two kinds of worship—the one, external, the other infinitely more noble: that internal worship which manifests itself in a good life, and is the greatest homage, the most true adoration which a creature can pay to his Creator;” and again: “The true integral worship of God consists in the life and acts of the perfect man, and in the offering up to God of that life and its acts.”

Concerning the excellence aimed at by the Christian, we read:—“Now God, the greatest Being, the most perfect, is the end towards which the Christian life tends, and in which it reposes in complete happiness. All the acts of a Christian life tend to that. Could there be a more excellent end? Faith proposes to itself, as an end, the vision of God and the enjoyment of God, not in His creation, but in Himself—in His proper essence. Can we conceive a more perfect aim? There is nothing more sublime than that end, for there is nothing more sublime than God.”

When seeking to prove that “the Christian doctrine, the

object of our faith, comes from God ;” Savonarola says : “ We know that it is impossible to foretell the future, whether by way of experience or of doctrine. Hence, even the most illustrious of philosophers attributed that knowledge to God alone. . . . God alone has the power to signify the future by the present. Now, we see in the Sacred Literature that the whole of the New Testament has been prefigured in the Old. It is not possible to say that it is an interpretation invented by Christians, and arranged according to pleasure. It would have been impossible without the aid of an intelligent pre-vision, to establish in the two Testaments such an agreement of words, deeds, authors, and of different times. This agreement is no work of hazard, for we remark in it nothing clashing or strange ; on the contrary, every part is admirably bound together. What is obscure in one place is cleared by another, so that the Holy Scripture, as a whole, serves as a commentary on each of its parts. . . . Let all those who desire to know the truth, read the Holy Scriptures with piety, with humility, with purity of heart, and they will certainly join with us in this opinion.”

Again, upon this same subject, we find these striking remarks :—“ The mode of language and development of Holy Scripture is so original, that it is inimitable to even the wisest and most worthy Christians. The inspiration of one and the same Spirit could alone have given to so many different authors the same form of discourse. For, in spite of the difference of time, of education, and of genius, the style of Scripture is always the same, which similarity could only come from God.”

Alluding to those preachers who neglected the Scriptures for “ philosophy and the art of rhetoric,” Savonarola says : “ God is my witness that, whenever I have felt inclined to employ in my sermons the subtleties of philosophy and the fine discourses of human wisdom, in order to convey some knowledge of the profundity of the Divine Word, I have observed in my audience signs of impatience and weariness, not only amongst the ignorant but even amongst educated men, who only lent a

distracted attention to my words. But, on every occasion, when, on the contrary, I had recourse to the majesty of the Holy Scriptures, either interpreting their sense or reciting the deeds they contain, they all listened with a marvellous attention, and remained before me motionless as statues."
 "Such is the doctrine which is said to be 'sharper than a two-edged sword,' which has illumined the whole world with virtue; which has overturned the worship of demons and the sacrilegious oracles of idols; and which, putting to flight innumerable errors, has worked marvels."

Concerning prayer as being "one aliment of the Christian life," we read:—"All those who make progress in virtue pray frequently; by assiduous prayer they fix their will upon God, and all things in this world appear to them empty and despicable." And this is not only attained by the wise and learned, but by the poor and simple; and it is easy to draw from this a proof in favour of our faith. "Besides, Christians, in their prayers, addressing God through Jesus Christ, adding at the end of their prayer, '*for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ,*' obtain from God singular forms of grace." Speaking of Christ, the object of our faith, he says:—"If Christ be not God, to believe and confess Him to be God, would be a supreme impiety and blasphemy. And then he draws this conclusion, that—"as Christians pray to God through Christ, whom they believe to be God, God would assuredly draw them from such an error, if it were an error," and not "make Himself an accomplice, by granting to them the favours they demand of Him."

Having devoted a large portion of his work to prove that the power, wisdom, and goodness of Christ evidence the truth of the Christian faith, Savonarola proceeds to consider doctrines which are "*above*, but not *contrary* to reason, whether upon creation or the sanctification of the reasonable creature." "The Christian religion," he says, "speaks reasonably upon the subject of those who are eternally lost. Why?" he asks, "should it be thought unreasonable that, as human justice is

exercised in the city of man, so Divine justice should be exercised in the city of God?"

Concerning the Incarnation, he observes, that "it presents nothing impossible or unreasonable, though, amongst created things, nothing can be compared to this mysterious union—God and man together—the Divine nature and the human."

The doctrine of "Original sin which vitiates the whole human race," our author pronounces to be "not contrary to reason," and the same of other doctrines "not capable of being explained" by reason.

Respecting the Eucharist—the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper—Savonarola affirms that "under the appearance of bread, however small it may be, the body of Christ is contained wholly and entire; and that under the species of wine, however small, the blood of Christ is present, wholly and entire;" and also, that "at the same time Christ is in heaven, wholly and entire;" whence, he says, "it follows that, by the consecration, Christ can be in the Sacrament of the Eucharist only in two modes." First, by the conversion of the bread into the body of Christ, and of the wine into His blood. Secondly, by a local presence. Having argued the matter with "unbelievers," who object to the first "because," say they, "nothing can be changed into a thing already existing;" he shows that they who accept the second, accept that which "is none the less impossible than the preceding, for either Christ would be at one time in two different places—in heaven and in the Sacrament—or He would quit heaven to appear in the Sacrament." Having cleared the way for the declaration of that which he falsely believed to be the true doctrine, Savonarola says:—"The ineffable power of God infinitely surpasses our feeble conceptions; things which are utterly impossible to our strength and to nature alone are easy to God." . . . We say, then, that the body and blood of Christ are present in the Eucharist by virtue of consecration, not by a local presence, but by conversion. Christ is *not* there present *as in a place*; He

is only present as in a place in heaven. In the Eucharist He is present sacramentally, and in a manner invisible ; whence it follows that He is wholly entire under each parcel separate from the others ; for He is not in the Sacrament according to the laws of extent, but in a manner more admirable, and possible only to God.”

Having reviewed the different subjects discussed in his book, Savonarola thus concludes :—“ Christianity alone remains, confirmed and ratified by the double power and light of nature and grace—by the holy life of Christians—by wisdom, works, and miracles which nourish the mind ; therefore it is Divine. What man will not embrace that religion ? Who will attack it without folly ? Approved by God, preserved through so many centuries, maintained in spite of persecutions, sealed by the blood of martyrs ; yea, that faith is Divine ! If, then, we have not lost all our understanding, we must believe that the faith of Jesus Christ is the true faith ; that there is another life when we shall appear in person before the tribunal of that formidable Judge, who will place the wicked on His left hand in torments, like impure goats ; and the good on His right hand in felicity, like sacred sheep, and will give them the privilege of seeing God face to face—God Triune and One, profound, ineffable—in whom the saints will eternally possess all blessedness, by the grace of the invincible and triumphant Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom be honour, power, empire, and glory, through all ages. Amen.”

CHAPTER XXII.

Trouble upon Trouble—Carnival of 1498.

Weep for the wrongs Religion hath endured,
Ye elders, grouped around the eternal throne;
Apostles, saints, disciples of the Lord,
Angels of God, evangelists, look down;
Martyrs weep tears of blood; nor is there one
Of all the stars and planets, unrestrained
In their fleet course, exulting in each zone
(To speak as mortals speak), that is not pained
To see the temple soiled and the white marble stained."

Girolamo Savonarola.

THE dispute between Savonarola and the Pope waxed worse and worse, and proved a source of sore anxiety both to the government and the people. The Signory who, during the remaining six months of this year (1497) were of the popular party, wrote frequently, but without effect, to their ambassador at Rome, to "knock incessantly at the door, and never cease to entreat His Holiness to recall the Bull of Excommunication." But, far from intending to release the Friar, Alexander was plotting how to secure him more firmly in his net. In the meantime, the object of his hatred remained for the most part within his cell, writing, for the press, vehement protestations against his "illegal" excommunication to which, just because it was illegal, he did not consider himself bound to submit.

And undoubtedly, had Savonarola avowedly shaken off the yoke of Rome, and asserted his right to obey the dictates of conscience—enlightened by Holy Scripture—as Luther did a

quarter of a century later ; had he done this, we could understand him when he refused to yield obedience even to the Pope himself. But, so long as he remained, confessedly, a faithful son of the Church of which the Pope was the head, we cannot wonder that, as Guicciardini says, "his disobedience appeared a very serious matter, and inconsistent with the character of a true Christian." Several of his disciples now left him, while a number of dissolute young men, shocked at the Friar's inconsistency ! formed themselves into an association, of which Dolfo Spini, his avowed enemy, was the leader—their object being "to sup together frequently, for the support of true religion, and concert every possible means by which to put down the excommunicated Friar." So says Guicciardini, and he adds, "Every one lived in fear of these violent, roystering companions."

Having in vain tried, by soft words, to reduce the rebellious monk to obedience, the Pope, on the 18th of October, threw off the mask for ever. A Bull, prohibiting him to preach "in San Marco or elsewhere," because he had "declared himself to be a man sent from God, and speaking in His name—a claim which ought to be confirmed by miracle"—was issued, and enforced under such stringent terms, that Savonarola seemed to be left no alternative, but to submit with all humility, or, like the great German reformer, burn the Bull. But he did neither the one nor the other.

And now, "from this time," says Guicciardini, "Fra Girolamo continued to go down in the world." The Signory, early in November, made one more effort in his behalf, but in vain. The Pope would not recall the Bull, and, more important in the eyes of many, as affecting the interests of the Republic, he refused to enter into the consideration of any matter under debate between Florence and the Court of Rome, until Savonarola should be delivered into his hands ; to which requirement the Signory would not concede.

On Christmas-day, after six months' silence (the time seemed

longer to the Friar and to his friends), Savonarola, in open defiance of the excommunication, celebrated mass three times in San Marco, and administered the Sacrament to his brethren, and many others besides; after which he led a solemn procession of monks and friars through the convent cloisters. The Signory (still of his party) granted him permission, on the 1st of February, to resume his Lent sermons in the Duomo. So now, once more, he ascended the pulpit; and there, notwithstanding the published circular of Lionardo de Medici, Archbishop of Florence, forbidding "all and everyone" to attend the church, and warning the parish priests to watch lest their flocks should stray away to "the son of perdition," and thus cut themselves off from the rites of the Church—the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, confession, and burial in consecrated ground;—notwithstanding all this, the Duomo was full to overflowing, and the preacher more startling in his denunciation of the sins of the clergy, and of the Pope himself. Plunging at once into his subject—Excommunication, the authority of the Pope, and freedom of conscience—he used arguments such as certainly could not have been expected from one who styled himself a "faithful son" of the Church of Rome. "When the authority appointed by God," he said, "severs himself from God, he is then as a broken tool, and is no longer entitled to claim our obedience." And again: "Our perfection does not consist in faith or in the law, but in charity, and he alone who possesses this, knows that which is necessary to salvation. Whoever, therefore, shall command anything contrary to charity, which is the fulness of the law, let him be anathema. Were it even an angel who said it, were all the saints and the Virgin Mary (which certainly is not possible) to say so, let them be anathematized; and if any Pope has ever spoken in contradiction to what I am now saying, let him be excommunicated."

Again he observes: "Some among you are afraid that, although this excommunication be null in the sight of God, it

may be valid in the eye of the Church. For me, *it is sufficient that I am not bound by it, but by Christ.* Shall I tell you," he asked, "how absolution is to be obtained? Ah, it were better for me to be silent. But this much I will tell you. This is the way," and, as he spoke, he struck two keys together, so as to imitate the clinking of money, thereby implying that money could purchase absolution in the Church of his day.

It was not strange that Alexander VI. should feel uneasy when these doctrines were preached on the house-top, and by one under the terrible ban of excommunication. If Savonarola failed to reform the Church, he shook it to its very foundation.

Shortly after this sermon, he lectured in San Marco on the duties and the character of the priesthood, closing with these thrilling sentences: "When I think of the life led by priests, I cannot refrain from tears. . . . O my brethren! my sons! I pray you to weep over their vices, that the Lord may, for the sake of His Church, bring the priests to repentance; for all must see that a great scourge is hanging over them. In Rome they make a mockery of Christ and of the saints; they are worse than the Turks and the Moors . . . they even make a traffic of the Sacraments. Do you think," he asks, "that Jesus Christ will endure this? Woe, woe to Italy and to Rome! Come forth—come forth from the midst of her, ye priests; let us see, my brethren, whether we cannot, in some degree, revive the Word of God." Then, as if speaking to God, he exclaimed: "Oh, Father! we shall be put to death: we shall be sent to prison; we shall be persecuted and put to death. . . . Be it so; let them do as they will, they cannot tear Christ from my heart; my desire is to die for my God!"

In his sermon, preached on Sexagesima Sunday, this year, we find these sentiments concerning the Pope and his authority: "I take it for granted that there is no man who is not liable to err. We have had many Popes who have gone astray. If it were true that the Pope can do no wrong, we need but

follow his example, and be saved. You will perhaps say that, so far as the Pope is a man, he may do wrong, but not in his character as Pope, and I reply: 'The Pope may err in his ecclesiastical censures and judgments. How many have been the laws made by one Pope and violated by another? How many opinions held by one and repudiated by another?'

The Carnival of this year was very different from its predecessor. True, there was a vast consumption of "vanities" in the Piazza. But the "angels" commissioned to collect them had been roughly handled by the Compagnacci and others like minded. There was an enormous figure of Lucifer placed on the top of the bonfire, and encircled by representations of the seven mortal sins, and, just as the match was put to the huge pile, the crowd closed in around, and chanted the *Te Deum*, while the smoke and flames ascended high above their heads. The alms collected were then, as in the previous year, carried in procession to the "*Buonnomini di San Martino*"; after which monks, friars, and laymen proceeded to San Marco, where they planted a crucifix, round which they danced in wild excitement, while psalms and hymns were chanted. Thus closed the Carnival of 1498. Its consequences were long remembered by both friends and foes of Savonarola.

In truth, the Friar's late sermons and the scenes enacted at this Carnival could not but strengthen the hostility of his enemies. Rome was furious against him, and he more furious than ever against Rome. His early sermons during Lent, having been sent to the Pope, he immediately issued a Bull, threatening to make the "worm of a preaching Friar" feel the full weight of his wrath. Nevertheless, these very sermons were printed, widely circulated, and devoured by the people, not only in Florence, but in other parts of Italy, and even beyond the Alps. A struggle to the death between the indomitable Friar and Catholic authority has begun.

"They begin at Rome to hear something of the new preaching, and I do not doubt that we shall come to blows,"

wrote Strozzi from Rome. And Bonsi, the Florentine ambassador, writing in the same strain, says : "I am assailed by a multitude of cardinals and prelates, all of whom blame the Signory, and declare that the rage of the Pope is terrific. You have many enemies here who are blowing the fire."

The most active of these was Mariano Genezzano, who had long since sworn to take vengeance upon his former rival in oratory. His private accusations against Savonarola appeared so important, that the Pope desired him to state them from the pulpit. With joyful alacrity he obeyed. But so low and personal was the style of his discourse, that his audience were disgusted, and the cardinals, who had expected to be edified, repeatedly shook their heads in token of displeasure.

A fresh command to the Signory to forbid Savonarola's preaching was now issued from Rome. The Pope's letter said, "If you refuse obedience to this command, then, that the dignity and authority of the Holy See may be maintained, we shall be forced to pass an interdict upon your city, and to have recourse to other measures still more effective." Thus wrote the "Vicar of Christ"! But, calm amid the storm, the object of his wrath continued to preach in San Marco.

After three successive Signories favourable to Savonarola, one mostly hostile to him was elected early in March; only three of the nine members were on his side. Full of hope, the Pope renewed his command to have the rebellious monk delivered into his hands. To his surprise, the Signory refused to obey—not from sympathy with Savonarola or with his doctrines, but because he, being by adoption a Florentine citizen, it would be a slight upon the independence of the Commonwealth were he allowed to be judged by a foreign jurisdiction—lay or clerical.

To screen the Signory from the odium sure to follow, were they to take it on themselves to resist the Pope's order, an assembly of magistrates met to deliberate upon the difficult question. Not a few in the assembly, scandalized at the Friar's continued obstinacy, urged the imperative duty of

doing all "for the honour of God"; or, in other words, "in obedience to the Pope." But these were in the minority. To the meeting at large, the honour of the Commonwealth was quite as dear as "the honour of God"—*i.e.*, the Pope—and with cunning wisdom they suggested that, were the Friar prohibited from preaching in the Duomo, and limited to San Marco, due honour might thus be paid both to God and the Commonwealth.

Thus matters were decided, and Savonarola continued his sermons in San Marco; but the Pope was not satisfied, and letter after letter arrived from Rome, expressing his indignation; marvelling, too, how "the Signory could, so far, have forgotten what was due to him and to themselves, as to aid and abet the contemptible reptile." Each letter reiterated the command for Savonarola to appear at Rome, there "to answer the charges brought against him, and to purge himself of his contumacy." The "mercy of the Mother Church" was promised, should he recant. But, if not, the Holy Father was "determined to resort to the most extreme measures against him." And further, were he not obeyed, the Pope declared that he "would confiscate all property belonging to Florentine citizens in Rome, forbid his subjects to have any dealings with the Commonwealth, and impose the same restrictions on other nations on pain of interdict!"

Still, the Signory refused to send the Friar to Rome. They, however, now forbade his preaching even in San Marco. Upon receiving this intelligence, the Pope wrote back a letter "full of joyful contentment." No doubt he perceived that the stiffnecked people of Florence would not further yield to him. Before receiving the order imposing silence, but, evidently, after the magistrates had passed it, Savonarola preached a tenderly affectionate sermon exclusively to women. It is described as "almost a hymn of praise to the Lord," though tinged with sorrow. "Lord," he said, "we ask not tranquillity from Thee, not that tribulation shall cease; but we do

ask for the Spirit, we ask for Thy love. Grant unto us gratitude and grace to overcome adversity. We would that Thy love should descend upon earth. Thou seest that the wicked become even more wicked and incorrigible; stretch forth, then, Thy hand and Thy power; nothing remains for me but to weep."

That same evening, the dreaded but expected order came from the Signory. Savonarola said to the messenger, "You come, I presume, from your masters." "Certainly, from their Lordships, the Signory," was the reply. "I also," rejoined Savonarola, "must consult *my* Lord. To-morrow you shall receive my answer." The following day, March 18th, he preached for the last time, told his audience of the order just received, and expressed his determination to obey it. "These are evil tidings for Florence," he said. "Misfortunes are about to fall on her; ye fear the interdict, but the Lord will send an interdict which will cause the wicked to lose both goods and life. . . . When the whole ecclesiastical power is corrupt, you must turn to Christ, who is the First Cause, and say, 'Thou art my Confessor, Bishop, and Pope.'"

It was thus that the Prior of San Marco's preaching came to an end, for the two or three addresses which he gave afterwards can scarcely be called sermons. For eight consecutive years he had, as we learn from himself (and as he had himself foretold when he began to preach), continued in Florence, with few and short intervals of absence; and, during that whole period, he was emphatically *the* preacher of the day. Not a single day, during Advent and Lent of those days, did he omit to preach, and in the intervals he preached on festival days. To quote his own words—he "could not live without preaching," and spent his life and strength proclaiming doctrines which he deemed to be essential to salvation, and denouncing sins which he believed to be abomination in the sight of God. In very truth, Savonarola was a preacher of righteousness, in an age the most corrupt, and in a Church sunk in the very depths of unright-

eousness. But, with all his holiness, zeal, and devotion to truth—as he found it in the Scriptures of Truth—and his self-sacrificing energy in pressing that truth home to the hearts of his hearers, his preaching was defective. Why? Because it did not reach the root of the evil; and so, while overthrowing much, he effected little actual good.

The great German Reformer began, it is true, as Savonarola did, by attacking practical abuses; but he did not stop there. As he studied Scripture, and his own heart by the light of Scripture, he discerned that the disease lay deep within the Church, within the *heart* of man; that the hideous iniquity—the gross corruption outwardly manifested—were but the plague-spots indicating the malignant nature of the malady. The felt need of personal salvation, and the assurance that he had obtained it, when the Spirit revealed to him that “the just shall live by faith,” constituted the very soul of Luther’s life and of his work,—therein lay the secret of his power. He had tried many a broken cistern—works of penance, obedience to the Church; but all had failed to speak peace to his conscience, to give his weary spirit rest. This was Luther’s experience; and having fought, and won, the battle within his own heart—not in his own strength, but through faith in Christ, the Captain of his salvation—he, in his teaching, spoke that which he knew, testified of that which God Himself had taught him. Luther spoke and wrote at least as freely and fervently of the *love* of God for sinners, as of His *wrath* against sin; His was, emphatically, a ministry of reconciliation.

Not so that of the Florentine Reformer. Too one-sided in its character, his preaching dwelt rather on the tremendous consequences *of* sin, than on the remedy *for* sin—Christ’s atonement offered on Calvary, which, while it has procured for man freedom from the *penalty* of sin, is also the means by which he is freed from the *power* of sin.

We do not wonder that Savonarola failed to apprehend this clearly himself. His coming short in this and other points of

doctrine should be read in the light of the days in which he lived ; when the light was as darkness—the days of the three worst Popes that ever filled the papal chair. We rather marvel at the knowledge of truth and purity to which he *did* attain ; and may in very truth take shame to ourselves for our *unfaithfulness* with our “*many things,*” when we mark his faithfulness with his “*few things.*”

But his grand work was a failure ; partly, because he sought to reform the State as well as the Church ; partly, because he gave forth his prophetic announcements as of equal authority with God’s own Word ; and partly, because of his defective views of the Gospel of Christ, on the one hand, and of the antagonistic character of the teaching of Rome *to* that Gospel, on the other.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Ordeal by Fire.

“It is written—Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.”

St. Matt. iv. 7.

S AVONAROLA'S controversy with the Pope was not a mere personal matter. Though the issue should be, as he fully expected, death to himself, it was not that which troubled him; it was the state of the Church, of which the infamous Alexander VI. was counted the head, that vexed his righteous soul, and made him all the more earnestly long for his deposition. But in order to this, a General Council must be called; and, as already stated, Savonarola had, though without effect, taken steps in that direction. At this Council, whenever it should assemble, he intended to plead his own cause, being in possession of documents which would, he said, “startle the world upon the state of things at Rome.”

Aware that, by a decree passed at the Council of Constance, the Pope was bound to summon a general council every ten years, and that, should he neglect to do this, authority was given to the Sovereign power to act in his stead; Savonarola now took up his pen. With all the power of eloquence and of argument he could command, he urged upon the Emperor, and the kings of England, France, Spain and Hungary, the duty of calling this Council “to reform the Church and depose a Pope, who was in reality no Pope.” He also wrote a special letter to Charles VIII. of France, urging him, for the second time, to take the lead in this great work.

This letter never reached Charles : the messenger who had it in charge was arrested on his way to France by agents of Il Moro. His papers, taken from him, were immediately sent to the Pope, whose rage at these "machinations of the excommunicated Friar" was unbounded. He was now in possession of undoubted proof of his "audacious intentions," and saw plainly that the "reptile," whom he had failed to crush, was likely to prove a formidable enemy.

Threatened from every quarter, Savonarola was now deserted by many of his followers. Some fled from the city, others hid themselves until the storm should blow over or abate. Meanwhile Il Mora's spies sent minute details of the progress of events to Milan ; and while the political horizon abroad daily grew more dark and lowering, a change of government was confidently expected in Florence, when wonderful disclosures should be made public. It was at this crisis—when people of all classes, and of every shade of opinion, were looking *without* for something of unusual excitement—that an incident, extraordinary and unexpected, occurred *within* Florence, which largely helped to cast reproach upon the Friar, and bring his story to an end.

It can scarcely be wondered at that the power and influence of the great Dominican should have made him, more or less, an object of jealousy to the other Orders of Friars, and especially to the Franciscans ; and now that he had begun "to go down in the world," now that his name was cast out as evil because of his opposition to the ruling powers, the Friars of St. Francis thought this a fitting opportunity to bring honour upon themselves in the eyes of all true and loyal sons of the Church, by "confounding and silencing the rebellious Dominican Prior of San Marco."

Indeed, for above a year past, Francesco di Puglia, a Franciscan friar, had condemned Savonarola himself and his doctrines from the pulpit. No notice, however, was taken of his attacks. It did not trouble Savonarola that he should be

termed a "heretic, schismatic, pretended prophet," when he knew the accusation was false. Bent upon war, Francesco, after a time, challenged him to pass unharmed through a burning pile, and thus prove the truth of his doctrine. The challenge was not accepted by Savonarola; but it so happened that his friend Domenico being present at one of the Franciscan's discourses, and considering himself to be included in the challenge, eagerly and confidently accepted it. But, no sooner had he done so than the Franciscan drew back, saying he had "business elsewhere." All this had happened the previous year, and seemed to have been forgotten. But now that Florence was turning her back upon her former idol, the crafty Franciscan felt encouraged to renew his challenge in Santa Croce, the church of his Order.

Then Domenico, girding himself for battle, declared his readiness to enter the fire, in support of his Master's three celebrated "conclusions"—

1. The Church of God needs renovation. It shall be scourged, then renewed.
2. Florence, also, shall be scourged; then restored to prosperity.
3. The unbelievers shall be converted to Christ.

To these propositions Domenico added from himself: "All these things shall happen in our days; and the recent excommunication fulminated against the very reverend Friar Girolamo is null, and those who disobey its injunctions do not sin."

Strange to say, Savonarola from the first objected to this proposed ordeal by fire. No doubt common sense might justly have led him to reject it. Yet, as he had previously himself suggested other miraculous experiments in proof of the truth of his doctrines, it is not easy to account for his opposition to this ordeal. His inconsistency must have struck many who recollected his sermon in San Marco, preached not many

months before, when he announced that on the first day of the Carnival he would, if any one of his adversaries would do likewise, go forth with the Sacrament in his hand, and solemnly call upon God to send down fire from heaven to consume whichever—he himself or his antagonist—was in error. And this was no vain boast. Burlamacchi tells us that when that day arrived, Savonarola, having said mass in San Marco, went out in his officiating dress, carrying the Host, and ascended the pulpit in the Piazza, already filled with thousands eager to witness a miracle. But first came the sermon—very different, indeed, from those of former days; no burst of eloquence startled his hearers, or roused within himself the power that was departing from him. Leaning over the pulpit, he said, “If I have said anything to you, citizens of Florence, in the name of God, which was not true; if the apostolical censure pronounced against me is valid; if I have deceived anyone; pray to God that He will send fire from heaven upon me and consume me in presence of the people; and I pray our Lord God, Three in One, whose body I hold in this blessed Sacrament, to send death to me in this place, if I have not preached the truth.”

For half an hour the people prayed and waited for this sign from heaven, but it came not. With what feelings Savonarola and his brethren returned to their convent, chanting a *Te Deum*, who can tell? Did it satisfy *him* who had implored to be “burned up if he were false,” that no fire was sent to prove that he *was* false? We cannot think so. And probably it was from a sense of disappointment felt at that time, that the Friar shortly afterwards made another equally strange and foolish proposal.

This was a challenge to the Franciscans to accompany him to a neighbouring cemetery, and there raise the dead! It was declined, but may it not have suggested to these Franciscans to demand again the ordeal by fire?—a challenge made with no honest intention to fulfil their part in it, but in the hope

that their opponent, whose faith appeared equal to any strain to which it might be subjected, would readily take up the gauntlet, and perish in the flames.

But he did not take it up. Savonarola, as already stated, set his face from the first against the ordeal; while, as we have seen, his friend Domenico accepted the challenge. Having done so, Domenico was not the man to draw back; and the matter had assumed a serious aspect before Savonarola appears to have given it much consideration. For his own part, he said he had "too much to do to waste time in such foolish vagaries." What a pity he did not see, with equal clearness, the folly, the wickedness, of similar tests so recently suggested by himself! Perhaps his having already failed to call down a miracle may have taught him the absurdity of expecting one now. And yet, his biographer, Burlamacchi, affirms that, after frequent refusals, Savonarola declared himself ready to enter the fire, "provided the Pope's legate and the ambassadors of Christian princes should witness the ordeal," and moreover, "solemnly promise that, if he came out unhurt, they would at once, under Divine guidance, set about a general reformation of the Church."

With respect to the Pope's bull of excommunication, Savonarola distinctly denied there being any necessity for the ordeal to prove that *it* was invalid. "Why should we enter the fire to prove that?" he asked. "Have we not, over and over again, shown by argument that it is null?"

Whether these arguments satisfied Savonarola himself is doubtful; that they did not satisfy others, and especially his adversaries, need not surprise us.

To return to the ordeal. When Francesco saw that his old antagonist, Domenico, was determined to brave the fire, he became increasingly anxious to back out of the business. With this intent he declared that his challenge was originally addressed, not to Domenico, but to Savonarola; and that with the Friar himself, and he only, would he have anything to

do. Having made this declaration as public as he could, Francesco rejoiced at his clever escape from the meshes of his own weaving.

But he was not yet "out of the wood." The Compagnacci, at one of their evening entertainments for "the support of true religion and the overthrow of the Friar," thus argued the matter in hand: they said, "If Savonarola enters the fire he is sure to be burned; if he decline to do so, he will lose credit with the people, and give us an opportunity to get up a riot, which will end in his capture." To promote the ordeal was, therefore, their aim, and for this they asked, and obtained, the help of the Signory; their notary immediately issued a copy of the disputed "Conclusions," which all—who wished to maintain and defend them by the ordeal by fire—were invited to sign. Domenico instantly signed them. Francesco refused, on the plea that his proposal was to pass through the fire with Savonarola, not with his subordinate, Domenico. In vain the Signory assured him that not a hair of his head should be even singed; that their sole object was to create a disturbance, under cover of which Savonarola might be captured, possibly killed. The trembling monk could not view the matter from that comfortable point of view. Finally, however, he consented to sign a declaration to this effect—that he would enter the fire provided Savonarola would pledge himself to enter it at the same moment; and this, he expressly said, he consented to do "at the request of the Signory."

"Assuredly," thought the Franciscan, as he signed this declaration, "Fra Girolamo has too much common sense to enter the burning pile; I need have no fear on that head." As to Domenico, he regarded him as a half-witted enthusiast, or possibly, so deeply dyed a fanatic as to be ready to sacrifice his life in the cause of his master. The faint-heartedness of Francesco alarmed the Compagnacci, and, lest their plot should fail, they advised him to induce his brother-monk, Fra Giuliano Rondinelli, to take his place in the ordeal with

Domenico. Rondinelli consented, declaring, as he did so, that he "knew he should be burned," but that he ventured his life "for the salvation of souls." Upon this, Fra Mariano, a friar of San Marco, and one or two others, determined not to be outdone by the Franciscans, boldly declared their readiness also to pass through the fire. From the present aspect of affairs it would therefore seem that the actors in this disgraceful scene will not be the original challenger—Francesco di Puglia—and he—Domenico—who so joyfully accepted the challenge, but the latter, in his own proper person, and Giuliano, the unfortunate scapegoat, whom the wily Francesco has prevailed upon to carry out the dreadful farce in his stead.

There were in Florence men, sober-minded enough to disapprove, and openly express their disapproval, of this ordeal. "This is an affair for priests," said one, "and ought rather to be discussed at Rome; but if the ordeal do take place, will it really put an end to disturbance in our city? If so, let us go, not only through fire, but through water, air, earth. Let us think of our city, and not of friars." It was Carlo Caringiani—a Florentine citizen of note—who thus spoke. When he sat down, another, like minded, rose, and, with tears, exclaimed: "When I think on the present state of things, I know not whether to desire life or death. Certain it is that if our forefathers, the founders of our city, could have foreseen these things—that we should be the sport and the contempt of the whole world—they would have disdained to have anything to do with it. I therefore beseech your Excellencies (the Signory) to put a stop to this affair."

But the sober-minded were in the minority, and, alas! there were, there must have been, many who saw clearly the absurdity of the ordeal as a test of truth—who, from motives the most wicked, yet wished for it. The Pope was eager for it; the Arrabbiati and the Compagnacci equally so. The Signory, for their own ends, desired it; while the Piagnoni loudly called for it, not having a shadow of doubt

that, when the moment of trial came, Savonarola would lead the way into the midst of the flames, and, followed by his faithful Domenico—who, they calculated, would not leave his master—both would come forth unscathed, with no smell of fire on them. Probably the Piagnoni, alone, did not discern the folly of the ordeal. Had not their leader oftentimes asserted that, whenever the time should arrive when a miraculous intervention in his favour should be required, God would not fail to work that miracle? He had often said—and we believe with perfect sincerity—that such would be his experience. No marvel, then, that his followers shared his belief. That the ordeal, therefore, should take place appeared inevitable.

On the 1st of April, Savonarola delivered a short discourse in San Marco on the subject of the ordeal. From the uncertain sound of that address, it is evident that his judgment was not satisfied respecting it. He said he had too much work on hand to give up his time to “such miserable contests,” but if his adversaries were bent upon refuting his prophecies by the proposed ordeal, “I will in no wise,” he said, “hesitate to go through the fire, and I shall be certain to come out unharmed.” Having spoken in this strain for a few moments, Savonarola said in conclusion: “They who truly feel themselves inspired by the Lord will certainly come out from the flames unhurt, should the trial take place, of which we are not yet certain. As for me, I reserve myself for a still greater work, for which I shall ever be ready to offer up my life. The time will come when the Lord will show supernatural signs, but that will certainly not be left to the choice or the will of any one. For the present, it suffices us to see that if we send any one of our brethren indiscriminately, we shall expose ourselves to the anger of the people, *should the Lord not bring him out unhurt from the flames.*” It would seem as if the monstrous absurdity about to be enacted had so clouded the Friar’s mind that he did not see how strangely illogical and contradictory were his words. “They who truly feel them-

selves inspired of the Lord," he said, "will certainly come forth from the flames unhurt"—forgetting that, according to the theory of the ordeal, held by both himself and his adversaries, this assurance was as applicable to one as to the other. For it was quite possible that Franciscans and Dominicans might alike—carried away by excitement—feel convinced that they were "truly inspired of the Lord;" undoubtedly Fra Giuliano, who asserted that he would "enter the fire for the salvation of souls," must have been so persuaded.

Day after day was fixed on, and then set aside, for the ordeal. Some expected the Pope to forbid it; but nothing was further from the intention of His Holiness, and when the 6th of April had come and gone, and no brief from Rome had arrived, the people, intolerant of such delay, called for the ordeal to take place—"to-morrow." "The friars of San Marco are all prepared," wrote Strozzi on the evening of the 6th. "If the trial does not take place—and I now think it will not—the preparation for it is even more striking than would be the miracle itself." Savonarola ended that day with a short address, recommending his friends to pray.

The next morning the Piazza presented a strange spectacle. The evil designs of the Compagnacci on the one hand, and suspicions of foul play on the other, made both parties come armed. The Piazza, therefore, was occupied by three separate bodies of armed men—five hundred soldiers in the pay of the Signory; five hundred armed ruffians, under Dolfo Spini—the Friar's inveterate enemy; and three hundred Piagnoni, led by Maruccio Salviati.

While these arrangements were being made, Savonarola celebrated mass in San Marco, after which he delivered an address to the assembled people, chiefly women—for the men had gone to the Piazza—and exhorted them to continue in prayer until he should return from the ordeal. As he ended his address, the mace-bearers of the Signory arrived to announce that all was ready.

The procession immediately formed. Four hundred Dominicans, with Fra Domenico, the champion of the day, at their head, took the lead. He wore a bright-coloured cope, and carried a long cross in his hand. Behind him walked Savonarola, robed in white, and bearing the Host in a crystal vase. Then followed the rest of the friars, all chanting aloud, "Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered." It was noon when the procession reached the Piazza, and since before dawn every available inch of ground had been occupied; for the people had come to see a miracle.

As the procession took up its position on its allotted space, Savonarola stepped forward, and reverently placed the Host on the altar erected by the Dominicans. As he did so, every eye was fixed upon him, and steadily he bore that gaze; though in his heart of hearts was there not a sense of disquietude, if not of fear, even while he, more loudly than any, had joined in chanting "Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered!"

Not far off were ranged the Friar's friends under Salviati; while the soldiers of the Signory were placed, where most needed, to preserve order, and close the outlets to the streets. The Compagnacci were stationed far off on the other side of the Piazza, under the overhanging Tetto di Pisani, so called from its having been built by the forced labour of Pisan prisoners. In later times it has been the seat of the post-office.

In full view of all, was the pile of combustible materials which had been prepared for this outrage upon common sense and good feeling. It was a platform, about seventy-six feet in length, nearly ten feet wide, and raised about four feet from the ground, and paved with brick. On this platform were placed masses of fagots, sprinkled with oil and resinous substances; there was a passage about two feet wide in the middle, and extending the entire length, along which the champions were to walk. The arrangements for the ordeal were these: When the fire was thoroughly kindled, the champions were

to enter at the opening nearest to the palace, and proceed to the further end; and the entrance was to be immediately closed by fire behind them. This last was Savonarola's suggestion, in order to prevent the possibility of either champion turning back, and leaving his companion in the flames. But why this precaution? Did not the Friar implicitly rely upon the Divine interposition in favour of him who should, "truly feel himself to be inspired of the Lord?"

And now, all seems ready, and the weary and excited crowd becomes more and more impatient; slow and solemn chanting fills the air, and Fra Domenico, in his flame-coloured cope, still kneels before the altar—on which the Host was deposited—in eager expectation of his summons.

There was no chanting on the Franciscan side, nor any discoverable sign of devotion or enthusiasm. Neither Francesco di Puglia, the original challenger, nor his miserable dupe, Giuliano Rondinelli, had yet appeared—they were having a secret conference with the Signory.

Domenico now rose from prayer, his countenance exhibiting the fixed conviction that God would sustain him in the trial; and with intense earnestness he implored there might be no more delay. Then Savonarola stepping forward, demanded that the Franciscan should come forth and not keep the people in further suspense. But there was no reply, no movement on his side. Caught in a net of their own weaving, the Franciscans had recourse to every possible pretence to try and extricate themselves. First, they suggested that, for aught they knew, the flame-coloured cope of Fra Domenico might be enchanted. The monk might come out of the fire unharmed—not by the interposition of God, but that of the devil. The cope must therefore be taken off. Savonarola and Domenico replied that to avoid any dispute, a contract had been signed stating that neither party had any belief in incantations. Nevertheless, the cope was put away. But, urged the Franciscans, the gown might be enchanted; to meet which difficulty, Domenico

offered to change dresses with any one of his companions. Accordingly, he was taken aside and dressed, from head to foot, in the robes of a Dominican—Alessandro Strozzi. Even this concession did not satisfy the Franciscans, and they now forbid Domenico to stand near Savonarola, lest that great magician should cast his spell upon him! Whereupon Domenico placed himself on the other side, among the Franciscans. So earnest was his desire to enter the fire, that he would have done anything—made any sacrifice, so that his wish might be granted.

The long-desired moment seems to have arrived, as a slight movement is visible among the crowd, as of people passing to and from the Palazzo. The chanting, too, became less deafening, and expectation rose to fever-height. There was a breathless pause, and then seditious, threatening cries filled the air as the crowd became aware that there was another disappointment. The Franciscan champion had again asked a conference with the Signory. The result of that conference did not transpire, and discontent gave place to fierce threats against those who meant to cheat the people of the promised spectacle. This was the very moment for which the Compagnacci had toiled and waited. It was joyfully seized; the Arrabbiati, darting forward towards Savonarola, attempted to arrest him, when Maruccio Salviati, and the three hundred Frateschi under his command, drew up in front of the Dominicans, and Salviati, drawing a line with his sword, exclaimed: "The man who crosses this line shall try the metal of Maruccio Salviati's arms;" "and this he said" (we quote an old chronicler) "in a tone and manner which made no man desire to advance a step further." The troops of the Signory, knowing little or nothing of the whole affair, seeing the populace disposed to be refractory, drove them back to their places. Order being restored, and the Compagnacci baffled, the populace reassumed the attitude of waiting, eager expectation. The Signory were more perplexed than ever, while Savonarola anxiously inquired

the cause of this continued delay. Just at that moment a heavy thunder-shower came on, disappointing many, and leading not a few to hope that a stop might thus be put to the wretched business in hand. But the shower soon passed off, and the sun shone out as brilliantly as before.

All this time the Franciscan champion had not appeared. His friends, fertile in finding excuses for his absence, now demanded that before the ordeal took place, Domenico must lay aside the crucifix; he at once consented, saying he would enter the fire holding the Host in its crystal vase, in his hand. Horrified at the idea, the Franciscans exclaimed, "What! will the impious wretch cause the holy elements to perish with him?" Instead of yielding to their clamour as before, Savonarola replied that "in any case, the accidents only of the Sacrament would be destroyed by the fire, the essential substance thereof would remain untouched." Taking advantage of the delay caused by this discussion, the Signory decided that the ordeal should not take place.

Upon hearing this announcement, the rage of the populace became terrific. All parties were equally angry and disappointed. Hunger is not calculated to improve the temper, and the people had eaten nothing since sunrise. Besides, each particular section of that vast multitude had its own special object to gain by the ordeal:—the Compagnacci and the Arrabbiati to secure the death of Savonarola; the Piagnoni, to obtain a triumphant vindication of his doctrine, prophetic gift and heavenly mission; while thousands—to whom whether Savonarola were an imposter or not, was a matter of indifference—were sorely disappointed at being cheated of the miracle, so confidently promised and expected.

Upon the devoted head of Savonarola fell this pitiless storm. Even the Piagnoni charged him with having proved, at the last moment, a broken reed. Not unnaturally they argued that, when others refused to enter the fire he ought to have walked in bravely, fearlessly, and thus given proof of his super-

natural mission. As might have been expected, the hostile Signory, who had rejoiced at the rain, and when it failed to stop the proceedings had, themselves, postponed them, now promulgated the malicious falsehood that the ordeal, not having been carried out, was owing to want of courage on Savonarola's part, which cowardice, they urged, was proof sufficient that he was a false prophet, and a deceiver of the people. The Franciscans, whose champion had not once appeared, as if he had not courage even to look upon the preparations for the ordeal, had the audacity to boast that the victory was theirs.

To be calumniated by his enemies did not surprise Savonarola, but the taunts of the Piagnoni he had not expected, and these were the most bitter drop in his cup which he was called upon to drink. But a faithful few stood by him, under whose protection he returned to San Marco amidst the murmuring and reviling of the infuriated crowd. "Poltroon," "hypocrite," "imposter," "false prophet," every opprobrious epithet, was hurled against him who, but a few hours before, was almost worshipped as a god. When he reached San Marco he found the women whom he had left praying, still on their knees before the altar. Ascending the pulpit he told, in simple words, and few, what had taken place, while horrid cries from the Piazza, "as of wild beasts robbed of their prey," rang through the cloisters.

Alone in his cell that night, Savonarola thought over the past—what a contrast to the present, uncheered by one ray of light! It was an hour, most bitter to the humiliated Friar. Can we doubt that, in the depths of his heart, the conviction that the time would come when a miracle should be demanded of him, had long been a pressing reality? and while the necessity for the miracle appeared but in the distance, his faith had never failed; the assurance that when that necessity should arise, a miracle would be granted was, to him, as "the substance" of the thing "hoped for." So certain was he of this himself, that he had imparted an equally firm confidence to his

followers. But, how was it now? And as this question arose, again and again, what answer could Savonarola give? Could he frame one which would satisfy his conscience? For, had he not, at the very moment when victory seemed certain, shrunk from putting forth his hand to grasp it? Had he been fearful for the result? If so, where was his faith? Everything appeared to be ready for the Divine manifestation which should proclaim to the world that he was truly inspired of God, stamped by Him as His prophet. All were ready—his enemies were there ready to be confounded by his triumph, the pile was there ready to be kindled. True, Francesco was not ready, he had hidden himself away. But Domenico was ready, longing to enter the fire. Why then did Savonarola hold back? Why did he not enter upon the ordeal boldly, and thus evidence the truth of what he had long affirmed concerning himself? Can we, looking back on that strange scene, answer the enquiry? We cannot.

But this, at least, appears plain and reasonable. Believing, that when Savonarola, over and over again, declared his confidence that God would work a miracle in his favour when such an attestation of his inspired mission were needed, he spoke in all sincerity, we can yet understand that, while still firm upon this point, he might not feel this confidence with respect to the ordeal. For, to believe that God would grant a miracle when the fit moment for it arrived was one thing; to feel persuaded that the time fixed by his enemies *was* the *right time*, and that preservation from injury while passing through a burning pile *was* the miracle which God would be pleased to work—quite another. As before stated, Savonarola, from the first, objected to the ordeal; and although his expressions of disapprobation varied from time to time, and in the end gave place to a cold assent, the folly of the whole thing, if not its impiety, probably led him to persuade himself (until the last moment) that it would most likely not take place at all.

Whatever view be taken of this melancholy and mysterious

subject, let it not be thought that Savonarola, notwithstanding his peculiarly sensitive constitution, both mental and physical, was reluctant to give his life for the promotion of that cause for which he had lived and laboured. By no means thus wrong one whose character is undoubtedly, strangely complicated, and difficult to comprehend. Often as he had declared his willingness to suffer for the Truth's sake, we believe he did not utter one idle boast. But, to die in dishonour—to be branded as a deceiver, a false prophet, the thought was too terrible—"O God!" he exclaimed, in bitterness of soul, "*that* is not martyrdom. It is the blotting out of a life that has been a protest against wrong. Let me die because of the Truth that is in me, not because of my weakness."

Besides, and above all other considerations, let it be borne in mind, that faith such as the ordeal by fire demanded, was *not faith* but *fanaticism*, a tempting of God. Savonarola had no warrant to believe that such faith should stand firm. We shall yet see that true faith never failed him, not in the darkest hour of trial—but that which had no scriptural promise upon which to rest, did prove a broken reed. It is very instructive to observe this.

CHAPTER XXIV.

San Marco Attacked.

“The foe is strong, his venom’d rage I dread,
Yet, O my God, do Thou his wrath restrain,
Shield me in battle, soothe my aching head
In the sharp hour of pain :
But more than this, oh give me toiling faith,
Large-hearted love, and zeal unto the death ;
Let me not live in vain.”—*H. Bonar.*

THE plot of the Arrabbiati has failed to a certain extent ; Savonarola has not been captured as had been so confidently expected, nevertheless the challenge with its unfortunate accompaniments tended materially to weaken his cause.

The day after the ordeal was Palm-Sunday. Once again Savonarola, from the pulpit of San Marco, addressed an audience whose faith in him was still unshaken. The sermon ended, he, in tones of deepest sadness, pronounced the benediction and bade farewell to the people ; then, slowly descending the pulpit steps, he turned from that scene for ever. This act of direct disobedience to the Signory who had forbidden him to preach, appears like that of one who, knowing that his time for labour was well-nigh spent, was determined to make the most of it. Nardi, the historian, alluding to this passage in Savonarola’s life, observes—“This man was ever true to himself ; he was never intimidated by any trouble or danger.”

Vespers being ended, numbers of the Piagnoni went to the

Duomo where Fra Mariano, who had been so anxious to pass through the fire the previous day, was expected to preach. On the way, insult of every kind awaited them, giving vent to passions fiercely roused by disappointed hate. The Duomo was crowded to excess, and not alone by people come to pray and hear a sermon : numbers of the Compagnacci filled the nave, while others, posted at the door, insulted those about to enter, and assured them there would not be a sermon. To this the Piagnoni returned a flat denial ; the Arrabbiati replied by a volley of stones, swords were drawn, in a moment the tumult had begun, of which not a few foresaw the end. Those who had come unarmed rushed to their homes for whatever weapons they could seize ; all was confusion. The Compagnacci, grouped together at the corners of the streets and other posts of command, threatened all not of their party who came within their reach, while, from the Piazza, arose the cry, " The fire to San Marco ! "

Scarcely had these words been uttered when the church and convent were besieged by the enraged multitude. On their way they killed two or three unfortunate Piagnoni, one, a poor man, a maker of spectacles, who, hearing the uproar, came out of his house to learn its cause. On rushed the crowd, and reaching the church, found not a few, chiefly women, still engaged in prayer. With wild shrieks these fled, followed by a volley of stones flung at them by the infuriated mob. A few of the townspeople, faithful friends of Savonarola, remained in the church, and having closed and barred its doors and those of the convent, they prepared to defend the hallowed ground to the last. For they had for several days foreseen this tumult, and unknown to Savonarola, who would have objected, they had brought fire-arms, muskets and pikes, into the convent. These weapons they now distributed among the lay-brothers who best knew how to use them, and meanwhile, a few of the friars, having also procured arms, joined their ranks. Savonarola was much displeased, and Domenico earnestly implored

them to lay aside their arms, and not "stain their hands with blood, so contrary to the Gospel and the precepts of their superior." And indeed, Dominicans, with helmets on their heads and long halberds in their hands, keeping guard along the cloisters, were a strange sight—and the cry, "Viva Christo!" but a mockery, unspeakably painful to Savonarola. Putting on his cope, he went forth with the crucifix in his hand, and entreated his brethren to let him surrender himself to the enemy, and thus prevent the shedding of blood. "Let me go," he pleaded, "for I know this tempest has arisen on my account." But the monks and friars gathered round their beloved leader, and exhorted him to remain with them. "If you go, you will be torn in pieces," they cried; "and then what shall we do?" What, indeed! left, as sheep without a shepherd!

Their prayer prevailed. Turning round, Savonarola said, "Follow me;" and leading them through the cloisters, they sang together a hymn of joyful confidence in God.

It was now about four o'clock in the afternoon. The Piazza was crowded to excess. Making their way to the front, the mace-bearers of the Signory delivered a message from that august body. Was it a command to abstain from further tumult? Nothing of the kind. This was their message:—"All within the convent are commanded to lay down their arms. All laymen are to depart from it. Savonarola is to quit the Florentine territory within twelve hours."

The tumultuous cries without reached the ears of those within the convent. Francesco Valori, one of its armed citizens, convinced that it would be impossible to defend the walls much longer, made his escape through a window, thence over the garden wall, and so reached his house. Hardly had he done so, when a message from the Signory demanded his presence before the board. Without a moment's hesitation he obeyed, strong in the confidence that his presence and personal authority would prevail to induce the Signory to restore tran-

quillity to the city. Recalling to mind days not long gone by, when the Signory had bowed as one man to his influence, Valori might naturally expect to prevail with them now. But, there was a grave difference between that occasion and the present; *then* popular opinion was with him, *now* it was against him.

Valori, however, was not permitted to try the effect of his eloquence. As he passed through the crowd, on his way to the Palazzo Publico, with head erect, his countenance betraying neither guilt nor fear, he was recognised by some who owed him no goodwill—relations of Ridolfi and of Tornabuoni, whose deaths he had procured the previous August. In one moment Valori was cut down. He who had expected, were Bernardo del Nero put away, to be the first man in Florence; he who had so furiously called for “justice,” and in answer to that call had procured the death of five of the first men in Florence; he, Francesco Valori, now fell a sacrifice to private revenge. And so did his wife. Hearing the noise, she ran to the window, and was killed by a shot from a cross-bow. Forcing their way into the house, the rioters ran wildly from room to room, plundering as they went; and in the midst of the tumult, an infant sleeping, all unconscious of its terrible surroundings, was smothered in its cradle.

All through the long hours of night, and into the early morning of the next day, the rioters did as they pleased. Some of them, scaling the convent walls, got in through the broken windows, others set the doors on fire, and effected an entrance through the flames and piles of burning wood. In less time than it takes to write it, the entire building was in the hands of the mob. In hope of plunder, even the infirmary was searched, also the friars’ cells, where not a few were found gathered together in prayer. Springing to their feet, the terrified monks, some with lighted tapers, others with crucifixes in their hands, fought in self-defence, “until,” says Burlamacchi, “by a Divine miracle the assailants, imagining themselves

attacked by angels, took to flight." The next moment, meeting a fresh influx of plunderers, they entered the choir. Then tolled the great convent bell, amid the clang of arms and the cries of the combatants, while Fra Benedetto hurled stones from the roof upon the assailants below. There was fighting within and fighting without all through that day; and, during those long hours, Savonarola fought too, but not with carnal weapons. On his knees in the choir he besought the Lord to save not himself only, but the church, the convent, and his brethren. Often was his prayer interrupted by the groans of the dying; a young man, mortally wounded, was laid to die close by him on the steps of the high altar. Fra Domenico administered the Lord's Supper to him, just before he expired in his arms. His last words were, "How sweet it is for brethren to be again found together."

As night closed in, the friars, faint and weary, ate a few dried figs, while the shots became more frequent, the horrid cries more loud. Before long a thick smoke, threatening suffocation, made them break the windows to let in the air. As they did so, the flames, which had been pent up since the doors were set on fire, some hours before, burst into the church. Then two of the friars, each seizing an arquebuss, fell back into the choir, and, climbing up behind the high altar, planted their pieces, one on each side of the great crucifix which surmounted it, and began to fire upon the assailants, who, taking advantage of the alarm caused by the flames, thought to hasten the destruction of the whole building.

Then, and not till then, Savonarola rose from his knees. Taking the Sacrament in his hands, he desired those present to follow him into the library. Meeting Benedetto on the way, pressing forwards to engage the enemy in close combat, Savonarola stopped him, saying, in a voice of mingled wrath and sorrow, "Leave the arms to the flesh, and take up the cross. It was never my will that my flock should become shedders of blood." Benedetto obeyed, threw down his arms,

and followed his brethren into the library. Placing the Host in the middle of that great hall, Savonarola gathered his followers around him, and spoke to them these his last words previous to his arrest, "My sons, before God, and in the presence of the Holy Sacrament, our enemies being already in possession of the convent, I confirm to you my teaching. All that I have said to you I received from God, and He is my witness in heaven that I have not lied. I did not know that all Florence would thus turn against me. But God's will be done! My last word is this, 'Have faith, patience, and prayer.' Let these be your arms! I leave you with sorrow and anguish, to go into the hands of the enemy. I know not whether they will take my life; but I am certain that when I shall be dead, I shall be more able to assist you in heaven than I have been able to do while on earth. Be of good courage. Embrace the cross of Christ, so shall you find safety."

Scarcely had he done speaking, when a second body of guards from the Signory arrived. Their announcement was tremendous—the convent should be reduced to ruins by means of artillery, unless the persons of Fra Girolamo Savonarola, and his two coadjutors, Fra Domenico and Fra Salvestro, were immediately delivered into the hands of the Signory. Thus the government openly sympathized with the rioters, when, in virtue of their office, their duty it was to put them down. Further resistance was now worse than useless. Savonarola confessed to Domenico, and received the Sacrament from his hands. Meanwhile, at the suggestion of Malatesta Sacramoro, one of those who had offered to enter the fire with Domenico, a message was forwarded to the Signory, requesting a written order for the arrest of the three friars. "So soon," says Villari, "did Malatesta play the part of Judas."

When the order for their arrest arrived, Salvestro could nowhere be found. Burlamacchi says he had undoubtedly hidden himself from fear. Savonarola and Domenico, though advised by

many to escape by the back of the convent, as Valori had done, scorned the suggestion. As they left the convent, Savonarola embraced each of the friars, saying to them: "My brethren, remember never to doubt. The work of the Lord is ever progressive, and my death will serve to hasten it." Hurried on by the crowd, who would, if they could, have torn them to pieces on the spot, they reached the Palazzo—their faces and garments blackened by the smoke of torches thrust beneath their hoods, while the cruel mob cried: "This is the true light." Reaching the Palazzo, the prisoners were at once ushered into the presence of the chief magistrate, and asked whether they still persisted in maintaining that the doctrine which they preached was from God. Having replied in the affirmative, they were instantly carried away to two separate cells. Savonarola's prison was that small chamber in the tower of the Palazzo in which Cosmo de Medici had been imprisoned previous to his exile.

Without a day's delay the Signory communicated these details to the various European Courts. Their ambassador at Rome was charged to ask of the Holy Father plenary absolution for their great sin, not only in having so long permitted Savonarola to preach, but in their having themselves listened to his sermons. At the same time they did not lose the opportunity, which this humiliating confession afforded them, to request permission to lay a tax on ecclesiastical property.

Pope Alexander's reply to the "true sons of the Church" abounded in words of commendation, while absolution was freely granted, and blessings of every kind promised for the present and the future. With these came the command to hasten with all speed Savonarola's trial for offences against the State; and this done, to send him to Rome, there to be tried for disobedience to the Pope, and all his other offences of a religious character. Alluding to the request concerning the ecclesiastical tax, the Pope promised "to do all in his power to gratify the Signory." He, however, did nothing.

Ludovico il Moro wrote a letter of warm congratulation to the Florentine Signory. But by far the most important communication which reached them, and that which proved most fatal to Savonarola and to the political fabric which he had erected, came from a most unexpected quarter; and it was this: On the 7th of April (the day on which the ordeal by fire was to have taken place), Charles VIII. of France died at Amboise. Miserable was the manner of his death. Suddenly attacked by apoplexy, he "was carried into a hovel filled with rubbish," says the historian, De Comines; "and there, upon a bed of straw, the King of France expired."

Savonarola had often prophesied that should Charles fail to fulfil his office as "the Rod of God's anger," to which the prophet declared God had called him, he should be forsaken of God, and left to die a miserable death. But this fulfilment of the prophecy could scarcely be a source of comfort either to the prophet himself or to his followers. For, in it, they lost their last and most powerful support, and at the very moment when the king seemed determined to re-enter Italy (as we learn from history) for the reformation of the land, and, as Savonarola confidently expected, that of the Church also.

Therefore it was that Guasconi, when announcing the death of Charles VIII. to Mazzinghi, observed: "Now, just as he showed himself to be about doing something, life was taken from him."

CHAPTER XXV.

Imprisonment and Trial of Savonarola.

O judgment! thou art fled to brutish beasts,
And men have lost their reason.

SHAKSPEARE (*Julius Cæsar*).

THE Inquisition had no tribunal in Florence. In those days it was not needed: the bishops could at any moment call on the civil powers to enforce their decrees. Nevertheless, there were difficulties to be got over before the mock trial of Savonarola and his brethren—Domenico and Salvestro—could be proceeded with. Not that there was any hesitation on the part of the Signory to undertake the onerous task. So anxious were they to enter upon it, that on the evening of the very day after the tumult and consequent arrest of the friars, they called a meeting to make arrangements for their examination.

That day was Monday in Easter week—a week which, in happier times, was wont to be especially consecrated by Savonarola to services in the Duomo. How many who now mocked and derided him had then listened with breathless attention to his fervent eloquence! He is now a prisoner in the hands of his enemies, and, besides his two companions, Domenico and Salvestro, seventeen others—some friars, some laymen—all known as his friends—are prisoners also. Having searched San Marco, and especially Savonarola's cell, in hope of finding papers which might tell against him on his trial, the Compag-

nacci gathered together all the weapons they could find in the church and convent, and placing them, stained by bloodshed as they were, upon a cart, exhibited them throughout the city, calling to the people: "See here the miracles of the Friar, and the tokens of his love for Florence"! It was truly a horrid sight, and produced the desired effect upon the populace, helping much to smooth the way for the business in hand.

Legally it belonged to the court of the "Eight" to try the prisoners, and hence arose the first question for discussion. The members then in office would be superseded by others at the end of the month—possibly by friends of the accused. What course should be adopted to avert such a possibility?

Then, again, the Pope's demand that Savonarola should be sent for trial to Rome must be considered. Would it not be derogatory to the honour and independence of Florence were the three Friars to be tried on foreign ground? This question was fully debated; but there is no record of any speech upon the subject, except that of Vespucci, who, as a doctor of laws, gave his opinion that Savonarola should not be sent to Rome, that the Pope should be assured of his safe custody in Florence, and that his trial should be conducted by competent persons. Vespucci further stated his opinion that there would be no need to publish the entire of the Friar's examination, but only those parts approved by the Signory. As to the question about the future filling up of the "Eight," it was argued that if the election failed to satisfy the Signory, they should be empowered to procure another. Armed with such full powers from without, and inspired by one sentiment—hatred against the accused—within, it was easy to calculate what the result of the deliberations of the Signory would be. And yet, as if to guard against the possibility of his escape, no aid of counsel was offered to the prisoner. It does not appear that he solicited such help. Did he not feel persuaded it would be denied him?

Preliminaries being arranged, a commission consisting of

seventeen—all avowed enemies of the accused—was appointed to conduct the trial, authority being given them to use torture and whatever other means they might think necessary to gain their end. Dolfo Spini—he who had been foremost in the tumult on Ascension-day—he who had both covertly and openly sought to kill the Friar, at one time by his own hand, at another by a hireling assassin—he, the leader of the Compagnacci, now sat as judge in a court in which law and justice were to be openly violated. So apparent was it from the first that the prisoners' cause was already prejudged, that one of the Signory, horrified at the judicial farce in which he was called to play a part, withdrew from his colleagues, with these cutting words, "God forbid that my family should stain their hands with the blood of this just man!"

The Commission was not formally complete until the 14th; but so anxious were his enemies to begin their cruel work, that Savonarola was examined by torture on the evening of the 9th, and for the following ten days. When first questioned concerning his doctrine, he replied, "You tempt the Lord." Being given writing materials, and desired to state his opinions—so simple, so free from guile or hypocrisy, were his words, so devoid of anything which could be legally urged against him, that his statement was immediately torn to pieces. It was evident that the Friar's condemnation could not *thus* be procured. This short document—lost for ever—was, in fact, the only confession of faith drawn up by Savonarola. Throughout the rest of his subsequent examination paper and pens were kept from him.

The details of those days are too painful to read, much too painful to write; enough to say that every means which ingenious cruelty could devise, in order to extort from the sufferer the confession required by his tormentors, were resorted to. Can we wonder, then, that when tortured beyond human endurance, his mind wandered, and he said and unsaid many things; and often so incoherently that he could not fail

to be misunderstood, even had his listeners been friends, not foes, until in the bitterness of conscious mental weakness, he cried out, "Take, O Lord! take, O take away my life." But death came not at his call—only delirium. And then, seeing their horrid labour was in vain, they sent him back to his dungeon; but ere he went, he fell on his knees and prayed for his murderers.

Thus lingered on eleven days of torture and delirium; and yet, at their close, the examiners declared that their victim's answers while in that state, had been given "spontaneously and in an uninjured state of body."

We can well believe that, when after each examination, Savonarola, in the quiet of his cell, recalled to mind words which had been wrung from him by extreme torture, "the iron entered into his soul," that such moments were, perhaps, the most painful in his whole life. But, upon what subject did he deny statements he had long held true? The reply to this question casts a bright light upon the character of Savonarola's teaching.

The subjects upon which he was examined were three—religion, politics, and visions and the gift of prophecy as possessed by himself; and it is most interesting and instructive to observe that upon the two former no torture, however prolonged or severe, could force him to yield a single point. His religious convictions—founded upon the truth of God, and received by faith—remained unshaken amid the storm; and so did his political views. But it was just the contrary upon the subject of visions and prophecy. Even when in the pulpit of the Duomo, and addressing an audience ready to accept as truth every word he uttered, Savonarola's prophetic statements were ever as an uncertain sound. His visions, though sincerely believed in by himself and his followers, were mainly, if not entirely, the fruit of a mind weakened by monkish fanaticism; hence we often find him saying the most contradictory things respecting his "gift of prophecy." When it was thus

with him, in calm weather and under the approving smile of thousands, could it be expected that Savonarola would give coherent answers, that he would be able to explain and defend his prophetic assertions before those whose only object in questioning him was to find ground for further torturing his wretched body? Impossible! At no time of his life had he been able to explain the subject to others, and this because he had never clearly understood it himself. Could he be expected to understand it, or clearly explain himself now, when his body was quivering under torture? He felt his weakness in that terrible moment. "O Lord!" he exclaimed, "Thou hast taken from me the spirit of prophecy." At another time, having firmly maintained that all he had ever said respecting visions was true, he concluded with these words of truth and soberness:—"Leave this alone, for if it be from God, you will have a clear sign of it; but if it be of man, it will fall to the ground. But whether I am a prophet or not is not an affair of the State, and no one has a right to judge or condemn the thoughts of others."

Upon political matters his answers were throughout clear and explicit. Over and over again he denied having ever used the confessional to obtain possession of State secrets, and with equal earnestness repudiated the charge of having by favour or disfavour shown to any one, sought to procure information respecting such matters. "My sole object," he affirmed, "was to favour free government in general, and such laws as would improve it."

To the Signory, Savonarola's answers, we can well believe, bore the impress of studied obscurity. Little could they appreciate the character, mental and physical, of their victim. Highly sensitive by nature, his cloister life, fastings, vigils, eight years of incessant preaching had told heavily upon him. And then, the events of those hours immediately preceding his arrest—the church and convent that he loved, fired and sacked! the cries of the wounded resounding within walls where the

voice of prayer and praise were wont to be heard! the insults to himself! the desertion of friends! and last, not least, the inward consciousness that he had failed.

It was upon this weak, nervous, excited, sorely afflicted one, that torture so severe, so terribly certain in its effects, that the executioner himself stood amazed to behold it, was brought to bear!

The Signory were sorely puzzled and disappointed. Examination, torture, renewed again and again, had brought forth nothing that could legally criminate the accused. What was to be done? The people were impatient for conviction. The Pope had written more than once to complain of the tardiness of the trial; the case seemed desperate, and required a desperate remedy.

It so happened that at the close of one long day of examination, and failure, one of the examiners meeting a notary of notoriously bad character, Ceccone by name, lamented to him that no amount of torture had availed to procure one grain of legal evidence against Savonarola. "Then," replied Ceccone, "where none exists, we must invent one"—adding, that he would undertake to make out "a process" which would "ensure conviction." But, he would not do this for nothing; no, the sum he required was 400 ducats. His offer was accepted; and with stealthy steps Ceconne was smuggled into the room in which the examination, by torture, was conducted—and there, hidden behind a curtain, he saw and heard enough for his hellish purpose. Out of the wild incoherent mass of confession, and recantation of confession, Ceccone spun a web strong and subtle. His long and minute report was marked by fabrication from beginning to end. "Yes," substituted for "no;" "No," for "yes," altering entire sentences. While others, of pure invention on his part, such as "This was my hypocrisy; my pride; I did it for worldly glory"—were freely inserted.

But even in this report of Ceccone's, mutilated as it was—Savonarola himself is heard, when the words, as correctly

reported, would tell against him. For instance, when affirming that the Church must first be scourged, then reformed, he said—“To aid me in this object which I had at heart, I told of things in my sermons by which Christians might know the abominations practised at Rome, so that they should desire to have a General Council called ; for if that were accomplished, I hoped to see many prelates, and also the Pope, deposed, and I should have endeavoured to be there : and being there, I felt confident that I should preach and do such things as would be glorious in the result.” Surely, it needed the inwrought conviction that he was speaking the truth to enable Savonarola to utter words so unsavoury to his examiners, except indeed so far as they might lead to his conviction—or, at least, lower him in the eyes of Florence. Thus, all during his trial, as indeed throughout his whole life, he exhibits a strangely compound character, —sublime heroism, with intervals of utter weakness ; profound powers of reasoning, with superstitious fancies.

The examination being ended, the Pope was duly informed of the fact. In the, justly styled, “odious” letter from the Signory, in which they express their regret at the length of the trial, they say, “We have had to deal with a man of most extraordinary patience in suffering, and of the greatest sagacity, who hardened himself against torture. Notwithstanding a long and most careful interrogatory, and with all the help of torture, we could scarcely extract anything from him which he wished to conceal from us, although we laid open almost the inmost recesses of his mind.”

Something yet remains to be done : something necessary in the eye of the law—Savonarola must affix his signature to the report of his trial. With difficulty he was persuaded to do so. But what did he sign ? Not the document drawn up by the authorized notary from his notes written in full view of the prisoner and his judges ; but a copy of that document, altered and falsified by Ceccone—the spy behind the window-curtain. It is even doubtful, so conflicting are the accounts handed

down to us, whether the paper Savonarola signed was, really, that which had just been read to him, or one, by sleight of hand, substituted in its place. Most likely it was the latter. Be that as it may, upon hearing its contents, he was asked, "Is that which is here written, true?" and he replied, "That which I have written is true." Did Savonarola, by these words, refer to his confession of faith, written with his own hand on the evening of his arrest? Who can tell? Having thus spoken, he returned to his cell.

Ceccone has done his work ; but not to the satisfaction of his employers. All his malice and ingenuity proved powerless to procure sentence of death against the accused ; consequently, the Signory rewarded him by 30, instead of 400 ducats.

Before publishing the depositions, which, after long discussion, it was agreed to do, these were, for the third time, altered. When circulated in that form, Florence read them with amazement ; neither to friend nor foe were they acceptable. Scarcely had the first copy been sold, when the Signory ordered the entire edition to be suppressed. Nevertheless, a second edition followed immediately, and was eagerly purchased.

It would appear as if the Signory already dreaded the odium sure to follow, when the present excitement should give place to calm reflection. For, upon whom would this odium lie? Surely, mainly upon the Signory ; and so, as if to screen themselves, they stated at the beginning of the first edition of the Notary's report, that "the commissioners and examiners of the Florentine Signory," had been "solemnly elected and deputed by a commission *from the Holy Apostolic See*"—thus would they throw the responsibility, which they had so heartily accepted, upon the Pope. When all was over, and their victim's ashes were floating down the Arno, the Signory, when announcing the fact to the King of France, expressly assured him, that the bishops, "Romolino and Turriano, had" (as we know they actually did) "by the authority of the Pope, pronounced his sentence, and that the Signory were *in no degree responsible!*"

But these efforts to screen themselves were in vain. *They* thought themselves safe when the first edition of the trial was suppressed ; but, to quote Burlamacchi, "God permitted it to be divulged : for Ceccone had sent a copy of it to a friend who promised not to shew it to any one, but afterwards deceived him, printed it, and so made it public."

The verdict for death appearing to be as far off as ever, the Signory decided upon a fresh examination of the accused. Though short, it was severe, and again, as before, his words were made to mean whatever his tormentors pleased. There was yet one more step required by the law — the report of the trial must be publicly read in the hall of the Great Council, the accused being also present. But what, if Savonarola should detect the falsehoods with which it abounded ! Could he fail to do so ? And so, it was settled that his *absence*, not his *presence*, should be required. The paper was read by the secretary of the "Eight," who had the effrontery to assure the assembled multitude that "Savonarola declined to be present, as he was afraid he should be stoned." No one, however, believed this assertion.

Savonarola passed a quiet month in his prison, free from further "questioning," from the 19th April to the 19th of May, when the Pope's commissioners arrived. How did he spend that month ?

When preaching on the Psalms, from time to time during his public ministry, he always passed over Psalms xxxi. and li., saying the time would come when he should especially need them, and that then he would "unfold their treasures to his own infinite comfort—and it might be, the comfort of others too." That time had now arrived ; and as solitude and rest revived his weary mind, and his poor shattered body became equal to the effort, he took up his pen, and traced the outpourings of his heart as he thought over those two Psalms. Turning to Psalm xxxi. 1 : "In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust ; let me never be ashamed ; deliver me in Thy righteous-

ness," he wrote these meditations—"Whither shall I, poor sinner, turn me? to the Lord, whose mercy is infinite. No one should glory in himself; all the saints say, not to us, but to the Lord glory belongs. They were not saved by their merits or their works, but by the goodness and the grace of God, therefore no one can have glory in himself." And again, further on: "O Lord, a thousand times hast Thou wiped out my iniquity, and yet a thousand times have I again fallen into it. But when Thy Spirit shall descend upon me, when Christ shall live within me, then I shall feel secure. Confirm me, then, O Lord, in Thy Spirit, for then only shall I be able to instruct the wicked in Thy ways. If Thou hadst desired the sacrifice of my body, I would have given it; but Thou askedst not for burnt-offerings, but for the spirit. Let, then, a heart that has repented of its sins be offered up to Thee, and more Thou wilt not require."

As if once again in the pulpit—preaching upon the need of reformation of the Church, he wrote these thoughts, "I fervently pray that all men may be saved, for the works of the just would greatly comfort me. I pray Thee, therefore, to turn Thine eyes towards Thy Church, when Thou wilt see how greatly unbelievers outnumber the Christians. Send forth Thy Spirit, and renovate the face of the earth. Hell is becoming full, and Thy Church empty. Arise therefore, O Lord! why sleepest Thou? Our sacrifices are not acceptable to Thee, for they are those of ceremony, and not of justice. Where now is the glory of the apostles—the strength of the martyrs—the simplicity of monks?"

Meditating upon the fifty-first Psalm, he touchingly describes the conflict going on within himself—sorrow one moment, hope the next making its voice heard. "Sorrow," he writes, "has pitched his camp around me, and has encompassed me with a strong and numerous army; he has taken full possession of my heart, and never ceases, night nor day, to attack me with the clang of arms. My friends fight under his banner, and

have become my enemies. All that I see, all that I hear, bring him before me." Then, as if to check these bursts of melancholy, he speaks of his state as like one in a fever, to whom everything tastes of bitterness. He says, "I will turn me to heavenly things, and Hope will come to my rescue. Sorrow cannot endure her aspect. Now let the world oppress me as it will, let mine enemies rise up against me, I fear them not, as one whose hope is in the Lord. It may be, O Lord, that Thou wilt not grant my prayer that I may be delivered from temporal anguish, for such a measure of grace might not help the soul, which virtue alone inspires with courage in days of tribulation. I shall then, for a time, be overcome by men; they will have strength and power against me; but Thou wilt not suffer that I shall be for ever cast down."

Then follows a passage of peculiar interest:—"I shall have hope then in the Lord, and I shall, ere long, be freed from tribulation. And by what merits? Not truly by my own, but by Thine, O Lord. I do not rely upon my own justification, but on Thy mercy. The Pharisees gloried in their justification; but they had it not from God. It comes from grace alone; and no one will be justified before God solely by having fulfilled the works of the law." In conclusion he says: "I shall not put my trust in man, but in the Lord alone; and I shall make my vows before the whole people; for the death of saints is precious in the eyes of the Lord. Should the whole army of my enemies be arrayed against me, my heart will not quake, for Thou art my refuge, and wilt lead me to my latter end."

Being deprived of pen, ink, and paper, Savonarola could write no more.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Fra Domenico—Patient in Tribulation.

—◆—
Who dares think one thing, and another tell,
My heart detests him as the gates of hell.

The Iliad.
—◆—

THE result of the examinations of Domenico and Salvestro was equally disappointing to the Signory. Strong in body and firm in mind, Domenico suffered without flinching or uttering a word which his examiners could urge against him. With refined cruelty they tried to break his spirit by assuring him that his revered master had retracted everything. But Domenico had not now to learn the character of him whom he had so long believed true ; and calm in the midst of terrible torture, his faith in Savonarola remained unshaken.

As if wishing to earn for themselves the character of upright judges, they desired him to state his confession of faith in his own handwriting, with a view to its being published. But, upon reading it, their courage failed ; every sentence—so pure, so true—would have told against themselves. As it stood then, it must not be made public ; and so, as they had done with the master, so they now did with the servant—they altered his confessions, and added—what he would have died rather than betray—the names of friends of Savonarola and of his cause. Even thus mangled, the Signory durst not publish it. A few manuscript copies alone were circulated.

Beginning with these words : “ My God and Lord Jesus

Christ, knows that I, Fra Domenico, for His sake, am not false in any of the things I now write—," the friar went on to affirm that he and Savonarola were pure from the blood shed in San Marco, they having earnestly protested against arms being brought into the convent. Upon the subject of the ordeal, he said: "I went forth with the utmost deliberation to pass through the fire, and never expected any objection being made to my carrying the Host with me." In conclusion he begged that his words might be interpreted "according to the intention with which they were written."

Being desired to state in writing his opinion of Savonarola, he at once complied. "From a certain impression on my mind," he wrote, "I have ever fixedly believed—and nothing has ever caused me to disbelieve—and I do now believe, in all the prophecies of Savonarola. . . . I have kept stedfastly to that faith, nor, on that account, ought your Excellencies to be offended, for this, my belief, does no injury to the State; in such matters every one is free to believe as he will." How deeply touching are these concluding words: "There is nothing more on my mind; if there be anything else you wish to know from me, ask me, and I will do my best to satisfy you. But give credit to all I say, as you certainly may, for I have always had a tender conscience. I am quite ready to speak as openly as if I were at the point of death, which may very easily be the case if you continue to torture me, for I am already utterly broken down. . . . I pray you, therefore, be merciful, and believe in the simple truth I have written." Yet all the more they tortured him, while he cried: "I know no more; for my whole concern has been to lead a life of virtue, and with Jesus Christ, the King of Florence. You can get nothing more out of me, for I have no more to give!" And still they tortured him. When exhausted, almost unto death, they placed a pen in his hand, and he traced these last words of his confession: "God's will be done! I never perceived, nor even had the slightest suspicion, that Father Hieronymo either

deceived or feigned ; but, on the contrary, he was ever most upright, and I have always considered him a man of a rare nature. Having the greatest reverence for him, I hoped, through him, to have the grace of God to enable me to do some good to the souls of men ; and, looking upon him as a man of God, I obeyed him with singleness of heart, and with all anxiety as his subject. I have sometimes said to the friars from the pulpit, that if ever I discovered the slightest error or deception in him, I would lay it open and make it publicly known. And it is most certain that I have sometimes declared to himself that which I would have done, and which I would now do, did I know that there was any duplicity in him."

Fra Salvestro, a prey from childhood to fancies and imaginations which he believed to be messages from heaven, presented, when under examination, a perfect contrast to Domenico. To save his life, he was ready to say, and again unsay, anything ; to swear falsely against Savonarola—to give up the names of many, who had called him "friend," to their enemies ! And yet, unwittingly, some of his assertions tended, and very remarkably, to establish Savonarola's innocence. Salvestro's depositions were, therefore, also submitted to Ceccone for correction, and, where desirable, additions !

Domenico and Salvestro being sent back to their cells, several friars of San Marco, and other friends of Savonarola, were placed under examination. Without one exception, they all affirmed the Friar to be "a man wholly devoted to heavenly things," who never concerned himself about the affairs of State, except with a view to promote true religion. Having borne this testimony to their Superior's character, they were shown Ceccone's report of his depositions, in which he was made to deny all he had ever said as to his visions and prophecies. Then, indeed, not a few, caught in the snare, expressed their surprise and anger in unmitigated terms.

We can hardly blame them. For their belief in Savonarola's visions and prophecies was, of necessity, without any solid

foundation upon which to rest. *They* believed them, because *he* believed them, and now that he—as they were assured, and by his own testimony—had himself retracted all he had formerly asserted—was it strange that their faith in him should become shaken? Even Fra Benedetto, his faithful and long-tried friend, felt, as he himself expressed it, “like a thrush that had been struck to the ground!” But Benedetto did not long remain in that prostrate state. Nerved by love and reverence for his friend and teacher, he looked carefully into the facts of the case, and discovered wherein the deception lay. Need we add that, as he pondered over the matter, his confidence in Savonarola gathered strength? All reliable witnesses, and they were many, bore testimony to the purity, the unfeigned sincerity of the Friar’s life, and of his whole bearing throughout his trial.

But there were friars in San Marco—poor, craven-hearted mortals, who, dreading the wrath of the Pope, threw themselves at his feet and implored his pardon for having harboured within their walls “the fomenter and leader of every error.” But even their wrath tended to his praise, for, in their letter to the Pope, they stated that “*the rectitude of Savonarola’s whole life; the sanctity of his habits . . . the success which attended his efforts to reclaim the city from vice, from usury, and crimes of every kind;*” all these things, they said, had “not only deceived themselves, but men of far greater genius.” Two of the friars bore this letter to Rome, and returned to Florence with the Pope’s reply, granting the desired absolution. Another letter from the Pope, addressed to the Archbishop and Chapter of the Duomo, empowered them to grant absolution *for any crime committed with a view to the destruction of Savonarola—even were it that of murder.* In both these letters the Pope reiterated his demand that Savonarola should be sent to Rome, there to receive sentence of death.

A new Signory being now in office, this demand of Roderigo

Borgia was again debated, and again it was decided that the impending sentence should be pronounced and executed in Florence, thereby to strike terror into the hearts of those—and they were not few—whose love and devotion to the Friar continued unabated. If the Pope desired to learn more than he had been told by letter, the Signory informed him that he might send commissioners to examine the three friars afresh in the city of Florence.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The End.

“ Be like a bird, which for an instant may
Rest on frail boughs, yet all untroubled sings ;
Nor checks its song to heed the bending spray,
Calm in the quiet consciousness of wings.”

Translated from Victor Hugo.

AT length the Pope yielded, and consented to send commissioners to Florence. These—Gioacchino Turriano, General of the Dominican Order ; and Francesco Romolino, Bishop of Ilerda—arrived on the 19th of May. As they passed through the streets, the cry, “ Let him die ! death to the Friar ! ” rent the air ; and Romolino, looking around, smiled, and said, “ Yes, he will die sure enough.” In fact, as the Florentine agent, writing from Rome, said, the two commissioners had been “ charged to put Savonarola to death even though he were a second John the Baptist.” Scarcely had they entered the apartments allotted to them, when Romolino exclaimed to the magistrates in attendance : “ We shall make a famous blaze ! I have the sentence already prepared ! ”

The examination began the following day. Savonarola was again severely tortured, the Papal Commissioners being determined to surpass all others in cruel ingenuity. The result was the same as on former occasions—the same fearless denial of heretical teaching and political crimes—the same delirious, incoherent answers when questioned respecting his gift of

prophecy. Two days having passed in this way, the Commissioners, seeing that neither by torture, nor cross-questioning, not even by torturing, his words as well as his body, could they find a single point upon which he could be legally condemned, thought it best to close the examination. Bishop Romolino, therefore, ended the second day's proceedings by ordering Savonarola to appear on the morrow to receive his sentence. "I am a prisoner," he replied; "I will come if they will lead me."

That evening, at about half-past five o'clock, Ceccone, accompanied by five Florentine citizens, came to try, by threats and promises, to extract something further from the Friar. They were utterly unsuccessful. While they were thus occupied, the Papal Commissioners, and those appointed as assessors, met in council to deliberate upon the sentence about to be pronounced. But there was not one moment's discussion! Sentence of death was immediately passed upon Savonarola and Salvestro; Romolino at the same time suggested that it might be well to spare the life of Domenico. "Not so," replied his coadjutors; "for, if he lives, he will keep alive the doctrines of his master." "Then," exclaimed the Bishop, "let him die! A miserable friar, more or less, is of small consequence."

That night, each prisoner in the loneliness of his cell, heard the dread tidings of his sentence. Salvestro was deeply agitated. Domenico, on the contrary, received it "as if it had been an invitation to a feast." Time being short, he at once wrote a farewell letter to his brethren, which ended with these words: "Kiss all the brethren of San Marco for me, especially our most beloved of Fiesole, whose names, imprinted on my heart, I carry before God. Collect together all the works of Fra Girolamo that are in my cell. Get them bound, and place one copy in the library, and one in the refectory, to be read at table; and let it be fixed by a chain, so that the lay brothers may sometimes read the books there." Domenico

was in so excited a state that when told that the bodies of all three should be burnt after death, he prayed to be burnt alive, in order, he said, that he might "endure that painful martyrdom for Jesus Christ's sake."

Savonarola was on his knees engaged in prayer when the messenger of death entered his cell. Without rising, he heard his sentence read ; it did not seem to afford him either joy or sorrow. Shortly after, when offered supper, he refused it, saying, his mind needed to be strengthened, not his body. Probably to this end a Benedictine monk now came to perform for him the last offices of his Church. Scarcely had he gone, when Jacopo Nicolini, clothed in black, with a black hood drawn over his face, entered the cell. His was the voluntary task to comfort those doomed to suffer the penalty of death, and now he inquired of Savonarola what he could do for him. One favour, only one, was demanded, that he would procure permission for the three condemned friars to meet together once more before they suffered. Nicolini at once consented, and, after some hesitation, the Signory gave permission for them to meet in the great hall of the "Five Hundred."

In the stillness of night they gathered there. It was the first time they had seen each other since the evening of Palm Sunday, when their convent was attacked. Forty days of imprisonment and torture, during which every effort had been made to induce each to believe that the others had recanted, had passed since that memorable Palm Sunday. As they stood now, face to face, what thrilling emotion filled their hearts ! There was not time for talking, even had they desired it ; they could only meet, each his brother's gaze, in silence. But one glance at their revered master, reassured Domenico and Salvestro—if, indeed, that were needed, that Savonarola had not spoken words of falsehood or deceit—that the confession shown to them as *his* had been altered, falsified, to suit the schemes of his enemies.

A few words, indeed, were spoken at that solemn interview.

In the spirit of days gone by, Savonarola, turning to Domenico, said: "I have been told that you have requested to be burnt alive; but that is wrong. It is not permitted to you to choose the manner of your death. Do we yet know with what firmness we shall suffer that to which we are condemned? That does not depend upon ourselves, but will be granted to us by the grace of God."

Then, in a severe tone, he said to Salvestro, "I know that you are anxious to declare your innocence before the people; I admonish you to lay aside that thought, and rather follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, even on the Cross, would not justify Himself."

Before parting, Domenico and Salvestro, kneeling down, received for the last time the benediction from their Superior. Then, slowly, each returned to his cell. Savonarola slept during the early part of the night, his head resting on Nicolini's shoulder. Calm and peaceful were his dreams, so pleasant his sleeping thoughts, that a smile often passed across his face. Rising before dawn, he passed the hours in prayer.

In the early morning the three friars partook together of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. As he raised the Host, Savonarola prayed thus:—"Lord, I know that Thou art that perfect Trinity, invisible, distinct, in Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. I know that Thou art the Eternal Word; that Thou didst descend from heaven; that Thou didst hang upon the Cross to shed blood for our sins. I pray Thee that by that blood I may have remission of my sins, for which I implore Thy forgiveness for every offence or injury done to this city, and for every other sin of which I unconsciously have been guilty." Having made this full Scriptural confession of faith, Savonarola, having first partaken himself, gave the Sacrament to his brethren. A few moments after, they were informed that all was ready for their execution.

To the Piazza they bent their steps, where a vast multitude awaited them. On the marble terrace, almost under the shade

of the Duomo, and on the very spot where, but a few months before, the huge bonfire of vanities had been consumed, and where still later, the ordeal by fire had been awaited—on that spot three grim tribunals had been erected. One of these was for the Bishop of Vasona, who, by command of the Pope, was to perform the ceremony of degrading the condemned. Another was for the Papal Commissioners, whose office it was to declare them heretics and schismatics, and then deliver them over to the secular arm of the State. The third tribunal was appropriated to the Gonfaloniere and the “Eight” who should pronounce sentence of death. Exactly in front was a long, narrow platform, stretching across the Piazza; and at its end an upright stake, with a cross-bar near the top, had been erected, upon which cross the friars were to suffer by hanging. An immense pile of combustibles, placed around the foot of the cross, had been prepared for the subsequent burning of the bodies.

There were some among the crowd who, though feeling no compunction at the atrocious murder about to be committed, yet objected to the arrangements made for carrying it out. To their pious minds the resemblance to the Cross of Calvary was painful! To satisfy their scruples, the cross-bar was shortened again and again; every effort made to remove the sacrilegious resemblance. “Whether,” it has been observed, “these pious efforts were successful in calming uneasy consciences, we are not told.”

As the crowd continued to gather—pressing, as crowds are wont to do, as close as possible to the horrible instrument of death—the looker-on might not at a glance discern much difference between it and that so lately assembled on the same spot to witness the ordeal. And yet, it was a very mingled multitude. Not impelled by one and the same feeling had they that day assembled—some were led simply by a hard-hearted, ferocious curiosity to witness a horrible sight; others by a feeling of bitter hatred towards the condemned, and

among these were some who had been Savonarola's disciples, but now, believing him false, they regarded him as worthy to die. "Let him suffer," could be read in the calm sense of satisfaction visible in their countenances. But there were others among the crowd, and many, very many, hiding themselves away in bitter grief for all that had befallen their master and their friend, who yet cherished the hope that at the last moment the spirit of prophecy would assert itself—that God would not let His servant fall into the hands of the wicked, but would by a miracle deliver him. Bitter were the taunts which these had to bear from the ruffianly mob, who composed by far the greater part of the populace, reinforced by hundreds let loose from prison, by order of the Signory, as if to make "confusion worse confounded."

It was ten o'clock when the friars entered upon this scene. At the foot of the stairs of the Palazzo Publico, a Dominican monk, in virtue of his office, disrobed the prisoners of their monastic garments. Savonarola seemed not to have expected this. Deeply moved, he said, as he gave his dress to the Dominican, "Oh, holy robe! How much I have loved thee! Thou wast granted to me by the grace of God, and I have to this hour preserved thee stainless. Now, I do not give thee up; but thou art taken from me."

Clothed in thin woollen garments, with feet naked and hands tied behind them, they passed on to the tribunal where sat the Bishop of Vasona, once Savonarola's friend and disciple. Taking his former master by the arm, the wretched, time-serving bishop, forgetting (probably from agitation) the prescribed form of words: "I separate thee from the Church militant, added—"and triumphant." "Militant, not triumphant, for that is not given to thee," exclaimed Savonarola, calm in hope, steadfast in faith, even in that supreme hour.

Having, at the second tribunal, been delivered over to the secular arm by the Papal Commissioners, the friars, stript and degraded, passed on to the third—that of the Florentine offi-

cial, where stood Dolfo Spini, as one of the "Eight." Sentence of death having been read, the condemned—in their close white garments, feet bare, hands bound—trode their way, with firm step, along that narrow platform, with the horrible cross-bar at its end. Did they—did Savonarola hear the yells of execration, the savage cries of those thirsting for his blood as he neared the goal? Or, did his spirit recall words spoken from the Cross of Calvary fifteen hundred years before? and did their assurance that all necessary for his salvation was "Finished," nerve him for suffering and for death!

Even Salvestro was calm. Fra Domenico, as he followed him, chanted the *Te Deum*. Savonarola came last. To some few in the crowd, who tried by a word of comfort to help him on his way, he said: "In the hour of death God only can give comfort." And to one who asked what it was that supported him in that hour of trial, he replied: "Our Lord suffered as much for me." These were his last words ere he reached the scaffold.

Salvestro suffered first, saying: "Into Thy hands I commit my spirit!" Domenico followed, with a countenance lighted up with hope and joy. Then came Savonarola, apparently so absorbed in thought that he was unconscious of the terrible surroundings. But just before he suffered, he cast one long, lingering look upon the multitude clamouring for his death—hundreds of whom had, day after day, pressed to hear him in the *Duomo*. Then, calm and serene, he committed his body into the hands of the executioner, and his soul into the keeping of Christ.

They flung his ashes over the *Ponte Vecchio* into the *Arno*, but not before many of the *Piagnoni*—and among these, women of high rank, disguised as servants—made their way through the taunting crowd, even to the foot of the scaffold, and there collected relics of the dead. Until the middle of the last century, flowers were wont to be annually scattered on the spot, where Savonarola fell asleep, on the 23rd of May, 1498, in the forty-seventh year of his age.

After his death, thirteen editions of his Paraphrase on the Fifty-first Psalm were published. They were eagerly purchased and read. The estimation in which they were held by thoughtful, pious men was greatly increased when Luther brought out a German edition of the work, with a preface, in which he says: "Although some theological mud adhered to the feet of that holy man, he nevertheless maintained Justification by Faith alone. He was burned by the Pope. But lo! he lives in blessedness, and Christ has canonized him."

"Sorrow banquished, labour ended,
Jordan past."

FINIS.

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