

Charles VIII., who, with a powerful army, subdued the peninsula as far as Naples. As the tread of armies drew near, again the prophetic voice of Savonarola was heard in the great Duomo, proclaiming the judgments of God in tones which come across the ages and move our souls to-day. His text was, "Behold I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth."

"Behold," he said, "the cup of your iniquity is full. Behold the thunder of the Lord is gathering, and it shall fall and break the cup, and your iniquity, which seems to you as pleasant wine, shall be poured out upon you, and shall be as molten lead. And you, O priests, who say, Ha, ha! there is no Presence in the sanctuary—the Shechinah is naught—the Mercy-seat is bare; we may sin behind the veil and who will punish us? To you I say, the presence of God shall be revealed in His temple as a consuming fire, and your sacred garments shall become a winding sheet of flame, and for sweet music there shall be shrieks and hissing, and for soft couches there shall be thorns, and for the breath of wantons shall come the pestilence; for God will no longer endure the pollution of His sanctuary; He will thoroughly purge His Church.

"Hear now, O Florence, chosen city in a chosen land! Repent and forsake evil; do justice; love mercy; put away all uncleanness from among you, and then the pestilence shall not enter, and the sword shall pass over you and leave you unhurt.

"Listen, O people, over whom my heart yearns as the heart of a mother over the children she has travailed for! God is my witness that, but for your sakes, I would willingly live as a turtle in the depths of the forest, singing low to my Beloved, who is mine and I am His. O Lord, Thou knowest I am willing, I am ready. Take me, stretch me on Thy cross; let the thorns press upon my brow, and let my sweat be anguish—I desire to be like Thee in Thy great love. But let me see the fruit of my travail; let this people be saved!"

Nor were the labours of Savonarola for the welfare of Florence confined to the pulpit of the Duomo. He went forth alone and on foot as an embassy to the invader, Charles

VIII. In the spirit of Elijah rebuking Ahab he boldly admonished him.

"Most Christian King," he began, "thou art an instrument in the Lord's hand, who sends thee to assuage the miseries of Italy (as I have foretold for many years past), and lays on thee the duty of reforming the Church which lies prostrate in the dust. But if thou failest to be just and merciful; if thou dost not show respect to the city of Florence, to its women, its citizens, its liberty; if thou forgettest the work for which the Lord sends thee, He will then choose another to perform it, and will in anger let His hand fall heavily upon thee, and will punish thee with dreadful scourges. These things I say to thee in the name of the Lord."

Once again "a poor wise man by his wisdom delivered a city," besieged by its enemies. The humble monk was a stronger defence of Florence than its walls and moats and armaments. Its ruler, Piero de Medici, fled in the hour of peril, and, in the disguise of a liveried lackey, sought an asylum in Venice. His palace was sacked and his art treasures scattered by the fickle mob, whom only the influence of Savonarola could call back to order. The French armies entered the city as allies instead of as enemies. Their long stay, however, wore out their welcome. Charles submitted an *ultimatum* which Capponi, the tribune of the people, refused to accept. "Then we will sound our trumpets," exclaimed the irritated king, threatening force. "And we," cried the patriot tribune, rending the parchment in pieces, "we will ring our bells." And the old cow, as the Florentines called the great bell in the tower of the Palazzo Vecchio, began to low,* its deep reverberations sounding like a tocsin over the city, where every house would become a fortress and every citizen a soldier for the defence of its ancient rights.

Again Savonarola became the

* *La vacca muglia* was the phrase for the ringing of this great bell, whose deep toned notes still boom from its lofty tower.