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The Great Florentine Preacher.

(Rev. W. C. Barclay, in the 'Standard'.)

In Ferrara, Italy, Sept. 21, 1452, of a pious and noble mother and a worthless father, was born Girolamo Savonarola, one of the greatest preachers of righteousness of any age, and destined to receive world-honor as the greatest moral reformer. His parents purposed that he would be a physician. While they were absent from home he fled to Bologna and entered a convent of the Dominican monks. The family were eminent as physicians, and it was only the unspeakable corruption of his native city and of the times that drove him into the convent. Twenty-three years later, at the age of forty-six, in the Piazza della Signoria, the forum of the republic, in Florence, Savonarola was burned at the stake. Wrote Martin Luther: 'This man was put to death solely for having desired that someone should come to purify the slough of Rome.'

Savonarola was a man of remarkable talents. His intellectual acumen, together with the extreme diligence and devotion with which he applied himself to the monastic life and to study, caused his rapid advancement. Very soon he was made teacher of the novices. In six years he was transferred to the monastery of St. Mark's in Florence, and ten years later he was elected prior. He was a poet, and a friend of literature and art. Among the artists of Florence were some of his closest friends. An element of his great natural genius was an extraordinary prophetic insight. History records a considerable number of examples of prophecies made by him which were fulfilled. Men hard of belief admitted his possession of this power. That every forecast of his was fulfilled I presume no one would claim. Infallibility did not pertain to him, though, perhaps, he himself and some of his disciples believed that it did.

Savonarola was pre-eminent as a preacher. No man in the history of the Church, since Apostolic times, has wrought greater effects by preaching than this Dominican monk. Florence was a most wicked city. Immorality was all-pervading. The rulers of the city made systematic efforts to corrupt the people—and succeeded. The inhabitants were sunk in depths of moral degradation. Love of virtue and enthusiasm for religion were alike dead. Worldliness and sensuous gaiety reigned. Against this awful tide of sinfulness and vice stood one man, the prior of St. Mark's. He purposed to call the city to righteousness, and his method was preaching. Marvellous was his success! As the result of his preaching Florence became a changed city. The people thronged the churches, and 'they sought the Lord with tears! They exalted Christ as king, and the city of Florence became, to all outward view, more nearly a city of God than has been the case with any other city in all history.' 'The people of Florence,' wrote a contemporary, 'have become fools for the love of Christ.'

What was the method of the preaching which wrought such wonderful effect? Savonarola was saturated with the Bible. Years before he had given himself to its study. He had meditated long over the messages of the prophets. Their thoughts had entered into the fibre of his being. When he preached he stood forth in the spirit and power of Elijah and Isaiah and John Baptist. He had given much study to the Book of Revelation. Some portions seemed to have been written with special reference to his own degenerate days. He, too, like John, had beheld the Lord in rapt visions. Living in a superstitious time, it is little wonder that he seemed to the people of Florence to speak as the very mouthpiece of God. In the library

They had to do with the whole range of men's needs and activities. Against his will, he was made the leader of the people in the struggle for the overthrow of the Medici and for the restoration of liberty. The constitution which he gave to Florence was the best, for justice and sound policy, that she ever had in all her innumerable mutations. Savonarola stands in history as the greatest of preacher-statesmen.

We come to the consideration of his work as a reformer. Savonarola cannot be said to have been a reformer in a doctrinal sense. He held fast to the theology, as to the discipline, the ritual, and the polity of the Roman Church. His loyalty to the Dominican order was unflinching, and



GIROLAMO SAVONAROLA.

of San Lorenzo, at Florence, may be seen the Bible that Savonarola studied. Its broad margin is written all over in the small, neat, careful notes which tell of the earnest, diligent study of the Scripture, which, in those days of spiritual declension made this monk the mighty man of God that he was. Another chief element of the power of Savonarola as a preacher 'was his intense conviction, his profound apprehension of God, his vivid sense of eternity, and his overwhelming belief in the judgments to come. He resembled Paul in his thorough belief in his divine mission, in his sensitiveness toward sin, and in his sympathy with God's holiness. And from all this there resulted in both a terrific realism in their interpretation of the divine wrath.' Added to all this, Savonarola was a man of the people. His sermons dealt with contemporary needs. They were sermons of the day.

he made it his boast that his order had never given birth to a heretic. He believed in the intercession of saints and angels. He believed the Roman doctrines concerning the Virgin. He held that the Pope was the true successor of Peter, and he took an active part in all the pious rites of Florence, 'including the processions in which the miraculous tutelary Madonna is borne through the streets.' He expressly declares: 'I have ever believed, and do believe, all that is believed by the holy Roman Church, and have ever submitted, and do submit, myself to her.'

The revolt of Savonarola was not against Rome. It was not like the later reformation—a doctrinal revolt. It was moral—the revolt of goodness against indescribable wickedness. The papacy, as an institution, was sacred to him, the reigning Pope was intolerable. He declared that the Pope had purchased his office, and