

### CHAPTER III

#### LATER YEARS

IT was on the 10th of May, 1508, that Michael Angelo noted down that he had received fifty ducats for his painting on the ceiling of the chapel of Pope Sixtus, and for the next four years he was occupied in painting the most extraordinary creation that the brain and the hand of man had ever conceived and carried out. This was done single-handed, and under great physical difficulties, for he had none of the appliances to facilitate painting in such a position, like the so-called "reversed stool" which the French painter Jouvenot invented more than a century later when painting the ceiling of the Parliament House at Rennes. Michael Angelo's original scheme for the decoration of this huge ceiling of the Sistine Chapel appears to have only comprised a series of paintings of Apostles of colossal dimensions within the lunettes above the windows, and filling in the rest of the ceiling with an ornamental decoration: he had already begun designing the figures of the Apostles when a fresh obstacle was placed before him.

The façade of the church of San Lorenzo in Florence was still unfinished, and as it was the burial-place of the Medici family, Pope Leo X. and his brother, Cardinal Giuliano de' Medici, considered that its incomplete con-

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dition was derogatory to the dignity of their family. They were therefore anxious that Michael Angelo should be employed to finish the church, and to this end the architect, San Gallo, and the sculptor-architect, Sansovino, were deputed by the Pope to confer with him. As a result we find that in 1518 Michael Angelo had a studio in Florence, in the Ogni Santi quarter, sufficiently large to hold twenty unfinished statues of life size, and some bas-reliefs, apparently intended for San Lorenzo. But in a letter written by the sculptor in 1520 to Sebastiano del Piombo, he informs him that the façade had not been commenced; nor was it ever commenced, for in the following year Pope Leo died, and with him passed away the idea of completing the exterior of the church, which remains to this day with its front all bare and unsightly. During the two years that he passed at Florence, Michael Angelo seems to have felt that both the Pope and the Cardinal were trifling with him, for in one of his letters he says: "I feel quite competent (*a me basta l'animo*) to make this work of the façade of San Lorenzo, so that, both in architecture and sculpture, it shall be the mirror of all Italy; but the Pope and the Cardinal must decide quickly, if they want me to do it or not." And in another letter he writes: "What I have promised to do, I shall do by all means, and I shall make the most beautiful work that ever was made in Italy, if God help me." In later years Michael Angelo did not hesitate to declare that Pope Leo had not his heart in the undertaking of the façade, but trifled with him in order that the work upon the tomb of his predecessor might be delayed.

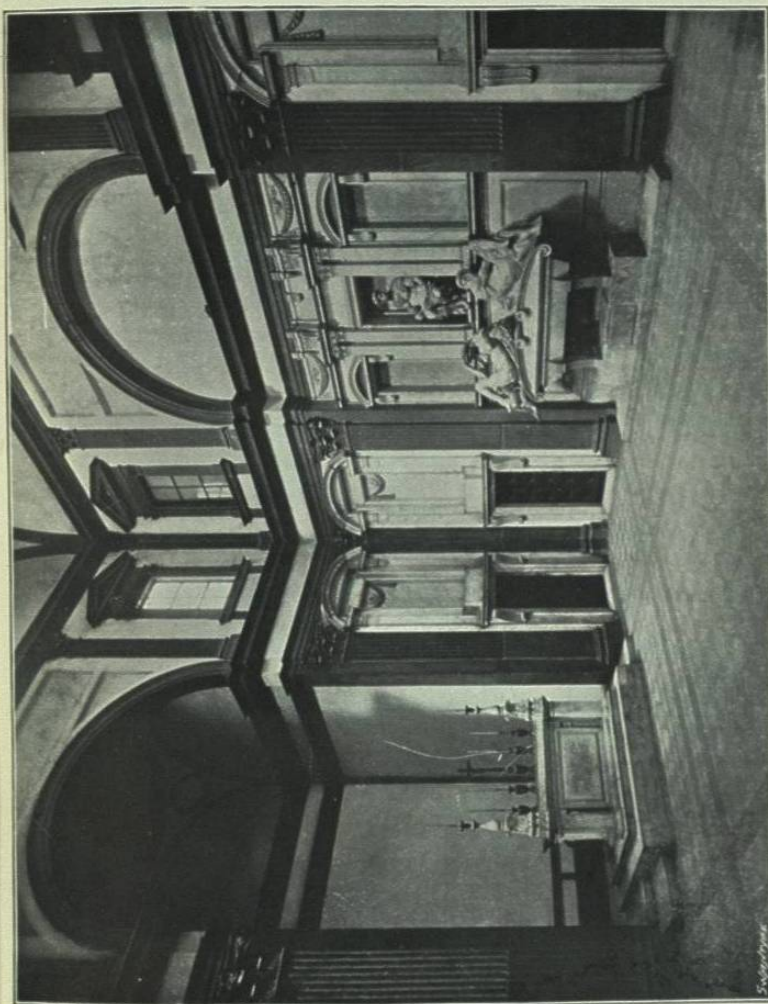
An interesting event took place in Florence in the



year 1519, when a circular was addressed by the Florentine Academy to Leo X., praying that a monument might be erected to the memory of Dante. To this circular Michael Angelo not only added his name, but volunteered to design the monument. I shall have an opportunity in another part of this memoir of the master to recur to the great admiration he always expressed for the "Divine Poet." One can be certain that no other writer inspired the sculptor so greatly as did Dante.

In the month of March, 1520, Michael Angelo commenced work on the tombs of the Medici in the sacristy of the Church of San Lorenzo. These were the tombs of Giuliano, brother of Leo X., and of Lorenzo, his nephew. Two years later he was at Carrara, and in a letter dated the 22nd of April, to his marble merchant, written from his lodging in the "Street of the Rough-hewn Stone"—as J. A. Symonds translates the *Via del Bozzo*—he asks him to collect two hundred cartloads of marble destined to be used in the interior of the new sacristy attached to the church of San Lorenzo. Many alterations and modifications were made in the building, but they were not of so sweeping or destructive a character as those in the tomb of Julius II. And it is satisfactory to know that we see the Medici tombs in the setting which their creator originally designed for them.

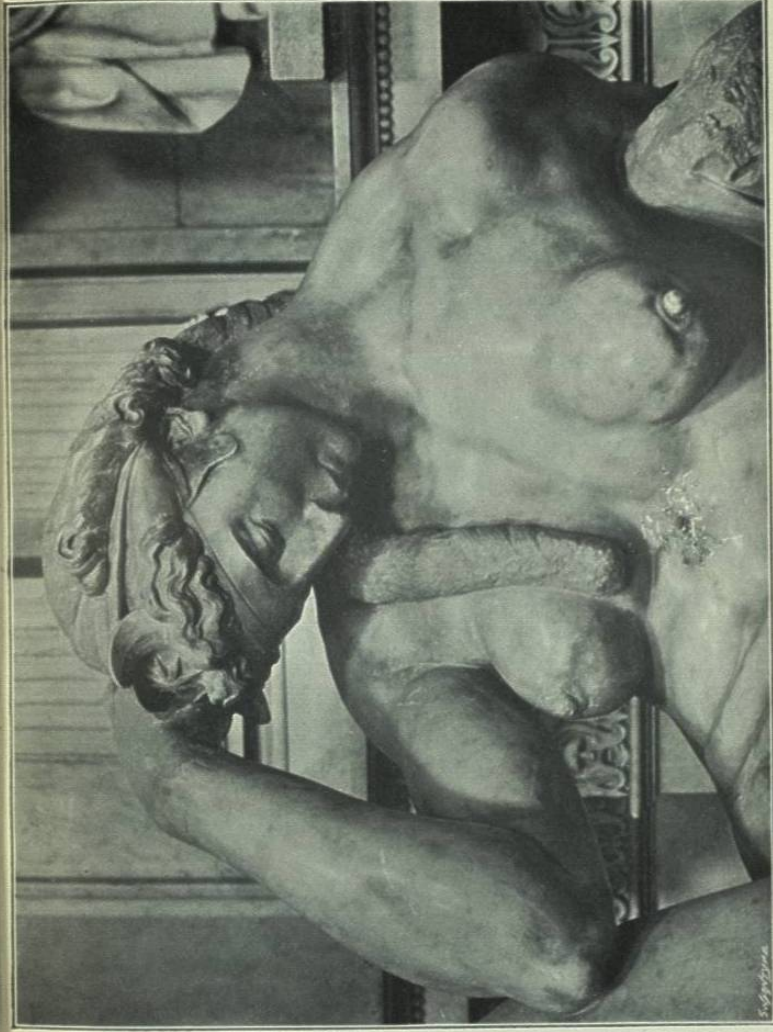
Much has been written on the meaning of the four recumbent figures lying below the seated figures of the Dukes. That of the woman below Duke Giuliano is supposed to be symbolical of *Night*, and it was on her that the famous quatrain was written by Strozzi, a quatrain to which the sculptor replied with so much



*Alinari photo*

SACRISTY, SAN LORENZO, FLORENCE





Anderson photo]

NIGHT

[Sacristy, San Lorenzo, Florence



dignity. The recumbent male figure facing that of *Night* is known as *Day*, and has all the supreme repose and godlike calm of the so-called Theseus on the pediment of the Parthenon. The companion figures below Duke Lorenzo are equally noble in their design; they have the names of *Twilight* and *Dawn*, both weary Titans, who seem to be too languid to die. Below the figures Michael Angelo inscribed:

"Night and Day speak thus and say: We have in our rapid flight brought Duke Julian to his death. It is but just that he should revenge himself. Behold his vengeance. As we have put him to death, he, dead, has deprived us of our light, his closed eyes have shut our own, which no longer shine upon the earth. What then might he not have done with us while he lived?" It is difficult to reconcile this somewhat oriental eulogy with the artist sculptor's known feeling towards the man by whom it was inspired, a man whom he regarded as a tyrant and as the enemy of his people. Michael Angelo probably only regarded the tomb of the Medici as an opportunity for creating superb symbols in marble, as he might have regarded the commission of any other prince to design a sepulchral effigy. That he cared little about handing down the features of the Dukes to posterity is shown by the reply he made to someone who found fault with him for not giving a true likeness of the two princes: "Who," he said, "will care in a thousand years whether these features resemble theirs or not?"

The noblest of the ducal figures is that of Lorenzo, which, from its thoughtful mien, has become known as the *Penseroso*. One does not need to be told that these two heads are not portraits, for they belong to that type of



manly beauty which no Medici ever possessed, and they can compare with the finest of the great sculptor's imaginary creations in a type of human being that he considered the most noble.

Besides these six figures there are in the same church other groups of statuary from the hand of Michael Angelo, of which the most important is a *Madonna and Child*. Here, too, are unfinished statues of St. Cosma and St. Damiano, patron saints of the Medici. These were designed by Michael Angelo, but carried out by his assistants, Fra Giovanni Agnolo dei Montorsoli and Raffaello da Montelupo.

Those who feel that the sacristy of San Lorenzo is bare and cold should remember that Michael Angelo's original design was that it should contain more statuary, and that the walls should be adorned with paintings. To some it will seem that this resting-place for the dead gains in solemnity by the plain white and black of its decorations. Certainly the simplicity of this sacristy is more striking than the gorgeous colour, painting, gilding, mosaic, the veneer of rare stones and marbles, the gilded statues encrusted with gems or paste, of the adjoining chapel of the Princes.

The hard work entailed by this Medicean sacristy whilst tormented about the tomb of Julius, told greatly upon Michael Angelo's health, and he probably welcomed the Papal brief which commanded him under pain of excommunication to work at nothing but the sacristy. Yet although so absolved, we know that Michael Angelo felt in honour bound to continue his labours on the tomb.

In 1529, in April, Michael Angelo had been appointed Inspector-General of the fortifications of Florence. His



Anderson photo

[Sacristy, San Lorenzo, Florence

MADONNA AND CHILD



first care was bestowed upon the important and commanding site of San Miniato, where the tall red walls with their machicolated towers, raised by his orders, can still be seen on the hill. Besides repairing, planning and building the fortifications of his city, Michael Angelo paid rapid and frequent visits to Ferrara, Pisa, and to Venice, the objects of which it is supposed were diplomatic. On the 21st of September, 1529, he stole from Florence in the greatest secrecy and went to Venice. Perhaps it was under the influence of one of his sudden panics at hearing that resistance on the part of the Florentines against the Medici was hopeless, and that his life, with that family again reigning in Florence, would be in jeopardy. He had had difficulties with his fortifications at San Miniato, and Condivi says that he had scented treachery and had warned the magistrates, but that little or no notice had been taken of his warnings. He thereupon gave up everything as lost, and fled. Florence seethed with treason, and Michael Angelo's action, although perhaps not heroic, in getting away, was prudent. Whether he had qualms of conscience in Venice, and felt that his conduct in quitting his post as chief of the fortifications on San Miniato was blamable, and that he repented his abrupt withdrawal from his charge we do not know, but whatever the cause he returned to Florence, having while in Venice, it is said, designed a new bridge at the Rialto. The graceful stone bridge, which all visitors to Venice must ever recall, was designed by Antonio da Ponte, and was not built until after the death of Michael Angelo.

During the siege which followed his return to Florence, Buonarroti showed much energy in defending the walls,



and to him is due the credit of having saved the church tower of San Miniato from ruin when a heavy fire was directed against it by the Imperialists. His method of protecting the tower was a novel one, bales of cotton and mattresses being placed against the walls by his orders, these proving sufficient armour against the not very powerful artillery directed upon it. He had had bastions built covering the hill of San Miniato from the gate to the Porta San Niccolo, but walls or bastion were of little avail with treachery inside the gates of the city. Stefano Colonna and Malatesta Baglioni played the part of chief conspirators and traitors, and through them Florence was given over to the enemy, and all Michael Angelo's defences proved useless.

After the capitulation the sculptor is traditionally said to have hidden in the tower of San Niccolo, one of the city's oldest churches, but it is more probable that some friend gave him shelter till the danger was past.

Shortly after these events Pope Clement sent for Michael Angelo to Rome, where there yet remained much work for his brain and hand to accomplish. His later years, which were nearly wholly spent in Rome, were less lonely than any other period of his life owing to the great friendship he formed with a very noble lady, the most distinguished patrician of her time, the Marchesa di Pescara, Vittoria Colonna. It was one of the truest and purest friendships between a great genius and a great noble lady that history has recorded; and it endured pure and perfect until death divided them. Only one or two of Michael Angelo's letters to Vittoria Colonna have been preserved, and only some half-dozen from Vittoria Colonna to him, but we know, without the

testimony of a correspondence, that his devotion and admiration for Vittoria Colonna were as great as his genius itself. If proof were needed of this devotion and admiration we find it enshrined in the verses he addressed to her.

Born in 1490, Vittoria was fifteen years younger than the sculptor. At the early age of twenty-five she lost her husband, the Marchese di Pescara, to whom she was devoted, and passed the remainder of her life principally at Viterbo and Orvieto, although frequently paying visits to her friends in Rome, and it was there she died in 1547. It was only during the later years of her life that the great friendship came to Michael Angelo and herself, and it was one of his lasting regrets that when he paid her an everlasting farewell, and stooped over her dead body as she lay upon her funeral couch, that he had only kissed the hand and not the brow of the woman whom he appears to have almost worshipped.

On the death of Clement VII. in 1534 his successor Paul III. carried out an idea which had been originated by one of his predecessors, the completion of the decoration of the interior of the Sistine Chapel by painting a huge fresco on the wall above the high altar. The work was given to Michael Angelo, and the following year saw its commencement.

Eight years were spent by Buonarroti in preparing cartoons and painting this vast space, and on Christmas Day, 1541, the fresco representing *The Judgement Day* was uncovered to the public gaze, and all Rome flocked to see this new wonder. Opinions regarding its merit were then, as they are now, divided. A more amazing *tour de force* than this painting of the *Dies Irae* does not