qualification for the religious life, and his daily prayer was, “ Lord! teach me the way my soul should walk.” But in 1474 his doubts were dispelled by a sermon heard at Faenza, and his way was clear. Dreading the pain of bidding farewell to his dear ones, he secretly stole away to Bologna, entered the monastery of St Domenico and then acquainted his father with his reasons for the step. The world’s wickedness was intolerable, he wrote; through­out Italy he beheld vice triumphant, virtue despised. Among the papers he had left behind at Ferrara was a treatise on “ Contempt of the World,” inveighing against the prevalent corruption and predicting the speedy vengeance of Heaven. His novitiate was marked by a fervour of humility. He sought the most menial offices, and did penance for his sins by the severest austerities. According to contemporary writers he was worn to a shadow.

All portraits of this extraordinary man are at first sight almost repulsively ugly, but written descriptions tell us that his gaunt features were beautified by an expression of singular force and benevolence. Luminous dark eyes sparkled and flamed beneath his thick, black brows, and his large mouth and prominent nether lip were as capable of gentle sweetness as of power and set resolve. He was of middling stature, dark complexion, had a nervous system of exceeding delicacy and the sanguineo-bilious temperament so often associated with genius. His manners were simple, his speech unadorned and almost homely. His splendid oratorical power was as yet unrevealed; but his intellectual gifts being at once recognized his superiors charged him with the instruction of the novices, instead of the humbler tasks he had wished to fulfil. He passed six quiet years in the convent, but his poems written during that period are expressive of burning indignation against the increasing corruptions of the church and profoundest sorrow for the calamities of his country.

In 1482 he reluctantly accepted a mission to Ferrara, and, regarding earthly affections as snares of the evil one, tried to keep aloof from his family. His preachings attracted slight attention there, no one—as he later remarked— being a prophet in his own land. An outbreak of hostilities between Ferrara and Venice, fomented by Pope Sixtus IV., soon caused his recall to Bologna. Thence he was despatched to St Mark’s in Florence, the scene of his future triumph and downfall.

Lorenzo the Magnificent was then (1482) at the height of his power and popularity, and the Florentines, dazzled by his splendour and devoted to pleasure and luxury, were docile subjects to his rule. At first Savonarola was enchanted with Florence. Fresh from the gloom of Bologna, sickened by the evils wrought on Italy by the scandalous nepotism of the pope, and oppressed by some natural human anxiety as to his reception in a strange city, the gaiety and charm of his novel surroundings lifted a weight from his soul. His cloister, sanctified by memories of St Antonine and adorned with the inspired paintings of Fra Angelico, seemed to him a fore-court of heaven. But his content speedily changed to horror. The Florence streets rang with Lorenzo’s ribald songs (the “ canti carnascialeschi ”); the smooth, cultured citizens were dead to all sense of religion or morality; and the spirit of the fashionable heathen philosophy had even infected the brotherhood of St Mark. In 1483 Savonarola was Lenten preacher in the church of St Lorenzo, but his plain, earnest exhortations attracted few hearers, while all the world thronged to Santo Spirito to enjoy the elegant rhetoric of Fra Mariano da Genazzano. Discouraged by this failure in the pulpit, Savonarola now devoted himself to teaching in the convent, but his zeal for the salvation

of the apathetic townsfolk was soon to stir him to fresh efforts. Convinced of being divinely inspired, he had begun to see visions, and discovered in the Apocalypse symbols of the heavenly vengeance about to overtake this sin-laden people. In a hymn to the Saviour composed at this time he gave vent to his prophetic dismay. The papal chair was now filled by Innocent VIII., whose rule was even more infamous than that of his predecessor Sixtus IV.

Savonarola’s first success as a preacher was gained at St Gemignano (1484-85), but it was only at Brescia in the following year that his power as an orator was fully revealed. In a sermon on the Apocalypse he shook men’s souls by his terrible threats of the wrath to come, and drew tears from their eyes by the tender pathos of his assurances of divine mercy. A Brescian friar relates that a halo of light was seen to flash round his head, and the citizens remembered his awful prophecies when in 1512 their town was put to the sack by Gaston de Foix.

Soon, at a Dominican council at Reggio, Savonarola had occasion to display his theological learning and subtlety. The famous Pico della Mirandola was particularly impressed by the friar’s attainments, and is said to have urged Lorenzo de’ Medici to recall him from Lombardy. When Savonarola returned to Florence in 1490, his fame as an orator had gone there before him. The cloister garden was too small for the crowds attending his lectures, and on the 1st August 1490 he gave his first sermon in the church of St Mark. To quote his own words, it was “ a terrible sermon,” and legend adds that he foretold he should preach for eight years.

And now, for the better setting forth of his doctrines, to silence pedants, and confute malignant misinterpretation, he published a collection of his writings. These proved his knowledge of the ancient philosophy he so fiercely condemned, and showed that no ignorance of the fathers caused him to seek inspiration from the Bible alone. *The Triumph of the Cross* is his principal work, but everything he wrote was animated by the ardent spirit of piety evidenced in his life. Savonarola’s sole aim was to bring mankind nearer to God.

In 1491 he was invited to preach in the cathedral, Sta Maria del Fiore, and his rule over Florence may be said to begin from that date. The anger and uneasiness of Lorenzo de’ Medici gave testimony to his power. Five of the leading men of Florence were sent to urge him to moderate his tone, and in his own interest and that of his convent to show’ more respect to the head of the state. But Savonarola rejected their advice. “ Tell your master,” he said in conclusion, “ that, albeit I am a humble stranger, he the lord of Florence, yet I shall remain and he depart.” Afterwards, in the presence of many witnesses, he fore­told that stupendous changes impended over Italy,—that Lorenzo, the pope, and the king of Naples were all near unto death.

In the July of the same year he was elected prior of St Mark’s. As the convent had been rebuilt by Cosimo, and enriched by the bounty of the Medici, it was considered the duty of the new superior to present his homage to Lorenzo. Savonarola, however, refused to conform to the usage. His election was due to God, not Lorenzo; to God alone would he promise submission. Upon this the sovereign angrily exclaimed : “ This stranger comes to dwell in my house, yet will not stoop to pay me a visit.” Nevertheless, disdaining to recognize the enmity of a mere monk, he tried various conciliatory measures. All were rejected by the unbending prior, who even refused to let his convent profit by Lorenzo’s donations. The Magnifico then sought to undermine his popularity, and Frit Mariano was employed to attack him from the pulpit. But the