CHAPTER IV

THE CAMPANILE AND THE BAPTISTERY

A short way with Veronese critics—Giotto's missing spire—Donatello's holy men—Giotto as encyclopædist—The seven and twenty reliefs—Ruskin in American—At the top of the tower—A sea of red roofs—The restful Baptistery—Historic stones—An ex-Pope's tomb—Andrea Pisano's doors—Ghiberti's first doors—Ghiberti's second doors—Michael angelo's praise—A gentleman artist.

IT was in 1332, as I have said, that Giotto was made capo-maestro, and on July 18th, 1334, the first stone of his campanile was laid, the understanding being that the structure was to exceed "in magnificence, height, and excellence of workmanship" anything in the world. As some further indication of the glorious feeling of patriotism then animating the Florentines, it may be remarked that when a Veronese who happened to be in Florence ventured to suggest that the city was aiming rather too high, he was at once thrown into gaol, and, on being set free when his time was done, was shown the treasury as an object lesson. Of the wealth and purposefulness of Florence at that time, in spite of the disastrous bellicose period she had been passing through, Villani the historian, who wrote history as it was being made, gives an excellent account, which Macaulay summarizes in his vivid way. Thus: "The revenue of the Republic amounted to three hundred thousand florins; a sum which, allowing for the depreciation of the precious metals, was at least equivalent

lent to six hundred thousand pounds sterling; a larger sum than England and Ireland, two centuries ago, yielded to Elizabeth. The manufacture of wool alone employed two hundred factories and thirty thousand workmen. The cloth annually produced sold, at an average, for twelve hundred thousand florins; a sum fully equal in exchangeable value to two millions and a half of our money. Four hundred thousand florins were annually coined. Eighty banks conducted the commercial operations, not of Florence only but of all Europe. The transactions of these establishments were sometimes of a magnitude which may surprise even the contemporaries of the Barings and the Rothschilds. Two houses advanced to Edward III of England upwards of three hundred thousand marks, at a time when the mark contained more silver than fifty shillings of the present day, and when the value of silver was more than quadruple of what it now is. The city and its environs contained a hundred and seventy thousand inhabitants. In the various schools about ten thousand children were taught to read; twelve hundred studied arithmetic; six hundred received a learned education."

Giotto died in 1336, and after his death, as I have said, Andrea Pisano came in for a while; to be followed by Talenti, who is said to have made considerable alterations in Giotto's design and to be responsible for the happy idea of increasing the height of the windows with the height of the tower and thus adding to the illusion of springing lightness. The topmost ones, so bold in size and so lovely with their spiral columns, almost seem to lift it.

The campanile to-day is 276 feet in height, and Giotto proposed to add to that a spire of 105 feet. The Florentines completed the façade of the cathedral in 1887 and are now spending enormous sums on the Medici chapel at

S. Lorenzo; why should they not one day carry out their greatest artist's intention?

The campanile as a structure had been finished in 1387, but not for many years did it receive its statues, of which something must be said, although it is impossible to get more than a vague idea of them, so high are they. A captive balloon should be arranged for the use of visitors. Those by Donatello, on the Baptistery side, are the most remarkable. The first of these—that nearest to the cathedral and the most striking as seen from the distant earth—is called John the Baptist, always a favourite subject with this sculptor, who, since he more than any at that thoughtful time endeavoured to discover and disclose the secret of character, is curiously unfortunate in the accident that has fastened names to these figures. This John, for example, bears no relation to his other Baptists; nor does the next figure represent David, as is generally supposed, but owes that error to the circumstance that when the David that originally stood here was moved to the north side, the old plinth bearing his name was left behind. This famous figure is stated by Vasari to be a portrait of a Florentine merchant named Barduccio Cherichini, and for centuries it has been known as Il Zuccone (or pumpkin) from its baldness. Donatello, according to Vasari, had a particular liking for the work, so much that he used to swear by it; while, when engaged upon it, he is said to have so believed in its reality as to exclaim, "Speak, speak! or may a dysentery seize thee!" It is now generally considered to represent Job, and we cannot too much regret the impossibility of getting near enough to study it. Next is the Jeremiah, which, according to Vasari, was a portrait of another Florentine, but which, since he bears his name on a scroll, may none the less be taken to realize the sculptor's idea of

THE PROCESSION OF THE MAGI

FROM THE FRESCO BY BENOZZO GOZZOLI IN THE MEDICI PALACE NOW THE PALAZZO RICCARDI)

Jeremiah. It is (according to the photographs) a fine piece of rugged vivacity, and the head is absolutely that of a real man. On the opposite side of the tower is the magnificent Abraham's sacrifice from the same strong hand, and by it Habakkuk, who is no less near life than the Jeremiah and Job, but a very different type. At both Or San Michele and the Bargello we are to find Donatello perhaps in a finer mood than here, and comfortably visible.

For most visitors to Florence and all disciples of Ruskin, the chief interest of the campanile ("The Shepherd's Tower" as he calls it) is the series of twenty-seven reliefs illustrating the history of the world and the progress of mankind, which are to be seen round the base, the design, it is supposed, of Giotto, executed by Andrea Pisano and Luca della Robbia. To Andrea are given all those on the west (7), south (7), east (5), and the two eastern ones on the north; to Luca the remaining five on the north. Ruskin's fascinating analysis of these reliefs should most certainly be read (without a total forgetfulness of the shepherd's other activities as a painter, architect, humorist, and friend of princes and poets), but equally certainly not in the American pirated edition which the Florentine booksellers are so ready (to their shame) to sell you. Only Ruskin in his best mood of fury could begin to do justice to the misspellings and mispunctuations of this terrible production.

Ruskin, I may say, believes several of the carvings to be from Giotto's own chisel as well as design, but other and more modern authorities disagree, although opinion now inclines to the belief that the designs for Pisano's Baptistery doors are also his. Such thoroughness and ingenuity were all in Giotto's way, and they certainly suggest his active mind. The campanile series begins at the west side with the creation of man. Among the most

attractive are, I think, those devoted to agriculture, with the spirited oxen, to astronomy, to architecture, to weaving, and to pottery. Giotto was even so thorough as to give one relief to the conquest of the air; and he makes Noah most satisfactorily drunk. Note also the Florentine fleurs-de-lis round the base of the tower. Every fleur-de-lis in Florence is beautiful—even those on advertisements and fire-plugs—but few are more beautiful than these.

I climbed the campanile one fine morning—417 steps from the ground—and was well repaid; but I think it is wiser to ascend the tower of the Palazzo Vecchio, because one is higher there and, since the bulk of the dome, which intrudes from the campanile, is avoided, one has a better all-round view. Florence seen from this eminence is very red—so uniformly so that many towers rise against it almost indistinguishably, particularly the Bargello's and the Badia's. One sees at once how few straight streets there are—the Ricasoli standing out among them as the exception; and one realizes how the city has developed outside, with its boulevards where the walls once were, leaving the gates isolated, and its cincture of factories. The occasional glimpses of cloisters and verdure among the red are very pleasant. One of the objects cut off by the cathedral dome is the English cemetery, but the modern Jewish temple stands out as noticeably almost as any of the ancient buildings. The Pitti looks like nothing but a barracks and the Porta Ferdinando has prominence which it gets from no other point. The roof of the Mercato Centrale is the ugliest thing in the view. While I was there the midday gun from the Boboli fortress was fired, instantly having its punctual double effect of sending all the pigeons up in a gray cloud of simulated alarm and starting every bell in this city of jangling steeples.

Those wishing to make either the campanile or Duomo ascents must remember to do it early. The closing hour for the day being twelve, no one is allowed to start up after about a quarter past eleven: a very foolish arrangement, since Florence and the surrounding Apennines under a slanting sun are more beautiful than in the morning glare, and the ascent would be less fatiguing. As it was, on descending, after being so long at the top, I was severely reprimanded by the custodian, who had previously marked me down as a barbarian for refusing his offer of field-glasses. But the Palazzo Vecchio tower is open till five.

The Baptistery is the beautiful octagonal building opposite the cathedral, and once the cathedral itself. It dates from the seventh or eighth century, but as we see it now is a product chiefly of the thirteenth. The bronze doors opposite the Via Calzaioli are open every day, a circumstance which visitors, baffled by the two sets of Ghiberti doors always so firmly closed, are apt to overlook. All children born in Florence are still baptized here, and I watched one afternoon an old priest at the task, a tiny Florentine being brought in to receive the name of Tosca, which she did with less distaste than most considering how thorough was his sprinkling. The Baptistery is rich in colour both without and within. The floor alone is a marvel of intricate inlaying, including the signs of the zodiac and a gnomic sentence which reads the same backwards and forwards—"En gire torte sol ciclos et roterigne". On this very pavement Dante, who called the church his "beautiful San Giovanni," has walked. Over the altar is a gigantic and primitive Christ in mosaic, more splendid than spiritual. The mosaics in the recesses of the clerestory—grey and white—are the most soft and lovely of all. I believe the Baptistery is the most restful place in Florence; and

this is rather odd considering that it is all marble and mosaic patterns. But its shape is very soothing, and age has given it a quality of its own, and there is just that touch of barbarism about it such as one gets in Byzantine buildings to lend it a peculiar character here.

The most notable sculpture in the Baptistery is the tomb of the ex-Pope John XXIII, whose licentiousness was such that there was nothing for it but to depose and imprison him. He had, however, much money, and on his liberation he settled in Florence, presented a true finger of John the Baptist to the Baptistery, and arranged in return for his bones to repose in that sanctuary. One of his executors was that Niccolò da Uzzano, the head of the noble faction in the city, whose coloured bust by Donatello is in the Bargello. The tomb is exceedingly fine, the work of Donatello and his partner Michelozzo, who were engaged to make it by Giovanni de' Medici, the ex-pontiff's friend, and the father of the great Cosimo. The design is all Donatello's, and his the recumbent cleric, lying very naturally, hardly as if dead at all, a little on one side, so that his face is seen nearly full; the three figures beneath are Michelozzo's; but Donatello probably carved the seated angels who display the scroll which bears the dead Pope's name. The Madonna and Child above are by Donatello's assistant, Pagno di Lapo Portigiani, a pretty relief by whom we saw in the Museum of the Cathedral. Being in red stone, and very dusty, like Ghiberti's doors (which want the hose regularly), the lines of the tomb are much impaired. Donatello is also represented here by a Mary Magdalene in wood, on an altar at the left of the entrance door, very powerful and poignant.

In the ordinary way, when visitors to Florence speak of the Baptistery doors they mean those opposite the Duomo,

and when they go to the Bargello and look at the designs made by Ghiberti and Brunelleschi in competition, they think that the competition was for those. But that is wrong. Ghiberti won his spurs with the doors on the north side, at which comparatively few persons look. The famous doors opposite the Duomo were commissioned many years later, when his genius was acknowledged and when he had become so accomplished as to do what he liked with his medium. Before, however, coming to Ghiberti, we ought to look at the work of an early predecessor but for whom there might have been no Ghiberti at all; for while Ghiberti was at work with his assistants on these north doors, between 1403 and 1424, the place which they occupy was filled by those executed seventy years earlier by Andrea Pisano (1270-1348), possibly from Giotto's designs, which are now at the south entrance, opposite the charming little loggia at the corner of the Via Calzaioli, called the Bigallo. These represent twenty scenes in the life of S. John the Baptist, and below them are eight figures of cardinal and Christian virtues, and they employed their sculptor from 1330 to 1336. They have three claims to notice: as being admirably simple and vigorous in themselves: as having influenced all later workers in this medium, and particularly Ghiberti and Donatello; and as being the bronze work of the sculptor of certain of the stone scenes round the base of Giotto's campanile. The panel in which the Baptist is seen up to his waist in the water is surely the very last word in audacity in bronze. Ghiberti was charged with making bronze do things that it was ill fitted for; but I do not know that even he moulded water—and transparent water—from it.

The year 1399 is one of the most notable in the history of modern art, since it was then that the competition for

the Baptistery gates was made public, this announcement being the spring from which many rivers flowed. In that year Lorenzo Ghiberti, a young goldsmith assisting his father, was twenty-one, and Filippo Brunelleschi, another goldsmith, was twenty-two, while Giotto had been dead sixty-three years and the impulse he had given to painting had almost worked itself out. The new doors were to be of the same shape and size as those by Andrea Pisano, which were already getting on for seventy years old, and candidates were invited to make a specimen relief to scale, representing the interrupted sacrifice of Isaac, although the subject-matter of the doors was to be the Life of S. John the Baptist. Among the judges was that Florentine banker whose name was beginning to be known in the city as a synonym for philanthropy, enlightenment, and sagacity, Giovanni de' Medici. In 1401 the specimens were ready and after much deliberation as to which was the better, Ghiberti's or Brunelleschi's—assisted, some say, by Brunelleschi's own advice in favour of his rival—the award was given to Ghiberti, and he was instructed to proceed with his task; while Brunelleschi, as we have seen, being a man of determined ambition, left for Rome to study architecture, having made up his mind to be second to no one in whichever of the arts and crafts he decided to pursue. Here then was the first result of the competition—that it turned Brunelleschi to architecture.

Ghiberti began seriously in 1403 and continued till 1424, when the doors were finished; but, in order to carry out the work, he required assistance in casting and so forth, and for that purpose engaged among others a sculptor named Donatello (born in 1386), a younger sculptor named Luca della Robbia (born in 1400), and a gigantic young painter called Masaccio (born in 1401), each of whom

was destined, taking fire no doubt from Ghiberti and his fine free way, to be a powerful innovator—Donatello (apart from other and rarer achievements) being the first sculptor since antiquity to place a statue on a pedestal around which observers could walk; Masaccio being the first painter to make pictures in the modern use of the term, with men and women of flesh and blood in them, as distinguished from decorative saints, and to be by example the instructor of all the greatest masters, from his pupil Filippo Lippi to Leonardo and Michelangelo; and Luca della Robbia being the inspired discoverer of an inexpensive means of glazing terra-cotta so that his beautiful and radiant Madonnas could be brought within the purchasing means of the poorest congregation in Italy. These alone are remarkable enough results, but when we recollect also that Brunelleschi's defeat led to the building of the cathedral dome, the significance of the event becomes the more extraordinary.

The doors, as I say, were finished in 1424, after twenty-one years' labour, and the Signoria left the Palazzo Vecchio in procession to see their installation. In the number and shape of the panels Pisano set the standard, but Ghiberti's work resembled that of his predecessor very little in other ways, for he had a mind of domestic sweetness without austerity and he was interested in making everything as easy and fluid and beautiful as might be. His thoroughness recalls Giotto in certain of his frescoes. The impression left by Pisano's doors is akin to that left by reading the New Testament; but Ghiberti makes everything happier than that. Two scenes—both on the level of the eye—I particularly like: the "Annunciation," with its little, lithe, reluctant Virgin, and the "Adoration" The border of

the Pisano doors is, I think, finer than that of Ghiberti's, but it is a later work.

Looking at them even now, with eyes that remember so much of the best art that followed them and took inspiration from them, we can understand the better how delighted Florence must have been with this new picture gallery and how the doors were besieged by sightseers. But greater still was to come. Ghiberti at once received the commission to make two more doors on his own scale for the south side of the Baptistery, and in 1425 he had begun on them. These were not finished until 1452, so that Ghiberti, then a man of seventy-four, had given practically his whole life to the making of four bronze doors. It is true that he did a few other things besides, such as the casket of S. Zenobius in the Duomo, and the Baptist and S. Matthew for Or San Michele; but he may be said justly to live by his doors, and particularly by the second pair, although it was the first pair that had the greater effect on his contemporaries and followers.

Among his assistants on these were Antonio Pollaiuolo (born in 1429), who designed the quail in the left border, and Paolo Uccello (born in 1397), both destined to be men of influence. The bald head on the right door is a portrait of Ghiberti; that of the old man on the left is his father, who helped him to polish the original competition plaque. Although commissioned for the south side they were placed where they now are, on the east, as being most worthy of the position of honour, and Pisano's doors, which used to be here, were moved to the south, where they now are.

On Ghiberti's workshop opposite S. Maria Novella, in the Via Bufalini, the memorial tablet mentions Michelangelo's praise—that these doors were beautiful enough to be the Gates of Paradise. After that what is an ordinary person

to say? That they are lovely is a commonplace. But they are more. They are so sensitive; bronze, the medium which Horace has called, by implication, the most durable of all, has become in Ghiberti's hands almost as soft as wax and tender as flesh. It does all he asks; it almost moves; every trace of sternness has vanished from it. Nothing in plastic art that we have ever seen or shall see is more easy and ingratiating than these almost living pictures.

Before them there is steadily a little knot of admirers, and on Sundays you may always see country people explaining the panels to each other. Every one has his favourite among these fascinating Biblical scenes, and mine are Cain and Abel, with the ploughing, and Abraham and Isaac, with its row of fir trees (see opposite page 16). It has been explained by the purists that the sculptor stretched the bounds of plastic art too far and made bronze paint pictures; but most persons will agree to ignore that. Of the charm of Ghiberti's mind the border gives further evidence, with its fruits and foliage, birds and woodland creatures, so true to life, and here fixed for all time, so naturally, that if these animals should ever (as is not unlikely in Italy where every one has a gun and shoots at his pleasure everything he sees) become extinct, they could be created again from these designs.

Ghiberti, who enjoyed great honour in his life and a considerable salary as joint architect of the dome with Brunelleschi, died three years after the completion of the second doors and was buried in S. Croce. His place in Florentine art is unique and glorious.

The broken porphyry pillars by these second doors were a gift from Pisa to Florence in recognition of Florence's watchfulness over Pisa while the Pisans were away subduing the Balearic islanders.

The bronze group over Ghiberti's first doors, representing

John the Baptist preaching between a Pharisee and a Levite, are the work (either alone or assisted by his master Leonardo da Vinci) of an interesting Florentine sculptor, Giovanni Francesco Rustici (1474-1554), who was remarkable among the artists of his time in being what we should call an amateur, having a competence of his own and the manners of a patron. Placing himself under Verrocchio, he became closely attached to Leonardo, a fellow-pupil, and made him his model rather than the older man. He took his art lightly, and lived, in Vasari's phrase, "free from care," having such beguilements as a tame menagerie (Leonardo, it will be remembered, loved animals too and had a habit of buying small caged birds in order to set them free), and two or three dining clubs, the members of which vied with each other in devising curious and exotic dishes. Andrea del Sarto, for example, once brought as his contribution to the feast a model of this very church we are studying, the Baptistery, of which the floor was constructed of jelly, the pillars of sausages, and the choir desk of cold veal, while the choristers were roast thrushes. Rustici further paved the way to a life free from care by appointing a steward of his estate whose duty it was to see that his money-box, to which he went whenever he wanted anything, always had money in it. This box he never locked, having learned that he need fear no robbery by once leaving his cloak for two days under a bush and then finding it again. "This world," he exclaimed, "is too good: it will not last." Among his pets were a porcupine trained to prick the legs of his guests under the table "so that they drew them in quickly"; a raven that spoke like a human being; an eagle, and many snakes. He also studied necromancy, the better to frighten his apprentices. He left Florence in 1528, after the Medici expulsion, and, like

Leonardo, took service with Francis the First. He died at the age of eighty.

I had an hour and more exactly opposite the Rustici group, on the same level, while waiting for the Scoppio del Carro, and I find it easy to believe that Leonardo himself had a hand in the work. The figure of the Baptist is superb, the attitude of his listeners masterly.