preacher’s scandalous accusations missed their mark, and disgusted his hearers without hurting his rival. Savon­arola took up the challenge; his eloquence prevailed, and Frà Mariano was silenced. But the latter, while feigning indifference, was thenceforth his rancorous and determined foe.

In April 1492 Lorenzo de’ Medici was on his death­bed at Careggi. Oppressed by the weight of his crimes, he needed some assurance of divine forgiveness from trustier lips than those of obsequious courtiers, and summoned the unyielding prior to shrive his soul. Savonarola reluctantly came, and, after hearing the agitated confession of the dying prince, offered absolution upon three conditions. Lorenzo asked in what they consisted. First, “You must repent and feel true faith in God’s mercy.” Lorenzo assented. Secondly, “You must give up your ill-gotten wealth.” This too Lorenzo promised, after some hesitation ; but upon hearing the third clause, “ You must restore the liberties of Florence,” Lorenzo turned his face to the wall and made no reply. Savonarola waited a few moments and then went away. And shortly after his penitent died unabsolved.

Savonarola’s influence now rapidly increased. Many adherents of the late prince came over to his side, disgusted by the violence and incompetency of Piero de’ Medici’s rule. All state affairs were mismanaged, and Florence was fast losing the power and prestige acquired under Lorenzo. The same year witnessed the fulfilment of Savonarola’s second prediction in the death of Inno­cent VIII. (July 1492); men’s minds were full of anxiety, and the scandalous election of Cardinal Borgia to the papal chair heralded the climax of Italy’s woes. The friar’s utterances became more and more fervent and impassioned. Patriotic solicitude combined with close study of Biblical prophecies had stirred him to a pious frenzy, in which he saw visions and believed himself the recipient of divine revelations. It was during the delivery of one of his forcible Advent sermons that he beheld the celebrated vision, recorded in contemporary medals and engravings, that is almost a symbol of his doctrines. A hand appeared to him bearing a flaming sword inscribed with the words: “ Gladius Domini supra terram ci to et velociter.” He heard supernatural voices proclaiming mercy to the faithful, vengeance on the guilty, and mighty cries that the wrath of God was at hand. Then the sword bent towards the earth, the sky darkened, thunder pealed, lightning flashed, and the whole world was wasted by famine, bloodshed, and pestilence. It was probably the noise of these sermons that caused the friar’s temporary removal from Florence at the instance of Piero de’ Medici. He was presently addressing enthusiastic congregations at Prato and Bologna. In the latter city his courage in rebuking the wife of Bentivoglio, the reigning lord, for interrupting divine service by her noisy entrance nearly cost him his life. Assassins were sent to kill him in his cell; but awed, it is said, by Savonarola’s words and demeanour they fled dismayed from his presence. At the close of his last sermon the undaunted friar publicly announced the day and hour of his departure from Bologna; and his lonely journey on foot over the Apennines was safely accomplished. He was rapturously welcomed by the community of St Mark’s, and at once proceeded to re-establish the discipline of the order and to sweep away all abuses. For this purpose he obtained, after much difficulty, a papal brief emancipating the Dominicans of St Mark from the rule of the Lombard vicars of that order. He thus became an independent author­ity, no longer at the command of distant superiors. Thoroughly reorganizing the convent, he relegated many of the brethren to a quieter retreat outside the city, only

retaining in Florence those best fitted to aid in intellectual labour. To render the convent self-supporting, he opened schools for various branches of art, and promoted the study of Oriental languages. His efforts were completely successful; the brethren’s enthusiasm was fired by their superior’s example; religion and learning made equal pro­gress ; St Mark’s became the most popular monastery in Florence, and many citizens of noble birth flocked thither to take the vows.

Meanwhile Savonarola continued to denounce the abuses of the church and the guilt and corruption of man­kind, and thundered forth predictions of heavenly wrath. The scourge of war was already at hand, for in 1494 the duke of Milan demanded the aid of France, and King Charles VIII. brought an army across the Alps. Piero de’ Medici, maddened with fear, and forgetting that hitherto Florence had been the firm friend of France, made alliance with the Neapolitan sovereign whose kingdom was claimed by Charles. Then, repenting this ill-judged step, he hurried in person to the French camp at Pietra Santa, and humbled himself before the king. And, not content with agreeing to all the latter’s demands, he further promised large sums of money and the surrender of the strongholds of Pisa and Leghorn.

This news drove Florence to revolt, and the worst excesses were feared from the popular fury. But even at this crisis Savonarola’s influence was all-powerful, and a bloodless revolution was effected. Piero Capponi’s declara­tion that “ it was time to put an end to this baby govern­ment ” .was the sole weapon needed to depose Piero de’ Medici. The resuscitated republic instantly sent a fresh embassy to the French king, to arrange the terms of his reception in Florence. Savonarola was one of the envoys, Charles being known to entertain the greatest veneration for the friar who had so long predicted his coming and declared it to be divinely ordained. He was most respectfully received at the camp, but could obtain no definite pledges from the king, who was bent on first coming to Florence. During Savonarola’s absence Piero de’ Medici had re-entered the city, found his power irretrievably lost, and been contemptuously but peaceably expelled. It is a proof of the high esteem in which Savonarola’s convent was held that, although the headquarters of the victorious popular party, Piero’s brother, Cardinal Medici, entrusted to its care a large share of the family treasures.

Returning full of hope from Pietra Santa, Savonarola might well have been dismayed by the distracted state of public affairs. There was no Government, and revolted Pisa was secretly favoured by the monarch who was knocking at the gates of Florence. Nevertheless, with the aid of Capponi, he guided the bewildered city safely through these critical days. Charles entered Florence on the 17th November 1494, and the citizens’ fears evaporated in jests on the puny exterior of the “threatened scourge.” But the exorbitance of his demands soon showed that he came as a foe. All was agitation; disturbances arose, and serious collision with the French troops seemed inevitable. The signory resolved to be rid of their dangerous guests; and, when Charles threatened to sound his trumpets unless the sums exacted were paid, Capponi tore up the treaty in his face and made the memorable reply: “Then we will ring our bells.” The monarch was cowed, accepted moderate terms, and, yielding to Savonarola’s remonstrances, left Florence on the 24th November.

The city was now free but in the utmost disorder, its commerce ruined, its treasury drained. After seventy years’ subjection to the Medici it had forgotten the art of self-government, and felt the need of a strong guiding hand. So the citizens turned to the patriot monk whose