

COMMENTARY

SAVONAROLA. The centenary of the birth of Jerome Savonarola has once more drawn attention to one of the most enigmatic of men, hailed with equal insistence as rebel and as defender of the faith. For a Dominican review he has a particular importance; his vocation lies beyond the troubled history of his time, and his witness for the truth is unassailed by the circumstances of his condemnation and death. It is some measure of the dilemma his life presents that in the present number of *BLACKFRIARS* two Dominicans should write of him from what may seem to be divergent points of view. And it is of especial value that a member of his own community of San Marco should give to English readers an authentic account of the Florentine tradition, which through the centuries has seen in Savonarola a true defender of the liberty and exaltation of the Church. In England, thanks to *Romola* and the mood of Protestantism, we stand in need of the corrective evidence of what in fact he said and did. For the issues that confronted Savonarola, involved as they must be in the maze of local intrigue and the political conflicts of his generation, are perennial so long as the Church exists in time and place. And the work of unravelling the threads of his mission and his final tragedy—a work that is by no means over—is more than a scholarly reconstruction of the past. It is a study, within a context of extreme confusion, of the limits of obedience and the rights of conscience. Thus it is that differing views as to the exact motive of Savonarola's attitude—whether the fundamental issue is seen to be his defence of the reform of his Order or, more generally, his determination to bear witness against the corruption of the papal court—cannot diminish his radical stand for the truth as he conceived it. It may be that there can be no final judgment, but it is perhaps a symbol of the true meaning of his life and death that he appears in Raphael's *Disputa* among the Doctors of the Church: the defender of orthodoxy, and that in Rome, at a Pope's command.