

EMIL LUDWIG

MICHELANGELO

Translated from German by Ethel Colburn Mayne



“I could only gaze and wonder. The master’s inward certainty and virility, his greatness, transcend all expression.”

—*Goethe*

Chronology

- 1475 March 6. Born at Caprese.
1475–94 In Florence.
1488–89 Studies under Ghirlandajo and Bertoldo.
1489–92 At the court of Lorenzo de' Medici.
1491 His nose broken.
1494–95 In Bologna.
1496–1501 First Roman sojourn. *Pietà*.
1501–05 Florence; *David*; Cartoon of Soldiers Bathing.
1505–06 Second Roman sojourn. Tomb of Pope Julius.
 Quarrel with Julius II.
1506–08 Bologna. Reconciliation with the Pope.
1508–17 Third Roman sojourn.
1508–12 Ceiling of Sistine Chapel.
1513 Death of Julius II. Pope Leo X.
1517–34 In Florence.
1521 Death of Leo X.
1520–34 Chapel, and Medici tombs.
1523–34 Pope Clement VII.
1529 Siege of Florence. Director of Fortifications. Flight
 and return.
1530 Fall of Florence.
1531–64 Friendship with Cavalieri.
1532–33 In Rome.
1534 Death of his father.
1534–64 His house and life in Rome.
1535–41 *The Last Judgment*.

1535–47 Friendship with Vittoria Colonna.
1542–50 Pauline Chapel frescoes.
1547 Death of Vittoria Colonna.
1547–64 Head-Architect of St. Peter's.
1555 Death of his servant Urbino.
1564 February 18th Michelangelo dies at Rome.

Chapter I

FOUNDATIONS

1

A still dark river rises near Caprese, winds through hill and dale to the Florentine plain, soon broadens out, to stream masterfully through the capital of the world, castle and church of the Popes reflected in its waters; then it rushes onward to the sea. A still dark boy opened his eyes in Caprese, grew up in Florence, then masterfully entered the town of the Popes, castle and church reflected in his spirit; and when after long decades he left the Eternal City and this temporal life, on the river's banks there had risen forms shaped by his mortal hand and yet immortal, and close to the river there soared, grey-blue, the boldest dome in the world—for thus it had been dreamed by the old man who, ninety years earlier, was born near the source of the Tiber.

Life, too, flowed still and dark there, with scarcely any women in it. The boy had no sisters; his mother had immediately handed him over to a woman at Settignano; and because she was a stone-mason's wife, he used to say in later life that he had sucked in his art at the breast. When at six he lost his mother, he probably knew little of her, and from his

father he seems to have experienced nothing but rigour—for the father was of noble birth, poor and often out of office, and so he was ill-tempered and hard on his sons. At that time he had recently become Mayor of the little place; but before long Buonarrotti returned to Florence and proposed to put all his five sons into business, for that was the ambition of every true Florentine. Was not Lorenzo throned yonder in the Palace, grandson of a sagacious banker, ruling the city like a doge? Had not gold and trade brought power and good fortune to all those Medici, Strozzi, Pitti?

What possessed the thirteen-year old boy—what possessed Michelangelo—to declare that he wanted to be a painter? There he sat, a reticent lad, gazing with serious eyes at anything that happened to stand or lie before him, and scrawling an image of it—or what seemed to him such—on a sheet of superlative paper. Not the father only, but the brothers too scolded him, for this was a poor, inglorious calling, and he was so often cuffed and beaten by his parent that even in his old age he would still talk of it. There was no mother to protect him; men ruled the gloomy household. But as he seemed to be good for nothing else, the father was in the end obliged to yield and take him to Messer Ghirlandajo, who was painting the walls of Santa Maria Novella, surrounded by apprentices and colour-grinders. The contract was for three years; the distrustful man grumbled and handed over his money and his hopes of making something out of his son; for how could anyone suppose that he would ever do as well as his present teacher, or the great Donatello of old?

If he had had a morsel of tact, he might more easily have got commissions. But he had not been long at his new craft before there was trouble with fellow-workers, and even with his teacher. When the apprentices were learning to copy draperies

from sketches, he would draw the lines with a powerful stroke but would alter them as his eye told him they ought to go, thus improving on the teacher. When he had to copy a drawing of *The Temptation of St. Anthony* (by the German Shongauer), he went of his own accord to the fish-market, made studies of eyes, scales, fins, for himself, and then painted all the creatures somewhat differently from those in the original. The master was startled by this picture. Narrow-minded and jealous by nature, as he had often shown himself before now, Ghirlandajo caused this copy to figure as a “studio-piece”—which meant that the master had had a hand in it. Thus it made less of a sensation and nobody asked any questions about his astonishing pupil.

A terrible pang for the soul of a sensitive youth! What was his crime? To have painted with more verve and diligence, displaying greater gifts. Was it forbidden, then, to express oneself in paint? Was one punished if one did, robbed of the thing one had produced? The harshness and gloom he had known throughout his youth, the coldness and antagonism of his father, had already made the child distrustful; now this first experience of the envy and dislike of his fellow-men fell on a heart oppressed.

But he was still young, every morning his work made fresh demands on him, and so he soon had a new idea—to paint his teacher and apprentices from below, as he saw them daily on the scaffolding in the Church; and he did it with such a sense of perspective that the master began to fear him. So he withheld his own sketch-book from the boy, though usually it was passed around among the pupils, so that they might learn to draw heads, sheep, dogs, ruins. What did this pupil do now? Twice snubbed, simply because he had done well, he took his first little revenge—if the master deceived the world

with his pupil's work, why should not the pupil deceive the master? And he copied an old yellowed sketch of his teacher's, smoked it, and handed it in, so that Ghirlandajo believed he had got back his own original drawing.

Before a year had gone by the teacher discovered a way of honourably ridding himself of the troublesome youth. Old Bertoldo, who had ceased to do any carving on his own account, was on the look-out for capable young men who were to learn the sculptor's art from the recently excavated antiques in the Medici garden. Michelangelo's hands, designed by God to counterfeit the human form, were itching to study this loftier of the two arts; and when he had once more prevailed upon his reluctant father, who did not like the idea of his son's being degraded to a stone-mason, it was not long before he was standing in the garden where he had often wandered with ardent eyes, and learning to hew his first block of marble, for many lay about, and the owner wanted them used for his new library. Among his fellow-students was a powerfully-built youth, very loquacious and the terror of them all when he frowned; he looked like a young warrior, did this Torriano. There they stood, side by side, trying their hands at depth of relief and chiselling. Michelangelo had chosen an antique head, the mask of a faun; but standing before it and meaning to copy it, he found it transforming itself under his fingers, becoming a grotesque caricature of an old man.

One morning the owner of the garden arrived, looked at the young men's work, stopped when he came to the caricature, glancing alternately from it to the original and thence to the boyish copyist. Lorenzo the Magnificent was then forty-one years old; but his face (at no time a youthful one), with its irregular broad nose, was now distorted by neuralgic pain and was of jaundiced complexion, so that he looked older than his

years. He was not imposing, he affected simplicity—partly because he was ugly, but more because ostentation might have irritated those of whom he always spoke as “my fellow-citizens,” for it was essential that his dictatorship should be carefully disguised. Before him he now saw a boy of fourteen, a slip of an adolescent in blooming health, and at that time undoubtedly handsome. Perhaps, though secretly attracted, he envied the freshness that irradiated the boy’s earnest face, his sunburnt olive skin, his straight nose. Or was it the gaze, half-awestruck, half appealing, of those young eyes? Or the audacity of this child, who dared to parody the Greek work? “You ought to know that old people don’t keep all their teeth,” said Lorenzo after a while, and went on his way.

Lorenzo had spoken to him! So thought the excited boy and set to work at chiselling a hole in his mask, so artfully that it looked as if a tooth *had* fallen out. When soon afterwards the proprietor saw the sculpture again, how could he help laughing? How could he fail to be pleased by such youthful ardour? He asked about the boy’s plans, his parents; and it was not long before he took him into his house as a guest.

2

Michelangelo was between 14 and 15 when he was spirited away to the Palazzo Medici. Must he not have felt as if it were all fantastic as a dream, when for the first time he awoke in his beautiful room, high above the loggia and the old garden, free as a prince to go where he would, urged daily to his work by his own ardour alone, responsible to none but his own aspiring soul? Where now was the morose father, always reproaching

him with the expense of his training, the ingloriousness of his calling? Where was the elder brother who looked down on him? Where the poverty stricken house, so dark and narrow, in which they lived together? One word from Lorenzo had prevailed on the father; a minor post in the customs, given him by the great man, had completely reconciled him; and when he heard that Lorenzo had presented his son with a violet cloak and a seat at table, allowed him to play and study with his own children, and moreover gave him five ducats a month, he probably reflected that not only silk and a banking concern, but marble too, could make a man's fortune for him. From now onwards he ceased to say that his son was a stone-mason; henceforward he called him a sculptor. Otherwise he had scarcely an idea of the high culture which now for two years was poured into the thirsty young mind. It was literally the sum of all the science, all the art of life, as then known to men, which competitively united all the best intellects in Italy at the Medici Palace and villas. There was Ficino the genial monk, mystic and musician, inventor of the plectron; Fra Mariano, the humorous Augustinian; Pico Mirandola, worldling and philosopher, astrologer and falcon-fancier, adept in the Cabala and in lovely women; most inexhaustible of all in untiring caprice and ardour was that Poliziano who had been snatched from a humble trade to be a student at the Palazzo Medici, and since then had become house poet in the vulgar tongue and in Latin, producing sermons, pageants, serenades. Greeks came there as guests, so did Norwegians and Spaniards; they all brought presents, daily waxed the catalogue of treasures in the garden and palace—helmets chased in silver, noble horses for the castellated stables, falcons from Rhodes, water-fowl, medallions, and jewels; above all, those objects of antique art which the soil was then beginning to yield up, bronzes and

marbles, weapons and vases. All these things and people were collected by the master of the house—by the ailing Lorenzo. A dilettante in poetry, a connoisseur in the plastic arts and in music, apt at classical quotation, a patron of youthful talent, he was a born Maecenas, the well-loved centre of a circle in which all distinctions were obliterated by a single name. Plato was the invisible saint of that circle; and though they might call themselves Christians, and with or without the aid of logic try to combine both worlds, in reality the spirit of the house was Greek—platonian, too, in the preponderance of males and male friendships, in the grace and skill with which the elder men attracted youths to themselves and showed them favour. Indeed, under Plato's bust there burned an undying lamp; on his feast-day Poliziano would rise and make a speech; they held symposia as in the time of Pericles. All this, as Poliziano chiefly but Lorenzo too expounded it, affected the youth in the way that corresponded to his nature. Now, studying the Platonic dialogues and at the same time living in their spirit, his acrimonious temperament was passing through its critical period; now between 15 and 17, he was flung into a predominately male world, and his young hand inevitably followed where his mind had preceded it. A battle of centaurs, in relief—that was what Poliziano urged him to try, and it figures now as his earliest attempt; a crowd of naked bodies, wrestling and fighting, much as he saw them bathing and sporting in life. The second work, a Madonna in relief, after the style of Donatello, seems less individual; and afterwards, it was the former, not the latter, line that he pursued, and even in his old age he would never part from his centaurs.

Since he did not want to abandon painting and was still unpractised in drawing, he often at this time went with a group of young men to the great exemplar of the Florentines,

who learnt their drawing from the frescoes of Masaccio. There in those days, sat the youthful Lippi, and for his part made portraits of the lot of them, as they stood or sat or sketched.

Then came an evil day. That Michelangelo could do better than his comrades was acknowledged. He who had formerly been angered by his teacher's jealousy, who had avenged his innate arrogance by a deception, now was still more pride-ridden; and this drove him, heedless of danger, to challenge, even to deride, the others. And that day Torrigiano was among those sketching—he, the Goliath of the students. "We used to go together" (so the latter told Cellini afterwards) "up to the church, and study in the Masaccio chapel. But he had a way of quizzing everyone who was sketching there. One day he did this to me. I was more than usually annoyed by it; I clenched my fist and gave him such a whack on his nose that the bones and cartilage felt as soft as a wafer. So he bore my mark as long as he lived!" After that whack Torrigiano fled, was banished from Florence, worked as an artist in foreign towns, and as a soldier did in many another man. But the tragedy he was born to inflict lies in that blow on Michelangelo's face.

The youth was carried home for dead. When he recovered, every glass showed him the disfigurement; a flat broken nose in the centre of that impressive countenance. The beauty of male heads, which he had often already captured with pencil and chisel, was reaved from his own head. Still more profoundly did the sixteen-year old boy withdraw into himself, more swiftly and more cruelly did mistrust and misanthropy consume his spirit; for condemn his arrogance though we may the retribution of the stronger had fallen too heavily upon him. He was marked for life.

At the time when Lorenzo discovered the boy and drew him into his household, there arose in Florence the fanatical Dominican who felt himself called to preach repentance to a sinful world. His methods were semipolitical; he saw that civic freedom was endangered, and when he attacked the city's secret rulers for their pagan way of life, it was but partly an ethical war-cry. Michelangelo, listening of a morning in San Marco, along with thousands of others, to the amazing monk, might also during the midday meal at Lorenzo's table hear earnest discussions on the best way of refuting him. The battle between faith and knowledge, between duty and pleasure-seeking, between God and the world, old as time and ever breaking out afresh, was enacted like a pageant before the eyes and in the ears of the young artist, growing fiercer with every month that passed, more confused with every sermon preached, and eminently calculated to convulse the susceptible heart of so youthful a creature. Was bodily beauty really sinful? Was Plato's tranquil world a mere seduction of the senses? Was faith in the Redeemer the only thing that mattered, and should Art, as the threatening monk demanded, concern itself exclusively with draped Madonnas and cease to explore the possibilities of the flower-like human form?

So far as his mentor Poliziano, and even Lorenzo himself, were concerned, he could not hope for a definite answer; there was no certainty for such enlightened spirits. Truth on both sides—that was their position, and to combine the two worlds their life-long dream. But for the boy the Greek faith had undergone a shattering assault, and an insoluble problem thenceforth baffled mind and hand, before either had attained

to creative freedom. Hearing from afar the thunders of the Judgment, he lost the plastic artist's nescience, and had to reconquer his faith in beauty, once he had heard it contemned by the monk's suggestive lips, and seen it destroyed in himself by the hand of his savage comrade.

Lorenzo was failing visibly. Savonarola's powerful eloquence, the strong appeal made to the crowd by his curses on the Medici, the decline of Lorenzo's worldwide business, his increasing physical sufferings, oppressed him body and soul. When he felt death approaching, he summoned the monk to his bedside. Whether the absolution for which he begged was given him, we do not know; but it is thought that the monk demanded the emancipation of Florence and was refused it by the dying man. Probably Michelangelo, seventeen years old, was present. The immediate effect on him he was long afterwards to depict. One thing is certain—that directly his patron was dead, he rushed back to his father's house, and there spent some days in a state of prostration.

Soon Lorenzo's son invited him to return; again he had his seat at table; and the young men now enjoyed at their ease the inherited luxury. Giulio too was back again—Lorenzo's younger son, exactly Michelangelo's age; in time he was to be a mighty Pope, and from this moment he exercised a notable influence on his companion's life. But Piero, the new master of the house, was but a sorry heir who regarded the budding artist as an appanage like his Spanish courser, and thought it no end of a joke when all Florence came hurryingly to see the marvellous snow-man that the sculptor fashioned for him one hard winter. But the people noticed as well a wooden crucifix that young Buonarotti had set up on the high altar in the cathedral. The grateful Prior gave him a room in Santo Spirito, and sometimes let him have a corpse to study—symbolic of

those times when the artist carved the Crucified in wood, while from the priest he procured dead bodies in order to model the images of naked pagans. This was almost the only material Michelangelo ever had for the study of arms, legs, hands; he seldom had the opportunity of drawing from the nude.

Such studies helped in no wise to clear his mind, for Savonarola's expiatory sermons were now the more effective because Lorenzo's cautious methods were frustrated by his son's wanton frivolity. Florence, more and more unwilling to obey an incompetent ruler, saw in King Charles of France a quasi-liberator, and the nearer he came with his army, the hotter things grew for the Medici. Gradually their friends fell away from them. What was Michelangelo to do? Disloyalty was foreign to his proud nature, but he felt that his gratitude was due to the father, not to the son; and politics were as naught to him who was driven by but one desire—to create form. But what was to become of the artists if their patrons were banished, and a mob of impassioned penitents should tear down pictures and statues? The Medici had nurtured him, through and for Lorenzo his earliest attempts had been made—everything inevitably combined to impel him towards that treasure house of beauty and art, and away from the zealous, angry monk.

His agitated spirit observed the collapse of that aesthetic world with all youth's pitiless lucidity, and his intelligence could not but show him how foolish it was to cling to the sinking ship. In this dilemma he did what Genius in perplexity has ever done—he avoided a decision; he fled. One day a lute-player, met at Lorenzo's court, came rushing to him, terrified—Lorenzo, half-naked, had appeared to him in dreams, a ghostly figure bidding him tell the son that soon he would be driven out, and never would return. But the man had been afraid to tell Piero,

and the apparition had come again and soundly boxed his ears for him. Then, urged thereto by his friends, the dreamer had ventured to approach the Medici, but Piero had laughed him to scorn and given him another drubbing. Michelangelo, however, with so many current whispers to warn him, regarded any kind of omen as a fulfilment of the monk's prophecies; and as he could foresee the fall of the Medici, he and two of his friends made ready and fled headlong two days after the dream was told him. Scarcely had he reached Bologna by way of Venice before everything had come true. Piero Medici was obliged to flee, King Charles entered in triumph, Florence was again a republic, which it had hardly been even in form, and Soderini, a respected citizen, was made Head of the State for his lifetime.

The fugitive heard, and trembled. He owed it to his good sense that he had got away in time; nevertheless, his faith in signs and omens was confirmed. His nineteen-year old heart beat high for liberty; the spiritual collapse of his patrons, together with that apparition which he had obeyed, made decision easier this time. He did not divine how often the choice between Florence and Medici would again be his to make.

At Bologna, his pride and his talent involved him in fresh dilemmas. Every stranger, on entering the town, had to have his thumbnail sealed with red wax; but it did not suit the high-spirited Buonarrotti to bear such a mark of slavery. So he and his companions were confined in the custom-house until a nobleman released him—and him alone—and took him home to his palace. Astonishing; for he had as yet achieved nothing, was an almost penniless fugitive with a disfigured face—and yet the charm of his youth, his individuality, must have been so compelling that a passing stranger came to his rescue and

led him home. There that evening, he read Dante and Petrarch to his host in his Tuscan accent, and Boccaccio too, until his audience of one fell asleep. The youth stayed on with his second Maecenas. He set to work on a famous monument in the parish church, chiselling a figure which the recently deceased great artist responsible for the tomb had left unfinished. It was a light-bearing angel. When he had done, the whole town was eager in praise of the stranger's work, but the artists were soon sulking about the upstart who had dared to surpass them. For the second time that youthful heart experienced the resentment of comrades, because his hand was blessed by the gods. For the second time he fled from his patron, terrified by human nature, and his home saw him once more a year after his flight. What did he find there? Liberty for the citizens and scorn for art, a father but no protector; desolate the garden of San Marco, that once had been peopled by marble forms. The only man who gave him a commission was, nevertheless, again a Medici, a cousin of the others; for him Michelangelo made a young St. John with the honeycomb between his hands, frail in his nudity as though a breeze might shatter him. And in the atmosphere dominated by the fanatical monk, amid the dirges, the processions, the requiems that now prevailed over the dances and masquerades of pleasure-loving Florence, sat the young modeller and hammered a little sleeping *Cupid* out of the stone, so heathenish that he was advised to give it the same kind of patina as of yore when he smoked the drawing, and sell it dear as an antique. In point of fact the dealer in Rome sent him thirty ducats and sold the figure to a cardinal for two hundred.

When people began to talk about it, the Cardinal sent to Florence a trusted emissary who, as if he wanted them for Rome, was to get several young sculptors to bring their works

to him. Michelangelo brought nothing, but on a sheet of paper he drew a masculine hand so plastically that the stranger was astounded; then on being questioned, he enumerated all his works, including the *Cupid*. The middleman saw there had been a swindle and invited the gifted trickster to follow him. There was nothing to stop Michelangelo; Rome could not but allure him; moreover, he had hopes of getting those one hundred and seventy ducats out of the dealer.

Thus, as the result of a forgery of genius, invited to the abode of a Prince of the Church, with fair words to dazzle him—but no commission—Michelangelo at twenty-one betook himself for the first time to Rome.

4

The date was 1496. Rome was an appanage of the Borgia. For the first time a Pope had his children publicly about him, and those children did as they pleased. At this very time, the city was agog with the news that Caesar, the second son, had had his elder brother flung into the Tiber; and it seemed likely that his sister Lucrezia was his mistress. He forced his father to make him a cardinal; before long he marched for the Romagna, there to unite Italy under the Borgia dynasty. Pope Alexander, at seventy, seemed to grow younger with every year; the loveliest women succumbed to him; on a wall in the Vatican he had his blonde mistress painted as a Madonna, himself worshipping at her feet. Rome was full of feastings and murders, of prison-cells, poison, and the lust of life, when Michelangelo's small, keen eyes beheld the city for the first time.

When he compared the palace of Riario, his new patron, with that of the Medici, he could not but be surprised at all things, disappointed in many. Here too was culture, but culture was not the umpire in the game; here Christ was still in the shade, but there was no Plato in the light. Instead of that harmony of minds and art, here was the noise of enterprise and action. Here were art, money, and heaps of commissions, but they were feverishly sought, feverishly executed; size rather than depth was aspired to; it was the hurried rhythm of a cosmopolis. The five years he spent here initiated the young Florentine into the caprices of the great, the intrigues of artists, the rivalry of all with all.

It began with two disappointments. The dealer had had to take back the *Sleeping Cupid*; he sold it elsewhere but gave the artist no more commissions. The Cardinal forgot he was in his house; but the Cardinal's barber, whose recreation was working in tempera, got Michelangelo to draw him a St. Francis as a model. When after a year he left the Cardinal, he found a better protector in a banker, one Galli, who ordered a Bacchus and a Cupid for his mansion. Two semi-commissions from Riario and one from the Medici came to nothing.

Nevertheless, at twenty-three, he managed to carry off from several rivals a commission which promised him credit and money and might establish his reputation—a *Pietà* for St. Peter's. He set to work intrepidly, feeling his responsibility, and wrote in the contract itself that the work was to be such "that no living master could do it better." What he then produced was epoch making. The dead Christ lay naked, his arms emaciated as if modelled (as they were) from a corpse, across the lap of a very beautiful young woman, largely built and enveloped from head to foot in draperies. Her muscular knees, the powerful strength with which she bore the weight of the naked man,

were the less suggestive of mother and son because he looked older than she. Woman's awe-inspiring vocation as generator of man is here set forth in all its mystery. When it was finished, half-Rome flocked round the latest group, admiring, staring in amazement—many thought the Madonna too beautiful. To one of these Michelangelo retorted: "Don't you know that chaste women keep their looks longer than the other kind? How much more a young woman who had never known what desire was, and moreover had been transfigured by divine love! But in the Son the reverse was to be shown... that he was subject to all human weaknesses except that of sin... That is why I made the mother so young, but the son the age he was." Already he could give religious reasons for what he felt aesthetically; for half-a-century he was to paint Biblical subjects in such a manner that the clerical gentlemen could not believe their ears and eyes; and yet a certain sense of fitness, which always balanced his native vigour, kept all his works, even in his dark days, ecclesiastical in feeling. The group quickly became famous; it was compared with the antique, which was more than ever the standard; but the young master's name was obscured by his achievement, and one day he heard with his own ears some strangers praising the new *Pietà* in St. Peter's as the work of a Milanese sculptor. Then the flame of ambition blazed high in him; he went that evening to the church and had himself locked in. There, that night, he stood in the dark before his work, a single candle gleaming on marble and master; there, so standing, he chiselled his name and native town. Thirty-four capital letters he chiselled; not on the socle, he set them on the shoulder-band that crossed the Madonna's garment, as though to take possession of her. About the same time, a thousand miles away, far in the North beyond the Alps, a German master wrote his initials on the gown, on the bosom

of his wife, as though to set his seal on her—what he wrote was A.D. That man drank life in copious draughts, had wife and child, travelled in strange lands to South and West, and when he finished a picture would sign it, so that for all time there should be no mistake.

Michelangelo never again signed a completed work. Working alone, almost without pupils, from that time forth he hewed forms out of the stone, forms nameless, timeless, typeless. Stubbornly, between sorrow and enlightenment, he lived as those figures live; and wrote home from Rome: “I have no friends, need none, and will have none.”

5

When at twenty-six he came home, Florence beheld in him a famous artist. Siena hastened to give him a commission—Piccolomini ordered for his private chapel fifteen life-size statues, which the sculptor promised to deliver in three years. This was the first of those immense contracts that Michelangelo fearlessly and rashly signed, only to break each in a fit of discontent. Some great lord (most of them were Princes of the Church) was to give him money for the marble, so that he might tranquilly accomplish in the grand manner what his dreams inspired him with. Marble—that was it! Stones and blocks! His fancy was to seek the stone in its primeval quarry, finger it there, then convey it by cart and ship to its subjection under the master-hand; for only in vast masses, in whole rows of stone figures could his torrential imagination find sustenance. He did not reflect that in those days power was apt to be transient, gold and enterprise to fade into thin

air—still less did it occur to him that in himself one purpose might drive out another. Just that was what he was just now to experience.

For forty years there had been lying inert in the courtyard of the Cathedral workshops a magnificent block of marble. It had been intended for an artist who was to hew from it a prophet for the Wool-Weavers' Guild. Michelangelo was asked if he would not like to attempt that block. Must it not, in its expectant whiteness, have allured him as a sleeping woman might—have made him who would beget a race with her lose all memory of the things he had promised but yesterday? How far away was Siena! And who was Piccolomini? There lay the marble, here the chisel; what that master had long ago intended must now be otherwise achieved; the Guild gave him leave to choose his subject—and he undertook the work.

He made his first stroke on the day he first climbed the scaffolding—so confidently did his youth trust his talent that all he had done by way of preparation was to make a little wax model. And he had judged the proportions so correctly that the top of his figure's head touched the top of the block. The master locked the workshop, let no one come near him, worked alone. Sometimes he fell asleep of evenings beside the block; but early in the morning would rub his eyes and set to work again. When he had finished, two years and a half had gone by of the three he had promised to the Cardinal at Siena. The whole town flocked to see the colossal figure. It was a giant, nine ells in height; and so it was called from the first day, though the master gave it the name of *David*, whom everyone thinks of as small. Thus did Michelangelo's imagination break through any tradition that might hamper him; he had seen a David of the inward eye, a boyish hero, holding the stone ready in his right hand and taking the sling

from his shoulder with the left. A naked athlete, there he stood, all strength and innocence; but though his keen gaze, fixed afar, took the hunter's measure of his foe, a small mouth beneath the powerful nose betrayed a latent readiness to be merciful. He had not a trace of the antique, but his fame was borne over all Italy; it was said that he surpassed the antique. Invited by the committee to advise on the erection of the statue, the great artists of Florence likewise gazed wonderingly at the giant. But though they praised it, these artists, they were filled with jealousy too. Before it stood Cosimo, Lippi, Credi, Perugino—friends of the master's adolescence: a phalanx of rivals. They decided to place it in front of the Signoria; four days and much ponderous machinery were needed for the transport; and every night the partisans of the other artists tried to destroy the giant, which only the town-guard could adequately protect. When at last it was erected, the day proved to be epoch-making; for decades afterwards people reckoned by "the year the giant was set up." Among the artists who stood before it in the Cathedral workshop was a man of noble stature, richly attired as one of wealth and exalted lineage—he had lately come home after an absence of eighteen years. This man had spread the fame of Florence further than any other, for he was Leonardo da Vinci, the painter and fortress-builder of Milan, in many ways most different from Michelangelo.

Michelangelo was naturally morose, jealousies had made him suspicious, he had withdrawn into himself and thereby aroused fresh enmities; he was virile and solitary, bitter and domineering; while the other lived in festal array, surrounded by adoring youths, worldly splendour, and vast schemes; and when his spirit found expression in dalliance with canvas, sketching block or paper, his tranquil face would wear a look of unfathomable tenderness. It was not because he was twenty

years older (at that time close upon fifty) that Leonardo seemed tinged with worldliness; he was even more of a romantic than the younger man, less of a fighter, less competitive. His was a contemplative spirit, experimenting in art and science; and when moved to create, it needed but the charcoal or the brush for leisurely following the imagined contours in his sensuously spiritual world. The other, wholly the plastic artist, even as a painter expressed in syncopated rhythms the sombre power of his visions; and with every work seemed more burdened by tragic, overmastering thoughts.

And yet there was an affinity in their natures, and hence in certain aspects of their work. The erotic impulse, strong in both artists, was of the platonic kind; both loved to represent the beauty of male youth, both abstained from women throughout all their lives. But Michelangelo's nude boys were more virile, his female forms more womanly, than Leonardo's, who contrived a mutual approximation which seemed to say that his symbolic genius was fain to temper the essential contrasts. Michelangelo, on the contrary, insisted on them, driving on himself the tragic origin of his inward world. His *Fortuna*, too, comes riding on her wheel, but she does not smile; as little as we can imagine *his* stern countenance smiling, could he imagine any other. Nearly all Leonardo's creations wear a smile. Only when they overstep the bounds of nature, only in their caricatures do the two masters resemble one another in line. For he who as a boy began with that grotesque in the Medici garden, would all his life return to kindred studies of a veracity that approaches distortion, and there are sketches of his—a red-chalk drawing of masks, a chalk-study of madness—which may be compared with sketches of Leonardo's.

Soon the youth was to enter into competition with the older master. In a great room at the Signoria two opposite blank walls

were to be painted by great Florentines. The Giant had just been erected when the city gave the home-coming Leonardo a commission for one wall. Michelangelo had painted hardly anything; his one picture, the Holy Family, could not but strike any connoisseur as the dream of a sculptor. The three figures, with their amazing muscular development, combined into a no less amazing pattern; while in the background five naked youths, undressing, embracing, and gazing at one another, seemed to be indulging in sport of some kind. But the Giant's fame was so resounding that, three months after it was set up, he was commissioned for the second wall in the Guildhall.

Each resented the other's rivalry with an uneasiness which would not be dispelled. When one day they met at San Trinità, a third person saw and described them. Michelangelo had been consulted about a passage in Dante, and Leonardo just then happening to pass by, he called to him and said derisively: "You explain the stanza! Haven't you actually modelled a bronze horse, even if your casting did go wrong! Those eunuchs in Milan gave you credit for it, all the same!" If the story is true, we may be sure that Leonardo made no reply. Certain it is that each carefully hid from the other his cartoon for the wall.

Both depicted scenes from the Florentines' victorious battles. Leonardo chose one from the battle of Anghiari, a subject which gave him riders and horses in a furious mêlée to paint; Michelangelo chose a hot summer-day with the soldiers bathing in the Arno, surprised by the Pisans and rushing to defend themselves. Again it was a number of naked youths, whose movements fascinated him. Before the cartoons were executed, they were put on exhibition, and all the citizens, especially the young artists, contended hotly about them. If the pair had only gone on to paint their attempts on the wall, a generation of artists could have learnt from the results.

But nothing came of it. Leonardo, fond of experiment and languid about execution, stopped short at the cartoon, reluctantly left his native place, and went to France. But Michelangelo, whose Giant had borne his fame over all Italy, was suddenly summoned to Rome in the middle of his new task. The Borgia had been killed by his own poison, a new Pope had been elected; San Gallo, the great Papal architect, had drawn his attention to the new genius. This call to Rome prevailed over all other desires and obligations. It was true that he had just signed a second contract, binding himself afresh to the Cardinal at Siena; and another besides, by which in the course of twelve years he was to chisel twelve apostles for the Cathedral at Florence. But it was the Pope who summoned him; the biggest blocks of marble were always the lure for this modelling hand, he forgot or postponed the lesser patrons—he hurried towards the star that shone upon his forward path.

Thus did Michelangelo, at thirty and this time with the most brilliant prospects, again betake himself to the capital of the world.

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