CAN THE CONDUCT OF SAVONAROLA BE JUSTIFIED?

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of Creighton University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts.

June 22, 1923

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In order to arrive at a reasonable and fair solution of the question propounded in our theme we shall first take a brief survey of the state of Italy shortly before and at the time when Savonarola began his life as a member of the Dominican Order and when, we may say, he began to take an active interest in the affairs of Italy and the Church, in order to see in what manner these things may have influenced his later conduct. We shall examine somewhat into the history of those who occupied the papal throne during this period and their connection with Savonarola to ascertain, if possible, how all these things affected his later actions, especially his preaching and his disregard of the commands of Alexander VI. We shall also look into his claims as a prophet, his interference with and administration of the affairs of Florence, and his failure to accomplish his designs, which ended in the final tragedy of his life. In all these things we must keep in mind that it is the conduct of Savonarola we are examining with a view of deciding whether or not it can be justified, and not the conduct of the popes or of those who may have been instrumental in his condemnation.

The political power of Italy was divided among the states of Milan, Naples, Venice, Florence and Rome. Of these, Naples, the largest, during the greatest part of the fourteenth century, was governed by a line of Aragonese kings, then for a brief time by the French and again by the Spaniards; Milan was under the rule of the powerful
family of the Sforza; Venice, the first maritime power of the world, had become a republic, and had a large dominion over the cities of North-eastern Italy; Florence, formerly a republic, had fallen under the sway of the Medici, who had crushed the popular institutions and assumed autocratic power; Rome, of course, was under the rule of the various popes, first Sixtus IV, followed by Innocent VIII, then Alexander VI.

It is difficult to make a statement of the condition, politically and morally of Italy at this time that could be regarded as a true representation in every respect, for Italy was a country of extremes, and a true picture could not be portrayed without showing the good and the bad, and although the bad, which was always apparent, seemed to predominate, but, on account of the deep religious feeling of the people, the good on the whole preponderated.

The rapid and influential development of a pagan-minded humanism and of the fine arts and the moral disorders of high-placed ecclesiastics was offset by an extraordinary development of sanctity, and despite the corruption of some of its members the salutary influence of the Church made itself felt in every department of society.

Sixtus IV became pope in 1471, and the condition of Italy may well be imagined when we read that the pope, on his way to St. John Lateran, on the same day he was crowned, was struck by stones thrown by rioters in the street. Of this pope, Dr. Creighton says: "Sixtus was an Italian prince who was engaged in consolidating his dominions into an independent state." (1) By consolidating the dominions he held in trust for the Church it is probable that he believed he could have them governed by subordinates devoted to himself and thus secure the internal well-being of the States, an object he undoubtedly had at heart, but this aim would scarcely justify the promotion of a crowd of relatives whose

(1) Lucas 18
mischievous influence was the bane of his pontificate. It was these promotions which made possible the simoniacal election of Alexander VI. Moreover, the circumstances of the time were such as to bring the misdeeds of the Pope, or rather his representatives, prominently under the notice of Savonarola. Sixtus seemed to be largely under the influence of Cardinal Pietro Riario, and the mad extravagance, the scandalous luxury, the unblushing immorality of this Cardinal received no effective check from the Pope, who seemed infatuated in his affection for this graceless nephew. (1) Riario was one of five nephews created Cardinals by Sixtus IV. During the reign of this Pope the nefarious conspiracy was executed by the family of the Pazzi, of Florence, in which this same Cardinal Pietro Riario was implicated, and in which the Pope, though not a party to it, can hardly be held blameless, which resulted in the murder of Julian de' Medici in the Duomo at Florence and in which Lorenzo de' Medici barely escaped death. Many went so far as to hold the Pope an accomplice to this crime, but the confession of Montesecco, quoted by Pastor and Creighton, absolutely clears the Pope from this charge. (2) Archbishop Salviati, of Pisa, one of the conspirators, became the victim of summary justice at the hands of the Florentines, and after being flogged, was hanged without trial; and more than fifty persons, many of whom were innocent, were executed the same day, and many others later. (3) For its part in the punishment of Salviati, Sixtus laid an interdict on the City of Florence, and it may have been possible that the recollection of these circumstances influenced Savonarola later on, when Alexander VI repeatedly threatened Florence with an interdict on his account, in not seeing the matter in a graver light.

(1) Lucas 19
(2) Pastor IV, 300 - Creighton III, 75
(3) (Pastor IV, 314)
Shortly before the departure of Savonarola from his father's house, there arrived at Ferrara, Eleanor, the daughter of the king of Naples, as the wife of Ercole d'Este. The reception of this newly married couple in Rome, on their way from Naples, had been on a scale of sumptuous magnificence which startled even the luxurious princes of Italy. This was all known to Savonarola who also knew it was the work of Cardinal Pietro Riario, who was about the same time made Archbishop of Florence, and whose progress through the northern states of Italy was attended by such a display of splendor as to impress upon the minds of everyone to what extreme lengths in extravagance a high ecclesiastic could go.

Another incident which must have made a deep impression upon Savonarola because it concerned his native city, Ferrara, was this: The Pope wished an alliance with the Venetians against the Neapolitans, and yielding to the influence of Riario, he allowed a war to be carried on against Ferrara, in which the Venetians could obtain it as the reward for their alliance. Later on the Pope guaranteed to the Duke of Ferrara the possession of his states, but the war was still carried on by Venice, against which republic it was now thr fortune of Sixtus to have turned his arms. By these intrigues and complicity in the small rivalries of the various Italian states the honor of the Holy See was seriously compromised. (1)

The death of Sixtus IV was followed by the election of Innocent VIII. If there was any relief felt at the election of Innocent VIII it was more due to the fact that a schism had been avoided than to any hope for real reform in the future. For as Sixtus had been controlled by the two Riarios, so Innocent allowed himself to act at the whim of Cardinal della Rovere and of his own son; and to the scandal of nepotism was now added

(1) Pastor, IV, 350
that of unparalleled magnificence and display in providing for his own family. The condition of Rome under both of these peoples was of the deepest venality and corruption in which not only the most noted families but many of the ecclesiastics of the highest standing were engaged, and throughout the whole of Italy many of the princes were debased in character and of tainted blood, tyrannising over the common people and engaged in plotting with or against each other. (1)

Into this age of political chaos and spiritual decadence Girolamo Savonarola was born, in September, 1452, at Ferrara. His grandfather, Michele Savonarola, was court physician to the house of d'Este, a princely family, where he associated with learned men and brilliant courtiers. It was to this grandfather and to his mother that Savonarola chiefly owes his early training. Of, Niccolo, the father of Savonarolo, little is known except that he seemed to have a due regard for the education of Girolamo. Michele Savonarola did not altogether escape the taint of the prevalent subservience to high court officials, but he seems to have had an eye for the contemptible side of court life and wrote a satire on the buffoonery and frivolity of Ferrarese society. He also wrote some medical works and several ascetical treatises which, no doubt, had their influence on the contempt for the world shown by Girolamo so early in his life. Girolamo was a boy of somewhat melancholy disposition, fond of solitude, and did not care for the pleasures of the ducal court. He made remarkable progress in his studies, especially in philosophy and theology. He was a follower of St. Thomas Aquinas, and despised the vain subtleties of the humanists. He early acquired a great familiarity with Holy Scripture, which, no doubt, was instrumental in his following the line of preaching

(1) Lucas, 22, 23.
which he afterwards took up.

It was not wholly on account of his personal aversion towards worldly things that he eschewed the court life of the d'Este family. He shows in his poem, *De Ruina Mundi*, written in 1472, that he was well informed upon the state of affairs in the world, that he understood the worst features of the Renaissance, with its revival of pagan ideals and vices, and that he knew it boded no good outlook for the future.

"Were it not (he says) O Master of the World, that Thy providence is infinite, I should be chilled with horror on seeing the world turned upside-down and virtue travestied. But I believe, O King of Heaven, that Thou dost delay Thy chastisements in order to punish the more severely those who are most guilty; or, perchance, because it is near at hand, Thou dost wait for the day of final judgment. The earth is so overcome with wickedness that it can nevermore lift its head. Its capital, Rome, lies prostrate....Gone are the days of piety and the days of virtue....Beware, my sons, that you put not your trust in anyone who is robed in purple; flee from palaces and stately halls and take care not to speak your thoughts save to a few; else you will have all the world for your enemy." (1)

Savonarola then seemed filled with horror for the life he would have to enter upon if engaged in worldly pursuits, and although at first he did not intend to become a monk or friar, and even resolved against it, after hearing a sermon preached by an Augustinian friar in 1474, he decided to enter the religious life. Believing that his parents would oppose his taking this step he did not inform them of his intention, and delayed leaving his home until after the following Easter, when he left home unperceived, journeying to Bologna on foot, where he offered himself as a novice at the Dominican Convent of San Domenico. He immediately wrote to his father, saying that the great "misery of the world, the wickedness of men. . . . their pride, idolatry, and fearful blasphemies; whereby things have come to such a pass that no one can be found acting righteously," are the motives by which he has been led to enter the religious life.

Lucas, 6
He then goes on to tell how he had prayed earnestly for light and says that he has left a paper which will more fully explain his state of mind. This paper, like the poem De Ruina Mundi, is an impassioned lament over the miserable condition of the world, which for its cruel oppression and shameless moral corruption is likened to Egypt in the days of the Exodus and to Sodom and Gomorrah. He goes on to say that the man who lives chastely and modestly is a man of no spirit, and speaks of those who plunder the orphans and rob their neighbor as being wise and looked upon with respect, and he who believes in God is looked upon as a simpleton. (1) The whole tenor of this letter is bemoaning the vice and corruption of the age. He appears always to look on the dark side of things; he seems engulfed in a pessimistic view of the world, and there seems no doubt that this continual dwelling on the hopelessness of affairs had its influence on the severe measures he afterwards took in his schemes of reform. One of his critics (Villari) seems to think that even at this early time he had an "incipient pride" in thinking he would be the Moses who would lead the Italian people out of their misery; but it seems rather that he was so filled with a sense of the wretched condition of his people that he only desired in all sincerity and earnestness to "put his shoulder to the wheel" and do his part in seeking a way out of the darkness which shrouded the morality of the Italian people.

If he applied in some of his writings, the language of Holy Writ to the vices of the times and presaged the terrible punishments that would follow, it could only have been from his intense desire for the purification of the people in his own day. In his letter to his father he

(1)Lucas, 6
says: "Why should not he (the writer) rise up, and together with the little ones of Christ, take his flight from these scenes of cruelty, these haunts of unbridled avarice and ambition." (1). Lucas says that from the outset of his religious life he distinguished himself by the most exact observance of the vows and of the rules of his Order, and that this is the uncontradicted testimony of his earliest biographers; that his own practice of poverty was most rigid and that he deplored the relaxations of his own Order; his purity was beyond reproach, he was most docile and showed a spirit of humble obedience in all things. This was declared of him by one who was his confessor for a long time. (2)

For seven years he lived in the retirement of his own Convent, when he was appointed "Lector" to the novices, first at Bologna and later at Florence. It is possible that such a rapid promotion was too much for a man of such an impressionable temperament as Savonarola. If it should be shown that later in his life he erred in judgment, it may have been due to some extent to the fact that a longer time should have elapsed before he was taken from under the guidance of a man more masterful and evenly balanced in the affairs of religious life than he was.

In 1481 he began preaching at Ferrara. This was soon after the disgraceful conspiracy of the Pazzi, of which we have spoken. In his own opinion his early preaching was not a success, for eight years afterwards he writes to his mother that it had been said to him at Ferrara many a time that the brethren must be in great need of men when they set so worthless a man as him to so great a task. But even if he could not see any

(1) Lucas, 7
(2) Lucas, 9
good results of his preaching, it is not probable that the words spoken by so earnest a preacher could have been wasted.

In the autumn of that same year hostilities which were threatened between the Venetians and Ercole d'este, the Duke of Ferrara, (which war we have spoken of as being countenanced by Sixtus IV) were the occasion of the dispersion of the Dominican students from Ferrara to other Convents, and Fra Girolamo was sent to San Marco, at Florence, where he was appointed "reader" of the Holy Scripture in the Convent. His earnest exhortations to his students to study the Bible were long remembered. It is said he prepared his lecture by meditation rather than by study, often coming to lecture with his eyes bathed in tears. Certainly in his early life he did not show signs of personal ambition or pride.

In 1482, he was appointed to preach the Lenten sermons in the Church of San Lorenzo, but it is recorded that "Neither his gestures nor his pronunciation gave satisfaction", and before the end of Lent his audience dwindled down to twenty-five persons. At the same time large crowds were flocking to hear his most bitter enemy, an Augustinian friar by name of Mariano da Gennazzano, at San Spirito, a man who attracted the people more by his "musical voice, his melodious cadences, his rhetorical pauses, his rounded periods," rather than his truly apostolic preaching. In later years, although Savonarola had rebuked Mariano for speaking insolently of the pope, Mariano became a great favorite of Alexander VI and used all his influence against Savonarola.

The apparent failure of his preaching bitterly disappointed Savonarola and he determined forever to renounce the work of preaching, and announced this to his hearers. Some of his friends even persuaded him to
this course. But this purpose could not be of long duration for he was a member of an Order of Preachers and was inflamed with a zeal for souls and conscious of powers which exercise would bring to the highest perfection, so he must have felt that the call to work was too strong to be permanently disregarded on the strength of his first ill efforts. Besides, the matter was settled for him by obedience and he was frequently sent to preach in the various towns of Tuscany and Lombardy, retaining, however, his office of professor at San Marco until 1486.

In 1482 he attended, as representative of his convent, the general chapter of the Order held at Reggio, and at this gathering of distinguished men his speaking on the affairs discussed there attracted much attention, especially the notice of the famous Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, who afterwards endeavored to induce Lorenzo de' Medici to have Savonarola recalled to Florence (according to Burlamacchi), but as he had not left Florence at this time, this is probably an error, which however does not discredit the truth of the story of his meeting with Mirandola at this Chapter and the impression made upon him by his words.

During his missionary labors in 1484 and 1485 Savonarola spent some time at San Gimignano, a small town near Siena, where for the first time he gave utterance in set form to the three propositions which afterwards played so important a part in his preaching, viz.: the Church shall be scourged; and afterwards renovated; and this shall happen soon. He often repeated that these propositions were not at first put forth as the result of any special revelation, but simply that he arrived at these conclusions from the application of the laws of Divine Providence as set forth
Mirandola says:

"It seemed to him that the majesty of divine justice required that terrible penalties should fall on wicked men, and especially on those, who, being placed in authority, corrupt the people by their bad example at a time when the human race, sunk in wickedness, had for so many ages abused the patience of God, and when the peoples of Asia and Africa were involved in many errors and in the darkness of ignorance. He thought, too, that the order of divine providence indisputably demanded the same chastisements, seeing that from the very beginning of history we have the record of a series of wonderful and mysterious judgments, whereby the lovable clemency and the terrible justice of God are alike made manifest."

Mirandola goes on to explain what he refers to by speaking of the punishment of our first parents, of the world by the deluge, of Egypt in the days of Pharaoh, and of the cities of the plain. He applies this to the condition of things at that time— that popes were declared to have gained their position by fraud and simony, and then to have indulged in their worst passions, and appointed as bishops and cardinals men like unto themselves. They lived without true religion and some of them even scoffed at the faith. He also speaks of the vices of secular princes who exercised tyrannical oppression and gave themselves up to rapine, to violence and to luxury, to flattery, to lust, to sacrilege, all so commonly that in the words of Holy Scripture, not one could be found who did right.

Mirandola says this is a true picture of what Savonarola had told him of his own thoughts. Lucas says "that in order to understand Savonarola's mind it is more important to know what he believed about contemporary history than to ascertain the actual facts. (2) Savonarola must have been thoroughly convinced of the fact that Innocent VIII and perhaps Sixtus IV were men of personally wicked lives because when he reveals his thoughts to Mirandola he speaks of wicked men in authority, and

(1) Lucas, 15
(2) Lucas, 15, 16.
this preceded the election of Alexander VI. Savonarola could hardly have been mistaken in his estimate of the times whether or not he was misinformed as to the personal conduct of any of these popes, and although much good may be put to the account of each of them, the fact remains that none of them made any effort to stem the tide of wickedness but rather augmented its flow by their luxury, their greed, their vices or their paganism.

Father Lucas says "The history of the reigns of Sixtus IV., Innocent VIII., and Alexander VI., has been made familiar to English readers, both Catholic and Protestant, by the historical works of Pastor and Creighton. Dr. Barry has recently expressed himself concerning this period in the following terms:

'He (Savonarola) had been driven by war from Ferrara to St. Mark's at Florence in 1481. The war was due to Sixtus IV., one of that evil succession in the Papal chair which, between Paul II and Paul III., during some sixty years, scandalised Christendom by their luxury, their greed, their vices, or their paganism. None among them has left the more dismal inheritance than Sixtu IV. ... Those who have searched into the annals of time agree in this judgment, however they may vary in the strength of the language that expresses it." L9 (1)

A man of pure heart must have felt that such flagrant sins could not go much longer unpunished.

Creighton says, "Other Popes, had been nepotists a little, but to Sixtus IV. nepotism stood in the first place." (2)

And Pastor refers to "that unfortunate attachment to his nephews ... which entangled him in a labyrinth of political complications, from which, at last, no honorable exit was possible. (3)

(1) Lucas, 16, 17.
(2) Creighton, V, 62, 63.
(3) Pastor, IV, 418.
Under Innocent VIII new offices were created and offices which had hitherto been bestowed as rewards of industry, faithfulness and eloquence, became simply a marketable commodity. Even the office of Librarian to the Vatican was for sale. This system greatly facilitated the introduction of untrustworthy officials. These officials were naturally detested in all countries as their only object was to get as much as possible for themselves out of the churches with which they had to do, and they were the most determined opponents of reform. Many of the Cardinals under this Pope gave great scandal by their disorderly lives, gambling and other vices, and in order to keep the money within their own number they stipulated in the election capitulation that their number should not exceed twenty-four. However, Innocent VIII did not observe this stipulation, but it was some years before he was able to carry out his purpose and create new Cardinals. Some of these Cardinals were fit and worthy men, but others were added in open violation of the prescriptions of the Church, such as the natural son of Innocent's brother, and the son of Lorenzo de' Medici, then only fourteen years old. (1)

"Between the wealth acquired by the accumulation of benefices and foreign bishoprics, and their connection with so many powerful kings and princes, the influence of the Cardinals had become so great that there was manifest danger of the subjection of the Papacy to the Sacred College." (2)

All of these Cardinals were surrounded by a Curia of their own, wore military attire, with a decorated sword, paraded the streets with a troop of horsemen, and far eclipsed the nobles of the day in the gorgeousness of their functions and the splendor of their palaces. By a modern historian they are likened to the old Roman Senators. The richest and most

(10 Pastor V, 356.
(2) Pastor V, 369/
powerful was Rodrigo Borgia, a Spaniard, created Cardinal by his Uncle, Calixtus III, while very young. He was afterwards Alexander VI. Another was Ascanio Sforza, of the powerful house of Milan, created Cardinal from political motives, in 1484, by Sixtus IV. and loaded with benefices, next to Rodrigo in wealth and love of show." (Pastor V, 367). The strongest personality in the College of Cardinals was perhaps Giulian della Rovere, (afterwards Julius II), Politics and war were his main interests in life. Proud and ambitious, but never small or mean, although in worldliness he was not above the rest, yet there was in him a certain seriousness and capacity for something better. He was a noble patron of Art and learning. He was really the ruling power under Innocent VIII, sometimes assuming such authority that some of the Ambassadors complained that two Popes were more than they could do with; one was quite enough." (Pastor 369)

No reformation whatever, was made in ecclesiastical affairs under Innocent VIII and the unworthy promotions of Sixtus IV rendered possible the choice of Innocent VIII and paved the way for the crowning scandal of all, the simonaical election of Alexander VI. By distributing rich abbeys and valuable benefices and by the use of his own vote, Cardinal Rodrigo Borgia was able to obtain the election after the death of Innocent VIII. It must not be presumed that his moral character was unknown as he had been an important character during the reign of three popes, but in those days, not only in Italy, but in France and Spain, public opinion in this respect was incredibly lenient and a dissolute life among the upper classes was looked upon almost as a matter of course. The profligacy of the rulers of Naples, Milan and Florence was almost unheard of, and the fact that the Princes of the Church were regarded largely in the light of
of temporal rulers had something to do with the slight esteem in which morality was held together with the general laxity of moral opinion.

It was this condition of affairs that Savonarola saw to the exclusion of everything else. His vision was obscured by the cloud of iniquity which filled the air so that his eyes were held against the good that was in existence. He did not see the genuine piety and faith that existed side by side with all the evil nor the great purity of family life among the common people, the pious practices nor the religious spirit of the guilds and brotherhoods, the great devotion to the Saints and the veneration for the Blessed Sacrament, always strong in Italy, but remarkably so at this time.

As we have said, it was in 1486, at San Gimignano, that Savonarola first uttered his three propositions. It is well to remember that he himself repeatedly asserted "that these famous propositions were not, in the first instance put forward as the outcome of any special revelation, but simply as conclusions deducible from the application of the laws of divine Providence as these are announced and exemplified in the pages of Holy Scripture." (1) The next year, at Brescia, he expounded the Apocalypse, of which he had made a deep study early in his religious life, threatening divine vengeance and calling to repentance. Here he met with such a response that his faith in himself was restored. During the same year he returned to Florence to preach the Apocalypse and at once achieved a triumph. The revulsion of feeling in his favor was tremendous, and "for hours the close-packed throng would await the small sallow-faced Friar with his furrowed brow, aquiline nose, and piercing fiery eyes." (2)

(1) Ims,15 (2) Pastor,185
In preaching, his sermons resembled those of the early Apostles, his sole aim being to expound the Scripture and return to the simplicity of the early Church. He seemed filled with the spirit of the Hebrew prophets and sought to revive their traditions. It seemed remarkable that he continued to rise in the esteem of the Florentines for he did not spare their most exalted treasures, nor hesitate to tell them their whole life was vain and frivolous in spite of their reputed intellect and wit. His manner was so impressive they accepted everything he said and frequently burst into tears during his sermons. His vivid descriptions caught their fancy and his presages of impending judgments were irresistible to an emotional people.

Lorenzo de' Medici, at that time at the height of his power and magnificence, went out of his way to attract the Friar, but all to no avail. Whether or not the thrusts which Savonarola made in his preaching at those in power were intended to be for Lorenzo, or whether they were in general a condemnation of abuses of arbitrary power, he steadily refused to modify them. Lorenzo's private efforts in this direction failing, he determined to have them controverted publicly, and for this purpose he induced Mariano della Barba to address him openly, which he did on Ascension Day, 1491, preaching from the text, "It is not yours to know the times and the moments." However, this proceeding rather redounded to the favor of Savonarola as Mariano's discourse was not well received. In reply to this sermon Savonarola asked Mariano why he had so suddenly changed in his regard since it was only recently Mariano had given him
great commendation and told him he would always be ready to help him. Then everyone knew Mariano had acted out of complaisance to others. But Mariano had not yet finished with Savonarola. Soon after this Mariano left Florence for Rome where he became the general of his Order and a great friend of Alexander VI., and in this capacity he was able to use his influence openly against Savonarola. The character of the man may be seen from the fact that before he left Florence he invited Savonarola to sing the High Mass at a great festival at San Gallo. Savonarola accepted the invitation, appearing to regard it as a courtesy. But the act of inviting him must have contained some admixture of hypocrisy as well as courtesy for Mariano could scarcely have approved of the course Savonarola was taking in his sermons.

In the course of the same year, 1491, Savonarola was made the Prior of the Convent of San Marco by an unanimous election. This Convent had been founded by Cosimo de' Medici and was a striking monument of the munificence of this princely family. For this reason a custom had arisen that each new Prior should pay a visit to the head of the founder's house. Lorenzo expected this mark of recognition from Savonarola, but whether he wished to show his disapproval of the political supremacy of the family or thought that by doing it he would acknowledge their right of patronage, he absolutely declined to make the visit, claiming that he owed his election to God alone and to God alone he should make his acknowledgements. Then Lorenzo complained that a stranger had come to live in his house and yet would not make him a visit. We can admire Savonarola for his fearlessness, but, but it might have been more prudent if he had adhered to the old custom of making the visit and attempted to placate the pride of Lorenzo. We must give Lorenzo credit for the fact that he paid no attention to this omission and frequently visited the Convent,
often walking in the garden with the friars, presumably in the hopes of meeting Savonarola, but Savonarola stayed in his cell, declining to appear unless he was asked for personally. It was thus pride which kept these two great men apart. Lorenzo did not give up hopes of winning Savonarola. He sent alms to the Convent which Savonarola immediately turned over to be distributed among the poor. Notwithstanding the hostile attitude which Savonarola assumed towards him, Lorenzo must have really had a deep admiration for the Friar, and the course of events in Florence later on, might have run smoother for both Savonarola and the people of Florence, if the Friar at this time would have shown a more conciliatory spirit towards the head of the Medici.

In 1492, Lorenzo fell seriously ill and sent for Savonarola. The exact facts regarding this visit cannot be ascertained, but all seem to agree that Lorenzo proposed to make his confession and Savonarola reminded him of three conditions under which alone he could hope for pardon: he must have a lively faith in the mercy of God; he must make restitution of all ill-gotten goods; and he must restore their liberties to the people of Florence. That Lorenzo professed his faith in God's mercy, and would make restitution as far as possible, but on hearing the third demand he made no answer, and Savonarola left without hearing his confession. The above is the version of the facts according to Cinnozi, Pico and Burlamacchi, his early biographers. But Father Lucas prefers to accept the story of Politian, who was actually present when Savonarola entered the room. He says Savonarola came not to hear the confession of Lorenzo but to give him words of friendly consolation; that he exhorted him to hold firm to the Catholic faith, resolve to live a good life if he should recover and to be resigned to die if God should so will, and before he de-
parted Lorenzo asked him for his blessing and Savonarola repeated the prayers for the dying, Lorenzo devoutly making the responses. Lucas says he accepts this version because it is more honorable to both parties and agrees with the unquestioned fact that Lorenzo had already received the last rites of the Church. Dr. Creighton, later on, also agrees with this version. (1)

The most striking feature of Savonarola's preaching is his constant allusion to Holy Scripture, his continuous exposition, verse by verse and chapter by chapter, and he constantly made the Old Testament throw light on the New and the New on the Old, and every Book from Genesis to the Apocalypse, upon every other book. His applications are often strained and far-fetched, and many of his discourses are characterized by a certain artificiality and fancifulness, and too large a place is sometimes given to the imagination, and so thin is the dividing line which separates mere fiction from the visions which he in later years communicated to his hearers, that one cannot help but suspect that the assiduous use of his imagination through these years may have been a predisposing cause which exposed him to the danger of illusion in regard to his visions later on. Aside from these defects in his sermons, his ascetical system shows a remarkable similarity to that outlined by St. Ignatius in his Spiritual Exercises; he taught that the realisation of the purpose of our creation can be found only in union with God by faith, hope and charity, and that such union is attainable only by those who despise the riches, honors and pleasures of this world; internal and external simplicity summed up the requisites for true happiness here below. Yet even here he showed a certain tendency to exaggeration, from which he was never quite free, for he classes among the external things which

(1) Lucas, 83, 84.
distract the mind, the ecclesiastical ceremonies of his own time. There was no doubt, in the time of Alexander VI. excess in this respect, but, as Father Lucas says it would have been wiser instead of lamenting at these things, to rejoice, rather that they, as well as the arts had been brought into the service of the Church, and it ought to have been possible to turn to good account this feature of contemporary ecclesiastical life. However, if in his invectives against vice he exceeded the bounds of moderation it must be said for him that it was his overmastering desire to deliver innocent children and women and the poorer classes from the evil example of the wicked fashions, immorality, greed and cruelty of those in the higher stations of life. He put the corporal works of mercy next to the spiritual, and his views in this regard are eminently practical. With immense energy he set to the relief of the poor and the peasants who were in great suffering from the neglect of agriculture resulting from the wars and political disturbances of the period. He urged upon the rich the necessity of paying a just wage and upon the poor the duty of labor and patience. And beneath all there was evidence of a deep and tender piety in all his sermons. His ultimate aim was to excite true devotion.

Of the immediate results of his preaching there can be no doubt. One writer says that Florence had become like a monastery. The lascivious songs which used to be heard at the Carnivals were replaced by pious canticles; the gaudy pageants by religious processions; the money formerly lost at gambling now found its way into the poor box. All this has never been called in question by those who have passed unfavorable judgments on his prophecies, his political action and his resistance to the pope.
Some of his critics are inclined to think that the religious enthusiasm Savonarola created and the moral reform he effected were merely transitory. But Father Lucas does not agree with this. He says we have to allow for a certain falling off after every great religious revival, but that not all fall back into their old ways; all great missioners expect these set-backs, but the fruit of the harvest must be trusted to God and cannot be judged by any human standard. He thinks if Savonarola had been more prudent in his preaching the results would have been more far-reaching. However, when we remember what an impression his preaching made upon some of the most saintly men of the time, and men of distinction in letters, politics and art, we must conclude there were many others in whose souls the fruit of his sermons remained to bring forth seeds at some later time.

The charge that Savonarola was unduly rigorous in the demands made of his followers with reference to fasting and the observance of the Sacraments can hardly be sustained. While prone to exaggeration, he seemed to feel deeply that the only way for the youth of that day to combat the temptations and allurements of the growing evils was by frequent confession and communion. He wisely believed that the only hope of reformation of society lay in the rising generation, and he succeeded by his preaching in winning over thousands of children for a time, at least, to a good and edifying life. One of his admirers, Cinozzi, says, "Words fail me when I try to set forth the change, the wonderful, stupendous, and almost incredible conversion, of so many thousands of boys of every condition of life." (1) He perhaps went too far in giving the children such a prominent part in his scheme of social regeneration, and his prudence

(1) Lucas, 44
in this respect may be questioned. For in allowing the children to exercise a sort of supervision or surveillance over their parents he aroused the opposition of many citizens. They complained that he was making a laughing-stock of Florence. Burlamacchi tells how a deputation of children even appeared before the Signory and exhorted them to do their duty in suppressing crime. Though not inculcated by Savonarola, there was danger that these children should become so proud of their own virtues as to arouse in them a spirit of insubordination.

Savonarola, early in his preaching, conceived himself to be inspired and favored with divine revelations; this was the very keynote of his preaching, and seems to be the one thing most disastrous to his career. He must have dwelt upon the things which he said he at first put forward "simply as conclusions deducible from the application of the laws of divine Providence", until they became in his mind revelations of divine Providence. He depended, for the wonderful effect of his sermons, upon the terrible denunciations and predictions which he announced. Upon these the people hung, spell-bound by his eloquence and his imagery. It was this transcendental exhibition of feeling that drew all men to him. Whenever he ceased to follow this manner of discourse he failed to hold the people. Early in his career remonstrances were made to him on this ground, but he claimed God Himself led him into this path and he could set no other course. He says:

"The Lord has placed me here, and has said to me, 'I have placed thee as a watchman in the centre of Italy, that thou mayest hear my words and announce them.' The Lord says, 'If I show thee and tell thee that a sword is to come, announce the sword; if they will not be converted, thou wilt have obeyed and shalt be safe. But if the sword come, and thou have not announced it, and they perish unwarned, I will require their blood at thy hands, and thou shalt bear the penalty.'"
This message he delivered in language taken from the Bible, the words of the prophet Ezechiel. (1)

To have made such a statement as the foregoing, Savonarola must have been a true prophet, or an impostor, or he must have been under a deep delusion. His holy life convinces us he was not an impostor. The Church alone could say he was a true prophet, and on this matter it has not spoken. St. Antoninus, the predecessor of Savonarola in the office of Prior of San Marco, said: "The mission to preach is one which comes indeed ultimately from God, but which must be communicated through the channel of lawful ecclesiastical authority, and must be confined to the place for which the commission is given." (2). If Savonarola had paid attention to such counsel as this and prudently confined his preaching to the field appointed by his superiors instead of covering a field supplied by his own imagination he might not have wandered so far into that realm where his thoughts and his imaginings drifted over the line of reality into that of hallucination and self-delusion. In an effort to justify himself in this regard, in his Compendium Revelationem, he says:

"For a long time he has foretold by divine inspiration many future things. He is rightly called a prophet who sees things which are beyond the scope of the knowledge which is natural to any creature; and in particular those future things which depend on the free will of man." To know these belongs to God alone, who may, however, reveal them to whom He will. He then goes on to describe the manner in which God does this. And then he comes down to apply this to the matter in hand, viz.: the state of Italy, and says that God has made a choice of him to announce to Italy the terrible scourge which is to fall upon her. He says, "And whereas Florence is placed in the midst of Italy like a heart in the midst of a man's body, He has deigned to make choice of her, to the intent that from her,

(1) Lucas, 50
(2) Lucas, 50.
as from a centre, that is prophetic announcement should be spread abroad through all Italy."

He then outlines how God, for the purpose of announcing these disasters, has caused him to come to Florence by order of his superiors in the year 1409, and how he began to preach on the Apocalypse and continually insisted on the three points (already mentioned) and how he endeavored to prove them by comparisons between Holy Scripture and the events which were then happening, and later on he had introduced some prophetic vision, merely in the form of a parable; that when he tried to preach other things he could never satisfy himself and had to go back to this form of preaching. Thus he goes on and justifies himself as a true prophet. He says the results of his preaching show he has not lied, for the results have been good and God, who loves truth would not allow good results to come from a lie; that he knows from the study of philosophy how far the natural light of reason can go and the things made known to him are beyond its scope; that they cannot arise from a melancholy temperament or from dreams or from a strong imagination; that he knows from reading the Bible and lives of the Saints, the marks whereby diabolical visions are distinguished from those that are divine, and the things he has foretold are more certain for him than the first principles for the philosophers, because he sees what he has foretold is exactly coming to pass; and he has never been deceived in the smallest detail; that all men of good life adhere to his teaching and the wicked oppose him; the strongest argument in his favor is that sinners are converted by his preaching.; that his Community, 250 in number, believe in his prophesies and believe in him and cannot be deceived; he does not desire to be regarded as a prophet as it is a mission or position of danger; that miracles are not necessary to prove he is a prophet as
few of the prophets worked miracles; that he never maintained he was
sent by God alone and not by his religious superiors; that he is not
a heretic as he has taught nothing contrary to the Christian faith
and has always and does now submit his teaching to the judgment of
the Holy Roman Church; that the light of faith is a supernatural
endowment and no one endowed with this light can firmly adhere to
an error which is contrary to the faith; that those who live and act
sincerely have a special illumination by which they are inclined to
discern without fail, divine revelations and operations, so in these
matters the good have not been deceived but the wicked have; that
whatever he has predicted has already happened or will come to happen;
that God does not reveal everything to him, but more or less, according
to His will. That results show his prophecies have helped the cause
of moral reform; that in an embassy which he took to Our Blessed Mother
she told him to persevere, that he must tell the people they have de-
served all manner of evils by their wickedness, especially because so
many for some years past have not believed what he has predicted, that
the City of Florence shall become more powerful, wealthy and glorious,
but woe to her rebellious subjects, for they shall be severly punished,
that the renovation of the Church, the conversion of the Moors, Turks,
etc., which he has predicted will soon take place, that she said these
things were granted absolutely without condition, and would occur soon
and speedily, and after this she dismissed him. He gives minute de-
tails of this vision. In this manner he vindicates his claim to be
a true prophet. (1)

Lucas, pp. 55-63
His reasons, then, for claiming the truth of his predictions were, practically: (1) his own subjective certainty; (2) the fulfilment of so many of his predictions; (3) the admirable results of his prophecies; (4) the fact they were accepted by the good and rejected by the wicked.

As to his first reason, that of subjective certainty, he himself admits that as far as other men are concerned his own certainty does not constitute an adequate reason for their assent, but he argues that when a man whose reputation for veracity and integrity are above suspicion, assumes a fact as true of which he alone can know, his testimony should certainly be given due weight, and should be regarded in his favor with reference to all subjects not in themselves especially inclined to be illusory. However, the very emphatic way in which he insists upon his own infallible certainty has a tendency to show he was deluded for Gerson says, "The revelations of one who does not show positive signs of a consistent humility, are not to be accepted as genuine." (1)

Savonarola certainly did not show signs of this humility, as he claims on all occasions to be absolutely certain on all points in which delusion might occur, certain of his own powers of reason and imagination; and on one occasion he called upon God to strike him dead on the spot if his words were not divinely inspired. While this challenge might well impress the ignorant, as proof it availed nothing except to show that he was willing to stoop to a device of itself deceptive. The advice of St. John of the Cross is that the recipient of what seem to be visions should as far as possible resist and reject them, and by no means take pleasure in them or store them away in the memory to be used as a guide in one's actions or designs; and he adds that words which seem to be addressed by God to the soul should be regarded with suspicion and es-

(1) Lucas, 66.
especially condemns the action of those who interrogate God in the hope of receiving a divine response.

It is true, Savonarola assures us that he entered upon his prophetic ministry with reluctance, but his conduct in this regard falls far short of the consistent attitude of self-distrust spoken of by St. John of the Cross. Savonarola not only allowed his hearers to know he "interrogated God in the hope of receiving a divine response", but that he expected an answer on a definite date.

In regard to the Florentines, he claimed actual and exact fulfillment of what he had foretold with reference to the punishments that would fall upon them and also as to the results of his preaching in the moral reform of the city. It does not seem that one would have to claim revelation to account for these predictions. Savonarola was noted for his clearness of vision, he had a keen sense of human foresight, and for years he had made a deep study of the Old Testament with its prophecies and warnings, and now applying the history of the past to the conditions of his own country, with his long range of vision, he could almost instinctively foresee that if the people kept on violating the laws of God they would follow in the same paths as did the people of old and the same punishments would be meted out to them. His own purity of heart could allow him to see things. He was not blinded by the pursuit of pleasure nor the greed and avarice for things of this world. Also, he lived in an age of prophecy, the air was full of predictions; many so-called prophets, men and women ventured predictions on future events. The general drift of the times, no doubt, unconsciously influenced Savonarola.
One thing that made the predictions of Savonarola more noticeable at this time was the prospect that a French invasion was conspicuously imminent. The prediction that he made that the French king would come was fulfilled, but the hopes based on the French king were doomed to disappointment. Savonarola prophesied that the people would be reformed by means of Charles VIII, but in regard to this part of his prophecy he had recourse, later on, to the expedient of claiming it was conditional. He made the prophecy, which he assumed was irrevocable, that the Turks and the Moors would be converted and that Florence should become more powerful, glorious and wealthy than ever before and that his dominions should be extended, and this was to happen speedily. Afterwards in explaining this prophecy he said it would come in about ten years. At the time he may have thought these prophecies were true, but, judging from results, we must conclude they were not true. Whatever moral reform resulted in Florence, we believe was due rather to his own earnest efforts and example, and his powerful preaching, rather than to his predictions, tho the people, hearing his predictions may have been influenced unconsciously toward bringing about a reform. However this would not prove the truth of his predictions. Neither would the fact that the people may have been frightened by his predictions go towards proving their truth.

If his prophecies resulted in good, they also contained a certain amount of evil. It certainly was not a good result for the people of Florence that children should be taught to be spies, even in a good cause or that in pursuance of his prophecies schismatical disobedience should almost result. The many conflicts in the city which were constantly taking place during the latter portion of his life were undoubtedly due to his advice and his preaching.
In regard to private revelations, Gerson says: "No private revelations are to be accepted as indisputably genuine until after the death of the person who professes to have received them... (nor) until all his acts, words and writings, to the end of his life, have been first examined." And gives as a reason that the "devil often for a long time tells the truth that he may at last draw a man into error. (1) Father Lucas says that all alleged revelations are to be received with caution, and this view is also held by Gerson, Amort and St. Thomas Aquinas. Amort says "Doubtful revelations, if they bring with them the danger of causing dissensions in the Church, are to be prohibited by public authority." Also, "Revelations, on the strength of which it is pretended that the recipient of them is dispensed from the observance of some law, natural or ecclesiastical, deserve no credence."

As regards the Florentines themselves, they lent a willing ear to the prophecies of Savonarola, for he assumed an attitude of subtle flattery towards them; he always ranged God on the side of the Florentines and he maintained that Florence would be the starting point of all his reforms. This might have been the design of Almighty God, but it is surely open to doubt.

As to the fact of his assertion that his prophecies were accepted by the good and rejected by the wicked, only God could possess the secret of who were the good and who the wicked and it would seem to be a very broad statement to say that all men were wicked who believed that Savonarola was deluded.

(1) Lucas 71
As to Savonarola's assertion that all good men believed in his prophecies, it is common history that the holiest men have often been misled, and then his own earnestness and asceticism and his wonderful personal magnetism would naturally lead men of this character to believe in him. It is a common thing for men to be carried away by the eloquence or persuasive manner of a speaker, and then in a short time when the influence of these personal characteristics has waned, absolutely disregard and put at naught the opinions or principles for the speaker had been so strongly contending.

Savonarola was deeply impressed with the idea that the renovation of the Church must begin with the clergy and in particular with the religious orders. He felt that simply as Prior of San Marco, he could not take this work in hand, the houses of his Order in Tuscany being subject to the Vicar of Lombardy, so he conceived the idea of separating the Tuscan houses from those in Lombardy, in order to procure a more strict observance of the rules. On May 25th, 1493, a memorial to this effect was drawn up for presentation to the Pope. This petition was duly discussed and attested by the brethren, and as it states, was seriously considered and only done after prayers for light and guidance had been offered for a long period. Savonarola, in a letter which he wrote in regard to this project disclaims any anxiety about himself being necessary for this work, saying; "It would be a supremely foolish thing for me to entertain any such solicitude as to say "If I were to die, who would carry on and observe the reform?" As if, forsooth, God had need of my help." This paragraph is rather inconsistent with his later actions, when he seemed to think he was
so necessary for the carrying on of God's work in Florence that he felt himself justified in opposing lawful authority for that purpose.

This separation soon became a matter of public and political interest. It was supported by the Florentine Signory and their representative in Rome, Fillipo Valori, by Piero de' Medici, the successor of Lorenzo, who wrote a strong letter in its favor, by Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici, afterwards Pope Leo X, and by the Cardinal Protector of the Order, Caraffa, Archbishop of Naples. Against it were the Superiors of the Lombard Congregation, Sforza, Duke of Milan, d'Este of Ferrara, Bentivoglio of Bol, the Venetian Signory, even the King of Naples and the Duke of Calabria. So to the politicians and princes of the Italian States it must have seemed a matter of some moment. Notwithstanding the powerful support in favor of the measure it almost failed of being carried through at Rome. However by a little act of finesse on the part of Cardinal Caraffa, it finally received the Papal Seal of Alexander VI., and a Brief was issued providing for the withdrawal of the Community of San Marco from the government of the superiors of Lombardy and placing it under the immediate jurisdiction of the General of the Order, who was to confirm the election of the Prior. Soon after, Savonarola addressed a letter to Piero de' Medici in which he says it is his intention and that of his convent "to carry out all your wishes", and further says "I recommend to you your convent. These facts are vouched for by both Burlamacchi and Cinozzi. (1)

Before the Brief became effective Savonarola was personally subject to the Vicar of the Lombard Congregation, and this Vicar issued a letter commanding Savonarola, under the severest penalties, to

(1) Burlamacchi, 56.
Cinozzi, 11.
leave Florence without delay, but the letter was addressed to the Prior at Fiesole, from which San Marco had been founded, and the Prior being absent, the order did not reach Fra Girolamb until after he was secured from its effect by the receipt of the Brief. Later on he was transferred to the Roman Province and to the Convent of San Marco. He then took up raidly the work of reform. New studies were introduced, a far greater austerity of life, poverty in raiment and furniture was strictly observed, fasting and penitential practices increased, prayer was made continuous, and such was the charity and fervor of the Community of San Marco that one describes it as a new Eden. The number of inmates increased from fifty to three hundred within a few years, among whom were numbered members of the noblest houses of Florence, and this fact helped to maintain the friendly relations between the Florentines and the reformed Friars.

In the course of a few years the Convents at Fiesole, Pisa and Prato were also separated from the Lombard Community and attached to San Marco, and in 1495 the associated houses were formally recognised as a new Congregation of which Savonarola was elected the first Vicar-General. These facts bear witness to the high estimation in which San Marco was held under the government of Savonarola. However, it is rather significant that the efforts to bring the houses at Pisa and Prato under the allegiance of San Marco did not meet with voluntary welcome, and the attempt at Siena was a failure. Attempts were made to colonize these Convents with friars from San Marco, but whatever success was achieved was only temporary. At Pisa the whole scheme collapsed and the Florentine Friars were obliged to vacate their new home and the Lombard friars regained possession. (1)

Lucas, 110
The words of St. Paul, "No man being a soldier to God entangleth himself in secular business", were no doubt familiar to Fra Girolamo and were alleged against him by those who criticized him for the part he took in the public affairs of Florence, but he should not be unconditionally condemned for the part he took in the political affairs of Florence at that time. The existing circumstances and the great influence he had in the city must be considered before an opinion can be formed about his conduct in this regard.

Savonarola had prophesied that the French king would come to Italy, and the invasion by Charles VIII. in 1494, seemed almost a fulfilment of this prophecy. The prophesy even described how the Florentine leaders would act. The ease with which Charles VIII. overran the country, almost without opposition, seemed to the people to be a divine judgment on the tyrannical government which had so long oppressed the people. And the conduct of Piero de' Medici, in not offering a firm resistance, but offending the king by an untoward friendliness towards the King of Naples, followed by an absolute yielding to the French King's demands, surely fulfilled the prediction of Savonarola as to the "drunken counsel" of the Florentines. As Savonarola evidently believed in his predictions he also was firmly convinced that he was necessary for their carrying out.

The first predictions as to the coming of the French king were made in Advent of 1493 or Lent of 1494, and the first negotiations of Charles VIII with Venice were begun in April 1493, and the rumor of a probable invasion had gained general currency early in 1494, and from Nardi's description of the prevalent feeling, Fra Girolamo only gave public utterance to the thoughts which were in the minds of many.
Fiero de' Medici made no secret of his intentions so no prophetic vision was needed to be to foretell what line of action he would follow. At first events transpired so as to justify Savonarola's confidence in himself, but later on, when the young King of Naples recovered what his father had lost and Charles VIII. made an ignominious retreat to France Savonarola's prophecies did not have the apparent fulfilment they previously had. From this time on he was inevitably drawn into the political affairs of Florence. Piero de' Medici fled and Savonarola became the sponsor of the Constitution which the city of Florence adopted and in reality the dictator of all public affairs. He had some success in reform in Florence, but the universal scheme of reform which he hoped to put into effect, that of renovating every department of life, religion, politics, society and art, was an absolute failure. This was the great form which he had prophesied would start in Florence, and which he based on the coming of the French king. Pastor says that in September of 1494 he began to speak of a "new Cyrus who would overrun Italy without opposition, and on September 21st he said "Behold I bring the waters of a great flood upon the earth."

A few days later the Medici were driven out of Florence and the French king entered. Savonarola alone was able to mollify or control the movements of the French monarch for the protection of the Florentines. Thus, as Pastor says, he was at once "forced into an unnatural position, and one of peril". He conceived and introduced a democratic form of government in which the ideas he had preached became law. Christ was to be the

(1) Pastor, V, 190.
King of Florence and Savonarola His interpreter. But how he could have believed that to be an inspiration in which the scheme of reform centred on such a profligate and vacillating a character as Charles VIII. is incomprehensible. Hofler says that from the moment Savonarola identified his course with that of Charles VIII. of France failure became inevitable. (1) But Savonarola seemed to believe himself infallible. He applied the words of Christ, "no iota shall remain that shall not be fulfilled" to his own predictions, and these prophecies were not of spiritual affairs, but purely political, such as the future of Florence and the conquest of Pisa.

A prophet of divine revelation and a leader in political affairs would seem to be an incongruous combination, but Savonarola justified his entrance into politics on the plea that it was necessary to save souls. His scheme of reform for Florence, was intended, no doubt, to result in a great spiritual benefit for the people, and he can hardly be blamed, under the circumstances, for his actions, but he was so carried away with his own idea that Florence was to be under the direct guidance of God and he was to be the medium through which God's will was to be made known, that he allowed himself to be drawn further and further into what seemed to be both religious and political fanaticism. He wished a reform within the Church, but in assigning to himself the position of manager of the affairs of Florence as interpreter of the Divine word, he was in reality making himself the head of a church within the Church. Sincere as he may have been, he was clearly wrong in taking this course, for the Roman pontiff is the only one whom God has delegated to make known His will to the people. This was a mistake which led in great part to his final undoing. His own poetic temperament, his study

(1) Rom. Welt. 226

Note, Pastor, V, 212
of the prophecies and Apocalyptic books of Scripture, convinced him that he had direct converse with God, he heard voices and saw angels and he lent himself to these dreams and imaginings until he had visions which had such control over him that he no longer doubted his intercourse with the world of spirits. He believed that on the account of his purity of intention God could not have deceived him. He must have been deeply deluded when the man on whom he built his hopes, Charles VIII, and who according to Savonarola's revelations, was to become the Saviour of Italy, especially of Florence, had to be entreated to treat the Florentines with kindness. It is true that through the French king Florence was freed, for the time being, from the oppression of Piero de' Medici. But it was not long until the Duke of Milan and other powerful states who had asked for the aid of the French king were more afraid of his aggression than they had been of the King of Naples, and were joined together in the Holy League, ostensibly for the purpose of protection against the Turk and the maintenance of the rights of the Holy See, but in reality for the expulsion of the "barbarians" from Italy. Florence and Ferrara were not members of this League, due largely to the influence of Savonarola, who was the principal opponent of the League, and when a second invasion seemed imminent the Pope complained that the obstinacy of the Florentine Signory would bring ruin on the whole peninsula. In this Savonarola went directly against the wishes and the policy of Alexander VI. for the liberation and defence of Italy. It is true he was under no obligations to further the wishes of the Pope, but he would have been more prudent if he had not been so persistent in his attempt to frustrate the designs of Alexander VI. which were apparently, at least, patriotic
and for the good of Italy. The fact that Charles VIII left Naples and Rome without any attempt to effect the reforms Savonarola expected of him should have warned the Friar as to the danger of over-confidence in his inspirations. (1) He was thoroughly imbued with the idea that he was the chosen prophet of God, that Charles VIII was the chosen king, and the Florentines the chosen people. He did not abandon this as a basis of his actions even after the French king had come and gone and accomplished nothing. He even held that the Florentines would recover Pisa, their most coveted possession, lost through the easy complaisance of Piero de' Medici and the avarice of Charles VIII. When questioned by Manfredi, the envoy of the Duke of Ferrara, he said Charles would return to do the work predicted of him in Italy or if he did not return it would be because it he thought the was not the will of God, and suggested that the French king had been deceived by bad advisers. Of course, no one can prove he was not inspired to utter the predictions he made regarding the French king, but at least he tries to excuse their non-fulfillment by showing they were conditional and that the king had been deceived, or that he would yet come. Afterwards he wrote to Charles VII, reproaching him for not carrying out God's commands, assuring him of the loyalty of the Florentines, commanding him to give Pisa back to Florence and warning him of the ills which would befall him if he did not carry out the designs of God made known through him.

As early as July, 1495, Alexander VI wrote to Savonarola, saying he had learned that the Friar had declared in his sermons that his predictions as to future events came not from himself, nor from human wisdom, but 'by a divine revelation'. In this letter the Pope 

(1) Lucas, 136
commands him to come to see him without delay, in order "to hear from your own lips what it has pleased God to make known to you, that we may pursue a better course." Savonarola replied that he desired to come to Rome, "but many obstacles stand in the way". He says that he is detained against his will and unable to obey the commands, the authority of which he most willingly and reverently acknowledges, giving as reasons for his not being able to come, bodily infirmity and the fear of violence on account of enemies he had made while establishing peace in Florence, and also that his absence would be a detriment to the people and he asked for a brief delay until the work begun should be accomplished. He says that he has no doubt it was for the good of the city that God has allowed these obstacles to stand in the way of his journey, but hopes he may soon be able to go to Rome in compliance with the wishes of His Holiness. He also says he is going to send the Pope a little book which he is printing which will tell all that he is at liberty to make known of what he has prophesied.

It is admitted that his statement in regard to his ill-health is true, and the dangers of the journey were no less real; his remaining in Florence for the good of the city may not have been such a weighty reason as he thought, but he undoubtedly put it forth in good faith. It is true he might have made heroic efforts and have overcome the obstacles to comply with the Pope's command, but there is no reason to believe that there was any bad faith in the excuse he gave for not coming. On the other hand, there is no reason to impute insincerity to Alexander VI. in this transaction, for while he was capable of almost any baseness, for at this time his ostensible object was to free Italy
from the invasion of the French king, and the fact that Savonarola was frustrating his designs, claiming divine authority for his opposition, was justification enough for the Pope to ask from him some explanation. The letter containing Savonarola's excuses was not received by the Pope before he despatched another Brief, which by a strange mistake was sent to the Friars Minor at Santa Croce, who were not at all favorable to Savonarola, and the fact of his not receiving Savonarola's letter, accounts to some extent, perhaps, for the severe tone of the Pope's second Brief.

Florence was the only Italian power which withstood the Pope in his opposition to the French king, and Savonarola was the persistent advocate of the French alliance. The King of France had frequently threatened the Pope with a Council for the purpose of reformation, meaning to depose the Pope, so that Savonarola's continued insistence on the French alliance began to be regarded with suspicion in Rome. Savonarola, feeling secure in the favor of the Florentines, allowed his discourses to become more and more political, and in one of them went so far as to demand, with the crucifix in his hand, that all who attempted to bring back the tyrants to Florence should be punished with death.

In the second Brief which the Pope sent he spoke of "a certain Fra Girolamo" who gave himself out to be a prophet without being able to prove his claim either by miracles or direct evidence from Holy Scripture, and he commanded that Savonarola must cease from preaching and the Convent of San Marco be reunited to the Lombard Congregation, to whose superior the Friar must now render obedience. All recalcitrants were
declared, ipso facto, under the ban of the Church. To this Brief, Savonarola replied saying he had never declared himself a prophet, but that he had undoubtedly foretold various things, some of which had been fulfilled, and others that would be verified at some future time. He objected to the Pope making the Lombard Vicar his judge, and said that on account of the quarrels between the two Congregations their reunion would only bring about fresh scandals. He also said that as the purpose of this union was to prevent others from lapsing into errors similar to his, that inasmuch as he had shown no error existed, there was no necessity for the union, and asked absolution; and, further, he said, if he was in error he was ready to avow it publicly, and submitted himself in all his writings to the Holy Roman Church. This letter was written September 29th. On October 16th, the Pope replied, yielding the most important point, that of the reunion of the Convent of San Marco to the Lombard Congregation, and only insisting that Savonarola abstain from preaching. It seemed necessary, doubtless, to Alexander at this time that if he was to gain his point, in opposing the French alliance, Savonarola must cease preaching, for if Savonarola preached at all, politics would be his theme. The Pope recounts the events leading up to the present, and says, from the letter he has lately received, and from what he has been told by others, Savonarola was ready to submit to the Church in all things, and he was willing to believe Savonarola had erred through excess of zeal rather than with any evil intent; that the matter is too important to be passed over lightly, but if Savonarola will refrain entirely from preaching until he can appear in Rome or a commission be sent to Florence, the former Briefs will be rescinded.

There was at this time a scheme for the restoration of Piero de' Medici which would have carried with it the adhesion of Florence to
the League of Italian States against the French invader, and prompted by
this rumor of Piero's return the Signory of Florence had commanded Sa-
vonarola to again begin preaching, which he had done before the arrival
of the last-mentioned Bull from the Pope. The Pope speaks in this Brief
of "disturbances" due to the preaching of Savonarola, but these dissen-
sions or "disturbances" resulted perhaps as much from the rumored approach
of Piero as from the preaching of the Friar. The Pope, however, held
the position of command, despite any imputation to his motives. Sa-
vonarola, notwithstanding he had signified his submission or willingness
to submit to the Pope, returned to preaching and in his sermons he called
for the death of all who would bring back the Medici. All the time
there were powerful influences at work to obtain the withdrawal of the
prohibition to preach. From this time on, and through the Lent of 1497,
he continued to hurl invectives at the Pope and to advocate the French
alliance, which he knew would result in another invasion of Italy and the
possible deposition of the Pope, his sermons all the time increasing the
tension between the different factions in Florence. He himself determined,
at whatever cost, to secure the success of his views, even though blood-
shed and the permanent embitterment between his fellow-citizens should be
the price. (1). He continued this even after the Pope had despatched
another Brief establishing a new Congregation out of the Dominican Convents
in the Province of Rome and Tuscany, removing Savonarola from Florence
and putting him under Cardinal Caraffa, his friend, who was elected the
first Vicar.

Savonarola answered this last Brief by an unconditional refusal,
based on the fact that the union depended not on his decision alone, but

(1) Lucas, 214
depended upon the consent of the two hundred and fifty other monks, who had all written to the Pope protesting against it, and that he was neither willing nor able to oppose their wishes as he considered them to be honest and just; that Superiors might not issue commands contrary to the rules of the Order nor contrary to the laws of charity or the welfare of souls; that and more to the effect that they must not allow themselves to be cowed by threats nor excommunications, but be ready to face death rather than submit to that which would be poison and perdition to their souls.

All these things were, no doubt, reported to the Pope, perhaps with exaggeration, and he held back for a time then resolved to try a new expedient. In order to influence the Florentines against the French alliance he decided to give them Pisa. At this Savonarola renewed his preaching against the Pope in such a spirit and with such language that many who formerly favored him became his enemies. Even Cardinal Caraffa ceased to defend him and public opinion in Florence began to go against him. His implacable enemies, the Atrabili (the advocates of an aristocratic form of government) and the Compagnacci (a party of roisterers), the lowest class in Florence, who were accountable for the murder in the Duomo before related, began to get the upper hand. In order to preserve order the Signory issued a decree forbidding all monks to preach after Ascension Day. On this day Savonarola again stood in the pulpit, renewing his former assertions that all who persecuted him were fighting God; that Italy, and especially Rome, would be terribly chastised, and then would come the reformation of the Church. At this a tumult began in the Church which soon spread into the streets. The authors of these disturbances remained unpunished so that Savonarola must surely have seen that he no longer had
the support of the people. He then wrote to the Pope in an attempt to stem the current against him, disclaiming all personal assertions against the Pope and declaring himself to be at all times ready to submit himself to the judgment of the Church, stating that he preached no other doctrine than that of the Fathers which he would soon prove in his book, The Triumph of the Cross. Already judgment had been pronounced against him in Rome, even Cardinal Caraffa being convinced of the necessity of this step. He had evaded the examination into his prophetic gifts, required by Rome, and while withholding from his superiors the submission to which he was held by his vows, he claimed unquestioned obedience to his own commands as divine revelations. (1)

On May 12, 1497 Alexander VI. attached his signature to the Brief of Excommunication. Savonarola's obstinate refusal to carry out the Union of the Convent of San Marco with the newly-erected Tuscan and Roman Congregation, and his persistent disregard of the prohibition against his preaching showed such insubordination towards the Holy See that it could no longer remain unchallenged. His continued invectives against Rome and his assumption of prophetic authority on which these were founded, and the fact of his opposition to the Pope in the matter of the French alliance all bore weight against him. But that fact of his insubordination brought about the final decision against him. (2)

(1) Pastor, VI., 19.
(2) Pastor, VI., 20, 21.
Whatever may be our opinion of the character of Alexander VI.
or the motives which underlay his conduct in regard to Savonarola, we
must admit that up to this time, as far as his external treatment was
concerned, he showed the Friar the utmost consideration. The Florentine
Envoys in Rome labored earnestly to obtain the withdrawal or at least
the suspension of this sentence, and had it not been for the actions of
Savonarola himself a peaceful settlement of the whole affair might have
been made. But on the nineteenth of June Savonarola wrote an "Epistle
against the surreptitious Excommunication addressed to all Christians
and friends of God." He declared the Excommunication invalid before
God, based on false reasons and devised by his enemies, again declaring
his willingness to submit to the authority of the Church, but stated that
no one was bound to submit to commands opposed to charity and the law of
God, since in such case Superiors were no longer representatives of God.
On Christmas Day Savonarola celebrated three Masses and gave communion
to all the faithful. He soon announced that he did not intend to take
any notice of the Excommunication, that his commission came from One who
was higher than the Pope. He began to preach again in February, 1498, in
defiance of his religious superiors, saying that anyone who gave commands
opposed to charity was excommunicated by God and if any Pope ever spoke
contrary to that, let him be declared excommunicate, using the words,
"Oh my Lord, if I should seek to be absolved from this excommunication,
let me be sent to hell" . . ."Therefore anyone who obstinately upholds
the excommunication and affirms that I ought not to preach these doctrines
is fighting against the kingdom of Christ, and supporting the kingdom of
Satan, and is himself a heretic, and deserves to be excluded from the
These utterances which he continued in all his sermons, were based on his unfortunate conviction that he had a mission from God. His attacks on the clergy of Italy, and especially of Rome, became more virulent than ever. On the last day of the Carnival, in front of the Church of San Marco, he mounted a pulpit, carrying the Blessed Sacrament in his hand, and almost beside himself with excitement, blasphemously exclaimed, "Oh Lord, if my deeds be not sincere, if my words be not inspired by Thee, strike me dead this instant (1)

The Pope then sent a Brief to the Florentines, threatening them with an Interdict unless they sent Savonarola to him, or set him apart and guarded him so he could not have speech with anyone. In a second Brief to the Canons he commanded that Savonarola should not be allowed to preach on any pretext whatever. Inter, he wrote to the Florentine Envoy that if Savonarola would abstain from preaching for a reasonable time he would absolve him from the censures he had brought upon himself, but if he persisted he would be obliged to proceed against him with the Interdict and all other lawful punishments, to vindicate the dignity of the Holy See. In reply to this letter, the Envoy wrote, pointing out that Savonarola had not preached in the Cathedral since the arrival of the Brief, and said the Government was unable to comply with the Pope's request. The Pope well knew that Savonarola was continuing to preach and abuse him in San Marco since he had heard the reports of his sermons, and he finally demanded that Savonarola be absolutely silenced, and once more commanded that he be shut up in some convent until he came and rendered himself worthy to be absolved, or Florence should be put under Interdict; all that was required was that Savonarola's

(1) Landucii, 163.
should acknowledge the supreme authority of the Holy See. The Signoria of Florence kept on defending Savonarola, delaying and saying they could not comply with the Pope's demands. In a letter to Bonsi, one of the Florentine ambassadors to Rome, the Pope said, referring to Savonarola: "If he would be obedient for a while and then ask for absolution, I would willingly grant it, and permit him to resume his sermons, but he must cease from abusing the Holy See, the Pope, and the College of Cardinals; for I do not object to his doctrines, but only to his preaching without having received absolution, and to his contempt of myself and of my censures; to tolerate this would be to give away my apostolic authority."

If at this time Savonarola could have humbled himself to ask for absolution all trouble might have been ended, for this statement of the Pope showed that the vindication of the authority of the Church was all he sought. But nothing was farther from the mind of Savonarola. He had said he was willing to submit himself to the authority of the Pope, but evidently he did not intend to recede from the position he had taken or submit in any way which would affect the principles he considered at stake. Forgetting all the evils of the recent schism, he was still blinded by the false theory that a Council is Superior to the Pope. He went on to urge that a Council should be held to depose the Pope, and his friends pressed the Florentine envoys in France and in Spain to support this plan; he himself addressed letters to all the great Christian Princes, including the kings of France, Spain, England and Hungary, and the Emperor of Germany, to convoke an anti-Papal Council. In this letter he said: "I assure you, in verbo Domini, that this Alexander is no pope at all."

(1) Gherardi, 209; Pastor VI, 34.
at all and should not be accounted such; for besides having attained to the Chair of St. Peter by the shameful sin of simony. ... I affirm also that he is not a Christian, and does not believe in the existence of God, which is the deepest depth of unbelief." He then invites all Christian princes to unite in convoking a Council as soon as possible, binds himself to substantiate all his charges and assures them God will confirm his words by miraculous tokens. (1)

The danger of a Council at this time was very real. Alexander's growing unpopularity, the way he had relinquished the projects of reform he had proposed, and his unblushing nepotism raised a storm of opposition against him in Italy and abroad. But the greatest danger lay in Savonarola's friendship for the French king, who was already making arrangements for calling a Council. Alexander had become aware of these intrigues and he came to believe that Savonarola's repeated threats about a Council were not mere empty words, and when this feeling finally took possession of the Pope all moderation toward Savonarola ceased. Villari tries to explain that Savonarola's opposition was not against the Papacy, but against the Pope, and therefore contained no taint of heresy. (2)

At this time, when Savonarola was using his utmost endeavors to bring about a revolt among the princes of Europe against Alexander, he was losing ground in Florence. His last invective against the Pope, delivered on Palm Sunday, had turned many of his supporters against him, for they began to feel that it would be a dangerous thing to have the hostility of the Pope towards the Friar visited on the

(1) Pastor, VI, 36

2 (Pastor, VI, 37, taken from Armstrong in the ENGL. HIST. REVIEW, IV, 455)
City of Florence. Many who were friendly to the Friar took the ground that as long as they were not sure of Savonarola's assertion being true that he was sent by God, it was better, or at least safer, to accept the censures of the Pope than to defend the Friar. On Quinquagesima Sunday of that same year he had said, "I entreat each one of you to pray earnestly to God that if my doctrine does not come from him, He will send down a fire upon me which shall consume my soul in hell." In other sermons he had repeatedly spoken of cases wherein the truth was not recognized until manifested by some direct token from God, and offered to pass through the fire in order to prove the reality of his mission. (1)

At this period the quarrel between the Pope and Friar was interrupted by an incident which brought about the final catastrophe in Savonarola's career.

There was in Florence a Franciscan preacher by the name of Francesco di Puglia who had made it his business to protest against the prophetical claims of Savonarola. He now declared himself to be ready to undergo the ordeal by fire with Savonarola, saying he fully believed he would be burnt, but he was ready to sacrifice himself to free the people from this delusion; that if Savonarola was not burnt with him they might believe him to be a prophet. (2) Savonarola did not show any enthusiasm for this ordeal as a proof of his claim of prophecy, but several of his followers, especially Fra Domenico da Pescia, announced their willingness to enter the fire with Francesco.

(1) Pastor VI, 41

(1) Ibid.
According to Father Lucas, it is not certain whether this challenge was addressed to Fra Girolamo personally or whether it was addressed to anyone who might by such a trial choose to maintain the nullity of Savonarola's excommunication and the genuineness of his prophetic mission. Savonarola professed himself to be ready to enter the fire if the adversary were willing to promise that in the event of Savonarola's being victorious the reform of the Church would be taken in hand; and that he would enter the fire with the fullest certainty that he would come forth unhurt. As to the Excommunication, he said it stood in no need of proof by fire, and as to his prophecies, he did not ask anyone to believe in them who was not so disposed. As for others, he said that if they felt disposed to go through the ordeal they would come out unhurt, if the experiment took place, concerning which he had his doubts. He also said he was reserved for a greater work for which he was willing to give his life.

It is certain that Fra Girolamo did not approve of the test by fire, and himself simply ignored the challenge, and he was also unwilling that anyone should take it up for him. But Fra Domenico, did not show the wisdom of his superior and declared himself ready to enter the fire with Francesco. Both parties were summoned before the Signory, and it was finally settled that Fra Domenico should undergo the ordeal on the part of Fra Girolamo and Fra Rondinello on the part of Fra Francesco. Each party gave an undertaking in writing that credence was to be given to the party who came forth unhurt; that the motive was to put an end to the prevalent dissension; that if the Dominican should perish in the flames then Savonarola and Domenico were to incur the penalty of Perpetual banishment and if the Franciscan alone should perish the same penalty was to be de-
clared against Francesco di Puglia and Fra Lorenzo Corsi; but if both should perish the penalty is to fall on the Dominicans alone; and if either party fails to carry out the undertaking that party would incur the punishment of banishment. The clause providing that both champions should perish the penalty was to fall on the Dominicans alone was sustained by the fact that the Signory took account of written documents, duly attested, and Fra Domenico had made the first written document, consisting of a series of "conclusions" which required to be proved by supernatural reasons and signs. The event was fixed for Friday, March 6, but postponed by the Signory to Saturday. The place appointed was the Piazza of the Signory. Every precaution was taken that the two Friars should walk through the fire. At the request of Savonarola it was arranged that the further end should be ignited first, and immediately after the entrance of the two friars into the narrow passage between the wood, the part behind them should be ignited.

There was in Florence at that time a certain Doffo Spini, the leader of the Compagnacci, who were really outlaws. He was allowed to entrench himself with some hundred of his armed followers in one corner of the Piazza, ostensibly for the purpose of keeping order, but really watching the event in the interest of the Franciscans. There was also the Constable of the Palazzo and a Special Guard under Salviati, a friend of Savonarola, in an open space near the Palazzo which had been kept for the religious of the two Orders. If those in authority on that day had wished to preserve order they should certainly have insisted on disarming Spini's men, for it must have been obvious to all that the presence of these men armed boded no peaceful ending for the affair.
Savonarola celebrated High Mass and addressed his people, saying that under all circumstances they would be victorious because God had predestined it, but God had not revealed to him whether or not the test would take place. The two Communities came, the Franciscans first with their two champions, Francesco and Rondinelli. The Dominicans came half an hour later, in procession, chanting a Psalm, with Fra Domenico in a cope of cloth of gold, followed by Fra Giolamo bearing the Blessed Sacrament. Everything was now ready. Then a difference arose as to what the two champions should be allowed to take into the fire. Fra Domenico insisted on taking the Crucifix, which the Franciscans refused to allow. At last a shower came on which suddenly ceased. The Domenico said he would consent to take the Sacred Host instead of the Crucifix. At this most of the Franciscans and many of the spectators objected saying it would be an outrage on the Blessed Sacrament. This discussion lasted until it became dark, and Savonarola's opponents became more and more violent. The Signoria then commanded both parties to withdraw. The mob, deprived of their spectacle, were furious, and their wrath naturally turned against the Dominican whose conduct was universally condemned, because the Franciscan had stood ready to enter the fire. The people asked why Savonarola was afraid to enter the fire when he was so sure a miracle would be performed and why he insisted on Domenico being allowed to carry the Sacred Host. Savonarola had led them to believe in such scenes as the ordeal and now he weakens and disappoints them in their expectations. They become bitter and revengeful. In one day Savonarola lost his high place of influence with the Florentines. Each side claimed a moral victory, but the general feeling was against the Dominicans and especially against Savonarola.
On the day following the "cimento", it being Palm Sunday, Savonarola again preaches, this time in contradiction to the command of the Signoria as well as the Pope. The same day his banishment was decreed, but it was never carried out. Before the day was over the Compagnacci and the Frateschi came to blows, the sermon of a Dominican friar preaching in the Cathedral, was violently interrupted, Valori, Savonarola's chief supporter, was murdered, and the Convent of San Marco was stormed. Savonarola and his companion, Domenico, were arrested in the Convent and were hooted at and insulted as they were conducted to the Signoria. The Pope had been informed that the ordeal by fire was to take place but he took no measures to prevent it. After wards the Signoria asked for powers to try the religious arrested. Alexander VI expressed satisfaction that the scandal caused by the excommunicated Friar was at length ended, but desired him sent to Rome. To this the Florentines objected and not consistent with the dignity of the city, and it was finally decided that two Papal Delegates would be sent to Florence to assist in the trial, Torriano, the General of the Dominicans, and Romilino, Bishop of Ilerda. Long before they arrived the trial had begun and Savonarola's opponents were in complete mastery of the city and prepared to employ torture and falsification of evidence to secure his destruction. According to Burlamacchi, Romilino showed from the outset an unseemly levity concerning the whole affair and gave it out openly that the issue of the trial was a foregone conclusion. Torriano bore a high character and the task must have been to him an unwelcome duty. The statements of Savonarola, procured under frequent applications of torture and distorted by interpolations and omissions can certainly not be accepted as proofs of anything, thus the justice of his sentence cannot be proved or disproved. The Government of the city was largely against

(1) Burlamacchi, 163
Savonarola, chiefly because the excitement had become so great that it seemed necessary to put a stop to any further action on his part, and Alexander VI insisted he should be punished mainly because he had insisted on calling in the secular powers to cause the deposition of the Pope. The rulers of Florence were responsible for the severity of the measures adopted against Savonarola from this time on. The Republic of Florence was in such a state of confusion that they believed the good of the state stood before anything else, and seemed ready to adopt any measure for its defence. They circulated a statement known as the "Confessions" of Savonarola, which was of such a character as to influence most of his intimate friends and disciples against him. Even the majority of the friars of San Marco deserted their master. They sent a letter to Alexander VI in which they said, "Not merely ourselves but likewise men of far greater talent were deceived by Fra Girolamo's cunning." (1) All the good he had ever done, his great kindness, his rectitude and holiness of life were now forgotten even by his own brethren.

As was foreseen, the trial resulted in a verdict of Guilty against Savonarola, Fra Domenico and Fra Silvestro, "for the monstrous crimes of which they had been convicted." The next day, the sentence, death by hanging, was executed. (2). They met their death courageously and calmly. They were first degraded from their priestly dignity as "heretics, schismatics, and contemners of the Holy See." Their bodies were taken down and burned and their ashes thrown into the Arno so no relics would be left for their disciples to venerate.

(1) (Pastor VI, 49)
(2) Pastor Vol. VI, 50.
Savonarola, in his theory, was always true to Catholic dogma, but in practice he went outside of the dogma he professed. In resisting the penal authority of the Holy See and endeavoring to call a Council, which if called, might have resulted in a schism, he would, while holding fast to the tenets of the Catholic Church, have founded an independent Church, which process could have forever been repeated by those dissatisfied with the Head of the Church. Piteous as was his downfall, it was necessary in order to preserve the integrity of the Church. This does not excuse the harshness nor the injustice of those in authority who succeeded in calumniating his character and assisted in procuring his condemnation by their nefarious falsification of his testimony.

The chief matters in which Savonarola's conduct may be questioned are his predictions and claims of prophecy; his connection with the King of France; his disregard of the Pope's commands to cease preaching and with reference to his refusal to accede to the Pope's commands to establish a new Congregation out of the Convents of Tuscany and Rome; his active participation in Florentine politics; his action towards the family of the Medici; and his attempt, through the Princes of Europe, to have a Council called to bring about the deposition of the Pope.

In regard to his predictions and claims of prophecy, we believe enough has been shown to justify the opinion that he was not a true prophet; that he allowed himself to be carried away into the realm of imagination until he believed the visions he saw there; that he adapted the language of Holy Scripture to his own thoughts and feelings in regard to existing conditions, and from his own knowledge and experience of history, he based his predictions as to the vengeance of God which would follow the people if they continued in their course of ecclesiastical and political vice and corruption, and with his own pre-knowledge, added to common
rumor, he made his prophecies concerning the coming of the French king.

With reference to his connection with the French king, Savonarola was not seriously culpable, but he certainly showed a lack of common prudence and self-deception in insisting and advocating any reform which depended upon so vain and vacillating a character as the French monarch. This was the general opinion of the men of his time as reflected in Pastor and Lucas.

With regard to his summons from the Pope to come to Rome, the Pope himself did not insist on this, so we may disregard it.

Respecting the commands of the Pope as to the forming of a new Congregation by the Union of the Convent of San Marco with the Roman and Tuscan Congregations, Savonarola may have been justified in his reasons for not desiring the union, but he could not have been justified for resisting the commands of the Pope. The main reason for the action of Alexander in this matter seems to have been to obtain the removal of Savonarola from Florence, for the time being, and if the Friar had acceded to the Pope's wishes in this regard, Alexander might have seen fit to have remedied the matter as he had recently in deferring to the wishes of Savonarola with reference to the separation of San Marco from the Lombard Congregation. What the Pope desired was simply peace in Florence and he felt it could be obtained only by the removal of the Friar. Finally, Alexander insisted on the one thing, that Savonarola would cease from preaching, in which case the other Briefs would be rescinded. Savonarola ceased from preaching for a time but again began, giving as a reason that his preaching was necessary for the work in Florence. In other words, he makes himself his own judge. He claims he is willing to obey and submit to the Church, but he evidently reserves these special matters to be decided by his own authority, and thus puts himself above the Holy See. Of these views,
he was absolutely convinced and insisted on their acceptance even at the
price of bloodshed. His act of preaching against the command of the Pope
was not merely a single act of disobedience, but was an attack upon the
supreme authority and Infallibility of the Pontiff. (1)

In reference to his active participation in Florentine politics,
when Piero de' Medici had fled, and the French king came to Florence, it
may have been that Savonarola found himself in circumstances which jus-
tified his interference in Florentine politics. And if, being invited
by the Signory, he had addressed them upon any matter which demanded
their attention, no fault could have been found; but it is questionable
whether it was a proper thing for him to ascribe to his personal opin-
ions an authority from God, and demand that they act according to his
views because he was speaking in the name of God. The new Constitutions
of Florence were the direct outcome of his influence and were in accord-
ance with the views of a majority of the citizens, but when these had
been promulgated Savonarola would have done much more for the cause of
reform in Florence and his efforts would have extended over a much long-
er period of time if he had not felt that he himself was "divinely com-
missioned" to carry out this work of political reform. The high and noble
designs which he had in mind were frustrated by this delusion that he
and only he could carry out these God-appointed plans. One thing is
certain, that his continued presence in Florence during the formation
of the different political parties augmented the bitter dissensions
which finally culminated in the ordeal and the final tragedy of his life.

(1) Pastor VI, 14.
As to Savonarola's treatment of the family of the Medici, inasmuch as the Convent of San Marco had been rebuilt by Cosimo de' Medici and the magnificent library donated by him, it would seem, as Fr. O'Neill says: "While admiring the spirit of Savonarola, we are tempted to regret that he did not meet Lorenzo. Without any sacrifice of dignity this could have been effected, as Lorenzo had practically 'gone 'half way'. Perhaps the course of events might have been changed had these men met then." (1). There is no doubt that Lorenzo, while he did not approve of Savonarola's scheme of reform, admired him, and had Savonarola been willing to concede something for the sake of reconciliation, he might have accomplished more for Florence than he did by his determined opposition; but instead, Savonarola went out of his way to inflict a personal slight upon Lorenzo de' Medici.

Before Piero de' Medici left Florence Savonarola did not seem to have such a marked dislike for him as he had shown towards Lorenzo. He even seemed on friendly terms with him. Piero supported the Community of San Marco in their petition for separation from the Lombard Congregation, and Savonarola acknowledged this letter in friendly terms. However, as soon as Piero had fled, at the approach of the French king, although Fra Girolamo had taken no part in the decree of outlawry passed against Piero, he was more than satisfied that Florence was rid of him and referred to his flight as "a deliverance which the Florentines had owed to the special Providence of God." And later, when referring in one of his sermons to the threatened attempt of Piero to return to the city, Savonarola said, "Execute justice, I say to you. Off with his head. Be he the chief of any family whatever, off with his head." (2) A few days later a law was passed fixing a price on Piero's head. This measure, the result of Savonarola's preaching, was considered unwise even by those who (1) Savonarola, 34
(2) Vol. II, p. 387-8
did not desire Fiero's return. The tragedy in which Bernardo del Nero, an officer of the Guard of the City, was executed, for not revealing his knowledge of the plot by which Fiero was to return, was also the fruit of Savonarola's words, and for which he must be held, at least, indirectly accountable, and Savonarola was also severely blamed for not interposing in favor of del Nero and the other five prisoners when they made an appeal to the Consiglio Grande, which right was denied them. Savonarola himself had helped to establish this right of appeal, but he held aloof from using his influence to secure this right for these men. Within a year he himself fell a victim to this thirst for political vengeance. We have alluded to this matter merely to show that harsh and cruel as the criminal laws of the time were, they were the same laws which later on were invoked against Savonarola, and which in the case of Del Nero he had done nothing to mitigate.

In regard to Savonarola's disregard of the Excommunication, and his attempt to have a Council summoned to procure the deposition of the Pope, though his actions were inexcusable, we believe that the terrible circumstances in which he found himself, together with the extreme point to which his own rashness and the machinations of his enemies had led him so influenced his mind that he no longer looked at things in their true light. He believed that no reform could come while Alexander VI occupied the Pontifical throne, and deluded by his own false reasoning, he acted upon the theory that he could oppose the Pope in person and still not oppose the Papacy. As a private individual Savonarola could not pass judgment that the decrees of the Pope were not valid because he did not consider Alexander a legal Pope. However much
he might deprecate the character of the Pope, Alexander was occupying the
Papal See and was entitled to be treated as the lawful pope, and was so regard-
ed by the people at large and certainly was so regarded by Savonarola in
his earlier years. The only ground on which Savonarola can be excused
is that of an error of judgment, and an error of a very serious kind. And
whatever the collusion or corruption of the Court or the Papal Commissaries
who tried him, they were fully justified in finding him guilty on this
the main charge against him. (1)

The three counts on which his condemnation were based were her-
esy, schism and contempt of the Holy See: Savonarola was certainly free
from guilt as far as heresy was concerned, as his whole life and his
teaching showed, but his acts being in contravention of the Bull of Pius
II which explicitly condemns an appeal from the Pope to a General Coun-
cil, (Jan. 28, 1459) amounted to constructive heresy and schism as well as
"contempt of the Holy See". So that in the eye of the law Savonarola's
guilt was abundantly proved and sentence passed accordingly. The one
who might have taken into consideration the holy life of Savonarola, the
wonderful influence he exercised for good, and his great zeal for the work
of God, and used his influence to have had the sentence moderated, was
Alexander VI, but he, more than ever taken up with the affairs of his own
family had only a feeling of relief that he would no longer be annoyed by
the danger of a Council, that he would now be able to control the Floren-
tines and that his scandalous life would no longer be the subject of
Savonarola's powerful eloquence. Evidently, he was willing that the law
should take its course.

As to the terrible tortures employed to extract evidence, and the
extreme harshness of the criminal procedure, we can only say these were
Lucas, 433.
according to the custom of the time, and horrible as they may seem in our
day, they were in common use at that time and regarded as a matter of course
in the execution of the criminal law. Savonarola was not a common criminal
but he had offended against the law, but as Bernardo del Nero, a man of
high position in Florence, had not long before undergone the penalty of
an offense against the law, so now Savonarola was the victim of the law.

While we must come to the conclusion that Savonarola's course
cannot be justified, we think that his ultimate purpose, his blameless
life, his personal asceticism, his kindness to the poor, his self-sacrifice,
and his firm and unshaken confidence in God, while it availed nothing for
him with Alexander VI, will forever keep a large place for him in history
and in the hearts of those who cannot excuse his conduct. The most serious
fault in his character and the root of most of his mistakes and the one
thing that led him on to his final ruin was his certainty of himself.
From the beginning of his public life down to its close, he was always sure
that God was behind all his utterances, and when he expressed an opinion
as to the reform of the Church or the future of Florence and Italy, or the
proceedings of Alexander VI, he was always certain that he was the medium
through which God presented his will in these respects to the people.

His over-confidence in his own pronouncements and his delusion in refer­
ence to being inspired would not allow him to give credence to or have
dealings with those who did not agree with him, even though they were men
of high character. It was this over-sureness of himself which led to his
refusal to obey the commands of the Pope and which at last changed his
friends and admirers into his enemies.
In the two or three weeks from the time of his condemnation until his death, Savonarola must have had time to go over the whole of his past life, and he must have then seen wherein he had failed. In the place where he had thought himself necessary to carry on God's work he was now condemned to die a criminal, and his scheme of reform, so far as he could see, was lost. In those hours of prayer and waiting for his last end perhaps he recalled how he had entered the monastery to be free from the turmoil of secular life, and yet in the performance of his duty he again came in contact with the world, and under such circumstances, that he was thrown into the very midst of its turmoil. But however deeply he became engrossed in secular affairs, he never swerved from the strict observance of his religious rule, and if he had not peace of mind, at least he had peace of soul, and perhaps those last weeks spent in prayer while waiting for his final end accomplished more for his cherished reforms than did all the years of his public preaching.

Though broken and worn with torture, he composed, during these last days of his imprisonment, his beautifully meditations on the Psalms and the "Rule of a Christian Life", which contains his thoughts and aspirations during that time of tribulation. After all, these were the greatest moments of his life for in them he showed his supreme confidence in God.

The following quotation is from Dr. Schnitzer, followed by the comments of Father Lucas:

"When Savonarola, degraded and unfrocked, ended his life on the gallows, his cause seemed to be irretrievably lost, and his enemies triumphed. Nevertheless he died a conqueror, and he died for the noblest cause for which a man can give his life--for the spread of God's kingdom on earth. The future belonged to him and he to the Church."
"So writes Dr. Schnitzer, and we may make his words our own without either justifying the disobedience of Fra Girolamo, or unreservedly condemning his judges. Even though his disobedience may have had its root in pride, and may have made his condemnation inevitable, no one can call in question the burning zeal for the kingdom of God which was the dominant motive of his life; and the fire which consumed his mortal remains may be deemed to have purged his fault, at least before the tribunal of human judgment. (1)

(1) Lucas, 440
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