

## SAVONAROLA.\*

We give a most hearty welcome to this new and improved edition of Professor Villari's *Life of Savonarola*, which may now be said to be so good and so complete that there is little chance of any considerable additions or improvements being introduced in the future. Students of Italian history, and more especially of Florentine history, during the period of the Renaissance, are of necessity aware of the profound importance of the work of Savonarola, not only in its religious, but perhaps even more, in its political bearing. Few men have suffered more at the hands of adverse criticism: few have awakened a more ardent enthusiasm in the hearts of his adherents and admirers. It has been with Savonarola, as with Cromwell and other men of the first class, they have been judged, to a great extent, according to the point of view of the age in which the judgment was formed: sometimes also, of course, according to the prejudices of the writer who dealt with their biography.

Savonarola has been made out, in turn, to be a charlatan, an ambitious politician, a wild fanatic, an apostle and prophet. The popularity of Roscoe's books on the Medici (a popularity now long on the wane) spread abroad among a large circle of English readers the unfavourable view of the character of the great Frate. Such a view would hardly anywhere be tolerated in these days. German, French, English, and Italian writers have at last agreed, with certain differences, to set his character in a true light, as that of a man absolutely sincere and devoted to the good of his country and of the Church, however much he might be mistaken.

We have no wish to disparage the work of Rudelbach and Meier, who first took seriously in hand the writing of the life of Savonarola with careful reference to original documents, although they certainly made a mistake in representing the Florentine reformer as a Protestant. Nor will any one who understands the work done by M. Perrens speak disrespectfully of the life of Savonarola which was written by one, who in that book and in his subsequent *History of Florence*, showed such an intimate acquaintance with his subject; and yet it must be admitted that the view which he gave of his hero was hardly consistent and coherent. It must, however, be conceded that to Signor Villari belongs the distinction of having given an absolutely historical and unbiassed representation of the life and character of this remarkable man.

Villari not only studied all the documents of the period bearing upon the subject, but printed at the end of his volumes all such as were necessary for the justifying of the opinions which he expressed respecting the life and character and conduct of the man of whom he treated. The view which he took of the position and character of Savonarola has, since the publication of the first edition of his book, been generally adopted, and, perhaps with one exception, to which we shall presently refer—was the view adopted by George Eliot in her great novel, *Romola*. Perhaps most English-speaking persons have got their notions of Savonarola from George Eliot, more than from any other source. On the whole, they will not have gone very far astray.

Villari's first edition was defective in one particular: he had not subjected some of the early authorities to a sufficiently critical examination. The two lives of the Frate, attributed to Burlamacchi and Pico della Mirandola (the younger) respectively, were used as of almost equal authority. Burlamacchi had been a Dominican Friar under Savonarola, and might be supposed to be a primary authority. Readers, however, could not help being struck by the fact that the author of this book quoted the work of della Mirandola, thus showing the later origin of his own. It is to the great German historian and critic Von Ranke that we are indebted for the thorough examination and solution of this question. Our readers who may care to consult his admirable essay, which at its appearance, some ten years ago, was accepted as showing the way out of several difficulties, will find it in the volume of which we give the title at the foot of the page.

Villari has, to a great extent, followed the guidance of Von Ranke, in his new edition of his life of Savonarola; and he has moreover made use of a good many documents which were previously unknown to him, a considerable number of which he has also appended to the new volumes. On the whole, we must give the greatest praise to this new work, upon which a great deal of conscientious labour has been expended with the very best results. In the first place, although we have handsomer volumes, the amount of reading is hardly increased by a page. Indeed, apart from the documents, the biography seems no longer than in the first edition. For all this, there is hardly a page which stands as it did before. The language is often improved, statements are made with greater exactness, some slight errors are corrected, some of them clerical errors of the writer, some those of the printer. We cannot, indeed, affirm that none will be found in the new edition; and on one point, we wish that Signor Villari had more closely followed the suggestions of Professor Ranke; but we are sure that little remains to be corrected.

It will probably be known to many of our readers that one of the most disputed incidents in the life of Savonarola is his interview with Lorenzo de' Medici, at the deathbed of the latter. Roscoe and others, who follow Poliziano, make out that Savonarola almost forced himself upon Lorenzo. Those who follow the early biographies of the Frate maintain that Lorenzo sent for him. It appears to us that, considering their previous relations, the latter must certainly be the true account of the matter. There are, however, two quite different accounts of the interview, and it must be admitted that there was great difficulty in disproving either, and also in reconciling them. If, however, we are to take Pico's account of the inter-

view, and regard that of Burlamacchi as later, and as containing legendary matter, as Ranke has suggested, then the difficulty disappears, and we are able to say that the account given by the friends of Savonarola is the true one, although Politian's account may, in some respects, supplement it. We think, then, that Villari has made a mistake in giving us one sentence in the account of the interview, which is not contained in the earlier authorities, and which contains something which cannot be reconciled with the other narratives of what took place.

The passage to which we refer is that in which Lorenzo is said to have confessed that there were three sins which specially weighed upon him, the sack of Volterra, the money taken from the *Monte delle Fanciulle*, and the blood that had been shed after the conspiracy of the Pazzi. Now, it has been objected, with some force, that no one was likely to have known the contents of this confession, and the objection has been thought to throw discredit upon the whole narrative, as given by the friends of Savonarola. Now, it so happens that this passage is found in the biography attributed to Burlamacchi alone, and the removal of these few lines, which may well be regarded as a later addition, will take away every difficulty in reconciling the various accounts of the interview. We hope that Signor Villari may expunge this one blot that we have remarked in his admirable narrative.

The other disputed point in the life of Savonarola has reference to the last days of his life. After his condemnation by Pope Alexander VI., Savonarola was examined under torture at Florence, and different accounts have been given of his words on that occasion. Villari has investigated this subject with the greatest care. He has shown clearly that the notary was bribed to publish a garbled account of the answers given by the Frate when subjected to the torture, and he has satisfied all fair readers that the only fault attributable to Savonarola was that of having disowned his prophecies. We think that here George Eliot has either misunderstood Villari (for the first edition of his work does not, on this point, differ from the second), or else she has taken a different view of the character of the great preacher. George Eliot represents Savonarola as being doubtful of his own sincerity, as almost admitting that he had deceived. What really happened was this: when he was questioned as to his prophetic gifts, under torture he answered that he was not sure that they had come from God. But afterwards he deplored this admission which, he said, had been extorted from him by the pain which he had to endure. We do not believe that Savonarola for one moment doubted his own sincerity and truthfulness, although he may for an instant have thought himself mistaken in believing that the message which he delivered was given by special and immediate inspiration. It is quite possible for us now to hold widely different opinions on these subjects without thinking differently of the character of Savonarola himself.

Italian scholars will do well to procure this new edition of a work which will soon be reckoned a classic, and which must for many a day, perhaps forever, be the standard biography of the great man whom it describes. We understand that an English translation will soon be published by Madame Villari, who, by her translation of her husband's life of Machiavelli, and her own article on Savonarola in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, has amply proved her fitness for the task.

## OUR LIBRARY TABLE.

THE STANDARD CANTATAS. A Handbook, by George P. Upton. Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Company.

This book is the third of the series in which the *Standard Operas* and *Standard Oratorios* have been its predecessors. Short sketches of the music and stories of the cantatas are presented, and the work is prefaced by an admirable treatise on the cantata and its widely different forms, from the middle of the seventeenth century down to the present era, rich in compositions of the kind from German, English, and American pens. Mr. Upton appears to be well-informed as to facts of musical history, and is wisely reticent upon critical points, never bothering the reader with his own opinion of this or that cantata or composer. He might have given John Francis Barnett, composer of the finest music yet fitted to Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, a better place than he has done, and he yields on some pages to the temptation—a very natural one—of rating the American composers and their work slightly overmuch. The book will prove of direct benefit to those who do not have access to Grove's Dictionary or other standard works.

HAND-BOOK OF COMMERCIAL UNION: A collection of papers read before the Commercial Union Club, Toronto, with speeches, letters, and other documents in favor of Unrestricted Reciprocity with the United States, preceded by an introduction by Mr. Goldwin Smith; edited by G. Mercer Adam. Toronto: Hunter, Rose and Company, 1888.

The subject with which this volume deals, though professedly an economical one, has already become the theme of general and animated political discussion. In this, as well as in other discussions of a quasi-political character, we deprecate all partisan and ill-considered ways of talking, and, in the interest of fair play, we object to the too common practice of Party opponents affixing on a movement, the professed aim of which is the general weal of the country, the stigma of treason and imputations of sinister motives which have been unreservedly disavowed. No good can come of such disingenuous methods, whether of public discussion or of journalistic criticism, and it is surely time to abandon them and to deal dispassion-

\* *La Storia di Girolamo Savonarola e de' suoi tempi*, da Pasquale Villari. Nuova Edizione. 2 voll. Firenze: Le Monnier, 1888. *Historisch-biographische Studien*, von Leopold von Ranke, 1877.