

## SAVONAROLA.

THE FOURHUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS MARTYRDOM

(MAY 23D.)

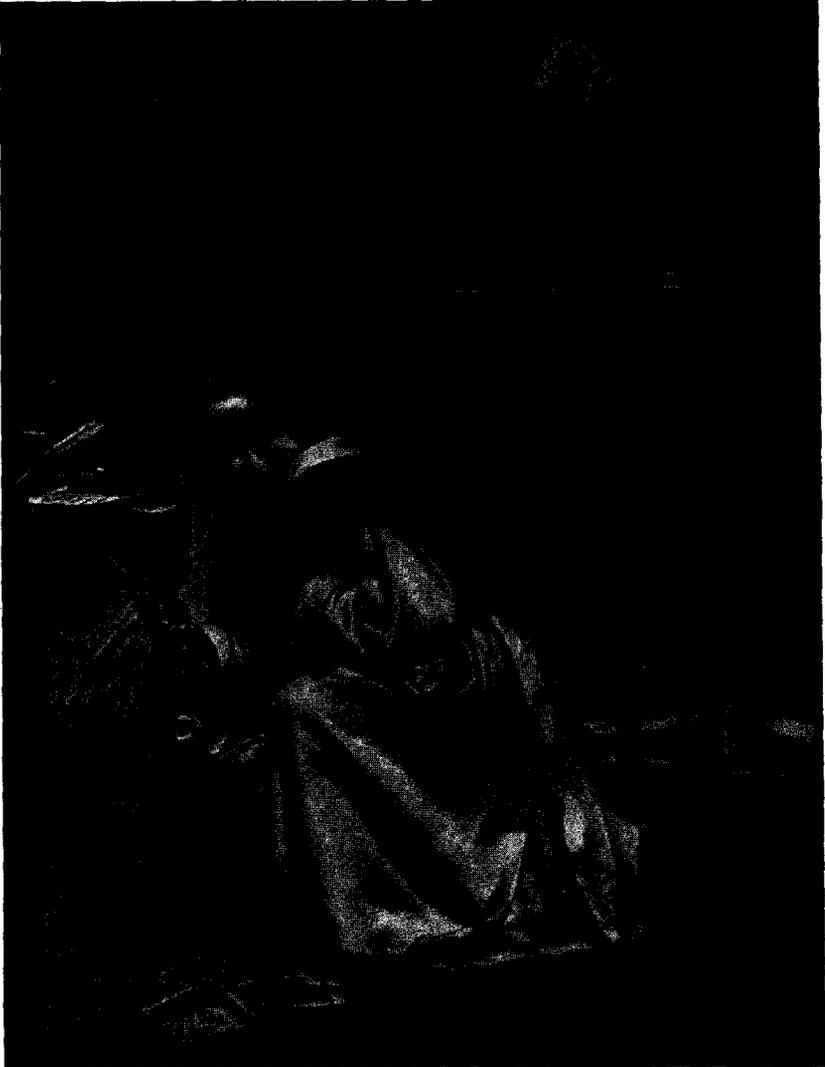
“THE ROLL of Italian great men,” says Madame Villari, “contains few grander names than that of Savonarola, and the career of this patriot-priest, reformer, and statesman is one of the strangest pages of Italy’s history. Amid the splendid corruptions of the Italian Renaissance he was the representative of pure Christianity, the founder and ruler of an ideal Christian republic, and, when vanquished by the power of Rome, suffered martyrdom for the cause to which his life had been dedicated. His doctrines have been the theme of interminable controversies and contradictory judgments. He has been alternately declared a fanatic bent on the revival of mediæval barbarism and an enlightened precursor of the reformation, a true Catholic prophet and martyr, and a shameless impostor and heretic. It is enough to say here that his best biographers and critics give satisfactory proofs that he was chiefly a reformer of morals, who, while boldly denouncing Papal corruptions, preserved an entire belief in all the dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church.”

Girolamo Savonarola was born in 1452, thirty-seven years after the burning of his great precursor, the Bohemian reformer and martyr, Huss. The career of the great Italian martyr bore in some respects a strong resemblance to that of his Bohemian forerunner. The most striking difference, however, was that the triumphs of Savonarola were greatest and most celebrated during his lifetime, while the power and influence of Huss was most effectively shown after his death. From a simple monk, by sheer genius and talent, and with no help but his own indomitable independence and unswerving religious conviction, Savonarola became the ruler and



THE BISHOP OF LODI PREACHING AT THE TRIAL OF JOHN HUSS. (From Castelar.)

saint of one of the wealthiest, most cultured, and most powerful cities of Europe. The city of Florence, licentious and Godless be-



SAVONAROLA PRAYING IN HIS CELL. (From Castelar.)

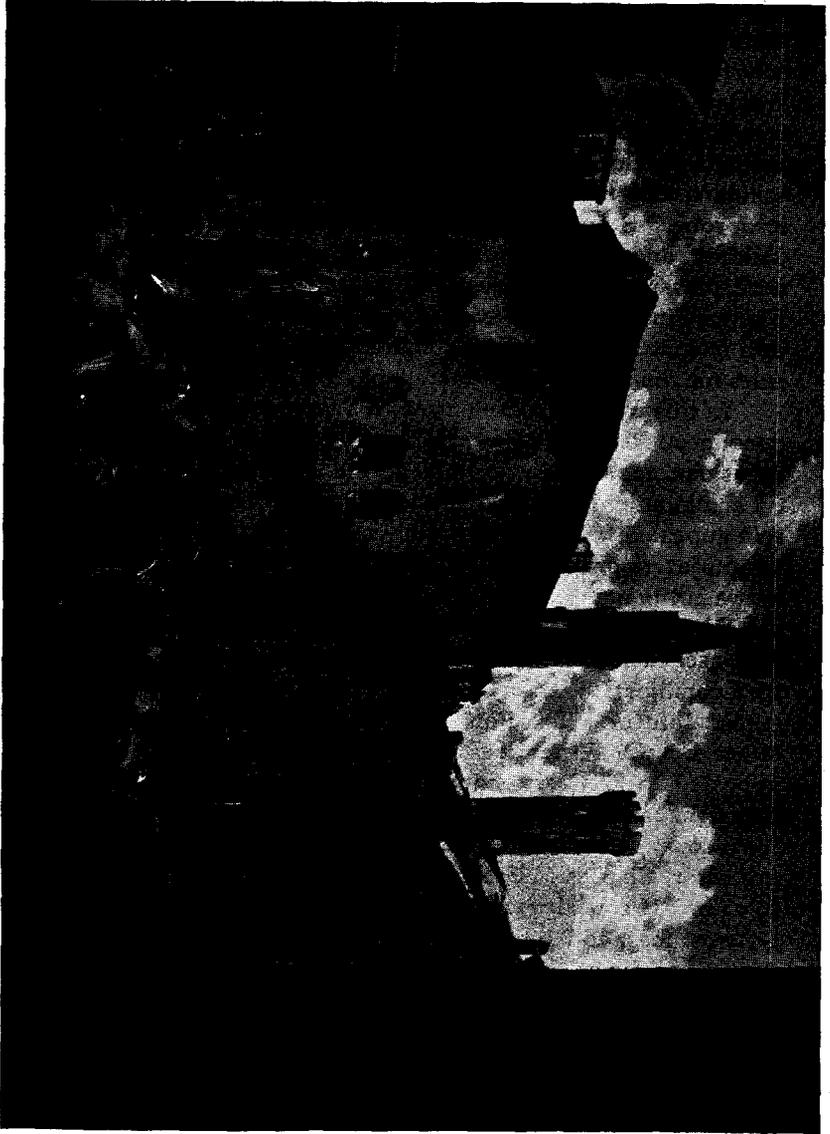
yond credibility, was converted in a few years by the example and energy of this great thinker and orator into an ideal republic of

saints. "Abjuring pomps and vanities, its citizens observed the ascetic régime of the cloister; half the year was devoted to abstinence and few dared to eat meat on the fasts ordained by Savonarola. Hymns and lauds rang in the streets that had so recently echoed with Lorenzo's dissolute songs. Both sexes dressed with Puritan plainness; husbands and wives quitted their homes for convents; marriage became an awful and scarcely permitted rite; mothers suckled their own babes; and persons of all ranks—nobles, scholars, and artists—renounced the world to assume the Dominican robe. Still more wonderful was Savonarola's influence over children, and their response to his appeals is a proof of the magnetic power of his goodness and purity. He organised the boys of Florence in a species of sacred militia, an inner republic, with its own magistrates and officials charged with the enforcement of his rules for the holy life."

In this Puritan commonwealth Savonarola ruled supreme. He denounced Rome and its corruptions, defied the Pope on numerous occasions, and politely declined all the invitations of the great Pontiff summoning him to Rome to account for his conduct. Savonarola appealed to the whole Catholic world for assistance in his attempts at reforming the Church, and when in 1496 the combat between the humble friar and the great and powerful Pope Alexander VI. was at its height, by a reactionary turn in affairs the secular ascendancy of Savonarola in Florence was undermined, and by a combination of his political and religious enemies, he was silenced forever. The Pope Alexander VI. insisted upon his trial, either by the Florentines or by a Roman tribunal. Savonarola appealed to all Christendom against the unrighteous Pontiff, and dispatched letters to the rulers of Europe, adjuring them to assemble a council to condemn Alexander VI. But his only friend and protector, Charles of France, was dead, and the appeal was made in vain. His trial was ordered, his judges were chosen from his bitterest foes, and after inhuman tortures on the rack he was condemned to die at the stake, "even," as the Pope said, "were he a second John the Baptist."

The burning took place on May 23d, 1498, just four hundred years ago this month. At the ceremonial of degradation, to the Bishop's formula: "I separate thee from the Church militant and from the Church triumphant" Savonarola replied in firm tones: "Not from the Church triumphant; that is beyond thy power."

Savonarola possessed the divine inspiration of the prophet and foretold the occurrence of many significant happenings during his



BURNING OF SAVONAROLA. (After Don Ricardo Balaca.)

life. But his last words contained a greater prophecy. In the commemorative celebration to be held in Florence this month, the Church whose representatives four hundred years ago sought and took his life, are to hold a solemn service in his honor. Savonarola has not been separated from the Church triumphant, not even from the Roman Catholic Church triumphant, which itself seems conscious of the great service which the excommunicated and martyred friar performed for it. It has always been said that his faith in the dogmas of the Church never swerved, and that his preachings were directed solely against its corruptions. If his reliance on the Bible as the surest guide in religious matters and his intense moral earnestness connect him pre-eminently with the Reformation, he was no less a reformer within the Roman Catholic Church itself. He had in his day declared the Pope's bull of excommunication null and void, and the Church itself now sanctions his action.