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ARTISTS

BOTTICELLI

BY

ERNST STEINMANN

TRANSLATED BY CAMPBELL DODGSON





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MONOGRAPHS ON ARTISTS

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EDITED, AND WRITTEN JOINTLY WITH OTHER AUTHORS

BY

H. KNACKFUSS

VI.

BOTTICELLI

BIELEFELD AND LEIPZIG
VELHAGEN & KLASING

1901

BOTTICELLI

BY

ERNST STEINMANN

TRANSLATED BY

CAMPBELL DODGSON

WITH 90 ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PICTURES AND DRAWINGS



BIELEFELD AND LEIPZIG
VELHAGEN & KLASING

1901

PRINTED BY FISCHER & WITTIG, LEIPZIG.

DONNA EMILIA PERUZZI

IN MEMORIAM.

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BOTTICELLI'S OWN PORTRAIT. From the Punishment of Korah, Dathan and Abiram in the Sistine Chapel, Rome.
(From a photograph by Anderson, Rome.)

SANDRO BOTTICELLI.

I.

THERE are numerous pictures in which the portrait of Sandro Botticelli has been discovered by early or recent critics. Of all these portraits, the best documentary evidence attaches to that of a young man, wearing a red mantle and black cap, who stands at the further end of the spectators to witness the crucifixion of St. Peter in Filippino's fresco in the Brancacci Chapel at Florence. The evidence is the statement of Vasari. But the sharp profile, in which the pupil piously traced the features of his master, has suffered so severely from the destroying hand of time, that its effect at the present day is almost repulsive, and this necessitated a search for some other picture representing Botticelli's figure and countenance with more fidelity to life. The artist's portrait of himself in the Sistine Chapel at Rome is perhaps the best calculated to fulfil every kind of expectation, while it most closely corresponds to the picture of him which fancy has created in our minds. In the fresco of the "Punishment of Korah" we see the master in the fulness of his creative power, only a little older than in the panel at the Berlin Museum, in which we may also recognise a portrait of himself. The young artist appears in a plain black painter's dress, in the midst of the princes of the church, clad in velvet and scarlet, who contribute to the splendour and significance of the fresco. The straight brown hair covers the brow under the dark cap; the head is bent a little forward, and the eyes look keenly to one side, as though fixed on some special object. The regular lines, the nobly formed mouth, the intelligent, somewhat sad looking eyes, lend to this countenance the same winning charm, the same melancholy interest, which enchant us in the many portraits of the youthful Raphael.

Such a portrait, moreover, throws a very welcome light on the character of a man, who has all our sympathy, whose many masterpieces testify to a life of ample achievement, and whose outward career can nevertheless only be traced with great difficulty by the aid of Vasari's unreliable information, by the brief and categorical statements of an anonymous writer, and by some few documents. The careless buoyancy of a true artist nature

may reveal itself to us in these features; but, in addition, there are already signs of that curious leaning to reverie, so unknown, as a rule, to the Italian, that he has no term for it in his language; a tendency which, nevertheless, in later years grew so much on this gifted artist, that it made him completely forget all care for the things of the present world.

The son of Mariano Filipepi was never destined to rise beyond the narrow limits of a modest middle-class existence; the days of Raphael and Michelangelo had not yet come, when artists moved amongst the leading men of their time, and enjoyed the highest prizes life could give. On the other hand Alessandro Botticelli, or more briefly, Sandro, was told in later years by an angry friend that he had learnt nothing, that he was hardly able to read, and might try in vain for a life-time to expound Dante. And who was there, in fact, to render a tanner's child, the youngest of four sons, familiar with the intellectual treasures of Italy, or to initiate him into the aristocratic culture of the humanists, the very essence of which he yet succeeded in expressing by the wonderful intuition of the artist, in his most delightful works?

The boy was born in 1447; in early youth he showed the same dislike of learning as nearly all his brethren in art, down to the great Michelangelo. Reading and writing became more of a torment to him the longer he tried to learn, and when his father found that the boy would never control his wandering thoughts sufficiently to do any good at school, he gave up the attempt in despair, and apprenticed him to a goldsmith. But young Sandro meant to be a painter, and it was not till they made him a pupil of Fra Filippo of the Carmine that his restless spirit found peace. He devoted himself with his whole soul to the new art, and thus earned the affection of his famous master, while he soon, according to Vasari, went far beyond anything that had ever been expected of him.

The young Sandro's rich imagination, however, was by no means entirely satisfied with the agreeable manner of Fra Filippo, whose



Fig. 1. FORTITUDE. Uffizi Gallery, Florence.
(From a photograph by Giacomo Brogi, Florence.)



Fig. 2. JUDITH RETURNING WITH THE HEAD OF HOLOFERNES. Uffizi Gallery, Florence.
(From a photograph by Giacomo Brogi, Florence.)

cheerfulness of disposition was reflected in his works. In Botticelli's earlier Madonnas we see the impression made on him by the powerful features peculiar to Verrocchio, while in the "Fortitude" of masculine beauty in the Uffizi (Fig. 1), his first independent work mentioned by Vasari, he was perfectly able to adapt himself to the style of the brothers Pollaiuolo, who had carried out the other six Virtues, cardinal and theological, for the Mercanzia at Florence.

The allegorical figure of Fortitude, splendidly preserved, sits on a high-backed throne, wearing a rich but martial dress and holding a gleaming sceptre in both hands. The splendid woman shows no trace of that harsh severity with which earlier art invested these personifications of the virtues



Fig. 3. THE DISCOVERY OF THE BODY OF HOLOFERNES. Uffizi Gallery, Florence.
(From a photograph by Giacomo Brogi, Florence.)

— a set of subjects of extremely common occurrence —; she retains none of the stiff and unwieldy emblems of her strength, such as a slain lion or a club held up in menace: but there is a wonderful rhythm in the mighty limbs and warrior frame, and a human beauty in the features. Botticelli's individuality asserts itself, apart from all foreign influences, in the grace of movement and in the pensive gaze of the slightly downcast eyes.

The two small pictures of Judith in the Uffizi, which once adorned the study of the notorious Bianca Capello, and the St. Sebastian at Berlin



Fig. 4. MADONNA. Corsini Palace, Florence.
(From a photograph by Alinari Brothers, Florence.)

belong likewise to a period in which Botticelli was still subject to alien influence, now from one side, now from another. "Judith returning after the accomplishment of her enterprise" (Fig. 2) is a little picture of enchanting naïveté, well preserved and wonderfully delicate in colouring. Holding a sword in her right hand, an olive branch in her left, the victorious heroine returns with head uplifted and quickened step to the camp of her people. Her youthful countenance, which reminds one strongly of Verrocchio, has an expression of slight melancholy, whereas the handmaiden, with her stalwart stride, carries the head of the slain enemy in an earthenware dish, on her own head, and in her hand the wine bottles which Holofernes had emptied. The second picture (Fig. 3), painted in dark, full-toned colours, represents the discovery of the dead Holofernes by his soldiers, and arouses our interest especially, because this is Botticelli's first attempt at a large composition, though only on a small scale. He has by no means overcome the difficulties which the problem of an agreeable arrangement and a wise subordination of minor details to the principal motive was bound to present; but the emphatic utterance of grief and horror, of compassion and vindictiveness in the faces of the throng of soldiers excites our admiration.

The St. Sebastian (Fig. 5), which was probably painted in 1473 for Santa Maria Maggiore at Florence, stands so strongly under the influence of Antonio Pollaiuolo in the modelling of the naked body, that it formerly even bore that master's name; but in the sad-looking youthful head with its clustering curls, one is reminded of Verrocchio's expressive boys' heads. At any rate Botticelli has sacrificed natural truth to beauty in this early work, for the anguish which the six arrows must have caused the martyr leaves no trace, or merely the faintest shadow, on his countenance or in his gestures.

There are certain Madonnas, of still earlier date than the Fortitude, the picture of Judith, and the St. Sebastian, in which the process of the painter's gradual emancipation from alien influences can most clearly be traced. It is a peculiarity which Botticelli shares with Leonardo, Raphael, and Michelangelo, that his Madonnas reveal one of the chief characteristics of his art; we may even say that, in depicting the tender relationship of Mary and her child, he gives greater proof than anywhere else of personal feeling, inexhaustible resource and creative energy.

While Renaissance art has received the most diverse appreciation on the æsthetic side, another and more essential part has been too much neglected. Sufficient emphasis has never been laid on the fact that the home of Art is in heaven, and that she attains her greatness as a priestess of Religion, whose consecrated hands bear down to earth the similitude of the Divine. And yet pictures of saints and of the Madonna were the inexhaustible theme of art for more than a thousand years, a striking witness to mankind's craving to give tangible form to what lies beyond the range of the senses. And since the "eternal womanhood" in

Mary drew the hearts of believers more forcibly to itself than the stern type of the suffering Redeemer or the incomprehensible majesty of the Father, it was above all the picture of the Madonna, that innumerable artists at every period strove to create, now in a more divine, now in a more human form; and the very greatest painters of the Renaissance, even the rugged Michelangelo, expended their whole genius on the everlasting theme, which Raphael carried to its utmost perfection in the radiant vision which we call the Sistine Madonna.

The circumstance that Botticelli has signed only one of his countless panels with name and date, may raise our esteem for his freedom from self-consciousness as an artist; but his voluntary surrender of posthumous fame has considerably increased the difficulty of arranging his works in chronological order. The powerful influence exercised by Fra Filippo on the young Sandro permits us to conjecture that the earliest works of the latter are the Madonnas at Palazzo Corsini and at the Spedale degli Innocenti. In the composition of the latter (Fig. 6) the pupil followed the famous picture of his master at the Uffizi (Fig. 7). The child Christ, lifted by the hands of an angel towards His mother,

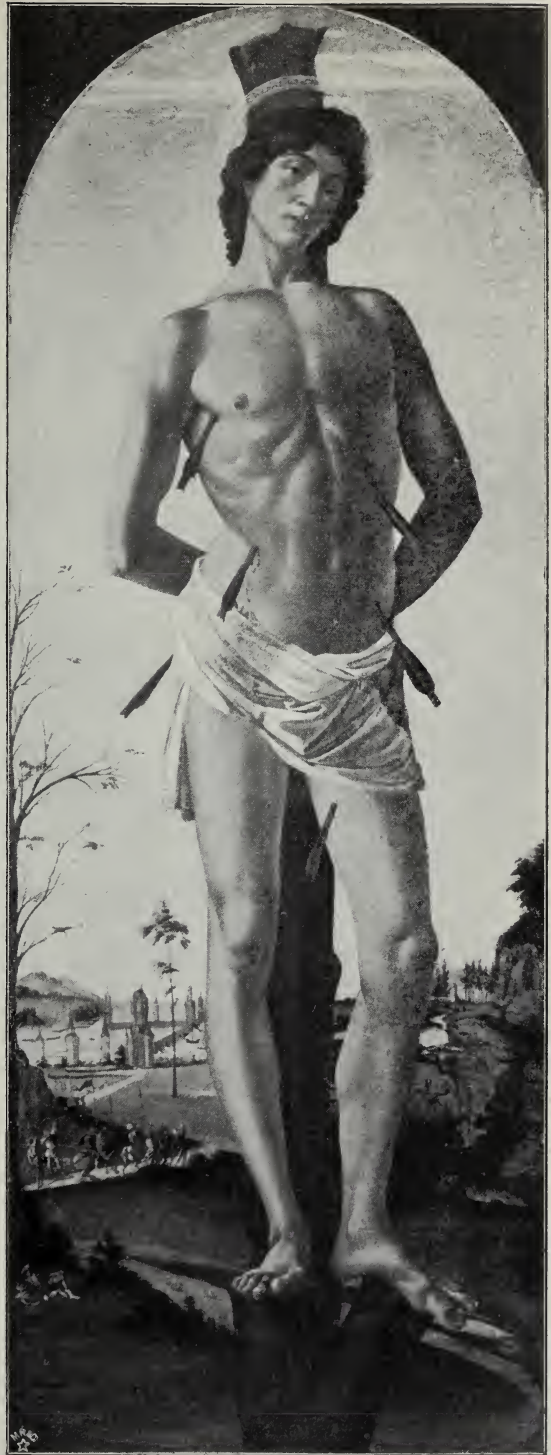


Fig. 5. ST. SEBASTIAN. Museum, Berlin.
(From a photograph by Franz Hanfstängl, Munich.)



Fig. 6. MADONNA. Spedale degli Innocenti, Florence.
(From a photograph by Alinari Brothers, Florence.)

who is drawn in profile, is the motive of both pictures; but while the disciple already shows his superiority to the master in the drawing of the hands, and in the structure of the charming children's heads, it is especially in the human beauty of his idea of the Mother of God, that he gives an intimation of the tendency afterwards followed, with conscious or unconscious emphasis, in his paintings of the Madonna. Mary no longer has her hands folded and raised towards the Child in adoration, as in Fra Filippo's picture, where his appeal for a caress remains unheeded; she embraces Him, though timidly, as if fearing to touch a holy thing, and the Child Himself is one of the earliest pleasing conceptions of the Infant Jesus which art has produced.



Fig. 7. FRA FILIPPO LIPPI. MADONNA. Uffizi Gallery, Florence.
(From a photograph by Alinari Brothers, Florence.)

The Madonnas in the Louvre (Fig. 8) and in the Poldi-Pezzoli Gallery at Milan (Fig. 9), carry on the same idea, while both betray a certain constraint combined with the ingenuous charm of youth, and prove in their turn how individual and profound was Botticelli's apprehension of his subject. The Child becomes more urgent in his demand for tenderness from His Mother, while Mary learns by degrees to overcome her awe of the Divine, and to show to her Son the pure fervour of her love. But she knows none of the joys of a mother's highest bliss; a presentiment of coming woe casts its shadow on her soul, and in the picture at Milan she gazes in mute sorrow on the nails and crown of thorns, which the unconscious Babe holds out playfully.

Verrocchio's harsher conception of the subject shows itself, in contrast to Fra Filippo's more tender sentiment, in a group of Madonnas, also the



Fig. 8. MADONNA. The Louvre, Paris.

product of the painter's youth, in which he has wavered and permitted first one, then the other of his teachers to influence his work in a greater or less degree. In the Madonna at Santa Maria Nuova at Florence (Fig. 10), in that recently removed from the Chigi Palace at Rome (Fig. 13), and in the Madonna of the Museo Nazionale at Naples (Fig. 11), to name only the best, Botticelli retains, indeed, the by no means skilful composition of

Fra Filippo, but in the types of the faces of the Virgin, the Child, and the angels he has followed Verrocchio without reserve. Seeing that Fra Filippo left Florence for ever in 1466, to paint the Assumption of the Virgin in the choir at Spoleto, may not his apprentice of nineteen have sought another guiding star to point out the right path for his genius? As a matter



Fig. 9. MADONNA. Museo Poldi-Pezzoli, Milan.

of fact, the lofty brow, the heavy eyelids, the strongly arched eyebrows, the broad ridge of the nose, peculiar to this whole group of Madonnas by Botticelli, are at the same time characteristic marks of the severe feminine type of Verrocchio, whose blunt, unrefined children with splendid curly hair have also tempted Fra Filippo's pupil to imitate a different model.



Fig. 10. MADONNA. Sta. Maria Nuova, Florence.
(From a photograph by Alinari Brothers, Florence.)

And was it an easy matter for Botticelli to shake off the spell of a personality like Verrocchio's? No indeed! The Madonna at Naples evinces in the elaborate folds of the ungirt robe, in the veil of dazzling whiteness, and in the depth of soul expressed in Mary's face, the maturity of a thoroughly independent artist, while yet the influence of Verrocchio is strongly marked in the charming landscape which fills the background of the picture.

The conflict between acquired formal expression and his own emotional life, now quickening with new vigour, is still more remarkably expressed in the Chigi Madonna, one of the most original, most lovable paintings of the Virgin of Botticelli's earlier period. A boy with a wreath of fresh

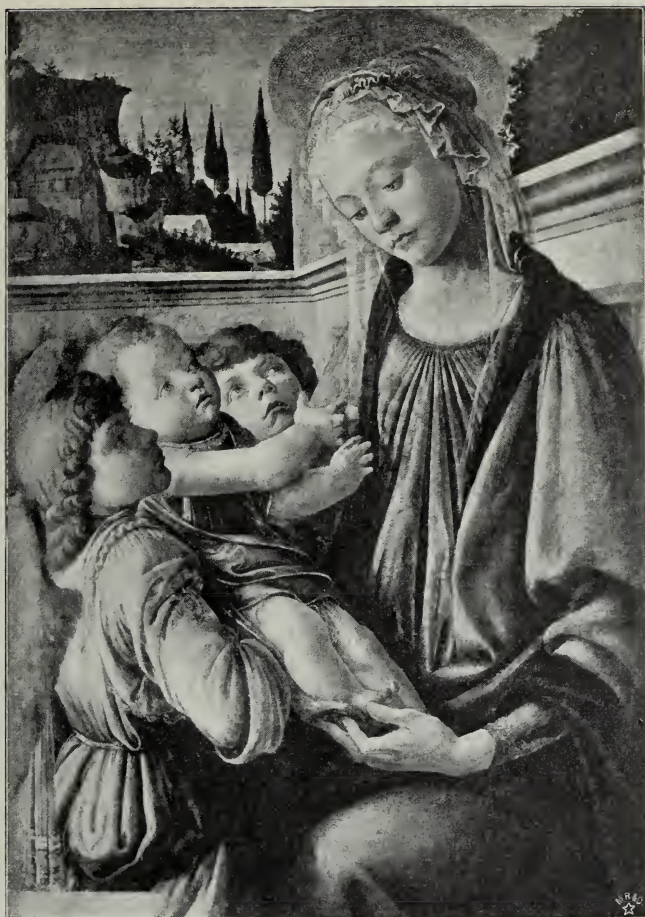


Fig. 11. MADONNA. Museo, Naples.

green on his curly head presents to the Mother and Child a dish laden with grapes and ears of corn, which the little Jesus, resting comfortably in his mother's lap, blesses benevolently, while Mary holds one of the ears in her hand. Bread and wine, the symbols of the Sacrifice of the Death of Christ—symbols which Mary willingly accepts, which Christ by his benediction ratifies—who but Botticelli could have clothed so solemn a thought in a form so winning?

While Verrocchio's influence is unmistakable in the types of the children; while we see, in the Virgin, Fra Filippo's naive ideal of the Madonna, yet the conception is as original as the feeling is solemn, mysterious, and suggestive. Did the artist mean to express, in this curiously interesting picture, a decisive moment in the life of the soul,

of both Mary and her Child, a moment at which destiny stood before each for acceptance or denial?

Unmistakable traces of the sharply accentuated art of Leonardo's great teacher are to be found, lastly, in the badly re-painted Madonna in the Accademia at Florence (Fig. 12), in which the pupil for the first time reveals himself as a master in characterisation, in composition, and in perspective. The picture is one of those "holy conversations" beloved

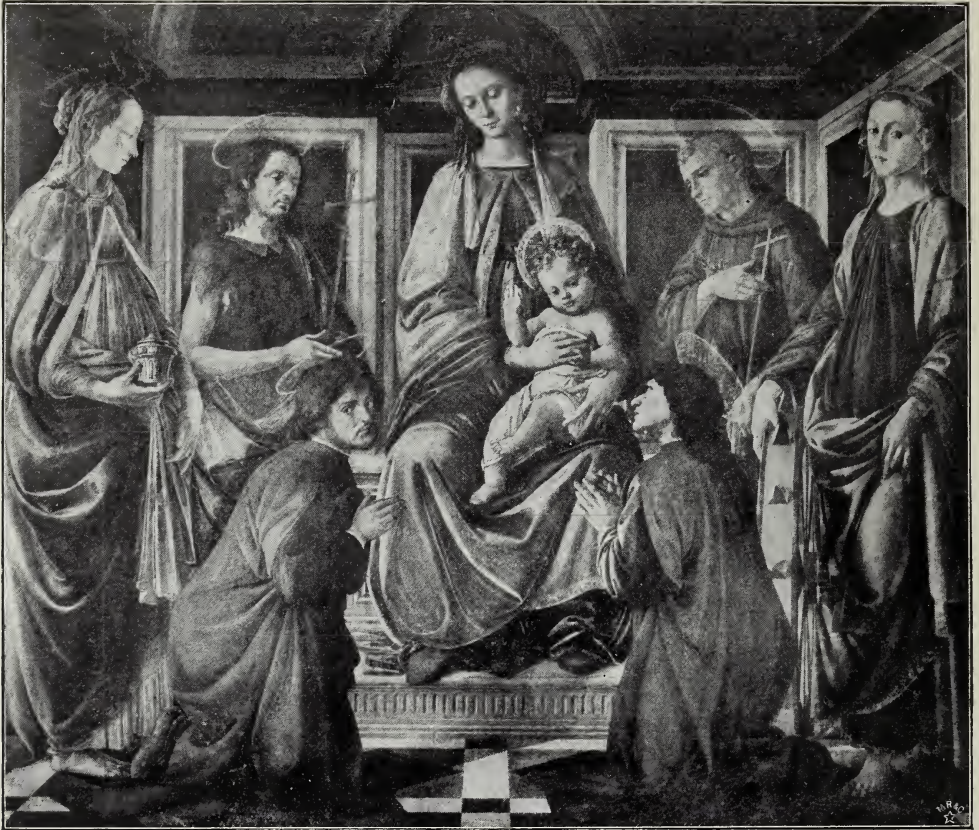


Fig. 12. MADONNA AND SAINTS. Academy, Florence.
(From a photograph by Giacomo Brogi, Florence.)

of the Quattrocento: the Mother of God, enthroned in the centre, has male and female Saints assembled round her, while the patrons of the house of Medici, SS. Cosmo and Damian, kneel in an attitude of worship before the steps of the throne.

But the purest embodiment of Botticelli's earlier ideal of the Madonna is the Virgin of the Magnificat in the Uffizi (Fig. 14). This is in every way the most celebrated of his religious pictures, and it is constantly surrounded by a throng of silent admirers. There is nothing of Fra Filippo, nothing of Verrocchio, in this picture, which reveals so much of Botticelli's genius



Fig. 13. MADONNA. Lately in the Chigi Gallery, Rome.
(By permission of Mr. Domenico Anderson.)

in its wealth of inward meaning, its brilliancy of colour and beauty of form. The Virgin (Fig. 15) and her Child are no longer supernatural beings who graciously accept our prayers: they have come amongst us men as our fellow-creatures; but they are of princely lineage, of perfect beauty in body and soul, and for that very reason strangers among their brethren. We would fain search into their history, penetrate their beauty, and share their sorrows; but we dare not greet with any words of love these beings so infinitely worthy of it. Neither can we pray to them; we can but rejoice afar off in the august beauty of the Virgin, in the grace of the Child whose soul is the dwelling-place of God's Holy Spirit. Is not access to the Holiest the exclusive privilege of the angelic hosts (Fig. 16), who draw nigh in gentle curiosity to behold the Incarnate Godhead, to serve in all humility the Handmaid of the Lord, to crown the Queen of Heaven? Botticelli's art was the first to create these beings of pathetic beauty, who consecrate their service to the Madonna with all their heart and mind, in ardent devotion and in tender reserve. Technically, also, this picture is superior to all its predecessors: it has been thought that the artist must have forsaken the use of tempera, the medium then in favour, since the red and blue are so lustrous, the flesh-colour so transparent and the single tones so delicately fused. It is certain that the artist himself seems to have taken peculiar pleasure in this picture, and that this explains the extreme care which he bestowed, as if he remembered his old craft as a goldsmith, on the long golden curls of Mary and the angels, the delicate patterns of their raiment, the exquisite border of gold, the variegated wimple and fine transparent veil of the Madonna.

If the "Magnificat" picture in the Uffizi marks the climax of the artist's mature achievement in painting the Virgin when absorbed in her inner life, the picture of the Madonna with St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist in the Berlin Museum (Fig. 17), painted in the years 1484—1485 for the Bardi Chapel in Santo Spirito, is perhaps the first altarpiece in which he was able to try his own original strength, liberated from every foreign influence, on an undertaking of considerable importance. Nature and art have created a paradise on earth to prepare a worthy setting for the Mother of God, and the solemn Saints whose duty it is to guard her throne. A bower of palms forms an arch over the Virgin's head; olives and cypresses rise over the two sentinels, and all around there is a scent of roses and lilies, and of the countless flowers which cover the ground. The Virgin, of a solemn and pensive beauty, is in the act of offering the breast to the struggling Babe, but the sense of her dignity represses her motherly instinct. The two Saints, figures full of rugged character and stern experience of life, show proof of their right to appear on the steps of this throne; the one points with his hand to the scroll with "Agnus Dei", while the other holds the open book, the raised pen, as if he were still engaged in writing his Gospel of Love. Even in later years Botticelli never produced a religious picture which tranquillises the soul, and gives a heavenward bent to earth-

bound thoughts, so persuasively as the "Madonna of the Palms", which we must mentally replace in one of the dim side-chapels of Santo Spirito in order fully to appreciate its effect.

What a tumult of emotion, what passion, half repressed, is seen in the "Assumption of the Virgin", formerly in the church of San Marco, now in



Fig. 14. MADONNA OF THE MAGNIFICAT. Uffizi Gallery, Florence.
(From a photograph by Anderson, Rome.)

the Accademia at Florence (Fig. 18). There are many points which indicate that this picture was produced about the same time as the Madonna at Berlin and soon after the artist's journey to Rome in 1481. The drawing of the principal group reminds us strongly of Fra Filippo's "Crowning of the Virgin" in the Duomo at Spoleto; the colours have not the depth and glow that we see, for instance, in the "Madonna enthroned", also in the Accademia, while they have not, on the other hand, the cold and dim look of the "Annunciation" in the Uffizi, a picture of Botticelli's latest period.

In addition to this, the upper part of the picture, in accordance with an old tradition, is painted on a background of gold, whilst in the figures



Fig. 15. HEAD OF THE MADONNA OF THE MAGNIFICAT.
(From a photograph by Giacomo Brogi, Florence.)

of saints who appear on a green meadow below, Botticelli does not yet plainly show himself such a master of perspective as his contemporaries gave him credit for being. But yet how clearly the character of each of

the four men is portrayed! The Evangelist of love, in strong emotion; St. Augustine, writing composedly; St. Jerome, beholding the vision with a gaze of indescribable yearning; and finally St. Eligius, patron of goldsmiths, a venerable impersonation of the sanguine spirit. For in these four men we find the four temperaments presented, and each takes part according



Fig. 16. GROUP OF ANGELS FROM THE MAGNIFICAT.
(From a photograph by Giacomo Brogi, Florence.)

to his nature in the great heavenly event. God the Father and the Virgin appear above in a blue and red circle of cherubim, both consumed by the flame of fervent rapture. Mary in all humility and gratitude is receiving the crown of heaven; God the Father seems almost to show a holy anger in the energy with which He gives utterance to His Will, as he places the crown on her head. The ardour of their enthusiasm

has communicated itself to the angels, who circle round the central group in ceaseless movement. They leap and soar, dance and fly through the air in vehement joy. Nothing can check the tumultuous movement of their flight; the heavens seem full of them, and those who are not taking part in the circling motion scatter countless roses at the feet of the Queen of heaven.



Fig. 17. MADONNA ENTHRONED WITH THE TWO SS. JOHN. Museum, Berlin.
(From a photograph by Franz Hanfstängl, Munich.)

In describing the quiet life of an artist which was never duly rewarded by outward success, while its inward development was marvellously logical and serene, and took a shape of infinite richness and productivity, we shall pay but small attention to the few historical data preserved by tradition, and shall follow with sympathy the psychological process of its hidden growth, perfection and decline. It helps us little to under-



Fig. 18. THE CORONATION OF THE VIRGIN. Academy, Florence.

stand Botticelli, if we hear that he was commissioned in October, 1482, jointly with Domenico Ghirlandajo, to paint the Sala dell' Udienza in the Palazzo Pubblico, or that his art was to have been called in requisition, again with the same master, in 1491, for decorating with mosaic the chapel of St. Zenobius in the Duomo at Florence, since he seems never to have carried out either work; but we follow eagerly the phases of his inward development, and remembering the animated strife of opposite currents of thought of which Florence was the scene at the end of the Quattrocento, we ask expectantly how his painting of the Madonna, which was for him the chief theme of art, however varied the episodes, will pursue its course, and what ultimate form its development will take.

It is a fact that the most brilliant epoch of the rule of Lorenzo the Magnificent was little to the advantage of religious art, because it was in the antique that the period sought and found its ideal. Moreover Botticelli's residence at Rome falls within this period; it was then, too, in all probability, that he painted the apparently very extensive frescoes at Villa Lemmi near Florence; and, finally, he was himself so deeply initiated in the ideas of the humanist circle that it was the Hellenic goddess of love, instead of the chaste Virgin Mary, who filled his imagination for a time, and whose charming picture he has attempted to immortalise in paintings which are among his most delightful works in beauty of colour and form.

Then, at the beginning of the nineties, there broke a devastating blast, a destructive hailstorm, over the luxuriant flowers and luscious fruit which the Renaissance had sown on mouldering soil. In 1491 Savonarola began his sermons in the Duomo at Florence. We know from more than one eye-witness what an immense impression the voice of the preacher, calling them to repentance, produced on his innumerable hearers. Pico della Mirandola, for instance, one of the most brilliant luminaries in the brilliant circle of the Magnificent, describes how his hair stood on end and he trembled in every limb, as one of the thrilling sermons of the Dominican passed over him like a storm. And Lorenzo Violi, who wrote down Savonarola's sermons in the church, interrupts himself and writes: "Here I could write no more, so overcome was I by the sweetness of his utterance", and at the close of the celebrated Good Friday Sermon of 1494 he makes the same confession and adds: "So great was the pain and the sobbing which overtook me". What wonder, that the eloquence and the example of this powerful character, who was never weary of calling wanton Florence more urgently and still more urgently to repentance, completely changed the look of the town in a few months? In fact, when on the last day of the Carnival in 1497 an immense pile of the most glorious works of art, pictures, statues, miniatures, was abandoned to the flames amidst the plaudits and hymns of all the youth of Florence, united in single-minded enthusiasm, it seemed for a moment as if the marvellous culture of the Renaissance was doomed to sink for ever into ashes. That culture had

its dark side, its elements of guilt and horror; but it will always mark a climax in the history of humanity. However, historical research has long ago acquitted the monk of San Marco of the reproach of annihilating the fairest flowers of art which the world has seen since the day of the Greeks.



Fig. 19. MADONNA. National Gallery, London.

It is true that on one side he laid a hand on its development and checked it, but what a rich and fertile current of thought he turned in another direction! As Savonarola, year after year, held young and old, rich and poor, high and low, spellbound by the fire of his eloquence, a permanent impression could not fail to be made on the artist community of Florence.



Fig. 20. THE CANIGIANI MADONNA. Academy, Vienna.

Vasari relates, in fact, that among others Luca della Robbia, Lorenzo di Credi, Fra Bartolommeo, Sandro Botticelli and lastly Michelangelo himself were his most zealous adherents, and they have all given expression in their works, to a greater or less extent, to the thoughts of their mighty teacher. We may believe Vasari's statement that Botticelli, like so many others, was completely lost for a time in the political confusion of those days, but he was certainly misinformed when he related that Botticelli really produced nothing more after coming into contact with Savonarola. On the contrary, just as Michelangelo derived his intellectual ideal of the Madonna from Savonarola's sermons, we can only suppose the Virgins of Sandro, so full of soul, the outcome of so deep an emotion, to have been produced under the influence of the same man, who had so much to tell of the maternal love of Mary, of her anxious, foreboding soul, her prophetic insight into the future. But with Michelangelo the merely human relations



Fig. 21. MADONNA WITH ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST AND AN ANGEL. Turin.

between Mother and Child were never completely lost sight of in the sad and solemn strain in which he treated the subject. Botticelli, on the other hand, with the same depth of affection but less strength of will, almost forgot the ideals of his youth and returned by preference to entirely religious painting under the influence of Savonarola's sermons. But even when he remains true to his own nature and paints Mother and Child, as in earlier years, in confidential intercourse, seeking love and receiving it, alone with one another in the wide world, or guarded and adored by timid angels, or accompanied, now and again, by the little St. John—even then we are astonished at the tumultuous fervour, the half-repressed ardour of passionate love with which Mary embraces the infant Jesus. And yet she is not happy; the shadow of death makes the flame of joy burn dimly; even the consoling love of the child Jesus cannot banish the Mother's secret fear. One may compare the Madonna in the National Gallery (Fig. 19) with the

Madonna in the Louvre, already mentioned, and it will appear at a glance how marvellously Botticelli's painting of the Virgin has gained in depth of insight and expression under Savonarola's influence. As in all the later works of the master, the composition has become more compact, but the motive is still almost the same: Mary embracing the Child, who stands on her lap. But just as the Child's craving for affection has become far more urgent, the



Fig. 22. MADONNA DEL PASSEGGIO. Pitti Palace, Florence.
(From a photograph by Giacomo Brogi, Florence.)

Mother also expresses the profoundest tenderness of love. The veil of sorrow has fallen over the grace, over the charm of youthfulness which delighted us in the Louvre picture, but for Mary there has been an awakening of the soul.

The "tondo" of the Academy at Vienna (Fig. 20), that of the Turin Gallery and, finally, the Holy Family of the Pitti Palace, introduce us similarly to a magic circle, the stillness of a region of dreams, where the world is forgotten. The motive of the first picture is an extremely happy invention. Two angels have plucked roses for the child Jesus and are offering him the gift. The boy has been eagerly collecting the flowers out of the lap of one of the angels into the folds of

his own little shirt, and now he turns back happily to his Mother to bring the treasure to her. But alas! her sorrowful mood persists; she expresses love, it may be, and gratitude, but not joy, and she does not perceive the question: "Why are you not glad?" in the Child's disappointed look, so innocent and touching. The angels, too, who were approaching, as in every picture, in timid reserve, have noticed the grief of the Madonna, and they divine its cause. "See how sad she is!", the younger whispers to the elder, who bows his fair, curly head, lost in thought, and still holds up his lap full of roses.

The "tondo" at Turin (Fig. 21), executed in great part by the pupils of the master, returns to the old theme of the Mother suckling her Child. The little St. John and an angel have drawn near in silent adoration, but Mary heeds them not; she has fallen to her knees in prayer and presses the Child, who sucks eagerly at her breast, in fervent, almost passionate



Fig. 23. MADONNA WITH SEVEN ANGELS. Museum, Berlin.
(From a photograph by Franz Hanfstängl, Munich.)

love to her heart; her eyes are downcast, her lips closed, but we feel that her soul is rising in ardent entreaty to God.

The picture with life-sized figures in the Pitti Palace (Fig. 22), an anticipation of Raphael's "Madonna del Passeggio", introduces once more a fresh motive. The little St. John has met the Madonna wandering alone in a rose-garden, and begged her to let him greet her Child with a kiss. Mary cannot deny him his wish, and stoops down with the Child, till

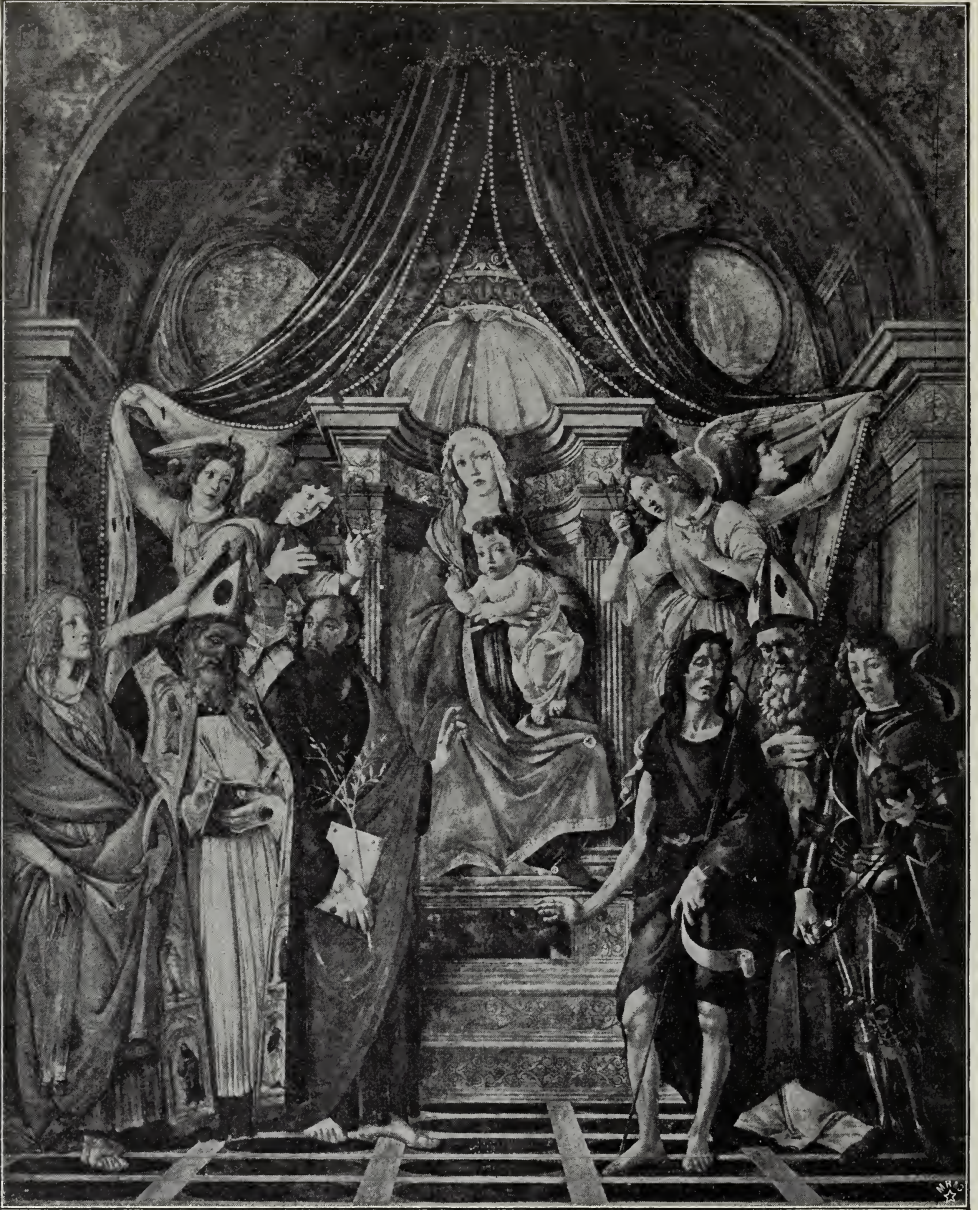


Fig. 24. MADONNA ENTHRONED WITH SAINTS. Academy, Florence.

St. John is able to throw his arms round him in a transport of devotion. St. John is the most attractive of the three persons in the picture, for the Virgin and Jesus seem only to yield mechanical obedience to pressure from without, and accept the boy's demonstration of love so coldly, with such an abandonment to woe, that we are aware of a great falling-off in the artist's power, if, indeed, the actual execution of the painting is to be regarded as the master's own.

“What shall I say of the maternal love of Mary for her Child? What of Mary herself? There is little to be found in the Scriptures about her, and the Holy Ghost, her Maker, has left much to the meditation of him who contemplates her devoutly.” That is the beginning of one of Savonarola’s sermons on the Virgin, in which he represents the Madonna as a prophetess, deep in thought, looking forward to the future in sad expectation. Botticelli, the “piagnone”, caught at such words as those and made them a law to himself. And there was never an artist before him who so entirely forgot himself and concentrated his thoughts on the nature of the Mother of God; there has been none since his day who has been so unwearied in inventing new motives which should either bring the Virgin into human closeness to the believer or else show him a godlike being at an unapproachable distance, and arouse perforce his awe and veneration. Under the influence of Savonarola, the picture of Mary seems to recede from the artist’s own sight into higher spheres; he hardly dares to approach the secret grief and love of her mother’s heart, and the devotional picture occupies ever more and more of his fertile fancy.

The chief productions of this period of the artist’s career are the “Madonna enthroned” of the Accademia at Florence, a tondo in the Uffizi, another in the Pallavicini collection at Rome and, finally, though it comes at the extreme limit of the period, the “Nativity” in the National Gallery, London, to which the signature with name and date lends a unique interest. But a quantity of pictures were also produced after 1490 in Botticelli’s studio, which, like so many of Raphael’s later Madonnas, show the master’s hand in the drawing and, here and there, even in the execution, whereas almost all the work in them



Fig. 25. STUDY OF AN ANGEL. Academy, Florence.



Fig. 26. MADONNA. Uffizi Gallery, Florence.
(From a photograph by Anderson, Rome.)

had to be left to the hands of assistants, because it was no longer possible for the master to cope with the ever-increasing number of commissions. The large picture of the Madonna with angels bearing tapers, in the Berlin Museum, and the round pictures in the Borghese Villa at Rome and the Corsini Palace at Florence are among the best of this extensive category; in fact, they have preserved so much of Botticelli's spirit, that there are critics, even at the present day, who accept them as works of the master's own hand in all respects.

It is a peculiarity of almost all these pictures that the Infant Christ turns with His right hand raised in blessing towards a throng of worshippers, while the burden of an inexorable destiny seems to weigh more and more heavily on the Virgin.

It must be said that part of these pictures have hitherto been dated almost ten years earlier; but if we allow that our artist went through a

logical development, if we believe that the influence of Savonarola enabled him to achieve yet higher things, if we recognise his never ceasing endeavour to intensify expression and to depict the state of [the soul itself, we cannot deny to the monk of San Marco that important share in forming Botticelli's ideal of the Madonna, which is undoubtedly his due. Indeed, it



Fig. 27. HEADS OF THREE ANGELS from the Tondo in the Uffizi Gallery.
(From a photograph by Giacomo Brogi, Florence.)

has always been rightly regarded as the effect of his heart-stirring preaching, that profane art was never more than an episode in the Renaissance, and that Mary and the Saints maintained their victorious supremacy over the gods of Greece.

In the Madonna at Berlin (Fig. 23) the seven angels carrying tapers, who surround the throne, especially arouse our interest. As far as composition and drawing go, they are certainly Botticelli's own work. Such

an idea occurs nowhere else in the master's pictures of the Virgin, and it is worth observing, because it teaches us how Botticelli adhered to the tradition of the church, which symbolised by the seven candles the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost. Dante also, in the "Purgatorio", describes the triumphal car of the church as accompanied by the seven candles of the Apocalypse, and Botticelli has represented it accordingly in his famous illustrations to Dante, which are among the greatest treasures of the Cabinet of Prints and Drawings at Berlin.

"Vergine, madre, figlia del tuo figlio" — Virgin, mother, daughter of thy Son — is the inscription on the highest step of the throne of the Madonna which Botticelli painted for the Convent of St. Barnabas, and which is now preserved in the Accademia at Florence (Fig. 24). The words are taken from the thirty-third canto of Dante's "Paradiso", and it seems as if the marvellous characterisation of the Virgin in the following line, "Umile ed alta più che creatura"¹⁾, struck the key-note of the whole picture. The huge painting, which has suffered in places from restoration, is carried out everywhere with equal care, and is, technically, one of the most finished pictures which Botticelli ever produced. With what noble artistic effect the throne of the Madonna stands under the receding arch! how unconstrained is the movement of the Saints in the wide space before the throne! It is a chosen group of holy men and women that have gathered round the Virgin, as if they wished to keep all unholy things from her presence, while they recommend the prayers of the faithful to her merciful intercession. We behold a picture of stern asceticism in St. John; next to him stands St. Michael, as a type of youthful beauty; but between the two, like kindly old age reconciling the harsh contrasts of youth, appears the white-bearded Augustine, with eyes bent devoutly to the ground. While the latter seems to be absorbed in thought, fathoming the mysteries of the Godhead, the black-bearded St. Barnabas on the opposite side is expounding doctrine which St. Ambrose, in profound emotion, is recording in his book. The charmingly naive St. Catherine alone preserves her virginal simplicity in the Divine presence; beauty confers on her the privilege of appearing among those solemn men, and she compensates for any want of profundity of thought by the true womanly feeling which we can read in her features.

Whereas all these saints are represented as men, who are still searching for enlightenment, the angels, forms of indescribable beauty, clad in raiment of light and variegated colours, take a direct part in the thoughts and emotions of the Virgin. It is true, they are only ministering spirits; but they fulfil their duties with the holy fire of enthusiasm, and with boundless humility. Two of them hold the crown of thorns and the nails towards the Saviour, while two others are busy in fastening the crimson curtains to the walls. Mary takes no heed of what is passing around her;

¹⁾ Humble and high beyond all other creature (Longfellow).

she holds the Child almost mechanically in her arms whilst He gives the benediction, and she gazes out of the picture with her large eyes, lost in painful thought. Sitting on her throne, under the velvet canopy, affectionately served by angels, venerated in all humility by saints, she still can feel no joy, and her silent grief has communicated itself to her Son. How effective is the contrast, how deeply felt, and how vividly portrayed! "Humble and high", in truth, "beyond all other creature" does the Virgin appear, but sighing under the oppressive weight of her destiny. The scene of the action leads us to the steps of a royal throne, and between the chosen figures, in festal attire, which surround it, there sits on the throne



Fig. 28. PEN-DRAWING OF THE ADORATION OF THE HOLY CHILD. Uffizi Gallery.

a trembling woman with a naked babe in her arms; a woman, too, whom Botticelli has clad, after Savonarola's stern injunction, in the plain robes of a matron.

If Botticelli's youthful ideal of the Madonna took its purest and loveliest shape in the "Magnificat", all criticism must finally be hushed before the tondo (Fig. 26) of the Virgin surrounded by six angels, which hangs exactly opposite the "Magnificat" in the Uffizi in its splendid original frame, of light blue adorned with golden lilies.

It is a masterly composition, with subdued, rather sad colouring of restful and pleasing effect, and wrought out with deliberate rejection of any meretricious brilliancy of detail. Botticelli, like many another painter, had been fond of gay colour in his youth; but here we meet, perhaps for the first time, with an effort to bring all the tones into harmony, to achieve

a calm and even effect of colour, and to lend outward emphasis to the clearly accentuated unity of idea which the picture possesses. So completely does this picture rise above the restrictions of space and time, that we do not even know whether the scene is laid in heaven or on earth. Golden rays descend through the pale blue ether on Mother and Child, who are more than ever conscious of bearing the burden of all the sorrow of mankind.

The sad looking Babe grasps with his left hand the pomegranate which Mary offers him, and holds up his right hand in benediction. He lies softly resting in his Mother's lap. That Mother of Sorrows, whose silent woe could not be more poignantly uttered, has communicated her heartfelt grief to the angels, who throng round her closely, whispering their eager questions, as if it were already their task to shield the Virgin from contact with pain (Fig. 27). Yes, it is the lonely woman, exposed to the scorn and railing of men, of whom Savonarola spoke in such impressive language; whose heart brooded day and night over the prophecies, in trembling expectation, in agonized foretaste of the inevitable doom to come.

The Nativity, painted in 1500, in the National Gallery, London (Fig. 29), is removed by its subject from the group of pictures of the Madonna in the narrower sense; but it gives the most remarkable proof, how firm and deeply rooted was the recollection of Savonarola in Botticelli's soul, and it must, therefore, be considered here in conclusion. The artist had already treated the Adoration of the Shepherds at an earlier period; for instance, in a tondo which was formerly in Lord Dudley's collection: but he had never ventured till now to blend the fancies created by his own imagination with a biblical subject whose form was hallowed by the tradition of centuries. A drawing in the Uffizi (Fig. 28) for the principal group is remarkable because it teaches us that Botticelli was never satisfied with his achievement in the way of expression, and that even if the drawing showed a complete grasp of the idea, he still strove unremittingly, in the execution of the picture, after a greater depth of realisation, after the perfect rendering of the emotion which possessed his soul. Thus we see the morose old foster-father, who in the sketch is just beginning to nod, completely doubled up, in the picture, and sound asleep; the naked Babe, however, stretches his hands and feet in impatient craving towards his Mother, who passes the Christmas night with her child in silent adoration, yielding less than St. Joseph to the human need of sleep. To right and left, at a measured distance, kneel the Kings and the Shepherds, crowned with olive, whilst angels point out to them the miracle which has come to pass. The Sages from the East appear, as in the unfinished Adoration in the Uffizi, without the attributes of their royal dignity; but Botticelli has represented them, according to old tradition, as personifications of the three ages of human life. Three angels kneel on the thatched roof of the shed and sing the "*Gloria in excelsis*" in deep devotion; both they



Fig. 29. THE NATIVITY. National Gallery, London.
(From a photograph by Braun, Clément & Co., Dornach and Paris.)

and their companions, who dance in a circle in the sky in the fervour of their rejoicing, carry large olive-boughs. Even the motion of the angels in the Coronation of the Virgin seems subdued when compared with the irresistible energy with which the heavenly hosts pursue their onward course, as if they must needs give vent to their passionate enthusiasm. Was the artist thinking of the carnivals of 1496 and 1497, when the boys and girls of the city, in the unbridled transports of prematurely excited passion, leaped round the bonfires, on which the costly luxuries of a refined civilisation were sacrificed to the idea of an undisputed dominion of Christ over Florence? For that was the aim and object of all Savonarola's sermons, an aim which he seemed to have attained when the inscription "Jesus Christus Rex populi Florentini" was set up over the entrance of the Palazzo Vecchio. In that case we have here not only another eloquent witness to the active part which Botticelli took in the quickly-changing events of those stormy days, but also a proof of the deep susceptibility of the artist, in whose works we can still behold, as in a mirror, a picture of the times in which he lived. In the subject represented at the bottom of the picture, the son has erected a final monument of gratitude to his spiritual father. Here three angels are greeting with kisses and embraces three Dominicans, crowned with olive, while the fiends, who have nothing in common with the souls of these holy men, are utterly confounded and seek refuge in the clefts of the rocks. Even if there is no attempt at actual portraiture in the faces of these men, there can be no doubt as to the persons whom they represent. They are the three Dominican martyrs, Girolamo Savonarola, Domenico Buonvicini and Silvestro Marussi, whom Botticelli has represented here, according to the precedent of Fra Angelico, in the embrace of angels, as the "homines bonae voluntatis", of whom it is said that "they rest from their labour and their works do follow them". The half-mystical inscription on the upper margin of the picture, containing the following expressions: "I, Alessandro, painted this picture during the confusion of Italy at the end of the year 1500 . . . in the time when the Devil was let loose for the space of three and a half years", has only recently found an interpreter; it refers to the martyrdom of Savonarola and his excommunication by Pope Alexander VI, events which, in 1500, were three and a half years old.

The picture is painted on a small scale and carried out with equal care in every part. It entirely contradicts Vasari's assertion that the creative energy of Botticelli was spent, when he came under Savonarola's influence. This work brings us to the end of the master's career; we must now turn back twenty years, and accompany him, at the prime of life, to the Eternal City, where the greatest artists of his native town, both before and after him, produced their monumental works, and where Botticelli too made his first attempts at historical painting on a large scale, and gained a brilliant success. In his Madonnas Botticelli appears a dreamer who cherished an ideal of his youth even till his old age as a sacred memory, and clothed

it in new shapes with never-ceasing affection; in Rome, at the court of Sixtus IV, he becomes on a sudden the man of action, to whom the aged Pope, with rare knowledge of character, entrusted the most difficult tasks in the extensive cycle of paintings in his palace-chapel, with the certainty that they would be promptly executed.

II.

In the church of Ognissanti at Florence are to be seen two figures of Saints in fresco, St. Jerome and St. Augustine, opposite to one another, in the walls of the nave. Domenico Ghirlandajo painted the St. Jerome in 1480; the St. Augustine was a slightly later work of Sandro Botticelli. Vasari even tells a story of a competition between the two masters on this occasion; and may we not believe his words, when we see how seriously the artists took the work entrusted to them, and what pains they took to show off their whole power and accomplishment in painting a single figure in the narrow space of a theologian's study? In fact, anyone who wishes at the present day to comprehend at a glance the special importance of those two men, who shared the highest honours of art in their famous native town of Florence, in the second half of the Quattrocento, may well devote his attention to the two figures of Saints at Ognissanti, seriously damaged, but still impressive and ranking among the finest and most characteristic works of Botticelli and Ghirlandajo when in the full enjoyment of their powers.



Fig. 30. ST. AUGUSTINE. Ognissanti, Florence.

St. Augustine (Fig. 30), an old man with a massive frame, sits at his writing-table in a dimly lighted room, where enormous books are displayed on the ledge which runs along the wall. The splendour of the gold tissue in his episcopal robes is subdued, but the pearl-embroidered mitre on the table betrays his high ecclesiastical rank. There is nothing in the narrow chamber to distract him from serious thought; a globe which stands on the reading-desk, rolls of manuscripts and open books form the whole of his working material. The Saint's left hand, from which the rich drapery of the mantle is thrown back above the elbow, rests on the writing-desk and



Fig. 31. SIXTUS II. Sistine Chapel, Rome.
(From a photograph by Anderson, Rome.)

grasps the ink-stand; the right hand is lifted to the breast in an attitude expressive of strong emotion. St. Augustine has his head bent a little forward, his eyes are directed upwards, and his lips slightly apart. His eyes are radiant and wide open, as if they beheld a vision. Is he receiving at this moment a revelation which will set him free at once from all the perplexities which earnest thought and labour did not avail to solve? What yearnings after things beyond this world, what hesitation, mingled with hope, at escaping at last from the torment of enquiry and beholding the truth, the very truth indeed, are revealed in the gaze and attitude of this aged figure, whose features have taken a cast of great

nobility and expressiveness after long years of work and after profound meditation.

When Sixtus IV, probably at the suggestion of his nephew, Giuliano della Rovere, who was travelling to France, summoned the best Florentine artists to Rome in the summer of 1481, to paint the newly finished sanctuary of his palace, Botticelli could point only to one achievement as a fresco-painter, in addition to the St. Augustine at Ognissanti, and that one was little calculated to recommend him.

It was not till November 25, 1480, that the citizens of Florence were released, in a solemn ceremony before the closed bronze gates of St. Peter's, from the interdict which rested on them in consequence of the

unsuccessful conspiracy of the Pazzi, in which the Pope himself was implicated. Botticelli was the very artist who had painted the portraits of the conspirators on the walls of the Bargello in remembrance of the happy preservation of Lorenzo de' Medici and the death of his enemies; and among these portraits was that of the Archbishop of Pisa, whose assassination provoked the bitter wrath of Sixtus. As early as February 6, 1479, the Pope addressed to the Signoria of Florence an urgent demand for the destruction of these portraits; but his anger does not seem to have extended to the painter, for not only is Botticelli named first



Fig. 32. STEPHANUS ROMANUS. Sistine Chapel, Rome.
(From a photograph by Anderson, Rome.)



Fig. 33. POPE CORNELIUS. Sistine Chapel, Rome.
(From a photograph by Anderson, Rome.)

among the artists who were definitely engaged on October 27, 1481, but, if we may believe Vasari, it was to him that the direction of the whole of this extensive work was entrusted.

The Chapel of Sixtus IV will always prove the supremacy of Florence over all the other cities of Italy as the birth-place of artistic genius at the period of the Renaissance. It will always be celebrated as the chief glory of the city on the Arno, containing, as it does, the united achievements of the three sister arts. A Florentine architect, Giovanni de' Dolci, built the Chapel of the Papal palace, Mino da Fiesole designed and

carried out the greater part of its sculptural decoration, while, finally, Florentine artists, from Sandro Botticelli to Michelangelo, won immortal fame by the paintings which they executed on wall and ceiling. What a ferment of life in quick pulsation, what a rivalry of powers exerted to the uttermost, went on during the two years from the summer of 1481 to August 15, 1483, within the walls of the Sistine chapel, those walls which were left for Michelangelo to finish, working there in solitude at his Titanic task till the whole was painted.



Fig. 34. TEMPTATION OF CHRIST. Sistine Chapel.
(From a photograph by Anderson, Rome.)

The plan of the basilica of old St. Peter's, which remained till Bramante undertook its reconstruction in the reign of Julius II, seems to have been received as a precedent for the design and decoration of the Sistine chapel. The rich mosaic decoration of the floor, "opus Alexandrinum", as it is called, is found almost invariably in the early Christian basilicas of Rome, but hardly ever in Renaissance churches; the marble barrier between the space allotted to the laity and that reserved for the priests is also without a parallel in *quattrocento* art, and is imitated from the rail which enclosed the tomb of the Princes of the Apostles in St. Peter's; but the most remarkable thing is the distribution of ornament on the walls, with the portraits of popes at the top, level with the windows, the series of historical paintings in the middle, and the pictorial tapestry below. This



Fig. 35. THE SACRIFICE OF THE LEPER AND THE TEMPTATION OF CHRIST. Sistine Chapel.
(From a photograph by Anderson, Rome.)

all proves how completely the successor of St. Peter was bent on reproducing in his domestic chapel the main characteristics of the most venerable fane in Christendom. Modern art can boast of no second series of monumental paintings to compare with those of the Sistine chapel, in which the life of Moses is so displayed as the counterpart of the life of Christ, that the separate scenes are treated typically. The paintings by the hand of Perugino on the wall above the altar were sacrificed to Michelangelo's "Last Judgment". Of the twelve frescoes still preserved on the lateral walls, three were carried out by Botticelli, while some of the martyr-popes, represented above at full length between the windows, are also by his hand, as we are told by Vasari. These pictures of the popes are arranged in a long series, like a gallery of ancestors, and each of the dignified and stately figures is so composed as to resemble a statue in a wide niche. Their present condition is by no means satisfactory, but it seems as if neither Fra Diamante nor Ghirlandajo, nor even Botticelli himself can have exerted their full powers on paintings placed at such a dizzy height. The close resemblance to the St. Augustine at Ognissanti enables us immediately to recognise Sixtus II (Fig. 31) und Stephanus Romanus (Fig. 32) as works of Botticelli. These are the finest types, and those of most spiritual significance, among the portraits of the popes; and in them the artist has expressed a momentary mood—in one case holy enthusiasm, in the other profound meditation—as he was wont to do in his best works. The youthful Cornelius (Fig. 33) and the popes Soter, Evaristus, Caius and Marcellinus are weaker in sentiment and less precisely drawn; but although they have all suffered from re-painting and from the falling off of pieces of plaster, they still betray clearly the strongly marked characteristics of their author, whose share in the representation of the four-and-twenty martyr-popes was probably confined to these seven.

It seems likely that Botticelli began his work in the Sistine chapel with the single New Testament subject which is commonly called "The Temptation of Christ" (Fig. 35). This curious picture is the second fresco on the right-hand wall, between the "Baptism of Christ" by Perugino and Domenico Ghirlandajo's "Calling of the first Disciples", and directly opposite the papal throne. Thus, even to the present day, the gaze of the successor of St. Peter must fall on this very picture, when he assists at the masses which are still sung regularly, at least twice a year, in the Sistine chapel. Has he any idea of the significance which that fresco possessed for the builder of the chapel? Does he know the reason why the subject from the New Testament is completely thrust into the background by that curious scene before a temple in the foreground? If we look first of all, as is natural, in Botticelli's picture, for a connecting link between the "Baptism of Christ" on the left and the "Calling of the Disciples" on the right of his fresco, we shall discover the "Temptation of Christ" carried out in detail on a small scale in the background. On the left, on a rocky eminence planted with olives, Satan approaches the Redeemer in the venerable

garb of a capuchin. Holding his staff and rosary in his left hand, he points with his right hand to the stones on the ground, while Christ, in gentle but earnest protest, raises his hand against the tempter, whose true nature is moreover betrayed by the vulture's claws and bat's wings.

The second scene of the Temptation introduces us to the pinnacles of the temple, a splendid Renaissance building which dominates the middle of the whole picture. "Cast thyself down", is the meaning conveyed by the Devil's outstretched hand. "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" is



Fig. 36. THE LEPER ESCORTED BY TWO FRIENDS: in the foreground to the right the portrait of Julius II. as Cardinal. Sistine Chapel.

(From a photograph by Anderson, Rome.)

the rebuke which we read in the countenance and gestures of the Redeemer. Still higher rises the presumption of the Devil and still more emphatic grows our Lord's refusal. In the first temptation Christ appears to admonish the tempter gently; in the second He refuses with indignation; but the tempter's invitation to fall down and worship him stirs Christ to the very depths. The words "Get thee hence, Satan", illustrated by the scene on the precipitous cliff in the right-hand corner, are accompanied by a passionate gesture, and in his consternation Satan leaves the monkish dress behind him, lets go the staff and rosary, and plunges into the abyss in his true and repulsive shape (Fig. 34).

Three angels, however, are already approaching on the top of the cliff, to spread a table with nourishment for the fasting Saviour, and lower down on the left, in the middle distance, they appear once more, grouped round the Redeemer as he walks, with lowly bearing, in fulfilment of the passage of Holy Scripture: "And, behold, angels came and ministered unto him".



Fig. 37. CENTRAL GROUP FROM THE SACRIFICE OF THE LEPER. Sistine Chapel.
(From a photograph by Anderson, Rome.)

If Botticelli, in the "Temptation of Christ" in the background, was continuing the series of New Testament subjects, he also commemorated in the foreground an event of the time, the reminiscence of which must have given much pleasure to the Rovere pope, as he sat opposite on his throne, and listened to the sacred music of his choir. The purificatory sacrifice of the leper, which is here being performed with minute observance of all the usages prescribed by the Jewish law, and with magnificent display, in the presence of the most distinguished dignitaries of the papal court, is a subject which occurs here for the first and only time in the history of art.

It is not surprising that for centuries no explanation of this ceremony was known, and that even Vasari did not remember the curious meaning of the scene, which is pyramidally constructed, and in its unity of composition admirably occupies the whole wide foreground of Botticelli's fresco.¹⁾ The directions given in Leviticus XIV, 2—7, for the purificatory sacrifice of the leper form the text on which the representation is based:



Fig. 38. DETAIL FROM THE SACRIFICE OF THE LEPER. Sistine Chapel.
(From a photograph by Anderson, Rome.)

2. This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing: He shall be brought unto the priest.

¹⁾ I here repeat the explanation of this picture, with a few additions and corrections, as I published it in the "*Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft*", Bd. XVIII, Heft I. The "Punishment of the Rebellion of Korah" and its bearing on the Archbishop of Carniola's attempt at a council, which I shall explain in the following pages, were also unknown till the present time. I have treated of them in greater detail elsewhere.

3. And the priest shall go forth out of the camp; and the priest shall look, and behold, if the plague of leprosy be healed in the leper:

4. Then shall the priest command to take for him that is to be cleansed two birds alive and clean, and cedar wood, and scarlet, and hyssop:



Fig. 39. DETAIL FROM THE SACRIFICE OF THE LEPER. Sistine Chapel.
(From a photograph by Anderson, Rome.)

5. And the priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over running water:

6. As for the living bird, he shall take it, and the cedar wood, and the scarlet, and the hyssop, and shall dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water:

7. And he shall sprinkle upon him that is to be cleansed from the leprosy seven times, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird loose into the open field.

The liberty which the artist was bound to allow himself, if he wanted to combine a series of consecutive actions into a single moment which the eye could seize at a glance, could not fail to increase the difficulty of understanding his subject: but the touching scrupulousness with which he has expressed every characteristic element in this sacrificial rite, is of great assistance to us in explaining the details, when once we have seized the



Fig. 40. HEAD OF A YOUNG MAN FROM THE SACRIFICE OF THE LEPER. Sistine Chapel.
(From a photograph by Anderson, Rome.)

fundamental idea. In front of the splendid Renaissance temple, with slight touches of Gothic in the windows of the upper storey, there stands a great altar, in which the cedar wood is being burned in a cauldron suspended over a blazing fire, in order that its fragrance may purify the air tainted by the leper's breath. Round the altar kneels a grateful throng, while the wife of the man who has been healed advances from the background on the left with hasty steps, carrying two fowls in an earthenware dish upon her head, half covered by a linen cloth. She is

hurrying towards the running water on the right side, in order to kill one of the birds in the earthen vessel, and to let the other go, as the Law of Moses commands.

The leper himself seems to be looking round impatiently to see this ceremony performed, though it is hidden from him by the bystanders. He is just approaching slowly from the right, and, supported by two friends,



Fig. 41. THE BOY WITH THE SERPENT. Sacrifice of the Leper.

has laboriously mounted the first step leading to the altar (Fig. 35). His countenance still bears every trace of the malady which he has passed through; in fact, the man on his right is incredulous of his recovery, and seeks to move the clothes aside with his hand, to convince himself that the leprosy has actually disappeared. Meanwhile all the preparatory rites have been performed; the blood of the slain bird has been poured into the golden dish, and a youthful priest in fluttering white robes is now approaching, quite in the foreground of the picture, to offer the blood to a

venerable old man in the high-priest's vestments as worn by Aaron (Fig. 37). Both of them hold the shallow bowl, and the white-bearded elder at the same time dips a bunch of green myrtle with the scarlet wool into the blood, in order to sprinkle the leper with it seven times, and then to restore him cleansed to the world.



Fig. 42. THE GIRL WITH A SERPENT. Capitoline Museum, Rome.

We see that Botticelli has not omitted a single one of the prescribed usages of this elaborate sacrificial rite; and if he has chosen myrtle, instead of hyssop, that is only because the cleansing power of the Old Testament hyssop has been transferred to the other plant in the custom of the Christian church: St. Margaret, for instance, in a picture by Borgognone at Bergamo, sprinkles the unclean dragon with just such

a bunch of myrtle. It would have been impossible, then, for the artist to characterize more plainly the curious process of purification; but we ask in amazement what reason can have induced the pope to command the insertion of a subject from the Judaic Law, a subject never previously represented in art, in the midst of a series of New Testament pictures. The answer proves to be simple enough, if we only remember how Sixtus IV cherished the idea of beautifying Rome, and how zealously he had carried on the construction of the magnificent Hospital of Santo Spirito, which was just completed at the time when the Florentine masters began to work in the Sistine Chapel. Unfortunately the splendid Renaissance façade was sacrificed to a subsequent addition to the building; but an old engraving proves that Botticelli made the façade of his temple an exact reproduction of that of Santo Spirito. That in itself gives the explanation of the idea which Sixtus IV meant the artist to express in the sacrifice of the leper's cleansing. Was not this picture intended to enhance the glory of the pope, in whose newly-erected hospital even the most terrible of all diseases might hope to find a cure? Moreover, Sixtus IV belonged to the Franciscan order, and it is not surprising that he fixed upon leprosy as the type of all bodily maladies. Did not St. Francis, whom the pope venerated most fervently as his especial patron, begin his glorious career by overcoming his repugnance to the loathsome disease so far as to devote himself to tending the lepers? The eyes of the aged pope, when he sat on his throne, assisting at the solemn mass, might rest with special delight on this fresco of Botticelli's, which extolled him as a worthy disciple of St. Francis; and he might flatter himself that the picture would hand down his glory to his most remote successors on the throne of St. Peter.

After the main point of this interesting painting has been explained, one can understand why the oak-tree of the Rovere family is introduced so frequently, and why so eminent an assembly of persons of rank, both spiritual and civil, is gathered round the "Purificatory Sacrifice of the Leper" rather than any other subject. Among others, the two most influential of the pope's nephews have found a place in the picture. Giuliano della Rovere, who was to receive the admiration of the world as Julius II, appears in an attitude of calm superiority, holding a white cloth in his crossed hands, at a slight distance behind the youthful priest; while the detested Girolamo Riario, Gonfaloniere of the church since the autumn of 1480, stands quite in the right-hand corner, showing in token of his office the gold-mounted wand which he had received only a few months ago from the hand of the pope (Fig. 38). Unhappily it is almost impossible for human ingenuity to discover the names of the men, so full of character, and of the handsome youths, whom Botticelli introduces as more or less interested participators in the ritual of the sacrifice; but we may assume that most of them belonged to the Confraternity of Santo Spirito, which Sixtus IV had founded as soon as the Hospital was finished, and of which he and all his court were members (Fig. 39 and 40).

There is one more fact, which arouses our interest in a picture composed with great artistic skill and executed with all the resources of an inventive brain. In the foreground on the right in front of the woman



Fig. 43. | THE EARLY LIFE OF MOSES, Sistine Chapel.

carrying wood (perhaps the only figure which Botticelli allowed a pupil to paint for him), there runs a little half-naked boy who carries a quantity of beautiful purple grapes in his lap, the possession of which a snake, hardly recognisable at the present day, seems inclined to dispute (Fig. 41).

In the very happy idea which forms the motive, in gesture and play of feature, in the uplifted right hand and the head thrown back with a fearless expression, this boy precisely resembles the girl with a dove in the Capitoline Museum, who also has a snake at her side, rather as a play-fellow than as an enemy (Fig. 42). The antique treasures of Rome must have worked directly on Botticelli's imagination; and we see how in the "Punishment of the Sedition of Korah" he introduced as an architectural background the Arch of Constantine, which was also drawn by Michelangelo and countless other artists, another proof of the



Fig. 44. THE EXODUS. Early Life of Moses.

impressionable nature of the artist, who found matter for meditation in every impulse from without, and knew how to profit by it in his art when occasion arose.

A political event, far-reaching in its effect on the last years of Sixtus IV, and described by all contemporary writers as the most successful and glorious circumstance of his tempestuous reign, had an indirect influence on Botticelli's painting of the early life of Moses on the opposite wall. On the 21st August, 1482, the warlike Pope was delivered by the victory of Roberto Malatesta at Campomorto from his most dangerous enemy, the Duke of Calabria; who, in the language of Jacopo da Volterra, like a new Hannibal, had daily threatened the gates of Rome with the

terrors of pillage. Sixtus commanded that the glorious feat of arms should be commemorated in the cycle of pictures in his palace chapel, and in the "Passage of the Red Sea" Piero di Cosimo raised a striking memorial to the hero of Campomorto. But such an important subject demanded the whole surface of the picture, and suffered no further scenes from the life of Moses to be combined with it, according to the practice followed



Fig. 45. THE SONS OF MOSES. Early Life of Moses.

in all the other frescoes, of painting several events within one frame. The plan, moreover, was already settled before the battle was fought, and the calling of Moses in the Old Testament was bound to correspond with the calling of the first disciples in the New Testament. The only remaining resource, therefore, was to connect the scene of the calling, which had to be combined also with the Exodus from Egypt, with the preceding picture, in which Botticelli had to depict the early life of Moses. Thus it came

about that the "Capitano degli Ebrei" appears only once in the fresco of Piero di Cosimo, where the climax and conclusion of an important drama had to be signalled, whereas Botticelli had to introduce the picture of Moses no less than seven times on a surface of equal extent, as if he were celebrating his achievements in an epic poem.

The difficulty of the problem was almost insurmountable — for who was likely to recognise in such an accumulation of facts a free utterance



Fig. 46. HEAD OF AARON. Early Life of Moses.

of the artist's own intention? — but, in solving it, Botticelli's power of creation asserted itself (Fig. 43). He faithfully depicts the historical course of events from right to left, but selects one incident of special and fascinating beauty as a centre for the artistic grouping of the other scenes. In the right-hand corner the indignant Moses strikes down the unmerciful Egyptian overseer, who lies shrieking on the ground; the ill-treated Israelite, with bleeding brow and face distorted with pain, falls into the arms of his terrified wife, who drags him from the spot. Thus the

death-stroke receives its formal justification; and in the background we see Moses, who has taken the guilt of the act upon him, fleeing alone into the desert.

Then the malice displayed by the shepherds towards Jethro's daughters arouses his wrath again; he raises his staff and drives them in flight before him. Then he waters the sheep of the innocent victims of their persecution and appears, further off, as a shepherd with his sheep in



Fig. 47. DETAIL FROM THE EARLY LIFE OF MOSES.

the act of taking off his sandals on holy ground. On his knees he receives God's commandments out of the burning bush, and at last he meets us for the seventh time as the leader of the people (Fig. 44). He is followed by his wife and two sons, by Aaron, with a long black beard and massive turban, and finally by women and men of the race of Israel, the former heavily laden with household goods (Fig. 45), the latter characterised by their costume as priest, sage or warrior (Fig. 46 and 47).

Nothing could have stirred so deeply the sympathy of the spectator for the hero of the Old Testament series of pictures as this straightforward and, to all appearances, quite naive story, which serves as intro-



Fig. 48. CENTRAL GROUP FROM THE EARLY LIFE OF MOSES. Sistine Chapel. From a photograph by Anderson, Rome.)

duction to his tremendous call. We are fascinated as by the narration of a beautiful legend, and if we look closer, we shall discover in the simple manner in which it is depicted, certain traits of profound psychological

truth. It is not the flight of Moses into the wilderness nor the routing of the shepherds, events which are of peculiar significance as types of the temptation of Christ; nor is it the miraculous summons from the burning bush nor the triumphant departure from the land of servitude that have given the artist the theme for the main composition of his picture: it is



Fig. 49. MOSES DRAWING WATER. Sistine Chapel.
(From a photograph by Anderson, Rome.)

an apparently subordinate feature of the early life of his hero that has made the deepest impression upon him. Botticelli has characterised Moses with his usual masterly skill as the man of action, who detests all wrong, who does not even shrink from dealing a mortal blow where an act of violence has to be avenged; as the chosen of God; as the leader of the people. There is no incident over which he lingers with so much pleasure as that loving action of the kindly stranger, who chivalrously

protects the weak, and gives ready help in an emergency by watering the flock of the daughters of Midian with his own hand (Fig. 48). This action reveals the most beautiful side of the character of the youthful Moses, as Botticelli's delicate tact perceived; he has represented it, accordingly, as a charming idyllic scene by a fountain under shady oak-trees. The type of Moses, as he draws the water (Fig. 49) is as beautiful as an ideal head of Christ, and the two shepherdesses, one of whom has fastened the yarn, which she has been spinning, to the top of her cloven pastoral staff, just



Fig. 50. THE DAUGHTERS OF JETHRO. Sistine Chapel.
(From a photograph by Anderson, Rome.)

as is done at the present day, are creations of enchanting freshness and truly poetic beauty (Fig. 50).

This fresco has unfortunately suffered much damage on the right side, where the baldachino is erected over the pope's throne, and it was impossible to avoid restoring it. Apart from that, however, this picture also must be regarded as Botticelli's own work throughout; indeed, he employed the hands of assistants much less than the majority of the artists who worked at the same task.

Thus in the last of the master's paintings in the Sistine chapel it is only in the background on the right, in the row of columns, that a practised eye will recognise a pupil's handiwork, whereas Botticelli himself must have

carried out the whole of the vast work in all essentials. It is, technically, the most perfect of the three frescoes, and the execution is so careful in every detail, even to the golden hem of a garment; the events are so dramatically set forth and the single figures so sharply characterised and drawn with such a masterly touch, that one cannot but recognise a steady growth of artistic power, while we must also assume that Botticelli's interest was aroused more deeply than usual. Was external influence brought to bear on him, and was a higher exertion of power demanded of him to cope with a higher task? Or was he himself excited beyond his wont by the difficulty of clothing an abundance of theological learning in an artistic form hardly adapted to its needs? At any rate, as in the "Leper's Sacrifice",



Fig. 51. THE PUNISHMENT OF KORAH, DATHAN AND ABIRAM. Sistine Chapel.
(From a photograph by Anderson, Rome.)

so here, Botticelli has contrived, like a true artist, to clothe the stubborn matter of his theme in such a beautiful form, that in his delight the spectator quite loses sight of the difficulty of the subject. It was a personal triumph, no doubt, for the artist: but, as regards the public, it was a fatal error; for, to the present day, the so-called "Punishment of the Rebellion of Korah" has remained "unto the Jews a stumbling-block and unto the Greeks foolishness". This magnificent fresco, which always attracts our eye and excites our imagination, cannot be completely understood till we have, on the one hand, clearly grasped its significance as the Old Testament prototype of Perugino's "Delivery of the Keys to St. Peter" on the opposite wall, and, on the other hand, taken the trouble to search out the sources in the Old Testament from which the separate scenes, with their numerous figures, are derived.

It is obvious that the subject of the delivery of the keys to St. Peter could not be omitted in his successor's court chapel; in fact, the whole cycle of New Testament pictures had to reach its climax in this solemn act, on which the historical position of the papacy is based. Perugino was fully aware, how honourable was the task entrusted to him; and it may be



Fig. 52. MOSES, from the Punishment of Korah.

Korah (Fig. 51) is being consumed by fire, because they dared with impious hands to offer sacrifice to God, a privilege committed only to the priestly race of Aaron. We see the aged high-priest in the background, adorned with the triple crown, quietly swinging his censer, and Eleazar hurrying away to make the censers of the men who have been burned into plates for a covering of the altar, while Moses, in the foreground, in a dark-green

affirmed that he has quite surpassed himself in his grand and simple treatment of that sublime moment, in which Christ chose the noblest of His disciples to be the cornerstone of the church. What a clearness in the composition, what a monumental grandeur in the figures! How dignified, how noble is the Giver! What humility, what faith are displayed by the receiver! No doubt, it was a mark of the Pope's special confidence, when he allotted this subject to the Umbrian master: but must not Botticelli, too, have given good proof of his ability, before Sixtus could permit him entirely to revolutionize the treatment of its Old Testament parallel? The threatening inscription on the Arch of Constantine:

"Nemo sibi assumat honorem nisi vocatus a deo tanquam Aron¹⁾,"

illustrates very clearly what is taking place at the altar, where the seditious mob of

¹⁾ Let no man take office upon himself, unless he be called of God, as Aaron was.

mantle bordered with gold, with uplifted staff and eyes turned towards heaven, invokes destruction on the rebels. This kingly figure is the ideal Moses as conceived by the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance (Fig. 52). It was only Michelangelo who could surpass this presentment of a being kindled through and through with divine fire, and combining the noblest



Fig. 53. THE STONING OF THE BLASPHEMER, from the Punishment of Korah.

human dignity with a lofty consciousness of rights conferred by God. But would Michelangelo himself have penetrated so deeply into the character of the great Shepherd of Israel, if his predecessors in the Sistine chapel had not exhausted their whole strength in painting the story of the life of Moses? The most insolent of the rebels recoils in terror, as if from a heavenly vision; a second, behind him, falls to the ground with a fearful cry of anguish, and a third, lying stretched in mute despair by the altar, hides his burning head on the ground. The contrast between the calmness

of Moses, strong in his faith, and the helpless despair of the insurgents, conscious of their guilt, on whom the terrors of death are fallen, impresses the spectator instantly like the sight of some natural catastrophe of the elements; and if he turns his eyes to the events depicted to right and left, he supposes that he has already exhausted the chief interest of this remarkable picture. And yet, taken as works of art, these groups are not merely on the same level as the principal scene; the latter is only half understood, if we have not grasped the significance of the former. To the right, Moses again appears as a wrathful judge, inflexible in carrying out the commandments of God. Surrounded by a merciless crowd, armed with stones, a man is being led out to be stoned to death, because he has blasphemed the Name of the Lord. As the fire consumed Korah and his company, because they had impiously violated the sacred privileges of Aaron, so this man, too, must perish, because he has dared to desecrate the still more sacred Name of God. But in this case the tumult of a passionately excited mob has extended its influence to Moses, who seems with his uplifted hands — (“lay hands upon his head” are the words of the Lord’s commandment¹) — to be fulminating the death-sentence against the unhappy blasphemer.

In the foreground, on the left, the inflexible justice of the Old Testament Jehovah is still at work, and Moses appears here again as the instrument of God in an attitude expressing violent emotion; while some of Korah’s company are falling victims to the devouring fire from heaven, the others, at Moses’ bidding, are being swallowed up alive by the earth, which breaks under their feet like thin sheets of ice. Here again the fearful anguish of soul in the expression and gestures of the guilty men is very striking; but Moses, as if weary of inflicting all these penalties, no longer displays either youthful excitement, as in the stoning, or kingly repose, as when standing by the altar. He bends under the burden of age, and is moved with compassion, and it seems as if the artist, with delicate tact, wished to lead up to Signorelli’s representation of the last acts of Moses in the next picture. But who are those two men, who are walking on clouds over the yawning abyss, and seem to be hovering in the air with closed eyes and groping hands? In a short passage of the fourth book of Moses (Numbers XI, 26—29) is to be found the explanation of this strange apparition, which both offers entirely new points of view for the understanding of the whole picture and confirms our conviction that an experienced theologian must have furnished the artist with the deep and pregnant theme of his picture.

26. There remained two men in the camp, the name of the one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad; and the spirit rested upon them; . . . and they prophesied in the camp.

27. And there ran a young man and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp.

¹) Levit. XXIV, 10—23.

28. And Joshua . . . answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them.

29. And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them.

Eldad and Medad, then, are the two men who, though accused, like the blasphemer and like Korah and his company, of revolting against the command of God, are moving safely upon a cloud over the chasm which swallows up the true rebels. They are blind towards the things of the



Fig. 54. TWO PORTRAIT HEADS FROM THE PUNISHMENT OF KORAH.
(From a photograph by Anderson, Rome.)

outer world, but the Spirit keeps them in safety, and they do not imperil, but confirm the privileges of the church.

Once more, it is a contemporary event which is reflected in Botticelli's remarkable fresco.

Andrea Zamomatic, Archbishop of Krain (Carniola), as the Germans called him, disappointed in his expectation of becoming a cardinal, had revolted against Sixtus at a time when the latter was hard pressed by other foes without the church. With the secret support of Lorenzo de' Medici and even of the Emperor, he proclaimed a general council on March 25th, 1482, in the Minster at Basle; and on July 21st he even issued a summons, in which "Francis of Savona" is described in so many words as "the son

of the Devil". The pope had to send nuncio after nuncio to Germany, before he could compass the fall of the rebellious archbishop who was at last arrested in December, 1482, and afterwards committed suicide in his dungeon at Basle.

The connection is sufficiently clear. Sixtus IV wished to have his activity as a builder commemorated in the "Purificatory Sacrifice of the Leper", and he celebrated, in the "Destruction of Pharaoh in the Red Sea", his success in war at Campomorto; so, finally, Botticelli's fresco was to recall his victorious and energetic proceedings against the Archbishop of Carniola. Did not Julius II and Leo X, three decades later, cause Raphael to celebrate their triumphs over foes at home and abroad in a precisely similar manner in the Stanza d'Eliodoro?

It was for the unruly prelate that the threatening motto, "Nemo sibi assumat", &c., was coined; it is to him that the lamentable end of Korah and his company alludes; he, finally, was represented in the person of the blasphemer, who had sinned against the name of God, as Andrea Zamometic had sinned against the sacred dignity of the pope.

If anyone is weary of theological subtleties, he may still feast his eyes, in conclusion, on the characteristic portraits which Botticelli has introduced into his subject on the right and left of the picture (Fig. 54). They have all carried the secret of their name into the grave, with the exception of the master himself; who, as we saw, appears on the right, next to the dignitary of the church, in a simple black painter's blouse and a black cap. He might safely show himself among these influential and learned folk after giving such proof of his own ability, and after remaining so loyal to his own genius, although compelled to make his art subservient to a higher will.

It is certain that anyone, who merely demands of art that it shall please the eye, without unduly exercising the brain, will scarcely find what he wants in Botticelli's frescoes; yet surely, perfect comprehension is the first condition of any true joy in a work of art. We must apply to art the principle that earnest work is the price of the nobler forms of enjoyment, and if we do not spare ourselves the trouble of understanding more fully the spirit of the monumental wall-paintings in the Sistine chapel, we shall easily comprehend Botticelli's unique position in early Renaissance art. Try to realise once again the difficulty of the task allotted to him, and the wonderful skill with which he managed to fulfil it! When he had to combine with the Temptation of Christ a commemoration of the building erected under the auspices of Sixtus IV at Rome, he conceived the idea of the "Leper's Sacrifice". Again, in the "Early Life of Moses", he had to find room for seven separate incidents on the surface of the picture, and he created a delightful idyll as their central point. Lastly, in the "Rebellion of Korah and his company" he had to do homage to the sovereign power of the Holy See as prefigured in the Old Testament; and he knew how to fascinate the beholder so completely by the fantastic beauty, the wealth of form and colour of his picture, that the most general

acquaintance with the subject represented was counted sufficient.

If we may believe Vasari, Pope Sixtus himself was fully satisfied with Botticelli's works, and was lavish in his remuneration; but he, with the characteristic indifference of the artist to property and rank, spent all his earnings before he left Rome, and returned to his native city in the autumn of 1483, after an absence of more than two years, as poor as when he went away.

III.

There was a tendency among artists, which grew ever stronger in the course of the Renaissance, to combine with some traditional subject from the Bible a picture of the brilliant civilisation of their own day. This appeared at Venice chiefly in the favourite banqueting scenes, while at Florence the tendency found its most marked expression in paintings of the "Adoration of the Magi". The wedding at Cana, the supper of the disciples at Emmaus, the banquet of Levi, even the Last Supper itself, were in reality merely so many names for the private repasts or ceremonious feasts of men who enjoyed life and its good things, and for representation, not always of the most innocent character, of the wanton, pleasure-loving life of Venice. The Adoration of the Wise Men from the East, with the variety and richness of costume of the kings and their retinues, gave ample opportunity of painting the distinguished manners of the severer Florentine aristocracy; and among the numerous figures which the com-



Fig. 55. STUDY FOR THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI. Uffizi

position required, countless portraits of celebrated contemporaries could be introduced. It was Leonardo himself who had created the predominant type in his unfinished "Adoration of the Magi", now in the Uffizi, which was ordered in 1478 as an altarpiece for the chapel of the Palazzo Vecchio. The manner in which the Madonna is at once brought forward out of a corner into the centre of the picture, while the kings approach her from either side in tumultuous devotion, and a brilliant retinue assembles in glad confusion round the principal group—all that is of Leonardo's devising, and it is a device which Botticelli adopted and retained. Numerous studies and paintings by the master are still in existence, in which this fundamental type is maintained and further developed, and it is only in the National Gallery picture, inspired as it is by deep emotion and reverence for Savonarola, that all worldly ostentation in the presence of Mary and her Child is banished, for obvious reasons, to make room for the heavenly hosts.

A second "Adoration" in the National Gallery (Fig. 57), formerly ascribed to Filippino Lippi, a similar one in the Hermitage at St. Petersburg (Fig. 56) and a third, of later date, unfinished and much re-painted, in the Uffizi (Fig. 58), all exemplify the same effective principle of composition; they place the event in a wide landscape, richly varied with rocks and ruined buildings, and surround the adoring kings with a multitude of people, in part reverential, and in part profane. Especially in the pictures at the Hermitage and in the Uffizi, a wide circle is interested in the great event of the Incarnation, and, around the Virgin, old and young have fallen on their knees to adore the Infant Christ; but the further it is removed from the centre, the more indifferent does the noisy throng become. Some are busy in guarding the horses, which chafe in impatience at the delay; in another quarter a violent dispute has broken out, which has to be settled sword in hand; others, again, exchange their experience in quiet conversation, and a portrait is recognisable here and there in the motley throng.

All these pictures are of later origin than the famous "Adoration of the Magi" (Fig. 59) which Botticelli painted for Santa Maria Novella, and which is now also in the Uffizi. There is not one of the many works of the artist which Vasari praises so lavishly or describes so fully. "Truly a marvellous work", he exclaims, "of such beauty in colouring, drawing and composition that every artist, even at the present day, beholds it with astonishment." And it is a fact that this picture is unrivalled in the art of Botticelli as regards the minute delicacy and the firm touch of the drawing, the gradation of the local tones and the cheerful and harmonious scheme of colour. It is carried out, moreover, with such a mastery of perspective, that more than thirty persons move with the greatest freedom in the limited space of its surface.

In a dark green mantle, trimmed with fur and covered all over with gold embroidery, the aged Cosimo de' Medici, the father of his country, kneels to receive the blessing of the Infant Christ, about to kiss the little foot which he reverently holds with a linen cloth. Vasari admired in



Fig. 56. ADORATION OF THE MAGI. The Hermitage, St. Petersburg. (From a photograph by Braun, Clément & Co., Dornach and Paris.)

this delicate portrait of the old man, executed with devoted industry and perfect mastery of technique, the expression of joy at arriving at the goal of the long pilgrimage, and happiness at being at length permitted to salute Him for whom the whole human race had yearned. In the foreground, quite in the middle, seen almost from the back, kneels Cosimo's son, Piero,



Fig. 57. ADORATION OF THE MAGI. The National Gallery, London.
(From a photograph by Franz Hanfstängl, Munich.)

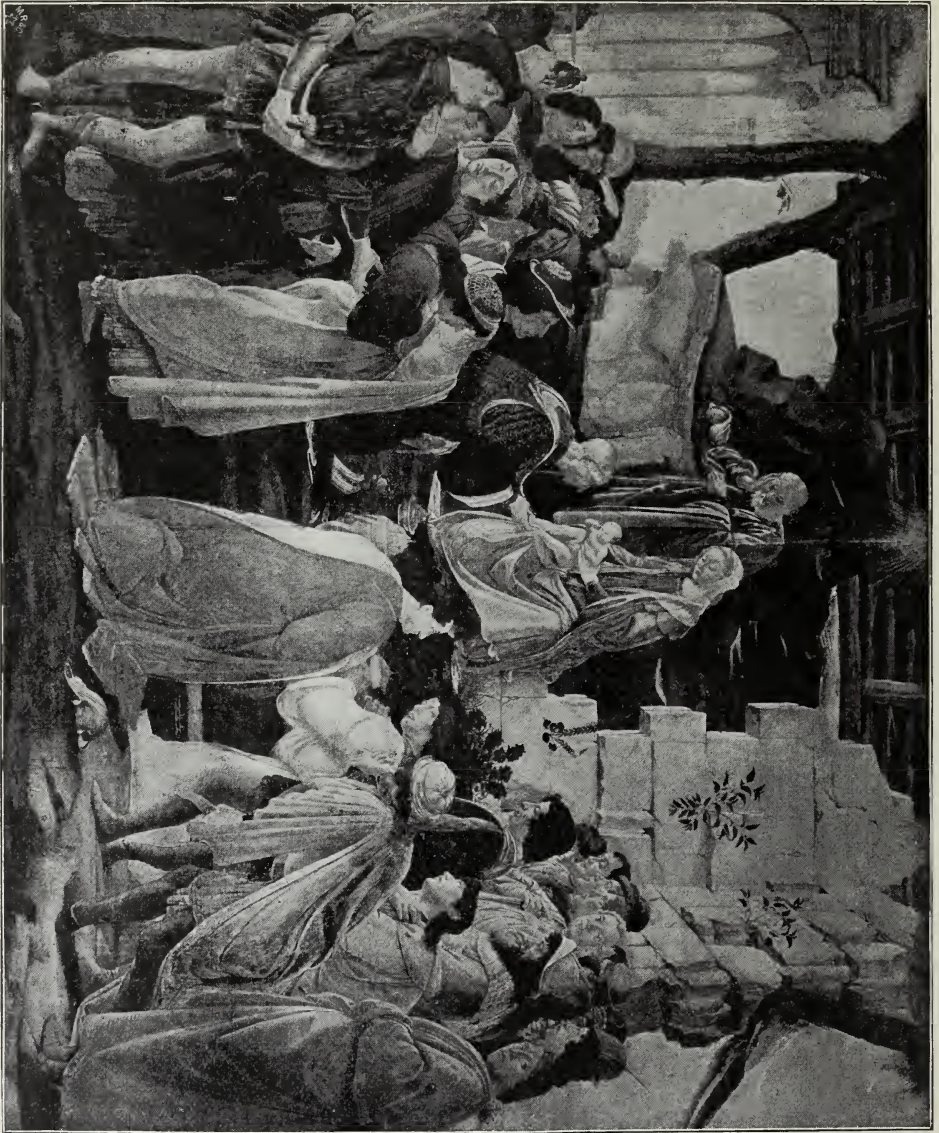
in a scarlet mantle lined with ermine; he turns towards Giovanni, his younger brother who died early, and who is also kneeling in the picture to present his offering to the Child in a vessel of gold. Between the two, but further back, stands Piero's son, the unfortunate Giuliano, father of Pope Clement VII, wearing a splendid, dark costume, with his expressive, melancholy face bent downwards and framed in long black hair. Two other portraits of him by the hand of Botticelli are preserved at Berlin



Fig. 59. ADORATION OF THE MAGI. Uffizi Gallery, Florence. (From a photograph by Alinari Brothers Florence.)

(Fig. 60) and Bergamo, which show the darling of the Florentines in a precisely similar attitude. He fell a victim to the disastrous conspiracy of the Pazzi, from which his brother Lorenzo escaped as if by a miracle.¹⁾ The "Magnifico", who doubtless gave the commission for the picture,

Fig. 59. ADORATION OF THE MAGI. Uffizi Gallery, Florence. (From a photograph by Giacomo Brogi, Florence.)



appears on the far left in the foreground, with both hands resting on the hilt of his sword, wearing a gold-embroidered crimson doublet, with

¹⁾ Among the portraits produced at this period which are still extant, that of a lady, at Frankfort-on-the-Main (Fig. 61), and the portrait of Caterina Sforza at Altenburg are perhaps the finest.

blue sleeves. He resembles his brother, not only in the imperturbable tranquillity of his eyes, cast down in meditation, but also in the form of his head, the way in which he wears his hair, and his attitude of aristocratic reserve. All the adherents of the house of the Medici take part in the solemn action, but who can tell their names today, or restore a personal existence in the memory of posterity to the brilliant assemblage which the "Magnifico" has collected round the founders of his celebrated family? One has only to look at each of these portraits singly, and to study the hands, with their masterly modelling, and the drapery, so conscientiously made to suit every movement, in order to comprehend Vasari's admiration; but it will be noticed that Botticelli has bestowed far greater care on the finish of those figures, which are portraits from life, than on the ideal figures of Mary and Joseph. This circumstance undoubtedly causes a slight discord between the inward significance and the outward appearance of those, the principal personages in the scene; but this discord is softened by the quiet, harmonious sentiment which pervades the whole, and by the emotions, temperate and well-attuned, which Botticelli has seldom expressed with so much refinement, dignity, and calm.

With this "Adoration of the Magi", which must have been produced either shortly before, or immediately after, the master's visit to Rome, Botticelli took his place at once in the front rank of the artists whom Lorenzo honoured with his commissions. He seems to have worked, up to the early "nineties", almost exclusively in the service of the Medici



Fig. 60. PORTRAIT OF GIULIANO DE' MEDICI. Museum, Berlin.
(From a photograph by Franz Hanfstängl, Munich.)



Fig. 61. PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN. Städel Institute, Frankfurt.
(From a photograph by Braun, Clément & Co., Dornach and Paris.)

and of their kinsmen and friends, the Tornabuoni. He witnessed the most brilliant days of the Medici, and met the young Michelangelo, of whose education Lorenzo had taken charge, in the Palazzo Riccardi. The picture of that glorious age, which no one can study without yearning for its revival, is most clearly reflected in the works of this period, in which Botticelli displays, in his pictures of Venus, the same enthusiasm for classical antiquity as was shown by Argyropulos, Marsilio Ficino, Poliziano and so many others in their writings and orations.

The first of the numerous pictures painted for Lorenzo the Magnificent, which Vasari mentions, is a life-sized Pallas, painted in tempera on canvas,

which was only recently brought to light in the Pitti Palace (Fig. 62). The blessings of peace and civil government, which Florence enjoyed under the sceptre of her Medicean ruler, are celebrated here under the symbol of a Minerva, crowned with olive (Fig. 63), who is reducing a shaggy centaur to obedience. The goddess has caught the bearded monster, armed with bow and quiver, trespassing on forbidden ways at the foot of a precipitous wall of stratified rock, where no escape is possible. She has speedily laid hold of the half-human creature by the forelock, and is administering the well-deserved rebuke with the calm superiority of a divine being united with feminine grace. The centaur's anxious look speaks



Fig. 62. PALLAS ATHENE TAMING A CENTAUR. Pitti Palace, Florence.
(From a photograph by Giacomo Brogi, Florence.)

eloquently of a bad conscience. Pallas, in her fluttering raiment, decorated all over with the rings of the Medici, moves along so lightly over the turf, that one might suppose it needed the heavy lance and the large shield which she carries on her back, to hold down the Zeus-born Goddess to



Fig. 63. HEAD OF PALLAS.
(From a photograph by Alinari Brothers, Florence.)

the Earth. The original and most naive conception of the antique, and the humour of the subject lend a peculiar charm to this picture, which for centuries was only known in a fragmentary fashion from a drawing in the Uffizi and a piece of tapestry belonging to the Comte de Baudreuil. It has also a special historical interest as a graceful act of homage to the house of Medici.

Another piece of delightful humour, such as it was seldom given to Botticelli to express, is the picture of Mars and Venus in the National Gallery, London (Fig. 64). But it is not the little roguish satyrs, amusing themselves with the heavy weapons of the God of war, who enchant us most; the secret bliss of love as Gods feel it, whose form is human but who know no grief, is painted with such simplicity, such chaste reserve, such delicate and poetical intuition, that the picture cannot but arouse the tenderest emotions of those who behold it. The sleeping god, probably Giuliano de' Medici himself, "il bel Giulio" as the Florentines called him, displays almost entirely the austere beauty of his powerful limbs; the strong breast rises and falls in tranquil motion, and we seem almost to hear the deep breathing of the sleeper, as he lies with his head thrown back and open mouth. The dreamless sleep of youth is his; his body has lost all elasticity, his slackened limbs have fallen into the easiest position. Venus watches over the slumber of her

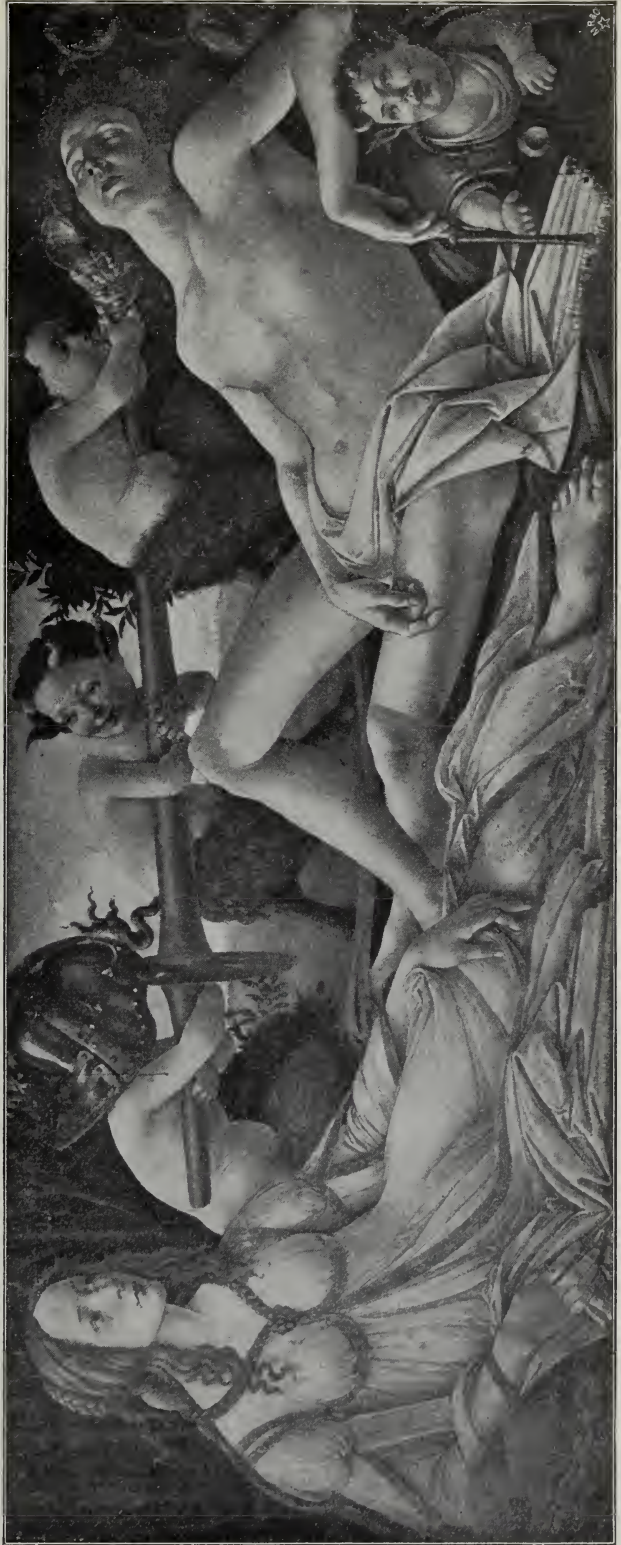


Fig. 64. MARS AND VENUS. National Gallery, London. (From a photograph by Braun, Clément & Co., Dornach and Paris.)

beloved; she reclines over against him in a shady grove of myrtle, lost in pleasant reverie, like the heroine of Titian's famous picture in the Borghese Gallery. She gazes into the distance, without passion, without desire, happy in perfect enjoyment, in the consciousness of loving and being loved. A white robe, falling into many folds, ornamented with a golden hem,



Fig. 65. HEAD OF VENUS, from Primavera.

veils the slender limbs of the Goddess of love, who seems human enough, and only betrays her Olympian origin by the radiant happiness of her nature. May we recognise a portrait in her also? One might almost think so, on comparing the two splendid pictures of Venus at which Botticelli must have been working about the same time for one of the Medici villas, probably at Careggi. Whereas the same individual feminine type appears once more in the delightful vision of the Goddess of love as she moves through the midst of the "Primavera" (Fig. 65), Botticelli has given the



Fig. 66. PRIMAVERA Academy, Florence. (From a photograph by Giacomo Progi, Florence.)

purest expression to his own ideal of Venus, approaching more nearly to the antique, in the picture of the foam-born Aphrodite.

In order to enjoy that marvellous creation of Botticelli's which bears the name of "Primavera" (Fig. 66), and is derived, as regards the subject, from a poem composed by Politian for a festal occasion, one must endeavour to imagine the original colours restored, for the picture is painted



Fig. 67. THE THREE GRACES, from Primavera.

in tempera and has darkened considerably. When the sky still gleamed in radiant blue through the shiny green of the oranges and myrtles, and the dust of centuries had not yet darkened the golden fruits and white bloom of the thick-foliaged trees; when the grass was still green and the countless flowers still fresh, the spring-like charm of this landscape must have been still more potent. The picture has certainly lost in outward attractiveness in the course of centuries, but its intrinsic value can be comprehended the more readily, even at the present day, because the

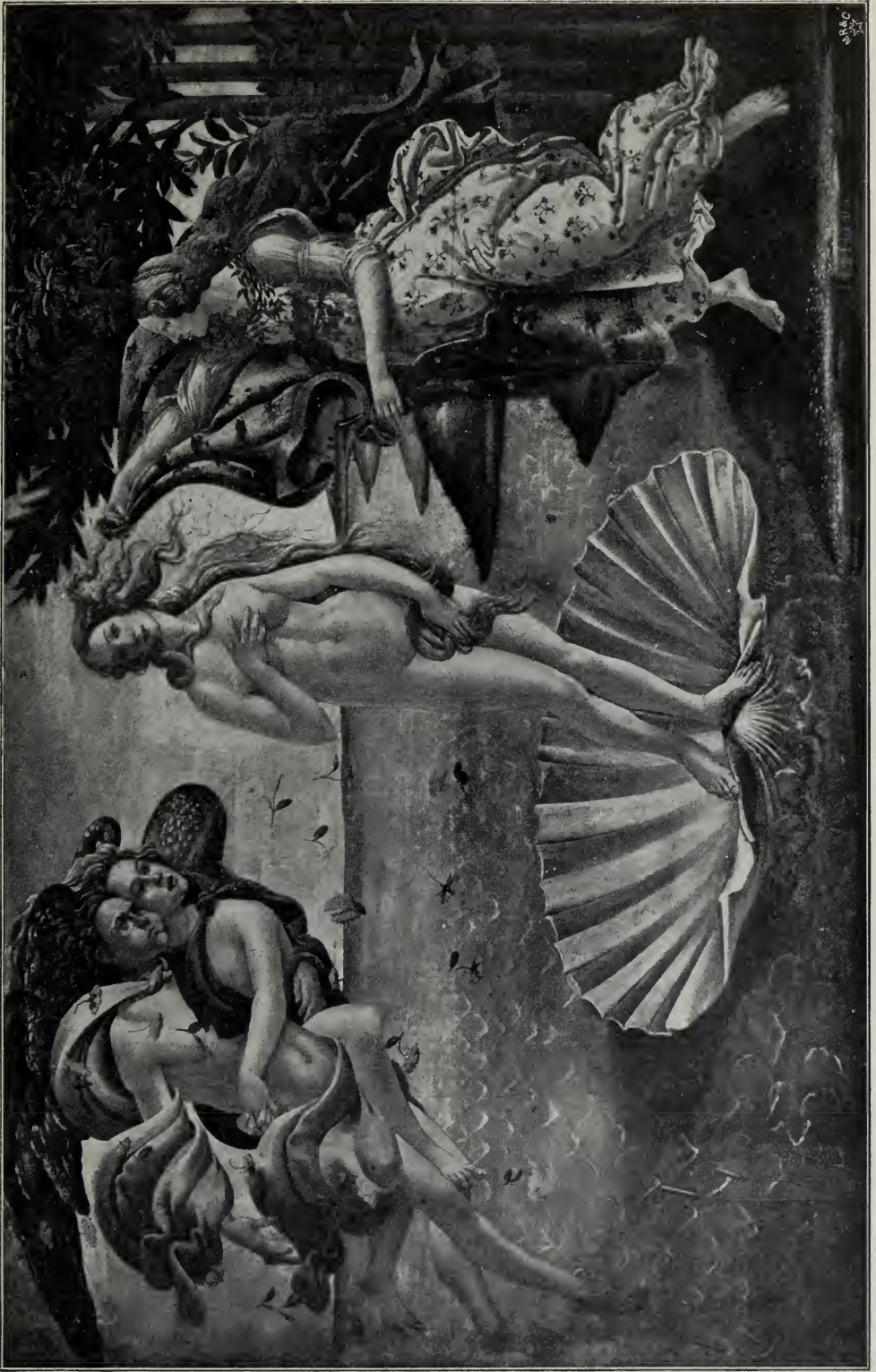


Fig. 68. THE BIRTH OF VENUS. Uffizi Gallery, Florence. (From a photograph by Anderson, Rome.)

figures, which are more than life-sized, are in a comparatively good state of preservation.

The slender Venus—probably the portrait of the mistress of Giuliano, whose own portrait may be recognised, as some people think, in the Mercury—appears in a white robe, ornamented with gold, as in the London picture, in the centre of the composition, just in front of a luxuriant myrtle-



Fig. 69. Two WINDS, from the Birth of Venus.
(From a photograph by Giacomo Brogi, Florence.)

bush. Her red mantle, with gold embroidery, has slipped down and rests on her right arm, of which the hand is raised; she steps forward slowly and looks at the beholder with a gracious smile, bending her head, adorned with a veil of gold tissue, a little to one side. Wanton Cupid hovers over her gaily, blindfold, in the act of pointing a glittering arrow at the three Graces, clad in transparent gauze, who dance a vernal measure in gentlest motion, rhythmically poised, before the Goddess of love (Fig. 67). Mercury, a splendid youthful figure, who is sure to remind us at once of the sleeping

Mars, drives the light clouds away from before them with his herald's wand; behind them, Primavera herself approaches, accompanied by Flora, who is fleeing from the tempestuous embrace of Zephyrus. The Goddess of Spring is plain rather than beautiful, but a marvellous creation of the fancy, perhaps the most significant allegorical figure that the whole Renaissance produced. A luxuriant spray of wild briar-rose serves as a girdle to hold in her robe, which is adorned with countless flowers; a thick wreath of fresh field-flowers surrounds her neck instead of glittering gems, and a diadem of white primulas and blue cornflowers is entwined in her fair



Fig. 70. GIOVANNI TORNABUONI WITH THE SEVEN LIBERAL ARTS. The Louvre, Paris.

hair. She advances gaily, strewing the fragrant blossoms of spring from the inexhaustible abundance of flowers in her lap on the path of the Goddess of love. Flora, thinly veiled, hurries more rapidly forward, to escape from the winged Zephyr. But, the wind-god, with puffed-out cheeks, has already flung his arm round the shoulder of the frightened goddess, and at his touch, as Politian's verses describe the scene, roses, anemones and pinks spring from her open mouth.

All is gay, but there is nothing exaggerated in movement or expression; the triumphal progress of Venus, which we are permitted to witness in the rustling orange-grove, moves past quietly and mysteriously, like a fleeting dream-picture, before our delighted eyes. No bacchanalian

dances accompany it; no desire for hasty, unrestrained enjoyment finds utterance here; we seem to share the bliss of a moment which heaven and earth adorn with their fairest gifts, and which the gods enjoy with a celestial calm, as if it were their lot to keep such festival every day. That is the felicitous purport of this creation of genius, in which the harmony of thought and expression deserves, perhaps, the highest praise. So pure a harmony is to be found in one other picture by Botticelli, and one only—the Birth of Venus—a work produced about the same time for the same pleasure-loving circle.

This is that Lady Beauty, in whose praise
Thy voice and hand shake still,—long known to thee
By flying hair and fluttering hem.

These verses, from a sonnet, "Soul's Beauty", by Rossetti, express perhaps better than any other words the poetical charm which clings to the birth of Aphrodite from the foam of the sea (Fig. 68). Politian's poem in celebration of a tournament of Giuliano de' Medici seems, here again, to have given the immediate suggestion for the picture; but "Primavera" and "The Birth of Venus" are closely related to one another, independently of any outward influence.

A pair of wind-gods, locked in a close embrace, with roses fluttering round them, have just driven to the shore the light, gilded shell on which



Fig. 71. GIOVANNA DEGLI ALBIZZI RECEIVES THE GIFTS OF THE FOUR CARDINAL VIRTUES. The Louvre, Paris.



Fig. 72. DETAIL FROM THE VILLA LEMMI FRESCO.
 (From a photograph by Braun, Clément & Co., Dornach and Paris.)

Venus has floated across the wide expanse of ocean (Fig. 69). Rippling billows play gently round the fragile craft; Venus stands on the edge of it, modestly covering her bosom with her hand. A wonderful wealth of golden hair floats round the Goddess, and her handmaiden, one of the Hours, holds a mantle spread to cover her, sprinkled all over with flowers of spring. This figure, of which the Berlin Museum possesses a weak repetition, has been justly praised as the most beautiful Venus in modern art; there is, perhaps, one picture with which it may be compared, and that is Giorgione's "Sleeping Venus" at Dresden. The purity of soul which dwells in the chaste and beautiful body of a perfect woman is depicted there with the same charm. The picture speaks to us like a story of the golden age of Saturn, which Marsilio Ficino has described in such glowing colours in his letters; the spectator feels almost an intruder, as he stands before it, witnessing one of the sacred mysteries, hidden in the marvellous book of Nature. The action is represented with so much truth, the virginal charm of the goddess, drawing her first breath, is so lifelike, the alacrity of her

ministrants is so irresistible, that we seem to hear the tremulous rustle of the laurel-grove, the gentle splash of the waves, and eagerly await the moment when the daughter of the foam will step ashore.

Botticelli stood on the level of the humanists in all he produced for the house of the Medici, but in the wall-paintings which he carried out in the villa of the Tornabuoni near Fiesole, he continued the venerable



Fig. 73. THE UNJUST JUDGE, from the Calumny of Apelles.
(From a photograph by Giacomo Brogi, Florence.)

traditions of the Middle Ages. The wealthy Giovanni Tornabuoni, friend and uncle to Lorenzo the Magnificent, employed for many years the most eminent painters and sculptors of his native city. Ghirlandajo was commissioned by him to produce the monumental frescoes in the choir of Santa Maria Novella, and it was for him that Verrocchio carved the famous relief on a sarcophagus in the Bargello. The marriage of his eldest son Lorenzo with Giovanna degli Albizzi seems, finally, to have offered the

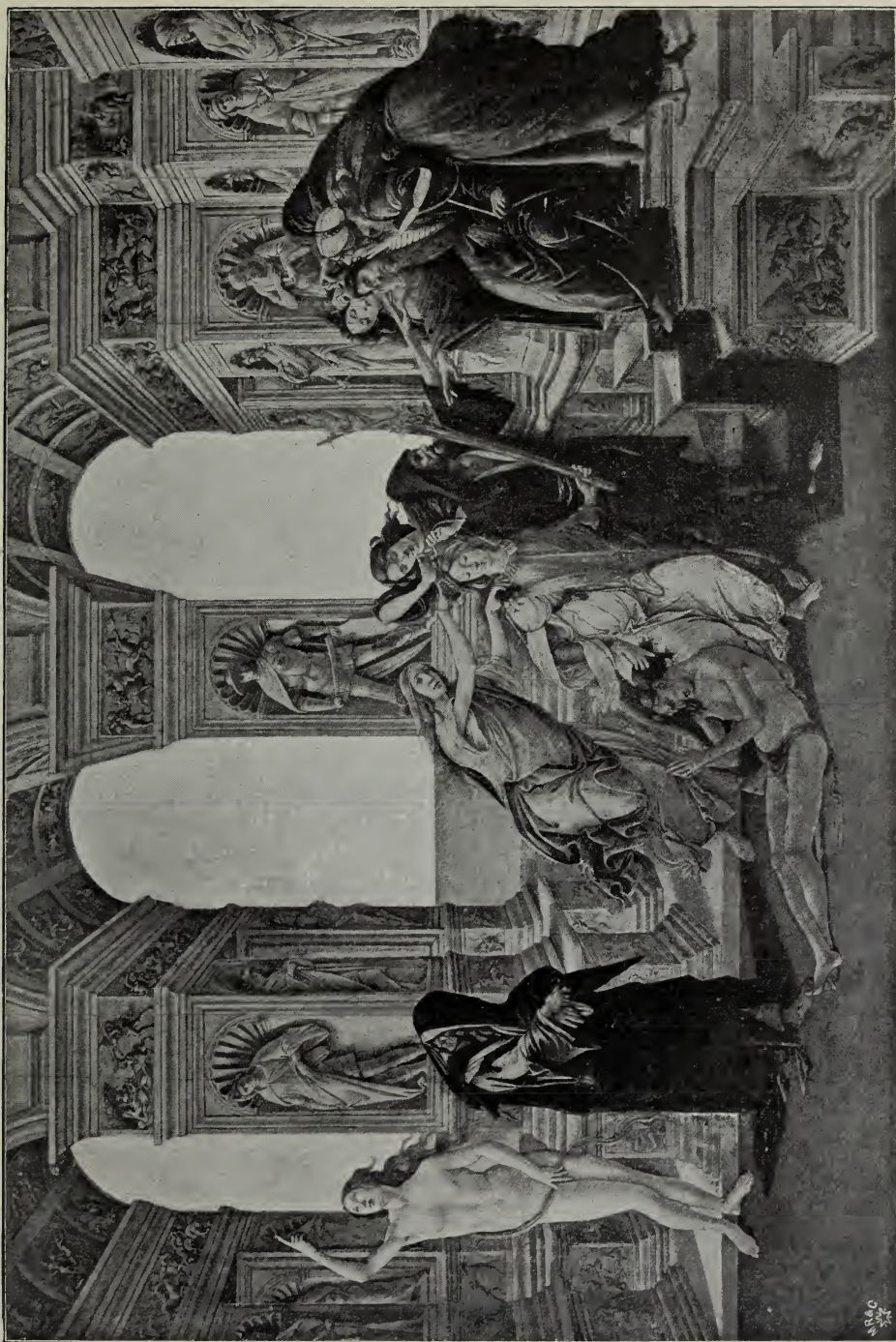


Fig. 74. THE CALUMNY OF APPELLES. Uffizi Gallery, Florence. (From a photograph by Giacomo Brogi, Florence.)

opportunity of entrusting Botticelli with the decorative paintings in the aforesaid villa. The severely injured frescoes which were discovered in 1873 under the whitewash in the Villa Lemmi, and which have been in the Louvre since 1881, represent on one side the bridegroom, being introduced into the circle of the Seven Liberal Arts, and on the other side the young wife, accepting the offering of the Four Cardinal Virtues. The first painting (Fig. 70), in which Dialectic presents the bashful Lorenzo to the circle of her Sister Arts, who are gathered round the throne of Philosophy, commemorates the great accomplishments of the young Tornabuoni; while the second fresco, which is unfortunately so damaged that we cannot be quite sure what is actually taking place, celebrates Giovanna degli Albizzi as the pattern of all the virtues (Fig. 71). The subject of the Seven Liberal Arts, represented as personifications of the sciences, was already to be found at Florence on Giotto's campanile, and in the paintings of the Spanish Chapel. There is a group of them, sculptured in marble, round the tomb of King Robert, Petrarch's friend, at Naples, and another set of the Arts, cast in bronze, adorns the monument of Sixtus IV in St. Peter's at Rome. But neither there, nor in the paintings of Melozzo da Forli at Urbino, nor in those of Pinturicchio in the Appartamento Borgia, is Philosophy so distinctly characterised as the Queen of all the Sciences, as she appears in Raphael's final glorification of her in the "School of Athens". This lends a peculiar interest to Botticelli's fresco, and he is also the only painter before Raphael who has collected the single figures into a charming and animated scene, without destroying the precise characterisation of the separate individuals. Philosophy, enthroned, in matronly dress, wearing a mantle adorned with golden flames, has raised her right hand, as if imparting instruction, and holds a bow in her left hand; at her feet sit, on the left, Geometry with a square, Astronomy with a globe, Music with an organ; on the right, Arithmetic with a table of figures, Grammar with a scorpion and a switch and finally, Rhetoric with a scroll half unfolded. All turn their attention with a greater or less degree of sympathy to the new arrival, whom Dialectic is just commending with an eloquent gesture of the hand to Philosophy, who smiles graciously upon him.

It is not Venus and the Graces, as has hitherto been supposed, who are to be recognised in the pleasing feminine figures, reminding us of Jethro's daughters in the Sistine Chapel, who are approaching the young wife of Lorenzo (Fig. 72). The very connection of subject with the first fresco compels us to see in them the Four Cardinal Virtues, just as they were painted by Piero della Francesca, in his famous picture in the Uffizi, accompanying Battista Sforza on her Triumphal car; and as, in Dante (*Purgatorio* XXXI, 107), they were appointed to wait on Beatrice, before she descended to the lower world. But the bad preservation of the picture makes it impossible to decide what is the meaning of the four flowers (of which only the stalks are still preserved), which the first of the women is about to present to Giovanna in an open napkin. Perhaps they sym-

bolize an equal number of virtues, which are to be imparted to the bride by this ceremonious act.

It was at the conclusion of this period of his development, when he was more employed in villas and palaces than in churches and chapels, and when he designed, among other things, certain subjects from a story in Boccaccio for a cassone of Lucrezia Pucci, that Botticelli painted the "Calumny of Apelles" (Fig. 74), described by Vasari as his last picture. The artist presented this picture, now in the Uffizi, to a nobleman of Florence, Fabio Segni, who was his intimate friend; and Vasari declares



Fig. 75. DETAIL FROM THE CALUMNY OF APELLES.
(From a photograph by Giacomo Brogi, Florence.)

that the beauty of its execution could not be surpassed, a judgment which may still pass undisputed. But if we compare this panel, the preservation of which is remarkably good, with the somewhat larger "Adoration of the Magi" from Santa Maria Novella, we miss the vivid colour and fine drawing in the faces, the accurate representation of bones and joints in the long, lean fingers. If we put it by the side of the slightly later pictures of Venus, full of calm and beauty, we are disagreeably surprised by the wild and unrestrained movement of the figures, the restless fluttering of the drapery, the lavish use of gold, and the ominous, almost terrifying expression of some of the faces. The subject itself, derived from a de-

scription of Lucian's to which Leon Battista Alberti gave currency in the art of the Renaissance, may be said to require some vehemence and passion in the treatment; it is a subject, in fact, which cannot fail to excite horror and pity in any human heart; yet no one will be inclined to dispute that Botticelli, when he painted the picture, had already declined from the zenith of his fame. It was carried out, however, with consummate mastery of technique, though with a certain degree of haste.

Every resource of art was expended on the decoration of the judgment-hall, gleaming with gold and marble. Between its stately pillars there is a distant view of the sea, with a surface as smooth as that of a mirror. Life-sized marble figures are let into the niches of the pillars, like the figures in the walls of Orsanmichele, the venerated national sanctuary of Florence; while every vacant surface of socle, capital or vault is adorned with richly gilded sculpture. The whole of the Renaissance building is remarkable for its fine proportions. It is a scene which the fancy peoples

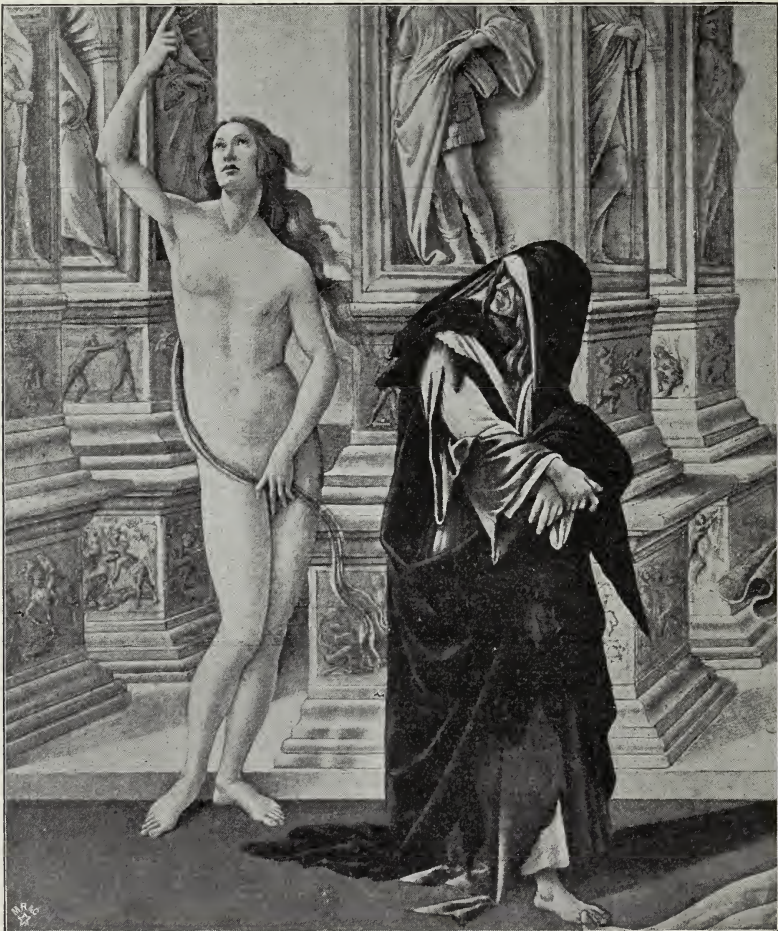


Fig. 76. PENITENCE AND TRUTH, from the Calumny of Apelles.
(From a photograph by Giacomo Brogi, Florence.)

with glad and noble beings, who revive the virtues of all these marble saints and heroes; a place, it would seem, in which wisdom alone may be heard, justice alone be executed; a place of refuge in which poets and thinkers may prepare for new intellectual achievements as they walk to and fro in those cool corridors by the sea.

Instead of this we witness a fearful deed of violence. In bitter contrast with the splendid marble all around, in ironical mockery of the solemn statues of justice and virtue on the walls, a noisy throng is dragging the innocent victim of calumny before the tribunal of the unjust judge (Fig. 73), who sits, with crown and sceptre, clad in a long green mantle, on a richly decorated throne. Two extraordinary female figures, Ignorance and Suspicion, stand on either side of the throne, revolting alike in the irresistible passionateness of their gestures, and in the stealthy haste with which they whisper insidious words into the long ass's ears of him who sits on it. We see how the king wavers and yields to the entreaties of the insinuating couple, leaning forward to catch the words which Envy declaims with a gesture of almost imperious force. Envy is an uncanny creature with shaggy hair and beard, pale and deformed, with torn raiment. He lifts his left hand towards the judge in emphatic asseveration, and with his right hand leads on Calumny, who holds a burning torch before her as a treacherous symbol of her pretended love of truth (Fig. 75). She dashes impetuously forward, with her left hand mercilessly grasping the hair of the victim of her intrigues. The latter, a young man nearly naked, has his folded hands raised towards heaven in assertion of his innocence. Calumny's appearance is plausible and crafty; her clothing is costly and her action so impetuous, that her busy attendants, Fraud and Deception, have found no time to finish tiring her hair, and are still eagerly engaged in twining a bunch of fragrant roses in her floating golden hair.

The tormentor, Remorse, approaches slowly after the tumultuous throng has passed. The lean and hideous hag is clothed from head to foot in mourning attire all torn and ragged; she has clasped her trembling hands before her in an attitude of reserve, and turned her horrible face towards naked Truth, a slim female figure freely imitated from the Venus Anadyomene, who gazes upwards and lifts her right hand to heaven in adjuration.

The full light of day streams from every side into the airy building, is refracted by the golden marble ornament of the walls and casts a glaring light on the curious scene, which belongs by its subject to the class of pictures founded on antiquity, while in form and expression it is closely allied to much later works by Botticelli.

The Calumny of Apelles is probably about contemporary with the curious little picture in Prince Pallavicini's collection, which was not generally known till a few years ago, but impresses the modern mind almost more than Botticelli's pictures of the Madonna or of Venus, although it is by no means remarkably well preserved (Fig. 77). On a seat of stone before the closed door of a massive Florentine palace of the early Renaissance there



Fig. 77. THE OUTCAST. Collection of Prince Pallavicini, Rome.
(By permission of Mr. Domenico Anderson.)

sits a miserable woman, wearing but a single torn linen garment, sobbing, with her head buried in her hands, and her dark lank hair falling down over her face. Her clothes lie scattered around her, but she has no longer the energy nor the will to cover her trembling limbs with them. The cold grey light of dawn is already falling on the freestone walls of the palace, but no mortal approaches to console the mourner.

What is the secret that her bosom conceals? What story would her life and eyes relate, if we could raise that head which now is sunk in

hopeless woe? All his contemporaries assert that Fra Filippo's pupil was a pleasant fellow, full of humour and good spirits, in his actual life. In his art Botticelli was the apostle of sorrow. The subdued and plaintive melancholy of his Madonnas rises in the "Abbandonata" to such an elemental outburst of inconsolable grief, that poetry alone, and no poetry save Shakespeare's, can utter in words what the painter's art has expressed so marvellously in form. The beginning of the 29th sonnet:

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweepe my outcast state,

is a motto which may safely be put under Botticelli's picture. Abandoned by destiny, a very scorn of men and an outcast, in solitude and tears—are any further words needed to denote the feeling which this picture conveys, or to suggest an interpretation which everyone must ultimately make and adopt for himself?

But still, the pictures of Venus, especially "Primavera", and the Birth of Aphrodite—remain the truly characteristic utterances of Botticelli's inner life in the golden days of Lorenzo the Magnificent. These are works which reflect with marvellous truth that faith in the antique which rejoiced the hearts of so many in that age.

But, alas! no mortal on this earthly pilgrimage will ever set foot in a land where the happiness of the senses is one with the peace of the soul. Botticelli, too, had a sad awakening, an abrupt disturbance of his dreams, when the thunder of the voice of Savonarola fell on his ears: he sought in terror for some hold and stay, in life and in death; the Gods of Hellas sank like phantoms into the abyss, and out of the misty sea of early recollections there rose, ever clearer and more brilliant, the pure symbol of Christian art, Mary, the Mother of God.

IV.

It was not only in regard to the Madonna that Savonarola's sermons and the personal influence of the great Dominican transformed the ideals of Botticelli in his later years. Just as the artist was induced by the influence of Fra Girolamo to choose exclusively biblical subjects, so do several of the rather scanty easel-pictures of the last two decades of his life express in other ways the austere spirit of the preacher of repentance. A peculiarity of all these pictures is a heightening of emotion; many of them possess an astonishing amount of passion in expression and movement.

At the same time the figures become more crowded, the colours colder and more gloomy in tone, and details are no longer carried out with the same amount of finish as before. Four small oblong panels with scenes from the life of St. Zenobius, dispersed at the present day among the galleries of London, Florence and Dresden (Fig. 78), display almost all these defects at once. The "Annunciation" in the Uffizi (Fig. 79), with

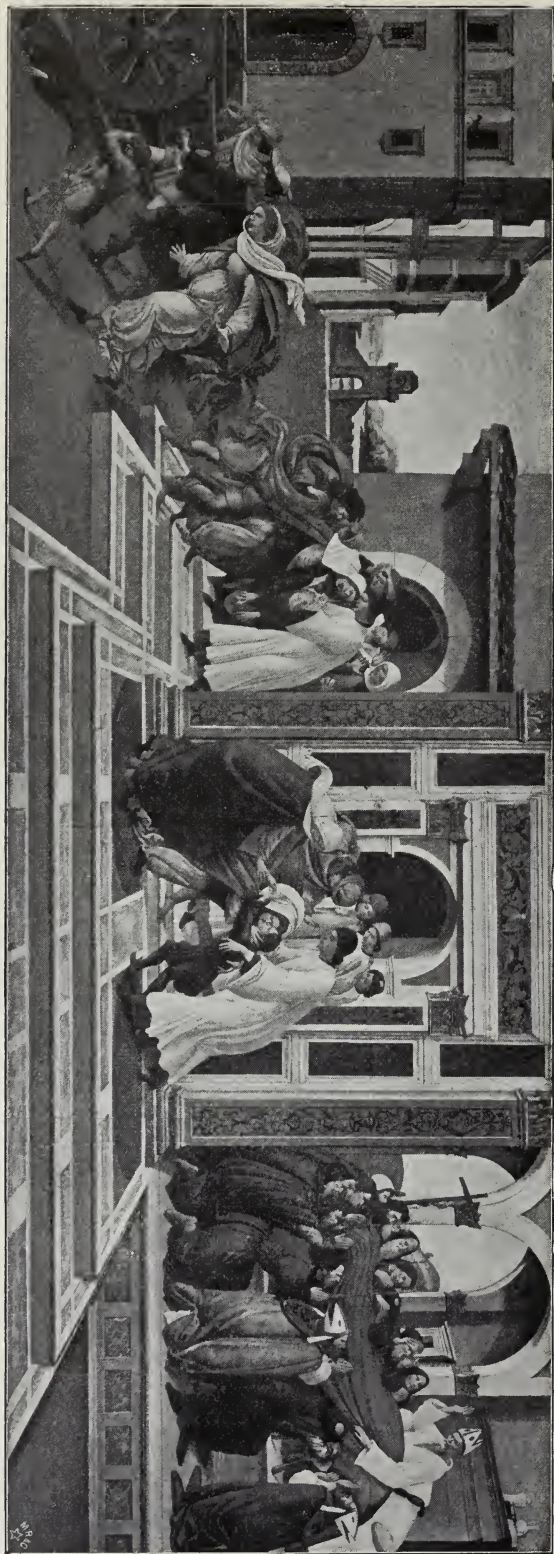


Fig. 78. SCENES FROM THE LIFE OF ST. ZENOBIOUS. Picture Gallery, Dresden. (From a photograph by Braun, Clément & Co., Dornach and Paris.)

its dull colours, is a picture which some critics have struck off the roll of Botticelli's works, but it is so rich in delicate touches, so brilliantly drawn and composed, that the painter can have left nothing more than parts of the colouring to the hands of pupils. With what humility does Mary, just risen from her *prie-dieu*, receive the message of the kneeling angel, and how effective is the rendering of a twofold process, reverential transmission and hesitating acceptance, as expressed by the right hand of the angel, lifted up, and that of Mary, directed downwards.

Savonarola, in describing the relation of Mary to her Child, had endeavoured to represent the Virgin's joy, as a mother, under the shadow of a prophetic foreboding of woe to come. He had dwelt on her outward appearance as announcing the awed expectation of a tremendous destiny, rather than pure joy in her first-born Son. But, on the other hand, he would attribute to her no undignified demonstration of grief at the Crucifixion. In his Good Friday sermons of 1494 and 1495 the "prophet sent of God", whose fervid eloquence then reached its climax, placed himself and his hearers, a devout and

eager multitude, which the huge Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore could not contain, beneath the cross and at the sepulchre of the Lord. He described in impressive tones the last act of the great drama of Salvation, beginning at Christ's parting from His Mother, and proceeding to the elevation of the cross; and his imagination was inexhaustible in depicting the agony of these last hours. "But do not think", he said, "that Mary



Fig. 79. THE ANNUNCIATION. Uffizi Gallery, Florence.
(From a photograph by Giacomo Brogi, Florence.)

went screaming through the streets and tore her hair, and conducted herself as one distraught; she followed her Son gently and in great humility. She may have shed some tears; but her outward mien was that of one not sorrowful only, but sorrowful and glad at once, so that men marvelled that she did not conduct herself in the manner of other women. And so, too, she stood beneath the cross; sorrowful and glad at once, and pondering on the mystery of the great goodness of God."

It is to these and similar utterances of Savonarola's, that the restraint, the temperate and beautiful utterance of grief, in Michelangelo's "Pietà" in St. Peter's, have been traced, and rightly traced, by earlier critics. But Botticelli, too, whose temperament, so easily roused, was still more strongly attracted by the great personality of the Dominican, could not shut his ears to such urgent admonitions. In the only two subjects from the Passion which he ever produced, both painted about 1500, he endeavoured to depict the deep emotion felt by the men and women busied about the body of the Redeemer, not by unrestrained outbursts of selfish grief, but by touching evidences of tender solicitude and boundless affection for the Departed.

In the "Lamentation" in the Poldi-Pezzoli Gallery at Milan (Fig. 80), which brings us, like the far more important picture at Munich, to the entrance of the open tomb in the rock, Mary has fallen fainting into the arms of the Beloved Disciple, himself agitated by bitter grief. Mary Magdalen, calm and still, holds the feet which once upon a time she had anointed; another of the holy women is engaged in wiping with loving hands the blood-stained hair of the Victim, and a third is the only one who is incapable of controlling her grief, and hides her face in her mantle as she sobs. Thus all have forgotten themselves and the world in the depth of their sorrow, and Joseph of Arimathea alone, who appears at some height above the women in the open door of the sepulchre, holds up the crown of thorns and the nails, and groans aloud.

The "Lamentation" at Munich (Fig. 81) is most closely related in conception and in outward form to the picture at Milan, but the horizontal composition, most artistically contrived, leaves room, in addition, for three saints, Peter, Paul and Jerome, who stand a little apart and mourn their Saviour in solemn reverence. The representation of the scene is far more dramatic than before, the manifestation of grief more poignant; the colours are darker, and, owing to the extraordinary skill shown in the perspective, the looker on seems to be taking part in the action, within the awful darkness of the tomb, to a far greater degree than in the picture at Milan. We admire the stern realism of the dead Christ, the noble resignation in the face of his mother, who is well nigh swooning, and the finely expressed grief and love of the men and women, who share equally in both emotions, and express them with a greater or less degree of vehemence.

Botticelli's easel pictures can only be traced as far as the year 1500; they end with the "Adoration of the Magi" in London, signed and dated by himself, in which he expressed so forcibly his enthusiasm for Savonarola. There is another "Adoration" in the Uffizi, a picture disfigured by crude colouring in the seventeenth century, containing equally remarkable portraits of Savonarola and Lorenzo de' Medici, near St. Joseph on the left; but, even if we assume that this was painted subsequently to the other, one picture was not enough to fill, even approximately, the long space of the last ten years of a lifetime which had been spent in restless activity. Moreover, Botticelli had only reached the age of sixty-three when he died,



Fig. 80. THE ENTOMBMENT. Museo Poldi-Pezzoli, Milan.

at Florence, on May 17th, 1510; he was, therefore, only fifty-three when as far as we know with certainty he finished his last picture, a work so masterly in technique, so true in expression, so original in invention, that it emphatically contradicts Vasari's romantic assertion that Botticelli produced nothing whatever after he became an adherent of Savonarola. What, then, was the occupation of the last decade of the artist's life? That it was a life of hard work to the very end, we may be sure, for the number of his works bears irrefutable witness to his untiring industry. Are we not justified in expecting new and precious works from his practised hand, clear and refined utterances of a mature understanding, of an inner life ever mobile and alert, ever growing in breadth and in depth!

Vasari, whose statements concerning the last years of Botticelli's life are very unreliable, has, nevertheless, woven one piece of information into his tangled web of truth and romance, by which we can trace both the inward development and the active occupation of our artist to the end of his life. "Being a man of profound thought", we are told, "he composed a commentary on part of Dante's poem, illustrated the *Inferno*, and had it printed; and since he spent much time on these things, and did no other work, disorders without end ensued in his outward life."

A deep interest in the personality of Dante, a comprehensive knowledge of the *Divine Comedy*, the contents of which were familiar to Florentine artists, from Giotto to Michelangelo, are revealed now and then even in the earlier works of Botticelli. He painted a portrait of Dante, now in an English private collection, after Giotto's celebrated picture in the Bargello; he drew inspiration in painting the Madonna from the splendid hymn to the Virgin in the thirty-third canto of the *Paradiso*, and adorned one of his most sublime pictures of this subject with the oracular sentence:

"Vergine madre, figlia del tuo figlio."

But there is no panel bearing the name of Botticelli which reveals so clearly his study of Dante as his famous "Assumption of the Virgin", produced before 1475 for the poet Matteo Palmieri. It is true that the painting was done throughout by the hands of pupils, and must not be attributed to Botticelli himself; but Vasari's statement that the master carried out the painting with his own hands is so far correct, that Botticelli himself designed the composition from information supplied by his learned patron (Fig. 82). On a hill at the foot of the picture, from which we enjoy a view extending over an immeasurable expanse of plain to the mountains which surround it, the twelve apostles form an animated group round Mary's open tomb, from which countless lilies raise their white heads. Palmieri and his wife kneel in prayer at an equal distance on either side. But over them the heavens are opened. In nine concentric circles, exactly in the order of Dante's description of Paradise, appear in thrice three ranks the heavenly hosts — *la milizia santa* — patriarchs, prophets, apostles; evangelists, martyrs, confessors; doctors, virgins and

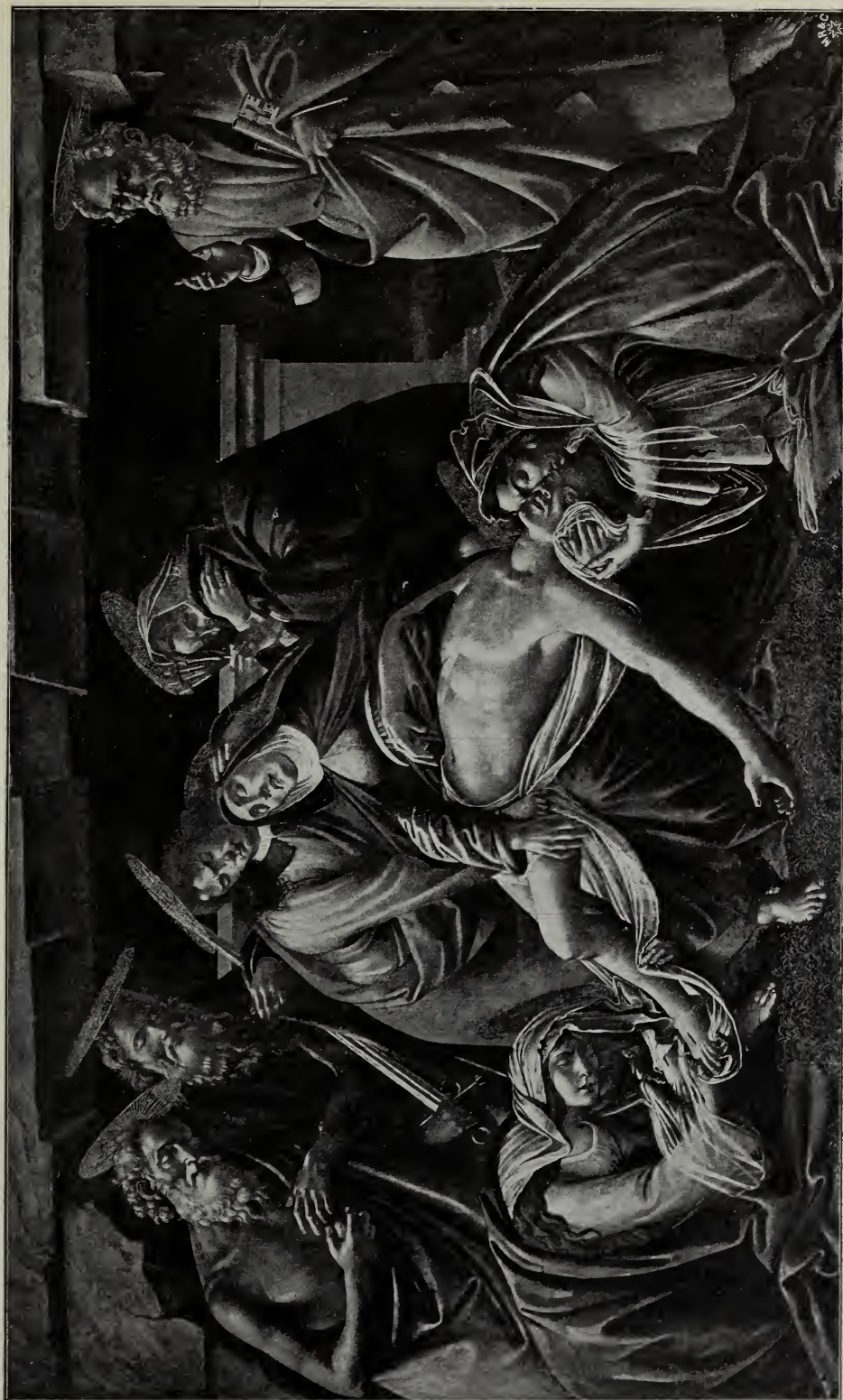


FIG. 81. THE LAMENTATION FOR CHRIST. MUNICH.

angels; the latter surrounding the throne of the Most High in ever narrowing circles, "as the petals cluster round the calyx of a white rose". Before that throne the Virgin kneels in the crystalline heaven, where innumerable cherubim sing the praises of the Almighty, and the elect of the company of heaven, Peter and John on one side, Adam and Eve on the other, are visible amid the angelic choirs, exactly as they appeared in Dante's vision.

Posterity, however, was so ill-disposed as to recognise another influence than Dante's in this remarkable picture. Matteo Palmieri himself had travelled through Paradise in a poem, modelled on Dante, which he entitled: "*La Città di Vita*", and had adopted an heretical opinion of Origen's respecting the angels who remained neutral at the rebellion of Lucifer. This heresy, it was thought, was also to be found in Botticelli's picture. The chapel in San Pietro Maggiore was closed by order of the ecclesiastical authorities, and was not opened to the public again for years afterwards. The altarpiece, however, which had been much disfigured by additions, was sold by the last scion of the Palmieri family and removed to England, where it is now preserved in the National Gallery.

A kinder destiny ruled over Botticelli's illustrations to Dante than over Michelangelo's. The latter perished in a shipwreck, but Botticelli's monumental work, representing nearly the whole of the *Divine Comedy* in pictures, has survived almost intact to the present day. This vast work was undertaken for Lorenzo di Pier Francesco de' Medici. Its date, like so many dates in the master's life, cannot be ascertained with precision. It may have been begun soon after Botticelli's return from Rome — in parts, perhaps, even earlier — but it was certainly not till the last years of the artist's life that it was even so far completed as we see it at present. It must have been his preoccupation with Dante that caused the master, as he grew old, to forget the outer world; and, though we know nothing further about a commentary on Dante by Sandro, Vasari's assertion at any rate bears witness to the diligent study which he gave to the greatest poetical genius of Italy. It seems more than probable that the artist fell into poverty and actual want, while he gave himself up to the serious intellectual work which bore such splendid fruit in the illustrations to the *Divine Comedy*, and he made repeatedly unsuccessful attempts to have his designs, which won the highest admiration from his contemporaries, engraved. There is, however, undoubtedly some exaggeration in Vasari's account of his latter days, which makes the artist wholly dependent on strangers for support. Botticelli's whole life, as a matter of fact, was spent in such a narrow groove, and was so lacking in brilliant outward success, that, when a biographer comes to describe it, he can give little more than a mere enumeration of his works. And do not these works bear witness better than any words to the important position held by the pupil of Fra Filippo and Verrocchio, the friend and contemporary of Leonardo, the forerunner of Michelangelo, in the culture of the Quattrocento? His art was a true mirror of every intellectual movement of that active period.

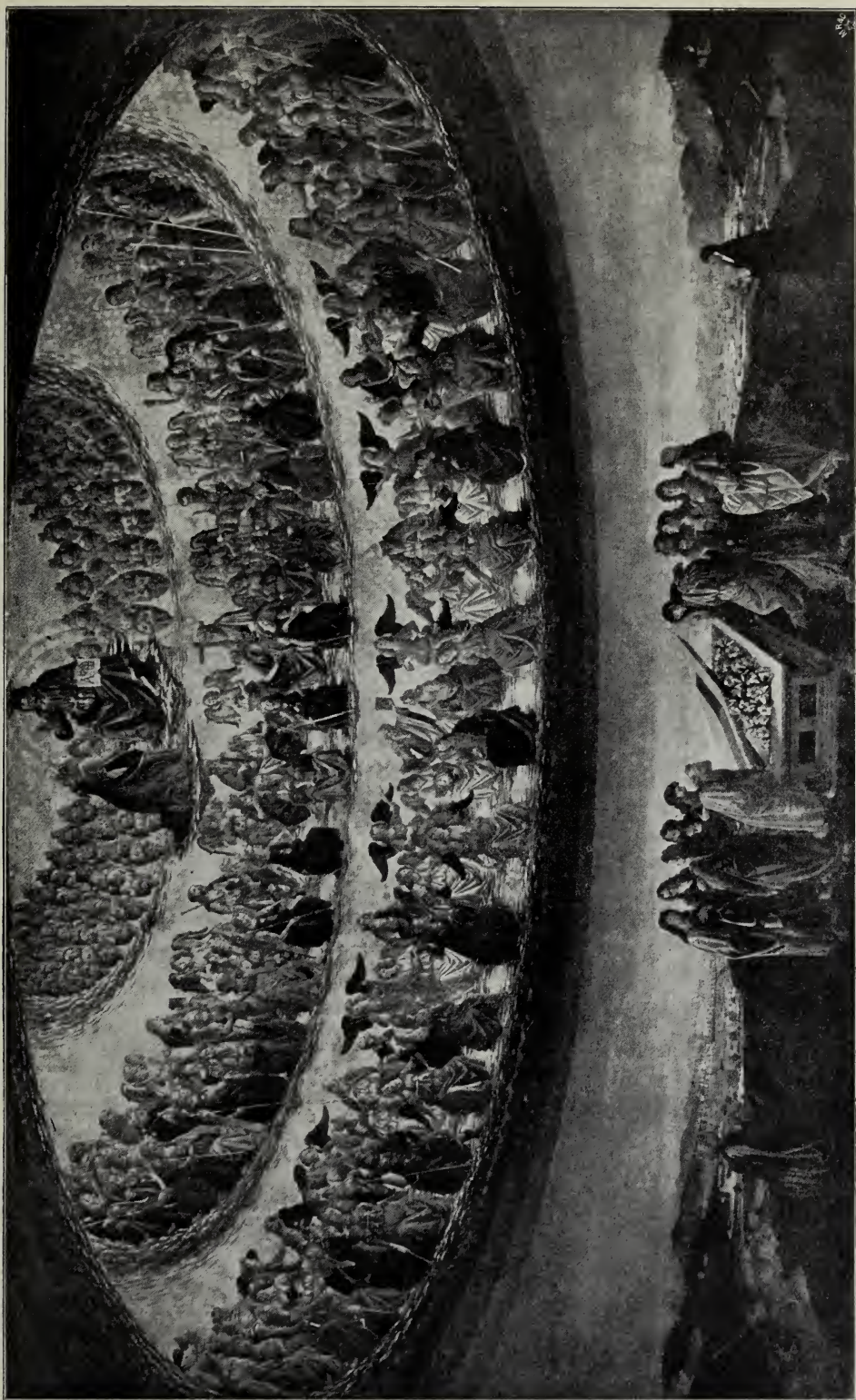


Fig. 82. THE ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN. National Gallery, London. (From a photograph by Braun, Clément & Co., Dornach and Paris.)

After recasting the popular traditions of the Middle ages in his early Madonnas, he appears as a painter at the court of Sixtus IV, penetrated with the spirit of profound theological subtlety; then, on returning to Florence and entering the service of the brilliant Medici, he becomes an enthusiastic herald of ideals which emulated classical antiquity, only to end as an adherent of Savonarola, and to stifle, or else to pursue to its uttermost logical development, all that he had hitherto learned and attained.

And so, when his day was drawing to its close, and he took Dante in his hand to seek for new founts which should offer the last draught of life to his thirsty soul, he could not fail to find, in the immortal cantos which tell of worlds beyond the grave, the blissful and deep satisfaction, the great peace undisturbed by worldly cares, which he had sought for long and anxiously, with ever diminishing hope, as he abandoned himself to every influence, every tempting promise of the world around him. Let us rejoice, then, that this symphony of a hidden life, hidden with all its wealth of melody in an artist's soul, closed at length on such grand and resonant chords.

The number of sheets of drawings by Botticelli relating to Dante's sublime poem which are still preserved, is no less than ninety-six, and they embrace the whole work with the exception of seven cantos of the *Inferno*, II—VII and XIV, which are missing. Since 1881, eighty-eight of these sheets, eighty-three of which contain drawings, have been in the Cabinet of Engravings at Berlin; they were formerly in the Hamilton Palace Library. Eight drawings for the *Inferno*, the illustrations to Cantos I, IX, X, XII, XIII, XV and XVI and a general diagram of Hell, are at present in the Vatican, where they were till lately inserted anyhow in a volume of MSS., which belonged to Christina, Queen of Sweden, though now they are treated with due respect and preserved in a special portfolio. Each vellum leaf has the text of a canto on the rough or "hairy" side and the drawing on the smooth or "fleshy" side, and the arrangement enables the reader, when the book is open, to look easily at text and illustration of the same canto at once on two successive pages. All the drawings were sketched in with silver-point and finished with the pen. One drawing in Berlin, and those in the Vatican, were completed in body-colours—not perhaps, by Botticelli himself—and it is, therefore, supposed that the original scheme was for the whole to be carried out in colours in the style of earlier illustrations to Dante.

As we ascend from the *Inferno* to the *Purgatorio*, it is easy to trace a constant development, a more profound grasp of the subject-matter, greater delicacy and sureness of drawing, and greater perspicuity in the composition. Here too, we are inclined to suppose that the work extended over a consecutive period of time; and if a task which demanded so much actual study, such profound concentration of thought, was often interrupted by other commissions which the busy artist had to undertake, it may have been prolonged over many years. Nevertheless the epical manner of narration remains the same; a series of incidents

are represented side by side on a single surface, and the thread is spun now rapidly, now in slower time, till the Paradiso is reached. Here, however, there is clear indication that the original plan has been altered. Botticelli's matured insight has led him to feel the inadequacy of a descriptive method of representing things, which only a poet's sublime imagination has ever beheld. He contents himself, therefore, with painting a reflection, as it were, of the incomprehensible mysteries of God in the ever changing countenances and gestures of Beatrice and Dante, whose figures have suddenly increased to twice their former proportions. Those mysteries themselves he dares not attempt to picture, and so he humbly



Fig. 83. DANTE. INFERNO XXXI.

subjects his art to the service of poetry, and has made the comprehension of his drawing depend on an exact knowledge of the Divine Comedy. We can, perhaps, draw further conclusions from such a procedure, and recognise the will of the patron in the scrupulous conscientiousness with which in the illustrations to the Inferno and Purgatorio the text is provided with a sort of commentary, scene by scene. That will cannot have asserted itself any longer when Botticelli, in the Paradiso, abandoned any sort of interpretation of the separate cantos. Here, moreover, a number of sheets remained unfinished, and others were only slightly sketched in with the silver-point. May it not, therefore, be assumed that the work was never delivered to the patron who gave the commission, an artistic member of a younger branch of the Medici, who died as early as 1505; and that Botti-

celli had grown so fond of his task, that he pursued it on his own account and dealt with it in his own way?

In that case the drawings for the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* would have been finished before 1503, in part, probably, much earlier, while the *Paradiso* was not produced till after the death of Lorenzo di Pier Francesco. At any rate, as it now lies before us, we can hardly suppose that it could have satisfied a patron who expected, after all, that when a picture was drawn it would throw some light on the text.

A general diagram, carried out in colours, showing the *Inferno* descending in nine ever narrowing circles in the form of a funnel, is the opening picture. Then follows the delightful illustration to the first canto. We see Dante walking, solitary and pensive, in the dark forest, and see the venerable figure of Virgil coming to help him, when he has lost his way, and is menaced by the panther, the lion, and the she-wolf.

The old man with a long beard, in his curious oriental costume, a long gown with a short cape over the shoulders, and a high hat trimmed with fur, is now depicted in a truly masterly way as the well-informed guide, the friend and consoler, the fatherly admonisher and teacher of Dante, who is often despondent but ever eager for knowledge; and he never leaves him until, in the 29th Canto of the *Purgatorio*, he has first humbly resigned the office of guide to the Roman poet Statius, being incapable himself, as a heathen, of explaining or contemplating the divine mysteries of the Faith. Botticelli depicts all the terrors of Hell, the fierce torments of the lost, the devilish joy of merciless fiends, with astonishing command over the subject-matter, a power of delineation which knows no limits, and an imagination which the poet himself could not surpass. What an abundance of ideas, what fertility of invention, what skill in composition, are displayed, for example, in the drawing to the ninth canto of the "*Inferno*", in which, after Phlegyas has conveyed Virgil and Dante, much against his will, across the Styx, the fallen angels deny them entrance to the city of God's enemies. On the tower appear the Furies, girt about with snakes, raging and holding up the Medusa's head towards the intruders, while Virgil carefully protects the terrified Dante with both hands from the sight of the monster. Lower down, an angel, whom we see again in the background, moving with the speed of a hurricane through the fugitive devils and lost souls, is driving the rebellious demons back into the tower, and under his protection the adventurous travellers in the lower regions make their way into the fortified town, where we see them stepping between the red-hot tombs in which infidels and heretics are undergoing their awful doom. The principal events of a canto are depicted like this in compact abridgement on almost every leaf, and we admire everywhere the skilful perspective, the inexhaustible imagination and anatomical knowledge which Botticelli unfolds in representing countless human figures in every conceivable posture. To select one point, lastly, out of so many — what precision and beauty of drawing is displayed in the six huge giants who keep guard

round the mouth of the well before the last circle, one of whom, on the left, with a moustache and a chain round his neck, is clearly a reminiscence of the dying gladiator in the Capitoline Museum (Fig. 83).

Antæus, the only one who is not in chains, has grasped Virgil and Dante with his right hand, and bending down, in bold foreshortening, he lets them both down into the nethermost pit, where the traitors, in four divisions, are fast bound in ice, and Satan himself, in the torments of hunger, chews the damned in his mouth. How far Botticelli surpassed, in his drawings to Dante, even the greatest masters of his time, may be seen by comparing

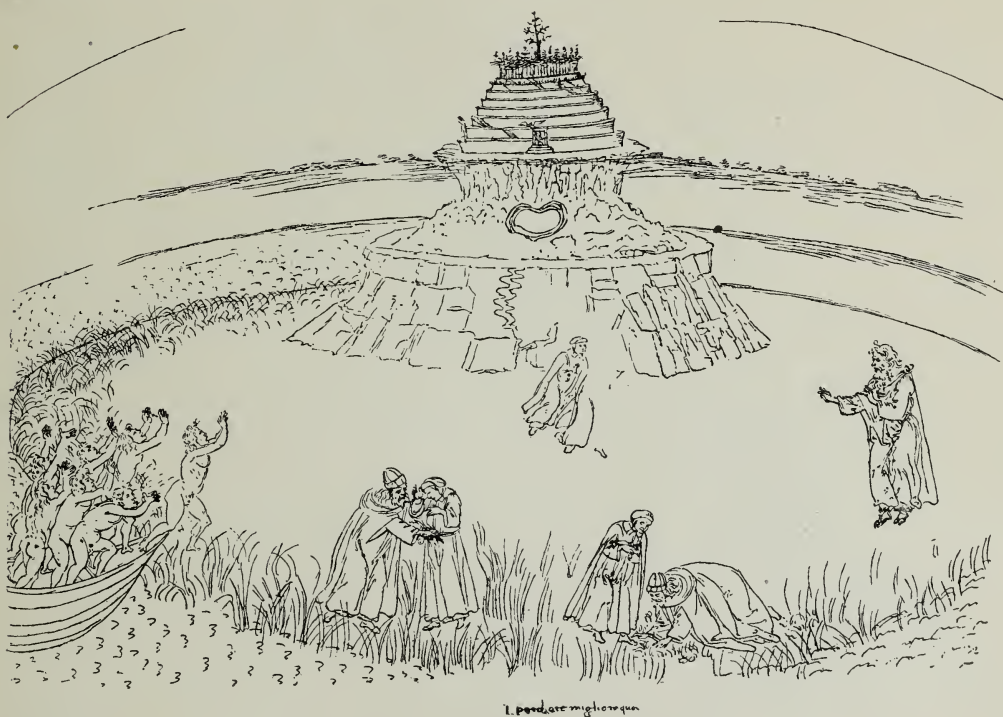


Fig. 84. DANTE. PURGATORIO I.

them with the *grisaille* frescoes, finished in 1502, in the chapel of San Brizio in the Duomo at Orvieto, where Luca Signorelli has illustrated the first eleven cantos of the "Purgatorio" in eleven small circular pictures. Signorelli is obliged to content himself, if only on account of the limited space, with selecting only one of the varying pictures of each canto, and that one, detached from its context, is not always easy to interpret. He shows, for example, as an illustration to the first canto, Dante kneeling before Cato in a rocky landscape, whereas Botticelli, anxious to use his own knowledge in order to make the comprehension of Dante easier to the beholder, has lightly sketched a complete diagram of the Mount of Purification, which rises according to the scheme adopted by the poet, out of a blue expanse of sea, exactly opposite to Jerusalem on the other side of the earth's

surface (Fig. 84). All the thirty-three illustrations to the "Purgatorio" are preserved, and all except the eighth, which is only touched in with silver-point, are completely carried out with the pen. Thus we accompany the poets step by step on the laborious ascent of the precipitous mountain, where those who have been killed by violence, and those who have deferred repentance too long, wait for admission to the gate of Purgatory. Perhaps the most splendid of the subjects belonging to the first portion of the "Purgatorio", are, first, the illustration to the 9th canto (Fig. 85) in which an eagle carries Dante in a dream up to the walls which encircle Purgatory, and an angel with a flaming sword writes the seven P's on his brow as



Fig. 85. DANTE. PURGATORIO IX.

he kneels there; then the drawing for the twelfth section, the circle of the proud, in which an angel offers himself as guide, and embraces the poet with the same affection which the angels show to the Dominicans in the "Adoration" of 1500; and, lastly, the illustration to the 27th canto, in which Virgil overcomes Dante's hesitation and induces him, at the angel's bidding, to step through the flames in which the incontinent are doing penance, and then, his sanctification accomplished, crowns him with laurel before he leaves him to his own guidance. These designs are only surpassed by the poetical charm of the concluding cantos, in which the poet's words have been turned by the artist into facts, and in which Botticelli, while adhering with scrupulous accuracy to the text of the poem, yet seems to have given shape to the visions of his own mind.

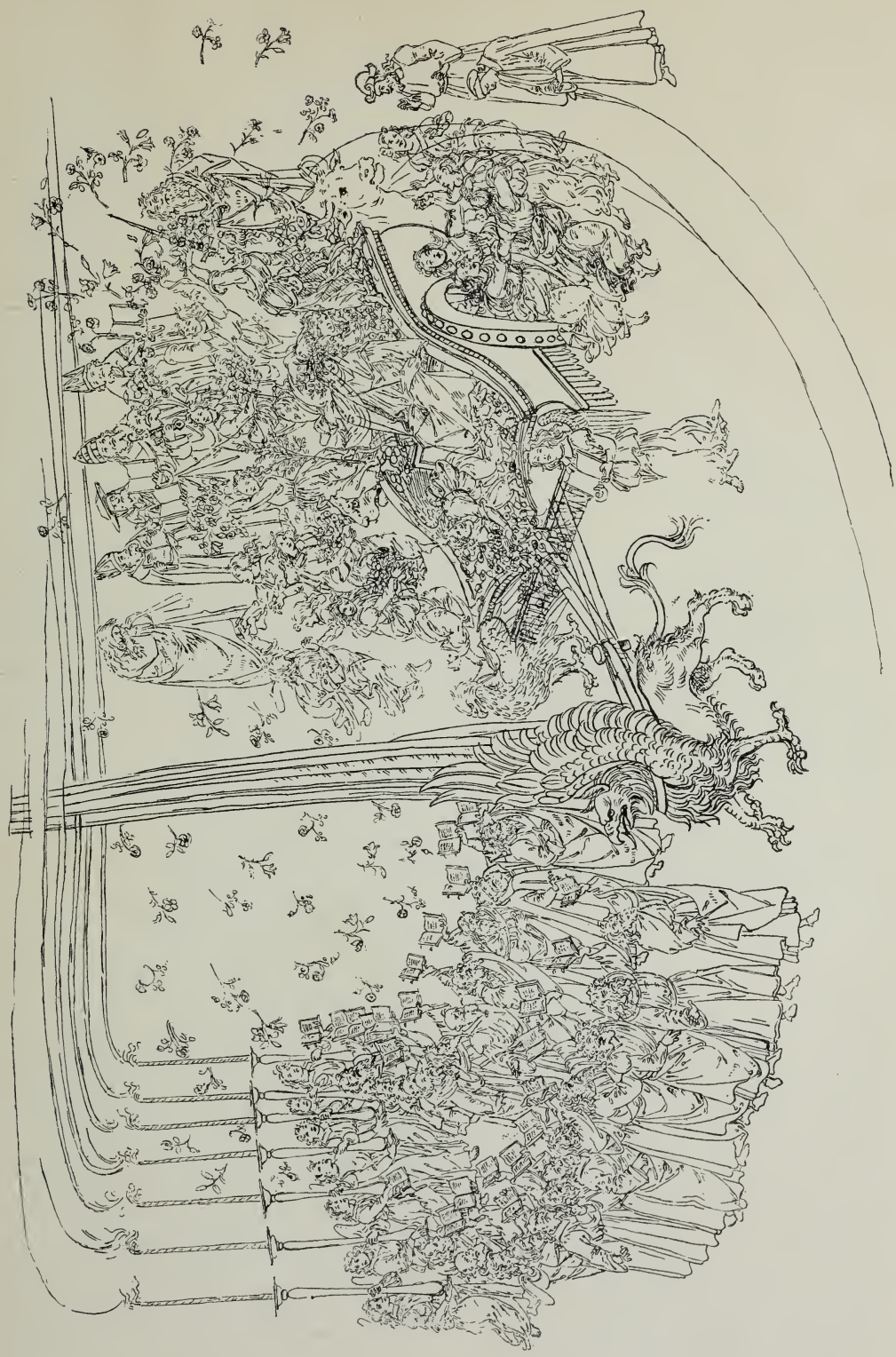


Fig. 86. DANTE. PURGATORIO XXX.

For the first and last time in the whole series of pictures which illustrate the "Inferno" and the "Purgatorio", the drawing to the 30th canto depicting the meeting of Dante and Beatrice, contains but one subject in the whole extent of the vellum; and yet this sheet contains more figures than any other in the series (Fig. 86). On the triumphal car of the church, drawn by a gryphon, and having the symbols of the Four Evangelists at its four corners, Beatrice is enthroned, wearing a white veil, her head crowned with an olive branch, and surrounded by countless angels who scatter roses in the air. Seven heavenly messengers have hastened on before with the seven candles of the Revelations; they are followed



Fig. 87. DANTE. PARADISO I.

by four-and-twenty elders with books raised on high, all turning back towards the car of the church; the three spiritual and the four profane virtues dance along beside the wheels, and they are followed by the two princes of the apostles, the four fathers of the church, and finally the Evangelist St. John, "walking in sleep with countenance acute". Dante stands alone with Statius on the other shore of the river Lethe; the longed-for vision of Beatrice has kindled anew the fervour of his old love, but, smitten with the pangs of remorse, he hangs his head in shame, as his beloved recalls to his memory with stern words of rebuke the sins of former days. It is not till Beatrice herself has dipped him in the cleansing water of the river, a scene most charmingly represented on the next leaf, and till the four cardinal virtues have set him in their midst, that the poet loses the painful



Fig. 88. DANTE. PARADISO XXVIII

recollection of his sins, and, sanctified and fortified by a second immersion, is at length "pure and disposed to mount unto the stars".

In the very first illustration to the "Paradiso" Botticelli gives up the attempt to make the picture an aid to the reader in understanding the text of the Divine Comedy. He does not begin with a general diagram, as he had done in the case of the "Inferno" and "Purgatorio", though Beatrice herself gives an elaborate description of the plan in the first two cantos; he contents himself with representing Dante and his guide as they soar up to Heaven over the last circle of Purgatory, carried away by their yearning for the bliss of Paradise (Fig. 87). Here, too, the drawing, with its noble simplicity, possesses a mysterious fascination arising from spiritual depth. With their shining eyes wide open and directed towards the sun, the two companions float up through the trees, slender and almost bare of leaves, as they would naturally be on the top of a mountain where they grow with difficulty; Beatrice leads the way, passing swiftly onwards, and drawing after her the poet crowned with bay, who breathes for the first time, in rapture mingled with awe, the pure celestial air.

Botticelli cannot altogether escape the reproach of monotony, seeing that he contents himself, during the first twenty-eight cantos, with Dante and Beatrice, travelling alone through the spheres of the seven planets and of the fixed stars, as his principal theme. Did he feel crippled in his power of giving shape to his ideas, when he had to reveal the sacred mysteries of Paradise to mortal eyes? Was he at a loss how to take hold of concrete, definite points in the various and often abstract contents of the various cantos? Were signs of the fatigue of old age, signs of approaching death, beginning to appear, and was the master bent on simplifying his task, in order to be able to complete it? In any case, the continual freshness of invention, the infinite diversity of countenance and gesture, in the simple group of Beatrice and Dante, reveal a study of the sacred poem no less profound than appears in the most scrupulous observance of the letter in the "Inferno" and "Purgatorio". Every movement, every change of countenance of the two characters has its justification in some verse of the corresponding canto. Now they step on quietly side by side, and Beatrice explains to her listening lover the changing marvels which his eye beholds, the unfathomable mysteries which his intellect cannot grasp. Now we see her fortifying him in doubt, consoling him in hesitation, raising him when he falls, and restoring to his blinded eyes the power of vision. With prophetic spirit she divines his questions before he utters them; she corrects him with gentle rebuke, and at length, transported herself by a divine longing, she animates the poet's heart, torn this way and that by a thousand emotions, with the pure fire of her own ardent love. What entrancing beauty of design, what elevation of feeling, are revealed, for instance, in the illustration to the seventh canto, in which Beatrice and Dante are seen in the sphere of Mercury, encircled by countless spirits in the symbolical form of flames (Fig. 88). Here the doubting poet



Fig. 89. DANTE. PARADISO VII.

stands with his head bowed in humility before her whose very name made his great heart tremble in fear and woe; and she, adorned with all the charms of youth, instructs the thinker, himself grown old, on the motives for the Crucifixion, the immortality of the soul, and the resurrection of the dead, with gentle words and such a radiant smile "as would bring bliss even in the fire of Hell".

We can tell from the last drawings to the "Paradiso", which are all unfinished and in part only slightly sketched, that Botticelli, keeping close to the text of the cantos, had returned to the plan of compositions in the grand style. The vellum leaves intended for the 31st and 33rd cantos have remained entirely blank; the composition for the 32nd is indicated in broad lines, showing an immense cone of rock, on the summit of which Christ and the Madonna are enthroned, and it is only the drawings to cantos 28—30 which allow us to recognise definitely the intention of the artist. The illustration to the 28th, with its very numerous figures, is almost completely

finished, and calls, moreover, for special attention on account of a certain interesting detail (Fig. 88). Dante and Beatrice appear in the highest sphere of heaven, surrounded by the nine orders of angels, who stand at the limits of created things, and hymn the omnipotence of the Most High with everlasting songs of praise in the immediate presence of God. In the lowest series of angels, whom Botticelli has adorned once more with all the poetic beauty, all the enthusiasm and self-surrender of youthful innocence which he alone could give to the messengers of God, there appears on the left an angel holding up a tablet with the artist's name, "Sandro di Mariano", inscribed upon it in minute characters. Was it the master's intention to certify to posterity his authorship in the work, or did he wish, with some presentiment of approaching death, thus to give expression to his hope of being allowed hereafter to hymn the majesty of God amidst the blessed company of the angels in Heaven? The uncertainty of the time at which the illustrations to Dante were produced—a problem of which only a conjectural solution can be given—forbids us to give any decisive answer to such questions.

There is much, indeed, that will for ever remain unknown in the modest life of Sandro Botticelli, and the last years of his life, in particular, vanish from our sight like far-off mountain summits on the misty horizon. In 1503 he pronounced an opinion, with certain other "elders" on the place in which the "David" of the young Michelangelo was to be erected; and in May, 1510, he was laid to rest in the family vault of the Filipepi in the Church of Ognissanti, in which the "St. Augustine" still tells of his fame.

The inventive Florentines spun a web of legends round the figure of the charming artist—legends which clearly reflect the harmless escapades of light-hearted youth, the active feats of a no less irresponsible manhood, and, finally, the bitter experiences of a solitary old age. And yet Botticelli, who owns, as an artist, one of the most marked individualities of the Renaissance period, has remained, as a man, one of the great unknown, whose creations alone, bearing, as they do, the stamp of genius, reveal to posterity some aspects of his gifted nature. And we are very willing to let him remain in a romantic twilight, which only fancy, not science, can ever hope to illumine.

"You would pluck out the heart of my mystery", says Hamlet to his too inquisitive friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; "there is much music", he continues, "much music, excellent voice, in this little organ; yet cannot you make it speak"

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