

said, it is the nature of mankind to be fickle and inconstant in their opinions; and though it may be an easy matter to persuade them to believe a thing at first, it is very difficult to keep them long in that persuasion: upon which account, it is necessary to be so appointed, as to be in a condition to make them believe by force, when they will no longer believe of themselves. Neither Moses [s], nor Cyrus, nor Theseus, nor Romulus, could ever have caused their institutions to have been long observed, if they had not been armed: in our own times Girolamo Savonarola the Dominican was destroyed when the multitude began to fall off from him; because he had neither power to keep those steady in their persuasion who acknowledged his Mission, nor to make others believe who denied it [t]. Such persons, therefore,

[s] Whoever reads the Bible carefully and attentively (says Machiavel, Book iii. Chap. xxx. of his *Political Discourses*) will see that Moses, in order to render his laws inviolable, was obliged to put a great number of men to death, who opposed him out of Envy: for having assembled the Sons of Levi, he spoke to them in this manner: "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Put every man his Sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate, throughout the Camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. And the children of Levi did according to the words of Moses; and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men." *Exod. xxxii. 27.*

[t] "It may here be proper (says Voltaire in his *General History of Europe*, vol. ii. p. iii.) to give some attention to an extraordinary fact, which at that time (viz. about the year 1498) exercised the credulity of Europe, and displayed the Power of Phanaticism. There was a Dominican Friar at Florence, named Jérôme Savonarola: this man was one of those Preachers, whose talent in haranguing from the Pulpit, makes them believe they are able to govern nations; one of those Theologians, who, after writing comments upon the Apocalypse, imagine they are endowed with the gift of Prophecy. He directed, he preached, he heard confessions, he wrote; and in a free City, necessarily divided into factions, he wanted to be at the head of a party.

As soon as the principal Citizens knew that Charles VIII. was projecting an expedition into Italy, he foretold it, and the common people thought him inspired. He declaimed against Pope Alexander; he likewise encouraged such of his country-men as opposed the Medici, and had spilt the blood of the friends of that family. No man in Florence ever had a greater influence over the minds of the vulgar. He was become a kind of Tribune of the People, by getting Artificers admitted into the Magistracy.

To be revenged on him, the Pope and the Medici had recourse to the same arms that he made use of: they sent a Franciscan Friar to preach against him; as the Order of St. Francis hated that of St. Dominic, full as much as the Guelphs had ever hated the Ghibelines. The Franciscan succeeded in making the Dominican odious: upon which, the two Orders came to open war. At last a Dominican offered to walk through a kindled pile of wood, in order to prove the sanctity of Savonarola. A Franciscan likewise proposed the same Ordeal to prove him an impostor. The people naturally greedy of such spectacles, insisted upon this being exhibited; and the Magistrates were obliged to comply. Their minds were still prepossessed with the old fable of Aldobrandinus, surnamed *Petrus Igneus*, who in the eleventh century, had passed and re-passed over burning coals in the midst of two piles of wood, and the partisans of Savonarola made no doubt but God would do for a Dominican, what he had done for a Benedictine. The contrary will