Anderson photo] [*Sistine Chapel, Rome*

THE CUMAEAN SIBYL

a youth seated on a pedestal. These figures are called "Ignudi" (the nudes), and of them Ruskin has written: "In this region of pure plastics, art drops the wand of the interpreter and allows physical beauty to be a law to itself."

Some of the "Ignudi" are crowned with wreaths, some bear sheaves of verdure. They are placed two and two facing one another, and support large medallions which were once gilt; on these medallions scenes from Biblical story can be traced, or scenes from the history of the Popes—the sacrifice of Abraham appears on one, the Emperor Barbarossa kneeling before Alexander III. on another. In these youthful figures Buonarroti was able to give free scope to the human form, bringing out in each the shapeliness and the play of every limb. Caryatides are painted in monochrome on the pedestals on which the "Ignudi" are seated, and between these pedestals tower the Sibyls and the Prophets, five and seven, on either side, the former, according to the legend of the Church, ranking in dignity next to the prophets of the Old Testament.

It would be no easy matter to select from amongst these magnificent figures, each a study in itself; but the most typical of Michael Angelo's power, perhaps, are those of Jeremiah, Josiah, and the Delphic Sibyl.

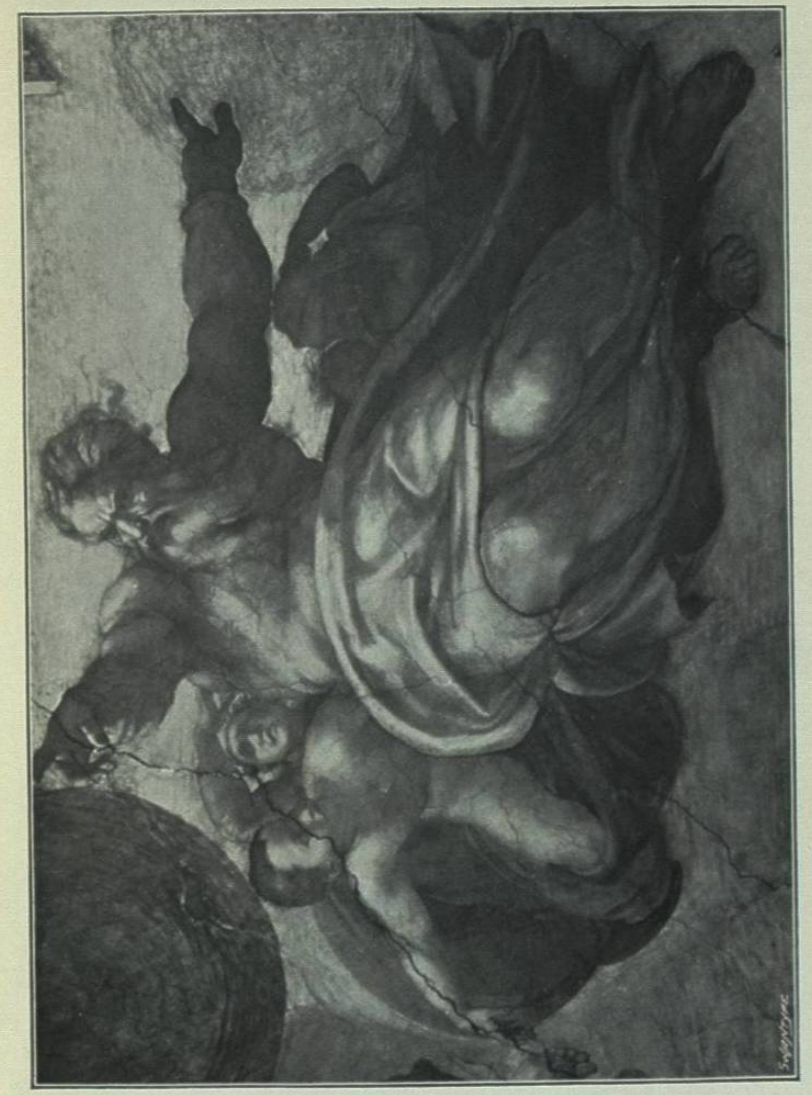
In the angles of the ceiling, between the tympanum and the piers, appear the smaller figures of youths, whilst at the feet of the Sibyls and Prophets children are introduced. These appear to be life-size, but in reality they are six feet high.

Michael Angelo, in order to give effect to his frescoes, made use of the lighting of the chapel with great skill,

the horizontal lights and shades being strongly laid in, whilst the painted shadows cast by the figures are deep in tone. The colouring is, on the whole, harmonious, the flesh tints being of a rosy brown, which harmonizes well with the grays and purples of the draperies. Here, however, the colouring is a secondary matter, for the modelling of all these hundreds of figures is the chief glory of the work. It should be noted that the draperies are painted with a bolder touch than the parts that are nude, and with transparent colours through which the groundwork appears. In the spandrils and arches above the chapel windows are groups of women with children, which are generally called the Genealogy of the Madonna, but they would more properly be called the Ancestry of Joseph.

In the corners of the roof are four historical subjects from the Old Testament; to wit, *Judith with the head of Holofernes*, *David slaying Goliath*, *The Elevation of the Brazen Serpent*, and *The Crucifixion of Haman*. The foreshortening in the panel of the *David*, and in that of *Haman*, should be noticed, for they are marvels of perspective.

For an explanation of the intellectual scheme of the paintings on the ceiling of the Sistine, one cannot do better than take J. A. Symonds for a guide. In his Life of the master, he says that, after unrolling the history of the creation of the world, of man and woman, of the entrance into Paradise of sin and the punishment that resulted, of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden, followed by the Flood as the punishment of a sinful world, in the rectangles of the central portion of the upper vaulting, Michael Angelo "intimated by means of four special



THE CREATION OF THE SUN AND THE MOON [*Sistine Chapel, Rome*

Alinari photo]

mercies granted to the Jewish people (the four histories painted in the angles) that redemption could follow repentance. He characterises the prophets and sibyls as the 'potent witnesses' to this promise, and adduces the figures from the genealogy of the Virgin as an 'appeal to history.'"

But when at length the mighty labour was ended, the mere physical strain had been so great that for months afterwards Michael Angelo could only read letters or books, or examine drawings, by holding them above his head, it being possible for him to see only in this position, owing to his lying upon his back day after day for months, painting the ceiling. In one of his sonnets he describes himself as having "grown a goitre by dwelling in this den," and says:

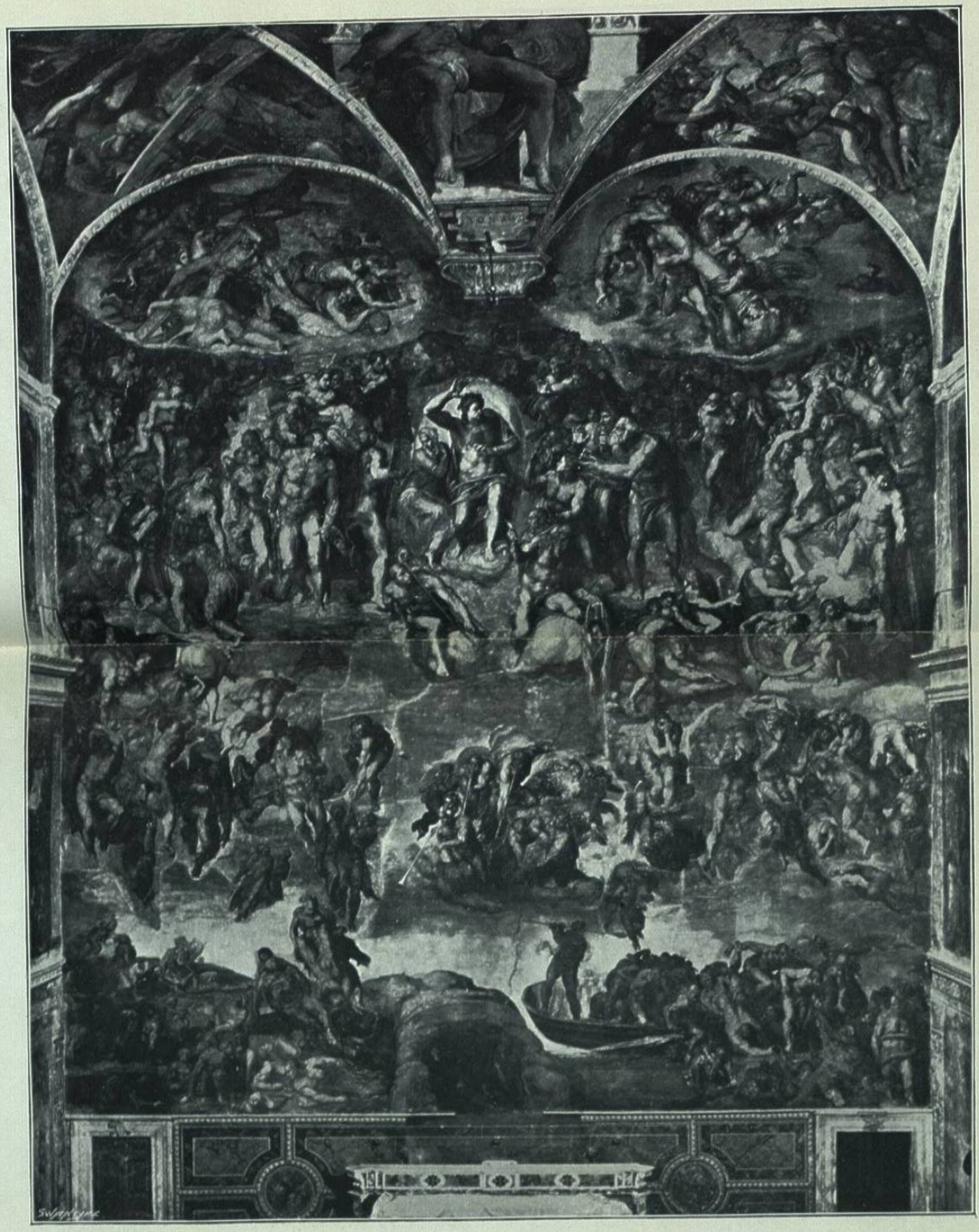
> "My beard turns up to heaven; my nape falls in,
> Fixed on my spine: my breast bone visibly
> Grows like a harp: a rich embroidery
> Bedews my face from brush-drops thick and thin."

Yet he must have felt that even his physical sufferings had their reward, for he knew that no other mortal had ever equalled the work his many-sided brain had carried to such successful issue.

Twenty years after the completion of the ceiling, the master was again in the Sistine Chapel at work, on the great fresco of *The Last Judgement*, which covers the whole of the north wall above the high altar. In the year 1534 Michael Angelo was sixty years old, and for the next seven years he devoted all his energies to this painting. Although the fresco of *The Last Judgement* is not so successful as the frescoes on the ceiling, it still

ranks high amongst the greatest works of pictorial art. As we now see it, *The Last Judgement* is a wreck. The colours have faded far more than those in the ceiling; the whole surface of the painting is blackened by the smoke of innumerable candles and the thousands of documents burnt below after each papal election; the grime of centuries clothes it in ruinous folds; and, worse than all, it has been much repainted.

The Last Judgement is a prodigious *tour de force*, but as a composition it is lacking in harmony. It requires careful study to form some idea of the scheme of this huge conglomeration of writhing forms and massive nudities. Let us begin at the top of the painting and work our eyes downwards. Springing from the double arch, at the summit of the vaulted ceiling, two groups of figures in every attitude of violent motion can be dimly distinguished; these figures are wingless angel messengers —in none of his frescoes did Michael Angelo place wings on the shoulders of his angels—bearing among them the instruments of the Passion, the Cross and the pillar of the Flagellation standing out conspicuously against the background; but it requires keen sight to distinguish the Crown of Thorns and the other emblems alluded to by Vasari in his description of the painting. In the centre of the fresco stands a nude figure of what appears to be a young Hercules, but it is the Christ surrounded by prophets, apostles, saints, and martyrs. A little behind and to the right is a crouching woman's figure; this is the Madonna, who appears terrified by the threatening attitude of the Judge of mankind, for the Saviour has his right hand raised, not in blessing, but in menace. Below this are angels blowing trumpets, while



Alinari photo] [*Sistine Chapel, Rome*

THE LAST JUDGEMENT

on either side appear the forms of the dead—the saved and the lost—the former being raised to the skies by attendant angels, the latter being hurled into the pit by demons. At the base of the fresco, Charon (whose introduction into the scene adds much to the pagan feeling already so dominant) ferries a boat-load of lost souls, whom he strikes furiously with his oar, across the Styx; on the opposite side the dead are seen bursting forth from their graves. Vasari writes that in introducing the figure of Charon into this fresco, Michael Angelo took the idea from his "most beloved author Dante" and from that poet's description of the boatman of Hell when he describes him:

> "Charon, the demon, with the eyes of flame,
> Calls the sad troops, and, having gathered all,
> Smites with raised oar the wretch that dares delay."

Taken as a whole this work can only be considered as a gigantic failure, a sublime fiasco. For although it may cause the spectator a momentary feeling akin to terror, no sane-minded being can believe that this hurly-burly of nude figures, with the pantomime crew of devils and hobgoblins, can by any stretch of the imagination be a foreshadowing of the ultimate day when the Almighty shall end all sorrow and suffering, when death and sin shall be no more and the last enemy of man shall perish. Buonarroti's *Last Judgement* is a pictorial rendering of the poem commencing "Dies irae, Dies illa," with all its gloomy horror, nor could one wish the most depraved of beings to be meted out such a punishment even by their fellow human beings, as that which the Saviour is represented as giving in this scene of terror. The manner in

which the Last Judgement has been treated by Michael Angelo would be more appropriate were it intended to illustrate the belief of a savage in a god of hate and revenge, than the belief of a follower of the Divine Saviour of mankind.

But this great wall painting need not be judged as an expression of belief: rather let it be studied for its anatomical knowledge and for its skill in the representation of the human form in every conceivable attitude. In this respect it is only rivalled by Michael Angelo's other work in this chapel. It will be noticed that none of the saintly personages or wingless angels introduced into this fresco have any nimbus or halo round their heads, and many of them are almost as nude as *Adam before the Fall.* This nudity in the figures of *The Last Judgement* caused strong disapproval during the lifetime of Michael Angelo, and it became a scandal among the "unco' guid" of Rome and the Papal Court. Everyone has heard how an artist, Daniele da Volterra, who was employed to add drapery to some of the figures, gained the name of "Il Braghettone," the breeches maker. Pope Paul III. is said to have carried his objection to this want of clothing in *The Last Judgement* to such a length of prurient fervour, that he was with difficulty prevented from having the fresco obliterated. If this Pope had had his will the fame of the painter would not have suffered greatly, for as it has already been said, the fresco is not one of Michael Angelo's successful efforts, full though it is of masterly drawing.

So much has the painting suffered from smoke and repainting that it is now impossible to judge of its original effect and colouring, but as we know, colour was

never the painter's forte, and if all the colour were taken away from the ceiling, and from the north wall of the Sistine Chapel, the effect of the frescoes would lose nothing in value. It is probably owing to this that photographic reproductions of these frescoes are so entirely satisfactory, and in studying them one can feel little regret that we have not the colour of the originals.

When he had at length finished *The Last Judgement,* Buonarroti, then sixty-seven years of age, set to work on the two large frescoes in the private chapel of Paul III., called after him the Pauline Chapel, and built by the renowned architect Antonio da Sangallo. There must have been a marked falling off in these paintings as compared with those in the Sistine Chapel, and Michael Angelo, when writing to the Pope in 1542, says that he felt "molto vecchio." But he still had many years of work before him. Old age, and what, alas! accompanies old age, the loss of those he loved, pressed now heavily on the weary artist.

The frescoes of the Pauline Chapel represent *The Martyrdom of St. Peter* and *The Conversion of St. Paul.* The French author, Stendhal, more than half a century ago, described these frescoes as then being so darkened and discoloured that he was unable to distinguish the white horse from which St. Paul had fallen. Even at the end of the eighteenth century these frescoes were considered irremediably injured. Michael Angelo was in his seventieth year when he finished these paintings in the Pauline Chapel. Vasari is right in saying that fresco painting is not the kind of work adapted to the failing physical powers of old age—"non è arte da vecchio." With the exception of shaping blocks of marble

into statues, no other manner of art production requires greater vigour and sureness of eye than painting in fresco. We have at the British Museum some studies for these paintings in the Pauline Chapel, and there are others at Oxford. Altogether Buonarroti was at work in the Vatican some score of years, the Pauline frescoes being his last contribution to its adornment.

Architecture, poetry, and some more sculpture filled up the remaining years of the artist's long and laborious existence.

During his later years he designed several paintings, a few of which may have been by his hand, but most of the pictures were painted after his designs by other artists. Of these there is the well-known *Leda*, the original of which, supposed to have belonged to Francis I., has been lost; it formed part of that art-loving king's collection at Fontainebleau. It was in that palace in the reign of Louis XIII., and is supposed to have been intentionally destroyed on the ground of its being indelicate. There is a fine cartoon of this painting in black chalk at Burlington House, which is believed to be an early copy. There is also an old copy of the *Leda* in the academy at Berlin. Another painting of a similar subject, that of a Venus, was described by Vasari as a "cosa divina." There is an old copy of this painting in the Uffizi Gallery at Florence, probably by Pontormo, and there is a repetition of it at Hampton Court.

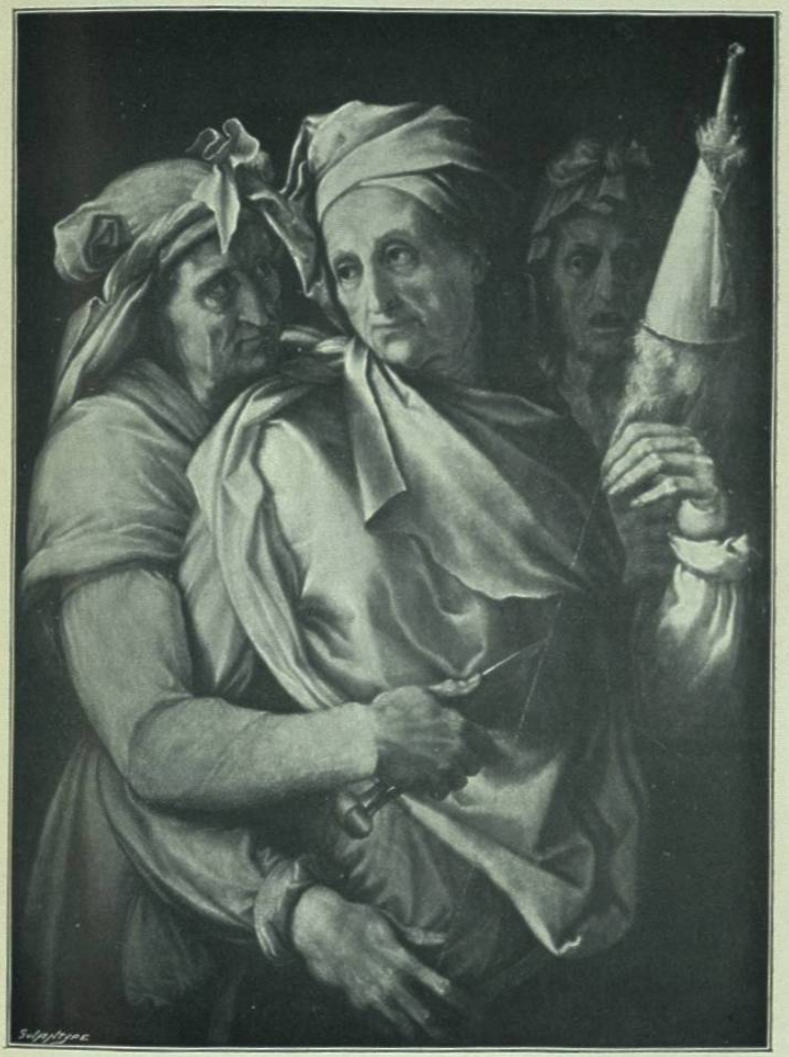
Besides these, many cartoons are traditionally said to have been inspired by Buonarroti, and among them Vasari states that Michael Angelo had designed for Alphonso d'Avalos, Marquis del Guasto, a painting of the Saviour with the woman of Samaria, and this is said

to have been repeated twice by Pontormo. There are also two *Annunciations* in churches in Rome after the master's designs; one is in Santa Maria della Pace, the other in St. John Lateran.

At Forli there existed a painting of the *Resurrection* by Marcello Venusti after a design by Buonarroti, of which there are studies from his hand in the British Museum and in the Louvre—studies full of what his pupil Sebastiano del Piombo called the "terribilità" of the master. There were also other paintings by Buonarroti's pupil, Venusti. Of these there was one in the Orleans Gallery, representing *Christ in the Garden of Olives*—this is a replica of one now at Munich. Michael Angelo is also supposed to have designed the painting of *The Martyrdom of St. Catharine* in the Church of Santa Maria Novella in Florence, but probably this is by Giuliano Bugiardini. Sebastiano del Piombo also painted some well-known works which were prompted by his master. The best known of these is that majestic picture, *The Raising of Lazarus*, in the National Gallery; but this belongs to the middle portion of Michael Angelo's career, as it bears the date 1519. Sketches and studies for this *Raising of Lazarus* by Michael Angelo himself exist in some public collections; there are two of the figures of Lazarus in red chalk in the British Museum.

At Rome, in the Church of San Pietro in Montorio, there is a celebrated altar painting in oil on marble, by Sebastiano del Piombo, of the flagellation of our Lord, which again is after a design of Buonarroti. By the same painter there is a *Holy Family* in our National Gallery, likewise designed by Michael Angelo, as well as a re-

markable little painting in oils called *The Dream of Human Life*, also attributed to the master. It has much of the great artist's character in the figure of the youth looking upwards, but it was painted by one of his pupils. In the Pitti Gallery at Florence there is a life-size group of three old crones known as *Michael Angelo's Three Fates*, but there is little substantial evidence to make this attribution anything but a surmise.



Anderson photo] [*Pitti Gallery, Florence*

THE THREE FATES

ATTRIBUTED TO MICHAEL ANGELO