

GIROLAMO  
SAVONAROLA

BY

E. L. S. HORSBURGH, B.A.

WITH SIXTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS

FOURTH EDITION

REVISED AND CONSIDERABLY ENLARGED

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## PREFACE

ANOTHER reissue being required of the little work on Savonarola, which I wrote many years ago, it has been thought desirable to make the new issue a new version. The present volume may be regarded as a sequel to the *Life of Lorenzo dei Medici*, which I published in 1909. It is the result of a renewed and far closer study of the documentary evidence on which our knowledge of Savonarola depends.

The incorporation of new material into the old structure proved a matter of so much difficulty that I have found it necessary practically to re-write the original book. But my general view of the man and of his work remains unchanged, or nearly so, by my more recent investigations.

I am, however, more than ever convinced that Savonarola, in the matter of his prophecies, is to be regarded rather as a poet than as, in the vulgar sense, a prophet. He is *ποιητής*, the weaver of Divine fantasies, the dreamer of unsubstantial dreams, the Seer of visions hidden from the common eye. It was the misplaced enthusiasm of un-

imaginative devotees which insisted upon clothing unsubstantial visions with material significance.

It is ever the fault of the material world that it can see no value in what it calls illusions. Hence the tragedy of poets—and of Savonarola.

It is ever the conviction of the spiritual world that what men call illusions are in truth the only realities. Hence the immortality of poets—and of Savonarola.

E. L. S. H.

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# GIROLAMO SAVONAROLA

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY

STATE OF ITALY, 1450-1500

THE life of Girolamo Savonarola was contained within the last fifty years of the fifteenth century (1452-98). That is to say, he was exactly contemporary with a most brilliant, diversified and momentous epoch in the history of the world. He was himself very much the product of the influences which surrounded him, though in some respects he represented antagonism to them, and reaction against them. From whatever point of view he is to be regarded, it is essential first of all to understand something of the age in which he lived. A rapid glance at the conditions which governed his times will serve in some measure to illustrate his character, to throw light upon his aims, and to explain both the nature of the influence which he exercised and the causes of its decline.

That period of fifty years within which Savonarola lived and worked, may be looked upon as the full summer of the times which are known as the Italian Renaissance. This new birth of the western world which had its origin in Italy, its influence radiating therefrom to the surrounding countries of Europe, was not really a

new birth. It was rather the culmination of a slow and gradual process which can be traced through the Dark and Middle Ages. It was the ultimate triumph of the laws of evolution and development in much the same way as the butterfly is the climax of those tedious and laborious stages through which the butterfly must pass before it can greet the sun. The Renaissance has given to the world much which is new—new standards of life, new ideals, new forms of art, new intellectual aspirations—but it must not be forgotten that the Renaissance also drew its own inspiration from the past and maintained its affinities with the past throughout. The genius of Dante was nurtured on mediaevalism, but the genius of Michelangelo was stimulated by Dante. Even so the mysticism and asceticism of the Middle Ages combine with the energy, restlessness and classic enthusiasm of the Renaissance to form a Savonarola.

That which seems most essentially a new birth in relation to the Renaissance epoch is the revival of classical learning, with which, however, it is often too exclusively associated. But even here the laws of development apply though in a less degree. Petrarch, Boccaccio, and the early pioneers of classical culture rediscovered for the world many of the masterpieces of the ancient Greek and Latin writers, but the great scholars of the Middle Ages were not ignorant of Latin, while the influence of Aristotle underlay and coloured the laborious fabric of scholastic philosophy.

Viewed therefore in its relation to the past, the Renaissance may be looked upon as the period of results—a great and glowing period when the effects of long centuries of time were as if rendered visible in definite forms and shapes of grace and beauty ; and it is little wonder if men failed, amid all these new phenomena, to recognize



their connexion with previous conditions; little wonder if they looked with contempt and aversion upon the dull centuries which separated them from the light and beauty and power of Plato, Cicero, Virgil, if they imagined that it was only now that the world had begun to live again.

When we consider what those results precisely were which the Renaissance exhibited to the eyes of men we find them displayed everywhere—in the domain of thought, of politics, of art, of social life. It was indeed a period of intellectual revival, and from this intellectual impulse all the other movements of the time took their origin and tone. In the Middle Ages, authority, especially ecclesiastical authority, imprisoned the intellect of man and put fetters upon the free play of the human mind. There were occasional revolts even then, but in spite of the heresies which sprang into life in the Middle Ages, themselves an indication of an independence of thought which refused to be shackled by authority, in spite of an Abelard in whom Renaissance humanism gained a victory over ecclesiasticism, the predominating factor in mediaevalism was authority. The predominating factor in the Renaissance was freedom of the mind. The scholars, artists, politicians of that age emancipated themselves from the old standards and conventions which had governed an earlier day, and the influx of classical learning, which followed rather than produced this outburst of intellectual vigour, did much to stimulate and intensify it, leading to more vigorous intellectual efforts, and to a more pronounced contempt for the immediate past, which lay under the shadow of darkness, uninfluenced, unilluminated by classical culture or humane ideals. Such a movement, which aimed at the attainment of free play for all the faculties of man, carried within it the hope of the future, but it carried within it also the seeds of much evil. Men found themselves emancipated from old

restraints before they had attached themselves securely to new principles of life and conduct. The cult of classical antiquity tended to become an affectation. In Italy it eventually degenerated into little more than slavish imitation, which left no room for originality, while only very imperfectly did it attain to the true spirit of the classics. In Art the return, or partial return, to Nature, which gives to the compositions of Giotto, notwithstanding his obvious technical limitations, their peculiar charm and appealing force, led in his successors to all sorts of incongruous effects, due to the intermixture of Renaissance feeling with mediaeval designs. Humanism, which in Italy of the Renaissance came to mean the exaltation of all that is human, was in danger of obliterating all sense of the Divine. This aspect of the Renaissance must be kept in view by all who would attempt to understand the career of Savonarola. So much the creature of his age, he was, nevertheless, a standing protest against some of its tendencies. It would be difficult to deny that some form of protest was urgently needed.

But, whatever its limitations, the Renaissance needs no other justification than is provided by the new spirit of free inquiry and independent thought which was its elemental and its governing characteristic. This new spirit was the generative principle of all those striking manifestations which the age displayed, and through its operations have arisen the conditions which now govern the modern world. The Reformation was but a specialized development of Renaissance ideas upon their religious side, while the great Revolution in France in 1789 was largely the outcome of an intellectual revolt upon the part of the masses against the mediaeval conditions which still continued to oppress them. Judged thus, it would be impossible to exaggerate the importance of

this transitional period between mediaeval and modern times, while the incongruities arising from that quaint intermixture of the past with the future which marks the age form in themselves a large part of its undefinable charm. It was an age when ideals of intellectual emancipation jostled against absolutism in the practical government of men, when alchemy, astrology, witchcraft, and superstitions of all sorts trod on the heels of the scientific spirit, when in one and the same man there might be found all the elements which go to form a hero in conjunction with those which go to form the most debased of ruffians and desperadoes. Government, society, morals, literature were in a state of flux, and the benign agency of time was needed to precipitate from a world in solution those components from which a new and purer world should be made up.

From such general considerations as these, let us pass to the particular conditions which were to be found in Italy during the period of Savonarola's life. For the purpose of illustrating the meaning and object of his work, those conditions may be conveniently classified as political, intellectual, and artistic.

It may be questioned whether the political state of Italy in the last half of the fifteenth century was in any way governed by Renaissance influences which were at work in the minds of men. The more closely we examine the evolution of the Italian States from the time of the disruption of the Roman Empire, the more clearly can we perceive that the Italy of the fifteenth century was, politically, the natural outcome of its antecedents, of its geographical position, of the character and temper of its inhabitants. The political and constitutional history of Italy would probably have been in its main outlines much the same even if the country had remained un-

affected by a Renaissance movement. That movement profoundly influenced the characters of the political rulers of the various States, but it did not necessarily influence in any important particulars the character of their rule. Without the Renaissance a Lorenzo de' Medici might have lost half his attractiveness and have approximated to our Edward IV, a Ludovico Sforza might have been as uninteresting as our Henry VII, but the States of Milan and of Florence would have experienced little change in the nature of the government imposed upon them. It has already been noted that government, during the Renaissance epoch, not in Italy only, but in England, in France, in Spain, was opposed in its aim and character to the independent spirit of criticism and inquiry which was the essence of the movement. At a time when a restless curiosity was urging men to desert the beaten path in order to explore every nook, recess and forbidden place, at a time when the canons and conventions imposed by authority were everywhere despised and neglected, at that time the authority of government was being tightened and despots were able with ease to impose their will upon the peoples. But while in France, in England, and in Spain, the government of absolute monarchs was being accepted in order that it might replace the disintegrating tendencies of an outworn feudalism, and individualize and emphasize the unity of the respective nations, in Italy there was little if any sense of nationality. The communal instinct, surviving from the days of the Roman Empire, predominated over the national. Not Italy, but Venice or Florence was the fatherland of the Venetian or the Florentine. Thus at the moment when all the forces within our own country and in France were working towards unity and consolidation, in Italy all the forces within it were working towards disintegration. An ex-

amination of the intricate and various causes which produced this contradictory condition is beyond the scope of this introduction, but the results of them are sufficiently apparent throughout the history of mediæval Italy. Groups of little communes, each fiercely independent and intensely jealous one of the other, absorbed the northern half of the country. The States of the Church occupied the central districts: while the southern portion, subjected, first by the Norman settlers, and later by Angevin rulers, to feudal influences which elsewhere had been successfully resisted, alone presented any semblance of homogeneity.

Among the communes of the northern districts, exhausted as they were by internal feuds, the struggle for existence eventually became so intense that the democratic spirit of independence which had characterized them was compelled to give way before the paramount necessity of securing some strong and efficient ruler who could compose the turmoils within and maintain the position of the commune among its external enemies. The particular sort of despot to which each commune would thus least reluctantly submit itself was determined by the special circumstances of each case, but the general causes which led to an age of despotisms, following an age of truculent democracy, were much the same in all. These despots, once established, were naturally anxious to guard themselves against rivals who might supplant them, and to extend the area of their government. To some the conditions were more favourable than to others, and thus it came about by the middle of the fifteenth century that five States were predominant in Italy—Milan, Venice, Florence, the Papacy and the kingdom of Naples. The remaining despotisms had been absorbed by them or had

commended themselves to one or other of them for the sake of security, or were too insignificant in regard to the extent of their territory, wealth, and population to be considered as rivals to the greater Powers.

The State of Milan, originally an Imperial fief, had before the close of the thirteenth century fallen very much into the hands of the Visconti family, which had long exercised the functions of Imperial Vicars-General. The despotism of the Visconti, thus established, was consolidated and cemented by the unscrupulous genius of Gian Galeazzo Visconti, who became first Duke of Milan in 1396. His daughter, Valentina Visconti, was married to Louis, Duke of Orleans, brother of Charles VI of France. It was this marriage which gave rise eventually to the claims of the house of Orleans upon the Duchy of Milan, claims which ultimately afforded a pretext for French invasion. On the death of Gian Galeazzo in 1402 he was succeeded by his son, Giovanni Maria, who ruled until his death ten years later. The succession then passed to Filippo Maria Visconti, whose natural daughter, Bianca, married the famous *condottiere*, or fighting free-lance of Italy, Francesco Sforza. The wars in which Milan found herself continually engaged during the despotism of Filippo Maria, made it necessary for that prince to apply frequently to Sforza for assistance. Sforza was equally courted by the Venetians, the enemies of Milan. He was thus able to make capital out of the circumstance that his services were indispensable to both parties, and before the time of Filippo Maria's death he had gained such a hold both upon Milan and its Duke that, independently of his marriage with Visconti's daughter, it was a mere question of time when he would reap the fruit of his intrigues and rule over the State. On the

death of Filippo Maria, in 1447, Milan declared itself a republic, but Sforza was appointed Captain-General of the military forces. It needed but a brief period for Sforza to avail himself to the full of the advantages of his situation. In 1450 he assumed to himself the lordship of Milan, thus establishing his own dynasty in place of that of the Visconti, and placing a formidable obstacle in the way of the Orleanist claim. The rule of the Sforzas over Milan is contemporary with the life of Savonarola.

The republic of Florence, for so it still loved to think itself, was one of the first of the Italian communes to lift its head from amid the chaos and turmoil of the Dark Ages. Resolute in its assertion of independence, tenacious of its democratic government, intent upon commercial interests, and priding itself upon its large and commodious life, Florence made a boast of her freedom, and fondly imagined herself to enjoy the fullest sweets of liberty. But it has been truly said that the Florentines loved the name of freedom, while they neither understood nor enjoyed at any time freedom itself. Fierce party conflicts rent the State. Faction shredded into new factions until parties and feuds were multiplied much as some unicellular organisms propagate themselves by fissure. The nobles were expelled from the service of the State, the democracy sought to establish and safeguard its independence by a complicated machinery of elective councils, and by entrusting the executive government to a succession of officials whose tenure of office should be so short as to preclude all danger of any one of them asserting himself as a single ruler. But experience shows us that the very multiplicity and complexity of constitutional safeguards may only ensure their inefficiency and smooth the path for an ambitious despot. Human ingenuity

could scarcely have devised a more imposing "edifice of shadows" than that which Siéyès constructed in France in 1799 for the purpose of maintaining republican institutions and revolutionary principles unimpaired by militarism or autocracy; yet a stroke of the pen was enough to place a Bonaparte in a position to wield one of the most finished and elaborate instruments of despotism which the world has seen. So it was in Florence in the Middle Ages. Had she continued a small and self-contained State, with interests wholly confined within herself, it is possible that her constitutional devices might have served their purpose; but in spite of her internal feuds, Florence advanced both commercially and territorially. The city developed into a State with a foreign policy and vast commercial ramifications. To safeguard the latter by peace and political repose soon became an object of more importance than to safeguard a freedom, which, at all times largely imaginary, could still in imagination be maintained. The diplomatic negotiations which her external interests involved could have little stability or force if liable to the variations and caprices of a constantly changing executive. Almost imperceptibly despotism began to appear amidst all the paraphernalia of democratic institutions, and the despots of Florence were men suited to the genius of such a State. After the expulsion of the nobles from all share in political life (1293) merchant princes began to assume the position which in feudal States the nobles naturally occupied. These commercial families soon found means to utilize the existing machinery of government for their own purposes, and thus by the time the nobles were once more admitted to some share in political power, there was no place for them in Florence; a new and democratic aristocracy of wealth had monopolized the avenues of power. Of these families at



the close of the fourteenth and during the earlier years of the fifteenth centuries, two of the most important were the Albizzi and the Medici. A fierce rivalry arose between them which, after many vicissitudes, eventually resulted in the banishment of the Albizzi and their chief partisans from Florence, and the establishment of Medicean influence in the person of Cosimo de' Medici (1434).

Cosimo was something more than a commercial and financial magnate with his finger on the pulse of European credit. He was a statesman and diplomatist of the first order. It was he who initiated that policy of balance of power by which he strove to maintain for Florence a stable equilibrium between the greater Italian States, a policy too exclusively associated with his grandson, the magnificent Lorenzo. But neither commerce nor statesmanship sufficed by themselves to consolidate the unique influence which Cosimo exercised over Florence. His strength lay largely in his unaffected sympathy with Florentine aspirations, in his genuine love of art, of the classical learning which Florence had gathered round herself, in his enthusiasm for the philosophy of Plato, and not least perhaps in his homely and unostentatious way of life by which he concealed from his fellow-citizens the fact that he was their master and not their equal.

Thus Florence almost without knowing it found herself enslaved. Her fetters may have been fetters of silk, but they were scarcely less binding than chains of iron. To his fellow-citizens Cosimo was *pater patriæ*, but in fact he represents the domination of a single will over a State which still cherished illusions of democratic independence.

The best test of the substance and reality of Cosimo's power lies in the fact that he was able to transmit it to one far less competent than himself. Piero, son of Cosimo, was a man of ability, political insight, and fine

taste, but he was crippled by gout, and compelled by physical disabilities to withdraw himself largely from public view.

The duty of representing the family before Florence and the Italian world was thrust upon the youthful Lorenzo, son of Piero and grandson of Cosimo. Born in 1449, Lorenzo was only in his sixteenth year when his grandfather died, but he had already been brought prominently forward as the hope of the Medicean house, and, through the illness of his father, he was called upon to undertake important missions of ceremony and diplomacy, which widened his knowledge of men, of affairs and of the world, and in turn accustomed the world to look upon him as being in a special way the representative of Florence. The fifteenth century was an age of precocity. Boys of tender years were to be found then as captains of armies and leaders in council. That he was only thirteen was no bar to Lorenzo's son being made a cardinal. Of the many examples of precocious youth which the age presents Lorenzo himself is perhaps the most conspicuous. We may deplore his early death, but, while deploring, may reflect that he crowded into his brief span of forty-three years the experiences of a long life-time. In 1469, on the death of his father, he assumed the position for which he had been prepared. His brother Giuliano was associated with him in the direction of affairs, and it seemed by no means unlikely that the Medicean ascendancy might fall a victim to the experiment of a dual sovereignty. This contingency was, however, averted, first of all by reason of the unassuming character of Giuliano himself and the ties of devoted admiration and affection which bound him to his brother, and secondly by his untimely death at the hands of the Pazzi conspirators in 1478. The Pazzi conspiracy formed undoubtedly

the crisis of Lorenzo's life. Private jealousies on the part of rivals, public resentment against the infringement of republican principles which his ascendancy represented, Papal spite against the man who stood in the way of the schemes of the Pontiff, all combined to mature a dangerous plot, which resulted in the assassination of Giuliano before the high altar of the Duomo, a fate from which Lorenzo barely escaped. The punishment which the Florentines summarily meted out to the conspirators, their partisans, and families aroused the fury of the thwarted Pope, who, on the pretext that ecclesiastical personages had been put to death without a trial, declared war against Florence, or rather against Lorenzo, and found a powerful ally in Ferrante, King of Naples. The hold which Lorenzo had already gained upon the affections of the Florentines is significantly attested in this period of his extremity. They refused to listen to the Pope's suggestion that they could obtain peace at the cost of surrendering Lorenzo. They made Lorenzo's cause their own, and were ready to suffer to the last rather than prove unfaithful to their most prominent citizen. The conduct of Lorenzo was no less magnanimous. Determined that the State should not suffer the horrors of war for his sake, and trusting doubtless to those powers of fascination and diplomacy with which he knew himself to be endowed, he determined to risk the chances of a personal visit to Ferrante. He was treated by the King of Naples with much ceremony as an honoured guest, but it may be questioned whether very favourable results would have followed from Lorenzo's romantic exploit, had it not been for the Turks, who, now pushing westward as far as the very shores of Southern Italy, were threatening the existence of every Italian State. The imminence of common peril reconciled for the moment the conflicts of Italy. The first

duty of the Pope, as head of Christendom, was to use all his energies to repel the infidel invader. Sixtus IV made peace with Florence, and Lorenzo and the Pope were reconciled in 1480. From this date until his death, twelve years later, his ascendancy was scarcely questioned. In 1481, Fra Girolamo Savonarola first came to Florence, obscure, unnoticed, a failure. A strange contrast to the situation of the two men ten years later when Lorenzo was dying and Savonarola was about to occupy Lorenzo's place as controller of the destinies of Florence! The nature and character of Lorenzo's rule will sufficiently appear in subsequent chapters. The brief career of Savonarola as a power in the State was a continuous protest against it.

We may therefore pass at once from Florence to a summary consideration of another of the five chief Italian Powers at this time—to the position occupied by the Papacy in the fifteenth century.

The anomaly presented by the Papacy in Renaissance times is one of the most startling which history presents. The Popes were the Vicars of Christ on earth—the spokesmen and representatives of the Prince of Peace, of the greatest of moral preachers. Yet the fifteenth century gave to Christendom a series of Popes who seem successively to have been more and more blind to the spiritual and moral obligations imposed upon them by their position. Their election was governed by the intrigues of the Sacred Conclave, and often secured by flagrant simony and corruption. If their individual characters approximated to our existing standard of morals that is the utmost that can be said in their favour, and even this can be said of few. In Alexander VI we find a man who is on all hands admitted to be the abnegation in his own person of every principle of morality, decency, or

virtue. Even in the case of such Popes as Nicolas V or Pius II, who were respectable in regard to private character (so much can be said of Pius during his tenure of the Papal office), we see little if any sense of spirituality. Brilliant, clever, astute, worldly, but utterly un-Christlike, such is the by no means uncharitable verdict which must be pronounced even against the most reputable of the Renaissance Popes.

It is not enough, however, to point out the anomaly and turn away with disgust and contempt from so much loftiness of spiritual pretension united to so much which was earthly, sensual, and devilish. It is necessary to understand that there were special causes which produced the conditions and as far as possible to grasp the nature of those causes. The character of the Renaissance Papacy was largely determined not so much by the superfluity of naughtiness which we seem to find in Popes like Sixtus IV, Innocent VIII or Alexander VI, as by the anomalous and difficult position which the Church occupied in the fifteenth century. An adequate presentment of the case demands the labour, scope and scholarship of a Pastor or Creighton, but even a few paragraphs may be sufficient to show the wisdom and sobriety which is contained in the following words of the late Bishop of London: "It is scarcely fair to isolate the Popes from their surroundings and hold them up to exceptional ignominy; yet it is impossible to forget their high office and their lofty claims. . . . It seems to me . . . neither becoming to adopt an attitude of lofty superiority over any one who ever played a prominent part in European affairs, nor charitable to lavish indiscriminate censure upon any man."

The ideal which the Papacy set before itself in the Middle Ages was as lofty as it was splendid. Popes like

Gregory VII and Innocent III stood for the universal claims of spirituality, justice, and right in a lawless and turbulent age. If the mediaeval Papacy exalted its office as being superior to that of any temporal Power, it was because it held that the rule of Christ should predominate over the government of any earthly sovereign. But individual Popes were apt to forget that they were not Christ, but frail and very human men. It was almost impossible that, invested with such attributes and powers, they should not sometimes abuse both, that the ambition of the man should not sometimes overmaster the zeal of the representative. The claim to intervene in secular and national affairs and to overrule the will of sovereigns and of nations undoubtedly tended to confuse and dislocate the order and government which sovereigns in their various States were endeavouring to establish, and to clash with that growing spirit of independent nationality which it was the work of the Middle Ages to foster.

As the national spirit developed, the interference of an external Power like the Papacy was less easily tolerated, and Papal claims which, in the days of Gregory VII or Innocent III, except to the sovereigns individually affected, were in harmony with the spirit of the age, were resented and repudiated as being out of date when put forward at the end of the thirteenth century by Boniface VIII. It had now become clearer to the rulers in Europe that what purported in the Pope to be spiritual fervour was in reality little more than the overweening ambition of a rival. The Papacy had become more secular, and Christendom had become more secular too. Thus when the pretensions of the Papacy were put forward by Boniface VIII (1294-1303) in their most extreme form, they were resisted by the English Edward I and the French Philip IV. In his contest

with Philip, Boniface was worsted and died in a frenzy of shame and indignation, and his successor, Benedict XI, fared even worse.

In 1305 a Pope was elected, Clement V, who was little more than Philip's creature, and from this date, for a period of more than seventy years, the Papal seat was removed from Rome to Avignon and fell almost completely under French influence, its policy being directed mainly by French interests. This Avignon exile—this Babylonish captivity of the Papacy—deeply undermined its position and authority in Europe. The mediaeval Papacy ended with Boniface VIII. From the beginning of the fourteenth century the Popes had to be satisfied with other and less far-reaching aims than those which had dictated the policy of the Pontiffs of an earlier day. The weakening and secularization of the Papacy which resulted from the Avignon exile was intensified by the Great Schism of the West, when for over forty years Europe was scandalized by the spectacle of two and sometimes three Popes, each claiming exclusively to be God's Vicar upon earth, each vituperating and anathematizing the others as anti-Christ, each after his election exerting himself to intensify and embitter a contest which he had been elected purposely to compose. The conscience and moral sense of Europe was shocked by this spectacle. The opinion began to prevail that the decrees of a General Council of the Church Universal were superior in validity to the decrees of a Pope. If this were so, Popes could be deposed and elected by the decisions of such a Council. The Council of Pisa, 1409, tended rather to increase than diminish the scandal, for neither of the two rival Popes would recognize its authority, nor that of the third Pope whom the Council itself set up. Five years later the Council

of Constance met. Practically it succeeded in terminating the worst evils of the Schism, though rivals still continued to contest for St. Peter's chair until at length the closing years of the Pontificate of Eugenius IV and the accession of Nicholas V (1447) mark the full restoration of the unity of the Papacy and inaugurate the series of Renaissance Popes.

If the dictum is true that the mediaeval Papacy ended with Boniface VIII, and that the Renaissance Papacy began with Nicolas V, it follows that between these dates there lies a period of nearly 150 years during which the Papacy was neither mediaeval nor Renaissance; when in fact it was in abeyance. It had not the spirit, power, nor prestige to put forward its old claims with any prospect of success, nor was it in a position to assert those local prerogatives of Italian sovereignty which were the chief care of the typical Popes of the Renaissance. The termination of the Great Schism gave to the Papacy once more a position and a policy. Restored to Rome, it fell to the lot of the Popes to rule over a turbulent city. Restored to Italy, it was for them to consolidate the Papal States and to make the influence of the Papacy felt in Italian politics. In view of the circumstances, it would have been difficult for the best of men to do more, and men distinguished for holiness and spirituality would have been strangely out of place among the temporal despots of the Renaissance. The Papacy was in this dilemma: if the Popes were successfully to assert their authority as secular rulers, those saintly qualities which befitted their spiritual office would have stood fatally in the way of their design; if they were worthily to fill the place of Christ's Vicars, they debarred themselves *ipso facto* from fulfilling those duties, as temporal rulers in Italy, which circumstances had



imposed upon them. The anomaly presented by the Renaissance Papacy is a logical outcome of its dual position as at once a spiritual and a temporal Power. It is to be remembered, however, that this position was not one which the Popes of the Renaissance had made for themselves, but one which they had inherited from the past. The necessary antagonism between an Italian despot and the representative of Christ was not recognized nor realized. The Popes in their own persons seemed to be living proof that such antagonism did not exist, but from the fact of its existence, and the fact that it was not realized, there sprang those strange and monstrous incongruities which we note with amazement in a Sixtus or an Alexander, that union of the loftiest pretensions to an almost divine sanctity with the aims and methods of a scheming and unscrupulous tyrant. With each election the character of the office and of its occupant seemed to deteriorate, until in 1492 a climax was reached in the choice by the conclave of Roderigo Borgia who desired to be designated by the name of "the invincible Alexander," and who consequently assumed the title of Alexander VI. This was the Pontiff against whom Savonarola raised his protest, and the intrigues of Alexander were largely instrumental in effecting the Friar's downfall. What further commentary is needed upon the character of the Renaissance Papacy, and of Alexander VI in particular, will be supplied in this study of Savonarola's life and work.

The position and policy of Naples and Venice still need to be indicated, but very briefly, for Venice was little, if at all, associated with the drama of Savonarola, while the association of Naples with that drama, though important, was indirect.

Venice, in an age of despotisms, boasted of the freedom

of her constitution and the character of independence which attached to her institutions. Like Florence, Venice in theory was free, and in truth she was almost alone among the States of Italy in refusing to submit herself to the rule of a single tyrant. But the despotism of an aristocratic oligarchy took the place in Venice of the unrestricted rule of an individual. Her geographical position in relation to the sea had long secured for her supremacy over the commerce of the world; her wealth, luxury, and refinement were the envy and admiration of the nations. Internally the Venetian territories were more self-contained, and their boundaries were more distinctly defined, than was the case with those of other States, owing to the many rivers which water the north-eastern regions of the Italian peninsula. These natural frontiers, while guaranteeing the integrity of her State, were yet no barrier to her own ambition nor to her desire for territorial aggrandisement. At one time we find her casting her eyes westward with designs upon the Milanese—at another extending herself southward by annexations in Romagna filched from the hands of the Papacy in the days of its weakness. Rich, strong, grasping, astute, aloof and utterly selfish, Venice was very much the unknown and incalculable factor in Italian politics. One thing alone was certain, that Venice would pursue her course, regardless of abstract ideals, enthusiasms, crusades or Italian aspirations, bent, in all her policy, upon one single end, the exaltation and enhancement of the Venetian State. This indeed was the end which each State pursued, but Venice could not offer the excuse for a policy of pure self-interest which could plausibly and with some justice be put forward by others. There were no disputed claims to Venice, as was the case in Naples and Milan. There was not that vagueness as to the limits

and extent of her territorial jurisdiction which is to be found in the case of the States of the Church. There were none of those generous illusions, but half illusions after all, which we find in Florence, that Florence was the natural rallying point for a united Italy, the natural centre of all that was most scholarly and cultured in Italian life—that the enhancement of Florence was for the ultimate good of Italy at large. Venice coldly and indifferently pursued her own course, and the punishment which eventually overtook her was the due reward of a sordid policy of calculated self-interest. It was in this spirit that Venice watched the affairs of Florence after the death of Lorenzo during the ascendancy and eclipse of Savonarola. She viewed with interest the political difficulties of a rival State, but the prophecies and denunciations of an excitable monk were in themselves matters of no concern to her.

If Venice stands entirely aloof from the Savonarola tragedy, Naples on the other hand exercised upon it, though unconsciously and indirectly, a deciding influence. Eventually reduced to order, after the turmoils following upon the disruption of the Roman Empire by Norman adventurers, the kingdom of Naples became the scene of the brilliance and the tragedy of the illustrious House of the Hohenstaufen. From them it was wrested in 1266 by Charles of Anjou, brother of St. Louis of France. In 1435 Queen Giovanna of Naples, who represented the Angevin House, but whose title as against other members of the same house had always been dubious, died without issue, and the claims to Naples were disputed between the elder representatives, who were descended from Louis of Anjou, brother of Charles V of France, and the younger who were descended from James of Aragon who had married the granddaughter of

Charles of Anjou, first Angevin King of Naples. In Alphonso, the Aragonese representative, there also ran the Hohenstaufen blood, and thus he stood for the reconciliation of the claims of the rival Houses. Matters were still further complicated by the pretensions of the Popes who asserted that Naples was a Papal fief, that any King of Naples was a Papal vassal liable to pay tribute to the Holy See, and that a title to the throne of Naples was only valid by reason of Papal investiture.

On Giovanna's death the House of Aragon prevailed in Naples, and Alphonso V of Aragon became King under the name of Alphonso I; but the descendants of Louis of Anjou still continued to assert their rights, though the Troubadour King René of Provence, grandson of Louis of Anjou and representative of the Angevin claims, was too much of a poet and a dreamer to press those rights with vigour and resolution. On René's death in 1480 his claims passed to his nephew, Charles, Count of Maine, but he died in the following year, leaving a will by which he bequeathed both his dominions and his claims to Louis XI, King of France. Thus the reigning French sovereign was formerly invested with a title on his own behalf to Naples which he might vindicate at leisure. Louis XI himself was too much occupied with the internal affairs of his kingdom to undertake an expedition beyond the Alps, but at the close of the fifteenth century the French stood at the gate of Italy, with an Orleanist claim to Milan and an Angevin claim to Naples, ready to intervene actively in Italian affairs. In 1494 the Italian campaign of Charles VIII (son of Louis XI) began, and on his way to Naples Charles passed through Florence.

The power of the House of Medici fell before him. Savonarola recognized in him the scourge of God, the

instrument which heaven had raised up to punish Italy for her iniquities and to restore liberty to Florence so long enslaved. It was the expedition of Charles VIII to Naples which brought about the ascendancy of Savonarola in Florence. It was Savonarola's French proclivities which were a main cause of his eventual overthrow.

With the active intervention of the French in Italy a new epoch dawned for the country. It was an epoch of shame and humiliation, for divided as she was, and with no instinct for nationality, Italy fell an easy victim to the selfishness of her own rulers and the rapacity of the foreigner. Italy, who for long had looked with superb contempt upon the "barbarians" who dwelt beyond her mountains, Italy, who had regarded the French claims merely as a pawn to be played in the complicated game of inter-state politics, was soon to find herself the sport of the stranger, her fair land the battle-ground on which those barbarians decided their own quarrels independently of her. By their intrigues, by their complete indifference to the interests of Italy as a whole, the despots of Italy brought doom upon themselves, and upon her the dominion of the foreigner. Savonarola was the prophet of this doom. With a clearer insight than his contemporaries possessed, he foresaw the inevitable consequences of the political and moral corruption which prevailed in the country. He stood, almost alone, impressed by the sense of coming catastrophe, confident that God would punish Italy for her sins, but as unconscious as the rest of Italian statesmen of the particular form which that catastrophe would assume. It is this premonition of vast and far-reaching changes, soon to come, which invests Savonarola with most of the interest which he arouses in the philosophic student of his age. The man who could read, even though imperfectly, the

signs of the times must necessarily stand out as a conspicuous figure among the purblind statesmen of Italy, who were precipitating their own ruin by the very policy from which they expected to gain their individual advantage.

But the interest which attaches to Savonarola the politician has been largely absorbed by the more personal and sensational interest which is felt in Savonarola the prophet and moral reformer. His claims as a prophet were perhaps based largely on illusion; his work as a reformer was transient, yet the instinct is correct which leads us to examine his pretensions with respect and closely to follow his career. For the sins of Italy which brought destruction upon her were not political sins alone. The Italian people could not urge that their undoing was the consequence of political mistakes on the part of their rulers with which they had nothing to do. The moral tone of the Italians was hopelessly corrupted, and the moral degradation of the people was only too faithfully reflected in the Popes and despots who held sway in the land.

Intellectually the Italians were far in advance of Europe. While the energies of other nations were concentrated upon nationality, Italy deliberately neglected nationality and devoted herself to culture and the accumulation of wealth. The ideal of chivalry which arose out of feudal institutions had little hold upon a country where feudalism had no roots. Instead of the chivalric ideal, the commercial ideal preponderated. An atmosphere of luxury, refinement and cultivated ease permeated Italy at a time when the rest of Christendom was absorbed in warfare and socially but little removed from barbarism. Elsewhere a man carved his way to fortune by the prowess of his strong arm. In Italy a man stood

out above his fellows by virtue of his superior intellectual capacities. Ability was the test by which character was tried, and it was not considered necessary that ability should be too much fettered by scruples. To achieve the end was the main object : the means used in achieving it were of quite secondary importance. There thus arose in Italy a different standard of morality from that which was understood and aimed at in England or in France. The familiar commonplaces of the Ten Commandments seemed antiquated and out of date to a people who prided themselves on their intellectual superiority. A new Decalogue, which enjoined success at all costs, came to supplant the inconvenient restrictions enjoined against murder, lust, and fraud. In Italy men lived too near the Church, were too familiar with the proceedings of its dignitaries and representatives, to be impressed with those simple feelings of awe and reverence which continued to animate foreigners even in the worst days of Papal degradation. The morals of the Italian clergy were, as a whole, little fitted to elevate the moral tone of the Italian people. Nor did the cult of antiquity tend to draw men strongly to the exercise of Stoic virtues. The classic writings appealed, not to a sense of morals, but to a sense of refinement, of humane and highly civilized life. The great Pagans of old seemed to be a standing proof to the *virtuosi* of Italy that Christianity was not essential in the scheme of things, but that a full satisfaction of the human mind could be found in a curious blend of Paganism combined with outward conformity to the requirements of ecclesiasticism.

Thus it must not be supposed that there was any open breach between Renaissance, Humanism and the profession of orthodoxy. While scholars rendered heart service to Plato, they continued to render lip service

to Christianity and its external symbols. Perhaps the moral degradation of Italy was enhanced by this very fact, for a vein of more or less unconscious hypocrisy was intermingled with the Italian character and served to intensify its corruption.

Yet there were some, and these among the greatest of the scholars of Renaissance Italy, who recognized Christianity as an evolution from Paganism, a natural and necessary development in the march of human progress, but at the same time they recognized the many abuses which had intermingled with its practice. The hope that inspired them was to find a form of faith in which the highest ideals of Pagan antiquity might be incorporated with the highest ideals of the modern world, the teaching of Plato with the teaching of Christ. In Florence a Platonic academy for the study and discussion of Plato's philosophy had been set up under the patronage of Cosimo de' Medici, and from it there emanated the mystical and fantastic speculations of Gemisthos Plethon, Marsilio Ficino, and Pico della Mirandola, which aimed at effecting a reconciliation between Plato and Christianity. Such speculations were in themselves a proof of the yearnings for better things which men of the highest and most cultivated minds experienced, and when Savonarola appeared with his practical and lofty ideals of moral reform and a regenerated Christianity, some of the Platonists seemed to see in him the reconciliation which they sought between their own conceptions and the prevailing conditions; they hailed him with enthusiasm, and enlisted beneath his banner.

The career of Savonarola reveals him in the threefold character of politician, mystic, and reformer. It has been the aim of this introduction to illustrate, from the conditions prevalent in Italy, the need for such a man.





GIOVANNI PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA  
*In the Uffizi, Florence. Painter unknown*



## CHAPTER II

### EARLY YEARS

**G**IROLAMO SAVONAROLA was born at Ferrara on 21 September, 1452. He was of an old Paduan stock, but his grandfather, Michele, had been called to the Court of the Estes at Ferrara in 1440, where he soon was appointed physician to the ducal family. It was Michele's youngest son, Nicolò, who was the father of Girolamo Savonarola. Of his parents, however, but little is known. From letters written to his mother, Elena Buonaccorsi, it has been inferred that her influence was powerful in moulding his character, but the chief responsibility for his education seems to have rested upon his grandfather, Michele. As a boy, Savonarola was of a melancholy and retiring disposition, utterly untouched by and unsympathetic to the brilliant life of festival, ceremony and pageant which surrounded him, and after one visit to the Court he was resolute in his determination never to visit it again. There is a legend which may be based on fact, that the pangs of unrequited love helped to intensify his aversion from the world, but the story that he offered his hand to Laodamia Strozzi, and was rejected by her, must be received with caution. Solitary, brooding, and devoted to philosophical and theological studies, his own assertion made in later years that he had never experienced the wish to marry may contain the truth. Before he

was 20 he had gained a profound knowledge of the Scriptures, as well as of the scholastic systems which constituted the chief educational training of the times, and he had assimilated the knowledge thus acquired by the thoroughness of his method and by deep and close meditation. Even at this early age, however, his outlook upon life was not narrowed and limited by the mere pedantry of scholarship or the subtleties of Biblical interpretation. With the weapons of the schoolmen and critics he was as well furnished as any, but he carried his eyes beyond his books to the world in which he lived and to the signs of the times, and expressed the feeling which the existing conditions of society aroused in him in a poem, written in 1472, entitled "*De Ruinâ Mundi*". In this poem he is filled with the sense of wickedness abounding. "I see the world upside down, and virtue and good customs sapped to their foundations. That man is happy who lives by rapine and feeds himself upon the blood of others; that soul is beautiful and gentle which by force and fraud acquires most. He who despises heaven and Christ, and ever seeks to trample others under foot, he will win honour from the world. . . . Rome lies prostrate, men and women compete to inflict wounds upon her. . . . The days of piety and purity have passed away." This poem, composed at the age of 20, before he had devoted himself to the religious life, strikes the keynote of Savonarola's future. In the days of his power as in the days of his youth it was the clear recognition of the enormous wickedness which prevailed around him which gave a tongue to his denunciations, a clarion call to his exhortations to repentance. The poem marks also that sense of the punishments and woes which must inevitably fall upon Italy as a consequence of its abandonment which the

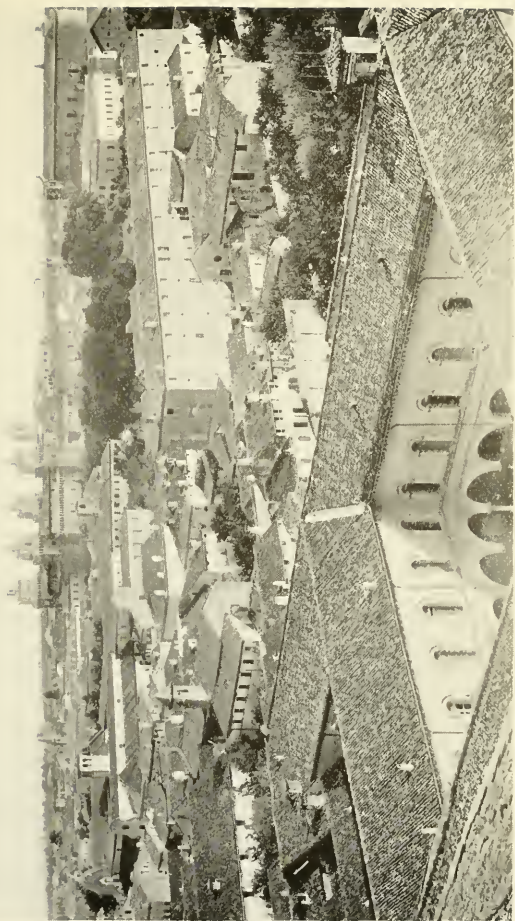
poet never ceased to feel and to express until the judgments he had foreseen began indeed to descend upon the land. It is not uncommon to find a youth of even less than 20 years of age who is "tormented by divine things," who has the deepest, most bitter consciousness of sin, the most earnest desire to escape from it and from all the temptations afforded by a thoughtless and giddy world; but it is rare to find one who, in addition to all this, possesses a comprehensive view of the conditions of his times, and a prescience of the results which must follow from the conditions. "I believe, O King of Heaven," he says in the "*De Ruinâ Mundi*," "that thou dost delay thy chastisements only to punish the more severely those who are most guilty." This may be a mere common-place of poetic rhetoric, or may be the inspiration of prophecy working in Savonarola's soul. It is at any rate significant that the imminence of coming doom continued to be the burden of his cry throughout his life.

Thus filled with disgust for the wickedness of the world and disenchanted as to its illusions, it was natural that his thoughts should turn to a monastic life in which, he might suppose, peace, contentment, and spiritual satisfaction were to be found. The project was one which he scarcely dared to entertain in view of the certain opposition of his family, yet it engrossed his mind, and refused to be dismissed. The months passed by and no decision was taken till, in 1474, from a project it became a resolve. Influenced by a sermon preached by an Augustinian friar at Faenza, Savonarola made his final choice and determined in due season to assume the cowl. The pains he would endure and those which he would inflict by separation were so keenly realized that months elapsed before he could brace himself to his resolve. At last, on 23

April, 1475, according to his biographer, Fra Benedetto, he took his lute and struck its strings to such plaintive chords and sang so sad an air, that his mother cried, "Alas, my son, this is a sign of our separation". But he with bowed head dared not raise his eyes to hers, but continued to strike the strings with trembling fingers.

On the next day all Ferrara was given up to festivity in honour of St. George. Savonarola was left at home in solitude. He seized the opportunity to steal away from his father's house, making for Bologna, where he applied to be admitted as a novice into the convent of S. Domenico. He was at once accepted, and soon gave evidence that it was not for the purpose of securing a learned leisure that he had adopted the monastic life, but that he might cleanse himself of sin by prayer and fasting and by the chastening influences of self-denial and austerities. But first he must explain himself to those whom he loved at home.

On 25 April, the day after his secret departure, he wrote a letter to his father which is characteristic of his mode both of thought and expression. He cannot doubt, he says, that his father has grieved over his departure, the more so as it was secret. But he may rest assured that his son's determination was not the result of some boyish impulse. Let him be judged, not in the light of passion, as women judge, but in the light of reason; it will then be for his father to say if he could have acted otherwise. Of his reasons the first is the great wretchedness of the world and the iniquity of men, so that there is no longer anyone that doeth good. "And so many a time in tears I sang to myself this verse '*Heu fuge crudeles terras, fuge littus avarum*'; for I was unable any longer to endure the evil doing of the blinded people of Italy, the more so as I saw virtue faint and brought to shame, while vice is exalted." And so he prayed



FERRARA





Messer Jesu Christo to raise him up out of that slough. The way has been shown him, and he must walk therein. Is it not right that he should fly from the filth and iniquity of this wretched world in order to live as a rational being and not as an animal among pigs?<sup>1</sup>

“O dearest Father, you have more reason to thank God than to complain. For God has given you a son, and preserved him for twenty-two years, and has deemed him worthy to become His militant knight. Do you not think it a great grace to have a son who is a cavalier of Jesus Christ? Moreover your undoubted love for me affords additional reason why you should rejoice; for seeing that I am made up of two parts, soul and body, it would be to disparage your love for me to suppose that you loved my body more than my soul. It is my soul that you love more than anything else in me. Anything therefore which favourably affects the welfare of my soul must be to you a cause of rejoicing.

It is however natural for the flesh to grieve. But men of wisdom and magnanimity, such as you are, know how to temper grief by reason. Do you imagine it was not great grief to me to leave you? Never since I was born have I experienced greater sorrow or affliction of mind, for I must abandon my own flesh and blood, and go among unknown people to make my body a sacrifice to Jesus Christ, and to sell my own will into the hands of those whom I have never known. Herein lies the explanation of that part of my conduct which I know has specially pained you, that I should have departed secretly as if in flight from you. Such was the grief and passion within my heart at the thought of parting, that had I given utterance to them I think my heart would have cracked, and my intention would have been

<sup>1</sup>In his sermons Savonarola constantly inveighs against “*La vita da porci*”.

hindered. Do not therefore, by your sorrow, add to my own; not that I grieve for what I have done, for I would not undo it if thereby I might become a greater man than was Cæsar. But I too am made of flesh and blood as you are, and as the human senses are repugnant to reason so must I fight cruelly [*crudelmente*] to prevent the Devil from leaping on to my shoulders. But these days, in which the pain is fresh, will quickly pass, and then I trust that we shall both of us find consolation, in this world by grace, and in the world to come by glory. I pray you, comfort my mother [*come virile*], and I beseech her to join you in giving me your blessing. I recommend to you also my brothers and sisters, especially Alberto: make him acquire knowledge, for it will be a great burden and sin if he is allowed to waste his time."

The note of human anguish which is struck here, in almost the first of Savonarola's published utterances, is the same note on which his public utterances close. In his last sermon he refers to the persecutions in store for him which as a man he could not fail to fear. For it is, he says, in accordance with the "*parte sensitiva*" of man that he should be saddened by afflictions. Even Christ Himself, though He was God, yet, as a man, was sad. "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." Human nature will not<sup>1</sup> be denied in any man, nor "without purpose has God given any natural inclination to man". Savonarola from first to last was one who felt keenly; more keenly perhaps than most men, for in him the "*parte sensitiva*" was more than commonly active. The essential humanity of the man throughout brings him into touch with us, however lofty the heights of transcendental ecstasy to which he aspired, and we are the better able to appreciate his endurance from a know-

<sup>1</sup> "*Triumphus Crucis*," Bk. II, Ch. 1.

ledge of the school of suffering in which he learned how to endure.

Noteworthy too from the first is his sense of the sins of others. It was not with him, as with Christian in Bunyan's immortal allegory, a sense of his own sin which led him to flee from the wrath to come. It was the burden of the sins of Italy, the iniquities of priests and prelates, the blasphemies, pride, and idolatry everywhere visible around him which lay heavy on his soul. From these he was irresistibly impelled to fly, that he might nurture his own virtue in solitude and seclusion. A warning voice seemed ever to be ringing in his ears urging him to abandon a wicked world; but its note was not the note of inspired denunciation sounded by some Hebrew prophet, nor that of fervid exhortation struck by St. Paul, but the warning came to him in the mellifluous accents of a great Pagan singer—*Heu fuge crudeles terras*. Thus Savonarola's call may be regarded as a reflection of the intermingling of Renaissance feeling with mediaeval asceticism which gives to his career, as to his epoch, so much of its interest and quality.

In order to explain more fully his flight from home and from the world Savonarola referred in his letter to a treatise which he had left behind him—his father would find it among his papers on the window—in which he had set forth the reasons which had actuated him. The tract was easily found, and was seen to be entitled "*Del dispregio del mondo*" ("Contempt of the World"). In it he expressed much the same sentiments as are to be found in his "*De Ruinâ*" and in his letter of farewell. A recent critic, Father Lucas, has suggested that Savonarola's attitude of mind towards the conditions which prevailed around him indicates a tendency to pessimism, which might in turn lead to exaggeration and impru-

dence. The implication is that, if in the days of influence and authority he inveighed against wickedness and corruption, even when seated on high upon a Pontifical chair, this must be set down in part to a natural disposition, exhibited from youth up, to look on the dark side of things. An abstract value attaches to this suggestion, for an overwhelming sense of the iniquities of those about one may generally be taken as an indication of self-consciousness and self-esteem. But in the concrete case of Savonarola the profligacy and immorality of the times are attested by such undeniable evidence that his denunciations may be attributed to clearness of vision and a sense of truth as reasonably as to a pessimistic disposition, while the wickedness in high places against which he fulminated in the day of his power was scarcely capable of being exaggerated however violent the language used in denouncing it.

During the first year of his novitiate he composed an ode which he called "*De Ruinâ Ecclesiæ*". It may be compared with his "*De Ruinâ Mundi*," for it was obviously written under the influence of the same high-wrought emotions which had coloured the earlier work. In the one he had viewed the world and had seen the ruin impending by reason of men's sins; in the other he viewed the Church and prophesied a like ruin by virtue of its corruption. To the Church, under the aspect of a pure virgin, the poet pours out his soul. He would weep for ever over the decay of ancient virtue, over the eclipse of truth and sound doctrine, and for the lack of saintly doctors, priests and bishops, who of old adorned the Church. The Holy Virgin, leads him into the cavern where she has sought refuge from contamination since the days when proud ambition—a false and haughty harlot—had invaded Rome; and when the poet cries in

exaltation, "Alas, O Lady! may it be mine to break these spreading wings," the Holy Virgin replies: "Weep and be silent: so it seems best to me".

The passage has frequently been brought forward as evidence that Savonarola was thus early a rebel from the Roman Church, in that he spoke of the Roman discipline as a proud harlot who had corrupted the purity of the true Church; but, according to his own commentary upon the work, the poet did not mean that the Church of Rome was a harlot; the "*fallace, superba meretrice*" was the spirit of ambition which had entered into and taken possession of the Church of Rome to the exclusion of spirituality, sanctity, and grace. Savonarola from first to last was a devoted son of the Roman Church, and nothing in his work or writings can justify the opinion that he was a Protestant reformer. From first to last his end was reformation, not revolt. He is not to be classed with Luther, but rather with pre-Reformation reformers, such as Colet, More, and Erasmus.

No reader of the "*De Ruinâ Ecclesiæ*" feels any sense of shock or of surprise in that the author, using his licence as a poet, should have celebrated in verse an interview between himself and the Virgin. As a poet it was his function to give rein to his imagination, and the bent of his genius set strongly towards visualized impersonation and dramatic dialogue.<sup>1</sup>

Is it not possible that the combined forces of poetic

<sup>1</sup> For Savonarola's passion for dramatic dialogue, see not only his "*Compendium*" but his "*Dyalogus de veritate prophetica*," and his sermons generally, e.g. Fifteenth Sermon on Job, 17 March, 1495; Twenty-second Sermon on Exodus, 18 March, 1498 (his last sermon). He constantly assumes an objector among his congregation, and replies from the pulpit to the criticisms which he puts into the objector's mouth. See Forty-eighth Sermon on Amos, 10 April, 1496, The Ascension Day Sermon, 4 May, 1497.

imagination and dramatic faculty afford the true explanation of some of those visions and celestial interviews which at a later time appealed to Savonarola's prosaic devotees as literal records of actual experience? How far does the dramatist become for the moment absorbed in his own creations? How far does he become incapable of distinguishing between the workings of the actual and the fictitious within his own mind? When, in his "*Compendium Revelationum*," we read Savonarola's description of his visit to the Courts of Heaven, his narrative of the conversation which he there held with the Virgin, or, as at another time, with the gatekeeper of Paradise, or even with God Himself, we are surely not bound to interpret the dramatic visions of a poet in the light of the hard logic of facts. By insisting on a precise literalism which will be satisfied with nothing less than a blind acceptance of supernatural happenings we ignore all that is most distinctive in the character and disposition of the man. We reduce the imaginative ecstasies of the seer to the dull level of miracle-mongering and thaumaturgy.

For seven years (1475-81) Savonarola remained in S. Domenico at Bologna. His zeal commended him to his superiors, who in due time allotted to him the honourable duty of teaching the novices. In the fulfilment of these duties, he seems to have exhibited the same sympathy, the same magnetic power which we find so powerful at S. Marco at a later time. Those great gifts of impassioned rhetoric and practical organization with which he was endowed, had, as yet, no opportunity to disclose themselves. As yet he dreamed not of the stage on which he was to be called to act so great a part. But in his quiet solitudes, unnoted and obscure, but clothed in charity, sympathy and obedience, leading an unevent-

ful life of useful labour and silent contemplation, Savonarola in after days may have looked back to the seven years spent at Bologna as the happiest and most peaceful in his active career.

Possibly it was in the quiet retirement of his Bologna convent that Savonarola first began to credit himself with prophetic insight, and to regard himself as an agent, divinely appointed for the renovation of the Church and the chastisement of the sins of Italy. Preaching in the Duomo of Florence on 13 January, 1495, he said, "I want you to know that I began to foresee these things [i.e. the renovation of the Church, and his other conclusions] more than fifteen, perhaps twenty, years ago. It is more than ten years since I began to preach them." It was therefore, if his statement is accepted as true, somewhere between 1475 and 1480 that he began to conceive of himself as the recipient of a special inspiration, though he allowed many years to elapse before giving public utterance to the message which had been entrusted to him to deliver. It is creditable to his wisdom and powers of self-restraint that he should not have allowed youthful enthusiasm to hurry him into premature declarations, and should so far have distrusted his own inexperience as to permit time to deepen impressions into convictions.

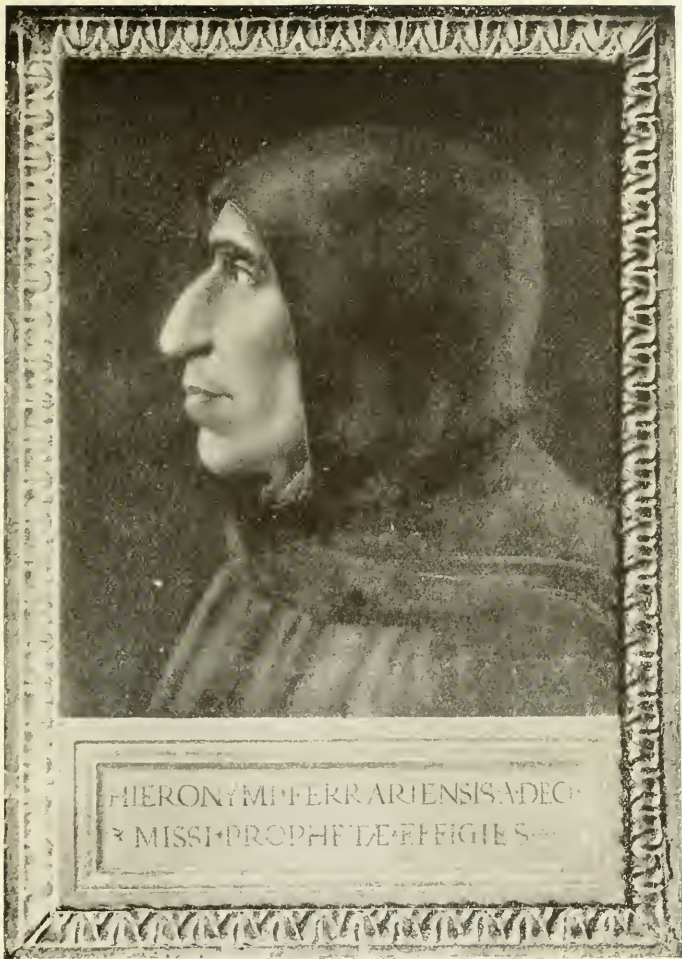
The quiet retirement of Bologna was, however, but a preparation for active employment in a wider sphere. The Dominican Order—the *Ordo Praedicatorum*—was essentially the preaching order, and in due time Savonarola was sent forth to preach. His first mission was to his native town of Ferrara and to his own people. In 1481 we find him a student at the Convent of Sta. Maria degli Angeli in that city, where he preached a course of sermons. He remained for some months at

Ferrara, but was chiefly conscious that there he was a failure. His experience taught him that elsewhere, away from his own country, he could produce infinitely greater fruit for his own soul and for the souls of others than was possible in Ferrara. For, as he naïvely tells his mother, the people who came to hear him remembered him. "Is not this, they said, that Maestro Jeronimo who used to commit such and such sins, and was even as we are?" and so they would not devoutly hear his words. It was no doubt with a sense of relief that, as a consequence of the outbreak of hostilities between Ferrara and Venice in the autumn of 1481, he received orders to betake himself to Florence where he was received into the Convent of S. Marco. There he so commended himself to the brethren by his saintly life, and his profound knowledge of the Scriptures, that he was appointed to the office of "lector," or reader in Holy Scripture, to the convent, and he was also chosen as Lent preacher in S. Lorenzo for 1482.

Thus the future was before him promising a life of useful labour, and of unhistoric quietude. No signs were yet apparent of the storms and tumults which were to beset him; the record of failure and disappointment, of ecstasy and giddy notoriety, of solid power, of woful overthrow, had not yet been opened. Before passing away from these restful days of peace and sympathetic endeavour, we may pause a moment to obtain a nearer view of Savonarola, and of the quiet solitudes in which he lived at S. Marco.

The appearance of Savonarola has been described in much detail by contemporaries, and several contemporary portraits are extant, one if not two of which is by Fra Bartolommeo. He is almost always represented with his head enveloped in the cowl and his features appear in





SAVONAROLA, BY FRA BARTOLOMMEO  
*In the Museum of S. Marco, Florence*



profile. The line of the nose is a regular curve; the nose itself, as well as the lips, full and fleshy, suggesting a disposition naturally sensuous. The brow is low, and, as far as can be seen beneath the cowl, is not indicative of high qualities of mental power. The cheeks are sunken and the cheek-bones strongly pronounced, the effect of fasts and vigils. From the general appearance of the face we might judge that with freedom from care and with good living it would have become puffy and gross. The chin seems to recede until we realize that this effect is due to the thick and protruding lips above it. There is nothing of beauty about the face except the deep-set and far-gazing eyes which contain a world of care within their yearning steadfast gaze. It is upon his eyes that those who have left descriptions of him especially dwell. "Gli occhi," says Burlammacchi, "erano risplendenti e di color celeste come quelle che da filosofi son chiamati *glaucci*, circondati intorno di rossi e lunghi peli." Fra Benedetto, one of Savonarola's brethren of S. Marco, in "*Cedrus Libani*," thus describes his appearance:—

Era parvo di corpo ma ben sano:  
 Era di membri a modo delicato  
 Che quasi relucca sua santa mano.  
 Ilare sempre, e non già mai turbato;  
 Di sguardo destro e penetrante e bello;  
 Dell' occhio sufformato, oscuro e grato.  
 Densa di barba e d'oscuro capello;  
 La bocca svelta e la faccia distesa;  
 Arcato il naso aliquanto aveva quello.

The thick heavy eyebrows emphasized the flashing of the "occhi glaucci" beneath them, which "sometimes gave forth red flashes". The eyes indeed redeem the face from what may almost be called grossness and vulgarity. If upon a first inspection the appearance of Savonarola is disappointing, yet the more we are

familiar with it, the more it succeeds in impressing us by virtue of the mingled energy and restraint which are marked upon it. "Though his countenance had no beauty of line," says Villari, "it expressed a severe nobility of character"—a verdict upon which as a whole we may agree.

The old convent of S. Marco had fallen into disrepair, and the handful of Silvestrine monks who inhabited it in the early years of the fifteenth century were not a credit to their order. Cosimo dei Medici, shortly after his return from banishment in 1434, was induced to make S. Marco an object of his munificence and care. Though profoundly convinced that a State could not be governed by paternosters, Cosimo was himself very far from being insensible to the influences of religion or from being indifferent to the value of religion in the organization of the State. He was moreover persuaded that by spending money profusely in the service and for the glory of God he could thereby expiate many sins of which he was personally conscious, and secure a continuance of Divine favours. However great his expenditure on churches, shrines or convents, he never found, he said, that God was his debtor. He caused S. Marco to be restored by the famous architect, Michelozzo Michelozzi, and secured it for the Dominicans of Fiesole who were attached to the Lombard Congregation of the Order. Nor was he content that the structure should be raised and adorned by the genius of one of the greatest architects of the day. The walls within were decorated with frescoes from the brush of the saintly Fra Angelico, who now, with his brethren from Fiesole, found in S. Marco a home. There may still be seen on chapter house, refectory and cell the most moving incidents of the life of Christ, the Nativity, the Presentation, the Transfiguration, and chief of all, the



THE NATIVITY, BY FRA ANGELICO  
*In S. Marco, Florence*



Crucifixion. One fresco shows two solitary figures—the Saviour dying upon the Cross and S. Dominic kneeling at its foot in an ecstasy of adoring woe; in another, Angelico's great Crucifixion, we have the exaltation of the monastic orders and of S. Dominic, the subtle recognition of the bounty of the Medici in the portraiture of the Medicean saints, and that deathless group of apostles and holy women who stand or kneel in agonies of lamentation around the feet of the central figure. We can picture Savonarola standing before these frescoes and feeling within himself all that passion of tears and emotion which Fra Angelico has poured forth upon the convent walls. He too had felt with S. Dominic, had suffered with Mary, had knelt in adoration with St. Jerome, had turned away with averted eyes, with St. Damien, from the sight of a scorned and crucified Redeemer. All that was most fervent in the piety of Angelico, all that was most poignant in the grief he represented, all that was most consolatory in the life which Christ lived on earth for men, struck from those walls upon the heart of Girolamo Savonarola, and awoke responsive chords of devotion and of love.

The generosity of Cosimo went beyond the restored structure, the frescoes, and the pleasant garden which lay within the cloisters. He presented to the convent a library, unique in its day, containing a selection from the splendid collection of manuscripts which at great cost he had got together. Thus S. Marco was equipped to be not only a retreat for piety and a shrine of art, but also a centre of learning, a resort of scholars, and a sanctuary in which the chief literary treasures of antiquity found a secure and honourable resting-place. Everything at S. Marco combined to stimulate the energies and quicken the feeling of saint, scholar, or artist.

Here Savonarola remained for a few years till he was again sent forth into the world. His novitiate was scarcely yet completed: as a preacher he was still unpractised, and indeed unacceptable: he was scarcely yet assured of his own mission. Little could he have dreamed in his quiet retirement that he was destined to be known throughout Italy as the greatest preacher of his age, and that within the space of a few years he would be the master not only of S. Marco but of Florence itself.



## CHAPTER III

### SAVONAROLA, SAN MARCO AND LORENZO DE' MEDICI

IT has been seen that in 1482 Savonarola had been appointed by his superiors to preach the Lent course of sermons in S. Lorenzo. His previous experiences in the pulpit can have done little to reassure him. The sermons which he had preached at Ferrara had neither satisfied himself nor attracted a considerable congregation. There he was, it is true, in his own country, where a prophet is without honour, but there were substantial reasons, other than the fact that his hearers had known him from boyhood, to explain his failure. He was unpractised in the arts of preaching, and the message which he desired to bring was not as yet either clearly or forcibly defined in his own mind. His soul burned within him, but he was not yet articulate. He was dimly conscious of a mission, but without the certainty which would enable him to express it. He denounced the sins of Italy, and told of judgments to come, but the conviction of a Divine prophetic inspiration, which was ultimately to overpower all deficiencies of voice and bearing, was not yet established. He may therefore well have regarded as an ordeal the prospect before him at S. Lorenzo. He was to preach to a Florentine audience in a city which was the heart and centre of Renaissance culture. Florence was too busy with art, with classical literature, with philosophy, and the pursuit of commerce

to care about the impetuous denunciations of an obscure and alien Friar. Judging everything from an artistic standpoint, Florence required from her preachers learning, style, taste, suavity, tact. The people who resorted to the Churches were critics and *dilettanti*, rather than men and women overwhelmed by the sense of sin and the need for forgiveness. The popular preacher of the day was an Augustinian monk, Fra Mariano, whose discourses at Santo Spirito gave the greatest satisfaction to the best judges. Fra Mariano is known to us chiefly through Savonarolist chroniclers, and it is probable that at their hands he has met with less than his deserts. He committed the unpardonable sin of opposing Savonarola, and thereby proclaimed himself a bad man, who came naturally and inevitably to a bad end. But the testimony of Ficino and Poliziano bears witness to Fra Mariano as a man of high culture, and that testimony is unconsciously supported by hostile chroniclers. Both Filipepi and Cinozzi connect his death with the loss by shipwreck of a case of valuable books. He was certainly not a revivalist and had little sympathy with revivalist methods. If Savonarola in the Duomo was bold in the assertion of his prophetic inspiration, Fra Mariano at Sta. Croce was equally bold in his repudiation of such claims as being unscriptural. But even in the height of their pulpit antagonism exchanges of courtesies passed between the rival Friars, who after all do not respectively represent the final principles of good and evil, but only differing points of view. The preaching and Society of Fra Mariano were specially acceptable to Lorenzo dei Medici, who built a Convent for his Order beyond the Porta S. Gallo where the Augustinian was installed almost as Court preacher to the Medici House. Savonarola, with his harsh voice, rough manner, and uncouth gestures stood little chance in Flor-

ence against such a competitor. Fourteen years later, he referred, in his twenty-first sermon, on Amos, preached in the Duomo in March, 1496, to his first public appearances in a Florentine pulpit. "You have known me," he said, "in past times : you have known that I was not fit for this enterprise, that I did not know how to move a hen, and yet to-day all Italy is moved by my preaching." Cinozzi, in less emphatic language, confirms his master's estimate of his own powers at this time. "His gestures and pronunciation pleased none, so that scarcely twenty-five women and children remained to hear him. He was so discouraged that he seriously thought of abandoning altogether the work of preaching, and he returned to Lombardy." The last statement, however, is misleading, for though he left Florence for Brescia in 1486, yet, with brief intervals of absence, he remained for nearly four years after his course in S. Lorenzo at S. Marco. There, in spite of his failure outside, he continued to arouse the greatest enthusiasm among the little band of brethren and students gathered around him, and he must have continued to command the full confidence of his superiors, if, in 1482, he was sent to represent his Convent at the Chapter of the Lombard Dominicans held in that year at Reggio. Doubts have been suggested as to this incident in Savonarola's life, for his biographers have asserted that on this occasion he so impressed Pico della Mirandola by his eloquence and abilities that "being unable to live without him," Pico persuaded his friend Lorenzo dei Medici, to invite the Friar to Florence. But in 1482 Savonarola was already domiciled in Florence, quite independently of any exertions on his behalf on the part of either Pico or Lorenzo. It is indeed obvious that his biographers refer to his permanent establishment in Florence which dates from 1489. It is highly im-

probable therefore that the effects produced on Pico by Savonarola in 1482 should not have secured a definite result until seven years later. The researches of Gherardi, however, have established the fact that the Chapter did actually meet at Reggio in 1482, and though we may dismiss the story of Pico and Lorenzo, there is yet no reason to doubt that both Pico and Savonarola were present on that occasion, and the intimacy between them may have dated from their meeting there. At Reggio Savonarola seems to have given a foretaste of his extraordinary powers. The conviction of a special inspiration was now beginning to work within him. From this time he began to have greater confidence in himself and in his mission. He returned to Florence, quieted in spirit, and resumed his duties as *lector* at S. Marco.

Of his life during the next two years (1482-84) little is known except that he was from time to time sent out on missionary expeditions to preach in various towns of Tuscany and Lombardy. According to Villari, though he does not quote his authority, this was the period when Savonarola first began to see visions and to be convinced of a definite Divine inspiration directing his labours. Reasons, derived from Savonarola's own words, have already been given which have led me to assign a considerably earlier date to the beginnings of his own belief in himself as being gifted with a prophetic foreknowledge of the future. But it may well be that at this time he saw, as it seemed to him, the heavens opened and heard a voice which bade him proclaim aloud the calamities which were about to fall upon the Church. It is certain that he in no way relaxed, either at S. Marco or upon his wanderings, the austerities which he had long been accustomed to practise. With a temperament highly nervous and finely strung, with a body emaciated by long

vigils and severe fasts, it was natural that Savonarola, his mind filled with the denunciations of the prophets of old, and with the apocalyptic mysteries of St. John the Divine, should pass sometimes into the region of hallucinations and should conjure up from a brain overwrought by study and physical privations ecstatic visions which took the shape of his own latest thoughts. Nor was it reckoned strange in those days that men should receive a direct revelation from on high. It was as much an age of mysticism as an age of criticism and enlightenment. Even Ficino believed himself to have been the recipient of supernatural communications, and was profoundly convinced that it is the stars above us which govern our conditions. There were those indeed who foresaw the coming of Savonarola himself from the conjunction of the stars. Il Tizio, a Sienese priest, and a contemporary, relates in his "*Storia di Siena*" that the mathematicians, from the conjunction of the two superiors, which took place in 1484 "*in Scorpionis Simulacro*," had often foretold the appearance of a minor prophet as soon as the conjunction should be minor. This prophet would be one who would leave his own country, would preach for nineteen years; would wear white garments; would institute a new religion; would have no fears of either pain or death. "Many other things also, from the conjunction of the superiors in Scorpio, did the mathematicians predict concerning him: so that many, adhering to their reasoning and authority, thought that he would prove to be Anti-Christ, and among those who thought thus was Cristoforo Landino. But the pseudo-Anti-Christ is a major prophet arising out of the changing conjunction of *triplicitas* in the first step of Aries, while we are talking of a minor conjunction in the sign of Scorpio." When the most brilliant intellects of a brilliant intellectual age

were swayed by such astrological jargon as this, there can be no excess of credulity in lesser minds which need surprise us. Without at present expressing any judgment as to the actual value to be attached to Savonarola's claims to be directly inspired by revelations from heaven, it may be well to take note of his neuropathic disposition, of his manner of life which was so favourable to neurotic development, and to the general atmosphere of quackery and superstition by which he was surrounded.

It must be admitted that no man of the time—not Lorenzo dei Medici, nor Guicciardini—rose superior to astrological superstitions more triumphantly than did Savonarola himself. His denunciations of the astrologers are scattered broadcast throughout his sermons. But these denunciations are in themselves evidence of the credulity of the age, and it was only in a credulous age that a Savonarola was possible.

Among the missionary expeditions he was called upon to undertake by far the most important was his visit in 1484, or early in the following year, to S. Gemignano, that township of many towers which lies about twenty miles to the south-west of Florence. It was here that the sense of his mission, and of a Divine inspiration to proclaim it, broke upon him in full force. Preaching there upon his usual text, the depravity of the age and the corruption of the Church, he uttered for the first time his three prophetic propositions: *that the Church shall be scourged; afterwards it shall be regenerated; and these things shall quickly come to pass.* These conclusions from this time forth constituted the burden of his message to Italy, and in after days he announced them as being directly revealed to him by God.<sup>1</sup> It becomes interesting

<sup>1</sup> *Vide*, Thirteenth Sermon on Haggai, 14 Dec., 1494; Third Sermon on Psalms, 13 Jan., 1495; and the final Sermon, 18 March, 1498.

therefore to trace the genesis of these conclusions, and the actual sources from which they were drawn.

According to Savonarola's own testimony, and that of his biographer, the younger Pico della Mirandola, he was not originally indebted to revelation for these propositions, but deduced them naturally from his study of the Scriptures. There he found, says Mirandola, "that the majesty of Divine Justice required that terrible penalties should fall on wicked men, especially on those who, being placed in authority, corrupt the people by their bad example, . . . and he found that from the very beginning of things we have a record of a series of wonderful and mysterious judgments whereby the loving clemency and the terrible Justice of God are alike made manifest."

Savonarola himself, in his "*Compendium Revelationum*" is explicit as to the sources of his conclusions. Referring to the sermons which he preached in Florence in the course of 1490, he says that, in particular, he enforced his three conclusions—"These I always endeavoured to prove by probable reasons, and figures from Scripture, and other similitudes or parables founded on what is at present visible in the Church; not asserting that I had these things through any other means than these reasonings, since men did not then seem to me disposed to believe. In following years I went farther, and seeing a better disposition in men, I sometimes brought forward some visions, not however saying that they were visions, but putting them forward by way of parables." From this I think we may infer that Savonarola himself was from the first convinced that he had "these things" by direct supernatural revelation, though they were capable of being deduced, without supernatural agency, by a thinking man from Scripture and from the prevailing con-

ditions. Any use which he originally made of the visions vouchsafed to him was to introduce them by way of parables and similitudes in support of his assertions.

If then we are justified in believing that it was at S. Gemignano that what were originally shadowy impressions of a Divine revelation deepened into a fixed and settled conviction that he was the recipient of such a revelation, we can understand the effect which his sermons there produced not only upon his hearers but upon himself. From this time he launched forth freely into prophetic warnings, became bolder and more precise in his statement of them, and was strengthened in a belief that a power outside himself was urging him on. The fires of a new impulse from this moment began to burn within him and transformed a dreaming monk into an inspired prophet. A course of sermons which he preached at Brescia in 1486 affords striking evidence that he had now become conscious of forces working within him which hitherto had been absent. There he foretold desolation, misery, and bloodshed which would overtake the City. The fervour and passion which animated the preacher communicated themselves to his hearers. The Brescians seemed to see the form of one of the four and twenty elders whom Savonarola had singled out as the herald of their doom. The flashing eye, the tones of thunder struck terror into their hearts. Twenty-six years later, in 1512, when Brescia opened its gates to the Venetians in opposition to the advance of the French arms, the French general stormed the town, took it and gave it up to pillage. "For two days," says Creighton, "Brescia was ravaged by the fury of a horde of brutal soldiers; more than 8000 were slain and many of the French were so laden with spoil that they returned home to enjoy it." There must have been many still alive who



saw in the sack of Brescia the fulfilment of the doom prophesied upon it by Savonarola.

At the moment when Savonarola's spiritual life was undergoing a crisis, the Church itself was passing through critical times. On 12 August, 1484, Sixtus IV died. His nephew, Girolamo Riario held the Castle of St. Angelo. The great family of Colonna was in arms to vindicate the wrongs it had suffered at the hands of Sixtus. Rome was almost in a state of siege, and the College of Cardinals was distracted by the rival pretensions of the candidates for the Papal Chair. The situation was such as to suggest the possibilities of a new Schism. When, on 29 August, a Pope was peacefully elected in the person of Giovanni Battista Cibò, Savonarola regarded the event as governed by a special interposition of the hand of God. In a prefatory note to his poem, "*Oratio pro Ecclesia*," written at this time, he says that on the death of Sixtus the Devil aroused dissensions in the Church. But God laid to his hand; and, peace being made, Innocent VIII was elected, not without wonder on the part of the sheep who were anxious as to a Schism [*non sine admiratione ovium quae de schismate dubitabant*]. From the fragment of the poem made accessible by Villari and Casanova, we are able to judge of its general tenor. He invokes "Jesus, sweet comfort and highest good of every afflicted heart," to look with eyes of perfect love upon Rome. Succour Thy holy Roman Church which the demon is destroying. Look with pity on the storm in which Thy Spouse is lost.

E quanto sangue, oimè! tra noi s'aspetta,  
 Se la tua man pietosa,  
 Che di perdonar sempre si diletta  
 Non la riduce a quella  
 Pace che fu, quand' era poverella.

“That peace which she enjoyed when she was poor.” This is the burden of his song almost before his public career began; nor in the days of his power did he ever swerve from his conviction that the malady of the Church was to be found in its wealth and material splendour.<sup>1</sup>

Wherever Savonarola may have gone after leaving S. Gemignano, it is certain that he returned in due course to Florence. For in December, 1485, he dates a letter to his mother from Florence, in which he seeks to console her for the death of her brother, his uncle Borso. Rather paradoxically, as it may seem, he acknowledges the providence of God towards his family, “for the more I pray for its welfare, the more every day has He stricken it”. But this is only because God is gracious, and desires through affliction to bring the afflicted soul to Himself. Consolation for earthly troubles is only to be found in the contemplation of Christ’s love, for the more this soul of ours is bound to the things of earth, so much the more is it far away from its eternal goal. Life here is nothing except as a preparation for the life which is to come.

The letter as a whole abounds in that asceticism which was so much in Savonarola’s character, and it serves to amplify his dictum: “My brethren, for what do we live here save to learn to die a good death?” In the midst of his consolations to his mother he abruptly breaks off to address his sisters, Beatrice and Chiara. Let them not waste their time in thoughts of marriage and of worldly happiness. St. Paul spoke truly when he declared that whoever marries does not sin, but lays up for himself tribulation, “and you have an example of this in your own mother. He who does not marry takes the better course.” The fervour of their brother’s exhortations, and the fact that they were not infrequently repeated,

<sup>1</sup> *Vide*, Sermon, “*Ut quid Deus repulisti*,” Advent, 1493.

lead us to suppose that Beatrice and Chiara did not see things quite in Savonarola's light. From his prayers to them to leave aside all vanities, to care nothing about company, to desire neither to see nor to be seen, not to go among men, but to be wholly given up to Christ it would appear that his sisters were thoroughly natural and very human girls. If the younger Pico's story be true that his uncle Giovanni offered Savonarola 400 scudi to dower his sisters, and that he refused it, it is improbable that they regarded their brother as one who had done them a service.

The exhortation closes with a moving picture of the recent death of a young *cantatrice* in Florence. "She was the darling of the whole city by reason of the sweetness of her voice which surpassed all the great singers. She died in great anguish carrying with her the punishment of her sins. Had she followed the path which at one time I wished to show her, perchance she would not have come to such a pass. What delight do all her charms afford her now? Where now are the melodies, the delicate foods in which once she rejoiced? The things of this world are fleeting like the wind. This life which we live here is but a brief passage either to the joys of Paradise, or to the pains of Hell. There life will be unending. How then can any one hesitate? Yet men are blind, intent on building where they cannot possess. Every one speaks well of a life of rectitude and praises virtue, but only a few follow it, though in this world nothing but sorrow is to be found."<sup>1</sup>

In 1486 Savonarola for a time severed his connexion with S. Marco in order to undertake a prolonged mission

<sup>1</sup> Marchese in "Archivio Storico Italiano" dates this letter 5 Nov., 1495. Villari and Casanova have secured the true date, 5 Dec., 1485, from a photograph of the original letter which is still extant in England.

among the Lombard towns. Apart from his visit to Brescia, to which reference has already been made, there is no detailed record of these apostolic wanderings. He is indeed almost lost to us for two or three years. It may be inferred, from a letter written to his mother in January, 1490, that Brescia was his head quarters during this period (1486-90), for he speaks of the difficulty he had experienced in getting letters through from Brescia to Ferrara. From the same source we learn that he had been commanded to preach the Lent course of 1490 at Genoa, and it was when at Pavia, on his way to Genoa, that the letter to his mother was written. Genoa therefore may confidently be assigned as one of the scenes of his labours, and it may be true, as Father Lucas asserts that he preached at Pavia, though from his own words it is clear that in 1490 he was only passing through Pavia on his way to Genoa. It was probably on the conclusion of his labours there that he returned to Florence, and resumed his position of *lector* in S. Marco.

Savonarolist biographers such as Pico and Burlamacchi have given currency to the story that Savonarola was recalled to Florence by Lorenzo dei Medici acting under the impulse of his friend Pico della Mirandola. They associate Pico's action, however, with the impression made upon him by Savonarola at Reggio seven years before, and thus they render the story suspicious. Moreover earlier and strictly contemporary biographers, such as Cinozzi and Filipepi, entirely ignore this story, Cinozzi indeed expressly stating that Savonarola's return to Florence was the consequence of the great desire of the brethren at S. Marco to have him with them again, while Savonarola himself in "*Compendium Revelationum*" confirms this statement when he says, "God brought me to Florence by commission of my superiors in 1489" [1490]. Per-

haps the matter is scarcely worth the controversy which has arisen around it, except in so far as it affects the larger question of the credibility of Savonarolist apologists. The point is one of picturesqueness and dramatic effect rather than of historical importance. The precise influences which led to Savonarola's recall have little bearing on his work or character. But there would be a certain picturesque irony in the fact, if it were true, that the man who was to stand before Florence as the foremost antagonist of the Medicean system should have been invited thither by the greatest representative of the House of Medici. It is unfortunate that so many of the dramatic stories of history, devised after the event, have to be received by the judicious with considerable caution and reserve.

On his return to S. Marco Savonarola at once resumed his old position of instructor, and in the summer of 1490 began a course of readings on the Apocalypse in the Convent garden. The theme was the same as that which had made so strong an impression on the people of Brescia four years before. Though subdued to the tone of his surroundings there was doubtless the same passionate earnestness, the same conviction of the judgments which await on sin. The little audience of Friars "beneath the damask rose-tree" began to be increased by laymen from outside. It was after the discourse of Sunday, 18 July, that he was exhorted by his friends to preach in the church of the Convent in order that a wider public might profit by his sermons. "Pray," he said, "till next Sunday." When it arrived he announced that on the following Sunday he would expound and preach in the church, "and I shall preach for more than eight years, and so indeed it came to pass".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Burlamacchi. The statement must be received with caution. For Savonarola did not preach "for more than eight years," but for less than

The sermons begun in S. Marco on 1 August, 1490, were continued throughout the year, and in all of them it was his chief concern to insist upon the truth of his three propositions. He denounced the sins of Italy and the corruption of the Church, and prophesied that God would quickly send a great scourge upon the guilty land. He varied his denunciations by glowing exhortations to repentance, while he certainly created upon his hearers the impression that he derived his foreknowledge of future events from a special divine revelation. To his original predictions he now, according to Cinozzi, added yet another, that the infidels would be converted, and from this time he constantly asserted that the conversion of the heathen would take place immediately, by which, as he explained, he meant within the lifetime of some of those to whom he was speaking. From the first his sermons and prophetic utterances met with a mixed reception in Florence. While he gathered round him a large body of enthusiastic supporters, the number of those who disliked his style and prophetic pretensions must also have been considerable. Other Friars, at Sta. Croce or Santo Spirito, also had their devoted followers, and it was not merely professional jealousy but sincere conviction which caused many Franciscans and Augustinians to take an attitude of strong opposition to Savonarola's claims. But to him opposition, from whatever quarter, seemed to be evidence of that very perver-

eight years. 1 August, 1490-18 March, 1498. But in "*Compendium Revelationum*" Savonarola himself mistakes the date, and says he began to preach in 1489, and other authorities, Cinozzi, Filipepi, say the same. We may suspect that Burlamacchi, with the false date before him, made the prediction harmonize with it. If so, the only authority on which the prediction rests loses most of its value. Savonarola in his confession corrects his own error, and dates his preaching at S. Marco from 1 August, 1490. That this is the true date is obvious. It is proved, among other things, by the fact that in 1490 1 August fell on a Sunday, but not in 1489.

sity which he denounced as part of the guilt which God was about to punish. As he became more and more persuaded that "it is not I who preach, but God who speaks through me," he naturally became more and more convinced that to criticize and oppose him was to criticize and oppose God. This sounds like egotism gone mad, but exactly in proportion as he was sincere it was impossible for him to think otherwise. He could honestly repudiate all personal feelings when to his opponents he might seem to be wholly swayed by such feelings. Doubtless he regarded himself as merely a poor worm, a mannikin, the meanest of mankind mysteriously appointed to be the mouthpiece of the Divine Will. But there is perhaps some excuse for those who regarded him as a pretentious and arrogant impostor who found his own advantage in trading upon the superstitious credulity of flatterers and devotees. When he declared that he "must be the hailstorm which will bruise the heads of those who will not get under cover," the statement could be construed as only another way of saying that he proposed to pursue with his denunciations all who did not agree with him. The student of human nature can have no difficulty in understanding how it was that the relations between the partisans and opponents of Savonarola would speedily become strained, at last perhaps to a point when the strain would be no longer tolerable. If that point should ever be reached there would be no alternative but a final trial of strength between the parties in which the weaker would go to the wall.

It is from Savonarola's own record that we learn that divisions and dissensions speedily arose as a consequence of his sermons. "Seeing," he says in "*Compendium Revelationum*," "the contradiction and division which I aroused, I was many times, like a coward, minded to

preach other things than these, but I could not do so ; everything else which I read or studied came to nought." He seems, however, to have made a serious effort to refrain from prophetic utterances, presumably as a consequence of the discords which they produced. For it is in this connexion that he gives us one of the most interesting of his autobiographical notices. "I remember," he says, "the first Lent that I preached in Florence in 1490 [he means 1491] having prepared my sermon for the second Sunday from such material, I determined to leave it, and to preach no more on such matters. God is my witness that all that Saturday, and all night I sat up even till Sunday morning, and could turn to nothing else, so much was every step closed to me, and all other teaching but that. That morning, being much fatigued by my long vigil, I heard a voice say to me : 'Fool, do you not see that the Will of God is that you should preach in that manner.' Accordingly that morning I preached a tremendous sermon [*sparentosa predicatione*]."

But though from the first there were those who cavilled and disapproved, the tide of popular favour soon began to run strongly with Savonarola. His congregation could scarcely be contained within the limits of S. Marco, and after the Advent course of 1490, it was felt that for the Lent sermons of 1491 a larger church was necessary. The preacher accordingly removed from S. Marco, to the Cathedral Church, or Duomo, of Florence, its pulpit becoming from this moment the principal scene of his labours, until circumstances compelled him seven years later to return to S. Marco a few weeks before his arrest and condemnation.

The Duomo now becomes the stage on which the whole tragic drama of Savonarola works itself out. It is a drama set throughout in an atmosphere of passionate



intensity. We see the prophet rising on the wings of ecstasy to proclaim the coming woe. The drama deepens as the predicted scourge begins to fall. The conviction of this supernatural inspiration carries everything before it, and the prophet becomes the divine lawgiver to the city. He ventures further forth upon the stormy sea of politics, and seeks to support his credit by giving still greater precision to his prophecies. The result is to arouse political adversaries, and to impair popular confidence in himself. He is caught up in a sea of troubles, but his passionate protesting eloquence never ceases to ring out from the pulpit beneath the mighty dome, until at last he is borne down by the weight of the forces he had roused against himself, and his voice is heard no more.

The expectation of a largely increased congregation was more than fulfilled when the pulpit of S. Marco was exchanged for that of the Duomo. Not only the substance of his preaching, but the personality of the man himself fascinated even those whom he repelled. To his followers his appeal was irresistible, but many who were not his followers, or who were so only for a time, felt the charm of a new spirit of enthusiasm and passionate intensity. For in the pulpit this plain insignificant figure became transformed. From an "*agnellino pieno di umiltà e carità*," he seemed to assume a "stature greater than his own, to exhibit an unconquerable and virile spirit, purged of every earthly consideration or respect, fearless of any living man, after the manner of the ancient prophets, apostles and martyrs".

There can be no doubt that from the first his principal attraction was the claim which he expressed or implied to a special divine revelation. But it is a mistake to suppose that his sermons were made up of nothing else but prophecy, denunciation and sensationalism. He made it a fundamental aim to expound Holy Scripture,

of every part of which he had a profound and intimate knowledge, and he was himself conscious that in the exposition of Scripture his strength lay. Though himself a philosopher and a rhetorician he trusted little to the effects of philosophical disquisitions or of rhetorical arts. "God is my witness," he says in his "*Triumphus Crucis*," "that many times when preaching to the people, while I wandered amid the subtleties of philosophy, in order to demonstrate to the proud intellects of this world the profundity of the Sacred Scriptures, I saw my hearers becoming less and less attentive. But suddenly, when I reverted to the exposition of the Scriptures themselves, I saw all eyes riveted upon me, and men hung upon my words, fixed and intent, as if they were marble statues." In proportion as he abandoned the technicalities of theology for the living Gospel, drawn from its original source, he realized that his teaching bore its fullest fruit in stimulating his hearers to the perfect life. In his interpretation of Scripture he was content to rely largely upon himself, constantly supporting himself however upon the authority of S. Thomas Aquinas and other great scholastic Doctors, rather than upon the new learning of the Renaissance with which he was equally familiar. His first aim without doubt was to restore and quicken a sense of spiritual life in the hearts of those who heard him, and when he used his alleged gift of prophecy or special inspiration it was only in order that the more effectually he might attain this end.

It was not long before in Florence Savonarola became the rage. For the Florentines were much as the Athenians of old, ever attracted by some new thing, while the message which Savonarola brought to them was of a character to startle and attract. For he continually enlarged upon the three propositions which he had first uttered at San

Gemignano, no longer concealing from his hearers that he received them as a direct inspiration from heaven. Nor, while inveighing against abuses and scandals in the Church and foretelling its speedy chastisement and regeneration, did he spare the vices of the Florentine people. On them too the judgments of God would fall. They had abandoned themselves to luxury, worldliness and an easy Paganism which had nothing in common with Christ; they had bartered their ancient freedom for the toys and spectacles presented to them by an autocratic ruler. They were false alike to Christ and to liberty.

Such scarcely veiled allusions to the tyranny which the Medici had imposed upon Florence had something in them which doubtless added to the attractiveness of the friar's sermons. There is always something piquant in listening to invectives launched against the powers that be. But Savonarola was something more than piquant. He appealed to a definite sense of freedom which was not yet extinct in many a Florentine heart. He set before the people an ideal to which at one time they had been passionately attached and made them realize how far, half unconsciously, they had lapsed from it.

Taking the general gist of Savonarola's sermons in Florence, we are able to see how, from his first appearances as a successful preacher, he combined within himself the dual functions of political and religious reformer. Politics and religion were with him so intermixed, the fear of God and the love of free government were to him so much one and the same thing, that he slipped into the position of a Florentine politician almost without knowing that he was anything but a reformer of morals. The sequel was to show that this two-fold position was a fatal one, for as a politician he was thrown not only athwart the path of the Medici but into direct conflict with the

secular aims of Italian statesmen, men who were not likely to hold their hands when they found themselves thwarted by the opposition of "a chattering friar".

When Savonarola denounced the corruption of the Church and the enslavement of Florence he spoke of what was plain for all men to see. It was because he made himself an articulate voice for the secret and half-formed thoughts of men that he sprang so rapidly to fame and influence. Many were thinking what he had the boldness to say. And when his words were enforced by vehement and startling assurances of visions and celestial interviews in which these things had been declared to him it was small wonder that, in an age strongly tinctured with superstitions, many should have lent a credulous ear, and should have seen in his emaciated form, worn features and flashing eyes a man in whom spirit had triumphed over body, a fit intermediary between God and His neglectful people.

The corruptions which had affected the Church in its head and its members have been referred to in general terms in the introductory chapter. Throughout the Renaissance period the Papacy was engaged in pursuing purely secular objects and was without scruple in its pursuit of them. The Pope who had most resolutely set himself to the task of consolidating the states of the Church and of carving out of them an Italian principality for his own kindred was Sixtus IV (1471-84). It is not necessary to credit Sixtus IV with all those nameless vices and unspeakable abominations which have been attributed to him in his own day and since. Such charges rest upon evidence which is tainted and have been dismissed by Creighton as "not proven". But whatever may have been the extent of his erudition and even of his private virtues, there can be no doubt that,

as Pontiff, Sixtus used the Papacy to secure his private interests, enlisting without scruple and without remorse all the temporal and spiritual weapons at his command in the service of ambition, intrigue and the disquietude of Italy. With such an example before them the great dignitaries of the Church naturally sought their own interests, regardless for the most part of the spiritual obligations imposed upon them by their position. The most astounding luxury prevailed in high places at Rome. The most shameless effrontery was displayed in the means used to get money. The holiest relics, the most sacred services of religion were prostituted for the purposes of gain. The inferior clergy were for the most part sunk in ignorance and sloth. The monastic orders had lost their freshness and enthusiasm; the regular clergy were dull and formal; in Italy itself vice went naked and unashamed. Assassination was a recognized political weapon and a legitimate instrument of private revenge. Abominable vices flourished unreprieved. It did not need the gift of prophecy to enable any thinking and observant man to be assured that in the near future reaction or revolution was inevitable.

In 1484 Pope Sixtus IV died. He was succeeded by Giovanni Battista Cibó, who took the title of Innocent VIII. At first better things were expected of the new Pope. Savonarola looked upon his election as the result of the direct working of the spirit of God upon the Conclave. But Innocent VIII soon showed himself to be animated by much the same ambitions as his predecessor. He looked upon the Papacy as an efficient means to advance his personal ends, and if he was not so restless as Sixtus nor so successful in securing his objects, this was not due to any loftier conception of his office, but to inferiority of character. The condition of the Church

remained unchanged under Innocent, or if there was a change it was for the worse. Innocent VIII was still Pope at the time when Savonarola began to preach in the Duomo.

The particular vices of Florence were very much those of the rest of Italy, but there was a grace, a charm about their exercise which made them the more insidious and the more demoralizing. There were, in the Florentines, many elements of greatness and nobility; they were instinct with the feeling for art, serious in their judgments, by no means the light, frivolous, irresponsible people they are sometimes thought to have been. But the pursuit of commerce had made them luxurious, the greed of territory had aroused their spirit of aggrandizement. They wanted repose within and a vigorous foreign policy without—conditions which are suitable to the emergence of a dictator.

In Lorenzo de' Medici the Florentines found a despot who satisfied their needs and corresponded to their aspirations. He has been described as a man who "combined the selfish audacity of the *condottiere* prince with the plausible hypocrisy of the cautious merchant, and had adorned the mixture with daubs of literary and artistic culture". It cannot be said that this judgment of Lorenzo by Dr. Creighton is altogether false, but it by no means expresses all the truth, and so conveys a wrong impression of the man. He had not grasped power in Florence by the arts of a *condottiere*, for he was not a man of war nor personally skilled in military affairs. He may have possessed the hypocrisy of a cautious merchant, but he was anything but a cautious merchant himself. He brought the fortunes of the Medici House almost to ruin by imprudent expenditure and indifference to business principles; indeed, the charge that lies heavy upon him



GROUP WITH LORENZO DE' MEDICI, FROM THE FRESCO "HONORIUS III  
GRANTS THE CHARTER OF S. FRANCIS," BY D. GHIRLANDAIO

*In the Church of S. Trinita, Florence*





is that he reinforced his exhausted private purse at the expense of the public treasury. His literary and artistic culture were something more than daubs upon a calculating personality. We need not accept the criticism of too ardent admirers who declared that as a poet he was superior to Dante and Petrarch, but he had the true feeling of a poet and an astonishing versatility which enabled him to attain excellence in very diverse branches of the poet's art. His artistic culture can scarcely be called in question. The man who was not so much the patron as the friend of Botticelli, Ghirlandaio and Michelangelo, the man whose collection of antiques in the San Marco Gardens was the school of art to Florence was something more than a posturing dilettante.

It is true that any estimate of Lorenzo's character is based not so much on fact as on feeling. There was much about him which all good men must condemn, but there was as much and more which exercises a fascination over some temperaments while rousing violent antagonism in others. His personality has overshadowed the conditions under which he held sway, and critics who charge him with being the enslaver of Florence forget to ask the question: At what time in her history was Florence in truth free? Lorenzo did not impose a despotism upon the State. He inherited it. The rule of a single man had become a necessity in Florence, but the position of a single ruler was unrecognized. It is this fact which explains the constant exercise of artifice, intrigue and wire-pulling which we find in Lorenzo's government. "In his rule there was one great flaw. This was not tyranny, nor corruption, nor any fault for which he was responsible, but the want of a constitutional position corresponding to his power." To supply this want he resorted to many dubious devices. He

cannot perhaps be wholly acquitted of the charge that he debauched the Florentines by shows and spectacles in order to blind them to their loss of independence or to reconcile them to its loss. But if it be admitted that a despotism was necessary it is difficult to see by what other means than those adopted by Lorenzo it could have been enforced. Far-reaching problems of government and intricate questions affecting the destinies not of Florence only but of Italy were constantly presented to his mind for solution. Their solution depended upon delicate negotiations and an uncontrolled power to decide. He needed a free hand, and so long as he got it he was not scrupulous as to the means whereby he secured it. It is not difficult to see the antagonism, tacit or expressed, which would necessarily arise between two such men as Lorenzo and Savonarola. The monk intermingled politics with his preaching, but had not a really strong grasp upon the political situation. He saw what was immediately before his eyes, an insidious despot as he deemed Lorenzo usurping the place of ancient freedom. Without concerning himself with the causes which had produced this situation or with the further question as to how far the situation corresponded to the needs of the times, he denounced the usurper. Lorenzo, on his part, when he thought of Savonarola at all, would think of him with contempt mingled with annoyance, contempt for an over-ambitious friar who would insist upon meddling with matters which he did not understand, annoyance that the nature of the measures, which he deemed necessary to secure a free hand for the conduct of affairs, should be too openly disclosed before the eyes of the people.

It would, however, be unfair to Savonarola to represent his antagonism to Lorenzo as resulting merely from pre-

judice and an incapacity to understand the conditions of Lorenzo's ascendancy. The lofty disdain with which Roscoe, in his life of Lorenzo, dismisses Savonarola from his pages shows an inability to comprehend either the significance of the Frate's work or the extent of the influence which he exercised in his own day, and indeed still continues to exercise. In attributing to Lorenzo personally the loss of liberty in Florence, Savonarola may have been narrow and unfair, his ideal of a theocratic State may have been visionary and unpractical, yet, as a reformer of morals, he was not far wrong in regarding the government of the Medici as the chief obstacle in his way, and in identifying Lorenzo with the moral depravity of Florence.

It was the aim of Savonarola to impress upon the Florentines that righteousness exalteth a nation, and to urge on each individual the paramount duty of single-minded devotion to the service of God. Whatever piety Lorenzo had was the private emotion of an individual disengaged from the practical conduct of politics and public life. The piety of Savonarola was wholly practical, incapable of being detached for a moment from civic and social duty. The objects of Lorenzo were often incompatible with scrupulous rectitude. Savonarola worked to set up the rule of Christ over the city. The antagonism of the two men is to be found, therefore, in their antagonistic conceptions as to the functions of government, nor is the conflict of ideas which they respectively represented even yet finally determined.

"States cannot be governed by Paternosters." It was a special part of Savonarola's mission to protest against this dictum, to insist that States can be properly governed only by Paternosters—in other words, that one ethical standard, and one alone, must apply equally to the

conduct of the public and the private man. It is scarcely too much to say that Savonarola's whole position was based upon this contention. "If you want to make good laws first reconcile yourselves to the laws of God, since all good laws depend on the Eternal Law, and to observe that the Grace of the Holy Spirit must be sought."<sup>1</sup> His *Tractate on the Regiment and Government of Florence* is nothing else but an amplification of this text that the individual practice of the highest Christian life (*ottimo vivere christiano*) is rendered easy or difficult in accordance with the character of the government. No form of government, in Savonarola's opinion, was more fatal to the purity of individual conduct than a tyranny, and the subtle analysis of such a form of government which he gives in the Tractate leaves no doubt that by a tyranny he means nothing else than such a form of government as the Medici had established in Florence.

Thus on general principles Lorenzo and Savonarola stood fundamentally and inevitably opposed, and though as private individuals each may have found much to admire in the qualities of the other, as public men it was inevitable that they should come into collision.

The exact circumstances however in which collision occurred are not easy to determine, for the statements even of contemporary chroniclers have to be weighed in relation to their predilections. It is to be remembered that Savonarola and Lorenzo were, both of them, men capable of arousing intense devotion and intense antipathy, pas-

<sup>1</sup> Eighth Sermon on "Haggai, 7 Dec., 1494, which also contains the following passage: "E non è vero quello che dicono i pazzi e cattivi, che lo Stato non si regge coi paternostri. Questo è detto di tisanni, e non di veri principi." See also thirteenth Sermon on Haggai, 14 Dec., 1494, where he again combats the proposition, and cites Moses, Joshua, Gideon, and especially Christ Himself who founded His State on no other principle,

sions which respectively find expression in the chroniclers of their times. Even from admitted facts it is possible for partisans to draw diametrically opposite conclusions. Where the facts are doubtful or in conflict the element of personal feeling must very largely influence the point of view.

Thus it is stated that scarcely was Savonarola's Lenten course of sermons ended than he was invited to preach before the Signoria on the Wednesday of Easter week, 1491, an opportunity which he used to inveigh strongly against the tyranny of Lorenzo's government. The rough draft, in Savonarola's handwriting, of a sermon commenting in general terms upon the evils of a tyranny, is certainly extant, and modern biographers of the Friar accept it as having been preached on that occasion.<sup>1</sup> If this be so, it is noteworthy that a Signoria which, by hypothesis, was completely subservient to Lorenzo should have invited a prominent opponent of Lorenzo's system to preach before it, and should have listened, apparently without protest, to a denunciation of that system. "I must tell you"—he is reported to have said—"that all the evil and all the good of the City depend upon its Head. Great therefore is his responsibility even for small sins, since, if he followed the right path, the whole city would be sanctified. . . . Tyrants are incorrigible because they are proud, because they love flattery, and because they will not restore ill-gotten gains . . . they corrupt voters, and farm out the taxes to aggravate the burdens of the people."

The incident, if it occurred, is as much an example of Lorenzo's magnanimity as of Savonarola's boldness. It

<sup>1</sup> e.g. Villari. Neither Cinozzi nor Filipepi, nor Guicciardini make any allusion to any sermon preached at this time before the Signoria by its invitation.

exhibits Lorenzo as genuinely interested in this gifted and unconventional Friar, and desirous of affording him the fullest and most weighty opportunity of expressing his views to the Government itself. Yet there can be no doubt that, while finding much to admire in Savonarola, Lorenzo was of opinion that in much which fell from him in the pulpit he was travelling outside his proper sphere. What precisely it was in Savonarola's sermons to which Lorenzo took exception is not easy to determine, but it is most improbable that he resented them on the ground that they were personal to himself and his government. Guicciardini expressly states that while such preaching was not pleasing to Lorenzo, yet it did not "touch him to the quick". Cinozzi declares that the objection was to the novel style adopted by Savonarola in his sermons at S. Marco on the Apocalypse. The Friar's denunciations and prophecies struck Lorenzo as being in bad taste, and likely moreover to stir up dissension in the city. Nor was Savonarola himself blind to this possibility. Probabilities favour the view that it was his sensationalism, not his strictures on Lorenzo and his government, which it seemed desirable to check. About Savonarola's political opinions Lorenzo cared little. Moreover in 1491 the Friar had not yet attained a position of any real importance in Florence. Still the political effects of his propaganda might prove disturbing to civil order. A friendly hint to this effect might not be amiss, and such a hint was probably given.

The story of a visit paid to him, at Lorenzo's instigation, by a deputation of five principal citizens, who came to request him "not to preach such things" was told by Savonarola himself in his last sermon, preached on 18 March, 1498. "You remember," he said, "in the beginning, when I began to preach these things (I will put it

more clearly—in the time of Lorenzo dei Medici), there came to me five of your principal citizens who then held sway in the city, four of whom are still alive. They gave me a warning, as from themselves, that I should not speak these things. In reply I said to them among other things, ‘You say you are not sent to me, but I say that you are. Go and tell Lorenzo to repent of his sins, for God will punish him and his. Let him repent I say and know this—that I am a foreigner, and he a citizen, nay the first in this city. Yet I have to stay here and he has to depart. It is I who have to stay, not he.’”

There is a temptation to suppose that this sermon of 1498 is the original source from which the story takes its being. If so, it was related seven years after the event coloured by all the glow and glamour of the events which those seven years had witnessed. In that interval of time Lorenzo had died, the House of Medici had fallen, Savonarola had risen from the comparative obscurity of his Priorate of S. Marco to the most prominent position in the State. A story told long afterwards, fitting so well to accomplished facts, must necessarily be received with caution. There is, however, strong evidence for the belief that the story as Savonarola told it corresponds fairly accurately to the actual facts. Cinozzi who was present on the occasion of this sermon declares that two of the five deputies were themselves present, and that he saw them, as Savonarola spoke, nodding to the congregation in token that all which he said was true. Cinozzi is careful to say, however, that he was not himself indebted to the sermon for his knowledge of the facts, for he had been made acquainted with them on the very day on which the deputation waited on the Friar. We have, moreover, in addition to the assertions of Savonarolist enthusiasts, such as Cinozzi and Filipepi, the sober

testimony of Guicciardini that such a deputation was sent, though he omits all the picturesque detail. Guicciardini is an unimpeachable witness. The story therefore, as told by Savonarola, may, in its main outlines, be implicitly accepted, but Guicciardini is a witness not only to fact but to motive. He expressly states that it was no part of Lorenzo's purpose to prohibit the Friar's preaching, nor to exclude him from the city, seeing that perhaps he held Savonarola in some reverence as a man of good life, and that he had not forgotten the unpopularity which he had incurred a few years before in banishing from the city the great revivalist preacher St. Bernardino of Feltre.

Savonarola himself makes an allusion to the case of St. Bernardino in a letter of this year (10 March, 1491) written to his friend and coadjutor Fra Domenico da Pescia. Perhaps the same fate, he says, is in store for him. The reference, however, seems to be inspired by a vague premonition of coming trouble rather than by any specific threat on the part of the ruling powers. For the letter almost certainly precedes the visit of the deputation, seeing that the writer, while noting the contrarieties which meet him, is chiefly concerned to urge on Domenico "not to be discouraged that so few in this city come to my preaching". Clearly he had not yet become a power, and the Government, we may be sure, would not think it worth while to move against the Friar until his popularity had made him a possible source of danger or disquiet.

Far from entertaining any personal animosity against Savonarola Lorenzo seems to have had, as Guicciardini hints, a sincere admiration for him as a man, and to have been desirous of living on friendly terms with him. Though the Convent of S. Marco was so closely identified with the Medici House, Lorenzo is not reported to have



offered any opposition to Savonarola's election as Prior of that convent in July. The election may indeed have been in part due to the influence brought to bear upon Lorenzo by Pico della Mirandola, his own near friend, and already an adherent of the Friar. Lorenzo certainly seems to have expected that the newly elected Prior of what was practically a Medicean convent would, upon his appointment, show the customary civilities to the Medici representative. Savonarola, however, studiously neglected to call upon Lorenzo or to recognize him in any way in connexion either with S. Marco or with his own election as Prior. He declared that he owed his election to God and to Him alone would he proffer obedience.

Lorenzo on his part frequently courted an audience by going to San Marco to hear Mass and by walking in the convent gardens. He would not, however, formally ask for an interview, nor would Savonarola, unasked, volunteer one. When Lorenzo endeavoured to propitiate the Prior with rich gifts offered to the convent, Savonarola's allusion to the watch-dog, whose duty it was to bark and ward off robbers, not to be bribed to silence by a bone cast to it, seems sufficiently to mark the spirit in which these overtures were received.

A further example of Lorenzo's supposed hostility to the Prior of S. Marco is found by Savonarolist biographers in a sermon, preached probably on Ascension Day, 1491, by Fra Mariano della Barba, prior of the Augustinian Convent of S. Gallo. The preacher chose for his text the verse, "It is not yours to know the times and the seasons," and took the occasion to enforce the grave responsibility which rested on those who laid claims to prophetic powers, and the grave dangers which such pretensions might involve for those who accepted them.

It is said that Fra Mariano was directly incited to preach such a sermon by Lorenzo, who was himself present together with Pico della Mirandola, Poliziano and the flower of the Medicean Court. Cinozzi, who tells us that he too was there, refers to the sermon as being too unmeasured in its strictures upon Savonarola. As for himself, he says, it had the effect of inclining him to the side of Savonarola, for up to that time he had rather been favourable to Fra Mariano and the point of view which he represented. A similar effect, says Cinozzi, was produced by the sermon on Pico della Mirandola.

All this may be true and yet no discredit need necessarily attach to Lorenzo in the matter. It is certain that he strongly disapproved of Savonarola's prophetic sensationalism. It is true that he was a close friend of Fra Mariano and a munificent supporter of his convent. There is no suggestion that Mariano did not genuinely entertain the convictions which he expressed. What can be more natural than that he should have preached as he did, or more likely than that Lorenzo should have approved, and, if necessary, suggested such a discourse?

It is to be remembered that those biographers of Savonarola who speak with most authority as being nearest to the events write with an express and avowed purpose to exhibit any opposition to Savonarola as proof positive of bad faith and treachery to the cause of good. Filipepi, indeed, in his *Chronicle*, is chiefly concerned to show the terrible fate which ultimately overtook those who in any way opposed the Friar.

Some of Filipepi's examples are so absurd and childish that none of them can be viewed without suspicion, and the account given both by him and Cinozzi of the ultimate fate of Mariano shows more of the prejudice of the

miracle-monger than of the truth which should inspire the historian.

We must go to other sources to discover that Fra Mariano was a scholar and a gentleman; a man who rose to the great position of general of the Augustinian Order, a man moreover who though strongly disapproving of the sensational element in Savonarola's mission, yet entertained a great respect for Savonarola as a man, visited him at S. Marco in order to express his appreciation of much that Savonarola was doing, invited him to sing High Mass at S. Gallo on an occasion of special ceremony, an invitation which Savonarola accepted in the spirit in which it was offered.

The two men undoubtedly represented opposing schools of style and thought, but there is no reason to suppose that their opposition assumed the form of personal enmity, nor that the public expression of their differences was prompted by the subterranean intrigues of Lorenzo dei Medici.

Savonarola very naturally took an early opportunity of replying to Fra Mariano, basing his discourse on the same text. Of this sermon only a fragment has survived, but in the opinion of his partisans Savonarola gained a signal triumph in this oratorical duel.

It may be noted that whatever measures were taken by Lorenzo against the Friar they were all by way of influence and persuasion, not of force. It may be claimed for Lorenzo, assuming him to have been seriously offended, that he showed some magnanimity in refraining, when all the power of the State was in his hands, from the use of force and even from any violent or arbitrary exercise of influence. It cannot be doubted that as a private citizen Lorenzo could appreciate the work of Savonarola and could find much in his character to admire.

They were not men who were ever likely to agree, but they could probably, in a private sphere, have agreed to differ with courtesy and respect. It was from their position as public men that a collision, if it occurred, was likely to arise. But when in 1492 Lorenzo was seized by a mortal illness, it was consonant with his nature that he should forget any public wrongs which he might believe himself to have suffered at Savonarola's hands, and should remember only the austere virtue and single-minded devotion of the Prior of San Marco. He therefore gave orders that Fra Hieronymo, as Savonarola was called, should be summoned "as being a man fearless and incapable of being made to swerve from truth by blandishments or any other arts". When Savonarola is said to have raised objections against obeying the call on the ground that he was unfitted for Lorenzo's purposes, he was overruled by assurances conveyed from the dying man that he was willing to fulfil any demands which might be made. Whether or no Savonarola at first objected it is certain that in the end he came to the villa Careggi, where Lorenzo was lying, and was admitted to the sick chamber. What transpired in the interview between the two men remains the subject of controversy. The story runs that Lorenzo began by confessing certain sins committed in his capacity as prince and statesman, and that Savonarola insisted upon the mercy of God on which Lorenzo might count on three conditions. These were that Lorenzo should have a great and living faith in God's mercy; that he should restore, or cause to be restored, his ill-gotten gains; and that he should give back liberty to Florence. Lorenzo signified assent to the first two conditions as they were propounded. On hearing the third he turned away his face and said nothing. Savonarola left him unabsolved.

The contemporary authorities for this version of the interview are so numerous, so unanimous and so specific, that great weight naturally attaches to their evidence. Such evidence is alone of any value, for it is obvious that no subsequent relations can have any weight of their own; they are merely repetitions of what the original authorities have stated. The question resolves itself into the amount of credence which is to be given to these witnesses. One of them, Cinozzi, declares that he had the account from the lips of Fra Silvestro, who suffered death in company with Savonarola six years later, one of the Friar's most devoted adherents, co-partner with Savonarola in visions and revelations, and one who may be supposed to have learned the facts from Savonarola himself. Another authority—the "*Biografia Latina*"—gives Fra Domenico together with Fra Silvestro as jointly responsible for the truth of the story. On the credibility of these two witnesses therefore the truth or falsehood of the version largely depends. In view of the independent confessions made by these two men at the time of their trial, and in view of the charges made by Fra Silvestro against Savonarola himself in the matter of the visions, it is not unfair to say that their testimony must be received with caution.

It is clear that none of those who relate thus circumstantially what took place between Savonarola and Lorenzo were actually present at the interview. But when Savonarola entered the room Angelo Poliziano was present, and he has left us a minute account of the details of Lorenzo's illness and death. He says nothing whatever about the three conditions propounded by Fra Hieronymo, and yet he was, to say the least, in as good a position to know the facts as any one else. If Poliziano was actually present at the interview he heard what took

place; if he was not, then the facts must have come from Savonarola himself, and it is scarcely credible that he would have violated the secrets of the confessional. It may be urged that as Lorenzo had already received the last sacraments before Savonarola's arrival, and made his confession to a priest, his interview with Fra Hieronymo was not officially a confession, and that the Friar therefore was not officially bound to secrecy; but the whole point of the story makes it clear that Savonarola supposed he was hearing a confession with a view to granting absolution. Therefore it is most unlikely that he revealed to anyone what took place.

When we turn to the conditions themselves they are such as Savonarola might well have put forward, but the last one was of so vague and impalpable a character that Lorenzo's alleged attitude towards it is highly improbable. He might well have agreed to restore liberty to Florence, seeing that on his deathbed he was powerless to affect Florentine liberty in any way whatever. It was not within his capacity to change the conditions of the State and the spirit of the people. The Medicean despotism was not the work of Lorenzo, but the outcome of circumstances, and as such Savonarola's third condition was meaningless and futile. If Lorenzo could consent to the restoration of his ill-gotten gains, which involved a definite and material restoration, he is scarcely likely to have had scruples about anything so immaterial and so indefinite as the restoration of liberty to Florence.

There is so much picturesqueness about the story that people will always cling to it as being true. The probabilities seem to point to its being apocryphal. Even if false it has a value, for it throws light upon the double position which Savonarola was now generally recognized to have taken up. He is represented at Lorenzo's bed-



LORENZO DE' MEDICI, BY GEORGIO VASARI





side as the priest and politician—the preacher of a lively faith in God, but at the same time the restorer of liberty to the State.

NOTE.—It is unnecessary, in a life of Savonarola, to enter more fully than I have done into the authenticity of this deathbed story. It concerns the character of Lorenzo more than that of Savonarola. I have therefore discussed it in detail in my “Lorenzo the Magnificent,” pp. 349-55.

The point, there relegated to a footnote, that Lorenzo's remains rested for a time at S. Marco, Savonarola's convent, previous to their interment in S. Lorenzo, is a strong one against the truth of the story as told by Savonarolist chroniclers. Savonarola would scarcely have received into his own convent the corpse of a man whom, as he lay dying, he had refused to absolve.

There is a passage in Savonarola's *Tractate on the Regiment and Government of Florence* which may or may not contain a veiled allusion to the episode. He there draws a picture of a tyrant, obviously modelled upon Lorenzo, and says: “The tyrant goes to church, gives alms, builds temples and chapels. He holds converse with religious persons, and *even makes confession to a man who is truly religious to appear to be absolved*, but he ruins religion by usurping benefices . . .” etc.

The Tractate was written probably in 1495, some years certainly after Lorenzo's death. The passage cited may have no particular application. It certainly affords no additional weight of evidence in favour of the popular story, but rather tells against it. But I should think it probable that when writing this passage, Savonarola had in his mind his summons to Lorenzo's deathbed, and thus distantly alludes to what took place between him and Lorenzo on that occasion.

## CHAPTER IV

### PROPHET AND REFORMER

THE year 1492 which saw the death of Lorenzo de' Medici saw also the death of Pope Innocent VIII, and the accession of Alexander VI to the Papal Chair. At the moment therefore when in Florence a great Churchman was beginning to awaken all Italy to a sense of sin and was calling her to repentance there was elected at Rome a Pope who in his own person was the frank and cynical abnegation of all the spiritual pretensions of the Papacy. He owed his election to flagrant simony and unblushing bribery. The claims of the cardinals to have acted in their selection of Alexander under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit may have been well or ill founded. Such claims are at once too conventional and too mysterious to allow of any practical test. It is certain that political and pecuniary influences were also at work, and that the head of a Church which had so often denounced simony secured his position by simony of the most outrageous character.

The schemes of Alexander, which were to use the Papacy as a means to aggrandize his own family, derived material assistance from the death of Lorenzo de' Medici. Lorenzo for many years had been the greatest among the statesmen of Italy, and by his steady adhesion to the principle of a balance of power among the Italian States he had proved an obstacle to the ambition of others

while gratifying his own. Already he had come into collision with Pope Sixtus IV in consequence of that Pontiff's plans of family aggrandizement, and though he had cultivated good relations with Innocent VIII, and had secured a footing in the Conclave by obtaining a cardinal's hat for his son, yet there can be no doubt that Alexander would have found in Lorenzo a resolute political opponent. The election of Alexander and the death of Lorenzo were therefore events which both pointed in the same direction, to a more resolute and unscrupulous assertion by the Papacy of personal and secular aims, to a less effective resistance to such aims on the part of the Italian States.

Though the power of Lorenzo in Florence was unofficial and ill-defined he had secured a sufficiently firm hold upon it to enable him to transmit it to his son Piero. Piero had few of his father's qualities. He was a big, strong, handsome man devoted to all forms of physical exercise, but slenderly endowed with political capacity and bent much more upon enjoyment than upon statecraft. He had little intellectual sympathy with his Florentine subjects and was careless of those political arts by which his family had built up and maintained its position. Without the qualifications to fit him to be the first man in a nominally free State Piero was set upon obtaining from the Florentines full and ample recognition of his position as their prince. Weak, indolent and headstrong, he was not fitted to guide the fortunes of his house at a period of crisis: he imagined that he could trust to force to maintain a position which had been built up on craft, subtlety and profound knowledge of men.

Meanwhile in Florence itself the influence of Savonarola was continually increasing, and before the end of 1492 he had gained for himself a position of prominence as a public man in Florence. This year is a turning-

point in Savonarola's life, for it marks the transition from monk to statesman. His sermons now become more than ever infused with that electric force which was to set the whole city in vibration. His message becomes more direct, his visions take on an irresistible poetic fervour, his prophecies are more precise, instant and imperative. Two sermons in 1492 are of special import for Savonarola as marking a crisis in his own spiritual development and in his career as a dominating figure in Florence. He had been selected to preach the Lent sermons that year in S. Lorenzo, and it was probably with Lorenzo dei Medici's sanction and approval that the choice of a preacher for what was in a special sense his own Church had been made. Ten days after Lorenzo's death, on 19 April, the eve of Holy Friday, Savonarola's exaltation was crowned by a vision of which he subsequently related the full details in his "*Compendium Revelationum*". "While preaching I beheld two crosses, the one a black one in the midst of Rome. Its head touched the sky, its arms extended over all the earth, and above it was written *Cruz iræ Dei*—The cross of the wrath of God. And as I saw it, suddenly I beheld tumult in the elements. Clouds flew through the air; winds, bolts, and lightnings whirled; hail, fire and swords rained down, and a great multitude of people were stricken, so that few remained on earth. After that there came '*un tempo molto sereno e chiaro*'—a sky all clear and serene—and I saw, of the same size as the first, another cross of gold over Jerusalem, so resplendent that it lit up all the world, and made all things to flower and rejoice. And above that was written '*Cruz misericordiæ Dei*'—The Cross of the mercy of God. And I saw all generations of men and women from all parts of the world come and adore and embrace it."

The impression, great as it was, produced by this sermon was eclipsed by that created by what may be called the "Gladius Domini" sermon of the same year. "It was," he says again in "*Compendium Revelationum*," "in 1492, the night before the last sermon I preached that Advent, that I saw in the Heavens a hand with a sword, and above it was written *Gladius Domini super terram cito et velociter*.<sup>1</sup> And above the hand was written *Vera et justa sunt Judicia Domini*.<sup>2</sup> And it seemed that the arm of the hand proceeded from three faces bathed in one common radiance, and the first said *Iniquitas sanctuarii mei clamat ad me de terra*.<sup>3</sup> The second cried: *Visitabo ergo in virga iniquitates eorum, et in verberibus peccata eorum*.<sup>4</sup> The third said: *Misericordiam meam non dispergam ab eo, neque nocebo in veritate mea, et miserebor pauperi et inopi*.<sup>5</sup> Once more the three voices in turn uttered words of menace and of mercy, and "then there came a great sound over all the earth of all the three voices together, and they cried,—Hear all ye dwellers on the earth; Thus saith the Lord: I the Lord speak in My holy zeal, Behold the days shall come when I will unsheath My sword upon you. Turn ye therefore to Me before the cup of My anger is filled full." And then there seemed to appear to him a vision of the whole world, and the angels came down from Heaven to earth, clothed all in white with multitudes of white stoles upon their shoulders, and red crosses in their hands. And they went about the earth proffering

<sup>1</sup> The sword of the Lord upon the earth soon and swiftly.

<sup>2</sup> True and just are the Judgments of the Lord.

<sup>3</sup> The iniquity of my sanctuary cries to me from the ground.

<sup>4</sup> Therefore will I visit their iniquities with a rod, and their sins with stripes.

<sup>5</sup> I will not make my mercy to depart from him, nor in my truth will I hurt him, and I will take pity on the poor man and needy.

to every one a white stole and a cross. Some accepted and were clothed therein. Some would not accept, but hindered not others who would: some would not accept nor would they permit others to do so. Those were the lukewarm and the wise of this world. Then the hand turned the sword again towards the earth, and suddenly it appeared as if once more all the air grew dark, and swords and hail rained down, with loud thunder and thunderbolts and lightnings. And there was in the land pestilence and famine and great tribulation. And the angels went up and down among the people, giving to those who wore the white garment and bore the cross to drink of a clear wine; and they drank and cried "How sweet to our lips are Thy words, O Lord". And the dregs which were at the bottom of the chalice were offered to the others but they would not drink. And yet they seemed as if they wished to be converted to penitence, but could not, for they cried out "Why hast Thou forgotten us, O Lord". And they wished to raise their eyes and look on God, but it was not permitted to them, being weighed down with tribulation so that they were like to drunken men, and it seemed as though their hearts came forth from their breasts, and they went about seeking the pleasures of this world, but could find them not. And then again the three voices cried out once more in unison their last appeal and warning, and the vision vanished away but for a last voice "which said to me, My son, if sinners had eyes to see they would see how heavy and how hard is this pestilence and this sharp sword".

Of all Savonarola's sermons I should place the "Gladius Domini" among the most important. For himself certainly it marked an epoch. We find him constantly referring to it in subsequent discourses, and declaring that the prophecy of a coming sword was a direct revelation

from God. "It was not I but God who foretold it;" he insisted in his great sermon on Penitence of 1 November, 1494, "now it is coming and has come." Again in his third sermon on the Psalms on 13 January of the following year he reiterates his assertion that "it was not I but God who spoke these things," and he expounds the full meaning of the vision. The sword is that of the King of France. The angels with red crosses, white stoles and the chalice are the preachers who foretold the coming scourge: the stole is purification, the chalice the passion. "Repent, O Florence, while yet there is time. Clothe thyself in the white garments of purification. Wait no longer, for there may be no further time for repentance."

Savonarola's early predictions had assumed the form of vague and general propositions. Now, in 1492, they are taking on definiteness and precision. The Sword of the Lord is stretched forth over the land. Divine vengeance will fall *cito et velociter*.

And yet no reader to-day, can fail to find in these visions of the Cross, the Sword, the Angels and the Crosses, the inspiration of the poet rather than the predictions of the prophet. They are an Apocalyptic ecstasy born of a poet's imagination: they are a poet's vision which sees a glory where the eyes of common men see nothing but a fact. But the vulgar, whose sense even of the spiritual can only find expression in forms of gross materialism, must needs translate the hyperbole of a rhapsodist into the vaticinations of a diviner, and the dreamer of dreams becomes a miracle-man in spite of himself.

It was then at the moment when, by the death of Lorenzo, Florence was left without a leader that Savonarola began to occupy a leading place in the eyes of the Florentine people. He claimed to be the mouthpiece of God, and

there was in him that Divine power which induced many to believe him. He claimed to be equally the messenger of the Most High when he inveighed against tyrants and when he urged the Florentines to repentance. To him men would naturally turn in any time of crisis in order to obtain inspired direction, whether they might be moved to effect a moral reformation or to re-establish the Constitution, or to remodel the policy of the State.

The growing importance of the Friar in Florence depended, as has been seen, on causes which were at once political and religious. But the primary foundation on which all his influence rested was his claim to definite prophetic powers, to a genuine insight into what the future would bring forth. He persuaded himself, and he was able to persuade others, that he was no ordinary man, nor even a man gifted with extraordinary but yet human capacity to read the signs of the times. However much we may see in him the qualities of an inspired poet, it was not as a poet, but as an inspired prophet, that he imposed himself upon the imagination of the Florentine people. His denunciations, promises, recommendations and injunctions were not of him but of God speaking through him, and thus they assumed the character of a Divine revelation which it was treason against God to ignore or to deny. It may be well therefore at once to examine these pretensions, to discover on what grounds they were based, and how far Savonarola was himself sincere in his own belief in the supernatural origin of the forces by which he was impelled.

No critical determination upon claims to prophetic powers is likely to command universal assent, for the judgment of the critic must inevitably be governed by his own individual temperament and training. Argument about the supernatural is not likely to be decisive and is



seldom profitable. But we possess the materials which enable us fairly accurately to estimate Savonarola's own point of view, and to trace the growth and development in him of the prophetic impulse. For with Savonarola the habit of visions and celestial manifestations seems to have been decidedly a growth, becoming stronger in itself and exercising a stronger influence upon his work as his career advanced. He began by being careful to put forward for his prophecies no claim to a supernatural origin, declaring that they were legitimate deductions drawn from the study of the Scriptures and from the signs of the times. It is true that in his "*Compendium*" he explains the reasons which induced him at the beginning to be thus guarded as to the nature and sources of his predictions. It was not because he was himself in any doubt that he was the recipient of a direct revelation from God, but because a prudent reserve seemed to be enjoined in the words of Christ. "Give not that which is holy to the dogs," and because he saw that his hearers were not yet rightly disposed for the reception of this secret. But his own confident persuasion was at all times strong and unshaken, and as the sense of his mission became more pressing, and as his hearers became more attuned to the message with which he was entrusted, the need for reticence and reserve diminished. The work which he had to do was clear before him. In the prosecution of that work was he justified in neglecting to use the instrument which God had put into his hands? In himself there was the conviction of a Divine revelation. In his hearers there was the disposition to accept him as inspired and to credit him with mysterious and almost miraculous powers. It was natural therefore that in due time Savonarola should openly declare himself as directly inspired from heaven, and should attribute his prophecies to those

sources from which from the first he was convinced he drew them.

With a view to regularizing and explaining these mysteries he composed two treatises, the "*Compendium Revelationum*" to which I have already made considerable reference, and the "*Dyalogus de Veritate Prophetica*". In these he discusses in the abstract the question of the possession of prophetic powers, and also gives many definite and concrete examples of the manner in which such powers had been conferred upon himself. The "*Compendium*" is especially remarkable for the precise grasp which it displays of the many objections which may be urged against claims to prophetic inspiration. Savonarola marshals them in order and shows much ingenuity by the way in which he dismisses each objection in turn. There is scarcely an argument which can be advanced against his claims which he does not forestall and for which he has not got an answer. The "*Compendium*," in fact, is a philosophic treatise put together partly in the form of Socratic dialogue. The personages are Savonarola, the Tempter and the Virgin Mary. The work falls roughly into three parts: first, a general vindication of his claims to prophetic powers; secondly, the argument with the Tempter; and thirdly, the interview with the Virgin Mary. The general idea which binds the last two parts together is to be found in Savonarola's determination to go on an embassy to the Virgin, taking with him as companions Faith, Simplicity, Prayer and Patience. On his way the devil, under a hermit's disguise, meets him, and a conversation takes place upon the general question of supernatural revelations. The Tempter having been discomfited and his identity revealed, the Friar makes his way to the court of Heaven, and his dialogue with the Blessed Virgin completes the composition.

The claims put forward in the "*Compendium*" are definite and precise. Savonarola declares that he has been commissioned by God Himself to act as God's mouthpiece to Florence and to Italy. "The Lord has placed me here and has said to me: 'I have placed thee as a watchman in the centre of Italy . . . that thou mayest hear My words and announce them'." Nor was there anything unphilosophical in the conviction of such a Divine revelation. God alone, he says, knows the future and He may reveal it to whom He chooses. Those who are so chosen become conscious that such a revelation has in truth been made to them by virtue of a certain "supernatural light" which enables the prophet to know that what has been revealed is true and that it is of God. This supernatural light is to the prophet what the light of reason is to the philosopher, and by virtue of it absolute conviction is acquired. The argument comes to little more than that the prophet is sure he is divinely inspired because he is sure that he is so. For the prophet himself there can be no doubt; for others it should go for something that a man with an established reputation for veracity should be wholly convinced of the truth of his own assertions. He then proceeds further to justify his claims by summarizing and refuting the arguments which may be urged against them. He repudiates the suggestion that he is a deceiver, or self-deceived by dreams and a too lively imagination. He forestalls the doubts of Hamlet—

. . . The spirit that I have seen  
 May be the devil: and the devil hath power  
 To assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps  
 Out of my weakness and my melancholy,

Abuses me to damn me.

Such misgivings he dismisses on the ground of his own inner certainty and because all that he has foretold has exactly come to pass. He shows that there is nothing repugnant to experience in such revelation, for God had spoken to St. Paul, St. Francis and many other saints, and just as special circumstances called for the direct and personal interposition of the Deity on those occasions and in the times of the prophets of old, so now the times were exceptional, seeing that the sins of Italy cried aloud to heaven and that a state of change was imminent for the Universal Church. He meets the suggestion that his predictions are based upon information derived from princes and statesmen with a contemptuous refusal to answer so absurd a contention: "common-sense teaches that no certain knowledge is to be had by such means". To many other objections he has a ready answer, and having gained an easy victory over his interlocutor he passes on upon his embassy to the Queen of Heaven. Having gained an audience the Virgin addressed him in the Tuscan language with so much elegance and propriety that he was astonished. She declared that Florence by reason of its sins, and especially by reason of the many who refused to believe Savonarola's prophecies, had deserved evils of all kinds, but hitherto these had been averted by the protection of the Virgin, to whom all power had been committed. Great tribulation was in store pending the renovation of the Church, but Florence would suffer in a less degree than the rest of Italy. She foretold the restoration of Pisa to Florence, a still further extension of territory, and darkly foreshadowed an alliance between the lilies of Florence, "beloved of my Son and of myself," and the lilies of France. Here the poet and the patriot assert themselves over the advocate. The passage is worth a full quotation. "Then she gave

me another little sphere, and I saw thereon the city of Florence all crowned with lilies which stretched out beyond her battlements, beyond her walls, and the angels upon the walls about her and around gazed upon her : whereat I rejoicing said, ‘Madonna, it seems to me that the little lilies should join with the great ones which have now begun to spread themselves abroad’. To this she made no reply, but proceeded, ‘My Son, if the neighbours of Florence who rejoice over her misfortunes knew what was to come upon themselves they would not rejoice over the woes of another, but would pity themselves, for greater tribulations shall fall upon them.’” Savonarola then asked when the promises made to Florence were to be fulfilled, and the answer was “*Cito et velociter*,” by which he was to understand no fixed date, but sooner rather than later.

This summary of the “*Compendium*,” condensed as it is, will give a better idea of the nature and influence of Savonarola’s claims as a prophet than can be gained from a general disquisition upon the subject. The literary mechanism of those parts of the treatise which are in dialogue might lead to the impression that he was merely enforcing his teaching by means of an allegory. The companions of his journey, Faith, Prayer and Penitence, the disputation with the Tempter and the interview with the Virgin recall passages from the “*Pilgrim’s Progress*”. Against this theory, however, there is the distinct declaration that this vision was actually vouchsafed to Savonarola “on the Octave of the Feast of the Annunciation”. Moreover this particular vision formed the material of one of the Friar’s sermons preached in the Duomo on 1 April, 1495, when it was certainly his intention that it should be accepted in a literal and not in a metaphorical or allegorical sense. His letters and sermons abound in

passages in which he declares Florence to be under the peculiar protection of Heaven. Not only his predictions but his whole subsequent policy in Florence were based upon the disclosures contained in the "*Compendium*". The treatise itself was ostensibly written in order to prevent "the mysteries of God from being held up to ridicule," and because "my words have often been misreported and misinterpreted". We are therefore justified in regarding the "*Compendium Revelationum*" as being a revelation of Savonarola's real self. Can we, on the strength of it, accept his claims? Is such an exclusive interest in Florence to the detriment of the rest of Italy conceivable on the part of the Virgin? is it to be imagined that she would have confided to Savonarola or to any one her views about the future of Pisa and the French alliance? To the present century the "*Compendium*," regarded as anything else but a poetic rhapsody, would seem blasphemous rather than appealing.

But it is easy to understand its effects at the time of its production and the strength of its appeal to the Florentine imagination. The age was credulous. The mysticism in the air was due as much to the new Platonic philosophy as to a survival from the Middle Ages. It is small wonder that the Florentines should have waxed enthusiastic over their prophet when he mingled with his denunciations so much that was flattering to an imaginative and self-conscious people.

Savonarola based his confidence in his predictions upon the fact that they were fulfilled. Many of them, undoubtedly, were fulfilled, but their fulfilment can be accounted for partly by the vagueness of the terms in which they were announced, and partly by reason of the keen political foresight which he undoubtedly possessed. He was a man of great powers and great acuteness, and could

look beyond the present to the consequences which would follow from the conditions of the present. But he was not infallible. One of his most precise prophecies was that the Turks would be converted within the lifetime of many who were living in his day. The Virgin is made to allude directly to this consummation in the "*Compendium Revelationum*". But the Turks have not even yet been converted.

When, therefore, we consider Savonarola's claims as a prophet, they must be regarded from two points of view: from the point of view of their genuineness in the abstract, and from the point of view of their effect upon those to whom they were immediately addressed. As serious claims to the possession of mystical and supernatural powers they may be dismissed; in their relation to the position and influence of Savonarola in Florence they may be looked upon as constituting the foundation of his reputation. Nor in this connexion must we ignore the methods by which these supernatural powers were announced. His powers as a preacher are of scarcely less importance than his claims as a prophet.

The testimony of contemporaries is unanimous as to the effects produced by Savonarola's sermons, but from the examples which have come down to us it is not altogether easy to account for the extraordinary influence which they exercised on those who heard them. Where the preacher was not denunciatory he was expository, and one might almost conclude that the impression produced by the denunciations must have been neutralized by the prolixity of the expositions. The divisions and subdivisions of the main theme were often carried to extravagant lengths; the digressions were so numerous and so lengthy that the thread of the discourse was apt to be lost; the voice of the preacher was harsh and dis-

cordant and the accepted rules of eloquence were studiously ignored. His strength lay in his minute and profound knowledge of the Scriptures, at that time so much a sealed book both to priests and laity. The wealth of his illustrations drawn from the sacred writers was inexhaustible. But in his dealing with the text he showed all the subtlety and dexterity of the schoolmen, and his discourses exhibit a strange mixture of St. Thomas Aquinas and latter-day revivalism. Accepting the theory of manifold senses contained in each text of the Bible, Savonarola could juggle with Scripture as a conjurer juggles with his apparatus, but just at the moment when he seemed in danger of wearying his hearers by scholastic refinements which were tedious and out of date, some startling parallel, some overwhelming appeal, some impassioned denunciation would take them by storm; they would rise with the preacher upon the wings of ecstasy or sink down crushed beneath the weight of coming doom, just as an instrument is responsive to the touch of a master hand.

The same sort of phenomena followed the preaching of Savonarola as followed that of Wesley, Whitfield and other revivalists. There was the sense among his hearers of being individually addressed with the individual effects of swoons, tears, hysteria or indifference, according to the temperament or self-discipline of each, and when the fiery and dramatic imagination of the orator conjured up some vision which seemed to pass in visible shape before his eyes—the Cross of God's anger in dim and threatening outline suspended amid the shadows of the Dome, or the Cross of God's mercy illuminating the building—few failed to catch the contagion of his enthusiasm or to be impressed with the reality of things unseen. But if there was much in Savonarola's preaching which was sensational, sensationalism was only a part of his power and



by no means the whole of it. No impression of him could be more false than that of a shallow hot-gospeller. He was a man of deep and wide learning. As a philosopher he was a match for the best of the brilliant Platonists who surrounded Lorenzo in the academy; as a scholar he was well versed in the classical masterpieces, and as a humanist he was capable of appreciating them as literature. The whole man was made manifest in his sermons, and his appeal was as often to the intellect as to the emotions of his audience.

Moreover, he stands out in his sermons as being eminently practical, using a shrewd knowledge of men and of the world to enforce definite lessons of virtue and good living. Indeed, it was mainly from the pulpit that he carried on his work of moral reform. To him preaching was not an end in itself, but simply an instrument by means of which practical and salutary ends might be obtained.

As a moral reformer it was Savonarola's aim to expose and as far as possible eradicate the specific vices which flourished in his day. He lashed unsparingly, and in no uncertain terms, the gross immoralities which corrupted the life of the city of Florence and of all Italy. He inaugurated a crusade against gambling, he denounced the prevailing luxury as being the handmaid of vice and idleness, he urged the duty of charity for the relief of the necessities of the poor, not so much by promiscuous almsgiving as by providing employment for those who were needy and out of work. He called upon the Church to reform itself in its head and members, inveighing against simony, against the luxury and worldliness of the hierarchy, the ignorance and evil lives of the inferior clergy. His exhortations were enforced by such vivid delineations of the Divine chastisement which would surely follow if

his appeals were neglected that many were terrorized into reform rather than convinced of sin and guided by conviction to repentance. The sensational element in his sermons had its counterpart in many sensational conversions, from which little was to be expected in the way of permanence or depth.

It has indeed been questioned if Savonarola's work produced any lasting result even in Florence. There can be little doubt that zeal sometimes outran discretion, that the methods of the Friar's agitation against wickedness were in some cases questionable, and that his movement as a whole left the frailty of human nature too much out of consideration, and that thus only an artificial and skin-deep effect was produced which was in its nature transitory. All this must be admitted, and yet it is possible to believe that lasting influences followed in many cases. We know that Michelangelo carried to his tomb the remembrance of Fra Hieronymo deeply graven on his heart, and Michelangelo survived him nearly seventy years. We know how deeply and permanently Botticelli was affected by Savonarola. Is it not reasonable to suppose that if among the world's great men of that age there were some who were enduringly influenced by Savonarola's work, there were among the unhistoric multitude not a few who were similarly affected? In this connexion it is important to notice the special effort made by Savonarola to attach the children of the city to him and to work through them. The uses to which he put them are open to criticism, but the influence which he gained over them is beyond question. These children formed the men and women of the succeeding generation, and it may be confidently asserted that many among them helped to perpetuate the Savonarola tradition and to hold aloft the ideals of their master.

The growing influence of Savonarola not only in Florence but outside is attested by certain definite and material developments in his position which mark the year 1493. By the end of May in that year he had succeeded in extracting from the Pope, Alexander VI, a Brief which secured the virtual independence of the Convent of S. Marco from external control, other than that of the General of the Dominican Order, thus gaining for himself an authority and power of initiative largely in excess of that which he had previously enjoyed. For, so far, his position both at S. Marco and in Florence, had been precarious and uncertain in that he was amenable at any moment to the orders of his conventual chiefs, who might see fit to remove him from Florence to some other sphere of activity. He was thus very much at the mercy not only of his own Dominican superiors but also of any Italian or Florentine politician powerful enough to work on those superiors for purposes of his own. Already, in 1492, we find Savonarola at Pisa preaching a course of sermons there at the Dominican Convent of Sta. Caterina. In 1493 he was at Bologna preaching the Lent course in that city. On this occasion he seems to have been absent from Florence for several weeks if not months. It is of course quite possible that his growing reputation as a preacher created a strong demand from many Italian towns for his services,—indeed we know this to have been so—and that he himself, quite voluntarily, gratified such demands wherever he could. But if his presence at Bologna was due to the commands of his superiors, or, as Villari suggests, to the initiative of Piero dei Medici, Savonarola could scarcely have failed to reflect how uncertain his tenure at S. Marco was, and how capriciously the whole of his great work in Florence might be brought to an end. Whatever may have been the impelling cir-

cumstances it is certain that as early as 1492 Savonarola contemplated the severance of S. Marco from external control, and took active steps to secure the success of his project.

For about forty years the position of S. Marco in the Dominican organization had been subject not unfrequently to changes and modifications. In the year 1451 the convent had been united to the "Lombard Congregation" of Friars Preachers, and was thus placed under the control of the Lombard Vicar of the Dominican Order. In 1469 a separation was effected, but a few years later, in 1474, S. Marco commended itself again to the Lombard Congregation and resumed its old position of dependence and subjection. The project of bringing about another separation and securing to his convent a position of independence was one which Savonarola seems to have entertained almost from the moment of his election as Prior. He deemed a separation necessary as securing him fixity of tenure in his office, but motives relating to conventual discipline were probably the most powerful. For he contemplated, as a part of his scheme of reform, a stricter rule than that which obtained elsewhere, and he would be powerless to effect this unless he had a free hand to remodel the practice of S. Marco without regard to that of other convents. It was indeed his hope that S. Marco, when once more in a position of independence, would become a centre round which the neighbouring monasteries might be induced to gather; the chief of a group all animated alike by ideals of austerity and sanctity of life. It would, of course, follow that, as the leading spirit and official head of this community, the position and authority of the Prior of S. Marco would be materially enhanced, but there is no reason to question the motives which actuated Savonarola in this matter, nor

to attribute to personal ambition a project entirely compatible with high and disinterested aims.

In pursuance of his plan he confided his schemes to the inmates of his convent and secured their goodwill and enthusiasm in the cause. Prayers were offered daily during several months for success; a petition in favour of separation was drafted and submitted to the Pope, and on 25 May, 1493, a special memorial was drawn up by "the entire number of the professed members of the convent now within its walls," in which the arguments in favour of separation were clearly set forward. This memorial, signed by all the brethren, attested by the public notaries and sealed with the seal of the city of Florence, was duly presented, though the issue was already decided before the petition reached the Pope's hands. In it the signatories declared "now the number of fathers and brothers has so greatly increased that the convent may . . . suitably be put upon a proper footing and be ruled by its own superiors, independently of the Congregation of Lombardy. We therefore determined to present a petition to this effect to our Lord the Pope to the end that we might in the future live and serve God in peace and in all love and charity."

The scheme met with powerful opposition outside the convent. The despots of various Italian States condescended to intervene in a matter which seemed to them likely to enhance Florence unduly and detract from the reputation of the northern States. The superiors of the Lombard Congregation were naturally against it. But if it met with strong opposition it also secured influential support from the Florentine magistracy and from Cardinal Caraffa, the Protector of the Dominican Order. The Pope, who cared little about the merits of the case, was much worried by the petitions and representations of

the rival parties, and seems to have been chiefly anxious to get rid of the whole affair. The subtlety or persistence of Cardinal Caraffa at length gained the day. The Papal Brief sanctioning the separation was signed on 22 May, before the receipt of the memorial from the brethren of S. Marco, and by it the Community of S. Marco was entirely withdrawn from the government of the Lombard Congregation and was placed under the immediate jurisdiction of the General of the Dominican Order.

Savonarola had thus obtained, under the authority of a Papal Brief, the position of independent authority which seemed to him essential to the permanence of his work in Florence and to his schemes of conventual reform. But the hand that gave might also be the hand to take away. The sequel will show that Savonarola's eventual overthrow was to a large extent involved in this apparently trifling matter. In any contest which might arise between the Friar and the Pope the independent position acquired by the former would naturally strengthen the force of his attack. It would be equally natural on the part of the Pope to wish to reduce the Friar to his former situation of subordination. To yield might mean defeat; not to yield would be flat rebellion against lawful and recognized authority. But for the moment no such contest seemed likely to arise. Savonarola had triumphantly secured his point, and, having secured it, set himself busily to work to reorganize his convent in accordance with the principle which was always near to his heart—that they who concern themselves with the reform of others must fit themselves, by lives of self-sacrifice, for the great task they have undertaken.

Having secured the independence of S. Marco and having reformed its discipline the next step was to affili-

ate to the rule of S. Marco the neighbouring Dominican convents. Savonarola vigorously applied all his energies and all his influence to attain this end, but his success was superficial rather than real. It is true that in less than two years S. Marco had become the central unit of a new Dominican Congregation of which in 1495 Savonarola was elected Vicar-General. The Dominican convents at Fiesole, at Pisa, and at Prato were definitely attached to this Congregation, while a new convent was established at Bibbdena, and possibly the Convent of S. Romano at Lucca was attached to the union. The attempts to incorporate the Dominicans of S. Gemignano and of Siena had to be abandoned, while the allegiance of some of the convents actually incorporated was from the first doubtful. In fact with the exception of S. Domenico at Fiesole which from its situation and associations was in close sympathy with S. Marco, none of the other affiliated convents seems to have accepted the rule of Savonarola with any cordiality. The absorption of S. Caterina of Pisa was effected by the simple method of dispossessing all but four out of forty-four of the existing brethren and filling up the vacant places with others, chiefly Florentines, who were well affected to the new order of things. When, however, in 1494, Pisa revolted from Florence the Florentine Friars were in their turn dispossessed, the ejected brethren returned, and S. Caterina resumed its original obedience to the Lombard Congregation.

At Prato the union of S. Domenico with S. Marco was only effected in 1496 after much negotiation, the methods adopted bearing some resemblance to those which had been put in force at Pisa. The Pratesi brethren were dispossessed of their convent but were established in neighbouring premises. S. Domenico itself was handed

over to the new Congregation, and was soon colonized by brethren from Florence for whom accommodation could not be found at S. Marco.

The new "Tuscan Congregation of the Roman Province of the Order of the Preachers"—to give it its full official title—meant, therefore, so far as it was successful, three things. It meant the extension of Florentine influence in neighbouring cities such as Pisa and Prato where purely political considerations made such an extension highly desirable. To Savonarola, as Vicar-General of the new Congregation, it meant a marked accession of authority and power, thus exposing his efforts for conventual union to the suspicion that they were actuated by motives of secular and personal ambition. But this is not to say that political or personal motives were primarily or even consciously behind the movement. There is no reason to doubt that Savonarola was impelled by no other declared and conscious impulse than that of zeal for his work of reform. The union meant to him the permanence of his own labours in Florence, and the opportunity of enforcing, not only in Florence but beyond it, a stricter discipline, a deeper enthusiasm, a more intense appreciation of *il ben vivere*—of the good life—among those whose lives were professedly devoted to the cause of righteousness.

This was essentially the burden of his plea in Advent, 1493, at the time when negotiations for the union were in progress. His sermon "*Ut quid Deus repulisti*" is a fiery invective against those who have corrupted the life of the spirit in meaningless forms and empty ceremonies:—the caitiff prelates who by their depraved works and evil example have defaced the beauty of the primitive Church; the priests who wear fine tresses of hair and fine waistcoats of silk, and seek to outdo the seculars in



their attire. "Go," he cries, "to Rome or anywhere in Christendom. You will find prelates intent upon poetry and oratory. You will see them with books of humanity in their hands, and they will give you to understand that they know how to direct souls with Virgil, Horace and Cicero. The Church is governed by astrology. There is not a prelate nor a dignitary who is not associated with some astrologer to assure him of the favourable moment for action. . . . The Church to-day rejoices in external ceremonies, in splendid vestments, in fine chalices and candlesticks of silver and of gold. Never, it is said, has divine worship been so well celebrated as now; never was the Church in so much honour, her prelates in greater reputation. The prelates of old were '*prelatuzzi*' in comparison with those of to-day. Aye! They were indeed '*prelatuzzi*' in that they were humble and poor men who had not so many fat bishoprics nor so many rich benefices as those of modern days; nor had they so many gold mitres and chalices, seeing that the little they had they gave to the poor. In the primitive Church the chalices were of wood, but the priests were golden. To-day the prelates of the Church are of wood and the chalices of gold. . . . One says to another, 'What think you of this Faith of ours? what is your opinion of it?' and the other replies 'You appear to me to be a fool. It is a dream; a thing of women and Friars.' . . . What doest Thou then, O Lord? Why dost Thou sleep? Rise up, O Lord! Come and free Thy Church from the hands of devils, from the hands of tyrants, from the hands of caitiff prelates. Dost Thou not see that Thy Church is full of animals, of wild beasts, of lions, bears, wolves which have all together devoured it? Dost Thou not see, O Lord, our tribulation? Hast Thou forgotten Thy Church? Dost Thou not love it? Hast thou no

care for it? And yet it is Thy Spouse! Dost Thou not recognize her? She is the same as that through which Thou didst descend into the Virgin's womb, through which Thou didst take on human flesh, through which Thou didst suffer so many shames, through which Thou wert willing to shed Thy blood upon the Cross. At what a price hast Thou bought her, O Lord! And therefore we pray Thee to come, and to come quickly, to liberate her. Come, I say, and punish these caitiffs; confound them; humble them to the dust; and so shall we with greater quietness be able to serve Thee."

The invectives of the preacher are not, however, confined to prelates, dignitaries and churchmen. There are others, tyrants, Kings and Princes who have despoiled the Lord's people. Against them also will God lift up His hands, His left hand to punish them here on earth, His right hand to punish them eternally in Hell. The corruption which the preacher lashed was not ecclesiastical corruption only, but that which was to be found in equal degree in the government of Kings and Princes. His work of reform embraced the State as much as the Church, and the reform of the State could only be accomplished by the overthrow of tyranny, of the rule of a despot, and the institution of free government. It was this genuine sympathy for liberty, this ardour for political freedom, which attracted towards him many who were indifferent to, or only secondarily affected by, his zeal for ecclesiastical reformation. For there were not a few in Florence, even when the Medici ascendancy was at its height, who still continued to cherish the hope that the ancient liberties of Florence might one day be restored to her. However much the despotism of the Medici can be explained and in a sense justified by the conditions from which it had arisen, yet to idealists it was a despotism

still and, as such, a thing to be eradicated and utterly destroyed. There were others, who, while not averse from despotism if exercised by themselves or by their party, were hostile to the particular despotism of the Medici. The common people, who scarcely realized that they were subjects, and who were therefore untouched by the modern spirit of loyalty, were likely to be attracted by any movement in the direction of democracy and to rally to the cry of free government. Thus when Savonarola held up the ideal of free government before the people and denounced the tyranny of a one-man government his voice was not that of one crying in the wilderness. He spoke to many sympathetic ears and awoke memories which had not wholly faded from the minds of men. The death of Lorenzo and the accession of Piero to Lorenzo's place of power gave emphasis to the Friar's words. The rule of Piero was an object lesson in what government ought not to be, and every month of it gave more concrete force to sentiments which in the lifetime of Lorenzo had been abstract and academic. When Piero fell from power some attempt to restore a republic in Florence was inevitable, and when the crisis came it was natural that the Florentines should turn to their foremost man and look to Savonarola for political guidance. Owing to the position which he had acquired his advice would then be listened to with all the respect which was due to him as a man, and also with the awe and reverence derived from the conviction that his recommendations came through him from Heaven itself, whose chosen instrument and mouthpiece he claimed, and was held, to be.

## CHAPTER V

1494—TO 30 NOVEMBER

### THE INVASION OF CHARLES VIII

“*ECCE gladius Domini super terram cito et velociter.*”  
In 1494 the “*Gladius Domini*,” the Sword of the Lord, fell upon Italy. It took the shape of Charles VIII of France. With the advent of the French, Italian liberty and independence took wings and vanished away and for three hundred years Italy became in turn the battle-field, the spoil and the plaything of the stranger.

The appearance of Charles in Italy at the head of his armies gave to Savonarola convincing proof that his prophecies and denunciations were of Divine inspiration, for were they not now being fulfilled to the letter and in full measure? Here was the new Cyrus whose coming he had foretold! Here was the scourge which was to chastise and then to renovate a guilty Church!

It is difficult to fix the precise date when Savonarola first began to proclaim that a new Cyrus was coming from the mountains whom none could resist, for God would be his leader and guide. Cinozzi states that it was in 1494, “when all the world was at peace,” that Savonarola proclaimed this message from the pulpit of S. Lorenzo. Filipepi declares that it was in the lifetime of Lorenzo dei Medici, that is before the spring of 1492, that Savonarola preached the coming of a new Cyrus. Savonarola

himself says after the Advent sermons of 1492. Cinozzi's statement, short as it is, contains two such glaring inaccuracies as to minor points of fact, that it is impossible to accept its main contention with confidence. Savonarola did not preach in S. Lorenzo in 1494, nor can the moment when Charles, after long preparation, was on the point of crossing the Alps be described as a time when all the world was at peace. Filipepi, writing after the event, probably confuses the general prediction contained in the "Gladius Domini" sermon of 1492 with the particular assertions as to the new Cyrus. Savonarolist biographers, always in search for the miraculous, would naturally and in good faith seek to identify the particular with the general, to make accomplished facts square with their hero's foreknowledge. But if it be true that Savonarola's first references to the new Cyrus were in 1494—and that is probably the truth—we are not in need of miracle or prophecy to account for them. All the world knew in 1494 that the invasion of Italy by Charles would certainly happen. It was easy for Savonarola, with his dramatic faculty and power of poetic hyperbole, to draw on historical analogy and to coin an arresting phrase.

The French invasion of 1494 was an event of such momentous importance to Italy, to Florence, to the Medici House, and to Savonarola that it would be strange had it failed powerfully to affect the imagination of men. To Italy it meant the earthquake and the whirlwind, coming as it seemed from the clear sky. The old landmarks of the past were swept away and all things ceased to be as they had been. Florence found herself in the throes of a revolution from which dates the extinction of her ancient glories; the House of Medici fell from the place of power which it had held for sixty years, and Savonarola was left, ostensibly to guide the tempest and

direct the storm, but in fact to be its sport and plaything until the moment when it caught him up and overwhelmed him. The quest of Charles VIII in search of a Neapolitan crown marks nothing less than the break-up of the mediaeval world.

In the introductory chapter I have already briefly alluded to the condition of the kingdom of Naples in the fifteenth century, and have shown the direct claims to the crown of Naples which Louis XI of France was able to transmit to his son, Charles VIII. Louis himself had neither the time nor the inclination to vindicate these claims, but Charles, from the moment that he was old enough to assume the government in France, was desirous of obtaining the glory and profit of military operations upon a grand scale, and saw the advantage of distracting in a foreign country the turbulent energies of the French nobility. But it is doubtful if Charles's Italian ambitions would ever have passed from dreams into realities had it not been for the stimulus applied from Italy itself. The devastation of Italy at the hands of the foreigner must be laid at the door of the Italian statesmen who deliberately invited the foreigner to invade their land. Intent upon their own interests and intrigues they cared nothing for Italy. The French claims upon Naples were a convenient weapon which might be used against Naples by her rivals should occasion arise, and no scruples of principle or patriotism weighed for a moment against the immediate advantage to be secured from foreign intervention. The consequences which were likely to follow were either ignored or not appreciated. "The statesmen of Italy," says Dr. Creighton, "were accustomed to play a game of ceaseless check and counter-check till they lost all sense of the reality of political forces. They had used the threat of French invasion as

a weapon in extremities till they had forgotten its actual meaning. . . . Italy was devoid of national feeling, and its statesmen, in spite of their boasted astuteness, knew nothing of the real forces which lay beyond the borders of Italy. The substitution of cleverness for principle was Italy's ruin."

In the prevailing indifference to any large policy founded on principle, it remained for accident to determine who should be the first individually to translate threats into action and invite the French into the country. The death of Ferrante, King of Naples, in January, 1494, after a reign of thirty-five years, was an accident which brought the French claims upon Naples into greater prominence at a particular time; the personal situation of Ludovico Sforza at Milan at the same moment was the accident which caused him to look to a French invasion as a means of throwing Italy into a state of confusion from which he could derive immediate advantage to himself.

Ludovico Sforza, Il Moro, as he is called perhaps from the mulberry-tree upon his escutcheon, had succeeded, a few years after the assassination of Galeazzo Maria Sforza in 1476, in securing to himself the government of Milan as the representative of his youthful nephew, Giovanni Galeazzo, son of the murdered duke. This position Ludovico was anxious to retain notwithstanding the fact that his nephew had now grown to manhood. Giovanni, though in 1494 he was 27 years of age, was kept as much as possible in the background, and his palace was little more than a prison. But as long as his nephew lived Ludovico's position was only that of a usurper in Milan, and the rights of Giovanni could be forcibly used against Ludovico by any Italian statesmen to whom his policy was obnoxious. In 1494 Naples had taken

up a position of active hostility to Ludovico and was openly championing the cause of Giovanni whose wife, Isabella, was a grand-daughter of Ferrante, a daughter of Ferrante's heir, Alphonso II. To use the French claims on Naples as a means to relieve the pressure of Naples upon himself was a simple and obvious device. An invitation to invade Italy in prosecution of those claims was sent by Ludovico to Charles VIII. The invitation was powerfully backed by Cardinal Rovere, who was animated by a strong hatred of Alexander VI and by an equally strong hope that Charles' expedition would result in Alexander's deposition from the Papal throne. Florence was bound to France by ancient ties of alliance. Venice "was coldly cautious". The persuasion which was brought to bear upon Charles accorded with his own ambition. The Italian invasion was decided upon, and on 8 September, 1494, the French victory at Rapallo announced to the world that a French descent upon Italy had passed from the world of dreams into the world of realities.

Just at the time when the French were beginning to pour into Italy, Savonarola resumed a course of sermons on the book of Genesis on which he had been engaged during the previous Lent. He had treated exhaustively the subject of Noah's Ark. On Easter Day of 1494 he had rhetorically reconstructed the fabric and invited all to enter in. Resuming in September he passed from the Ark to the Deluge which overwhelmed a sinful world, and on the 21st his text was "*Ecce ego adducam aquas super terram*" (Behold, I will pour forth the waters upon the earth). The choice of the text, the voice, the gesture with which it was delivered corresponded with the emotions of the congregation. The floodgates of Italy were unloosed; the land was being overrun by barbarians as



by a deluge. Here, in visible form, in the person of the French King, was that scourge of God whose advent Savonarola had so often foretold. Men looked upon it as the result of Divine interposition that the preacher had reached, in his course of sermons, that particular text at that particular time. Savonarola himself declared that there was something strange and indeed miraculous in the fact that he had been impelled, almost against his will, to linger so long upon the earlier chapters "so that I could never reach the chapter on the flood until these tribulations had already begun." Already, he tells us, he had foretold—though the prediction cannot be verified in his sermons which are extant—that there would come over the Alps one who, like another Cyrus, would vindicate the cause of God in Italy, that the fortresses of Italy would be no barrier to his advance, and that the Florentines, especially those who at the time ruled the city, would attach themselves to a policy contrary to their interests and would ally themselves to a cause which was about to be overthrown. The verification of these predictions was now at hand. "Behold," he cried, "the sword has descended, the scourge has fallen, the prophecies are being fulfilled; behold it is the Lord who is leading on these armies."

The coincidence between Charles's descent into Italy and Savonarola's sermon on the Deluge admits of an interpretation which is independent of prophecy or miracle. The French invasion had been planned many months before it began and Charles's ambassadors had visited Florence to secure support there more than a month before the King crossed the Alps. Savonarola's sermon was a dramatic effect which exactly harmonized with existing knowledge and an existing state of feeling. None the less is it easy to see how all the circumstances would

tend to increase the Friar's conviction that his words and actions were prompted by a power outside himself which could come only from God.<sup>1</sup> Alone among his contemporaries he had read the signs of the times and had consistently foretold that God's wrath was kindled against Italy and that an instrument of God's vengeance was at hand. He could scarcely fail to see in Charles VIII the vindication of his foresight, the visible evidence of the truth of those "conclusions" which he had so many times asserted. Hence for Savonarola it followed that resistance to Charles was resistance to God's divinely chosen agent. Charles had a mission from on high to regenerate Italy. Let him fulfil it. Should he fail in fulfilling it, then God, in His own good time, would call the defaulter to account.

It was thus that Savonarola identified himself politically with a policy of alliance between France and Florence, a policy to which he steadfastly adhered. *Gigli e Gigli*. The lilies of Florence were to match the lilies of France.

<sup>1</sup> The following time-table of Charles VIII's movements is the best commentary on the prevalent notion that Savonarola owed his foreknowledge of the French invasion to miraculous revelation.

1492. *Passim*. Charles negotiates with Henry VII of England, the Emperor, and Ferdinand of Spain with a view to securing a free hand for his Italian projects.

1493. Charles assumes the title of King of Sicily and Jerusalem: an indirect assertion of his Neapolitan claims.

1494. January—or perhaps February. The Neapolitan ambassadors dismissed from the French Court.

March 6. Charles at Lyons superintending the mobilization of his forces. Two embassies from Florence had already been received by Charles ("De Commines," Bk. vii. c. 6).

May. First contingents cross the Alps.

August. Charles, with the main body, crosses the Alps.

Sept. 5. Charles reaches Turin.

Sept. 8. French victory at Rapallo.

Sept. 9. Charles at Asti, laid up with smallpox.

Sept. 21. Savonarola's Sermon—"Ecce ego adducam".

But such a policy was scarcely to be reconciled with an Italian spirit of patriotism, and was one which would inevitably bring both Florence and Savonarola into conflict with those statesmen who saw the salvation of Italy in the expulsion of the foreigner from her soil. Here is the clue to Savonarola's subsequent career and eventual overthrow. It was not because he was a moral reformer that he was destroyed by a worldly and profligate Pope, but because as a Florentine politician he directed the policy of the State into a channel which crossed the views and interests of those who for the moment, however unworthily, represented the idea of patriotism among the Italians.

Charles VIII met with little opposition as he advanced into the country. The ease with which all obstacles melted away before him seemed almost to justify Savonarola's belief that the French were under the immediate protection of Providence. An undertaking which was beset with difficulties and possibilities of disaster at every turn resolved itself into a triumphal march. As the King approached Florence the city became more and more alarmed. For Piero de' Medici, just before Charles set out from France, had deliberately dissociated himself from the traditional policy of Florence, which was one of friendship to France, and had ostentatiously allied himself to the cause of Naples which Charles was coming to overthrow. At length Piero discovered that he had attached himself and the fortunes of his house to a losing cause. Incapable of any exhibition of strength and vigour he at last determined to abandon Naples and throw himself upon Charles's generosity. An agreement was made by which Piero consented to hand over to the French King the principal Florentine fortresses, and to lend him a large sum of money (26 October). The terms

were a disgrace to Piero and were bitterly resented by Florence. The Signory and the chief citizens met in consultation on 4 November and determined to send an embassy to Charles. Among the ambassadors was Piero Capponi, whose words at the conference had been of evil augury for the Medici. "It is time," he said, "to have done with the government of children and to regain our liberty." Another ambassador was Savonarola.

The selection of Savonarola in full Pratica for this high office affords a startling proof of the position of political as well as religious influence to which he had now attained. However much his predictions are capable of a natural explanation there can be no doubt that to many of his contemporaries there seemed to be behind him some supernatural force which enabled him to see where other men were blind. His appointment as ambassador no doubt followed largely from the effect which he had produced by his great sermon of 21 September, but throughout the crisis he continued regularly to preach, and his eloquence reached a climax in the sermon on Penitence of 1 November. The Duomo, we may be sure, was packed with an agitated crowd, for the forces of Charles were before the Florentine fortress of Sarzana, Piero dei Medici, was in the French camp and only five days before he had signed away great slices of Florentine territory in the hope thereby of making his peace with Charles. It was All Saints' Day, a Saturday morning, and Savonarola had come prepared to continue his course of sermons on Haggai. He had proposed to himself to speak to those who had already entered into the Ark of the good life (*nell' Arca del ben vivere*) but on entering the pulpit he announced that he had been enjoined to speak of penitence instead. "Indeed I will not preach to you

at all this morning, but we will talk together and call every one to penitence. *Poenitentiam agite appropinquabit regnum Coelorum.* 'By the waters of Babylon there we sat down and wept.' O Florence, sit down beside the rivers of thy sins! Make a river of tears to wash them away; remember thy heavenly country whence thy soul has come; seek with penitence to return to it. Your sins are the cause of the tribulations which are coming upon you. God sends them. God is at the head of these armies and leads them on. And since I have told you many times before that tribulation would come, that God would send it to cleanse His Church, therefore henceforth you ought to believe me now that you see the effect. Your wickedness, O Italy, O Rome, O Florence, your impieties, your fornications, your cruelty, your wickedness cause this tribulation to come. Behold the cause! There is but one remedy—Penitence—*Agite poenitentiam.*

“Again, O Florence, it is your ingratitude. O ungrateful Florence! God has spoken to you and you have not been willing to hear Him. If the Turks had heard what you have heard they would have repented of their sins. O Florence, the Lord has spoken to you in many ways. If God had not illuminated me, you would not have been illuminated, and you have been illuminated more than any other place. Do you not remember, Florence, how, not many years ago, you stood towards the things of God and of the Faith? were you not in many things practically a heretic? Do you not know that I have made you, so to speak, touch the Faith with your hand? You stood there with your extrinsic ceremonies, and seemed to be holy. God showed you how mistaken you were, and that ceremonies, without purity of heart, are worth nothing at all. The Christian life consists in other things than ceremonies.

“You cannot plead ignorance. God has revealed Himself to you, and has disclosed to you the future. When I said ‘*Ecce gladius Domini*’ you made sport of me, said I was a fool. Now, even now, I say to you, Thus saith the Lord—‘Turn unto Me with all your hearts, with fasting, with wailing and with tears.’ Turn unto the Lord who is still waiting to receive you. Let your penitence be true, not feigned; let it spring not from your human fears but from your whole heart for love of God. Otherwise I tell you you shall be punished in soul and body and life.

“O Churchmen! hear my words: O priests, O prelates of the Church of Christ, let go your benefices to which you cannot minister; let go your pomps, your concubines, your clowns.

“O monks! let go the superfluity of your vestments, of your silver vessels, and all the splendours of your Badias and your benefices. Give yourselves up to simplicity; work with your hands as did the monks of old. . . . And you who have your houses full of vanities and statues (*figure*) and dishonourable things—wicked books, the Morgante, and other things against the Faith, let them go: bring them to me that I may make a fire of them, a sacrifice to God. . . .

“And now, four words more, and then go home.

“*Vox dicentis, clama*; the voice of one saying, Cry aloud!

“O Italy, for thy sins adversity will come upon thee . . .

“O Florence, for thy sins adversity will come upon thee . . .

“*Vox dicentis: clama*; and what does it cry?

“O *chierica, chierica*, O shaven crowns of the clergy! because of you has all this tempest arisen. You are the principal cause of these troubles. Woe! woe! I say, to

him who wears a shaven crown! (a chi avrà la chierica in capo) . . .

“We celebrate to-day the festival of All Saints. I pray you, glorious Saints, by this your holy day, make prayers to the Lord for this people. And Thee, O Lord, who in this holy day hast fed us with thy sweetness, Thee I pray, through the bowels of Thy mercy, to give to this people a true knowledge of Thee and a true repentance for their sins, through the merits of Thy passion; through the merits of Thy most Holy Mother, and through the prayers of all the Saints, the cherubim, the seraphim, and all the angelic choir, and all the hierarchies of Thy most holy angels and blessed spirits. And take away from Thy people this tribulation, and sooner make me a liar if only Thy honour be preserved O my Lord *qui es benedictus in saecula saeculorum*, Amen.”

The exhortations and denunciations contained in this All Saints' Day sermon were repeated on the two following days, Sunday and Monday, 2 and 3 November. They were reinforced by the proclamation, apparently on Savonarola's personal authority, of a general fast throughout the Florentine territory which was so extensively adopted and lasted so long that it threatened the financial ruin of the Florentine butchers. So injurious indeed did the access of emotional pietism during the Savonarola regime prove to the butchers' trade that it became necessary to grant to them a special remission of taxation in compensation for their losses. “A Dominican Friar,” writes the Mantuan envoy to Gonzaga (17 November) “has so terrified all the Florentines that they are wholly given up to piety. Three days in the week they fast on bread and water, and two more on wine and bread. All the maidens and many of the wives have taken refuge in convents so that only men and youths and old women are now

to be seen in the streets." There was a sense of unknown and terrible calamity immediately threatening not the State in the abstract but each individual member of it. But to the sense of panic there was joined the conviction that by a complete surrender to the injunctions of Savonarola the ruin which must inevitably overtake the other Italian States might be averted from Florence. Thus Savonarola dominated the situation. He was at once Prophet and Redeemer. And just as he had foretold the woe which was about to fall so it was within his power to shield Florence and her people from its incidence. Such was the state of the public mind when the Pratica, the assembly of representative citizens, met on 4 November, and it was under the influence of such feeling that Savonarola on the following day was appointed one of four ambassadors to wait upon the King of France at Pisa.

In his "*Compendium Revelationum*" Savonarola has given an abstract of his speech to Charles on this occasion. No doubt he left to his colleagues the purely political and diplomatic business of the embassy which was to secure such modification as was possible of the terms to which Piero dei Medici had agreed. It was the special function of the Friar to impress upon Charles the sense of a Divine mission and to induce him to accept Savonarola as an exponent of the Divine will. He addressed Charles as Most Christian King and Great Minister of Divine Justice. As such he was the appointed instrument to accomplish the purposes of Omnipotent Jehovah "who distributes and communicates His infinite bounty to His creatures in two ways, to wit, by way of Mercy and by way of Justice." After expatiating at length upon this theme in the abstract and upon its special application to Charles's circumstances he proceeded to assure the King that a Divine revelation had



# CAROLVS VIII GAEREX



CHARLES VIII OF FRANCE

*In the Uffizi, Florence. Painter unknown*



been made to him that God would send a grievous scourge upon Italy and that Charles was that scourge. "And so at last, O King, thou hast come. Thou hast come as the Minister of God; the Minister of Justice. Thou wilt always be welcome. We receive thee with joyful hearts and with a glad countenance. Thy coming has rejoiced our hearts, has exalted our minds, and has made to rejoice all the servants of Jesus Christ, all who love justice and wish to live well. For we hope that by thee Jehovah will abase the pride of the proud, will exalt the humility of the humble, will crush vice, exalt virtue, make straight the things that are crooked, will renew the old and reform all that is deformed. Come then, glad, secure, triumphant, since He who sent you forth triumphed upon the Cross for our salvation." But having been thus sent by God to accomplish the purposes of Providence Charles must learn "from God's unprofitable servant to whom this secret has been revealed" to exercise mercy, especially to God's chosen city of Florence, to defend innocence, to pardon offences by whomsoever done, "for they have innocently offended, not knowing that you were sent by God."

The effect of Savonarola's utterances was genuinely to impress Charles with the sanctity of the purpose he had set himself to accomplish in Italy. He began to regard himself in the light of the Friar's representations, and the emblem "*Missus a Deo*" was soon added to his banners. But he found his position as liberator of Italy a difficult and embarrassing one. The city of Pisa seized the opportunity presented by the general confusion to throw off the yoke of Florence which it loathed. De Commynes draws a vivid picture of a concourse of Pisan citizens waylaying Charles, as he was going to Mass with cries of "Liberty, liberty," beseeching him with tears that

he would vouchsafe to restore it to them. . . . The King, not understanding what they meant by that word Liberty and beginning to commiserate the afflictions which the people of Italy endured, both under Princes and Commonwealths, replied that he was willing it should be so, though, to speak truth, he had no authority to grant it, for the town was not his own.

To Florence the retention of Pisa was vital, for it commanded the mouth of the Arno and thus gave her free access to the sea. It seemed a strange commentary on Savonarola's assurances that God would spare Florence, that God's appointed minister should, at the very outset of his task, rob Florence of her only effective seaport and threaten the complete ruin of her commercial greatness. Charles, too, as the patron of Pisan liberties and the would-be ally of Florence found himself in a dilemma from which he sought to extricate himself by vague assurances to both parties. In the meantime he pursued his way to Florence where he arrived on 17 November. There, since the departure of the embassy, stirring events had taken place. Piero dei Medici had arrived home from the camp of Charles on the 8th. On the 9th—" *il giorno proprio di S. Salvatore* "—a popular rising in the city resulted in the flight of Piero with his brothers, their formal banishment, and the overthrow of the Medicean government. Charles, upon his arrival, found Florence in the throes of a revolution, without a government, without a representative, and, as it seemed, absolutely at his mercy. He was in a position to exact hard conditions, and the conditions which he exacted, notwithstanding the brilliant intervention of Piero Capponi, were hard. But it was hoped that they were final, and that Charles would now pass on. He, however, showed no disposition to depart, and the sack of the city by the French seemed

imminent. At this juncture men again looked to Savonarola for salvation. He was invited, "as I believe by the Signoria," says Cinozzi, to go to Charles and to exhort him to depart. At the moment when the invitation reached him—it was Saturday, 29 November—the Friar was about to sit down to dinner with his brethren in the refectory of S. Marco. Enjoining upon his colleagues to betake themselves to the chapel and there to remain prostrate in prayer till his return, he went to the Medici palace where Charles was quartered, passed the guards and penetrated into the inner chamber of the King. There he addressed Charles, "*con grand impeto di spirito*"—says Filipepi, in correspondence with Cinozzi's "*vivamente*": enjoined upon him to leave Florence, both himself and his army, and to leave her unscathed as he had found her. In answer to the demand of the "superbissimo Re" for the authority by which Savonarola spoke the Friar is said to have drawn from his bosom a small brass Crucifix. "This Christ," he said, "crucified for sinners, lays this command upon you." The King made no reply, but immediately, on the following day, set forth (30 November).

This story related by pietistic biographers is sufficiently in agreement with the record of sober annalists, such as Nardi, to convince us that such an interview actually took place, and that Charles was strongly urged by Savonarola to depart. It happened, however, that the Friar's counsel was in agreement with that given to the King by his military advisers. D'Aubigny, the French Captain-General in Romagna, had come in person to Florence in order to impress upon Charles that he was wasting precious time which might more profitably be spent in pursuing his march to Naples. Savonarola had equally insisted that precious time was being wasted, for Charles was

doing nothing for that renovation of the Church which it was his special mission to accomplish. But whether the King's ultimate decision to depart from Florence was prompted more by religious than military considerations is a question which in the absence of fuller information it is impossible to determine. It is sufficient to lodge a caveat against the popular notion that the sack of Florence was averted and the departure of Charles effected solely by the influence which Savonarola exercised over the King.

The relations of Savonarola with Charles VIII are interesting, chiefly for the light they throw upon Savonarola's character and political conduct. The invasion itself was regarded in Italy at the time, and may be regarded still, from two points of view. There were those who, disgusted by the shifty aims and selfish intrigues of Italian princes and statesmen, could see deliverance for Italy only at the hands of the foreigner. Just as in days gone by it had been the dream of some of the noblest Italian patriots that Italian unity and concord were to be secured for Italy from the Emperor, so it was possible now for genuine patriots to look to France to secure liberty for the Italian States. The dream may have been an illusion, but there was nothing necessarily shameful in entertaining it. But on the other hand there were those who saw in the advent of the stranger the ruin of the land. To drive the foreigner from Italy seemed to them to be the first duty of every true Italian, and events showed that those who took this view were the most far-seeing statesmen and the best patriots.

Thus, to have invited the French into Italy and to have encouraged their enterprise seemed to some a glory, to others a disgrace; but there could be no compromise, nor any basis for a common understanding between those

who were for the foreigners and those who were against them. The shame or the glory, as the case may be, of calling the French into Italy does not rest upon Savonarola. It was not he who influenced Charles to undertake his expedition. But upon Savonarola lies the responsibility, for good or evil, of encouraging Charles's enterprise when once it had been undertaken, and of stamping with the hall-mark of Divine approval an invasion which was the beginning of endless woes for Italy. It would be to exaggerate Savonarola's importance and to overestimate the influence which he exerted to lay upon him the blame for all the miseries which Italy from this time had to endure at the hands of the stranger. The French expedition would assuredly have taken place if Savonarola had never existed, but at a time when a little resolute effort would have been sufficient to check Charles's advance and ruin his undertaking the influence of Savonarola and of Florence was thrown into the French scale, and an enterprise which was fraught with disaster for Italy was by him represented to the Italian people as under the special guidance and control of God, who was employing Charles as his minister.

But while Savonarola's general attitude towards the French invasion lays him open to adverse criticism, the services which he rendered to Florence at this time of crisis were great, and entitle him to the praise which has been bestowed upon him. If he was able to imbue Charles with a superstitious belief in the divinely inspired character of his expedition, he was also able to impress Charles with the belief that the terms of his mission implied a lenient policy towards Florence. To Savonarola Florence was the chosen city of God, and so he represented it to the French King. Any undue severity exercised by God's instrument upon God's chosen city involved

a glaring contradiction. It was largely due to the Friar that the French occupation of Florence, from 17 to 30 November, brought comparatively little suffering to the city. It was owing to him, at any rate in part, that Charles was induced to pass on; it was by his restraining influence that the citizens themselves during those anxious days were kept under some degree of control, and that the internal peace of Florence was maintained. The French invasion shows at once the weakness and the strength of Savonarola: his weakness in that he stood forward to champion an enterprise which was fatal to Italy, in that he gathered for himself from that enterprise fresh credentials for his fatal claims to be a prophet; while his strength is shown by the fact that he was able to impose something of the vigour and intensity of his own character upon a weak and irresolute prince, and to secure the comparative immunity of Florence amid the barbaric licence which attended the progress of an invading and triumphant army.



## CHAPTER VI

### SAVONAROLA AND THE FLORENTINE THEOCRACY

THE expulsion of Piero de Medici from Florence involved the dissolution of all the principles of government which had been in operation during the period of the Medici ascendancy. If the State was not to fall into anarchy it was essential that new systems of government should be evolved as rapidly as possible. The times were favourable for a liberal Constitution, for the Florentines, by overthrowing their despotic rulers, supposed that they had regained their ancient heritage of liberty. All that was needed was to formulate a system under which this newly recovered liberty could be enjoyed. The need for immediate action was pressing, for all the energies of the republic would be wanted to reduce Pisa once more to subjection and to restore to their obedience such other dependencies as had shown an inclination to follow the example of the Pisans. As long as the internal government of Florence was unsettled movements of revolt were to be looked for outside, and there were still left within the city many partisans of the Medici who would naturally seize the opportunity presented by the absence of strong government to secure the return of Piero and the continuation of the old system.

Accordingly on 2 December, 1494, two days after the departure of Charles, a general assemblage of the people, or Parlamento, was held on the Piazza, and by popular vote

the right of the *Balia* was granted to the Signory, which meant that the Signory was temporarily invested with practically dictatorial powers. A board of twenty Accoppiatori was appointed whose function it was to select the Signoria. The board was invested with a twelve-months' tenure of power, and thus became, to all intents and purposes, the government for that period. Thus, for the moment at any rate, provision was made for carrying on the government of the State, while the Constitution which should ultimately replace this provisional government was left over for full and careful discussion.

The machinery of government in Florence had always been exceedingly complex, and the old machinery was still standing in spite of sixty years of Medicean despotism. It had never been the policy of the Medici to abolish existing institutions, but to manipulate them cunningly in their own interests. The whole apparatus of government therefore still remained very much as it had been for centuries, and it was felt to be advisable to retain as much of it as was possible, only introducing such modifications as would prevent a return of tyranny and secure a more popular and democratic method of representation. At the head of the administration stood the Signory, consisting of the Gonfalonier of Justice, who was the chief functionary in the State, and eight priors chosen from the city guilds. The members of the Signory held office for two months, it being the object of the Florentine Constitution to ensure that as many individual citizens as possible should have a chance of holding high offices of State. Foreign affairs and matters of peace and war were entrusted to a Committee of Ten appointed for six months, while another Board of Eight controlled the administration of justice, and these held office for a period of four months. Twenty-eight assessors were also ap-

pointed to sit with the Signory to advise but not to give decisions, sixteen Gonfaloniers of the city companies and twelve Buoni Uomini, who, together with the Signory, constituted what was known as the Collegio.

The legislative functions and the selection of magistrates were, at any rate in theory, in the hands of two councils, the Consiglio del Popolo and the Consiglio del Commune, but Cosimo and Lorenzo de' Medici, by creating two new Councils of the Seventy and of the Hundred, composed of their own partisans, and by transferring to these bodies the most important functions possessed by the old councils, had been able to secure for their House an uncontrolled supremacy in the State.

The first step therefore towards the establishment of a new Constitution based upon democratic principles was the abolition of the Medicean Councils, and they were abolished by the authority of the twenty Accoppiatori who assumed on 3 December the executive government of the State. The overthrow of the Medicean arrangements involved the reconstruction of a new Legislature, and the form which that Legislature should assume became a question on which discussion ran high. There was a natural tendency to look around for models, but the only State in Italy of any pretensions which had preserved itself from despotism was Venice, and men therefore looked to the Venetian Constitution to supply a pattern for the new Constitution of Florence. But Florence was bent upon a democratic form of government: the government of Venice was essentially aristocratic. This antagonism between ideals was perhaps not realized by men who saw democracy triumphant wherever a Council was installed, and despotism rampant wherever government was controlled by a single will. But the antagonism was there none the less and the

difficulty lay in adapting a Venetian model to Florentine needs and conditions. Eventually out of the long discussions two definite opinions took shape. Paolo Soderini, who had been Florentine ambassador at Venice, favoured the establishment of a Grand Council, consisting of some 1500 members, which should legislate, sanction taxation and elect the magistrates, while a lesser Council of Eighty should deliberate upon such matters as were unsuitable for discussion by so large a number as 1500 men. Guidantonio Vespucci, on the other hand, objected to the Grand Council altogether on the ground that the Florentine populace was quite unfitted to exercise so large a control over the government of the State. Both Soderini and Vespucci were agreed that the Signoria and the various executive boards should remain as they were. It was when matters were at this point that Savonarola appeared in the political arena and exercised a deciding influence upon the character of the new Constitution.

We may well believe him when he tells us it was not without deep misgivings that he was led to intervene in these high matters of State. It was Advent, and he was preaching a course of sermons on the prophet Haggai. In the nineteenth sermon on Haggai, delivered on the Fourth Sunday in Advent (21 December), we can plainly perceive the feelings of strong excitement with which Savonarola watched the course of events, which would lead, as he trusted, to the realization of one of his grand ideals, the restoration of liberty to Florence. The feeling that any interposition on his part would be misplaced was overborne by the strong political instinct which impelled him to interpose. As usual he saw the call of God in the promptings of his individual character and fashioned a Divine revelation out of the conflict between opposing

duties: "The Lord has driven my bark into the open sea—the wind drives me forward; the Lord forbids my return. I communed last night with the Lord and said: 'Pity me, O Lord; lead me back to my haven'. 'It is impossible, see you not that the wind is contrary?' 'I will preach, if so I must, but why need I meddle with the government of Florence?' 'If thou wouldst make Florence a holy city thou must establish her on firm foundations and give her a government which favours virtue.'" To Savonarola his mission as a reformer of morals was inextricably interwoven with the political reformation of the State. It was therefore as the agent of a higher power that he now declared the will of Heaven in the matter of the new Constitution.

But already, immediately after the establishment of the provisional Government, on the Sunday following the departure of Charles, Savonarola in his eighth sermon on Haggai had expressed his general views upon government and reform. Choosing for his text "*Cantate Domino canticum novum quia mirabilia fecit*" he first impressed upon his hearers that recent events in Florence had been brought about directly by God, and that any one who did not recognize this must be a fool or blind or obstinate. The only possible return for these favours was to love God with all the heart and with all the mind. If Florence would renovate her understanding and turn to God then she need have no fear of these armies nor of the new Cyrus who was marching against the modern Babylon, the corrupted Roman Church. The time had come for Florence to become new. "*O città nuova*, you must sing a new song, and seek to have a new form." First of all it was necessary to enact such laws as would prevent any one man from making himself Head of the State. Authority must be derived from character alone. But in order to make good laws it was necessary first of

all to be reconciled to the laws of God, seeing that all good laws depend upon the Eternal Law which could only be observed by the Grace of the Holy Spirit.

The preacher again renewed his assurances that Florence was in God's special charge. God loves her and wishes her well. He will save her for Himself "*Salvabit sibi*". Note well that '*For Himself*,' for God will not save Florence for the benefit of such a man as may wish to make himself supreme and to say, *Florence is Mine*. The Lord hath saved her *for Himself*, and He will give grace to Florence whereby she may find a good form of government under which no one man can lift up his head, a government for example on the Venetian pattern, or another as God may inspire." At this point the preacher hinted that he himself might not be unwilling to give his advice if he were invited to address his exhortations to the Signoria in the Palazzo. In the meantime let the people give themselves up to prayer and fasting for three days, and then let the Councils meet to determine on the form of government.

But it was not sufficient to be renewed in government. The citizens must be renewed in the spirit of their understanding, so that they might be directed by the impulse of humility, charity and simplicity. In choosing men for office let them exalt good men who were humble, and if need be force them to accept appointment. Let the charitable exert themselves to diminish the weight of taxation which oppressed the people: "As to simplicity, you must, O Florence, live a little more simply than you have done, without so much luxury and superfluity as in past times." From such simplicity of life it must follow that the City will become richer, will have more to spend in time of war, will be in a better position to protect and defend itself. The people too will be thus kept quiet

and in peace, no longer needing, as many blind fools think, to be kept happy by festivals. "That may be true where tyrants rule but it is not true in a free city."

This sermon, from which it appears that Savonarola was among the first to suggest a Constitution on the Venetian model, was followed up during the week by four others, so that his discourse upon 14 December—the third Sunday in Advent—was the thirteenth of his course on Haggai. On this occasion none but men were admitted to the Duomo, and we may assume a large attendance of the principal men in Florence. Savonarola addressed them upon the text *Erudimini qui judicatis terram* (*Be ye instructed, ye that judge the earth*). Man, he said, being a social animal, must congregate with his fellows and therefore is in need of government which may be of many kinds. Government by a single ruler, if he be a good one, is the best government of all; but if he be a bad one it is the worst. In hot climates where men are more enervated than elsewhere they are more inclined to submit to one-man rule. Again, amid northern colds where there is much blood but little intellect (*ingegno*) they are also willing to submit to one man. But in Italy, where blood and intellect commingle, men do not remain patient under the rule of one. Each man would like to be head and rule over others. Thus discords arise. So in Italy, in Florence especially, the government of more than one is better than that of one. But this government must be well ordered or it will split up into factions, and one faction will persecute the others. The form of government therefore is a matter of the first importance. "*Erudimini qui judicatis terram.*"

At this point the agitation of the preacher found vent in an impassioned outburst to his hearers to believe him. "Ah! if I could only express all that I feel within my-

self! I am like a new jar full of must which boils and ferments within but cannot get forth. O Florence, if you have been unwilling to believe me hitherto, believe in me from this time forward. If you have believed, believe more than ever this morning, but yet think not of me, *povero fraticello, omunculo inetto e pieno di peccati*. It is God, not I, who does it all. . . . Hear, O Florence, what I say to you this morning. Hear what God has inspired me to say."

First Florence must set her hand to the work of her own reformation. So should the City become glorious indeed, for blessings not spiritual only but temporal also would follow. She should become richer, more powerful, and would still farther extend her borders. From Florence the spirit of reform would extend to the whole of Italy and beyond it. For Turks and pagans would be converted and baptized "and many who are here now shall see it".

Reverting to his sermon of the previous Sunday he proceeded again to protest against the doctrine that States cannot be governed by paternosters, insisting that it is only in the spirit of paternosters that States can be well governed. Therefore the Signory must expel from the City everything which was hostile to the "*culto divino*". Let the clergy be mirrors reflecting the good life to the people. Let atrocious vices be suppressed by drastic laws. Let gaming and licentious songs and taverns be put down, and let the women reform the ill manner of their dress. Good citizens should seek neither state nor office, but if office is thrust upon them they should exercise it in the public welfare. Taxation should be justly assessed and imposed upon real property, not arbitrarily but in accordance with a fixed scale. Dowries paid by the State should be moderate in amount, never



exceeding 500 ducats, and in the case of artisans not more than 300. In framing the new Constitution the interests of the working classes should specially be considered, and while the greater offices of the State should be filled by election the lesser should be filled by lot. After a further invective against "tyrants," and a distinct recommendation of the Venetian model, adequately modified, for the new Constitution, the preacher emphatically promised "that if you do with all your hearts what I tell you I promise you from God remission of your sins and great glory in Paradise". "God has constituted Himself your Doctor. If you do as I tell you, you need have no fear of your enemies for you will be more powerful than they. God will defend you *Qui est benedictus in sæcula sæculorum.*"

Before ending the sermon, however, Savonarola had made one practical suggestion which was subsequently carried out almost to the letter. He proposed that each of the Sixteen Companies of the City should assemble under its Gonfalonier, and independently formulate a Constitution. Thus sixteen Constitutions would result. The sixteen Gonfaloniers were then to meet and confer upon the several schemes, finally selecting four for submission to the Signory. The Signory in turn, after the Mass of the Holy Spirit, were, from these four, to select the one to be adopted. This one would prove to be of God, and since the Constitution of Venice was given to the Venetians by God, it would turn out that the particular Constitution selected would be the one which approximated most nearly to the Venetian model. In the course of the discussions which followed this Sermon of 14 December, Savonarola was frequently summoned to the Palazzo to assist the Signory with his advice, and within little more than a week a new constitution was

selected, very much on the principle which Savonarola had recommended, and upon 23 December it received the sanction of law.

As he had predicted it took the form of the Venetian model. While the executive arrangements remained unchanged the chief and final authority in the State was now to be vested in a *Consiglio Maggiore* or Grand Council which superseded the old Councils of the Comune and of the Popolo. The Grand Council selected an inner body, or Senate, of Eighty, the members of which must have reached the age of 40, were to hold office for six months, and were eligible for re-election. This Senate was to act as an advisory body to the Signory, to appoint ambassadors, and to have cognisance of such matters as could not advantageously be discussed in full Council. For the *Consiglio Maggiore* was to consist of not less than 1500 members, and it was probable that in time it would number as many as 3000. Its proceedings were to have no validity unless a quorum of at least 1000 was present.<sup>1</sup> The executive, except that it was reinforced by the Eighty, remained unchanged.

Such, in outline, was the famous Republican Constitution of 1494 which is so much identified with the name of Savonarola. The current rumour, which Guicciardini reports, may have been true that the Friar was incited to advocate popular government by Paolantonio Soderini as a consequence of his disgust at being excluded from the

<sup>1</sup>The age limit for election to the Grand Council was 29. Only those were eligible for election who had paid their taxes, and who were *beneficiati*—i.e. had filled some official position as magistrate in the Signoria or the Ten or the Sixteen, or whose father, grandfather or great-grandfather had held such a position. But twenty-eight additional members, not so qualified, might be elected annually if they could secure a clear majority of two-thirds of the votes cast. That youth might not be unrepresented a special provision enacted that a few citizens who had reached the age of 24 were to be admitted from time to time.

provisional government of the Twenty. Soderini was certainly an influential member of the Ten, and it was the Constitutional scheme drawn up by the Ten which carried the day over all rivals. He, as Florentine ambassador at Venice, had had opportunities of carefully observing the workings of the Venetian system: in short it may be freely admitted that the Florentine Constitution of '94 bears the stamp of Soderini upon it. But this is not to say that Savonarola's advocacy of it was—to use a modern phrase—"a put-up job". Soderini's views were undoubtedly in complete harmony with the Friar's own political convictions; the latter possessed the influence, which Soderini did not, to get those views carried into effect and embodied in concrete forms.

Savonarola's Constitution then, for so we may designate it, rested upon a basis of limited democracy. It was not democratic in the sense that "the people" obtained a greater share than before in the conduct of affairs. The Guilds continued to be, as before, the ultimate source of authority, and membership of the Grand Council was almost exclusively confined to the official classes. Savonarola had no belief in the doctrine that the voice of "the people" is the voice of God. On the contrary he was well aware of the ease with which a designing politician could use the mob as the instrument of his designs. Therefore he made it his special concern to take away from the mob that power, of immemorial antiquity, which even the "tyranny" of the Medici had conserved, which they possessed through the *Parlamento*. The *Parlamento*, a mediaeval form of Referendum, was a general assembly of all male citizens within the State which met upon the summons of the great bell of Florence to give the force of full popular sanction or nega-

tion to proposals which a period of crisis had brought forth. In Parlamento, over and over again, the people at the very moment when they were claiming to be the sole source of authority, had surrendered all authority, amid shouts of popular acclamation, into the hands of a despot or dictatorial clique. And this might happen again. The fabric of the new Constitution so laboriously raised might in a moment be shattered nominally by the authority of the popular voice, but in fact by some contriving antagonist possessed of the arts by which a mob is won. From the very day of the expulsion of the Medici Florence was given over to factions. There were the Medici partisans, the *Bigi*, who looked and strove for the restoration of the Medici régime. There were the *Bianchi*, the party of oligarchical aristocrats who opposed the Medici only that they might reconstruct the Medici system in their own interests. There were the *Piagnoni*, as the followers of Savonarola were called, more or less fanatically attached to any system which he might support, while the *Arrabbiati* were his fanatical opponents. Within these main factions others tended to generate with strange involutions and reticulations which become more complicated with the lapse of time so that they almost defy analysis. The situation certainly afforded opportunities for the manipulation of a Parlamento in the interests of a party, and Savonarola was determined that, should the opportunity arise, there should be no Parlamento to manipulate. Accordingly, with his usual intensity of conviction and vigour of language, he set himself to the task of totally abolishing the Parlamento. It was, he declared, only a specious name for taking government out of the hands of the people. On the new Council Hall a tablet should be fixed with this inscription:—

Sappi che non vuol dir altro Parlamento  
 Che voler torre di mano al popolo il reggimento  
 —Sermon, 28 July, 1495.

(*Know that to talk of Parlamento means nothing else than a desire to take government out of the hands of the people.*)

At the sound of the summoning bell, therefore, the people must rise and draw their swords against the Parlamento. If it be one of the Signory who has caused it to be rung an informer against him should receive 3000 ducats, a less sum in proportion to the official rank of the culprit. If of the Signory the culprit should be executed, if of lower rank he should be declared a rebel, and all his property confiscated. All Gonfaloniers must swear that on the sound of the bell they will sack the houses of the Signory, a quarter of the plunder going to the Gonfalonier, the rest to his Company. Should the Signoria as a body succeed in calling a Parlamento they *ipso facto*<sup>1</sup> cease to be Signori the moment they set foot upon the *ringhiera*, and any one may cut them to pieces without penalty.

The substance of these recommendations of July was, with modifications, embodied in a statute in the early days of August, and with the abolition of the Parlamento the last pretence that the government of Florence rested ultimately upon a genuinely popular basis was destroyed. "Thus the middle classes deprived the lower of even the semblance of a share in government. The Parlamento which abolished the Medici *régime* had shouted away its own existence. Hitherto every insignificant *Balia* had required the assent of this popular assembly; but the sweeping change which established the new republic had

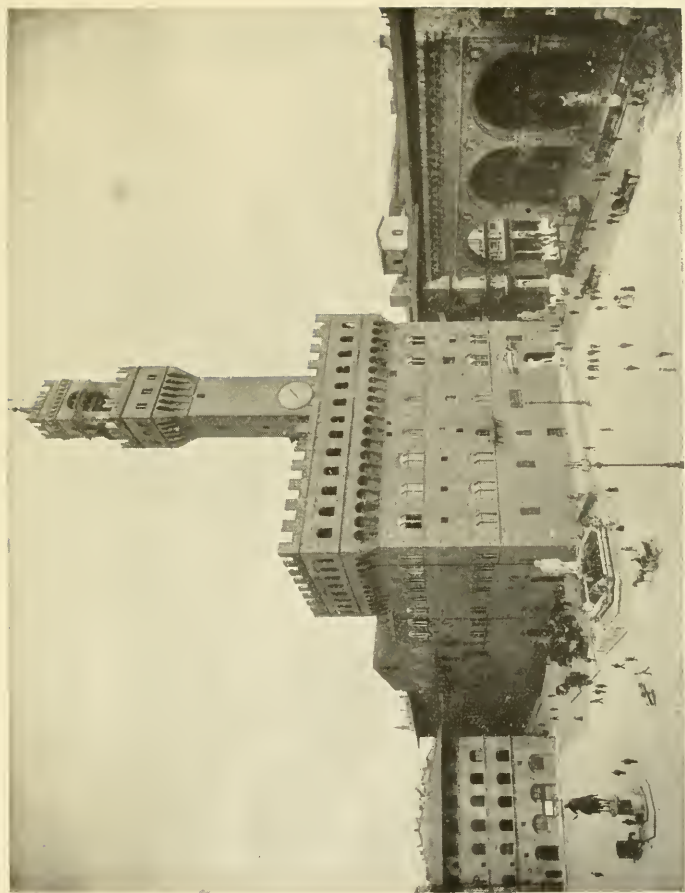
<sup>1</sup> The people assembled, for a Parlamento, in the Piazza del Signoria adjoining the Palazzo Publico. (Savonarola was executed on the Piazza.) The *ringhiera* was the raised platform reserved for officials abutting on the Palazzo, which commanded the Piazza.

never received its sanction. The time might come when even this faint echo of the people's voice might be regretted." <sup>1</sup>

Still, Savonarola is scarcely to be accused as an enemy to the liberties of the common people because his sense of the realities of things led him to abolish a transparent sham. He felt within himself that in opposing the appearance of popular rights he was in fact disarming despotism of one of its most insidious weapons. But between hostility to the people and distrust of their capacity to govern there are infinite degrees. Distrust of the people, however, is a phrase which is scarcely applicable in the case of Savonarola and his contemporaries. It implies a due consideration of popular claims to a share in government and the deliberate rejection of those claims. To the governing class, at the end of the fifteenth century, any such claims would have appeared too extravagant and fantastic to deserve a moment's attention. To them political rights meant the rights of those who were qualified by experience, property, or education to exercise them, and democracy therefore meant to them not government by the people in the mass, but government by the fit, in the interests of all, to the exclusion of the despotism either of a tyrant, or a clique, or a mob.

In this sense Savonarola was a democrat. He sought to secure the interests of all, and gave continuous proofs of his care and concern for the masses, but in his view the general interest depended on government vested in the hands of the middle classes. It was on the middle class that his strength rested and he was strong in proportion to their support. Though he may seem to have some roots in the aristocracy, yet, as a body, the aristocracy was ready to use him as long as he served its political purposes

<sup>1</sup> E. Armstrong, "Cambridge Modern History," vol. I, p. 162.



PIAZZA DELLA SIGNORIA, PALAZZO VECCHIO, AND LOGGIA DEI LANZI, FLORENCE, PRESENT TIME





rather than to place effective confidence in his leadership. As the prophet and wonder-worker he appealed to the superstition of the mob and gained an ascendancy over its imagination. But such ascendancy rested on the perilous foundation of successful prediction and would last only as long as his prophecies proved true. A suspicion that they had been tricked would be sufficient at any moment to let loose the mob upon Savonarola and all his works.

At the moment, however, the star of Savonarola was in the ascendant. The sword which he had foretold had fallen upon the land. Florence, though severely smitten for her sins, was still Florence with a golden future before her. For the reign of tyrants was ended. The old republican glories of the city were revived. A new Constitution, of almost Divine origin, gave an established guarantee for the permanence of her newly won liberties. And if some territory had been lost in the confusion of the French invasion, if the allegiance of some subject States was wavering, and if Pisa was in open revolt, these were God's judgments upon the sins of Florence in the past, and there was the prophet's confident assurance and the people's confident conviction that these troubles would soon be ended, and that Florence would emerge from them more powerful and more splendid than before.

Though the general principles of the new Constitution were determined and embodied in law before the end of 1494, there still remained many points of detail to be decided, and to the satisfactory settlement of such details Savonarola vigorously applied himself in 1495. There were, for example, the questions of taxation, of amnesty, and of the right to appeal.

It has been seen that in his thirteenth sermon on Haggai Savonarola had already touched upon his views as to taxation, and had suggested a tax on land as being

the most suitable source of revenue. The proposal involved the abolition of a large part of the Medici system of taxation, such as the poll tax, and the tax on movables and earnings. An exclusive land tax naturally commended itself to the commercial class in Florence which found itself thereby exempted from taxation upon the profits of trade. But such a tax was inequitable inasmuch as it tended to throw the whole burden of taxation upon a class, and inexpedient inasmuch as the true sources of Florentine wealth contributed little or nothing to the revenue. Thus there was the danger of continual deficits, and of hand-to-mouth expedients invented to relieve them, and of an abiding sense of grievance and injustice among the landed, and least protected, interest in the community. There was also the difficulty of arriving at any satisfactory valuation of the land. These objections, however, gave way before the advocacy of Savonarola and his supporters. By the law of the "*Decima*," proposed and carried in February, 1495, all citizens were to pay ten per cent on income derived from real property, and a special office was created for the just valuation of such property.

Scarcely less important than the question of taxation was that of amnesty for past political offences, and of securing a fair trial for those accused of such offences in the future. It had long been customary in Florence to follow up a political crisis by wholesale penalties of death, banishment, and confiscation against the defeated party, and the partisans of the fallen Medici were now in hourly expectation of such a fate. Savonarola was insistent on the necessity of forgiving and forgetting. The old era had passed away: all things were being made new. Let the new epoch be inaugurated with a measure of leniency and reconciliation. In the first of a series of sermons upon the

Psalms, begun in January, 1495,<sup>1</sup> he advocates the cause of universal peace, and repeats to his congregation the arguments which, he says, he had already urged in the Palazzo on "S. Silvester's Day". He gives eight reasons based on natural law for amnesty, of which the sixth has a melancholy bearing upon his own case: "Unless universal peace be brought about you will provoke God against yourselves, for those will be accused who are innocent, and *under torture you will make them confess things which they have not done*: you will punish them for no fault that they have done, and so you will provoke the wrath of God against you, for there is nothing which provokes the wrath of God more than this". The one aim of Florence should be to put aside rancours and party spirit, for it is the existing rancours which prevent the capture of Pisa. "I tell you of a truth that Pisa is not yours, not because of the malignity or power of the Pisans, but because of your *rancore e ingratitude*."

In the same sermon he touched upon the question of an appeal in criminal cases from the decision of the Signoria to some ultimate tribunal, and for the next three months the law "of the Six Beans" became the burning political question of the day.

The constitutional importance of this measure however would not entitle it to any extended consideration here were it not that Savonarola's reputation, and even to some extent his fate, came to be involved in this matter of the appeal. A brief statement in anticipation of the narrative which is to follow may therefore be timely. It has been charged against him that, having strongly advocated the right of appeal, Savonarola, to suit his own purposes, denied this right to certain accused

<sup>1</sup> Villari and Casanova say on the 6th. The 6th was a Tuesday. The sermon was almost certainly delivered on Sunday, 4 January.

persons, Bernardo del Nero and others, who had been convicted before the Signory of treason to the republic, and that, to quote Macchiavelli,<sup>1</sup> "this disclosure of the Friar's ambitious and partisan temper deprived him of his reputation and gave him much trouble". The necessity for the law therefore, its provisions, and Savonarola's attitude in regard to it, become matters of much importance.

Hitherto the decision of the Signoria in political and criminal cases tried before it had been final. The Signoria consisted of nine individuals, and a two-thirds majority was necessary for condemnation. Hence six votes, or six beans placed in the voting-box, secured a verdict. There was at this time a strong body of opinion that a right to appeal ought to lie from the Signoria to some other court, but the difficulty was felt of specifying or creating such a court, and some apprehensions were also entertained that any appeal from the decisions of the chief magistrates would tend to impair the authority and prestige of the executive. The question was further complicated by the ever-shifting hopes and fears of the various factions as to the effects of a right to appeal upon their party interests. Each Signoria held office only for two months, and such constant changes in the executive produced almost equally constant changes in its political complexion. Thus when a faction had successfully manœuvred to secure a Signoria favourable to it, that faction would naturally resent any appeal from the authority of its nominees: but equally it would advocate an appeal from the nominees of a rival faction which in its turn had got the upper hand. Apply this general principle to the particular faction of the *Bigi* or Mediceans. As long as they remained out in the cold

<sup>1</sup> "Discorsi," I, c. 45.

and subject to the persecutions of power they would favour an appeal from the verdict of their opponents. As soon as there was the smallest prospect of installing a Medicean Signoria in office, they would begin to be doubtful as to the advisability of an appeal.

In the state of faction by which Florence was at this time torn it is not difficult to conceive the agitations and excitement which this question aroused. Scarcely any one felt quite sure of himself in regard to it and Savonarola dominated the situation. As for him, he entertained no doubts whatever. "We must," he says in this sermon of January, "modify a little the authority of the Six Beans. For they are all powerful to banish, to 'admonish,' and even to call a Parlamento. Those, therefore, who may be condemned by the Six Beans should have a right of appeal to a Council of Eighty or a Hundred composed of members of the Grand Council."<sup>1</sup> Thus the excitement generated by the question centred round the person of the Friar. To the supporters of the measure he was an indispensable ally, a tower of strength; to its opponents he was the one man they had to fear. If his influence were removed they would almost certainly carry the day. At this juncture popular agitation reached a climax when it was understood that Savonarola was going to Lucca to preach the Lent sermons there.

<sup>1</sup> The right to "admonish" (*ammonire*) was a political weapon in the hands of the executive which could be used, like exile and taxation, for the destruction of opponents. Savonarola's exact meaning in this passage is unfortunately not quite clear. Did he mean his appeal court to be the *Consiglio dell' Ottanta*—the Council of Eighty set up by the new Constitution—and that that body should add to its duties the functions of a court of appeal? Or did he mean that in each case as it arose the Grand Council should appoint eighty or a hundred of its members *ad hoc* to act as a final court of appeal? The loose phrase "eighty or a hundred" might cover either supposition, for the *Consiglio dell' Ottanta* did not consist of Eighty members precisely, but of about eighty.

From the circumstances of the situation there is a natural disposition to suppose that this proposal was a manœuvre, insidiously contrived by his political opponents in order to get him out of the way. Professor Villari is of this opinion, for he tells us that as a consequence of a Sermon<sup>1</sup> preached on 13 January upon the reformation of the Church, Savonarola's enemies so worked matters at Rome that he was ordered to spend the season of Lent at Lucca. A series of letters, however, unearthed by Guasti and published by him in the "Giornale Storico degli Archivi Toscani" goes to show that the initiative in this proposal originated from Lucca, that the invitation reached Savonarola several weeks before any of his January sermons were preached, that on 28 December and again on 8 January urgent letters were dispatched to Rome by the Florentine authorities imploring the Pope to permit Savonarola to preach the Lent course in Florence, and to forbid him to set foot outside.<sup>2</sup>

It seemed, however, that these exhortations would prove fruitless, for on 25 January, Savonarola took leave of his people in his Seventh Sermon on the Psalms, and foreshadowed a long absence: for it was his intention to go not to Lucca only but far further afield in order to conduct a mission to the "infidels," a course towards which he felt the strongest call. In this sermon he defends himself against the charge of raising up dissensions in Florence. It is true, he says, that sometimes he has had to be a

<sup>1</sup> This was the sermon, preached probably on Sunday, 11 January, to which frequent allusions have been already made. In it he interprets his vision of the *Gladius Domini*, the circumstances in which he was impelled to give utterance to that vision, etc.

<sup>2</sup> "Iterum atque iterum rogamus ut Sanctitatis vestrae jussu pedem hinc efferre vetetur. Hoc nobis populoque nostro universo ita gratum erit ut nihil gratius acceptiusque et salutaris . . . hoc tempore accidere possit" (Signory to the Pope, 24 December, 1494).

little angry. But now he wishes to become simple Friar once more. "I renounce affairs of State and do not want to be mixed up any more with the Six Beans. I will go to my cell, and do not send for me any more; so that if the King of France or the Emperor should come, I shall not come." But every politician has felt at times this satiety of the things of the world. Savonarola was neither the first nor the last to express the conviction that it is better to be a poor fisherman than to meddle with the government of men. But the sense of this conviction has seldom been sufficiently durable to drive a statesman into retirement. With Savonarola the mood soon passed when the prospect of his withdrawal from Florence was removed. The Lucca question was ultimately settled by the substitution of Fra Domenico da Pescia for Savonarola as Lent preacher there, the latter remaining to preach the Lent in Florence. Courteous letters passed between him and the Anziani, the ruling family at Lucca. The hope was expressed that he would come next year, and Savonarola acknowledged that the call to Lucca impressed him as a Divine summons which it would be impious to disobey. For the moment, however, his lot was cast in Florence. All his political enthusiasms revived, and all his influence was powerfully applied to securing the passage of the Law of the Six Beans.

As a counterblast to the advocacy of Savonarola the opponents of the measure secured the services of a Franciscan, Fra Domenico da Ponzio, to preach against appeal: the rival pulpits of the Duomo and Sta. Croce rang with argument and counter-argument. In this war of sermons we see the first beginnings of that rivalry between the Franciscans and the Dominican supporters of Savonarola which was at last to play so large a part in the final tragedy. Passion ran so high that, if we may

believe Cinozzi, a proposal was actually carried in the Signoria to banish Savonarola from the City, but they did not dare to execute it "because they feared the people". The intervention of Da Ponzio added a further complication in that it intensified the uncertainty which prevailed as to the actual source of Savonarola's authority. It was not he, but God who spoke through him. But Da Ponzio, as an accredited minister of the Church, could also claim to speak with an authority more than human. Through which of the two was God really speaking? Was He in fact speaking through either? It was determined to call a Council, really a Pratica, to which were summoned two representatives from each of the religious bodies, and about a dozen prominent citizens. The question for decision was whether Savonarola "had these things from God or not". It was a Dominican conventual who opened the proceedings by expressing his sorrow for the dissension and the sedition which Savonarola's preaching had aroused in the city. Savonarola, who was present in person, warmly replied, deploring that he should be exposed to censure from his own people, and eventually he reduced the opposition to silence. All the same, says Cinozzi, "*scissio facta est inter nos*" (a schism arose among us). But the demand for proof had been made, and the demand for "a sign"—some objective evidence of the Friar's inspiration—must almost inevitably follow.

At last the advocacy of Savonarola prevailed, and an appeal from the Six Beans was determined upon. In March, 1495, a law was drawn up and passed granting a general amnesty and the right of appeal from the verdict of the Signoria, not to the Council of Eighty, nor to any *ad hoc* committee of eighty or a hundred selected from the Grand Council, but to the Grand Council itself.



Professor Villari insists with much warmth that this was not Savonarola's proposal, but something quite different from it, and he sees in this departure from the Friar's plan some diabolical scheme on the part of the enemies of the new Constitution to destroy it. He admits, however, that in the eyes of contemporaries like Macchiavelli and Guicciardini, Savonarola was the real author of the law of the Six Beans, and he fails to show that Savonarola himself expressed any dissatisfaction with the actual court of appeal which was decided upon, even though it was not such a court as he had suggested. Indeed in a sermon on Job, 1 April, 1495, he expressly took credit to himself for having secured the right of appeal from the Six Beans. The truth seems to be that what Savonarola really wanted was a final court of appeal. As to the constitution of that court he was indifferent, provided it represented the sovereign authority of the State. His recommendation of a body of eighty persons was a detail which he was willing to waive, and on which, after the first suggestion, he did not insist. For it never seems to have secured any measure of popular support, nor to have been submitted to serious consideration. The question at issue throughout was never any other than an appeal to the whole body of the Grand Council or no appeal at all.

Savonarola in his zeal for a Constitution did not neglect to advise practical measures for the relief of the poor. He advocated the establishment of a Monte di Pietà, or Government pawn-shop, where articles might be pledged at moderate interest and with adequate security. This measure was designed to meet the abuses which attended the prevalent system of borrowing from the Jews, whose rate of interest on money advanced— $33\frac{1}{2}$  per cent compound interest—was certainly extortionate. The law of

1496, which established a Monte controlled by the Government, enacted that not more than  $7\frac{1}{2}$  per cent was to be exacted on pledges, and that all existing contracts with Jew money-lenders were null and void. This provision seems to be far in excess of Savonarola's views on Jewish usury. In reply to the Anziani of Lucca who had asked his advice as to the expulsion of the Jews, he expresses an opinion that in the case of those who have been parties to usurious transactions on no account can the privilege be granted to them by Government of repudiating the stipulated interest, "for this is to act expressly contrary to justice, the cardinal principle of justice being to render to every man his due". The preamble of the statute, however, reflected the whole spirit of Savonarola. It ran: "Blessed be he that cherisheth the poor and needy; in the day of adversity the Lord shall give him freedom".

Savonarola cannot be accused of being, theoretically an enemy of the Jews. The effect of his policy, however, was to lead to the practical expulsion of the Jews from Florence.

The Republican Constitution of 1495 was an attempt to re-establish in Florence the old principles of free government, in such a form as might satisfy aspiration for liberty and at the same time ensure an effective control over the State. But to Savonarola it meant something more than this. He regarded it as the triumph of God's kingdom upon earth, and inasmuch as the Florentines had received their Constitution from Savonarola they had received it from God, whose instrument he was. Florence to Savonarola was not a republic but a theocracy. The rightful King of Florence was Jesus Christ, and many an inscription testified to the enthusiasm of the people for this conception of their polity. But it is

obvious that there lay beneath this conception a grave danger for Florence and for Savonarola. If Christ was King of Florence Savonarola was His prophet, the accredited agent through which the will of Heaven was to be transmitted to the people. Infidelity to the Constitution which he had recommended and sanctioned became in his view infidelity to God. Political opponents assumed in his eyes the proportions of impious men in league with the powers of darkness against the Kingdom of Heaven. A moderate and sober view of party conflicts and political antagonisms was impossible for one who could see nothing but perverse wickedness in those who disagreed with him. The very fact that Savonarola honestly regarded himself as divinely inspired to guide the destinies of the State rendered him unfit to assume the responsibilities of government, tended to weaken his efforts for spiritual and moral reform, to identify him with a party and unduly to exalt him in his own esteem. To the Florentines it was a source of danger that their new Constitution should be associated so closely with an individual whose overthrow, should it occur, would deal a crushing blow to the constitutional system with which that individual was so closely identified. A Constitution must necessarily be ephemeral if it rests too entirely upon an ephemeral personality. Nevertheless, it is marvellous that a man who from his youth had been an inmate of a cloister should have shown so much sound political wisdom, should have grasped so clearly the needs of a State in which he was an alien, and should have been able to devise measures so suited to those needs. The Republican Constitution of Savonarola has earned warm commendation from such a political thinker as Macchiavelli, who stands before the world as the embodiment of almost everything against which

Savonarola protested. It was perhaps a mistake that Savonarola should have plunged at all into the stormy sea of Florentine politics, but if the plunge had to be taken he could scarcely have acquitted himself better in those troubled waters.

## CHAPTER VII

### SAVONAROLA AND CHARLES VIII-1495

THE stormy seas of Florentine politics on which Savonarola had launched his frail barque were swept not only by the winds of domestic controversy. They were also stirred to their depths by the convulsions caused by the movements of Charles VIII and his French army. The fierce party conflicts which raged over the proposals for a new Constitution, for amnesty and for an appeal law concealed beneath their surface passionate and profound differences on the subject of foreign policy. Under Savonarola's influence and guidance Florence had contracted an alliance with France, and if he was to be believed, Charles VIII was as manifestly the chosen instrument of God to effect his purposes in Italy and in Florence as Savonarola was God's prophet and mouth-piece divinely called and raised up to accomplish the reformation of the State. Thus the adherents of the Friar constituted the Pro-French party, and the new constitutional arrangements assumed the appearance of a pro-French policy. The establishment of the Grand Council and of an appeal court were therefore in a sense a ratification of the Union of the Lilies—the lilies of Florence and the lilies of France.

But Florence was no exception to the rule that the foreign policy of States is dictated not by sentiment but by considerations of material and secular advantage.

Florence, in the midst of the deluge, wanted to be the one tract of Italian soil which would not be submerged. She wanted also the restoration of Pisa. These advantages, it was believed, could best be secured by an alliance with France, and the pro-French feeling was likely to last precisely as long as a French alliance seemed likely to secure them. And here the assurances of Savonarola were precise. Florence would be spared; Pisa would be restored. It is true that these promises were conditional upon Florence doing all those things which Savonarola told her to do, but if his predictions were not realized there would arise an irresistible tendency to attribute their failure not to the moral delinquencies of the Florentines but to the imposture of the prophet. To force upon Charles, therefore, the course of action which the Friar had predicted that he would adopt, became a primary necessity for the maintenance of Savonarola's position.

But Charles, in the prosecution of his enterprise, was doing, or neglecting to do, many things in a manner altogether contrary to the expectations which Savonarola's assurances had aroused. He had shown no special care for Florentine interests; he had done nothing to secure the restoration of Pisa; there were grave fears that on his return from Naples he would again quarter his army upon Florence with all the possibilities of sack and destruction which a foreign occupation of the City involved. The efforts of Savonarola therefore in the spring and early summer of 1495 were directed to the twofold object of reassuring the Florentines, and of impressing upon Charles a full sense of his duty. The first of these aims he sought to accomplish by his Lenten course of Sermons on the Book of Job: the second by a series of letters to Charles which were followed up in June by a personal interview.

The course on Job is largely devoted to a reassertion, in an extreme form, of the preacher's Divine mission. The twenty-ninth sermon, preached on the Octave of the Annunciation (1 April) contains that account of his interview with the Virgin which he incorporated into the *Compendium Revelationum*. But already, in the fifteenth sermon, of 17 March, he had given a circumstantial narrative of an embassy which he undertook, on behalf of the Florentines to the very throne of God Himself. He explained that as he was preparing to set forth, clothed in white garments, one appeared unto him who said that he must be otherwise clothed if he was to go forth on behalf of Florence on such a mission. White robes were a fitting vesture for the good, but as he was going on behalf not of the good only but of the whole city, he must wear in addition to his *white* robes, *black* ones for the sinners, and *grey* for the lukewarm. Surely the allegory here must have overcome the supernaturalism of even the extremest literalist among the congregation, for every one must have recognized with an understanding smile this caustic allusion to the factions in the city, the *Bianchi*, the *Neri*, the *Bigi*, the Whites, the Blacks, the Greys. But this allegorical exordium soon shades off into a record of actual experience as he recounts a long conversation between himself and the Keeper of Heaven's gate, his introduction into the presence of God, and full details of the interview which then took place. After explaining the nature of his mission, he offers thanks for the favours which God had already conferred upon the city, the liberties which had been granted to her, the privileges which she enjoyed in being the recipient of a revelation of future events. True there were some who were unthankful for these mercies, who would not believe, and thus the City was disunited. He implores pardon for

these unbelievers, for these *cattivi e ostinati e tepidi* who will not observe the injunctions he has laid upon them. He secures a promise of God's mercy for such men if only they will repent, and lead a good Christian life with prayer and fasting. "And this is my message to you, O people, on the part of the Lord." But the sin of these *cattivi* is so great that some special means must be sought to placate the anger of God against them. Thus he be-thinks him of the Blessed Virgin, to whom, as having been the habitation of the Son of God, God can refuse nothing. He beseeches her to intercede with God for these wicked men, and she agrees to do so. A farther conversation follows between Savonarola and the door-keeper upon the problem of the efficacy of prayer. How can prayer be efficacious if God changes not, if the order of the universe is fixed and finally established? With a last invocation to God that if tribulation must come it may come quickly the sermon ends.

To us who read this sermon to-day, and the more famous "sermon of the lilies," preached a fortnight later, the strain of poetic allegory which pervades them throughout is sufficiently obvious. In some parts of them, as has been seen, the allegory must have been equally obvious both to the preacher and his hearers. But there were other parts undoubtedly of which this cannot be said: parts where the exalted imagination of the preacher carried him into those realms of ecstasy where fact and fancy become indistinguishable. It would be rash to say that Savonarola did not himself fervently believe that he had been personally the recipient of the confidences both of God and of the Virgin. However it may have been with him, we have ample evidence that many of his hearers fervently and literally believed this. "The first of April, 1495," says Landucci, "Fra Girolamo preached



and testified that the Virgin Mary had revealed to him that the City of Florence was to become more glorious, richer, and more powerful than ever before, though this would be after many sorrows. And this he promised absolutely. And he said all these things as a prophet; and the greater part of the people believed him." Landucci was a simple soul, although he was a chemist, and the value of his "Diary," written from day to day as events occurred and under the fresh influence of the impressions which they aroused, lies in its perfect honesty and good faith. The "greater part of the people" believed that Savonarola spoke not as an allegorist but as a prophet: and unquestionably there were times when Savonarola himself shared this conviction with the people.

But visionary as he was, he was also essentially a practical man who knew that practical measures must be added as a reinforcement to visions and exhortations. In the midst of the agitations caused by the movements of Charles VIII in Italy Savonarola wrote several letters to the King, the fourth of which is dated 26 May. Fuller reference must be made later to the course of Charles' enterprise, but at the end of May the situation was briefly this: The almost miraculous success which had attended the French expedition aroused the alarm of the Italian States and some of the foreign Powers. In the face of a federation formed against him which threatened to cut his communications Charles thought it prudent to withdraw from Naples on 20 May. A ten days' march brought him to Rome, where he arrived on 1 June. It was therefore at the moment when Charles was on the march to Rome that Savonarola's letter of 26 May was written.

He writes in order to admonish Charles as to what is necessary for his salvation. Charles is of a truth that

one among the Christian Princes whom God has chosen for carrying out this mystery of the renovation of the Church. But it was God Himself who had revealed to the writer that Charles would come, and what would be the issue of his coming. Therefore he was commissioned on the part of God now to declare to Charles what was God's will, lest God withdraw His hand. Charles must not oppress the people: especially must he refrain from oppressing the Florentines. Florence, mainly as a consequence of the exertions of the writer, is thoroughly loyal to the French alliance save for a few who pursue an opposite policy. She will remain so "with the help of our preaching and exhortations," for it is the will of God that there should be this alliance between Florence and France: it is the will of God that under French protection the newly won liberties of the State should flourish, for the new Constitution has been set up, not by man but by God, and therefore He wills that it should prosper. Just as God has raised up Charles to be the instrument of Divine purposes, even so has "God chosen out this City, has filled her with His servants, and has resolved to magnify her, and raise her up, and whoso toucheth her toucheth the apple of His eye. . . . All this that I have written to you is as true as the Gospel."

In a letter of a later date Savonarola refers directly to the question of Pisa, and bids Charles, in the name of God, to give back to Florence that which belongs to her.

In the meantime Charles was advancing steadily northward and on 13 June was at Siena, but thirty miles away. Piero de' Medici was in his train. Florence was once more in a state of panic, for there seemed to be nothing which Charles was not strong enough to do, and no man knew what he would do. Already he had se-

cured two instalments of his Florentine subsidy and was clamouring for a third. Perhaps he was on the march to secure it by force of arms. Was this the security in the midst of the troubles of Italy which the Friar had promised? Where was the renovation of the Church, the restoration of Pisa, the extended glory and territory of the new Republic? The city threw itself into a state of defence; barricades were erected in the streets. If Charles had indeed come to Florence there can be little doubt that his coming would have been anticipated by a popular rising against Savonarola as an alien trickster who had lured Florence to her ruin. The crisis was big with Savonarola's fate and he took instant and bold steps to meet it. Acting under the impulse not of human but Divine authority<sup>1</sup> Savonarola sought out Charles in his camp at Poggibonsi (17 June). The Friar is himself the best witness as to what passed at the interview. Immediately upon his return he communicated to the Congregation in the Duomo a narrative of his mission.<sup>2</sup>

*"Eccomi ancora qua"*—Here I am again!—was his exordium, and in a very human manner he proceeded to talk of everything but the one thing he was there to say, holding back his news and keeping his hearers on tenter-hooks of expectation. At last he came to the point: "I told him, and I say it here again, that all the world may know it, that if he did not do what I have said to him, when that shall come which I

<sup>1</sup> Villari and Casanova say that Florence "had recourse once more to Savonarola" at this crisis. Lucas has it that "the Florentine Government had recourse," etc., the implication is that he went officially as an accredited ambassador. My statement is based on Savonarola's own words in his sermon of 24 June: "I have not been your ambassador. I have had no commission from the Signoria nor from the Ten, although I was besought to go by some friends."

<sup>2</sup> Twenty-second Sermon on Psalms, Wednesday, 24 June.

have announced to him men will remember this Friar" (*si ricordi di questo fratre*). He had, he says, repeated to Charles the substance of his letter of 26 May. The story of the interview being ended, Savonarola then turned to his hearers and reproached them as being the true cause of all these troubles. "Your murmurings have delayed the accomplishment of what I have foretold. . . . These *Arrabbiati*—I know not how otherwise to call them—I use your own expression—have murmured so much and have told so many lies that they have made God to be angry. It is they who delay your welfare, O Florence." The conclusion is that God has opened the hand of "this first barber" that he may shave with a razor the head and the hair and the beard: (Isaiah vii. 20), that is, God has given to the King of France whatever he has desired in Italy, "but if he does not do what I tell him, I say to thee, and all the world shall hear it, that God will withdraw His hand."

It is improbable, however, that Savonarola would have effected much towards establishing his position if he had not had some material results to show from his efforts. Confident assurances, constant repetitions, his letters and even his self-imposed embassy to Charles would have counted for little by themselves. The great facts of the situation were that Charles had pursued his march from Siena to Pisa by way of Castel Fiorentino and had passed Florence by: and that the whole question of restoring Pisa and the other Florentine towns had been debated at Poggibonsi where Savonarola pressed hard upon the King for their restitution. Thus Florence was preserved from the imminent danger of a French occupation, and for the moment at any rate there were good hopes of the restoration of her territories at the hands of Charles. These hopes, it is true, were destined to disappointment,

but for about six months—until the end of 1495 in fact—Florence laboured under the pleasing expectation that her towns were about to be restored and the credit of Savonarola was accordingly enhanced. For a brief period he was able to apply himself to matters more directly within his own sphere than Florentine politics. He was engaged throughout the summer in the organization and extension of his new Dominican Congregation: he was actively setting on foot his reform movement in Florence. It was at the moment when the stormy seas seemed to have sunk into comparative calm that there were heard the first mutterings of that Papal thunder which heralded the tempests which were to destroy him.

## CHAPTER VIII

### PROPHET AND POPE

WE may, I think, regard the summer of 1495 as the period when the star of Savonarola reached its zenith. The new Constitution was established. It is scarcely exaggeration to say that Savonarola's word was law, for recommendations made in sermons not unfrequently found expression within a week or two in the Statute book. The fear of a French occupation had subsided, and the large subsidies which Florence had paid to Charles VIII seemed likely to produce an equivalent in the restoration of Pisa and the other sequestered territories. Internal opposition had been borne down if not actually crushed out, and external opposition to the Friar had been so far subterranean and ineffective. Now, in the autumn of 1495, he was called upon to meet external opposition in an open and declared form, and by far the most formidable of his external opponents was the Pope, Alexander VI.

Alexander comes suddenly upon the scene. So far there has been no mention of him, no thought of him. In the matter of the New Congregation indeed the Pope was the ultimate authority who must decide it, but he did decide it in favour of Savonarola's policy. In Savonarola's sermons against ecclesiastical corruptions his denunciations were always abstract; against the clergy, the prelates; against Florence; against the *cattivi* and

*tepidi*; against Rome, but never against the Pope personally. Much more than half of Savonarola's active career in Florence is over before the Pope is even heard of as an actor in the Savonarola tragedy. When at last the Pope intervened politics, not personalities, were the cause of his intervention.

In estimating the relations between Savonarola and the Pope it is of the first importance to rid ourselves as far as possible of sentiment, and to view the two men not in the light of their respective characters but in the light of their political ideas. Because Alexander was a very wicked man placed in the highest seat of ecclesiastical authority, and because Savonarola was a holy son of the Church who raised his protest against the corruptions of Rome, there is a natural tendency to see in Savonarola's fate the triumph of a scandalous Pope over the man who denounced him. The truth is that Alexander's private character and the sanctity of Savonarola's aims had little to do with the questions at issue between them. Alexander's attitude towards the Friar was governed by his political interests, not by his personal feelings. Savonarola fell, not because he was a moral reformer, who rebuked the vices of a Pope, but because he was a politician whose political aims crossed the policy which the Papacy was resolute in pursuing.

The cardinal fact of Italian politics in 1495 was the presence in Italy of the French King with an apparently irresistible army of invasion. It is necessary now to revert to the French expedition and to enter a little more fully into the effects which Charles's enterprise had produced upon Italian statesmen.

The success which had attended the expedition of Charles VIII seemed to contemporary observers little short of miraculous. Every obstacle to his progress

which Italy could devise had melted away almost without a blow, and, in the triumph of the French, men tardily recognized the ruin of Italy. Even Ludovico Sforza, who had called the French into the land, was compelled to admit that he had done great mischief to Italy. But the mischief was done. The practical question was how it could best be repaired. In order to repair it a league of the principal Italian Powers, Milan, Venice and the Papacy, was formed in 1495, and was supported by some of the foreign rivals of France, by the Emperor Maximilian and Ferdinand the Catholic of Spain. Arrangements for the formation of this "Holy League" as it was called, were completed by 31 March, and on 12 April the articles of federation between the contracting parties were signed. Of this League the Pope was the leading spirit, and the essential object at which it aimed was the expulsion of the French from Italy. But there was one Italian State of importance which resolutely opposed the League. This was Florence, which adhered to its old policy of alliance with France, and which had received Charles VIII as the protector of its liberties. This policy, which isolated Florence from the rest of Italy, was closely identified with Girolamo Savonarola, who had fortified Charles in his enterprise, had impressed upon him the sense of a Divine mission, and had associated Charles in the minds of the Florentines, with the overthrow of the tyrannical power of the Medici and the re-establishment of liberty in the State. Thus, in the opinion of the rest of Italy, Florence was taking a course which was unpatriotic, a course which precluded the Florentines from being looked upon as "good Italians".

It is not necessary to enter into a discussion as to the respective merits of the rival policies. There is something to be said for both. Neither policy was prompted by



very exalted motives of abstract patriotism, but by the motives of self-interest. In view of subsequent events the League can scarcely command our respect, for the time was soon to come when the very men who had formed it were found intriguing against the objects which it had been formed to attain. The Florentine alliance with France was maintained, however much Savonarola might have wished it otherwise, for the simple reason that it seemed to promise the greatest advantages to Florence. This much may be frankly admitted, but nevertheless for the moment, and at the time of its formation, the League stood for whatever spirit of nationality and common patriotism existed in Italy at the time; the alliance between France and Florence, in the eyes of their opponents, stood for everything which was opposed to these sentiments.

It was natural that the first object of the League would be to show a solid front to the invader. To this end the adhesion of Florence must at all costs be secured. This was the object which Alexander VI set himself to attain, and, whatever may be our opinion about Alexander's private character, it must be admitted that his object was not inconsistent either with piety or patriotism. When, therefore, Alexander discovered that the chief obstacle in the way of his endeavours was an obscure friar who had gained for himself a position of ascendancy in Florence, it was not excess of wickedness which led him to seek to crush the Friar, but a natural and not unjustifiable desire to clear away a difficulty from his diplomatic path.

The relative positions occupied by the two men gave Alexander an immense advantage. He was Pope, the head of Christendom; Savonarola was an ecclesiastic subordinate to the Pope's authority. The Pope, in any con-

flict with an ecclesiastic, held in his hands irresistible weapons, authority such as no orthodox Churchmen could gainsay, the control of ecclesiastical censures, and the power to excommunicate. Alexander was not the man to feel any scruples about using these weapons in a political contest. The Papacy had long been secularized, and the application of its spiritual powers to its political necessities had become customary before the days of Alexander. The public opinion of to-day regards such a misuse of spiritual authority as a scandal. In the days of the Renaissance Papacy men were too accustomed to it to regard it as anything else than legitimate, justifiable, and a matter of course. Once again we see in Savonarola's position the elements of weakness and of strength combined. As a moral reformer he could have done nothing had he not been a Churchman; as a politician opposed to the Papal policy the fact of his being a Churchman was fatal to his success.

But though in any contest between Pope and Friar the superiority of the former was enormous, yet the advantages were not wholly on the Pope's side. There still remained a certain degree of force in the idea, to which Christendom at the beginning of the century had become accustomed, of an appeal from the Pope to a Council of the Church Universal, while the private character of Alexander VI exposed him in a special degree to the force of such an appeal. It was notorious that he had secured his election by unblushing simony: decrees of councils had frequently declared that a Pope simoniacally elected was no true Pope: moreover the scandals associated with the Pope's manner of life were a standing shame to the Papacy as an institution. It was open therefore to Savonarola to parry the Papal thrusts by a demand for a General Council, and the demand was one which Chris-

tendom would not be unlikely to entertain against such a Pontiff as Alexander VI.

To these general considerations one or two particulars have to be added. The Florentines, or rather the Savonarolists, looked to their alliance with France to secure two special objects—the maintenance of the Republican Constitution, which could only be maintained by the permanent exclusion of the Medici from the State—and the recovery of Pisa, which had revolted from its allegiance. The League, on the other hand, looked upon the Republic as the creation of Savonarola, as the outcome of ephemeral excitement, and as giving no guarantee for any permanent or stable policy on the part of Florence. Hence the restoration of the Medici was included among the objects of the League, and the restoration of Pisa was by it dangled before the Florentines as a bait to induce them to swallow the restoration of the Medici, and to reject the alliance with France. The Savonarolists on their part were resolute that the exiled house should not be restored, and were persuaded that the best hopes for regaining Pisa rested upon the aid of France.

For the moment the followers of Savonarola were in the ascendant and constituted the government. But the government, by the terms of the Constitution, was subject to constant change. The support which it gave to the Friar's policy was in a large measure conditioned by the verification of his predictions. On one point only all parties were unanimous, that Pisa must be recovered, and if its recovery should ultimately seem more probable at the hands of the League than from dependence on Savonarola's assurances the strongest temptation would arise to abandon him and his policy together, and to unite in one concerted effort to secure the grand object of the universal hope.

The attitude of Florence, and of Savonarola, towards the revolt of Pisa from its Florentine allegiance and the revolt of Florence from its allegiance to the House of Medici, though perfectly natural, yet involved an inconsistency which almost amounted to a contradiction. The Florentines were enthusiastic for their own republican liberties which they had recovered from the Medici, but were equally enthusiastic in their determination to crush the Pisans and to destroy the liberty which Pisa had recovered from Florence. It was enough for Florence that the subjection of Pisa was essential to her own commercial prosperity. She showed not the slightest capacity to realize the aspirations of Pisa in the light of her own, or to estimate the situation from any other than a purely self-centred point of view. The fierce fanaticism of the dominant party in Florence against Pisa is exemplified in a sentence of five years' banishment pronounced against a certain Canon of the Cathedral, Giovanni Francesco di Bracciolini, on the ground that he had expressed the opinion that the Pisans were not unreasonable in their desire to regain their liberty. A slight offence, surely, in a man living under a free republic! Savonarola shared to the full the popular sentiments. Never again should Florence endure that the heel of a tyrant should trample upon her ancient freedom; but never should it consent to unloose the chains which held Pisa in unwilling servitude to herself. The man who was the most determined enemy of the despotic rule of the Medici in Florence was the most determined advocate of the despotic rule of Florence over Pisa.

The Holy League was ratified in the spring of 1495, and throughout the summer the Pope as its head was making vigorous efforts to secure the adhesion of Florence. His surprise was only equalled by his annoyance

that, at such a crisis, one of the foremost Italian States should range itself on the side of the invader. This surprise was increased when it was represented to him that Florence was in fact completely dominated by a Dominican monk, who professed to have visions, and who, on the strength of these visions, made himself the champion of the Franco-Florentine alliance. To Alexander the situation, had it not contained serious consequences for his own projects, would have seemed nothing else than absurd. But it was a situation to be reckoned with. This blighting influence exercised by a fantastical friar must be undermined and destroyed, and, this could best be done by bringing to bear upon him the lawful and recognized authority of the head of the Church over a subordinate. Accordingly, on 21 July, 1495, a Papal Brief was addressed to Savonarola, in which he was invited in courteous language to come to Rome in order to render an account of the claims which the Pope understood him to have put forward to prophetic inspiration. Savonarola's reply, dated 30 July, was couched in respectful language. In it he excused himself from obeying at once the Pope's commands on the ground that his health forbade him to travel, that it was against the interest of Florence that he should leave the city at present, and that it was contrary to the will of God that he should do so. As to his prophetic claims he promised to forward, immediately upon its publication, his "*Compendium Revelationum*," in which he had set forth all that was to be said and known upon that matter. He expressed himself as eager to fulfil the Pope's wishes while humbly praying that a brief delay might be granted to him.

It is doubtful, in view of what followed and of some expressions subsequently used by Savonarola himself, whether this reply reached the Pope, for, on 8 September,

Alexander wrote to the Florentine Signory urging upon Florence the necessity of joining the League unless the Florentines wished to incur the odium of being the only men who were desirous of the ruin of Italy. A threat to excommunicate Charles VIII, should he again invade Italy, was coupled with a further threat of a like penalty on all who might assist him. On the same day the Pope issued a Brief against Savonarola, addressed, apparently by a slip of the secretarial pen, to the Friars of Sta. Croce, though destined for the Friars of St. Marco. In this Brief no allusion is made to Savonarola's letter of apology, but it criticizes his pretensions to a Divine commission, regrets that the patient forbearance hitherto exhibited has had no effect in inducing him to acknowledge the danger and folly of his pretensions, and proceeds to inhibit "a certain Fra Girolamo" as Savonarola is contemptuously styled, from preaching. The real sting of the Brief lay, however, in its conclusion, for it ended by reuniting the Convent of St. Marco with the Lombard Congregation, from which, through Savonarola's efforts, it had so recently been separated, a separation which the Pope now qualified as 'scandalous,' and "brought about, as he has since learned, by the deceitful machinations of certain perverse friars".

But to Savonarola it was the Pope's intervention which had been brought about by the deceitful machinations of his political opponents in Florence. Writing on 15 September to a Dominican friend at Rome he says: "I know the root of all these plots. They are the work of evil-minded citizens who would fain re-establish tyranny in Florence . . . nevertheless if there be no other way . . . I am resolved to make submission, so as to avoid even a venial sin." He lost no time in preparing his reply to the Papal Brief. Before the end of the month it was ready (29 September) and dispatched to

Rome. In it the writer expresses his grief that malicious men should have poisoned the Pope's mind against him by false statements. As he has never taught anything except openly and in the face of the world he can bring thousands of witnesses to prove the falsehood of the charges made against him. As regards prophecy he has followed only the sacred Scriptures and the Doctors of the Church, but prophecy is not heresy, nor has prophecy ever been forbidden, nor can it be, for if so, then the very word of God Himself would be ignored, Who, through Amos, has declared that He hath done nothing without revealing His secrets to His servants, the Prophets. However he submits himself and all his teaching to the correction of the Holy Roman Church. He proceeds to deal in detail with the charges made against him in the Brief, denying that he had ever professed to be sent by God, or to have had converse with God, or to have asserted that those who did not believe in him could not be saved. But even while denying he continues to assert what he seems to deny. As he has received his predictions from God the fact that anyone should obstinately refuse to believe him is a sign that such a one is "outside a state of Grace," though incredulity, not attended by obstinacy, is not necessarily such a sign.

This reply throws light on the subtle, metaphysical, and scholastic mind of the writer, while the definite denial, in the face of his sermon of 17 March (p. 153), that he had ever claimed to have converse with God is only to be reconciled with truth on the assumption that his assertions in that sermon were hyperbolical and intended only in an allegorical sense. No one, neither his most convinced opponent nor his most unsympathetic critic, has seriously accused Savonarola of deliberate

falsehood. In this specific denial we have, not proof it is true, but notable evidence that his visions are to be interpreted in the light of his perfervid imagination and a bent towards allegorical exposition, though doubtless there were moments when even to himself allegory became indistinguishable from reality, when poetic fancy assumed to him the form of concrete fact. The misfortune was that his prosaic hearers, agape for the marvellous, would be immeasurably less competent to discriminate between poetry and experience. On them the visions produced all the effects of deception, though the visionary himself perhaps was altogether without intention to deceive.

The receipt of Savonarola's letter at Rome was almost immediately followed by a third Papal Brief dated 16 October. Its content is on the whole creditable to Alexander VI, for there is not a word in it which breathes the spirit of personal resentment. The Pope restates his objections to Savonarola's preaching on the ground that it tended to provoke disturbance, and being based upon the prediction of future events, was likely to mislead simple-minded persons. But, seeing that Savonarola was willing in all things to submit himself to the correction of the Holy Roman Church, the Pope was ready to believe that he had erred, not with evil intent, but from a certain simplicity and misguided zeal. But from henceforth the Pope insists that Savonarola shall desist from preaching of any kind, public or private, "until such time as it may be possible for you to come to our presence, not under the protection of an armed escort, as is your present fashion of going abroad, but with the security, quietness, and modesty, which become a religious man, or until we shall make some other provision". If Savonarola would obey these injunctions then the Pope would



rescind his former Brief "so that you may live in peace according to the dictates of your own conscience".

Such terms, hard as they may have seemed to Savonarola, were yet more lenient, and conveyed in a more conciliatory tone, than he had reason to expect. Though they condemned him to silence in the pulpit, yet they revoked the threatened dissolution of the new Tuscan congregation. They left open to Savonarola a great field for his work of reform both within his convents and in Florence herself. To refuse them, he felt, would be at once rash and impolitic. He therefore determined to desist from preaching, and from the end of October until the following February his place in the pulpit of the Duomo was filled by his devoted follower, Fra Domenico. The voice was the voice of Domenico but the spirit which animated it was that of Savonarola still.

It may be doubted if the Papal Brief of October would have been couched in such conciliatory language if the Pope had been aware of the character of the sermons which Savonarola preached immediately pending its arrival. On the 11th, on the 16th, and again on the 26th of October, he used his freedom, which he could still claim, to avert a crisis which threatened the Government.<sup>1</sup>

Already, before the end of June, the new Constitution was in working order, and the full authority over the State had passed into the hands of the Grand Council. Such celerity in establishing a new system had not been anticipated, for, it will be remembered, the provisional government of Twenty *Accoppiatori* had received its powers for a period of twelve months. The twelve months were not up until November, but largely owing to the influence of the Friar, the Twenty were induced

<sup>1</sup>The Papal Brief of the 16th had not arrived, or had not been made public, in Florence by 26 October.

to lay down their office in June in order to make room, with the least possible delay, for the permanent republican Constitution. Identified as it was with Savonarola and the Franco-Florentine alliance, the new Constitution presented the most formidable obstacle alike to the hopes of the Medici and of the Holy League. It barred the way to a Medici restoration and to the entry of Florence into the Italian federation against the French. Accordingly the policy of the League was directed to the subversion of the new government which was to be replaced by that of Piero dei Medici. Nor had this policy been allowed to stand still pending the negotiations between the Pope and Savonarola. At the moment when Alexander was accusing Savonarola of fomenting disturbances in Florence he was himself actively engaged in an endeavour to overthrow the form of government which Florence had imposed upon herself. By the joint exertions of the Pope, the Venetians, and Ludovico Sforza, a body of troops was raised under the command of Virginio Orsini, Piero's brother-in-law, and with Orsini was Piero himself. Marching from the south, from the neighbourhood of Siena, and supported by the contingent of Bentivoglio of Bologna marching from the north, Florence was to be invested, its government suppressed, and the rule of the Medici reimposed upon her. The design utterly miscarried and ended in fiasco, but it was in the midst of the alarms created by the appearance of an imminent danger that Savonarola preached his October sermons. They must be read in the light of the situation not as it ultimately developed but as it appeared at the moment. Only so is it possible to understand or to excuse the extraordinary violence of the preacher's language. Government by a single person, he cried, is government by the Devil. In the Grand Council lies your safety. If you

are strong and solid for the Council you need have no fear of any man: if you abolish the Council you will be ruined. If you find any one speaking ill of this government mark him down as a public enemy and a rebel against Christ. Execute justice: Off with his head! Be he the chief of any family whatever, off with his head! Whoever would change the government of the Grand Council let him be eternally cursed by the Lord!<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately for Savonarola's determination the passing of the crisis was almost contemporaneous with the publication of the Papal Brief by which he was suspended from preaching. He felt therefore no hesitation in complying with the Pope's commands. Abandoning the work of the pulpit to his lieutenant he awaited with patience the result of the persistent efforts of the Signoria to modify Alexander's resolution, while he applied himself actively to the task of effecting a moral revolution in Florence.

Of the reforms accomplished at this time perhaps the most important was the organization of the "Blessed Bands" of children—a sort of sacred militia enlisted by the Friar to assist his campaign against vice—and the purification of the carnival festivities from the licence attending them which long tradition had sanctioned and approved.

It is a proof of Savonarola's sagacity that he should have seen the importance of influencing strongly the rising generation if his movement of reform was to have

<sup>1</sup> My paraphrase is chiefly based on the sermon of the 16th, but it embodies recommendations given in all three sermons. I have not seen it noticed that the sermon of the 16th was the twenty-ninth on the Psalms while that of 28 July was the twenty-sixth on the Psalms. Can this mean that he only preached twice between 28 July and 16 October? Or was his course on Psalms intermitted to give place to another course of which we have no record? It is more probable that he practically ceased to preach after the receipt of the Brief of 8 September, until forced into action by the crisis of October.

any permanence. And by forming the children of Florence into an army, regulated by a semi-military discipline, with ranks and grades, he appealed directly to the love of excitement and the spirit of imitation which are in children so strongly developed. He gave them a new form of amusement and a high sense of self-importance, and had no difficulty in enrolling under his banner thousands of boys and girls, if we are to believe the chroniclers, all of them devoted to their leader, strictly under his obedience, and full of childlike enthusiasm for the objects which he had in view. We are told that the girls thought no more of their dresses, but urged upon their mothers to give to the poor what would have been expended on their adornment. This, says Cinozzi, was truly wonderful, "for girls, as you know, have no other appetite than that of adorning themselves, and in this they spend all their time". But still more marvellous was it that several thousands of youths of all conditions "who were given up to every kind of vice," under Savonarola's influence became an example to the whole city, so that a "splendour of Divine grace shone upon their faces and a great work was accomplished by their means". It was Savonarola's object to regenerate each individual member of his child-army, and then to use the members collectively to forward his crusade against the prevailing wickedness. Among their duties were the collection of alms for the poor, house-to-house visitations for the collection of "vanities" to serve as fuel for the "bonfire of vanities" which was to be one of the great attractions of the carnival. It was for them to stimulate religious zeal for the services of the Church, to repress the passion for gambling, and to give information to the authorities where they found any infractions of existing laws, to reprove ostentatious or unbecoming modes of dress,

severely to repress the prevalent habit of throwing stones, to be diligent themselves in their attendances at the Duomo. Processions of children, carrying olive branches and chanting hymns to the praise of Christ and the Virgin, were to replace the barbaric pageants of the carnival. "Children of my own," says Landucci, "were among those blessed bands. The children were held in such reverence that every one abstained from scandalous vice." Many of the sumptuary enactments were embodied in legal form and confirmed by the Signoria. Filipepi, who is delightful by reason of his passion for the marvellous and his complete deficiency in the sense of humour, tells us that the law affecting women's dress was recited in Council by an official who was an opponent of Savonarola. He read it with such an intonation and in such a manner as to make it sound ridiculous. It happened, however, by a curious accident that this man shortly afterwards lost his office which was one of the best in the Palazzo. Filipepi evidently has no suspicion that an offence against Savonarola and the loss of a lucrative government office may have been a case of cause and effect. At Rome, indeed, it was openly said that Florence was in truth governed by a Friar and a troop of children, and the Florentine envoy warned the Signory that it was making itself and the city ridiculous by tolerating such a state of things. Indeed, though Savonarola's intentions were excellent, and though much good was undoubtedly done, it may be questioned whether the methods adopted were not bad for the city and bad for the children. The whirl of excitement in which they lived, the inquisitorial powers with which they were invested, the unhealthy self-consciousness which could not fail to be engendered, were liable to give rise to as many evils as were suppressed by the "blessed bands". Nor

was it likely that precocious piety, stimulated by purely external and artificial incitements, would be permanent, nor that the results obtained from the children's efforts would be anything but ephemeral.

Associated with the organization of the children-militia was the purification of the carnival in Florence. Here Savonarola's object was to impress upon the festivities and pageants which were customary at carnival time a distinctly religious stamp, while maintaining as far as possible the essential features of the carnival celebrations, the processions, dances, songs and bonfires. The processions were of children, white-robed and singing; the songs were hymns of praise set to the well-known tunes which Heinrich Izaak had composed for Lorenzo dei Medici's "*Canti Carnascialeschi*"; the dances were such as angels and purified souls are represented as performing on the frescoes and canvasses of Fra Angelico and Botticelli, "so that it seemed as if the angels had come down to earth to rejoice with the children of men. Ah! what a glorious city Florence then was!" (Cinozzi.) The bonfires were a consuming fire for the destruction of "lascivious pictures, immoral books, masks, mirrors, false hair, cosmetics, cards, dice, daggers, all the apparatus of licentious gallantry, of extravagant play, of vindictive passion". It has been said that many precious works of art perished in these bonfires, and that Savonarola's pyramid of vanities was a fabric reared by a vandal. The discussion of this point may, however, be postponed to a subsequent chapter dealing with Savonarola's general attitude towards the Renaissance.

In the meantime the city was pining to hear the voice of its prophet sounding once more in the Duomo. Things were going badly with Florence. The Medicean party was raising its head, the animosity of the League was

greater than ever; the Pope was steadily exercising pressure to induce Florence to abandon the French alliance, the new Constitution was languishing for want of the stimulus and encouragement which the man who had called it into being could best supply. But far exceeding all this was the sting of disappointed hopes, the sense of bitter disillusionment in relation to the fortunes of the war with Pisa. In June, after Savonarola's interview with Charles at Poggibonsi, there were, as we have seen, bright prospects for the acquisition of Pisa, and for the restoration of the sequestered territories of Florence. Before the end of the year the French commander in Pisa, Entragues, had betrayed the obligations and the solemn oaths of his master by selling the fortress of Pisa, which Florence had built, to the Pisans, Pietra Santa to Lucca, and Sarzana to the Genoese. Such were the consequences of trusting to the predictions of an inspired Friar! Indeed, we cannot wonder if men pointed the contrast between the government of the Medici and that of the Piagnoni. Under Lorenzo Pietra Santa and Sarzana had been acquired; under the Piagnoni they had been lost. Under Lorenzo Pisa had become the first Florentine seaport, affording easy access to the open world beyond, under the Piagnoni Pisa had thrown off the rule of Florence, never, as it now seemed, to be regained; while even by land the northern roads were in the hands of open enemies or doubtful friends.

Had these things happened at a time when Savonarola was in possession of the Cathedral pulpit, at a time when he was continually declaiming what men took to be inspired assurances of success and prosperity for Florence, it would probably have gone hard with him. But now misfortune itself redounded to his credit. For it was possible to maintain that it was because his voice had

been silenced that these disasters had fallen upon the State. If only the Pope could be induced to withdraw his prohibition and to allow Savonarola to preach then perchance the clouds would roll away and the sun of fortune shine on Florence once more. Already urgent representations had been made to the Pope to this effect. In November the Signoria had written that "in the midst of all our troubles nothing has helped us more . . . than the presence and labours of Fra Hieronymo of Ferrara, a man whom the Divine Mercy has sent to save us from ruin. . . . Holy Father, we need this man of God and his preaching, whereby he may bring our city, as he has ever done, to a better way of life and to the service of the living God." In the same month a letter was dispatched to Cardinal Caraffa, urging the same request in similar terms, exhorting him to use his influence with the Pope in order to secure permission for Savonarola to preach the Advent sermons in the Duomo. About the same time a special envoy, Ricciardo Becchi, was dispatched to Rome primarily to secure the Pope's consent to a levy of a tenth upon ecclesiastical property. But his instructions were precise and repeated that, in addition to financial favours, he should endeavour to obtain a formal sanction for the resumption of Savonarola's preaching, "and nothing you can do could be more pleasing and acceptable to your fellow-citizens". For the time, however, all these efforts were unavailing. At last in February, 1496, the Signoria, after much debate, formally invited Savonarola to preach during Lent, and the invitation was accepted.

This bare statement of fact carries with it the suggestion that Savonarola's resolve was nothing less than flat rebellion against the supreme authority over that Holy Church of which he was at once a member and a



minister. As such it is regarded by Dr. Pastor, that eminent Roman Catholic historian of the Papacy, to whose labours history is so much indebted. But before stamping Savonarola as a rebel, at this stage of his career, against the constituted authority of his Church, it is necessary at least to take note of a mass of evidence which presents his action in quite another light. This evidence is so contradictory that it would, I think, be rash to draw final conclusions from it: but, on the strength of it, the opinion can be supported that Savonarola only consented to preach again under the supposition that he had the formal or implied permission of the Pope to do so. There is the statement of the annalist, Nardi, which Villari follows, that the Pope was induced by the efforts of Savonarola's friends, and especially of the Ten of Liberty, "to revoke the aforesaid Brief," that is, the Brief, which suspended Savonarola from preaching. There is the statement of Savonarola himself, reported to Ludovico Sforza, 16 February, by Somenzi, the Milanese ambassador at Florence, that he had the Pope's leave to preach the Lent course in Florence. There is the impression, current at the time, and definitely expressed both in discussion and in extant correspondence, that "a certain Cardinal"—who sometimes assumes the form of Cardinal Caraffa—had extracted from the Pope some sort of implied permission. There is a letter from Becchi to the Ten, dated 5 April, 1496, in which he relates an interview between himself and the Bishop of Capaccio. The Bishop assured Becchi that he had done his utmost, and with success, to appease the Pope, but that the executive at Florence ought to see to it that Savonarola "speaks modestly of His Beatitude, of the Most Reverend Cardinals, and of the other prelates, not exceeding the limits of other excellent and worthy preachers, and that

he shuts his mouth about what does not concern him, nor belong to his office". This means little or nothing if it does not mean that, as far as the Pope was concerned, Savonarola might open his mouth, provided he spoke respectfully of dignitaries, and confined his remarks to what concerned him.

On the other hand no formal Brief revoking the Brief of 16 October is extant, and Pastor has negative evidence to warrant his statement that "of course no Brief to that effect was forthcoming". Somenzi's assertion to Sforza is directly contradicted by that of Tranchedino, Sforza's envoy at Bologna, who, writing four days after Somenzi (20 February) informs his master that it is not true that Savonarola has the Pope's permission, but "has taken it upon himself". The good offices of a certain Cardinal—of Caraffa or whoever is meant—seem to have been assumed by rumour rather than to be established by ascertained facts, and the correspondence between Becchi and the Ten in March shows that strenuous efforts were being made to secure the Pope's sanction for Savonarola's preaching several weeks after his preaching had been in fact resumed. Moreover, if Savonarola preached by permission from the Pope, his parable of the Vineyard, elaborated in his sermon of 16 February (the first sermon after his suspension), loses much of its point. A certain man had a vineyard which he committed to the care of his son. Wicked men, desirous of ruining the vineyard, maligned the son to his absent father. The father sent for his son to answer these accusations, but the son refused to obey the summons, for he knew that in his absence the vineyard would be wrecked. Thus in refusing to obey his father the son was most effectively safeguarding his father's interests. "Whenever therefore it is patent that the commands of superiors are contrary to

the commands of God, and especially to the laws of love, no one in such a case ought to obey, for we must obey God rather than man. . . . It is the intention of law, not the letter of it, which ought to be obeyed." The parable directly applies to the speaker's refusal to go to Rome in obedience to the Pope's commands, but indirectly it implies that obedience to ecclesiastical superiors must be conditional on the circumstances which have given rise to the commands—and this in fact became Savonarola's fundamental position.

Reviewing the evidence I can only say for my own part that the assertion that Savonarola, by resuming his preaching, pronounced himself an open rebel against Papal authority, does not seem to me to be established though it may be true. The time was scarcely ripe for open rebellion. Moreover the impression that something in the nature of an implied sanction had been obtained from Alexander was so general, both in Florence and in Rome, that it is difficult to believe that there was no substance behind it. More significant perhaps than anything is Alexander's inaction. He grumbled, it is true, but he took no active and immediate steps to suppress the rebel. Alexander was not the kind of man to brook an open defiance of his authority. On the whole it seems probable that something which could be construed into an implied sanction was extorted from the Pope, or that Savonarola believed that some such sanction had been given.

It was on Ash Wednesday (17 February, 1496) that Savonarola began his Lent Sermons on Amos and Zachariah, a course which he continued daily until 3 April. All the old familiar chords are struck again, but the new situation created by the attitude of the Pope called for a definition of the preacher's position. There

are many expressions, scattered throughout the sermons, of his own insufficiency for the work he was appointed to do. He is a mannikin (*omicciuolo*) who is not worth threepence. He, in his own strength, is not fit to rule a henroost. He is the moth around the candle, attracted by its light but knowing not that it burns, so the insect flies into it and singes its wings. He is the sailor on the stormy sea far from port—*O porto mio dolce*, shall I ever see thee again? O heart of mine, how could you ever set sail from so sweet a haven? O my soul, see whither thou art driven! O my Lord, Thou seest that I am sailing on such profound seas, yet *sia fatta la tua volontà*—let Thy will be done. But these outpourings of a soul overwrought detract in no degree from the vigour of his exposition, from the intensity of his denunciations, from the subtleness of his reasoning. He declared himself repeatedly a true son of the Church, ready at all times to render submission to lawful authority. “I say that he will be damned who does not submit to the Holy Roman Church.” But distinction must be drawn between lawful and unlawful commands, between authority speaking through the mouth of a man, and authority having behind it the immutable sanction of the Church. “Commands,” he said, “given in consequence of lying reports are invalid; when in evident contradiction to the law of charity laid down by the Gospel it is our duty to resist them even as St. Paul resisted St. Peter. We are bound to presume that no such commands will be imposed upon us, but in case they are imposed we must reply, ‘Thou dost err, thou art not the Roman Church, but a man and a sinner’.” The Pope had placed Savonarola on the defensive, and he was compelled to resort to dangerous distinctions which might be satisfactory to a theological casuist, but which to plain men seemed

to bring him perilously near to rebellion against the Church.

Equally outspoken were his denunciations against the sins of Italy and especially of Rome. He was unmuzzled now and meant to make full use of his freedom. Without referring in terms to the character of Alexander, he yet inveighed with fiery earnestness against the vices which prevailed at Rome, vices with which the name of Alexander was identified. "O Rome, prepare thee, for thy punishment shall be heavy. Thou shalt be girdled with steel, put to the sword, to fire. . . . Thou, Rome, art stricken with a mortal disease even unto death. Thou hast lost thy health, thou hast forsaken the Lord, thou art sick with sins and tribulations. If thou wouldst be healed forsake feasting; forsake thy pride, thy ambition, thy lust, thy greed: these be the food that have caused thy sickness, these that bring thee to death."

Notwithstanding the Pope's remonstrances and Briefs the Friar still continued to put forward his claims to prophetic inspiration; and incidentally to repudiate the charge that he was a disturber of Italy. "O fools! where are my hosts and my treasure wherewith to throw Italy into confusion? Not by me is Italy disturbed, but I foretell that she will be disturbed. I foretell that the scourge will be hastened by your sins. Thou unbelieving one, a mighty war shall strip thee of thy pomp and pride. Thou shalt see the barbers shaving Italy to the bone. A mighty pestilence shall make you cast aside your vanities, O women; as for thee, thou murmuring populace, thy tongue shall be stilled by a great famine. Citizens, unless ye live in the fear of God and the love of free government, the Lord will bring sorrow on you, and His promises to Florence will only be fulfilled in your children."

The high-water mark of passion and emotion was

reached in the Twenty-first Sermon on Amos, preached on Tuesday, 8 March. The theme was the familiar one—the sins of Italy and of Rome, and God's coming judgments. "O Rome, I, the Lord, will give you up to those who will lay you waste to your foundations. I will bring pestilence upon you, and men bestial and cruel, savage even as are the lions and the bears. There will not be left enough people to bury the dead." As if inspired with a holy fury the preacher then proceeded to draw so graphic a picture of the woes to come that the exaltation of his hearers was wrought to such a pitch that the sermon could not be continued.

In the midst of fiery prophecy and fierce denunciation there are interspersed passages of cool and grave political advice. The Grand Council was to elect a new Signoria on 25 February. On the 24th the Friar's sermon was devoted to the sense of responsibility under which the election of chief magistrates should be made. On the day of the election the congregation was warned against the government of "tyrants"; whoever desired to set up a tyranny should be persecuted even unto death. The doggerel couplet against the *Parlamento* was repeated, and it was dogmatically affirmed that whoever wished to destroy the Grand Council desired to take the government out of the hands of Christ. Electors, in casting their vote, should cast it for the man of known prudence and wisdom, but should the personal qualities of the candidate be unknown, then the voter, after prayer, should take a black bean and a white one in his hand and, without looking, draw one of them out and put it in the box. God would direct the choice even as He directed the Apostles when they chose Matthias.<sup>1</sup> There

<sup>1</sup>The growth of Savonarola legend and the transfusion of a vulgar materialism into hyperbolic and allegorical assertions may be illustrated

was a rumour that the new Council Hall was not securely built. Let them go forward without fear. Even should the report be true, God would miraculously make it strong enough and ensure its stability.

In the twenty-sixth Sermon he endeavours to reconcile his frequent assurances that in the tribulations of Italy Florence would be spared, with the existing fortunes of the city. Bad as things were in Florence other cities were in far worse case. Disorder is sometimes necessary if order is to ensue. The calamities of Florence will be great or small according to the degree in which she acts righteously.

One sermon (the twelfth) is devoted to the "*vaccae pingues quae estis in monte Samariae*"—"ye fat cows that are upon the mountain of Samaria"—by which are meant the harlots who abound in Italy and most of all in Rome. "Hear, *O vacche grasse* (pardon me, ladies, I know no other word to use. It is not I but the Prophet that speaks it.") The discourse is composed of miscellaneous observations on the immodesty of women's dress, the dissoluteness of their lives; on ceremonial convention which has supplanted the life of the spirit; masses, organs, vestments have usurped the place of living faith and the inner worship of the heart; on the universal

by a comparison of this passage with the story told by Cinozzi of the white beans which were miraculously changed into black ones. He says that when the votes were taken upon the question of establishing the new Constitution the decision in its favour was unanimous, all the beans (votes) being black, i.e. in the affirmative. "There were however some who said 'I know that I cast a white bean'. And some for shame stood quiet: even the adversaries of the Padre Fra Hieronymo held it to be a wonderful thing, especially as he had many times asserted in his sermons that the thing had to be done, whether or no, and that the white beans would become black ones." Here we have an assertion that God would direct the choice of the voters turned into a miracle performed upon the votes.

passion for poetry, rhetoric and mere trifles which exalts Aristotle, logic, and the poets into the popular subject matter for the sermons of divines. The fruitful rain of Heaven does not fructify such seed as this.

In the Forty-eighth Sermon the preacher bids farewell to his flock for a while. Pestilence was raging in the city and the contagion might be spread by a concourse of people crowded within comparatively narrow limits. Therefore he was going to cease from preaching. It was true that special prayers had been offered that the pestilence might not hinder the preaching, and so far none who had attended had been stricken "neither small nor great, neither women nor girls, but we must not tempt God. Yet if only three-quarters of Florence would agree to repent and live well I believe that God would remove the scourge from us altogether." As a final word of warning he refers to the current rumour that St. Marco had become a centre of political intrigue, that, as Mr. Armstrong puts it, "it was universally believed that the midnight meetings at the Medici Palace had but been transferred to the parlour of St. Mark's, and that elections and legislative proposals were previously settled by an informal caucus". "You ought not," Savonarola declared, "to come worrying us except on matters of real importance. Every one comes to our convent for everything. You ought not to do it. I do not want to be mixed up with this person or that in matters concerning your government and your laws. I am only concerned with the general peace of the city. Go to your magistrates. Do not come to me; though in any case of conscience we shall be willing to advise."

Such was the general tenor of Savonarola's Lenten Course on Amos and Zachariah. It is clear that the Pope's inhibition and the letters which had passed be-



tween him and Alexander had not influenced him to abate by one jot or tittle either his pretensions to prophetic powers, his denunciations against wickedness, or his claim to advise on political matters. The energy and passion which he infused into these sermons secured for him an even wider hearing than before, and Florence in 1496 seemed to be more under his influence than at any other time. "He governs this State," says Somenzi to Sforza (18 March, 1496), "after his own fashion. He makes the Signoria and all the other officials and magistrates do whatever he likes." Yet in a sense his general position was not so strong. He had now come into definite conflict with his supreme ecclesiastical superior, and the conflict was necessarily an unequal one. Submission or suppression must be the inevitable result of such a contest, unless he were prepared to relinquish his churchmanship and head a schismatic movement against the Papacy. The utmost that he was prepared to do was to appeal to the General Council, at a time when councils were discredited and when the European powers were engrossed in their own secular affairs. The resentment of the Pope might take the shape of ecclesiastical censures levelled not merely against Savonarola but against Florence which harboured, aided and abetted him. Time would show how far Florence would be prepared to support the Friar to her own detriment. Thus, though Lent of 1496 may be looked upon as the zenith of Savonarola's fortunes, it rather marks the beginning of the end.

On the conclusion of his Lent sermons Savonarola went for a short time to Prato in order to re-organize the Dominican Convent in that town which had recently been attached to the Tuscan Congregation. Thence he went to Pistoia, returning to Florence about the middle of May, when he began a course on Ruth and Micah.

The sermons were much the same in character and substance as those preached in Lent. But Alexander VI remained quiet. He seems to have hoped by lenient treatment to conciliate the Friar, and is said on somewhat insufficient authority to have made him an offer of a Cardinal's hat. At any rate, in his sermon of 20 August, Savonarola declared that he had no desire for hats or mitres, save, "that which Thou hast given to all Thy saints, death, a red hat, a hat red with blood. This is all my desire." This sermon is of special importance, for it may be regarded as an official manifesto issued to friends and opponents alike. It was preached not in the Duomo but in the New Council Hall, by request of the Signoria, and all the city magistracy was invited to be present. Savonarola justifies his past action, defends himself from the charge of having ruined the State, and "of doing everything here". Far from this being true, he is no politician (*Io non sono uomo di Stato*), he does not concern himself with affairs of state. He, an alien, who had nothing to lose, was not a fit person to advise in regard to the particulars of government: all his recommendations had been of a general character, such as his advocacy of the Grand Council and the abolition of the Parlamento. He was charged with having advocated an alliance with France, or an alliance with the League. He has not spoken on the matter, nor given grounds for any Prince, King or Lord being able to boast that he has favoured one rather than another. His advice had been that the government should submit its problems to God in prayer, and then act in accordance with divine inspiration. "Nevertheless, O Friar, you have said 'Lilies and Lilies'? You did not understand my meaning." (*Tu non lo intendi quello*).

This is a remarkable declaration, and a very summary

way of disposing of an impression which was universally entertained. What then *had* been his meaning when he urged the union of the Lilies? In what sense did he desire what appeared to be his whole course of policy since the coming of Charles VIII into Italy to be taken? What justification does he offer for leading all the world to believe that he meant one thing when in fact he meant another and a different thing? An answer to these questions consistent with the good faith and veracity of Savonarola may perhaps, even though with difficulty, be found. The statesmen and the theologian are seldom at a loss to find reasons drawn from metaphysics and etymology which will reconcile statements which to the plain man appear contradictory. But in this case it is at least probable that the explanation of Savonarola's guarded words of 20 August upon his attitude towards the Franco-Florentine alliance is to be found in the political situation of Florence at the moment which was leading him to contemplate a rupture with France and the possibilities of securing foreign support for Florence from other quarters.

For by this time it was obvious to all men that the alliance with France was producing none of those results which had been expected from it. Charles, as Landucci puts it, was evidently "making game of them". Pisa seemed to be irretrievably lost; territories which belonged to Florence had first been appropriated and then sold out of hand by a French officer; Florence by the rest of Italy was held as a traitor to the common cause; plague, pestilence and famine ran riot in the city. More than this, nothing had been done by Charles to accomplish the reformation of the Church and of Italy which, according to Savonarola, he was divinely commissioned to effect. In such circumstances and at such a time it

was certainly a happy idea on the part of those who opposed the Friar to concoct letters—or a letter—purporting to be written by Savonarola to Charles, to introduce into them offensive references to Charles's falseness, and then to intercept these letters and make them public.

It was towards the end of August, just at the time of Savonarola's sermon of the 20th, that Somenzi, the agent of Sforza, showed to the Signoria certain letters, ostensibly from Savonarola to the King of France, at the same time causing a copy of them to fall into the hands of the French envoy at Florence who found that he was himself alluded to in very disparaging terms. Savonarola, when appealed to, declared that he knew nothing about the letters—he could only judge of their authenticity when the originals were in his hands. The Signoria would express no opinion as to the genuineness of the letters, but endeavoured to excuse them to Somenzi as containing nothing, whether they were forged or genuine, detrimental to the interests of Sforza or of the League. The French envoy rushed off to the Signoria demanding instant explanations and apologies. He would hear nothing of the letters being a forgery, insisting that they were undoubtedly the handiwork of the Friar, on whom he vowed vengeance, declaring that he would "show up his hypocrisies and rascality". "Thus," says Somenzi, "the matter is made public to the great shame of the Friar," and for three weeks Florence was in the throes of a diplomatic crisis. Savonarola tried to pacify the envoy through the medium of the Cardinal of Gurk. The envoy assured the Signoria that it was this Friar who was ruining Florence. The matter was at last patched up, but the incident left an unpleasant taste behind it, and impressed observers with the conviction that the popularity of the French cause was declining in Florence.

The inactivity of Charles VIII, the hopelessness of resting any confidence upon his support, were thrown into more glaring relief by the vigour and enterprise of the League. While Charles lingered in his own kingdom beyond the Alps, long expected but doing nothing, the League was successful in securing for its cause not merely the name and patronage of the Emperor Maximilian but his actual presence at the head of an army in Italy. By the end of September, 1496, he was at Vigevano in Lombardy, and in October he had made his way by Genoa to Pisa. Every effort was made in Florence to propitiate Maximilian and to secure his friendship. A special embassy pursued the vagrant Emperor from place to place until at last he was found at Pisa. He was assured of the great desire of Florence to do everything that was pleasing to him. He was reminded of the advantages which might accrue to himself from an alliance with her, though the ambassadors were candid enough to declare that in no circumstances, not even to secure the Emperor's friendship, could Florence join the League: to do so would be contrary to her honour, her good faith and her interest. The Emperor saw the advantage of temporizing while he pursued his plan of campaign. Professing his inability to give a definite reply without consulting his allies he referred the Embassy to the Papal Legate who was at Genoa. He in turn referred them to Sforza at Milan. Meantime, while the ambassadors were thus engaged in futile wanderings, Maximilian, in conjunction with the Venetians, invested Leghorn, thus threatening the last source of supply for Florence from the outside world.

Within Florence every one was in despair. The price of corn rose to between five and six *lire* per bushel. The gaunt figure of famine stalked through her streets, and

pestilence added its horrors to starvation. The Signoria confessed its impotence by declaring that the citizens must trust to other than human aid. At this juncture Savonarola was foremost in the endeavour to keep up the sinking hearts of the people. The rich were exhorted to charity with such effect that, Filipepi tells us, 2000 *scudi* were collected in the Duomo alone. The operations of the Monte were largely extended. At Savonarola's suggestion the famous image of the Virgin was brought from Sta. Maria Impruneta and carried in solemn procession through the city. As the procession moved along—"even at the very hour when the Virgin was entering the city"—news arrived that some corn ships from Marseilles had forced the blockade of Leghorn (29 October). Florence was saved, surely by nothing less than a direct interposition of Providence on her behalf. Her prophet had proved a saviour more powerful than her government: the timely intervention of a French squadron had given visible evidence of the advantages of the French alliance. The sinking credit of Savonarola was restored, and the popularity of his Francophil policy became greater than ever.

The day before the great news came from Leghorn Savonarola resumed his course of sermons on Ruth and Micah. For more than a month he had abstained from preaching, but in the existing crisis he felt he could be silent no longer. The sermon, the twenty-sixth on Ruth, created a tremendous impression, for Somenzi, writing the same day, gives Sforza an abstract of it, remarking that "the Friar has spoken wonderful things". The preacher recalled the services which in past times he had rendered to Florence, how he had saved her when threatened by Charles, and how his predictions had been realized in the past. So it would be with those predic-

tions which had not yet come to pass. If only Florence stood firm in the faith, God's promises would be fulfilled in her. "This doctrine which I preach is not mine: it is of God. You murmur against me: you want to make me out to be a prophet. I am not a prophet, nor the son of a prophet . . . but I say to you *in verbo Domini*, that if you set up a tyrant amongst you it will go ill with you and with him."

This timely appearance in the pulpit confirmed the conviction on the part of his adherents that in some supernatural way the fortunes of the State were at the disposal of the Friar. When he was silent everything went ill: when he preached, immediately everything began to go well. In less than three weeks after the delivery of this sermon the Emperor had withdrawn in disgust from a thankless task which had brought him to bankruptcy but had effected nothing for his cause. On 17 November, Maximilian retired from Italy, and his active participation in the efforts of the Holy League was at an end.

In Florence itself the strife of parties towards the close of the year had resulted in developments which on the whole were favourable to the Piagnoni and to Savonarola. Piero Capponi, one of the strongest men in Florence, who had drifted into the position of leader of the anti-Savonarola faction, had earlier in the year been killed while prosecuting the war with Pisa, and his death had cleared the way for the emergence of Francesco Valori as the most powerful man in the State. Valori was fanatical in his support of Savonarola and the Piagnoni interest, and his election as Gonfalonier for the months of January and February, 1497, was a striking evidence of the ascendancy which the Friar now enjoyed. It was, however, at the moment when Savona-

rola seemed to be once more in the ascendant that a new blow was dealt him from the hands of the Pope. A Papal Brief of 7 November, 1496, was issued within a few days of the relief of Leghorn, and struck Savonarola at the very time when he was specially identified with the miraculous preservation of the State from an overwhelming danger. By this Brief he found himself deposed from the independent position which, as Vicar-General of the Tuscan Congregation of Dominican Convents, he had secured, with the alternatives of submission and rebellion clearly defined before him. Submission meant that the sources of his power would be undermined to a degree which might imply their total destruction: rebellion meant consequences both for himself and for Florence which could scarcely fail to be fatal.

A new chapter in Savonarola's history opens with the renewed warfare between Prophet and Pope.



## CHAPTER IX

### THE EXCOMMUNICATION

THE Papal Brief of 7 November, 1496, announced the appointment of Cardinal Caraffa as Vicar-General of a new Congregation of Dominican houses, to be known as the Tusco-Roman Congregation, and of these associated Convents S. Marco was to be one. The effect of the Brief was to destroy the newly created Tuscan Congregation, to depose Savonarola from the position of its Vicar-General, and to reduce S. Marco from a situation of independent superiority to one of subservience.

These effects, however, were incidental to the Brief: they were not necessarily the animating causes of it. The name of Savonarola is not mentioned; the name of S. Marco merely finds its place with the other houses which were to form the new Congregation, Cardinal Caraffa was Savonarola's friend. The document itself, in its cold official language and in its formal statement of papal policy, bears upon its face no other appearance than that of a pronouncement upon a minor detail of ecclesiastical organization. There is not a word in it which is inconsistent with the zeal of a conscientious and spiritually-minded Pope for the best interests of a religious order which he was desirous of serving.

It would, however, be to put a strain even upon charity to suppose that Alexander VI was wholly unmindful of the personal consequences for Savonarola which the

Brief entailed, and, if those consequences were clearly foreseen, it must be admitted that under the innocent disguise of a harmless and ordinary administrative act the Pope cleverly covered a crushing blow dealt against the Friar. For if Savonarola resisted he declared himself a rebel; if he acquiesced he surrendered a vital source of his power. In either event the advantage was all with the Pope. It is therefore as an astute move in the game of war between Pope and Prophet that the Brief of 7 November must be estimated.

The precise motives which prompted aggressive action on the part of Alexander at this time rather than at another can only be determined inferentially. More than fifteen months had elapsed since he had commanded Savonarola's presence at Rome, but the command had not yet been obeyed: more than thirteen months ago he had been inhibited from preaching, yet in the interval he had continually preached: S. Marco had been officially and on paper reunited to the Lombard Congregation, yet it still remained independent. More than twelve months had passed since the Friar's suspension had been formally confirmed, yet his activity had continued as great as ever. At any moment throughout 1496 further action on the part of the Pope was to be looked for, yet no action was taken until the year had nearly expired.

The fact seems to be that throughout this long interval the Pope scarcely knew his own mind upon the matter. The diplomatic correspondence with Rome in 1496 shows him in a state of irritable uncertainty as to the proper course to adopt. Continually beset by representations from Florence on behalf of the Friar he was equally beset by the representations of the League in opposition to him. The Pope probably knew the danger to any cause which lies in manufacturing a martyr

against it: moreover it must have been difficult for him to realize that an obscure monk was worth serious attention except at the moments when his case was thrust prominently before him. While Savonarola naturally in the eyes of his biographers completely fills the picture, yet, beyond their perspective, the great world to which Savonarola was unknown was still going on, and Alexander had many other things to do and to think about.

Now, however, in the autumn of 1496 when the Friar's influence seemed to be weakening, when his pro-French policy was being discredited, when the activities of the League seemed likely to be crowned with some definite results, the moment appeared to be opportune for a move which, under the guise of an impersonal administrative measure, forced the adversary's hand, and placed him in a dilemma from which escape with advantage was impossible.

Savonarola felt the blow keenly and entered a vigorous protest. He was supported by the whole brotherhood of S. Marco, who unanimously, to the number of about 250, protested, by letter to the Pope, against the proposals of the Brief, this protest being followed by an elaborate Apology in which they justified their opposition in detail. In the meantime Torriano, the General of the Dominican Order, was busy in conjunction with Cardinal Caraffa in carrying the Pope's instructions into execution, but no immediate steps were taken in regard to S. Marco until the issue of the appeal of the brethren to Alexander should be made known. Savonarola himself utilized the interval to strengthen his improved position in Florence, and to take all possible advantage of the ascendancy which at the close of the year his party had so providentially gained in the city. Throughout Advent he preached a course upon Ezekiel which he continued

into Lent, and celebrated the Carnival festivities of 1497 on an even more extended scale of pietistic enthusiasm than in the previous year.

The Advent sermons call for no special comment, for they follow closely the lines, with which we have become familiar, of previous courses. In Lent, however, and especially in the sermon of 27 February, he rises to a note of unwonted exaltation in his appeal to Florence—*Vivi! levasu, anima mia! Vivi, vivi, Firenze! Risorgi, Firenze! Vivi! apri gli occhi!*" This is one of many of the Friar's sermons which must be interpreted in the light of the immediate political situation. In a few hours Francesco Valori would lay down his office of Gonfalonier, and his place would be taken by Bernardo del Nero, leader of the aristocratic party, and well known as having little sympathy with the Piagnone. For the next two months at any rate Savonarola would have to face the opposition of a hostile Signoria.

In the same sermon the preacher makes reference to the demand which had arisen that he should perform a miracle. The demand was not unnatural. Savonarola claimed to be the mouthpiece of God, and the assurances which he gave to Florence assumed the colour of divinely inspired prophecies. When the actual course of events seemed to be running contrary to those assurances it was inevitable that some unmistakable manifestation should be asked for to prove that Savonarola was a prophet indeed. The suggestion of a miracle had first fallen, with or without conscious intention, from the Pope himself in his Brief of September, 1495—"It is not enough for any one simply to declare that he has been sent by God. . . . He must confirm this claim to a Divine mission either by a miracle, or by some special testimony of Holy Scripture." And in the atmosphere of sensationalism

and religious excitement which surrounded Savonarola such a demand, emanating originally from sceptical opponents, was likely to be favourably received even by enthusiastic supporters.

To this general and increasing demand for a sign Savonarola gave his answer in his sermon of 27 February: "Ah! seek not a miracle, my son, for no miracle is needed for living well (*al ben vivere*). Whoever asks for manifestations of that kind when they are not necessary asks only from curiosity. And then the Lord will give answer 'A depraved generation seeks a sign'. Those who demand miracles are wicked men. . . . The good life: that is the miracle. Live well: that is the miracle. A miracle is that which is above and beyond nature. To live well and lead a Christian life is in itself something '*sopra natura*'. Seek for no other miracle than that, though I say of a truth that whenever the need shall arise I have such faith in Our Saviour that He will certainly provide one."

While Savonarola's Lent course was in progress the reaction against him, of which the election of Bernardo del Nero as Gonfalonier is a testimony, found expression in a rival course of Lent sermons, preached in response to a special invitation, by the Friar's whilom adversary, Fra Mariano da Genazzano. Mariano's well-known Medicean proclivities, coupled with the Gonfalonierate of del Nero, who was supposed to favour a Medici restoration, were certainly suggestive of a concerted plan on the part of the *Palleschi*,—as the adherents of the exiled family were styled—to subvert the republican government, and to establish either Piero, or the younger branch of his family, in the seat of power. Additional weight attached to Fra Mariano's presence and utterances in Florence from the fact that he had lived for some years in Rome,

was deep in the counsels of the Pope, and might be taken therefore as representing the Papal mind in regard to the existing situation. But Mariano's immediate purpose was not to restore the Medici but to undermine Savonarola; to show the hollowness of his pretensions to Divine inspiration, and to warn the Florentines of the penalties which they incurred by continuing to harbour and support a rebel against the Pope's authority. No record of Mariano's sermons has come down to us other than his dramatic appeal to the Pope to "cut off, cut off, most blessed Father, this monster from the Church of God," but it is not a large assumption to suppose that he alluded to the state of impotence to which Florence had reduced herself by her adhesion to the Friar, to the dissensions which rent the city, to the arbitrary and fanatical government of Valori, to the intolerance of the Piagnoni when in power which had just shown itself in the banishment of many Franciscan preachers who had presumed to raise their protest against Savonarola's ascendancy. These were some of the facts of the moment which engrossed public attention, and Mariano's congregation went, we may be sure, to hear his views on the situation whether he actually expressed them or not.

Savonarola at any rate considered the sermons of his rival to be sufficiently damaging to merit a reply. On Saturday, 11 March, and on the following Sunday, he preached two sermons, both of which were prompted by the remarks of Mariano. In the first he referred to the threat of an excommunication against himself which Mariano seems to have let fall, and declared that no excommunication would come this year just as, in accordance with his prediction, none had come last year. In the second he inveighed with renewed fervour against the corruptions of the Church; "he took the bit from his

tongue"—to quote Villari—"and, stimulated by the re-proofs of the Augustinian, was once more so aggressive against the Church and the Pope that the sermon still remains upon the prohibited list".

In the meantime vigorous preparations had been in operation for many weeks for the celebration of the Mid-Lent Carnival. As early as Christmas Day, 1496, the vast congregation gathered in the Duomo (Nardi tells us it numbered over 1300) had been exhorted to surrender their "Vanities" into safe keeping against the great day of the "Bonfire of the Vanities" which was to be the crowning feature of the occasion. The children composing the Blessed Bands were active in the public collection of alms in the streets, and in domiciliary visits for the ostensible purpose of persuading the citizens to give up their Vanities, which also bore the appearance of a novel form of police espionage organized by the Piagnone party against those who disagreed with them. Among the articles collected Nardi enumerates books, both in Latin and the vulgar tongue, which were likely to prove injurious to morals; pictures and statues of all kinds which might arouse lascivious suggestions: so that from the beginning of the Advent fast up to the Carnival a multitude of such things were given up: false hair, head-dresses and ornaments for the head; face paints, washes, perfumes of all kinds and similar vanities; beautiful pictures, chessboards, playing cards, books of fate, of magic and of superstition; the works of Boccaccio and the Morgante—a marvellous quantity. On the appointed day a solemn Mass was celebrated in the Duomo; then a procession was marshalled in due order, and the processionists, all clothed in white, with red crosses in their hands, their heads entwined with olive garlands, marched first to S. Marco, then back to the Cathedral, where the

alms already collected were distributed; then to the Piazza del Signoria singing psalms and hymns and popular lauds. There on the Piazza stood the great pyre of Vanities piled to a great height. At the appointed signal a blast of trumpets sounded for action. The four Captains of the quarters advanced with torches in their hands, and amid the deafening clamour of trumpets and applause the symbolic figure of Old Carnival which crowned the structure seemed under the influence of the gathering flames for a moment to be endowed with animation, tottered, fell, and was lost to view amid the fiery blaze and whirling clouds of smoke.

The Carnival celebration of mid-February marks the climax of Valori's Piagnone administration and of dominant Savonarolism. But it may be doubted if its ultimate effects did not do more to undermine than to establish the influence of the Friar. Pietistic excitement inevitably tends to reaction, and scenic extravagances applied to the realm of the spirit may tend to deaden the very life which they are designed to inspire. Whatever may have been the momentary outcome of a spectacular protest against luxury and vice, it could scarcely fail to pander to a dangerous emotionalism and to create an appetite for organized destruction. It was indeed much the same spirit of morbid and unhealthy sensationalism which led now to the burning of the Vanities and later to the burning of Savonarola. A wrought-up mob was being schooled not to discriminate between combustible objects so long as there was something to burn. Nor was this the only extravagance which distinguished the Carnival of 1497. The restraints enforced by Savonarola in his pursuit of moral reform, his methods of inquisition into the details of private life, the whole atmosphere of miracle and thaumaturgy which



breathed around him, seemed to many to impose an intolerable servitude upon the free instincts of nature, to be a too complete reversion, in the days of Humanism, to the repressive asceticism of the Middle Age.

Practical measures were deemed necessary to stem the tide of reaction. The Piagnoni determined that while they held the reins they would drive furiously, and practically muzzle opposition by banishment, intimidation, and the brute force of a majority vote. In the hope of securing a larger measure of support in the Grand Council the age limit of admission to that body was reduced from twenty-nine to twenty-four, for it was thought that younger men might introduce an enthusiasm for republican institutions which was scarcely to be looked for from those who had been schooled in the traditions of a despotism. The reduction, however, produced a contrary result, for it was among the young men of fashion that Savonarola met with his most determined and unscrupulous opponents. They in a special degree found themselves affected by the unwonted Puritanism which he and his adherents enforced. To indulge all the vices against which Savonarola inveighed became almost a point of honour among those to whom vice only assumed the appearance of a convenient badge of political opposition to the Friar. The party known as the *Compagnacci* was composed mainly of young men, and under its leader, Doffo Spini, it was every day becoming more powerful and more aggressive. It was an informal association of hot-heads and young bloods which represented nothing but hostility to the Friar and all his works, and its successive periods of prominence or inactivity afford a measure of the fluctuations of Savonarola's influence.

The Gonfalonierate of Bernardo del Nero marks the

period when the dissensions of faction threatened nothing less than the disruption of the State. At no time were strong government, united action, a common sense of civic patriotism, more necessary. Famine had reached to such a point that men dropped down dead in the streets from sheer exhaustion, and a famine-stricken populace could offer no effective resistance to the ravages of pestilence. The Pisan war was dragging on with no prospect of success, and in the distance the mutterings of Papal thunders could be heard threatening excommunication and interdict upon the devoted city. The situation drove the government into action. At the beginning of April a small committee of eleven citizens was appointed, the members of which were known as *I Pacieri*, or the Pacifiers. Their business was to compose the discords in the city, and it was hoped that a body of men which included leading representatives of the conflicting parties—Del Nero himself and Francesco Valori were members of the committee—might prove successful in arriving at some common understanding. Guicciardini, however, whose father was one of the *Pacieri*, dismisses their efforts in a sentence: "They produced no effect, and every day the humours boiled up anew". The State was ripe for a revolution.

Indeed responsible men had for some time been considering what form the inevitable revolution should take, what system of government should replace the discredited control of the Grand Council. Bernardo del Nero was not deterred by his position as temporary head of the State from contemplating *uno Stato stretto*, that is to say an aristocratic and oligarchical system analogous to that which had existed under the Medici. Though not a Medicean in the sense of desiring the restoration of Piero, yet Del Nero looked to the younger branch of the Medici

House to provide representative figureheads for his proposed government which should revert to the old traditional Medicean policy of alliance between Florence and Milan. Such proposals being in the air it was natural that Piero de' Medici should have felt the time to be ripe for a renewed attempt to re-establish the position which he had lost. At the head of a small troop he advanced from Siena at the end of April and appeared at the Porta Romana, confident in the belief that his presence would be greeted by an immediate and irresistible rising of his adherents on his behalf. No such rising occurred. Florence might be in need of a revolution, but she was as yet by no means determined as to the kind of revolution she wanted, and was far from showing any real or united enthusiasm for Piero and his enterprise. Mortified by the absence of support, and hampered by heavy and incessant rains, Piero made no effort to use the force at his disposal, but withdrew ignominiously to Siena whence he had come.

Piero's raid, though in itself as contemptible as it was abortive, was none the less fraught with the ultimate fate of Savonarola and his opponents. In a few months it was to cost Bernardo del Nero his life, and Savonarola no small part of his credit and reputation. But this was in the future. For the moment it rather served to increase the confidence of his immediate adherents in the prophet who, it was said, had predicted what the issue of Piero's venture would be; who might indeed be thought miraculously to have influenced it.<sup>1</sup> But the number, if

<sup>1</sup> Nardi relates that Filippo Arrigucci, one of the Signory, sent Girolamo Benivieni as a deputation to Savonarola to inquire what the issue of Piero's enterprise would be. "O you of little faith," was the reply, "wherefore do you doubt? Do you not know that God is with you? Go, and say from me to those Signori that we will pray for the City—that Piero shall come as far as the gate, and turn away having effected nothing"—and it was so.

not the faith, of his devotees was declining: the glamour of his eloquence and of his personality was beginning to fade, and at this time of crisis, confusion and alarm his opponents seemed to see their opportunity to destroy him. A new Signoria was installed in office a few days before the term of its predecessor had expired, and it was found to be composed of men equally opposed to the Medici and to Savonarola. Thus once more adversity was credited with making strange bedfellows. It began to be rumoured that the Friar was drawing towards the Mediceans, that he was drawing away from the French alliance, that he was intriguing to overthrow the Constitution and to establish Francesco Valori in a quasi-despotism by securing his appointment as Gonfalonier for life.

The truth of these rumours, whether much or little, need not now concern us: that they existed is the salient fact which helps to an understanding of the active and rancorous hostility which he was now called upon to meet. A concurrence of opinion tended to identify the Friar with the distractions by which the City was torn. A chance suggestion of the year before that he should be banished from the City was revived: the *Compagnacci* were prepared to go farther, and threatened physical violence if not death against him; the war of pulpits between contending preachers added to the clamour. It was the 3rd of May, the eve of the Ascension. On that day a Pratica met to consider the situation and resolved that, in consequence of the plague, all preaching should cease for a time in the City, but it was evidently left doubtful whether the resolution was to take immediate effect or was only to be put in force after the Ascension Day Sermons had been preached. It was known that Savonarola was to preach that day in the Duomo, and he

himself was trusting to the occasion to assist him in retrieving the situation. Throughout the 3rd excitement was at fever point upon the question—would the Friar preach or would he not? Bets were freely laid by the *Compagnacci* that he would not. Savonarola's friends gathered around him, imploring him not to expose himself to an extreme and unnecessary risk. He put all remonstrances aside, and on the morning of 4 May he was prepared to set forth to the Duomo. But in the meantime the *Compagnacci* had used the silence of the night to effect a sacrilegious entry into the Cathedral. There they defiled the pulpit by smearing it with grease, if not with more loathsome and disgusting material;<sup>1</sup> hung around it the putrid skin of an ass, and in the middle of the church contrived a collapsible structure, supporting a heavy chest which was to fall while the service was in progress, and create general tumult and alarm.

Outside, in the streets between S. Marco and the Duomo, the coming of the Friar was awaited by an expectant and uncertain mob which might be swayed this way or that according to the mood of the moment. Once more Savonarola's friends besought him not to set forth, to abandon his intention of preaching that day, not to expose himself and his cause to the imminent risk of destruction. Savonarola remained immovable. Seeing that at all hazards he would go, his followers constituted themselves into a strong bodyguard, and thus escorted he made his way to the Cathedral. His sermon was based on the text—“*Domine, Deus meus, in te speravi. Salvum me fac.*” [O Lord, my God, in Thee have I trusted.

<sup>1</sup> We may hope that popular rumour exaggerated the enormity of this outrage. Somenzi says “*imbratato il pulpito di sevo*” (fat). He is not likely to have minimized his account for Sforza's benefit.

*Make me safe.*] He thought, he said, to be in Heaven with Christ that morning, but he has been disappointed. "You thought perhaps that I was afraid; know you not, that faith fears nothing. You cannot hurt my soul. You benefit me by your persecutions. You thought I would not come to preach to-day. I have come. 'Thanks to your escort,' you will say. I did not summon it. I desired to come, and always will come when God inspires me to do so, and no man on earth shall stop me. I will give my life for my flock. Other good shepherds, better than I, will not be wanting to take my place, for God, out of these stones, can raise up children to Abraham. O Lord, my God, they say that I have seduced and deceived the people. Thou knowest that I have committed no such sin. Thou knowest what voice it was that called me to the City of Florence, saying 'Go forth from thine own land, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, and come to the land which I shall show thee'. By Thy inspiration, by no will of my own, I came to this city, and I am content that the glorious Virgin Mary has deigned to be a witness, together with all the blessed spirits and all the patriarchs and prophets, apostles, martyrs, confessors, virgins and all the company of Heaven, against my soul if I have not spoken truth. All that I have preached of the scourge of Italy, of the renovation of the Church, of the promises made to Florence, and all the other things I have predicted in Thy name, I have not pronounced them of myself, but by Thy illumination and commandment: not the illumination of dreams, but illumination given openly and clearly in my waking hours, with all the certainty which is fitting to so great a thing." All that he has said about the government, about the new Constitution has been spoken in obedience to God; he has said only that which God has

made him say. The rumours that under him S. Marco has become a political conventicle, and its funds the treasury of a party are false. If the accusations made against him are true he is willing to lose the grace of God and to undergo any punishment. He calls Heaven and Earth to witness that those who speak against "these things" speak not against him but against God. "*Exsurge Domine in ira Tua.* I ask not vengeance, nor do I think of it, but Thou seest, O Lord, how many devils have come out of Hell<sup>1</sup> to excite the wicked to extinguish Thy light." He exhorts his hearers to peace, charity and concord. "But, you say, it is you, Friar, who are the cause of our dissensions. It is your bad life which is the cause. Christ came not to bring peace between the wicked and the good, but war; to divide the father from the son, the mother from the daughter, father-in-law from daughter-in-law, brother from brother, parent from parent. Live well, and then there will be peace. If you will not, then it is you, not I, that are the cause of these dissensions. You seek to hinder my preaching in order that you may live after your own fashion. Do not do so or it will fare ill with you. But, Friar, you ought not to be preaching this morning for fear of scandal. My preaching has never been cause of scandal. But the Signoria forbade you. That is not true, and if it were it would be open to discussion whether I was bound to obey. Whenever I shall feel that scandal will arise then I shall not preach. I hear rumours astir ——" It was probably at this moment that the heavy box came clattering down on the stone flooring of the church. Instantly tumult began to

<sup>1</sup>The Miltonic idea of the great conspiracy hatched in Hell by proud Lucifer in order to hinder the Divine word spoken by the holy prophet, which constitutes the sixth canto of "*Cedrus Libani*" is doubtless derived from this passage.

prevail among the congregation. Few knew what had happened. Everybody in alarm was wondering what would happen next. The din of confused voices resounded through the Duomo, and above it for one brief moment more rose the voice of the preacher. "Have patience: if you knew what I know—even I—you would cry out. Have no fear you others, for God is with us, and there are here many legions of Angels. . . ." Panic was giving way to riot. The shrill tones from the pulpit were drowned in the growing tumult. His devoted band gathered around the preacher, and he was escorted back through the menacing crowds in safety to S. Marco. Men said that the days of Guelphs and Ghibellines had returned. Such, as far as my imagination can read through the lines of the records, was the scene enacted in the Duomo on this Ascension morning. It was the last sermon which Savonarola was to preach that year. He determined to submit to the decision of the Signoria, a decision which was still in operation when a higher authority intervened. The government, under the pretext of the general interest, had impartially suspended all preaching for a time, and Savonarola was silent with the rest. Within a fortnight he was a marked man, an ecclesiastical outcast, for upon 13 May a Papal Brief pronounced upon him the sentence of excommunication.

Rather more than six months had passed since the issue of the Papal Brief of November, enjoining the union of S. Marco with the Tusco-Roman Congregation of Dominican Convents. In the interval Savonarola had done nothing in obedience to the Papal injunction, but had been vigorous in protest against it. We can but marvel at the prolonged patience of a Pope who was content for six months to sit still and see himself defied. The diplomatic correspondence of those months shows



him to have been constantly in a state of irritation and annoyance, not so much perhaps against Savonarola personally as against Florence which allowed itself to be led by the nose by a "chatterer" (*parabolano*). His complaint especially was that Florence would not join the League, insisted on the maintenance of the French alliance, would pay no attention to his assurances, on behalf of the League, as to the restoration of Pisa, and would take no steps to check the extravagant invectives of the Friar against one who, however unworthily, occupied the sacred seat of St. Peter. Perhaps the Pope's indulgence was prompted by Piero's preparations for his attempt in the Spring. If the Medici were restored the subordination of Florence, and of Savonarola, to the Pope's policy would be automatically secured. But the attempt had failed; the credit of Savonarola was on the wane: the events of Ascension Day showed the strength of internal opposition against him. The moment seemed opportune and the Pope determined to profit by it.

The Brief "*Cum saepe a quamplurimis*" of 13 May, 1497, recapitulates the previous history of the case between Savonarola and the Holy See. The Pope having understood that a certain Fra Hieronymo Savonarola of Ferrara has disseminated some kind of pernicious dogma to the scandal and destruction of simple souls, had hoped that, his error being demonstrated, he would return to the path of obedience. Therefore Papal Briefs had been issued bidding the said Friar to come to Rome and to cease from preaching, but these he has shown himself totally unwilling to obey. The Pope has treated his disobedience with greater leniency perhaps than the case deserved, for he has tolerated the Friar's excuses and even endured his persistence in preaching

“trusting by our clemency to convert him to the true path of obedience”. But it has turned out otherwise, for when, by a further Brief the Convent of S. Marco was united to the Tusco-Roman Congregation the Friar utterly refused obedience to the Papal commands, neglected the ecclesiastical censures which he had thus automatically incurred, and, “*pertinaciter et damnabiliter,*” persisted in his obstinacy. “Wherefore we, desirous of affording suitable remedies for the safety of souls for which by virtue of our pastoral office we are responsible, lest their blood be required at our hands in the last Judgment Day, enjoin and command you, and anyone of you, that in your churches on holy days, when the people are present in numbers, you declare and pronounce the said Fra Hieronymo excommunicated, and that he be held and considered as an excommunicated person by all men in that he has not obeyed our Apostolic admonitions and commands.”

Under pain of a like excommunication all persons of either sex, clerical or lay, were commanded entirely to refrain from any intercourse with the said Fra Hieronymo who is excommunicated and under suspicion of heresy: none are to give him audience when speaking either in sermons or in any other fashion, nor to extend aid or favour to him directly or indirectly in any way whatsoever, nor to resort to the places or monastery where he may happen to reside. The Brief was entrusted to Giovanni da Camerino, the Papal Commissary to whom obedience and assistance were enjoined, and it was addressed to the Pope's well-beloved sons, the monks of the Benedictine convents in Florence.

The declaratory clauses of the Brief contain not an unfair summary of the Pope's grievances against the Friar, and present the issue between them very clearly from the

Pope's point of view. There is no perversion nor even over-statement of the facts, however little appreciation may be shown of Savonarola's motives. The condemnatory clauses have a sound which is harsh and severe, but their language corresponds with the Papal estimate of the facts and to a large extent follows an official formula. The suggestion of heresy seems uncalled for, for no attempt is made to justify it by references to Savonarola's teaching, unless "the dissemination of some kind of pernicious dogma" was in itself heretical. The phrase, however, "*de heresi suspectum*," is not introduced into the main body of the Brief but in the exordium into which it seems to have crept as an afterthought. The Pope's object was not merely to crush a refractory ecclesiastic, but to disorganize and break up a political party, and a whisper of heresy against its leader might prove an effective instrument to accomplish this purpose.

The Brief meant that the long truce between Pope and Prophet was at an end. It was a declaration of war by his suzerain against a rebel vassal whose insolence and disobedience, in the eyes of that suzerain, had gone too long unpunished. To Savonarola it meant the beginning of the end, for from henceforth resistance or submission must equally prove fatal to the cause for which he stood. The vain endeavour to escape from his dilemma constitutes the record of the short remainder of Savonarola's life.

## CHAPTER X

### THE CLIMAX

THE history of Savonarola during the last year of his life is the history of a complex struggle between conflicting forces and rival interests involving political, social, commercial and ecclesiastical elements in embarrassing confusion. Savonarola was so closely identified and indirectly intertwined with the life of Florence on all its sides that he stands out as the centre around which all discords gathered. In the tragedy which was enacting his place was of necessity that of the hero. But in the tragedies of life the true point of interest is often not the individual, but the contention of opposing circumstances of which he is the sport and puppet. It will tend to a clearer appreciation of the story if, before narrating it, we recapitulate apart from Savonarola's personality the positions of the respective parties involved and the general issues which were at stake.

The internal policy of Florence, as far as her discords permitted her to have a policy, was to maintain her newly established republican form of government and to exclude the possibility of a return of the Medici. To secure this end Florence depended upon an alliance with a foreign Power at a time when the rest of Italy was leagued together against the influence of that Power in Italy. Thus externally Florence pursued a policy which laid her open to the charge of unpatriotism. The complaint

against the Florentines was that they were not "good Italians," and the efforts of the Italian League were directed to securing the adhesion of Florence to its policy as a preliminary to united action against France. The quarrel, therefore, lay between Florence and the League, and the fact that the representatives of the rival policies should be the Pope and Savonarola was in the nature of an accident which served to give piquancy to the contest.

But with the Pope in his ecclesiastical capacity Florence had no quarrel; on the contrary she prided herself on her ancient and long-tried fidelity to the Church, and was most anxious on general and material grounds to maintain the best relations with the Holy See. For the Pope possessed weapons which, if used against Florence, might be most injurious if not fatal to her interests. The finances of the State might be ruined if the Pope withheld his consent to the imposition of taxes upon the clergy; the commercial interests of the State might grievously suffer if a Papal interdict was enforced; the persons and property of Florentine merchants trading in Rome and in the States of the Church would be at the mercy of the Pope if opposition to him was carried too far. Florence, in fact, found herself hopelessly entangled in the complications to which the double position of the Pope gave rise. To the Pope in his capacity of a ruling Italian Prince she was inflexibly opposed; to the Pope as the spiritual Head of Christendom she was willing to render ready and cheerful obedience.

Moreover, Florence wanted to regain Pisa, and the Pope declared himself in a position to promise its restoration on behalf of the League, provided his conditions were accepted. The conditions involved a breach with France, the restoration of the Medici, a free hand for the

Pope in his dealings with Savonarola, and the recognition of his right to intervene in the internal affairs of the State. To accept such conditions was practically impossible, more especially as it was extremely doubtful if the Pope had the power to restore Pisa. But to regain Pisa had become to the Florentines an object of passionate endeavour, and it is easy to see the advantage which the Pope could derive from playing upon this passion and using it for his own purposes.

While Florence was thus committed to a policy of hostility to the Pope, and at the same time was dependent upon his favours; while from one point of view she was his determined opponent, and from another was his faithful supporter, it was impossible that her political attitude should be firm and resolute. Herein lies the tragedy of Savonarola, for he was the predestined victim of circumstances which were conflicting and irreconcilable. The same situation soon declared itself in his own personal encounter with the Pope. He must either obey the Pope or boldly assume the position of a rebel against authority. Either course implied the abandonment of every principle and conviction which he held dear. As an orthodox and devoted Churchman he recognized the abstract validity of Papal authority; as a man bent on the accomplishment of a great moral reformation, he saw in Alexander VI the chief obstacle to his design. In his dilemma he was compelled to resort to arguments which, however canonically valid, sounded very much like sophistries. They served to intensify the anger of the Pope while they were ineffectual to unite Florence upon Savonarola's side. The plain man saw a plain issue without being able to grasp the subtle distinctions wherewith Savonarola sought to complicate it, and when it was a question between fidelity to the Friar and the sacrifice of

material interests, in the nature of things the Friar had to go by the board.

The publication of the Papal Brief of excommunication in 1497 tended to narrow the issue between Savonarola and his opponents. Hitherto he had been mainly identified in the minds of the Florentines with a great movement of political and moral regeneration, and had had upon his side a large measure of sympathy and support from both government and people. But the excommunication at once tended to reduce the differences between the Pope and Florence to a matter of ecclesiastical discipline as between superior and subordinate, and to expose Florence to the pains and penalties of ecclesiastical censures in the interest of a theological controversy. The strong ground of public confidence on which Savonarola had stood, already much weakened, was now being insidiously mined beneath his feet, and he had no longer any sure foundation to rest upon. The Pope might be wrong, his power might be unlawfully exercised, but all the onus of proof lay with Savonarola, and all the means of suppression were in the hands of the Pope. It was doubtless a scandal that the Pope should use his spiritual position as a means to enforce his purely political aims, but this was a spectacle to which men had long been accustomed, and they felt no sense of shock. In proportion as the struggle resolved itself into its ecclesiastical elements the Papal cause grew daily stronger, that of Savonarola grew daily weaker, and at the last Alexander contrived to stand for great principles, the unity of Christendom, the supremacy of the Apostolic See, the liberation of Italy from the stranger, while Savonarola was made to represent to the eyes of the world schism, disobedience, unpatriotism, and the fate that awaits them.

The varying fortunes of this contest we have now to trace from the publication of the excommunication to the days of crisis and overthrow in the spring of 1498.

Though issued in May the Papal Brief was not actually received and promulgated in Florence until the middle of June. It had been entrusted to Camerino, a man who had been associated with Fra Mariano in opposition to Savonarola, and who already had been expelled from Florence, perhaps as a consequence of that opposition. Having reached Siena Camerino halted there until he could obtain assurances as to the reception which would await him, and it was only after an application to the Signoria for a safe-conduct that he pursued his journey, arriving in Florence on 17 June. On the following day, a Sunday, the Brief was formally recited in Santo Spirito and in other churches.

But although no official cognizance could be taken of the Brief until it had been formally received, the knowledge that such a Brief had been formulated and was upon its way had reached Florence within a week of its composition. Savonarola at once took steps to meet it. His own personal attitude towards it was exhibited by his celebration of the Mass, in company with his brethren, in S. Marco on the very day after its arrival. Already in his Lenten Course on Ezekiel, when threats of excommunication were in the air, he had declared that he would know what to do. "Bring this excommunication aloft upon a spear-head: open the gates to it. I will answer it. If I do not make you marvel, say afterwards whatever pleases you. I will make many faces to grow pale: I will send up a cry at which the world will tremble." Now it was upon its way, but before its actual arrival an appeal to the Pope might be effective. Accordingly, on 22 May, Savonarola wrote a letter to Alexander which



assumes that the Pope's action has been the result of nothing else than misunderstanding and false information. "Wherefore is my Lord angry with his servant? Have I done wrong because enemies accuse me? Why does not my Lord question his servant and listen to his reply before believing charges made against him." Thousands of witnesses can testify that he has never attacked the person of the Pope, "who holds the place of God upon earth". He has always submitted himself to correction and will always do so whenever need arises. A treatise which he is preparing on the Triumph of the Cross will soon sufficiently show his orthodoxy. Meantime, if other help should fail him he will trust in God.

On the day following the official promulgation of the Brief Savonarola proceeded to answer it in detail in an open letter addressed "to all Christians and those beloved of God". He describes himself as the servant of Jesus Christ sent by Him to the City of Florence, and reiterates his assurances that he has been divinely appointed to foretell the scourge which would come upon Italy preparatory to the renovation of the Church and of the whole world. These prophecies were in course of fulfilment, and those who were working against him were only contributing to their realization. Even this excommunication was an example of the truth of his predictions, for he had long ago foretold it when no one was thinking of any such thing. As for its validity it could have none, inasmuch as it was based on false premises, for it was not true that he was either a heretic or disobedient. He was willing in every way to submit himself to authority, but only to lawful authority, and that could not be lawful authority which was contrary to the commands of God and the Church. In the matter of the union of S. Marco with the Tusco-Roman Congregation he never could con-

sent to a measure designed to relax the severity of discipline and observance, nor, even if he wished, was it in his power to acquiesce against the wishes of his brethren, who were unanimously opposed to the scheme. The excommunication then being based on false and insufficient grounds was invalid, and "if these our arguments are not listened to . . . we will make this truth known to all the world in such a fashion that nobody will be able to gainsay it".

Another letter soon followed in which he sought to prove from the Canonists that a conscientious belief in the injustice of any command given by a superior is a good and sufficient reason for disobeying it, and he was undoubtedly able to make out a strong case for himself from the principles laid down by such acknowledged authorities of weight and sanctity as Gerson, Paludanus and S. Antoninus. But all this was futile, unless he could convert the Pope to his views and so secure the withdrawal of the Brief, or else win over Florence and Christendom to his side, and thus bring irresistible pressure to bear upon an obstinate and malevolent Pope.

Once more to a plain man the issue was a very plain one—obedience or rebellion. It was all very well for Savonarola to argue upon unimpeachable authority that it was not rebellion to disobey unlawful commands, but this only seemed to constitute Savonarola the judge as to what commands were lawful and what were not, opening a way to endless disputations and coming perilously near to an assertion of the right of private judgment to override the express commands of the acknowledged Head of the Church.

But the breach between Savonarola and Alexander was not yet irreconcilable, and circumstances arose which seemed likely to result in a reconciliation. The Friar had

already ceased to preach ; the successive Signories elected from the summer of 1497 were favourably disposed towards him, and on 14 June the murder of the Duke of Gandia in Rome threw his father, the Pope, into such ecstasies of grief as to lead him to contemplate a reform of his own life and of the abuses of the Church. The Pope gratefully received from Savonarola a dignified and tender letter of condolence in which he was urged to find comfort for his sorrow in the exercise of faith and in the active service of God. The Pope indeed appointed a commission of six Cardinals to undertake the work of ecclesiastical reform, and the case between himself and Savonarola was at the same time committed to the consideration of that commission. But the grief of Alexander was rapidly assuaged by its own violence and his repentance was short-lived. His interest in his political plans was soon as active as ever, and at any moment the weight of his hand might fall heavily upon Florence.

There all parties were in a state of keen activity. S. Marco, the City and the Signoria were alike stirred by the pressing question—what would the Pope do next?

At S. Marco the Brethren drew up a joint letter to the Pope extolling Savonarola's virtues and his services to the City. They have understood, they say, that some few people have given sinister information to His Holiness and irritated him into action against the Friar. His doctrine has been represented as false and contrary to the public welfare. They, the signatories, to the number of more than 250, living and conversing with their Prior every hour of the day, have been witnesses of the purity of his life and doctrine, and of the astonishing conversions wrought by his means. Is it likely that they, having such knowledge and experience, and having abandoned the world for the service of God, would defend and sus-

tain a heretic and evil-doer and moreover an alien in Florence? But they do not ask the Pope to accept their testimony only. They have secured the signatures of many noble and good citizens of the State to the petition which they now urge, and could supply if necessary not hundreds but thousands of such signatures. Therefore they beseech His Holiness to withdraw his censures and to favour Savonarola in the great work to which he has set his hand.

It was true that no less than 358 citizens had put their names to a petition to the Pope couched in similar terms. An analysis of the signatures shows among the deponents two members of the House of Medici, and three of the allied house of Tornabuoni; four Rucellai, seven Strozzi, eight Ridolfi and five Albizzi. Simoni Filipepi, the analyst and brother of Botticelli, signed, together with two Del Neri, two Machiavelli, and Francesco Valori. But it was thought inadvisable to forward this petition, and thus, though it is extant, it did not officially come into the hands of the Pope. Indeed to sign such a petition was technically an offence of the first magnitude against the State. It was an assumption of authority on the part of private persons to negotiate upon an affair of State with a foreign Power—the very charge which later was to prove fatal to Savonarola. The Signoria felt compelled to take note of this breach of diplomatic etiquette, and was also called upon to determine what its own attitude was to be towards the situation which had arisen between the Pope and Florence. That situation was considered to be sufficiently serious to justify the calling of a *Pratica* which met in two sessions, on the 5th and on the 9th of July. It consisted of the Signoria, the Colleges, the Ten, the Eight, the Captains of the Parte Guelfa, the officials of the Monte, and certain representa-

tive citizens specially summoned to attend (*the Arroti*). The first session was devoted to the question of the policy to be pursued in the matter of the Excommunication: the second to the action, if any, which was to be taken in regard to those who had signed petitions either for Savonarola or against him. Between the sessions, and influenced doubtless by the discussions of the first, the Signoria, on 8 July wrote a letter to the Pope in terms very similar in tenor to the petition of the Brethren of St. Marco. Savonarola's virtues are extolled and the Pope is assured that he can do nothing more grateful to the City than to withdraw his sentence of excommunication. But after the second meeting of the Pratica on the following day the general feeling seems to have been that the essential thing to do was to safeguard the general interests of the City, and to prevent as far as possible the welfare of the State from being compromised by an ecclesiastical quarrel in which the State properly had no part. To this end a free hand was given to the Signory "to recommend to His Holiness this his most devoted City, and even if it should appear to him that Fra Hieronymo had sinned in any manner, it would please him not to visit those offences upon the City which was so affectionately disposed to the Holy See". No action was taken in regard to those citizens who had signed petitions, but it was resolved that the petition signed by the 358 should not be sent.

In the meantime the mind of Alexander is displayed as alternating between clemency and severity. While on the one hand his anger against Savonarola and against Florence was being constantly inflamed by the reports submitted to him by the enemies of the Friar within and without the City, the Pope was on the other hand equally beset by the Friar's partisans who found influential sup-

porters in the Cardinal of Perugia and the Bishop of Capaccio. On 19 July Becchi informed the Ten that if Savonarola would consent to the union of S. Marco with the new Congregation, and give an undertaking to come to Rome within two months, there was every hope that the excommunication would be withdrawn; a few days later the Signoria expresses its grateful thanks to the Cardinal and the Bishop for their good offices, and is glad to hear of the favourable disposition of the Pope, "who has shown himself so benevolent and propitious towards our affairs and Fra Hieronymo". A single letter, taken by itself, is insufficient to afford conclusive testimony to a lenient and benevolent disposition on the part of the Pope: and it is possible that the Signory by attributing benevolence to him hoped to induce a spirit of benevolence which had not yet been experienced. But throughout the months of August and September there were so many letters—of special thanks to this Cardinal, of gratitude to that, of hopeful anticipations from the Pope's mildness—as to afford proof that Alexander was by no means consumed by that obdurate prejudice against Savonarola with which he is commonly credited. But the move really lay with the Friar. To withdraw the excommunication without having first received something which at any rate might pass as submission would have been to admit the validity of his resistance and to stultify not the Pope but the Papacy. And so to Savonarola any submission beyond that which he had already tendered would have seemed a betrayal of his cause, an acknowledgment of the truth of the charges of heresy and disobedience which had been brought against him. "We have done what was due on our part," he writes on 13 August to Este's Chancellor, Ludovico Pittorio, "and the Pope seems well disposed":

“as to the excommunication, I should esteem it a much greater censure to redeem it at a price.” This may possibly refer to a rumour, which was certainly current later on, that the Pope was to be bribed by 5000 scudi,—by 16,000 ducats—by various indeterminate sums—to raise the excommunication, but, writing in August, it is as likely that Savonarola only meant that he would not redeem the excommunication at the price of further submission. “I am well,” he writes to his brother on the 14th. “Have no fears for me, and do not believe all you hear, for every day a thousand fables are in circulation. Be sure that in all these tribulations God will give us the victory. . . . If Rome is against me know that it is not against me but against Christ that she is fighting. She is fighting against God. Who can resist Him and yet be at peace? Doubt not that God will conquer.” Not the faintest note of submission sounds through these sentences.

Yet, to such a temperament as his, the strain of the situation must with each day have grown more and more wearing and intolerable. Recluse and ascetic as he was by profession, by nature he was fashioned to be a man of action and his field of action was denied him. “I cannot live without preaching.” But neither could he live and at the same time admit that the whole foundation on which his scheme of life was built was unsound. The world was beginning to cease to have a place for him and the complexities of his tragedy could be solved only by death.

It was in this month of August, at a time when Savonarola could do little but await the turn of events, that a staggering blow was dealt against his reputation from an entirely unexpected quarter. With or without justification—for facts are secondary to a prevailing impression

as to what is fact—he was held responsible by public opinion for denying the privileges of the Constitution, on which he had been the loudest to insist, to a body of accused persons who happened to be prominently identified with opposition to his party. Five citizens were condemned to death on the charge of having been privy to a conspiracy against the State. They appealed from the verdict of the Signoria to the Grand Council under the law of “the six beans”. The appeal was refused, and the refusal was generally attributed to the influence exercised by Savonarola.

These developments were the outcome of events to which reference has already been made. The attempt of Piero de' Medici had occurred at the end of April, and had resulted, as has been seen, in fiasco. A small commission was at once appointed to investigate the affair and to discover to what extent it represented an organized conspiracy against the government. But little had come of these investigations. However, at the beginning of August, when the matter had been almost forgotten, a certain Lamberto della Antella, a Medicean agent and deep in Piero's counsels, moved by treachery or revenge, or by the hope that a sentence of banishment against him might be revoked, wrote to a private citizen in Florence to the effect that he had important secrets to reveal, and that, if a safe conduct were granted him, he would come to Florence and disclose them. A knowledge of this letter having at last reached the Signoria it was determined to hear what Antella had to say. As a result many leading citizens found themselves compromised, and Bernardo del Nero, who had been chief magistrate at the time when Piero's attempt was made, Lorenzo Tornabuoni, Piero's cousin, Niccoló Ridolfi, Giannozzo Pucci and Giovanni Cambi were indicted on a



charge of high treason. The charge against Bernardo was that he had known of the plot and had not disclosed it, and there seems no doubt that to this extent he was guilty. He and his companions were condemned and sentence of death was pronounced upon them. But by the Constitution an appeal was authorized in criminal cases to the Grand Council, and such an appeal was immediately lodged. There were, however, circumstances in the case which rendered it doubtful if, in this instance, the right of appeal applied. Counsel for the prisoners had originally refused the proposal that the Grand Council instead of the Signory should pronounce the the verdict. The trial had not been conducted by the Signoria alone, but by a Pratica consisting of about 200 persons. It might be urged that the substantial purposes of the law of appeal had already been served. However, it was determined to leave the decision in the matter to the Signoria, the Pratica, summoned anew to give an opinion on the point, having advised that an appeal should not be permitted.

In the Signoria opinion was almost equally divided, for when the question was put to the vote it was found that four blacks had been cast against five whites, that is, the advocates of appeal were actually in a majority, though the question was still in abeyance, for a two-thirds majority was necessary to carry a final decision. The Pratica was again convened, and on this occasion Francesco Valori, who was identified in the public mind with Savonarola, uttered a threatening and violent harangue. With outstretched arm he called upon the Signoria to do its duty, and furiously banging on the box in front of him declared that, if they failed, either he or they should die. The excitement ran so high that Carlo Strozzi seized Piero Guicciardini, one of the Signoria, and threatened to throw

him out of the window. Thus intimidated two of the weaker members deserted their colours, and, by six blacks to three whites, the right of appeal was refused.<sup>1</sup>

There is no evidence to connect Savonarola with these proceedings beyond the fact that Valori was his close adherent and much in his confidence. Indeed the only charge against him is that he was silent. None the less, in view of the fact that Savonarola was so much the author of the law of appeal and in view of the influence which he exercised, there were many who thought at the time, what George Eliot thought in our day, that it was his obvious duty to intervene and that he refrained from doing so because of his strong personal feeling in opposition to the accused. Men remembered that when Valori was Gonfalonier the Friar had told him in the strongest language that if he failed to execute justice upon the guilty God would do so to him and more also. Valori's conduct seemed to be the interpretation in action of Savonarola's admonitions. The whole question of Savonarola's attitude towards the affair is not one of facts but of impressions. There are no facts except that he was silent and did nothing in a matter with which he may be represented as having no concern. The practical point is that some of his influential supporters disapproved of his inaction, and that, to use the words of Machiavelli, "this disclosure of his ambitious and partisan temper deprived him of his reputation and gave him much trouble".

Amid the war of words and diplomats which was raging around his name Savonarola himself remained quiet, corresponding with his friends, composing various short tractates embodying his teaching—among them his treatise

<sup>1</sup> I have mainly followed Guicciardini's account. As his father was one of the Signori, and a staunch member of the minority, he ought to have known what occurred.



CONVENT OF S. MARCO, FLORENCE. THE PLAZZA AND THE CHURCH



“The Triumph of the Cross”—and fighting the plague from S. Marco with heroic tenacity and self-sacrifice. This was the time when he enjoyed the gratification, so often denied to the labourer in the field of moral reform, of witnessing some fruit from his exertions. Many of the younger novices were sent away from Florence to avoid the contagion, and such, writes Savonarola, was the spirit of charity and Christian zeal among the citizens that some of them received as many as twenty or thirty novices into their own villas, and maintained them at their own expense in order to isolate them from infection and secure the advantages of a more salubrious air. He himself, with the older brethren, remained in S. Marco, daily faring forth among the plague-stricken people, ministering to the sick and bringing comfort to the dying, to the joy and consolation of their spirits and his own. “Fear not,” he said one day, when Fra Domenico and Fra Silvestro were in gloomy converse as to the dark prospects before them, “what need is there for your fears? Do we not know that we must all die the death? It is only the time of it of which we are ignorant.” “Be not afraid”—he writes at this time (14 August) to his brother Alberto—“be not afraid that I stay in Florence in the midst of plague: The Lord will help me. I remain to console the afflicted. Though I have been urged to go I am not willing to abandon my little flock (*le peccorelle*). The joy and equanimity of all, hovering as they are between life and death is incredible. Not our brethren alone but citizens and even women seem, as they render up their souls to their Saviour, to sleep rather than to die; and those who remain alive not only have no fears of death, but even seem to desire it.”

But as the summer season of 1497 waned and the year deepened into autumn, with each passing day the sense

of weariness, of unsatisfied passion for action deepened with the year; the impulse to preach became more and more irresistible. It was torture to Savonarola not to be up and doing; it was impossible to possess his soul in patience when the pulpit was denied him. The efforts of his friends seemed to be having some effect at Rome, and a Signoria favourable to him at home was instant in pressing his cause with the Pope. The course of events seems at last to have impressed upon him the sense that he was himself the chief obstacle to his own emancipation. By a timely admission of the Pope's authority and some non-committal suggestion of a willingness to submit to it the way might be smoothed to an accommodation and a decent covering be provided for a papal act of grace. What precise steps in this direction Savonarola took is doubtful, but it is certain that an impression prevailed in responsible quarters that he had done something, perhaps much, towards conciliating Alexander. "We believe," said the Signoria on 13 October to Bracci, "that Fra Hieronymo has fulfilled everything" (*ara eseguito tutto*) though we are left in doubt as to what "everything" implied. Possibly the reference is to a letter, dated on the same day (13 October) from S. Marco which purports to be a letter from Savonarola to the Pope. For the authenticity of this actual letter I should by no means like to vouch, but, authentic or not, it is perhaps legitimate to refer to it as expressing in particular terms that general willingness towards an accommodation with which at the moment he was credited. "Most Holy Father, I kiss the feet of your Holiness. As a child, grieving at his father's displeasure . . . I fly to your feet, begging you at last to give ear to my cries and keep me no longer away from your embrace. For to whom shall I go, if not to the Shepherd whose voice I love to hear, whose

blessing I implore, whose saving presence I ardently desire. I would go at once and cast myself at your feet if I could be safe on the journey from the malice and plots of my enemies. As soon as I can do so without risk I will at once set out, and I wish heartily that I could do so now that I might at last clear myself of every calumny. Meanwhile, most humbly do I submit in all things, as I have ever done, to your authority, and if, through any want of judgment or inadvertence I have erred in anything, I humbly ask forgiveness. Be pleased, therefore, I beseech you, not to close against me the fountains of your clemency, nor to spurn one whom you would find, if once you knew him, not less devoted to you than sincere." Whatever may have been the precise terms in which the Friar framed his submission there can be little doubt that this letter expresses the substance and degree of the submission he was prepared to make. It is little more than a restatement and amplification of what he had already repeatedly said as to his general willingness to submit himself to the authority of the Church. Except on the matter of a personal visit to Rome he has nothing to say, and no assurances to give, as to the particular acts of disobedience cited against him in the Brief of Excommunication, and even as regards the visit the gist of what he has to say is that he is sorry he cannot come. Nor, from his point of view, was anything more to be expected. He had been given to understand that a few formal sentences from him, expressive of his reverence and respect for Catholic authority, would make it easy for the Pope to retreat from a position which he was not specially anxious to maintain. There was a prospect that a quarrel congenial to neither party could be brought to an end by the interchange of mutual civilities and acknowledgments, and Savonarola on his part would not be wanting in mak-

ing the necessary overtures. But that he was to be taken as making a frank and unreserved surrender of the whole ground on which he stood could scarcely have occurred to him. Indeed Manfredi, the Ferrarese ambassador at Florence, a man deep in Savonarola's confidence, probably expresses the situation exactly as the Friar regarded it when, a month later, he informed the Duke that "he (Savonarola) hopes his affairs with the Pope will soon be satisfactorily arranged . . . and this, if it comes to pass, will redound to his great praise and commendation, the more so because he has not yielded to the Pope's demands". Submission with reservations is of course a dangerous game to play and it exposes the player to the charge of insincerity. But here it was not insincerity so much as miscalculation and a misunderstanding of the circumstances which actuated Savonarola, and we can conceive him as being genuinely surprised and disappointed that his well-meant overtures should have failed to produce the results he felt entitled to expect.

To the Pope on the other hand it appeared that attempts were being made to throw dust in his eyes by submission which was no submission, by polite general assurances which produced no fruit either in the policy of Florence towards the League or in the obedience of Savonarola to specific commands. The situation between Pope and Friar had become intensified rather than relieved.

It was, moreover, just as the year was drawing to a close that the hopes of Florence from Charles VIII and the French were once more beginning to revive. Preparations were being made in Marseilles for an expedition to Leghorn and it was hoped that D'Aubigny would soon be in possession of the port, to hold it against the League in the interests of Florence and the Friar's party.



Manfredi reports that Savonarola expressed the opinion in November that "he did not see that the King of France had as yet been rejected of God"—in other words, that he had once more become established in the belief in the efficacy of the Franco-Florentine alliance. The Signoria of November-December was favourable to him, and the Gonfalonier elected for January and February, Giuliano Salviati, was his friend. The threats of Rome had been menacing for six months, but nothing had come of them. All the omens were favourable, and the hour, it seemed, was striking for some decisive action. On Christmas Day Savonarola resolved openly to defy Pope and excommunication alike. Privately, in the seclusion of S. Marco, he had ignored the excommunication from the first. Now he emerged from that seclusion, and publicly and solemnly celebrated High Mass in the Duomo on one of the chief festival days of the Catholic Church.

This act of bold and flat defiance was followed within a few weeks by the announcement that Savonarola intended to resume preaching in the Duomo, and on Septuagesima Sunday (11 February, 1498) the resolve was carried into execution. The sense of shock was universal throughout Florence. The proceedings of Christmas Day had already aroused general surprise, and no small disquietude even to his devotees. But the proceedings of Christmas Day were an affair of outposts. Now the battle was joined and men had to determine definitely on which side they stood. Neutrality between Pope and Friar was no longer possible: therefore, as Guicciardini tells us, one of the first effects of Savonarola's resolution was to range in the ranks of his declared opponents that party which had sought to maintain a neutral footing amid the strife of factions and opinions.

His open and declared enemies were emboldened to a more vigorous and determined opposition, while the more cautious and prudent among his friends began to consider the possible dangers which might attach to themselves from open support to an avowed rebel against the recognized head of the Catholic world. Savonarola might be all that he claimed to be, and yet to accept his ministrations and to listen to his preaching involved very definite penalties which at any moment might take a material shape. Nor were such timid souls reassured, but rather the more alarmed, by the violent and high-handed action of the Signoria, which identified itself ostentatiously with Savonarola's determination, if it was not primarily responsible for it. Their policy was the simple one of crushing out objections by the sheer force of power. Leonardo de' Medici, the Vicar-General of the Archbishop of Florence, as soon as Savonarola's intention to preach was known, issued a prohibition to all the clergy and laymen within his ecclesiastical jurisdiction against attendance at the sermons. Whereupon the Signoria declared that such a prohibition had no validity, that Savonarola was to preach 'in any event,' and they commanded the Vicar-General, under penalties of treason, to quit his office within two hours of the receipt of the order. In the interests of an ecclesiastic, who in the eyes of the faithful was a rebel against the Church, ecclesiastical and civil authority stood confronted in naked opposition. Timid and quiet men found themselves unwillingly forced to choose which they would serve, either choice being equally fraught with unpleasant if not disastrous consequences to themselves. In the case of such men, if they were ultimately to declare for Savonarola against the Pope, it would be necessary for the former to give convincing evidence that rebellion against God's

Vicar upon earth was in truth the cause of God. Extremists on either side experienced no such difficulties. Fanaticism is fanned by opposition, and the enemies of Savonarola were as fanatical as his friends. Now that the battle was joined it must be fought out to a final issue and each side welcomed the fray. The various and disunited parties which had represented antagonism to the Friar now closed their ranks and presented a solid front. His followers prepared to give an enthusiastic and imposing welcome to their general upon his reappearance in the field. Now with confidence renewed, they looked forward to a certain victory. Now there would be restored to them that spiritual sustenance which for many months had been denied to them but without which their spiritual being could scarcely be maintained. Comfort, support, argument would now all be forthcoming to strengthen and establish their drooping faith and doubtful position. They looked to his declamation and denunciations to supply the war cries and martial strains to animate them for the contest, while from the enthusiasm and confidence of his faithful followers there would pass into the leader a double portion of energy and determination.

The Septuagesima sermon was followed by sermons on the two succeeding Sundays, Sexagesima and Quinquagesima, and these were preached from the pulpit of the Duomo. They were succeeded by a course of sermons on Exodus and certain Psalms preached daily in S. Marco from 26 February to 18 March. The twenty-second on Exodus on 18 March, 1498, was Savonarola's last sermon. These Lent discourses may first be considered as a whole, for they constitute the preacher's vindication of himself from the charges under which he laboured. Some particular sermons are inspired by the events of the mo-

ment, but taken together they form a connected body of reasoning, exposition and declamation which presents the preacher's general position with absolute clearness. From the first he goes straight to the point of his relations to the Pope and his conduct in refusing obedience to the Papal Briefs. Beginning with a few impassioned sentences of appeal to the Almighty, who has set him afloat upon a wide sea where he no longer can behold the port (the figure recalls the Advent sermon of 1494), he came to the question of his excommunication, and resolutely impugned its validity. Using the analogy of a carpenter's tool which is useless for any effective purpose unless there is a hand to guide it, he declared that the Pope, unless he be guided as an instrument of a superior agent, "is no better than you are yourselves"; he can exercise no power because he is moved by no guiding hand; he is "a broken iron" (*ferro rotto*). There are ready means by which it may be ascertained if the guidance of God is behind the Pope's commands. All that is necessary is to see if those commands be in accordance with, or contrary to, that which is the root of all wisdom, namely, godly living and charity, and if they be contrary it may be at once asserted that he is not moved by a supreme agent and therefore is a broken iron. "He who commands what is contrary to charity, let him be anathema! let him be excommunicate! nay, such a one *is* excommunicate of God. If an angel were to give such a command, let him be anathema! . . . nay, if all the saints and even the Virgin Mary herself were to do so—which is impossible—let them be anathema!" He then proceeded to endorse the proposition already laid down by his apologist, Pico della Mirandola the younger, who had asserted that Savonarola's excommunication was a proof of innocence, and to declare that, though excommunicated, he stood

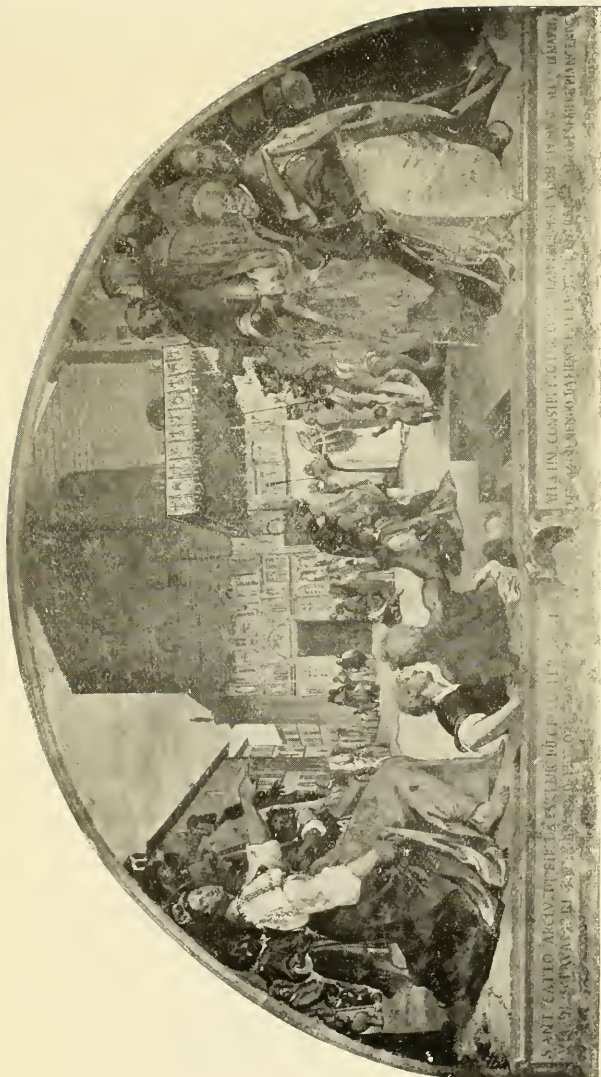
for the cause of Christ; all good men and lovers of Christ were upon his side, and if it was impossible to do good without being excommunicated then he was content to throw in his lot with the excommunicate: nay more, he would deem it sin to seek absolution from an excommunication which was a penalty for well-doing. "O my Lord, I turn to Thee and say: If ever I should seek absolution from this excommunication, send me to hell. I should fear to commit a mortal sin were I to seek absolution."

Before commenting on the position which Savonarola thus boldly took up, it may be well to bring together a few more passages from the sermons of this time in order to exhibit that position in the clearest light. The whole man and the pent-up passion of many months of silence are revealed to us in these, his latest utterances; in them we see displayed at once the sources of his weakness and his strength. Referring further to the action of the Pope he asserted that it was possible for the Pope, as Pope, to err, for it was very evident that Popes had been in error in the past from the fact that the decrees of one Pope had often been set aside by another, and as for excommunications and absolutions both could be had by the judicious expenditure of a little money. "Excommunications!" he exclaimed on Quinquagesima—"Excommunications are cheap to-day." He reiterated his claims to Divine inspiration, for though all that he had foretold had not yet come to pass, still much had already been fulfilled, and all would be fulfilled in due time. Signs enough had been given to stamp him as God's prophet, and wonders would not be wanting in God's good time. "The Lord has not yet been pleased to work a miracle . . . you have not yet constrained me to work a miracle . . . O Lord, I would that Thou shouldst make haste . . .

and that God may be the more ready to make haste, I propose that on the carnival day we should all join in earnest prayer, and I will say Mass, and I will take the Sacrament in my hands, and let every one earnestly pray that if this thing proceeds from me, if I am deceiving myself, Christ will send down upon me fire from heaven, which may then and there swallow me up in hell, but that if it is from God, let us pray that He will make haste."

In addition to such denunciations of the Pope as have been quoted and to such a vehement challenge to his opponents, there also occur veiled and mysterious allusions to the power which he himself possessed to ensure triumph for himself and for his cause. "It is not yet time," he declared, "*to turn the key.*" "We have so far brought forth but one of those five stones which David carried, but it will not be long before we shall bring forth the others." From the confession extracted from Fra Domenico, Savonarola's disciple, it is clear that the expression "turn the key" referred to a project on the part of Savonarola to instigate the Princes of Christendom to summon a General Council which should declare Alexander VI to be no true Pope, proceed to depose him, and set up another. This was certainly one of the stones which Savonarola was preparing to use against his Goliath, though it was a dangerous weapon, liable to recoil upon himself. What the other stones were we have no precise means of judging, but it is obvious that in his contest with Alexander, Savonarola supposed himself to have the direct sanction of God for his cause as well as certain definite and terrestrial means whereby he might secure its ultimate triumph.

From the general drift of these Lenten sermons it is clear that Savonarola was standing upon very slippery ground. We cannot fail to be impressed with the



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INDUCTION OF S. ANTONINUS AS ARCHBISHOP OF FLORENCE, BY POCETTI, SAVONAROLA STANDING ON THE RIGHT





earnestness of the man, with his confidence in Divine approval for his labours, with his single-minded devotion to a lofty spiritual ideal, but he was unable to form a just estimate of the material forces against which he was contending: he failed to realize that the factors which would determine the struggle were not spiritual but political. He could not understand how any one professing to be the servant of God could be opposed to him in his work for God's service. God would assuredly vindicate his faithful minister, if need be by Divine intervention and the performance of a miracle. Thus Savonarola unconsciously appealed to the lower nature of his supporters rather than to their loftiest and most spiritual ideals. He stood before them rather as a wonder-worker who could at will call down from Heaven miraculous assistance to his aid than as the apostle of a higher life. Instead of calling the people to God, he was calling God to the people, and basing himself upon his reputation as a prophet and magician when his strength should have rested on his position as a moral reformer. Thus, unless he could show some evidence, when the demand should arise, of supernatural support, his influence was bound to be transient. As long as he could maintain his personal credit his followers would be true to him, but at the first sign of reverses they would demand a miracle, and, failing its production, they would repudiate their prophet as an impostor. The suddenness of Savonarola's fall is the measure of the unsound and unsubstantial character of the foundations on which he rested.

In the meantime the report that the Friar had again begun to preach was promptly circulated in Rome and at the Italian Courts, and created profound indignation. Six days after the Septuagesima sermon the Florentine ambassador at Rome wrote to the Signory saying that a

serious situation had been created: dispatches followed quickly in succession whereby the government was made acquainted with the Pope's displeasure and warned of the inevitable consequences. The contest between Savonarola and Alexander had now become a personal matter, for the Pope could scarcely hear with equanimity of the invectives which had been levelled against his private and public character. Moreover there was a serious danger in the threat of a General Council which the Friar obscurely held out, a danger all the more real because of the open support given by the Florentine government to Savonarola in allowing him to preach in spite of the excommunication. The Pope, being also persuaded that it was due to this "chattering Friar" that the Florentines adhered to their French alliance, a strong combination of motives urged him to severe measures against Savonarola and the government which supported him. He wished to silence an inconvenient critic of his private life, to vindicate the authority of the occupant of the Holy See, and to win over Florence from her attachment to a mischievous monk and an anti-Italian policy. The financial embarrassments of Florence and her earnest desire to recover Pisa were circumstances which played into the Pope's hands, for it was easy to make the suppression of Savonarola a condition of any favours he might be disposed to grant. Hence on 26 February, 1498, the Pope addressed a letter to the Signory in which he recounted the grievances which he had suffered at the hands of "that son of iniquity, Fra Hieronymo Savonarola," and declared that unless the Friar were sent to Rome, or at least kept in confinement at Florence, he would be compelled to lay Florence under an interdict or even to proceed to more severe measures.

Apart from the expression "that son of iniquity" ap-

plied to Savonarola, the Pope expressed himself in moderate terms and not unreasonably. Judging Alexander simply as a man, and not as a synonym for every form of wickedness, we can scarcely be surprised that he was indignant, and that he expressed his indignation forcibly. He had been called a broken iron, and the expression rankled. The death of his son had been alluded to as a judgment of God upon him, and as a fulfilment of Savonarola's prophecies. Rather is it surprising that he should so soon have allowed his personal feelings to cool down to the extent of expressing to the Florentine envoy on 27 February his willingness to absolve Savonarola and to allow him to preach if he would submit to the Pope's authority. There is no evidence to show that the Pope pursued Savonarola with rancorous hostility, nor that he hid beneath the mask of an easy toleration the murderous schemes of an intriguing bravo. He was too encased in worldliness and corruption to feel, as it is imagined that he felt them, the shafts of Savonarola's embittered invective. But he was too essentially a man to be wholly insensitive to what he deemed personal insults. Having read the remonstrances and explanations offered by the Signory to his Brief of 26 February, Alexander characterized the dispatch as "a sorry letter" (*una trista lettera*). Here was an excommunicated monk who had dared to defy his sentence, whose defiance had been endorsed and abetted by the government, who had openly called the Pope a broken iron, who had reproached him as being responsible for the death of his own son, who had declared he would rather go to Hell than seek absolution, and all the government could do was to write a dispatch which barely concealed their determination to do nothing! The whole letter smacked of the Friar, and the Pope expressed his conviction that it was actually

his handiwork. Yet Alexander swallowed his sense of personal resentment sufficiently to reply in language of studied moderation. In a dispatch of 9 March he reiterated the grounds of his displeasure against the Friar, which was wholly unconnected with his evangelical zeal or with malicious and false representations which had been made concerning him. "What you have written about him inspires us with sentiments of paternal love and compassion, but we grieve that he has been misled by we know not what spirit of pride into his present contumacy. The keys were given by Christ to St. Peter *principaliter*; wherefore whoever declares himself independent of ecclesiastical censures cuts himself off from Christ. You must not wonder then, if, having tolerated him so far, we can do so no longer."

In the meantime in Florence a state of confusion and uncertainty prevailed which almost amounted to panic. The Papal Brief of 26 February which stigmatized Savonarola as a "son of iniquity" and demanded his surrender or his imprisonment, arrived on 1 or 2 March. It proved a rude awakening to those who, lulled into a sense of security by the Pope's prolonged inactivity, had deluded themselves into the belief that he would never act. So far, since he had begun to preach again, Savonarola had carried everything before him. On Septuagesima, 11 February, he had defied the Pope's authority, had declared that he had it from God Himself that the excommunication was invalid, and had threatened "to turn the key". On Sexagesima, 18 February, he set out to prove the thesis that "whoever believes the excommunication to be valid is *ipso facto* a heretic," and in order to prove it he passed in review all the points at issue between the Pope and himself during the past two years. With complete satisfaction to himself he showed that

every charge which had been brought against him was wholly without justification, and traversed every statement on which the sentence of excommunication had been based. On Quinquagesima, 25 February, he had challenged God Himself to attest the truth of his mission. Attended by his faithful following he had gone forth from the Duomo to S. Marco, and there had solemnly invoked the fire of heaven that it would fall upon him and plunge him quick into Hell if he were indeed a deceiver of the people. Then, sunk on their knees in silent prayer, all awaited in solemn silence the issue of this tremendous invocation. On 27 February Savonarola was again the central figure to whom all eyes were turned, for it was the day of the Carnival. Once again the white-robed procession filed through the city streets, the red crosses flashed their challenge to the unbelieving, and once again the Vanities blazed up in the Piazza of the Signoria. But the Carnival was scarcely over when it was rumoured that a Brief from Rome had come, and from the moment of its arrival the fate of Savonarola began to tremble in the balance.

Already some premonition of coming trouble seems to have warned Savonarola that it was necessary to be prudent. Either upon his own initiative or acting under the suggestion of the Signoria he determined to withdraw from the Duomo, and to preach only in S. Marco. After Quinquagesima the Duomo heard him no more. Limits of space in S. Marco made it necessary to confine attendance to men only, but as a concession to the outcries of the women the service on Saturdays was reserved exclusively for them. But these arrangements by no means implied the silence of Savonarolism in the Cathedral pulpit. The full teaching of the prophet still found eloquent expression there from the mouth of Fra Do-

menico and other brethren of S. Marco: the Pope had some grounds for his subsequent complaint that a change of preacher made little apparent difference to the character of the preaching.

But now, with the beginning of March, the time had arrived when Florence as a State must define its position towards the Papal demands, and the Government must assume full responsibility in regard to a pressing matter of foreign policy. And the Government which entered upon office upon 1 March was by no means so favourable towards the Friar's party as preceding Signorias had been. The Gonfalonier was Piero, of the house of Medici, but in the access of democratic enthusiasm which had overthrown the power of that house, he had dropped his patronymic and assumed the name of Popoleschi. The views of Popoleschi himself were adverse to Savonarola, but the Signoria over which he presided was neither strong enough nor sufficiently united to give the weight and authority to its action which the situation demanded. We enter therefore upon the period of *Praticas*, of which there were no less than ten in the course of two months, all of them summoned to assist the Signoria in the determination of particular questions, as they arose in connexion with the Savonarola controversy.

The first was summoned on 3 March to consider what answer should be returned to the Pope's Brief. The motion submitted to the Assembly officially ran: "*Andandus esset Pontifici Savonarola an prohibendus a predicatione*" (should Savonarola be given up to the Pope or prohibited from preaching). The opinions expressed were so various and conflicting that the Pratica was adjourned without coming to a decision, but the letter of the Signoria of 4 March—that "sorry letter" of which the Pope complained—embodied in the strongest form the views

which had been expressed by Battista Ridolfi and other pronounced partisans of the Friar's party. Villari professes himself unable to understand how it was that a Signoria which he describes as hostile to Savonarola could have written a letter so strongly in his favour, while Dr. Pastor attempts to solve the difficulty presented by the proceedings of the Signoria during the next few weeks by the ingenious suggestion that the inaction, dilatoriness, and general conduct of the Government in thwarting Alexander and supporting Savonarola were deliberately designed to arouse the Pope to an extreme of irritation and then to use that irritation as a pretext for drastic action against the Piagnone party. Mr. Armstrong dismisses this explanation as being "too far fetched," but it derives some colour from a dispatch of 17 March from the Venetian envoys to the Anziani, which details the rumours from Florence which were current in Venice, and among them this impression that the policy of the Florentine Government was, under guise of opposing the Pope, to force his hand against Savonarola. Somenzi also in his dispatches to Sforza, can only account for the action of the Signori, of whom, he says, six to three were against the Friar, on the same supposition.

The Signoria's letter of 4 March produced from the Pope the Brief of the 9th to which reference has already been made. If its terms were general and guarded there could be no doubt as to what they specifically implied, for the Government was plainly told by its envoy at Rome that Florence would be put under an interdict if the Pope's warnings and commands were any longer neglected. With this fresh information before it the adjourned Practica reassembled on 14 March. From the full report of the debate which has come down to us we are able to see as if in actual movement the cross-currents

of opinion by which the State was agitated. In the opinion of many the personal question, as it affected Savonarola, had become merged in the larger, and far more important question of the independence of the State from foreign dictation. Was the Pope to be permitted to interfere in the domestic affairs of Florence? Was such language as that which the Papal Brief addressed to Florence to be tolerated? "Why! such a Brief would never have been sent even to Perugia and such-like" (*simili*). Thus Paolo Antonio Soderini on behalf of the Ten, and several of the speakers echoed his words. The comparison of Florence to "Perugia and such-like" evidently rankled. Some, in the interest of trade and commerce, urged obedience; some eulogized the Friar; some thought the situation ought to be represented to him, leaving it to him to determine what course he should adopt. Eventually the Pratica was again adjourned, to meet again on the 17th, when a unanimous resolution was arrived at, either by the Pratica as a whole or by certain of its members sitting as a select committee, that "Fra Hieronymo be persuaded to cease altogether from preaching; and so satisfy the Pope: but as to the other demands of the Brief they were deemed unworthy of the Republic".

All the proceedings of the Praticas had been accompanied by a running fire of comment from Savonarola himself delivered from the pulpit of S. Marco. He had already declared that this was a war which must be carried on *a ferri puliti*—with polished swords—and that its effects would be to stagger humanity (*faremo stupire tullo il mondo*). In the fifth sermon on Exodus he reproached the Signoria for the mildness and moderation it exhibited in its replies. "Let me answer a word or two. I will thunder in their ears in such a fashion that



they will hear indeed" (1 March). "Hold your Councils then," he cried on the 14th, "and if you determine that I am not to preach I will cease. . . . Do you want a sign that what I preach is the truth? Then you will see that those in the Council who get up to speak in favour of this truth will speak like valiant men (*gagliardi*) for angels will guide their tongue. Those who oppose it will speak like men muffled (*mozzi*) between their teeth like foxes. Should there be one who speaks boldly against me he will be some fool, sent as a spy, and wrought up to the point by others. . . . Tell those who are seeking to make themselves great and exalted that their seats are prepared for them—in Hell. You wish to be of the Ten, of the Eight? You will quickly be of the Ten, of the Eight—in Hell. Tell them that the rod has come. Some one has his seat in Hell already. Send and tell me in good time what you determine that I may not fatigue myself in preparing sermons."

War "with polished swords," though scarcely with polished taste or polished language! The time for reticences and civilities had gone by. The sword once drawn Savonarola threw away the scabbard, and resorted to the sheer force of vituperation to assist him in his contest. He had already (13 March) written to the Pope in terms which closed the door with a bang against all possibilities of reconciliation or compromise. "Your Holiness has let loose savage wolves upon an innocent lamb. You have not listened to my reasons. I cannot hope any longer in your Holiness, but I must trust myself wholly to Him who chooses the weak things of this world to confound the strong. I do not seek this world's glory, but I look for death and I desire it. Your Holiness will do well to delay no longer but to provide for your own salvation."

The last reference doubtless is to Alexander's salvation

in another world than this. But it would not be the fault of Savonarola if the Pope did not shortly have to provide for his salvation in this world also. In the war of naked swords which was now definitely engaged the time seemed to have come for bringing into action the forces of European intervention which Savonarola had long held in reserve. He must now "turn the key and unlock the casket". The flood-gates were to be unloosed, and the reprobation of the Catholic world, expressed through a General Council of the Universal Church, was to pour like a torrent upon the head of a profligate, simoniacal and unworthy Pope.

Already, while the *Praticas* were busy in the discussion of his case, Savonarola was contemplating an appeal to the Princes of Europe to summon a General Council. Any doubt, if indeed he felt any doubt, as to the expediency of such a project was finally removed by the decision of the *Pratica* that he should be dissuaded from preaching. This decision was communicated to him in the evening of 17 March, a few hours after it had been taken. Savonarola, in accordance with his declaration of a few days before, resolved to acquiesce in the wishes of the Government even though his consent meant nothing less than the evacuation of his principal stronghold, the pulpit. The more reason therefore that he should seek to compensate this reverse by a bold strategic movement which might retrieve all. Before the end of the month draft letters had been drawn up on the subject of a General Council, and the best means were being sought whereby their safe delivery might be ensured into the hands of those for whom they were intended.

But meanwhile there was to be one sermon more—the last one. Savonarola stipulated that he should be allowed to bid farewell, and so on the next day, Sunday,

18 March, he preached the twenty-second and final sermon of his Lent course on Exodus. The sermon consists of one more eloquent vindication of the right to resist unlawful authority ; of an explanation of the causes which had led him to yield, in such a matter as preaching, to the persuasions of a secular government, the whole being interspersed with passionate outbursts which lay bare the innermost recesses of his soul. He has preached not because he wished, but because he must : a raging fire within his bones and heart has compelled him to speak : "I felt myself all burning, all inflamed with the spirit of the Lord. Oh, spirit within ! you rouse the waves of the sea, as the wind does ; you stir the tempest as you pass. Do not do so, O spirit ! . . . I can do no other. This is the conclusion" (*non si può fare altro. Questa è la conclusione*).

On such a note, of which Luther was to catch the echo, the voice of the great preacher died away into silence. His day of preaching was over, but it should end not in defeat but victory ; action should now take the place of words.

The idea of a General Council of the Universal Church which might overthrow a wrongful Pope and effect the reformation of ecclesiastical abuses, was by no means chimerical. At the beginning of the century the papacy had been in abeyance, and the authority of Councils became supreme. The dangers to which the restored Papacy was exposed from the prevalence of the Counciliar spirit had been apparent to Alexander's immediate predecessors. Pius II's Bull of *Execrabilis* which denounced any appeal to a General Council as "execrable and in former times unheard of," and which declared that any one making such an appeal was excommunicate, reflected the present sense of danger

which a Pontiff even in 1460 entertained. The character and policy of Alexander himself had given a fresh impetus to the Counciliar spirit. It was with a view to calling a General Council that Cardinal della Rovere had urged upon Charles VIII the invasion of Italy in 1494, and so late as 1497 Charles had secured the sanction of the Sorbonne to a series of propositions asserting generally and in the abstract the authority of Councils even when convened independently of a Papal summons, and, in particular, the individual power of the King of France to summon a Council on his own responsibility.

The measures which Savonarola now adopted were therefore really formidable both to the Pope personally and to the Papacy as an institution. If they were successful they would be fatal to Alexander, and would almost certainly result in another schism. The natural law of self-defence urged the Pope to strong measures, and his position as defender of the unity of the Church gave a sort of moral sanction to any action he might take to maintain his personal position. Before the end of March Savonarola's letters to the principal European sovereigns were ready in draft and only awaiting dispatch. They were destined for the Kings of France, England, Spain, Hungary, and for the Emperor. If the content of all may be judged from one which is extant, Savonarola urged the summoning of a General Council on the grounds that the Church was without a head, that Alexander was no true Pope, and these assertions he was prepared to prove by reasons, and if necessary by miracles. One such letter was actually dispatched by Domenico Mazzinghi to the Florentine ambassador in France, but it never reached its destination. The courier who bore it fell into the hands of the emissaries of Ludovico Sforza at Milan, who relieved him of his dispatches and immedi-

ately forwarded them to the Pope. Alexander was thus in possession of documentary evidence of the Friar's designs, and a quarrel upon a matter of ecclesiastical discipline at once assumed the proportions of a struggle for existence. The chances of war had thrown Savonarola, bound hand and foot, into the grasp of his adversary, and Alexander was not the man to hesitate nor to forbear when motives of self-interest and ecclesiastical expediency combined to induce him to strike hard. There is no doubt that from the moment when the Pope received from Sforza the intercepted letter Savonarola's cause was lost. It was due to unforeseen accidents that the actual circumstances of his fall were independent of the direct action of his principal adversary.

The story of those accidents has now to be related.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE ORDEAL AND ARREST

THROUGHOUT Savonarola's career in Florence he had constantly had to face the opposition of the Franciscans. Under the spell cast by the eloquent Dominican over the city, Santa Croce saw itself compelled to yield the pride of place to San Marco, but yielded with no good will. Franciscan preachers had from the first denounced Savonarola's claims to Divine inspiration; they had opposed him on the question of the appeal from the Six Beans, had vehemently urged the validity of the Brief of excommunication, and had condemned Savonarola's disobedience to it. In all this there is nothing to show that the Franciscans were not perfectly sincere. Their opposition was not necessarily the malignant spite of disappointed rivals, for it was quite consistent with piety and good living to regard Savonarola as a doubtful prophet and unsound politician. Nevertheless the jealousies existing between rival houses no doubt counted for something in the war of pulpits which had been carried on. Now that Savonarola was silenced the Franciscans were able to gain more attention. "Santa Croce," says Dr. Creighton, "rang with denunciations of the false prophet, the heretic, the excommunicated monk."

It appears from the narrative of Burlamacchi that twelve months earlier, in Lent, 1497, a violent controversy had broken out at Prato, between Fra Domenico da Pescia,

Savonarola's first lieutenant, and Fra Francesco da Puglia, a Franciscan monk. The controversy arose from the fact that these friars had been chosen to deliver Lenten sermons at Prato in the churches of S. Domenico and della Pieve respectively. Fra Francesco's discourses were filled with impassioned warnings against the presumption of Savonarola's pretensions, and at last, carried away by excessive zeal, or sincerely anxious to bring his rival's prophetic claims to a definite test, the Franciscan declared that he was ready to enter the fire in company with Fra Domenico and thus bring to the decision of an ordeal the questions at issue between them. The challenge came to nothing, but is significant of the state of feeling which prevailed, and of the desire of Savonarola's opponents to force him to put forward that miraculous proof, which he had frequently insinuated that he was able in good time to produce, of those mysterious powers with which he claimed to be endowed.

Now, in Lent, 1498, the challenge was renewed in Florence, and the parties to it were the same Fra Francesco da Puglia and Fra Domenico da Pescia who had been rivals at Prato the year before.

Much rather profitless controversy has raged from that time to this as to whether the challenge originated with the Franciscan or the Dominican. Apart from its purely antiquarian interest the matter is of no importance either in its bearing upon subsequent events or in elucidating the characters of those concerned. Some such incident was the inevitable outcome of Savonarola's movement and method. His whole position rested upon his repeated assertions that of himself he was nothing, but that God spoke through him. Prophecies and advice tendered upon such authority would be credited just as long as the prophecies proved true and the advice produced the

predicted results. A public man basing himself upon a Divine revelation may go unchallenged so long as his revelations harmonize with accomplished facts, or the credulity of his hearers. But when facts and revelation seem to be at variance then the claim to supernatural powers must be substantiated by definite proofs. Savonarola had moved for years in an atmosphere of miracle. The demand for a particular manifestation of his powers arose therefore not from accident, malice, or calculated design, but from the nature of things. The phrase "*co' miracoli e segni*"—with miracles and signs—had almost become a catch word in S. Marco, and not Savonarola alone, but his lieutenants in the convent, were in the habit of enforcing their assertions by the statement that their truth would be established by supernatural testimony. It followed as a natural consequence that one day they would be taken at their word, and definitely challenged to produce those signs and wonders which were, as they declared, at their command.

What is certain, amid the clouds of conflicting testimonies, is the fact that towards the end of March the two Friars, Francesco da Puglia in Sta. Croce and Fra Domenico in the Duomo were fiercely engaged in a pulpit warfare, and that Savonarola was the subject of their contention. It is certain that the Franciscan repudiated Savonarola's prophetic and supernatural claims, and upheld the validity of the excommunication. It is equally certain that the Dominican upheld the claims and repudiated the excommunication. From the character of Fra Domenico, which shines transparently through his confession, we may confidently infer his methods. He would take his stand simply on supernatural revelation. "It was the angels who imposed on me what I was to say," as he naïvely, and in all good faith, declares in his confession.



Savonarola's "Conclusions" were true, because they were directly and divinely inspired, and to doubt them was to doubt God Himself. And in His own good time God, by miracles and signs, would manifest His truth.

If this was the general tenor of Fra Domenico's Lent sermons—and we may be practically certain that it was,—then the Franciscan was in fact receiving a challenge when technically he might appear to be offering one. He was expressing his willingness to accept a test which was not a suggestion of the moment, but one which had been put forward times out of number over a series of years, as the touchstone of Savonarola's position.

The crisis of this protracted contention was reached on the Festival of the Annunciation, Sunday, 25 March. Then Fra Francesco, to clinch his arguments, offered to pass through the fire in company with Savonarola and so bring to a material test the claims of the latter to miraculous powers. Fra Domenico welcomed the proposal with enthusiasm, nailed a copy of Savonarola's Conclusions upon the doors of Sta. Croce, thus publicly proclaiming them to be the definite issue, the truth or falsehood of which the ordeal was to decide.

At once the whole city was thrown into a state of violent and morbid excitement. On all sides the ordeal was welcomed. To the populace it promised a spectacle with thrills such as no carnival or Medicean festivities had ever provided. To the enemies of the Friar it promised an opportunity of discrediting him for ever. To his friends it brought the day, long looked for, and long foretold, when miracle would for ever silence incredulity, and the reputation of the master would be established beyond the possibility of doubt.

Touching evidence of the devotion for Savonarola felt by his adherents is afforded by the numbers who came

forward, men, women, children of all classes and all ages, as candidates for the honour of entering the flames. Cinozzi records one particular application which he himself witnessed. He was walking with Savonarola in the convent garden when "a youth of substance and beautiful person presented a written petition in which he offered himself to the fire, and fearing lest that should not suffice, he prostrated himself upon the ground before the feet of the Friar, urging his request with all the energy of voice and gesture which he could command". Such enthusiasm was regarded by Savonarola himself, and was represented to the Pope by his brethren, as in itself a manifestation of the justice of their cause, more especially when contrasted with the mere handful of Franciscans who expressed themselves willing to undergo the test. But the fact was forgotten that the Franciscans expected to be burned; the Savonarolists were convinced that they would go unscathed. To the one party the only prospect offered was that of certain death. To the other the danger of personal risk was swallowed up in the certainty of a miraculous preservation. The volunteers on either side were strictly proportionate to the felt sense of danger.

The affair, however, could not go forward until the Government had defined its attitude towards it; for it was only by the sanction of Government and under its protection, that such an experiment could be carried out. The Signoria apparently had no choice but to acquiesce and assume responsibility, for public excitement had reached such a pitch that a popular rising would have followed an official decision to quash the proceedings. All that the Signoria could do was to regularize them and to formulate precisely the conditions of the test. Accordingly, on 28 March, both Fra Domenico and Fra Francesco were called before the Signoria, and formal documents were drawn

up and registered embodying the terms of the ordeal. Difficulties upon matters of detail soon arose, for the Franciscan, whose challenge had been made to Savonarola personally, was not prepared to sign an agreement which accepted Domenico as a substitute. He had no cause of quarrel with Domenico, and moreover even if Domenico were to perish, the prime author of the confusion would still remain alive. Another Franciscan Friar would doubtless be ready to try conclusions with the lieutenant, but Fra Francesco would match himself only against the commander. Savonarola, however, regarded these proceedings with disapproval and refused to be personally a party to them. He would do nothing to damp the ardour of those who were willing to undertake so great an adventure, but for himself he felt that he was reserved for a greater work. At length, after much discussion, the names both of Francesco and Savonarola were withdrawn, the champions eventually chosen being Fra Domenico to represent S. Marco and Fra Giuliano Rondinelli to do battle for Sta. Croce.

Having arranged the preliminaries the Signoria, with a view to strengthening its hands and minimizing its own responsibility, summoned a *Pratica* for 30 March, when the action of the Government was subjected to much hostile criticism, a very general opinion being expressed that such matters as the quarrels of rival Friars were altogether outside the province of government. "When I hear of such things as these," said Giovanni Canacci, "I know not whether I wish to be alive or dead. If our ancestors who founded our City had thought that matters of this kind would be debated here, and that we should be held up as a laughing stock to the scorn of all the world, they would have disdained to do anything at all. The business of Government is to relieve the distresses of the people—

whether by fire, water, air, or in any other manner is of little consequence. Put an end to all this that misery and disaster may not fall upon our City." One speaker suggested that an ordeal by water would be equally conclusive as a test of truth and far less dangerous. Another thought that to cross the Arno without getting wet would be an effective way of carrying out the suggestion of the last speaker, and "just as good a miracle".

But whatever may have been the objections of level-headed men to an appeal to the rude and barbarous methods of a bygone age, the expectations of the public had been roused to such a pitch that it was felt to be dangerous to leave them unsatisfied. It was therefore determined to proceed, and, on the same day, the regulations and conditions under which the trial was to be carried on were formally embodied in a State paper.

It was enacted that if the ordeal resulted in the death of the Dominican alone, then Savonarola was to be perpetually banished; if in the death of the Franciscan alone, a like penalty was to befall the chief representative of the order, Francesco da Puglia; but if both should perish the sentence of banishment should affect the Dominicans only. This was a decision altogether in accordance with the merits of the case, and is no proof, as has been often alleged, of favouritism towards the Franciscans; for they claimed no power of working miracles, but fully expected their champion to be burned. The death of both parties would be a sufficient vindication of the truth of the contentions of the Franciscans.

The precise issue which the ordeal was to decide was defined by Fra Domenico in his "Conclusions". He appealed to a miracle to affirm the truth of the following propositions, all originally laid down by Savonarola: *The Church of God needs reform. It will be scourged. It will*

*be renewed. Florence after the scourge will be renewed and will prosper. The infidels will be turned to Christ. These things will happen in our time. The excommunication lately issued against Fra Hieronymo is null and void. Those do not sin who disregard it.*

The Franciscans on their part made no appeal to a miracle to confirm the truth of their contention that Savonarola was not a prophet and that his excommunication was valid. The destruction of Savonarola's champion would be sufficient proof that they were right. It was true that their champion must also be destroyed, but they were prepared for that: their representative was willing to sacrifice his life "for the salvation of souls". Thus the *onus probandi* lay altogether on one side. An appeal to supernatural intervention had to justify itself against an appeal to natural law; or rather, the Dominicans had to afford proof that contradictory effects can follow from one and the same cause—that fire could, under Divine impulsion, be made to discriminate between individuals in accordance with their opinions, natural law acting naturally in the case of one party to the dispute; supernatural intervention acting miraculously in the case of the other. It is obvious therefore that all the heroism of the adventure lay, by the hypothesis, on the side of the Franciscans who knew that for them at any rate it could have no other issue than excruciating suffering and certain death. But the admiration of the world in this matter has usually been reserved exclusively for the Savonarolists who made no claims to the glory of martyrdom, seeing that their whole contention was that for them no risk was involved.

Vividly does this appeal to trial by fire bring home to us the intermingling, as it were, of the mediaeval with the Renaissance world. Amid all the culture, the refine-

ment and the learning of Florence the forces of superstition were still rampant enough to compel the Florentine magistracy to arrange a spectacle completely out of harmony, as it seems to us, with the mental attainment of the age. That the superstitions of the vulgar could force such a reversion to the blind judicial system of an unlettered age is a clear indication that even in the golden days of classical refinement barbarism had not entirely lost its hold upon Italy.

Before proceeding to relate the story of the ordeal a word must be said as to the impression created at Rome by the news from Florence. Alexander and the College of Cardinals were astonished at the proposal of the rival parties and expressed their strongest disapproval of the whole business. Villari's contention that the Pope secretly aided and abetted the ordeal rests on no extant evidence and is indeed contrary to what evidence is available. The Pope must necessarily have been opposed to a project which cut at the root of his claim to supreme authority in matters of faith and discipline, and which submitted to the hazard of a miracle a question on which he had already pronounced an authoritative judgment. It may be retorted that the Pope was hostile to the ordeal because he was fearful that a miracle would ensue and that Savonarola would be vindicated, but in that case he could not have been favourable to it. The Pope's objections followed naturally from his position as head of the Church which a miracle was invoked to undermine. No measures, however, were taken at Rome to put a stop to the affair, for the Pope was assured by the Florentine ambassador that it could not be stopped save by the revocation of the Brief of excommunication. Nothing, however, appears to have been done to encourage or countenance it in any way whatever.

In Florence the ordeal was eventually fixed for Saturday, 7 April (1498). Elaborate arrangements were made for the maintenance of order in the city, and an avenue about thirty yards long by ten broad was constructed in the Piazza of the Signory, lined on each side with piles of fuel, leaving a passage about two and a half feet broad through the pyre. The Piazza itself was patrolled by armed men, the presence of Doffo Spini with some hundreds of the *Compagnacci* in the interests of the Franciscans being balanced by Marcuccio Salviati at the head of a special force for the protection of the Dominicans. It was felt that the peace of the city was trembling in the balance, and that whichever side won popular fury was likely to break loose against its defeated antagonist. All strangers were ordered to leave the City: the gates were closed, the streets were barricaded, and all approaches to the Piazza were strongly held by an armed guard. Rumours were current that it was intended that the whole affair should end in fiasco, that each party was engaged in trying to outwit the other, that the *Compagnacci* had guaranteed to the Franciscans that their champion should not enter the fire, that the Dominicans had organized the arrangements in such a way as to strike terror into their rivals and intimidate them into withdrawal. Meantime S. Marco and Sta Croce had been given up to prayer and fasting, nor did the Dominicans yield to the Franciscans in the fervour of their devotional preparations. Early on the morning of the 7th the Dominican brethren assembled in the church of S. Marco where Savonarola, after celebrating High Mass, defined his position. The ordeal, he declared, was not of his seeking, nor could any man command a miracle at will; yet as the challenge had been issued it must be taken up, even though he himself was reserved for a greater work. His

last words to his supporters before setting out were to the effect that on the previous night two things had been revealed to him in a vision, one absolute, the other conditional. In any circumstances the triumph of his party was absolutely assured, but he was unable to say whether the trial by fire would indeed take place, for this was a secret of which God had not given him the clue.

The hours between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. had been fixed by the Signoria as the time for the ordeal, and at 10 o'clock, according to Somenzi's dispatch of the following day, the Franciscans made their way into the Piazza "without any ceremony," and quietly occupied the position allotted to them. There, according to the Franciscan annalist, they waited two hours for the arrival of their opponents "perishing with hunger and cold." Somenzi, however, is more to be trusted on an unimportant point of detail when he tells Sforza that it was 10.30 when the Dominicans arrived. They entered the Piazza marching in pairs behind an uplifted crucifix and chanting the 67th Psalm—"Let God arise and let His enemies be scattered," followed by the 64th and 43rd Psalms and the Litany—the volume of sound "striking terror into the hearts of all who heard it". Behind came Fra Domenico supported by Savonarola, who carried the Host "in his excommunicated hands," as the horrified Franciscan relates. The whole company entered the Loggia de' Lanzi, which had been partitioned for the accommodation of the rival parties, and engaged in prayer, Savonarola kneeling beside an altar on which the Sacrament had been deposited.

Then difficulties began to arise. It is impossible to assign with any degree of certainty the responsibility for the delays which ensued, but certain objections were undoubtedly raised by the Franciscans which may have been





SAVONAROLA AS S. PETER MARTYR  
*In the Ancient and Modern Gallery, Florence*



valid or may have been mere pretexts. They demanded that Fra Domenico should put off his cope of cloth of gold, for it might have been enchanted by Savonarola's arts, and should exchange clothing with a brother friar. They objected also to the crucifix being carried through the flames. The points were yielded, but only after lengthy negotiations. At last, when all was arranged, it was discovered that Domenico intended to enter the fire carrying the consecrated Host in his hand. The shock caused by this proposal reverberates still through the annals, letters, and dispatches of the time. It was a point on which the Franciscans could admit no compromise. They could be no parties to what they regarded as a horrible and outrageous sacrilege. A long theological controversy followed on the question of the substance and the accidents contained within the elements, but all that it served to settle was that neither party would give way, while the populace was becoming exasperated by the waste of time. For, as the hours wore away, and nothing was being done, the excited spectators began to clamour for the spectacle, and an ugly rush was only checked by the firmness of Marcuccio Salviati, and his guard. A thunderstorm accompanied by heavy rain increased the ill-feeling already aroused, and it soon became clear that no ordeal would take place. The people, feeling themselves cheated of a carnival show, vented their wrath upon Savonarola and his party who seemed to be shirking an experiment which they had themselves challenged. Seeing that Savonarola had so often alluded to a miracle by means of which his claims would be guaranteed it was inevitable that the blame would fall upon him if, when opportunity for a miracle was afforded, advantage was not taken of it. Whoever was technically in fault for the delays, Savonarola's all was staked upon this chance and he should have

forced an issue at all hazards. A fiasco could have little effect upon the position of the Franciscans, but a fiasco to Savonarola meant irretrievable ruin.

At last, about 2 o'clock, the Signoria announced that the people were to return home as the ordeal would not take place that day. An armed escort was provided for the Dominicans to protect them from the fury of the mob which assailed the procession as it returned to S. Marco with jeers and execrations. Savonarola had built up his position upon the credulity of the populace. In a moment the foundation on which he rested crumbled away beneath his feet. He had established himself in the hearts of his followers by what they understood to be definite claims to supernatural powers. On the first occasion when he was called upon to exercise them he had failed to justify his pretensions. The popular judgment on the failure of the ordeal may have been very erroneous and founded upon no very accurate knowledge of the facts, the responsibility for the fiasco may or may not have been Savonarola's, but the man who, perhaps unconsciously to himself, rested in so large a measure on the superstitions and passions of the vulgar, was courting destruction if from any cause he allowed superstition and passion to be turned against him.

The next day, 8 April, was Palm Sunday, and then the fury of the disappointed mob found vent in open riot. The disturbance originated in the Duomo, where the remaining supporters of Savonarola were gathering to listen to a sermon from one of his disciples and champions, Fra Mariano Ughi. Ughi was himself a man of the moment, for he was not only one of the volunteers for the ordeal, but had entered into a formal agreement, signed before the Signoria, to pass through the fire if the Franciscans on their part could produce a champion to meet him. With-

in the Duomo and on its Piazza outside the *Compagnacci* were gathered in force, determined that the sermon should not be preached. The frightened congregation withdrew to San Marco, followed by infuriated crowds armed with stones and various weapons of assault. An attack was made upon the convent, which was met by a vigorous defence on the part of those within. Without the knowledge of Savonarola a little store of weapons had already been gathered together in anticipation of such an assault, and these were freely used. The conduct of Savonarola throughout the terrible hours which now followed shows him in his best light and rouses warm admiration. He strove to calm the excitement of his adherents and frequently urged them to resort only to the weapons of prayer and intercession. Fra Benedetto—the author of "*Cedrus Libani*,"—who was himself prominent among the defenders—has drawn in his simple rhymes a vivid picture of the scene and of his master. After relating that he, in company with some other brethren, had thrown down upon the seething mob below the "*alta scorza*," or crowning pinnacle of the convent church, he describes how, on his descent to the level ground, he found "the Saint" in prayer.

E mi riprese con parlare umano.  
 Disse : " Figliuolo, ascolta al mio sermone :  
 Prendi la Croce e non l'arme e coltello :  
 Di far cosi non è mia 'ntenzione ".  
 Allor cessò ciascun di far ripari  
 Og'n uom di far defesa allor restò'  
 Per non voler al Santo esser discari.

It was only on the compulsion of his friends that Savonarola was induced to abandon his intention of surrendering to the besiegers. Placing himself at the head of his brethren he proceeded to the choir of the convent church, where all engaged with him in prayer.

A fearful tumult raged without ; an attempt was made to fire the walls of the convent and the noise of battle raged around them ; but within there was only heard the sound of weeping and the ceaseless chant of the litanies as each member of that forlorn company prepared himself for instant death.

Not only around S. Marco but in all the streets of the city a wild and furious mob had broken loose from all authority. Some of the very men who were officially responsible for the preservation of order placed themselves at the head of the rioters. One of the Gonfaloniers, raising the standard of his Company with shouts of *Popolo, Popolo*, rallied a force for an attack on the palace of Francesco Valori. The passions which he, as Savonarola's most prominent partisan, had done so much to inflame were now turned against himself. His wife was shot dead by a crossbowman as she stood watching the tumult from her window. Valori himself, when obeying a summons from the Signoria to attend them at the Palazzo, was assassinated in the street by a Ridolfi and a Tornabuoni in revenge for the part he had played in the execution of their kinsmen. The Signoria remained in permanent session and issued its decrees from hour to hour—Savonarola was to go into banishment within twelve hours—all laymen were to leave S. Marco on pain of being accounted rebels—no citizen under the same penalty was to enter S. Marco—but no practical measures were taken to suppress the riot which reached its climax round the devoted convent as day was drawing to its decline. It was evening when at length some of the assailants scaled the walls and made an entrance into the choir. The instinct of self-preservation was now too strong to be suppressed and some of the friars again had recourse to arms. A furious fire carried on from pulpit and high

altar desecrated the House of God, and Savonarola was powerless to stop it. But taking up the Host he succeeded at length in drawing the majority of his remaining brethren with him to the "Greek Library," where a messenger from the Signory was received in audience. The order was that Savonarola, Fra Domenico, and Fra Silvestro should at once attend them at the Palazzo. There was some delay while the messenger returned to fetch written evidence that such a resolution had been passed by the Signory, and Savonarola used the interval to say a last farewell. He reaffirmed his Divine mission. "What I have said I have received from God and God in heaven is my witness that I speak the truth," and so he bade his friends take comfort.

Non so se della vita or sarò privo,  
Ma se purfusse crudelmente morto  
Pui morto in Ciel v'aiuterò che vivo.  
Prendete tutti del mio dir conforto ;  
Tutti la croce vogliate abbracciare  
Chè per quella del Ciel s'acquista el porto.

Then together with Fra Domenico—Silvestro had hidden himself and could not be found—he put himself into the hands of the officials of the Signory and was conducted from San Marco to the Palazzo. It is impossible, when reading the details of the mockery and insult which attended him on his last journey, to avoid a comparison between Savonarola and the Master whom he had striven so faithfully, even if mistakenly, to serve.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE TRIAL AND EXECUTION

THE Signory lost no time in communicating to the Pope the news of what had occurred in Florence. Alexander was delighted that the initiative no longer rested with him, and prepared to profit to the utmost by the advantages which chance had thrown into his hands. He was profuse in acknowledgment of the services rendered to the Church by the Franciscans, and willingly absolved the Signoria from all ecclesiastical censures which they might have incurred in the course of proceedings against Savonarola. He did not, it is true, as yet comply with the request which the Signoria thought it opportune to make that the Pope would sanction a tax of a tenth upon ecclesiastical property, but the favour was only delayed until the Government should prove by its action the sincerity of its words.

In the meantime the friars had been put upon their trial and proceedings against them were being carried on apace. The Pope was anxious that the prisoners should be sent to Rome that their trial might be there conducted by the ecclesiastical authorities, but to this request the magistrates could not consent. They had already appointed a commission to conduct the case, without waiting for an ecclesiastical sanction for their action, though Papal Briefs arrived in due course and were found to permit even the use of torture if so stringent a measure had



been, or should be, considered necessary to elicit the truth from the accused. This commission consisted of sixteen persons, of whom one was Doffo Spini, the leader of the *Compagnacci*. No friends of the Friar seem to have been appointed to seats upon it, though three or four perhaps were not actively hostile to him.

Writers upon Savonarola's trial have very largely confined their criticism to the degree of fairness or unfairness with which the judicial proceedings against him were conducted. A question almost more important, and certainly preliminary to any sound judgment upon the trial itself, is what were the precise offences for which he and his companions were tried? When the terms of his indictment have been determined we then may inquire to what extent, if any, they made Savonarola amenable to the common law of Florence, to what extent his alleged offences came within the cognizance of ecclesiastical law, and whether any proper distinction was drawn in the conduct of the trial between the civil and the ecclesiastical charges against him. The irregularities and falsifications which mark the actual proceedings are notorious and established. The exact terms of the indictment seem in a large degree to have been lost sight of.

Before the ordeal and the attack upon San Marco, Savonarola, in the eyes of the Florentine magistracy, had been an innocent man. In the previous year (1497) the letters of the Signorias to the Pope and to the Florentine ambassadors at Rome constantly represent him as a good and holy man striving to accomplish in Florence a great work of spiritual revival and moral reform. In that year, however, the constantly changing Signorias had been in the main favourable to him, and their commendation followed naturally from their opinions.

The remarkable fact is that the Government under

which Savonarola was tried should have initiated its term of office by eulogies of Savonarola as warm as those of its predecessors. On 3 March, 1498, the Signoria informed Alexander that "we can bear witness that he is an admirable worker in the Lord's vineyard and one who has gathered therefrom such fruits as none other has been able to gather". As late as 31 March, after informing the Pope that his orders had been obeyed and Savonarola forbidden to preach, the Signoria expressed itself as glad to bear witness that he had abstained from doing so, and pleased "to hear that our submission has appeased your Holiness". Yet in little more than a week from that date Savonarola was being examined and put to the torture by orders of the same Signoria on suspicion of heinous crimes, involving a sentence of death.

We are left to judge of the nature of those crimes by the interrogatories addressed to the prisoners. These have been classified as religious, political and prophetic. A more detailed classification, however, is needed if we are to understand what particular offences came under the cognizance of the civil authorities and what were left to the determination of an ecclesiastical court.

There is a passage in the Papal Brief of 12 April, addressed to the Signory in which the Pope congratulates that body on the measures taken "to repress the mad folly of that son of iniquity, Fra Hieronymo Savonarola, who had not only deluded the people . . . but had subsequently *resisted your commands and ours by force of arms*".

From this we may gather that one charge was that of armed rebellion against the authority of the State. Thus the strictest investigations were made into the circumstances in which arms had been collected in S. Marco in anticipation of the riot, and the depositions of many

citizens and Friars are extant which admit us to view, as from behind the scenes, the tragic drama of Palm Sunday.

Questions were put to the prisoners with a view to discover how far they and the brethren at S. Marco had been mixed up in political intrigues and party wire-pulling in order to influence the elections to the various offices in Florence. On the supposition of such intrigues it was not difficult to formulate a charge of treason to the Constitution.

Questions were directed to discover whether the Friars were mixed up with any proposal to subvert the existing Government, and to set up Francesco Valori, or some other, as life-Gonfalonier. Any such design might be construed as treason to the Constitution.

Such treason, if it existed, would be the more dangerous in proportion as Savonarola had been able to persuade the people that he was no ordinary man, but one directly inspired and commissioned by God to accomplish the will of God in Florence. If such pretensions were an imposture no punishment could be too severe for the impostor who had used them to secure his own ends. Savonarola, therefore, was strictly questioned as to his prophetic claims and pretensions to be the recipient of Divine revelations, and thus a matter which at first sight seems to come under ecclesiastical cognizance alone fell naturally within the sphere of civil investigation.

The common law of Florence forbade any unauthorized communications with external authorities. But a petition to the Pope had been drawn up and signed, though not sent, by many of the most prominent citizens in favour of Savonarola. These citizens had been guilty of an offence against the law in signing such a document, and if the petition was instigated from S. Marco and by Savonarola he was especially guilty in the matter.

And lastly, there were the letters which he had written, and which he proposed to send, to the European sovereigns urging the summoning of a General Council. These letters brought him within the cognizance of the law which forbade such communications, and also within the grasp of the ecclesiastical law which, in view of the danger of schism, had prohibited by the Bull of "*Execrabilis*" any unauthorized appeal to a General Council.

Such being the charges, it may be admitted that the case as a whole was fairly well met by the appointment of a civil commission to conduct it, supplemented by a further trial before two Papal Commissioners appointed to investigate Savonarola's conduct in relation to ecclesiastical offences. The offences alleged against Savonarola brought him within the range of a secular court of inquiry, even though among those offences there were some which seem to be quite outside the cognizance of the civil power. It is to be noted that he was not in the first instance tried and condemned for disobedience to the Papal commands nor for preaching heretical doctrine. He was tried and condemned by a secular court on secular grounds. It was not until two separate and exhaustive examinations had been held by civil commissioners by whom his fate was already decided, that commissioners specially appointed by the Pope for the purpose were sent to conduct a third independent and ecclesiastical investigation, which resulted in the verdict that Savonarola was guilty of heresy, schism, and disobedience to Papal authority, in addition to those crimes against the State on which sentence had already been pronounced.

So far we have been concerned merely with the nature of the charges which were formulated against the friars. This is a matter totally distinct from the question of their

innocence or guilt ; and when in the conduct of a trial it is found necessary to resort to illegal shifts in selecting the tribunal (for four of the original commissioners were removed to make way for more pronounced opponents of the Piagnone party), to the application of torture and to the falsification of the depositions which have been thus secured, the presumption is in favour of the innocence of the accused.

Yet before venturing to pronounce the whole proceedings illegal, abominable, and unjust, it is necessary to take into account the methods of judicial procedure which prevailed at the time, methods by no means so shocking to the sense of justice which then existed as to our own. It is true, for example, that the cognizance of criminal offences in Florence was reserved to the Board of Eight, and hence the trial of Savonarola by a special commission was contrary to the Constitution, yet in the case of Bernardo del Nero a mixed commission had been set up to conduct his trial. This precedent was now followed, or at any rate the precedent afforded a colourable excuse for the procedure which was adopted. We in our day attribute no value to confessions extracted under torture, yet Savonarola was neither the first nor the last political prisoner to whom torture was applied, and he had himself from the pulpit recommended its application. Torture was an almost invariable concomitant of the criminal procedure of the times. The deliberate falsification of the evidence obtained argues a weak case, and yet men of high reputation attested Savonarola's confession, and Torriano, the chief Papal Commissioner, was Master-General of Savonarola's own order, had shown himself zealous in forwarding Savonarola's schemes of conventual reform, and had appointed Savonarola Vicar of the Tuscan Congregation. The standards of to-day differ so

materially from those of 400 years ago that we must be cautious in applying present-day opinions to the events of a distant past, but it is not easy to see how even to-day, the law remaining what it was, Savonarola could be acquitted on all the counts of the indictment. Certain facts, which, technically at any rate, were treasonable, were known to all, facts which could not be affected by any confessions which Savonarola might make, nor by the question whether such confessions were valid or not. Such a fact was the intercepted letter to France, in itself a sufficiently damning *pièce de conviction*. The examination of Savonarola under torture was not so much with a view to prove his guilt, for no doubt on that point seems to have been entertained, but to elicit as much information as possible as to the extent of his designs and the complicity of others in them, and to assist the first requirement of the law, that no prisoner should be accounted guilty until he had confessed his crime.

The first examination of Savonarola and his associates began on 9 April, the day of his arrest, extended over the remaining days of Holy Week, with the exception of the 10th, and was not concluded till Easter Tuesday, 17 April. The "process," or series of confessions which the commission obtained, was not considered altogether satisfactory, for no sooner was the "process" published than it was withdrawn by order. It was doubtless owing to the unconvincing character of the evidence obtained in the first trial that a second trial was begun on 21 April, extending over three days, and many more days were given to the interrogation of the various citizens who had been arrested at the same time as the friars, and to the determination of the punishments to be inflicted upon them. In the meantime the guilt of Savonarola was taken as established, and all that remained

was to come to terms with the Pope as to the place of punishment, and as to any further investigations that Alexander might wish to make through his own commissioners. It was evidently a ruling principle of the trial that everything possible should be done to conciliate the Pope, short of admitting his right to trench on the authority of the Government in secular affairs. Throughout the proceedings *Praticas* were continually summoned by the Gonfalonier to assist the Signoria by their advice, no less than five such *Praticas* being called between 9 and 28 April and one on 5 May. A principal subject of debate was whether the friars were to be surrendered to the Pope or not.

At last on 12 May the Pope agreed that the sentence of death should be carried out at Florence, and appointed two commissioners to conduct a third examination on his behalf. These commissioners began their task on 20 May, and although one of them, Francesco Romolino, Bishop of Ilerda, was a man of the worst reputation, the other, Giovacchino Torriano, General of the Dominican Order, was conspicuous for his high character. The ecclesiastical trial ended on 22 May, when Savonarola was found guilty of heresy, schism and disobedience, and the sentence of the civil commission was confirmed. On the following day, 23 May, the sentence was carried into effect.

Throughout these successive examinations the services of a notary, a certain Ser Francesco di Barone, usually known as Ser Ceccone, were retained for the vilest purposes of injustice, namely, to doctor and falsify the depositions of the accused to their prejudice. This circumstance tends in a large measure to deprive the depositions of any historical value, and more than anything else has created the popular impression that Savonarola

died a martyr's death, foully murdered at the hands of unscrupulous judges, who, being unable, like Pilate, to find any fault in this man, fabricated the charges on which he was condemned. But in truth the question of Savonarola's guilt does not depend primarily upon his alleged confessions, for if we exonerate him absolutely from the charge of imposture and of political intrigues, there remains, as has been seen, his correspondence with foreign princes, about which no doubt whatever existed. The real injury which Ser Ceccone's falsifications have done lies in the fact that the depositions of the prisoners, except that of Fra Domenico, are almost valueless as self-revelations. We cannot accept them as throwing any certain light upon Savonarola's prophetic claims, nor as any real evidence of the facts which the depositions contain. That they were obtained under torture invalidates them still farther.

Yet by a comparison of the various depositions, and in the light of external contemporary evidences, certain inferences may be drawn which probably approximate fairly closely to the truth. Thus the deposition of Fra Domenico is declared by one of his most ardent disciples to be true in every particular ; that of Fra Silvestro to be true, but not in every particular. If the confession of Savonarola be read side by side with those of his associates, it will be found that there is substantial agreement between them on the subject of his prophetic claims, and we can arrive at something very like the truth as to the origin and methods of his supposed revelations from heaven.

It seems that in the first instance these revelations originated with Fra Silvestro, who was of a nervous and excitable disposition, given to talking in his sleep, and with a strong tendency to dreams. These dreams he communicated to Savonarola, who encouraged him to



believe they were a revelation from God. In due time a sort of partnership in revelations was established between Savonarola, Domenico and Silvestro, the latter supplying the manifestations and the other two appropriating them and making them their own, seeing, as Fra Domenico says, "that we three had but one heart". On this point the confession of Domenico alone is to be received with confidence, and it is from him that we derive this idea of a sort of common property existing in the supposed visions of Silvestro, and in so far as the confessions of Savonarola and Silvestro agree with that of Domenico they unquestionably tend to establish the truth of what he says.

But, however this may have been, there is abundant evidence to show that the publication of this account of the friars' revelations struck dismay into the hearts of their followers. On all sides we hear passionate protestations against the deceptions which had been practised upon the credulous. Luca Landucci, the chemist, whose children had been enrolled in Savonarola's "blessed bands" notes in his diary that he was present when the "process" of Fra Girolamo was read in the Grand Council on 19 April, and the feeling with which he then listened to a confession "written with his own hand" by the man "whom we had held as a prophet, and who confessed that he was no prophet, and that he had not received from God the things which he had preached". "I had expected to see in Florence the new Jerusalem, from which good laws were to come forth and the splendid example of a virtuous life. And now I perceived the contrary, and for medicine I took the words '*In voluntate Tua, Domine, omnia sunt posita*'."

Still more remarkable was the effect produced upon the brethren of S. Marco. With one accord they forsook Savonarola and hastened to make their submission

to the Pope. They excused themselves for the support which they had given to their Prior on the ground that he had shown himself capable of deceiving men far more practised and able than themselves: they now repudiated him entirely. "May it be enough for your Holiness to have seized the source of all error, Fra Girolamo: let him suffer condign punishment if there be any fitted for such wickedness as his, and let us, who are strayed sheep, return into the true shepherd." The language of repudiation, abasement and abject meanness could scarcely descend lower.

The unseemly haste with which his brethren forsook and fled from him is in striking contrast to the quiet serenity of Savonarola himself in his prison cell in the Alberghettino, or bell-tower of the Palace of the Signory. In the presence of his tormentors indeed his highly sensitive and over-wrought nature, his frame emaciated by fasting and vigils, were not proof against the tortures which he had to undergo; but in the days of respite he bore himself as one who had nothing to retract, to palliate, to excuse. Though his body was lacerated and twisted by the rope, he yet could compose himself to write meditations on the fiftieth Psalm and on the thirtieth Psalm, "*In Thee, O Lord, have I hoped*". He also wrote "*A Rule for Living a Christian Life*," in which once more he laid down the principles of his faith. There is no evidence in these prison meditations of any sense of shame and humiliation in having been untrue to himself and to his Divine commission, and it is certainly fair that these, the last expositions of his doctrine, should be set in opposition to his alleged recantations. And although they do not provide any justification for Luther's claim to see in Savonarola a forerunner of the Protestant faith, they exhibit his confidence in the grace and mercy of

God, and the certainty that salvation is to be found in the merits of Christ alone. He pictures the apparition of Despair in all the panoply of arms : "Despair hath pitched his camp around me and encompassed me with a strong host. . . . My friends are arrayed under his banner and are become my foes. All things which I see, all I hear, bear the device of Despair." But he turns his eyes to Heaven and beholds a radiant vision of Hope shining with celestial splendour, and "smilingly Hope cried, O Knight of Christ, what is thy mind in this battle? Hast thou Faith or not? Yes, I have faith. Then know that this is a great gift of God, for Faith is God's gift, nor is it to be obtained by our works lest any one should take glory to himself."

Thus his latest living thoughts ran in the direction of allegory and of celestial visions seen by the eye of Faith. Perhaps such revelations were all to which he had ever aspired, all which had ever been vouchsafed, but now in his last hour he reduces them to their true proportions, to a poet's dreams. In the days of his power he had not been able to refrain from exaggerating them, from conveying the impression that subjective fancies were objective realities. Now, when all have forsaken him, he flies to his one remaining refuge with the single prayer, "Cancel, O Lord, all my sins. . . . Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

When the long agony of waiting was at last ended and the sentence was pronounced upon him Savonarola prepared himself to die. He obtained permission for a last interview with his two fellow-prisoners, Fra Domenico and Fra Silvestro, when he fortified them by his words and presence to endure the fate before them with composure. Then, having confessed himself to a Benedictine friar, he passed the night of 22 May in tranquil re-

pose and devotion. In the early morning of the 23rd he administered the Sacrament to himself and to his two companions. This done he quietly awaited the summons of the Signory.

Meanwhile preparations for the execution had been hurried on in the Piazza facing the Palazzo Vecchio. A platform had been constructed connected with the Palazzo and running out for some distance into the square, terminating in a projecting half-circle, on which a scaffold, surrounded by combustibles, had been erected. The friars were to be hanged and their bodies consumed by fire. On the steps of the Palazzo three tribunals were set apart for the three separate sets of officials who presided over the proceedings. In one the Bishop of Vaison was to perform the ceremony of degradation and of stripping the prisoners of their ecclesiastical habits: in the next sat the two Papal Commissioners: in the third the chief magistrates of the city. It was about half-past nine in the morning when the friars were conducted from their cells to the steps of the palace, where they were unfrocked. As his friar's gown was stripped from him Savonarola cried, "Holy gown, thou wert granted to me by God's grace, and I have ever kept thee unstained. Now I forsake thee not, but am bereft of thee." Barefoot and bound they then advanced to the Bishop's tribunal, where they were again habited and again degraded. The Bishop forgetful of the formula, cried out, "I separate thee from the Church militant and triumphant". "Militant," quickly rejoined Savonarola, "not triumphant, for that rests not with you." The Papal Commissioners then declared the prisoners guilty of heresy and schism, but offered to them absolution for their sins, an offer which was reverently accepted. Finally the Eight took a last vote upon the sentence to be inflicted. It was unani-



THE PIAZZA SIGNORIA, SHOWING THE EXECUTION OF SAVONAROLA

*Painter unknown. All'Conto.*



mously confirmed, though one member was significantly absent, and under the sanction of their secular authority that sentence was immediately carried out.

The first to mount the scaffold was Fra Silvestro ; then Fra Domenico's turn came. Savonarola was the last to traverse the narrow platform to be hanged in chains between his two brethren. Men said the scaffold was like a cross, and the analogy of the Crucifixion could scarcely fail to suggest itself to the minds of some. Each of the friars went to his doom with splendid composure and with the light of Heaven radiating in his eyes. No word escaped their lips ; no miracle was vouchsafed to snatch them from the jaws of destruction. The last hopes of their devoted followers died away as they realized that there would be no answer to the taunting cry, "O prophet, now is the time for a miracle. Prophet! save thyself".

The piled-up faggots blazed ; the rising flames caught the chained and forlorn figures of the victims ; and soon the slow waters of Arno were bearing to the sea a handful of ashes and a few charred bones, the only remnants of the mortal framework of Fra Girolamo Savonarola.

Arno gentil! da poi che fusti adorno

Delle sante relique de' Profeti . . .

Benedetto sia tu che ricevesti

Quel che sprezzorno gli uomini indiscreti.

## CHAPTER XIII

### SAVONAROLA AND THE RENAISSANCE

IT is a truism to say that men and opinions must be judged in relation to their environment. But, though a truism, the proposition can scarcely be enforced too frequently or too insistently, for the temptation to judge the past in the light of the present is for most of us well-nigh irresistible. We have some instinctive understanding of the present in which we live ; we can have, when all is done, but a vague comprehension of conditions which are behind us, removed by the far distance from the range of our experience. Our judgment of men, of institutions, and of opinions is coloured by our sympathies, which can never be entirely abstract, but must take their shades from the movement of life around us. To form an absolutely just estimate of any man is impossible, for no man is fully known even to himself. It is not only in the light of what Savonarola did, and wrote, and aspired to do that he is to be judged, but with allowance made for all the unrealized possibilities, undefined yearnings and infinite aspirations of an ardent and spiritual nature. Scorned and rejected of men, he could go to meet his death in the conviction that he was about to appear before the judgment bar of One who knew all—

All, I could never be,  
All, men ignored in me,  
*This* I was worth to God.



And in the spirit of this conviction he could die with fortitude, and with steadfast confidence in his record as inscribed in the book of Life, however the record might inscribe itself in the pages of history.

The interest which attaches to Savonarola is largely personal, for in him we have the somewhat rare spectacle of a whole State, intensely self-conscious and jealously patriotic, swayed for some years by the influence of an obscure stranger. Such an individual sway could have been exercised only by a man who reflected in a remarkable degree the spirit of the age in which he lived and the aspirations of the State which he controlled. At every point Savonarola was in touch with life around him, and in his little "world of man" he represents the complex and contradictory forces of the Renaissance which were operating in his day. If at any time it is idle to look for rigid consistency and precise conformity to pattern in the lives of men, how much more impossible is it to discover these in the men who lived "in that world of incongruous feeling which we call the Renaissance". The age of Savonarola was a period when everything was in solution. The past and the future were in conflict and the issue seemed to be in doubt. The Middle Ages still exercised control over the minds of men, but the fascinations of a half-discovered world of new experience, which lay dimly before their gaze, were acting as a solvent upon established systems. Neither in the past nor in the future was there yet any sure foothold. It was an age of unstable balance in government, religion, speculation, and conduct. Priding themselves upon their intellectual emancipation, the men of the Renaissance epoch were none the less steeped in occultism and superstition. The metal was boiling in the cauldron; the time for the casting of the statue had not yet arrived. The celestial

visions and angelic promptings of Savonarola found their counterpart in the Neo-Platonic doctrine of Ficino and Poliziano; the philosophy of the schools jostled the inductive philosophy soon to be justified in Galileo and perfected by Bacon; the revival of learning itself, so fraught with the possibilities of progress and emancipation, tended to harden into a mere fashionable cult, and became so wedded to imitation that originality and initiative were held as something like treason to scholarship.

Judged in relation to a society thus situated in a state of flux and transition, Savonarola's position as a dreamer of dreams becomes intelligible; indeed the more closely his life is studied in the light of his environment the higher he stands as an exponent of much which was best in his age, as, in some particulars at any rate, a pioneer of modern thought. In his system of philosophy, and in his attitude towards classical learning, he is akin to Bacon and Erasmus in many of his conclusions, founded though those conclusions were largely upon scholastic systems. In this respect he is a link between the mediaeval and the modern world. But an examination of his general position towards the Renaissance leads to the conviction that he was neither much behind his age nor much in advance of it, faithfully reflecting its higher aspirations, not wholly untouched by its base alloy, yet resolutely bent upon claiming for purity of life, for the beauty of holiness, and for an animating faith in Christianity an assured place in the Renaissance scheme of things.

The revival of classical learning in Italy in the fifteenth century had given fresh vigour and a new trend to philosophical speculations. The schoolmen had based themselves upon Aristotle as understood through the medium of Arabian commentators, and upon the basis of his principles, as then understood, a vast and complicated

system of philosophy had been elaborated which represented the quintessence of mediaeval thought distilled from the ingenuity of the learned and the speculations of rival thinkers. Now it had become possible to read Aristotle in the original, and, in the new light thus thrown upon his teaching, and in the advancing freedom of the human mind, the scholastic philosophy was seen to be out of harmony with the spirit which the classical revival had engendered.

Scholars from the East found their way into Italy imbued not only with Aristotle but with Plato, and the whole teaching of Plato was recovered in the fifteenth century for the modern world. The passion for Pagan writers and for Pagan ideas was stimulated by the apparent conflict between Aristotelian and Platonic conceptions. Platonists and Aristotelians occupied rival camps and hurled voluminous treatises and much invective at one another, but both parties equally professed allegiance to the Church, and were, at least in theory, orthodox supporters of a Christian philosophy which had little in common with either. New knowledge had to be brought into relation with mediaeval dogma.

Thus it was the dream of Gemisthos Plethon, the founder of the Florentine Academy, to reconcile in one harmonious whole the Pagan and the Christian philosophical systems. By an ingenious process of subtraction and adaptation he eventually evolved a compromise, in which Olympus and the Pagan gods figure strangely side by side with the doctrine of redemption and the sacramental mysteries. The work of Gemisthos was continued in Florence by Marsilio Ficino, who, basing himself on Plato's recognition of a conscious governing principle in the operations of Nature, was enabled to find in Plato an idea of God, and of God's workings in Nature, to some

extent in harmony with the teaching of the Church and the conclusions of Christian philosophy.

Amid the dialectical exercises and intellectual strivings of the Neo-Platonist philosophers Savonarola moved as an expert. He had in his youth grounded himself in the Aristotelian philosophy of the schools and in the "*Summa*" of St. Thomas Aquinas, and when teacher of the novices at S. Marco it was a part of his duty to instruct them in scholastic lore. The depth of his learning is attested alike by his enemies, his friends, and impartial historians such as Guicciardini. Moreover the philosophical treatises from his own pen which are extant are themselves a sufficient proof of the wide range of his studies, and of his grasp upon the principles of mediaeval philosophy. But they are also an indication of the influence which the speculations of the Platonists of the Academy exercised upon his mind. Believing that the ultimate goal of man is what he calls beatitude, he shows that beatitude consists in the pure vision of the Divine; but that which is invisible and beyond the sphere of human perceptions can be attained only by proceeding from facts which are known and sensations with which we are familiar to an intellectual analysis of those facts, and so "we can penetrate to the substance of natural things, and, after considering these, attain to a knowledge of invisible things".

Thus Savonarola, though saturated in Aristotelian scholasticism, was not in bondage to mediaeval philosophy. It is no evidence of his antagonism to Renaissance ideas that he had profoundly studied and thoroughly grasped the principles of a philosophy which the Renaissance claimed to have superseded. He was not thereby rendered incapable, but more capable, of comprehending the speculations of his own day and of weighing their



SCULPTURE BY ...  
In the ...



real value, though in his heart of hearts he despised all philosophical systems which claimed to stand as substitutes for a living faith in Christ, and was prepared to use philosophy only so far as it served to further an intellectual acceptance of the Gospel message. There were times when the pretensions of Paganism to supplant Christ roused him to exuberance of language and characteristic exaggeration. "Plato, Aristotle, and the other philosophers are fast in Hell." "Any old woman knows more about Faith than Plato." "The only good which Plato and Aristotle ever did was to provide arguments which can be turned against heretics." But rhetoric addressed to a popular congregation was not always an index of his own inmost mind. The devotion of many of the leading Neo-Platonists to Savonarola is evidence that they recognized in him one whose solution of the problems which perplexed them was in harmony with their own. Far from finding in him an enemy to enlightened thought, such men as Pico della Mirandola recognized in him one who could sympathize and understand, one whose animating principle of life was the same as theirs, a passionate attachment to abstract truth and a genuine desire to ascertain it.

Nor was Savonarola behind his times in the study of classical literature. It was Virgil who sounded for him the call to quit the world and devote himself to its regeneration. But just as in philosophy he saw the absurdities involved in the pretensions of the philosophers to harmonize and assimilate systems which were essentially irreconcilable, so he looked with contempt on those "classicists" who were as hide-bound to the classics as the mediaeval scholars to the schoolmen.

He insisted on the claims of the world in which he lived to have something to say for itself. In his opinion

it was mere pedantry and narrow-mindedness to see life exclusively through the eyes of men who had lived under wholly different conditions many hundreds of years ago. There was more of the modern spirit in Savonarola, who read the classics in the spirit of free criticism, than in those Trissotins of the Renaissance age who would not read the Bible for fear of spoiling their style. "There are some," he said with truth, "who have so narrowed their minds and fettered them with the chains of antiquity that not only do they refuse to speak save as the ancients, but will say nothing which has not already been said by them. What reasoning is this? that if the ancients spoke not thus neither will we speak thus. If no good deed was done by the ancients must we therefore do no good deed?" Erasmus in his "*Ciceronian*" could scarcely put the matter in a more common-sensible and apposite way. It would have been well for many of the scholars of the Renaissance if they had advanced as far in knowledge as Savonarola, who saw that no intellectual nor artistic achievement of value could result from slavish imitation, and that initiative and originality could only spring from the independent exercise of the faculties of the mind.

It is perhaps in such views as these that we can find a clue to Savonarola's opinions upon the character and direction of the artistic movement of his times. By one school he is held to have been the vindictive foe to art and culture, by another to have been representative of all that was best in the humanistic revival. That he was the enemy of art the burning of the vanities is held to be proof; that he was the friend of culture is said to be attested by his purchase of the Medicean library for his convent.

The evidence on the one side is unsatisfactory because



we do not know precisely what of permanent value was burned upon the pyre of the vanities. Puritanical enthusiasts rejoiced to record how pictures by the first masters, pieces of statuary, rare editions of Boccaccio perished in the flames, and how the offer of a sum of 20,000 ducats could not redeem from destruction the treasures which were consumed. But even the destruction of an edition of "The Decameron" does not necessarily imply a total insensibility to the claims of art. On the whole a study of contemporary inventories of the vanities leads to the supposition that, while some objects of real artistic value were consumed, Savonarola's crusade was in the main directed against the implements of vice and display.

But with the evidence before us it is best to assume that much was destroyed which the world would now be glad to recover as being of high artistic value, and on this assumption we may proceed to examine Savonarola's general position towards the fine arts.

Throughout the fifteenth century the arts of sculpture and of painting had been continually advancing in technique and were becoming more and more deeply penetrated, as the century advanced, by the varied influences exercised by the age. The purely spiritual and ecclesiastical ideal of art had found in the fifteenth century its greatest, and perhaps its last, representative in Fra Angelico; but the atmosphere in which he moved was charged with forces which were driving the pursuit of art more and more into technical and scientific channels beyond which lay the vision of pure beauty to be attained as art's final goal. Thus while the subject-matter of the arts continued in the main to be drawn from sacred legend and the Scriptures, the spirit in which artists worked was so frankly secular that it tended to destroy any

religious or spiritual purpose which the work was nominally intended to convey. Contemporary portraits introduced into pictures illustrating the Nativity, studies from the nude to secure adequate representation of the Magdalen, the poses of a Tuscan *contadina* adapted to the requirements of a Madonna, all these might serve the purposes of beauty and yet be regarded as unsuitable for developing the spiritual life. It is not necessarily treason to art to object to professedly religious compositions from which every trace of a religious purpose has been banished, nor does the pursuit of pure beauty always result in achievements of which a moralist can approve. Savonarola looked at life primarily from the point of view of a moral and spiritual reformer, and if he found the pursuit of art, as practised in his day, hostile to the ends at which he aimed, he would naturally condemn it without concerning himself as to the abstract value, as works of art, of the productions which he condemned. He was probably actuated by no theoretical opinions upon the province of art, but by his everyday experience of the effects which he saw to be produced by works of a certain character. As a practical man, when he saw an opportunity of destroying what he found to be harmful, he used that opportunity to the utmost. It is beside the point to indulge in æsthetic disquisitions as to whether Savonarola ought to have regarded as injurious to morals the works which he destroyed, whether art ought or ought not to have a moral purpose, whether the highest pursuit of art can be compatible with the highest aims of Christianity. Art pursued on certain lines, and pictures produced of a certain character, did seem to him injurious to morals, and being persuaded of this he set his face resolutely against such art and such pictures.

In these opinions he found many advocates among



THE ANNUNCIATION, BY FRA ANGELICO  
*In S. Marco, Florence.*



the best artists of his day. The Della Robbia, Lorenzo di Credi, Sandro Botticelli, the divine Michelangelo ranged themselves under Savonarola's banner, and the best answer that can be made to those who hold up Savonarola to condemnation as a fanatical opponent of art is to be found in the great artists of his day who were among his supporters.

But if Savonarola was hostile to certain forms of art and to certain manifestations of the artistic spirit, he was a warm friend to such an ideal of art as Fra Angelico interpreted upon the convent walls of S. Marco. Stimulated by the immortal masterpieces of the blessed friar, and animated by his spirit, Savonarola set up within his convent a school of design, where the practice of the arts was carried on by such of the inmates as were fitted to pursue it under the superintendence of masters from without. In short, within certain clearly defined limits, he recognized to the fullest extent the claims of art upon life. His limits, judged from an abstract standard of æsthetics, may have been narrow, and destructive of art pursued as an end in itself, but, judged from the point of view of a moral reformer in Renaissance Florence, his limits are intelligible, and as a consistent man he could scarcely have made them wider.

The purchase of the Medicean library for S. Marco is a convincing evidence of the strong intellectual sympathies of Savonarola with his own age. He not only rendered an inestimable service to Florence by keeping intact what remained of those treasures which Cosimo and Lorenzo dei Medici had collected, but by making them accessible to the public he extended their usefulness and contributed to the cause of classical learning and literary culture. Cavillers may take exception to his consistency, for it may be urged that there was much in the Medicean

manuscripts which was not calculated to improve morals or advance the spiritual life, but in Savonarola we are concerned with a man, not with some monstrous embodiment of all the perfections: moreover he might legitimately distinguish between those productions of the artists which would be accessible at all times to an emotional and uninstructed public, and the works of ancient writers which would be studied in seclusion by scholars with a true feeling for the purposes of scholarship.

The position which Savonarola occupied upon the threshold of the Reformation leads naturally to the inquiry how far he is to be looked upon as the precursor and herald of that movement. The early reformers claimed him as their own. Luther in his usual vigorous language declared that Savonarola's prison meditations showed him to have accepted the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone; and often, since Luther's days, the revolt of Savonarola against the authority of Alexander VI has been used as a proof that he anticipated the revolt of Luther against the Papacy. When, however, we study Savonarola's life as a whole, and his works as a whole, it will be evident that, in spite of isolated incidents and isolated passages, his allegiance to Catholic doctrine and to the Roman supremacy cannot be challenged. If in his prison meditations, when he felt himself forsaken by all, with death immediately before him, he wrote words which seemed to imply a denial of the value of works in the scheme of salvation, there are passages scattered throughout his sermons and his writings which bear conclusive testimony to the Catholic orthodoxy of his views upon this question. When we wish to know precisely the position on which a man takes his stand we turn, if we

can find it, to some authoritative statement in which he has defined his position. Such a statement is to be found in Savonarola's "*Triumph of the Cross*," a dogmatic treatise in which he sets forth the Christian creed as he understood and accepted it.

Basing himself upon the philosophic principle that we must proceed from the known to the unknown in our search for ultimate truth, he starts from the visible Church of Christ on earth, and "even as the philosophers seek God in the visible works of nature, so we in the visible Church find the invisible Church and its supreme head, Jesus Christ". From his study of the visible Church and its institutions he at length reaches the point where he is able to lay down precisely his definition of that Church. "The Church militant here on earth is one, under one head, as the likeness and as the image of the Church triumphant in heaven under the rule of Jesus Christ, and although there is but one fold and one shepherd, yet, although Christ in heaven is the true and sole head of the Church, He hath left St. Peter as His representative upon earth saying, 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church, and I will give unto thee the keys of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. . . .' Nor can these words apply to St. Peter alone, for inasmuch as God hath promised that His Church shall endure to the end of the world, so they must be held to apply to St. Peter and his successors. Wherefore it is manifest that all the faithful should be united under the Pope, as the supreme head of the Roman Church, the mother of all other Churches, and that whosoever departs from the unity and doctrines of the Roman Church unquestionably departs from Christ."

In the face of such a pronouncement it is futile to

claim Savonarola as having the smallest conscious sympathy with the views afterwards entertained by the Protestant reformers.

But in his struggle with Alexander VI he was unconsciously aiding the cause of the Protestant Reformation. It is true that he was careful to discriminate between the man, Roderigo Borgia, who imposed upon him unlawful commands, and the Pope who could not as Pope ordain anything contrary to Christian doctrine. It is also true that Savonarola was not straining his Catholicism by such a discrimination, but was well within his right as a Catholic in asserting that every command of a Pope must be potentially contained within the original structure of Catholic doctrine derived from Christ and from Scripture; but the points in dispute between Alexander and Savonarola appeared to the average man to come within the cognizance of the Papal authority, and hence the impression was created, even among the Friar's most earnest supporters, that he was presuming to set up the right of private judgment against the authority of the Head of the Church. Thus Savonarola's contumacy tended to familiarize men's minds with the idea of private judgment as having rights against authority—the very idea which the reformers a little later so triumphantly asserted.

But apart from this there is not a vestige of foundation for the opinion that Savonarola was a herald of the Reformation. The Catholic Church received him in his youth; the great Catholic Order of the Preachers claimed him as its devoted servant from manhood to the day of his death; the doctrine which he consistently taught was the doctrine which has remained substantially the same for nearly twenty centuries, and in the faith of that doctrine he died. His excommunication from the Church



militant resulted from a combination of forces which were almost wholly political, forces with which the question of doctrinal orthodoxy had nothing whatever to do.

Savonarola's life and teaching and his miserable end form an eloquent commentary upon the corruptions with which the Church in his day was defiled. But to protest against its corruptions was not to be a rebel against the Church; history can only mark the ironic incongruity of a period which saw Girolamo Savonarola burned as a heretic and Roderigo Borgia enthroned upon St. Peter's Chair.