

CHAPTER II

THE TOMB OF JULIUS

I THINK, to judge by my own feelings, that my readers will not be ungrateful if I sum up as succinctly as possible the long and weary story of the tragedy of Julius's sepulchre. Originated in pride, the tomb of Julius was abandoned soon after its commencement by order of the Pope himself. A superstitious feeling on the part of the Pope was reported as the cause, it being rumoured that some ill-wishers of Michael Angelo's had suggested to the Pontiff that he who prepares his funeral monument in his lifetime hastens the period for its occupation. When Julius had departed this life succeeding Popes raised difficulties, and placed such obstacles in the way of its completion, that the original scheme for the most gorgeous tomb that any Pope had ever dreamt of dwindled down to the almost solitary figure of the Israelitish lawgiver, with lesser statues beside and above him, nothing save the figure of Moses and the two bound captives of the Louvre being from the hand of Buonarroti. At the outset Michael Angelo's design was approved by Julius, who sent him to Carrara to select the finest statuary marble, and only allowed the sculptor to return to the work in Rome when he had collected a whole quarry-full of material. Julius appears to have destroyed the



Alinari photo

[San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome]

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ancient basilica of St. Peter's in order that he might rebuild it on a larger scale, as a more fitting receptacle for his own funeral monument, Bramante, Raphael's uncle, being appointed chief architect. Between Bramante and Michael Angelo there was no love lost, although in after years the sculptor bore witness to the excellence of the architect's original design for the new Cathedral of Christendom.

Michael Angelo spent eight months at Carrara superintending the marble cutters, the excavating, the cutting out, shaping and packing the pure white marble before it could be shipped to Rome. Whilst at Carrara he blocked out with his own hands—the term hands is used here intentionally, as Michael Angelo could work marble with his left as well as his right hand—two of the statues destined to form part of the tomb. These were probably the two figures called *The Slaves*, now in the Louvre. It was whilst he was working in the quarries that Michael Angelo had that strange wish to shape one of the promontories at Carrara, which juts out into the Mediterranean, into the form of a mighty Colossus to serve as a landmark for the guidance of mariners out at sea. From Carrara Michael Angelo paid a visit to the slate quarries of Lavagna, having previously made an arrangement with some seamen to transport thirty-four tons of marble to Rome at a cost of sixty-two golden ducats: this contract was dated the 12th of November, 1505. Before returning to Rome Michael Angelo paid a brief visit to Florence, beginning his interrupted work upon the tomb of Julius immediately he arrived in the Eternal City. Shortly afterwards the marbles he had collected at Carrara were landed and formed a huge

pile on the Piazza of St. Peter's near the Church of St. Catharine. Close to this mountain of marble the sculptor had his workshop, built on the Vatican side of the Piazza. So interested was the Pope in the earlier progress of the work upon his tomb, that he had a temporary bridge run over from the Vatican to Michael Angelo's workshop, so that he might watch the various processes of the labour. During the first three months all appeared to be going well, when a bolt fell from the blue. Michael Angelo suddenly left Rome, flying in all haste from the Papal States. No entirely satisfactory explanation of this action on the part of the sculptor has ever been given. By some it was believed that he had been insulted by the Pope or by one of his myrmidons, by others that Bramante and others of his enemies had a hand in driving him out of Rome. Whatever the cause, Michael Angelo, after giving his servants orders to sell his house and all that it contained to the Jews, mounted his horse at two o'clock in the morning and never drew rein until he was safe at Poggibonsi, on Florentine territory, and beyond the jurisdiction of Julius.

Five mounted Papal messengers galloped after our sculptor with orders from the Pope, and a letter commanding his immediate return to Rome. The messengers overtook him at Poggibonsi, but Michael Angelo refused to return, let the Pope rage and storm as he might. Julius had met his match in Buonarroti, and on the sculptor rode to Florence, giving the Pope's servants, however, the assurance that he would continue to work upon the tomb in that city. Very speedily briefs followed letters, letters followed briefs from Julius to the magistrates of Florence, in which they were commanded

to order Michael Angelo to return forthwith to Rome. But the sculptor remained firm in his determination, and declared that he had a mind to pay a visit to the Grand Turk, by whom, he said, he had been told he would be received and welcomed with every kind of honour.

In the month of November in that year Pope Julius visited Bologna, and whilst there he commanded Michael Angelo to appear before him. Probably Buonarroti thought there was no use in holding out any longer and continuing to defy the head of the Church, so putting his pride aside he set out to obey the Pope's command. When in the presence of the Pontiff Michael Angelo knelt before him and craved forgiveness: for some moments—which must have appeared long to the sculptor—Julius made no answer. But when an officious prelate, who was in attendance, showed his tactlessness by making an apology for Michael Angelo, to the effect that after all it should be remembered that artists were a kind of folk not accountable to other men for their behaviour, for they, poor creatures, knew naught outside their trade, Julius lost his temper—he was then an irascible old man of seventy-five—and seizing his stick belaboured the unlucky priest over the shoulders, and ordered him to be kicked out of the room.

The Papal rage being thus happily expended, Michael Angelo was not only immediately forgiven but taken back into favour—for a time at least. But the work on the tomb was destined to be further interrupted, Julius ordering Michael Angelo to make a colossal statue in bronze of himself, to be placed in front of the cathedral at Bologna. Buonarroti designed a seated figure of the Pope, full of character, with one hand raised. When

asked by the Pope whether he was represented in the act of blessing or cursing, Michael Angelo—who, unlike the bishop at the interview between Julius and himself, was a man of tact—answered that he had intended to represent His Holiness as admonishing the people of Bologna, who but shortly before had been in open revolt against the Pope's pretensions. "What," inquired Julius, "will you put in my other hand?" The sculptor suggested placing a book, upon which the fiery old Pontiff retorted that a sword would be more suited to his character. It ended by the keys of St. Peter being held by the hand in question. This very militant effigy of Julius II., however, had only a brief existence of four years; for the Bentivogli, who had been driven out of Bologna by the Papal party, re-took the city, and Julius in bronze, keys and all, was hurled to the ground, and broken up, reappearing in the shape of a huge cannon, which was dubbed "La Giulia" in honour of its origin. After this event Michael Angelo appears never to have returned to Bologna.

For working in bronze Buonarroti had as little liking as for painting in oils. Bronze-making, he said, did not appertain to his art, and certainly none of his scarce works that are known in that material can compare with any of his sculptures in marble.

Julius II. died on the 21st of February, 1513, and early in May of that year a new agreement, relating to his tomb, was entered into between Lorenzo Pucci, an Apostolic notary, afterwards Cardinal dei Santi-Quattro, and Leonardo Grosso della Rovere, a nephew of Julius, and Michael Angelo, the two former being charged by the newly-elected Pope to superintend the completion of

Julius's sepulchre by Buonarroti. Michael Angelo agreed to undertake no other work until he had finished the tomb, which he promised should be completed in seven years. Until then there had been no plan of reducing the size of the monument from its original design. Michael Angelo, we may think, would be anxious and willing to do all honour to the memory of Julius, for whom, in spite of all their quarrels and differences, he had a sincere admiration, and he renewed his labours on the sepulchre with feverish energy. In 1516, however, a new agreement was entered into between Michael Angelo and the two cardinals. According to this fresh arrangement it was stipulated that the tomb should be completed in 1529, and, when finished, the sculptor should receive 16,000 golden *écus*—he had already been paid 3,500 for former work upon it. Besides this sum Michael Angelo was to be given a house in Rome, near the Trevi fountain by the Church of Santa Maria di Loreto, a house which he had formerly occupied in the first years of his work upon the tomb of Julius: it was further agreed that he might continue to work upon the monument either at Florence or at Carrara if he pleased.

Thirty statues for the tomb are mentioned in this agreement, including the recumbent figure of the Pope, and one of the Madonna. In the month of November of that year, 1516, we hear of the sculptor being at Carrara, where he had gone to collect marble; but all his labour was wasted, for in the April of the following year the compact between the cardinals and himself was broken. Eight years passed by and the tomb had not advanced. There were endless disputes and quarrels which hampered the sculptor in his task.

We have now arrived at the year 1525, when it appears that Michael Angelo had given up all hope of ever completing the tomb—at any rate on the original plan—for we find him suggesting a mural monument to Julius, to be placed in St. Peter's, in the fashion of that of Pope Pius II. and Pius IV., then in the Basilica, but now the noblest monuments in the Church of S. Andrea della Valle. Buonarroti even made designs to exemplify his suggestion. Yet another seven years passed away. In the April of 1532 Duke Francis of Urbino entered into another agreement with Michael Angelo, regarding the everlasting tomb of Julius. All previous contracts were set aside, and the sculptor was required only to furnish six statues for the monument, of which number some were already in hand. He was to receive 6,000 golden ducats for the half-dozen statues, and the work was to be finished in Rome in the course of three years. Two artists were summoned from Florence to assist Michael Angelo, and, in 1542, Raffaello da Montelupo was also called in: it was by him that the two figures known as *Contemplative* and *Active Life* were made after designs by the master. A little later in the same year we hear of Buonarroti's body-servant, who was also a sculptor—Urbino, as his master called him, although his real name was Francesco degli Amadori—helping with the tomb. This was the faithful friend who died many years afterwards, full of years in Michael Angelo's service, to the latter's sorrow and lasting grief.

In the July of this same year Michael Angelo addressed a supplication to Pope Paul II. (whose private chapel he painted), in which he states that he is then unable to do more than complete the statue of Moses

upon the tomb of Julius, and the figures representing the Active and the Contemplative Life. In the following month the sculptor cast from his shoulders the terrible incubus of this nightmare of a tomb, and with it, it is to be hoped, the whole train of vexations and troubles it had brought upon him. The tomb of Julius II., as we see it now in the Church of S. Pietro in Vincoli, was not finished until the year 1545. Gladly does one dismiss this sepulchre of Pope Julius and all the trouble it caused its great creator, and return to the year 1508.