

Iacopo Nardi, *Istorie della città di Firenze*

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But on the second day of March, the friar, while preaching in the cathedral, took leave of the people, saying that he was going to give way to the wrath of his adversaries, but he invited his audience to the Church of San Marco. There, continuing to preach on the explication of Exodus, he delivered sermons full of terror, more than ever severely chastising the clergy and all the other generations of men. Indeed, despite the respect due the excommunication, the crowd of auditors multiplied so much that, since this church lacked the capacity for such a multitude, it was necessary that he preach there to the men only, and it was ordered that Fra Domenico da Pescia preach to the women in the nuns' Church of San Niccolò on the via del Cocomero. Given the state of the times and of affairs, both the priests and the friars of the city, almost everyone in the parish—whether because of remorse and the prick of conscience, or because of envy and hatred, or because of fear and the danger of losing their benefices and other signs of respect—did not want to give absolution, or give Communion, or bury in consecrated ground the bodies of those who believed the prophecies of those friars or attended their sermons. In spite of such and so great a persecution and prohibition, it came about—I know not how—that the people, seized with a like conviction, not only went to hear the sermons, but more and more would go every day to the monastery of San Marco to join the religious life. So great were the division, the schism, the travail, and the confusion among every sort of people that in Rome and all over Italy they debated about almost nothing else, and in Florence, on Carnival day and the days preceding it, through the instigation and encouragement of the said Fra Girolamo and Fra Domenico, a great number of men, women, and young people went to confession and Communion, and in the said church he celebrated a devout and solemn sung Mass. When Mass was finished, the said friar came with the Sacrament in hand and mounted a pulpit erected for the occasion at the door of the church, and while the friars and the people, kneeling all around, sang many hymns and psalms, after he had silently said a few brief prayers, with the tabernacle of the Sacrament [i.e., monstrance] in his hand he blessed all the people who were in the piazza, admonishing and asking everyone to pray fervently, and he prayed to God that if he had not prophesied and said and done truly, without deception, all the important things which he had predicted and affirmed *by the word of the Lord*, that that God, Who among Christians is believed to be really and truly in that Sacrament, should expressly and clearly show a sign to that effect.

On the same day of Carnival, the people, divided according to the accustomed arrangement by quarters [of the city], carrying in procession a beautiful and most ornate tabernacle with the image of Jesus Christ represented as a child, went through all the city singing hymns and psalms and lauds in the vernacular. That same evening, having returned to the Piazza della Signoria, they burned many disgraceful, lascivious, and vain things, which had been begged for and collected by the children on the preceding day, in the same way as they had done the year before, and all [was done] with great delight and festivity by the children and by all those persons who accorded faith to the prophecies of the friar. In this way, those days which are customarily devoted to the pastimes and pleasures of the world seemed at that time all to have been consecrated to and celebrated for the honor and glory of Christ; however, on this occasion many insults and much villainy were said and done to these children in the procession, even to the point of tearing from their hands and breaking into pieces those little red crosses which they bore in their hands, and many other things besides, which manifestly resulted in contempt for our religion, whatever might have been the intention of that friar, and however much he might be excommunicate and a sinner and worthy of every shame and contumely.

Because of these things, a multitude of vices and the rage of his adversaries were seen and known to grow the more, the more goodness and piety grew in simple men, upright in heart. But in Rome especially an extraordinarily important scandal arose, there being no one there who could contain the Pope's fury, either with reasons or with pleas and prayers; wherefore, His Holiness wrote threateningly several more times that, since the censures of the Holy Church were held to be of no account, he would do all which he had at other times threatened to do, adding to them also arms and temporal force. For in truth, the Pope and all his court very much feared a universal schism and the division of Christendom, and for such disorder [to occur] it seemed that nothing else was lacking but some ecclesiastical leader of high repute and authority. For this reason, the Pope was encouraged and spurred on by the prelates and preachers in Rome to impose a remedy upon the affair. Among these was that Fra Mariano [da Genazzano]⁷⁴ whom we have mentioned above, who had been banished from Florence with little honor on account of the things he had done against the city at the instance of Piero de' Medici. He was very fond of the Medici, since he had been particularly benefited and honored by Lorenzo, Piero's father, to such a degree that by his attentions he had restored almost the whole convent of San

74. An Augustinian and longtime foe of Savonarola, by this point Vicar General of his order.

Gallo. So the Pope wrote again, repeating the same threats and adding some much greater in a brief sent through a special emissary.

When this brief had finally been made public in Florence, and a division ensued between the Signory and the other chief magistrates, the city found itself in great travail, since many disputes and consultations took place concerning this issue. A great assembly of twenty-five citizens from every quarter [of the city] gathered, along with the senate of the Eighty and other magistrates accustomed to intervene in public consultations. In this assembly, after more than six hours of consultation and dispute, nothing was concluded, so balanced were these contrary opinions. But on the seventeenth of March, Giovanni Berlinghieri, a daring man, finding himself a Prior [of the Signory] and Piero Popoleschi Gonfalonier, they, along with their companions but against the wishes of the others, so managed it that it was expressly commanded, with many threats, that the friar stop preaching altogether. And so, the following day, he delivered a very grave sermon, once again protesting on God's behalf, and decrying the vices of the clergy, and threatening Rome and Florence in particular with various grave and imminent scourges, and saying that there was a need now more than ever to turn to Christ as universal source and cause, since no other remedy was to be found for the correction and reform of Holy Church, as has been said, more or less, above; putting an end to his sermon in this way, he took his leave. These words, and others similar to them, interpreted perhaps more maliciously than they should have been, were the principal and evil cause of every perturbation in Rome and Florence, for they could not reasonably be supported with patience. And so, in the election of the Signory at that time, his enemies were much favored, and for this reason Fra Domenico da Pescia began to preach.

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When he had preached for a few days, it happened that one Fra Francesco di Puglia, one of the Observant Friars of St. Francis, while preaching in the Church of Santa Croce, said one morning that he did not believe that these friars told the truth about this matter when they had maintained that they spoke through divine inspiration and *by the word of the Lord*. The same friar, adding that the excommunication imposed against Fra Girolamo was valid and reasonable, went on to say many other things like this to support his propositions, and he said that he was glad to ready himself right now to enter the fire, even though he thought he might die, if the said Fra Girolamo would also enter it with him and, should he save himself, manifestly show the truth of his prophecies by a supernatural sign. This agreed with what the same Fra Girolamo had stated publicly several times, that, should natural reasons not suffice to confirm the truth of what he had preached, he would

not hesitate to prove them by supernatural signs. When Fra Domenico heard this proposal, he accepted the challenge and the conditions, and he said publicly that, in order to prove the truth of the conclusions preached by Fra Girolamo, he wanted to enter the fire himself, from which he believed he would escape miraculously, without a scratch, by the grace of God. I did not want to fail to make note of these conclusions in this place, for the memory of those who are to come. In brief, these were the conclusions:

The Church of God is in need of reform and renovation.
The Church of God will be scourged, and after the scourge, it will be reformed and renewed, and it will prosper.

Infidels will be converted to Christ and to His faith.

Florence will be scourged, and after the scourge, she will be renewed and will prosper. All these things will happen in our life-

time.

That the excommunication made concerning our father, Fra Girolamo, had no force. Those not observing it would commit no

sin.⁷⁵

75. *Ecclēsia Dei indiget reformatione, et renovatione. Ecclesia Dei flagellabitur, et post flagella reformabitur, et prosperabitur. Infideles ad Christum, et fidem eius convertentur. Florentia flagellabitur, et post flagella renovabitur, et prosperabitur. Haec omnia erunt diebus nostris. Quod excommunicatio facta de patre nostro fratre Hieronymo non tenet. Non servantes eam, non peccant.*