words had freed them of King Charles, and Savonarola became the lawgiver of Florence. The first thing done at his instance was to relieve the starving populace within and without the walls; shops were opened to give work to the unemployed; all taxes, especially those weighing on the lower classes, were reduced; the strictest admini­stration of justice was enforced, and all men were exhorted to place their trust in the Lord. And, after much debate as to the constitution of the new republic, Savonarola’s influence carried the day in favour of Soderini’s proposal of a universal or general government, with a great council on the Venetian plan, but modified to suit the needs of the city. The Florentines’ love for their great preacher was enhanced by gratitude on this triumphant defence of their rights. The great council consisted of 3200 citizens of blameless reputation and over twenty-five years of age, a third of the number sitting for six months in turn in the hall of the Cinquecento expressly built for the pur­pose. There was also an upper council of eighty, which in conjunction with the signory decided all questions of too important and delicate a nature for discussion in the larger assembly. These institutions were approved by the people, and gave a fair promise of justice. Savonarola’s programme of the new government was comprised in the following formula:—(1) fear of God and purification of manners; (2) promotion of the public welfare in pre­ference to private interests; (3) a general amnesty to political offenders; (4) a council on the Venetian model, but with no doge. At first the new machinery acted well; the public mind was tranquil, and the war with Pisa—not as yet of threatening proportions—was enough to occupy the Florentines and prevent internecine feuds.

Without holding any official post in the commonwealth he had created the prior of St Mark’s was the real head of the state, the dictator of Florence, and guarded the public weal with extraordinary political wisdom. At his instance the tyrannical system of arbitrary imposts and so-called voluntary loans was abolished, and replaced by a tax of ten per cent. (la decima) on all real property. The laws and edicts of this period read like paraphrases of Savonarola’s sermons, and indeed his counsels were always given as addenda to the religious exhortations in which he denounced the sins of his country and the pollution of the church, and urged Florence to cast off iniquity and become a truly Christian city, a pattern not only to Rome but to the world at large. His eloquence was now at the flood. Day by day his impassioned words, filled with the spirit of the Old Testament, wrought upon the minds of the Florentines and strung them to a pitch of pious emotion never before—and never since—attained by them. Their fervour was too hot to be lasting, and Savonarola’s un­compromising spirit roused the hatred of political adver­saries as well as of the degraded court of Rome. Even now, when his authority was at its highest, when his fame filled the land, and the vast cathedral and its precincts lacked space for the crowds flocking to hear him, his enemies were secretly preparing his downfall.

Pleasure loving Florence was completely changed. Ab­juring pomps and vanities, its citizens observed the ascetic regime 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 organized 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. It was with the aid of these youthful enthu­siasts that Savonarola arranged the religious carnival of 1496, when the citizens gave their costliest possessions in alms to the poor, and tonsured monks, crowned with flowers, sang lauds and performed wild dances for the glory of God. In the same spirit, and to point the doctrine of renunciation of carnal gauds, he celebrated the carnival of 1497 by the famous “burning of the vanities ” in the Piazza della Signoria. A Venetian merchant is known to have bid 22,000 gold florins for the doomed vanities, but the scandalized authorities not only rejected his offer but added his portrait to the pile. Nevertheless the artistic value of the objects consumed has been greatly exaggerated by some writers. There is no proof that any book or painting of real merit was sacrificed, and Savonarola was neither a foe to art nor to learning. On the contrary, so great was his respect for both that, when there was a question of selling the Medici library to pay that family’s debts, he saved the collection at the expense of the convent purse.

Meanwhile events were taking a turn hostile to the prior. Alexander VI. had long regretted the enfranchise­ment of St Mark’s from the rule of the Lombard Dominicans, and now, having seen a transcript of one of Savonarola’s denunciations of his crimes, resolved to silence this daring preacher at any cost. Bribery was the first weapon employed, and a cardinal’s hat was held out as a bait. But Savonarola indignantly spurned the offer, replying to it from the pulpit with the prophetic words : “ No hat will I have but that of a martyr, reddened with my own blood.”

So long as King Charles remained in Italy Alexander’s concern for his own safety prevented all vigorous measures against the friar. But no Borgia ever forgot an enemy. He bided his time, and the transformation of sceptical Florence into an austerely Christian republic claiming the Saviour as its head only increased his resolve to crush the man who had wrought this marvel. The potent duke of Milan, Ludovico Sforza, and other foes were labouring for the same end, and already in July 1495 a papal brief had courteously summoned Savonarola to Rome. In terms of equal courtesy the prior declined the invitation, nor did he obey a second, less softly worded, in September. Then came a third, threatening Florence with an interdict in case of renewed refusal. Savonarola disregarded the command, but suspending his sermons went to preach for a while in other Tuscan cities. But in Lent his celebrated sermons upon Amos were delivered in the duomo, and again he urged the necessity of reforming the church, striving by ingenious arguments to reconcile re­bellion against Alexander with unalterable fidelity to the Holy See. All Italy recognized that a mortal combat was going on between a humble friar and the head of the church. What would be the result ? Savonarola’s voice was arousing a storm that might shake even the power of Rome ! Alive to the danger, the pope knew that his foe must be crushed, and the religious carnival of 1496 afforded a good pretext for stronger proceedings against him. The threatened anathema was, for some reason, deferred, but a brief uniting St Mark’s to a new Tuscan branch of the Dominicans now deprived Savonarola of his independent power. However, in the beginning of 1497 the Piagnoni were again in office, with the prior’s staunch friend, Francesco Valori, at their head. In March the aspect of affairs changed. The Arrabbiati and the Medicean faction merged political differences in their