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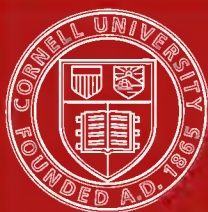
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*Giorgio Vasari by himself  
from the Original Painting now in  
the Uffizi Gallery, Florence*







THE LIFE OF GIORGIO  
**VASARI**

A STUDY OF THE LATER  
RENAISSANCE IN ITALY  
BY ROBERT W. CARDEN, A.R.I.B.A.  
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



1911

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## TO MY WIFE

“Benedetto sia'l giorno e'l mese e l'anno  
E la stagione e'l tempo e l'ora e'l punto  
E'l bel paese e'l loco ov'io fui giuntò  
Da due begli occhi che legato m'hanno.”

*Petrarca.*



## PREFACE

IT may be urged by those who are acquainted with the works executed by Giorgio Vasari, both in architecture and painting, that they are not such as to merit the serious labour involved by an extended biography: and with this view I am in entire agreement. The study of Vasari has, however, other aspects, and it is with these that the present volume is chiefly concerned. The biographer of the artists of the Italian Renaissance concludes his *Lives* with a short account of his own works; adding it, as he would have us believe, somewhat unwillingly. These notices necessarily cease with the publication of the 1568 Edition, leaving the remaining years of his life unrecorded. When Bottari published a new edition, with numerous notes and addenda, he endeavoured to complete the Life of the biographer with a cursory compilation from Vasari's own letters of the period. The Life, thus finished, has been allowed to stand; for the late Gaetano Milanesi was content to reprint the notices given by Bottari with little additional matter. Neither seems to have tested the accuracy of the Autobiography by comparing it with Vasari's contemporary correspondence; nor did they find it of interest to sift the large amount of collateral evidence which lay at hand. I conclude,

therefore, that those who undertake the vast work of editing these volumes are carried away by their interest in the greater personalities of whom Vasari tells, and to such an extent that the biographer himself is passed over with but scant notice, while the magnitude of the task he so faithfully performed is almost forgotten.

The life of Vasari—of the individual, not the mediocre artist—is one that amply repays whatever study is devoted to it. He was the first writer to set out coherently the story of the Renaissance of art in Italy: and, while lacking the equipment of the modern critic and historian, he has traced the development of the sister arts from their early beginnings down to the splendid days which marked the opening of the sixteenth century, with a clearness which is deserving of all praise. His *Lives* are divided into three periods, which may conveniently be described as the infancy, the youth and the manhood of the arts. Here Vasari stopped, supposing that this manhood would endure for ever: forgetting that senile decay follows as surely upon the steps of maturity as manhood upon youth. This period of decay coincides in a remarkable degree with the sixty-three years that Vasari spent in this world of ours; and he has left us—quite unconsciously—as clearly written a history of this fourth and last phase as any to be found in the *Lives*. This document, to use a hackneyed phrase, is a human document—Vasari himself. He was nine years old when Raffaello died and he survived Michelangelo by ten years, dying with the know-

ledge that all the great old masters were dead and there were no younger men fitted to carry on the splendid traditions of the past.

Many writers have devoted themselves to the study of the golden period of the Renaissance. They lead us to Parnassus and leave us there, declining to tell us of the path that lies beyond and leads steeply down into the misty valleys once more. There is, however, an interest which attaches itself to the process of decay, melancholy though it may be: and in Vasari's life, as we find it in his letters and in the witness of his contemporaries, we may clearly mark the decline of art both in Florence and Rome; under Cosimo de' Medici in the one and under the Popes who succeeded Clement VII in the other.

Vasari may be considered as the most prominent artist of this period of decadence. Both architect and painter, he lived in the midst of courts; he conversed with Alessandro, Cosimo and Francesco de' Medici; and was as familiar as commoner clay might be with the Popes from Clement VII to Gregory XIII. He knew all the great painters who were slowly passing away around him, and the notices of them in the *Lives* are largely supplied from his own eye-witness. More than two hundred and sixty of his letters have already been published and a great many more have recently been discovered, though they are not as yet available for the purposes of this work. In addition to this we have the Autobiography, together with a number of his poems, so that there is ample material for the present work.

He claims our interest as a type of the aftermath

and as the writer of the *Lives*. Whatever grandeur his architecture may possess is due to the magnificent scale on which his ducal patron was accustomed to build, rather than to any intrinsic merit on the part of the designer—the Palazzo de' Cavalieri at Pisa only excepted. His paintings are so inferior that it would be waste of time to emphasise their demerits. But with this the worst has been said. His literary legacy is of far greater value. In his letters he strips himself bare, as it were; he shows us the joys and sorrows incident upon the service of mighty princes in the great days of old: and he shows us, what is perhaps of still greater interest, the manner in which he collected the wonderful amount of information which is contained in the *Lives of the most excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*.

R. W. C.

AREZZO,

March, 1910.



# CONTENTS

## CHAPTER I

### CHILDHOOD AND EARLY DAYS

	PAGE
Origin of the Vasari family—Lazzaro Vasari—Childhood of Giorgio Vasari—Baccio Bandinelli—Expulsion of the Medici from Florence—Michelangelo's <i>David</i> —The plague—Vasari's wanderings—He is invited to Rome by Ippolito de' Medici—His studies with Francesco Salviati—Sebastiano del Piombo—Vasari's task in life—The <i>Venus and the Three Graces</i> —Discrepancies between his letters and the Autobiography—Departure of Ippolito for Hungary—Vasari returns to Arezzo—His illness—He is admitted to the Compagnia dei Pittori Fiorentini . . . . .	1

## CHAPTER II

### ALESSANDRO DE' MEDICI

Caterina de' Medici—Government of Alessandro—Fortezza da Basso—Vasari's early works in the Palazzo Vecchio— <i>Annunciation</i> for the "Murate"—Visit of Charles V to Florence—Preparations for Alessandro's wedding—His assassination—Election of Cosimo de' Medici . . . . .	22
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

## CHAPTER III

### CAMALDOLI

Vasari's despair—Visits to Camaldoli and works done there—Ottaviano de' Medici—Monte San Savino—Bologna—Vasari returns to Florence and begins afresh—Birth of Francesco de' Medici—Vasari visits Venice . . . . .	43
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

## CHAPTER IV

### THE "LIVES OF THE PAINTERS"

Rome—Study of architecture—Palazzo Farnese cornice—Lucca—Rome again—Naples—Sala della Cancelleria—Inception of the <i>Lives</i> —Doubts as to when they were really begun—Their progress—Caro's letter—Visit to Rimini—Purchase of a house in Arezzo— <i>Feast of Ahasuerus</i> —Contemporary opinion of Vasari . . . . .	65
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER V

JULIUS III

	PAGE
Vasari marries—His views on matrimony—Julius III elected— Vasari hastens to Rome—Publication of the <i>Lives</i> —Discontent of Vasari in Rome—Tomb of Cardinal del Monte—Vigna Giulia —Homesickness—Façade for Sforza Almeni—Vasari leaves Rome in disgust . . . . .	90

CHAPTER VI

FLORENCE

Cristofano Gherardi—Tasso, and the “Stanze Nuove” in the Palazzo Vecchio—Michelangelo’s letters—War in the Val di Chiana—Battle of Marciano—Vincenzo Borghini—Michelangelo and St. Peter’s—Vasari appointed architect to the Palazzo Vecchio—Death of Gherardi—Church of the Florentines in Rome—Baccio Bandinelli—“Dialoghi” . . . . .	113
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER VII

SECOND EDITION OF THE “LIVES”

Visit to Rome with Cardinal Giovanni de’ Medici—The journey described by Vasari—Michelangelo—Sala Regia—Vasari’s chapel at Arezzo—Palazzo Vecchio again—Report on adjacent property —Uffizi—Cosimo’s tours of inspection—The Palazzo de’ Cavalieri at Pisa—Illness of Vasari’s wife—Second edition of the <i>Lives</i> begun—Borghini’s share in them—Death of Giovanni, Garzia and the Duchess Eleonora . . . . .	138
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER VIII

PALAZZO VECCHIO

Shortage of money for architectural works—Progress of buildings— Column of Santa Trinità—The stairs in the Palazzo Vecchio— Vasari’s glowing accounts of it—Death of Michelangelo— His funeral . . . . .	164
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER IX

PREPARATIONS FOR FRANCESCO DE’ MEDICI’S WEDDING

Cartoons for the Sala Grande—Tomb of Michelangelo—Corridor across the Arno—Preparations for Francesco’s wedding— Borghini’s report . . . . .	189
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER X

## WEDDING OF FRANCESCO DE' MEDICI

	PAGE
Preparations for the wedding—Arrival of the bride, Giovanna—The wedding ceremony and festivities . . . . .	213

## CHAPTER XI

## THE TOUR OF ITALY

Vasari is instructed to decorate the walls of the Sala Grande—His journey through Italy—Perugia—Notes for the <i>Lives</i> —Rome—Daniello da Volterra—Travelling in the sixteenth century—"Umbrellaes"—Inns—Bologna—Milan— <i>Cenacolo</i> —Vasari on Gothic art—Certosa di Pavia—Cremona—The Anguisciola—Return to Tuscany . . . . .	226
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER XII

## ROME AND ST. PETER'S

Madonna dell' Umiltà at Pistoia—Finishing touches to the <i>Lives</i> —Federigo Zuccherò and the <i>Lives</i> —His own writings—Sala Regia—Vasari's visits to Rome—St. Peter's—Sistine Bridge—Pirro Ligorio—Santa Maria Novella, Florence—The "Arrotino" . . . . .	243
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER XIII

## END OF THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Parsimony of Rome—Trouble with the printers of the <i>Lives</i> —Publication of the Second Edition—Building activity of Duke Cosimo—Vasari's monetary difficulties—His flatteries—His statement of accounts—Preparations for painting the Sala Grande—The Montughi property and the Cavalieri at Pisa—Cosimo becomes Grand Duke of Tuscany and marries Camilla Martelli . . . . .	271
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER XIV

## PIUS V

Hurried visit to Rome with Cosimo de' Medici—The Cavalieri at Pisa—Back to Rome—Paintings in the Vatican—Sangalietto on Vasari's work—Knighthood—Return to Florence—Paintings in the Sala Grande—First mention of the cupola of Santa Maria del Fiore—Back to Rome to paint the Sala Regia—Battle of Lepanto—Death of Pius . . . . .	294
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

# xiv THE LIFE OF GIORGIO VASARI

## CHAPTER XV

### ROME

	PAGE
Gregory XIII—Vasari summoned to Rome by the new Pope—The Sala Regia and the <i>Massacre of the Huguenots</i> —Approach of old age . . . . .	318

## CHAPTER XVI

### DEATH OF THE ARTIST

Failing health of Cosimo—Anxiety of Vasari to return to his master's side—Portrait of Gregory XIII—Invitation to Spain—Completion of the Sala Regia—Cupola to be Vasari's last work—Rome a benevolent employer—Last days spent with the Grand Duke, discussing the cartoons for the Cupola—Death of Cosimo—Death of Vasari . . . . .	332
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE CUPOLA

Vasari's place in art—His belief in himself—Fate of the Cupola of Santa Maria del Fiore—Zuccherò appointed to complete it—Lasca's satirical verses concerning the completed work . . . . .	351
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

INDEX . . . . .	361
-----------------	-----

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	FACING PAGE
Giorgio Vasari, by Himself <i>(Photo by G. Brogi, Florence)</i>	. (Photogravure) <i>Frontispiece</i>
Lorenzo de' Medici ( <i>Vasari</i> )	. . . . 20
Ippolito de' Medici ( <i>Titian</i> )	. . . . 24
Alessandro de' Medici ( <i>Vasari</i> )	. . . . 38
St. Gregory at Supper with Twelve Poor Men ( <i>Vasari</i> )	. . . . 54
Baptismal Procession ( <i>Vasari</i> )	. . . . 60
St. Eustace and St. Blaise ( <i>Vasari</i> )	. . . . 68
Tomb of Cardinal del Monte ( <i>Vasari</i> )	. . . . 98
Pazienza . . . . .	. . . . 104
Interior of the Sala degli Elementi, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence ( <i>Vasari</i> ) . . . . .	. . . . 114
Ceiling of one of the Stanze Nuove, Palazzo Vecchio ( <i>Vasari</i> )	. . . . 124
Sala Grande, Palazzo Vecchio . . . . .	. . . . 134
Frontispiece to Vasari's "Libro di Disegni" . . . . .	. . . . 158
Loggia of the Uffizi towards the Arno, Florence . . . . .	. . . . 166
Return of Cosimo the Elder from Exile ( <i>Vasari</i> ) . . . . .	. . . . 170
Siege of Florence by the Prince of Orange ( <i>Vasari</i> ) . . . . .	. . . . 176
Brunellesco presenting the Model for San Lorenzo to Cosimo the Elder ( <i>Vasari</i> ) . . . . .	. . . . 180
Tomb of Michelangelo, Santa Croce, Florence ( <i>Vasari</i> ) . . . . .	. . . . 192
Cosimo de' Medici ( <i>Bronzino</i> ) . . . . .	. . . . 214
Cortile of Palazzo Vecchio . . . . .	. . . . 216
Coronation of Charles V ( <i>Vasari</i> ) . . . . .	. . . . 228
Interior of the Church of the Madonna dell' Umiltà, Pistoia	. . . . 248

## xvi THE LIFE OF GIORGIO VASARI

	FACING PAGE
Federigo Zuccherò, by Himself . . . .	254
Coronation of the Virgin ( <i>Vasari</i> ) . . . .	274
Staircase in Cortile of the Laurenziana, Florence . . . .	276
Palazzo dei Cavalieri di Santo Stefano, Pisa . . . .	290
Battle of Marciano ( <i>Vasari</i> ) . . . .	304
Medallion Portrait of Lorenzo de' Medici ( <i>Vasari</i> ) . . . .	322
The Siege of Pisa ( <i>Vasari</i> ) . . . .	346

# THE LIFE OF GIORGIO VASARI

## CHAPTER I

### CHILDHOOD AND EARLY DAYS

Origin of the Vasari family—Lazzaro Vasari—Childhood of Giorgio Vasari—Baccio Bandinelli—Expulsion of the Medici from Florence—Michelangelo's David—The plague—Vasari's wanderings—He is invited to Rome by Ippolito de' Medici—His studies with Francesco Salviati—Sebastiano del Piombo—Vasari's task in life—The Venus and the Three Graces—Discrepancies between his letters and the Autobiography—Departure of Ippolito for Hungary—Vasari returns to Arezzo—His illness—He is admitted to the Compagnia dei Pittori Fiorentini.

**I**N the early years of the fifteenth century a certain Lazzaro, son of Niccolò de' Taldi, left his home in Cortona and settled in Arezzo, where he opened a little shop for the sale of ornamental leather saddles. At first sight it is difficult to recognise in this unassuming leather-worker the Lazzaro Vasari who "had been famous in his day as a painter, not only in his native city but throughout the whole of Tuscany."<sup>1</sup> Yet this Lazzaro, although in the *Estimo*, or Census, of Cortona for the year 1427 he declared himself to be a "sellaio da cavalli," figures in the *Lives of the Painters* as one of Tuscany's earliest artists, a position to which he has no claim

<sup>1</sup> *Le Vite de' più eccellenti Pittori, Architetti e Scultori*. Florentine edition of 1878-85, Vol. II, p. 553. Unless otherwise stated, all references throughout this volume are made to this edition.

whatsoever. The account which his biographer and great-grandson has given us is not less interesting, however, because it deals with a myth, for it shows us something of the methods employed in the production of these historic volumes, and serves as a warning that not every word to be found in them is to be accepted for truth.

Doubtless Giorgio Vasari fully believed all that he tells us of his ancestor, but while attributing certain pictures to him he is perfectly honest, telling us that they bear no inscription and that his statements are only based upon information obtained from old men whose testimony he believes to be true. The real purpose for which Lazzaro was introduced into the *Lives* seems to have been to supply Giorgio himself with an artistic ancestry; and this is supported by the exordium to the Life of the supposititious painter. "It is passing pleasant for anyone to find that his ancestors and the members of his own family have been famous in some profession, whether it be of arms. or letters, or painting, or any other noble calling: and whosoever finds some honourable mention of his progenitors recorded by history will have, if not a stimulating impetus towards endeavouring to distinguish himself, at least something to restrain him from besmirching the records of a family which has produced illustrious and distinguished men. You will understand, then, from what I have just said, all that I myself feel when I find that among my ancestors was Lazzaro Vasari." He then refers to pictures which no longer exist, tells us that Lazzaro painted them, and ingenuously describes his "manner" after an examination of these same unauthenticated works. Such information is, of course, worthless; but in the Life of Lazzaro he traces the



fortunes of his family down to his own time, with the addition of a good deal of interesting matter. Lazzaro's brothers followed the potter's calling and remained for a time in Cortona: but when fortune smiled on the saddler in his new home he gathered all his relations around him and the family became permanently settled in Arezzo, still carrying on the traditional trade of *vasaio*, or potter.

Lazzaro died in 1452, leaving a son, Giorgio, engaged in the making of pots, and a nephew (son of his sister), Luca Signorelli, who afterwards became famous as a painter. Giorgio the elder, grandfather of the biographer, busied himself with researches into the methods of the old Etruscan potters, and was so far successful as to rediscover some of their secret processes and to unearth an ancient potter's furnace with a quantity of valuable pieces. By this means he contrived to raise himself a little above his fellows, and it is with him that the family name of "Vasari" (*vasaro*, or *vasaio*, a potter) seems to have originated. With him, too, the Vasari first came to the notice of the Medici, for Lorenzo the Magnificent accepted some of the treasures which had been found. Giorgio died in 1484 at the age of sixty-eight, leaving a large family of sons, most of whom, if not all, followed the old calling. One of these, Antonio by name, married Maddalena Tacci, and on July 30th, 1511, their union was blessed by the birth of a son. This child was called Giorgio after his grandfather, and, as the author of the *Lives of the Painters*, was destined to render the name immortal.

His childhood was not of the brightest. His father was in poor circumstances, and after the birth of little Giorgio the family seems to have increased

in numbers with alarming regularity and rapidity.<sup>1</sup> As for Giorgio, he was afflicted with ill health from the outset, suffering from prolonged attacks of bleeding at the nose, which frequently reduced him to the last stage of exhaustion. The malady appears to have left him with growing years, as he does not refer to it either in the Autobiography or in such of his letters as have been preserved. Benvenuto Cellini, who is not necessarily to be believed, tells us that he was also “subject to a species of dry scab, which he was always in the habit of scratching with his hands”; and relates that on one occasion, while “sleeping in the same bed as an excellent workman named Manno, who was in my service, when he meant to scratch himself, he tore the skin from one of Manno’s legs with his filthy claws, the nails of which he never used to cut.”<sup>2</sup>

His early youth was passed in his native city, and while learning his letters in the school attached to the church of the Pieve d’Arezzo, or under the guidance of Giovanni Pollastra, he received his first elementary instruction in drawing from his kinsman Luca Signorelli, then a very old man. Possessed of a certain degree of ability, and being well aware that he would have to make his own way in life, Giorgio passed his leisure hours, sketch-book in hand, wandering from church to church, and sitting diligently at his drawing in the cool and quiet of the sacred buildings, while his schoolfellows played without in the bright sunshine. Sometimes he

<sup>1</sup> In a letter to Giovanni Pollastra, Vasari speaks of his father as “receiving from my mother a present of a child every nine months.”

<sup>2</sup> Benvenuto Cellini, *Memoirs*, translated by J. A. Symonds. London, Nimmo, 1888.

would get a friendly criticism from Guglielmo da Marsiglia, the Frenchman who was making the great stained-glass windows for the Duomo—those great windows which Vasari never forgot, and of which he wrote in later years:—

“Come di questo corpo; il più bello  
 Che’ avanza ogn’ altro bel, è l’occhio bello,  
 Così dell’ Aretin duomo il più bello  
 Son le finestre, ch’ ogni bel men bello  
 A paragon saria: onde si bello  
 Il tempio viene, ch’ esser non può più bello.”<sup>1</sup>

And though in the Life of Francesco Salviati he says that he “learnt to draw” from Guglielmo, it is impossible for us to place much faith in this statement, having regard to the extreme youth of the future historian.

The death of Adrian VI and the succession of Clement VII to the papal throne were events of importance in his career. Hitherto he had lived at peace in his father’s house, studying with the utmost assiduity in the intervals of sickness; but when Clement, who as Cardinal Giulio de’ Medici had governed Florence, was called upon to assume the tiara, the two bastards, Alessandro and Ippolito, became the heads of the Medici family in Florence. Neither was of suitable age to assume the government—neither was more than thirteen years old—and accordingly Cardinal Silvio Passerini was sent by the Pope to superintend their education and to rule the city during their minority. In May, 1524, he passed through Arezzo on the way to assume his

<sup>1</sup> “As in our mortal frame that which exceeds all else in beauty is the very beauty of the eye, so in Arezzo’s fane the greatest beauty lies in her great windows: for compared with them all other beauty seems less beautiful. In them this temple attains to beauty unsurpassable.”

new responsibilities, and while there Giorgio, being brought to his notice, so delighted the learned prelate by reciting whole books of Virgil's *Æneid* off by heart (so, at least, Vasari tells us) that he forthwith ordered the boy's father to bring him to Florence, and offered to provide for him.

Vasari was accommodated in the house of Niccolò Vespucci, a Knight of Rhodes, and spent two hours of each day sharing the lessons of the young Medici, under the guidance of Piero Valeriano, while at the same time his education in the arts received due attention, though his studies pursued a by no means uninterrupted course. No sooner was he placed with Michelangelo than Clement called the artist away to Rome, and Giorgio passed with little ceremony to the care of Andrea del Sarto.<sup>[1]</sup> He tells us with evident self-complacency that before his departure "the master personally repaired to the dwelling of Andrea for the purpose of recommending the boy to his care." Thence he passed, all too rapidly, to the *bottega* of Baccio Bandinelli, a man entirely unfitted to have the charge of any youth. Giorgio's nature was gentle and generous, and he could have had little in common with one whose character was so utterly different. The account of Bandinelli given in the *Lives*, however, should be read with reserve, for it would be an injustice to believe, without further proof, that he wilfully destroyed the cartoon for the *Battle of Pisa*, as Vasari relates. But apart from the opinion of the biographer there are other accounts which show the character of Bandinelli in an unfavourable light. "The Cavaliere Bandinelli," writes Baldassare Turini to Cardinal Cybo, "seems to know how to get round your Reverences, and has managed to

put nearly all the money which was intended for these monuments<sup>1</sup> into his own pocket. It is positively a scandal that he should have been promised six hundred crowns for a picture which anybody else would have done for half the sum, and make a far better thing of it too: and he has been promised three hundred crowns for a little picture which could be done better by someone else for half the price. . . . If your Reverence had seen, or could see, his anxiety to grab all this money, and the pompous way he sets about finishing these second-rate pictures and statues of his, you would scarcely believe it. It is a positive outrage that your Reverences should submit to being treated in this way." And writing to Cosimo de' Medici, Duke of Florence, he says that Bandinelli is "so vicious by nature and so consumed with the greed for money that he thinks more of getting an extra penny for one of his pictures than he does of a hundred dukes."<sup>2</sup>

It was fortunate for the young painter that he was not destined to remain long under the guidance of Bandinelli. In 1527, before he had been many months with that master, the period of his first sojourn in Florence came suddenly and unexpectedly to an end. The army of Charles V was at that time marching through Italy on its way to attack Rome; and already, as though foreseeing the result of this expedition, the Florentines had endeavoured to oust the Medici from their position in the city. Vasari refers to this rising, of which, being of a timid as well as a cautious nature, he was a spectator from a safe distance, in the *Life*

<sup>1</sup> The monuments to Leo X and Clement VII. The letter is given in Gaye's *Carteggio*, Vol. II, No. 107.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 108.

of Francesco Salviati,<sup>1</sup> and describes his own bravery on this occasion. It happened that the Cardinal and his charge Ippolito had left the city to confer with their ally, the Duke of Urbino, commanding the troops of the League opposed to the Emperor; and during their absence the Florentines seized the Palazzo della Signoria (the Palazzo Vecchio), and passed a decree condemning the Medici to exile. But they forgot that the Duke of Urbino was accompanied by his army. Before the day was out the city had been retaken and siege laid to the Palazzo, the defenders of which employed themselves in hurling stones (a supply being always kept on the roof with a view to these amenities of Florentine life) at the attacking party. One of these stones struck Michelangelo's statue of David, breaking one arm into three pieces. Vasari, who had crept into safe hiding somewhere near the Ponte Vecchio as soon as ever the trouble began, relates how the fragments lay there unheeded for three days, and how at the end of that period "the two boys went into the Piazza amid all those armed men, and without so much as a thought for the danger they ran, snatched up the pieces of the arm." The heroism of this exploit would win our unstinted admiration, were it not that the effect is spoilt by the supplementary information given by Varchi. It is clear from his account that after the first day of the tumult the Piazza della Signoria was held by troops belonging to the Medicean faction, and that all who were known to be partisans of the family were free to come and go at their pleasure.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Vite*, Vol. VII, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> David remained with but one arm until the end of 1543, when, under orders from Cosimo, the broken limb was replaced and secured

When at last Rome fell, and the Pope himself lay a helpless captive in the Castel Sant' Angelo, the opportunity which the Florentines had long sought for arrived. They assembled in overwhelming numbers, and issued an edict condemning the late tyrants to exile; "and at eleven o'clock on Friday morning [May 17th, 1527] the Medici asked that they might be allowed to depart, and prayed the Signoria to give them two citizens as an escort and guarantee of good faith: and at midday, or rather, about one o'clock in the afternoon, the Legate (Cardinal Passerini) and Ippolito left the Palazzo and went out along the highway through the Porta San Gallo towards Poggio, desiring to be taken thence with a sufficient guard to Massa in Lunigiana."<sup>1</sup> A Republic was established, which was only overthrown in 1530 after Florence had suffered a terrible siege at the hands of the Medici and their allies.

Vasari was obliged to provide for himself; and, unlike Michelangelo and Cellini, both of whom were as ready to find employment during war as in times of peace, he showed no desire to share the fortunes of either Florence or the Medici. To make matters worse, the plague broke out in Florence, and spread death and terror throughout the length and breadth of the state. It is difficult in this twentieth century, with our enlightened legislation for the preservation of the public health and the high efficiency of the

with bronze dowels. There is a reference to this in a letter from Pierfrancesco Riccio, at one time tutor to Cosimo, dated November 7th, 1543. "People round about," he says, "have been putting in their spare time watching the erection of a hoarding around the colossal David. It is being done so that his poor old arm may be mended, but most people think he is going to have his face washed." Archivio di Stato di Firenze, *Carteggio Universale*, filza 363, c. 419.

<sup>1</sup> *Ragguagli delle Cose di Firenze dal 1524 al 1530*. Cod. Magliab., XXV, 570.

medical profession, to imagine what an outbreak of this scourge meant four hundred years ago. All who were able to do so escaped from the infected districts, while the usual form of government was temporarily superseded by an emergency council whose powers were practically unlimited. In Florence seven-eighths of the shops were shut, and the few tradesmen who still carried on business prevented customers from entering their premises by placing an iron grating across the doorway. Payment was received in a wooden or iron bowl and immediately thrown into a jar of water to prevent contamination. The inhabitants only went out at night, and even then they carried in one hand a ball of evil-smelling disinfectant, holding it to their noses until they were nearly stifled. Should a miserable individual happen to meet an acquaintance during his nightly prowling, his first words were usually: "For God's sake don't come near me: let us speak at a distance!" And as soon as he returned home he treated himself internally or externally with a decoction made from the nettle plant to ward off evil results. And when he felt the grip of the disease upon him he was obliged to lie untended till death took him or to submit to the quackeries practised by blacksmiths, cobblers and other ignorant fellows, as all the doctors had fled as soon as the disorder manifested itself.

Among the first victims of the scourge was Antonio Vasari, the father of Giorgio, who died in August, 1527, leaving a widow and six children to be provided for. Giorgio, the eldest, was only sixteen years old. He was immediately recalled by his uncle to Arezzo, where he spent the time of enforced idleness in painting different subjects in fresco for the peasants of the neighbourhood.



It is unnecessary to dwell on these early attempts, done before he had begun to handle colours in earnest, or on the "half-length figures of Sta. Agata, San Rocco and San Sebastiano" for the Servite monks of Arezzo. When there came a lull in the ravages of the plague he ventured back to Florence at the urgent instance of Francesco Salviati, and the two together, with Nannoccio da San Giorgio, worked for two years under the care of Raffaello dal Brescia. In 1529, finding his ears deafened by the clang of the armourer's hammer, and the city full of warlike preparations against the advancing armies of the Pope and Charles (who had not only become reconciled, but were acting in concert for the purpose of wresting Florence from Niccolò Capponi), Vasari again found it expedient to remove elsewhere.

He retired to Pisa, where, believing himself out of reach of the strife, he took service with the goldsmith Manno, of whom mention has already been made. We may believe that he set about his new work with his accustomed seriousness and attention, though we are not especially told so. The information concerning these years is scanty in the extreme, and very often self-contradictory. We know that at the end of four months he gave up all thought of becoming a goldsmith and left Pisa in order to return to Arezzo; and we are reluctantly compelled to suggest that his hasty flight was again due to the uncomfortable proximity of the opposing forces to Pisa. Vasari slipped away as soon as ever he found fresh danger threatening him; and as the route through Florence had, under the circumstances, no attractions for him, the discreet and wary youth decided to go home some other way. He might have gone through Siena, but that city had placed herself under the protection of

Charles in 1524, and it was not unlikely that fighting would be in progress there as well as in Florence. Finally he decided to make a grand *détour* and reach Arezzo by way of Modena and Bologna, entailing a journey of two hundred and seventy-six miles, in order to reach a place which actually lay a hundred and five miles distant.

The journey must have been exceedingly tedious, and from the circumstances in which Vasari was placed, and the mountainous nature of parts of the road, was probably accomplished mostly on foot. He reached Bologna towards the end of 1529, and to his complete satisfaction found that everyone there was engaged in preparing for the reception of Charles V. who was shortly to be crowned in that city by the Pope. Vasari found work to do, and remained to witness the coronation ceremony, which took place amid a scene of great pomp on February 24th, 1530. Shortly afterwards he hurried away to Arezzo, being anxious to hear how things had prospered during his long absence. His uncle had meanwhile assumed control of the slender possessions of the family, and Giorgio learnt on his arrival that his interests had been so well looked after as to promise him a fair competence in the future.

In other directions, however, there were fresh troubles to be faced. Vasari's brother, a lad of only thirteen, was carried off by the plague while fighting with the army before Florence; and the painter himself experienced the utmost difficulty in finding work to do, owing to the unsettled state of the neighbourhood. At length he was employed by the Abbot of San Bernardo to paint two pictures, and this was followed by a further commission for some frescoes, which were to be done in the square porch of

the church.<sup>1</sup> While he was thus engaged Ippolito de' Medici visited Arezzo, and finding that his former school-companion had fallen on evil days, told him that he was to join him in Rome as soon as the frescoes were completed.

No invitation could have been more welcome. The Medici were in full power. Ippolito had been created a Cardinal in 1529 during the illness of the Pope, so that in the event of Clement's death the family might still have a representative in Rome and a voice in the conclave. As a consequence Vasari had every reason to view the approaching visit to Rome with high anticipation, and the finishing touches were joyfully put to the work in Arezzo. Towards the end of 1531 Giorgio set out to enter the service of the Medici for the second time.

To complete his satisfaction he found in Rome Francesco Salviati, with whom he had worked under Bandinelli in Florence and rescued the broken arm of the David, and the friendship already begun ripened into a lifelong comradeship which only ceased with the death of Salviati in 1563.

During this stay in Rome the two young men were inseparable, sketching and measuring the mighty ruins of the city with exemplary perseverance, and seizing the opportunity when the Pope was out a-riding of entering the private apartments of the Vatican and there sketching and painting in hot haste to finish before the Pope and his suite should return. Then, as a light recreation, they studied anatomy together, not in a school or by means of models and skeletons, but, as Vasari tersely puts it, "up in the cemetery." Salviati turned his

<sup>1</sup> These early frescoes, the four Evangelists and God the Father, still exist. They are very crude, but more vigorous than his later works.

attention to these things because his tastes lay in that direction, and Vasari partly for the same reason, but chiefly because there was ever present in his mind the urgent need of providing for his widowed mother and his little brother and sisters. The burden laid upon his shoulders by the death of his father became the ruling factor of his life, and in his self-sacrificing generosity he scarcely so much as thought of himself until his sisters were either married or received into convents and his one surviving brother apprenticed to a notary. Vasari entered into his new life full of determination to make the most of his opportunities: he tells us that he and Salviati used to spend long days sketching the monuments of bygone splendour scattered throughout the city, with nothing but a crust of bread to cheat their hungry stomachs; and at sunset, after supper, each would criticise the other's work, and sit copying his companion's drawings until the night was far spent. Yet with all this toil Giorgio was very happy, and it was with mingled feelings that he wrote home, comparing his present well-being with the years spent in nightmare wanderings during the exile of the Medici.

"I do not know how to thank you, Signor Cavaliere," he says, writing to Niccolò Vespucci shortly after his arrival in Rome, "for your kindly interest in my affairs, and for enabling me to return to the same position which it was my good fortune to hold in your house four years ago, at a time when my father, of blessed memory, was spending the greater portion of his substance on me in Florence, hoping that in spite of my tender age a sense of filial piety and a desire to assist him in bearing the burden of educating three small sisters and two brothers, all younger than myself, would produce in

me a steadiness beyond my years." He refers to his former wanderings, and lifts a corner of the veil which has fallen over the events of 1527 and the succeeding years. "You already know," he continues, "how in August, 1527, the cruelty of the plague snatched my father from us; and how I, not being able to stay in the city, wandered through the country districts painting saints in the village churches." He draws a vivid comparison between the ease he enjoyed during his father's lifetime and the discomforts which had to be borne after his death, "until at last here in Rome I came once more into the service of the great Cardinal Ippolito de' Medici, as once before I had served him and his brother [*sic*] the Duke Alessandro."<sup>1</sup> "I find his lordship more inclined than ever not only to help and encourage my own unworthy self (*che sono un ombra*), but all who show any inclination to study. How much ought I, after thanking God, to give thanks to you, *Signor mio onorato?*" He tells Vespucci that he is anxious to be among those who earn pensions, "piombi," and the other splendid rewards which art offers to her votaries, and goes on to say that since his arrival in Rome two months ago he has been given suitable rooms and an attendant. He has also received an entirely new wardrobe, and evidently thinks a great deal of himself as he struts about Rome, conscious that he is favoured by the Medici. His head is just a little, ever so little, turned for the moment, and already in imagination he sees himself filling some honourable post at court. This we gather from his mention of the "Piombi" and other offices. ✓

The post of "Frate del Piombo"<sup>2</sup> fell vacant to-

<sup>1</sup> They were not brothers, but cousins, though both were illegitimate.

<sup>2</sup> This lucrative appointment could only be held by a priest or friar,

wards the end of 1531, and Sebastiano Viniziano received the appointment, donning the monastic habit without hesitation, and settling down to enjoy the emoluments of his office in much the same frame of mind as a former Pope who had received the news of his election with the words: "Since God has given us the Papacy, let us proceed to enjoy the same."

Vasari was probably acquainted with Sebastiano, and it would be too much to suppose that the young painter was proof against the corruptness of the age, or was less of a time-server than others of his generation. Sebastiano's letter to Pietro Aretino announcing his good fortune accurately mirrors the spirit which prevailed in Rome at the time. It is dated December 4th, 1531.<sup>1</sup> "Dearest Compare," he writes, "I dare say you are wondering at my neglect and at the time I have allowed to pass without a letter. The reason is that I have not anything to write about. Now that his Holiness has made a friar of me you must not in the least suppose that my 'brother'-dom has spoilt me, or that I am no longer the same old Sebastiano, painter and jolly good fellow I used to be. I am sorry, though, not to be with all my bosom friends and companions so as to enjoy with them what God and our patron Pope Clement have given me. I don't suppose I need tell you the which and the why and the how it

and whoever was elected had to adopt the monastic habit. The duties of the *Frate* were to affix the leaden seals to the papal briefs. Benvenuto Cellini, among others, was a candidate when the post fell vacant at the death of Fra Mariano; and he gives a diverting account of his interview with the Pope. As soon as he preferred his request Clement replied: "The place you ask for is worth eight hundred crowns a year, so that were I to give it to you, you would never do any work but spend your days in idleness, pampering your body." Cellini answered: "A really good cat mouses better on a full stomach than on an empty one."

<sup>1</sup> Given in Bottari's *Raccolta*, Vol. V, No. 65.

all came to pass (*in che modo, e che, e come*). Our mutual friend Messer Marco will tell you the whole story without your having to ask for it. Enough that I am *Frate Piombatore* in the place of Fra Mariano. So—long life to Pope Clement, say I!

“I wish to goodness you had listened to me.<sup>1</sup> Patience, brother mine! I was sure, and more than sure that I was right all the time, and you see now that the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Tell Sansovino that in Rome we don't fish as he does in Venice for eels and that sort of thing, but for offices, Cardinals' hats, leaden seals and such like. I don't want to run my native city down; but I do want to remind Sansovino, and you too, of what is to be had in Rome for the asking. Remember me in a 'friar'-ly sort of way to our comrade Titian and to the others, not forgetting our musical friend Giulio.”

We need not wonder if, with a family to keep, Giorgio's mouth watered to see positions of importance given away according to the whim of those in power. He pursued his studies without intermission, and seems to have made rapid progress. His serious artistic training, indeed, dates only from this period, and it is worthy of note that with all his admiration for Michelangelo, and the fulsome flatteries to be found in the Life of his hero, he nowhere claims to be his pupil, though without question he was one of his most ardent followers. “I may say,” he remarks in the Autobiography, “that the ease of mind and the studies I made at this period were the chief and most important preceptor in art that ever I had . . . while the friendly rivalry of so many youths of my

<sup>1</sup> Sebastiano had tried in vain to persuade Aretino and Jacopo Sansovino to follow his own example and to come to Rome on the look out for sinecures.

own age—most of whom are now pre-eminent in our art—proved an incentive to further progress.”<sup>1</sup> Already he had begun his first painting, representing Venus and the Three Graces, and both the Cardinal and Pope Clement took a real or simulated interest in it. Giorgio was completely happy, and in writing the story of his own life thirty or more years later he loves to linger over the recital of every little incident. The haze of distance has converted it all into a golden dream. Those were brave days when he painted that first picture of the Three Graces; when the young Cardinal and the Pope himself used to come in and watch his facile brush at work, laughing at the saucy little peeping faun he had placed in the corner of the picture! He looks back with pride to the delighted surprise with which Ippolito first saw that peering sprite spring out of the canvas to gaze covertly upon the beauty of the Three, and tells us that his young master forthwith commissioned him to paint the *Battle of the Satyrs* and to fill it with imps of like fashioning to this naughty elf. And still carried away by his theme he relates how the Cardinal was obliged to accompany the expedition into Hungary against the Turks, leaving his protégé to finish the two pictures under the direct care of the Pope; and that Clement instructed his *maestro di camera* to take especial charge of him and see that he was provided for. He was to be allowed to go to Florence for the summer, if he so desired, and serve Duke Alessandro.

This is the version he gives in the Autobiography, but unfortunately for the veracity of the historian, his contemporary letters, which consequently are not affected by the glamour of time, tell another story.

<sup>1</sup> *Vite*, Vol. VII, p. 653.



From a letter to Ottaviano de' Medici,<sup>1</sup> dated June 13th, 1532, it is clear that the Cardinal left Giorgio in the charge of his own major-domo Domenico Canigiani, and had written a letter to Alessandro de' Medici (who had been elected Duke of Florence in 1532) asking him to receive Vasari into his service.

1532

If the painter was sorry to leave Rome, it was chiefly because he held a comfortable billet there. "It is most annoying," he says, "that as soon as I begin to earn a little money he [the Cardinal] has to go away with all his suite to fight the Turks in Hungary"—but he evidently thought that the change to the court of Florence was no great hardship.

However, he had still the two pictures to finish, and was detained by them until the middle of summer in Rome, where long hours of solitude and hard work,<sup>2</sup> coupled with the fever-breeding heat of the city, brought on a serious illness. He gave himself up for dead, and devoted what he believed were his last moments to preparing himself for the next world. As his condition rapidly changed from bad to worse, it was decided to transport him to Arezzo in a litter, and there, after two relapses, he slowly recovered.

Before the departure of Ippolito, Vasari had been in the habit of visiting his young patron every day to show him some new drawing or fresh evidence of progress; and in a letter to Bishop Giovio, dated

<sup>1</sup> Ottaviano was directly descended from Averardo I, founder of the family fortunes, through his son Jovenco, from whom Ottaviano was fifth in direct male descent. He was born in 1482 and died in 1546. He married (1) Bartolomea Giugni, (2) Francesca Salviati, and (3) Lucrezia de' Medici. His son Alessandro, born in 1535, became Pope Leo XI in 1605.

<sup>2</sup> According to one of his letters, he used to work all day and far into the night, keeping his eyes open by the singular device of anointing them with lamp-oil.

September 4th, 1532, he shows plainly that it was the interest taken in him by those of high estate which gave him his chief impetus. “My aspirations are not so great now, as I am assailed by a feeling of melancholy. I am less ambitious and eager than I used to be, as I have nobody to encourage and stimulate me as the most reverend Cardinal used to do.” “I know that the Cardinal has been told that I am dead; but after reading this you will be able to persuade him that I am still alive and, what is more, that I have done the enclosed drawing, which I ask you to give my most reverend Signore—more as a token of my service than for any other reason.” He is improving in health, and expresses his belief that “God looked down and saw the virgin purity of those three little girls, the innocence of the boy, the mother’s grief at his condition, and the misfortunes of their whole house.”

Towards the end of October he was well enough to proceed to Florence, and there he remained until the terrible tragedy enacted on January 5th, 1537, threw him once more into the midst of uncertainties and sent him wandering anew throughout Italy.

During his stay in Florence Giorgio made further progress in his art, and received some important commissions from the Duke. He was admitted to the *Compagnia dei Pittori Fiorentini* in the same year, his name appearing in the Registro as “Giorgio d’antonio di maestro Lazzaro Vasari”; and was placed under the care of Ottaviano de’ Medici, for whom he seems to have cherished a strong affection, and to whom he refers in the Autobiography in glowing terms. At this time he painted the portrait of Lorenzo the Magnificent, now in the Uffizi Gallery, from the contemporary materials



*Giorgio Vasari*

LORENZO DE' MEDICI  
(Florence: Uffizi Gallery, No. 1269)

*Brogi*



available, and one of Alessandro; following up these efforts with what purports to be a copy of Andrea del Sarto's *Sacrifice of Abraham*. The history of this work will serve to illustrate Vasari's desire to satisfy his patrons, whatever the cost might be, and shows the length to which he was prepared to go in a mistaken endeavour to keep his promises. It happened that the original work had already been removed from Florence; but Vasari, having overcome a somewhat natural dismay at this discovery, set to work to reproduce as much of it as he could remember, and to supply the rest from his own imagination. If he did not satisfy his employers, and on this point we are not informed, he was himself quite pleased with the result; and writing to Antonio de' Medici (February, 1533) he says: "If you think I have not given Abraham enough of that loving spirit, that fervour and readiness to obey the will of God while consummating the sacrifice, your lordship and Messer Ottaviano must forgive me. I know perfectly well how it ought to look, and if I have not given him the proper expression it is just because, being young and a beginner, my hand is less able to obey than my mind to dictate; and my judgment and experience are not yet perfect." The pseudo-modesty of that "not yet" is one of the chief indications of character to be noticed throughout all his writings and correspondence; and it is emphasised further on in the same letter: "Daily improving in one thing and another: perhaps the time will come when it will not be necessary for me to apologise at all for my work." That time, according to Vasari, came, as we shall see.

## CHAPTER II

### ALESSANDRO DE' MEDICI

Caterina de' Medici—Government of Alessandro—Fortezza da Basso—Vasari's early works in the Palazzo Vecchio—*Annunciation* for the "Murate"—Visit of Charles V to Florence—Preparations for Alessandro's wedding—His assassination—Election of Cosimo de' Medici.

THE betrothal of Caterina de' Medici, sister of the Duke, to the young Prince, afterwards King Henri II of France, threw the whole Florentine court into a state of bustle and confusion in 1533. The future queen was only fourteen years of age, and had endeared herself to all the servitors and friends of the Medici. Vasari, a lad of twenty-two, was one of her admirers in an humble way, and was no doubt secretly rejoiced at the prospect of special opportunities for seeing her which suddenly opened up when the Duke ordered him to paint her portrait. She proved to be a somewhat troublesome sitter, but the artist's regard for her makes him wonderfully tolerant of her pranks. "I adore her," he says in a letter to Carlo Guasconi, "if I may be allowed to say so, as I do the saints of Paradise. I can't paint her affability, so I must write about it instead. One morning last week I had been painting away at her picture right up to dinner time, and when I came back I was surprised to find her sitting up at my easel absorbed in making a blackamoor of herself as terrible as thirty live devils rolled into one (*che pareva il trenta diavoli vivo vivo*); and if I had not

taken to my heels and escaped downstairs she would undoubtedly have done the same to me.”<sup>1</sup> His head is full of the little duchess, and as his friends in Florence are too busy to listen to his chatter, he pours out his feelings on paper in the seclusion of his own little room, which is over the gateway and looking into the courtyard of the Convento de' Servi, “where, as it is Saturday morning, all the mendicant cripples and blind folk are telling their beads and praying hard in the hope of receiving alms; making such a din that I can hardly think, and have had the greatest difficulty in stringing these few words together.”

It has already been said that Alessandro de' Medici had been installed as Duke of Florence in 1532; and it is necessary, before proceeding further, to examine more closely into the state of affairs prevailing in the city at this period. Alessandro obtained from the Emperor, Charles V, an imperial patent confirming his title, and though it was expressly stipulated therein that the Florentines were to enjoy the same liberty as under the previous Medicean rulers, the co-existence of a Duke and a Republic within the same circuit of walls was obviously impossible. Clement VII obtained from the Emperor fresh privileges for his kinsman, and before long the whole government was gathered into the hands of the *gonfaloniere*—a post which Alessandro as Duke of Florence himself held—and of three Senators, who were changed every three months. The old Signoria was suppressed and the Republic actually destroyed by this means, but for a while the Florentine nobility gave no sign of dissatisfaction and brooded in silence over their wrongs. Alessandro,

<sup>1</sup> This picture has disappeared.

in imitation of the Roman Emperors and of former Medicean rulers, endeavoured to enlist the favour of the people by amusing them with pageants and festivities, and corrupted their already doubtful morals by the infamous example of his own dissolute mode of life. "In feates of love and chaunge of women was his special delite," remarks an old writer: and he neglected business for the pursuit of his licentious pleasures, seeming to regard his high office only as a means by which to gain his own ends. Such a condition of things was not likely to continue indefinitely, and though the culminating tragedy was deferred for a little while, difficulties, doubts, and dim terrors began to assail the Duke. The disaffection spread even to his own family. His enemies found a capable leader in the person of Cardinal Ippolito, who considered, not without reason, that the position held by Alessandro was his by right. Indeed, in the days before their expulsion in 1527 it had been Ippolito who held the headship of the family in Florence, and Varchi, in his *Istoria Fiorentina*, speaks of him as the "Magnifico Ippolito," generally omitting all mention of Alessandro. They were of about the same age, but Ippolito, as the son of Giuliano—albeit illegitimate—was more closely related to the Pope than his rival. While Alessandro was dissolute and tyrannical, Ippolito, according to Varchi, was full of grace and goodness—affable, generous, and benevolent towards all who showed themselves worthy of his favour. In direct contrast to the unpleasant features of Alessandro, who had a long, thin, and prominent nose, heavy lips, and the black curly hair common to his mother's race, the Cardinal, we are told, was "exceedingly handsome and pleasant





*Titian*

*Broggi*

IPPOLITO DE' MEDICI  
(Florence: Pitti Gallery, No. 201)



to look upon." Such was the opponent who now arose to test the stability of Alessandro's new office.

The Cardinal opened up negotiations with the most violent of Alessandro's enemies, and it at once became evident that he intended to remove his kinsman and to add the title of Duke to his ecclesiastical dignity. Alessandro was terrified, and in feverish haste fortified all the towns in his dominion, and began the erection of the Fortezza da Basso in Florence itself.

Of these events Vasari was a witness, and though he rarely refers to current topics, he has left an entertaining account of the laying of the foundation stone of this fortress in a letter to Pietro Aretino. It is dated July 15th, 1534.<sup>1</sup>

After describing the early part of the ceremony, he says:—"Then I heard somebody describing how Peter and John were in Samaria working all sorts of wonderful miracles and laying hands on many, who thereby received the Holy Spirit. This finished, the trombones struck up the 'Veni Sancte Spiritus'; then came the Gospel, and after that the Creed, over

<sup>1</sup> Lapini, *Diario*, in his entry for December 5th, 1535, says that at that date the walls were nearly finished. A more extensive notice is given by Varchi, who supplements Vasari by telling us that the first stone was laid "with due observation made of the aspect of the stars, the same being drawn up by *maestro* Giuliano Buonamici of Prato, who in those days was a famous and learned astrologer. The design was made by Pierfrancesco da Viterbo, a celebrated architect of the period; and the work was begun and pushed forward with much solicitude and diligence, for Duke Alessandro went every day to mark its progress and to urge the men to fresh efforts" (Varchi, *Istoria Fiorentina*, Lib. XIV, cap. 19). The foundations were begun in the previous May, on the site of the Porta a Faenza, much of the necessary money being lent by Filippo Strozzi, then a fervent adherent of the Medici, but who afterwards went over to their enemies and died—not without very grave suspicions of foul play—a prisoner in the fortress he had helped to build.

which they made much more noise than you would hear on the Ponte Vecchio round a basket of tench even in Lent! When the Cantors had finished they began again with the Versicles, and at last we got to the Preface with so many ceremonies that I began to see that I should end up by eating both dinner and supper in one." He conquered his growing hunger, however, and remained until the ceremony was over. The Elevation of the Host was the signal for a military display not altogether unlike the pageants of to-day. Suddenly "the captains began to come upon the scene, wearing the most superb arms and armour you ever saw, and reminding me of the Triumph of Scipio after the Second Punic War. They went by in fours, and then opened out on the left, turning their backs to the east, while in their train came forty pieces of artillery, each drawn by four pairs of oxen, the cannon being brand new and bearing the ducal arms. They came up on magnificent carriages, and were decorated with olive branches, while behind them arrived several ammunition waggons loaded with balls. Here and there were mules carrying barrels of powder and other instruments of war—enough to make Mars himself turn pale and shake with fear. As a matter of fact, I saw more than one white face in the crowd, for it seemed like an intimation that the bit and curb-rein were being got ready for certain folk who had hitherto been in the habit of pulling the check-string themselves." At the moment of the Elevation "there was such a din of artillery, mixed with the blare of trumpets, the noise of arquebuses and shouts, that I quite thought Heaven and earth were tumbling about my ears. Then all the horses began to neigh in an ecstasy of terror, and it was an hour

before the smoke cleared away and we were able to see each other's faces again."

It will be remembered that Giorgio had painted a portrait of his patron, and we have now to add that it gave complete satisfaction. As a result, Alessandro wrote to Ippolito to ask that the young painter might be allowed to remain in Florence in order to complete the decorations in the Medici palace, which had been begun during the pontificate of Leo X by Giovanni da Udine.<sup>1</sup> Vasari was already in receipt of a salary of six crowns a month with board, "and a servant, with lodging and other conveniences"; but for this new undertaking he was to receive in addition the marriage portion of his eldest sister. With a joyful heart he wrote to tell his "orphaned, unfortunate, needy and helpless family" the good luck that had befallen him; at the same time, and with characteristic despatch, asking his uncle to hunt out a suitable husband for his sister. The prospective bride was not consulted in the matter. The main factor in marriages in Italy was, and to some extent still is, the amount of the bride's dowry. Courtship consisted chiefly in comparing the worldly wealth of the respective fathers, and the proposal was made and accepted or rejected by them without the assistance of the young couple. If everything proved satisfactory, the prospective bride and bridegroom were informed

<sup>1</sup> Life of Giovanni da Udine, *Vite*, Vol. VI, p. 557. "There were four panels in the underside of the vaulting, each twelve *braccia* by six, which were not painted at that time. But many years later Giorgio Vasari, a young man of eighteen, who in 1535 was in the service of Duke Alessandro de' Medici . . . painted in them scenes from the Life of Julius Cæsar." It has already been pointed out that the "young man of eighteen" was born in 1511, and therefore must have been in his twenty-third year at the beginning of 1535. These scenes no longer exist. The portrait of Alessandro hangs in the *Tribuna* of the Uffizi.

of the arrangements made for their happiness, and duly plighted their troth. It will be seen, therefore, how great a task Vasari set himself when he resolved to provide for all three of his sisters.

Through the kind offices of Antonio Turini, a friend of Giorgio's father, it was arranged that the second sister should become a nun; and though the intending novice was expected to bring to the convent an endowment equivalent to a marriage portion, it was arranged, through the mediation of Turini, that Giorgio should paint a picture instead of paying down a sum of money. The news of this decision reached the artist while he was completing his work in the palace, and the satisfaction it brought finds full expression in a letter to the benevolent friend who had carried the negotiations to a satisfactory conclusion.

"The last letter received from you," he writes, "fills me with joy. Since my second sister desires to give herself to God I am quite willing that she should enter the Convent of the Murate; and I am grateful to you for having persuaded the nuns to accept my offer of a picture in lieu of a donation in money. What other friend would have exerted himself to ease the burden of another as you have done for me, when, weighed down by so many adversities, I was well-nigh worried into the grave!"

Vasari, who never wasted time, sat down at once with his usual impetuosity and made a first sketch for the work, enclosing it in the letter. The subject was the Annunciation, and he apologises beforehand for any faults which may be discovered in his drawing. "If the nuns," he writes, "being women, think that our Lady appears too frightened as the angelic salutation greets her ear, please remind them that

Gabriel especially told her *not to be afraid*. I have put in more than one angel, because such an ambassador, coming down to our earth with such a message of peace and liberation from the pains of hell, would never have been sent alone."

It was at this stage in his career that Vasari, observing that the Duke took an inordinate interest in building and works of fortification, turned his attention to the study of architecture, that branch of art in which he subsequently attained something of distinction.

Leaving Vasari for the moment living in the best of all possible worlds, it becomes necessary to trace the course of other events which sooner or later were to interfere with his happiness. Clement VII had died on September 25th, 1534, and on October 13th, Alessandro Farnese, that "prophaine skoffer," as Lithgow calls him, had succeeded him as Paul III. Ippolito de' Medici, nursing his designs against the Duke of Florence, had reason to hope for assistance from the new Pope; and to further his designs a deputation of Florentine exiles was despatched to the Emperor to lodge a series of complaints against Alessandro's tyrannous misgovernment, while the Cardinal expressed his willingness, backing his offer with a suitable gift in money, to take over the government of Florence and rule the State in a proper manner. Charles was just returning from the campaign against Barbarossa in Tunis, and Ippolito set out for Naples with the intention of meeting him there and offering his services in person. Then, suddenly, while on a visit to Giulia Gonzaga at Fondi, he was taken with a strange and unaccountable malady. That was on August 2nd, and three days later, immediately after partaking of some

chicken broth, his condition became worse. The seneschal, Giovan Andrea dal Borgo by name, was arrested, and after being put to the torture, confessed that he had poisoned his master. It was too late, however, to remedy the evil; for in five days more the Cardinal breathed his last, dying, to all appearances, from a slow fever. It is, of course, easier to attribute the sudden death of a man in such a position to the machinations of his enemies than to prove it: but Ippolito was a dangerous rallying point for the opponents of the Duke, and such an assumption is entirely consistent with the character of Alessandro and the political morality of the period. The deputation, however, fulfilled its mission, and Alessandro was summoned before the Emperor to answer the charges made against him. Whether he succeeded in rebutting these accusations, or what were the motives which actuated Charles on this occasion, are points on which opinions differ,<sup>1</sup> and the result of the trial—if such a farce may be dignified by that title—was to seat Alessandro more firmly than ever upon the ducal throne. He returned from Naples with many tokens of the imperial favour.

When peace had been established between the Emperor and the Pope in 1529, after the sack of Rome, the Emperor had promised the hand of his

<sup>1</sup> "The Duke replied to the accusations of the Florentines as best he might: but whether it was due to the money which had been paid to the imperial ministers which produced those satisfactory results which it usually does, or that the Emperor, finding himself on the verge of another Italian war, thought it better for his own interests to have a single ruler in Florence, and one who was dependent on himself rather than a council of many persons at feud amongst themselves and inclined to give their support to the French, as were the Florentines, it is certain that he gave his judgment in favour of the Duke, and renewed his supreme position in Florence" (Muratori, *Annali*, sub. 1536.)



natural daughter Margherita, then a child of eight, to Alessandro. This agreement was renewed in Naples, and the Emperor further showed approval of his son-in-law elect by promising to visit him in Florence.

These events meant a fresh impetus to the arts in Florence and fresh opportunities for Vasari to distinguish himself. Couriers were despatched into Tuscany who rode at topmost speed, sparing neither themselves nor their horses in their anxiety to carry the tidings to Florence. No pains were to be spared in decorating the city so that the Emperor might be received with suitable magnificence. There are two accounts of these preparations in the *Lives of the Painters* from which, though they are mutually destructive, the truth may be extracted with some degree of probability. Vasari was not, however, as he seems to imply in the *Life of Tribolo*,<sup>1</sup> the contriver of the whole scheme of decoration. From his correspondence it appears that he was quietly at work upon the third of the four pictures in the Palace when the news arrived.

He immediately set himself to the new task with the greatest ardour, and believed that he would have no difficulty in finishing the portion allotted to him within the given time. But the favour with which he was known to be regarded by the Duke had made him unpopular with his fellow-artists, and they seized this opportunity of putting every imaginable obstacle

<sup>1</sup> "As I had to distribute the work to the various craftsmen under the orders of his Excellency," etc. (*Life of Tribolo*, Vol. VI, p. 67). In the letter to Raffaello dal Borgo mentioned below, he says that the Duke had given orders that "Luigi Guicciardini, Giovanni Corsi, Palla Ruccellai and Alessandro Cosini shall have charge of the arrangements, decorations and triumphal procession which are to do honour to his Majesty . . . He has also ordered these gentlemen to employ me."

in his path. The twenty assistants whose services he had engaged were, on one pretext or another, enticed away, and Giorgio, left entirely alone, was reduced to a condition verging on desperation. Perhaps the truth is, not that they were jealous of Giorgio, but that assistants were scarce and that his rivals offered better pay. Nevertheless, he had too much at stake to allow himself to be beaten, and accordingly wrote urgent letters to his friends imploring their help. Cristofano Gherardi, Stefano Veltroni (cousin of Giorgio), and Raffaello dal Borgo rallied round him and spared nothing in their efforts to annihilate time. How, after all, he succeeded in getting the work done and the signal mode in which the Duke expressed his thanks, are best described in Vasari's own words.

In the letter summoning Raffaello dal Borgo to Florence he entreats him to hurry as fast as horse will carry him, not "stopping for boots, or spurs, or sword, or hat, as that will waste time" (March 15th, 1536). He has so much to do that the men who were to help him have taken fright—that is how he puts it—and though they absolutely refuse to continue their work, Luigi Guiccardini insists on its all being done by Vasari with such assistance as he can obtain. "So you can guess," he continues, "how badly I want your help in this breathless scramble. I should not have bothered you had not these workmen, fearing I should get the credit of their work, conspired against me, though they don't know that I see through their little game, saying that 'the horse of Arezzo wants to deck himself out in the skin of the Florentine lion.' And so, as a loving friend and a comrade in distress, I implore you to come over and lend a hand. I know you will

not fail me. . . . Besides, I want to show these good people that, although I am a beardless youth and small of stature to boot, I can do my duty to my lord without their aid. Dear, sweet and kind Raffaello, don't leave your Giorgio in the lurch !”

With the loyal assistance of his friends, and by dint of sticking at his work for five days and nights without rest, Vasari managed to get done within a few hours of the Emperor's arrival. Charles had lodged on the night of April 28th at the Certosa just outside Florence, whither Alessandro had accompanied him. “The same evening,” says Vasari, in a long and interesting letter to Aretino describing the procession,<sup>1</sup> “the Duke returned to Florence for the purpose of hurrying up the workmen so as to have all the statues, arches and decorations finished by eight o'clock in the morning. For this purpose he went over the whole course of the procession, giving the necessary instructions here, encouraging the men there, and all the while keeping his eye open to see whose work was the most satisfactory. I know this for a fact, because at seven o'clock on the following day when his Excellency set out mounted on his nag (*ronzino*), followed by all the court, to meet his Majesty at Certosa, he passed along the route so as to have another look at the statues and triumphal arches. Even then they were not all done. When he got to San Felice in Piazza, where I had erected a great façade, forty *braccia* high, with columns, pictures and other decorations (all of which I shall describe in the proper place), he found that the whole thing was quite finished. Well, he was struck with astonishment not only at the magnitude

<sup>1</sup> The letter seems to have been written on April 29th, the day of the Emperor's arrival.

of the work and the speed with which it had been accomplished but with the mastery of it all. He asked where I was, and learnt that, being half dead with fatigue, I had crept into a church and was asleep for very weariness on a bundle of green-stuff intended for the decorations. At this the Duke began to laugh, and told someone to fetch me immediately. I got up—blinking, sleepy, tired, and dazed as I was, and found him surrounded by his suite. When I came up he said: ‘Giorgio mine, this work of yours is larger, more beautiful, better executed and more speedily finished than that of anybody else. I see in it the proof of your devotion to my service, and before long the Duke Alessandro will know how to reward you for this and former works.’” After further remarks bearing a general resemblance to the copy-book maxims of our childhood, the Duke drew Vasari to him and kissed him on the forehead. “Then he continued his journey: and I felt all my faculties, which had deserted me on account of my tiredness and sleepiness, suddenly revive. I don’t think that a month of sleep would have refreshed me quite as much as the Duke’s words did.”

Alessandro kept his word, and that same day found time to see Giorgio again and to direct that in addition to four hundred ducats for his own work he was to receive the fines inflicted on the artists who had failed to carry out their promises. Vasari received about seven hundred ducats in all, and provided for his sister out of this money instead of waiting until the pictures in the palace were completed. It is indicative of his intensity of purpose that he should have devoted his ducats to this end instead of keeping them for himself; and, as

## PREPARATIONS FOR MARGHERITA 35

after events proved, it was a fortunate thing that he did so. Although he was blissfully ignorant of the future, the time was rapidly approaching when he would again be a wandering outcast. It was not until four years later, after passing through many trials and disappointments, that he was in a position to provide for his third and last sister.

It is an unfortunate circumstance that most of Vasari's letters which were undoubtedly written at this period are undated, and consequently fail to supply all the information it would be desirable to have concerning the sequence of events. He speaks, as already noticed, of having been at work in the palace when instructions came to prepare Florence for the arrival of the Emperor, and says that as the Sala was required for the occasion he was obliged to cover up the blanks in the ceiling by nailing his cartoons in the empty panels. The bride-elect, Margherita, does not seem to have accompanied her father on this visit, deferring her own triumphal entry into Florence until such time as suitable accommodation could be prepared for her. As soon as the Emperor had departed Vasari and his companions were ordered to rearrange the whole of the palace of Ottaviano de' Medici and to add a new wing to it, besides carrying out all the necessary preparations for the reception of the august visitor. We have Vasari's word for it that the splendour of his achievements at this critical moment struck dumb all beholders. The whole of the new wing was completed in only four weeks, "and Tribolo, Andrea di Cosimo and I finished both the decoration of the house and all the preparations for the wedding in ten days; aided

by about ninety (!) sculptors and painters of the city, counting pupils and masters.”<sup>1</sup>

Since the days when Vasari had painted the portrait of the little Duchess Caterina he had left his lodging in the convent of the Servi and gone to live in the palace of Ottaviano de' Medici. All the occupants of the palace were now obliged to turn out at a moment's notice to make room for the bride; and at least one member of the household, namely Madonna Francesca, deeply resented having to give up her own home at the command of the Duke. So much may be gathered from Vasari's letter to Francesco Rucellai, written in May, 1536:—"Your rooms, mine—in fact, everybody's rooms—are being turned out so as to accommodate her Excellency. Messer Ottaviano has decided to take us all to the Spedale di Lelmo.<sup>2</sup> Who would have thought that in the middle of these rejoicings and festivities we should suddenly have to go into hospital, all of us! Madonna Francesca, his wife, is the only one who objects, and says she won't submit to it, as she is within a month of her confinement, and has prepared everything for a great reception to be given after the event to her relations and a host of the nobility. She has been obliged to give in; but she did it with a very bad grace." "Everything is going to be done on a magnificent scale for the ducal wedding," he adds, "and this very morning I had orders to paint all the *loggie* in Messer Ottaviano's house."

As the triumphal arches erected on the occasion of the imperial visit were still standing, for the climate

<sup>1</sup> Life of Tribolo, Vol. VI, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> Also known as the Ospedale di San Matteo. The Accademia now stands on its site.

of Italy is less unkind than our own, and flags may bear a few hours' exposure without much risk of ruin, there was not so much work to be done as on the former occasion, and Vasari found time to draw out the cartoons for a picture which was to be painted at Arezzo during the summer months. He seems, too, to have had leisure to complete the paintings in the Palazzo, as they are fully described in a letter written to Pietro Aretino about this period,<sup>1</sup> and ending with a characteristic outburst. "If Heaven grant me the strength, as you see it has given me the opportunity, do not doubt that I shall do the best I can, so that Arezzo, which so far as I have been able to discover has never produced an artist above the level of mediocrity, . . . shall break the ice (*rompere il ghiaccio*) with me."

Margherita entered Florence at the beginning of June, and Vasari, after waiting to witness the festivities, went away to Arezzo to pass the summer and to paint a picture already sketched out for the Compagnia di San Rocco; returning to Florence in the following September.

It is not to be supposed that the marriage of Alessandro in any way reformed his character. If possible he became worse, aided and abetted by Lorenzo, or Lorenzino, de' Medici, a distant kinsman in whom culture, madness and villainy were equally blended. His youth had been passed in Rome; but incurring the anger of Clement VII by an act of wanton vandalism, he was obliged to flee to Florence in order to escape the halter. In Alessandro he found

<sup>1</sup> Milanese, in Vol. VIII of the Sansoni Edition, places this letter as No. 12 and dates it 1534. This is obviously an error, for as we have already seen the work was still incomplete at the time of Charles's visit in April and May, 1536. It should come at least after No. 15.

a kindred spirit, and scarcely a day passed that the two did not indulge in some violent breach of morality, carrying shame into convents and the families of rich and poor alike. Even Florence, the Florence of the sixteenth century already tutored by Alessandro, was scandalised at the behaviour of her leading citizen.

Then came the grim tragedy which removed Alessandro for ever. Lorenzino, for reasons unknown, had resolved to compass the death of his boon companion, and accordingly, on Saturday night, January 5th, 1537, he laid a trap for his intended victim which was only too likely to succeed, and which in the careful preparation of all its details exhibited a diabolical degree of cunning.

There lived in the city a lady of whom Alessandro was more than usually enamoured, and this lady Lorenzino promised to bring to the Duke. The two men accordingly went to the apartments of Lorenzino, and there the Duke waited while his companion went to fetch the momentary possessor of his affections. He did not notice that Lorenzino picked up the sword he carelessly threw aside as he unbuckled his belt, nor that he tied the sword securely in its scabbard, replacing it in its former position: nor did he remark, as he lay expectant on the couch, exhausted with his daily excesses, that Lorenzino cast a look of savage satisfaction upon him before he went out.

Lorenzino shut the door silently and hurried away on his errand as Alessandro fell into a heavy slumber. His steps were directed, not to the dwelling of Leonardo Ginori, but to the hovel of a man who had become notorious as an assassin, and who went by the name of Scoronconcolo. With the same





*Giorgio Vasari*

ALESSANDRO DE' MEDICI  
(Florence: Uffizi Gallery, No. 1281)

*Alinari*



cunning that he had exhibited throughout his preparations, Lorenzino had engaged the services of Scoronconcolo without divulging the name of the person to be despatched. Varchi, who claims to have had his information from the murderers themselves, gives an account of the deed which at once fascinates and repels the reader with its vividness and horror.

“Brother,” said Lorenzino, approaching Scoronconcolo with a joyful countenance, “the time has come. I have shut up mine enemy in my chamber, and he sleeps.”

“Let us be quick, then,” replied Scoronconcolo, rising from his seat. The two men went out; and as they mounted the stairs leading to where the Duke lay sleeping Lorenzino turned round and said in a whisper:—

“Wait not to see if he be a friend of the Duke, but set your hand swiftly to the work.”

“I will not fail, even if it were the Duke himself.”

Lorenzino smiled and said:—

“That is the right view to take. Whoever it be, he cannot escape us now.”

Scoronconcolo signed to the other to go forward. Lorenzino lifted the latch, then let it fall again hesitatingly. He raised it a second time and went in. His eyes fell on the heaving form of the Duke, lighted only by the uncertain flickering of the log fire. Alessandro was either asleep, or feigning sleep. The murderer paused for a second and then said:—

“My lord, are you asleep?”

These words were accompanied by a cruel sword-thrust which pierced the Duke’s body through the middle, the weapon protruding a full span beyond. The blow, in itself mortal, roused the sleeping man,

who scrambled behind the bed endeavouring to ward off the strokes of his murderers with a stool. Resistance was in vain, yet Alessandro fought desperately for his life, uttering no sound. He struggled to the door with the hope of escaping: but Scoronconcolo stood there and struck him a terrible blow in the face with his dagger. Lorenzino seized him from behind and bore him down on the bed: and for fear of his crying out forced the dying man's mouth open and pushed two fingers down his throat. Alessandro bit him to the bone, and Lorenzino, stifling an involuntary cry of pain, called Scoronconcolo to his assistance. A wild struggle ensued, the two men fighting desperately on the blood-soaked bed, Scoronconcolo fearing to strike lest he should inadvertently wound his companion. At length the Duke grew faint with loss of blood, and Scoronconcolo ended his struggles with a thrust in the neck. The foul deed was accomplished, and Alessandro fell back lifeless, with his teeth still buried in Lorenzino's hand.

The body was lifted into bed and covered over. Lorenzino locked the door and put the key into his pocket. At midnight, having by means of a subterfuge obtained permission to leave the city, the assassins took horse and set out for Venice, arriving there forty-eight hours later.

Thus ended the rule of the elder branch of the Medici. Alessandro, himself of illegitimate birth, left only an illegitimate son, Giulio, of whom we catch glimpses from time to time. After the murder of his father he was removed from Florence and brought up in seclusion. When Cosimo de' Medici founded the Order of the Cavalieri di Santo Stefano in 1561 he was appointed Admiral-in-Chief.

of the galleys belonging to the Order. Montaigne, in his *Journal du Voyage en Italie*, describes how he met him in 1581 at Pisa, where he was then residing. "He is an old man, and I chanced to see him. He lives at his ease on the bounty of the present Duke and takes no part in public affairs, being content to amuse himself with the excellent hunting and fishing to be enjoyed in the neighbourhood."

The tragedy which had occurred was not immediately discovered, and it seems strange that although the Duke's absence was noticed no definite steps were taken to find out what had happened. It was known, however, that Lorenzino had left the city at dead of night, riding post; and this fact, coupled with the non-appearance of Alessandro, gave rise to great uneasiness. Cardinal Cybo and the leading Florentines decided to keep their misgivings to themselves, but took the precaution of filling the city with soldiery.

When the door of Lorenzino's chamber was at last forced open and the body of the Duke discovered the Council of the Quarantotto was hastily called together; and while all agreed on the single point of keeping the murder secret, on all others the forty-eight members held, as Varchi remarks, forty-eight opinions. The widowed Duchess took refuge in the Fortezza da Basso.

On the following Wednesday, January 9th, the news was made public, and Cosimo was elected, not at first Duke of Florence, but head of the State, his election being precipitated by the threats of the soldiery, who, we are told, had surrounded the Medici Palace in Via Larga (where the Quarantotto were assembled) and threatened to hurl the

councillors from the windows if they did not choose a duke without further delay.<sup>1</sup> Owing perhaps to the bond existing between the Medici and the all-powerful Emperor, there was no organised attempt to overthrow the Government, though the populace stood ready to rise if a leader should appear. The palaces of Cosimo and Lorenzino were sacked, but beyond this not unusual circumstance in Italian political procedure there was little disorder.

<sup>1</sup> Saltini, *Tragédie Medicee Domestique*, Introd. xviii.

## CHAPTER III

### CAMALDOLI

Vasari's despair—Visits to Camaldoli and works done there—Ottaviano de' Medici—Monte San Savino—Bologna—Vasari returns to Florence and begins afresh—Birth of Francesco de' Medici—Vasari visits Venice.

VASARI received the news of his patron's death with undisguised grief. For him it seemed to spell utter disaster, and he wrote immediately to inform his uncle that he was coming to Arezzo as soon as he could get away. His letter is a mixture of grief for his loss and fear for the safety of his own skin. "Here am I, respected Uncle," he writes (January 10th, 1537), "with all my worldly aspirations, the favours of fortune, the enthusiasm engendered by the confidence of a prince and the hoped for rewards of my labours snuffed out with a single breath. Duke Alessandro my patron lies dead, stretched upon the ground with his throat slit, like the beasts that perish, through the cruelty and envy of his cousin Lorenzo di Pier Francesco. In common with all his friends I bewail his terrible end. All his paid soldiers, all his guards and his fortresses have proved useless to ward off the stroke of a single sword or to undo the machinations of two secret and villainous traitors. At this moment I cannot, as many selfishly do already, think of the misfortune that has befallen myself. Courts like these must ever be a breeding place for adulators, seducers, deceivers and ruffians such as have brought

about not only the death of our Prince, but of all who, spurning God for worldly pleasures, come to the same dreadful end as his Excellency did last night.<sup>1</sup> I think the sands are run out for all us who served him. My mortification is the greater because Cardinal Ippolito de' Medici and Clement his uncle, whose patronage sent my ambition soaring high, have both been ruthlessly snatched away by death." So long as Vasari had a patron in Alessandro he does not seem to have missed these others, but when he likewise was taken the artist awoke to the uncertainty of court life. "Now that the veil has been torn from before my eyes I realise that in my godlessness I did not pause to think whither my steps would lead if I continued in this enslavement; nor did I see that though I might gain honour, fame and riches for my bodily part it would be paid for by the shame, unhappiness and infinite hurt of my immortal soul. Now—since death has broken the chains which once held me to this illustrious family—I am resolved to absent myself for a while from all courts, whether spiritual or temporal, believing that if I do so God will have the more compassion on me, seeing me wander from town to town, making the utmost of my little ability; beautifying the world, confessing His omnipotence and devoting myself to His holy service. I am convinced that if I do this, He who is the Providence of the birds and of the beasts will surely send me plenty of work, so that by the sweat of my brow I shall still be able to help both you and all my family, especially as I might have held the

<sup>1</sup> This at least appears to be the sense of Vasari's letter. He was evidently in a state of great agitation, and the letter is very much involved in places. It will be noticed that Vasari, in common with all the Florentines, was ignorant that the murder had been kept secret for three days.



same post as heretofore under Signor Cosimo de' Medici, elected Prince in his (Alessandro's) place." This is suspiciously like an attempt to make a bargain with the Almighty. Vasari is not certain what to do. He would go to Rome to continue his studies if it were not that he has still a picture to complete for the church of San Domenico. The city is in a condition of nervous unrest, and he begs his uncle to pray for his safe return to Arezzo. "I swear to you," he says, "that we retainers of the late Duke Alessandro stand in the greatest peril here in Florence. I have shut myself up in my own rooms and have dispersed my few belongings among my friends. As soon as the gates are opened I shall send them all to you."

It would be exceedingly difficult to say how much of Giorgio's sorrow was for the Duke and how much for himself. He would have venerated any man who bore the title of Duke of Florence, even were he ten times a greater scoundrel than Alessandro. Moreover, the murdered Duke had been capable of appreciating Vasari's merits and had made public recognition of his services on the occasion of Charles's visit. What more likely than that Vasari in return should have felt a degree of affection for his patron quite out of proportion to his deserts? The only place in which he expresses his opinion of the Duke is in the letter to Pietro Aretino; but this was written immediately after the memorable interview in Piazza San Felice when Alessandro had kissed him, and while the seven hundred ducats were still jingling in his pocket. Perhaps we should tone down the terms of this eulogy. With the impress of those coarse negro-like lips upon his forehead Giorgio writes: "He is truly worthy to be the

Prince not only of this city—which is the greatest in Tuscany—but of the whole of this unfortunate, miserable, weak and troubled Italy: for this doctor<sup>1</sup> alone is likely to be able to heal her sores.” How much reliance is to be placed upon Vasari’s judgment may be gathered from this one instance.

Whatever the real facts of the case may have been, it is clear that the murder of Alessandro was a great calamity for the painter, and altered the whole course of his life. The intention of keeping away from court life was rigidly adhered to; and Vasari not only became a recluse, but ran considerable risk of losing his reason, falling once more a prey to melancholia.

He returned to Arezzo as soon as his work in Florence was finished, and we gather from a letter written to a friend a month after the death of Alessandro that he had shut himself up in one room, ‘suffering so much with melancholia on account of the Duke’s death that his brain is almost affected.’<sup>2</sup> His condition of mind is reflected in his work—a *Deposition*, for the Compagnia del Corpus Domini—of which he says: “As I go on painting I ponder upon this divine mystery of the righteous Son of God, who was so cruelly done to death for our sins. It helps me to bear with my own grief; I am content to live in peaceful poverty now, and find that there is much consolation for my troubled spirit.” It was in vain that his friends in Florence urged him to come back to the court; Giorgio remained steadfast in his resolution. His correspondence shows

<sup>1</sup> The word here translated “doctor” is in the original “medico,” and is evidently a play upon the name of the Medici. The letter is that already quoted as having been written presumably on April 29th, 1536.

<sup>2</sup> *Vite*, Vol. VIII, Letter No. 20, to Baccio Rontini.

that he was glad to be free from the chains of his former bondage, the unkindness, the ingratitude and vain hopes of court life with all the deceits and flatteries which such service entailed. Then, too, he had still the duty to face of finding a husband for his sister, in addition to providing for his mother, his brother, and an aged uncle. He had no intention, as he artlessly expresses it, of serving "those whom poison or the dagger are likely to remove when most you have need of them." No: henceforth he resolved to court the favours of art alone, believing that in so doing he would give less offence to "God and the Eternal Future."<sup>1</sup>

It soon became apparent to Giorgio's friends that unless something were done to divert his attention from himself his reason was likely to be seriously, perhaps permanently, affected. He sat and moped alone, mewed up in his own room, 'shunning the society of his fellow men and the more intimate companionship of home life.' At length he allowed himself to be persuaded into paying a visit to Camaldoli, where it was hoped the mountain air would bring him to a more healthy frame of mind. It is highly probable, though not certain, that he went there first in July or August, 1537. The facts which lead us to this conclusion may be stated in a few words.

When Vasari left Florence and returned to Arezzo he had already in hand two pictures: one the *Deposition* already referred to, and the other a large canvas for the Compagnia di San Rocco. He mentions the former work in a letter of February, 1537, saying that he hopes to finish it soon. The San Rocco picture was finished in July of the same year, according to a letter written on the 6th of that month,

<sup>1</sup> Letter No. 23, July 6th, 1537.

and then Vasari began the redecoration of the chapel in which the picture was to be hung.<sup>1</sup> He had already made up his mind to go to Rome, where numerous friends offered him a welcome, and pressed forward with his work in order to escape from Tuscany and its bitter memories. So much is to be gleaned from the *Autobiography*. Then, he says, he went to Camaldoli in the hope of finding employment, probably, as already stated, in July or August, 1537; and there the "eternal solitude of that mountainous district and the quiet of that holy sanctuary" fell like balm on his troubled spirit.

The Hermitage of Camaldoli, founded by Romualdo at the beginning of the eleventh century, stands upon a lofty point in the Apennines known as the Campo Malduli, about thirty-five miles from Arezzo. The monastery, in the days of Vasari, seems to have been regarded somewhat in the light of a sanatorium; for Benedetto Varchi, the historian and poet, with many another illustrious Tuscan, was wont to ascend the steep path that leads to Camaldoli to rest from the fatigues of public life. One of Varchi's sonnets was penned in praise of this asylum:—

"Qual fu cor tanto debole ed infermo  
 . . . Che in questo silenzio alpestre ed ermo  
 Di mille abeti mille volte cinto  
 D'ogni cura mortal per sempre scinto  
 Non si rendesse a Dio costante e fermo?"

To this spot, "belted a thousand times by a thousand firs," Vasari went in accordance with the

<sup>1</sup> "Io ho finito la tavola di San Rocco e da questi uomini della Compagnia ho preso a fare la cappella e la facciata, con tutto l'ornamento. . . . Questo presto sarà finita." The chapel of San Rocco has long since disappeared, but two of Vasari's pictures illustrating scenes from the life of the Saint, and a fresco dealing with the same subject, are in the *Pinacoteca* at Arezzo.

wishes of his friends, and quickly began to recover. At the end of the second day there is already a change. "I begin to see," he writes, "what a mad folly was mine, and whither it was leading me. Up to the present I have spoken to five old men of about eighty, and it is astonishing to see how, old as they are, they get up in the middle of the night like so many boys, and set out each from his own little cell, braving the frosts and deep-lying snows, to walk the hundred and fifty paces which separate their dwellings from the church. They go to Matins and all their other sacred offices in the same spirit as anyone else would go to a wedding. Up here the very silence itself is so full of eloquence that I scarcely dare to breathe; the leaves of the trees seem afraid to rustle in the breeze, and the tiny rivulets racing from cell to cell along their wooden channels forget to brawl and disturb the peace of the hermitage."

The impression made on Vasari's mind by the simple life of these good men was strange. After the court life he had sighed for, then found wanting and unsatisfactory, it came as a surprise to see these cenobite monks with their frugality and rules of silence in full enjoyment of the contentedness he had vainly sought in a totally different sphere. Their dwellings were of the simplest sort. Each monk had a separate apartment, divided into three portions. In one of these stood a low couch covered by a straw pallet on which the recluse was obliged to sleep fully dressed. The second portion contained a few books and a desk, and was his study. The remaining portion formed the sitting-room and was furnished with a fire-place in which huge logs were kept burning night and day on account of the intense cold. Opposite there was a small window,

and under it a wooden shelf serving as a table when the hermit sat at meat. There was also a small recess containing an altar before which he spent a goodly part of the day in prayer and praise. Of comforts such as even the sixteenth century boasted there were none. The apartment was lined with boarding as a protection against the cold; and the various cells were knit together by a covered portico where the monk might sit to enjoy the air or meditate on the divine Mysteries, sometimes receiving a visit from another member of the confraternity when the rule of silence was in abeyance. When the brethren were "in retreat" they were allowed to speak no word, but lived totally apart, eating without question such food as the monks in charge of the kitchen placed upon the little shelf outside the door of each habitation. At such times if a brother found himself in need of salt or oil or some other commodity he placed the empty vessel on the shelf as a sign that he wished it to be replenished: but he was not allowed to speak.

A few days spent among the pine trees of Camaldoli served to soften the outline of the past and render it as a troubled dream but half remembered in waking hours. Vasari threw off his morbid repinings and began to hunger for work. The older church erected in 1203 had, in 1523, given place to a new structure which at the time of Giorgio's visit still lacked much of its internal decoration,<sup>1</sup> and the monks, though desirous of employing him, were afraid of his youthful appearance, and hesitated to give him the work. As he tells us in the *Autobiography*, he persuaded them to give him a trial,

<sup>1</sup> The monastery had been sacked in 1527, and untold damage done to the buildings.

and accordingly he set to work on a picture of the *Virgin and Child with SS. John Baptist and Jerome*. It occupied him for two months, but when finished it "gave great pleasure to the Fathers (or so they pretended) and himself"; and the same two months sufficed to show him how much more preferable were quiet and solitude than the "noises of cities and courts." As the winter months were approaching, and it was impossible to work in fresco during the long frosts at Camaldoli, Vasari returned to Arezzo when this picture was completed, having given a promise to go back in the following summer and decorate the remaining portion of the screen. He then seems to have finished his picture for the Compagnia di San Rocco, and we find him writing to Ottaviano de' Medici to say that he will come on a visit to Florence in obedience to Ottaviano's wishes. His stay lasted only a few days, and he had much difficulty in excusing himself for persistently refusing to enter the service of Cosimo. He held to his resolution of going to Rome, and the Autobiography states that he arrived in that city in February, 1538, having yielded to the importunities of Ottaviano only so far as to copy one of Raphael's pictures at his urgent request. He remained in Rome until the following June, and during that time, assisted by his pupil Giambattista Cungi dal Borgo, who had accompanied him, made more than three hundred drawings of important buildings, "robbing her (Rome) of all her most admirable possessions."<sup>1</sup> At the same time, to judge from the few fragments of correspondence which have been preserved, he carried on a vigorous

<sup>1</sup> *Vite*, Vol. VIII, Letter No. 21 (to Pietro Aretino), to which Milanese ascribes the date of November, 1537, without any very apparent reason. It seems more likely that it refers to the following year.

controversy with Ottaviano, who never ceased telling him to return to Florence. Ottaviano's letters are lost, but in one of them he evidently called Giorgio some very hard names, for the latter replies that he regards them as "a crown, not of laurel or myrtle, but of purest gold"; and he thanks the writer for these epithets, saying that he could receive no more flattering tribute. "I am determined to remain among these stones which have become living things in the hands of the masters of past days," he tells Ottaviano in another letter. "I am resolved to forget all the years that are past." "I prefer to be dead and buried in Rome, rather than alive anywhere else, where idleness, sloth and laziness do but blunt the edge of genius; making it lifeless and inert instead of bright and fertile."

It appears to have been while in Florence that he met Fra Bartolommeo Graziani and received instructions to paint the *Assumption* in the Monastery of Sant' Agostino at Monte San Savino, which was to prove one of his best works. The execution of this picture was, however, delayed until his return from Rome, but probably was begun before his second visit to Camaldoli. We know that he began the *Nativity* at Camaldoli during this summer (1538), and if we are correct in ascribing to his letter to Pietro Aretino the date of November, 1538, this must be the picture to which he refers as a "very large work which I have not been able to finish as the cold weather has set in." He adds that he has just arrived in Florence so as to spend the feast of All Saints with Ottaviano, and intends proceeding to Monte San Savino "to finish a vast picture nine *braccia*<sup>1</sup> in height." It is therefore obvious that the

<sup>1</sup> The *braccio* employed by Vasari was about twenty-three inches in length.



picture was already commenced: and, moreover, we learn from the Autobiography that the results of his studies in Rome are to be seen in this picture, which he considers to be "one of the best things he ever did." Poets wrote laudatory verses in his honour, though he thinks they were moved more by affection for himself than by the quality of his work: "if there be any merit in the picture, it is the gift of God."

The succeeding winter (1538-39), spent by Giorgio in Florence at the side of his patron and friend Ottaviano de' Medici, found him more than half inclined to give up his life of retirement. There are no more letters until 1540, and the only information available is to be found in the Autobiography, and a few references scattered through the pages of the *Lives*. The picture at Camaldoli claimed his attention during the summer, and he seems not only to have completed the *Nativity*, but to have commenced his third large painting, the *Deposition*,<sup>1</sup> leaving it in a condition which necessitated a further visit in the following year.

Vasari must have felt that the hoped-for fruits of his wandering life and avoidance of courts were yielding an abundant harvest. He had a series of works in hand for the monks of Camaldoli, commissions from his numerous friends in Rome and Florence, and an important work at Monte San Savino. Then, while still at Camaldoli, Don Miniato Pitti, the patron who had first employed him, "having seen the picture at Monte San Savino and

<sup>1</sup> In addition to these three pictures Vasari painted two smaller pictures representing *St. Donato* and *St. Ilarino*. In the chapel of the monks' choir there is an *Annunciation*, and in the Infirmary chapel an *Agony in the Garden*.

the work at Camaldoli, told Don Filippo Serragli, abbot of San Michele in Bosco (near Bologna) that as the refectory of that famous convent was about to be painted, the undertaking ought to be entrusted to Giorgio and to nobody else."<sup>1</sup>

A casual remark in the Life of Salviati provides the clue to the date of this occurrence, as Vasari, while in Bologna on this occasion, received a visit from Salviati, who had been working but a few days before on the preparations for Cosimo de' Medici's wedding. Cosimo was married in 1539. Francesco reached Bologna two days after Giorgio had arrived there, coming direct from Camaldoli. The proposed work was of considerable magnitude, and as Vasari hoped to complete it before the following summer he was obliged to set about it with even more than his usual despatch. Cristofano Gherardi<sup>2</sup> and Cungi were sent on before him from Camaldoli to get everything in readiness for the arrival of Giorgio, and as soon as the first frost put a stop to the frescoes at the Hermitage, Vasari packed up his wearing apparel, his brushes and pigments, and set out for Bologna. A month later the whole work had been sketched out, including a great frieze in fresco with twenty scenes from the Apocalypse and three large panel pictures. But not all the efforts of his two assistants could satisfy the demands of the master painter; and accordingly Stefano Veltroni was bidden to join the little party in the Monastery of San Michele. Vasari urged them to still greater activity by promising a pair of scarlet hose to whoever showed most skill and diligence. This tempt-

<sup>1</sup> *Vite*, VII, 664.

<sup>2</sup> Of Borgo San Sepolcro. He was born in 1508 and died in 1556. His association with Vasari began in 1528.



*Giorgio Vasari*

S. GREGORY AT SUPPER WITH TWELVE POOR MEN  
(*Bologna*)

*Bolognesi*



ing offer had the desired effect, for we learn from the Life of Gherardi that at the finish Giorgio was in fairness obliged to give a pair to each of them. It is to be hoped that the biographer was reimbursed for the unexpected outlay incurred by this generous offer. Of the works done here but little remains. The monastery was suppressed in 1797, and one of the panel pictures, *St. Gregory at Supper with Twelve Poor Men* (in which the head of Gregory is a portrait of Clement VII, and one of the poor men, according to Vasari, presents the features of Alessandro, "in memory of the many benefits and kindnesses he showered upon me"), is preserved in the Pinacoteca at Bologna. Vasari's memory has once more betrayed him, for Alessandro is not among the Poor Men, but a courtier who stands behind St. Gregory grasping his chair with both hands and gazing across the table as though he alone has discerned the presence of the Christ at the banquet. *The Christ in the House of Simon* is no longer in Bologna, and the third picture, representing *Abraham Entertaining the Angels*, is said by Milanesi to have been sent to Milan, but it is neither in the Brera nor Ambrogiana Galleries.

Giorgio completed his task, as stated in the inscription,<sup>1</sup> in eight months; and as he had worked more to please his friends than for gain, was quite content to receive two hundred crowns as payment.

There were more reasons for his haste than that

<sup>1</sup> The St. Gregory is signed and dated "Giorgio Aretino faceva MDXXXX." The old inscription once attached to the series, however, gave the date as 1539: "Otonis mensibus opus ab Aretino Georgio pictum, non tam præcio, quam amicorum obsequio, et honoris voto, anno MDXXXIX. Philippus Serralius pon. curavit." All the accessories of the St. Gregory picture were the unassisted work of Cristofano, Vasari painting only the figures.

given by the artist, for it is clear that the painters of Bologna resented his appearance in their midst and endeavoured to make his stay as unpleasant as possible. Biagio Pupini of Treviso in particular showed his jealousy and fear that Giorgio had come to rob the Bolognese of their rights by tormenting him without ceasing. "These things, however, gave them far more trouble than they did me," he says, "and, as a matter of fact, I was only amused at their anger and machinations." But they contrived to drive him away nevertheless; otherwise it would be difficult to account for his precipitate flight to Florence, where, as he says, he whiled away the time in copying pictures until it was possible to continue the work at Camaldoli; and probably executing the pictures of the *Dead Christ* and the *Resurrection* for Don Miniato Pitti, which are referred to in his own life.

Once more, and for the last time, we find Vasari at Camaldoli, namely, in the summer of 1540, completing the work which had been begun four years previously. The *Deposition*, replacing the altar-piece painted by Spinello Aretino in 1361, was soon completed, and Vasari took advantage of his leisure time and the "quiet coolness of Camaldoli" to paint a *St. John* for Ottaviano de' Medici. It may be noted that throughout his whole career Vasari was never at a loss for something to do. Before one work was completed another invariably came in view: and so it proved at this juncture. The *St. John* was not completed before Bindo Altoviti, visiting Camaldoli, gave Vasari instructions to prepare a picture for the church of Sant' Apostolo in Florence, a work in which he strained every nerve to rival perfection itself, as it was the first specimen of his handiwork to be placed in that city, and he hoped to begin with

a flourish. This picture, representing the *Deposition*, is now in the chapel of the Conception in SS. Apostoli, and for it the artist received the sum of 300 *scudi* in gold, besides many favours from Bindo when, later on, he again visited Rome.

With the return of Vasari from Camaldoli to Florence in the autumn of 1540 it is as well to pause and look back for a moment. His life during the four years of his voluntary exile from the friends of his youth had taught him much that was to prove useful in after life. He had begun to realise that court life resembled strong drink; that a man might abstain from either and yet be happy, and that too much enjoyment of either intoxicant was likely to be followed by ill effects. At the age of twenty-nine Vasari, when he returned to Florence, found himself in the forefront of the artists of his time; not, be it noted, because he was a painter of outstanding merit, but because Italian art had grown old after a short and unparalleled course, and was sinking already in decay. This fact Giorgio was incapable of understanding. He viewed himself as a diamond of the first water standing boldly forth in a setting of brilliants, whereas his real position is that of a second-rate gem whose chief adornment is its isolation. The giants, with the single exception of Michelangelo, had passed away. Vasari stood as a being of ordinary height amid dwarfs; and thought himself to have become a giant because he found no one of his own stature. Yet, though Giorgio as an artist was shorter by a head than he believed, modern criticism has done him an injustice in remembering him as a biographer and forgetting all that he did as painter and architect. The architect of the Uffizi Gallery and of the Palazzo de'

Cavalieri di San Stefano at Pisa is surely worthy of some recognition beyond that of a gossip whose records are to be in part disproved and the rest disbelieved. As a painter he did nothing which commands our admiration, but he was one of the most eminent men of his own generation; a period, it must be remembered, when art was believed to have already reached perfection, leaving nothing for Vasari and his contemporaries to do but to live up to the established level of excellence, not to strive to exceed it. In the eyes of Giorgio the high-water mark of art had been established, and even in his most sanguine moments he only feels that he "must not fall behind Michelangelo and Raffaello."

After the many difficulties and gaps which occur in the account of his wanderings, it is satisfactory to find that the return of Vasari to Florence in the autumn of 1540 is substantiated by a letter written at the end of October. It contains little of interest, but we learn from it that the work at Camaldoli was just completed before the cold weather set in.

Camaldoli had been the last link left of his old life. Each time he revisited that peaceful spot Vasari felt renewed within himself the old hatred of courts, while the simple routine of the monastery touched a chord in his heart and set it vibrating in harmony. Yet it must be confessed that each succeeding winter, when he was driven from his mountain refuge, found his resolution less firm. The Medici, patrons of his family for more than three generations, were to him divinely appointed Princes and the lords of his destiny; and whenever he had the opportunity Vasari turned his steps to Florence, seeing the devil's hook yet nibbling at the bait, making it his excuse that he was obliged by duty to



report himself to Ottaviano. When at length the works at Camaldoli, Monte San Savino and Bologna no longer called him, he yielded still further to the voice of the tempter and took up his abode in Florence.

It is significant of his attitude of mind at this time that, as he tells us in the *Autobiography*, in order to free himself from troublesome thoughts, he first of all found a husband for his remaining sister, and then purchased a house which had just been begun at Arezzo: facts which throw light upon his earnings since the time when he had written to his uncle saying: "God will have the more compassion on me, seeing me wander from town to town, making the utmost of my little ability, beautifying the world, confessing His omnipotence and devoting myself to His holy service."

The first work to occupy him was the picture for Bindo Altoviti, the *Conception*, in the church of Sant' Apostolo, for which he received a sum of three hundred crowns. It is still in good preservation; and though the prudery of a later age has caused the nude figure of Adam to be decorated with painted drapery, it is interesting as being the first work done after his return to the world. It was followed by a *Venus and the Swan*, for Ottaviano de' Medici.

In the meanwhile Vasari had been asked to visit Venice, and would undoubtedly have gone forthwith had it not been that a domestic event, of much importance in the family of Duke Cosimo, was daily expected. At length, on March 23rd, 1541, the Duchess, Eleonora di Toledo, gave birth to a son and heir. The ducal infant had, of course, to be baptised, and it was in anticipation of this ceremony that

Vasari elected to postpone the journey to Venice. Tribolo had control of the preparations in the Baptistery, and at first it appeared as though Giorgio had waited in vain. Then, at the last moment—six days before the baptism, if we are to believe our author—Cosimo gave orders that a large picture of *St. John baptising our Lord* should be painted behind the high altar. The story, which as usual redounds to the credit of Vasari, is told in the *Life of Tribolo*.<sup>1</sup> Jacopo di Pontormo refused to undertake the picture at so short a notice: Ridolfo Ghirlandaio did the same, and so did Bronzino and many others.

Now Giorgio Vasari happened to return from Bologna about that time. You must know, also, that Tasso, architect of the Palazzo, had his own particular friends, and that there was a little clique of artists who basked in the favouring smile of Pierfrancesco Ricci, major-domo to the Duke, and who so managed things that nobody outside this select body ever got any work to do. This clique stood in terror of Giorgio, who only laughed at their vanity and stupidity, relying on his own ability and not on the favour of others to get him employment. Where others had feared to tread Vasari rushed in; and having begun the picture, finished it in six days with as fine a finish as the rest of the work. It was the one thing necessary to make the whole scheme perfect. This feat made such an impression on the biographer that he mentions it in his own life as an example of the “great rapidity” and “incredible ease” with which all his “pictures and designs of whatsoever kind” had always been done: qualities which, as Milanesi justly remarks, have been considered by posterity as blameworthy rather than otherwise.

<sup>1</sup> *Vite*, Vol. VI, p. 89.



*Giorgio Vasari*

BAPTISMAL PROCESSION  
(*Florence: Palazzo Vecchio*)

*Brogi*



The *Venus and the Swan* was finished in July, but though Vasari hoped to set out for Venice "at the end of August" he was prevented from carrying out this intention until October. On the 6th of that month he wrote to Aretino from Bologna to say that he had begun his journey; and from various sources we are enabled to trace his progress through Parma, Modena, and Mantua, visiting, in the latter town, Giulio Romano, whom he already knew *per fama e lettere*. During the four days of Vasari's sojourn Giulio acted as his guide, showing him all the wonders of the Palazzo del Tè and other buildings; while Giorgio, as his habit was, interspersed little scraps of gossip into the conversation to beguile the time. Among the treasures of the Gonzaga family was a portrait of Leo X, which Giulio showed his visitor, telling him that it was the work of Raphael. "But Giorgio Vasari . . . he who had been the protégé and favourite of Ottaviano de' Medici in his childhood," knew better, as he had seen Andrea del Sarto at work upon it, copying the original at the command of Ippolito, who then hid the genuine work of Raphael in a cupboard.<sup>1</sup> In short, Vasari—to use his own words—"discovered and made known the whole affair."

Passing through Verona and stopping to fill his note-books with sketches of all that interested him, in spite of the dangers of the road, Giorgio arrived in Venice at the end of the year, and immediately found work in preparing the accessories for the setting of Pietro Aretino's *Talanta*, to be performed by the Compagnia della Calza. His first step, after accepting the commission, was to send for Gherardi, Cungi, and the other assistants, without whom he

<sup>1</sup> *Vite*, Vol. V, p. 42.

seems to have been incapable of doing even the most insignificant work. Lanzi,<sup>1</sup> indeed, is unkind enough to say that Giorgio had as many helpers in his pictures as labourers on his buildings; and certainly there is ample justification for the remark. In the present instance, however, Giorgio was compelled to work alone for a considerable time. The circumstances which delayed the arrival of his assistants throw an interesting sidelight upon the joys of travelling in Italy during the sixteenth century; for Gherardi and his companions, if they followed the usual route, would be obliged to travel on horseback as far as Padua and then sail down the Brenta in an open boat to Fusina, where a mudbank stopped the mouth of the river. The boat was then placed on a wheeled carriage, and with infinite pains hauled with winches along a corduroy road to the shore of the lagoon, where the passengers once more embarked and the boat proceeded in the direction of Venice. The journey, which is to-day accomplished by train in less than an hour, took, according to that delightful traveller, Tom Coryat, twelve hours,<sup>2</sup> and not infrequently the boat was blown out of its course. This misfortune befell Cungi and Gherardi, and while Vasari looked out for them day by day from Venice, wondering why they did not come, they were being borne swiftly and surely across the Adriatic in a totally different direction. When the vessel reached land the travellers, weak and ill with the terrors of the voyage, found to their dismay that they had

<sup>1</sup> Lanzi: *Storia Pittorica della Italia dal risorgimento . . . al fine del XVIII secolo.*

<sup>2</sup> A professor at Padua University assured the present writer that in his youth this method of reaching Venice was still the usual one. He says that the journey took three days, and that they relieved the monotony by singing to the accompaniment of mandolines and guitars.

drifted to Istria, and had once again to brave the fickleness of sea and wind. They did not reach Venice until Vasari had given up all hopes of them and had set to work, in a very bad temper and all alone.

Yet most of the work was, in the end, done by Cristoforo Gherardi, as we learn from the life of that painter. There is a letter extant, written by Vasari to Ottaviano, in which he describes the *festa* with the same monotony of detail which characterises all his accounts of similar undertakings. "Everyone"—of course—"who sees it is smitten with astonishment, and they say it is a pity to take it all down again." There was a background on which was depicted far more of Rome than could ever be seen from one point of view: there were columns of the "Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, Tuscan, Composite and Rustic" orders—whatever the last may be; and there was a highly realistic sun "which moved across the scene during the performance, and gave out an exceedingly bright light"; contrived apparently with glass vessels filled with water, and lamps. The play was acted by the chief nobles of Venice, "and there was such a large assemblage of guests that it was almost impossible to breathe, for the lights and the number of people made the room hot to suffocation."

Vasari remained in Venice for some time, painting a series of pictures for the palace of Giorgio Cornaro—since destroyed—and revelling in the beauties of that island city, "the most glorious and heavenly show upon the water that ever mortal eye beheld, such a show as did even ravish me with delight and admiration," as Coryat described it a few years after Vasari's visit. Venice is still surpassingly fair; but what she must have been when her frescoed and

gilded palaces were fresh from the painters' hands, each window with its "very pleasant little tarrasse, that jutteth, or butteth out from the maine building, the edge whereof is decked with many prety litle turned pillars, either of marble or free stone to leane over," can only be guessed at. The quaint and unusual costumes of the "Polonians, Slavonians, Persians, Grecians, Turks, Jewes, Christians of all the famousest regions of Christendome," whom the above-mentioned traveller saw in the Piazzetta as they landed from their richly laden ships to bring their merchandise to the great emporium of Venice, left their impression on Vasari's mind, and ten years or so later served him for the figures in the *Adoration of the Magi* in Sta. Maria di Scolca at Rimini.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE "LIVES OF THE PAINTERS"

Rome—Study of architecture—Palazzo Farnese cornice—Lucca—Rome again—Naples—Sala della Cancelleria—Inception of the *Lives*—Doubts as to when they were really begun—Their progress—Caro's letter—Visit to Rimini—Purchase of a house in Arezzo—*Feast of Ahasuerus*—Contemporary opinion of Vasari.

THE attractions of Venice proved so great that it was only the persuasive arguments of Gherardi which prevailed to draw Vasari away from a city where "good drawing was neglected for the pursuit of brilliant colouring." On the 16th of August, as Giorgio himself relates, he returned to Tuscany and set hand to the decoration of his new home, painting at the same time a *Nativity* for the nuns of Santa Margherita. These works were soon completed, and towards the end of the autumn he set out once more for Rome; destined, as after events proved, to return many times and to rise to positions of increasing importance. We are not able to trace in detail the steps by which he rose. Once more there is a break in his correspondence, and between the closing months of 1543 and the year 1545 there is a gap over which the Autobiography throws no bridge.

Giorgio began to devote more serious attention to architecture than he had hitherto done, urged thereto by the praises bestowed upon him by Michelangelo: praises which "for the sake of modesty" he will not repeat<sup>1</sup>. In the meantime he continued to paint, and

<sup>1</sup> *Vite*, Vol. VII, p. 672.

finished for Bindo Altoviti the *Deposition* which now hangs in the Pamfili Gallery. This picture "had the good fortune not to displease (*per sua grazia non dispiacque*) the greatest painter, architect, and sculptor that has ever been in our time, and perhaps in past ages," and also attracted the notice of Cardinal Farnese, for whom, as we learn from the Life of Gherardi, Vasari painted a large picture in oils, which was hung in the Palazzo della Cancelleria<sup>1</sup>.

Then followed the usual summer visit to Florence and Arezzo: and in the autumn months he again turned southwards to spend the winter among those cherished stones which

"Time's gradual touch  
Has mouldered into beauty"

and near his "divinissimo Michelangelo." We are not told what works occupied him, but it was in all probability at this period that he became, as he infers in the Life of Antonio da San Gallo, one of the best architects in Rome. He is speaking of the Palazzo Farnese and of the competition for the cornice. Paul III, while still Cardinal Farnese, had practically completed the structure, but on becoming Pope commanded San Gallo to effect considerable alterations. The building was carried up from the architect's designs, but when the time came for setting up the cornice, Paul, "who wanted to have the finest cornice that any palace could possibly have," gave orders that "all the best architects in Rome" should submit designs.

"And so, one morning, when the Pope was lunching

<sup>1</sup> *Vite*, Vol. VI, p. 227. Vasari also mentions in the same place a picture for Galeotto de Girone for the church of Sant' Agostino. There is a letter, dated January 20th, 1543, from Vasari to Cardinal Farnese, written in Rome and referring to a cartoon—possibly that for the picture in the Cancelleria.

in the Belvedere, all the drawings I have spoken of were taken to him, in the presence of Antonio. They were by Pierino del Vaga, Fra Bastiano del Piombo, Michelangelo Buonarroti, and Giorgio Vasari, who was at that time a youth in the service of Cardinal Farnese." Vasari, indeed, submitted two designs, though neither of them won for him the distinction of finishing the palace. It may be noted, too, that neither Pierino nor Fra Bastiano had any claim to be considered architects. The incident must have taken place in 1543, as the only other occasion on which Vasari is known to have been in the employment of the Cardinal was in 1546, the year of San Gallo's death. Vasari apparently, in his own opinion, was still a youth at the age of thirty-two.

The Autobiography tells us that "on the Feast of St. Peter following,<sup>1</sup> as it was excessively hot in Rome and I had already spent the whole winter of 1543 there, I went back to Florence; and there, in the house of Messer Ottaviano de' Medici (which I might almost call my own home) I painted for Messer Biagio Mei of Lucca, his godfather, the same subject as I had done for Messer Bindo in Sant' Apostoli," namely, a *Conception*. It is a miserable performance, if the truth be told, though the design shows some originality. On the summit of the Tree of Good and Evil is seated the Madonna, while in the branches are entangled such worldly people as kings, soldiers and women. The serpent winds round the trunk of the tree, and it is to be noticed that Vasari gives it the head of a woman. There is a small, slightly modified sketch of the same subject in the Uffizi. Both pictures present a restless mass of writhing figures, lacking both in colour and composition. The

<sup>1</sup> That is to say, on June 29th, 1544.

larger work is now in the Pinacoteca at Lucca, whither it was removed on the demolition of the church of San Pier Cigoli. At the same time two other, and far more satisfactory, works of Vasari—a *St. Blaise* and a *St. Eustace*—found their way into this gallery. These pictures were also, in all probability, painted for Biagio Mei, one of them, indeed, representing his titular saint.

There is a letter, written to Francesco Leoni and dated Lucca, July 21st, which partly supports the Autobiography by saying that he has been in Lucca for the past two weeks for the purpose of putting up this picture in the church of San Pier Cigoli. The letter, however, states that the picture had been completed in the previous autumn.

The sequel to the visit to Lucca is described in another letter to Leoni, dated August 8th, 1544. Biagio Mei, to Vasari's evident disgust, died while the finishing touches were being put to the work. The misfortune put him into a bad temper, for the whole of the epistle is one continued grumble at Fate, at everything in general and Ottaviano de' Medici in particular. "I came back from Lucca last night," he writes, "and I left Messer Biagio Mei dead in his bed. The loss makes me feel desperate for more reasons than one, but I will tell you all about it when I see you." "I am getting on as well as I can expect, but not so well as I deserve; and it is all because I am too much at the beck and call of other people." He resents being ordered about by Ottaviano, and says that he holds himself at his (Leoni's) service, "although Messer Ottaviano keeps shouting to me to go to Rome, with the air of a patron who has given me, at the very least, the papal tiara."



*Giorgio Vasari*



*Albani*

S. EUSTACE AND S. BLAISE  
(Lucca)



Vasari's sudden outburst of spleen against Ottaviano, whom in calmer moments he acknowledges to have been the chief of his benefactors, was probably due partly to the inconvenience and loss of patronage incident on the death of Biagio Mei and partly to the fact that to visit Rome at this juncture would interfere with other work which he had in hand, consisting of two pictures, the *Virgin and Saints* and the *Deposition*, destined for the Cathedral of Pisa. These were done after his return from Lucca, and the execution of them must have filled up the interval before his return to Rome. They appear to have been destroyed in the fire of 1595.

In Rome he set to work with his accustomed ardour, hoping to make up for the time spent at Lucca and Pisa; and, perhaps, to win back the favour of Ottaviano. As a result, "being ill and worn out with infinite hard work," he was obliged to return to Florence in order to be nursed back to health.

But there was to be no rest for Giorgio Vasari. At the end of the year, or early in 1545, he was summoned to Naples, to work for the monks of Monte Oliveto and for Pietro di Toledo, the Viceroy; and as usual he set off at once, eager to begin, and more eager still to show the Neapolitans the splendour of his attainments. "It is a remarkable fact," he tells us in the oft-quoted Autobiography, "that from Giotto's time down to our own day this great and noble city has not produced one artist whose works are of importance, although some of the pictures of Perugino and Raffaello have found their way there. On that account I endeavoured, so far as lay in my power, to awaken the intellects of those people." Instead, however, of stirring the natives

into impotent emulation and winning the triumph he sighed for, Vasari was destined to have one more rude awakening from his dreams. Towards the end of his visit a struggle arose between the monks and the officers of justice over the question of precedence, during which the monks fought all too valiantly, and succeeded in wounding several of their opponents. In this fray the fifteen assistants of Giorgio took no insignificant part, and as a consequence they were compelled to escape from Neapolitan territory by such means as their ingenuity suggested, leaving Giorgio to face the storm alone. Discouraged at the turn events had taken and robbed of all assistance, Vasari stayed on for a while, then turned away sadly and returned to Rome, taking with him twenty-four pictures which had still to be finished for the church of S. Giovanni a Carbonara. Of this large series one of the pictures done on the spot, the *Presentation in the Temple*, is now preserved in the Museo Nazionale at Naples. Fifteen of the twenty-four finished in Rome are still to be seen in the church of San Giovanni a Carbonara, blackened by time and greatly damaged. The paintings for the monks of Monte Oliveto to which the Autobiography refers are in the ceiling of the old Sacristy, or chapel of the Carracciolo di Sant' Erasmo, a series of panels surrounded by grotteschi in the manner of Raffaello. They have been restored with a thoroughness which has obliterated all traces of the original work with the exception of two panels, in which Vasari's work may still be detected. In addition to the work already mentioned, he executed two frescoes over the inner side of the lateral doorways in the Cathedral, which have been destroyed in the process of restoring the façade; and an allegorical picture, painted in 1543,



and bearing the title *Justice punishing Vice and rewarding Virtue*, which is now preserved in the Museo Nazionale.

Vasari had been a year at Naples;<sup>1</sup> and as it is reasonable to suppose that even with the help of "about fifteen" assistants (supposing that they all contrived to escape from Naples) a considerable lapse of time would be required for the completion of the Neapolitan pictures, it must be assumed that the decoration of the Sala della Cancelleria in the Palazzo San Giorgio could not have been begun very early in 1546. This work Giorgio completed in exactly a hundred days, a feat which seems to have surprised everybody with exception of Michelangelo, who on reading the inscription in which Giorgio recorded his achievement, is said to have expressed his opinion in the words, *e' si conosce*—"anyone could have seen that." This anecdote is related by Vasari himself at the end of his Life of Michelangelo, though he discreetly omits the name of the artist to whom the rebuke was addressed. The painter himself discovered the error into which his haste had led him in time to apologise for it in the Autobiography, but ungenerously lays the blame upon his assistants.<sup>2</sup> "I

<sup>1</sup> "Avendo in un anno lavorato in quella città opere abbastanza" (*Vite*, Vol. VII, p. 674).

<sup>2</sup> Of these assistants seven are mentioned by name in various parts of the *Lives*. Bizzerra and Roviale (Spaniards), Battista Bagnacavallo, Bastiano Flori, Gian Paolo dal Borgo, Fra Salvatore Foschi and Raffaello dal Colle. Of Vasari's paintings in the Cancelleria there is a contemporary notice (preserved in *Bottari*, Vol. V, No. 37) written by Antonfrancesco Doni, a Servite monk, to Lelio Torelli, a few months after the completion of the work. He gives a very careful and minute account of it, which tallies in a remarkable degree with that in the Autobiography. "As I am in Rome," he writes, . . . "I want to tell you about something new and beautiful of which you may have heard, though you cannot have seen it: I refer to the Sala of the most reverend and illustrious Cardinal Farnese which was painted last year by that most excellent artist, Giorgio Vasari of Arezzo."

resolved that for the future I would undertake no more work unless I could do the whole of it myself, allowing my assistants to draw only the rough outlines from my designs. . . . It would have been better to have taken a hundred months and to have done the whole thing myself."

Yet while Vasari was thus engaged in a work which even he admitted to be far from satisfactory, he was unconsciously standing on the very threshold of immortality. The story of how the *Lives of the Painters* came to be written has been told by Giorgio himself, and is well known to all students of art. It was, according to him, in 1546<sup>1</sup>—the date is of importance—that he painted the Sala della Cancelleria, spending his evenings among the suite of the Cardinal.

"At the time I am speaking of," he says, "I was in the habit of going to the house of the most illustrious Cardinal after I had finished work for the day, and used to sit by while he supped, listening to the elegant and scholarly discourse with which Molza, Annibale Caro, Messer Gandolfo, Messer Claudio Tolomei, Messer Romolo Amaseo, Monsignore Giovio, and many other learned and gallant gentlemen who frequented the palace used to entertain him. On one particular evening they were discussing Giovio's Museum, as well as the portraits of illustrious men he had collected and put in it. The conversation passed from one topic to another, as generally happens in a gathering of this sort, and Monsignor Giovio remarked that he had always wished to enrich his Museum and his Book of Eulogies with some kind of treatise tracing the

<sup>1</sup> "L'anno medesimo (1546), avendo animo il Cardinale Farnese di far dipingere la sala della Cancelleria nel palazzo di San Giorgio," etc.

history of all who had been famous in the arts of design, beginning with Giotto and coming down to our own day. Then, as he warmed to his theme, he revealed a certain amount of intuitive knowledge and a nice appreciation of our art, though it is true that for the most part he confined himself to generalities and avoided the discussion of technical matters. Often, too, he would mix up the baptismal and family names of the painters he mentioned, getting himself entangled with their nationalities and their works, and telling the wrong end of the story first. When Giovo finished speaking, the Cardinal turned to me and said:—

“Well, Giorgio, and what do you think of the matter? Do you not think that such a work would be well worth doing?”

“It would, indeed, be a splendid undertaking, most illustrious Cardinal,” I replied, “provided that Giovo were assisted by a painter, or someone who could put the facts into their proper order and explain the technicalities to him. I offer this suggestion because in much of what he said just now he put the cart before the horse.”

“An animated conversation took place between the Cardinal, Giovo, Caro Tolomei and the others. Then the Cardinal turned to me again, and said:—

“Well; could you not yourself supply some sort of outline, and a series of notices of each artist, arranged in the proper order? By doing so you would confer a benefit on these arts of yours.”

“I gave my promise, and although I knew that such a work was beyond my ability, I said that I would do all that lay in my power, and do it with the utmost willingness.”

This is the account of the incident given by Vasari, and the one which has been accepted as reliable. Even in this, however, the writer of the *Lives* has been caught napping by Sig. Scoti-Bertinelli,<sup>1</sup> who justly observes that as Molza died in February, 1544, he could not very well have been present—at least in the flesh—at the historic gathering of 1546. Either, therefore, Vasari is incorrect in stating that Molza was one of those who supped with the Cardinal on that evening, or else the incident actually took place earlier than the date assigned to it. The above-mentioned writer adduces many arguments in favour of the latter theory; and, while failing to produce any conclusive testimony, gives it as his opinion that the discussion took place not in 1546, but in the earlier part of 1543. To give his arguments in full would occupy too much space, but the centre-point of his attack is based upon the short time at the biographer's disposal if the book were only begun in 1546, and before the end of the following year had so far progressed as to be “nearly ready for copying out in a clerkly hand.” In support of his contention he urges that Vasari was particularly busy at this time; and when it is remembered that he had the whole of the Sala to decorate in addition to six pictures which are specifically mentioned in the Autobiography, it does not seem possible that he should have found time to compile the volumes which have rendered the name of Giorgio Vasari undying.

Vasari, however, had really been preparing for these *Lives* ever since he was a child—witness his remarks at the end of his Life of Ghiberti, in which he says,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Annali della Reale Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*, Vol. XIX (1906), p. 23 et seq.

<sup>2</sup> *Vite*, Vol. II, p. 249.

speaking of the drawings in his *Libro di Disegni*:—"I obtained these drawings"—by Ghiberti—"together with others by Giotto and his contemporaries, from Vettorino Ghiberti, in 1528, when I was quite a young man. And I have always held them, as I do still, in great veneration, both because they are beautiful and as a memorial of such great masters." Vasari, indeed, knowing that he alone had the material for such a work, may even have been the first to moot the subject, ventilating his opinions among his friends, making suggestions as to their form and scope while keeping discreetly silent upon the notes he had already collected. It must be urged, too, that Sig. Scoti-Bertinelli's evidence is not always as satisfactory as it would appear, for in the course of his work already cited he refers to two unpublished manuscripts in the Biblioteca della Confraternità di Santa Maria at Arezzo. In the first place the city can boast of no such library, and presumably he refers to the Biblioteca della Pia Fraternità di Santa Maria, which is now the Municipal Library. But more than this: the present writer has been able to satisfy himself that one of the two manuscripts does not exist, and never has existed, at least in the library referred to.<sup>1</sup> It is the one cited by him as being entitled "Vita di Giorgio Vasari, pittore aretino, scrittore delle Vite de' Pittori, Scultori ed Architetti." He appears to have been deceived by a cursory glance at a ponderous manuscript

<sup>1</sup> By the courtesy of the Librarian and with the kind assistance of Sig. Ubaldo Pasqui, author of the *Guida d'Arezzo* and an acknowledged authority on the archives of the city, I was enabled to ransack the treasures of the library and to assure myself that the statements made above are fully justified. I was convinced that Sig. Scoti-Bertinelli had not read his "manuscript" with much attention, and I hoped by a more careful perusal to find new light on my subject. I was disappointed.

with the title "Memorie Storiche Aretine," the Index of which is far more complete than the volume. The former, in fact, was drawn up first by way of a general synopsis, but the subsequent text was never completed. The *Life of Vasari*, while his name certainly appears in the Index, was never written.

Until the question is settled by the discovery of conclusive evidence to the contrary, it will be advisable to adhere to Giorgio's own story, accusing him only of a bad memory when he says that Molza was one of those who urged him to write the *Lives*. How tenaciously he clings to the idea that Molza was still living is to be seen in his account of the further progress of the book.

It is almost a pity that Giorgio was destined to live and die three hundred and more years ago. Had he been living to-day he would assuredly have been a journalist, and would have made his mark in the newspaper world as a never-failing fount of "copy." From early youth, as already noted, he had been fond of collecting information of the kind required for the *Lives*, and the long round of visits he had made while on his way to Venice in 1542 had most surely added greatly to his store. These notes he put into shape and carried to Giovio for his consideration and acceptance. The Bishop refused to take the completion of the work out of the hands of one who was evidently quite capable of doing it; and when Giorgio tried to excuse himself "he set Caro, Molza, Tolomei and all the rest of my most intimate friends on to me; and finally I agreed to finish it myself. I set to work and began to write the book, with the intention of submitting it to one of them for correction, and then publishing it under a pseudonym." There are many indications which

might be cited to show that Vasari adhered, in the First Edition, to his intention not only of issuing the book anonymously, but even of omitting all mention of himself. One instance will suffice.

It will be remembered that Giorgio, while in Mantua in 1541, had been the guest of Giulio Romano, and that he had taken the opportunity of exposing the trick played by Cardinal Ippolito de' Medici on the Duke of Mantua in palming off a copy made by Andrea del Sarto as an original work by Raffaello. In recounting this incident in the First Edition, Giorgio says that the fraud was exposed by "a man who was staying with Andrea at the time he painted the picture." He adds that this person was "under the patronage of Ottaviano," but does not disclose his identity. In the Second Edition, that of 1568, he completely recasts the sentence, and with some pride tells the reader that Giulio's informant was "Giorgio Vasari . . . who in his childhood had been the favourite and protégé of Ottaviano."<sup>1</sup>

So it was that Giorgio found himself pushed bodily, as it were, into the literary field. And, strangely enough, while he is tolerably proud of his work as a painter, his writings are mentioned with modesty, with real modesty. No fault can be found with his Preface to the First Edition. He apologises for the book having grown larger than he originally intended, and says he has spent ten years in collecting his materials. "So many were the difficulties I

<sup>1</sup> "Ma capitando a Mantoa un che si ste' con Andrea, mentre si fe' quest' opera, et fu creatura d' Ottaviano, aveva veduto Andrea lavorare quel quadro, scoperse la cosa." First (Torrentino) Edition.

"Ma capitando a Mantoa Giorgio Vasari, il quale, essendo fanciullo e creatura di Messer Ottaviano, aveva veduto," etc. Second (Giuntina) Edition.

encountered that at times I should have given up in despair, had it not been for the kindness and generosity of a large number of friends, to whom I am eternally grateful for their encouragement. It is because of them that I went ahead bravely. I thank them for their loving assistance and for information and advice given when I was in perplexity. . . . I neither expect nor delude myself with the hope of making a name for myself as a historian or writer of books. I have not thought of such a thing. My business in life is to paint, not to write. And I have put together these notices, or memorials, or rough sketches (as I prefer to call them) so that some person of higher attainments and equipped with all those excellences which befit the true writer, may in sweeter tones and a more exalted style extol the merits and immortalise the names of these glorious artists whom I have merely rescued from the dust and oblivion of time which already in part concealed them. . . . I have written as a simple painter should write and in my own language. Whether it be the Florentine tongue or the dialect of Tuscany I shall not pause to consider: nor yet whether I ought to have used so many of the technical words belonging to my craft. I had to use them so as to make myself understood by my fellow-workmen." He mistrusted his own abilities to such an extent that he gave the whole book into the hands of a friend "with full and entire liberty to cut it about to suit his own taste, so long as he neither interfered with the substance nor sense" of what was written. "I have not set out for the purpose of teaching people how to write in the Tuscan tongue: my intention was just this—to write about the lives and works of the artists."

Yet with this great work in hand, it is astonishing



to note the quantity of canvas he found time to cover with paint while it was in progress, labouring alternately with his brushes and his pen; justifying the sarcasm of Benvenuto Cellini:—

“ A chi piace il far presto ; un, meglio e tardo  
Or se Dio presta vita all' Aretino  
Gli è per dipingere tutto questo mondo.”

In October Vasari left Rome for Florence, with, we may presume, a goodly pile of manuscript under his arm. In Florence, by order of the Pope (Paul III), he painted a *Last Supper* in the refectory of the Murate, a picture which went, later, to the church of Santa Croce. Then followed a *Marriage of Santa Caterina*, for the monastery of Bigallo, outside Florence; and a *Pietà* and a *San Girolamo*, both of which were despatched to an unnamed patron in France. He also completed a picture which had been begun for Bastiano della Seta for the Cathedral of Pisa, and followed it up with a *Madonna*, for his friend Simone Corsi.

From this bare record of his paintings it is necessary to turn to the progress of the *Lives*. The book which he had undertaken more as a pastime than anything else assumed increasing importance, and the flattering encouragement of his friends had the effect on Vasari of spurring him to fresh efforts. The welfare of the book rapidly became the ruling factor of his life. For more than a year he was its slave, painting only so as to minister to the needs of his favourite child. He spared not himself, and he did not spare his friends. A specimen extract was submitted to Annibale Caro, that prince of letter writers,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is much to be regretted that the *Lettere Familiari* of Annihale Caro have not been translated into English. He was a man of keen and kindly wit, with a facility of expression which gives his letters a vivid

with a request that he would pronounce judgment thereon. Caro replied in a letter calculated to inflate the budding author's vanity to bursting-point.

"You have added to my span of life," he writes on December 11th, 1547, "by allowing me to see this fragment of your Commentary on the Artists of Design, and I greatly enjoyed reading it through. In my judgment it is a work which ought to be read by everybody, not only because of the famous men who figure in its pages, but also, so far as I can judge from the specimen before me, on account of the information it contains touching many events and many times. It seems to me to be well written, in a pure style, with much care. I would only suggest that sundry unsatisfactory transpositions in the wording should be altered, and that where, in pursuit of an elegant style, you have placed the verb at the end of the sentence, you should put it back again into its proper position. In this kind of composition such phrasing is out of place and displeasing. I should prefer to see a book of this sort written exactly as you would speak: it should be natural rather than full of metaphors and hyperbole, and chatty rather

interest even after the lapse of more than three centuries. His letter to Giovanfrancesco Leoni, entirely occupied with a dissertation upon the unusual dimensions of Leoni's nose, is a masterpiece of humour. "How blessed are you," he cries, "who carry upon your face what is at one and the same time the wonder and consolation of all who behold you! All who see it are astounded: those who are allowed to touch it are enraptured; the whole world is the more glad because such a thing exists, and everyone wants to possess it for himself. All the poets sing about it, all the prose writers are scribbling about it, all the orators are making speeches on the same subject. I could even imagine the Sibyls prophesying about it; that Apelles would like to paint it, and Polycletus want to carve it. Michelangelo would immortalise it in all three of the arts. . . . O perfect nose! O prince among noses! O divine nose! O nose blessed beyond all other noses! Blessings on the mother who gave you such a nose, and blessed be everything you smell," etc.

than stilted. But your book is just what it ought to be, except for a few little things here and there, and these you will readily detect and alter when you come to read it over again. For the rest, I rejoice that you have undertaken so great and useful a work, and I am confident that it will live for ever, especially as such a history is much needed and will prove of the greatest interest."<sup>1</sup>

This letter raises an interesting question with regard to the preparation of the *Lives*. Vasari, still the slave of the book, was eager to find someone who would undertake to correct it, as already related in his Preface. Gian Matteo Faetani, Abbot of Santa Maria di Scolca at Rimini, offered to give the copying of it to one of his monks, and promised to revise the whole work himself. Giorgio, in return, was to paint a picture for the conventual church. The *Autobiography* places the date of this agreement in 1547, but in the *Life of Francesco Salviati* Vasari contradicts himself by saying that he spent the whole of 1548 in Rimini. That the latter version is correct becomes obvious when it is recollected that so late as December, 1547, the biographer submitted his book to Caro for an opinion. It is in the last degree improbable that Vasari would have insulted the Abbot, after he had revised the book, by subjecting it to the criticism of even so eminent a scholar as Annibale Caro; nor is it more probable that in such a case there would still have lingered faults such as those to which Caro calls Giorgio's attention.

The journey to Rimini, therefore, could not have been made before the middle of December, 1547, and it is far more likely to have been in the spring of the following year that Giorgio began to paint the

<sup>1</sup> *Bottari*, Vol. III, No. 94.

*Adoration of the Magi* which once hung over the high altar of the now demolished church of Santa Maria di Scolca.

This *Adoration* is described by the painter with obvious pride. He tells us that he made one of the kings black of hue and set him in the midst of swarthy-visaged courtiers, that the second was a white man and had a suite to match, and that the third king was neither black nor white but brown, having attendants who likewise were neither black nor white but brown. Then there were a couple of side panels into which were crowded such members of the train as had been squeezed out of the centre-piece, all in the finest of clothes and accompanied by a troop of "horses, elephants and giraffes." This work finished, Vasari found employment in the church of San Francesco in Rimini, painting a *Stigmata* for the high altar: 'and because the mountain was barren, and therefore of a brown colour, and both St. Francis and his companion were dressed in their brown habits,' the artist placed a great sun in the heavens; and in the sun was the Christ, surrounded by seraphs, so as to break the monotony of colour. Once more Vasari has forgotten: for the St. Francis, which is signed and dated GEORGIUS VASARIUS ARRET. FACIEBAT MDXLVIII, is very different from the description in the Autobiography, the Saint, strangely enough, being actually clothed in a *white* habit. The picture is one of Vasari's worst.

These pictures fell under the critical lash of Algarotti, for writing to Mariette in 1761,<sup>1</sup> and describing the works of art in Rimini, he says, referring to the *Stigmata*, that Giorgio "would have done far better

<sup>1</sup> *Bottari*, Appendix to Vol. VII, Letter No. 31. Francesco Algarotti to Giovanni Mariette, June 10th, 1761.

not to have put his name to it." And in speaking of the *Adoration* he writes: "You will remember how Vasari, in describing this work, says that he painted two other pictures to go on either side, containing all that there was not room for in the central panel; camels, giraffes, servants, attendants and the courtiers of the three kings. These are no longer there; and, to tell the truth, it is no great loss. Such a representation in three acts must have been like a Chinese comedy."

From Rimini, with the Autobiography as our only guide, we follow Giorgio to Ravenna, where he painted for Sant' Apollinare in Classe the *Deposition from the Cross* which now hangs in the Pinacoteca.

The house which he had purchased in Arezzo some time previously had been progressing slowly while Vasari was working at, and for, his book. It must be admitted that Giorgio showed commendable foresight in purchasing this house; for, making due allowance for the narrowness of the street in which it stands—a failing which is common to the streets of most Italian towns—its position is pleasant enough. The city climbs steeply up the northern slopes of a hill, and Vasari's house, in a street which has been given the all too modern name of the Via Venti Settembre, occupies an elevated position well removed from the more noisy business centre. It is a large house, even as Italian houses go, with a tolerable frontage to the street and a raised and terraced garden, interspersed with shady walks and green avenues. A cursory visit to it reveals the fact that Vasari had got on in the world. His attitude towards life is not that of the time when the plague had robbed him of his father and threatened the family with extinction. The Casa Vasari ranked among the best, and its

decorative frescoes were to be the monument of his art. It was to be covered with frescoes within and without, and the whole summer<sup>1</sup> was to be devoted to this labour of mingled pride and pleasure. He was going to decorate the front of the house with frescoes, then the sitting-room was to be similarly treated, and after that three of the other rooms: and the designs, which were already sketched out, included views of all the places where the artist had worked and gained the wherewithal to pay for his building operations—"as if, so to put it, they were bringing their tribute to my house."

It might be supposed, from the account of Vasari's occupation at this time, that he intended to get married and settle down quietly in his new home. Nothing was further from his thoughts, however, if we may draw a conclusion from so much of his scheme as he was able to carry out. Commissions showered upon the artist wherever he went, and now interfered with the realisation of his project. All that he finished at this period was the sitting-room; and in one of the thirteen panels he made it abundantly evident that no thought of marriage, either present or future, was in his mind. The panel referred to contained, "as a sort of joke," a representation of a bride leaving her father's house to take up her abode with her husband. One hand stretches towards the paternal dwelling and holds a rake, while the other hand grasps a lighted torch. This Vasari describes as an allegorical picture, and the meaning of it might be hard to guess did he not himself enlighten us. The rake indicates that before leaving her father's

<sup>1</sup> From the context of the Autobiography it is clear that Vasari intends the summer of 1547 to be understood. The work cannot have been begun before 1548.

roof the bride collects every available and portable article for her own future use; and she holds the torch before her to signify that "as soon as she enters the home of her husband she becomes a veritable firebrand, consuming and destroying wherever she goes."

When at length Giorgio did marry, it would be interesting to know what explanation he gave his wife of this "allegory," but as a matter of fact the said allegory is so veiled in uncertainty that it may be doubted whether anyone would be likely to solve the riddle. Out of a tangled mass of humanity there emerges a female figure holding a rake and a torch: the rest is conjecture. It might as well represent a provident housewife who, apprehensive of approaching rain, has decided to get up in the night and gather the hay which is intended to form the winter sustenance of the family goat.

How much time was devoted to the embellishment of his house is not clear. According to the *Autobiography*, Giorgio was still at work upon it at the end of 1547 and the beginning of the following year.<sup>1</sup> Very little of the outside received any decoration at all, and the only indication of its artistic owner is to be seen in the representation of an Egyptian colonnade on one of the annexes. Inside, he painted the sitting-room already referred to, which contains the "bride" and the views of the several cities in which Vasari had worked. It is a handsome enough room, and the decorations are the work of one who was evidently working for love; not to gain money or in a race against time. It is curious to note that, in his native city of Arezzo, there is a greater sense of peaceful calm in all his paintings

<sup>1</sup> *Mentre ch' io mi stava così passando tempo, venuto l'anno 1548,*" etc.

than will be found, for instance, in his large panels in the Palazzo Vecchio at Florence. In like manner he decorated the ceilings of the chief bedrooms.

These works were done at the best period of his art; for the same year that saw the completion of such of these works as were destined to be finished also brought him instructions "to paint the *Feast of Ahasuerus* in the monastery of SS. Fiore and Lucilla." From the contract for this work, still proudly guarded in the Biblioteca of Arezzo, we know that the agreement was made on July 13th, 1548. The work itself is signed and dated 1549. The *Feast of Ahasuerus*, or as it is called in the contract, the Story of Esther, is the best of Giorgio's works. It gave the greatest satisfaction to all who beheld it, and in especial it pleased the painter, who is at considerable pains to conceal his contentment. His desire had been to express both majesty and grandeur, but he does not feel capable of deciding whether he has achieved his object or no. On this occasion he felt called upon to put all his strength into a supreme effort to do "something out of the common"; and, be it whispered, in his own estimation he has succeeded. "In fact," he says, glowing with pride at the reminiscence of his pictorial feat, "if I were to believe all I heard said about my work I might have persuaded myself that I had really accomplished something. I know full well how it ought to have been done, and how it would have been done if my hand had been capable of carrying out the conception of my brain. In very truth—this at least I say in all frankness—I put the utmost diligence and care into it." The custodian of the Badia, by the way, claims that Ahasuerus and Esther are respectively the portraits of Vasari and his wife.



Vasari, however, had no wife at the time; and while the lady whom he married in the following year appears to have been as devoid of character—judging from Vasari's portrait of her on the altar erected over the tomb of his ancestors—as the Esther in the picture, it is certain that the fair-haired Ahasuerus with the delicate pink complexion bears no resemblance whatever to the painter himself.

Four minor works are mentioned in the Autobiography as having been done after the *Feast of Ahasuerus* and before his return to Florence: a *Portrait of Luigi Guicciardini*, brother of the historian, a *Virgin and Saints* for San Francesco di Castiglione Aretino, a *Banner* for the Compagnia di San Giovanni de' Paducci, and a scheme for laying out a vast garden for Cardinal del Monte—afterwards Pope Paul III—at the foot of Monte San Savino, a work which was never carried out.

Vasari's return to Florence towards the end of 1549 marks the beginning of a fresh epoch in his career. Within a few months his patron, Cardinal del Monte, was to become Pope and to employ Vasari on important works in Rome; and Giorgio—despite his picture of the bridal homecoming—was to settle down as a married man.

Before narrating the singular reasons which led him into the conjugal noose, there is a letter to him from Caro which refers to a picture done at this period; and as it throws a vivid light upon the estimation in which Vasari's work was held by his contemporaries, it may be of interest to quote from it. As soon as the painter reached Florence he set to work upon a picture which had been long promised to his friend. Caro had selected the subject himself, and the letter contains a comprehensive description of the lines the

composition is to follow, together with an honest, if perhaps unpalatable, criticism. "I should like," writes Caro on May 10th, 1548, a year before the picture was commenced, "to have a first-rate work from your hand, partly for my own delectation and partly for your benefit, so that I can show it to those who speak of you as a rapid rather than as a good painter. I spoke to Botto about it, but I do not want to bother you until you have leisure to begin it. But since you have offered to set to work at once you can imagine how glad I am; though whether you do it quickly or take plenty of time over it I leave to you, for I fully believe that it is possible to work both quickly and well when the spirit moves. In this respect painting resembles poetry. I admit that people say you would paint better if you painted in less haste, but though in this case they are probably right, it does not follow as a necessary conclusion; for it is equally true that a laboured production, one that lacks conviction and is not finished with the same enthusiasm that marked its commencement, is equally bad."<sup>1</sup> Then, proceeding to discuss the subject of the picture, he suggests that it should consist of two nude figures, "as this is the branch of art which is best calculated to show a painter's skill. Beyond these two principal figures I am not anxious for the composition to include any others, unless they are minor figures in the background. It seems to me that the composition would thus throw the chief figures into greater prominence. If you care to receive a suggestion from me, I should say that the story of *Venus and Adonis* affords an opportunity for delineating two of the most shapely models you can find, though the subject has already been done. . . . If you do not wish to have more

<sup>1</sup> *Bottari*, Vol. II, No. 2.

than one figure, then I would suggest a *Leda*, and particularly I would like you to bear in mind that by Michel Angiolo, as it gives me renewed pleasure each time I see it."

This picture was sent to France, whither another of his, *Psyche and Cupid*, also went. The *Endymion*, in which Tommaso Cambi, "very handsome, learned, courteous, and gentle, caused himself to be painted entirely naked," was done at this period, Cambi having been prompted to this strange desire by the sight of Vasari's last-named work. We know also of another picture which was executed during this visit to Florence, the *Portrait of Pietro Aretino's Mother*, though it is not mentioned in the *Autobiography*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There are two letters in *Bottari* (Vol. III, Nos. 78 and 79) from Aretino to Vasari which deal with this portrait. In the first of them Aretino asks the painter, as a great favour, to undertake the work. "I do more than ask, I entreat you in the name of our cordial friendship to put everything else on one side." He tells Giorgio that, thanks to his well-known ability with the brush, such a portrait will seem like the actual reality; and that when he sees the counterfeit it will be as though he were in her presence, although she is dead. The painter will find her portrait "over the doorway of St. Peter's, where she stands in the attitude of the Virgin of the Annunciation."

How widely different are the characteristics which go to make up the sum of our human nature! Pietro Aretino's affection and veneration for his mother are manifest in these letters to Vasari: yet when he died the best his friends could find to say of him was that he maligned everybody save God Almighty, and Him he knew not of.

"Qui giace l'Aretin', Poeta Tusco,  
Chi disse mal d'ogniun', fuora che di Dio,  
Scusandosi, dicendo, io nol' conosco."

The second letter, dated May, 1549, acknowledges the safe arrival of the picture.

## CHAPTER V

### JULIUS III

Vasari marries—His views on matrimony—Julius III elected—Vasari hastens to Rome—Publication of the *Lives*—Discontent of Vasari in Rome—Tomb of Cardinal del Monte—Vigna Giulia—Homesickness—Façade for Sforza Almeni—Vasari leaves Rome in disgust.

IT is difficult to arrive at any conclusion with regard to Vasari's opinion of the gentler sex. He was singularly free from the vices of the age, and seems to have been but little contaminated by his up-bringing in the dissolute court of Alessandro de' Medici. Of love or love-making there is not the smallest hint anywhere to be found in his letters.

Whatever may have been his views, Giorgio has left no record of them; and when he speaks of his marriage in the Autobiography, he gives us to understand that it was, so to speak, by an unavoidable accident that the noose was slipped over his head and the ring on to a woman's finger. It was due to no carelessness or negligence on his part; it was just another turn given by Dame Fortune to her wheel.

It happened like this. He had reached the age of thirty-eight and was still a bachelor. One day, having journeyed to Bologna to visit Cardinal del Monte, and while staying with him, the conversation fell upon the subject of matrimony. The Cardinal told Giorgio he thought it was high time that he took unto

himself a wife. Giorgio at first seems to have been ungallant enough to turn a deaf ear to all persuasions. The Cardinal argued and cajoled. Giorgio persistently refused. He did not want to get married, and that was the truth of it. The Cardinal stuck to his guns. Giorgio stuck to his guns. At length the Cardinal opened another line of attack, and began to enlarge upon the advantages which Giorgio would reap if he sought the hand of Niccolosa, the daughter of Francesco Bacci of Arezzo. In short, the prelate "brought so many unanswerable arguments into play" that the painter consented, with a certain lingering reluctance, to do what hitherto he "had been careful to avoid, that is to say, to take a wife." And with wholly admirable self-abnegation he adds: "And so, as it was the Cardinal's wish, I took the daughter of Francesco Bacci, a noble of Arezzo." Surely this noble act entitles Giorgio Vasari to stand beside the Roman Lucretia!

Vasari's attitude towards matrimony is inexplicable. The only reason for his reluctance that can be put forward is that his work took him from place to place, and that he might not find it convenient to drag a wife and a possible family about wherever he went. He seems, too, to have regarded the wedded state as an obstacle to his ambition, recalling perhaps the story of Paolo Uccello, who sat up far into the night studying the laws of perspective, replying—whenever his wife suggested that it was time for him to come to bed—"Oh, what a beautiful thing is this perspective!" Vasari would have no such obstacles in his path; and if the truth were known, he felt that whatever time he spent in his own home was time lost, and that the petty matters of domestic

procedure proved irksome after the life of the court. We do not find these sentiments expressed in the Autobiography, but in a letter to Albergotti he makes it evident that he considers a wife a burden and the influence of home other than elevating. "I am suffering the penalty," he says, "of all who remain in their own homes, contented with a few grape vines, a few square feet of ground, and a wife tied round one's neck like a millstone. A man in that condition can never raise his eyes or his ambition above sordid things."

This Niccolosa Bacci—"La Cosina," as Vasari came to call her when they were better acquainted—seems to have been related to Pietro Aretino.

Directly after his marriage the happy bridegroom returned to Florence, while his bride leaps back into oblivion with the same startling suddenness that marks her first, so far as we know, intrusion into the life of her lord and master. We hear no more of her for some years, and Giorgio's love letters, if he ever wrote any, have disappeared. When he mentions her in his correspondence it is generally to say that she is grumbling at his long absences; and when he follows the fashion of the day by composing sonnets in her honour, he almost invariably takes the opportunity of telling her that away from her side life is not worth living, and that he is fading away for lack of her society. In one sonnet he says that if she is feeling sad about their separation she will be able to guess all the more shrewdly how much worse he feels. If he but had his own way, the sun would neither rise nor set before he would be on his way home. He suffers strange maladies for want of her. Sometimes he "burns like a red-hot furnace"; at other times he finds the words freezing on his lips,

while "the snow in the sunlight is not more cold" than he is.

"Se il mio starti lontano a te dispiace,  
 Consorte cara, a me dispiace e duole,  
 Che non si leva o colca in nel cielo sole  
 Ch' io posi quest' afflitta anima in pace.  
 Ardo tal'or qual accesa fornace  
 M'agghiaccia ancora in bocca le parole,  
 Divento come fredda neve al sole,  
 E quella fonte d'Empiro intinta face.  
 Pur vivo di speranza e di disio  
 Di venir presto a te."

And in another sonnet he admits that his "fruitless quest for greater fame and greater wealth keeps him from her, his *cara consorte*." Nobody can appreciate better than he does her nobleness of mind and faithfulness to him, and that it is her little Giorgio that she wants and not his possessions. If his erring nature bids him resolve to absent himself from her company, at least she must believe that his real desire is to have her ever near him.

"Conosco ben che la mia vana sorte,  
 Per acquistar più fama e più ricchezze,  
 Mi tien lontan da te, cara consorte.  
 Non è chi più di me stimi et apprezze  
 La nobiltà tua e la tuo (*sic*) fede,  
 E ch' ogn' altro mio ben odi e disprezze ;  
 Ma quello honor, che drento al cor mi siede  
 Di lasciarti immortal con meco in terra  
 Far ch'l mio occhio è cieco e più non vede.  
 Or se l'animo mio, ch'in ver tropp'erra  
 Di starti sì lontano è risoluto  
 Volerti appresso fin che starà'n terra  
 Conoscendo che'l tempo, ch'ho perduto  
 In cose vane, mai più si racquista,  
 Nè creder ch'un ch'ha fame, sia pasciuto.  
 Hor, poi che chiara io ho dal ciel la vista,  
 E che'l mio mal conosco e la tua voglia,

Vo' lasciar questa vita amara e trista,  
 Caverò te di pensier e me di doglia  
 Col venir io costà, o tu a Roma :  
 Questo è un sì, ch'al cor mai più si spoglia.  
 Che il portar ogni dì sì grave soma  
 Di pensier, di fatiche, e non sapere  
 Perch'io le facci, il cervel mio sì doma.  
 Che mi varrà dopo molt'anni avere  
 Figli di te, e non poter mostrargli  
 Le virtù, che si fanno huomin tenere ?  
 Che varria lor, s'io potessi lassarli  
 Richezze e non havessin' altro intorno  
 Che gente che studiassino in rubarli ?"

Giorgio's wife was obliged to find such solace in these sonnets as she could. Her husband was much too busy and had become far too great a man—in his own opinion, at least—to be able to neglect the call of duty for the enjoyments of conjugal bliss. Duty with him consisted of an honest desire to please his friends, but underneath it there lay the seeds of a boundless ambition. A true child of the times, he knew perfectly well that he could not afford to lose the patronage of the wealthy; and fortunately enough for him, he was, as we gather from his letters, tolerably expert in the art of adulation. Popes and prelates, kings and emperors, all were divinely appointed; but they were appointed chiefly for the purpose of employing the little artist who came from Arezzo. In return he showed himself ever ready and willing to do their behests. He worked for them to the best of his ability, partly because he wished to please—and this quite apart from the financial side of the question—partly because he could not live without their favours, and partly, it must be confessed, because he did not believe that there lived anybody else who could design or paint quite so well as himself. In his dealings with his equals he was generous, kind



and affectionate—witness the many letters written by him to Vincenzo Borghini, Prior of the Ospedale degli Innocenti, who became his lifelong friend. Then, too, we have the testimony of Vinta, one of Duke Cosimo's secretaries, who tells his master that Giorgio has got himself into debt, chiefly because all his numerous friends, and every person coming from Arezzo, make his house their headquarters, and that consequently his earnings are eaten up by the demands of hospitality.

Vasari's first work after he had left his wife in Arezzo among his other possessions, and had himself returned to Florence, was to paint a *Madonna* for Bindo Altoviti, after which he received instructions to decorate the chapel of the Martelli family. The *Lives*, meanwhile, were approaching completion, and by order of Cosimo the business of printing them was put into the hands of Lorenzo Torrentini, the ducal printer. But while Giorgio was in the midst of revising the sheets Paul III died, on November 10th, 1549, and Cardinal del Monte visited Florence on his way to attend the conclave, confident that he would be elected to the vacant see. This view was also held by Giorgio, and consequently it was a matter of policy, as well as of personal pleasure, for him to take the opportunity of paying his respects to the Cardinal on whose account he had got married. He found his patron full of the approaching election, and already making arrangements for the future. "I am going to Rome," he tells Giorgio, "and assuredly shall be made Pope. If you have any work in hand, finish it as quickly as may be; then, as soon as the news reaches you, hurry to Rome without waiting for further instructions."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Vite*, Vol. VII, p. 693.

The Cardinal was duly elected as he had prophesied, and on February 8th, 1550, ascended the papal throne as Julius III. Shortly afterwards Vasari presented himself at the Vatican, full of hopes for the future, and believing that at last Providence was about to reward him bountifully for the labours and vexations of the past. He did not wait even to see the *Lives* issued from the press, but hurried away, scarcely stopping to take farewell of his friends.

Cardinal del Monte and Julius III proved to be two vastly different people. The four years of Vasari's sojourn in Rome sufficed to make him almost hate the very name of Pope; for in addition to the growing feeling of exile from his native land (and, let us hope, from his wife), he was daily subject to petty worries that were nearly insupportable. The Pope, he found, resembled nothing so much as a weathercock. He changed his mind without the smallest provocation, and even then could not be relied upon to adhere to his later decision.

“ Un papato composto di rispetti  
 Di considerazioni e di discorsi,  
 Di più, di poi, di ma, di sì, di forse,  
 Di pur, d'assai parole senza effetti,  
 Di pensier, di consigli, di concetti,  
 Di congetture magre, per apporsi,  
 D'intrattenerti, purchè non si sborsi,  
 Con Audienze, Risposte e bei Detti.”<sup>1</sup>

These things vexed the soul of the artist, and he blames his august patron for whatever mistakes he may have made during this visit to Rome. “I was always at the beck and call of that Pope, and he kept me running about all the time,” he says in the *Autobiography*, and it is difficult to repress a smile

<sup>1</sup> F. Berni, *Opere Burlesche*, No. 25, London, 1721.

at the droll picture his words suggest. We see him at work upon the tomb of the first Cardinal del Monte, unable to complete his schemes because the Pope will not decide whether it is to be erected in San Pietro a Montorio or in the church of the Florentines; we see him sitting at his work in Rome and wondering what sort of a mess Torrentini is making of the *Lives* in his absence; and then we see him painting the portrait of the Pope, asking him to sit still and not fidget about quite so much, "which I believe he would have done if the sudden twinges of gout hadn't forced him to make a wry face."<sup>1</sup>

The *Lives* were finally published early in 1550, presumably towards the end of February; for on March 8th he writes to Cosimo de' Medici to say that he is sending the volumes. His tone is not the same as that adopted in the Preface. He feels that he has done a splendid work, and has conferred a boon on the arts by bringing his abilities to bear upon them, for he says: "What I am sending you is the result, not of two months' work, but of ten years' study, and I hope that you will realise while reading them the love, the practical knowledge and sound judgment that I have of and for these beautiful and noble arts; and also that you will realise the diligence with which I have completed the work, robbing myself of my own leisure in order to do them such honour as lay in my power." He considers this a suitable occasion on which to ask some little favours on his own account; for being, as His Highness is aware, in the service of His Holiness, he has asked Carlo Lenzoni to present the books to the

<sup>1</sup> "Già più volte (ho) supplicato sua Santità a star ferma; e se la gotta non gli avesse fatto un viso amaro dal male, egli n'era contento" (Letter to Francesco Bonanni, May 18th, 1550).

Duke as soon as they are finished, and at the same time to present a little petition with regard to some of his property. But Carlo is ill, and the Duke has gone to Pisa, so Giorgio thinks it better to write than wait. Perhaps the most important part of the letter is that in which he speaks of the many years he has been in the service of the Medici, and in which he reproaches the Duke, in a half-apologetic manner, for not having employed him as yet, while at the same time he throws out a hint that he would be glad to get away from Rome. He speaks of himself as "a servant of no importance, and in no way deserving of His Highness's favour, nor yet to be so much as thought about by so great a Prince"; and he comes to the conclusion that the reason why Cosimo has never given him anything to do is to be found in his own resolve to wander from place to place, doing such work as came to hand. He now hints that he would have been wiser if he had stayed at the court of the Medici, thus definitely admitting that his friends had been right when, after the murder of Alessandro, they had endeavoured to dissuade him from his rash vow to avoid the society of courts.

And now Giorgio had to plead guilty to another mistake. He found that he was at the mercy of the Pope's least whim, and he could see no way out of the dilemma in which he had placed himself. He had been glad enough to leave the Martelli chapel unfinished in order to become painter to a Pope, but now he would have given all his chances of preferment and all the splendours of the papal court to be once more at work in Ottaviano's house, finishing the picture which had been commissioned by the heirs of Gismondo Martelli for the family chapel in San



Giorgio Vasari

TOMB OF CARDINAL DEL MONTE  
(Rome : S. Pietro in Montorio)

Anderson



Lorenzo, the picture which, as future events showed, was to be the means of his entering the ducal service. It represented the *Martyrdom of San Gismondo* and his wife and children, who, as the legend tells, were cast into a bottomless well by some tyrannical king. Cosimo saw it when visiting his kinsman and was well pleased; so pleased that Vasari received an invitation to return to Florence when his work in Rome was completed. But the time was not yet come; and while striving to satisfy His Holiness in Rome, Giorgio's thoughts turned not once but often to the City Beautiful beside the Arno, and to the bright vision which Cosimo's message had called up. A Benvenuto Cellini would have found a simple way out of the difficulty by packing up his baggage and setting out for Florence without troubling to take leave of the Pope, and there he would have boasted and squabbled until the resentment of the Pope had cooled down. But no such thought entered Giorgio's head; and if it had he would have lacked the courage to put it into execution.

Julius kept him occupied. Michelangelo was asked to supervise Giorgio in the matter of the tomb for the Cardinal del Monte, and at least one journey to Carrara was undertaken by Vasari, as we learn from the *Life of Michelangelo*, for the purpose of selecting the marbles. With the exception of this expedition, however, and two flying visits which he seems to have paid to Florence—in one of which he contrived to complete the Martelli chapel—the biographer remained in Rome, disconsolate and lonely, penning third-rate sonnets to his wife whenever she wrote to ask him if he ever meant to come home again. His chief solace lay in his proximity to Michelangelo, whom, he tells us, he visited every day, and who

really seems to have held the little painter in considerable esteem. It may be noted in passing that this esteem does not appear to have extended to his work as an artist; for when Michelangelo finds himself compelled to say something about Giorgio's designs for the work at the Palazzo Vecchio he takes refuge in ambiguities.

"Touching the pictures," he writes, "it seems to me that I have seen something marvellous; as, indeed, everything that is or shall be done under the shadow of your Excellency ought to be":<sup>1</sup> a remark which deserves to be recorded if only on account of its evasiveness.

We are not told what Cosimo thought of the *Lives*, but he seems to have listened to the *supplica* about the property, as, writing to a friend on May 18th, 1550, Vasari says he is glad to hear that "the Frassineto affair" is being attended to, and that he hopes it will be concluded to the satisfaction of the Duke. He adds once again, emphasising his anxiety to enter the service of Cosimo, that although he has placed himself under the yoke of the Pope his heart is still in Florence, and he can think of nothing else but the Duke and the Duke's magnificence. Nevertheless the artist was in high favour in Rome, and was admitted to the familiar company of His Holiness, as may be gathered from a letter written by Pietro Vettori.<sup>2</sup>

The four years of his stay in Rome are passed over with little comment in the Autobiography, and there are very few letters extant which were written

<sup>1</sup> *Le Lettere di Michelangelo*. G. Milanesi, Florence, Le Monnier, 1875. Letter No. 489, to Cosimo de' Medici, April 25th, 1560.

<sup>2</sup> Gaye, *Carteggio Inedito*, Vol. II, footnote to Letter No. 268. "Per quel che ritraggho da Giorgio Vasari, che è spesso a gli orecchi di sua Santità et molto dimestico del Signor Baldovini," etc.



at this period. From the former we learn that in 1553 he painted a *Beheading of the Baptist* for the church of the Misericordia, and that he designed and decorated two *loggie* for Bindo Altoviti. He also painted a *Conversion of St. Paul*, taking considerable pains to make it different from that done by Michelangelo in the Pauline Chapel, lest the two pictures should be mistaken for the work of the same hand!<sup>1</sup> He claims, too, to have got out the original designs for the Vigna Giulia, and the Autobiography betrays his annoyance at the work having ultimately been carried out by another architect, Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola, better known in England by the single name of Vignola. "I was the first," he says, "to work out the scheme for the Vigna Giulia . . . for although the work was actually carried out by others, it was always I who put the ideas of the Pope on paper, and then submitted them to Michelangelo for revision and correction." The designs for the Vigna were done in 1553. Vasari seems actually to have begun the work, as Bartolomeo Ammannato, the Florentine sculptor and, subsequently, architect, executed two figures for a fountain in the *cortile* as well as other work, including a *loggia* which was in close proximity to the fountain.

As Ammannato was a great friend of Vasari's and consequently figures more than once in these pages, it may be well to say something more about him. He was the pupil of Francesco Sansovino, under whom he worked on the beautiful Libreria di San Marco in Venice. His chief works were sculptural, and accordingly we find him making the four statues

<sup>1</sup> This very strange rendering of St. Paul's conversion is now in S. Pietro a Montorio, in the same chapel as the tomb of Cardinal del Monte.

which adorn the tomb of Cardinal del Monte. He was thrown out of work by the death of Julius III and followed his friend back to Florence, where Vasari obtained work for him under Cosimo. Until this period he had worked chiefly as a sculptor, but the destruction of the Ponte Santa Trinità in 1557 gave him the opportunity of becoming an architect, though the design for the Palazzo Rucellai in Rome is attributed to him by at least two writers of repute.<sup>1</sup> At a later date he became architect to the Palazzo Pitti in Florence, and to him the internal quadrangle is to be attributed. His best achievement in architecture is the Palazzo del Governo at Lucca, begun in 1578 but never finished. What there is of it shows sufficiently well what it might have been, for though not more than half was ever built, there is a breadth and balance in the design—it is based on the Palazzo Farnese at Rome—which is worthy of the traditions of the best period of the Renaissance. He married wisely and well, for his wife, Laura Battiferri, a lady of attainments with whom the greatest scholars of the day were not above exchanging sonnets, brought him a considerable fortune, much of which was spent in endowing the Collegio di Giesù in Florence. He died in 1592. His portrait, as well as that of Laura, is to be seen in Alessandro Allori's picture of the Wedding in Cana of Galilee.

But to return to Giorgio. The scant testimony of the biographer's own account is supplemented in a very meagre way by his letters. There are only two extant which belong to the year 1550, both of which have already been noticed. Representing his correspondence of 1551 there are three letters, two of

<sup>1</sup> Baglione, *Le Vite de' Pittori*, etc., 1773; Baldinucci, *Notizie de' Professori del Disegno, da Cimabue in qua*, 1845-7.

them of no interest and the third merely indicating that he is about to visit Arezzo on business. There are no letters at all for the following year; and it is not until we come to 1553 that we again hear definitely of what he is doing. In a letter to Minerbetti, Bishop of Arezzo, he says that he is painting a *Paziienza*, in which he portrays in allegorical form his own patience and longsuffering with the caprices of the Pope, while awaiting permission to depart from Rome. Patience is represented by the figure of a woman standing upright. 'She is of middle age, and neither wholly draped nor wholly nude, to signify that she desires neither poverty nor riches. She is secured to a rock by a chain fastened to her left foot (as that is the least noble part), and her hands are left unbound to show that she could release herself if she wished. She extends her arms as if to tell us that she will not desert her post until the drops of water falling from the clepsydra, drop by drop, have eaten away the rock, while with fixity of gaze she contemplates the enduring stone, patiently wondering how long a time must pass before her vigil is ended, patiently waiting with the same forlorn hope that all must experience who strive to complete their obligations in spite of annoyances and discomforts.' This picture is now in the Pitti Gallery at Florence, where it is ascribed to Francesco Salviati. It may be, of course, that Salviati plagiarised Vasari's idea, or that Vasari copied from Salviati, but such a supposition does not appear tenable: and the work alluded to exactly corresponds with Vasari's description. Patience has her hands free and her left foot in shackles; she has no more clothing than is suggested in Vasari's letter; and she gazes with some degree of longing at the clepsydra. It is a

pity that Giorgio should not get the credit for this work, for it is decidedly above the level of his other productions: and this is only to be expected, seeing that presumably, as he was merely killing time in Rome, he had ample leisure in which to proceed without his usual disastrous haste. Here we have the picture of all Giorgio is suffering. In another letter to the Bishop he says that he is doing the designs for the Vigna, and describes, in happy vein, the work he has still to do. "I had no sooner arrived"—he had just been to Arezzo—"than *Nostro Signore* told me to get out the drawings for the Vigna: so, when I have disposed of Ceres with her harvest-laden car drawn by winged snakes, and all the women and children and priests who offer her the first fruits of the earth with the incense of corn (*gl' incensi del frumento*): and when I have got rid of Bacchus and his grapes and vine leaves and other accessories; when I have settled Silenus, Priapus, all the satyrs, wood nymphs, and bacchanals; the presiding deities of the fountains (with their usual sacrifices); the spirits of the water-springs and the whole array of flower-bedecked river ledges; and when at last the softest breezes and western winds have breathed life into my figures—why then, after I have sketched it all out, there will still remain the colouring, all of which I shall have to do with my own hands." But for this he would be back in Arezzo, hoeing up the weeds in the garden he loves so much.

Towards the end of the year homesickness had reached an acute stage with Giorgio, helped on, doubtless, by the terrible Roman summer. In a strange metaphor he writes to Ricasoli, Bishop of Cortona, to say that "the tree of his peregrinations has begun not only to shed its leaves, but to dry up



PAZIENZA  
(Florence: Pitti Gallery)

*Brogi*



at the roots," and that nothing could please him better than to return to Arezzo. In yet another letter to the Bishop, which, though dateless, must have been written about this time, he says that he will set out for Tuscany right willingly as soon as he has satisfied all the capricious requirements of the Pope; the more so as about this time he received an intimation that the Duke of Florence was ready to employ him as soon as he could get away from Rome. He is far from all his relations and friends; there are no children at home to make the household complete, a fact which caused perpetual sorrow to the painter and his wife. When he felt particularly homesick, he would moralise at considerable length and in indifferent verse upon the futility of striving to build up a great reputation when there seemed no possibility of his founding, so to speak, a dynasty of Vasarian artists to perpetuate his name. Two sonnets have been preserved in which he refers to the subject. In one of them, after taking himself to task for being too ambitious, he confesses in sorrow that though he still may strive to leave a glorious monument to himself in his buildings and pictures, yet, after all, whatever he does will be done in vain. The true monument—a family of little Giorgio Vasaris—will never adorn the world.

“Desire of Fame! That cause of so much sorrow  
Engulfs my hours of pleasure and of play—  
Cease, then, my soul, to seek a better Morrow  
Since the pursuit but robs thee of To-day.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Desio d'onor, cagion di tanta doglia,  
Tu studi al mio piacer chiuder le porte;  
Anima, non sperar in miglior sorte,  
Poichè 'l vano tardar del ben ti spoglia.  
Lassa il fallace tuo cammin che scuro  
Resterà doppo te, ancor che chiaro

But to return to the letter, which, as it voices exactly the same sentiments as the first of the two sonnets, seems to have been written about the same time. "I am more tired than rich," he says, "far from my wife, childless, separated from my household gods and deprived of the company of my friends. And although ambition and avarice between them might lead me to stop where I am so that, in addition to my manifold works, I might leave a goodly competence to those that come after me . . . I have no intention of leaving them so much that they will be enabled to spend the rest of their days in luxurious idleness, and finish up by squandering all that I have been at such pains to earn." He has had quite enough of the splendours and adulations of court life. "Instead of the seductions of court life, I could do very well with a house with a little garden, wherein I could be lazy when I felt like it, if it were coupled with some sort of work that would occupy several years—something that I could finish, or that would end by finishing me (*che o lei finisse me, o io finissi lei*)—with food sufficient for my old mother, my wife, myself, one servant and the lad who looks after a worn-out nag unable to draw its own water or keep its coat in order. Beyond that, if I should want clothes or anything else for the household, I could always paint a saint or two for

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Pensi lassar per fama in muri e 'n legni,  
 Muovi l' almo tuo cieco, a i prieghi duro  
 Da chi ti chiama e tien più che se caro  
 Non far più notte e giorno opre e disegni."

In the other sonnet he says that only his faith in God prevents his giving way to despair:—

"Se la speranza mia e tua, ch'è in Dio,  
 Non fussi tal che mi porgessi aiuta  
 Disperarci di noi non lasciar prole."



some of my friends, and so find the necessary money." Above all things he wants to get away from Rome, and firmly believes that, were he anywhere else, he would accomplish wonderful things. He implores the Bishop to do what he can to secure his return to Tuscany, and points out how much of the credit of these hypothetical achievements would accrue to the good Bishop himself. "If you, who have already earned the name of benefactor, should enable me to come home, and if I were to accomplish something remarkable, what would the world in general say, and artists in particular? I do not want to press you, nor do I ask more than your affection for the prince demands." He concludes by telling him that he would thus "restore a son to his mother, a husband to his wife, a companion to his friends and a servant to himself"; he would be in a position, in the light of these inducements, to guess how great a favour he would be conferring upon mankind at large.

These outpourings of a vexed spirit failed to produce the desired effect, not because Cosimo was unwilling to have him, but—to use Vasari's own words—'because while he does not feel that he has any obligation towards the citizens of Rome, he does feel that he has a duty to Rome herself, and he would not like to go away with a guilty conscience. And besides, not being a priest, he might find it difficult to invent plausible excuses, if anyone were to accuse him of ingratitude'—a sarcasm which is made all the more trenchant by its being addressed to a Bishop. As time wears on we find Vasari growing more and more discontented with Rome, and expressing his opinion of her ecclesiastics in unmeasured terms. The little painter, in fact, is losing his temper. The Bishops and Cardinals no longer

command his fawning admiration: they have become merely a lot of "asses decked out in silk," and he quotes a saying of Michelangelo with evident relish to the effect that "all who begin by making donkeys of themselves for princes to drive may expect to be kept in harness for the remainder of their lives." He doesn't ever again want to listen to a sonnet composed in his honour, he doesn't care in the least for epigrams written to praise his work, and he is sick and tired of being made a fuss of, the reason being that these praises and ambition between them have turned his head. He implores the Bishop to pray God send him back to Arezzo with speed and in safety.

It must not be supposed that Vasari was in a similar frame of mind during the whole of his stay in Rome. There were moments when the old desire for work absorbed his entire being. Unable to get back to his home, he did the next best thing in getting out designs for works which were to be done as soon as the Pope and Providence allowed him to return to Tuscany. On this occasion Sforza Almeni, chief chamberlain and prime favourite of Cosimo de' Medici, was his employer; for Sforza had decided to have the front of his house decorated with frescoes. It was to this work that Vasari set hand, and for a little while most of his correspondence is full of descriptions of the cartoons and the manner in which he proposes to deal with his theme, the *Life of Man*. He shows it to Michelangelo: for "one day that rarest and most divine old man<sup>1</sup> was in my rooms, and when he saw the drawings he was delighted, and praised me, as is his wont, for the novelty of the

<sup>1</sup> "Il mio rarissimo e divinissimo Vecchio." See Vasari's letter to Almeni, dated October 14th, 1553.

accessories, the originality of the composition and the great number of the figures." The finished sketches were sent to Almeni, accompanied by a long rigmarole describing the whole thing, and not omitting the smallest detail. This description still exists, but it is too long for quotation and would afford but uninteresting reading. An idea of it may be gathered from a part of the poem, in which Giorgio expresses himself thus:—

"The Life of Man, albeit each one of us is destined to pass all his days in experiencing and supporting its vicissitudes, is the most noble subject that it is possible to depict upon the façade of a house." After much prosing of a similar nature he proceeds to the description, and concludes with this truly Vasarian conceit: "I shall be much obliged if you will refrain from exhibiting the cartoons, for not only would such a rough sketch bring very little honour either to myself or to you, but I have known of similar cases in which other people, having seen sketches like these, have pirated the whole composition before the original scheme had been executed."

It would appear that at this time, the end of 1553, the tomb of Cardinal del Monte was already completed, and that Giorgio only remained in Rome in order to finish a *loggia*, which he had undertaken for Bindo Altoviti; for, on October 26th, he writes to Minerbetti to say that "the work on the *loggia* is proceeding at a great pace," and that he is pushing it on as fast as possible in order to get away. But still his release was delayed by one thing and another, and two weeks later he writes again to Minerbetti, this time in a state of utter dejection: "If only Dame Fortune were as prompt in rewarding me according to my merits as she is in making me a

beast of burden for people who don't appreciate either merit, worth or faithful service, I could then afford to be more liberal in my dealings in return. I believe, *Monsignore*, nay, I am positive, that after this letter you will receive no more from me dated from Rome, but from my own country of which you are the spiritual pastor. I can imagine my wife's delight when she received my baggage, and I expect she is preparing a good stout cord to tie me up with, so that I shall not again escape. And there is my poor old mother wishing all the time that these wheels within wheels which for the good of others deprive her of the pleasure of seeing me, could break off short at their axles. There is Ser Paolo breathing more freely at the sound of my approaching footsteps, knowing that the carelessness and neglect of hirelings will soon come to an end. The very stones of my house must surely settle more solidly together at the news that I am coming, and my desolate chests and store-rooms, now so empty, must rejoice at the thought that I shall so soon return to fill them up! Then there is my garden thirsting for want of me! I know that it put forth fresh buds when it heard the glad tidings, for all the old leaves have most assuredly dried up and withered, knowing that I have to work so hard for others that strangers are sent to cut the grass and gather up the leaves that fall just now over the bountiful earth like an autumnal covering. I picture to myself the gladness of my friends, my family and all who are waiting to see this harassed being emerge from this *purgatorio* or *inferno de' vivi*, as Petrarch calls it. I am full of compassion for my poor little property at Frassineto, for every day it used to cry aloud for me to come home and enjoy its sweet-flavoured bread as a reward.

for my labours: and when it found that I turned a deaf ear to its entreaties, it sought refuge in the arms of Mother Chiana, hiding itself under her muddy waves, until the bed of those two little streams which water the land on the further side were filled to overflowing with the ruin of the rains, the seed-lands flooded, the banks broken down and the ditches filled to their marges; and all this just for the purpose of showing me that though I seem to care so little for what my fields have done for me, they still mean to defy me and to make me come home." The passage is exceedingly difficult to translate: for that matter Vasari is always difficult to follow whenever he grows poetic—but it is clear that his property had suffered greatly from the autumnal rains, and that he is in high spirits at the thought of returning to Tuscany so soon. The immediate cause of his jubilation is that on the day this letter was written he had completed Bindo Altoviti's *loggia*, and that in ten days' time he would be free to go home, so that his friends and his family may enjoy his society for the rest of his days. His spirit, he says, has long ago put on its travelling suit, its riding boots and its spurs, and has packed up its baggage.

“Ridurrèmi a quel pover loco ch'io  
Sudai più volte, e con piacere onesto  
Finse il pennel l' umido, il caldo e'l gielo,”

as he puts it in one of his sonnets addressed to his wife.

Yet still there were delays. On November 26th he is still in Rome, and still putting the finishing touches to Bindo's *loggia*, having done so much work on it in the last three weeks that he is both astonished and amused at the manner in which he has tackled

the work.<sup>1</sup> It is nearly his last letter from Rome, and he has already sent off some of his baggage and has taken farewell of all his friends.

Thus ended the four years of self-imposed exile ; with but one regret, that he had not been allowed to finish the *Vigna Giulia*. It is evidently to this that he refers in the *Autobiography* when he speaks of his return to Tuscany: " I at length made up my mind that it was no use waiting, and that I was only wasting time in trying to serve him (Julius III). So, notwithstanding that I had made all the drawings for the frescoes in the *loggia* above the fountain, I finally decided that at all costs I would depart and enter the service of the Duke of Florence."

<sup>1</sup> *Vite*, Vol. VIII, Letter No. 54, to Sforza Almeni.

## CHAPTER VI

### FLORENCE

Cristofano Gherardi—Tasso, and the *Stanze Nuove* in the Palazzo Vecchio—Michelangelo's letters—War in the Val di Chiana—Battle of Marciano—Vincenzo Borghini—Michelangelo and St. Peter's—Vasari appointed architect to the Palazzo Vecchio—Death of Gherardi—Church of the Florentines in Rome—Baccio Bandinelli—*Dialoghi*.

UPON his departure from Rome Vasari went first to Arezzo, and there painted, as a mild form of relaxation, the *Pazienza* which has already been mentioned. Thence, after a short stay, he went to Florence to pay his respects to the Duke and to kiss his hand. Cosimo received him almost with cordiality, and immediately began to cast about to find something for him to do. Sforza, at the same time, was anxious to proceed with the façade of his house, and as Vasari appeared likely to be entirely taken up with work for the Duke, it became necessary to find a substitute capable of executing the *Life of Man* from Giorgio's cartoons. This circumstance gives the biographer an opportunity of obtruding on his readers with an account of how he befriended Cristofano Gherardi in a time of trouble.

Cristofano Gherardi dal Borgo San Sepolcro—to give him his full name and distinction—was, as we have already had occasion to note, one of Vasari's most intimate friends. He had been implicated—only remotely, it is true—in the political disturbances which arose after the murder of Duke Alessandro

in 1537, but for such share as he had taken he received sentence of banishment. That sentence was still in force when Vasari returned to Florence, and when he was asked to name a substitute for himself in the matter of the frescoes, it occurred to the kind-hearted little painter that here was a capital opportunity for reinstating his friend in favour. He went to Almeni, therefore, and told him that the one man who was suited to the work was under sentence of banishment, and so could not be employed. Representations of a like nature were made to the Duke by both Giorgio and Almeni, and in the end Cosimo agreed to remove the ban, and even to receive Cristofano in person. Vasari relates that when the offender appeared before the Duke he was greatly surprised to see, "not some great strapping ruffian," but the "very best little fellow (*omicciatto*) in the world."<sup>1</sup>

Giovanni Batista Tasso,<sup>2</sup> a carpenter whom Cosimo had raised to the dignity of architect to the Palazzo Vecchio, was then engaged in planning the *Stanze Nuove*, and Vasari received instructions to decorate them as soon as the walls were ready. The other palace of the Medici—the Pitti—had been purchased by Eleonora di Toledo, wife of Cosimo, from the Pitti family in February, 1549, but as the build-

<sup>1</sup> *Vite*, Vol. VI, p. 231.

<sup>2</sup> The epitaph written by il Lasca is sufficient indication of the opinion held by his contemporaries as to the merits of this architect:—

“ Il Tasso è qui sepolto, il qual fu prima  
Maestro di legname, e poi divenne  
Intagliatore, e tanto salse in cima,  
Che di quell'arte il principato tenne ;  
Poi fatto audace con più pregio e stima  
Cercando al ciel volare, arse le penne,  
E cadde in terra da sì alto volo,  
Non sendo architettor ni legniuolo.”





*Breyer*

INTERIOR OF THE SALA GRANDE, PALAZZO VECCHIO, FLORENCE



ing was still unfinished, and the Duke and his court were comfortably established in the Palazzo Vecchio, he seems to have preferred to remain where he was, enlarging the building to suit his requirements, while Bartolomeo Ammannato, another of Vasari's friends, superintended the completion of the Pitti. Cosimo continued to reside in the Palazzo di Piazza, or de' Priori, or della Signoria, as it was variously called, until 1550, when he removed to the Pitti. It was at this date that the older palace began to be called the Palazzo Vecchio, to distinguish it from the newer ducal residence.

The *Stanze Nuove* were a suite of rooms at the back of the Sala Grande, and were built upon the remains of the Palazzo del Capitano and the Palazzo dell' Esecutore. These additions seem to have included all that portion of the Palazzo which extended to the Via dei Leoni and the Via de' Gondi. Vasari tells us that these additions were begun in the year before his return from Rome, namely in 1552, but as a matter of fact Tasso had been at work upon them since 1548.<sup>1</sup>

This Tasso—*legnaiuolo*, as all his contemporaries are careful to add, as though fearing lest he should really be mistaken for an architect—was an odd person, and a member of an odd clique with still more odd propensities. The head of this band was a certain Iacone, and the chief recommendation for membership seems to have been personal uncleanness. Vasari tell us, though his account is probably over-coloured, that they never washed nor had their rooms swept out, while their beds were made once every two months. They ate their meals off drawing

<sup>1</sup> See Aurelio Gotti, *Storia del Palazzo Vecchio in Firenze*, Florence, Civelli, 1889.

paper in lieu of the more usual table linen, and indulged in other eccentricities of that sort. Giorgio, of course, would have nothing to do with them and their evil ways, regarding them as so many idle vagabonds who wilfully threw away their chances. Indeed, one day he told them so, and he tells us that he told them so. They were standing laughing and enjoying themselves in the streets of Florence one day, when who should come in sight but the virtuous, prosperous and upright Giorgio, mounted on a horse and followed by a servant. The sight seemed to tickle Iacone's fancy, and before Vasari had reached the little party they had already decided to amuse themselves at his expense. But Giorgio rebuked them gravely, even severely and with much sarcasm. When Iacone greeted him flippantly, he replied in sentences that ought to have been carved over his tomb: "I find myself exceedingly well, I thank you, my good Iacone. I once was as poor as you and your friends here are, but now I am worth three thousand crowns and more: once you thought I was a fool, but now friars and priests alike find that I am a man of worth: once I was your servant, but now this man who rides behind me waits on me hand and foot and takes charge of this my horse: once I wore the common cloth that all poverty-stricken painters have to wear, now I am clad in velvet: once I was obliged to go about on foot, now I go on horseback. Therefore, you see, my good Iacone, I find myself very well indeed. God bless you!" And Giorgio rode on with dignity befitting his station, satisfied, no doubt, that Iacone and his friends had received a crushing rebuke.

As some time would elapse before the walls were ready for him to commence the decorative work

Vasari obtained leave of absence from the Duke, and spent a couple of months "between Arezzo and Cortona," in which latter city he had to complete an unfinished work for the Compagnia di Gesù Cristo, consisting of the three large panels from the life of our Lord, and scenes from the Old Testament. The greater portion of it, however, appears to be the work of Cristofano.

By September, 1554, the façade for Almeni would seem to have been finished, for in a letter from Frozino Lapini to Antonio Gianfigliuzzi, written on the 28th of the month, Lapini says: "No sooner had you and your family gone away from us than those paintings by the *Aretino* in the Via de' Servi, which you were so anxious to see, were uncovered. . . . I really cannot decide whether I ought to devote the chief portion of my description, and the greater praise, to the subtleness of the composition and the ability of the artist, or to the wonderful imagery of the allegory and the ingenuity with which it is set forth. It seems impossible that it could have been better done." Il Lasca refers to these frescoes in a sonnet addressed to Sforza, the frescoes in which—

"Oggi il grande Aretin, vostra mercede,  
Ha col giudizio e col pennel dimostro  
Quanto far possa la Natura e l'Arte ;  
Che chi mira da fuor l'albergo vostro,  
Miracol tale e così fatto vede  
Che attonito e stupito indi si parte."

It was at this period that matters between the Florentine *fuorusciti*, aided by the French, and the forces of the Duchy came to a head in the Val di Chiana, plunging the whole of the Tuscan territory into uncertainty and doubt. The echoes of these

disturbances which are to be found in Vasari's correspondence are, as usual, faint: for unless the painter were directly affected either in person or property, he is rarely troubled by wars or rumours of wars. In fact, Michelangelo rebukes him for his indifference in a letter bearing date "the I-don't-know-what-th" of April, 1554. "My dear Giorgio," he writes, "I had much pleasure in reading your last letter and to see that you still remember the poor old man; and more because you were present at the ceremony you speak of, and have seen the birth of another Buonarroto. For this information I thank you as much as I can, or know how to (*quanto so e posso*), but I entirely disapprove of these pomps and vanities, because no man ought to rejoice when all the rest of the world is in tears. And so I think that Lionardo<sup>1</sup> shows little judgment in celebrating the birth of a child with rejoicings that ought to be reserved for the death of one who has ended a life of good deeds. I have no news to tell you. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the love you bear me, even though I am unworthy of it. Everything here is much as usual. The I don't-know-what-th of April, 1554."

Three months later the war touched Vasari with a vengeance. It was while he was still "between Arezzo and Cortona" that matters came to a crisis, and he writes to Simone Botti saying that all his crops are in a wretched state, and that it is almost impossible to persuade the farm hands to sow anything at all. Even if he supplies the seed himself he is very doubtful whether they can be got to sow it, unless the outlook improves. This letter was

<sup>1</sup> Lionardo Buonarroti, nephew of Michelangelo and father of the infant referred to in the letter.

indited from Arezzo, and shows that the writer was at his own home on July 4th, struggling to re-organise the management of both his property and his finances. It would appear that he was obliged to give over trying to put heart into his labourers by the arrival of the belligerent forces; and he beat a hurried but certainly wise retreat to the safe walls of the capital. Of what happened to his property during the campaign which ended at Marciano he has left a succinct account in his letter to Michelangelo, dated the 20th August.

“And now, although the French have burnt my houses, cottages and granaries, and have carried off all my cattle,<sup>1</sup> yet I thank God for it, because by His grace they have thus brought about their own undoing in this very valley of the Chiana.” It is thus Vasari speaks of the rout of Piero, leaving us to cull the details from other sources. The Florentine army which had set out to assail Siena in January, 1553, had met with varying successes during the eighteen months of the campaign, but on August 2nd, 1554, the forces of Piero Strozzi were finally overthrown at Marciano in the Val di Chiana. Later in the day three couriers, following each fast on the heels of the other, dashed into the city to bring the glad tidings, wearing, as Lapini tells us, garlands of flowers about their helmets, and carry-branches of olive as a token. The submission of Siena followed in April of the next year. Amid the rejoicings with which the tidings were welcomed there was, almost necessarily, a certain amount of

<sup>1</sup> “On the 18th of the said month (July) the army of Piero Strozzi overran the country as far as Arezzo, and then camped near Civitella and Foiano. And they took welcome booty in the shape of corn and cattle, for they were in great need and suffered much for the want of food” (Lapini, *Diario*).

disappointment among the secret enemies of the Medici in Florence, and Vasari hints at this in his letter to Michelangelo when he says that there has been trouble in the city, adding, however, that it is only the wicked—that is to say, those who would oppose the Duke openly if they dared—who have anything to fear, as the adherents of the Medici live in favour, not only with Cosimo, but with God Himself.

If we are to believe the Autobiography, Giorgio Vasari was sufficiently well off to be able to bear these losses. He was “splendidly and generously rewarded by the magnanimous liberality of this great Duke, not only with a salary and presents of money, with houses in the country and in Florence where he might work with greater convenience, but also with the supreme office of the *gonfalomierato* of Arezzo,” a position which he might delegate to a substitute. These emoluments, however, did not accrue to him until the following year, and Sig. Scoti-Bertinelli quotes a document in the Archivio Storico di Firenze<sup>1</sup> which shows that Vasari was definitely taken into the Duke’s service as *pittore stipendiato*, with a monthly salary of twenty-five florins, on March 1st, 1555. The statement made in the Life of Salviati, touching his invitation to France, is also shown to be incorrect by the same document. He says that Andrea Tassini had been told in 1554 to send a painter into France, and that he asked Giorgio Vasari to go, who replied that “not for any salary, promise or expectation would he depart from the service of his lord the Duke.”

The year thus auspiciously begun is one full of interest to our subject. Through the medium of the

<sup>1</sup> Filza, No. 3491, f. 6.



document just mentioned Vasari commenced his long and faithful service with Duke Cosimo, and was chosen by him to succeed Tasso as architect to the Palazzo Vecchio. It is of interest also because in it begins that long series of letters which passed between Vasari and Vincenzo Borghini, Prior of the Ospedale degli Innocenti, and from which we obtain the most vivid glimpses of his personal character. Borghini was five years younger than Giorgio, and although the first of these letters is dated on the 4th of January, 1555, it is clear that the two men were already friends. "Behold me, *Signor Spedalingo mio*—me, your Giorgio—back again from Rome, freed from the worries of Julius III, and having despatched the business of both Montorio<sup>1</sup> and the Vigna!"

Having secured his own return from Rome, Vasari next endeavoured to entice Michelangelo back to Florence, acting on the Duke's instructions, who was himself so desirous of having the great artist near him that he sent a special messenger to Rome to treat with him. Giorgio had already appealed to him to leave Rome in the same letter that speaks of the damage wrought by the French, imploring him to bring "his soul, and with it his body, to its native land, so that his fellow-countrymen may have the pleasure of gazing upon him once more before he goes to join the spirits of famous men who are now the ornament of Heaven"; adding that the Duke's sole desire is to enjoy his society, and not to plague him with the worries of work. "Flee from that rapacious Babylon as Petrarch your fellow-citizen did." To these entreaties Michelangelo refused to

<sup>1</sup> The tomb of the Cardinal del Monte in the church of San Pietro a Montorio.

listen, and in May there is a letter from him to Vasari explaining his reasons.

“I was made to undertake the work upon St. Peter’s against my will, and up to the present I have laboured at it for eight years, not only without remuneration, but even to my own sorrow and hurt. Now that the work is really progressing and there is money in hand, and especially as we are almost ready to begin the dome, I think it would spell ruin to the building if I were to desert it at this juncture. The whole Christian world would cry shame on me, and in the Day of Judgment this would be accounted to me for a grievous sin that I had committed.”<sup>1</sup>

The death of Tasso in May of this year afforded Vasari what may justly be considered the opportunity of his later life: for the Duke, desiring that the Palazzo Vecchio, “built on no regular plan, a piece at the time and more to suit the convenience of officials than according to a preconceived scheme,” should be reconstructed as far as possible, appointed Vasari in place of the dead architect. “To this work,” he tells us, “albeit that it seemed an undertaking beyond my abilities, I set hand, and made, as best I might, a very large model, which is now in the possession of his Excellency.”

The Autobiography mentions the painting of the Sala Grande almost in the same sentence as the designs for altering the palace, as though the two works were done immediately after the death of Tasso. That this was not the case we learn later on, for when we come to the account of the preparations for the wedding of Francesco de’ Medici, son and heir of Cosimo, we find that Giorgio was obliged

<sup>1</sup> *Le Lettere di Michelangelo, cit.*, No. 457, May 11th, 1555.

to hurry on with the painting so as to get it done for this event, which took place in 1565. Vasari, apparently, having more or less carefully traced the course of his life through all his wanderings until his safe arrival in Florence under the protecting wing of the Duke, at this point loses all semblance of consecutiveness and does not think it necessary to observe chronological rectitude in his narrative. The difficulties and dangers are past; Florence and the ducal service have been his goal; and, having reached that goal, he is only careful to record his journeyings and works, without paying much attention to the sequence. It may be, however, that the hasty revision of the *Autobiography*, undertaken at the very last moment before the *Second Edition* went to press, is responsible for this lack of coherence. It is only by the light of his letters that the story can be pieced together.

The ravages of time have robbed us of whatever letters he may have written during the first few months of his appointment as architect to the *Palazzo Vecchio*, but it is clear that the work was progressing favourably, and that much of it was approaching completion by the end of the year. We know also, on the evidence of the actual document, that the contract for the new choir in the Cathedral at Arezzo was signed by Vasari on November 19th, and it is natural to suppose that some portion of the previous months had been spent in preparing the drawings for the work. On the same day he was taken ill, but recovered before the end of the year, as there is a letter from him to Bartolomeo Concini, dated January 8th, 1556, in which he complains that his work in the *Palazzo Vecchio* is nearly suspended for want of instructions,

due perhaps to the state of affairs in the neighbourhood of Florence. Of the outlook at the time Vasari gives us a glimpse, in so far as his own property was concerned. The ducal emissaries have been scouring the Val di Chiana as well as other places for provender for the army, and some of them have discovered that Vasari had managed to save a little corn when his lands were ravaged by the French. He is in deadly terror lest they should take it away, although he has express permission from Cosimo to retain it for his own use. It is only "a hundred and sixty bushels (*staia*) of wheat that I want for my own use, but I am very much afraid, although they have been told I have permission to keep it, that they will not let me. Would *vostra Signoria* have the kindness to send me a letter to this effect, so that I may not be deprived of what has already been given me?"

With the death of Cristofano Gherardi in this year Giorgio lost his most able assistant. Cristofano had been his constant helper for twenty-four years, and the effect of this loss was considerable, having regard to the extent to which the master relied on his assistants. Cristofano has been to him "as the half of himself," and he tells Cosimo that, on account of his death, the work will have to proceed more slowly. Giorgio's grief found an outlet in the following epitaph, which is worthy to be recorded if only as embodying the biographer's tribute to his friend's talent:—

"Tace qui estinto in terra il Gran Pittore,  
Cristofor, che fu pari alla natura;  
Morte invidiosa il messe in sepoltura  
Malgrado suo, la fama or' lo tra' fuore.  
Dispensò si ben' gl'anni, i mesi e ore  
Havendo a gl'animali e a i corpi cura,



*Giorgio Vasari*

CEILING OF ONE OF THE STANZE NUOVE  
(Florence: Palazzo Vecchio)

Brosi



Le piante, l'erbe, i frutti, e chiara e scura  
Fe' l'aer' bella e così 'l tinto orrore.  
Or chi ama virtù meco si doglia,  
Che sian rimasti d'ogni lume spenti  
In questo mortal carcer, cieco e nudo.  
Dorranno a Roma, e Flora, e gran lamenti  
Farà la patria sua, e' l Tebro crudo,  
Poi che scurato alla Pittura è' l Sole."

One would like to know if Vasari really meant that last line: if he really—feeling the red blood coursing through his own veins—thought that when Cristofano died “the Sun turned away his face from Painting.”

Vasari had, in the meanwhile, moved into a new house so as to be near the Palazzo Vecchio and to enable him to go to and from his work under cover. From Vasari's report to Cosimo we learn that the Sala of Lorenzo il Vecchio is now being decorated, all the other rooms have been plastered, and the Scala Grande is so far forward that the decorations in relief are already in hand, as well as the painting. The other staircase, that leading to the terrace on the roof, is also being built, and the architect waxes enthusiastic over the discovery of an old wall in the spot fixed upon for the foundations.

“Listen to this, my lord,” he says, “concerning the staircase that was agreed upon, leading to the terrace. When we began to pull down those rooms Castraverde used to have, I discovered so many arches supporting the walls of the upper floor that I decided to build a cross wall under the first six steps in the lower room which used to be the Contract Office. . . . I was in constant fear because your most illustrious Excellency had so often told me that it would be impossible to get a proper foundation there. Well, it had to be done; and so I set the excavators

to work. We had not got out more than three feet of soil when we stumbled across a wall five feet thick, which had once been part of a tower, not only in the very spot where it was wanted, but so much more solid than I should have made mine that it will strengthen and tie in the whole of that angle of the building." After this outburst he returns to what is being done at the Pitti, and says that everything there is in a terrible mess, and that it will require a lot of time and money before it can be put straight.

Vasari had not accepted Michelangelo's refusal to return to Florence as final. He kept himself fully informed as to the course events were taking in Rome; and when, at the beginning of 1557, he learnt that the works at St. Peter's were standing practically idle, he again, with the full concurrence of the Duke, renewed his entreaties with Michelangelo. "I have been informed by many persons coming from Rome that the progress of your work on St. Peter's has almost stopped, and that you are undecided whether to give up your position and come here or not." The Duke, "moved by his affection towards you, told me this evening that he is going to write to you, and commanded me to write as well, to assure you that you will be given everything you can desire, and that his Excellency will meet all your wishes in the most generous spirit." If Michelangelo would care to have his company, Giorgio is perfectly ready to go all the way to Rome to act as escort. To this Michelangelo replied in a letter full of sadness and the suggestion of despair.

"Messer Giorgio, my dear friend: God is my witness how much against my will it was that Pope



Paul forced me into this work at St. Peter's ten years ago. If the work had been continued without intermission from that time forward, it would by now have been as far advanced as I had reason to hope, and I should have been able to come to you." He cannot, dare not leave St. Peter's; partly because his departure would be all too welcome to certain unscrupulous persons and would be the ruin of the building. Chief among the unscrupulous persons—though he does not mention him by name—was Nanni di Baccio Bigio, who, having a little favour with the Pope, never ceased in his efforts to supplant Michelangelo, using the most absurd accusations to support his own candidature. One of his devices was to send his wife to Florence, escorted by Jacopo del Conte, saying that he could not accompany her himself as he was too busy in Rome, trying to undo the damage which was daily being wrought to St. Peter's. It was from Jacopo that Michelangelo's supporters learnt the lies that Nanni was disseminating, and a letter full of warning was sent to the artist by Giovanni Francesco Ughi, from which we learn the nature of these accusations. Nanni declared that Michelangelo was totally ignorant of architecture, and kept a "ghost" in the person of a Spaniard whose knowledge, likewise, was *manco che manco*—less than nothing: that Michelangelo was in his second childhood: that he worked at night so that his errors might not be seen: and that he caused the *Deputati* to waste enormous sums on needless works. More than this, he had the courage to approach Duke Cosimo and to ask his assistance in supplanting the architect of St. Peter's, receiving a rebuke which should have—but did not—put an end to his machinations in this direction. "We shall never," wrote

Cosimo, replying in a letter which does him the greatest honour, "lend our support to such an action so long as Michelangelo continues to live, for it would be too great an insult to his genius and the love we bear him."

Michelangelo's other reason for remaining in Rome was that he had certain obligations there, in addition to a house and property valued at several thousand *scudi*, and if he goes off without the Pope's permission he is doubtful what will be the fate of his possessions.

Vasari was obliged to desist from his persuasions, finding them useless; and he handed Michelangelo's replies to Cosimo for his perusal, taking the opportunity of posing, as he loved to do, as one of the great artist's most intimate friends. "I who know him so well and can enter into his feelings," he remarks, "seem to see him trembling with fear and glowing at the same time with affection for yourself: indeed, I am in the fullest sympathy with him." Cosimo, too, was forced to accept Michelangelo's excuses: but with what regret may be gathered from the letters wherein he finds occasion to refer to him. When the *Deputati sopra la Fabbrica* in charge of the church of the Florentines in Rome desired to have the plans provided by Michelangelo altered, the Duke rebuked them sharply: "As the design for the church of our nation, which we sent you by the hand of Tiberio Calcagni, was made by Michelangelo himself, there is nothing that can be added to it, nothing that can be withdrawn. We are greatly pleased therewith, and consider it as being in every way worthy of so excellent an artist, as well as to be built by our own people." And on the same day (April 30th, 1560) he writes to Michelangelo, as

though to excuse the want of respect shown by the *Deputati*: "To presume to praise anything that comes from your hand seems almost to detract from its excellence, seeing that it is impossible to admire your work sufficiently. We do not wish to fall into this error, desiring only to say that we are so much in love with (*ci ha innamorato*) your design for the church of our nation that it grieves us to think it has still to be built."<sup>1</sup>

Giving up all hope of winning his friend back to Florence, Vasari turned his attention to the work he had in hand. In one letter he has to complain that it is now three weeks since his men were paid, and he asks what he is to do under the circumstances. From a second we learn that another new house has been given him by the Duke, and that he has just moved in on the very day the letter was written. "I shall have a rare tale of gratitude to tell you," he writes to the Duke, "for I have to-day moved into the new house you gave me, with all my family, and I am all

<sup>1</sup> See Gaye, *Carteggio*, Vol. III, Nos. 40 and 41. A very interesting light is thrown by Vasari, in his Life of Jacopo Sansovino, upon the intense rivalry existing between the various States, which at times led them to get voluntarily into difficulties in order to show their ability to get out of them again. Before the church of the Florentines was built the Spaniards and Frenchmen in Rome already had their national and particular places of worship. Florence, therefore, as the chief city of Tuscany, must also have hers, designs for which were made at various times by Raffaello, Antonio da San Gallo, Peruzzi and Jacopo Sansovino—to say nothing of the designs of Michelangelo just referred to. The site extended along the Tiber, and to carry out Sansovino's plan it would be necessary to encroach upon the river, carrying a portion of the structure upon piles. So far from this being an obstacle in their path, the Florentines hailed the opportunity for "showing off" with joy: "and because it would cost more and was a far more magnificent way of doing it, the church was begun on this plan." It may be added that the work was abandoned during the pontificate of Adrian VI, and that Sansovino finally fled to Venice upon the sack of Rome, so that we owe the beautiful Libreria di San Marco to the catastrophe of 1527.

eagerness to tell you that I am more your devoted servant than ever.”<sup>1</sup>

We have no further information as to what the biographer was doing in Florence until the April of the following year, when there is a letter from him to Borghini, written in such a happy vein that we may surmise the world was going very well indeed with the little painter. “Signor Hospitaller mine,” he begins; “I call you mine because there is nothing in this world that is more mine than you are, for you are my refuge in all times of trouble; and I verily believe that when the good God sent me into the world, He decided to send you after me for my personal convenience. The consequence is that I am something like a small vine stuck on a large pole, and that makes me look bigger than I am. The boy and the mules you kindly lent me behaved so well that, were I with you, I would straightway build them a triumphal arch with festoons and sacks of corn. Thanks to your kindness we all got here safely; and though I may be used to the company of priests, I will not say ‘God reward you for it’ for fear of seeming a hypocrite. But indeed I am much obliged to you, and you have heaped up kindness on kindness until, after God, I bear most affection for you, not even

<sup>1</sup> *Vite*, Vol. VIII, Letter No. 64. The text of this letter appears to have been tampered with, as it is difficult to believe that Vasari wrote in the terms attributed to him. It is the kind of letter he might have written to an equal, but it is certainly not couched in the form he usually observes when addressing the Duke. He is made to use the “lei,” and to say that he is “più vostro che mai.” In every other letter he approaches Cosimo with the utmost respect, and invariably calls him “vostra Eccellenza illustrissima”—your most illustrious Excellency. There appears to be no reason for this sudden and uncharacteristic lapse into familiarity with his august patron. Sig. Scoti-Bertinelli affirms, on what authority I do not know, that the majority of Vasari’s letters were not only copied out, but edited by his nephew, who altered their sense so as to put his uncle in a better light.

excepting the Duke himself,"—or, he might have added, his wife. "Well, as soon as ever the Easter holidays are over I shall move heaven and earth to get to you so as to enjoy a little more of your society than I have done of late. Things are going on here exactly as you would have them,<sup>1</sup> and there has been no necessity to depart from what was agreed upon. I have nothing more to say at present, except that I am always at your service. Take care of yourself, and continue to love me."

Vasari's popularity at court brought around him the inevitable jealousies. Chief among his rivals was Baccio Bandinelli, who viewed his advancement with much concern. He supported, as best he might, the appointment of Giorgio as successor to Tasso at the Palazzo Vecchio; but when he learnt that the Duke intended to erect a palace at Pisa—presumably the Palazzo de' Cavalieri, which, as we know, was subsequently confided to Vasari—in addition to the works already in progress, he resolved at all costs to enter into active competition, and approached the Duke through the Duchess. "As your Excellency," he writes, "seems to have employed a great many architects at various times, it may please you to employ me for the contemplated palace at Pisa. Being your faithful servant, I will show you whether I know anything about architecture or not; and whether I am capable of judging what sort of a habitation is suitable to the position, requirements and comforts of so great a

<sup>1</sup> i.e. the alterations in the palace. From this time forward all Vasari's work in Florence was done, if not entirely upon lines laid down for him by Borghini, at least with his collaboration. The proofs of this statement are to be found in many documents still forthcoming, which will be dealt with in their sequence.

prince.”<sup>1</sup> To this letter, in which the writer is at small pains to conceal his overpowering conceit, the Duke seems to have made no reply; and in any case the appeal would have proved useless, as the would-be architect died in the following year. The crime that Vasari imputes to him, of having wilfully destroyed Michelangelo’s cartoon for the *Battle of Pisa*, is by no means proved, but it would be idle to pretend that the Cavaliere Bandinelli could ever have been a desirable acquaintance, even in the days of the sixteenth century.

Vasari, meanwhile, proceeded with his work entirely undisturbed by the efforts of his enemies. He made so many designs for the Palazzo Vecchio that the Duke was astonished, and he began an elaborate model of the whole building, showing both the old work and the new. In fact, as he himself tells us, his head was “full of lines, fortresses, and ideas,” and he implores Borghini, who had gone into the country, to hurry back, as he has nobody to whom he can unburden himself. The summer of this year was partly devoted to the composition of the *Dialoghi* on the subject of the decorations in the *Stanze Nuove*, which were then nearly finished. The rough copy was evidently submitted to Borghini for revision and amendment, as, when Cosimo expresses a wish to see it, Vasari writes to Borghini asking for its return as soon as he has read through the portions which have been added, so that he may copy it out for the Duke. The copy must have

<sup>1</sup> Gaye, Vol. III, No. 5, dated May 30th, 1558. “Havendo Vostra Eccellenza in varii tempi maneggiato diversi Architetti, piacendo maneggiar me nel nuovo edifitio del palazzo di pisa, chome fedel servo li mostrerrò se io mi intendo d’architettura, e si io conosco chome vuol essere labitatione dun principe grande quanto shaspetta al honor, utile et diletto.”

been beautifully written, as it took him until the beginning of the following year to complete, when it was presented to Cosimo. These *Dialoghi*, although they were not published until 1588, fourteen years after Vasari's death, were written, with the exception of the “Terza Giornata,” in 1557. The “Terza Giornata,” treating solely of the Sala Grande, was added in 1567. They are of little interest, and consist chiefly of an elaborate description of all the paintings done by Vasari in the new rooms, presented in the form of a series of conversations supposed to take place between the painter and Francesco de' Medici. The young Prince is made to ask a succession of perfectly inane questions in order that Giorgio, in answering them, may exhibit his knowledge. In the opening lines we are given a picture of the artist overcome by the heat and unable to work.

PRINCE. “What are you doing to-day, Giorgio? You are neither sketching out new pictures nor proceeding with those that are begun. This heat must assuredly be as trying to you as it is to me; for, as I found it too hot in my own apartments for me to sleep, I came into those you have painted, to while away the time, and to see whether it is cooler in here.”

GIORGIO. “Your Excellency is most welcome; but tell me, do you often go about thus unattended?”

PRINCE. “I have come in here unattended because I sent a short time ago to see what you were doing; and they told me that you were pacing up and down the room with your belt unbuckled, looking the picture of misery and doing no work.”

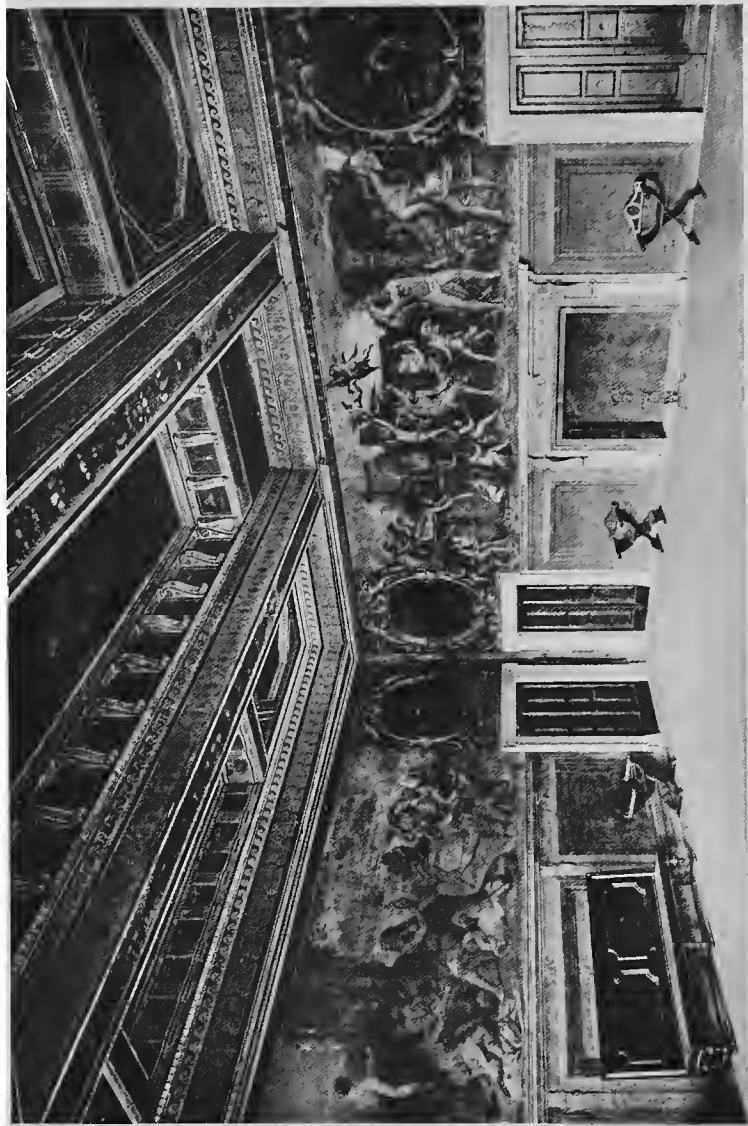
GIORGIO. "That is quite true, my Lord. In this heat I have no inclination to work. One cannot work for ever; and, as your Highness must be aware, everything that moves grows tired sometime or other. Therefore do not marvel if we proceed but slowly with the work, especially as we are approaching the completion of it."

After this quite aimless commencement the Prince remarks that Giorgio has promised to explain the meaning of the whole series of paintings, and that if he is still of the same mind there is no better opportunity than the present. Giorgio, of course, is still of the same mind, and straightway begins. They pace from room to room, the Prince exhibiting an unquenchable thirst for information, and Giorgio appearing in the light of an encyclopædia of learning. Sometimes the Prince is made to ask questions which enable the painter to explain away mistakes he has made; and there is a delightful explanation put forward for the introduction of only three figures where there ought to have been two dozen. The Prince and his guide have entered the Sala degli Elementi, and the eye of the former is immediately attracted by three ladies wearing butterfly wings and attending the Chariot of the Sun on its daily journey. He turns to Giorgio and asks who they are.

GIORGIO. "These are the Hours, whose duty it is to bridle the horses of the Morning, and to go before them all day long. I have given them wings so as to make them seem lighter than air, for we have nothing on earth more fleeting than the Hours."

PRINCE. "What a beautiful idea! But tell me, are there not twelve hours in the day and another







twelve in the night? Why, then, have you depicted but three?”

“Because,” says Giorgio with unshaken gravity, “some of the others have gone on in front and the rest are a long way behind. Painters are allowed to do that sort of thing when there is not enough room in the picture for them all.”

With these extracts we may leave the *Dialoghi*.

The Sala Grande had still to be reconstructed, and it would seem that the greater part of this year was spent by Giorgio upon the model for it. He himself is silent upon the matter both in the Autobiography and in his letters; and the only glimpse we have of him comes through the medium of an amusing complaint made by the Lucchese Ambassador. In one portion of his work in the Palazzo Giorgio had divided the whole space into three principal panels, and in one of them he painted the Capture of Siena, while the second contained a representation of the Capture of Pisa. The third space was still blank when the Ambassador, happening to be in the room, asked Vasari what he intended to paint in it. “Oh,” said Giorgio, “I am going to wait until I can depict the Capture of Lucca!” The indignation of the Ambassador may be more easily imagined than described, and a strong protest was addressed to the Maestro Generale di Altopascio, who, however, affected to treat the matter as a joke, saying that the freedom of speech of a painter ought not to be taken seriously.

Julius III had died in 1555, and Marcellus II, who succeeded him, only survived his election by twenty-one days. On March 23rd of the same year the choice of the conclave fell on Giovanni Pietro

Caraffa, who adopted the name of Paul IV. Paul died on August 18th, 1559, and on the following Christmas Day Giovanni Angelo de' Medici was raised to the vacant see as Pius IV. The interval between the death of a Pope and the election of his successor was a trying time for all who were even remotely concerned with politics. Upon the result of these elections much depended, for it was naturally a matter of vital importance to the ruler of each several state to secure, if possible, the election of a prelate friendly to himself. For seventeen weeks after the death of Paul the civilised world waited with anxiety for the decision of the conclave, and the Florentine court grew apprehensive of what the final result would be. Had the business been left in the hands of Giorgio Vasari, as he laughingly says in a letter to Borghini, we are let into the secret of whom he would have chosen. "*Reverendo Signor Spedalingo*, if it were not that I do not want to put you to any inconvenience, seeing that you have fled from home so as to get a little quiet, I should have come over this morning and planted myself upon you. But Santa Lucia has given me a kind heart to-day, and so I am writing instead . . . send me word by my serving man whether I am to come, or stop where I am, or wait further instructions, or what I am to do, or what you would like me to do. I belong more to you than I do to myself—I think you will agree that I was born simply for the benefit of other people. I kiss your forehead with that tenderness which springs from my love for you, which is infinite. I would to God that, as they cannot settle on a Pope, they would choose you. You deserve to be made Pope, King and Emperor all in one. With this I will conclude. I am writing

this in the Palazzo (which, by the by, is driving me mad) on the day of the Virgin Martyr, who delights the hearts of all priests and friars with gifts of wax candles and imitation eyes"—that is to say, Santa Lucia, whose festival falls on December 13th.

## CHAPTER VII

### SECOND EDITION OF THE "LIVES"

Visit to Rome with Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici—The journey described by Vasari—Michelangelo—Sala Regia—Vasari's chapel at Arezzo—Palazzo Vecchio again—Report on adjacent property—Uffizi—Cosimo's tour of inspection—The Palazzo de' Cavalieri at Pisa—Illness of Vasari's wife—Second edition of the *Lives* begun—Borghini's share in them—Death of Giovanni, Garzia and the Duchess Eleonora.

**T**HE new Pope, Pius IV, shared the ambitions of his race, and, following the precedent of Clement VII, immediately looked out for a suitable member of the family whom he might raise to the dignity of a Cardinal. His choice, in default of any one older, fell on Giovanni, second son of the Duke Cosimo, a lad who had not yet completed his seventeenth year; and on the last day of January, 1560, Giovanni de' Medici, although not as yet ordained so much as a deacon, became a Cardinal of the Church. He set out for Rome soon afterwards to receive the hat from the Pope, and Giorgio Vasari accompanied him, writing full and particular accounts of their triumphal progress to his friends from every stopping-place. They arrived at Siena in the beginning of March, having been received at Colle on the way with transports of delight, while the recently conquered Sieneſe found it advisable to greet the son of their new Signore with every magnificence and an exhibition of more affection than they perhaps felt. On March 23rd the travellers reached Bolsena, and Vasari wrote to Borghini, again reverting to

their reception at Colle. "When I described our arrival at Siena," he writes, "I told you also what happened at Colle, when the crowd began to shout 'Papa! Papa!' instead of 'Palle! Palle!' It was enough to scare the womenfolk. About the priest at Monte Oliveto I shall say nothing, for our party was so large that we should have eaten the monks out of house and home if it had not been for the presents which were showered upon us from all sides. But at Pienza it was a beautiful sight to see about fifty little children, who might almost have been your own,<sup>1</sup> with garlands of olives on their heads and branches of it in their hands, who came out to meet us, all dressed in white. But what I liked best," added Giorgio naively, "was the quantity of wine and wild plums<sup>2</sup> we got at Monte Alcino, which will enable us to finish our journey like fat abbots." The entry into Rome was to be made the occasion for a magnificent reception. From these letters it appears that several Cardinals were visited by Giovanni de' Medici on his way, and they vied with each other in their endeavours to do him honour. Thus, at Ronciglione, Cardinal Farnese gave a banquet "which was stupendous," while that same evening the young Cardinal was called upon to partake of another feast at Bracciano, given by Cardinal Santa Fiore, which Giorgio describes as being "not merely a banquet, but almost a wedding feast." "In fact, *Signor mio*, I have never in my life seen so much rejoicing as greeted us on this journey." On the Thursday evening they arrived in Rome, and were received by four thousand horsemen, a hundred

<sup>1</sup> This is not a reflection on Borghini's character, but refers to the children who were under his charge in the Ospedale degli Innocenti.

<sup>2</sup> *Prugnoli*. These seem to be some sort of wild sloes.

coaches, an enormous crowd of people and half a dozen Cardinals. The young Giovanni bore himself throughout with all the dignity of a much older man, and won the admiration of all beholders. "He bears himself," says Giorgio, "as if he had been born a Cardinal."

This visit is referred to by the biographer in the Life of Michelangelo, and he takes the opportunity of saying that he went as "the servant and friend" of the Cardinal and because it suited his own convenience.<sup>1</sup> He does not mention it in his Autobiography, perhaps because he has already described the principal events in the Lives of Michelangelo and Francesco Salviati. In one respect, however, these accounts do not agree with the testimony of his correspondence, from which it appears that, instead of going to Rome for his own convenience, he went by order of the Duke, and for a definite purpose. He was sent to Rome to show the model for the proposed alteration of the Sala Grande to Michelangelo, and to ask his advice. In the letter in which he informs Cosimo of his departure,<sup>2</sup> he says that as he has received instructions to consult with Michelangelo about the Sala, he will be grateful if the Duke will write and ask him to give Vasari the full benefit of his advice upon all the points that will be laid before him; and later on, after the arrival in Rome, Vasari sends the Duke a long account of what he has been doing.

<sup>1</sup> "Andò il medesimo anno Giovanni cardinale de' Medici, figliuolo del duca Cosimo a Roma per il cappello a Pio quarto, e *convenne*, come suo servitore e familiare, al Vasari *andar seco*, che volentieri vi andò" (*Vite*, Vol. VII, p. 258).

<sup>2</sup> *Vite*, Vol. VIII, Letter No. 94, dated March 5th, 1560. Milanesi is certainly wrong in attributing this letter to the following year, as it undoubtedly refers to the incidents of the journey undertaken in 1560.



“As soon as I arrived,” he says, “I went to call upon my grand Michelangelo. He did not know I was here, and received me as a father would receive a long-lost son, falling upon my neck with a thousand embraces and weeping for joy. . . . We spent the whole of Monday and Tuesday discussing the model for the Sala Grande and the subjects for the paintings; for I have brought everything with me. I will do my utmost to profit by the time I spend with him, and will get as much instruction out of him as I can.” He has aged considerably since Vasari last saw him, and is scarcely able to move. Despite this increasing infirmity, Michelangelo contrived to ride to St. Peter’s one day, and showed his visitor the model for the dome, “a most extraordinary and notable piece of work.” Their conversation during these interviews was chiefly concerned with the Duke and the benefits God has vouchsafed to him, Vasari, apparently, being one of them; for he quotes Michelangelo as having said that “since he himself was not found worthy to serve the Duke in his prime, he thanked God that Vasari had been sent in his stead.”<sup>1</sup>

With the single exception of the pleasure derived from the society of Michelangelo, Vasari found little enjoyment in Rome. “I am quite well,” he tells Borghini, “and visit Michelangelo every day. I spend my evenings with Salviati, and my mornings with our Cardinal; so now you know the sort of life I am leading.” And then, in spite of what he has just said, he adds: “Poor old Salviati has only had the pleasure of seeing me twice. I haven’t a soul to call my own, so send me your full sympathy, *anima mia!* If ever I escape from this place I will be all

<sup>1</sup> Letter No. 73, dated April 9th, 1560.

yours once more. Ah, me! what a dearth there is, *Signor mio*, of men who do good for good's sake! I wonder that I am not swallowed alive! Just at present I am in the greatest demand with everybody; and, after all, even I am nothing wonderful!"

Francesco Salviati was, at this time, in a state of much despondency—he was ever *di natura malinconico*, as Vasari tells us—because Pius IV had decided to complete the Sala Regia, but could not make up his mind whether to give the work to Salviati or Daniello da Volterra. The uncertainty preyed on Salviati's mind, and as soon as Giorgio arrived he told him all his troubles. Vasari, "greatly appreciating his merits, told him that he had managed his affairs very badly indeed, and that for the future he had better get Giorgio to arrange everything."<sup>1</sup>

Vasari's good opinion of himself had led him into arrogance. If further proof were needed, it is only necessary to follow up the story of the Sala Regia. Being asked by the Pope to decorate a portion of it, Giorgio sees fit to reply that "he has one to do for the Duke which is three times as large; and that he was treated so badly by the late Pope Julius III, for whom he had done much work on the Vigna, at Monte San Savino, and elsewhere, that he no longer knew what to expect of certain people."

But though Vasari had lost all faith in Popes and in Rome, Michelangelo, even in extreme old age, held potent sway over the susceptible heart of his admirer. "Oh, my dear Don Vincenzo," he exclaims

<sup>1</sup> *Vite*, Vol. VII, p. 35. According to a marginal note which Milanese says is to be seen in a copy of the *Vite* preserved in the Corsini Library, this advice of Vasari's gave rise to a saying in Rome, "Lascia fare a Giorgio"—you leave it to Giorgio!

after one of his daily visits, "my eyes rejoice at the very sight of him!" And what is more to the point, through this familiar intercourse Giorgio came to a dim, though transient, understanding of his own insignificance. He discovered that "what he had thought to be an elephant was nothing larger than a rat."<sup>1</sup> This, however, is but a passing cloud obscuring his vanity; for within a week he has again put on all the airs of a great man, while with ill-simulated humility he inveighs against the adulations and fawnings that meet him at every turn. His final word is that "this accursed Rome (*Romaccia*) is a living lie, and a scandal in the sight of all who seek the paths of virtue."

Vasari returned to Florence in April, and stayed there until in August he went for a brief holiday to Arezzo, partly for change of air, and partly to play the country gentleman, wandering across his fields and examining his crops and cattle. Arrived at his country seat—in *villeggiatura*—he found that everything was in the old disorder, and that his labourers cared for little beyond the payment of their hire, and least of all for his interests. In consequence the rest he had promised himself was disturbed by the necessity of reorganising the internal economy of his estates; and perhaps still more by the ambitious scheme he had formed of erecting a family chapel in the church at Arezzo. This scheme occupied the greater part of his attention at this time, and is mentioned in several of his letters. On September 25th he tells Borghini that he has been making the necessary arrangements, but that while he would prefer to endow a new one over the spot where lie the bones of his ancestors, the overseers of the

<sup>1</sup> *Vite*, Vol. VIII, Letter No. 75, to Borghini, dated April 13th, 1560.

building urge him to endow the chapel of the high altar as it is badly in need of restoration, and would, in any case, have to be repaired. Vasari waived his own wishes in the matter, and not only designed the reconstruction of the chapel but defrayed all the expenses out of his own pocket, adding a clause to his will to the effect that the chapel of San Giorgio in the Pieve d'Arezzo is to receive out of his estate a hundred *staia* of grain yearly, and that fifteen masses are to be said on St. George's day. On the following day fifty masses are to be recited for the souls of himself and his family, and in the event of his family becoming extinct (in which case all his property is to go to the Confraternità di Santa Maria della Misericordia) a hundred masses are to be said in place of the original fifty.<sup>1</sup>

This is the chapel to which he refers in the Autobiography as having been "endowed by me, painted by my own hand, and offered to the divine Goodness in recognition, however unworthy, of my great debt to the Almighty Who has deigned to shower upon me so many benefits"; and again, in the Life of Pietro Laurati, he suddenly breaks through his narrative when speaking of the Pieve d'Arezzo, in order to dilate upon his own work. In these sacred precincts he had learnt his letters in near proximity to the resting-place of his forefathers; and it is but natural that the building, then falling into decay, should have a warm place in his affections. Its windows were small, and the church, in consequence, dark. When Vasari, having passed through the fire of his early trials came to be passing rich, the desire to provide a more stately burial-place for his ancestors came within the bounds of possibility. The

<sup>1</sup> This will is given *in extenso* by Gaye, Vol. II, p. 502.

outcome was this chapel. The work was begun in 1560, but the necessary papal permission was not obtained until Vasari's visit to Rome in 1567, when, as he notes in the *Autobiography*, his Holiness "with infinite kindness and favour" sent him the brief "free of charge" for "the erection of a chapel and *decanato* in the Pieve d'Arezzo (which is the high altar of the said Pieve) under the patronage of myself and of my family." The actual work entailed the complete remodelling and restoration of the church, which "you might describe as having been brought back to life from death; for in addition to having let more light into it, for it was excessively dark, by enlarging the old windows and adding new ones, I took out the choir as well, which was in front (of the high altar) and put it behind the altar, to the great satisfaction of the clergy." Since the days of Vasari another and equally comprehensive process of restoration has befallen the church of Santa Maria della Pieve. It is one which would have given the biographer but small pleasure to see, for it involved the reconversion of the building to its original form, except with regard to the choir, while the whole of Vasari's altar was carefully removed and re-erected in the Badia di Santa Fiore in the centre of the city. His work, however, has probably gained by the exchange; certainly the splendid church of the Pieve has, for nothing could well have been more out of place than Vasari's florid and gaudy design in its sturdy Romanesque setting. In the Badia it is less incongruous, and the shade of Giorgio Vasari may rest content that it is surrounded by a greater number of windows, and can therefore be more readily seen. On the new altar, which stands isolated, there is a picture towards the nave of

the *Calling of Andrew and Peter*, who are at their nets, and towards the choir there is a *St. George and the Dragon*, the latter the better work of the two. On either side of the central picture there is an oblong panel, in each of which are two saints ; while the predella is of the usual type, divided into a number of small panels. On the back there are portraits of Lazzaro Vasari—*Lazaro Vasario pictori eximio*, as he still persists in calling him—and of Giorgio the elder, neither of which is likely to be very reliable. But we have also portraits of the biographer's father and mother, as well as of himself and "La Cosina." The father is represented as clean shaven, and appears to be a man who treated the world and its sorrows lightly, who lived well and left its cares to others. Maddalena Tacci, on the other hand, is clearly the one to whom he left these same cares ; for Giorgio's mother wears a look of anxiety. But as she outlived her husband for many years, Vasari would naturally recollect the one as a young man, while the other would remain imprinted in his memory as she was when she died, a few years before the picture was painted, a woman well over sixty years of age. The portraits of Giorgio and his wife are full-length and life-size, and he represents her as young, very fair, and with refined features. She is evidently of good family and exceedingly docile—the sort of wife we should have expected him to choose, seeing that he had to get married. She would sit at home patiently in the stately Sala of the Casa Vasari, wearing a silken gown suited to her surroundings and the estate of her lord and master, gazing at the painted allegories overhead, or looking out from her high windows across that wonderful, fertile plain that

stretches away towards Florence, wondering when the great little man would be pleased to return. Having made something of a martyr of her, it was fitting that Vasari should place her upon a sumptuous altar, which, as he tells us, was finished "with gold, inlay, painting, marble, travertine, *breccia*, porphyry, and other stones."<sup>1</sup>

Returning once more to Florence he took up the interrupted work in the Palazzo Vecchio, being chiefly occupied with the alteration of the great staircase. As usual, he is enthusiastic and full of schemes for its improvement. He tells the Duke that he has hit on a "most ingenious" means of getting over the difficulties which have arisen, and describes his scheme in such a roundabout way as to completely confuse his patron. The Duke replied that he could make neither head nor tail of Vasari's description, but that two things were clear to him.

"The first is, that in order to carry up the staircase according to your plans it will be necessary to destroy every bit of the work already done, and this I have no intention of doing; the other is, that your new arrangement will absorb the whole of the landing between the statue of David and the entrance to the Salotto, which would not only be a mistake, but could not by any possible means look well when finished." To this crushing reply Vasari returned an humble apology for having expressed himself so badly as to give the Duke a false impression, and explained that his plans had been misunderstood. Finally, the staircase had to wait over until the return of Cosimo to Florence, Vasari meanwhile proceeding with the other portions of the work. Many of his official reports are still extant, but they

<sup>1</sup> *Vite*, Vol. I, p. 475.

are generally uninteresting. They report progress, and usually contain a string of complaints. One letter will stand for them all, and serve to illustrate some of the difficulties lying in the path of an architect at the court of Cosimo. On January 15th, 1561, Giorgio writes as follows:—

“I have taken up the floors of the first two rooms looking towards the Piazza: the others I cannot get at, as Donna Antonia refuses to let me touch them, and has *locked up all the doors*. Will your Excellency be pleased to say what I am to do under the circumstances?” Then: “I do not want to speak any more about my own affairs, but if there is not a change soon, what with the worry and the amount of work I have in hand, I do not think it will be long before I follow Luca Martini;<sup>1</sup> and then your Excellency will doubtless feel sorry that my wants were not satisfied while I was still alive, as now I am put to so much inconvenience.”

To this letter Cosimo replied that Giorgio was to get on with his work and not trouble his head about anything that Donna Antonia might do to annoy him, as the Duke's orders were given to Vasari and not to the womenfolk of the house. As to his personal grievances, he was to have patience until the return of the Duke, when everything would be settled to his satisfaction.

In spite of the journey to Rome for the purpose of obtaining Michelangelo's approval of the proposed alterations in the Sala Grande, the actual work was not begun for another three years. On February 16th, 1561, Vasari writes imploring the Duke to inaugurate the new year (which, according to the Florentine computation, began on March 25th) by

<sup>1</sup> Martini had died a few days previously.



allowing him to set to work on the Sala. Cosimo, however, refused to give the requisite orders, probably because he knew that Giorgio would have quite enough to do in superintending the enlargement of the *Magistrati*, better known to-day as the Uffizi Gallery.<sup>1</sup> Although the foundations for this work were not begun until July, Vasari was already preparing his scheme in March, when he addresses a report to his patron as to the value and extent of the buildings which will have to be demolished to make room for the new work.

“Most illustrious and excellent Lord,” he begins, “according to the instructions received from your Highness, Messer Antonio de’ Nobili and I have duly caused the floors, ceilings and walls to be measured with the utmost care. We have had the quantities of these materials priced, not in accordance with what the buildings now yield in annual revenue, but according to the amount and quality of the materials in each house, in order that your illustrious Excellency may understand the matter more fully. I have had the measurements taken by Master Bernardo di Antonio, mason, and Master Pietro del Zucca, estimator, and the totals of the walling and carpenter’s work are hereto appended. It seems advisable to send all the calculations so as to avoid confusion and to show the value of each individual house.

“From these figures your most illustrious Excellency will see that the buildings adjacent to the Zecca, being of better quality, are worth more; but if any work is to be done at this point it will be necessary to

<sup>1</sup> This scheme was on foot as early as 1545, as Lapini notes in his *Diario* that “on March 11 they began to pull down the houses and shops opposite the Zecca of Florence so as to prepare for the new street and habitation of the *Magistrati*.”

destroy a portion of these buildings, as the building line, taken from the front of the Zecca, cuts through them and will be interfered with by the rear portions of the houses along the street leading to Volta de' Girolami. As your illustrious Excellency will note from the plan, it will be necessary to leave a small courtyard, about ten *braccia*<sup>1</sup> wide, where the staircase leading to the upper rooms will be, in order to get light for the Audience Chamber and the halls of Chancery of the Magistrati. This will leave very little that could be saved, and the remaining space might be added to the front rooms so as to make them of greater importance. The *Signori Otto di Pratica* who now occupy these buildings could be moved into the aforesaid rooms, and instead of paying rent for the whole would only have to pay for such part as they occupy. The houses affected are thirteen in number, and I have placed a mark against them in the estimate.

“On the other side, towards San Pier Scheraggio, none of the houses are worth anything, as they are very old and the material very much decayed. It is a matter for surprise that anyone should live in them, and it is only the fact that they lie so near the Palace which gives them any value at all. I have nothing further to report at present; but your Excellency will doubtless be able to decide what is to be done. I have never seen a more filthy set of pig-styes than these houses are, and I am of the opinion that if they were elsewhere nobody would live in them.

“Should your Highness resolve to proceed with the work, it would be advisable to call in two other persons to make a confidential report and to see whether there is any variation in the price. I do

<sup>1</sup> About 19 feet.

not believe that this will be the case if they are men who know their business.

“ In the meantime I am proceeding with the model. I find that as the floor of the Zecca is four and a half *braccia* above the level of the river there will be room for a range of stables, which could also be reached from the houses at the rear. All this your most illustrious Excellency will see from the new model which I am having made with every possible attention. I am supplying all the necessary conveniences and offices to each suite of rooms, without departing from the general scheme laid down by your Excellency, and the work is proceeding favourably. The painting in the little room is nearly finished, and for a week I have been working with my own hands to hurry it along so that the rest of the new apartments can be completed. As your Excellency will see from the memorial placed by me in the hands of Signor Montalvo,<sup>1</sup> I await instructions from your Highness with regard to these rooms, holding myself ever ready to execute your commands. The plaster ceiling in the writing-room is now being modelled and the floor is being laid. The room under it is quite finished, but the large chest there had to be taken away in pieces. All this Signor Montalvo will explain in detail, as he was present when the work was done.

“ There is nothing further to report, but I implore your Excellency to grant my former application ”— that is to say, the settlement of his own personal

<sup>1</sup> Antonio de Montalvo. He succeeded Sforza Almeni as chamberlain to the Duke in 1566, when Cosimo, enraged by Sforza's betrayal of an important secret and his subsequent disregard of his wishes, killed his erstwhile favourite in a moment of mad passion, transfixing him with a pike that unhappily lay near at hand. The story is told in full by Saltini, *Tragedie Medicee Domestiche* (Florence, Barbèra, 1898).

affairs—"so that my mind may be at rest and the work completed in peace and quietness, enabling me to end my life in your service; in the realisation that, after God, all my prosperity and happiness emanate from yourself.

"Humbly and with all my heart I prostrate myself before you."

The abject self-effacement of the architect in this grand finale must have been distinctly pleasing to his noble patron; and, as we have already noted, the foundations were begun in the following July. Thereafter, until some time in 1569, Vasari and his trusty men laboured at the work with unabating zeal; and it is pleasant to note that even in the "good old days" the builder and contractor was much the same sort of individual as he is to-day. This at least is the inference to be gathered from three letters published by Gualandi,<sup>1</sup> referring to the church of San Pier Scheraggio, mentioned in the report of Vasari. This building, long since removed, stood inconveniently near the Uffizi de' Magistrati; so near, in fact, that the architect seems to have used it as a highly convenient builders' yard and workshop. For more than a year the main doorway was blocked by a large mound of builders' rubbish, so that, as the priests complained to Cosimo, it was utterly impossible to hold service there. At times, too, the blocks of stone intended for the new work would, in a spirit of playfulness, slip from their positions and fall with a crash through the roof of the church. This must have been very disconcerting for the parson, but his remonstrances met with little sympathy from Cosimo. When he wrote to complain that "the Overseers of the Fabric have brought timber, tool-chests, earth

<sup>1</sup> *Nuova Raccolta di Lettere*, Bologna, 1844, Vol. I, No. 52.

and rubbish into the church, saying they were acting on behalf of your Highness," the Duke referred him back to the Overseers, telling him "to see what they have to say about the matter. We leave the care of the church to those whom it concerns, for as it lies under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop it can be no affair of ours." Those who have read the *Diario* of Landucci, too, will recollect his observations with regard to the preparations of those who were building the Palazzo Strozzi. "At the same time they began to pull down the houses, a great number of labourers and foremen being employed in the work. All the neighbouring streets were blocked with stone piled mountain-high, and with mounds of rubbish which a string of mules and donkeys were engaged in carrying away, returning with loads of gravel; with the result that it was almost impossible for foot passengers to get past the scene of these operations. We tradespeople"—Master Landucci was a grocer—"who had our shops near by lived in a perpetual atmosphere of builders' dust, suffering much annoyance from the number of people who stopped to gape at the proceedings, and from the number of beasts of burden which could not be persuaded to pass the spot."

This, however, is a digression, and carries us away from the regular course of Vasari's life under the Duke of Florence. We have no means of ascertaining what the personal troubles were to which the biographer alludes, but that they were serious and financial seems clear. They worried him to such an extent that he fell ill while in attendance on the Duke during a tour of his territories in 1561. An account of this illness and its happy issue is preserved in a letter to Borghini, in which Vasari describes how the fever attacked him at Leghorn,

and how sympathetic the Duke had shown himself, even to the extent of granting all that Giorgio had asked for in his letters from Florence. Cosimo had gone on to Antignano, but as the painter was too ill to travel, he remained behind at Leghorn, thus gaining a little respite from those fatiguing journeys on horseback. "The long day's rest I got yesterday," he tells Borghini, "has done me a lot of good, but the Duke's having granted all my requests last night has quite cured me; for I took the opportunity of putting before him a memorial in which I asked for a great many things, and he signed it with his own hand. I am very delighted. To-day Guidi is going to write the letters of authorisation: and he sends you his compliments. So to-morrow I shall set out on my way to you, happy and contented. I will not send you the particulars because I shall be able to tell you them myself all in good time."

The remainder of this year was occupied with the work in the Palazzo and the building of the Uffizi. In November Cosimo and the Duchess returned to Florence, and as, in a letter to Borghini dated November 21st, 1561, Vasari says that they "are exceedingly pleased with the *stanze di sopra*, it is clear that the architect fulfilled his promise and had completed them before the arrival of his patron.

Cosimo de' Medici, having reduced the whole of the Sienese territory to obedience, and having, moreover, been confirmed by Imperial decree in the possession of his conquests, devoted a portion of each year to a tour of his dual Duchy. He was eager not only to fortify his frontier, but also to instil into his subjects an affectionate regard for his person. Whenever, on these pilgrimages, there was anything of an artistic or architectural character to

be done, Vasari was sent for in a great hurry, and had to rush off to his patron, no matter what the weather might be. That these journeys were not always to the painter's taste we have ample evidence; but, particularly in these matters, Cosimo's word was law. Not even his children were spared the fatigues and dangers of these pilgrimages, and not all the remonstrances of the court physicians could avail to remove him from his determination to take his three young sons, Giovanni, Garzia, and Ferdinando, upon that ill-fated journey which at the end of 1562 deprived him, at one blow, of his wife and two of his sons. Still less, then, might Vasari hope to evade the will of the Duke.

When, therefore, the Duke decided to alter the official residence of the Commissario at Pisa and transform it into the Palazzo de' Cavalieri di Santo Stefano, an order of knighthood founded by himself for the purpose of protecting the coast against the inroads of pirates, he sent for Giorgio, who reached Pisa on the day of the Epiphany, after a most unpleasant journey, "half dead from the mud under foot, the floods around and the rain overhead, which did not cease all the way from the Badia di San Savino to Empoli." "I dried myself," adds Giorgio laconically, "and went to bed . . . and this morning I am none the worse for the experience." His work at Pisa may still be seen, though the original *sgraffiti* have long since crumbled away with the plaster on which they were cut. The front of the building has recently been re-plastered, and again decorated in the old manner, while vestiges of the older work between the topmost windows, which had suffered less hurt because they were protected by the generous projection of the roof, are blended with the restora-

tion. One might, indeed, wish that all restorations were as satisfactorily carried out, for the appearance of the building is exceedingly rich and handsome. In front of it there stands a statue of Ferdinand, third Granduca of Tuscany, which guide-books persist in acclaiming as Cosimo, despite the fact that "Ferdinandus III" is writ large upon the pedestal. As far as the church of the Cavalieri is concerned, a different story must be told; for the façade is the work of Talenti, while the ceiling is by Cristoforo Allori and others. The plan is probably Vasari's; and the campanile which later on figures in his correspondence is still to be seen: a not very original structure of red brick surmounted by a lantern of white marble, with enrichments of the same in the belfry storey.

The alterations to these two buildings were but one of the many works over which Vasari had control at this period. It is difficult to believe that he was able to superintend these operations in Pisa while at the same time he was proceeding with the work in the Palazzo Vecchio and the Uffizi at Florence. Yet such is the case. We cannot wonder if "La Cosina" grumbles once more at his prolonged absences and refuses to be pacified with a fresh batch of sonnets. We do not know whether these later poems of the painter-architect were more unsatisfactory than usual, but something has evidently occurred which reduces his wife to a state of grievous ill-health. Vasari was much troubled at her condition, and in a letter dated May 9th, 1562, he refers to it. "Nothing seems to give her pleasure," he writes, "and nothing seems to annoy her." She is getting worse, and he is waiting to see "what God has in store for him." It is noticeable that in his



hour of trial he throws off the gloss of the courtier and speaks of the Duke, not as "his most illustrious Excellency," but as "Cosimo," pure and simple.

But even with his wife in a state that caused him great anxiety, Giorgio remained true to his ambitions in life. No portion of his work was neglected, and the same letter which speaks of her illness contains the first intimation that he is preparing the Second Edition of the *Lives*. It is instructive that the letter containing this reference should be addressed to Vincenzo Borghini, his lifelong friend and adviser; and the question immediately arises as to what share Don Vincenzo had in the production of these famous volumes.

In the *Priorista di Giuliano Ricci* there occurs the following reference to the two editions of the *Lives*: "I remember hearing Don Miniato Pitti say that when Giorgio was preparing the First Edition he gave him a good deal of help, and told him a lot of anecdotes, together with a multitude of lies (*vi messe molte novelle e infinite bugie*). For the Second Edition Giorgio asked help of nobody, but elaborated and embroidered his so-called facts to such an extent that Don Miniato could scarcely recognise the old lies in their new dress, so wonderfully had Vasari contrived to mix them up."<sup>1</sup> It is highly improbable, however, that there is any truth in this statement. In the first place, Don Miniato Pitti was one of Vasari's earliest friends and well-wishers, and had given him employment during the unsettled days of the siege of Florence both in Pisa and Arezzo, so that it is extremely unlikely that he would have willingly misled his former protégé in so important a matter as the *Lives*. In the second place, it is untrue that

<sup>1</sup> Scoti-Bertinelli, *op. cit.*, p. 65, and Gaye, Vol. I, p. 150 footnote.

Vasari "asked help of nobody" in the preparation of the Second Edition, for such independence would not have been in keeping with his conduct on other occasions; witness the First Edition submitted to Gian Matteo Faetano of Rimini, and the additions to the *Dialoghi* which, in 1558, were sent to Borghini for approval. Borghini, indeed, acted as censor to all Vasari's later writings, and often supplied the subjects and suggested the composition of his pictures. What is more natural, then, than that Vasari should have recourse to his friend for assistance in the preparation of the Second Edition of the *Lives*? This theory, firmly believed in by both Milanesi and Bottari, was only a theory until Signor Scoti-Bertinelli, in the course of his researches, unearthed several documents of the highest interest. The first of these is a draft copy of the dedicatory letter prefixed to the original edition and addressed to Cosimo. It is in Borghini's handwriting, and is accompanied by a letter to Giorgio, clearly showing that, if he did not write the actual dedication in its final form, Borghini at least inspired it. But far more interesting were two other documents discovered by the same writer. One of them is entitled "Per le Vite di M. Giorgio," and is also in Borghini's handwriting. It is identical in substance with a portion of the *Proemio* to Volume I, the only difference being that Vasari has rephrased it. The other document is merely headed "M. G. V." (Messer Giorgio Vasari), and forms part of a treatise on drawing.

It would be tedious, as well as unnecessary, to adduce all the arguments of Signor Scoti-Bertinelli; but his conclusion—that these documents are separate pages torn by chance from a notebook containing the additions which were to be made to the Second



FRONTISPIECE TO VASARI'S "LIBRO DI DISEGNI"  
(Florence: Uffizi Gallery)



Edition—is supported, rather than otherwise, by such notices as appear in Vasari's letters. There is also the curious "Literary Testament" of Vasari,<sup>1</sup> addressed to Borghini by the biographer before one of his visits to Rome. It bears no date, but certainly refers to the Second Edition. Borghini, among other things, is to "revise, abridge, cancel, add to or supplement the work as may be necessary." He is also to look carefully over the title-page of the work, and to see that the author is described as "Giorgio Vasari, pittore aretino," as in the Third Part of the earlier edition there is no mention of his being a painter. Borghini is left absolutely free to do anything that will add to the value of the work.

While on this subject of the *Lives* it may be interesting to add a short note as to the fate of Vasari's Book of Drawings. He seems to have been fortunate enough to secure examples in pencil, black and white or colour, of the work of nearly every artist mentioned in his volumes. The market value of such a collection at the present day would amount to a fabulous sum, and it is to be regretted that the result of so many years of patient toil has been to some extent scattered. We know that Vasari regarded his book as a great treasure, and we know that he carefully bound all the sheets together and designed a special title-page, in which, as might have been expected, he included the portrait of Michelangelo. The drawing, in pen and ink heightened by washes of grey, is now in the Uffizi, and bears the following inscription: "Disegni di diversi pittori ecc. ti antichi e moderni," and clearly formed part of the cover for the celebrated *Libro di Disegni*, or Book of Drawings. Most of these are now in the Uffizi.

<sup>1</sup> Gaye, *Carteggio*, Vol. III, No. 300.

In the letter last quoted, in which Giorgio refers to his wife's illness, he says he wishes Borghini would send on the written matter he has got for him, and though it may be argued that these papers need not necessarily be concerned with the *Lives*, a sentence in the next letter, written three days later, seems to offer proof positive that Vasari did refer to the preparation of the new edition. "I expect to be able to come and spend Whitsuntide with you," he says, "but as you have not told me whether you have those writings of mine *and the Lives*, I am afraid that my coming may prove to be a waste of time." Clearly, then, Vasari intended to spend his holidays with Borghini discussing the revision of his book.

The closing days of the year 1562 were marked by the terrible calamity already referred to. The old story of this tragedy which the gossip-mongers of the last two centuries loved to tell has long since been proved false. We now know that the youthful Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici was not mortally stabbed by his brother Don Garzia, a lad of fifteen, during a quarrel as to whose dog had pulled down the quarry while they were out hunting together; and we know that the story of the Duke having killed Don Garzia with his own hand beside the body of his victim, as an act of just retribution, is equally untrue. The unadorned facts of the case are sufficiently moving.

In the middle of October the Duke decided to go on one of his progresses throughout his territories, and, furthermore, he elected to take the whole of his family with him, despite the warnings of the court physicians that the air of the Maremme was likely to prove harmful to them. On November 5th the court was at Massa Marittima, and ten days later, at

Rosignano, Cardinal Giovanni fell ill with malarial fever, after the fatigues of the hunt. At the same time Don Garzia, his younger brother, was struck down by the same enemy, but the symptoms in neither case gave rise to any anxiety. Two days later, however, the condition of Giovanni proved serious, and on the 20th he died in his father's arms. The tragedy that was enacting is best followed by means of extracts from Cosimo's letters to his eldest son, Francesco, at that time at the Spanish court.

"Don Gartia and Don Ernando,"<sup>1</sup> writes Cosimo on the day of Giovanni's death, "have both had a touch of the fever, but they will be quite well by to-morrow, when we shall all go to Pisa." Garzia, however, was still in the grip of the malaria, and the journey proved too much for his state of health. He grew rapidly worse, and on December 5th the doctors gave up all hope of saving him. Seven days later he breathed his last.

The consternation that reigned in Florence, where only the most meagre information as to what was happening at Pisa was to be obtained, may be imagined. The body of Giovanni had been sent back to the capital and there buried with all the pomp suitable to his dignity, and within three weeks—almost before the catafalque had been removed from San Lorenzo—another sad procession, bearing the corpse of his brother, entered the city gates. Nor was this all. The Duchess had long been in a delicate state of health and suffered from a troublesome cough. She was ill-prepared to support the loss of

<sup>1</sup> Ferdinando de' Medici, fourth son of the Duke. He was made a Cardinal in succession to his brother Giovanni in the following year, and on the death of Francesco, who became second Grand Duke of Tuscany, resigned his cardinalate in 1587, and was crowned third Grand Duke. He married Cristina of Lorraine.

her son Giovanni, and his death had been a great shock to her. Her fears for the life of Garzia reduced her to a condition from which only one issue was possible. Five days after Don Garzia breathed his last Eleonora di Toledo, Duchess of Tuscany, closed her eyes for ever, ignorant that Garzia was already awaiting her in the impenetrable Beyond.

The closing scenes of this drama are described with pitiful simplicity in Cosimo's letters to Francesco bearing the sad intelligence. He endeavours to console himself and his son with a philosophy which, all too clearly, cannot lessen his own sorrow, and he seems to say with the poet:—

“ But not all the preaching since Adam  
Can make Death other than Death.”

Two pages of this letter are taken up with the struggle of the stricken man to come to the point and broach the terrible news. He cannot. Then, hurriedly, he tells how Garzia “went back to God, rejoicing as though he went to a bridal . . .” “But how can I finish this letter,” he cries in anguish, “being called upon to speak of a grief still greater? . . . With the help of God, let me tell you what remains.” The story of her last moments is unfolded with simple directness. He tells of her grief for Giovanni, and how they dared not give her news of Garzia. But she guessed what they feared to tell and prepared to follow him; so, finally, “with incredible fortitude, and chatting to us all the time, she gave back her soul to God, dying almost in my own arms. Three days before the end she confessed and received the Sacrament, and the day before she died she asked to be given Extreme Unction. Then, having first attended to her spiritual welfare, she



divided up her possessions in my presence among her servants and attendants. During the last two days she retained full consciousness and lay on her bed waiting, nearly always with the crucifix clasped in her hands and speaking calmly of the approach of death as though it were an ordinary matter. Her speech remained with her until the last hour, and she recognised all who were around her.”

## CHAPTER VIII

### PALAZZO VECCHIO

Shortage of money for architectural works—Progress of buildings—  
Column of Santa Trinità—The stairs in the Palazzo Vecchio—Vasari's  
glowing accounts of it—Death of Michelangelo—His funeral.

**T**HE bereavements which had so suddenly fallen upon the Duke had, externally at least, little effect upon him, for on January 19th, 1563, Giorgio tells Borghini that he left the Duke at Pisa well and contented; also Don Arnando (Ferdinando), who was practically free from fever. "Although the red hat has arrived for him, he is not yet aware that he has been made a Cardinal, nor even that the Duchess and the others are dead. I left the Duke greatly consoled, but had considerable difficulty in getting away from him. He was glad to see me, and I have come away with a great many things settled up, so that I have plenty to go on with."

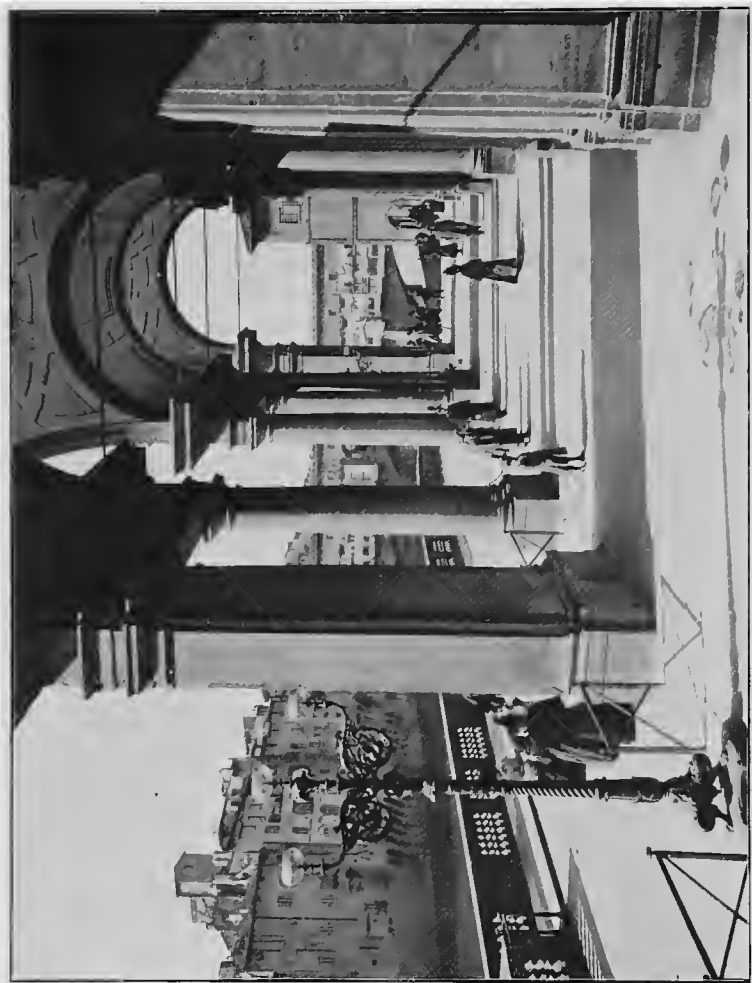
One of the undertakings referred to in this letter seems to have been the continuation of the Sacristy of San Lorenzo, which Giorgio put in hand, following out the instructions which Michelangelo had written out for his guidance. There is a letter from Giorgio to the Duke on the subject, in which he complains of the little respect paid by the priests to Michelangelo's work; for when he first went in to take his measurements he found that during the past winter they had warmed the place with charcoal

braziers, "for all the statues and the walls are covered with soot. It is a positive disgrace; and what makes it worse is that orders were given last year that the prior was to have a chimney made in one of the recesses, and it has never been done." Vasari drew up a scheme for the completion of the Sacristy, by which the work still to be done would be apportioned among the members of the Accademia, then recently reorganised.

In spite of the famine produced by the almost incessant bad weather of the past few years, Cosimo continued to plan new works, so that in the beginning of the year it is not surprising to know that there was a general shortage of money both for the Palazzo Pitti and the Uffizi in Florence and for the Palazzo de' Cavalieri at Pisa. Not only was there little to be had for building operations, but Vasari's pay also fell into arrears. We find him waylaying the Duke and assailing him with petitions setting forth his most pressing needs and putting himself in the position of the Duke's benefactor. "*Illustrissimo e Eccellentissimo Signor mio,*" he writes, "I take the liberty of sending you the present memorial, in spite of the fact that I explained verbally to your Highness yesterday morning how much I was in need of money, and also in spite of your Highness's generous promise that I should receive satisfaction. The property of Buonagrazia in Valdarno, which has been so often promised to me, is now vacant, and I take this opportunity of again asking you to bear me in mind, reminding you at the same time of all that I am doing on your behalf" (*quanto fo et opero per lei*).

In fact, to judge from the correspondence which passed between the Duke and his various advisers,

there was something of an architectural crisis in Tuscany ; and whatever money did come to hand was eagerly grabbed up by the first arrival on the scene. As a result of these difficulties the ducal architects, *Provveditori* and builders showed the utmost anxiety to impress their patron with the amount of work they were doing, and by harassing him with unnecessary letters and details moved him to wrath. On January 30th the *Provveditori* for the Uffizi wrote to complain that, owing to the bad times prevailing and the amount of money that was being spent on the *Cavalieri* at Pisa, they could get nothing for the prosecution of their own work, although they only required the mere trifle of 150 *scudi* per week ; and about the same time there is a letter from Bartolomeo Ammannato, architect to the Pitti, in which he says that “ Messer Tommaso (de’ Medici) gave orders for 250 *scudi* to be paid on the last three Saturdays, but for Saturday next there will only be 83 *scudi*. As we are in need of timber, tiles and lime, this sum will not be enough.” The *Provveditori* for the Uffizi, in their report to the Duke, added a detailed account of what they proposed to do, and this information was repeated by Vasari in another letter on the following day, and yet again by Bernardo Puccini. These unnecessary repetitions annoyed his most illustrious Excellency, as we have already said, and the original letter from the *Provveditori* bears a marginal note to the effect that “ his Excellency doesn’t want letters from so many people, but one only signed by them all.” It is evidently the memorandum taken down by the ducal secretary, for within a few days the *Provveditori* received the following dignified and characteristic rebuke :—



1795

LOGGIA OF THE UFFIZI TOWARDS THE ARNO, FLORENCE  
(CORRIDOR ACROSS PONTE VECCHIO IN DISTANCE)



“To the *Provveditori* of the Work on the new Site, February 9th (1563).

“The information you give us in your letter of the 30th has already reached us from other sources. Therefore, as we have matters of far greater importance to occupy our attention, and in order to avoid these petty annoyances for the future, we desire, touching the said works, that you will send us but one letter at the time, and that the said letter shall be signed by Giorgio (Vasari) and Puccino on your behalf. We have already told both of them separately, and we now repeat the same to you, that the work must be carried up equally in every part,<sup>1</sup> in order to avoid the appearance of its having been built in pieces and dovetailed together. The whole building is to proceed equally. No part whatsoever is to be completed until we have seen how it looks, as we do not wish to be obliged to pull it down again, as we should have to do if it failed to give us satisfaction.”

In spite of the serious financial outlook Cosimo resolved to undertake yet another important work, the completion of the great staircase in the Palazzo Vecchio and the decoration of the Sala Grande. Vasari, as before, was put in charge of the matter, and there is a letter from him to his patron, dated March 3rd, 1563, in which he expresses his gratitude for the Duke's resolve to proceed with the work, and his own expectation of eclipsing everything that has ever been done in the way of staircases and *Sale*. “It will surpass everything that has ever been done by mortal man in size and magnificence, in decorative stonework, in statues, bronzes, marbles and foun-

<sup>1</sup> Vasari and his collaborators proposed to carry up the end façade (towards San Pier Scheraggio) first, and having completed that, to proceed with the other portions.

tains, as well as in the originality of the paintings it will contain. The designs for both the ceiling and the walls are already being prepared." He goes on to prophesy that the work will excel the glories of the Venetian Senate and all that has ever been achieved by kings, popes and emperors.

"Having first thanked God," he continues, "I thank you, my sweetest master (*Signor mio dolcissimo*), for having given me so honourable and worthy a task; for through this work my ability as an artist, such as it is, will be perpetuated throughout all time, coupled with your august name; and in addition to the honour I hope to gain from this undertaking, I shall enjoy still greater rewards from your liberality. And because words fail to express my gratitude for the compliment you have paid me in this matter, and since I have no other means at command than that of diligence and hard work, I do assure you that all my work shall be full of beauty, full of fire, of power and vivacity, and carried out to the best of my judgment." The rest of the letter consists of a rough outline of the proposed decorations, and to it is appended a sketch diagram. From the tone of the letter it is clear that Vasari already hears in imagination the applause that will greet the uncovering of his masterpieces, and his prayer is that the Almighty will give him health and strength both of body and mind, so that he may "finish the work in absolute perfection, to the glory of God, of himself, and of the Duke."

To this letter Cosimo replied on the 14th, in terms which ought to have given the artist the fullest satisfaction. "The description given in your letter of the 3rd, as also the sketches enclosed therein of the Sala Grande and its ceiling, have pleased us mightily."



He then goes on to criticise several points, among them the composition of the picture dealing with the capture of Siena. Vasari has represented the Duke as surrounded by a group of advisers; but Cosimo will have none of them, explaining with conscious pride that he achieved the subjugation of the city without external assistance. "The group of counsellors which you have placed about our person where you represent us in the act of deliberating upon the campaign against Siena, is not in the least necessary as we acted entirely alone in the matter. You can fill up the places of these counsellors with figures representing Silence and some other of the Virtues."

The contracts for the masonry and carpenters' work were signed on April 23rd. The masonry was to cost 2000 florins, and the estimate for the new roof amounted to 4894 florins.<sup>1</sup>

Vasari, though he could not hope to begin his own work in the Sala for another year or so, had his hands full. In Pisa he still had the buildings for the

<sup>1</sup> See Gaye, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 103. The originals of these contracts are preserved in the Biblioteca of the Palazzo Pitti, in a volume bearing the inscription:—"This book belongs to the illustrious and excellent Duke Cosimo."

The mason, Master Bernardo, who was one of Vasari's right-hand men, and accompanied him on his tour through Italy some years later, agrees to "increase the height of all the walling of the said Salone," and to make the total internal height twelve *braccia* (23 feet), doing the work "in a proper manner with stone of good quality and not taken from the Arno, with slaked lime mixed with a small proportion of sand. The actual words here are *calcine colate, grasse e non piene di rena*. *Calcina grassa* is mortar consisting of lime mixed with a very small proportion of sand, and is the converse of *calcina magra*, in which the quantity of sand is proportionately in excess. The work is to be of the thicknesses of the old work, and is to have all projections, etc., in every way corresponding to the existing portion. He binds himself to build under each bressummer (*cavallo*) a pilaster constructed with paving bricks (*mezane campigiane*—that is, bricks above the ordinary size and chiefly used for pavings), and to turn arches between the said pilasters similar to those in the existing work, over the window openings, an

Cavalieri to superintend, and in Florence he seems to have been partly responsible for the erection of the granite column in the Piazza di Santa Trinità, which, having been given to Cosimo by the Pope, was raised in Florence in commemoration of the victory over the French under Piero Strozzi at Marciano in 1554. It was brought from the Baths of Caracalla, and from the fact that it was nearly a year on its journey from Rome it may be argued that the task was no light one, especially as after having been brought as far as Signa by water, the

to replace the stonework of the windows together with their fastenings. The word translated "fastenings" is in the original rendered by *arpioni*, the pivot portion of the hinge on which the casement frames were hung. From this description it would appear that the Florentine windows must have been far from draught-proof.

He is to "render and set" in plaster round the windows both internally and externally. The walls above the level of the ceiling (where they would not be seen) are to be rendered only, as a protection against damage from rats and mice. "In all these walls the whole of the work is to be undertaken by the said Master Bernardo, who is to supply all timber, scaffolding, etc., all of which, with the other materials, are to be approved by the architect or his representative."

The contractor then proceeds to bind himself to take down the old ceiling with all requisite care, and to save as much of the stuff as he can; this he may use for his scaffolding. He binds himself, further, "to build the portion above the work of (Baccio) Bandinelli, where the three large windows are situated, together with the corridor, upon three or more corbels, according to the requirements of sound work." He is to proceed in the same manner above the work of Ammannato; and, further, binds himself to build into the masonry all the necessary cramps for the decorative stonework surrounding the paintings on the walls.

"He promises . . . to complete the said work within three years from the first day of August, 1563."

"On the other part . . . Messer Filippo di Giovanni dell' Antella, bursar, agrees to pay to the said Master Bernardo the sum of two thousand florins, at the rate of seven *lire* to the florin, within three years."

The carpenter, one Master Battista, son of Bartolomeo Botticelli, then makes his declaration to the following effect: He agrees to "carry out all the work in the ceiling with timber of good quality, dry and well-seasoned, with all the mouldings, lengths and thicknesses shown on the



Giorgio Vasari

Bronze

RETURN OF COSIMO THE ELDER FROM EXILE  
(*Firenze: Palazzo Vecchio*)



remainder of the distance had to be accomplished over rough roads, the column being hauled over rollers by means of winches. On April 21st Vasari, accompanied by Bartolomeo Ammannato, went down to Signa, whither the column had just arrived, to consult as to the best method of landing it from its barge. Vasari, however, was prevented from taking part in the proceedings, for a letter written by him on the following day says that he is unwell and has gone to bed, hoping that it is only a slight indisposition. He returned to Arezzo, and though

model . . . together with all carved work shown thereon; to place rosettes or carved pendants (literally, rosettes or diamond-faceted projections), whichever will look best, in the moulded strips between the painted panels, six *braccia* apart, according to the said model. To place fifty inscriptions upon the underside of the beams, with masks, vine-pattern ornaments or other enrichments at the ends, the lettering to be a quarter (of a *braccio*?) in height. In all the angles of the octagons, twenty-four in number, to place the arms of his illustrious Excellency, that is to say, the capricorn, the turtle and anchor, etc., all to be carved in half relief and (large enough) to fill the spaces: and in the circular spaces in the angles he agrees to place four large coats of arms, carved in half relief, with the ducal crown, *palle*, etc., according to the said design."

"He agrees to . . . construct a cornice round the said Salone in conformity with the said model, divided into bays by large corbels similar to those in the model, and to carve a band of egg-and-tongue ornament with other enrichments in the cornice."

"He binds himself to form behind the cornice and ceiling a sufficient framework to keep it firm, consisting of large and stout beams with joists and boarding to take the weight of the ceiling between the bresssumers."

"He undertakes not to remove his staging . . . until the painters have completed the decoration of the ceiling and the gilding thereof."

"Finally, he binds himself to form eleven panels in the ceiling, each eight *braccia* across; four of them to be square, four octagonal and the other three circular. Similarly he will make twelve panels, each nine *braccia* high and four in width; also sixteen panels four *braccia* square, all the said panels being formed with due care, with straight and well-seasoned battens."

The work is to be completed, like the former contract, within three years commencing from the 1st August, 1563, and the contract price which Filippo dell' Antella agrees to pay on behalf of the Duke is 4894 florins.

he continued to work at his chapel, it was not until a month had passed that he was able to report to Cosimo that he was "beginning to feel a little better."

Ammannato accordingly looked after the landing of the column alone. Ten days were occupied in hoisting it on to the shore, and on May 1st Ammannato was able to report to the Duke that the disembarkation had been safely carried out. There still remained the stupendous task of hauling it to the capital, and it was not until four days before Christmas that it arrived in Florence, having taken nearly eight months to traverse the ten miles which separate Signa from that city. Another eighteen months were devoured in preparing a suitable base, and finally, on July 11th, 1565, it was raised into the position it now occupies.

In addition to this, Vasari had still the great staircase of the Palazzo Vecchio to finish. It was indeed true, as Vasari had said, that the palace was a collection of odd apartments rather than a homogeneous building. It had seen many changes since the days when Arnulfo di Cambio first began its construction in 1299. In 1453-4 Michelozzo Michelozzi had made some attempt to reduce the palace to orderly convenience, and though the biographer tells us that he was incapable of planning a new staircase, the truth seems to be that he had no time to attempt it, as he followed Cosimo the Elder into exile when the Medici were driven from Florence in 1454. The Sala Grande, in some sense the monument of Girolamo Savonarola, was commenced under his auspices—the auspices of him who told the Florentines that "the only government that can suit us is the government of the citizens, and that which is

universal." The older parliaments had become the pseudo-legal cloaks under which the Medici masked their acts of despotism, and for these Savonarola wished to substitute a great council which was to be the work, not of man, but of God. Within the Palazzo de' Signoria there was no chamber sufficiently large to receive the council thus created, and in 1495 Cronaca was appointed to erect the Sala Grande. By the end of the following year this work was almost complete, the little amount of decoration allowed by the Frate, who three years later caused "the Vanities" to be burnt in the public square, adding nothing to the time required for its construction. Savonarola, the self-appointed mouthpiece of the wrath of God, had but little time to devote to the refinements of life. The tragedy that was here enacted is too well known to call for repetition, but it is pleasant to note that a colossal figure of this latter-day prophet has now been placed in a position of honour in the Sala where once his voice was heard, and that four centuries after his martyrdom a bronze tablet has been placed over the spot where he died. The ceiling was of simple framed timbers, with a meagre cornice surrounding it. The Sala, as Cronaca finished it, was so vast that the few windows supplied by him were insufficient for their purpose. Such as it was, however, it was allowed to remain until the days of Duke Cosimo, Cronaca meanwhile being engaged upon altering the staircase that had defied Michelozzi. "It was six *braccia* in width and built in two flights," says Vasari, who had the honour of pulling it down again some seventy years later. "It was enriched with carvings in *macigno*, with Corinthian pilasters and capitals, double cornices and arches of the same stone. The vaults were semicircular,

The windows were ornamented with columns of *mischio*, with carved marble capitals.”<sup>1</sup>

This staircase Vasari entirely rebuilt. When completed it met with approval on all sides, and—though we may disapprove of Vasari’s want of taste in the matter—fully deserves the encomiums he is not too modest to bestow upon it when describing the preparations for the wedding of Francesco de’ Medici. The difference between the old stairs and the new is humorously described in a contemporary dialogue<sup>2</sup> supposed to take place between two men, Pubblio and Marchetto, who are discussing the recent changes in the city. Pubblio happens to remark that when, in the olden days, Federigo da Bozzolo rushed into the palace to quell the insurrection that was threatening among the people in 1527, he had much difficulty in mounting the stairs. “Indeed, he got rather red in the face, and being a very fat man he found that the effort of running up so many plaguey steps and then running all the way down again, made him feel exceedingly hot. Nowadays, since their Highnesses (the Medici) have had them altered and made so very convenient, you don’t notice whether you are going up or coming down.”

“Ah,” says Marchetto reflectively, “truly an amazing piece of architecture! But tell me, why were the old steps made so steep?”

“That,” responds his friend without the least hesitation, “was done so that when the citizens

<sup>1</sup> *Vite*, Vol. IV, Life of Cronaca. “Macigno” is a greenish grey sandstone. “Mischio” is a conglomerate, and apparently the same as *breccia*.

<sup>2</sup> *Apologia dei Capucci*, Magliabecchiana MSS. Quoted by Gualandi, *Memorie Originali Italiane risguardanti le Belle Arti* (Bologna, 1840), Fourth Series, No. 117.



wanted to come and argue with the Government they should get out of breath on the stairs and, by the time they reached the top, be quite incapable of ventilating their grievances. But now everything is changed, and there is a doctor<sup>1</sup> at the head of affairs who has all sorts of elixirs and precious distillations always at hand. Whenever he applies these medicaments to the noses of Senators or Magistrates they straightway make a bolt for the street, and so the stairs have been made pleasing and easy of descent in order to assist their exit."

Giorgio never ceased to regard this staircase as one of his masterpieces. In his opinion, perhaps, it was only surpassed by the great chamber to which it led the way, and of which the artist has left several accounts. In the Autobiography he relates how Cosimo resolved to heighten the roof and decorate the walls and ceiling, "a most stupendous and important work, and one that might well have been beyond my abilities, though it certainly was not beyond my ambition. But whether it was that the confidence of my Prince and the good fortune attending all his undertakings gave me greater skill than usual; or whether hope and opportunity combined to assist me; or whether—and this I ought to have placed first—God gave me strength necessary for the purpose; these are things that I know not. I undertook the work, and, as may be seen, I completed it, in spite of the predictions of others, not only in less time than I had promised or than the work deserved, but less even than I or his most illustrious Excellency had believed possible. I quite think that he was astonished, and more than satisfied, seeing

<sup>1</sup> The word used in the original is "medico," a pun on the family name of the Duke.

that I got it done in the nick of time, just when he had the most need of it for the greatest of all possible occasions : and, so that you may know the reason of my solicitude, that was because he had arranged a marriage between his son Francesco and the Archduchess Giovanna of Austria, sister of the Emperor Maximilian and daughter of Charles V. And here I leave you—not only you who are artists, but all other folk as well—who have seen the vastness of the work to think about it for yourselves. The greatness and the terrible nature of the occasion (*la quale occasione terribilissima e grande*) must be my excuse if through haste I have not given complete satisfaction in all these pictures of wars on land and wars at sea, sieges of cities, batteries, assaults, skirmishes, building of cities, great councils, ceremonies both ancient and modern, with triumphs and a thousand other incidents.” He thought it his duty, he says, to do all he could to get it finished, so that this room could be used for the more important ceremonies of the approaching festivities ; and, as though afraid to spoil his work by not saying enough about it, goes on to tell the reader that in this one ceiling he has represented pretty nearly everything that the mind of man is capable of imagining. There are bodies and faces, robes and draperies, helmets, vizors and other head-pieces ; there are cuirasses, horses, trappings and harness ; every sort of artillery ; ships, tempests, rain, snow and ‘ many other things that he cannot think of at the moment.’ Whoever sees the work will readily guess the anxiety it caused him and the many nights he lay sleepless on his bed thinking about it ; and though it is true that he had the assistance of his pupils, sometimes he found them useful, sometimes not, and very frequently he was obliged to re-



Giorgio Vasari

SIEGE OF FLORENCE BY THE PRINCE OF ORANGE  
(*Fiorucco: Palazzo Vecchio*)



paint all that they had done in order to bring it into line with the rest of the work as regards *maniera*.

The self-appreciation of this account, however, pales into insignificance in comparison with the unblushing admiration with which he speaks of it when describing the wedding of Francesco. This "description," indeed, is little else than a string of superlatives applied to his own achievements. The Sala is reached by means of "agiattissime scale"; and within is the "stupendous and most sumptuous ceiling, admirable for the variety and number of its exceedingly fine (*rarissime*) paintings; admirable for the highly original conception (*ingegnosissima invenzione*) and wonderful richness (*richissimi*) of its subdivisions and for the infinite quantity of gilding that glitters on every point; but perhaps still more admirable because it is the work of one man alone, and was completed in an incredibly short space of time."<sup>1</sup> He continues this modest statement by saying he doubts whether there could be found a hall of greater size anywhere, or one that afforded more scope for the artist: "but beyond all question it would be impossible to find in the whole world anything more rich,

<sup>1</sup> *Descrizione dell' Apparato fatto . . . per le Nozze . . . di Francesco de' Medici*. A reprint of this work appears in the Sansoni Edition of the *Vite*, Vol. VIII. The blame for this self-laudatory outburst cannot be entirely attributed to Vasari. Throughout his career the simple-minded painter placed more faith in the opinion of others than in his own. Domenico Mellini had already published a description of these works, and had been unstinting in his praises of their author. So greatly did Vasari believe Mellini's eminently favourable criticism to be justified, that his own description is copied almost verbatim from Mellini's book. The latter writer, in speaking of the Sala Grande, says that "in size, beauty, richness and splendour it surpasses not only every other rich and ornate hall in Europe, but in the whole world." Further description he withholds, as Vasari himself is about to write on the subject, "whose book will shortly be published." Speaking of Vasari and the works of the Palazzo Vecchio in general, he expresses once more the same sentiments as are found in Vasari's description. He describes the artist as "a most excel-

more beautiful, more ornate or better arranged than the Sala Grande appeared on the day that the *Comedia* was recited."

The "incredibly short space of time," it may be observed, was a period of about eighteen months, as we shall see that Vasari was already at work on the Sala in October, 1564, and that it was not completed before the state entry of Francesco's bride on December 20th, 1565. Moreover, on referring to the *Dialoghi*, it is difficult to reconcile the statement that it was the work of "one man alone" with the information he gives the Prince during the course of those tedious conversations. Among the portrait heads in the large panel representing the triumphal return of the Florentine army from Siena—it is the panel on the left-hand side of the central circular picture, looking towards the statue of Savonarola—he points out "Maestro Bernardo di Mona Mattea, the worthy mason who was responsible for the work of raising the roof of the chamber fourteen *braccia* (about 27 feet) above the original level, and who carried up all the walling under it and the rooms we have just visited." Another head is

lent painter and elegant architect, deserving the highest encomiums and eternal praise: for he was the sovereign master, architect, and sole executant of the marvellous enrichments, such as have never before been seen in our day, in the *cortile* and the staircases involved in the restoration of the Palazzo, and of all the paintings. And what is beyond the power of imagination and belief is the wondrous rapidity with which he has done it all. For when his illustrious Excellency desired to heighten the aforesaid Sala—a work which at any time would be a serious undertaking and exceedingly hazardous—and to decorate it in honour of the welcome arrival and felicitous marriage of her Highness, he raised the roof fourteen *braccia*. And this he did, not only when it was of great importance that it should be done, but he finished it and brought it to perfection in two years, far less time than was thought possible. He did the same with the useful and ornamental corridor by which he joined the Palazzo di Piazza (Palazzo Vecchio) to the Pitti, in the space of five months, stupefying everybody that saw it."

that of Batista Botticelli, the joiner who framed the ceiling; and a third represents Messer Stefano Veltroni dal Monte Sansavino, who was responsible for all the gilding. Here, too, is depicted the robust form of Vincenzo Borghini himself, together with Giovambatista Adriani,<sup>1</sup> both of whom "were of the greatest possible assistance to me with their suggestions." Then comes Giorgio Vasari, accompanied by Batista Naldini, Giovanni Strada, and Jacopo Zucchi, "youths of great promise in our profession, who have all three helped me to bring this work to perfection, and without whose assistance I could not have finished it in a lifetime." Vasari himself may readily be recognised by the likeness to his known portraits. He holds a paper in his hand, doubtless a sketch design for the ceiling itself. Adriani, a middle-aged man with an iron-grey beard, is on his right, and Borghini, rotund and good-natured, clad in clerical garb, is on his left.

The Palazzo Vecchio, too, after Giorgio had brought his master mind to bear on its problems, was the chief thing that excited the curiosity and admiration of Ridolfo Ghirlandaio in his old age. Vasari himself vouches for the fact, for he tells us how Ridolfo's anxiety to see these marvels was intensified by the many reports that reached him; "so one day, while the Duke was absent from Florence, he caused himself to be carried in his armchair to the palace, where he stayed and had lunch, examining everything. The whole palace was so different from what he remembered it that he did not recognise it again, and that night, as he was being carried home,

<sup>1</sup> Adriani, it will be remembered, wrote a letter to Vasari containing a short history of painting from the earliest days of the art. It was printed as an introduction to the *Vite*.

he said, 'Now I can die happy, for I shall be able to tell our artists in the Beyond that I have seen what was dead brought back to life, what was hideous made beautiful, and what was old restored to its youth.'"<sup>1</sup>

One more incident connected with the Sala Grande—or if not with the Sala, with one of the other rooms in the Palazzo Vecchio painted by Vasari—is worthy to find a place here. It is the story which in all probability was first set on foot by Settimanni,<sup>2</sup> and was worked up into a little masterpiece of dramatic art by Dumas.<sup>3</sup> This is the story as the French novelist, giving full rein to his splendid imagination, tells it:—

“One day, when Giorgio Vasari, concealed from view by the scaffolding, was painting the ceiling of one of the rooms in the Palazzo Vecchio, Isabella<sup>4</sup> came in, and being quite unaware that she was not alone, settled herself on a couch. It was about mid-day, and as it was very hot she drew the curtains about her and presently fell asleep. Shortly afterwards Cosimo also entered the apartment, and catching sight of her, went to where she lay. A moment later Isabella uttered a piercing shriek. At this terrible cry Vasari resolutely looked down no more, but closed his eyes as though he, too, were asleep.

“Suddenly Cosimo recollected that this was the

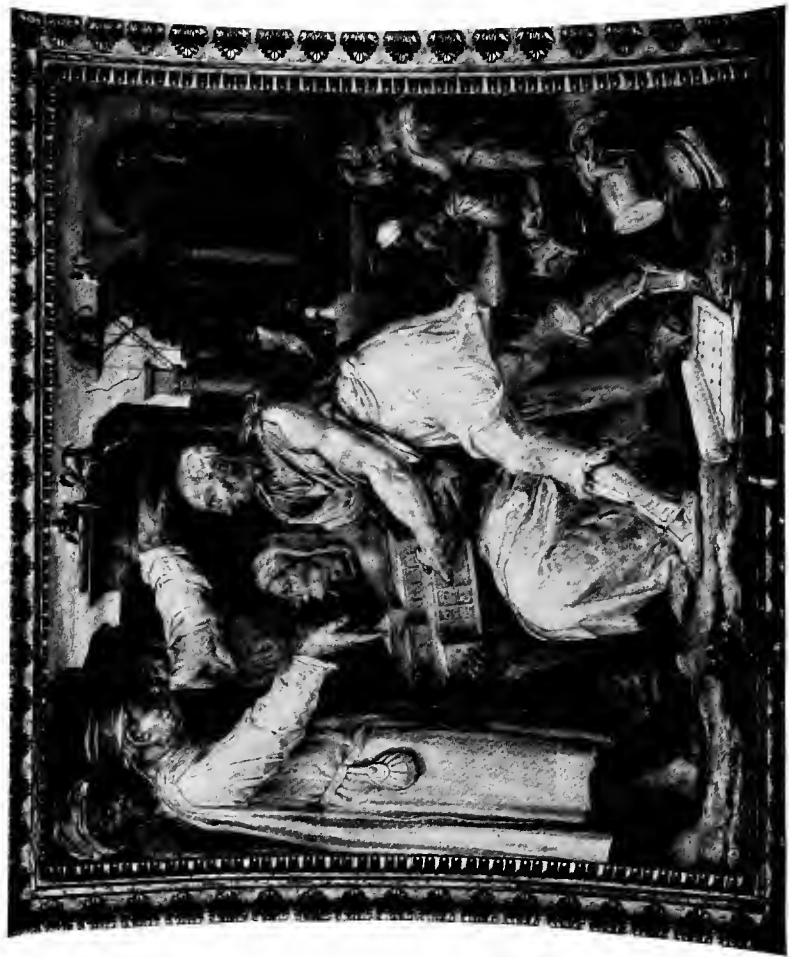
<sup>1</sup> *Vite*, Vol. VI, p. 546.

<sup>2</sup> *Diario*, printed in Vol. IV, R. Archivio di Stato di Firenze. Settimanni merely says that Giorgio was an unwilling witness of the event about to be related, and immediately turned his face away, “feeling no inclination to paint any more that day.”

<sup>3</sup> *La Galerie de Florence . . . avec une texte en Français par Alexandre Dumas*. Florence, 1842.

<sup>4</sup> Isabella Romola de' Medici, second daughter of the Duke. She was born in 1542, and married the Duke of Bracciano.





*Giorgio Vasari*

BRUNELLESKO PRESENTING THE MODEL FOR SAN LORENZO TO COSIMO THE ELDER  
(*Florence: Palazzo Vecchio*)

807



room in which the artist was at work. He raised his eyes to the ceiling ; his glance fell on the scaffolding. An idea struck him. In a minute he had mounted the ladder with noiseless tread, and on reaching the platform saw the form of Vasari, who, with his face turned to the wall, lay fast asleep. He walked towards the prostrate figure, drew his dagger, and advanced its point slowly towards his breast to assure himself that he was indeed sleeping. Vasari made not the slightest movement, his breathing continued calm and regular, and Cosimo, convinced that his favourite painter had really been oblivious of what had passed, replaced his dagger in its sheath and descended from the scaffolding.

“At his customary hour Vasari left his work and went home. The following day he returned to his task at the usual time. His presence of mind had saved him ; for had he endeavoured to flee he would inevitably have been lost : in whatsoever place he might try to conceal himself, either the dagger or the poisoned meats of the Medici would have found him out.

“This episode happened about the year 1557.”

It is disappointing to think that so interesting an anecdote is false from beginning to end, but truth will out, according to the old adage ; and the truth in this particular case is that Isabella was at the time betrothed to Paolo Giordano Orsini, Duca di Bracciano, and that the Medici had gone to live in the Palazzo Pitti some years before this event is supposed to have taken place.

The story of the Sala Grande has caused us to wander from our more immediate subject. It was while the painter was awaiting the handing over of this apartment by the contractors that the news of

Michelangelo's death, in January, 1564, reached Florence. As may be supposed, Giorgio felt the loss very keenly, but the letter in which he sends his condolences to Lionardo Buonarroti is a curious mixture of sentiment and business instinct. It is true that Giorgio was genuinely grieved; but at the moment he was entirely possessed with the thirst for "copy," and it was perhaps a gloomy satisfaction to him to think that his next edition would now contain a complete life of Michelangelo, with a fitting account of his death and burial. "I have received the news of the death of *mio Messer Michelangelo* with the most profound sorrow, for he was my father in affection quite as much as he was your uncle by the ties of blood. I was sorry to learn that you did not get back before the end. I feel convinced that the God who sent him to us as a miracle among men, both as regards his genius and saintly example, has gathered him into His own arms so that one who did so much to beautify the world with his hands may henceforth ornament Paradise with the presence of his soul." Immediately following this extravagant tribute comes a request for information as to Michelangelo's later years, "from 1550 to the present day, touching both the progress of St. Peter's and his private life; for within the next three months the new edition of the *Lives* will be in the printer's hands, and I wish to give honourable notice of the closing years of his life. If you can put your hand on any of his sonnets, or songs or other compositions you might send them as well; and if you should happen to come across any letters from princes or other eminent people, I should be glad to have them so as to give additional lustre to his memory."

Vasari's sorrow at the loss of his master found another outlet in verse, and in a sonnet still preserved he complains that Michelangelo has left him behind in "this prison of horrors, where fraud and cheating are the fashion, where all that is good dies, and where the envious only remain to eat out their own hearts."

"Vasar, ch' in questo carcer pien d'orrore  
 Sol t'ha lassato, ove l'inganno e frode  
 S'annida, e 'l ben si muor, l'invidia rode  
 Sè drento, e di pietà spento è'l valore.  
 Ne fia spenta però, chi innanzi a gl'occhi  
 Vedrà la vita tua, o Buon Arroto,  
 Ch' eterno potrà farsi et immortale."

The body was smuggled out of Rome by Lionardo, concealed in a bale of merchandise,<sup>1</sup> for neither the Pope nor the people of Rome would willingly have given up the precious spoil. Vasari had charge of the funeral arrangements, and there is a letter from him to Lionardo which corroborates the information given by the diarist. In acknowledging the debt of gratitude Florence owes to Lionardo, Vasari says: "If you had sent us some great treasure it could not have been a more welcome gift than these hallowed and peerless remains. . . . I have not allowed them to be removed from the shell, but have had them sealed up at the customs office, pending instructions from his illustrious Excellency."

Cosimo took a personal interest in the honours that were to be paid to the illustrious dead, commanding Benedetto Varchi, the historian, to deliver

<sup>1</sup> "A dì X di Marzo, 1564, venerdì a ore 20, arrivò in Firenze il cadavere di M. Buonarroti, trafugato di Roma da Lionardo, suo nipote, in una balla di mercanzia" (A. Lapini, *Diario Fiorentino*).

the funeral oration, and readily granting Vasari's request that the actual ceremony might take place in San Lorenzo after Easter, in order that Lionardo might be present. "I believe," writes Giorgio, "that it will be such a funeral as has never fallen to the lot of either Pope, King or Emperor; and I may add, that if you had sent the bodies of both St. Peter and St. Paul you could scarcely have won more gratitude from their Excellencies, or from the citizens, artists and people of this city." He adds his private conviction that "God has given him rest in Paradise," and he knows that Michelangelo is praying that Vasari, "who revered him so much in this world, may be with him in the next, and may there continue to admire him."<sup>1</sup>

It would appear that Giorgio had some difficulty in obtaining the information he wanted to complete the Life of Michelangelo; for at the end of April he again writes to Lionardo acknowledging the receipt of certain letters and the notes sent by Daniello da Volterra and Antonio Amelini di Fano, touching the life of his hero, but complaining that none of them do more than expatiate upon his virtuous and upright mode of life. Details such as these he is in a position to supply from his own knowledge. "My desire is that *la Signoria vostra* will condescend to give me some information on matters of art. I would like to know, for instance, something about the timber-work for the dome of St. Peter's as shown in the stone model, and the worries and vexations which beset him in the time of Pope Paul IV, as well as what occurred at the same time with regard to Nanni Bigio dell' Ontacho and Fra Guglielmo (della Porta). I have already

<sup>1</sup> *Vite*, Vol. VIII, Letter No. 125, to Lionardo, March 18th, 1564.

written to Messer Daniello Ricciarelli (da Volterra) about it, as I intend, after giving some account of his exemplary life, to draw attention to the great patience with which he supported the insults heaped upon him by evil-minded persons." There is also another letter to Lionardo urging him to send the information asked for "concerning St. Peter's from '50 onwards."

Vasari had a particular reason for wishing to make the Life of Michelangelo complete. Since the publication of Giorgio's First Edition, *Condivi*, a pupil of the great master and inmate of his house, had taken the field with another Life, and Giorgio regarded this as a direct infringement of his own prerogatives. This it is that explains the presence of sundry veiled attacks on nobody in particular which have found their way into the Vasarian account. "I have to thank God for many blessings," writes our Giorgio in the Second Edition, "for more blessings than usually fall to the lot of a member of our profession: and among the greatest of these I count the chance by which I was born during the lifetime of Michelangelo, that I was considered worthy of having him for my master, and that he treated me as his own familiar friend. This friendship is known to everybody, and the letters I have by me which he wrote to me would alone be sufficient to prove it. As a matter of fact, I am indebted to his kindness for much of the information about himself which I am using: so that I am in a position to tell of many things, and all of them true, which are unknown to any other person." This, of course, is simply a hit at *Condivi*, whose *Vita di Michelangelo* he hoped to discredit while covertly modelling his own version upon it to a very large extent.

In spite of having to superintend the preparations for the funeral, Vasari found time to visit Arezzo, and it is evident that in March he was at his native town engaged in the pleasant task of painting pictures for his own chapel. This we learn from a letter to the Bishop of Cortona, telling him that if he had gone to visit Giorgio while at Arezzo he might have had the privilege of seeing a painting which he (Giorgio) had just done, "at a great cost and with rich decorations, for the chapel and high altar of the Pieve."

The funeral took place on July 14th. Cosimo had just previously resigned the government to his son Francesco, perhaps in imitation of the example set by the Emperor Charles V; but while the abdication of the latter was permanent and sincere, the former kept the reins of government so near to his own hand that at any time he might grasp them once more and direct the policy of the State. The chief reason for his resignation is to be found in the state of his health, which had begun to cause uneasiness in the previous year when his system showed the first symptoms of gout. In October of the same year he suffered from stone, and this, together with one or two slight apoplectic seizures, counselled him that it would be wise to pave the way for Francesco, his successor. He retired from Florence as a place of permanent residence, and passed increasingly long periods either at Pisa or Poggio a Caiano. He was at the latter place at the time of the funeral, and thither Giorgio, as responsible to the Duke for the proper carrying out of the ceremony, sent his official account. "This morning," says Giorgio, "and this is the 14th of the present month, the obsequies of the divine Michelangelo



took place, to the complete satisfaction of everybody concerned. San Lorenzo was filled to overflowing with people of note, besides a large number of noble ladies, and so many foreigners that it was a strange sight to see them all. The utmost decorum was maintained at all the doors, and everything passed off quietly. . . . Benvenuto (Cellini) did not trouble to put in an appearance, and San Gallo also elected to stop away, a thing that has given rise to a deal of chatter."

That San Gallo stayed away out of spite is probable, knowing as we do the ill-will he bore the dead artist; but Vasari is unjust in attributing the same motive to Benvenuto, who, as a matter of fact, was himself too ill to attend the funeral. On the contrary, his conduct was all that could be desired, and a remarkable contrast to that of the man we meet in the Memoirs. His selection as one of the four artists appointed to plan the arrangements for the sad ceremony he considered in the light of a great honour done him by the Accademia, and the letter to Borghini, in which he sets out his ideas on the subject, is full of modesty and kindness. "Above all," he concludes, "I beg you of your goodness not to let anyone see what I have suggested, and particularly not to let your Messer Giorgio (Vasari) see it, for he is fertile in invention and an able designer; and if he sees my scheme his own inventiveness may be unconsciously influenced. I should be very sorry indeed if his intellectual liberty were in any way tampered with in this matter."

This is somewhat different from the sentiment expressed in one of his sonnets, where he says that the only thing that annoys him is to see Borghini going about Florence followed by that little mongrel dog

Giorgio, both of whom God has allowed to fill the earth with every sort of artistic monstrosity:—

“Mi noia sol de' Nocenti 'l Priore,  
E l'empio botol suo crudel Giorgetto:  
Par che sol a questi Dio abbia eletto  
Per far nel mondo d'ogni sorta errore.”

## CHAPTER IX

### PREPARATIONS FOR FRANCESCO DE' MEDICI'S WEDDING

Cartoons for the Sala Grande—Tomb of Michelangelo—Corridor across the Arno—Preparations for Francesco's wedding—Borghini's report.

**A**LTHOUGH the death of Michelangelo did not, and could not, in any way affect the position of Vasari as an artist, it is interesting to observe that Giorgio held a different view of the matter. If Michelangelo may be compared to Elijah, it was Giorgio who played the part of Elisha and on whom the mantle of the prophet fell. All the giants of art were dead; Giorgio himself had helped to bury the last and greatest of them all. The sole survivor, the indisputable successor of these masters, was Vasari—he had no doubt upon that point whatsoever. And this is the view we find set forth in the letter to Cosimo written on July 14th. The funeral is over and has been described: it only remains for the Duke and his faithful painter to provide for the future of the arts. Vasari is nobly willing to bear his portion of the responsibility. “As for myself,” he says, “I have always been anxious that you should assist all those who require help; and, as your Highness has seen in the past, and will have daily opportunity of observing, I shall spare no pains to keep these noble arts alive and to advance them by means of my paintings, my writings, and by every other means within my power.” As a consequence of this

heroic resolve it was only natural that the Sala Grande should be thought out with extra care; and the subjects were discussed by all the chief scholars of the court. Borghini, as usual, was the ruling spirit in these debates, and most of Cosimo's letters concerning the ceiling are addressed to him and not to Vasari. Vasari, it is true, made frequent pilgrimages to the Duke's place of retirement at Poggio a Caiano for the purpose of conferring with his master, but it is by no means clear that his share in the proceedings lightened the labours of the others, as the following extracts tend to show:—

“Giorgio Vasari,” writes Borghini to the Duke on November 4th, 1564, “has just returned from his visit to your illustrious Excellency, and tells me that you have settled the subjects for all the remaining panels in the ceiling of the Sala. They have now been drawn out and arranged according to your Excellency's instructions, with but one exception. It is the panel in which, as he tells me, your Excellency wishes to have portrayed the fact that Florence has never been taken by an enemy.” Borghini sensibly observes that “it is impossible to paint the picture of a town never having been captured,” and suggests as an alternative the *Defeat of Radegaisus by Stilicho under the Walls of Florence*, after the city had been hard pressed by the besieging army. From Vasari's letter of the same date we learn that his advisers were considerably exercised over the matter. “The Prior degli Innocenti is nearly distracted with arguing about the picture your illustrious Excellency has asked for, first with Messer Lelio (Torelli) and then with other learned persons. I think they have now hit upon something that will do, and I expect there will be a letter from him with

this to explain what they suggest." Cosimo, instead of being pleased with the eagerness of his servants in Florence, who were willing to attempt even the impossible on his behalf, told them—in a round-about way, it is true—that they were a set of stupid bunglers, and that Vasari was worse than the rest. "Either he entirely misunderstood us," he writes on November 12th, "or else we were unable to explain the matter as we desired. We wish you to understand that the idea of Florence never having been subjugated did not so much as enter our head, seeing that the contrary fact is well known. What we did say was that she had never been sacked and destroyed, and we made the remark when speaking of the picture representing the rebuilding of the city, and to prevent him from doing something idiotic (*qualche absurdo*). It was for this reason that we mentioned it to Giorgio. However, we are glad that the question has arisen, for your studies and researches into the matter are of great interest . . . and may, perhaps, come in useful for the picture that is still wanting, especially as the episode is a well-known one and full of incident. At the present moment we are inclined to be very pleased with the notion."

The subject of this picture, however, was not so easily disposed of; and while Giorgio proceeded with the others, Borghini, the Abbot Giusti (secretary to the Duke), Pier Vettori and Adriani continued to wrangle for weeks over the last of the series. Exactly what the difficulty was is not clear; but on November 23rd Vasari acknowledges the receipt on that date of "the final decision with regard to the picture that is still lacking. It has arrived in the very nick of time, for it is the only part that was wanting in

the whole scheme of the ceiling. I have already begun it. As to the seven panels which have still to be drawn out in colour—I have drawn out the other thirty-two—I hope to have them all sketched out by the end of January. We have uncovered a piece of the ceiling, about a *braccio* square, complete with its gilding and all, and it makes a splendid show; and although it is thirty-three *braccia* above the floor, everything is clearly discernible down to the smallest detail, and I am delighted with it.”

Four days later there is another letter from Vasari, this time to Giusti, saying that he has stopped work on the last of the pictures as Borghini has just been to see it, and they both feel doubtful whether it will be approved by the Duke. It has been decided that Giorgio shall wait until Cosimo has been consulted. “It doesn’t matter a scrap to me,” writes Giorgio, adopting a superior tone on the strength of the important work on which he is engaged, “because I haven’t done the cartoon yet: but if I had done it I certainly should not begin a fresh one now, because I am quite worried enough as it is with these thirty-nine pictures, all so full of figures: and I assure you that it is impossible to alter the attitude of any one of them, because all that human ingenuity can do has already been done.”

The real fact of the matter seems to be that Borghini, after having won the approval of the Duke for his suggested picture of the *Defeat of Radegaisus*, wished to change his mind without incurring disfavour: for, after stopping Vasari as already related, he writes to Giusti to say that he thinks the subject chosen might with advantage be replaced with another. The letter is dated November 23rd.

“To tell the truth,” he writes, “seeing that it will



*Giorgio Vasari*

**TOMB OF MICHELANGELO**  
*(Florence: Santa Croce)*

*Alinari*





be hung in a public place where everyone can see and pass judgment on it, this picture requires to be thought out with particular care. For this reason I have decided to put before his illustrious Excellency this consideration : that though the story of the rout of Radegaisus is a splendid subject, and quite in conformity with the remainder of the pictures, yet it would be better still to represent in its place that time when Constantine the Great was Emperor and Saint Silvester Pope ; when this city of ours, although there may have been a few within her walls who had secretly embraced the doctrine of Christianity, received for the first time, openly and without fear, the Christian Faith and Baptism and the symbol of the Cross : and having cast out the image of Mars, dedicated the temple that once was his to God and to Saint John Baptist. The conversion of a city from a false to the true religion is a most notable event, and one fully worthy to be recorded."

The ceaseless energy of Vasari must account for the many works he was able to accomplish at this period. It is unnecessary to recapitulate all that was still in progress in Florence and elsewhere ; yet, busy as he already was, he seems to have been unable to refuse new responsibilities. He cared little for fatigue, and spared himself neither in body nor mind. In the midst of his work he readily undertook to design the tomb which now marks the resting-place of Michelangelo in Santa Croce, doing so "for love of an old man who loved me much and out of admiration for his virtues,"<sup>1</sup> and perhaps for fear lest another should outstrip him in honouring his hero.

Nor did these arduous labours have an ill effect

<sup>1</sup> *Vite*, Vol. VIII, Letter No. 131, dated November 5th, 1564.

upon his health, although by nature he was delicate and scarcely fitted for hard and continuous effort. "I am in excellent health," he writes to the Duke at the end of the month, "though I cannot tell the reason, seeing that never before in my life have I had heavier responsibilities nor more work upon my hands. I am in better health than I ever enjoyed, and this I attribute to the dispensation of God and to the guiding genius of your Excellency, before whom all difficulties disappear."

These works engrossed his attention until the marriage which Cosimo had been negotiating between his son Francesco and Giovanna of Austria was finally settled. The news was received in Florence with the utmost satisfaction, and the day after its publication a solemn thanksgiving was celebrated in Santa Maria del Fiore. Never before had there been so much bustle, even in the busy streets of Florence, as was witnessed during the months that must elapse before the actual ceremony on December 20th, when Francesco led his bride to their princely apartments in the Palazzo Vecchio. Foundations were hastily begun in Piazza di Santa Trinità for the column that had been sent from Rome, and the corner of the Ringhiera before the Palazzo Vecchio was rapidly removed to make room for Ammannato's fountain and colossal figure of Neptune. The most urgent works, as usual, were confided to Vasari; and the corridor across the Ponte Vecchio which had hitherto been a project in the air, became, almost as if it had been called into existence by a magician's wand, an accomplished fact. In this, as in all the other undertakings of the period, rapidity was the chief object, and to judge from the wording of the contract, the drawings were not even

finished before the work was begun. Bernardo d'Antonio undertakes, as the master builder, to finish by the end of September following, 1565, a corridor by means of which it will be possible to go from the Palazzo Principale di Piazza (Palazzo Vecchio) to the Palazzo de' Pitti. It is to follow Lungarno as far as Ponte Vecchio and is to be covered in with an arcade; across the bridge it is to be carried over the shops and dwelling-houses; when the "house of the heirs of Matteo Manelli" is reached, the corridor is to be carried outwards upon corbels, so as to interfere in no way with the privacy of the Manelli. The said corridor is to have a roof of tiles, and is to be ceiled underneath with plaster, adorned with suitable enrichments, all in accordance with such instructions, drawings and details as shall from time to time be received from "the magnificent Messer Giorgio Vasaro [*sic*], painter and architect to his most illustrious Excellency."<sup>1</sup> This corridor alone might serve to show the magnificent scale on which the Medici were in the habit of building. To pass from the Palazzo Vecchio to the Pitti it was necessary to connect the former to the Uffizi by a bridge; then, after traversing the eastern wing and the south end of the Uffizi, a great flight of steps leads out of the western wing down to the level of the roofs of the *botteghe* on Ponte Vecchio. A sharp turn to the left leads out over Lungarno, and from thence, turning to the right, the corridor is carried on a series of arcades to the bridge. It then turns once more to the left and crosses the river over the roofs of the shops, breaking out on corbels so as to pass the house of the Manelli. On the further side it crosses over the Via de' Bardi and disappears behind

<sup>1</sup> This contract was signed on March 12th, 1565.

the houses fronting the Via Guicciardini. In the Piazza di Santa Felicità it may be seen over the portal of the church, on the south side of which it again disappears from view, only reappearing as it passes along the Giardino di Boboli and enters the Pitti. From door to door the distance traversed is about eight hundred metres, or half a mile. It was a more serious undertaking than would at first sight appear, and that Cosimo was anxious to see it completed is apparent from a letter to Vasari, wherein we find him urging his architect to employ more men and get the work in hand at all points at the same time. "We are highly desirous," the letter runs, "that the masonry of the corridor shall be finished in as short a time as possible, and we have decided that a great effort must be made before the harvest season begins, when all the *contadini* will be busy. The work must be pushed forward, and this we trust you are doing. In order to expedite the matter we desire you to set the labourers to work at all points, so that the whole of it will be in hand at the same time, and therefore reach completion with greater celerity." This is the work which Vasari finished "in five months, although it looks more like the work of five years." As a matter of fact it took eight months to complete; for Lapini, the diarist, says that "on the 19th of March, 1564 (1565 common style) . . . the foundations for the first pilaster of the corridor were begun, and afterwards the others, in their order"; while he notes, at a later date, that "the said corridor, leading all the way to the Palazzo de' Pitti, was completed at the end of November, 1565."

At first sight it may appear singular that after carrying his corridor through, or over, all obstacles, Cosimo should have decided to carry it round the

house of the Manelli. Thereby hangs a tale, or—if we care to listen to the detractors of Cosimo—many tales. The true one shows the Duke in an unfamiliar light, and is related by Mellini;<sup>1</sup> the others, though possibly more romantic, are totally untrue. Mellini relates that the building in question—the home of Matteo's heirs—stood in the way of the corridor, and that the Duke had asked permission to carry the work through it. When Manelli pointed out what appears to be tolerably obvious, namely, that this would mean the destruction of the house in question, the Duke gave orders for the corridor to be carried round the building on corbels, remarking quietly that “every man should have the right to do what he liked with his own property.” In the other stories, which were diligently propagated by his enemies, Cosimo is made to come daily to watch the progress of the work, where, looking down by chance one day upon the houses below, he catches sight of the fair face of Cammilla Martelli. Having told so much of the story, it seems almost superfluous to say that the Duke falls in love on the spot. It is, of course, true that Cammilla was Cosimo's mistress for some time, but this love affair did not come about in the way the story-tellers would have us believe. The facts which go to spoil so gentle a romance are that the Martelli had no house within sight of the bridge, and that the corridor itself is so low that it would not have been possible for the Duke to look down upon it, even if it had been visible.

The corridor was but one of the special preparations made for Francesco's wedding. The entrance of the bride was to be the occasion of a magnificent

<sup>1</sup> *Ricordi ai Costumi, Azioni e Governo del serenissimo Gran Duca Cosimo I.* Florence, 1820.

procession, designed so as to display the opulence of the Medicean capital, and the streets through which she would journey to the Duomo and thence to the Palazzo Vecchio were to be decorated in a suitable manner. It is to be observed that though the procession and decorations were somewhat on the lines of those of to-day, that cumbersome machine, the "Executive Committee," had not been invented. The method of those days was far simpler. There were, there could be, no petty jealousies, no squabbles and no delays. Vincenzo Borghini was told to draw up a scheme for the whole business, and by the beginning of April he was able to put his proposals before the Duke. They were as follows:—

"First of all, as the entry (of the bride-elect) will be made through the Porta al Prato, there ought to be a triumphal arch at that point: and as first impressions are invariably of very great importance, it ought to be made as beautiful and monumental as possible.

"In the next place, I think it would be a good idea to have something at the entrance to Borgo Ognissanti, though I should not be inclined to spoil the view of that part of the city by an arch. It would be more satisfactory to have a couple of statues there, one on each side, raised on lofty pedestals.<sup>1</sup> If you would rather have an arch, there is ample room for it, and any form of ornamentation would look well there.

"Thirdly, in front of the church of Ognissanti, in

<sup>1</sup> Borghini's idea, as he explains later, was to have two colossal female figures, representing Austria and Tuscany, one on either side of the roadway, extending their arms across the road and holding a laurel wreath between them over the spot where the bride would pass. This seems to have been the only symptom of originality shown in the whole scheme.

the Square, there could be some decorative feature ; either a pyramid or an equestrian statue or something of a similar nature. This is one of the places that need not be considered for the moment, until we have seen how the rest of the route works out, and whether there will be too much or too little decoration.

“In the fourth place, at Canto de' Ricasoli (where it joins the Ponte alla Carraia), as it is at this point that the procession will turn into Lungarno, I think that some kind of embellishment will be necessary ; but whatever we put there ought not to be carried up any higher than the first-floor windows of the Bishop's house ; for above them there is that painted decoration work which—though it may not be the finest painting in the world—is pleasing to the eye and looks quite well from a distance. On the other hand, if we put something particularly beautiful underneath it, it may be necessary, after all, to hide the painting.

“In the next place, at the angle of the ruined bridge of Santa Trinità,<sup>1</sup> as well as at the end of the

<sup>1</sup> The bridge was ruined by the sudden rising of the Arno on September 13th, 1557. One of the worst floods ever known in Italy, it did incalculable damage, especially in Florence, where large tracts were submerged to a depth of nearly seventeen feet. From contemporary accounts it appears that there had been heavy rains on the previous day in the valley of the Sieve, with the result that the stream overflowed its banks and burst into the upper reaches of the Arno in a mighty wave. The Arno, thus reinforced, rose several feet, then rushed with devastating force upon the city, carrying upon its swirling, angry waters the trees which had been cut down and stacked by the peasants at the river's edge ready for winter use. In a moment—as though it were a liquid battering-ram—the floating mass came roaring under the Ponte alle Grazie, pausing as the stout piers broke its force, then dashing onwards under the Ponte Vecchio. At the next bridge, the Ponte a Santa Trinità, the tree trunks, which by the whim of fortune had spared its fellows, came broadside across the arches, blocking them. Log piled on log with incredible rapidity until a dam had formed itself across the whole width of the river. The storm-

street opposite (which would be seen by anyone coming from Lungarno), there ought to be something ; but the decorations here should be so arranged that the eye is pleasantly and gradually led from one object to another, meeting in every direction with something beautiful.

“ At Santa Trinità there need not be any special preparation, as the column and its accessories will be erected there, and could not be improved upon.

“ Then, at the corner, or Loggia de’ Tornaquinci, it seems to me that it would be a good idea to have a stately and magnificent arch, so as to mask the turnings and irregularities of the streets at this point, the more so as it will be visible all the way down the Strada di Santa Trinità.

“ In the Piazza di San Michele there might be a statue or similar object ; but this is another spot that can be considered later on, as I have suggested with regard to Piazza d’Ognissanti.

“ The Canto de’ Carnesecchi will require a lot of thinking about, because the place is an ugly one, with streets of all sizes opening into it. We shall have to do something to make it look more im-

flood, checked for an instant in its course, leapt at the obstruction, and with a mighty, shuddering roar the bridge was swept away. The torrent passed on its way to the sea, leaving a fretted gap stretching from shore to shore. So instantaneous had been the disaster that those who were on the bridge had no chance of saving themselves. Two children alone escaped as by a miracle, and were left standing upon an isolated pier in mid-stream, where they remained for two days, being kept from starvation by the inhabitants of the Palazzo Strozzi, who contrived to pass them wine and bread by means of a cord dropped from the palace roof. The damage done was enormous, and when the waters had subsided the city was found to be half buried under a bed of mud. It is said that when Cosimo saw the condition of his once beautiful capital he burst into tears.

The Ponte a Santa Trinità was rebuilt by Bartolomeo Ammannato, the work occupying three years, and being completed in 1570 at a cost of 70,000 scudi.



portant, seeing that the procession will round this corner, and an altogether different scene will be suddenly presented.

“At the principal door of the church of Santa Maria del Fiore it would be well to erect a special and magnificent portal suited to the importance of the building. If it is designed by an artist of ability it might come in useful later on when the new façade and doors are being erected; in any case, it would serve to give some idea of how this front should look when completed.<sup>1</sup>

“In the Piazza di San Pullinare there ought to be a group of statuary, either of figures or something of the sort, because here the view extends as far as Canto de' Pazzi and the spice warehouses, which are miserable erections, and require to be touched up for the occasion. At this point, however, it will be necessary to consider more carefully which route is to be followed, for the one chosen—from San Firenze by way of the corner where the lions used to be kept, and thence to the Piazza (de' Signoria)—presents two difficulties. The first is that the spot where one turns into the Borgo de' Greci is little adapted to receive any form of decoration that will look well, and this is just where it is most necessary. However, this can be gone into if your Excellency decides to come round that way. The second difficulty is the greater of the two, for the view of the Palazzo and the entrance from this side is not very attractive, so that the effect on turning the corner will be rather disappointing. I have merely mentioned this in

<sup>1</sup> Vasari, in his description already quoted, mentions that the Duomo was enriched with a sumptuous portal with wooden doors, which were divided into panels in the same manner as those of the Baptistery. These were filled with bassi-rilievi in terra, gilded. They were so excellently done that he expresses a wish that they could be cast in bronze.

order to put forward all the questions that have arisen. It was thought that the procession might go by way of Canto di San Pullinare and turn down by the Garbo, going thence straight to Canto del Diamante and from there turning into the Piazza, so that the Palazzo, the three Giants of the Loggia and the Magistrati would then all come into view at the same moment. Nothing better could be done than this, for it will allow the Princess's escort to open out in the Piazza and form an avenue all the way to the Palazzo. In this respect it would be impossible to wish for a more effective approach, but it has one drawback in the narrowness of the Garbo. It might be remedied in part by pulling down the huts<sup>1</sup> and one or two low walls that are in the way, as was done in even wider streets for the state entry of Pope Leo. After all, the Via de' Tornabuoni is not much wider than this, and we are obliged to pass through that. However, I think it wise to mention the matter so that your Excellencies may decide what is to be done.

“Going from San Firenze towards the Piazza there will have to be a triumphal arch, and it will have to be erected to suit the width and proportions of the site, and should be made especially graceful; but if the procession follows the Garbo route I should place this feature at Canto del Diamante, though instead of an arch I should put a painted background,

<sup>1</sup> “Tetti bassi,” literally, “low roofs.” As, however, it would not in any way have improved the appearance of the neighbourhood to have stripped the buildings of their roofs and left the walls standing in the guise of ruins, it seems that Borghini proposed to pull down these erections altogether. Landucci, *Diario*, uses the term when speaking of an old-clothes shop. It may perhaps be translated as a “booth.” “Aprimo lo Speciale del Re, in Mercato Vecchio, ch'era prima un rigattiere, ch'erano tetti bassi.”

like the one that was put up at San Felice in the Piazza for the entry of the Emperor, grafting it on to the walls of the *speziale del Diamante* and carrying it across to the road leading to Mercato Nuovo. I shall have more to say about this when speaking of the details.

“As Ammannato's marble statue of the Giant with its accessories is to be placed just beyond the Palazzo (where the Lion used to be), this portion is excellently provided for.

“At the entrance to the Palazzo itself I should put an imposing portal. This is the place where all the pomp and ornamentation will come to an end, so I should like to make a triumphal arch of this portal, and to make it as rich and magnificent as it can be made. Nearly always it is the beginning and the finish of these things that are most criticised, and which make the most permanent impression on the mind of the beholder.”

Thus carefully does Borghini go over the whole course to be traversed, suggesting a detailed treatment for every point requiring embellishment. As far as the palace is concerned, he says that “as Giorgio, whose ability and dexterity call for no comment, is already in charge of the works there, I don't think we need trouble ourselves very much about that portion.” “With regard to the Sala Grande,” he continues, “the whole work on the ceiling—paintings, stucchi and gilding—have been put in hand with such promptness as to promise well for its being quite ready for the festivities.”

Borghini not only had charge of the initial preparations for the decoration of the city, but was also responsible for the accessories; for his letter to the Duke contains suggestions as to the advisability

of having musicians placed at various points, and concludes with a list of the available artists, with notes as to how much work each may be expected to do. "I have not yet referred to the question of music, but I have observed that in all similar affairs it is the custom to station singers and musicians on the various triumphal arches, whose duty it is to salute the new-comers, and act as heralds of prosperity and happiness, using a form of salutation suited to the occasion. This is a point on which I have not yet made up my mind; we might have them, and we might just as well leave them out. It is my private opinion that on such occasions, where there is a great concourse of people, and, to tell the truth, where there is a lot of commotion and noise arising from the jostling of men and horses, mingled with shouts and acclamations and one thing and another, there is very little chance of the musicians being heard at all." As to the artists, he suggests that Giorgio Vasari shall be instructed to prepare designs for all the decorations (with a few notable exceptions), and advises that Giovanni Caccini should be appointed overseer. Then there is "San Gallo, who is very old, but may perhaps do something." Benvenuto Cellini is in Florence, and available, but Borghini is evidently in doubt as to whether he can be relied upon for anything. "If only he could be persuaded to do the eighth part of all the things he talks about, even that would be a considerable amount; but to tell the truth, he is getting too old for certain kinds of work."

Proceeding to discuss the details of these festivities, Borghini shows that he has made a careful study of all the previous pageants of which record has been

kept; and he further shows himself no mean politician by the way in which he endeavours to suit his scheme to the taste of the "Germans." He proposes to put a fountain of running wine somewhere along the route, "as I understand that the German people are mightily pleased with fountains that squirt wine instead of water; and knowing that such things are a chief feature of their rejoicings, I think it would be an excellent plan to have one here (at Ponte alla Carraia) pumping out streams of wine in two directions . . . and accordingly I have made a rough sketch of it, to the best of my ability, to show the sort of thing I mean, but of course it can be greatly improved upon." The sketch referred to was appended to the letter, with many others, showing the different portions of the decorations and incorporating Borghini's ideas. He says that most of the drawings were made by Vasari, and apologises for his own attempts with simple frankness. "They aren't worth looking at, but they will serve to give you a faint idea of what I mean. They are all out of proportion and I have drawn them badly." The scenic arrangements for the *Comedie* which were to form a part of the festivities were left in Vasari's charge, for Borghini tells the Duke that "Giorgio is sending with this a design for the theatre for the *Comedie* and other spectacles which are to take place in the Sala; and has arranged it so that it can be put up and taken down with ease, and can be put away for future use."

In concluding this long missive Borghini adds a few general hints as to the conduct of these preparations. "I think it would be an excellent plan to observe the utmost secrecy throughout our operations," and he explains that he has other reasons for

making the suggestion beyond the desire of stimulating the curiosity of the Florentines. There was an acute rivalry between the courts of Tuscany and Ferrara, as, indeed, there was between all the Italian courts, in the matter of which should display the greater magnificence. Borghini had not forgotten the recent celebrations in Mantua on the occasion of the raising of Luigi d'Este, Bishop of Ferrara and brother of the Duke of Mantua, to the cardinalate; when Leone Leoni, as he tells Michelangelo in one of his letters, had charge of the most extraordinary and wonderful pageant that the world had ever seen, "with monsters, islands, real water, battles on land and sea, and all Paradise and Hell in it. I am doing it with the aid of three hundred other men, as an atonement for my past iniquities. We have turned the city into a sort of Devil's auction, and I have got the name of a destroying angel, for there isn't a stick of wood left, not a single nail, not an inch of canvas nor anything else. If I had been an earthquake I could not have swallowed them up more completely."

The sister of Francesco's bride, the Archduchess Barbera of Austria, was betrothed to the son of the Duke of Ferrara, and the Ferrarese wedding was to take place before that in Florence. Cosimo, indeed, had asked for the hand of Barbera for his own heir, as being the elder daughter, but was dissuaded on account of the disparity between their ages. The rivalry between Florence and Ferrara was therefore peculiarly intense at the moment, and Borghini well knew that every nerve would be strained to reach an unsurpassable limit of splendour in the preparations for Barbera's wedding. It accordingly formed no part of his scheme to give the rival city the smallest

inkling of the tremendous preparations that were on foot in Florence. "As there is going to be this wedding in Ferrara," he writes, "it will be as well not to let them get wind of what we are doing, for they will assuredly enter keenly into competition, and when they have done all they can to create a record, we may have to make an extra effort to beat it." In order to obtain the requisite secrecy the chief portion of the work is to be done in the workshops: "and the contractor who undertakes the preparation of one arch shall receive only such information as concerns his own work, and nothing more. This should be quite possible if the man in charge of the whole thing is a good organiser and thoroughly suited for his post."

The story of these preparations is taken up strongly in Vasari's letters. By the beginning of June the little painter had sketched out more than half the work, and was already beginning to feel worried. Everything worried him on this occasion: he was worried because the Duke refused at first to allow Caccini to leave his work at Pisa and take charge in Florence; then, when Caccini did take over the management of the preparations, he was worried because Caccini was not so useful as he had hoped. The intractability of some of his assistants afforded another opportunity for worrying, and the absence of Borghini from the capital worried him more than all his other troubles put together. It seems almost as if Giorgio and his friend Vincenzo, during the stress of this undertaking, got on each other's nerves at times, for their letters not infrequently crossed, and proved mutually unsatisfactory. "I shall be glad," writes Borghini on June 10th, "if you will let me have drawings or sketches of the arches. It does

not matter very much if they are rough, as all I want is the general arrangement and principal dimensions, for there are a thousand things, shields, armorial bearings, portraits and mottoes, to be fitted in, and unless I know the form of the arch I cannot finish my arrangement of them." "I should like to remind you," he continues, "that his illustrious Excellency . . . at the consultation held in his chamber . . . left it for me to do all the inventing, and for you to do all the carrying out. This decision he ratified in council on the first of May." On the same date there is a letter from Giorgio to his friend reporting progress, from which we gather that the artist had finished the drawings for all the decorations as far as the palace doors. "I will send them with the others," he says, "and I hope to finish them all by to-morrow. In the meantime you can amuse yourself with the *cortile*, for there is a great deal for you to do there." It may be noted in passing that Borghini exhausted the whole range of mythological and allegorical story in this *cortile*, where, as he expresses it, "we have already put all the Virtues, all the Gods, all the Graces and all the Joys. I really don't believe there is anything we have left out."

But to return to the letter of Giorgio. "The Duke has answered Caccini's letter about this business by saying that he has two more years' work for him to do at Pisa. I rather think that Messer Sforzo (Almeni) has been trying to get the place for Benedetto Uguccioni, but I hear very little. His Excellency wants to have Santa Maria del Fiore whitewashed, so that will be something for S. Carlo and Antonio Miniati to do. I will do my best to get Caccini appointed."



It was apparently in response to this letter that Borghini wrote the one given by Bottari<sup>1</sup> in which he criticises Vasari's design for the group which it was proposed to place at the ruined Ponte a Santa Trinità, and incidentally demonstrates the very large share the Prior had in Vasari's work at this period. "I like the drawing you send me, and I think it will look well. There are one or two things about it, however, which I do not like. In the first place, the Seas"—by which he means the allegorical figures representing the Seas—"appear to me to be rather small, and although I certainly don't want them to be a pair of thundering great giants (*gigantacci*), I want them to be larger than life-size. The figured dimensions on your drawing lead me to think that they will not be very big, but perhaps I have misunderstood you. Being Seas, I don't want them to have vases in their hands, because those are the attributes of Rivers. Put them, instead, on the backs of marine monsters, with other strange sea animals—whales and the like."

In his next letter Vasari sends Borghini the designs for the commemorative medals with the request that the Prior will put a suitable inscription to each, adding that the Duke wants them to be "short, incisive and elegant." "In the meantime I am getting on with the arcades and walls of the *cortile*,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bottari, *Raccolta di Lettere Inedite*, Vol. I, No. 59.

<sup>2</sup> The letter is dated June 13th, 1565. Lapini, *Diario*, notes that "during the present month of June the work of painting the loggie and courtyard of the Duke's palace was begun, together with all the modelled work and gilding of the columns. And this was done in honour of the approaching marriage of the Prince Francesco, and for the coming of the most Serene Giovanna, his bride-elect. This work was done with the utmost rapidity. On the 4th October the painting of the loggie was completed, and the columns above mentioned were brought into the state of perfection in which they are now to be seen; and it is passing wonderful

which I have just begun. We may as well make up our minds that we are going to reap little satisfaction from the work we have undertaken, because the people with whom we have to deal are evilly minded and envious, and will put all the obstacles they can in our way. This hint will be enough for you. Lorenzo del Berna has already refused to do the arch at Canto alla Paglia, because he wants to do something different from what is being done at the Prato.<sup>1</sup> The position is pretty much the same everywhere, but I need not trouble you with petty details. I shall allow myself no rest until everything has been put in order, for Caccini is not used to this sort of thing, and, as a consequence, everything is behindhand—or else it has to be altered. If we go on in this fashion nothing will be ready in time. I have been on horseback the whole morning, riding from place to place arranging things. One has got to keep on the move for fear of falling asleep. In one respect I am glad to know that you have gone away for your health's sake and the good of the work, for you will

that all this work could have been done in so short a time. The whole work was the invention of Maestro Giorgio Vasari of Arezzo." It is to be regretted that Vasari has been allowed no share in the praise bestowed upon the sumptuous appearance imparted to this famous courtyard by the delicate ornamentation of the columns. There can be no doubt whatever, in view of the extracts given above, that Vasari schemed the work, even if he did not make full-size cartoons of the actual details; yet the inscription in the *cortile*, placed there in 1812, makes no mention of him. It records that it was beautified in this manner for the wedding, after having been built by Arnulfo in 1298 and altered by Michelozzi in 1434. It states that the vaults and lunettes were painted by Stefano Veltroni of Monte San Savino, Marco da Faenza, and Francesco Salviati; that the stuccoes on the columns were the work of Pietro Paolo Minocci da Forlì, Lionardo Ricciarelli da Volterra, Sebastiano del Tadda of Fiesole, and Lionardo Marignolli of Florence; the views of German cities were executed by Sebastiano Veronese, Giovanni Lomhardi of Venice, and Cesare Baglioni of Bologna. All this seems distinctly unfair to Vasari.

<sup>1</sup> That is to say, at the Porta al Prato.

be able to rest and at the same time complete your preparations in peace and quietness; but my not having you here to consult with on certain matters of importance rather complicates things. If I can get the arch at the Paglia settled up by this evening I will let you know in the morning, and send the design with the others and all that I have done so far. In the meantime you might send back all the drawings for the Tornaquinci and the Sale,<sup>1</sup> as well as the four figures in relief that are to go in the courtyard. You might also be thinking about those others for the pilasters near by." Four days later we learn that the truculent Lorenzo del Berna has submitted and is getting along with his work. Giorgio himself, however, is surrounded by worries and vexations. "I have got so much to do, and so many things keep going wrong, that sometimes I positively don't know where I am; but in spite of all this I still continue to go ahead somehow, and see that at least the most important works are being done. I am far more worried about you than about anything else, for I know you have a terrible lot of work upon your shoulders. However, it's all got to be done, and I expect we shall get through with it as we have done on previous occasions, so I shall say no more about it. We must leave it in the hands of God, do what we can, and take care not to break down under the strain. If that were to happen everyone would laugh at us and say that it served us right! So, in one respect, I am very glad you are not here, for to be out of all the worry is a great thing. We have got enough work before us and to spare—well, since we have got to dance, let us do it gracefully! . . . As for the Sala, the ceiling is approaching com-

<sup>1</sup> i.e. the arch that was to go near the Dogana del Sale.

pletion, and all hands are now at work on the courtyard. That Francesco from Poppi is quite good at fresco, and the twelve canvases for the Sala are progressing. The Sala is now closed, and as that Venetian, or Pistolese, or Veronese—whichever he is—has just arrived,<sup>1</sup> and I have received the remaining sketches for the drop-scene, they will have to work all day next Monday, as I mean to finish it off once and for all.”

<sup>1</sup> Sebastiano Vini, a native of Verona, but residing at Pistoia.

## CHAPTER X

### WEDDING OF FRANCESCO DE' MEDICI

Preparations for the wedding—Arrival of the bride, Giovanna—  
The wedding ceremony and festivities.

VASARI was not alone in desiring the speedy return of Borghini to the scene of action. Both the Duke and Francesco were getting nervous at his prolonged absence, and seem to have asked about the Prior every time they met Giorgio. "I have little to tell you," he writes on the day following the despatch of the last letter, "except that a great many people here are waiting for your return, myself the first among them. The Duke has asked when you will be here: twice I told him I would write to you if his Excellency wanted you back in a hurry, but he replied that if you were back in time for San Giovanni it would be soon enough. Then, yesterday, the Prince asked me when you were coming, and I told him the same thing. He was quite satisfied."

The difficulties that surrounded the position of the Duke are in some measure illustrated by these letters and the minor writings of Vasari. The Medici had many enemies in Florence, and though they might not find it convenient to indulge in any outward show of hostility, they were nevertheless ready at all times to seize upon any opportunity that presented itself for weakening his influence. Vincenzo

Borghini had suggested that the triumphal arch near the Dogana del Sale should be dedicated to "Prudence," the various phases of which could be well illustrated in the traditional policy of the Medici family and by scenes from the lives of its noblest members. To this the Duke seems to have consented readily enough. When, however, it was further suggested that, inasmuch as the family had reached its climax of virtue in the person of the present Duke, the whole theme should be illustrated by scenes from the life of Cosimo alone, he seems to have feared lest such a display of arrogance should become a weapon in the hands of his enemies. Vasari, who suffered from no qualms of conscience where the honour of his patron was concerned, told him that it was his duty to humanity to let Borghini have his way, using, no doubt, the same arguments as he afterwards incorporated in his *Descrizione dell' Apparato* :—

"It is beyond doubt that he is the most resplendent scion of this most honourable family that the world has ever seen ; and therefore all their magnanimous actions and virtues may best be symbolised and displayed to the public view by depicting scenes taken from the life story of him alone." To this patent flattery Vasari was not ashamed to add that the statement was so undeniably true that in making it he ran no risk of being accused of adulation.

Cosimo at length consented, and Borghini began to elaborate his ideas for the arch. All the actions of the Duke, his benevolent rule, his conquests, his affection for his family, were duly set forth and forwarded to Vasari, who as duly placed them before his patron for approval. In one scene Bor-



*Bronzino*

COSIMO DE' MEDICI  
(*London: National Gallery, No. 704*)

*M.S.*





ghini had depicted the Duke in the company of his late wife, "for whom, while she yet lived, his love was so great that he might have indeed been called the Mirror of Conjugal Affection." Cosimo, however, in the three years that had elapsed since her death, has somewhat fallen from this noble rectitude, having found complete, if illicit, solace in the arms of Leonora degli Albizzi. As a consequence, when Vasari received the details of Borghini's scheme, he had considerable misgivings as to whether the Duke would altogether relish this allusion to his erstwhile fidelity, knowing as he did the amours in which his lord was engaged. Borghini, too, was doubtful as to the manner in which the Duke would receive the proposed scheme, for in his covering letter—in which he calls Giorgio "my dearest Messer Giorgio and alleviator of my burden"—he enjoins him to use circumspection in broaching the subject, and above all to wait for a propitious moment. Vasari would willingly have left the task of laying the scheme before the Duke to another had this been possible, and he warned the Prior that the Duke would not be pleased with the suggestion. There being no way out of it, Giorgio nerved himself for the interview, and waited until a suitable opportunity presented itself. He relates that the Duke was pleased with the beginning of Borghini's letter; but "when I came to that part about the Duchess he grew agitated." Vasari was equal to the occasion, and with artful persuasions won consent for the scheme. He tells us that the Duke "declared with a laugh: 'Why, little by little you have brought me to such a condition that I am ready to do exactly as you wish, and everything you do gives me entire satisfaction!'. . . So this is the end of Number

Eleven,<sup>1</sup> and I am now waiting for you to send me the subjects, as they will want careful consideration both from you and me, for his most illustrious Excellency has made many suggestions with regard to them. These I need not specify at present, seeing that the matter is not yet in hand. But it is a satisfaction to know that he is content, and that the thing is settled." Vasari was beginning to feel the effect of this hard work, and if it were not for his determination to see the business through he would break down under the load he has to carry. This is his condition on June 19th, 1565. Two days later he is in better spirits, due to his having had a long conversation with the Duke, at the end of which his patron praised him without stint for his achievements in the palace. As a consequence Vasari finds an outlet for his elation in nonsensical letters to Borghini.

"Magnificent and Reverend Signore," he writes, "I wait for you more anxiously than I wait for the Messiah, and if you think I am joking, you are wrong. On the contrary, it is you who joke with me. The drawings you send do not merely surprise me, they stupefy me; because the art of drawing, in addition to being difficult, demonstrates both the inventive power and the ability of the draughtsman. In your case it shows not only both these things, but your goodwill as well. I have good cause to wish you well, because I know the sort of man you are; and I love you, and you love me; so that if only I had half a Duke who knew me as well as you do, and

<sup>1</sup> In order to facilitate matters each portion of the decorations was given a distinctive number, and both Vasari and Borghini adopt these designations throughout their correspondence. "Number Eleven" was the triumphal arch at the Dogana del Sale.



CORTILE OF PALAZZO VECCHIO, FLORENCE

*Broggi*



if I were only a quarter-part of his illustrious Excellency and knew as much about your worth and amiability as I do now, I shouldn't leave you to look after a parcel of babies;<sup>1</sup> but you should be put in charge of all the wisest old men in the city. Now you had better go out for a stroll, as I don't want our friendship to Father-John-ify the sincerity of my intentions, or your goodness and amiability.<sup>2</sup> So I shall stop this, as I don't mean to joke any more.

“In that little matter of the Duchess I have indeed done you a good turn. This morning I was talking with his illustrious Excellency all the time the procession<sup>3</sup> was passing, standing at a window in Anton Francesco Gondi's house, waiting to see his illustrious Excellency the Cardinal go by in his vestments, following in the wake of the Holy Sacrament—we talked, I say, of many things that cannot and ought not to be written down. This, however, I may say, that so far as the Duchess is concerned, he leaves it all to us, and we can do what we like. The finishing touch was put to my triumph when he saw that the courtyard was begun—and begun, too, in such a manner as to warrant that it would bring honour and glory to himself when finished—for he turned round and said, ‘Giorgio, thou hast almost deprived me of the power of speech; thine achievements surpass the bounds of possibility!’ I only

<sup>1</sup> Borghini, as already noted, was Prior of the Ospedale degli Innocenti, an asylum for children.

<sup>2</sup> “Ora andate a spasso che non vorrei che lamicitia nostra sergiovannare la candidezza del animo mio,” etc. The word “sergiovannare” is an invention on the part of Vasari, and alludes to a certain priest, Ser Giovanni, the mutual friend of Giorgio and Borghini.

<sup>3</sup> The procession of Corpus Domini. Vasari's letter was written on the day of the festival.

hope he will be of the same mind when it is finished ! I await your return, as I want your opinion, and there are many points to be settled. I suppose you will be here on Sunday, as you daren't stop away any longer than that. And now—still waiting—I must close this letter. May God send you back safe and well."

We are left to guess whether the eyes of Giorgio were gladdened by the sight of Borghini on the following Sunday, but we may surmise that the Prior did return to Florence from the fact that the letters from Vasari cease abruptly at this point. They begin, however, towards the end of August again ; but the information they contain as to the progress of the work is exceedingly meagre. On September 22nd, Giorgio tells Borghini that most of the work being done in the shops is approaching completion : "the Duke has ordered that the timbering along the route"—to which the painted canvas was to be affixed—"is to be begun at the very latest by the middle of November.<sup>1</sup> As you already know, the Prince sets out in a week's time, so you will have to come back immediately in order that he may confer with you on several matters of importance before he goes. The Duke has asked for you a good many times. On each occasion I replied that you were out of town, intent upon the inscriptions. In fine, by the end of this week it will be absolutely imperative for you to come back here to put the finishing touch to everything." "I have little more to say," he adds, "except that I am feeling excessively

<sup>1</sup> "E che a mezzo Novembre sarà il più lungo." The Archduchess entered Florence on December 20th, so that there was a whole month allowed for putting up the decorations. Lapini, *Diario*, notes that the preparations in the streets and piazze were begun on November 11th, and that they remained in position until the 29th of January following.

melancholy. The Giant<sup>1</sup> is getting nearer to the fountain, and the corridor is ready for people to walk across it. The Duke has been across, and is well pleased."

There is one more letter in which Vasari gives the Prior an account of his progress as well as of his woes. It bears no precise date, but was written in September four days before Borghini's return to Florence again put an end to the correspondence. In it he expresses his joy that Borghini has nearly finished all he has in hand for the wedding, and he is delighted to hear that Pier Vettori has "praised everything."

"Marcellino<sup>2</sup> is to arrive on Monday without fail, and the end of next week will see the ceiling completed, the scaffolding down, and the blank places filled up with cartoons; for his Excellency wants the pictures to be put up and joined together with sheets of paper so that they can be removed in a few minutes." "I am worn out and troubled with an everlasting headache. I should like to get these pictures off my hands and go away for a week's holiday: I feel half dead." This is the last mention of these preparations to be found in Vasari's writings, though he has described the completed work elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> Strangely enough, he scarcely refers to them in the *Autobiography*; and when his letters again

<sup>1</sup> This is the statue by Ammannato to which Borghini refers in his letter to Cosimo outlining his suggestions for the decorations. On March 1st the Lion, or *Marzocco*, which stood at the angle of the Ringhiera before the Palazzo Vecchio was removed: "and that portion of the Ringhiera that was towards the Dogana was levelled with the ground, the foundations for the fountain and the base of the statue of Neptune being laid upon the site just cleared" (Gotti, *Il Palazzo Vecchio in Firenze, cit.*).

<sup>2</sup> Giovanni Battista Adriani.

<sup>3</sup> *Descrizione dell' Apparato fatto . . . per le Nozze, etc.*, printed in Vol. VIII of the Sansoni Edition of the *Vite*.

take up the story of his life the wedding is over, the decorations that involved him in so much trouble and labour have been taken down, and Giorgio is mildly abusing his masters for not allowing him a holiday after the hard work of the previous year. Such information as he gives us is amplified by the contemporary witness of Domenico Mellini, who wrote an account of the wedding preparations as well as of the actual festivities.<sup>1</sup>

From Mellini we learn that Vasari was too occupied to be able to do any actual work himself beyond that of preparing the cartoons; while the pictures which were hung in the Sala Grande and pieced together with paper were actually only ten in number, and not twelve as originally proposed. "Of the ten pictures of the cities which are in the Sala and were designed by Messer Giorgio, those representing Siena, Pisa, Montepulciano and Cortona were finished in a most excellent manner by Alessandro del Barbieri, the Florentine. Those of Borgo and Prato were the work of Maestro Giovanni Lombardi, of Venice; those of Pistoia and Fiesole were done by Maestro Bastiano (Vini), of Verona; and Rurino, the Piedmontese, painted that of Arezzo. The large figures, representing the founders of these several cities, with the greater number of the *putti* above the festoons, were painted by that excellent artist Lorenzo Sabatini, of Bologna, by whom were also painted the figures in the vestibule and anteroom between the Sala Grande and the Sala de' Dugento. The whole work was executed in fresco in an admirable and beautiful manner. The perspective<sup>2</sup> and its

<sup>1</sup> *Descrizione dell' Entrata della Serenissima Reina Giovanna d'Austria . . . in Firenze*, Florence, 1566; and *Descrizione dell' Apparato della Comedia . . . nelle reale Nozze*, Florence, 1566.

<sup>2</sup> The painted background which formed the setting for the *Comedia*.



accessories, although designed and invented by Messer Giorgio, were carried out by Prospero Fontana, of Bologna, a most excellent painter and a man of sound judgment. The drop-scene was sixteen *braccia* in height and twenty *braccia* wide, and bore a representation of a magnificent hunting expedition placed amid beautiful scenery. It was painted by Federigo Zuccherò, of Sant' Angelo in Vado, who showed in this undertaking how well he was acquainted with the art of painting, and proved himself to be a great master of his art."<sup>1</sup>

At length, after a week of incessant rain which must have been exceedingly depressing to all concerned, the important day dawned bright and smiling to welcome the bride and her escort. "On the sixteenth [*sic*] of the said December, being a Sunday, the queenly (*regina*) Giovanna, wife of Prince Francesco, entered the city by way of the Porta al Prato. For the past eight days it had rained without pause; but the sun shone on the day she came. And in her train came a goodly company of Marquises, Counts and Cavaliers: and the whole court of Duke Cosimo, with the chiefest citizens of Florence, all in splendid array, went out to meet her. Likewise all the clergy from the Duomo and from San Lorenzo went out to meet her at the outer gate of the Porta al Prato. When she had arrived at the outer gate of the Porta al Prato, the queen [*sic*] kneeled down; and Bishop Concino, with suitable words, held forth a Crucifix for her to kiss. Afterwards Messer Tommaso de' Medici, Cavalier of Christ, presented her with a wondrous crown of gold set with priceless gems and borne upon a golden salver: and when he had presented it the Archbishop of Siena and the Bishop

<sup>1</sup> Mellini, *op. cit.*

of Arezzo, Messer Bernardetto de' Minerbetti, took the crown into their hands and together they set it on her head, where it ever remained until the great palace of the Duke was reached. She was accompanied by fifty young men, all nobles of Florence, bearing a costly baldacchino of cloth of gold. These youths were all of them dressed in splendid garments." Thus Lapini describes the arrival of the bride.

And where was Vasari, the man who had contributed so largely to the success of the occasion? We are not informed, but it is to be hoped that he was able to don his best cloak and gold chain, and to mingle with the throng of gaily dressed Florentines who filled the streets. For him the most important day was still to come; for the *Messa del Congiunto*, followed by the recitation of the *Comedia* and the wedding feast, did not take place until the Thursday after Giovanna's arrival. His triumph would come when all the guests were assembled in the Sala Grande. It was he who had contrived all the somewhat intricate preparations in this vast hall: he had planned the movable stage on which the *Comedia* was to be recited, as well as all the tables and benches which would be required for the sumptuous banquet, by which the play was to be followed. Moreover, he had been instructed to clear the Sala of all encumbrances, so that the guests of the Medici might dance at their pleasure. The arrival of Giovanna of Austria could have been no holiday for him, therefore—architect, painter, author, stage-manager and master of ceremonies by turns.

It happened that in the midst of the preparations, and eleven days before the state entry of the Archduchess, the Pope, Pius IV, died; and the ceremonies

were consequently robbed of some of their splendour by the absence of the Cardinals and many other men of note, whose personal interests, being involved in the now pending election, kept them within their own territories. The rejoicings in Florence were not allowed to suffer, however. The guests who had been bidden to the feast came upon the day appointed, and were ushered into the Sala Grande—or as many of them as the Duke thought fit to admit; for we are told that when a company of three hundred and sixty ladies had arrived (and Vasari vouches for it that they were all “the most beautiful, the richest and the most exalted noblewomen, with their lords, *cavalieri* and gentlemen of like estate”) the Duke ordered the doors to be closed. The later arrivals received a polite intimation that they could not be admitted. It is not our province to speculate upon the probable mood in which the later arrivals returned to their own homes.

The guests having been arranged in their respective seats, the signal was given for the *Comedia* to begin; and here it may be noted that the curtain, instead of rising, as in a modern representation, was allowed to fall, thereby disclosing the stage and its scenery. “When the curtain fell,” says Vasari, “it seemed as if Paradise itself with choirs of angels had suddenly unfolded before their eyes.” The play was of the usual type. Venus, Cupid, and the whole range of heathen mythology figured in it, twanging lutes, exchanging platitudes, lauding the bride, the bridegroom, the Medici and the Imperial house of Austria, and utterly failing to relieve the intolerable monotony with dreary madrigals.

At the conclusion of the play—when the curtain, presumably, had risen after the final tableau of Love

Triumphant—all the guests retired to another apartment, while a host of carpenters pulled down the stage and seats, erecting in their stead the tables for the banquet, a performance which must have taken considerable time if Mellini is correct in stating that the stage could not be erected and taken down again in less than eight hours. The transformation effected, “their Highnesses returned to the Sala, followed by the whole company of noble ladies.<sup>1</sup> And when all were seated in their appointed places, many hours were devoted to feasting and pleasant intercourse. How magnificent, how regal and how rich was the banquet may be judged from the description thereof which we have already written.”

It speaks well for Florentine digestions that after “many hours” of continuous eating the guests were ready to pass what remained of the evening in dancing. Perhaps they were inured to this kind of entertainment, for—again, if Mellini is to be believed—they would have gone on dancing for ever, “had not Aurora grown jealous of their joy and interfered,” a musical way of saying that the guests went home with the milk. Other festivities followed. There were representations of various kinds, with bull-fights on Sundays in the Piazza di Santa Croce and before the church of Santa Maria Novella; while at one time a mimic castle was erected in front of the latter building, which withstood all the most ferocious attacks of its besiegers for nearly two days, towards the end of which a breach was effected in the heroic canvas walls which for forty hours and more had so boldly defied the enemy while quivering with every

<sup>1</sup> Mellini, from whom this extract is taken, entirely ignores the gentlemen who must have been present.

gust of wind. Finally there were six notable masquerades; until the celebrations gradually merged with those annual Carnival games which only end with the midnight clang of Shrove Tuesday.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE TOUR OF ITALY

Vasari is instructed to decorate the walls of the Sala Grande—His journey through Italy—Perugia—Notes for the *Lives*—Rome—Daniello da Volterra—Travelling in the sixteenth century—"Umbrellæs"—Inns—Bologna—Milan—*Cenacolo*—Vasari on Gothic art—Certosa di Pavia—Cremona—The Anguisciola—Return to Tuscany.

IT would appear that, after the wedding of the Prince, Vasari was on the verge of a breakdown. It has been well said that during the whole of the preparations he had played the part of Atlas, carrying a world of work upon his shoulders. It is no wonder if, when a part of the load was removed, he felt severely the effects of all he had borne and done. The reader of the somewhat scanty notices which appear in the Autobiography may hardly realise to the full what he was called upon to accomplish in an exceedingly short space of time. "I should like to add," he states simply, "that almost at the same time"—that is to say, while he was still busy with the tomb of Michelangelo, the Sala Grande, the other works in the Palazzo Vecchio, the church and palace for the Cavalieri at Pisa and the corridor across the Arno—"I had to prepare designs for all the arches which formed part of the celebrations in Florence in connection with the wedding, so as to enable his Excellency to order all things according to his liking. And afterwards I had to finish a considerable portion of the work

myself, in order to get it done in time." And on the same page he says: "For a long time, concurrently with these buildings, I have been steadily proceeding with the Loggia and extensive buildings for the Magistrati," a commission which a present-day architect might be disposed to consider quite sufficient to occupy his whole time. Yet this is not all. "Besides these things I was obliged, on account of this same wedding, to enlarge and reconstruct the apparatus used in the tribune of Santo Spirito for the ceremony which previously had always taken place in San Felice di Piazza,<sup>1</sup> making it as strong as possible in the hope of avoiding the accidents which have hitherto usually marked the celebration of this festival," an allusion, probably, to the accident which had happened during the visit of the Duke and Duchess of Milan in 1471, when, in the course of the sacred play representing the Descent of the Holy Spirit, the church had been set on fire.

Vasari richly deserved the holiday he craved for, but for a while it looked as if he were doomed to disappointment. On March 18th, 1566, he writes to the *Rettori della Confraternità d'Arezzo* saying: "I am exceedingly sorry to tell you that these my lords and patrons, after having granted me leave of absence for four months to come to Arezzo for a little rest, have repented; and now I shall have to begin another big work. If this turns out to be the case, I shall be forced to relinquish the hope I had already formed of preparing a memorial of myself, and presenting it when done to your holy and pious institution. Should

<sup>1</sup> "On the eighth day of the said June the *cielo* was begun in Santo Spirito, here in Florence; and that was done so that the feast of the Annunciation of the Madonna might be celebrated there in honour of the coming of *la serenissima Giovanna*, bride of our most illustrious Prince of Florence" (Lapini, *Diario*).

this be contrary to the wishes of their Excellencies and the will of God (whom I ought to have put first, seeing that He governeth all things) you must be satisfied with the good intention : and whenever I have the opportunity I will confer some benefit on your house.”

From the Autobiography it becomes clear what was the nature of the new work ; and it is evident that Vasari did not, after all, lose his holiday. Cosimo had decreed that the walls of the Sala Grande should be decorated with paintings similar to those already executed in the ceiling. At any other time this commission would assuredly have filled the soul of Giorgio with happiness and gratitude towards his magnanimous patron ; but at the moment his one idea was that of freeing himself from Florence, and not even the chance of adding to those proofs of his ability which were to keep his memory green for all time and place him on an equality with Michelangelo and Raffaello could compensate him for the imminent loss. When he came to write the Autobiography these feelings had passed away, leaving him only grateful to God and the Medici. “For these and all my works, without making excuses for the manifold imperfections they contain and of which I am fully aware, if I shall be found to have done anything of merit, I render thanks unceasingly to God, through Whom I trust to receive such help in the formidable task of decorating the walls of the Sala, that when it is finished I shall see my masters fully satisfied : those patrons who during the past thirteen years have afforded me so many opportunities of doing great works, for my own honour and benefit ; so that at the end, when I am worn out, old and feeble, I may finish my days in peace and happiness. And though





*Giorgio Vasari*

*Brogi*

**CORONATION OF CHARLES V**  
*(Florence: Palazzo Vecchio)*



the works I have written of above have, for divers reasons, nearly all been done in the greatest haste, this last I hope to accomplish at my leisure, since the lord Duke is content that I hurry not, but proceed as best suits me, taking such rest and recreation as I myself shall desire. For this reason, seeing that I was much in need of a holiday after the fatigues occasioned by the above works, he gave me permission last year to spend several months in travel."

Beyond his desire to rest from his labours, Vasari had another object in view when he proposed to travel. The Second Edition of the *Lives*, which as we have seen was already in preparation, had probably been pushed on one side by the late festivities, and the biographer naturally wished to take the opportunity which now presented itself of journeying through Italy and of verifying first hand much of the information which in the previous edition he had perforce taken on hearsay. Indeed, in his Life of Benvenuto Garofalo he tells us that as he had not been able to explore the art treasures of Italy since his journey of 1542, he decided, "at whatever cost," to make another tour for the purposes of his book.

At the end of March, accordingly, he set out on his travels, arriving at Arezzo after a journey through mud and rain, on his way to Perugia, whither he was carrying three large pictures for the monks of San Piero de' Cassinesi.<sup>1</sup> The pictures had evidently been less fortunate than himself, for the mule on whose back they had been loaded was taken ill on the road,

<sup>1</sup> "I have forgotten to say that the year before"—the year before his second visit to Rome, which he has just been describing—"when I went first to kiss the feet of Pius V, I journeyed by way of Perugia, in order to put into their places three large pictures I had done for the refectory of the black monks of San Piero in that city" (*Vite*, Vol. VII, p. 707).

and it was only with great difficulty that the miserable beast was dragged as far as Quarata. "It was with the utmost difficulty that I got the pictures for Perugia as far as Quarata," writes Vasari from Arezzo at the beginning of April, "for the mule that ought to have transported them fell ill and could scarcely carry the load. This morning fresh mules are being sent to Quarata to bring them along. I shan't move from here until they are safely under way again. The cellarer has come from Perugia to take the business in hand. I will let you know how we get on; but for the life of me I can't imagine how they managed to get on to such an awful road. God forgive all this rain!"

The difficulties of the muddy roads were quickly overcome, for three days later Vasari wrote to Borghini from Perugia giving him the promised report, and describing his triumph without a suspicion of a blush. "Most Reverend Signor Hospitaller mine, the pictures have arrived here safely, and when they were unpacked I found that they were none the worse for their adventures. If it is true that they were not opened until I reached the convent, the only reason for it is that I got there before they had time to undo them." It reads like the arrival of Santa Claus at Christmas. "The monks, and even the Abbot himself, could scarcely conceal their impatience to see what was in my packages. As soon as I had got out of my riding-boots we undid them, the Abbot and every single soul in the convent crowding round. I thought they would all go mad with delight when the pictures were disclosed, especially the Abbot, who said they were just what he had hoped for; and then everyone bestowed no end of praise both on you and me. They tell me that these

are better than the paintings in the refectory of the Badia at Arezzo." They have since been removed to one of the chapels in the church, and lead us to suppose that the Abbot and his friends must have been very easy to please. The subjects are the *Marriage in Cana of Galilee* (with a portrait of the artist's wife), a *St. Jerome*, and a *St. Benedict*, the latter dated 1566.

"They have already been hung in the refectory here, and harmonise exceedingly well with the other decorations. I shall devote the whole of to-day to giving them the finishing touches. Then I am off to Assisi, and if possible I hope to be in Rome on Saturday. We have had good weather and are a jovial company, so that I already feel much better, thanks be to God. I left matters in Arezzo only so-so : they must possess their souls in patience until I get back."

"I have no more to say, except that I hope you are well and will not forget to pray for my return in safety and health. I will let you know what I am doing from time to time. Tell Giacomo Giunti that I had written out that bit he wanted and then stuffed it into my pocket so as to send it with this letter ; but yesterday morning, when I went out to see some ancient relic near Cortona, called the Grotto of Pythagoras or Archimedes, I must have dropped it when I took out my book to make a sketch. I haven't another copy with me, so he will have to wait till I get to Rome, when I will write it all out again and send it at the earliest opportunity."

Vasari kept his word in the matter of writing to his friend, and it is by means of these letters that we are enabled to accompany him on his travels, gaining on the way fresh glimpses of his character and gather-

ing a hint of the respect with which he was everywhere received. If the pictures are drawn in too bright colours the fault is not so much Giorgio's as of the period in which he lived; and if we cannot quite believe in the crowds that at times flocked out of the cities to greet his approach, this very inability to believe enables us to form a truer estimate of his innocently vain and simple nature. All the strange mixture that went to make up the sum of his character is to be found in his next letter to Borghini, written from Rome on April 14th, two days after his arrival. In it he is grave and gay, almost in the same moment; in it the desire to profit by the death of a friend struggles for the mastery with a certain sense of personal loss; and yet, in the same missive, he descants on the pleasures of theatre-going in one sentence, and in the next refuses to seek out Annibale Caro, urging as an excuse that he wishes to devote all his time to his spiritual welfare. It is a remarkable medley, the out-pouring of an active mind which finds itself free for a little space from every care.

“*Reverendo Don Vincenzo mio,*” it runs, “I wrote to you from Perugia to say that the pictures had arrived, that all I had to do was to put them up, and that I had Master Bernardo and Jacopino to help me. They look very well, and I expect the Abbot has already written to you to tell you what he thinks about them. The lighting is exactly right, and they are more satisfactory than those of Arezzo. They have done wonders for me, I can tell you, for I have now got orders to do a picture for the *Mercanzia* of Perugia, which is to be hung in San Lorenzo—a thing that ten years ago they wanted to give to Titian or Salviati or some other great painter. But

the sight of my achievements settled them. It is to be on canvas, like these are. And that's all I have to say about the pictures for Perugia. . . .

“I was obliged to stay in Perugia three days longer than I wanted to on account of the rain; then I went through Assisi, Foligno and Spoleto—where I went and had another look at Fra Filippo's chapel in the Cathedral. It is a beautiful work—what a painter he was! We reached Rome on Wednesday in Holy Week. I have improved in health so much that people here say I don't look a day older than when I was in Rome last, though I can't say the same for them, for if the climate of this part of the world deals havoc with marble statues and painted pictures, bethink you what must happen in the case of living people who never allow themselves any rest. It is sufficient indication of this that Daniello da Volterra went off in less than four days, departing this life, they tell me, in a fit of temper because his horse<sup>1</sup> didn't turn out a success at the first casting, and he would have to do it all over again. The mould is still in the ground, and now the man who made it will soon be in the same place. I trust God will forgive him, while I make due enquiries of his friends so as to be able to add his life and portrait to the *Lives*.

“I have derived much pleasure from my visits to the theatre, for you know I was ever fond of the play whenever I could find one to go to. I had a long talk with Niccolò del Nero about it.

“I will fulfil your wishes with respect to Messer Annibale Caro, but I have not been to see him yet. I haven't been to see anybody, because during these

<sup>1</sup> The equestrian statue of Henri II of France which Caterina de' Medici, his widow, had commissioned from Daniello.

holy days I want to give myself up entirely to the welfare of my eternal soul.

“If Don Silvano has arrived in Florence, I shall be much obliged if you will tell him that the *Lives* are being pushed forward, and that I am writing him a letter to accompany this which he can either give to my brother Ser Pietro or to you, in order that the work may not be delayed. I shall also be glad if you will give all the letters to Ser Pietro so that he may send to Arezzo those that are addressed to Arezzo, and give the others to the persons for whom they are intended.

“I have seen pretty nearly everything there is to be seen : some things I like, the rest I don't. Of all the works of the present generation—with the exception of Salviati's performances—there is not one that I care for, although these artists are supposed to be men of talent. This must suffice for the present : we shall have plenty of opportunity for discussing these things later on.

“P.S.—I have just seen Annibale Caro and given him your message. He expresses great affection for you, and says he will do as you desire.”

As in duty bound, Giorgio visited the Vatican and kissed the foot of the Pope, Pius V, who received him with much favour and promptly gave him instructions to paint a picture, which, however, the artist might execute in Florence and carry to Rome in person in the following year.

Although his stay in Rome did not exceed five days, Vasari contrived to accomplish a good deal of useful work during that time, making sketches which were to be of service for the new paintings in the Sala Grande, and shedding an arrogantly negative patronage over the younger generation of artists



which had arisen since his last visit to the city. In one letter he writes: "I have given considerable satisfaction here, and on all sides they have received me in a most flattering way<sup>1</sup> . . . there is no building going on here whatsoever, and nobody is having anything painted. All the budding artists are gradually slipping away, and I can't get any fresh drawings because there aren't any. Those by the older artists I obtained long ago, and they are already in my book."

Leaving Rome in the middle of April, Giorgio continued his voyage of discovery, seeking for nascent genius in Narni, Spoleto, Val di Varchiano, Tollentino, Macerata, Terni, Ricanati and Loreto in vain. His journey was carried out with the same rapidity and despatch that marked his achievements in the sphere of art, and not even the attractions of Ancona could detain him more than a few hours. "Here we found many of our friends and saw a great many things. Last night my old friend, Cardinal di Gambero, gave me a very kind and flattering reception. We visited a number of buildings, but I haven't time either to describe or discuss them now. I am very much interested to see these things and compare them with ours at home: ours are better designed, better proportioned, better built and far more original. Every person I talk to seems to be not only aware, but willing to confess that our Duke and his undertakings have no rivals"—the "undertakings" to which the traveller refers being, no doubt, the Uffizi, the Cavalieri at Pisa and the other buildings which he had himself designed.

<sup>1</sup> "Io ho satisfatto assai, e da tutti ho auto gran carezze." Letter No. 154, to Borghini, written on April 17th, the day of his departure from Rome.

“We are all well,” he continues, “and pursue our journey on horseback in the best of spirits. It is doing me no end of good, and I thoroughly enjoy the ride and the ever-changing scenes that confront me at every turn of the road.”

The desire to pause for a moment and endeavour to sketch the equipment of the traveller is irresistible. At the period with which we are concerned the usual costume of a horseman consisted of a *cappa*, or voluminous cape, a *gabbano*, or species of cloak with sleeves (which were generally allowed to hang empty), the garment being prevented from slipping off by a more or less ornate clasp fastened at the throat, or a *tabarro*, the modern equivalent of which is the heraldic tabard, a tunic without sleeves but with slits through which the arms were passed. These garments were made of *panno*—the generic term for cloth of all descriptions—or of *rascia*, a coarse woollen material suitable for winter wear. When he intended to make a long journey the horseman clothed himself in *feltro*, donning a cap of cloth, velvet or *feltro*, into which a feather was stuck, secured by a jewel. His feet were shod with capacious riding-boots, furnished with spurs. A rapier usually formed part of his equipment, and though it is difficult to imagine the timid Giorgio pricking his way bravely through unknown perils with his trusty sword buckled at his side and a devil-may-care expression replacing his usual gentle mien, it is still more difficult to think that he would have risked his precious life without one. As to whether he would have known how to use it in an emergency is quite another matter. For aught we know he may also have carried a musket, even as the horsemen whom Tom Coryat met a few years later between Padua

and Verona did, who were for the most part “furnished with muskets ready charged, and touch-boxes hanging by their sides full of Gunpowder, together with little pouches full of bullets, which is a thing commonly used in most parts of Italy that a man shall scarce find a horseman in any place riding without them. I heard that this is the reason of it: because the people of the country are so given to villainies that they will rob, rifle and murder passengers if they are not sufficiently provided to protect themselves against them.” But perhaps another reason for their going about thus armed was to be found in another statement made by the same writer. Speaking of Susa, he says: “At the townes end certain searchers examined us for money, according to a custome that is used in many other townes and Cities of Italy. For if a man doth carry more money about him than is warranted or allowed in the country, it is *ipse facto* confiscated to the Prince or Magistrate in whose territory a man is taken.” There were professional robbers in Italy as well as amateurs.

That fascinating observer, William Thomas, in his *Historye of Italye*, also makes the same complaint. “One greate faute there is, for almost no straunger can travaile the realme unrobbed, specyallye betwene Rome and Naples.”

This not altogether pleasing picture of the traveller's lot has, however, its reverse side; for Tom Coryat tells us that fans, “curiously adorned” with pictures of “amorous things tending to dalliance,” were quite as ubiquitous as muskets, and—lest the reader shall mistake their use—he explains that they are contrivances which “both men and women of the country do carry to coole themselves

withall in the time of heat, by the often fanning of their faces." But whatever interest Tom took in these fans was forgotten upon the first occasion that a horseman carrying an umbrella came in sight. He had never seen such a thing before in his life, and was all agog at the novelty, not realising that the heat of the Italian sun rendered some such contrivance an absolute necessity, and that nearly every horseman carried one. The entry in his "Crudities" makes it clear that the "vmbrellæs" of his day were not built on quite the same lines as the umbrellas of the present year of grace. "Also many of them," he says, "doe carry other fine things of a far greater price, that will cost at the least a ducket, which they commonly call in the Italian tongue *vmbrellæs*, that is, things that minister shadow unto them for shelter against the scorching heate of the Sunne. These are made of leather something answerable to the forme of a little cannopy, and hooped in the inside with diuers little wooden hoops that extend the vmbrella in a pretty large compasse. They are vsed especially by horsemen, who carry them in their hands when they ride, fastening the end of the handle vpon one of their thighes, and they impart so large a shadow vnto them, that it keepeth the heate of the sunne from the vpper parts of their bodies."<sup>1</sup>

Montaigne, in his *Journal du Voyage en Italie*, makes some curious observations on the subject of travelling in Italy in his day, particularly with regard to the method of advertisement adopted by the various innkeepers. Within the towns no man dared cry up the attractions of his house, and

<sup>1</sup> "Coryat's Crudities, hastily gobbled vp in five Moneths Travells in France, Savoy, Italy," etc., 1611.

accordingly it became necessary to do all the touting along the roads that stretched, dusty and white, through the campagna. Hours before the traveller reached his destination the agents of the innkeepers would be met with, each one vociferating a list of the unique attractions offered by the particular inn to which he was attached. Sometimes, if business were slack, mine host himself might be met with on the road, ready to proffer the most sumptuous repast and the softest of beds in return for the solicited patronage; so that it was no unusual thing for a "likely" traveller who had, perhaps, set out with but one attendant, to arrive within sight of the city with an imposing escort of gaily-dressed horsemen and lackeys, all shouting, wrangling, gesticulating, and competing in a thousand ways as to who could make the most tempting offer. Then, as the traveller slackened pace under the gateway, his escort melted away as if by magic; and while he entered the city alone his late tormentors scampered away in a cloud of dust to waylay the next arrival.

Between Florence and Rome he notes that "they charge five Giulios (worth about sixpence apiece) for the hire of a horse, and two for the post, and they make the same terms if the horses are hired for two or three posts, or for several days, in which case the traveller has no trouble about the horses; for, from one place to another, the innkeepers take charge of those belonging to their neighbours, and, moreover, they will make a contract under which you may be supplied with a fresh horse elsewhere on the road in case one of your own should fail." His lodging for the night, presumably including refreshment, generally cost about four *giulii*, and the accommodation was for the most part clean and

wholesome, as it is to the present day, even in the miserable inns of the most benighted villages. Only near Viterbo and in Florence did he find the accommodation bad; for he notes that when he reached the former town he was "hoarse, and had a bad cold through having slept in my clothes last night on a table at San Lorenzo, by reason of the vermin, a misadventure which only befell me at Florence and this place." On the return journey he again passed through San Lorenzo, but, profiting by past experience, refused to sleep there, riding on after supper another thirty-two miles to Chirio, a fact which speaks volumes for the uncleanness of the inn at San Lorenzo. And as he rides on in the gathering dusk good Monsieur de Montaigne falls to calling down blessings on the head of Francesco de' Medici, the reigning Grand Duke, who has put the roads into such excellent repair. "All these roads have recently been levelled by order of the Duke of Tuscany, a work of the greatest service to the public. May God reward him, seeing that he has made what were the hardest roads to traverse to be as easy as the city streets."

But to return to Giorgio, whom we left at Ancona with the Cardinal di Gambero. The sights of the city detained him only a few hours, and then he hastened through Ravenna—where, as he tells us, he made a careful drawing of the Rotonda (San Vitale)—and Rimini to Bologna, working himself up to a more liberal appreciation of the works of art to be found outside his beloved Tuscany. "My eyes are being gradually opened, and I am confirmed in my opinion that the arts are better understood, and the artists more enterprising, in this district than in any other part of the country. I shall have a wonderful

lot to tell you when I come home." Somewhere upon the road between Ancona and Bologna, or it may have been in Bologna itself, Vasari fell in with the Abbots of Arezzo and Perugia, for both of whom, it will be remembered, he had fulfilled commissions. Finding that they were all bound for Modena they agreed to make the journey in company, and it would be interesting to know whether the remarkable ovations with which they were received everywhere, and which Vasari describes in his letters to Borghini, were due to the presence of the artist or the prelates. "All goes well," he writes, "and honours are raining down upon our heads. The common people simply run behind us like mad things all the time." Yet with it all—with all this flattery which Giorgio unquestionably took unto himself, he was beginning to feel homesick, even as he had done in Rome during the four years he had fought against the whims of Julius III. Amid all the throng of friendly strangers he sought in vain for one who should take the place of his own Vincenzo Borghini. "Wherever I go I meet many friends, many great minds; but I look in vain for anyone like you—you, the best thing I have on earth and whom I love so much." Not even his wife, "La Cosina," seems to have been more dear to him than the Prior degli Innocenti.

Thus he continued upon his journey, keeping up a running commentary in letters to his friend. At Modena he gathered fresh inspiration from Correggio's work, as well as at Parma and Reggio. Thence he went to Piacenza, and so to Pavia, passing the world-famous Certosa on the way, and stopping finally in Milan, where there was much for him to see. Leonardo's *Last Supper*, we may note, had

already lost all the glory of its freshness, for Giorgio laments that it "is in a very bad way, and nothing remains of it but an indistinct blur."<sup>1</sup> The immense Castello, which has now shrunk to the shadow of its former self, was an almost impregnable fortress, a city within a city; "distinguished by many spacious and goodly greene courts, which are invironed with faire rows of houses like streets . . . also in these courts as it were certaine market places, there are usually markets kept: of these courts I saw foure or five severally." The pride of the garrison was a culverin "which was said to carry a bullet at the least eight miles, which I doe hardly beleeve to be true," while the circuit of the walls was defended by at least two hundred pieces of ordnance, an unprecedented armament at the period.

"My last letters," writes Giorgio on May 9th, "were despatched to you from Bologna on the 28th of last month. I set out thence for Modena with Father Abbot of Arezzo and his brother of Perugia, and there (at Modena) I saw many works by Correggio as well as at Parma and Reggio. I had to stop two days at Parma on account of the rain. Sunday morning, having spent Saturday in Piacenza, we started for Pavia, and there I had a good look at all the work of the Goths." His attitude towards "Gothic" art was already well known to Borghini from the Introduction to the *Lives*, and therefore there was no occasion for him to enlarge upon the subject. But it may not be out of place to recall at least in part Vasari's criticism. He described it as a barbarian and monstrous style devoid of all order, while the number of buildings they had erected he con-

<sup>1</sup> *Vite*, Vol. VI, Life of Benvenuto Garofalo, p. 491. "Non si scorge più se non una macchia abbagliata."



sidered positively appalling. For him the style consisted of a confusion of niches and pinnacles, crockets and scrolls, piled up in such a way that he was always expecting to see the whole erection crumble into ruins at his feet. And, what was worse, these buildings were not few and far between, but "all Italy is filled with their abominable erections." This remarkable tirade ends with a prayer that the nations of the world may henceforth be preserved, by Divine intervention, from the perpetuation of such a style. This attitude, it should be noted, was the attitude of nearly all the artists of the Renaissance towards what was called the "German Style," and a further echo of it is to be found in the poems of Benvenuto Cellini:—

". . . architettura  
Storpiata e guasta alle mani de' Tedeschi."

"I made a quantity of notes," the letter continues, "but I haven't drawn anything out yet as I have nothing of much importance, but I will send you something to satisfy your curiosity. On the Monday I went to the Certosa di Pavia. It is a great and notable affair, but built by people of little judgment, who, however, have taken a deal of trouble over it. It is wonderfully elaborate, but there are some 'impossible' details." He is mightily impressed with the carvings intended for the tomb of Gaston de Foix, which are lying about in the Certosa, and grieves over their neglected condition. "Finally we got to Milan, and there we had such a reception! It would take too long, even if it were possible to do so, to describe all the extraordinary attentions that were paid us, and the crowds of people that came out to honour our arrival. I have been received

everywhere and by everybody with marked respect, as if I were somebody of note. They seem to consider it almost a miracle that a man who has so much work on hand and so many obstacles to overcome as I have, should be able to shake them all off and go about the country inspecting the works of other people. Messer Lione, my compatriot, went nearly mad with delight. He has done and is doing such wonderful things, that if Michelangelo could come to life again and see the style in which he lives, he would certainly say that the art which has put him on such a pedestal is different from what it was when he practised it; for truly these masters are no longer philosophers, but princes. I am glad to think that it is so, and that I have lived long enough to see such an art emerge from its surroundings of robbery and jobbery. Now I must close. To-morrow I set out again, turning my face towards the open country. I am going to Lodi first, then to Cremona, Brescia and San Benedetto di Mantova, arriving—if it please God—on Monday. When I have seen the sights and visited your friends the *Padri*, I shall go on to Mantua to have another look at Giulio Romano's work. Then I go on to Verona, Vicenza and Padua; and finally, I expect to be in Venice three days before the Ascension. From thence I will write and tell you when I am setting out for home. That will be, if nothing occurs to upset my plans, any time between the end of the month and the third of June. It won't be the fourth, because that is the anniversary of the rebellion of the Aretines. In the meantime, if you care to give me the news, you might tell me how my friend Messer Giovanni Caccini is, what people thought of the arches and other decorations,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For the entry of Giovanna of Austria,

and whether they have been taken down yet. Tell me also if Battista's affairs and mine are going on satisfactorily, if the chapel is finished, and what is happening at the Magistrati. And tell me how Messer Bartolomeo Gondi is getting on, and whether you have had any talk with the Duke. I know nothing whatever of anything, and your giving me the news will help me to decide whether to delay my return or hurry back as quickly as possible."

His arrival at San Benedetto di Mantova is duly chronicled in a further letter to Borghini, from which we learn that the weather has again delayed his progress. The rain came down so incessantly that Messer Bernardo, his travelling companion, watered the wine with it, and the road from Milan to Brescia was in such a state that both riders and horses suffered greatly. The weather did not, however, prevent their visiting Cremona for the express purpose of seeing the works—"marvels," he calls them—of Sofonisba Anguisciola, the "lady" artist, who, with her magniloquently named sisters Lucia, Europa, Anna and Minerva, had, as an old writer quaintly expresses it, "overcome the feminineness of her sex" and proved herself proficient with the brush. But Vasari does not enlarge upon her achievements, having already written of her in the *Lives*. At the time of his visit Sofonisba was away at the court of Madrid, but Giorgio had the satisfaction of meeting Europa, "who is still quite young, but abounding in grace and intelligence," while even the baby—Anna—already showed promise of following in the footsteps of her sisters, drawing *con molto profitto*. He was profoundly impressed by the ability of all the members of this talented family, describing their

home in Cremona as the “abode of Painting and of all the Virtues”; quoting Ariosto in their praise:—

“Le donne son venute in eccellenza  
Di ciascun’ arte, ov’ hanno posto cura,”

and attempting to solve the mystery of their excellence by putting this conundrum to his readers: “If womenfolk, as we know, are able to bring living men into the world, is it so very wonderful that those of them who list can reproduce their lineaments on canvas?” In the letter he dismisses them with a sentence, and turns again to the recital of his own triumphs and his reception “with unspeakable caresses” at San Benedetto. He purposes to be in Venice as soon as he has explored Verona, Vicenza and Padua. One thing alone in this letter is worthy of note: he has at length written to his wife, and the letter is enclosed in this one to Borghini, who is to give it to Ser Pietro, and he is to send it to her at Arezzo. Let us hope it reached her.

Giorgio’s expectations of returning by the beginning of June were apparently realised, for on May 27th he was in Ferrara and writing to the Duke. As usual the weather had been playing him tricks, and every river that lay in his path was swollen into a torrent. “I have got as far as Ferrara,” he writes, “but I am so worn out with the sea voyage (from Venice) to Chioggia and the rest of the rivers [*sic*] that I have not the courage to go a step further. However, by God’s grace, I am safe and well, and abounding in energy. I shall have something to tell you about all the wonderful things I have seen, and I sincerely hope to finish my travels with less discomfort, as it has now turned hot and I shall have only the dust to contend with, though I expect to find the

whole world under water as soon as I get past Pianoro.”

Thus ends this wonderful journey, of so much importance in view of the Second Edition of the *Lives* which was so soon to be published.

## CHAPTER XII

### ROME AND ST. PETER'S

Madonna dell' Umiltà at Pistoia—Finishing touches to the *Lives*—Federigo Zuccherò and the *Lives*—His own writings—Sala Regia—Vasari's visits to Rome—St. Peter's—Sistine Bridge—Pirro Ligorio—Santa Maria Novella, Florence—The "Arrotino."

UPON Vasari's return to Florence in June, 1566, he devoted himself almost exclusively to putting his notes in order and to the completion of the new edition. There seems to have been a convenient lull in his building operations, and the only undertaking of this nature of which we find mention is the dome of the Madonna dell' Umiltà at Pistoia. This church had been commenced some time previously, and instead of employing an architect Cosimo had placed Vitoni, who—like Tasso—was a carpenter, in charge of the work. Vitoni set about it with that blissfulness which is said to accompany ignorance, and speedily got himself into difficulties by weakening the drum on which the dome was to stand and splitting the substructure into two separate rings by a succession of intramural passages. The work came to a standstill, and Vitoni escaped from his troubles by dying at a convenient moment. After his death, according to Vasari, no architect had the temerity to undertake the raising of the dome, and matters remained thus until the return of Vasari from Rome. It is, indeed, probable that, coming as he did fresh from St. Peter's where he had renewed his acquaint-



*Alinari*  
INTERIOR OF THE CHURCH OF THE MADONNA DELL' UMILTÀ, PISTOIA





ance with the expedients adopted successively by Antonio da San Gallo and Michelangelo for strengthening the work of Bramante, Giorgio Vasari was, of all architects then living, the most likely to bring Vitoni's work to a successful issue. Be the matter as it may, he was sent to Pistoia shortly after his return to Tuscany, and was so far fortunate in the precautions he took that the contract for the completion of the church was signed in the following year.<sup>1</sup>

But his chief and all-absorbing study was undoubtedly the completion of the book. In the still silence of the terrible, relentless heat which only those who have spent a summer in Italy can fully appreciate, we see him sitting indoors, with windows wide open and lattice shutters shut, his mantle thrown off and the great beads of perspiration coursing each other down his face, while he writes the Autobiography, so often quoted in these pages, which was to be the worthy coping stone of his literary edifice. This picture is suggested by a letter to Borghini, written in July. Borghini was away at Poppiano, a country place in the Casentino to which he migrated annually so as to escape the heat of Florence during the summer, and Vasari, confined in the stifling city, is at little pains to conceal his envy.

"I send you greetings from out of all this heat," he writes, "though judging from the song the *cicale* are singing hereabouts I suspect that it is not much cooler where you are. But at least you are a free agent, and are at Poppiano." "I am sending you,"

<sup>1</sup> Not even Vasari, however, has been quite successful, for the four tiers of tie rods which encircle the lower portion of the drum are painful witnesses of the threatened failure of the dome. It is to be hoped that it will remain standing, for its contour is exceedingly graceful, and it forms a notable landmark as one approaches the city.

he says later on in the same letter, "the abstract of my Autobiography, done up in a sealed packet. Please pick out for me the portions you consider interesting. There are also some other notes to be added at the end of the book which I have only just prepared. You know better than I do how to fit them in, and it may help you to while away the time." He is glad to think that Borghini will not return until the "fury of the heat is passed."

The excessive heat continued without a break until days ran into weeks and weeks threatened to run into months without a sign of the clouds which herald the approach of a welcome, cooling storm. Yet such is the perverseness of human nature that when, after having complained of the heat, a sudden storm brought the temperature down with a run, Vasari was put out of temper because he found himself feeling chilly. This, combined with the news that his crops were turning out badly and that his mother-in-law was breathing her last at Arezzo just at the moment when he had planned to go there for a little relaxation, must be held to account for the tone of his next letter to his friend. "Most magnificent and reverend *Signor mio*," he begins, "you must be remarkably busy with your writing and other occupations since the recollection of me sweltering in the heat here never seems to cross your mind. The rain has put everything right again—it has even brought the Duke back, for he was here last night, talking with me. This morning he had breakfast with his Highness (Francesco) in the palace. I was present," says Vasari, a remark which may lead the reader to suppose that Giorgio was one of the guests at table. He was present, however, merely as an onlooker, for it was Cosimo's custom to take his

meals in public—that is to say, the doors of the room were left open, and any of his subjects who wished might enter without hindrance. The Duke sat at the head of the table, in a high-backed chair with a canopy over it, and when the repast was finished he more often than not engaged those about him in conversation. It was held to be the most propitious occasion for asking favours, and it is therefore to be supposed that there was generally a goodly number of spectators present, each armed with some humble and dutiful petition. “I was present, and he asked me where you were. I told him that you had gone to Poppiano so as to escape the heat, and that you weren’t feeling very well. He merely replied that it was high time you came back. It is thought that his illustrious Excellency will stay here a week, and then, I fancy, he will go to Poggio. He is looking wonderfully well, better than I think I have ever seen him look. . . . I am anxiously awaiting Ser Pietro’s return from Arezzo, for my harvest has been an exceedingly poor one, and I shall scarcely have four hundred bushels of grain to garner, and not so much as a cupful of oats—and this after all I have spent on my crops! God give me patience, but my trustfulness seems to end in my getting nothing I want. I was thinking of going over there, but as I hear that La Cosina’s mother has been given Extreme Unction and I don’t care about participating in deathbed performances, I have postponed my visit. I shall have to go sooner or later though, and take Veri de’ Medici so as to get the river banks put in order. If you come back this way I shall hope to see you. I should have come over, only I am all alone in the house.”

What happened to his mother-in-law we are not

told, but it is to be inferred that she died, as La Cosina came to Florence a few days later and stayed with her affectionate and doting husband, returning to Arezzo on September 2nd. A month later Giorgio seems to have joined her, as on October 2nd he writes to Borghini from Arezzo, abusing him for his silence. "You have taught me a great deal," he writes, "but I refuse to learn from you the habit of not writing to those who love me as I love you. It is now more than a month since I last saw or heard from you—God forgive you! I have written to you three times (including this), and if my letters have been short I have at least told you that I am alive. I shall be returning to Florence about Friday or Saturday, if nothing happens to upset my plans." He is leaving Arezzo with a fair prospect of settling his affairs satisfactorily.

The picture for the Pope, which was to take him to Rome again in the following year, is briefly referred to in several letters of this period, and many other pictures which cannot with certainty be identified are also mentioned. In the letter already quoted, that in which he refers to his Autobiography, he speaks of a cartoon for Cardinal Montepulciano, and of a picture for Biffolo, the subject being *Christ parting from His Mother*. The Pope's picture is already sketched out. In another letter he mentions that he has given Ser Gostantino's pictures to Crocino so as to have them copied, and he tells Borghini that "the two pictures for the Badia are sketched out, as well as that for Filippo and the one for the Pope, so that when you return you will be able to see them. I am just going to begin the picture for Bishop Strozzi (of Volterra)." The picture here referred to seems to have been the *Crucifixion*, painted for Sta. Maria Novella, and now hung in the sacristy. Vasari

also painted the portrait of the Bishop, but all the information we have concerning this picture is contained in a madrigal written by G. B. Strozzi :—

“Di bel Vaso arte fuore  
 Tragge un sì vivo suo vermiglio e bianco  
 E natural colore,  
 Che non verrà, per tempo od altro, manco :  
 Nè più d'Apelle par quel primo onore ;  
 E ragion è, tant' anco  
 Più ricchi scettri, e più chiare ghirlande  
 Ha il buon nostro Alessandro, ed è più grande.”

It is impossible to say whether the “vermilion and white” has fulfilled the prediction of the poet, for the present resting place of the picture is unknown.

By the end of the year the last sheets of the book were in the hands of Giunti, the printer, though Vasari was still diligently gathering information from all sources, for at the end of November we find him writing to Lionardo Buonarrotti, asking him to remind Federigo Zucchero that he is waiting for information about Taddeo, Federigo's brother. “Please ask him to send what I have asked for as soon as he possibly can, for the printers have nearly got to the end of their work, and I cannot get them to delay, as they want to get the book finished.” Federigo was a man of uncertain temperament, and seems to have had a well-defined dislike for Vasari. He delayed sending the desired information, and a week later the biographer wrote again to Lionardo, urging him to stir him up. “I beg you to ask Federigo Zucchero for the information I want, as the printers have nearly finished, and they refuse to wait any longer. I implore you to see that the notes are sent off at once : if you do this I shall be exceedingly grateful.” There is also an enclosure in the letter addressed to

Giulio Mazzoni, asking for certain information concerning the life of Daniello da Volterra.

The sequel to these messages to Zuccherò is exceedingly interesting. Whether Vasari ever received the assistance he sought is not clear, but from his later letters it would seem that Federigo ignored his request; in any case, seeing that he had the opportunity of supplying correct information, whatever mistakes are to be found in the Life of Taddeo as Vasari wrote it must be ascribed, not to the biographer, but to Federigo. Either he wilfully supplied a misleading account of his brother's life, or else he equally wilfully refused to supply any account at all. When at length the *Lives* appeared, Zuccherò was the first to attack the author, though his scurrilous diatribes were never published. They took the form of marginal notes added to his own copy of Vasari's Second Edition, and exhibit a degree of hatred for which it is difficult to account. Milanese is disposed to think that Federigo wished to surpass Vasari both as painter and as writer, but perhaps the chief reason for his dislike is to be found in Vasari's preference for the works of Francesco Salviati, while Federigo considered his own brother to have been the better artist. Vasari, on the other hand, was either unconscious of Federigo's hatred or too magnanimous to notice it, for he speaks most highly of his work, especially in Santa Maria dell' Orto in Rome, where "his performances were such that one saw the first evidence of the great ability he has since manifested."<sup>1</sup> Regarding Federigo's claims as an author, there is little to be said in his favour. He wrote several books, the most pretentious of them being entitled *Idea de' Pittori, Scultori ed Architetti*,

<sup>1</sup> *Vite*, Vol. VII, p. 85.



*Brogi*

FEDERIGO ZUCCHERO, BY HIMSELF  
*(Florence: Uffizi Gallery, No. 720)*





a bombastic rigmarole in which he seeks to reduce everything, concrete and abstract, to the rules of design. It will be sufficient to quote the epilogue to this piece of shallow profundity for the reader to gather what the rest of the book is like. It runs as follows :—

PROPERTY AND QUALITY OF DESIGN.

*Name.*

Divine Scintilla.

*Quality.*

Circumscription, mensuration and form.

*Substance.*

Form and shape without substance of body.

*Appearance.*

Linear simplicity.

*Definition.*

Form of all forms.

Light of the intellect and mainspring of all undertakings.

*Instruments.*

The pen and the pencil.

THE END, PRAISE BE TO GOD.

The marginal notes to the *Vite* deal chiefly with the account of Taddeo. Nearly every statement made by Vasari is traversed by his malignant annotator, though Giorgio seems to have dealt not altogether unfavourably with his subject. The worst he says of him is quoted as the opinion of others, and is given for what it is worth, namely, that many artists have blamed him, saying that a "certain avariciousness led him to undertake every sort of work and to get others to do it for him, thereby gaining money that might have enabled many to

gain an honest livelihood." It sounds as if Taddeo was a contractor for painted work on a large scale, and it is admittedly not a kind thing to say about another man. Vasari is acknowledged on all hands to have been an inveterate gossip, and *on-dits* were eagerly seized upon by him for use in his biographies. Federigo answers the accusation in his marginal notes with fury: "It is an abominable lie to say so!" For the rest, it would appear that Taddeo and Giorgio were on terms of friendship, for when the former visited Florence he was entertained by Vasari, who was "amico suo," and allowed to see the work in the Sala Grande which was already begun. Federigo scratches out "amico suo" and substitutes "amico finto e maledico senza ragione"—false friend, and backbiter without a cause.

Then, because Vasari passes over Taddeo's work in the Duomo at Urbino with a mere mention, Zucchero falls on him, seeking to rend him to pieces: "And if these paintings had been done by one of his Florentines he would have praised them up to the skies." In particular he resents Giorgio's praise of Salviati, for when he gives it as his opinion that Taddeo did not equal Salviati in the works at the Palazzo Farnese, Federigo retorts marginally: "Obvious prejudice and maliciousness this praising Salviati's work here more than it deserves, and then blaming Taddeo."

There is more justice, however, in his remarks concerning the Sala Regia, or Sala de' Re. In the Life of Taddeo Giorgio gives the following account of the matter, an account by no means untainted by conceit and arrogance: "In the meantime his Holiness, wishing at all costs to complete the decoration of the Sala de' Re, after the many disagreements

between Daniello (da Volterra) and Salviati which have already been described<sup>1</sup> . . . gave instructions to the Bishop of Forlì"—*Monsignore Tantecose*, Milord Busybody, as Michelangelo used to call him—"as to what he wanted done. The latter wrote to Vasari on the 3rd of September in the year 1561, saying that as the Pope had decided to complete the Sala de' Re, he had been ordered to find a suitable man to undertake the business once and for all. Under these circumstances, as well as moved thereto by their longstanding friendship and other considerations, he asked him (Vasari) to obtain leave of absence from the Duke and come to Rome so as to do the work, adding that it would bring him much honour and renown, and would give *sua Beatitudine* (the Pope) the utmost satisfaction. He concluded by asking for an immediate reply. In answer to this appeal, Vasari wrote saying that he found himself exceedingly comfortable where he was, and that as he was receiving far more liberal remuneration from the Duke for his services than he had ever had in Rome from any of the Popes, he desired nothing better than to remain in the employ of his Excellency, for whom he was then engaged in decorating a far greater Sala than the Sala de' Re; and that in Rome itself they could not fail to find men

<sup>1</sup> Francesco Salviati, even if we judge him only from Vasari's partisan account, seems to have been an uncommonly bad-tempered and ungrateful person. He availed himself of Riccio's influence to obtain employment in the Sala Regia, getting Pirro Ligorio to support his application. Having been given the work he rewarded his two benefactors by speaking every ill of them. His rival Daniello da Volterra had already completed a picture in the Sala, and Francesco's first act was to destroy every trace of it. Ligorio revenged himself by getting him dismissed. These are the squabbles to which Giorgio refers. Salviati died in 1563 regretted by few—perhaps by none, with the exception of his friend and biographer.

who were suitable for the purpose in hand." Federigo's comment on this is: "Self-appreciation: gibble-gabble without rhyme or reason." His dislike for Salviati finds vent and relief among these notes, for when Vasari, describing the death of that artist, says that "the Cardinal Sant' Angelo fully realised how much he had lost through the death of Salviati," Federigo ran his pen through the word "lost" and wrote instead "gained."

Lastly, Federigo has another thrust at the biographer when he describes how Taddeo came to be employed in the Palazzo Farnese. "As there was a scarcity of good painters in Rome," says Vasari, "the *Signori* resolved, as there was nobody else, to give instructions that the Sala Maggiore of the Palazzo should be painted by Taddeo." This is hardly a complimentary way of putting it, and Federigo's retort is, under the circumstances, excusable. "There was still, however, Giorgio Vasari to be found in Florence," he says, "and I marvel much to think that they did not send for him without more ado, and give him the chance of letting off another impertinent and vainglorious squib, like the one about the Sala Regia."

At the risk of wearying the reader, we must quote another instance of Federigo's malignant dislike for Vasari, which followed him even after he had lain long in the grave. It is contained in a letter given by Bottari.<sup>1</sup> In it he returns to the old theme, criticising both the author and the *Lives*. "I always held the painters of Lombardy in high esteem," he writes, "but I now consider that they are deserving of even more credit than they get. This part of the country (and particularly Milan, which is the capital) is full

<sup>1</sup> *Raccolta*, Vol. VII, appendix, No. 34.

of rich people and of monasteries and friaries which spend large sums of money, so that it is unnecessary for native artists to go and work outside the district, and therefore they are little known beyond their own thresholds, especially as few people of real intelligence ever come here. It is true that Messer Giorgio came and saw something; but his eyes were blind to the work of these excellent artists, and he was always more sparing in praise than in blame. He wasn't capable of praising anyone but his own beloved Tuscans, and these he extolled whether their work was good or bad—God have mercy on him! The truth is that his head got so swelled by the patronage of Michelangelo and Duke Cosimo that he treated as an unredeemable outcast anyone who refused to touch his cap to him in respectful salutation. You know how he treated my poor brother, although everybody says there wasn't one Tuscan who was his superior—not even poor Giorgio, whose sum of knowledge was how to paint quickly and cover the walls with figures, like a billsticker."

In the following February Vasari set out for Rome, taking with him the Pope's picture. The subject was the *Adoration of the Magi*, and the work was intended for the walls of the new church which the Pope was building at Bosco, near Alessandria della Paglia. As soon as Pius heard that Vasari's task was done he sent word desiring him to take the picture to Rome in person, "for his own satisfaction, and as he wished to confer with me about some of his projects"—the words are Vasari's own—"but chiefly because he wanted to discuss the work at St. Peter's, the completion of which he had very much at heart." He sent the artist a hundred crowns for his journey, but it does not seem to have been

enough—or else Vasari seized the moment as being a suitable one in which to ask Cosimo for something on account for work done and materials consumed—for there is a letter from “Giorgio Vasari, your most humble servitor” to his “most illustrious and most excellent Lord,” in which the writer waxes eloquent over his own services, and begs for a recognition in cash, “seeing that I have been instructed to begin the decoration of the walls of the Sala Grande, a work which I shall be able to do with greater skill if I have assistance of a monetary nature. . . . I beg to remind your Highness that the Giorgio who thus petitions you is already advanced in years”—he was fifty-six—“and requires help for many reasons, as he has many nephews and nieces, besides poor relations. Therefore, with the most earnest solicitude I lay my case before you, beseeching the Lord God to keep you in health and happiness.” Poor Giorgio! he spent a good deal of time in asking for arrears, and in return received a great many promises, few of which seem ever to have been redeemed. On the present occasion Vasari was told to “get away to Rome and come back quickly: his Excellency will not forget you. In the meantime say what it is you want, and by the time you return everything will be put right. February 18th, 1566” (1567 common style).

This is just what Vasari could not do. When these money matters came to the settling point he found himself quite unable to “say what it was he wanted.” Vasari, as we shall see later, refused to name a fixed sum, and probably, therefore, came off badly in the end.

There are two letters in which he describes his arrival in Rome. One of them is a strictly formal

document addressed to Francesco de' Medici, very much in the form of a report, and the other is one of his familiar, chatty letters to Borghini. As a consequence, the latter is the one which gives us most information. "I got to Rome quite safely," he begins, "and so did the picture. I had no sooner arrived than the Pope wanted to see it, not even giving me time to take off my riding-boots. So it was taken into the *guardaroba*, and there he saw it, and liked it very much. I talked with him for more than an hour about our Padroni; then, when he had seen enough of the picture, he recollected that I had been travelling ever since breakfast-time last Tuesday, and sent me to bed. He has given me rooms in the palace itself, and they are the very same ones that his Holiness uses in the winter.<sup>1</sup> In the days of Paul IV there was a chapel here.

"The Pope wants one or two things done, which I will explain in my next letter; but among them there is to be another picture, like the one in your Badia, with two others—one on either side—something like those I did for Camaldoli. They are for the high altar of the church in Bosco. I have received orders to examine the substructure of the Ponte Sisto, which is in a dangerous state; also the works at St. Peter's, from which Pirro (Ligorio) has just been dismissed, though not before he has made I don't know how many mistakes. These the Holy Father wants put right if possible—but you shall have the news later on."

It is to Pirro Ligorio, who succeeded Michelangelo

<sup>1</sup> "Che son le medesime di Sua Santità, ch' egli adopera il verno." This must surely be an exaggeration, for it is highly improbable that anyone would be allowed to occupy the Pope's private apartments. And, seeing that Vasari arrived in February, how comes it that Pius was not using his winter quarters himself?

as architect to St. Peter's, that Vasari alludes in the Autobiography when he says that "I urged him (Pius V) not to allow the design of Michelangelo to be departed from at St. Peter's"; for Pirro had ideas of his own, and would have carried them into effect had not his career as Surveyor to the Fabric (or its sixteenth-century equivalent) been opportunely cut short. Vasari tells us more of what the troubles were when dealing with the Life of Michelangelo, most of it being told with an air of importance entirely befitting the occasion. "And for the time being," he says, "that Pope—*quel Papa*—refused to listen to the suggestions of anybody else, as Vasari had clearly demonstrated the manner in which he (Michelangelo) had given life to the building. He also obtained a promise from his Holiness that, touching the designs, he would allow nothing to be done without consulting him (Vasari) first." Vasari, indeed, seems to have been regarded by the Pope as Michelangelo's successor and the repository of all his secrets, so much so that a few years after the death of the architect of St. Peter's, Giorgio was commanded to call together the overseers of the fabric and deliver to them a lecture, to the end that they might hear and receive his instructions as the interpreter of Michelangelo's plans. With the same purpose in view of assuring that Michelangelo's plans should not be forgotten, Giorgio carefully described the model which had been made; "so that if ever it happens—which God forbid—that the progress of this work should be hindered by the envy and malignity of presumptuous individuals now that he is dead, as it was during his life, these writings of mine, whether they be good or bad, will be found of value by those who come after and desire faithfully to carry



out the scheme of this rare genius." So many and so seemingly insuperable were the difficulties that beset the completion of this vast pile that many believed it would never be finished. Its appearance at this time has fortunately been described by an Englishman, then on a tour through Italy. He speaks of the remains of classic days, describing them delightfully as "the wonderfull maiestie of buildings that only the rootes thereof do yet represent," then turns his attention to his own time, and after deploring "the pryde and abhominacion that the Churchmen there mainteign," speaks of St. Peter's. "The newe building, if it were finished, wolde be the goodliest thyng of this worlde, not onelye for the antike pillers that ben taken out of the antiquities, and bestowed there, but also for the greatnesse and excellent porcion that it hath. Neverthelesse it hath been so many yeres a doing, and is yet so unperfect, that most stand in dout, whether ever it shalbe finished or no."

But to return to Vasari's letter. "I have had a great reception here," he goes on to say, "and yesterday I had to go in a coach with Cardinale Alessandrino and Commendone to see I don't know how many building sites": an expedition which, from its possibilities, seems to have made his mouth water.

In Rome Giorgio came across an old acquaintance against whom he had a grudge, and tells us how he paid it. "I can't think of anything else I want to say, except that I have had a little talk with Lottino. I pulled his ears for him, so now I think he is convinced of the error of his ways. He says he didn't know, but that he does now; and he is going to speak and act differently for the future." One

would like to know what Lottino had done to incur Giorgio's wrath and to drive him to such extreme measures.

It is a peculiarity of Vasari's correspondence that whenever his thoughts begin to slacken in pace he fills up the gap with, "Now I must close," or, "I have nothing more to tell you." This done, the stream of thought flows on again; and many letters continue for more than a page after he has said all he has to say. The present letter is a case in point, for he continues with: "I have had enough to do, for every day I have had to be at the disposal of his Holiness, so that I have not had time even to visit the Abbot of Rome." He found time, however, to pick up information for the *Lives*, especially for the Life of Taddeo Zuccherò, which still continued to be a thorn in his side, for he tells Borghini that the Life is nearly ready: "I hope to send Corneto the Life of Taddeo in my next letter. In the meantime greet Batista (Naldini) in my name, and find out if he is doing anything; also Messer Andrea (Pasquale, court physician to Cosimo). I expect to set out from here directly after Easter, if I am good,<sup>1</sup> and in the meantime salute all my friends for me, especially Messer Giambatista Adriani, and ask him not to forget what he has promised to do for my book": referring to the prefatory history of painting which, as we know, Adriani prepared for inclusion in the *Lives*.

The letter to Francesco is of a more political nature, and from it we are led to conclude that Vasari was charged with a special mission to the Pope. "I kissed his feet in the name of your illustrious Excellency," says Giorgio, "and he asked

<sup>1</sup> "S'io sarò valentuomo."

me how you were, and wanted to know a great many things about your Highness. When he had inspected the medallion portrait of the Duke he enquired whether I had one of your Excellency. I said I had not got one, which is the truth. I think he would like to see one. I beg your Highness to have one sent, either in silver or lead, and I can say that I had it by me. He seems to hold you in particular affection. Then I kissed his feet again on behalf of her Highness, asking the Holy Father, when he says Mass (as he does every day), to pray God help her in her approaching confinement." He finds the papal court very different from what it was: it is "such an extravagant metamorphosis" that he is quite bewildered.

For a month Giorgio remained in Rome, assisting Pius to frame his schemes, gathering still more notes for the *Lives*, and writing home every now and then to ask whether Tanai de' Medici and his builder, *Maestro* Bernardo, were preparing the walls of the Sala for his pictures. Among the works undertaken for the Pope was what he calls a "macchina grandissima," a sort of triumphal arch with more than thirty pictures in it, intended for the church of Santa Croce del Bosco, already mentioned. In addition, Pius wanted to erect a magnificent chapel, but Vasari, foreseeing that it would be a work requiring a considerable amount of time and perhaps interfering with his own work in Florence, managed to dissuade him from the project. "I offered to do the designs," says Vasari in one of his letters, "and to give him the benefit of my advice; but he refused, saying that unless I do the whole thing myself it will be a failure, the more so as he has been disappointed more than once in similar undertakings during the past year."

It is almost excusable, when his Holiness was saying such pretty things to our artist, if his head was turned by this flattery. "I never go outside the Vatican now," he writes, "and I am getting so puffed up that I begin to look like a barrel filled to bursting point. I am discovering that I am a greater man than I thought. . . . I am now engaged in making designs and models for his private enterprises. St. Peter's is getting into shape again; and so, in spite of hard work and all this ceremonial, I am fully determined to get all I have in hand finished by the end of the week. Everything here seems to fall into ruins, and as I have already written too long a letter and have still to write to my Padroni, I shall have to stop; but I shall be greatly obliged if you will ride over to Santa Maria Novella to see how the work is going on, and how the Strozzi chapel is looking. Let me know the result of your visit." This is the only reference in his letters to his unfortunate architectural exploits in this church. The blame for the removal of the *tramezzo* is generally laid entirely at Vasari's door, though in reality Cosimo was responsible for the alteration. On October 5th, 1565, the *Operai della Chiesa* wrote to the Duke, clearly demonstrating that he had already announced his intention of having the *tramezzo* removed and the high altar brought forward long before Vasari was told to carry out the work. The letter, in fact, was written for the purpose of discovering who was to be the architect, and concludes: "The *Operai* of the said church, your most humble and obedient servants, earnestly beg that your illustrious Excellency will give instructions to whatever architect is to be employed, so that he may be enabled to carry out the works which your illustrious Excellency

intends to have done." There is a memorandum attached to this missive which says that Giorgio Vasari is to be the architect, and it is therefore probable that Cosimo's ideas on the subject had taken definite form before Vasari was given his orders, though it is not unlikely that he had been consulted. The architect's report, formulated at a later date, included arrangements for bringing the high altar into the old choir and building a new double choir in the rear of it, doing as little damage as possible to the stalls and frescoes. Furthermore, it provided for the removal of the heavy screen or *tramezzo* (here called a *Ponte*) which separated the choir from the nave, the adjacent tombs being removed to different sites. The four altars which stood against the screen were to be merged into one, to be erected elsewhere. The estimate was made on January 10th, 1566.

Such a drastic rearrangement necessarily involved the destruction of many features and ornaments which we would gladly have seen in Santa Maria Novella to-day. Had it not been for this mistaken piety on the part of Cosimo the wonderful series of frescoes by Masaccio might still adorn the walls of the church. But it was Cosimo's wish, not Vasari's whim, that wrought the harm. True, Vasari writes eulogistically of the work in his Autobiography, but we could scarcely expect him, courtier that he was, to have blamed the work of his patron in a book dedicated to that patron. Vasari carried out the instructions of his master in all things, and he saw that it was good, even if sometimes it appeared to other people in a different light. "He (the Duke) has just lately caused me to remove the *tramezzo* from the church of Santa Maria Novella, which spoilt

all its beauty, and we built a new and very rich choir behind the high altar, taking away the old one because it filled up the greater portion of the rest of the building. It looks like a magnificent new church, which, indeed, is what it really is."

Vasari carried out similar alterations in other churches, noticeably in the church at Arezzo, and here the removal of the old choir seems to have been his own idea, as it was part of the work done at his expense when he erected the Vasari chapel, which has already been mentioned elsewhere.

The new mode of arrangement seems to have incurred the disapproval of Lapini, who, in speaking of Santa Maria Novella, curiously enough applies to Vasari's alterations the identical words which Vasari had applied to the work he had been instructed to destroy. Vasari wrote that the *tramezzo toglièva tutta la sua bellezza*—that the screen spoilt all the beauty of the church. The entry in the *Diario* is: "On April 23rd, 1566, they finished pulling down the old choir of the aforesaid church"—and with it the *tramezzo*—"which had stood for many and many years. But it spoilt all its beauty—*guastava tutta la sua bellezza*. And not alone was the choir of this church ruined, but of all the other churches as well (for there were many that had these screens across them). Those who removed them considered that their churches were thereby greatly improved and beautified. The Dominican Fathers were the first to remove the screen from the church and the choir from before the high altar, building behind the said altar the new and beautiful choir which is to be seen now. The removal of these choirs was welcomed by the majority of the people."

The removal of the choir entailed the destruction

of its enclosing wall, and consequently of the chapels which had been built against it externally. The removal of the screen deprived all who sought quiet of a convenient place within which they might retire unseen and undisturbed for prayer and meditation.

Of the things which, as Vasari notes, were "falling into ruins" in Rome, the chief was the Sistine Bridge, which corroborated Vasari's remark by breaking down shortly afterwards, being thereafter known as the Ponte Rotto. The catastrophe was partly caused by the bungling of Pirro Ligorio who was called in to repair it, and partly by the parsimony of Rome. "The Tiber will have to look after its own bridge," wrote Vasari, "as neither the Pope nor the Roman people will undertake the expense of repairs."

It is significant of the change which had occurred in Rome, and to which Vasari refers in his correspondence, that the splendid antiques which were still from time to time unearthed became a drug in the market, and might be secured for a quite inadequate sum. While Vasari was in Rome he came across several, and urged his patrons in Florence to purchase them. Two of them were fauns, "about the same size as the Bacchus of Sansovino, inexpressibly beautiful. They were found not long ago, and I have experienced more pleasure in looking at them than I have felt for a long time. Since Benedictions are more in fashion at present than statues, I believe they might be secured for less than a hundred *scudi* each. If I were a rich man I would buy them myself; but as I am not, I beg to suggest that they would be very suitable for the palace. Let me know what are your wishes in the matter. I will leave full particulars with your Highness's Ambassador, so that

he can take charge of the transaction in case I have already set out for home. If this Pope lives long there can be no doubt but that there will be many such statues going begging in Rome, and innumerable objects of value will be thrown on the market. I am bringing particulars of all I have seen." The well-known "Arrotino," now in the Uffizi, was purchased at this time, also through Vasari's agency; for though his letter describing the find has disappeared, the Duke's reply still exists. It is as follows: "Replying to your letter of the 13th (of March, 1567), received to-day, we have to inform you that we have decided to purchase, whatever the price may be, the statue of the peasant sharpening his knife. As the owner puts the price at eight hundred *scudi*, and if you cannot persuade him to accept less, we authorise you to settle for that sum and obtain possession of the statue. You had better go with our Ambassador and obtain permission from his Holiness to remove it from Rome."



## CHAPTER XIII

### END OF THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Parsimony of Rome—Trouble with the printers of the *Lives*—Publication of the Second Edition—Building activity of Duke Cosimo—Vasari's monetary difficulties—His flatteries—His statement of accounts—Preparations for painting the Sala Grande—The Montughi property and the Cavalieri at Pisa—Cosimo becomes Grand Duke of Tuscany and marries Cammilla Martelli.

PIUS V was not likely, under the circumstances just related, to be popular with the artistic fraternity then residing in Rome. "The ancient splendour of this place," says Vasari, "has been superseded by stinginess in living, dullness in costume and simplicity in nearly everything else. Rome, in fact, has become utterly commonplace. If Christ loved the poverty-stricken and the city wished to follow in His steps, she could not be going about it in a better way, for she is well on the way towards becoming positively beggarly." The great Vasari, on his arrival, was greeted with delight by the brethren of the brush, for they hoped to see a revival of their calling, and hailed his coming as a good omen. When, however, they learnt that he was not going to stay, and that nothing was going to be done after all, their disappointment may be imagined. "The stonecutters, masons, carpenters, painters and sculptors here had set much store upon my coming, for they expected to see great things. Now they know I am going away again, and that the Pope isn't going to

build anything, you can guess whether they are disgusted or not. There is absolutely nothing doing here, and things are going from bad to worse." In this letter, written to Borghini a week before the biographer left Rome, there is a further reference to the Life of Taddeo Zuccherò. Giorgio was not satisfied with it. He could evidently get nothing satisfactory out of Federigo, and the odd scraps of information he contrived to pick up here and there were unreliable and scanty—too unreliable almost for him to venture to incorporate them in the *Lives*. Such as they were, however, he duly forwarded them to Florence, and we are led to conclude that they were being set up by Giunti. Then, at the last moment, Vasari discovered that his manuscript was too full of errors for him to dare to print it, and accordingly he sent injunctions to the printer that it was to be stopped. "As regards the Life of Taddeo," he writes, "if they have not begun to set it up, tell them to leave it until after Easter, when I shall be back again. There are a thousand and one things to be corrected."

On March 21st, Vasari set out for Florence; or, rather, there is a letter to Francesco in which he states his intention of doing so. Whether or no he kept his word we have no means of ascertaining, as there is a gap in his correspondence. When again he emerges from obscurity it is to play a new rôle, that of understudy to the Duke. "The Duke of Parma is coming here to-day, and our Duke has gone to Sarrezano (Sarzana) so as to avoid having the same set-out as he had with his brother Farnese. I shall have to entertain him, so the Prince tells me."

The *Lives* reached their concluding stage, as far as the manuscript is concerned, at the end of Sep-

tember, 1567. The innumerable delays had caused annoyance to the Duke, who took a deep interest in the undertaking, and it was probably fear of losing the ducal patronage that made Giunti finish the book with a sudden spurt. Vasari puts the blame on Giunti, though it is difficult to see why, as it was not until September 20th that he sent off his own portrait, and even then it would appear that his *Life* had still to follow, the concluding notice of the *Lives*. "I have this very day drawn my own portrait with the aid of a looking-glass. I drew it on wood, and if Messer Cristofano<sup>1</sup> at Venice only does it justice it will be quite a pleasing head, as I have made a good thing of it. I shall send it off to Venice this evening. In the meantime, Cino is wrangling with Giunti, who refuses to print the descriptions of all those masques, state processions and triumphal entries. He says it means ruin to his printing-house. At last I had to speak to the Duke about it, who replied that they were to get on with the work and look sharp about it. I have written to Cino to tell him all this, so I don't think he ought to have much trouble in settling the matter. I told him also that I would like to add my own *Life*, for the benefit of those who want to know something about me, only I don't see exactly how to do it."

"I have just heard that your wine-making will be finished on Monday next, and I would dearly like to be with you. This morning the Duke told me he wanted to see the cartoon"—presumably that for the great fresco of the *Battle of Pisa* on the wall of the Sala Grande—"and as I couldn't get him

<sup>1</sup> Christopher Coriolanus, the Flemish engraver, who was preparing the blocks for the Second Edition.

to say when I was to show it him, I would like to be here when he chooses to ask for it. I hope to be able to fit in both things. I shall have time to make up my mind before it is too late. I should like to come very much, as you will suppose, and I should like to spend at least three days with you—that would mean that I should be able to put in six shifts at the wine-press.<sup>1</sup> That ought to be enough, and it would enable me to let off steam, which would do me a power of good. But for all that, I don't see exactly how it is to be done, though, as I said before, I still have hopes of running over." The Arno, he announces, is in flood, and the work on the Ponte Santa Trinità has been stopped for the present.

The year 1568 saw the publication of the Second Edition of the *Lives*, and accordingly we have not the Autobiography after that date to be in turn a help and a stumbling-block. It would appear as though, just before going to press, Vasari made a hurried survey of his own achievements; and such as were not already mentioned were jumbled together into a few final paragraphs and sent to Giunti almost before the ink on them was dry. In these concluding sentences he describes briefly the Perugian pictures, the *Coronation of the Virgin* for the church of San Francesco at Città di Castello (where it still hangs) and the *Crucifixion* which was painted for "his

<sup>1</sup> "Sei volte lo star nelle vinaccie." The word "vinaccia" is the term applied to the seeds of the grapes after the must has been extracted. It seems to apply, however, also to the whole resultant pulp after the juice has been pressed from the fruit. The only interpretation to be put on Vasari's words is that he intended to take off his boots and take his turn in the wine-tubs treading out the grapes, regarding the performance in much the same light as the would-be strong man of to-day regards his ten minutes with the dumb-bells or patent "exerciser"—as a means of restoring health to a jaded system.



*Giorgio Vasari*

CORONATION OF THE VIRGIN  
*(Città di Castello)*

*Atinari*



dear friends Matteo and Simone Botti." In this picture, as Giorgio himself tells us, the Crucified is surrounded by "our Lady, St. John and the Magdalen, all of them crying." Then follows the *Annunciation*, now in the Louvre, but originally painted for Santa Maria Novella. For Luca Torrigiani he painted a picture with *Venus and the Three Graces*, finishing it "with as much diligence and study as was possible, not less to satisfy my own self than to please a dear and cherished friend." Three other pictures, a *Dead Christ*, *Spring* and *Autumn*, were sent to France and there seem to have disappeared. There is a *Crucifixion* mentioned which was done for the nuns of Luco di Mugello, a *Portrait of Antonio de' Nobili*, and a *Head of Christ*. Another treatment of the last subject was given by Vasari to Mondragone, one of Francesco de' Medici's confidential servants: "I gave it to him," writes Vasari, "because he is a great admirer of genius (!) and of the arts, and to the end that whenever he looks thereon he may remember how greatly I esteemed him." At the moment of going to press he has in hand (in addition to the Sala Grande cartoons) three pictures: one of them a "cosa capricciosissima" for Antonio de Montalvo, who succeeded Sforza Almeni, a privy chamberlain to Cosimo; the second a *Coronation of the Virgin* for the church of San Vincenzo at Prato; and the last an *Assumption of the Virgin*, "which is almost completed," for the Black Monks of Florence. The picture for Montalvo is still in possession of the Marchesi Ramirez de Montalvo.

He tells us that the Duke built "palaces, cities, gateways, loggie, piazze, fountains and country places," and, "like Solomon," altered churches and temples—referring, of course, to the changes made

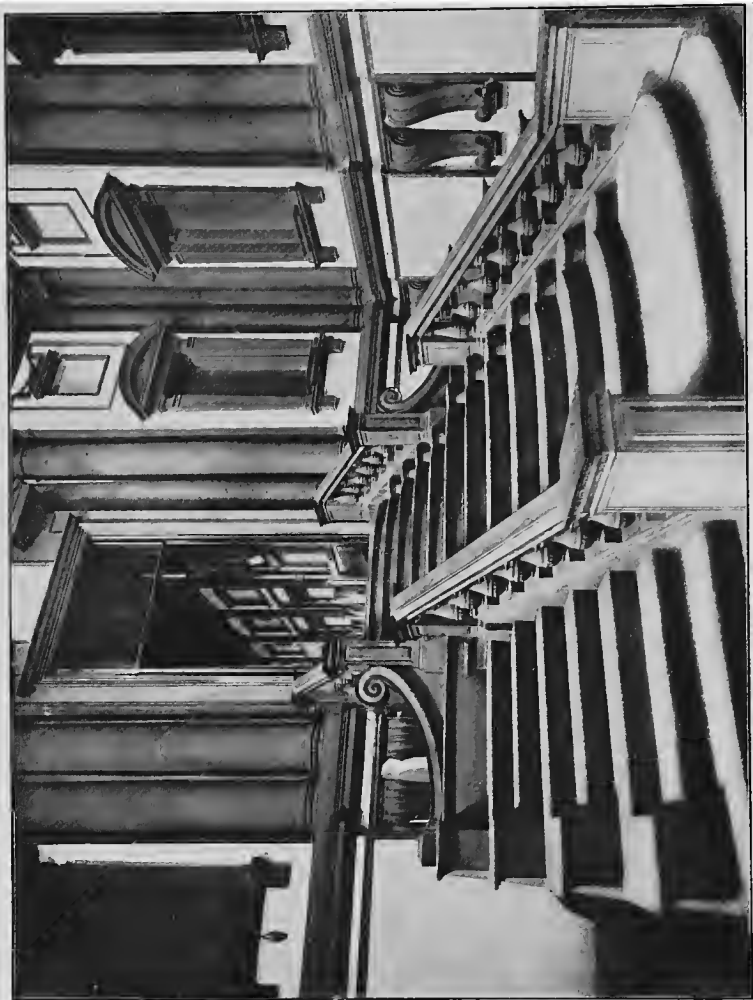
in Santa Maria Novella and Santa Croce. In the latter church, by the way, there are still three pictures by Vasari, *Christ carrying the Cross*, the *Descent of the Holy Spirit*, and the *Incredulity of St. Thomas*.

“But because it would take too long to speak of all the other pictures, designs innumerable, models and masques which I have designed; and because I have already said enough and to spare; for these reasons I will say no more about myself, except that, however great and important may have been the works I have submitted for the consideration of Duke Cosimo, I have never succeeded in equalling, much less in outdoing, his own majestic conceptions, which everyone will believe when they learn that he intends to erect a third sacristy in San Lorenzo, similar in size and general arrangement to that designed by Michelangelo, save only that it is to be constructed of marble and mosaic; wherein shall lie under honourable and worthy monuments his dead children, his father, his mother, the magnanimous Duchess Eleonora his consort, and himself. For this work I have already made a model according to his instructions and incorporating his ideas: and the building, when completed, will be a truly royal and magnificent mausoleum.<sup>1</sup>

“And this is enough of talking about myself, who have worked hard for fifty-five years”—once more Giorgio has forgotten his age, for in reality he was a year older than he thinks—“and must continue to live so long as it shall please God, to His honour

<sup>1</sup> The projected sacristy was not erected until 1604, and Vasari's plans and models were not used. The present building, the Cappella dei Principi, is octagonal in form, and gorgeously decorated with coloured marble mosaic.





*Brug*

STAIRCASE IN CORTILE OF THE LAURENZIANA, FLORENCE



and in the service of my friends, as well and as long as I am able, in ease, and for the betterment of these most noble arts."

Thus ends the Autobiography, and with it the *Lives*. Vasari's tone has changed since he wrote the Preface to the First Edition, and the note of modesty is missing. He is already famous as an author, his book already immortal. "To tell the truth," he says in the Preface to the Second Edition, "it is rather a lucky thing for many of these painters that through the beneficence of the Almighty, who gives life to all things, I have been spared long enough to re-write nearly the whole of my book; for I have removed a great deal that had crept into it during my absence, and have added many useful and important things that were lacking." Yet even in Vasari's own day there were some who did not scruple to write to him and point out the mistakes still lingering in his text. Gabriele Bombaso, for instance, writes to Vasari in December, 1572, on behalf of Prospero Clementi, to whom a copy of the *Lives* had been sent, and after thanking him for the gift, says: "But I am compelled to add on my own behalf, that although Prospero is much obliged to you, he has little reason to be obliged to the man who gave you your information about himself and his works. To begin with, he was born at Reggio, and not at Modena, and he has never been spoken of or considered as anything but a Reggiano that I know of. He is the nephew of the Bartolommeo Clementi, sculptor and architect of Reggio, who is mentioned by Cesarino in his Commentary on Vitruvius." He then proceeds to point out the numerous other errors in Vasari's account of Clementi.

We are left to map out the remaining six years of

his life as best we may from his letters. Fortunately there are many of them, and though they do not tell us all we should like to know, they at least afford us glimpses of the chief events which occurred in the life of one who had become, perhaps, the greatest living artist of the day.

The first occurrence of importance after the completion of the *Lives* was the baptism of Eleonora, daughter of Francesco de' Medici, the child for whose safe arrival Vasari had solicited the prayers of the Pope. It is true that a son would have been more welcome, but when the expected child proved to be a girl the preparations for her baptism betrayed no lingering disappointment. She was born on March 1st, 1567, and on February 28th of the following year received the name of her paternal grandmother in the baptistery of San Giovanni. Those who wish to know how the building was decorated for the occasion may read the full, and at the same time tedious and dull, account sent the same day by Vasari (who was responsible for the whole of the arrangements) to Guglielmo Sangalletti, treasurer to his Holiness.

Although Vasari had at length achieved celebrity and had won for himself the post of supreme artist, if we may so express it, at the court of Florence his monetary difficulties increased rather than otherwise. His salary was paid at irregular intervals, and, depending as it did upon the whim of the Duke, Vasari was in the position of being in total ignorance as to what were his assets. The Duke made many promises, but these were found by the artist to be not negotiable. As a last resource he sent in a bill, or perhaps it would be fairer to describe it as an estimate, for the paintings in the Sala Grande. After

many years of experience he came to the conclusion that it would be better to establish the price beforehand, instead of relying on his patron's generosity for the just reward of his labours: for Cosimo's generosity was often too heavily handicapped by other claims to be altogether satisfactory to the artist. Accordingly, instead of a "donation or special remuneration over and above his ordinary salary," he proposes that he shall receive:—

"For each of the IIII pictures in fresco . . .	300 ducats.
For each of the two smaller ones in fresco . . .	200 ducats.
For each of the IIII paintings in oil on stone	100 ducats.

which, including all the X pictures above mentioned, comes to 2000 ducats. There remains the XII pictures in oil along the dado, and these, at 100 ducats each, come to 1200 ducats." Having ventured so far he is overcome with timidity, and concludes: "If your illustrious Excellency thinks I have charged too much for anything, will your Highness please alter it, because I wish the adjustment of the price and everything else to be left entirely to your discretion. Your supplicant has no other desire beyond that of serving you and living in your esteem."

No truer word ever fell from Vasari's pen. Few men in any time have lived so much as he did for the favour of those whom God had placed over him; and perhaps few men in any time have found the game quite such a paying one. "Whoever forms the opinion that Vasari was a man of strong character falls into a very great error," writes Scoti-Bertinelli.<sup>1</sup> "He was a true child of the times, anxious to get on in the world; he always knew how the wind blew, and bowed to every gust; and

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 19.

he was, moreover, proficient in the difficult art of flattery."

It is, or it should be, unnecessary to remind the reader of the flattery meted out by the ingenious Giorgio to Michelangelo. What could be more subtle than the wish expressed by his admirer, that he might some day find himself in Paradise, if only for the purpose of continuing there that admiration for his divine Michelangelo which he had begun on earth? And that this flattery was thickly spread over his correspondence with his friends is equally evident, not only from some of the letters themselves, but more often still from the modest disclaimers of those to whom his letters were addressed. There is one from Annibale Caro, in which he says that the perusal of Giorgio's letter makes him blush: "Messer Giorgio," he writes, "I should call you a good fellow if it were not for the direction on your letter—in which you call me 'miraculous'—and for the letter itself, which is so full of 'most excellents,' 'most learneds,' and other high-flown flatteries that I have already blushed more than four times over it, when I have been showing it to certain of my friends."

Vasari's disinterested desire to serve the Duke and live only for his good opinion did not prevent him from tackling Francesco on the same matter of his emoluments. From a letter which is marked as having been "read" on July 22nd of this year, and which was therefore probably written shortly before that date, we learn a little more of the conditions under which Vasari served the Medicean household. We also learn how many times he was able to get "your illustrious Excellency" into one sentence.

"Most illustrious and most excellent Prince, some

time ago Giorgio Vasari, the humble servant of your illustrious Excellency, reminded his most illustrious and most excellent lordship the Duke that his most illustrious Excellency had promised to pay me for the ceiling of the Sala Grande and for the other works I have done in times past: and that, under date of February 18th, 1566, he made that rescript about my going to Rome, and that I was to say in the meantime what it was I wanted, so that by the time I got back everything would be arranged to my liking. When I said that I should be quite content with whatever his most illustrious Excellency decided to give me, he ordered me to set out in detail exactly what I desired. Accordingly I asked for three things: firstly, that certain properties in Valdarno which his Excellency had granted to me by rescript made so long ago as 1558, and which, without my knowledge of the fact, had subsequently been incorporated in the lands of the Order of Santo Stefano, should be restored to me, in accordance with the original promise of his illustrious Excellency, and that the Order should receive compensation; secondly, I asked that the house given me by your Excellency in Borgo Santa Croce should be made devisable to the children of Ser Pietro my brother; and thirdly, seeing that when first I entered the service of his most illustrious Excellency it was agreed that, in addition to my ordinary salary, I was to receive extra payment proportionate to the amount of work done, and as I have always received remuneration under this arrangement of such a nature as to leave me not only highly contented but sincerely grateful, I entreated him that for the future he would pay me a definite sum, to be agreed upon beforehand, for the new work already done and for the

other I have still to do in the frescoes on the walls of the Sala Grande." From this magnificent period, the splendid phrasing of which must have cost poor Giorgio a deal of thought—unless he got Borghini to assist in its composition—we may infer that the artist was not quite so contented and obliged by the Duke's former generosity as he pretended; for in this letter he evinces a strong desire to ensure himself against a possible disappointment. Vasari was none of your gambling fellows, and the bird in hand was to him not only worth more than the fabled two in the bush, but more than all the fowls of the air.

"As far as the first two heads are concerned," the letter continues, "I received a reply quite in accordance with my wishes and his generosity, thus disposing of the matters in the past. With regard to the third head, dealing with future works, and particularly with the Sala Grande, he has considered my suggestions (that I should be paid an established sum for each piece of work, receiving payment in proportion to my progress), but he has also had to bear in mind that I am now rather in the service of your most illustrious Excellency than of himself, that the orders I have to carry out are your orders, and, in fine, that I am working for you. He says it is his desire that all benefactions and acts of liberality shall proceed from your illustrious Excellency, and that for the future he wishes me to look for all remuneration and all benefits to the greatness and munificence of yourself. In accordance with this resolution he has written the following words on my application: 'The Prince wishes you well, and it is he who has the spending of the revenues accruing to the State.'"

With these specious excuses Cosimo shifted the burden of paying Giorgio's salary on to the shoulders



of his son. Whether the artist was deceived by the action of his patron does not appear; and Giorgio was too good a courtier to let it appear. The outcome of the matter is to be found in a letter to Cosimo, presumably written by Vinta, which, although it bears no date, evidently refers to Vasari's memorial. The writer has, as we gather from the context, been deputed to thrash out the whole matter with the petitioner, to enquire into his circumstances, and to ascertain exactly what he wants. The result of Vinta's enquiries is best related in his own words:—

“Giorgio Vasari has made application to your most illustrious Excellency touching the settlement of his accounts. According to your Excellency's instructions I sent for him, and am now able to throw a little more light on the matter. When all is said and done, his petition reduces itself to one principal point, which is this: that he has served and is still serving your Excellency, first as painter and latterly as architect as well, and that he hopes (if his efforts have given your Excellency satisfaction) that you intend to give him some special reward, partly as a sign of the said liberality and partly in recognition of his labours in times past. What he really wants to know is, how much will this extra remuneration be? He had been moved to make this enquiry by the natural wish we all have to set our affairs in order; and he tells me that as his expenses have been very heavy, and his finances at so low an ebb that he has got into debt—which I can readily believe, as everything is excessively dear; and I know that when anyone from Arezzo, or any of his friends, come here (and he has many friends), they take up their quarters in his house, so that it costs him a good deal for hospitality—he considers that his best course is to

come to you with an open heart and lay the whole matter before you; renewing the dedication of himself to the service of your Excellency, and, in particular, to the completion of the paintings in the Sala Grande. For, as your Excellency has decided to have the work done, he is resolved to undertake the task, and is further resolved (if he has not already shown the stuff he is made of) to put his whole heart and soul into the work so that your Excellency and the whole world will be satisfied with the result. He spoke particularly of the house he now lives in—which is worth about a thousand crowns—and of the estate of Montughi, and the upshot, as I gathered, is that he wants to have a house with plenty of room in it and a good light for his pictures, cartoons, designs, and other things appertaining to his work. He would have to enlarge his present house, and this he does not want to do, as it would ultimately be of more benefit to the owner than to himself; but if the house were his own he would arrange it to suit his purpose and for the exercise of his art. As to the Montughi estate, this has not been confiscated, but it is in the possession of the tax-gatherers as surety for moneys due. He proposes that your Excellency should give him 1500 crowns, on the understanding that he is to spend as much of the money as may be necessary for the improvement of the property. The estate is one that ought to have a large sum spent on it. He also says that it would be a great comfort for him to have a place to which he could retire when he had to make cartoons for important undertakings, and in which he could take his ease without fear of molestation. Although under this arrangement he would not become absolute proprietor of the place, he would at least feel

himself, to a certain extent, secure, and there would thus be an appreciable return for the money advanced by your illustrious Excellency and for what he has spent himself. His principal desire is that his bodily service shall be linked up for ever to your Excellency even as his heart-service<sup>1</sup> is, so that he need never have to face the possibility of going away from Florence. He has, according to your Excellency's orders, received 500 *scudi*, which he has devoted to the payment of his debts; but both for this sum and for the others which from time to time have been given him he counts himself your debtor, and wishes these amounts to be taken into consideration and deducted from the total sum due. Nothing that I have said, and no arguments of mine have been able to extract from him a clear statement of how much he wants, or of how much he thinks he ought to have. In the whole affair he places himself in your Excellency's hands, and although in his statement he has put down certain details, they are only to be considered as a guide, not as points he wishes to insist upon. He would much rather leave the final settlement to the good will and liberality of your Excellency, whose decision will most assuredly be entirely satisfactory to him.

“The gist of the whole matter is that your Excellency should decide upon the sums you intend to give the said Giorgio, both as annual salary and as extra payment for work done and to be done. It would be well, therefore, to settle the business either in the way he suggests or in any other way that seems good to your Excellency, providing also for the future. In either case he leaves himself

<sup>1</sup> “Come egli è fermo con l' animo, così fermarsi anco col corpo” (Gaye, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, No. 237).

entirely at the discretion of your Excellency's liberality."

To this letter there was a paper attached which is not without interest to the matter in hand. It contains a memorandum of the salary which was being at the time paid to Vasari and his chief assistants, and the funds to which these sums were chargeable. It is dated March 10th, 1568 (1569 common style). "Giorgio Vasari has twenty-five florins per month as salary, the sum being paid out of your Highness's list. In addition to this he has a provision of thirteen crowns a month from the Fabbrica de' XIII Magistrati, the sum being paid from the funds of that building. His total provision for the year is 456 florins." Then follows a note as to the salaries of his assistants, to which is appended: "I am inclined to think that most of their work is done on his (Vasari's) behalf rather than for you," a remark which seems to imply that Giorgio was not quite so scrupulously honest and upright in all his dealings as he might have been.

That Vasari issued triumphant from his difficulties we learn, not from himself, but from a chance letter written to him by his cousin Stefano Veltroni. From this it is clear that by the middle of September Cosimo had acceded to all his requests, had granted the succession in the matter of Giorgio's house in Florence to his nephews and nieces, and had given him permission to treat with Cavalieri for the property at Montughi in Valdarno.

All this was highly satisfactory to the artist, who, in addition to the above benefits, had been able to ascertain what payment he was to receive for the paintings in the Sala Grande. It may be presumed that the following sonnet, written by Giorgio in

honour of his generous patron, was composed at this time and expresses—in very inferior verse, it must be confessed—his sentiments at the moment:—

“Alta vita, ch'al Ciel poggiando ascendi  
 E col tuo nome grande il mondo onori,  
 Pregiando le virtù più ch'i tesori,  
 Et ogni tempo e spesa in essi spendi,  
 Ogni cosa di bel tu cerchi e prendi,  
 Senz' avaritia, e sempre fai favori  
 A ogni bello ingegno e aiuti e indori  
 Chiunque travaglia, però in alto ascendi.  
 Tuo sono e sarò, fin che quest' alma  
 Sta drento a questa spoglia, e poscia spero  
 Viver per l'opre mie con teco a paro.  
 Per te la virtù mia vive oggi in calma  
 Ne spero più nel successor di Pietro  
 Ma in te, che troppo m'ami e mi tien caro.”

In these lines we find the same sentiments, the same conceits that dominate his whole character. Cosimo is the most liberal and enlightened of art patrons, delighting to pour out his favours on every man of genius. Then, as if the inference were too obvious to require more specific mention, Giorgio proceeds to say that in return for this patronage he considered himself bound in body and soul to the service of his lord; and that when he shall have shuffled off this mortal coil, he hopes to live, through his works, co-equal and co-immortal with the Duke himself.

Having, so to speak, bled his sense of gratitude by this poetic outburst, Giorgio proceeded with the cartoons for the Sala, endeavouring to pretend that the work was beyond his capabilities; doing so, apparently, for the sole purpose of extracting flattering entreaties from his numerous friends. “You have got a chance,” writes Veltroni in the letter last

quoted, "such as nobody in times past ever had, and such as may never come again to a human being. And given health, which is the gift of the Almighty, how can you say you have little hope of living to see it completed?"

The negotiations for the purchase of the Montughi property were carried to a satisfactory conclusion in the following year, though we learn very little about them from the correspondence. We know that Vasari had set his heart immovably on the possession of the property, because he tells Veltroni so, explaining that it will add greatly to the value of his other real estate both in Florence and Arezzo; and in August, 1569, we find him writing to the Cavalieri and bargaining with them over the purchase price of the live stock. He seems to be already owner of the land itself, but the Cavalieri are very reluctant about selling him the pigs as well. The oxen, the sheep and the chickens Vasari may have at a price, but for some reason not explained the Cavalieri have developed a special affection for the pigs, and, like Pharaoh with the Israelites, refused to let them go. But—such is the perverseness of human nature—these pigs, while their fate hung in the balance, had awakened a sympathetic chord in the responsive bosom of Giorgio. Life at Montughi, where the daily sight of the empty sty would be a perpetual reminder of his loss, was not to be thought of, and he refused to buy the oxen, sheep and other denizens of the farmyard unless the pigs were included. Thus the negotiations reached an impasse, and just when the reader becomes deeply interested in the ultimate fate of the pigs the correspondence comes to an abrupt end. Perhaps some faint and dusty document yet lies hidden among the records of the

Order of Santo Stefano which might settle their bacon for ever.

It would seem that Vasari had still the construction of the dome of the Madonna dell' Umiltà in hand at this time, as there is a letter from Cosimo to the *Commessario* at Pistoia, dated June 28th, saying that the Overseers of the Fabric are to make Vasari a present of a hundred crowns in recognition of his services. Beyond this, however, and a letter in which Giorgio asks the Duke's intervention to get "La Cosina's" brother out of a scrape, we have very little information as to the events of the year. His whole time was probably taken up with the preparations for the completion of the Sala, and we find periodical complaints made by him as to the slowness with which the walls are being got ready for his masterpieces. "The arrangement by which only one mason is being employed increases the cost of the work instead of saving money, as it is delaying everything. Neither I nor any of my assistants are able to proceed with even the most important operations." "The delay in the matter of the Sala is a most serious thing, because this Giorgio of yours is growing old, he is losing his sight, his powers are diminishing, and Death has an odd knack of putting an end to every story."<sup>1</sup> The cartoon for the *Battle of Pisa* was finished at the time this letter was written, and Vasari and his assistants had retired to the seclusion of the house near Santa Croce, and were busy upon the cartoon for the picture representing the downfall of Siena. At intervals Giorgio emerged from his retreat to pay hurried visits to the works for the Cavalieri at Pisa; and among his

<sup>1</sup> *Vite*, Vol. VIII, Letter No. 188, to Francesco de' Medici, September 22nd, 1569.

letters is one in which he thanks them with much fervour for a present of a hundred crowns, "given to me as an appreciation of my services to your most sacred Order ; services which, as your lordships have seen, have been given with the utmost willingness. I shall strive to continue ever in the same spirit, plying my task with the same honesty, diligence and affection that you have already recognised in my work."

The building proceeded apace, and Vasari and the Cavalieri vied with each other in their attempts to get it done. Cosimo himself, as founder and benefactor of the Order, took an absorbing interest in its progress, and seems to have entertained fears lest he should not live to see it completed. All the architect's plans were submitted to him for approval, and sometimes we find Vasari telling the Cavalieri that he has a batch of drawings ready, but that the Duke is suffering too badly with the gout for him to be able to get them approved. In December this year the Duke had a very sharp attack, and Vasari, writing on the third of the month, says that he has been waiting to consult with him about the campanile, the bells, the pictures and the ciborium, but that his Highness has been prevented from transacting any business for a week past by his old enemy.

On the 18th December Vasari was allowed to see his august patron, and apparently gained permission to commence the tower ; for on the last day of the year he writes to the Cavalieri in some perturbation, asking them to get on with the work as Francesco is coming over to Pisa, and he fears lest he may be angry at the little show they have made. "I shall be greatly obliged if you will put the tower in hand as soon as possible, for if his Highness should happen to





PALAZZO DEI CAVALIERI DI SANTO STEFFANO, PISA



find it in its present condition I should get into very serious trouble with the Grand Duke."

The fact that Giorgio speaks of his patron as a Grand Duke in this letter is significant of the great changes which were taking place in the status of the Medici family, and more especially in the life of Cosimo himself. The story of the latter's love affairs after the death of the Duchess in 1561 has often been told, and each successive teller during the ensuing two centuries or so seems to have contrived to omit a little more of the truth than his predecessor, and to add a little more to the tissue of lies with which the plain facts had become interwoven, until the original narrative is scarcely recognisable under its disguise.

Yet the plain unvarnished truth is sufficiently unpleasant. For a few years after the death of Eleonora the Duke remained true to her memory; but in proportion as her image grew more dim, so did the dark eyes of Leonora degli Albizzi appear more bright and alluring, until at length he succumbed to her bewitchments. It is, of course, impossible to gauge the morals of Italy in the sixteenth century by the accepted standard of England in the present year of grace; but that Cosimo was ashamed of his lapses from the path of virtue is evident from the fact that he tried to keep the matter a strict secret. It was the divulcation of this secret that cost Sforza Almeni his life, for he was one of the few who knew of their guilty relations, and in an evil moment for himself communicated his knowledge to Francesco. Francesco remonstrated with his father, but Cosimo was incapable of freeing himself from the position he was in. The Duke's remorse for having slain Sforza was of short dura-

tion, and failed to separate him from his paramour. On the contrary, her power over him increased, and he became little more than a puppet in her hands. Wherever he went Leonora degli Albizzi accompanied him; his unwedded wife, unworthy of the position she had half usurped; descending to the lowest depths of vulgar horseplay to show the power she held over the man who ruled all Florence and Tuscany. What picture could be more sad than that drawn by Saltini of this once proud prince, crippled with gout and leaning heavily on the arm of an attendant, or hobbling with the aid of a stick, endeavouring to seat himself in his chair, and of Leonora pulling the chair from under him, causing him to fall heavily to the floor—aye, and cutting his head open on the cruel stones as he falls?

Leonora's rule was short, for in 1567 Cosimo succumbed to the charms of a younger mistress in the person of Cammilla Martelli, who was then in her twenty-third year. With her he lived in seclusion for two years, leaving the duty of ruling the state to his son Francesco, and concerning himself only with schemes for the aggrandisement of the family. One of these schemes was concerned with the title of Duke of Florence, which had been bestowed upon him by the Emperor in days gone by. That title had seemed sufficient at the time, but a successful policy of expansion had added Pisa, Siena and the whole of Tuscany to his duchy, so that the dignity of a mere dukedom appeared incompatible with the breadth of his possessions. He endeavoured, therefore, to have the duchy elevated to the rank of an arch-duchy; and when he found that his project was resolutely opposed by the Austrian archdukes—who were ill-disposed to admit the Florentine princes to

an equality with themselves—turned his attention towards securing for himself and his heirs the title of Grand Duke of Tuscany. To this there was nobody to object, and Cosimo duly became first Grand Duke, being crowned by Pius V in Rome on March 5th, 1570. The only stipulation of importance made by his Holiness was that Cosimo, who before his coronation had to confess the sins of his past life and promise atonement, should, as an integral part of that atonement, mend his ways by marrying Camilla Martelli. On March 29th following Camilla became his lawful wedded wife; but she never became Grand Duchess of Tuscany.

## CHAPTER XIV

### PIUS V

Hurried visit to Rome with Cosimo de' Medici—The Cavalieri at Pisa—  
Back to Rome—Paintings in the Vatican—Sangallego on Vasari's  
work—Knighthood—Return to Florence—Paintings in the Sala  
Grande—First mention of the cupola of Santa Maria del Fiore—Back  
to Rome to paint the Sala Regia—Battle of Lepanto—Death of Pius.

**W**HEN Cosimo de' Medici went to Rome in 1570 to be crowned Grand Duke of Tuscany, as already related, Vasari was sent on in advance, having, as he explains in a letter to the Cavalieri, business of his own to transact with his Holiness, connected presumably with his work in the Vatican. But before leaving Florence Vasari was to receive the honour of a visit from the Grand Duke for the purpose of inspecting the progress made with the decorations for the organ and other accessories intended for the church of the Cavalieri. "He came to my workshop in Santa Croce," writes Vasari, "to see the decorations for the organ, the gilding of which has just been completed. He was so pleased and satisfied with what he saw that he is determined, through me and according to his own instructions, to make his and your church"—the letter is to the Chapter of the Order of Santo Stefano—"the state-liest and most sumptuous within the borders of his territories."

Vasari's visit to Rome was a short one, for by Lady Day he was back again in Florence, whence we find

him writing once more to the Cavalieri, reporting the progress made in his workshop during his absence, and asking for information about the campanile, which is still in course of erection. "I should have come over myself before this if it were not that I am worn out with travelling and bad weather, to say nothing of the mental and bodily fatigues caused by the Pope's affairs." There is also a note saying he came back by way of Passetgli—which seems to be another name for the property at Montughi, already mentioned as having been leased to Vasari by the Order—and found, as tenants often do even to this day, that there were sundry urgent repairs necessary which ought to be done at the expense of the landlords. "I came back from Rome through Passetgli, and I find that the ceilings and roofs of all the houses have suffered badly through the severe weather this winter; so much so that they are on the point of coming down, a calamity which I prophesied to you in writing some time ago. It is absolutely necessary either that I should have them seen to at once (the cost would be insignificant), or that your surveyor should come and give orders what is to be done. Send me word and I will show him how the thing can be done well and cheaply."

By the beginning of April the work which Vasari had in hand in Florence for the Cavalieri was completed and ready to be transported. Two grave questions immediately arose: the first being a threatened strike among the gilders, who were dissatisfied with the rate of pay, saying that it was insufficient for the amount of intricate labour involved, and the other the problem of how to remove the work in safety to Pisa. He suggests that the Cavalieri had better address a petition to the Grand

Duke, asking exemption from taxation both in Florence and Pisa<sup>1</sup> for all material sent by Giorgio on behalf of the Order.

From the end of April, 1570, to the beginning of December following there is a gap in the correspondence. Vasari doubtless continued throughout that time to give to the world proofs of his astonishing genius, and to write full accounts of his achievements to his friends; but if he did so none of his letters have come down to us. The hiatus closes with an epistle to Vincenzo Borghini, written from Baccano, where Giorgio is putting up for the night on his way to Rome. "*Magnifico e Reverendo Signor mio*," he begins, "I have not written to you before this because during my stay at Arezzo I had so much to do in arranging my affairs and those of Ser Pietro that I thought I should go off my head. However, I have settled up everything in such a manner that I may now go on my way rejoicing and with a tranquil mind. God be praised for everything!"

"I have left instructions that all my land at San Paolo, Cappucciolo and Frassineto"—Giorgio had joined the ranks of the landed gentry at last!—"are to be ploughed and cultivated before my return: also that the boundary walls at Frassineto are to be put in order, as agreed to by the *provveditore* Gianfigliuzzi. The arrangements I have been able to

<sup>1</sup> The tax here referred to is the same as the modern *dazio*, equivalent to the French octroi dues. Each Italian town has its own *Dazio Comunale*, or civic customs house (quite distinct from the *Dogana*, or Government Customs House), with a clearly defined schedule of taxation for certain specified imports and exports. The moneys accruing from these charges go to swell the civic treasury, while the charges levied by the *Dogana*—whose field of activity is confined to the frontier—are the property of the State.



make are most advantageous, as you shall hear all in good time; and if, when I come back, everything turns out to have been finished to my liking, why then I shall be able to rest there in peace, and pass what remains of this troubled and burdensome life in tranquillity. I stayed at Arezzo for a week as Jacopino (del Zucca) was taken with a fever, but with the help of the Almighty I was so far successful in combating it that I was able to bring him, weak though he is but free from fever, to Baccano, whence I now write you these lines to announce our safety." He promised to write again from Rome giving a full and circumstantial account of his arrival; and it is to be inferred from his words that he expected to make a sort of triumphal entry into the papal city, a surmise which is strengthened by the fact that he refused to travel in company with the Cardinale Alessandrino, who was also bound for Rome, fearing lest his own glory might haply be dimmed by the presence of so high a church dignitary, or that all the honours might be paid to the Cardinal and he himself go short.

From the letter just quoted and those following it is clear that Vasari had been "borrowed" from the Medici by the Pope; and on December 7th Giorgio wrote to Francesco acquainting him with his safe arrival, and giving an account of his favourable reception at the papal court. "*Serenissimo Principe, Signor mio,*" he begins, "his Holiness had given up expecting me, having been informed that your Highness had decided to employ me this winter in decorating your own apartments. He was delighted when at length I arrived, and was introduced into his presence by Cardinal Rusticcio in your name. He asked me innumerable questions about your High-

ness and about her Highness your most serene consort." "He told me," Giorgio continues, "how very much obliged he was to you for having spared me to him. I have already begun work on the first chapel, opposite his own room, and he is impatient to be able to use it. I intend to keep hard at my work, for there is a lot to be done, especially as in the other two chapels, the stuccoes of which have just been completed from my designs, the quantity of decoration increases daily, owing to fresh pictures being added to the scheme. To tell the truth, my thoughts are still in the Sala Grande rather than anywhere else, but for all that I will serve him to the best of my ability. It is only what I ought to do, for since Raphael and Michelangelo have painted here it is my duty to your Highness and myself not to fall behind them. By the grace of God I have already made an excellent beginning in the ceiling of this first chapel, where I am painting the *Fall of the Wicked Angels*. It is something quite new, but difficult and full of variety." Perhaps Pius shared Vasari's belief that he would, if not eclipse Raphael and Michelangelo, at least equal them, for he gave orders that not even the cardinals nor chamberlains were to be allowed to see the work while it was in progress. "His Holiness has expressed a wish that neither cardinals nor chamberlains nor anybody else shall see what I am doing, and so I have shut myself up in complete seclusion. Every day his Holiness comes to note what progress I have made, and everybody pays me so much court that I have good reason to be satisfied, though I know it is all done for the sake of your Highness, on whom my tongue can never call down enough blessings, to whom I can never return enough thanks, and whom I can never suffi-

ciently praise." At this point the letter and its flatteries become so involved that it is impossible to render them intelligibly into English. Suffice it to say that he hopes to commemorate for the benefit of posterity, by means of such poor talent as he possesses, that wonderful demi-god, Francesco de' Medici.

The artist was not a little flattered to find himself so cordially welcomed in the Vatican, and though he would have us believe that he considered his reception due solely to the status of his patrons in Florence, it is easy to read between the lines and to realise what he really thought about the matter. In his own mind he was satisfied that his own merit won for him such distinction, and the affability of the Pope was only what might be expected in one holding an exalted position when receiving the homage of so distinguished a person as Giorgio Vasari. Had not Cosimo himself shown his deference to the master mind of Michelangelo by speaking to him cap in hand? So Vasari, in a lesser degree, was received. He had not to observe the pomp and ceremony which was usually expected from visitors to the Vatican. He was not obliged to conform to that strange ceremonial of which Montaigne has left a practically contemporary account: he may have been introduced into the presence by the Florentine Ambassador, but it may be supposed that the remainder of the state performance—the genuflexion on entering the room, the stealing round the walls instead of advancing directly to where the Pope was seated, the second genuflexion when the journey was half accomplished, the third genuflexion at the outer edge of the holy carpet some eight feet away from the throne, the subsequent journey across the said carpet on both

knees in a sort of ungainly waddle, and then the crowning bliss of lying full-length on the floor in order to kiss the little white cross embroidered on the Pope's scarlet slipper—all this, we may suppose, was omitted, for it would have been excessively tedious to have to go through the whole performance every time he wanted instructions from his Holiness. Instead, the Pope condescended to visit the painter daily at his work, keeping the carpet business for people of less outstanding merit. No wonder, then, that Vasari was loud in his praises of Pius V, "than whom few better have wielded the Keys since St. Peter."

Cosimo was less sanguine about Vasari's chances of obliterating the fame of Raphael and Michelangelo, though his letters to the artist were of a decidedly cordial nature. "You are to remain there," he writes, "as long as your services are required, using all diligence, and endeavouring to give every satisfaction. Kiss the most sacred feet of his Holiness in our name, and assure him that nothing could be more pleasing to us in this world than that we should be of service to him. Tell him, also, that we consider it a particular favour that he should deign to employ you, our servant." Then, referring to Vasari's splendid aspirations, he continues: "Take every care of your health, so that, having as you say the work of so many great men constantly before your eyes, you may do full justice to yourself, and satisfy us by giving satisfaction to his Holiness."

The favour shown him by the Pope, coupled with the encouraging letters of the Grand Duke, raised Vasari to a pitch of high enthusiasm. On the 1st of January, 1571, he tells Francesco de' Medici that so much of his work as is already done "has fairly

astounded his Holiness, who seems to be very pleased," though it appears that it was the rapidity of the artist's execution rather than the excellence of his work which caused the surprise. "I hope to take the opportunity afforded by these frescoes to make manifest not alone the greatness of your Highness, but also the ability which God has vouchsafed to me; from Whom in this more than in any other of my works I gather fresh strength, renewed health and greater power."

While thus Vasari added to his laurels in Rome, there were vexations in store for him in Florence. The roof of the Sala Grande, the roof he had himself built and then decorated with his paintings, began to leak. Fortunately for the curious, he has left a record of what he felt when the news reached him. "If it were possible for anyone to die of grief," he writes, "I should already be in my grave." He says that the Palazzo Vecchio is the "apple of his eye" and the undertaking on which he has poured out the best that was in him; and seems to imply that the roof has taken a mean advantage of him by leaking during his absence. If it were not that he feared to offend the Pope, he would have set out for Florence immediately upon receipt of the news: but all things considered—seeing that he would also have angered the Grand Duke—Vasari was perhaps wise in restraining his impulse and remaining where he was, working, as he promised, at his frescoes in the Vatican chapels, and finding odd moments in which to elaborate the cartoons for the well-beloved Sala at home. On February 10th he writes to Francesco telling him that he has already finished fifty-six cartoons for the Pope, and that his Holiness, accompanied only by Sangalietto, the papal treasurer, pays

visits of inspection to the work at frequent intervals. "He seems to enjoy watching me, and talks to me a good deal. He often speaks of your Highness, and, indeed, it is abundantly clear that he loves you greatly. He is always pleased when I tell him how quick you are to encourage every sort of well-doing, and at every word of mine he blesses you." One would have thought that such a conversation would become terribly monotonous. "It is just the same thing if we are talking about the Grand Duke."

With all his endeavours to get the work finished so as to be able to return to Tuscany, Vasari was not destined to get on as fast as he would have liked. Already in February we hear that he does not want July to find him still in Rome, though the quantity of work has increased so much that "there is more to do than would be required for one of the walls of your Highness's Sala." The Sala—the apple of his eye—fills his thoughts and his letters. He goes to Rome because that is the wish of the Pope and of the Grand Duke, but even there he has only one of his assistants, Sandro del Barbieri, actually helping him with the frescoes, while the other, Jacopino del Zucca, is kept busy—on the sly, as it were—with the cartoons for Florence. "Jacopino is engaged in putting together the several portions of the *Battle of Val di Chiana*<sup>1</sup> so as to form one great cartoon: as for me, when I am tired of doing my frescoes in the chapel I take a rest by getting on with the cartoons, so that directly I get back to Florence I shall be able to set to work in earnest." "I am getting on splendidly with the frescoes, and when the time comes for them to be uncovered I hope not only that his Holiness will be satisfied, but that my fellow-artists will

<sup>1</sup> The Battle of Marciano.

view my efforts favourably, for that is the real test. And if, at the same time, I were only to exhibit my cartoon for the Sala to these noble lords and gentlemen, everybody would be thunderstruck (*ho da fare sbalordire ognuno*), for they are both wonderful achievements."

Who shall say after this candid expression of opinion that Vasari hid his light under a bushel? Jacopo Marzupini, in a sonnet addressed to the artist, has put Giorgio's thoughts into verse, for each line is as an echo of the sentiments expressed in his letters. Both nature and art blushing retire before Vasari's achievements: his touch causes paper, canvas, wood and marble to be no longer mere paper, canvas, wood and marble, but to spring into life; while not even Michelangelo had the power to produce such works as were done by the little painter from Arezzo. Surely here we have an echo of Giorgio himself! "Now let that glorious city Arezzo rejoice that she has given to the world so priceless a treasure."

"Voi stupir fate, come io scrivo in carme  
 Natura e l'arte et con eterno ingegno  
 Lo spirito date col dotto disegno  
 Alle carte, alle tele, a' legni, a' marmi.  
 Il Buonarrotto mai seppe mostrarmi  
 Si stupendo arteficio altero e degno,  
 Ond' io, per celebrarvi in questo regno,  
 Un Pindaro, un Apollo vorrei farmi.  
 Giorgio immortal, che dal mar Indo al Tile  
 Cercando il tutto non trovate il paro,  
 Che già fate stupir huomini e Dei,  
 Hor goda Arezzo, città signorile,  
 Ch'ha partorito sì divin tesoro  
 Di cui ne veggio ogn' or quaggiù trofei."

One of these wonderful achievements—the first chapel, that is to say—was consecrated and thrown

open to the public view on April 30th, the result being recorded by the artist in another letter to Francesco. "They say here, and I agree with them, that it is the best thing that ever I did. His Holiness himself consecrated it, singing the pontifical Mass with much jubilation. I have given him cause for it, though such a remark ought to reach you through other channels than through me. Suffice it to say, that in whatsoever concerns the honour of God and your Highness I always do my best, nor shall I ever be found wanting: and being as I am your servant, I shall never cease to extol your name to the skies, for I have no other object in life than that of recording the glory, the honour and the fame of your Highness." Even with his mind running on what Rome is saying about his recent masterpiece, he does not forget the Sala, for he tells the Prince that the cartoon for the Battle of Marciano is almost completed, requiring only ten days for the finishing touches.

Perhaps the most notable thing about Vasari's stay in Rome during the winter of 1570-71 is the fact that he condescended to allow his wife to stay with him, apparently during the whole of Lent—and possibly as a Lenten penance. "Madonna Cosina, my wife, who has been staying here at Perdoni all this Lent, has just gone away, having received many marks of favour from his Holiness. He allowed her to be taken over the whole of the palace (the Vatican), permitting her to inspect those portions which women are forbidden to enter, even to his own personal and private apartments."

Lest we should be inclined to discount Vasari's glowing accounts of his achievements, Providence, not usually so thoughtful in these matters, has pre-





Giorgio Vasari

BATTLE OF MARCIANO  
(*Florence: Palazzo Vecchio*)

6957



served for our reading the corroborating testimony of an independent observer, Sangallegto, the papal treasurer. "In order not to fall short in the execution of my duty, and at the same time knowing that I shall give pleasure to your Highness," he writes to Francesco on May 11th, 1571, "I will now give you an account of how our Messer Giorgio has been acquitting himself. He has already finished one of the three chapels, that of St. Peter Martyr. His Holiness has had Mass sung there, and was himself present with six Cardinals, being very pleased with the work, as is everybody who has seen it. The other two chapels are proceeding apace, and within a fortnight the one dedicated to St. Stephen will be completed. By the end of June the last, dedicated to the Assumption of our Lady, will be done; and it is beyond contradiction that Messer Giorgio has never done anything better than these present works. Indeed, his Holiness could hardly be more pleased than he is, and every day finds something fresh for him to do, either in the construction of St. Peter's, or in devising a way of bringing a supply of fresh water into the city, or in restoring the church of San Giovanni Laterano, or in something else of the same sort; so that I fear there is likely to be considerable delay—I mean with regard to his return to Florence. I venture to think, however, that this will not be displeasing to your Highness, especially as the sacrifice you are called upon to make gives such pleasure to his Holiness."

At the end of June, or early in July, Vasari was able to leave Rome, returning to Florence not the same unadorned Giorgio whom we have hitherto met, but the wearer of the golden spurs of knighthood, bestowed upon him by Pius as a mark of his appreciation and

also as a compliment to the Medici. The Cavaliere Vasari hastens to inform his clients, the heads of the Order of Santo Stefano, of his new dignity, and it is amusing to note that he is keenly alive to the financial value of his exalted position. The golden spurs are good in his eyes, but far better are the twelve hundred crowns accompanying a *Cavaliato di San Pietro*. "I have satisfied his Holiness mightily, and have come away with something to the good, as he has made me a golden-spurred knight of the Order of San Pietro. It is worth twelve hundred crowns."

Immediately on his return to Florence Vasari must have set to work upon the frescoes of the Battle of Marciano with his characteristic impetuosity, for on September 4th—that is to say, little more than *six weeks* after his arrival—he announces that the Sala Grande is finished; and that it is finished not only to his own satisfaction, but in such a manner as to rejoice the heart of the Grand Duke. As, however, the great fresco was not uncovered until the 5th of January, 1572, we are unable to place much faith in Vasari's statement, though it is likely that at the time he wrote the more important parts of the work were sufficiently forward for the success of the finished work to be assured. However the case may have been, it is certain that Cosimo was delighted with Vasari's achievement, for he immediately gave orders for him to undertake the decoration of the dome of the cathedral church, Santa Maria del Fiore.

Unfortunately opinions do not differ upon the question of Cosimo's wisdom in arriving at this decision, nor, in view of the remarkable inferiority of these vast frescoes—even in comparison with some of Vasari's own works—can it be considered that

Cosimo was justified in thus handing over Brunellesco's dome to the disastrous brush of the biographer, and, subsequently, of Federigo Zuccherò. If, as some think, the cupola rises internally to too great a height, Vasari and his successor have certainly contrived to reduce that impression: the bands of exceedingly solid cloud on which the several tiers of figures rest not only obscure the form of the gigantic vault, but break up the angular lines of the octagon, so that we are obliged to grope dimly after the real form they have done so much to hide. One could wish that Giorgio had succeeded sufficiently to have left a faithful band of admirers maintaining with no little heat their opinion that the Duke was justified in ordering the work to be done. Such is not the case. Vasari's contemporaries condemned the result of his labours without a dissentient voice, and later generations have endorsed their verdict with the same unanimity. How much of the failure was due to Vasari and how much is to be attributed to Federigo Zuccherò, who stepped into his shoes when Giorgio died, must be enquired into later on; but this much must be urged on Vasari's behalf, that the choice of his successor was singularly unfortunate. From what we have already seen of Federigo we know that he bore a grudge against Vasari, and we also know that his was not the nature that could rise above petty squabbles, even for the sake of the art he professed to love; and it is therefore extremely unlikely that he cared to do his best to secure the success of these frescoes, realising that all the credit and all the glory would accrue to the author and designer of the original scheme.

Vasari was sixty years of age when thus called upon to commence the work he was destined not to

finish. Strangely enough we do not find him indulging in vain despairings that he may not live to see its completion, as in the case of the Sala Grande. He is deeply impressed by the magnitude of the new undertaking, and fearful lest his powers may prove unequal to the task. "The Grand Duke, as a reward for the Sala Grande which I have just completed, has given orders that I am to paint the cupola. God give me the requisite strength, and do you intercede with Him for me." In these simple words the artist conveys the news to his friend the Bishop of Montepulciano.

The remainder of this year is passed over in silence by his correspondence, but Gaye<sup>1</sup> prints two letters which help to bridge the gap. One is from the Grand Duke to the *Riformatori d'Arezzo*, instructing them to enroll Vasari's brother and his heirs in perpetuity among the *gonfalonieri* of the city. The artist himself had received that honour ten years previously, a fact which is alluded to in the letter. "Some time ago," the letter runs, "you elected Giorgio Vasari as one of the *gonfalonieri* of your city at our request. Now, seeing that the good service he has rendered to us is deserving of acknowledgment and reward, we should be pleased if you will confer the same honour upon Pietro, his brother, and upon his heirs successively, out of regard to the said Giorgio. We shall be glad if you will see to this." The second letter is also from Cosimo, but addressed to the Pope. From it we learn that Vasari has once more been "borrowed." "Giorgio Vasari, the painter, is about to return to serve your Holiness in all things that may be required of him. I am more pleased that he should work for you than for myself, counting

<sup>1</sup> *Carteggio Inedito*.

it an honour that your Holiness should deign to employ my servants, and knowing how much regard and good-will you have for the said Giorgio."

The artist set out immediately ; and as we have a letter from him to Borghini dated from Rome on January 9th, 1572, it is clear that he had to forego the pleasure of witnessing the uncovering of his frescoes in the Sala and of hearing first hand the praises that might or might not be bestowed upon them. The public was allowed to see them for the first time on the 5th, at which date the artist was already on his way to Rome—as on the 18th he writes to ask Borghini what Francesco thinks of the great work—and Giorgio would have been obliged to travel much quicker than was his wont if he traversed the weary leagues between Rome and Florence in four days, especially as the weather, even for that time of the year, was unusually bad. "We are worse off down here in the way of weather," writes Giorgio, "than I ever remember to have been ; for we have sunshine, high winds, rain and snow, heat and cold, oftentimes all in the same day. It gives me the cold shivers even to think of it."

Nor was the bad weather all that at this time gave the artist cause for complaint. He had been despatched to Rome in order to decorate the walls of the Sala de' Re in the Vatican, but for some time after his arrival he was still kept in suspense, waiting for instructions to begin the actual work. On the top of these vexations came troubles with his assistants, the causes of which are not discoverable, though they are alluded to in his correspondence. From this we learn that Vasari had decided to employ Giovanni lo Stradano, but that for some reason or other Giovanni had turned sulky and refused to accompany him, in

spite of the fact that the two had worked together at least as far back as 1565 during the preparations for Francesco's wedding. Another of his former assistants was then put forward, Jacopino del Zucca, but the master refused to accept him, remarking that Jacopino had not improved of late years, and had become jealous and malignant towards him. Rather than accept such service Giorgio would prefer to work alone, even if such a course necessitated his return to Rome in the following year.

The worry caused by the disaffection of his helpers was not of long duration, and as before the end of February he received definite instructions to begin work in the Sala de' Re, the prospect of being able to return at a reasonably early date to Florence, there to put into execution his vast schemes for the cupola of Santa Maria del Fiore, brightened considerably. The weather alone continued to fight against him, though by preventing the commencement of the frescoes it afforded him more leisure to paint two pictures for the Pope, a *St. Jerome* and an *Assumption of the Magdalene*, and to prepare the preliminary drawings for the cupola. Indeed, as was the case when he was called to Rome in the midst of his work in the Sala Grande, he thought more of what he had to do for his ducal patron than for the Pope. "I am not forgetting the designs for the cupola, and this is a good place for me to think them out in, as they will require a lot of scheming, and the vault of Michelangelo's (the Sistine) chapel is an excellent guide." It must not be imagined that Vasari intended to copy Michelangelo's works. In point of fact he had very little to do with either the choice of his subject or its general treatment. Borghini's was the brain which once more drew up



the general scheme of decoration. In *Il Riposo*<sup>1</sup> Raffaello Borghini puts these words into the mouth of Girolamo Michelozzi: "Avvertite, Messer Bernardo (Vecchietti) che egli si dice, che cotesta invenzione fu trovata da Don Vincenzo Borghini, già Priore degli Innocenti," *the composition of this work was suggested by Don Vincenzo Borghini, at that time Prior degli Innocenti.*

The designs for the upper part of the cupola were completed within three weeks after his arrival in Rome, as we learn from a letter to Francesco, in which we also catch a passing glimpse of the great Flemish sculptor who is so inappropriately known by the name of Giovanni da Bologna.

"Most serene Prince, my only Lord," it begins, "you will learn from the lips of Messer Giovanni Bologna that I have already made a number of designs for his Holiness, as well for easel pictures as for the *Battle of the Turks*,<sup>2</sup> all of which I have shown to him (Giovanni). I have also led him to the feet of his Holiness, saying that he was another of your Highness's servants, and one who is foremost among sculptors. In the few days he has been here he has already visited and sketched half Rome, and this should be of the greatest profit to his future works, as the days have been well spent. He comes back to the service of your Highness with the most lively satisfaction, while I remain behind to do what shall be required of me by his Holiness. There is a great deal of work in the air; but for all that, as you will learn from Messer Giovanni, I have found time to begin the cartoons for the cupola, and have

<sup>1</sup> Published in Florence, 1730.

<sup>2</sup> The Battle of Lepanto, the fresco which Vasari was engaged in painting in the Sala de' Re.

partly done the drawings for the figures around the lantern. What they are like I leave for him to say." This was at the end of January, and a month later he makes a further report to the Prince.

"Most serene and great Prince, my Master: If I am dilatory in telling you of my progress, the reason is that, being obliged to do practically all the work myself"—the difficulty with his assistants was not as yet settled—"the amount to be done is so great that I seem not to make much progress; and albeit I work rapidly, continuously and willingly at it, his Holiness would like to see me go faster still, for he is an old man. I, too, should like to see the thing more forward than it is, for I would rather enjoy the comforts of my own home than suffer the inconveniences and worries incident upon important undertakings for other people. His Holiness has finally decided that I am to do the *Battle of the Turks* in the Sala Regia." A long description follows, and we learn that the artist spent much of his time with Marcantonio Colonna and other generals so as to glean from them the details of the combat. "There is so much work in it, such a jumble of galleys, masts, oars, banners and cordage that I frequently lose heart, for it is the most complicated thing I ever undertook. My hope is in the Almighty who brought it about, that He will give me the same victory with my brushes as He gave the Christians with their arms."

These observations refer only to the cartoons as yet, for the winter lingered longer than usual, and even at the beginning of March it was still too cold for the actual work to be commenced. On the first day of the month Vasari reports that "here we have the same snowstorms, frosts and cold winds," a thing

unknown at so late a date; but he adds that he keeps uncommonly well—*io sto arcibene*—and is immune from all seasonable ailments. He is in a good temper, too, because, as he says, “I have at last finished with the pin-prick conspiracies and vexations brought about by our fellow-Academicians; and if only the frosts had allowed it I should already have begun work on the frescoes. As it is, by to-day week the cartoon for the *Battle of the Turks* will be entirely finished.” He goes on to say, as illustrating the carefulness with which he sought to assure the accuracy of his details, that on the previous day he lunched with Marcantonio Colonna and Rumagasso, a captain from whom he obtained much information concerning the incidents of the fight. “It will certainly be a splendid work, and you shall see it when I come home, as I am going to pack the cartoon in with the drawings for the cupola and bring it with me.”

But it is often the unexpected that happens. Exactly two months after the date of the letter from which the above quotations are taken Pius V breathed his last, and by so doing naturally brought Giorgio's work to an abrupt conclusion. It was a misfortune for the painter and his Florentine patrons, for Pius had been on the most friendly terms with the Medici. The knowledge of this fact probably gave to Vasari's letters on this occasion their predominating note. He hastens to condole with the Grand Duke on his personal loss in the death of so good and pious a man, in whom he has lost a father; to Francesco he reports that his Holiness has died amid the tears of all Rome and to the regret, perhaps the hurt, of the whole Christian world. “God has snatched him from us because of our sins.” Then he continues

with a strange absence of logical sequence in his ideas: "May He of His goodness give us another as saintly who will look after His flock here below; for since the days of St. Peter himself there has never been so holy a Pope." Fortunately the *Battle of Lepanto* was already finished—"the best thing that ever I did, and the largest and most carefully thought out," as usual. But Giorgio's hopes have gone to heaven with the Pope, though the fame of his works will remain below and live for ever. Such is the burden of his letter to Francesco, who also, says Giorgio, has lost a father. The artist intends to return to Florence, but without undue hurry, resting a few days at Arezzo as he is half dead with the work he has just completed. There is a postscript in which he says: "I have just covered up the picture, because the conclave will take place there. It will not be uncovered until a new Pope has been elected."

Vasari's personal views on the subject are to be found in a letter to Borghini, in dealing with whom it was less necessary to keep in mind the political import of his words. The Pope died, "regretted by all the city and by the whole body of the faithful, *from what I hear*. It is certainly a considerable loss for our patrons. For me the loss is irreparable, as I was just on the point of settling your business satisfactorily, having already presented the petition, and was about to get something good for myself (*ne cavevo per me qualcosa*). The best news I have to tell you is that I have finished the fresco of the *Battle of the Turks*, which will render me famous, as, by the grace of God, I have never done anything like it." He had, in fact, succeeded in adding his name to the small list of immortal painters; the

triumvirate was now complete, and the name of Giorgio Vasari stood on a level with those of Michelangelo and Raffaello. "I feel sure that when the new Pope is elected I shall be compelled to come back here and do more painting, for their Reverences are very loath to let me go. However, there will be plenty of time to think about that after the election. At present there are other things to be thought of, and may God do what is best for us all." Between May and October we learn little of what the artist was doing with himself. He seems still to have been engaged upon the tomb of Michelangelo, and to have devoted the rest of his time to the cartoons for the cupola, making frequent journeys to the Città di Castello, whither the Grand Duke had retired with his young wife, so as to consult with his patron concerning the numerous works in hand. "The Grand Duke went away to Castello after the wedding in the Palazzo Pitti," writes Vasari to Borghini on the 1st of October, 1572, referring to the marriage of Cammilla Martelli's sister, "and I have had to go over and see him nearly every day to arrange about a new fountain and plans for his many buildings, among them the new palace which is in building at Capraia in the district of Pisa, a little church at Colle Mingoli, and several fountains at Castello." He also had to redecorate the organ in Santa Croce, while the actual preparations for the frescoes in the dome of Santa Maria del Fiore were already begun, and already had caused some friction between the clergy and the painter. According to Lapini, the diarist, however, the first works of preparation had been commenced in the previous February, while Giorgio was still in Rome, and long before the death of Pius smoothed the way for his return to Florence.

“On the twenty-sixth day of February, 1571 (old style) was begun the work of preparing the scaffolding in the cupola of the Florentine cathedral, to the end that the same might be painted . . . and on that day the masons attached to the building took down certain balustradings which protected the highest gallery at the springing of the dome over the older sacristy. This was done so as to afford a base on which the remainder of the scaffolding might be erected.”

The scaffolding was finished, and Vasari began his frescoes on June 11th, “on a Wednesday morning at eleven of the clock,” to quote the precise account given by Lapini. “Before he began,” the diarist continues, “he caused to be celebrated at the Altar of the Sacrament a Mass of the Holy Spirit, and immediately after it was finished he began to do the work. The said Messer Giorgio only painted the Kings which are in the first tier beneath the lantern; and then he died. Federigo Zuccherò followed, as will be described in its proper place, and he began by painting the octagon which is above the tribune of San Zanobi, or, rather, of the Sacrament; and one by one he did the other sides of the octagon.” So, also, it will be our duty to give some account of the work done by Zuccherò “in its proper place”; but for the present we have still Vasari’s letters to be our guide, and the sequence of events demands that we should follow them.

To return, therefore, to the letter to Borghini. “I have managed to get my canvas screen up in Santa Maria del Fiore, above the arches, with the result that the priests are saying much worse things about me than ever they did about Bronzino. However, it is up at last, and they can now officiate in

the choir without impediment, at which all the city marvels greatly, to see that I have managed to stretch so large a curtain in such a manner, while at the same time I can examine the effect of my work from below as it proceeds, and show it to anybody I wish. But what has put the finishing touch to my troubles has been the wind, which has been blowing so boisterously that I haven't been able to go out for two days; while on account of the Prince I have had to stay in my room designing pots and vases until three o'clock. Never mind; I am alive and quite well. I went to Castello this morning"—he tells us this quite forgetting that he has not been out for the past two days—"to crave leave of absence, and have got permission to stay away until Thursday next. His Highness is exceedingly well, and inclined to take liberties with his new-found health,<sup>1</sup> so I expect what I have heard is the truth, namely, that he is about to remove to Poggio (a Caiano). If I can smuggle myself away on Saturday, being the feast of St. Francis, and if I am not left high and dry for want of a nag, I shall endeavour to pay you a visit. There, now you know exactly why I haven't been to see you before."

<sup>1</sup> The words used by Vasari are *vuol pigliare un poco di legno senza guardia*. As it is inconceivable that the Grand Duke of Tuscany should exhibit a desire to go out unattended for the purpose of gathering sticks, I have ventured to translate the sentence as above.

## CHAPTER XV

### ROME

Gregory XIII—Vasari summoned to Rome by the new Pope—The Sala Regia and the *Massacre of the Huguenots*—Approach of old age.

WHILE Giorgio was thus engaged in making plans for the immediate future, the new Pope, Ugo Buoncompagni, who on May 26th had been elected under the name of Gregory XIII, had been making other arrangements for the artist. The result of Cosimo's having taken liberties with his precarious health, too, helped to traverse the fulfilment of the artist's wishes. The Duke was taken suddenly ill, so ill that Vasari felt disinclined to leave the precincts of the palace; and the projected visit to Borghini had to be replaced by a letter of excuse. "You must not be surprised," writes Vasari on October 12th, "at my having failed to come and see you, for to-morrow is the last day on which his Highness has to take the *sciloppo del legno*.<sup>1</sup> Yesterday I spent the whole day over there; and now, after having had something to eat, I am about to return, getting Ser Pietro to write this for me so as to save time while I am putting on my riding-boots. His Highness feels much better in his head, eyes, and legs, but there is no improvement in his voice."

The Grand Duke's health improved, apparently as

<sup>1</sup> Literally "syrup of wood." Possibly the medicine was some decoction of wormwood.



the result of his taking the *sciloppo del legno*, for within three days after the letter to Borghini he was able to receive Vasari in audience and discuss the question of his going to Rome; and what in that case was to be done about the frescoes in the cupola. The artist throughout had a presentiment that as soon as he had settled down seriously to prosecute his labours in Florence the dreaded summons to Rome would arrive, and this proved to be the case. It was in vain that he urged the Grand Duke to have him excused, and it was equally useless for him to solicit the mediation of Francesco. The policy of the Florentine court made it imperative that the new Pope should be put under an obligation, and Giorgio was obliged to tear himself away once more from his beloved cupola and set out for Rome, faithfully carrying out the commands of his patron. How little Giorgio relished the prospect, and how much he dreaded this visit to the Vatican, is told in his letters to Borghini.

“As I told you in my last letter, I had quite made up my mind to come and see you: but all the time I had a sort of presentiment, which—although it had been decided by the Grand Duke that I was to proceed with the cupola and think no more about this trip to Rome, as I had heard nothing more from them—robbed life of all its pleasures by silently urging me to waste no time, but to get on with the cartoons, studies, and designs for the work, burning the midnight oil in order to get them done. As a result I have finished Michelangelo’s picture,<sup>1</sup> as well as the one for Guidacci and a host of other things that filled my mind and my house: hoping

<sup>1</sup> The picture here referred to is possibly the portrait by Vasari now in the Uffizi.

that if, finally, I had to go to Rome, I should be able to lay this unction to my soul, that I had nothing else in the world to worry me. Well; I divined rightly. Last Thursday there came a letter from Cardinal Buoncompagno saying that the Pope had resolved that I should finish the Sala Regia, that I was to get ready to go to Rome as soon as possible, and that he had himself ordered the letter to be written. I went off the same evening to interview the Prince, and told him that I did not want to go, but would much rather stay here. He replied that I had become one of the family, and that I must talk to the Grand Duke about it. His Highness is at Poggio, and I shall ride over there to-morrow to hear what he has to say. The worst of it, *Signor Priore*, and the thing that troubles me most, is that there are two pictures still to be done and they will take me four months." He would give almost anything to be able to refuse the invitation, or rather command, to go to Rome; wishing to stay near Florence all the winter, though not in the city itself, as he is desirous of purchasing a villa he had seen in the vicinity, which, being situated at a considerable altitude, will, he thinks, enable him to escape the effects of the winter air of Florence.

Cosimo, however, had already decided that the new Pope's wishes must be obeyed; for the following letter was despatched from Poggio a Caiano on the day after Vasari had penned his despairing epistle to Borghini:—

"Most holy and blessed Father. The painter, Giorgio Vasari, will shortly be on his way to Rome, sent by me to do whatever your Holiness shall require of him. I have commanded him to obey you implicitly; and I esteem it a great favour that you

should deign to make use of my servants. The said Giorgio will kiss the sacred feet of your Holiness in my name. May your life be a long and happy one."

Then, just as Giorgio had given up all hope of being excused, came a further letter from Rome telling him he could remain where he was until he received other orders, and this reprieve—although it was rescinded anew within the space of a week—filled the heart of the painter with joy and set him to work upon the cupola with renewed energy and redoubled zest. "I have had a letter from Rome to say that, if I hear nothing to the contrary, I am to stay here and get on with this work. Such an intimation is more than welcome: if you come over to see me, think how glad I shall be! And if I come over to see you, think how glad you will be!" The extract is from one of his characteristic letters to Borghini.

As already hinted, Giorgio heard something different all too soon, and upon receipt of the fresh summons to Rome renewed his supplication with the Duke. His entreaties, however, fell on deaf ears; but though Cosimo had decided that Vasari must obey the Pope's wishes, he knew well how to gild the bitter pill his faithful servitor was to be obliged to swallow. This is Vasari's own account of the interview, as related in a letter to his friend. The Grand Duke, it should be premised, was at Poggio a Caiano, waiting for news of his daughter-in-law's confinement, an event which was looked forward to with some anxiety, as up to the present Francesco de' Medici had no heir, and in the event of his death without male issue the Grand Dukedom would of necessity pass to Cardinal Ferdinando, his younger brother.

“Last Sunday I went over to Poggio and spent a couple of hours with his Highness . . . finding an excellent opportunity to explain my views with regard to the cupola. I told him I thought it would be better not to depart from the instructions he had already given me; that I wanted to give up all idea of finishing this work in Rome; and that I had already sold my workshop there, telling Marcantonio, my nephew, to come back here. I then handed him the letter from Cardinal Buoncompagno to read, and when he had finished it he turned to me, saying: ‘Giorgio, I cannot see any means by which you can escape from this visit to Rome: firstly, because it is the first letter that his Holiness has written to me, and I cannot refuse his request; and secondly, because your going to Rome will be of the greatest service to me. The unusual position you will hold while in the Vatican will be as useful to me as it was when you were there before in the service of Pius V, the more so as not one of our confidential agents is at the papal court at the present moment.<sup>1</sup> Therefore you must get ready, so that I may send you on your journey before the weather breaks up. I shall write and tell his Holiness that I am sending you, and that he does me a favour by making use of what is mine; and I shall ask him to send you back as soon as possible, so that you may complete the

<sup>1</sup> This seems to be an invention on the part of the artist, or else Cosimo was anxious to flatter his vanity by giving this projected visit to Rome a fictitious value. The Grand Duke’s own son, Ferdinando, Cardinal de’ Medici, was at the time in Rome, and might be relied on to give his father timely notice of all that was going on. We have, moreover, Vasari’s word for it that Ferdinando was a *persona grata* with the Pope. “Our Cardinal de’ Medici,” he says, “stands in the most extraordinary favour with his Holiness.”



*Giorgio Vasari*

*Brogi*

MEDALLION PORTRAIT OF LORENZO DE' MEDICI  
(Florence: Palazzo Vecchio)



frescoes in the cupola. While you are there this winter you will be able to get on with the cartoons for it, and I am sure that as soon as you have done your work in the Sala he will release you. Take your assistants with you and get on as quickly as you can, for the Pope is growing old; you will have a chance of getting paid for what you have already done as well as for what remains to do. You may also be able to secure a position for that lad of yours, Marcantonio, and if you do not, then I will find him something to do in Pisa at the Sapienza. You are to tell the Prince to answer Cardinal Buoncompagno's letter; and you are to tell him also that I [*sic*] have been commanded to obey the Pope's instructions, but that as soon as I have finished their Reverences are to send me back, as during my absence things here are likely to suffer!" In the middle of his story Vasari, flushed with the recollection of his patron's flattery, forgets that he is reporting the Duke's speech; the construction of his sentence breaks down lamentably, with the result that there is a bewildering interchange of the first and second persons. It is in such trifles as this that the real value of Giorgio's letters to Borghini lies; in them we see the true Vasari, and not the courtier and time-server. In his correspondence with the Medici, and indeed with nearly everybody else, we find evidence of carefully thought-out phrases, and utterances which are more politic than indicative of the actual thoughts of the writer.

When Vasari writes to Borghini his pen runs on without restraint, and we see the man himself—impetuous, affectionate, easily flattered and genuinely pleased with the position of high importance he so obviously holds at the Tuscan court. "He then

told me," the letter continues, "to go to Pistoia immediately, as it was of the utmost importance that the work there should be pushed forward, and then to come back as soon as I had done all there was to do. I did as I was commanded, and came back directly, to find that the letter to his Holiness had already been sent off. On my way back I met the Prince going to Poggio in company with the Cardinal di Piacenza, and I told him I was about to set out for Rome. He said he was very glad to hear it, and that we should have plenty of time to talk the matter over before my departure. It has done nothing but rain all night, so I suppose you will be coming back to Florence; in which case I shall at least go away with the consolation of having seen you, though to tell the truth I undertake the journey with a heart that is heavy enough. However, as the Granduca remarked, in serving the Pope I am serving God; and as for the cupola, He will do all for the best. And with this I shall conclude my letter."

There was, therefore, no door of escape, and being of a philosophical turn of mind in his old age, he devoted himself to the problem of how best to get to Rome, finish the work, and come back to his beloved cupola. On November 2nd he set out, arriving twelve days later in the papal city, after a journey in easy stages of twenty miles a day. He congratulated himself on having encountered neither wind nor rain nor snow on the way, and as a consequence he was able to congratulate himself still further on the fact that he arrived in good health and the best of spirits. He escaped the breaking up of the weather only by a narrow margin, as the rains commenced just as he was entering the gates of Rome.



“Most serene Prince,” he writes, on November 17th, describing his reception, “I arrived in Rome in bad weather, and on the 15th I had an interview with the Cardinal. After telling me how very glad he was that your Highness had sent me, he took me immediately into the presence of his Holiness, who, as soon as I had kissed his feet in the name of your Highness and the Grand Duke, kissed me on the forehead. He asked a great many things about Florentine affairs, and about your Highness’s family ; and said he was anxious to hear whether the expected infant would be a boy, adding that ‘as soon as her Highness begins to bring boys into the world she would give up having girls altogether.’ He then told me he was determined to finish the Sala once and for all, to which I replied that I would, without fail, furnish the two great pictures which are still wanted, and that afterwards we could think about the rest.” One of the two pictures is to be the *Massacre of the Huguenots*, an event which was looked upon in Rome in a somewhat different light from that in which we are now accustomed to regard it, being accounted, in fact, one of the most glorious events of Gregory’s pontificate. Vasari calls it “that affair of the Huguenots,” and Francesco de’ Medici, replying to Giorgio’s letter, refers to it in much the same strain. He is glad to hear that “his Holiness has, with his usual good judgment, decided to have painted in the Sala Regia so holy and noteworthy an action as the retribution wrought on the Huguenots in France.”

While Vasari was detained in Rome he received the most honourable treatment at the hands of the Pope. The court was different from what it had been under recent successors of St. Peter. Gregory

regarded his election in a serious light, and proceeded to curb the worldly pomp and magnificence of his cardinals. If there were no other testimony in support of this statement, the word of Giorgio himself might be enough, as more than once he refers to the changes which have taken place since his last visit to Rome. He describes the new Pope as a kind man, and "though stern and of few words," he shows great affection for the painter. Elsewhere he tells us that "I do not see the Pope every day, as I am busy in the Sala Regia. If I am not sent for, or if I have nothing important to say to him, I do not seek an interview, as this court is governed in a very different manner from what it used to be. The chief things I find abounding in Rome are taciturnity and decorous gravity."

Under such circumstances it is surprising to find that the Pope troubled himself about the personal comforts of the artist at all, or that he cared whether his lodging was good or bad. Two factors seem to have smoothed Vasari's path: the first the circumstance that the Grand Duke would note the treatment of his favourite with a critical eye, and the other the increasing years both of artist and Pope. Gregory elected to treat Vasari with every honour. "His Holiness appears to be incredibly fond of me. He has appointed for my use some of the finest apartments in the Belvedere, painted and decorated with historical scenes by"—oh, irony of fate!—"Federigo Zuccherò. Two of the rooms in particular are exceedingly fine; one of them has the walls hung with tapestry, and contains luxurious cloth-covered couches, so that really I doubt whether Apelles or any other painter was ever the

recipient of so much honour from any crowned head."

With all this it does not appear that Vasari was able to accomplish much work during the earlier part of his visit. He had spoken too soon of having escaped from the ill-effects of so tedious a journey, for within a week of his arrival he was struck down by a feverish cold, the cause of which he considers to be the "bad weather I experienced on my journey," quite forgetting that he had shortly before told Borghini how he escaped the chastisement of wind, rain and snow. However, the main point is that Vasari fell ill and was prevented from getting on with the "Huguenot affair" in the Sala Regia. The only bright spot in this delay was the solicitude shown by the Pope, who sent his own physician to attend the invalid. "My own diligence and not having any constitutional weakness have combined to make me well again. And so that God might have me still more in His protection, he gave orders that I was to stay in bed for a fortnight<sup>1</sup> so as to rest and avoid such complications as might possibly supervene." "He has turned the Cardinal Polacco out of the Belvedere," he says later on in the letter, "so that I might have better accommodation, and now I am lodged like a king with so much gorgeousness that I think it evident how very much esteem he has for my patrons, my ability and myself." Bronzino, the painter, is dead—he died on November 23rd—and Giorgio, as usual, is plunged in grief that there is one artist less in the world. "To tell the truth, *Signore*

<sup>1</sup> Lest the reader should make a mistake as to who it was that told Giorgio to stay in bed, it will perhaps be advisable to quote the actual words: "E perchè Dio tiene protezione di me, m'ha voluto tenere in letto questi quindici di."

*Priore*, I weep bitterly for him, as it is a great loss. God help the younger generation that our art become not extinct, which I greatly fear. Here there are no artists left and no new men coming on: nobody is willing to go through the drudgery of learning.”

The mental and the physical condition of Giorgio Vasari at the end of the year 1572 clearly indicate that, like his well-beloved patron Cosimo de' Medici, he was beginning to break up. In former years he had been able to bear the fatigue of long journeys and incessant activity in his calling without their leaving a mark upon him. Now, however, he was growing short-winded and, to be frank, was getting somewhat wheezy with chronic catarrh. Old age caught him in her grip long before he sighted the end of life's allotted span, and death was soon to snatch him away, not too full of years, at the age of sixty-three. In spite of his ailments and increasing infirmities Giorgio struggled bravely on, though already he foresaw that it would be the end of April, and not of March, before he was able to return to Florence. Perhaps he had a misgiving that, after all, he would not live to complete the cupola; and he needed no spurring forward on the part of the Pope. “I have already been to lunch on two occasions with the Castellan:<sup>1</sup> he is extraordinarily fond of me (*che mi adora*), and grieves to see how old I am getting, just at a time when my services are most needed. His Holiness, too, is perpetually keeping me up to the mark over this Sala, urging me to finish it, believing—such is the great faith he has in my abilities—that I shall do something that will please him.” Even in his old age Giorgio has lost

<sup>1</sup> Jacopo Buoncompagno, son of the Pope.

nothing of his magnificent belief in his supreme powers as an artist. He tells Francesco de' Medici, in a letter dated January 16th, 1573, that "God has seen fit to endow me, growing old as I am, with greater powers than ever, so that before the coming of the hot weather I shall have brought my work to perfection. Thus, through the medium of your Highness who lent him my services, his Holiness will be enabled to leave this notable and splendid memorial of himself for the enjoyment of posterity. When it is finished I shall come back again to serve you until my life's end, in the terrible undertaking of the cupola. Even now I contrive to give four hours each day, either during the day or in the night, to my designs and studies for this work, so that the Almighty, in whose honour so great an undertaking was begun, shall cause your name to resound through all ages, during life, after death, and until the world shall cease to exist."

It was the cupola that now filled Giorgio's thoughts by day and his dreams by night, even as a few years before the Sala Grande of the Palazzo Vecchio had done. He would gladly have abandoned the Sala Regia if that might be done without offending the Grand Duke; but though Cosimo knew full well the secret wishes of his servant, reasons of State forbade his acceding to them. He kept the enthusiasm of the artist at fever heat by telling him to use all despatch in the service of the Pope and to hurry back to Florence. The letters of Cosimo were couched in terms of affectionate condescension, even to the extent of addressing him as *magnifico nostro carissimo*; and Giorgio, lest the Duke should grow cool in the matter, sent full and frequent accounts of his progress with the cartoons. "If it were not," he

writes at the end of January, "that I fear to disturb your Highness's lofty meditations, I should be only too ready, although I am almost overpowered by the immensity of what I have in hand—immense because of the variety and number of things that are included in it—I should be only too ready to write to you every day, informing you with my pen of all that I accomplish with my brush both by night and by day so as to get the work finished, and to be able to obey your Highness's injunctions in the matter of getting done quickly and then returning to Florence so as to get on with the cupola." The usual appreciation of his own abilities and the splendid undertakings of the Grand Duke follows, concluding with these words: "And I who through your beneficence may number myself among the most favoured and fortunate of my profession, after thanking God Almighty, ought to be grateful to your Highness, seeing that you have ever given me the opportunity of increasing my fame by putting such important works under my care, so that not only have my abilities been appreciated by your Highness, but they have also by that means come to the knowledge of many Popes, many exalted potentates and the whole world. Gifted by Providence with good health and patronised by you, I am now, at my advanced age, capable of more continuous exertions than when I was a lad of twenty." The artist's happy frame of mind reacted on his body, and he felt able to undertake more severe physical exercise than had lately been his wont. Among the exploits of which he tells his friend Borghini was the pious act of visiting the seven churches in succession during Carnival, not forgetting to pray in each of them for the spiritual welfare of the Prior. The Pope, however, did not approve

of his running risks in these needless pilgrimages, for “when his Holiness heard that I had visited the seven churches on foot he reprimanded me for doing so, although I wasn’t a bit tired, and finished up by absolving me from all my sins.”

## CHAPTER XVI

### DEATH OF THE ARTIST

Failing health of Cosimo—Anxiety of Vasari to return to his master's side—Portrait of Gregory XIII—Invitation to Spain—Completion of the Sala Regia—Cupola to be Vasari's last work—Rome a benevolent employer—Last days spent with the Grand Duke, discussing the cartoons for the Cupola—Death of Cosimo—Death of Vasari.

**T**IME, who thus began to treat Vasari with some little harshness, dealt still more severely with the Grand Duke, now fast becoming a chronic invalid. Saltini tells us that two years before the date with which we are now concerned Cosimo had practically lost all use of his arms and legs, and suffered so much with catarrh that he could scarcely speak above a whisper. In February, 1573, his condition became worse, causing great alarm to all the court. The unwelcome news reached Giorgio in Rome, filling him with forebodings. "I had already heard what you tell me about the Grand Duke's condition," he says in his letter to Borghini, "from Cardinal de Cesis. You do well to say 'God help him.' . . . The Almighty has already taken Pius V from us: should He take the Grand Duke as well, it will indeed appear as if He were about to avenge Himself upon us for our offences." The effect of this illness sank deep into his spirit, and though it did not cause him to slacken his pace with the cartoons for the cupola, it made him think very seriously about putting his own affairs in order and preparing



for the next world. It was at this time that he added a codicil to his will providing for his wife and disposing of several small sums of money for the benefit of his nieces. Fortune, having persistently turned a deaf ear to Vasari's desire for children of his own, had given him at least five nieces, who are mentioned by name in his will, and all of whom became nuns, as well as two nephews, to say nothing of his brother Piero's children. His house in Arezzo had been left to his own children in a former will, with injunctions that they were not to turn their mother out of doors. But when age had overtaken him, and he knew that he was destined to die childless, he left this house to Piero's children, with the proviso that no alterations of any kind were to be made in its construction. To each child was bequeathed a room, but no partitions were to be built: if they could not agree to live peaceably together, they might divide up their several portions with boarding, but the house was not in any way to be interfered with. To his wife he left some property at Capucciolo and a sum of 500 florins, from which, however, was to be deducted such part of her dowry of 800 florins as had not been paid. His property at Frassineto, including lands, horses, mules, cows, bullocks, sheep, goats, pigs and donkeys, was left to the children of Piero. "Every day," the letter continues, "I hear of the death of some friend or another, cut off in the midst of a life of worry; therefore I say to myself *estote parati*. . . . I fear, I tremble, for our Grand Duke. May it please God to keep us from this terrible calamity. Yet it is from God that all things proceed, the evil as well as the good; and all these things are come upon us for our sins. I spend my time in frequenting the holy

places, praying for his speedy restoration and for the welfare of my many benefactors, of whom you are one. God is my witness how great an affection I bear you." The letter, it is scarcely necessary to state, is addressed to Borghini, and was written partly so that his concern for the Duke might be known in the proper quarter, and partly because he thought it well to remind his friends that, whatever his health might be, his artistic abilities were in no way impaired. "Every day I am brought to a fuller recognition of the ability God has given me, for whenever I find myself involved in a difficult and complex piece of work my powers invariably rise to the task imposed upon them. You will readily believe this when I say that alone I have completed six great cartoons representing as many terrific events (*storie terribili*), each one full of original ideas, of figures, and of other things both beautiful and intricate; that I have never done anything quite so good, and that I am determined to complete the whole work with my own hands, only employing my assistants for the accessories, draperies, and other portions which are of less importance, such as the landscapes, buildings and similar details."

After reading so far in Giorgio's letter it becomes interesting to speculate on how much would be left for the ingenuous painter himself to do. The faces and hands, and finally the pompous inscription—in which the artist proclaims that twelve Popes, in thirty-nine years, employed a dozen painters to decorate the Sala Regia; and that the thirteenth Pope, the thirteenth of the name of Gregory, employed the thirteenth painter, *Georgius Vasarius pictor Aretin. Cosmi Magni Aetruriae Ducis alunnum*, who, to make the cycle of thirteen complete, finished the

work in thirteen months—were all that could have remained for him to achieve. But these he did achieve, his fingers, as he tells us, moving “as fast as a piper’s,” returning in the intervals, when he had to give place to his assistants, to his princely apartments in the Belvedere, where he turned his attention to the beloved cupola of Florence. “When I come back I shall bring with me the scheme for the whole vault . . . and you will see the best and most carefully thought out drawings that I ever did, which I hope will astound both the Grand Duke and yourself.” Again the recipient of the letter is Borghini. And while the cartoons were destined to astonish the Florentines, the same treat was in store, so Vasari thought, for the inhabitants of Rome, as in another letter to Borghini, referring to the Sala Regia, he says that although the weather is unusually bad, the hills being covered with snow, he keeps well, as “God, who seems to have an especial care for me, makes me strong and valiant even in my old age, so that nothing impedes my progress, and I get through my work as bravely as any younger man would do: and if I managed to amaze these Romans with my former works, this last performance of mine will assuredly leave them speechless with wonder.”

A fortnight or so later he again refers to the same topic, expressing his delight at the progress made, and saying that whereas once he had been doomed to count the time till his return to Florence in months, he now counts it not even in weeks or days, but in hours. He believes that by the middle of April his task will be completed. “But I do not yet know,” he adds, “how much longer his Holiness will keep me here, though every day seems as a thousand years, and that for two reasons: first,

because I am greatly in need of rest, both bodily and mental; and, secondly, because I have reached such an age that even small delays may be serious. However, I have indeed performed my knightly duty, for by the grace of God all the designs for the cupola are finished, and well finished, too, so that anybody who knows anything about painting could take the matter up and do the actual frescoes. The only part I have not yet drawn out is the figure of the Christ, and I have left that so as to have something to occupy myself with during Eastertide and until my departure."

The delays which occurred before he was able to turn his back on Rome were numerous and vexatious, the one bright spot in his life during the next month being the news that Cosimo was getting better, and was, for the time being at any rate, out of danger. Apart from this, Fate was adversely disposed towards the fast aging painter. She even threatened to destroy one of his cherished pictures in the Sala Regia, for no sooner had he completed the fresco representing *The Alliance made between the Spanish, Venetians and Paul V*, than the news reached Rome that the Venetians had seceded from the League. Gregory was intensely mortified at this breach of faith, and he felt it the more keenly as he was himself a Venetian. He wished to have Vasari's painting obliterated, but subsequently changed his mind, either because it had been so recently completed, or else because he was "won over by the beauty and amount of study involved in the picture," both of which reasons are put forward by Vasari at various times in his correspondence. To the colder reason of modern criticism there may appear a third and more cogent

argument for the preservation of this picture in the fact that Gregory was in a great hurry to have the Sala completed, and the proposed act would have entailed considerable delay in the work.

Vasari was at this time engaged in painting a portrait of the Pope, and seized the opportunity afforded by lengthy sittings to crave permission to depart now that the great task was finished. He seems also to have presumed to give his Holiness some excellent, if unsought, advice with regard to the picture of the League during these sittings, and relates the circumstance with satisfaction. "Yesterday I was with him for two hours finishing the portrait, and we talked a great deal about that affair of the League. He had quite recovered from his anger, and it was a very fortunate thing that I was there, as God opened my mouth and I gave him much good advice." It is recorded, by the way, that the mouth of Balaam's ass was once opened, and that he, too, gave good advice to his master. "Then," the letter continues, "as I have already done half the last picture and finished all the others, I said that I would like to go back to Florence at the end of May. To this he replied that, as I had laboured industriously and done so much to please him, he would do nothing to thwart my desires, but that if I elected to stay he would be glad to retain my services."

Vasari had set his heart on returning to Florence, and not all the flattering proffers of the Pope, or later of the King of Spain, could deter him. The latter offered him the position of court painter with a regular salary of fifteen hundred crowns a year and extra payment for each picture completed, but Giorgio would have none of it. Marcantonio Colonna was

commissioned to interview him on the subject and was sent empty away. "I desire no further fame," says Giorgio in relating the incident in one of his letters, "I seek no more worldly pelf; and I do not want to undertake any more big schemes with their attendant worries. I thank God for the proffered honour, but it only serves to make me go back more contentedly to the enjoyment of my own little possessions: for I have performed so many feats of arms, fought so many battles, and by my efforts extinguished so many rivalries, that I have been enabled to put by sufficient to serve me until the earth covers my bones. Therefore, *Signore Priore*, you may expect me back; and when I come I shall have no other wish than to finish the cupola in peace and quietness, and after that to close my eyes in the eternal sleep."

The offers of employment which reached him from all sides were exceedingly gratifying to the painter, even though he turned away from their allurements. The envy and malice of his fellow-artists in Rome, too, added not a little to his feeling of satisfaction. "To be slandered by his assistants," he remarks, "is the daily bread of him who endeavours to do his duty"; and as Vasari notoriously had more than the usual share of these professional accessories, it is to be presumed that he was envied and belied in proportion. He rejoices that his task in Rome is nearly finished, and gently rails at his friends in Florence for their anxiety to see him at work on the cupola, allowing no interval for rest. "You keep on calling, calling me," he says, "to come and finish the cupola." "It is the last cross I shall bear. . . . But I will have courage, and faith in God. While He guides me I fear nothing, neither Time, nor hard work, nor even death itself."

It is his persistent dwelling upon his ability to defy the attacks of time which shows most clearly how Vasari must have realised that for him the sands were fast running out: and though he generally contrives to keep up a bold front, there are letters in which he throws off the mask and confesses to a feeling of unwonted weariness. "This time," he says, writing to Francesco on April 16th, "I am indeed exhausted, and now that I have reached the age of sixty years,<sup>1</sup> the almost insuperable difficulties and the worries consequent upon works of such a magnitude are more than I can support. May the blessed God from whom I received whatever ability I may have and the opportunity of showing it in the commencement of so worthy an enterprise, give me grace and strength to finish it. If there remains any time over when it is done, I will devote it to His service and praise."

The Sala Regia, the cause of Giorgio's delay in Rome, was completed during the same month of April, and the consciousness of another imminent triumph spreads a glow of happiness and expectation over his next letters. "I have just uncovered some of the pictures," he says, writing to Borghini on the 16th, "and I think they will make a stir, as for the chief part they are the work of my own hands. If the work has been arduous, the enhancement of my reputation will be proportionately great. I only hope it will have the same effect upon the payment I am to receive! To have painted such a Sala as this, *Signor priore mio*, is a notable achievement, for though it is not so large as the one in Florence there is infinitely more work in it, and it stands in the chief city of the world. Thanks be to God that such

<sup>1</sup> He was sixty-one, and not sixty.

an enterprise was put into my hands without my having to ask for it even, and that I have proved equal to the task."

The high opinion held by the artist concerning his work was endorsed by the Pope, who shortly afterwards paid a private visit to the scene of his labours. "Yesterday, the festival of the Ascension, his Holiness sent for me saying that he desired to inspect the new pavement and the pictures, which are now practically finished, while the Sala is still closed to the public. So I had everything uncovered, and as a result gave great pleasure both to him and myself, for this is the first time I have been able to judge of the effect as a whole. My dear Prior, that Pope and the few gentlemen who were with him were full of astonishment, I can tell you! His Holiness stayed there for more than a whole hour and used the greatest cordiality when speaking to me, saying that I had never done anything better in my life. He promised that he would find something for Marcantonio without fail, and said that he would not forget me either. This evening the whole court is buzzing with admiration, for the news has spread that the Sala is finished. It has been decided to throw it open on Corpus Christi, so that will give time for the pavement to be finished and for the inscriptions to be placed under the pictures." He goes on to say that he is in need of rest, not because he feels any bodily fatigue after his labours, nor yet because he is tired of the attentions paid him at court, but because he yearns for the comfort of his own home and the society of his intimate friends, and is suffering from what we should call nowadays brain-fag, "after having done little else than think and scheme for seven months



on end." He considers this to be his masterpiece: "It is going to be the most beautiful of all my works," he says, "for I have never managed to impart so much vigour and relief to my figures before." And this he has accomplished in spite of the difficulties and vexations caused by bad weather, of which he says jokingly in one of his letters that if his friends have found it cold in Florence it has been far worse in Rome, for half the time he has been obliged to work not in *fresco*, but in *freddo*,<sup>1</sup> and many a time I have felt the plaster freezing while I worked upon it." Vasari's share in the Sala Regia, as already shown, consists of three great panels, the *Massacre of the Huguenots*, the *Battle of Lepanto*, and the *League between Pius V, the Spaniards and the Venetians*. These are the works which were to rival Michelangelo's Sistine ceiling and the Stanze of Raffaello, which lie beyond in the labyrinthine palace of the Vatican. The Stanze, the Sistine, and the Sala Regia are indeed monuments; but while the first two are the monuments of their painters' greatness, the third is but the monument of Vasari's conceit; and, as Fate wills it, the present-day visitor's course through the Vatican is so arranged that he passes from the mysteries and miracles of Raffaello to the marvellous vault of Michelangelo: then, if he wander so far, into the Sala, where Vasari's uninspired and uninspiring frescoes strike a discordant and quite unpleasant note.

Although Vasari refused to admit even to himself that he was growing old, too old almost for work, he was fully determined that the cupola should be the last of his undertakings. He seems to have arrived at this decision not because his artistic

<sup>1</sup> "E io questo anno non ho lavorato in fresco, ma in freddo."

powers were exhausted, but because he looked upon each successive work as being better than the last, and nearer to that perfection which he felt he was about to reach in Santa Maria del Fiore. It is perhaps for this very reason that we find the reiterated phrase applied by him to the Sala Regia—"the best thing that ever I did"—coupled with a recognition of the superior powers which he believes the Deity had endowed him with in his old age. The crowning achievement of his life, the noble and perpetual memorial of Cosimo de' Medici's reign, was to be the cupola. After that Cosimo might die and Vasari retire to his farm, forgetting that he had even been the worthy successor of Michelangelo and Raffaello. His fame was to live for ever in the cathedral church of the Lily of Arno. It was in this frame of mind that on May 16th, 1573, he wrote to Francesco, mapping out the future that was only in part to be his. "As by the grace of God and by dint of working hard night and day I have been able to continue with the painting of this Sala Regia, and have finished it in such a way as to leave it the best of all my works in Rome, I think I may say—having arrived at an age when most men give over working—that the hand of the Almighty God rules mine as well as guides the actions of your most serene Highness. It is my hope, being never so happy as when serving your family, that I shall be able to return to Florence and finish the great cupola, that being the last work I mean to do." He tells the Prince how anxious he is to get away, and that on his arrival in Florence he will so dispose of the cupola as to add, by his efforts, still more lustre to the already illustrious name of the Medici.

Although the Sala was already finished and only

waiting the day set apart for its public opening, Giorgio was unable to escape from Rome as early as he hoped. He was commissioned by the Pope to paint portraits of Cosimo, Francesco and his wife; and was obliged to wait until sketches could be sent from Florence. These minor works kept him hanging about until the hot weather he so much dreaded arrived and threatened to upset his equanimity altogether. It is almost in a state of despair that he writes to Francesco saying that he now intends to set out for Florence without fail on the first or second of June, whether his paintings are finished or not. The heat of Rome is insupportable, "beastly hot"—*un bestial caldo* are his exact words, and he does not intend to remain there any longer.

It does not appear, however, that the numerous delays were due so much to the action of the Pope as to the artist's intention of being present at the unveiling of his work. We have seen that praise was as nectar to him, and judging from the stir that had been made in the Vatican when it became known that Gregory had paid a private visit of inspection to the Sala, Giorgio had reason to believe that his works would receive a popular ovation when thrown open to the public gaze. It formed no part of his plans to miss the reward of his labours, or to be absent while sonnets perhaps were being penned in his praise; and, too, the question of payment had still to be settled. In this last respect he was too skilled in the usages of courts not to know that much depended upon striking while the iron was hot, and, as is shown by the sequel, he chose his moment so well that he issued from the financial aspect of his undertaking triumphant and rejoicing. It is interesting to note the change that his feelings have undergone towards the Eternal City;

he speaks of her no longer with his vituperative *questa Romaccia*—this abominable, despicable, nothing-I-can-say-about-it-is-bad-enough Rome—but as a kind and generous benefactor. “This Rome,” he writes to Borghini, “has been a very good Rome to me indeed. Many a time she has found me in rags and sent me away with a fine coat on my back; and this time even the eyes of the blindest are opened to the scope of my achievements. The Sala is a sublime performance, and though God saw fit to deprive me of all my envying assistants, that very fact obliged me to worry through the whole thing single-handed, and has in consequence been its own reward. Let me give the praise to God. The Pope has grown so fond of me that he is quite distressed at my approaching departure, and says he will ask my patrons to send me back next winter. Well, well; to be desired of so many people—albeit I am a miserable little mortal—is something to thank the Almighty for. All the same, I am delighted at the prospect of coming back to Florence, and am making my final preparations. The business portion of the undertaking here is settled, so on that score I shall come back to you a satisfied and contented man. As for Marcantonio, his Holiness has made him an allowance of a hundred crowns a year, with the promise of the first place falling vacant, either a *cavalierato* or whatever it may happen to be. And, finally, the Datario has become my very good friend ever since he saw the pictures uncovered in the Sala. I am setting out on my journey to-morrow, the first of June. I shall travel in easy stages, twenty miles a day, half in the early freshness of the morning and the remainder in the evening. I have excellent baiting places. The Cardinal Farnese is going to put me up at Caprarola,

Cardinal Simoncello at Orvieto, and Messer Piero Bacci, the Governor, at Castel della Pieve. At Cortona the Bishop will entertain me during my stay ; at Frassineto I shall be with Mona Cosina, and at Arezzo I shall find the rest of my relations. I will write to you from thence, as I shall be remaining ten days, after which I shall bring La Cosina by way of La Verna to Camaldoli (where his Holiness has granted permission for her to be lodged in the Badia da Basso), and thence by way of Valle Ombrosa to Florence."

Thus ended the last of Vasari's visits to Rome, in a little blaze of glory. He had been treated with marked respect by a Pope who was by no means as lavish with his favour as his predecessors had been, and there is conscious pride in the heart of honest bourgeois Giorgio as he recites the catalogue of notabilities who are to have the honour of giving him a bed for the night on his way back to Tuscany.

Upon his arrival in Florence the painter hurried to pay his duty to the Grand Duke. We have no means of knowing whether Vasari was surprised at the great change which had taken place in the condition of his patron—indeed, there is but little information forthcoming which would serve to throw a light upon the closing days of these two men, so utterly dissimilar, and yet so strangely attracted the one to the other. We have already had occasion to remark the affection with which Vasari regarded all the members of the Medici family, and his particular attachment to the person of the Grand Duke ; and Cosimo, when he had given over the cares of the government to his son and lay upon a bed of sickness, scarcely able either to move or make his wishes known, found much solace in the society of the faithful painter whose whole life had been more or less con-

nected with his own. The elder by some eight years, Vasari was a link with the past. He had witnessed the murder of Alessandro, or had as nearly witnessed it as any save the actual assassins, and had seen the accession of the present Duke. During the thirty-six years of his reign he had participated in nearly every event of importance, with the exception of those of a bellicose nature, and even these it had been his duty to depict upon the walls of the Sala Grande as a lasting memorial of the same. The honour which Cosimo hoped to win from future generations by the magnificence of his buildings was in part the honour of Vasari, for his was the mind that first contrived them and which guided their erection. If Cosimo founded the Order of Santo Stefano, it was Vasari who planned and embellished both the church and palace belonging to the order at Pisa. If Cosimo reconstructed the Sala Grande of the Palazzo Vecchio, Vasari's was the hand that did the actual work; and now that there remained but one thing worthy to be accomplished in Florence—the decoration of Brunelleschi's great dome—it was still Vasari, old and feeble, who visited the sick-bed of his dying patron to receive his faltering instructions and to discuss details. This is the picture sketched for us by Giorgio's hand: "I have spent the whole of these holidays with the Grand Duke, who likes to have me near him; and although he does not speak, is always glad to hear what is going on, and takes great delight in looking at the drawings for the cupola I have to show him."

It was Vasari's intention to begin the actual work directly after the festival of San Pietro, at the end of June, but he was prevented, not by the illness of the Grand Duke, but by his own feeble state of health.



Bregel

THE SIEGE OF PISA  
(Florence: Uffizi Gallery)

Giorgio Vasari





The labour involved in climbing to the scaffolding high up in the dome was such that his spirit shrank from the attempt, and he put off the commencement of his work from day to day. "I should have been up long ago to work at the frescoes, but the catarrh has been too much for me. I am trying to contrive some sort of basket or cage in which I can be drawn up to the scaffolding. Except for this I am as well as usual, but if I do not feel better before the winter comes on I shall have to move to a different lodging." And so it goes on, the simple story of an old man whose lifework is done gently slipping into the grave—just as he had wished it to be in one of his letters, except that the cupola had still to be done. Sometimes he mounts aloft and manages to do a spell of painting; sometimes the Grand Duke has a relapse and Giorgio hovers within call, in case he may be asked for; sometimes again he seems to be getting better, and then Giorgio is ever ready with a new drawing or a fresh scheme to show his patron and to keep alive his interest in the things of this world. Vasari was willing even to neglect the great work if by so doing he could give pleasure to his master. "Yesterday the Grand Duke was very pleased because I showed him a new drawing, and he kept me talking about it until four o'clock." This letter, dated July 18th, 1573, is the last of those written by Vasari still extant; after it there comes unillumined silence—not yet the silence of death, but a silence through which no glimpse of the failing artist reaches us. How he watched beside his patron, the once mighty Cosimo, now laid low and more impotent than a babe, we guess rather than know of certain knowledge; we see him, old and grey, stimulating his fading powers into momentary vigour whenever

the great Duke rallied from the torpor which was slowly enveloping his faculties, so that there might be some new drawing to show "when he recovered." And doubtless Giorgio would talk of the future and of the mutual glory that would be theirs when the cupola was numbered among things accomplished; for hope is as inextinguishable in the heart of age as in the heart of youth. It was nothing significant to Vasari that he preferred to ascend into the cupola in a basket rather than by the laborious climbing of immeasurable ladders; it did not tell him that he was attempting more than was in him to achieve. Except for the catarrh he is as well as usual. It is a passing cold, or the unsuitable weather—certainly not the infirmity of age—that retards the progress of the work. As soon as he has got over his indisposition he will go up into the dome and work away night and day at the frescoes, for he will certainly be called back to Rome when the autumn comes, so that it is most important to push forward with the Florentine frescoes in the meantime. Sometimes the thought troubles him that the Granduca may not, after all, live long enough to witness his servant's triumph; and then it is that Giorgio works for longer hours, plying his brush faster and more furiously than ever in the vain race with death. But always Cosimo is to be the victim, and not Giorgio Vasari, his faithful painter.

For nearly a year after Vasari penned that last letter Cosimo continued the losing struggle for life, the artist remaining ever at hand, during such time as he was not engaged upon his frescoes, to learn the latest news from the sick-room and to be permitted sometimes to visit the illustrious sufferer. In the meantime the very frescoes halted, as if the mechan-

ism by which they were to be evolved had suddenly lost its motive power and the wheels were running down. Gradually the Grand Duke sank; gradually the progress of the frescoes slackened, and Giorgio's heart grew heavy within him. He realised now that his patron would not live to share his triumph, and this realisation seems to have sealed the fate of the frescoes. On April 24th, 1574, Cosimo de' Medici, first Grand Duke of Tuscany, passed to his eternal rest, and among those who mourned him none perhaps was more sincere in his grief than the painter, who lingered sorrowfully until the last, and then crept away with a heavy heart to his own home. With the death of his patron his interest in the cupola and all desire to proceed with it vanished. *Le roi est mort* sounded his death knell, and no new hope sprang for him from the subsequent cry of *Vive le roi!*

“I am plunged into the deepest grief, as your Highness will readily imagine, by the death of the Cavaliere Messer Giorgio, my brother, which has just taken place. May his soul rest in peace.” So wrote Pietro Vasari, on June 27th, to Francesco de' Medici, only sixty-four days after the decease of Cosimo. Who shall say that the loss of his beloved master did not hasten the artist's dissolution? He seems to have suffered from no specific disease, but to have slipped quietly away from his moorings and launched into the eternal. Beyond Pietro's letter and a short notice in a manuscript preserved in the Biblioteca della Pia Confraternità di Santa Maria at Arezzo there is nothing to be learnt that we do not already know. “On June 27th, 1574, there died Messer Giorgio Vasari of Arezzo, a painter and architect of

great merit. He was the architect of the whole of the new buildings near the Zecca in Florence for the Magistrati: he painted the walls and ceiling of the magnificent *salone* which belongs to the Duke; he commenced the paintings in the dome of the Florentine Cathedral, but only completed the groups of kings under the lantern; and executed many other works which are to be seen here in Florence.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lapini, *Diario*.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE CUPOLA

Vasari's place in art—His belief in himself—Fate of the Cupola of Santa Maria del Fiore—Zuccherò appointed to complete it—Lasca's satirical verses concerning the completed work.

SO died Giorgio Vasari, having indeed rendered himself immortal, but not by his skill as architect and painter. He considered himself to be a consummate artist; he believed himself the worthy successor of Michelangelo and Raffaello, and that the popes and princes he served would gain additional lustre from the works he did for them. He was to live among the immortals, he knew that; yet he mistook the source of his immortality. Had he been told that as a painter he would run the risk of sinking into the realm of the forgotten but that he would live for ever as the historian of the artists, he would have laughed his interlocutor to scorn, or perhaps have boxed his ears as he did Lottino's.

Vasari was not entirely to blame for this lack of the sense of proportion. The tide of the Renaissance was already on the turn when first he saw the light in Arezzo. He himself considered that the period of trial and experiment in art was over, and that he and his contemporaries had but to follow the lines defined by their predecessors in order to reach perfection. "No one," he exclaims, "who is a painter nowadays cares any more to strive after new compositions, new attitudes or new folds for drapery; for new modes of expression or for sublimity in all the varied

effects obtainable in art. All the perfection that can possibly be given to works of this kind has already been imparted to these figures (in the Sistine chapel) by Michelangelo." It was enough that the would-be artist possessed a certain dexterity with his pencil and knew how to handle a brush. If he were an adept in the laws of perspective and had a few ideas to boot—or a good friend to supply the deficiency—there was no knowing to what eminence he might rise. This is Vasari's profession of faith, and this is the equipment by means of which he believed himself capable of rivalling the greatest painters the world has ever known. That this is so his paintings bear ample testimony. He was gifted with most of the parts that go to make up the artist, yet there is always missing that semi-divine touch that would give his work individuality, raising his vast productions from their monotonous level of uninspired mediocrity into the ranks of the world's masterpieces. His was an art to which there was only a physical limit: and while Borghini supplied the subjects and settled the *minutiæ* of dress and accessories, Giorgio worked away for dear life at canvas or wall-space, justifying Cellini's simulated terror lest he should live long enough to cover all Florence with his efforts.

— The biographer of artists, Vasari knew better than anyone else what course the arts had taken: he knew which of his predecessors had risen to eminence; and when he, too, in process of time rose to a like position, he was blinded by conceit and self-satisfaction to the true source of the favours showered upon him. It is as though he said to himself: "Raffaello and Michelangelo were great painters to whom were given the most important commissions in Rome and elsewhere: I follow in their footsteps both in Rome

and Florence: Duke Cosimo welcomes me at his court, and the Pope begs me from him as a personal favour—therefore I also am a great painter.” Such logic, while faulty, is human and comprehensible; and perhaps Vasari is the more lovable just because he did lack that sense of proportion and view himself through a glass that not only magnified, but was rose-coloured into the bargain.

It is strange to reflect how exactly the verdict of posterity has reversed Vasari's judgment. It is possible to believe that not a few of those who are quite familiar with his name as a writer are unaware that he was a prominent artist in his own day, and many who have seen his extensive frescoes in Florence may yet learn with surprise that after the death of Michelangelo he was called in as consulting architect to St. Peter's at Rome.

He stands among the immortals, not as an architect, still less as a painter, but as the historian of art; the first to set himself to collect the fast fading records of those great old masters who overcame the difficulties of draughtmanship and perspective, and whose genius triumphed over all the subtleties of expression and motion. Many a painter whose name is passing well known would have sunk into oblivion had not Giorgio enshrined him in the *Lives*: and now those same *Lives*, written by one whose hand was “more fitted to wield the brush than the pen,” have become his own monument, to last as in his fond blindness he hoped of his paintings, “during life, after death, and until the world shall have ceased to exist.”

“Gira qui gli occhi, o tu, che varchi, e'l passo  
Arresta: qui di Giorgio è 'l carnal velo,  
E la fama empie il mondo, e vola al cielo:  
Onora il tempio, il nome, il spirto, e'l sasso,”

The body of the dead painter was taken to Arezzo, *con grandissimo onore*, but not until four years later, as we learn from the manuscript at Arezzo already mentioned. He seems to have been first buried at Florence: for the old forgotten and unknown writer who has left us this record says: "On the seven and twentieth day of June, and in the year 1574, there died Messer Giorgio Vasari, who had been held in much favour by the Pontiffs Pius V and Gregory XIII: also by the Granduca Cosimo and Francesco. And in the year 1578 his body was taken thence from Florence to Arezzo, being escorted all the way by fifty torches." After four years he was buried with becoming solemnity in the chapel he had designed and adorned in the church of the Pieve d'Arezzo; mourned, though on account of his lengthy absences he could scarcely have been greatly missed, by his wife, his brother and numerous nephews and nieces. The name he had been at such pains to render famous, hoping in his childlessness to see it perpetuated in his brother's sons, was, however, doomed to early extinction, for a few years after the death of the painter we find the Confraternità di Santa Maria della Misericordia, to whom the property was to revert when the family died out, in the enjoyment of his revenues.

Nor was there a better fate in store for the unfinished frescoes in Santa Maria del Fiore. As already related, only the first range of figures under the lantern was completed when Giorgio laid aside his brush for ever. For the space of two years nothing further was done, but in August, 1576, Francesco de' Medici, now Grand Duke of Tuscany in the place of his father, called upon Federigo Zuccherò, Vasari's arch-enemy, to finish the work.



No worse choice could have been made, and had Francesco been able to peep at the marginal notes in Federigo's copy of the *Lives*, he might well have hesitated before making such a selection. A recent writer<sup>1</sup> goes so far as to state that Federigo "destroyed all that Vasari had already painted, for the satisfaction of replacing it with his own compositions," adding that as the work was completed in 1579 Zuccherò proved himself to have been as rapid an executant as his predecessor, by decorating practically the whole cupola in five years. For this statement, however, there appears to be no substantial basis, as Lapini, the contemporary diarist, is very explicit in his entry. "And on the thirtieth day of the said month of August, 1576, Messer Federigo Zuccheri [*sic*] of Urbino, a painter by calling, began to paint in the cupola of the cathedral of Florence, at the spot where Messer Giorgio Vasari of Arezzo left off. The latter had begun to paint it himself, but he painted only the figures of the kings which are under the lantern, and these are all in the first range. Then he died, and Maestro Federigo Zuccherò painted all the remainder." From this notice it is clear that Zuccherò worked more quickly than M. Muntz supposes, as instead of five, it only took him three years to complete a vast undertaking which, in the words of Raffaello Borghini, might very reasonably have occupied a man his whole life.

"And on the nineteenth day of the said August (1579), on a Saturday, the newly painted cupola was uncovered and the great screen taken away in such wise that the said work could be seen without impediment. And when it was disclosed some said one thing and some another: some said that the cupola

<sup>1</sup> E. Muntz, *Florence et la Toscane*, Hachette, Paris, 1901, page 201.

appeared less high than formerly: some said that it had been more beautiful before the work was done, and that it appeared diminished in size. Some said exactly the opposite, and many were the opinions held and expressed, as is the case in nearly every question that arises in life. Nevertheless, by people of sound judgment who are not led blindly by the voice of fashion, it was considered to be a splendid and brilliant work."

The mouthpiece of the voice of fashion to whom Lapini alludes was Anton Francesco Grazzini, better known as *il Lasca*, who wrote a long poem satirising the performance of Vasari and Zuccherò, saying that it was undertaken with little sense and less judgment:—

. . . "Quel lavoro  
Che già con poco senno e men giudizio  
Fu cominciato da Giorgan' Vasari."

He regrets that a foreigner—by which he meant someone not a Tuscan—had to be called in to finish the work, but admits that Federigo had no equal among the painters then living:—

"Il qual per dire il vero,  
Nel disegnare, e maneggiar colori,  
Ha poch' oggi, o nessun, che gli sia pari."

He then turns to the task of criticising the result of their labours, but refuses to disclose his own opinion, preferring to tell us what "the public" thinks.

"Ringraziato sia 'l ciel, pur s'è veduto  
La cupola scoperta  
Più e più giorni stare ;  
E quel tempo è venuto,  
Ch'ognuno a suo piacere  
L'ha potuta vedere,  
E ben considerare,

E dirne apertamente il suo parere.  
 Io voglio il mio tacere,  
 Ma ben quel raccontare  
 Del popolo tutto, che generalmente  
 Torcendo il grifo, dice che gli pare  
 Che al mondo non si sia  
 Mai fatto la maggior gagliofferia ;  
 E i due pittor non resta d'ingiuriar."

Poor Giorgio! It was perhaps well for him that he did not live to see the work finished after all. It would have killed him to be told that no names were bad enough for him, and that his would-be masterpiece was the most execrable bit of bungling ever done with paint. The blame is entirely laid on Vasari, for Zucchero only carried out his designs.

" Pur il secondo non si può imputare,  
 Nè dee da nessun esser biasimato,  
 Sendo stato chiamato  
 Quell' opera a finire,  
 Che scambio d'abbellire  
 La cupola, abbruttisce, abbassa e guasta.  
 Io parlo per ver dire ;  
 Non per odio d'alcun, ne per disprezzo ;  
 Ma ben Giogin d'Arezzo,  
 Giogin', Giogin', debb'essere incolpato."

Vasari is the sole culprit, and he has been led either by greed of gain or by envy, or perhaps by the hope of fame presumptuously to attempt the painting of the cupola.

" Giorgio fece il peccato,  
 Che del guadagno troppo innamorato,  
 O dall' invidia, o dall' onor tirato  
 E come architetto poco intendente  
 Presuntuosamente il primo è stato  
 La cupola a dimingere."

Then follows a detailed attack, during which il Lasca likens the dome to a foot-bath or a saucepan

instead of the stately hemisphere that Brunellesco left it:—

“E mensole e cornici ivi entro a fingere  
 Senz'ordine e misura  
 Acciochè dalle mura  
 Non cadessero in coro  
 Quelle sue figuracce d'oro in oro.  
 E dopo ha per ristoro  
 Quegli ottangoli guasti o riturati,  
 O dipinti o impiestrati,  
 Che sendo larghi abbasso  
 S'andavan restringendo appoco appoco,  
 Tanto, che passo, passo  
 Si conduceano al terminato loco,  
 Che alla lanterna poi si congiugneva,  
 Con tanta grazia e tal proporzione,  
 Ch'ognun, che la vedeva,  
 Gli occhi e'l petto s'empieva  
 Di meraviglia e di consolatione.  
 Or pare alle persone,  
 Sendo tanto abbassata,  
 Ch'ella sia diventata  
 Un catinaccio da lavare i piedi,  
 O una conca da bollir bucati.”

“Where are now those giants of art?” he cries in fine scorn. Where are Michelangelo and the rest, that their wrath may fall on Vasari? In particular he invokes the spirit of Benvenuto Cellini because he was a man without fear or favour unto any person, and had a deep reverence for the majesty of this dome, whose beauty he never ceased to admire. He pictures Cellini tearing his hair—his own, not Vasari's—and raging through the streets of Florence at this insult to the dome, looking for Vasari, to take him to some secluded spot and then crucify him.

“O Michele immortale, Angel divino,  
 Lionardo, Andrea, o Pontormo, o Bronzino,  
 O voi tutti altri degni d'ogni pregio,  
 Perchè non siate or vivi?”

Pur fra color, che son di vita privi,  
 Vivo vorrei Benvenuto Cellini,  
 Che senza alcun ritegno o barbazzale  
 Delle cose malfatte dicea male :  
 E la cupola al mondo singolare,  
 Non si potea di lodar mai saziare :  
 E la solea chiamare,  
 Alzandola alle stelle,  
 La meraviglia delle cose belle.  
 Certo non capirebbe or nella pella,  
 In tal guisa dipintala vegendo ;  
 E saltando e correndo e fulminando,  
 S'andrebbe querelando,  
 E per tutto gridando ad alta voce  
 Giorgin d'Arezzo meterebbe in croce."

This is the final judgment : that Vasari is worse than a robber or a murderer, and that nobody would die of grief if one fine day it was found that the dome had been carefully whitewashed !

" Oggi universalmente  
 Odiato dalla gente,  
 Quasi pubblico ladro o assassino :  
 E'l popolo Fiorentino  
 Non sarà mai di lamentarsi stanco  
 Se forse un dì non se le dà di bianco."

And this is what "the public" thought about the work which was to cause the names of Cosimo de' Medici and Giorgio Vasari to "resound throughout all ages, during life, after death, and until the world shall have ceased to exist."

THE END



## INDEX

- Adriani, G. B., 179, 191, 219, 264  
 Albizzi, L. degli, 215, 291  
 Algarotti, *cit.*, 82  
 Allori, C., 156  
 Almeni, Sforza, 108, 113, 291  
 Amaseo, R., 72  
 Amelini, A., 184  
 Ammannato, Bart., 101, 115, 166,  
 171, 194, 200  
 Anguisciola, S., 245  
 Antonia, Donna, 148  
 Antonio, Bernardo di, 149  
 Aretino, Pietro, 89  
 Arezzo, 12, 146  
 „ San Bernardo, 12  
 „ Cathedral, 123  
 „ Comp. di San Rocco, 37  
 „ Sta. Fiore, 145  
 „ Sta. Maria della Pieve, 268;  
 Vasari's Chapel, 143  
 „ Vasari's House, 59, 65, 85,  
 333  
*Arrotino*, 270  
 Austria, Barbera of, 206  
 „ Giovanna of, 194  
 „ Margherita of, 35  
 Bacci, Niccolosa. See Cosina, La  
 Baglione, *cit.*, 102  
 Bagnacavallo, B., 71  
 Baldinucci, *cit.*, 102  
 Bandinelli, B., 6, 131  
 Barbieri, A. del, 220, 302  
 Berna, L. del, 211  
 Bigio, Nanni di Baccio, 127  
 Bizzera, 71  
 Bologna, Giov. da, 311  
 „ S. Michele in Bosco, 54  
 Bombaso, G., 277  
 Borghini, R., *cit.*, 311  
 „ Vincenzo, 95, 121, 179,  
 190, 191, 214, 241, 249, 310, 334;  
 his share in the *Lives*, 157; report  
 for Wedding of Francesco de'  
 Medici, 198  
 Borgo, R. dal, 31, 32  
 „ G. P. dal, 71  
 Bosco, near Alessandria della  
 Paglia, 259  
 Bottari, *cit.*, VII, 209, 258  
 Botti, 274  
 Botticelli, B., 179  
 Brescia, 244  
 „ R. dal, 11  
 Bronzino, 327  
 Buonagrazia in Valdarno, 165  
 Buonarroti, L., 253  
 „ Michelangelo. See  
 Michelangelo  
 Buoncompagni, Ugo. See Gregory  
 XIII  
 Caccini, G., 204, 207, 244  
 Calcagni, T., 128  
 Camaldoli, 47, 48, 52, 53  
 Cambio, A. di, 172  
 Cappucciolo, 296  
 Caro, A., 72, 76, 79, 87, 280  
 Cavalieri di Santo Stefano, 40  
 Cellini, B., 4, 16, 79, 187, 204,  
 243  
 Charles V, 7, 12, 29

## 362 THE LIFE OF GIORGIO VASARI

Clement VII, 5, 23  
 Clementi, P., 277  
 Colle, R. dal, 71  
 Colonna, Marcantonio, 312, 313, 337  
 Concini, B., 123  
 Condivi, his Life of Michelangelo, 185  
 Conte, Iacopo del, 127  
 Coriolanus, C., 273  
 Cortona, 117  
 Coryat, T., *cit.*, 62, 63, 236, 238  
 Cosimo, A. di, 35  
 Cosina, La, 92, 146, 252, 304, 345  
 Cremona, 244  
 Cronaca, 173  
 Cungi, G., 51, 54  
 Cybo, Cardinal, 41

*Dialoghi*, 178

Dumas, *cit.*, 180

Faetani, G. M., 81

Fans, 237

Farnese, A. See Paul III

Florence, Bridge of Sta. Trinità, 199

„ Column of Sta. Trinità, 170, 172, 194

„ Corridor across the Arno, 194

„ Sta. Croce, Tomb of Michelangelo, 193

„ Fortezza da Basso, 25

„ Fountain of Neptune, 194, 203, 219

„ S. Lorenzo, 98, 164, 276

„ Sta. Maria del Fiore, 201, 306, 310, 315, 323, 329, 335, 338, 341, 347, 354, 355

„ Sta. Maria Novella, 252, 266

„ Palazzo Pitti, 114, 166

„ „ Strozzi, 153

Florence, Palazzo Vecchio, 122, 147, 167, 172, 179, 190; Cortile, 208, 217; Sala Grande, 122, 135, 167, 173, 180, 190, 203, 211, 219, 228, 260, 264, 273, 278, 281, 286, 287, 289, 301, 302, 304, 306, 309, 346; Stanze Nuove, 114, 115, 125, 132, 154, 234

„ S. Pier Scheraggio, 152

„ Uffizi, 149, 166, 319, 350 ✓

Fontana, P., 221

Foschi, Fra S., 71

Francesca, Madonna (wife of O. de' Medici), 36

Frassineto, 296, 333, 345

Gallo, A. da San, 129, 187, 204

Gandolfo, 72

Gaye, *cit.*, 159, 169, 308

Gherardi, C., 32, 54, 113, 117, 124

Ghirlandaio, R., 179

Giovio, Bishop, 19, 72

Giunti, Giacomo, 231, 253, 275

Giusti, Abbot, 191

Gothic Architecture, 242

Gregory XIII, 318, 326, 340, 354

Gualandi, *cit.*, 152

Guicciardini, L., 32

Iacone, 115

Inns, 238

Julius III, 87, 90, 95, 96; his character, 96, 97; death, 135

Landucci, *cit.*, 153, 202, 203

Lanzi, *cit.*, 62

Lapini, *cit.*, 25, 119, 149, 183, 196, 209, 218, 222, 227, 268, 315, 350, 355

Lapini, Frozino, 117

Lasca, il, *cit.*, 117, 356

Lenzoni, C., 97



- Leoni, Leone, 244  
*Life of Man*, 109  
 Ligorio, P., 257, 261, 269  
 Lippi, Fra F., 233  
*Lives of the Painters*, 233, 249, 274 ;  
 their inception, 72 ; progress, 79,  
 95, 264 ; correction by Faetani, 81 ;  
 publication, 97 ; second edition,  
 157, 229, 253, 272 ; criticism of,  
 277  
 Lodi, 244  
 Lombardi, G., 220  
 Lotino, 263  
 Lucca, Palazzo del Governatore, 102
- Manelli, House of, 195, 197  
 Manno, 4, 11  
 Mantua, 244  
 Marcellus II, 135  
 Marciano, Battle of, 119  
 Marsiglia, G. da, 5  
 Martelli, Cammilla, 197, 292  
 Martini, Luca, 148  
 Marzupini, Jacopo, 303  
 Masaccio, 267  
 Mattea, B. di Mona, 178  
 Mazzoni, G., 254  
 Medici, Alessandro de', 5 ; his  
 government, 23 ; betrothal, 31 ;  
 his death, 38  
 Medici, Caterina, 22  
 ,, Cosimo the Elder, 172  
 ,, Cosimo, Granduca, 41, 99,  
 113, 114, 125, 126, 147,  
 154, 160, 166, 168, 180,  
 199, 290, 294, 300, 315,  
 317, 320, 322, 329, 332,  
 336, 345, 348 ; his opinion  
 of Michelangelo, 127 ;  
 retires from the govern-  
 ment, 186 ; building oper-  
 ations, 195, 213, 250 ; his  
 death, 349  
 ,, Ferdinando, 155, 161, 164,  
 321, 322
- Medici, Francesco, 59, 194, 230,  
 297, 321, 354  
 ,, Garzia, 155, 160, 161  
 ,, Giovanni, 138, 155, 160, 161  
 ,, Giulio, 40  
 ,, Ippolito, 5, 15, 24, 29  
 ,, Isabella, 180  
 ,, Lorenzino, 37  
 ,, Lorenzo, 3, 5, 18, 20, 33,  
 55  
 ,, Ottaviano, 19, 21, 36, 51,  
 52, 67, 68  
 ,, Tanai, 265  
 ,, Tommaso, 166  
 Mellini, *cit.*, 177, 197, 220, 221  
 Michelangelo, 65, 67, 108, 118, 121,  
 126, 142, 261, 280, 352 ; David,  
 8 ; Cartoons for *Battle of Pisa*, 6 ;  
 his death, 182 ; funeral, 186  
 Michele, San, in Bosco. See  
 Bologna  
 Michelozzi, Michelozzo, 172  
 Milan, 241, 243  
 Milanese, G., *cit.*, vii  
 Modena, 241, 242  
 Molza, 72, 76  
 Montaigne, *cit.*, 41, 238, 299  
 Montalvo, A. di, 151  
 Monte, Card. del. See Julius III  
 Monte Sansovino, 52  
 Montughi, 284, 286, 288, 295  
 Mugello, Luco di, 275  
 Müntz, E., *cit.*, 355
- Naldini, B., 179  
 Nannoccio da San Giorgio, 11  
 Naples, 69  
 ,, Cathedral, 70  
 ,, S. Giovanni a Carbonara,  
 70, 71  
 ,, Monte Oliveto, 70  
 ,, Museo Nazionale, 70  
 Nobili, Ant. de', 149
- Padua, 244

Parma, 241  
 Passerini, Card. Silvio, 5  
 Paul III (Farnese), 29, 66  
 Paul IV, 136, 138  
 Pavia, 241, 243  
 Perugia, 229  
 „ S. Piero de' Cassinesi, 229  
 Peruzzi, 129  
 Piacenza, 241  
 Pictures:—Abraham Entertaining the Angels, 55; Adoration of the Magi (for Pius V), 259; ditto (Rimini), 64, 82; Alliance between Spain, Venice, and Paul V (Sala Regia, Vatican), 336; Annunciation (Louvre), 275; ditto (Murate), 28; Assumption (Black Monks, Florence), 275; ditto (Monte San Savino), 52; Assumption of the Magdalene (Pius V), 310; Autumn (to France), 275; Banner (for Comp. de' Paducci), 87; Battle of Satyrs, 18; Battle of Lepanto (Vatican), 311; Beheading of the Baptist, 101; S. Benedict (Perugia), 231; S. Blaise (Lucca), 68; Calling of Andrew and Peter (Arezzo), 146; Conception (Lucca), 67; ditto (SS. Apostoli, Florence), 59; Conversion of S. Paul (Rome), 101; Coronation of the Virgin (Città di Castello), 274; ditto (Prato), 275; Crucifixion (for Botti), 274; ditto (Luco di Mugello), 275; ditto (S. M. Novella, Florence), 252; Christ Carrying the Cross (Sta. Croce, Florence), 276; Christ Parting from His Mother, 252; Dead Christ (France), 275; another, 56; Head of Christ, 275; Deposition (Arezzo), 46; ditto (SS. Apostoli, Florence), 57; ditto (Pamfilii Gallery), 66; ditto (Pisa Cathedral), 69; ditto (Camal-

doli), 53; ditto (Ravenna), 83; Descent of the Holy Spirit (Sta. Croce, Florence), 276; Endymion, 89; St. Eustace (Lucca), 68; Feast of Ahasuerus (Arezzo), 86; St. George and the Dragon (Arezzo), 146; St. Gregory at Supper (Bologna), 55; Incredulity of St. Thomas (Sta. Croce, Florence), 276; St. Jerome (France), 79; ditto (Perugia), 231; ditto (Pius V), 310; St. John, 56; Justice Punishing Vice, etc. (Naples), 71; Last Supper (Sta. Croce, Florence), 79; Madonna (Simone Corsi), 79; ditto (Altoviti), 95; Marriage of St. Catherine (Bigallo), 79; Marriage in Cana (Perugia), 231; Martyrdom of S. Gismondo, 99; Massacre of the Huguenots (Vatican), 325; Misericordia, 101; Nativity (Camaldoli), 52; ditto (Nuns of Sta. Margherita), 65; Pietà (France), 79; Portrait of L. Guicciardini, 87; ditto of P. Aretino's Mother, 89; ditto of Gregory XIII, 337; ditto of Michelangelo, 319; ditto Ant. de' Nobili, 275; ditto Alessandro de' Medici, 21; ditto Lorenzo de' Medici, 20; Presentation in the Temple (Naples), 70; Psyche and Cupid (France), 89; Resurrection, 56; Sacrifice of Abraham, 21; Spring (France), 275; Stigmata (Rimini), 82; Venus and the Graces (Torrigiani), 275; another, 18; Venus and the Swan (O. de' Medici), 59; Virgin and Child (Camaldoli), 51; Virgin and Saints (Pisa), 69; ditto (Castiglione Aretino), 87  
 Piombo, Frate del, 15  
 Pisa, Palazzo de' Cavalieri, 131, 155, 166, 289 294

- Pistoia, 248, 289, 324  
 Pius IV, 136, 222  
 Pius V, 234, 261, 262, 271, 297, 301,  
 354; his death, 313  
 Plague, 9  
 Pollastra, G., 4  
 Poppi, F. da, 212  
 Puccini, B., 166  
 Pupini, B., da Treviso, 56  
  
 Raffaello, 129  
 Ravenna, 83  
 Reggio, 241  
 Rimini, 81, 82  
 Romano, Giulio, 77  
 Rome, 65, 67, 71, 259, 271  
   ,, Church of the Florentines,  
   128  
   ,, Palazzo Farnese, 66, 258  
   ,, ,, Ruccellai, 102  
   ,, S. Pietro in Montorio, 99,  
   101, 109  
   ,, S. Pietro in Vaticano, 122,  
   126, 141, 182, 259, 261,  
   353  
   ,, Vatican, 256; Sala Regia,  
   142, 256, 309, 311, 320,  
   325, 334, 336, 339, 340  
   ,, Vigna Giulia, 101, 104  
   ,, Ponte Sisto, 261, 269  
 Roviale, 71  
 Rumagasso, 313  
 Rurino, 220  
  
 Sabatini, L., 220  
 Saltini, *cit.*, 42, 151  
 Salviati, F., 5, 11, 13, 103, 141, 234,  
 257  
 Sangalietto, 301  
 San Gallo, A. da, 66  
 Sansovino, I., 17  
 Sarto, A. del, 6  
 Savonarola, 172  
 Scoronconcolo, 38  
 Scoti-Bertinelli, *cit.*, 74, 130, 157,  
 158, 279  
  
 Settimanni, *cit.*, 180  
 Signorelli, Luca, 3, 4  
 Strada, Giov. della, 179, 309  
  
 Tacci, Maddelena, 3, 146  
 Taldi, Lazzaro de'. See Vasari,  
   Lazzaro  
 Talenti, 156  
 "Tantecose," Monsignore, 257  
 Tasso, G. B., 114, 122  
 Thomas, William, *cit.*, 237  
 Titian, 17  
 Toledo, E. di, 114, 162  
 Tolomei, C., 72, 76  
 Torrentini, L., 95  
 Torrigiani, L., 275  
 Tramezzi, 266  
 Travelling, 62, 236  
 Tribolo, 35  
 Turini, A., 28  
  
 Udine, G. da, 27  
 Ughi, G. F., 127  
 "Umbrellæ," 238  
  
 Vaga, P. del, 67  
 Varchi, B., 183  
 Valeriano, P., 6  
*Vasario*, 3  
 Vasari, Antonio, 3, 10  
   ,, Giorgio the Elder, 3, 146  
   ,, ,, ,, Younger, birth  
   and parentage, 3; stormy days in  
   Florence, 7; death of his father,  
   10; early pictures, 11; goes to  
   Pisa, 11; returns to Arezzo, 12;  
   visits Rome and studies anatomy,  
   13; his task in life, 14; returns  
   to Arezzo ill, 19; enrolled a  
   painter, 20; family affairs, 27;  
   second sister becomes a nun, 28;  
   study of architecture, 29; pre-  
   parations for arrival of Marg-  
   herita of Austria, 31; his share  
   in the work and its success, 33;

his grief at death of Alessandro, 43; opinion of Alessandro, 45; return to Arezzo, 46; visit to Camaldoli, 48; visits Rome for study, 51; works at Camaldoli, Monte San Savino, and Bologna, 51; returns to court life, 57; purchase of house at Arezzo, 59; decoration of new house, 65, 85; visit to Rome, 65; competition for cornice, Farnese Palace, 67; visit to Naples, 69; story of the *Lives*, 72; their progress, 79; visit to Rimini, 81, 82; Ravenna, 83; his views on matrimony, 84, 90; contemporary opinion of his work, 87; his sonnets, 92; his view of life, 94; goes to Rome to serve Julius III, 96; publication of the *Lives*, 97; discontent, 99; homesickness, 104; designs for Almeni's house, 108, 113; Loggia for Altoviti, 109, 111; return to Florence, 113; enters service of Cosimo, 113; interview with Iacone, 116; his property destroyed, 118; "pittore stipendiato," and invited to France, 120; appointed architect to the Palazzo Vecchio, 122; grief at death of Gherardi, 124; his rivals at court, 131; his repartee, 135; visit to Rome with Card. Giovanni de' Medici, 138; his conceit, 142, 298, 301, 303, 304, 314, 329, 330, 334, 335, 339, 341, 344; the family chapel, 145; progress of Pal. Vecchio, 147; illness at Leghorn, 153; work for the Cavalieri at Pisa, 155; his literary testament, 159; *Libro di Disegni*, 159; financial difficulties, 165, 278; opinion of his own work, 175; grief at death of Michelangelo, 183; Life of

Michelangelo, 184; Vasari and the future, 189; corridor across the Arno, and other preparations for wedding of Francesco de' Medici, 196; his opinion of Cosimo, 214; over-work, 227; reasons for his journey through Italy, 229; Perugia, 229; Spoleto, Rome, 233; Ravenna, 240; Milan, 241, 243; his opinion of Gothic architecture, 242; Cremona, 245; Autohography, 249, 273, 276; his mother-in-law, 251; Life of Taddeo Zuccherò, 253; F. Zuccherò, 254; summoned to Rome, 259; St. Peter's, 261; return to Florence, 272; portrait for the *Lives*, 273; his satisfaction with the *Lives*, 277; as courtier and flatterer, 279; statement of accounts, 280; his hospitality, 283; approach of old age, 289; visits Rome with Cosimo, 294; back to Rome to serve Pius V, 296; as a man of property, 296; his works in the Vatican, 298; his life in the Vatican, 305; knighthood, 305; cupola of Sta. Maria del Fiore, 307; Gonfalonierato, 308; summoned to Rome to decorate the Sala Regia, 308; return to Florence on death of Pius V, 314; again to Rome to serve Gregory XIII, 319; his character, 323; interview with Gregory, 325; changes in Rome, 326; illness, 327; concern for Cosimo de' Medici, 332; invited to Spain, 337; his rivals, 338; appreciation of Rome, 343; return to Florence, 344; closing days, 345; his death, 349; his place in art, 351; his funeral, 354

Vasari, Lazzaro, 1, 146

,, Marcantonio, 322, 340, 344

- Vasari, Pietro, 318, 349  
Veltroni, S., 32, 54, 179  
Vermin, 240  
Verona, 244  
Vespucci, N., 6  
Vettori, Pier, 191; 219  
Vicenza, 244  
Vinci, Leonardo da, Last Supper,  
241  
Vini, S., 220
- Viniziano, Sebastiano, 16, 67  
Vitoni, 248  
Volterra, Daniello da, 184, 233,  
254, 257
- Zucca, Iacopo del, 179, 302, 310  
Zuccherò, F., 221, 253, 258, 259,  
307, 316, 326, 354, 359  
,, Taddeo, 253, 258, 264

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