CHAPTER II

THE DUOMO: ITS ASSOCIATIONS

Dante's picture—Sir John Hawkwood—Ancestor and Descendant—The Pazzi Conspiracy—Squeamish Montesecco—Giuliano de' Medici dies—Lorenzo's escape—Vengeance on the Pazzi—Botticelli's cartoon—High Mass—Luca della Robbia—Michelangelo nearing the end—The Miracles of Zenobius—East and West meet in splendour—Marsilio Ficino and the New Learning—Beautiful glass.

OF the four men most concerned in the structure of the Duomo I have already spoken. There are other men held in memory there, and certain paintings and statues, of which I wish to speak now.

The picture of Dante in the left aisle was painted by command of the Republic in 1465, one hundred and sixty-three years after his banishment from the city. Lectures on Dante were frequently delivered in the churches of Florence during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and it was interesting for those attending them to have a portrait on the wall. This picture was painted by Domenico di Michelino, the portrait of Dante being prepared for him by Alessio Baldovinetti, who probably took it from Giotto's fresco in the chapel of the Podestà at the Bargello. In this picture Dante stands between the Inferno and a concentrated Florence in which portions of the Duomo, the Signoria, the Badia, the Bargello, and Or San Michele are visible. Behind him is Paradise. In his hand is the "Divine

Comedy" I say no more of the poet here, because a large part of the chapter on the Badia is given to him.

Near the Dante picture in the left aisle are two Donatellos—the massive S. John the Evangelist, seated, who might have given ideas to Michelangelo for his Moses a century and more later; and, nearer the door, between the tablets to De Fabris and Squarciaparello, the so-called Poggio Bracciolini, a witty Italian statesman and Humanist and friend of the Medici, who, however, since he was much younger than this figure at the time of its exhibition, and is not known to have visited Florence till later, probably did not sit for it. But it is a powerful and very natural work, although its author never intended it to stand on any floor, even of so dim a cathedral as this. The S. John, I may say, was brought from the old façade—not Arnolfo's, but the committee's façade—where it had a niche about ten feet from the ground. The Poggio was also on this façade, but higher. It was Poggio's son, Jacopo, who took part in the Pazzi Conspiracy, of which we are about to read, and was very properly hanged for it.

Of the two pictures on the entrance wall, so high as to be imperfectly seen, that on the right as you face it has peculiar interest to English visitors, for (painted by Paolo Uccello, whose great battle piece enriches our National Gallery) it represents Sir John Hawkwood, an English free-lance and head of the famous White Company, who after some successful raids on Papal territory in France, put his sword, his military genius, and his bravoes at the service of the highest bidder among the warlike cities and provinces of Italy, and, eventually passing wholly into the employment of Florence (after harrying her for other paymasters for some years), delivered her very signally from her enemies in 1392. Hawkwood was an Essex man, the

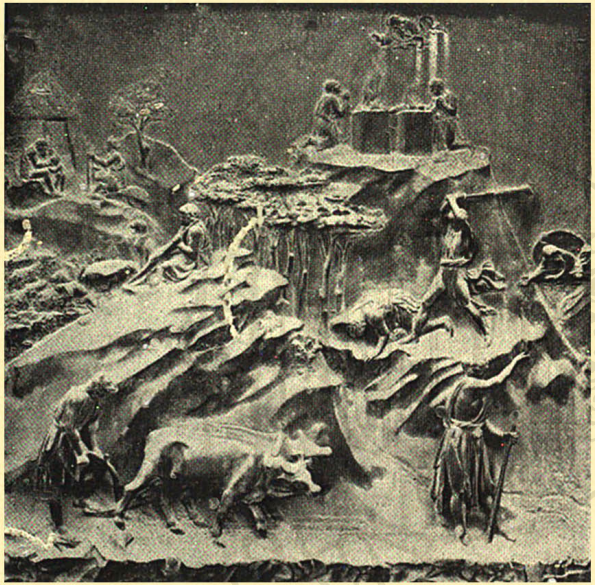
son of a tanner at Hinckford, and was born there early in the fourteenth century. He seems to have reached France as an archer under Edward III, and to have remained a free-booter, passing on to Italy, about 1362, to engage joyously in as much fighting as any English commander can ever have had, for some thirty years, with very good pay for it. Although, by all accounts, a very Salomon Brazenhead, Hawkwood had enough dignity to be appointed English Ambassador to Rome, and later to Florence, which he made his home, and where he died in 1394. He was buried in the Duomo, on the north side of the choir, and was to have reposed beneath a sumptuous monument made under his own instructions, with frescoes by Taddeo Gaddi and Giuliano d' Arrigo; but something intervened, and Uccello's fresco was used instead, and this, some sixty years ago, was transferred to canvas and moved to the position in which it now is seen.

Hawkwood's life, briskly told by a full-blooded hand, would make a fine book. One pleasant story at least is related of him, that on being beset by some begging friars who prefaced their mendicancy with the words, "God give you peace," he answered, "God take away your alms"; and, on their protesting, reminded them that such peace was the last thing he required, since should their pious wish come true he would die of hunger. One of the daughters of this fire-eater married John Shelley, and thus became an ancestress of Shelley the poet, who, as it chances, also found a home for a while in this city, almost within hailing distance of his ancestor's tomb and portrait, and here wrote not only his "Ode to the West Wind," but his caustic satire, "Peter Bell the Third."

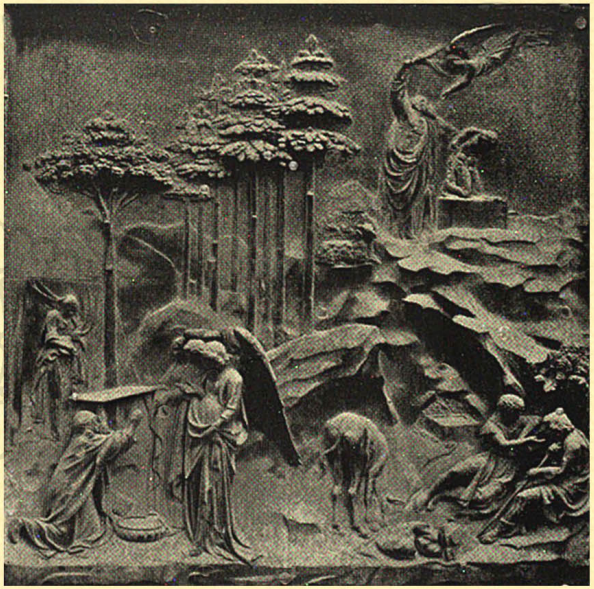
Hawkwood's name is steeped sufficiently in carnage; but we get to the scene of bloodshed in reality as we approach

the choir, for it was here that Giuliano de' Medici was assassinated, as he attended High Mass, on April 26th, 1478, with the connivance, if not actually at the instigation, of Christ's Vicar himself, Pope Sixtus IV. Florentine history is so eventful and so tortuous that beyond the bare outline given in chapter V, I shall make in these pages but little effort to follow it, assuming a certain amount of knowledge on the part of the reader; but it must be stated here that periodical revolts against the power and prestige of the Medici often occurred, and none was more desperate than that of the Pazzi family in 1478, acting with the support of the Pope behind all and with the co-operation of Girolamo Riario, nephew of the Pope, and Salviati, Archbishop of Pisa. The Pazzi, who were not only opposed to the temporal power of the Medici, but were their rivals in business—both families being bankers—wished to rid Florence of Lorenzo and Giuliano in order to be greater both civically and financially. Girolamo wished the removal of Lorenzo and Giuliano in order that hostility to his plans for adding Forli and Faenza to the territory of Imola, which the Pope had successfully won for him against Lorenzo's opposition, might disappear. The Pope had various political reasons for wishing Lorenzo's and Giuliano's death and bringing Florence, always headstrong and dangerous, to heel. While as for Salviati, it was sufficient that he was Archbishop of Pisa, Florence's ancient rival and foe; but he was a thorough bad lot anyway. Assassination also was in the air, for Galeazzo Maria Sforza of Milan had been stabbed in church in 1476, thus to some extent paving the way for this murder, since Lorenzo and Sforza, when acting together, had been practically unassailable.

In 1478 Lorenzo was twenty-nine, Giuliano twenty-five.



CAIN AND ABEL



ABRAHAM AND ISAAC

PANELS FROM THE SECOND BRONZE DOORS BY GHIBERTI AT THE BAPTISTERY

Lorenzo had been at the head of Florentine affairs for nine years and he was steadily growing in strength and popularity. Hence it was now or never.

The conspirators' first idea was to kill the brothers at a banquet which Lorenzo was to give to the great-nephew of the Pope, the youthful Cardinal Raffaello Riario, who promised to be an amenable catspaw. Giuliano, however, having hurt his leg, was not well enough to be present, but as he would attend High Mass, the conspirators decided to act then. That is to say, it was then, in the cathedral, that the death of the Medici brothers was to be effected; meanwhile another detachment of conspirators under Salviati was to rise simultaneously to capture the Signoria, while the armed men of the party who were outside and inside the walls would begin their attacks on the populace. Thus, at the same moment Medici and city would fall. Such was the plan.

The actual assassins were Francesco de' Pazzi and Bernardo Bandini, who were nominally friends of the Medici (Francesco's brother Guglielmo having married Bianca de' Medici, Lorenzo's sister), and two priests named Maffeo da Volterra and Stefano da Bagnone. A professional bravo named Montesecco was to have killed Lorenzo, but refused on learning that the scene of the murder was to be a church. At that, he said, he drew the line: murder anywhere else he could perform cheerfully, but in a sacred building it was too much to ask. He therefore did nothing, but, subsequently confessing, made the guilt of all his associates doubly certain.

When High Mass began it was found that Giuliano was not present, and Francesco de' Pazzi and Bandini were sent to persuade him to come—a Judas-like errand indeed. On the way back, it is said, one of them affectionately placed

his arm round Giuliano—to see if he wore a shirt of mail —remarking, to cover the action, that he was getting fat. On his arrival, Giuliano took his place at the north side of the circular choir, near the door which leads to the Via de' Servi, while Lorenzo stood at the opposite side. At the given signal Bandini and Pazzi were to stab Giuliano and the two priests were to stab Lorenzo. The signal was the breaking of the Eucharistic wafer, and at this solemn moment Giuliano was instantly killed, with one stab in the heart and nineteen elsewhere, Francesco so overdoing his attack that he severely wounded himself too; but Lorenzo was in time to see the beginning of the assault, and, making a movement to escape, he prevented the priest from doing aught but inflict a gash in his neck, and, springing away, dashed behind the altar to the old sacristy, where certain of his friends who followed him banged the heavy bronze doors on the pursuing foe. Those in the cathedral, meanwhile, were in a state of hysterical alarm; the youthful cardinal was hurried into the new sacristy; Guglielmo de' Pazzi bellowed forth his innocence in loud tones; and his murderous brother and Bandini got off.

Order being restored, Lorenzo was led by a strong body-guard to the Palazzo Medici, where he appeared at a window to convince the momentarily increasing crowd that he was still living. Meanwhile things were going not much more satisfactorily for the Pazzi at the Palazzo Vecchio, where, according to the plan, the gonfalonier, Cesare Petrucci, was to be either killed or secured. The Archbishop Salviati, who was to effect this, managed his interview so clumsily that Petrucci suspected something, those being suspicious times, and instead of submitting to capture, himself turned the key on his visitors. The Pazzi faction in the city, meanwhile, hoping that all had gone

well in the Palazzo Vecchio, as well as in the cathedral (as they thought), were running through the streets calling "Viva la Libertà!" to be met with counter cries of "Palle! palle!"—the palle being the balls on the Medici escutcheon, still to be seen all over Florence and its vicinity and on every curtain in the Uffizi.

The truth gradually spreading, the city then rose for the Medici and justice began to be done. The Archbishop was hanged at once, just as he was, from a window of the Palazzo Vecchio. Francesco de' Pazzi, who had got home to bed, was dragged to the Palazzo and hanged too. The mob meanwhile were not idle, and most of the Pazzi were accounted for, together with many followers—although Lorenzo publicly implored them to be merciful. Poliziano the scholar-poet and friend of Lorenzo, has left a vivid account of the day. With his own eyes he saw the hanging Salviati, in his last throes, bite the hanging Francesco de' Pazzi. Old Jacopo succeeded in escaping, but not for long, and a day or so later he too was hanged. Bandini got as far as Constantinople, but was brought back in chains and hanged. The two priests hid in the Benedictine abbey in the city and for a while evaded search, but being found they were torn to pieces by the crowd. Montesecco, having confessed, was beheaded in the courtyard of the Bargello.

The hanging of the chief conspirators was kept in the minds of the short-memoried Florentines by a representation outside the Palazzo Vecchio, by none other than the wistful, spiritual Botticelli; while three effigies, life size, of Lorenzo—one of them with his bandaged neck—were made by Verrocchio in coloured wax and set up in places where prayers might be offered. Commemorative medals which may be seen in the Bargello, were also struck, and the family of Pazzi was banished and its name removed

by decree from the city's archives. Poor Giuliano, who was generally beloved for his charm and youthful spirits, was buried at S. Lorenzo in great state.

I have often attended High Mass in this Duomo choir—the theatre of the Pazzi tragedy—but never without thinking of that scene.

Luca della Robbia's doors to the new sacristy, which gave the young cardinal his safety, had been finished only eleven years. Donatello was to have designed them, but his work at Padua was too pressing. The commission was then given to Michelozzo, Donatello's partner, and to Luca della Robbia, but it seems likely that Luca did nearly all. The doors are in very high relief, thus differing absolutely from Donatello's at S. Lorenzo, which are in very low. Luca's work here is sweet and mild rather than strong, and the panels derive their principal charm from the angels, who, in pairs, attend the saints. Above the door was placed, at the time of Lorenzo's escape, the beautiful cantoria, also by Luca, which is now in the museum of the cathedral, while above the door of the old sacristy was Donatello's cantoria. Commonplace new ones now take their place. In the semicircle over each door is a coloured relief by Luca: that over the bronze doors being the "Resurrection," and the other the "Ascension"; and they are interesting not only for their beauty but as being the earliest-known examples in Luca's newly-discovered glazed terra-cotta medium, which was to do so much in the hands of himself, his nephew Andrea, and his followers, to make Florence still lovelier and the legend of the Virgin Mary still sweeter. But of the della Robbias and their exquisite genius I shall say more later, when we come to the Bargello.

As different as would be possible to imagine is the genius

of that younger sculptor, the author of the Pietà at the back of the altar, near where we now stand, who, when Luca finished these bronze doors, in 1467, was not yet born—Michelangelo Buonarroti. This group, which is unfinished, is the last the old and weary Titan ever worked at, and it was meant to be part of his own tomb. Vasari, to whose "Lives of the Painters" we shall be indebted, as this book proceeds, for so much good human nature, and who speaks of Michelangelo with peculiar authority, since he was his friend, pupil, and correspondent, tells us that once when he went to see the sculptor in Rome, near the end, he found him at work upon this Pietà, but the sculptor was so dissatisfied with one portion that he let his lantern fall in order that Vasari might not see it, saying: "I am so old that death frequently drags at my mantle to take me, and one day my person will fall like this lantern". The Pietà is still in deep gloom, as the master would have liked, but enough is revealed to prove its pathos and its power.

In the east end of the nave is the chapel of S. Zenobius, containing a bronze reliquary by Ghiberti, with scenes upon it from the life of this saint, so important in Florentine religious history. It is, however, very hard to see, and should be illuminated. Zenobius was born at Florence in the reign of Constantine the Great, when Christianity was by no means the prevailing religion of the city, although the way had been paved by various martyrs. After studying philosophy and preaching with much acceptance, Zenobius was summoned to Rome by Pope Damasus. On the Pope's death he became Bishop of Florence, and did much, says Butler, to "extirpate the kingdom of Satan". The saint lived in the ancient tower which still stands—one of the few survivors of Florence's hundreds of towers—at the corner of the Via Por S. Maria (which leads from the Mercato

Nuovo to the Ponte Vecchio) and the Via Lambertesca. It is called the Torre de' Girolami, and on S. Zenobius' day—May 25th—is decorated with flowers; and since never are so many flowers in the city of flowers as at that time, it is a sight to see. The remains of the saint were moved to the Duomo, although it had not then its dome, from S. Lorenzo, in 1330, and the simple column in the centre of the road opposite Ghiberti's first Baptistery doors was erected to mark the event, since on that very spot, it is said, stood a dead elm tree which, when the bier of the saint chanced to touch it, immediately sprang to life again and burst into leaf; even, the enthusiastic chronicler adds, into flower. The result was that the tree was cut completely to pieces by relic hunters, but the column by the Baptistery, the work of Brunelleschi (erected on the site of an earlier one), fortunately remains as evidence of the miracle. Ghiberti, however, did not choose this miracle but another for representation; for not only did Zenobius dead restore animation, but while he was himself living he resuscitated two boys. The one was a ward of his own; the second was an ordinary Florentine, for whom the same modest boon was craved by his sorrowing parents. It is one of these scenes of resuscitation which Ghiberti has designed in bronze, while Ridolfo Ghirlandaio painted it in a picture in the Uffizi. We shall see S. Zenobius again in the fresco by Ridolfo's father, the great Ghirlandaio, in the Palazzo Vecchio; while the portrait on the first pillar of the left aisle, as one enters the cathedral is of Zenobius too.

The date of the Pazzi Conspiracy was 1478. A few years later the same building witnessed the extraordinary effects of Savonarola's oratory, when such was the terrible picture he drew of the fate of unregenerate sinners that his listeners' hair was said actually to rise with fright.

Savonarola came towards the end of the Renaissance, to give it its death-blow. By contrast there is a tablet on the right wall of the cathedral in honour of one who did much to bring about the paganism and sophistication against which the impassioned reformer uttered his fiercest denunciations: Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), the neo-Platonist protégé of Cosimo de' Medici and friend both of Piero de' Medici and Lorenzo. To explain Marsilio's influence it is necessary to recede a little into history. In 1439 Cosimo de' Medici succeeded in transferring the scene of the Great Council of the Church to Florence. At this conference representatives of the Western Church, centred in Rome, met those of the Eastern Church, centred in Constantinople, which was still Christian, for the purpose of discussing various matters, not the least of which was the protection of the Eastern Church against the Infidel. Not only was Constantinople continually threatened by the Turks, and in need of arms as well as sympathy, but the two branches of the Church were at enmity over a number of points. It was as much to heal these differences as to seek temporal aid that the Emperor John Palæologus, the Patriarch of Constantinople, and a vast concourse of nobles, priests, and Greek scholars, arrived in Italy, and, after sojourning at Venice and Ferrara, moved on to Florence at the invitation of Cosimo. The Emperor resided in the Peruzzi palace, now no more, near S. Croce; the Patriarch of Constantinople lodged (and as it chanced, died, for he was very old) at the Ferrantini palace, now the Casa Vernaccia, in the Borgo Pinti; while Pope Eugenius was at the convent attached to S. Maria Novella. The meetings of the Council were held where we now stand—in the cathedral, whose dome had just been placed upon it all ready for them.

The Council failed in its purpose, and, as we know, Constantinople was lost some years later, and the great empire of which John Palæologus was the last ruler ceased to be. That, however, at the moment is beside the mark. The interesting thing to us is that among the scholars who came from Constantinople, bringing with them numbers of manuscripts and systems of thought wholly new to the Florentines, was one Georgius Gemisthos, a Greek philosopher of much personal charm and comeliness, who talked a bland and beautiful Platonism that was extremely alluring not only to his youthful listeners but also to Cosimo himself. Gemisthos was, however, a Greek, and Cosimo was too busy a man in a city of enemies, or at any rate of the envious, to be able to do much more than extend his patronage to the old man and despatch emissaries to the East for more and more manuscripts; but discerning the allurements of the new gospel, Cosimo directed a Florentine enthusiast who knew Greek to spread the serene creed among his friends, who were all ripe for it, and this enthusiast was none other than a youthful scholar by name Marsilio Ficino, connected with S. Lorenzo, Cosimo's family church, and the son of Cosimo's own physician. To the young and ardent Marsilio, Plato became a god and Gemisthos not less than divine for bringing the tidings. He kept a lamp always burning before Plato's bust, and later founded the Platonic Academy, at which Plato's works were discussed, orations delivered, and new dialogues exchanged, between such keen minds as Marsilio, Pulci, Landini, Giovanni Cavalcanti, Leon Battista Alberti, the architect and scholar, Pico della Mirandola, the precocious disputant and aristocratic mystic, Poliziano, the tutor of Lorenzo's sons, and Lorenzo the Magnificent himself. It was thus from the Greek invasion of Florence that

proceeded the stream of culture which is known as Humanism, and which, no doubt, in time, was so largely concerned in bringing about that indifference to spiritual things which, leading to general laxity and indulgence, filled Savonarola with despair.

I am not concerned to enter deeply into the subject of the Renaissance. But this must be said—that the new painting and sculpture, particularly the painting of Masaccio and the sculpture of Donatello, had shown the world that the human being could be made the measure of the Divine. The Madonna and Christ had been related to life. The new learning, by leading these keen Tuscan intellects, so eager for reasonableness, to the Greek philosophers who were so wise and so calm without any of the consolations of Christianity, naturally set them wondering if there were not a religion of Humanity that was perhaps a finer thing than the religion that required all the machinery and intrigue of Rome. And when, as the knowledge of Greek spread and the minute examination of documents ensued, it was found that Rome had not disdained forgery to gain her ends, a blow was struck against the Church from which it never recovered;—and how much of this was due to this Florentine Marsilio, sitting at the feet of the Greek Gemisthos, who came to Florence at the invitation of Cosimo de' Medici!

The cathedral glass, as I say, is mostly overladen with grime; some quite so; but the circular windows in the dome seem to be magnificent in design. They are attributed to Ghiberti and Donatello, and are lovely in colour. The greens in particular are very striking. But the jewel of these circular windows of Florence is that by Ghiberti on the west wall of S. Croce.

And here I leave the Duomo, with the counsel to visitors

to Florence to make a point of entering it every day—not, as so many Florentines do, in order to make a short cut from the Via Calzaioli to the Via de' Servi, and vice versâ, but to gather its spirit. It is different every hour in the day, and every hour the light enters it with new beauty.