CHAPTER VI

MICHAEL ANGELO AS ARCHITECT

IT has been seen how great was Michael Angelo, both as a sculptor and as a painter. He was remarkable also as an architect; for not only did he design the most stupendous dome of any church in Christendom by placing, as he boasted he would place, the Dome of the Pantheon on the Church of St. Peter, but he added the greatest buildings in Rome—the Farnese Palace and the palaces on the Capitol—to that city of magnificent buildings. Had Buonarroti been allowed to place the façade which he designed before the Church of San Lorenzo in Florence, Italy might have boasted of another architectural marvel. It is said that when he was building St. Peter's he was told he would have the opportunity to surpass the dome of Brunelleschi, and that he replied in verse:

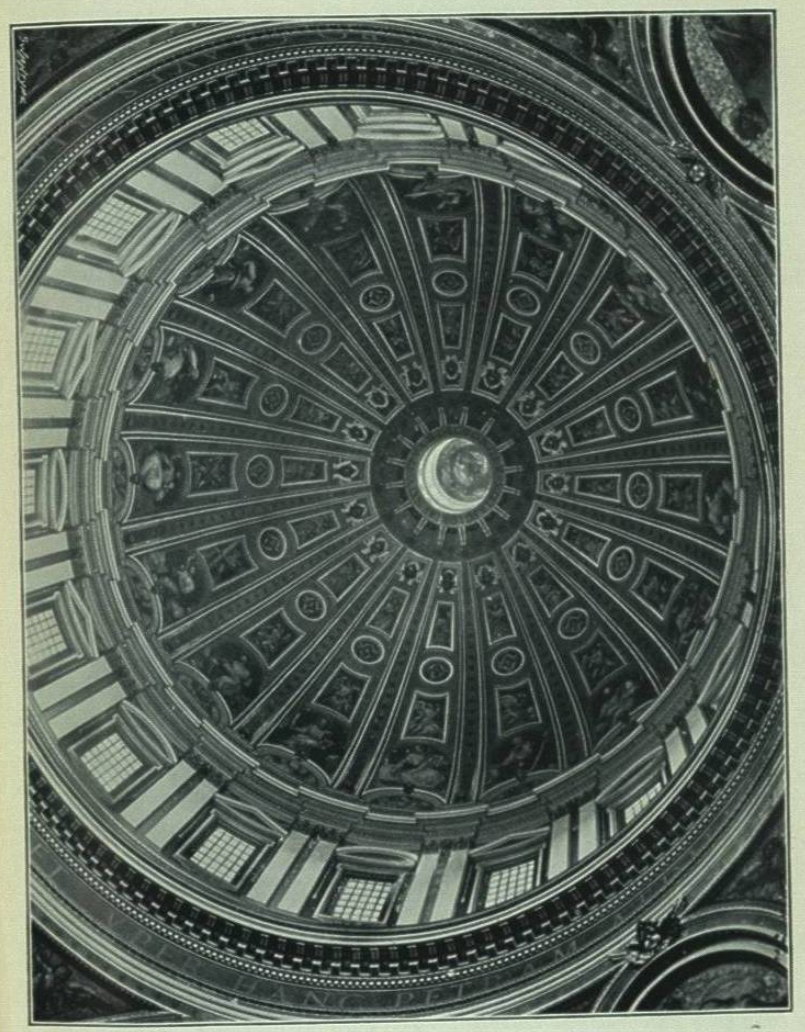
"Io farò la sua sorella,
Più grande già, ma non più bella,"

which freely translated runs: "I will make its equal, much larger certainly, but not finer." Michael Angelo had not studied architecture as a profession, and, even in his greatest architectural designs, architects are apt to find faults in his superb amateurishness of treatment. Among these critics, the French architect, Charles Garnier, whose huge, splendid, but somewhat over-ornate

Opera House in Paris is among the few great architectural creations of the last century, has gone so far in his criticism as to express his opinion that Michael Angelo has no right to be called an architect at all, and calls his style in some of his buildings, notably the Porta Pia in Rome, *baroque*. Garnier also criticises the buildings designed for the palaces on the Campidoglio, which he thinks defective in taste. Nor will he even allow the Dome of St. Peter's, with its marvellous cupola, to be above criticism, and is of the opinion that it has more right to be considered as the idea of Giacomo della Porta than of Buonarroti. "But why," asks Garnier, "seek for spots on the sun?" Why indeed?

Even during the Renaissance the Italians were not creative or original in architecture. From Byzantium came the spacious cupolas, the wealth and glory of mosaics which still glow on the walls of St. Mark's at Venice, in the Royal Chapel at Palermo, and in the great church at Monreale, at Cefalù, and at Ravenna. But it took centuries for the Italians to copy with any fidelity the antique order of architecture, and it was not until after Brunelleschi and Leo Battista Alberti's time that the Graeco-Roman style was freely introduced in Italian churches and palaces. The Lombard style is almost identified with the Roman; but the so-called Gothic never became popular in Italy, although that huge mass of marble, the Cathedral at Milan, is Gothic. It was never repeated by the great Italian architects during the later days of the Renaissance.

Michael Angelo appeared at a period of transition in Italian architecture. He lived to raise the most stupendous monument of classical architecture in existence.



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INTERIOR OF THE CUPOLA OF ST. PETER'S, ROME

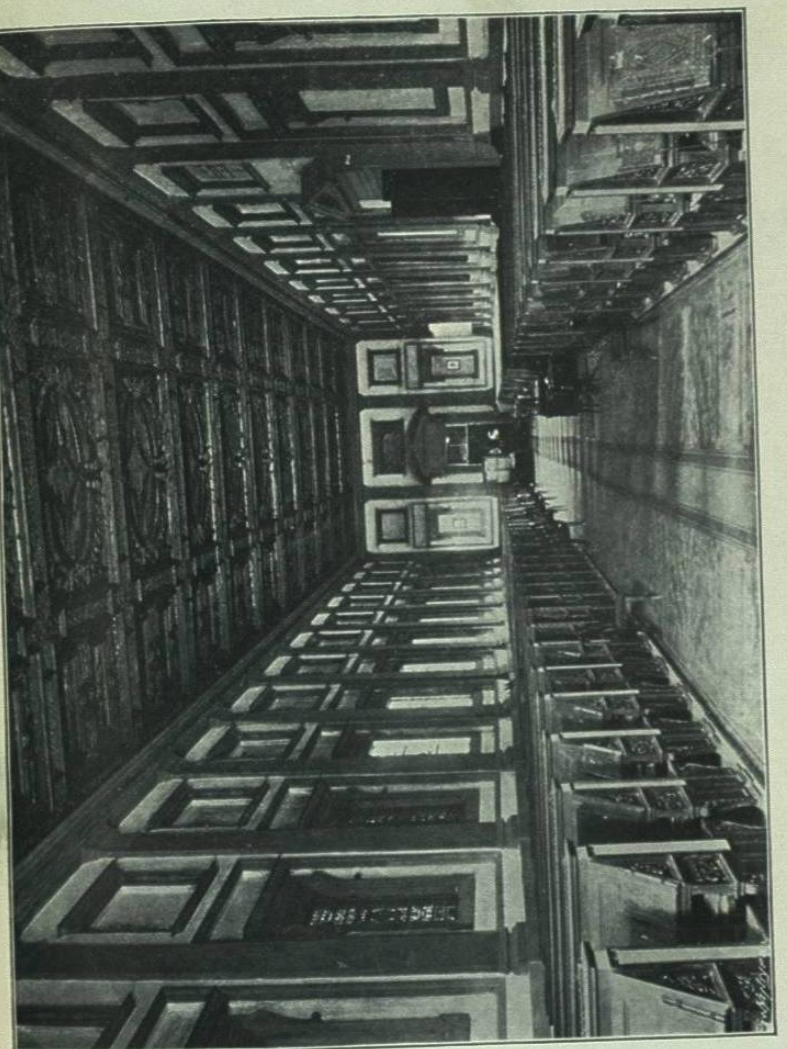
This was followed by an impure style in the next generation, and shortly after his death the bastard form came into play, developing into the so-called Baroco, this in turn being followed by the Rococo.

In 1547 Buonarroti had been appointed architect-in-chief for the construction of the great Basilica of St. Peter's, an appointment for which he refused all salary, working, as he nobly expressed, "for the love of God alone." Bramante had commenced the new building of St. Peter's on the plan of an equilateral cross, which is generally known as the Greek cross. But this plan was altered, a Latin cross being substituted by Raphael, Baldassare Peruzzi, and San Gallo. Michael Angelo restored the shape to the Greek cross, but after his death it was once more changed to the form in which we now see it. There can be no question that, had Michael Angelo lived long enough to complete the church, or had the model he made in his eightieth year been carried out, St. Peter's would have been an even more imposing structure than it is now. It was a misfortune that after Buonarroti's death Pope Paul V. employed the architect Maderno to complete the building, which he did in the form of a Latin cross, elongating the nave, and adding the baroque façade by which he completely spoilt the proportions of the church, and detracted from its general effect. What the world owes to Michael Angelo in St. Peter's is its glorious dome and cupola, the noblest monument that the skill of man has accomplished. One forgets the shortcomings and bad taste of the interior when one looks on that great dome rising into space. It is as Symonds writes, "the final manifestation of Michael Angelo's genius as a creative artist."

Melancholy as is the history of Michael Angelo's troubles with regard to the tomb of Julius II., those he endured while creating that world's wonder, the cupola of St. Peter's, were hardly less so. A long line of Popes and architects impeded him in his labours, and for seventeen years defeated him in his intentions regarding the construction of the building, only leaving the cupola as he designed it.

On the accession of Marcellus II. to the papal throne, Michael Angelo's enemies renewed their hostility, and it was at this time that he wrote to Vasari: "I was set to work on St. Peter's against my will, and I have served now eight years gratis, and with the utmost injury and discomfort to myself. Now that the fabric has been pushed forward and there is no money to spend, and I am just on the point of vaulting in the cupola, my departure from Rome would be the ruin of the edifice, and for me a great disgrace throughout Christendom, and to my soul a grievous sin." The model made in wood by Maître Jean, a Frenchman, under the eye of Michael Angelo, still exists at St. Peter's, and in no essential detail does it differ from the cupola.

The three palatial buildings which crown the Campidoglio at Rome owe their existence to Buonarroti. In 1534 Paul III. saw and approved the plans which Michael Angelo submitted to him. These included the flight of steps which lead up from the Piazza to the open square on the top of the Capitoline Hill. These three palaces consist of the Palace of the Campidoglio in the centre, flanked by the museums of sculpture and the Palace of the Senate. In the centre of the square Michael Angelo placed the equestrian bronze statue of



THE LAURENTIAN LIBRARY, FLORENCE

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Marcus Aurelius. After his death, the architects Vignola and Giacomo della Porta completed these buildings after Michael Angelo's designs.

Writing to his nephew in 1559, Michael Angelo alludes to a church which he had been asked to build for the Florentines in Rome: "The Florentines are inclined to erect a great edifice—that is to say, their church, and all of them with one accord put pressure on me to attend to this." But nothing came of this scheme, the money was not forthcoming, and no models or designs for this church exist. This is but one of the many contemplated works which Buonarroti was never able to carry out in the Eternal City.

While these schemes and buildings were occupying Michael Angelo's attention in Rome, he was consulted by some Florentine artists as to plans for the completion of the Laurentian Library, in which the staircase seems to have caused great difficulty, and finally Vasari, unable to understand Michael Angelo's idea for its completion, constructed one from his own plan.

It would be tedious to give a list of the buildings on which Michael Angelo was engaged in Rome. In some cases, as in the gate of the Porta Pia, and those of the Porta del Popolo, which are ascribed to him, he was in no way responsible beyond the fact that Vasari mentions that he made plans and sketches for the latter gate, "of which the Pope Pius IV. selected the least costly." It was this Pope who commissioned Buonarroti to transform a portion of the ruins of the Baths of Diocletian into a church. But it is not easy to determine Michael Angelo's share in the transformation, as the church was entirely re-modelled in 1749. Buonarroti had formed a

portion of the ruins into a building shaped like a Latin cross, but this was changed into a Greek one, and the interior of the church desecrated by the vulgarest style of rococo decoration. The handsome cloisters attached to this church, now used as a museum, are said to be Michael Angelo's designs, and were one of the features of the Eternal City, when the great clump of cypresses, said to have been planted by the architect, still grew in their midst.

CHAPTER VII

MICHAEL ANGELO AS DRAUGHTSMAN

IT has been justly said that Buonarroti's drawings and studies are among his most wonderful productions, for his hand followed the working of his mind with marvellous rapidity, and the simpler the means the greater appears the talent of the artist. Of the three greatest art-geniuses of Italy—Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci and Michael Angelo—the last produced, if not the greatest number of drawings, many of the finest, which are now the glory of the great art museums of Europe. In the Louvre, in the British Museum, in Berlin, at Oxford, at Windsor Castle, and at Chatsworth are many superb drawings by the master; but the most remarkable collection of his drawings is perhaps that in the Albertina Museum at Vienna.

No other great Italian artist made the human body his special study as did Michael Angelo. Up to his time it had been considered contrary to the tenets of the Church to sculpture or paint the nude; it had been ignored in art; but Buonarroti did not hesitate to portray man as he was, naked and not ashamed.

I think there is no exaggeration in saying that if all Michael Angelo's other works were to disappear, like some "baseless fabric of a vision," his studies and drawings in chalk, India ink and sepia would prove him to