

The Dominican Savonarola and the Reformation

A Reply to Dean Farrar

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Wisdom kept him safe from his enemies, and defended him from seducers, and gave him a strong conflict that he might overcome and know that wisdom is mightier than all. In bands she left him not till she brought him the sceptre of the Kingdom, and power against those that oppressed him; and showed them to be liars that had accused him, and gave him everlasting glory." (Wisdom x. 12–14.)

Si quid tamen hoc in opere displiceat aut mordeat; non ulciscendi lacesseque prurigini tribuendum aut voluntati, sed defensionis impositae necessitati donandum. Nam et libere respondentem ferre debet, qui libere provocavit. Haec tu, Lector optime, lege, perlege, intellige, expende; tibi que a Paradis suffragio cave." (Pico della Mirandola, Praefatio ad Vitam Fr. H. Savonarola. Edit. 1674.)

1. A Protest

The object of the writer of this paper is, as a Catholic priest, a Dominican Father, and a lover of truth, to vindicate the honoured memory of a loyal Catholic, a zealous priest, and a fervent Dominican; and in the name of historic truth, to enter a protest against words spoken by one of the many leaders of thought — of many thoughts, thoughts different and contradictory — in the Anglican Church. The words were spoken of one whom all Dominicans are proud to remember as a brother Dominican, a model Dominican, a zealous Dominican, a saintly son of their saintly Father — Jerome Savonarola, a man who four centuries ago professed the Rule which they profess, and wore the habit which they wear to-day. Would to God that all Dominicans kept that Rule as well, and wore that habit as worthily! Would to God that all Catholics were as staunch, as fervent, as loyal, as devoted to St. Peter's See, as he! Dr. Farrar, who to his many titles now adds that of Dean of Canterbury, lecturing at St. Margaret's, Westminster (Sunday, April 21, 1895), on the "Leaders of the Reformation," with unwarranted and unwarrantable assurance instanced Savonarola as one of these. (The substance of an Address delivered in St. Dominic's Priory Church, Haverstock Hill, Sunday, April 28, 1895.)

The conscience of the eminent preacher seemed to smite him as he coupled that most Catholic of Catholic names with the names of Huss, Melancthon, Calvin, or Luther; and so he qualified the title by saying that he was a "harbinger" rather than a "leader" of the Reformation.

Savonarola a leader of the Reformation! Savonarola a "harbinger" even of that inglorious event! To one who knows his age, his work, his end, it seems beyond the bounds of credulity that any man of acknowledged literary talent and historical research could have dreamed such a dream, and then that he could have had the effrontery in his waking moments to tell his dream as a sober fact to an

audience of intelligent men. Well was it that the preacher prepared his listeners for bold flights of imagination by assuring them that his assertions rested upon the authority, in addition to the English translation of Villari, of a "noble and powerful romance!" The Dean called his address a lecture. The novelist, with greater candour than the lecturer, honestly calls her book, not a history, but "a novel," and states frankly in a note that the sermon which she quotes as preached by Savonarola is not really his, but "a free representation of his style of preaching in his more impassioned moods." Perhaps if Dean Farrar had read Burlamacchi, or Pico della Mirandola, or Tournon, or Marchese, or Père Bayonne's Étude, or Savonarola's own works, which are many (see list in Appendix No. I.), instead of George Eliot's novel, he might have hesitated before calling Savonarola the "harbinger" of that event which he himself would have denounced vigorously as an apostasy and as a religious revolt. Even Bayle, Calvinist first and Freethinker afterwards, remarks that "it is very strange that Protestants should number among their martyrs a friar who during his lifetime had always celebrated Mass and invoked the saints, and who at the hour of his death went to Confession and Communion, made an act of faith in the Real Presence, and humbly accepted a Plenary Indulgence granted him by the Pope."

2. Savonarola

Let us first see who Savonarola was, and then we will return to the question raised by the Dean, what was he?

His was indeed a mysterious life, his a strange and chequered history. P. Molineri has put on record a saying attributed in Rome to Benedict XIV., who held the great Dominican in veneration: "If God gives me the grace to get to Heaven, as soon as I shall have consoled myself with the Beatific Vision, my curiosity will lead me to look for Savonarola." Pope Pius VII. is also reported to have said: "In Heaven three serious questions will be solved: the Immaculate Conception, the Suppression of the Society of Jesus, and the death of Savonarola."

In his *Lives of the Illustrious Men of the Dominican Order* Tournon thus summarizes his wonderful career (*Histoire des Hommes Illustres de l'Ordre de S. Dominique*, tom. iii. liv. xxiii. Edit. Paris, 1746):

Amongst the apostolic men in whose lives we have seen realized all that our Lord foretold to His first disciples, the renowned Jerome Savonarola holds high rank. His natural gifts soon won the admiration of learned men as well as of ordinary people. The purity of his life, and the greatness of his virtues gained for him the esteem, respect, and confidence of the faithful. The zeal for the house of God which fired him soon urged him to undertake great works of piety; and the success which crowned his efforts soon began to excite men's envy. His supernatural gifts, his earnest and pathetic sermons, his many writings so full of light and fervour, all increased the number both of his admirers and his enemies. His prophecies, although they were afterwards fulfilled, irritated his enemies and led them to seek a pretext to bring about his downfall. The city of Florence, after having for a long time listened to him with respect, after having hailed him as the restorer of its freedom, after having esteemed him as a man of God sent by Heaven to teach the people to walk in the way of justice, looked on with delight when he fell into the hands of his enemies, when he was condemned as a false prophet, and when he died upon the scaffold. But the death of this truly great man was another proof that he had spoken by the Spirit of God. The greatness of soul, and the strength of mind which he had shown all his life, remained with him to the end; he sealed with his blood the truth of his prophecies, which came to pass even in his lifetime. Despite the intrigues, and

the shameful prejudice of those who have tried to blacken his memory, that memory has been to many as an odour of life. Many disciples have followed in their Master's footsteps. Great men and holy men have given public witness to his innocence. Several of his bitterest foes have become his staunch admirers. His friends, far from being shocked at his death, have been strengthened by it in their belief in his sanctity. His enemies have become his apologists, and his friends his historians, and one and the other have given to posterity some idea of the edifying life of this servant of God.

The family of Savonarola originally belonged to Padua, but he himself was born at Ferrara on the 21st of September, 1452. His early years were spent in study. "He made good progress in Grammar and Latinity," says Burlamacchi, and afterwards, when his father made him apply to the study of liberal sciences, he showed rare talent and acute perception, "and in a short time he surpassed his fellow-students. Nor did he profit less in the study of good manners and of holy morals. While yet in his tender years it was his delight to be alone, employing himself in making little altars and performing acts of devotion." In due course he began to study Theology, giving much time to this, always to him a congenial pursuit. He soon lost all taste for the study of Platonic Philosophy so much in vogue in the Renaissance. He refers to this in after-life in one of his sermons: "I was then in the error of the schools, and I studied with great care the Dialogues of Plato, but when God brought me to see the true light, I cast away from me all those vain ideas which filled my mind. What real profit is there in all the wisdom of Philosophy, if a poor old woman, established in the faith, knows more of true wisdom than Plato?"

At the age of twenty he was deeply moved at the sight of the wickedness of men, and an earnestness took possession of his soul which in after-years found vent in that flood of burning eloquence which fascinated and yet terrified, which made men fear and yet love him. It was at this time that he gave expression to the feelings of sorrow which were swelling as a torrent within him, in his poem *De Ruina Mundi*, in which he speaks of the misery of the world, and then asks as if in holy impatience (Madden's translation, *Life and Martyrdom of Savonarola*):

How long, O Lord, those scenes wilt Thou endure
Of riot on the part of those who deem
Their usurpation sanctioned and secure
While Thy true servants suffer daily more and more?

It was at this time too, or perhaps two or three years later, that he wrote his other poem, *De Ruina Ecclesiae*, in which he bewails the misfortunes that have come upon the Church in the infidelity and tepidity of her children.

O thou chaste Virgin! thy unworthy son
(Since thy Eternal Spouse approves that claim)
In sadness oft recalls those times bygone,
Of glorious perils, martyrdoms, of fame
For ignominious death, of the bright flame
Of faith. Alas! those times exist no more,
Zeal there is none: the men are not the same;
Heroic Christian men they were of yore,
The pristine love must now be sought in Mary's
core.

After recounting the lack of faith, of "the zone of chastity," "the evangelic themes," of "the worldly schemes by sacred persons planned," the "virtue still in rags, with pallid cheeks, with hair dishevelled, and with garment torn," he cries out in pity's pleading voice:

Weep for the wrongs religion has endured,
Ye aged men who stand around the throne,
Apostles, saints, disciples of the Lord,
Angels of Heaven, Evangelists look down.
Martyrs weep tears of blood;
there is not one
Of all the stars and planets unrestrained
In their swift course, exulting in
each zone,
To speak as mortals feel, that is not pained
To see the Temple spoiled, and the white
marble stained.

In the last stanza we seem to see the birth of his vocation to his future life so full of a pathos and zeal destined to be misunderstood:

Spirit of song, I know these strains of mine, The scorpion sting of slander must endure; Or it may be that men will not divine Their meaning, and perhaps 'tis even more To be desired, they should my thoughts ignore — For my own peace of mind — nay better too, Leave the dread struggle with abuse and power, And thus for quiet's sake the task forego, That seems to be imposed on me, for weal or woe. (Madden's translation.)

After reading these lines we are not surprised to find him, at the age of twenty-three, forming the resolution to leave the world for the cloister, a resolution which he put into effect on the 24th of April, 1475, by entering the Dominican Order in the convent at Bologna, where the body of the saintly Dominic lies under the stately tomb which was designed by Nicolò Pisano. Of his life here, which lasted seven years, Villari tells us:

While in the monastery he led a silent life, and became increasingly absorbed in spiritual contemplation. He was so worn by fasting and penance that, when pacing the cloisters, he seemed more like a spectre than a living man. The hardest tests of the novitiate seemed light to him, and his Superiors were frequently obliged to curb his zeal. Even on days not appointed for abstinence, he scarcely ate enough to support life. His bed was a grating with a sack of straw on it and one blanket; his clothing of the coarsest kind but strictly clean; in modesty, humility, and obedience, he surpassed all the rest of the brethren. The fervour of his devotion excited the wonder of the Superiors, and his brother monks often believed him to be rapt in a holy trance. The cloister walls seemed to have had the effect of restoring his peace of mind by separating him from the world, and to have purified him of all desires save for prayer and obedience. (Vol. i. p. 20.)

After his seven years' sojourn at Bologna, during which God was preparing him for his future work, he was sent, but only for a short time, to the Dominican Convent at Ferrara, his native place. Here "he lived as one dead to the world, seeing none of his acquaintances, and very little of his family, for fear of wakening his dormant affections. The streets, houses, and churches of his native town spoke to him of a past which he sought to banish from his mind."

He was finally appointed in the year 1481 to the Convent of San Marco in Florence. Here he was destined to pass the happiest and the saddest days of his life. Here within these convent walls, or at least within the walls of the beautiful city, he was to spend the rest of his life, to make his name famous throughout Italy, and even Europe, to all time, and then to end his days by his strangely tragic death.

He was named Master of Novices and Professor of Theology, and afterwards was elected Prior, and later on appointed by his Superior Vicar-General of the Reformed Tuscan Province of his Order. He soon began to preach to the Florentine people. He was ignorant of the arts of oratory, and he despised the ornate artificial style of preaching then so much in vogue. The only law of rhetoric which he knew was the first and most important canon, without which the words of the preacher will be "as sounding brass and tinkling cymbals," and the preacher himself will be as one "beating the air," viz., "to preach well is to preach without art, but with heart." The people were accustomed to flowery phrases and rounded periods, and quotations from pagan poets, and they cared not for the new preacher who preached God and not himself, who spoke to their hearts rather than to their ears and mind. It sounds strangely to us now, in the light of his after-life, to hear Burlamacchi tell us that when he preached at Ferrara his fellow-citizens cared little for his preaching, that at Bologna he was

styled "a simple man and a preacher for women," and that in Florence, when preaching the Lent at San Lorenzo, "his congregation went on diminishing till at last towards the end of Lent, it was reduced to twenty-five persons including women and children."

Soon, however, the strings of his tongue were to be loosened, and the pent-up feelings of his great soul were to be poured out in a torrent of irresistible eloquence that was to go straight to the hearts of all. His audience was to be numbered not by units, or hundreds, but by thousands of eager earnest listeners, hungering for the bread which is God's word to man.

He began to preach against the corruptions of a corrupt and corrupting age, against the evil wrought by the spirits of darkness in the high places, against the wickedness prevalent in the Church and in the State. He preached from a heart burning with zeal for souls that were perishing. To use the words of Cardinal Newman in his sermon on *The Mission of St. Philip*:

A true son of St. Dominic in energy, in severity of life, in contempt of merely secular learning, a forerunner of St. Pius V. in boldness, in resoluteness, in zeal for the honour of the house of God, and for the restoration of holy discipline, Savonarola felt "his spirit stirred up within him" like another Paul, when he came to that beautiful home of genius and philosophy; for he found Florence like another Athens "wholly given to idolatry." He groaned within him, and was troubled, and refused consolation, when he beheld a Christian Court and people priding itself on its material greatness, its intellectual gifts, and its social refinements, while it abandoned itself to luxury, to feast and song and revel, to fine shows and splendid apparel, to an impure poetry, to a depraved and sensual character of art, to heathen speculations, and to forbidden, superstitious practices. His vehement spirit could not be restrained, and got the better of him, and he burst into a whirlwind of indignation and invective against all that he found in Florence, and condemned the whole established system and all who took part in it, high and low, prince or peasant, ecclesiastic or layman, with a pitiless rigour which for the moment certainly did a great deal more than St. Paul was able to do at the Areopagus; for St. Paul only made one or two converts there, and departed, whereas Savonarola had great immediate success, frightened and abashed the offenders, rallied round him the better disposed, and elicited and developed whatever there was of piety, whether in the multitude or in the upper class. It was the truth of his cause, the earnestness of his convictions, the singleness of his aims, the impartiality of his censures, the intrepidity of his menaces, which constituted the secret of his success.

His words, aided by penance and prayer, and inspired by the love of God and man, went with the straightness and swiftness of an arrow to the hearts of men — of men too of every grade.

And now came the triumph of his life, the fruit of his penance, zeal, and prayer. His audiences outgrew the capacities of the largest churches in Florence; the great Duomo or Cathedral of the city — Sta. Maria dei Fiori, the masterpiece of Arnolfo di Cambio's and Giotto's combined skill, vast though it is, was too small to contain the thousands who flocked to hear his impassioned words.

Not only did his sermons attract multitudes to the foot of his pulpit, they sent them away changed in heart and in the purpose of their life. The whole city assumed an altered aspect — the houses became as convents, the streets as religious cloisters, the squares as monastic quadrangles. His words, as divine seeds, bore the fruits of sanctity in the lives of the Florentine people. The churches were filled with devout worshippers; the confessionals were thronged with penitents; the very streets resounded to the music of hymns and psalms. The people were beside themselves with enthusiasm. The scenes described in the Acts of the Apostles when the primitive Christians had but

"one heart and soul in the Lord," were re-enacted. Men sold their goods and gave the proceeds to the needy. They formed themselves into a Christian commonwealth of which practically, though not nominally, Savonarola was the head. "Piero de' Medici is no longer fit to rule the State," they said: "the Republic must provide for itself; the moment has come to shake off the baby Government." They shook it off, and a new and Christian Government was formed under the guidance of Savonarola, who, though he had no seat in the Council, no voice in the chamber of State, yet from the pulpit of Sta. Maria dei Fiori, virtually and by his influence was the lawgiver and ruler of the people.

Things went on well for a time, peace was restored, piety flourished, charity triumphed over selfish lawlessness, religion was respected — "They had one heart and one soul in the Lord." But it was only for a time — the change was but as a passing one, the peaceful reform effected without shedding of blood was but as a lull before the storm. Enemies arose about him to plot and plan secretly — yes, and openly — till they could bring about his downfall. He had enemies — who that tries to do good has not? "I know who the real authors of these troubles are," he wrote to a brother Religious in Rome, "they are wicked citizens who would raise themselves to power, and they have as their accomplices certain princes of Italy. They all wish to get rid of me whatever the cost, they think that my presence here is an obstacle to their ambition, ...so much so that I cannot leave my convent without an escort. I do not think that His Holiness would wish me to go to Rome if he knew all," ...and then he adds with true religious instinct: "I will obey, even though my obedience should result in the ruin of the entire world, for I would not sin in this matter even venially." (Père Bayonne, *Étude*, p. 81.) Pico della Mirandola tells us: "When the fame of his holiness grew, with it envy grew, and from envy came calumnies; for as his virtue won for him friends, so did it make enemies. Amongst his most bitter foes were those, prelates of the Church some of them, who by their evil lives were giving scandal." (*Vita Savonarola*, cap. ix.) He had preached against them; he had spoken openly of their sins; he had said with the Baptist: *Non licet* — "It is not lawful." Like Herodias, they would be content with nothing but his head — and his head they received.

The story of his downfall is a long one and a sad one. Much has been written about it, but perhaps the last word has not yet been said. No one can doubt his zeal, no one can call in question the holiness of his life and the singleness of his purpose. If he had a fault — and who has not? — it was excess of zeal, and excess is always sin. If he erred — and who has not erred in less trying surroundings than his? — his error was an error of judgment, and not of will. "I will obey, even though from my obedience shall result the ruin of the entire world," that was the expression of his will. If when the hour came to test his firm resolve, he failed — he had explained before why he failed: "If His Holiness knew all he would not ask me to go to Rome." Better for him, better for his memory, had he obeyed, even though "the ruin" had followed. *Fiat justitia ruat caelum* — "Let justice be done even though the heavens should fall." Obedience to legitimate authority in a Catholic — a priest especially and a Religious — is always justice, even though the one who holds authority be not what he should. In a short memoir it is not possible to enter into the long and sad history of his apparent collision with Pope Alexander VI. We shall have to refer to it later on, but it can only be *currente calamo*, in a brief and hurried way. Any one who wishes to study the question more profoundly may do so in Père Bayonne's *Étude sur Jérôme Savonarole*, or in Pico della Mirandola, his contemporary, who held him in deepest veneration, or in his Dominican biographer, Tournon (*Histoire des Hommes Illustres de l'Ordre de S. Dominique*, tom. iii.). Suffice it to say that his enemies, both ecclesiastic and lay, whose lives he had condemned and against whose abuses he had inveighed with such terribly scathing words, accused him to the Pope of heresy, of which (as

we shall see) he was innocent; of disobedience, which certainly was not of the will; and of imprudent zeal of which he was perhaps guilty, for zeal without prudence is guilt. He was forbidden to preach. For a time he obeyed and was silent, preaching only with his prolific pen. But seeing the misery around, and listening to the appeals of the people and rulers of Florence, he got into the pulpit again and denounced once more in words of terrible force the evil lives of men, threatening them with vengeance to come. Here was his fault. Savonarola in his humble cell, kneeling before his crucifix, praying for men, would have been a more eloquent preacher than Savonarola in the pulpit moving the people, by words of might and power, to tears and sorrow for sin. Savonarola's obedient silence would have been a more powerful sermon to all time than Savonarola's words when spoken against the will of Rome. "Doth the Lord desire holocausts and victims, and not rather that the voice of God be obeyed? For obedience is better than sacrifices; and to hearken rather than offer the fat of rams. Because it is like the sin of witchcraft to rebel, and like the crime of idolatry to refuse to obey," Samuel said to Saul. "And Saul said to Samuel: I have sinned, because I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and thy words, fearing the people and obeying their voice. ...And Samuel said to Saul: I will not return with thee, because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord; and the Lord hath rejected thee from being King over Israel. And Samuel turned to go away; and he laid hold of the skirt of his mantle and it rent. And Samuel said: The Lord shall rend from thee the kingdom of Israel this day." (1 Kings xv. 22–26.)

The question of Savonarola's conduct in this trying time is shrouded in mystery — with Pius VII. we await its solution in Heaven. Evidence is contradictory, friends defend him, foes accuse him, but no historian brings against him the charge of either heresy or schism; at most he was disobedient under circumstances most trying to a man of earnest faith and burning love. If he was disobedient, every Catholic, whether he venerate his memory or join with those who would cast a shadow over a glorious name, must admit that his disobedience was a flaw in the crystal, a black thread in the white-woven web.

If he was disobedient, how terribly did he pay the penalty of his sin; it was burnt away in fire, it was washed out in blood! "The Lord hath rejected thee from being King over Israel." His power was broken, his influence gone. Through the misrepresentations of his enemies, the Pope was induced to issue a sentence of excommunication against him, an action, it is said, which Alexander VI. lived to regret when the clouds had passed and the light was revealed (see Appendix No. 3). A reaction set in, a revulsion of feeling such as we see sometimes in the history of Italy and the lives of her children, and one which it is difficult to understand. The very Florentines, though many were true to the end, turned against him. They whose idol he had been, to whom his will had been law, whose every word had been as a pearl from Heaven, sided with his foes. They elected to the Signory, or Council, men who were known to be his foes. He was tried before the Pope's Commissioners by the magistrates of Florence. He made no attack on his judges, no attempt at self-defence. He was tried on three points: religion, politics, and his prophecies. In his replies he solemnly denied ever having taught any but the Catholic faith, though he admitted having preached against the abuses of men. His political creed he summed up in a few words: "My sole aim was to promote free government and all measures tending to its improvement." When asked about his prophecies, he replied: "Leave this matter alone; for if it was of God, ye will receive manifest proofs of it; if of man, it will fall to the ground. Whether I be a prophet or not is no concern of the State." Answers were of no avail, his sentence had already been decreed; and the sentence was, "he must die."

His end was "tragic," — that is the word all his biographers use. It is said that in 1479 St. Francis of Paula foretold of his death, which occurred in 1498. "He shall be hated, envied, accused unjustly to the Sovereign Pontiff, condemned to death on false testimony, and be hung between two of his brethren." So was it done; but over that tragic death we prefer to draw a veil — it is a credit to no one, an honour to none.

According to the barbarous customs of those days, he was tortured and then handed over to the secular power and ruthlessly done to death, "strangled, hung on a gibbet, and then burned in the very square where he had set fire to the costly furniture of vanity and sin; having previously made his confession, received Holy Communion, and accepted a Plenary Indulgence sent by the Pope." This was on the eve of the Ascension, the 23rd day of May, 1498, he being then but forty-five years of age.

In one of his sermons he had said: "My teaching has revived faith and virtue in your town. Is not this true, good people? Do you not bear me witness that a few years ago Florence was plunged in the darkness of paganism?" Savonarola was put to death, and Florence returned to her paganism again. "The rich and powerful family (the Medici) returned to Florence, and things went on pretty much as before."

3. Savonarola not the "Harbinger" of the Reformation

Such was Savonarola's life. What was his work? What rôle did he fill in the religious world of men? What were his "views" upon the vital subject of religion and creed? We need not ask: "Was he a Catholic or a Protestant?" for there were no Protestants then. Luther was a little Catholic boy of twelve when Savonarola died; Henry Tudor, afterwards Henry VIII., was a good Catholic too, and remained so for many years, even after he became King. No; those who believed in God at all and in His Incarnate Son belonged to one Church — for there was only one — "One Lord, one faith, one baptism." All said, and said truthfully: "I believe in One, Holy, Catholic Church." Savonarola then was a Catholic, Catholic to the heart's core, Catholic to the very marrow of his bones; Catholic in life, Catholic in death. Did he wish to be anything else? Did he aspire to any change? Did he dream of any evolution by which his Catholic Church should be transformed into another, with a different name, a different creed, a different system of government, a different head?

Dean Farrar would have us think so, at least if we may judge by his words, if the words were spoken seriously, not merely to tickle ears and to please men's fancy, but to convince their minds and form their judgment, and that too not on a point of doctrine, but an historic fact. Sooth to say, the Dean is not the first who has been guilty of this assumption, an assumption as unjust as it is unjustifiable. Madden, in his Preface to the *Life and Martyrdom of Savonarola*, says: "Protestants claim him for their creed, as the precursor of Luther. Luther himself claimed him for it; so did Flaccius, Beza, Heidegger, Arnold, Fabricius; and in later times, Milner, Heraut, and Hase." (P. viii.)

Visitors to Worms, too, will recall Luther's monument, with Huss on his right and Savonarola on his left. Well is it for Luther's monument that the statue of Savonarola is lifeless, else Rietschel would not long recognize the design as his own! Well that "those lips have not language," else Luther's admirers might hear such words as these: "He who shall contumaciously assert that the Roman Church is not the head of all Churches cannot be absolved by an ordinary priest, because such a man is a heretic and therefore excommunicated." (Savonarola's *Instruction for Confessors*. Roman Edition, 1517.)

Savonarola was no "leader," no "precursor," no "harbinger" of Luther or of Luther's work

If a man is a "harbinger" or precursor of a movement, surely he must prepare for, or foretell ("forthtell," the Dean would say) that movement in his words, his principles, his works, or in the practice of his life. What our Dominican hero forethought, or "forthtold," we cannot say, but we do not believe that even in the loftiest flights of his vivid Italian imagination he ever supposed that men of sense would try to reform branches of the Church by uprooting the tree altogether, that they would try to remedy the accidental defects of the "house built upon a rock" by endeavouring to destroy its very foundations. If he forethought of these men at all, it would have been as of "heretics" whom he ought to "avoid;" if he "forthtold" of their work, it must have been as of heresy, and of schism, and of sin. What he forecasted we know not, but this we know, and this we say, and we do not speak on the authority of a "romance," however "noble and powerful" — his life, his preaching, his work, his very death are all protests against Protestantism and condemnation of the pseudo-Reformation, for they are all in diametrical opposition to the life, preaching, teaching, and work of the pseudo-Reformer.

Savonarola a Reformer of men and morals

Savonarola a Reformer! Yes, he was a reformer, not merely a "harbinger," not simply a "forthteller," but a reformer — a reformer, that in the true sense of the word. For there are two kinds of reformation in the Church. There is the reformation of men and morals, and in such a work Savonarola had a glorious part. Then there is a reformation, falsely so-called, of the Church herself, an attempt, that is, to reform God's work and not man's perversity, to change the constitution, the doctrine, the nature of that Church, against which the Divine Founder said: "The gates of Hell shall not prevail," to which He promised His abiding presence: "Lo, I am with you all days, even to the end of the world," in which He foretold that the "Holy Ghost shall teach all truth," and which St. Paul describes in the fifth chapter of his Epistle to the Ephesians as being "a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, ...but ...holy and without blemish." In other words, there are reformers of the evil lives of men, even of men in high places, in convent cells and sanctuary stalls, and episcopal sees, and on the Papal chair — for neither laymen, nor monks, nor priests, nor Bishops, nor Popes are impeccable; and there are pseudo-reformers of a Church which is the work of God, a work outside the pale of man's reforming.

Savonarola was a reformer of men and morals we grant you; but never did he presume even in the most impassioned moments of his matchless eloquence, which made women faint for fear and strong men quiver visibly, never did he presume to "touch the sacred ark of God," never did he imply even that the Church, as a Church, could have "spot or wrinkle" — priests, Bishops, Popes, yes; but not "the Church of the Living God, the pillar and ground of truth." The Protestant Sismondi admits that "Savonarola in no way departed from Catholic teaching, but confined his efforts to the restoration of morals and discipline." No! "Like Noah, like Abraham, like Samuel, and Amos, and Isaiah, and all the best of the Hebrew Prophets, like John the Baptist, and Peter and Paul, and James and John" (we quote the Dean's words), "Savonarola instructed his people in godly living;" but unlike Huss and Melancthon, and Calvin and Luther, he never preached against the doctrines of the Church, the tenets of Catholic faith, the definitions which form our doctrinal creed. Villari, one of his biographers, the one to whom the Dean refers, sums it up in a word, and we commend that word to the Dean: "In fact, Savonarola's attacks were never directed in the slightest degree against the dogmas of the Roman Church, but against those who corrupted them." (Vol. ii. p. 241.)

The Protestant historian, Sismondi, admits again with historic candour that "in seeking to reform the Church, Savonarola never wandered from Catholic principles, ...that he did not claim the right of

private judgment in dogmatic questions, ...and that he devoted all his efforts to the restoration of discipline, to the reformation of the lives of the clergy, and to the winning of priests and laymen to a more perfect observance of the Gospel laws." (*Histoire de la Renaissance de la Liberté en Italie*, c. xiii.)

1. He was a reformer of morals and men

Unlike the false Reformers of the sixteenth century, this reformer of the fifteenth began his reformation with himself. Luther, the father of the German Reformation, on his own admission, did not reform himself. He began his work by breaking his vows made to God, and by inducing another vowed Religious to throw off her religious obligations and join herself to him in a wedlock which was sacrilegious; and his after-life we know, for he has revealed it to us in his Table-talk and elsewhere. Of Henry VIII., the father of the English Reformation, we need say nothing to English readers. Nay, of the private lives of one and the other we must be silent, lest our words should defile your eyes and mind, gentle reader, and our paper and pen.

But look at Savonarola's life — how pure! how blameless! At the age of twenty-two, after a youth of innocence at which no one can "cast a stone," he enters the Dominican Order, and he tells us why he did so in a pathetic letter of farewell which he wrote to his father:

The motive which decides me to enter Religion is simply this: the wretched misery of the world, the wickedness of men, their thefts, impurities, robberies, the pride, idolatry, and shocking blasphemies which stain our age to such a degree that we hardly find any one trying to lead a good life. Hence, many times daily, these lines come before my mind and bring tears to my eyes: "Fly from this heartless land, fly from this covetous shore." And, indeed, I can no longer endure the appalling wickedness that exists in parts of Italy. Everywhere piety is despised, and vice is honoured. What keener sorrow can this life ever bring me? And, therefore, day after day I have implored our Lord Jesus Christ to draw me from the abyss, and my heart is unceasingly crying out to God: "Show me the way in which I should walk, for unto Thee have I lifted up my soul." In His infinite pity God has deigned to show me this way, and I have entered upon it, although it is a grace of which I am utterly unworthy.

He took the vows that Luther took, though not in the same Order, and he kept them to the letter, and to the very inmost spirit, until the hour of his death, when kissing the scapular, the distinctive badge of his Order, he exclaimed: "O holy habit, which I have preserved unsullied to this hour, since they take thee from me — adieu."

No one, either friend or foe, tries to "convince" Savonarola of sin. Whether at Bologna, near the tomb of the holy Dominic, or at Florence, in the Convent of San Marco, redolent of the sanctity of St. Antoninus, and from whose frescoed walls Fra Angelico preached then, as now, sermons which never lack eloquence and power, his was a blameless life. His black robe of penance and his white robe of innocence covered a heart all aglow with love of God and of man. With his wallet and staff and Bible when travelling on foot; and at home in his convent, his tiny cell, still shown, with its humble table and simple wooden chair and hard, comfortless bed, what a contrast was his life to the luxurious life of an Anglican dignitary!

He seems almost to have "forthtold" their lives: "What am I to say of clerics and priests of the Church who ought to practise greater frugality than laymen, and whose duty it is to provide for the poor? I must rather weep for them than speak to them. The whole world knows how much they possess that is superfluous, and how lavishly they spend money as they choose. With what

conscience will such as they be able to stand before the terrible tribunal of Christ?" (*The Simplicity of a Christian Life*, Eighth Conclusion. Roman Edition, 1517.)

2. He was a reformer of his Order

He was a reformer again of his Order, and his zeal was appreciated to the full. Elected unanimously as Prior by his brethren, his Superiors afterwards appointed him Vicar-General of the Reformed Tuscan Congregation of his Order — a Congregation, or Province, which numbered some three hundred members — and this office he preserved to the end.

3. A reformer of the people

And what a marvellous reformer of the people, who in very deed needed a reform. Like another Jeremias, he lamented: "The ways of Sion weep, for there is none that cometh to the solemn feast." Like another Baptist, he cried out with fiery zeal: "Do penance, for the Kingdom of God is at hand." "O Italy! O Florence! on account of thy sins, calamities come upon thee. Hasten to return to the Lord thy God, for He is good and merciful to thee." His sermons are matters of history. How that people rose at midnight, and waited for hours at the Cathedral doors, weeping and praying. The vast and spacious Duomo was too small. They erected galleries, and it was packed from tiled floor to vaulted roof, and many had to return to their homes, for still there was no room. Then his burning, weird words, so full of might and power, his terrible warnings, his fiery eloquence, his majestic gestures! He swayed the people as he would. They wept audibly, they cried aloud for mercy, they trembled visibly. It was as though an angel had come down and moved the waters of compunction in the hearts of men. It was as though one spoke who had come from another world. It was as if Elias had come from Horeb, or the Baptist from the desert place. Then the strange scenes that followed the sermons! Women reformed their dress. Youths forgot their light songs, and sang hymns in the street instead. People met together to recite the Offices and Psalms. Then they brought their articles of vanity, beautiful pictures, figures carved in ivory and alabaster, lutes, flutes, guitars, perfumes, masks, books, and poems. "There were tapestries and brocades of immodest design, pictures and sculptures held too likely to incite to vice; there were boards and tables for all sorts of games, playing-cards, along with the blocks for printing them, dice, and other apparatus for gambling; there were worldly music-books and musical instruments, ...there were handsome copies of Ovid, Boccaccio, Petrarca, Pulci, ...there were all the implements of feminine vanity — rouge-pots, false hair, mirrors, perfumes, powders, and transparent veils, intended to provoke inquisitive glances." (*Romola*.) All these were made into a great pyre, or pyramid, in the Piazza della Signoria. A stranger — a Venetian merchant, it is said — offered 20,000 crowns for the pyramid as it stood. No! they burnt them all as a holocaust of penance, in token of their sorrow and abandonment of sin.

Here was a reformer indeed! Had Luther done this, had he effected such a change, then he too would have been — what he was not — a reformer. He tells us the result of his preaching in a sermon delivered at Wittenberg in 1553: "Since the preaching of our doctrine, the world becomes worse and worse, more impious, more shameless. Men are more avaricious, more impure than they were formerly under the Papacy. Everywhere avarice, immodesty, drunkenness, disgraceful disorders, and abominable passions." Again he writes: "Hardly have we begun to preach our Gospel, than we see in the country a fearful revolution, schisms, sects, and everywhere complete ruin of morality and order. Licence and all kinds of vice have been carried to greater excess than under the Papacy. People who formerly were true to duty, now know no restraint or check, and live as an untamed horse would, without restraint or shame, and are a prey to the vilest pleasures."

4. A reformer of men in high places

Savonarola would, in fine, have reformed men in high places in the Church as well as in the State. This is what he meant by the reform of the Church — of the members, that is, of the Church. The reform, indeed, was demanded in the cloister, in the sanctuary, in the houses of prelates and doctors, as he puts it so pithily: "In the primitive Church the chalices were of wood, and the prelates of gold: but now the chalices are of gold, and the prelates of wood." (*De Simplicitate Vitae Christianae*.) But here he failed, and in his failing fell. It needed more than an Apostle, it needed a Council of the Church to reform the Church's Episcopacy. Savonarola tried, but failed. The Council of Trent tried in after-years, and succeeded. He tried, and all glory to his effort! He was a reformer in the truest sense, a reformer of morals and men. Such reformers are men of God. Such was St. Bernard, such was St. Dominic, such St. Philip Neri, such St. Charles Borromeo. Such was Savonarola — a reformer of morals and men.

Savonarola not a reformer of Doctrine or Creed

He was a true reformer, a reformer of the evil ways of men, "the support of his family, the ruler of his brethren, the stay of the people." (Eccles. iv. 9.) Yes, but let us repeat again and again, in no sense did he pose, did he pretend, did he presume to be, as they did in the sixteenth century, a renovator of creed, a sower of new doctrines, a reformer of Christ's Immaculate Spouse. To use the words of Villari, whose *Life of Savonarola* the Dean professes to have read: "To regard him as the leader of a party, a sect, or a system, is an error only to be committed by those unacquainted with the friar and his times." (Vol. ii. p. 418.) Again: "It is impossible to read his books without being firmly convinced that, to the day of his death, Savonarola remained unswervingly faithful to the dogmas of his faith; and that instead of seeking to destroy the unity of the Church, it was his constant desire to render it more complete." (Ibid.) John Addington Symonds writes very appositely: "He was no apostle of reform. It did not occur to him to reconstruct the creed, to dispute the discipline, or to criticize the authority of the Church." (*A Short History of the Renaissance in Italy*.) Even the Dean of Canterbury said recently at Westminster: "He was a preacher of righteousness, ...he instructed his people in godly living. The priests had preached dogmas and ceremonies." He added significantly: "He never emancipated himself from the errors of Rome, though he never dwelt on them." Substitute "truth" for "error," and we agree with the words that he said: Savonarola never emancipated himself from Rome — nor would he. True, his sermons were especially, though not exclusively, sermons on moral subjects rather than dogmatic theses — why? Because he was a man of his age, because he was abreast of his times, and he preached to suit the needs of his day. If they asked for bread, he did not give them a stone; if they demanded a fish, he did not give them a serpent. We in England have to preach dogma "in season and out of season," and why? Because the English people have wandered from dogmatic truth. They have been told that dogma is synonymous with bigotry. "Blind guides have led the blind," and leaders and led have fallen into the pit of ignorance of Divine truth. In Italy, in the fifteenth century, men were "believers," but not "doers of the Word," and so the Apostle of Italy had to preach not faith, but practice; he had to be a reformer of practical morality, therefore had he to be in all, and above all, a preacher of righteousness and of godly living.

But Savonarola has left in his writings, notably in his *Triumph of the Cross*, which is from first to last a dogmatic treatise, and in his spoken words, which happily remain to us, his dogmatic belief. And what was it? A creed diametrically at variance with the Gospel of the so-called "reformers." As he differed from them *toto coelo* in the practical piety of his life, so did he in the preaching of the

Word. His religious creed was the antithesis of theirs. He taught the very doctrines upon which they made shipwreck of their faith.

His text-book was the *Summa* of the Dominican, St. Thomas of Aquin, that book of which Popes have said that it is "blessed and Catholic" (Urban V.), that it is "the light of the Church" (Nicholas V.), and that "the Roman Church professes to follow its teaching" (Innocent XII.); that book which the Fathers of the Council of Trent placed on the table next to the Holy Gospels as their most beautiful commentary. Pico della Mirandola attributes the vocation of Savonarola to the Dominican Order to his love and admiration for St. Thomas. (Q. iii.) The same contemporary biographer assures us that a year before his death he wrote: "Of St. Thomas I will say three things: I venerated him when I was in the world; I am ignorant, but what I do know I learned from his teaching; and the more I study his writings, the more convinced I become that he is a giant, and the rest are dwarfs." What wonder then that under the guidance of St. Thomas he preached doctrines totally at variance with what is called the "reformed creed." We will pass over the abstract questions of grace, and justification, and original sin.

Good Works

On the important question of good works and their necessity, in contradistinction to the Reformer's teaching of justification by faith alone, he says clearly: "Every one shall have according to his works;" and in one of his sermons (xvi.) he cries out: "Do you want Jesus Christ to be your friend? Answer His Divine appeal. Your Lord asks you to give Him your heart. Do something for Him then."

Church Authority

The Reformers separated themselves from the Church, denying her authority, despising her excommunications, casting her commands to the winds. How different was the teaching, preaching, and practice of Savonarola! The fourth book of the *Triumph of the Cross* is a complete vindication of Church authority, treating as it does of its Divine institution, its hierarchy, its power from on high, and its perpetual life even to the end of time. "All that the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church has decided, and all that she may decide in future time, we must accept; and all that she despises, or may hereafter despise and condemn, we must reject; for in any doubt she is the one whom we consult as our first principle, as the infallible rule which God has established for the good of our soul." (C. ix.) "Mayest thou always submit to the correction of the Roman Church, ...that Church in which there is no error." (Sermon on Sunday within the Octave of the Ascension.) "The right eye is faith, ...it consists especially in following the teaching of the Church of Rome. ...Never separate yourself from her obedience. ...Always pay attention to what she lays down, ...for it is written: 'Thou art Peter, and upon thee will I build My Church.'" (Marchese, p. 177.)

The Sacraments

The Reformers' teaching on the subject of the sacraments is summed up in the twenty-fifth of the Thirty-Nine Articles, the Articles which, whether sections of the Anglicans agree with them or not, form the authoritative profession of faith of the members of "the Church by law established" in England. The Article runs thus: "Sacraments ordained of Christ be not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession, but rather they be certain sure witnesses and effectual signs of grace and God's good-will towards us, by the which He doth work invisibly in us. ...There are two sacraments ordained of Christ our Lord. ...Those five commonly called sacraments, ...are not to be counted as sacraments,"

Savonarola, on the other hand, distinctly teaches, following the doctrine of the Catholic Church, that there are seven sacraments, and that the five which the Article rejects are to be "counted as sacraments," sacraments too "of the Gospel." He proves this by analogy in almost the words of St. Thomas, in the sixteenth chapter of the fourth book of *The Triumph of the Cross*. He maintains again that all these seven sacraments are means and instruments of grace: "The sacraments are instruments, the means made use of by Jesus Christ to work out our salvation. ...And since no one can be saved without grace, it is fitting that these sacraments should, as instrumental causes, give grace." (Marchese, c. xiv.)

Confession of sin

Although Luther has written: "I esteem auricular confession, as well as chastity and virginity, most salutary;" although he has exclaimed: "What would be the affliction of the Christian if there were no auricular confession?" and although Calvin said: "By means of private confession, pardon is obtained from those to whom Christ has said, All that you have loosed," &c. (Inst. bk. iii. c. iv.); and although the Book of Common Prayer gives the form of absolution to be used by "the priest" after "a special confession of sin," still no one can deny — Dean Farrar will frankly admit it — that until recent years the teaching and practice of the ministers and people of the Lutheran, Calvinistic, and English Protestant Churches, were most emphatically opposed to confession, in theory and in fact. Of late, it is true, a large, and increasingly large number of Protestants, have returned to this pre-Reformation creed and practice. Still the Protestant Church, as a Church, condemns confession as a distinctive doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, and holds it to be unnecessary for the forgiveness of sin.

Savonarola's doctrine on the point is as clear and incisive as his practice was indisputable. In a letter on frequent Communion he says: "I presuppose before everything that the communicant has had his conscience cleansed from sins by true contrition and an integral confession." In the third book of *The Triumph of the Cross*, he writes:

As the inflicting of punishment for sin requires legal judgment, so it is necessary for the penitent, who submits himself to Christ to be healed, to await judgment in the taxing of the punishment; and that judgment Christ makes known through His ministers, as He does in the other sacraments. But since right judgment cannot be pronounced on unknown sin, confession is needed as the second part of the sacrament, so that the wound, which was concealed but is now laid bare before the minister of Christ, may receive a fitting healing. No one indeed is a fair judge in his own cause. And so it must be that if this confession is subjected to judgment, the minister of Christ has a judicial power, for which two things are required, first authority to know and inquire into the sin, and secondly, the power of absolving and condemning. These then are the two-fold keys of the Church: authority with the science of discerning, and the faculty of binding and loosing. Since then (as has been said) the sacraments as instruments confer grace, it is certain that by virtue of the keys is granted a fuller effect of grace itself and remission than by contrition only. In the benefit of the keys too, somewhat of the temporal punishment which remains due is remitted by the absolving ministers of Christ, to the penitent, who still, when satisfaction is enjoined on him, is bound to the residue; and this is the third part of the Sacrament of Penance. Therefore it is manifest that this sacrament has been most opportunely instituted. (C. xvi.)

Once more:

The first part of the Sacrament of Penance is contrition, which being an effect of grace, produces many results: it does away with the separation from God which sin had brought about, it repairs the evil caused by sin, the debt of eternal punishment, and lastly it helps the soul to struggle against bad habits, for it supplies an abundance of grace inclining the soul to do good and strengthening it against evil. But because contrition is not the same in all, for all have not the same good-will and entire conversion to God, and because imperfect dispositions cannot entirely take away the debt of punishment due to sin (although the Sacrament of Penance always does away with the debt of eternal punishment), God in His loving mercy has provided the two remaining parts of the sacrament, to wit, confession and satisfaction. (Ibid.)

Villari (the Dean's authority) reminds us that just before Savonarola died he wrote on a bookcover, for lack of paper, a *Rule for Virtuous Living*, in which he says, "To examine one's sins, to meditate, ...Confession and Communion incline our hearts to receive grace." (Vol. ii. p. 389.) This theoretical teaching was realized in the practice of his life. According to a law of his Order then in force, made in the General Chapter held at Bologna, in 1252, he was obliged to go to confession always before saying Mass; and as a Superior, it was his duty to see that this ordination was observed by those under his care. (Const. O.P. dist. 1. cap. 1.) Villari again tells us, that when he was in prison, there "came one of the black brethren of St. Benedict to receive the prisoner's confession, and Savonarola kneeling before him fulfilled all the duties of religion with much fervour. It was the same with the other two friars." (Vol. ii. p. 398.)

Transubstantiation

One of the doctrines strenuously denied by the Reformers was "Transubstantiation;" the twenty-eighth of the Thirty-Nine Articles puts it clearly as the Protestant creed: "Transubstantiation (or the change of the substance of bread and wine) cannot be proved by Holy Writ, but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture." Savonarola, on the other hand, says in his *Triumph of the Cross*, and much the same words occur in his *Treatise on the Sacrament and the Mysteries of the Mass*:

We believe, and we declare, that under the appearances of bread, no matter how small they may be, is the Body of Christ, whole and entire, and that also under the appearances of wine, even in the smallest drop, is the Blood of Christ, whole and entire; and we believe that Jesus Christ, whole and entire, is at the same time in Heaven. We say that the Body and Blood of Christ are present in the Blessed Eucharist in virtue of the words of consecration, not because He comes there from somewhere else, but because the substance is changed. By the power of the words by which Transubstantiation takes place, there is in the Eucharist the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ under the appearances of bread and wine, because that is the meaning of Transubstantiation; but by natural concomitance, there is also the Soul and Divinity. (Bk. iii. c. 17.)

Then he taught the same in the practice of his life, every day saying Mass and spending long hours before the Blessed Sacrament. On the morning of his death Mass was said in his presence, and he received Holy Communion for the last time. Why, even in the "noble and powerful romance" he is represented on more than one occasion as giving Holy Communion and carrying the Blessed Sacrament.

Devotion to Mary and the Saints

On the subject of the invocation of saints, and especially of the "Queen of All Saints," Mary the Divine Mother, we know the views of the Reformers; it is "a fond thing vainly invented, and founded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God." (Article xxii.) If

Savonarola was "a harbinger of the Reformers," he ought neither to have preached nor to have practised this devotion. If it was "a fond thing vainly invented," it ought to have fallen under those anathemas which he, of all men, knew how to hurl with such unerring force against corruptions and abuses, "repugnant to the Word of God." Was it so? Quite the reverse; he both preached and taught this devotion, and he himself was devout to Mary, God's Mother, and the saints God's favourite, because loyal, children.

The Dean of Canterbury said in the lecture to which we have so often alluded: "In the middle age the worship of the Virgin had practically superseded the worship of Christ, yet Savonarola denounced it."

Let us clearly understand each other, that we may clearly reply. If by "worship" the Dean means the worship due to God, "a worship superseding the worship of God," so do we, so does the Catholic Church denounce it. If he means a superstitious devotion, so do we and so does the Catholic Church repudiate it — all superstition. If he means the excess of devotion, so do we, and so does the Catholic Church say "anathema" to the excess. But if he means love, reverence, affection, devotion to that woman of women, the Mother of God, to whom Jesus Christ gave the love, reverence, affection, and devotion of a life, this we deny: Savonarola both preached and practised such devotion even as we. It was his very devotion that made him protest so loudly against those who took as their models for Mary's statue and Mary's pictures lewd and dissolute women. "Conceive what must have been the beauty of the Blessed Virgin," he says, "who possessed such sanctity, sanctity that shone from all her features." "Beautiful Virgin! Virgin Mother of God! Virgin full of mercy!" was his favourite aspiration. He wrote a devout treatise on the Ave Maria — which was Heaven's message to earth, Gabriel's prayer, and the Church's prayer to the Mother of God — in which he says: "Pray for us, O Mother of God, to whom thy Son can refuse nothing. O thou well-beloved spouse, to whom thy Spouse will grant everything. Thou, O gracious Queen, thou art our Mother and the Mother of Mercy, therefore shouldst thou have pity on us!" "Doubt not," he tells his readers, "but that if you pray in this manner, you will be heard." Again: "She is blessed by God who has laden her with gifts and graces greater than He has given to others except to the Humanity of her Divine Son, Jesus Christ, ...but after that (the Sacred Humanity of our Lord), we justly hold that she has received more graces than every human or angelic creature." "Is she not the spouse of Him who is the King of the universe, that is God the all-powerful, for Jesus Christ is the true Son of God? Is she not the Mother of the King of earth and Heaven, of Jesus Christ, who is consubstantial with the Father? Is she not the tabernacle of the Holy Ghost, who with Father and Son is blessed for evermore? The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost will, that she who is Spouse, Mother, and tabernacle, should be held in great honour by all creatures." In his sermon for the Third Sunday of Lent, he cried out from his great earnest soul: "O Mary! O saints of God! angels and archangels, plead with the Lord that He hear us without fail!"

If this is "denouncing" devotion to Mary and the saints, language must have had a different meaning in the fifteenth century, from the meaning which it has to-day. Upon this point we may add the hymn, so full of Catholic faith and love, which he composed, and which was sung during the great plague in Florence. For the translation we are indebted to R. R. Madden. (*Life*, vol. i. p. 380.)

O Star of Galilee,
Shining o'er this earth's dark sea.
Shed thy glorious light on me.
Maria Stella Maris.

Queen of Clemency and Love,
Be my Advocate above,
And, through Christ, all sin remove.
Maria Stella Maris.

When the Angel called thee blest,
And with transports filled thy breast,
'Twas thy Lord became thy guest.
Maria Stella Maris.

Earth's purest creature thou,
In the heavens exulting now,
With a halo round thy brow.
Maria Stella Maris.

Beauty beams in every trace
Of the Virgin Mother's face,
Full of glory and of grace —
Maria Stella Maris.

A Beacon to the just,
To the sinner Hope and Trust,
Joy of the angel host.
Maria Stella Maris.

Ever glorified, thy throne
Is where thy Blessed Son
Doth reign: through Him alone,
Maria Stella Maris.

All pestilence shall cease,
And sin and strife decrease,
And the kingdom come of peace.
Maria Stella Maris.

Rites and Ceremonies

Now as to rites and ceremonies. Let us once more quote the words of the Dean: "He would have none of the Church's superb ritual, its gorgeous, glittering, sensuous, and perfumed services." He would have none of it! Why, he lived and moved in the Church's ritual! What was the daily Mass which he said? It was the Mass which is said even now in a Dominican Church every day, from first to last one of the most ceremonious of the Church's services. Villari speaks often of his "performing," that is, as we should say, "singing High Mass." "On the last day of the Carnival ...all were prepared for a religious solemnity. In the morning, men, women, and children, attended a Great (High) Mass, celebrated by Savonarola, and all received Communion from his hands." (Vol. ii. p. 133.) Every one knows that of all the devotions of the Catholic Church, none has such "superb ritual," none is so "gorgeous," "glittering," and "perfumed," as a High Mass. It is almost as "gorgeous," and "glittering," and "perfumed," as the worship described in the fourth, fifth, and eighth chapters of the Apocalypse, with the "rainbow around the throne," and the "twenty ancients clothed in white garments with golden crowns on their heads," and "the seven lamps burning before

the throne," and "before the throne the sea of glass like crystal," and the "living creatures saying, Holy, Holy, Holy," and "the four-and-twenty ancients falling down before Him that sitteth on the throne," and "the golden vials full of odours," and "the harps," and "the priests," and the "golden censer with much incense," and "the smoke of the incense," and "the golden altar." And yet Savonarola was the celebrant of, that is, he took the principal part, and was the chief and moving figure in this High Mass.

What, again, was The Church's Office in which he daily took part as a Dominican friar who had deliberately joined an Order which is a choral Order and is traditionally the Order most devoted to the ritual of the Church? The Divine Office is the same that is said several times a day in Dominican Churches now — with its standing, and its kneeling, and its bowing, and its ever-varying postures, with its incense, and its candles, and its plaintive chant, and its daily procession introduced by St. Dominic himself and prescribed as part of the sacred routine of daily prayer in a Chapter held in Paris as early as 1226. What was the Ceremonial followed at San Marco's in Florence during the priorship of Savonarola four hundred years ago? What but the Dominican Ceremonial which Dominicans follow in England to-day, for it was drawn up in 1245 by four friars from France, England, Lombardy, and Germany!

Let the Dean turn again to the "powerful novel" from which he has studied Savonarola's life and taken his inspiration, and what will he find? Ceremonies everywhere! In the chapter on "The Unseen Madonna," a ceremonial procession, headed by a cross and "a white image of the youthful Jesus," and "a long train of the Florentine youth," and Benedictines, and Franciscans, and Servites, and Carmelites, and Dominicans, and officers of State, and "Canons of the Duomo carrying a sacred relic," and the Archbishop in gorgeous cope with canopy held over him, and in the midst of all, as part of the procession — Savonarola! At the trial by fire once more, Fra Domenico, his bosom friend, true to him in life and faithful to him unto death, is "arrayed in a velvet cope," and heads the procession, cross in hand. Savonarola follows, "in the white vestments of a priest, carrying in his hands the sacred vessels containing the Sacred Host, which he deposits on the altar, all the while chanting slowly." This description of the novelist, we may say, with the exception of a few details, is not romance, but history; it is fact, not fiction: the Dean will find it in Villari. Which does the scene remind us of — the service in the Church of the Reformers, or the service of our Catholic Church? The cold, dry, soul-chilling worship of the Established Church, or the inspiring, generous devotional worship of the Church to which Savonarola and we belong?

So much for Savonarola's actions with reference to the ceremonies and ritual of the Church. Now a word as to his teaching. The eighteenth chapter of the third book of *The Triumph of the Cross* is a defence of ceremonies and ritual, special reference, with explanations, being made to the Catholic practices of bowing to images of our Lord and the saints, using holy water blessed by a priest, and wearing vestments. During the Advent of 1491, Savonarola was preaching a course of sermons on the First Epistle of St. John. This course he interrupted, in order to gratify the wishes of many of his listeners to have from him an explanation of the ceremonies of the Mass, and to learn how to hear Mass with profit to their souls. This man, of whom it has been said that "he would have none of the Church's ritual," devotes four sermons to the elucidation of the meaning of the ceremonies of the Mass. He explains the signification of the vestments, such as are worn in our churches to-day, the amice, the alb, the girdle, the maniple, the stole, and the chasuble. He then describes to them the ceremonies of the sacred rite of all others to the Catholic most sacred. He tells them what thoughts to dwell upon during the various portions of the Mass; at the Confiteor, the Kyrie eleison, thrice

repeated, the Epistle, the Gospel, the Credo, the Sanctus, the Communion. He even goes into minute details, such as the crosses made by the priest on forehead, lips, and heart when he says the Gospel, the washing of the fingers at the Lavabo, the saying of the *Ite Missa est*, and the blessing given at the end.

And yet we are asked to believe that "he would have none of the Church's ritual!"

The Papacy

And now we come to our last and crucial point, "obedience to the See of Rome," which we Catholics look upon as the centre of unity, the heart of the Catholic Church, the ruling power in Christendom. Against this the Reformers protested, and so are called Protestants. To this See, Savonarola professed devotion, loyalty, and obedience even to the end. His words are a clear profession of his belief. Even Villari says of them: "Pope Alexander could not have exacted a more explicit profession of faith or a more absolute submission to Papal authority." (Vol. ii. 241.) This is his profession of faith to the Papacy. The words occur in the fourth book of *The Triumph of the Cross* (c. vi.), to which we have so often referred. After stating that he is now going to "argue against heretics who, though they admit Christ's Gospel, yet have they fallen into different errors about it," and that "it being impossible to discuss every dogma which he disputes," he proposes with one blow (*uno ictu*) "to strike at all their errors," he goes on:

First, therefore, we will prove that it is necessary for the entire Church (*universam ecclesiam*) to be governed by one head. If heretics admit that the Church is guarded by Divine Providence, they must also acknowledge that it has the best and wisest government. The best government for a multitude is that one should rule all so that peace and unity may prevail. In the Church triumphant in Heaven God is the sole Ruler, so in the Church militant should there be one head. ...So in Osee i. 11, we read: "And the children of Juda and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint themselves one head;" and in the Gospel of St. John (St. John x.): "There shall be one fold and one Shepherd." Now we cannot say that our Lord was Head of the Church in such a way that after His Ascension into Heaven it was to have no visible Head whatever, for in this case the Church would be left a prey to divisions and all sorts of confusion and disorder. Opposite opinions, disputes, difficulties, and doubts can only be settled by a judge who is well known to all. Therefore, our Lord said to Peter, "Feed My sheep," and again, "I have prayed for thee, Peter, that thy faith may never fail, and do thou in thy turn confirm thy brethren." Here we see clearly that our Lord made St. Peter His Vicar on earth, and we see it still more clearly in those other words, "Thou art Peter (the rock), and on this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of Hell shall never prevail against it, and to thee will I give the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be likewise bound in Heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven." Now surely we cannot say that this supreme authority was only given to St. Peter and not to his successors, for our Lord said that His Church was to last to the end of time: "Behold I am with you all days, to the end of the world." And this is what Isaiah meant when, speaking of the Son of God, he said: "He shall sit upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom, to strengthen it and confirm it for ever in judgment and justice." Now, since the Bishops of Rome are the successors of St. Peter, it follows that the Church of Rome is the mistress and head of all Churches, and all true Christians must be united to the Roman Pontiff, like members to their head; and, moreover, all those who separate from the unity and teaching of the Roman Church, separate themselves from Jesus Christ.

Surely, as Villari puts it forcibly, "it was no longer possible to believe that one who had so explicitly acknowledged the authority of the Papal Keys had the slightest intention of raising a schism in the Church." Surely no one can for an instant maintain that he was not in his teaching loyal to the Holy See. If at any time he was wanting in obedience, if under any circumstance he failed to carry out the will of the Holy Father, no one can accuse him of heresy upon this which we have called the "crucial point" of Catholic belief. Words could not express more emphatically faith in the primacy and supremacy of the Pope as a cardinal article of Catholic creed than the words which we have just cited. How different from the words of Luther, of Calvin, of the English Church. Never did he say, never did he imply that any one belonging to the Church of God could withdraw himself from obedience to the Holy See. "The Bishop of Rome hath no jurisdiction in this realm of England," (Article xxxvii.) would have inspired him with such a sermon from the pulpit of the Duomo, that no one would have ventured to have substituted "Florence" or "Italy" for "England." "It is not true," he said vehemently from that very pulpit when some one even hinted that he was not obedient to the Pope, "it is not true. ...I submit everything that I may say to the judgment of the Church of Rome." (Sermon on Exodus, 1498.)

Objections raised against his loyalty to the Pope

We cannot, in the little space allotted to us in a *brochure*, enter into the large subject, upon which many volumes have been written, of the supposed, or real, collision of Savonarola with Alexander VI. Any one who wishes to see the question more fully discussed will find it treated of (as we have already said) in the *Étude sur Savonarole*, by the Dominican, Père Ceslas Bayonne, who has also translated into French many of our great Dominican's works. We can only touch upon it briefly. Let us say at the outset that the argument, laid down by some Catholic as well as many Protestant authors, that Savonarola was excusable if he was not in all things subject to Alexander VI. on account of the private life of the Pope, which was unworthy of his high calling, is an argument which we entirely repudiate. No matter what his private life may have been, no depravity can justify disobedience, however exasperating to a man of austere virtue the depravity may be. The obedience of Catholics to the Pope rests, not on his personal holiness, but on his authoritative power. We obey him, not as a man, but as the Vicar and representative of God. Whatever Pope Alexander may have been as a man, he was Pope, and as Pope had authority to command. Moreover, as Pope he was acknowledged by the Church, and as Pope he had a right to the obedience of the faithful. His private character we leave to God, his public authority is a matter beyond dispute. We admit then frankly that if Savonarola disobeyed, in that he sinned; all that we maintain is that, if he sinned, his was neither the sin of heresy nor yet of schism.

But did he disobey? He was a son — we have seen it in his words — was he a rebellious one? Three accusations are brought against him: (1) That he refused to go to Rome when summoned by the Pope, a summons which every priest is bound, if possible, to obey. (2) That he continued to preach when forbidden to do so by the Holy See, or, at least, that though for a time he ceased to preach, he took up his sermons again. (3) That he wrote to the Kings of England and France, and to the Emperor of Germany and the Queen of Spain, upon the importance of summoning a General Council to depose the reigning Pontiff.

1. As to the first count: his refusal to go to Rome

Here is the Pope's letter inviting him as a Father, and commanding him as a Superior to visit him, and laying down the objects of that visit. The letter and those which follow are beyond dispute — they are admitted by all to be authentic.

Beloved son, — Health and Apostolic benediction.

Amongst the many who have toiled in the vineyard of the Lord of Sabaoth, We have heard from several sources that your labours have been particularly earnest and successful. This fills us with deep joy and gratitude to God, who so powerfully works amongst us by His grace. Nor do We doubt but that you are an instrument in His hands for the abundant sowing of His Divine Word, and the reaping of a plentiful harvest. Moreover, recent letters on this very subject have given Us to understand that in all your sermons you instruct the people in the service of God, and that you announce future events, being moved thereto not by human wisdom or learning, but by the Spirit of God. Being desirous therefore, as in duty bound, of conferring with you on these matters, and so learning God's will more clearly, We desire you to come to Us as soon as possible, and send you a command in virtue of holy obedience to that effect. We shall greet you with fatherly tenderness and love.

Given at Rome at St. Peter's, July 21, 1495.

Now, how did Savonarola receive this letter? We know the action of the so-called "Reformers" under similar circumstances. Luther publicly burned the Papal Decretals in the square at Wittenberg, and said that he would wish to do the same with the Pope and the Papal See. (Exust. Antichrist. Decret. Opp. Lutheri. ii. p. 320. Edit. Jenae.) The English Church hurled back at the Pontiff the thirty-seventh Article: "The Bishop of Rome has no jurisdiction in this realm of England." How different the action of Savonarola, whom the Dean of Canterbury would have to be the "harbinger of the Reformation." He receives it as a dutiful son. He admits the authority of the Father. He kneels at his feet in spirit — as a child — and he protests that it is only impossibility which prevents him from going where his heart draws him, viz., to the feet of the Vicar of Christ. It is unfair to say that he refused to go to Rome. It was not that he would not; no, he could not go to Rome. He wrote to the Pope and gave his reasons, at the same time professing his obedience to the Holy See, his willingness to kneel at the Holy Father's feet, and his intention of so doing when in his power. Listen to his letter to Pope Alexander, and remember the while that they were not days when men travelled impelled by steam. A journey for him meant a journey on foot, and a journey from Florence to Rome and back was not then as now, a matter of hours, but of days and perhaps weeks, to say nothing of dangers on the way.

Most Holy Father, I prostrate myself at the feet of your Holiness. Although I am aware that we must always obey the commands of our superiors, since we read in Holy Writ: "He that heareth you, heareth Me," still it is their meaning and not merely their words that we have to obey. And since I have long desired to visit Rome and worship at the threshold of the Apostles, and venerate the relics of so many saints, and see your Holiness, these my earnest longings have greatly increased since the day I received your Holiness's letter deigning to invite one so unworthy to your presence. But as there are many difficulties in the way, I will humbly set them before your Holiness, that you may see that my excuses are reasonable, and that it is necessity and not unwillingness which prevents me obeying the command I received with the deepest love and reverence. In the first place, there is my weak state of health, resulting from the attacks of fever and other illnesses I have had of late. Then my position here, especially during the past year, has entailed on me such a continual strain of mind

and body that I am reduced to the greatest weakness and utterly unable to undertake any work or undergo the least fatigue. The doctors have even obliged me to give up all preaching and study of any kind. For in their opinion, and in that of many other friends, I shall be endangering my life unless I at once submit to proper treatment. But since Almighty God has made use of me to deliver this city from bloodshed and various other serious evils, and to establish peace and respect for the laws, I have made as many enemies as there are wicked men in this place, for whether they were citizens or strangers, they vented their rage on me when they saw their love of fighting, their ambition, and their greedy thoughts of rapine and plunder frustrated. At the present moment their plots against my life, either by open assassination or more secret poisoning, are so frequent, that I cannot leave the house without guards. Indeed, when I went to confer with the French King, the loyal Florentines would not allow me to pass out of their protection, although I was furnished with a safe conduct. And although I trust in God, yet I may not despise ordinary precautions, lest I may seem to be tempting Him, since it is written, "When they persecute you in one city, flee into another." Moreover, the recent improvement in this city, which God's grace has effected, is hardly sufficiently established to withstand the persistent efforts of the wicked, and needs daily care and attention. Since, therefore, my departure at the present moment would, in the opinion of earnest and prudent men, cause difficulties amongst the people and help on the plots of the Medicean faction, it is evidently not God's will that I should leave here at present. I hope it will be soon. And if, perhaps, your Holiness wishes to know more about the misfortunes of Italy and the renovation of the Church, of which I have publicly spoken, it is all fully treated of in a book which I am now having printed, and which, as soon as it is ready, I will send to your Holiness, and from it you will be able to gather all that you wish to hear. I have said nothing but what is there. I have only delivered the message entrusted to me; to go beyond that and attempt to read the unknown secrets of God would be sinful. I have had all these things printed that all may know if I have been deceived and deceiving. But if things happen as I have said, then let them thank our Lord and Saviour, who, by His loving care of us, shows that He wishes no one to perish eternally. And so I ask your Holiness to accept these my excuses as most true and valid, and to believe that nothing could give me greater joy than to be able to carry out your commands. I need no other spur than my own desires to urge me to conquer these difficulties as soon as I can and satisfy the wishes of your Holiness, to whom I commend myself in all humility.

From the Convent of St. Mark's, Florence, the last day of July, 1495.

2. As to the second objection: his preaching after the Pope's inhibition

Contemporary historians tell us that the Pope's Legate returned to Rome from Sienna without delivering the Papal Bull to Savonarola in Florence, merely sending it by another; that Savonarola maintained, not that the Pope had not power to prohibit his preaching, but that His Holiness had done so under a misapprehension, that he had been misled by his enemies and misguided by those against whom he had preached, and that had the Pope known the real truth he would not have issued the decree, and that therefore it was void. This being so, Savonarola maintained — rightly or wrongly we need not inquire now — that the inhibition did not bind. Again, we must remember that those were not days of electric telegraphs or even quick posts, and so, explanations being difficult, misunderstandings were frequent. The magistrates of Florence and the Fathers of St. Mark's wrote to the Pope, telling him he had been misinformed (see Appendix No. 3). Savonarola wrote again, and whilst professing his loyalty to the Holy See and his obedience to the Vicar of Christ, gave his reasons why he thought the Pope's order not binding.

Most Holy Father, I prostrate myself at the feet of your Holiness. Why is my Lord angry with his servant, or where is the wrong that I have done? If the sons of iniquity have spoken falsely of me, why does my Lord not inquire of his servant and hear his account before believing them? For it is not easy to persuade a mind which is already prejudiced. Many dogs have compassed me, the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me, and they say: "Behold! his God cannot help him or save him." For your Holiness holds the place of God on earth, and they accuse me of treason towards you, saying that I do not cease to blame you and find fault with you, and so in many ways they twist and cruelly pervert the meaning of my words. The same thing was done two years ago, but thousands who heard me can witness to my innocence, as well as my own words faithfully taken down at the time and printed and scattered abroad. Let these be brought forward and read and examined, that it may be seen if in them there is anything offensive to your Holiness, as these liars so often assert. Is it likely that I would say one thing and write another, and so lay myself open to the charge of flagrant contradiction? What could be the object or the intention of such a line of conduct? I only wonder that your Holiness does not see their wicked madness. As for this great and renowned preacher, he must have little shame or honesty to accuse an innocent man of the very crime of which he is guilty. His words cannot be hidden away — there are numerous witnesses who have heard him openly attacking your Holiness, and lest I should be accused of falsehood, I could, if necessary, bring forward legal proof. But I have not forgotten that his insolence has already been silenced and condemned, since it is sinful to calumniate any one, no matter how lowly he may be, much more one who is the Ruler and Pastor of all. Who so senseless as to be ignorant of this? For, thanks be to God, I am not yet so utterly abandoned, so utterly forgetful of my duty, as, without any reason or excuse, to dare to attack and insult the Vicar of Christ, to whom above every one else on earth reverence is due. As for the rest, I have never uttered a word contrary to the Holy Catholic Faith, or contrary to the teaching of the Roman Church, to whose judgment and authority I have ever submitted myself, and ever shall whenever I am called upon. And this is what I have always taught and shall teach with all my strength, at the same time doing my best to rouse men to sorrow for sin and amendment of life by wakening their faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The work which I shall shortly bring out, on *The Triumph of the Cross*, is a witness to my faith, and from it can be seen if I have ever taught heresy or in any way opposed the Catholic faith. Will your Holiness therefore turn a deaf ear to these envious and lying tongues and only believe what has been examined and proved, since many of their falsehoods have already been openly detected. But if all human help fail me, and the wickedness of these impious men gain the day, I will still hope in God and in His help, and make their wickedness so public to the whole world that perhaps at the very last they will repent of their evil designs. I most humbly commend myself to your Holiness.

From the Convent of St. Mark, Florence, May 22, 1497.

3. The third count: his appeal for a General Council

In this he erred, through excess of zeal. The letters were undoubtedly written — and written they ought not to have been. The provocation was great, but, like any other temptation to wrong-doing, it should have been resisted with patience and prayer and trust in God, who alone can calm the storm and bid the waves "be still" till Peter's bark has reached the shore. The days were dark, very dark; the times troubled, very troubled; wickedness prevailed even in holy places; his earnest soul was stirred at the sight of wrong-doing, and zeal triumphed over prudence. He was wrong! Many thought at the time, and Savonarola amongst them, that the election of Alexander VI. to the Pontificate was invalid because simoniacal. History has proved this false, since the Church has

acknowledged him as a true Pope, though not worthy of his high calling. Savonarola was wrong in writing the letters, although the letters were never sent, as documents recently found go to show. Still he was wrong, but it was an error of the mind and not of the heart; it was an error of fact, and not of principle or doctrine.

Nay, if, for argument's sake, we admit that in all three points he erred, what does it prove? That he was disobedient, but not heretical; that he acknowledged not in fact what was really the belief of his mind and the conviction of his soul. If through being misled, or through excess of zeal, he disobeyed — what then? It was disobedience, not heresy or schism. It was a blot on an otherwise stainless life, a stain on an otherwise unsullied name. The penalty of that blot he has paid with his life, the stain has been cleansed with his blood, his name remains fair. But to call Savonarola a "leader of the Reformers," a "harbinger of the Reformation" — his life, his words, his acts, all laugh the idea to scorn!

Savonarola was a loyal Catholic

Never was a man more Catholic or more in touch with the Catholic Church than he. Several of her saints regarded him as a saint. St. Philip Neri, "the Apostle of Rome," who was born in Florence and then lived in Rome, and therefore knew Rome and knew Savonarola, always had a picture of "the Apostle of Florence" in his room, with an aureola of glory around his head. St. Catharine of Ricci, too, had his portrait, and under it the inscription, "True likeness of F. Jerome, a prophet sent from God," and she preserved one of his fingers as a relic, calling it "the finger of Blessed Jerome." She even ascribed a miracle to his prayers. (Benedict XIV., *De Servorum Dei Beatificatione*, lib. iii. c. xxv.)

Catholic artists have perpetuated his memory as sacred. The great Raphael, at the instance of Pope Julius II., painted a picture of the Blessed Sacrament, at the Vatican, and represented Savonarola by St. Thomas's side. Fra Bartolommeo's picture of him in the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence represents him as a martyr. Medals were struck of him in Rome, on which his name was engraved, with the prefix of "Blessed." Offices were composed in his honour, and hymns written in his name. His religious brethren held his memory in veneration. A few years after his death, Cardinal Alessandro dei Medici wrote: "They (the Dominicans of San Marco) celebrate his feast as that of a martyr; they preserve his relics as if he were a saint, even the beam of the gallows from which he was hanged, the iron hooks which bore his weight, his habit, his hoods, the bones left unconsumed by the fire, his ashes, his hair-shirt; they treasure the wine which was blessed by him and give it to the sick, and talk of miracles."

His writings, which were never condemned even by Alexander VI., although published in his reign, were critically examined under Paul III., Julius III., and Paul IV., and were declared free from all error. Popes have spoken of him in glowing terms; one (Paul III.) saying that he would consider him as suspected of heresy who would accuse Savonarola of heresy. Benedict XIV. thought him worthy of canonization, and said that "as a proof of his holiness it was enough that St. Philip Neri proclaimed it 'a victory' that his writings were approved, and that he always had the aureoled image of Savonarola in his room." His name appears on the *Catalogue of Saints and Blessed Servants of God and other Venerable persons illustrious by their sanctity*, published in Rome in the year 1751, during the Pontificate of this same Benedict XIV. Archbishop Capecelatro, in his *Life of St. Philip Neri*, recently translated by the Rev. Father Pope of the Birmingham Oratory, has a most interesting chapter on "St. Philip and Savonarola," in which he tells us amongst other things that Clement VIII.

"held him (Savonarola) in singular veneration, had serious thoughts of canonizing him, and allowed his portraits to be seen in Rome, with rays about his head, and with the titles of 'Blessed' and 'Doctor' and 'Martyr.'"

Conclusion

To sum up all in a word. Savonarola's life, teaching, and creed were the very antithesis of the life, teaching, and creed of the "Reformers" of the sixteenth age. They left the cloister for the world; he left the world for the cloister, and was ever true to his vows. They began by self-deformation, on their own admission; he by self-reformation, on the evidence of friend and foe. They dragged down public morality, on their own showing; he raised it to the highest perfection. They aimed at reforming creed and doctrine; he reformed morals and men, upholding always doctrine and creed. They denied what he taught: the necessity of good works, the need of the sacraments as channels of grace, Transubstantiation, rites and ceremonies, loyalty to Peter's See, and devotion to the Mother of God. How, then, can he be their "leader," their "harbinger" — he who condemns and anathematizes them all!

Magna est veritas et prevalebit — "Truth is great and will prevail." In the words of Dean Farrar: "Savonarola perished, but the truth of which he had been the mighty preacher lived and bore fruit unto eternal life." Yes, it lived, and lives, but where? Savonarola tells us with his last breath. It was the day of his cruel, heartless death. He had assisted at Mass. He had received "the Body of the Lord." He had bowed his head for the Plenary Indulgence sent by the Pope. He had said, "I retract any errors which I may have taught." His lips open for the last time — those lips that had so often spoken fearless words of intrepid zeal — and what were his last words? They were the words which are said to have been his first; words which summed up his life, words which vindicated his venerated name: *Credo in Sanctam Ecclesiam Catholicam* — "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church." In that Church he lived, in that Church he died, in that Church his will ever be *clarum et venerabile nomen* — "an illustrious and venerable name."

Appendix No. I — List of Savonarola's Works

The Triumph of the Cross. 4 books.

On the Simplicity of Christian Life. 5 books.

On Jewish Astrology. 3 books.

Explanation of the Our Father and Hail Mary.

Treatise on Humility.

Treatise on Love of Jesus Christ.

Treatise on Widowhood.

The Lament of the Spouse of Christ.

The Soul and the Spirit. 7 Dialogues.

Reason and Sense. 3 Dialogues.

Prayer. 2 books.

Rules of Prayer and Devout Life.

Explanation of the Commandments.

The Sacrifice of the Mass and its Mysteries.

Frequent Communion.

The Sign of the Cross. Advantages and Meaning.

Union with God. A Discourse.

Letter on taking the Habit of Religion.

On the Perfection of the Religious State.

Letters to the Brethren of the Order of St. Dominic.

Spiritual Reading. For Sisters of Third Order.

Perfection of Spiritual Life.

The Seven Rules of a Religious.

Meditations on the Psalm, *Diligam te, Domine*.

Meditations on Various Psalms.

The Mystery of the Cross.

Manual of Confessors.

Sermons for Sundays and Festivals.

Forty-Eight Sermons for Lent.

Homilies on Holy Writ, &c.

Appendix No. 2 — Pope Alexander VI. and Savonarola

It is the common opinion among the apologists of Savonarola that Alexander VI. was deceived by the calumnious mis-statements of his enemies, that at times even during his life the Pope had serious misgivings as to the truth of the accusations against him, and that after his death he conceived a sincere veneration for his memory.

In the year 1496, so we are told by Burlamacchi, Villari, and others, the Pope, through the Procurator-General of the Dominican Order, P. Ludovico de Ferrara, offered him a Cardinal's hat, "on account of his virtues and his wisdom." On the following day, August 20, he gave his answer from the pulpit of the Duomo. "No, no," he cried out, "I do not wish for human glory — far be it from me! It is enough for me, O Lord, that Thou hast shed Thy Blood for me. I wish not to glorify myself, but Thee. Thou art my glory, Thou dost lift up my head, and all my being. I wish for neither hats nor mitres, great or small; I wish only for Thy gift to Thy saints, death. A hat, a red hat, but red with blood — this is what I desire." When this bold answer was reported to the Pope, Alexander expressed admiration for his rare firmness of character, and exclaimed: "That man must be a great servant of God. Let no one speak to me again either in his favour or against him."

In the May of the following year, the adversaries of Savonarola having reported ill of him again to His Holiness, the Florentine Ambassador presented a protest to him in the name of the Republic,

and Savonarola wrote the letter which we have already quoted. The representations of the Ambassador and the letter of Savonarola made a great impression on the Pope, and the Cardinal Archbishop of Naples assured the Florentine Ambassador that the Holy Father regretted having sent the Brief, especially as he had sent it by John di Camerino, whom he now knew to be an enemy both of Florence and of Savonarola. Hearing that the Legate had not gone to Florence, but had remained at Sienna, he said: "If he is wise, he will not go there." It is probable that, had not the Papal Brief been then published in Florence, it would have been withdrawn, as was a former Bull which was sent in the October of 1496. (Bayonne, *Étude*, p. 106.)

After the death of Savonarola, when his enemies were silenced, things which had been kept from him were brought to the notice of the Pope, and he learned to appreciate his spirit, his virtues, and his zeal. When apologists defended the memory of the great Dominican, he listened to all and censured none. In 1501 he published a decree against authors suspected of heresy, but Savonarola's name does not appear amongst them. The writings of Savonarola were shortly after printed in Venice, with the approval of the Patriarch and the Inquisitor of the Faith. P. Neri tells us, too, in his *Apologia pro Fra G. Savonarola*, that when the newly elected General of the Dominicans, P. Vincent Bandelli, spoke to Alexander VI. of the great virtue of the illustrious friar, the Pope sighed, and said that he had been misinformed. (Edit. Florence, 1546, p. 120.) P. Molineri relates also that, when a Dominican had the boldness to reproach Alexander with having cast dishonour on Savonarola's name, the Pope replied: "By no means; it was my Legate who was cruel." Burlamacchi, in fine, informs his readers that, "as time went on, the Pope regretted more and more the step that he had taken, and that he declared on one occasion, in a full Consistory, that he would willingly inscribe the name of Savonarola on the Catalogue of Saints." (*Vita Savonarola*, p. 195. Edit. de Lucca, 1764.)

Appendix No. 3

(Lupi, *Nuovi Documenti*, p. 112; ap. Bayonne, p. 151.)

Letter of the Magistrates of Florence to Alexander VI.

Most Holy Father, — Whilst Father Jerome Savonarola was instructing the faithful in religion and morality in our Cathedral Church, your Apostolic Letter was given to him, in which you speak of him as a son of iniquity. He at once withdrew into his monastery, resolved to give way for a time to the violence of the storm, and feeling convinced that the anger of Your Holiness would be appeased when you knew the deep malice of his calumniators. They have dared to accuse him of sowing pernicious errors amongst the people, and of being to them the cause of sin and scandal. But in witness of the truth we declare that, on the contrary, he has been a most excellent minister of the word; and that up to the present time he has worked in the vineyard of the Lord with such great success that no other preacher whom we have known has ever gathered such precious fruits from his preaching. As to the saying of the Prophet: "Make known to us the things which are to come, and we shall know that ye are God's," we must admit that we are bound to acknowledge something more than human in a man who for eight years has foretold to us many things which have afterwards come to pass. But his principal work has been to bring about our reformation, and to lead us to piety and virtue by his instructions, his writings, and his constant preaching.

The zeal of God's house which devours him has won for him the enmity of many who love darkness rather than light; and thus false reports have made Your Holiness regard as a dangerous man one who has made use of his ministry and his talents only to preach justice, to make every one true to

duty, to keep our Republic from dangers, to oppose tyranny, to instruct parents to bring their children up as Christians, to lead women to modesty and simplicity, to accustom young people to read the life of Jesus Christ and the lives of His Saints, in a word, to protect society against the evil example of those who are unworthy of the name of Christians.

See then, Most Holy Father, what are the actions, what the intentions, of Savonarola; see what his accusers call "pulling down the walls of Jerusalem." What is the object of their false charges? What but to blacken and destroy a just man, to deprive us of a faithful guide, and to bring about new troubles amongst our citizens; for this is the only means left to them of harming us and of carrying out their ambitious ends.

We grieve to find ourselves in such circumstances that we cannot carry out the orders of Your Holiness without doing great harm to our country, and showing great ingratitude to a man who has rendered us singular services. Let us add that it would be difficult to do anything against him without causing universal grief and exposing many to danger, for the well-known virtue and the reputation of Savonarola have won for him the hearts of the faithful and the esteem of the people. Your Holiness, always being opposed to the disturbance of order, would certainly not wish us to obey in a danger so certain, and to our own dishonour.

Given in the Palace, the 4th of May, 1497.

Extract from the Letter of the Fathers of San Marco to Pope Alexander VI.

We are nearly all Florentines; we live and hold converse with him (Savonarola); and as we have left the world in order to serve God, Your Holiness will understand that we would not defend one who is a stranger were we not convinced of the excellence of his life, were we not certain that the hand of God is with him, and that upon his presence here and his preaching depend both the safety of our city and the advancement of the Christian religion. The proof of this we have in the great number of honourable, prudent, and learned men whom he has converted, and who live under his fostering care that they may grow in faith and virtue. And in order to strengthen our evidence, and to remove all shadow of suspicion, we have asked a number of noble and virtuous citizens to sign this our address. Should Your Holiness wish it, we can produce signatures not only by hundreds, but by thousands. Your Holiness will thus see that you have been misinformed in this matter by people who have no fear of God. We beg of you, therefore, to deign to revoke the censures which have been fulminated against Father Jerome, and to give him your sanction to carry out the holy work which he has taken in hand.
