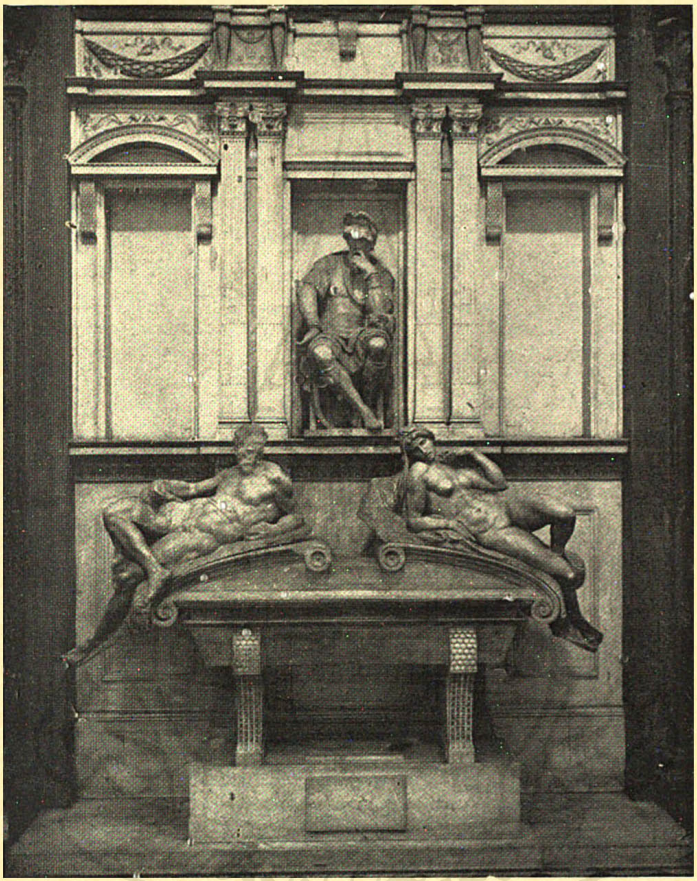
CHAPTER V

THE RICCARDI PALACE AND THE MEDICI

An evasion of history—"Il Caparra"—The Gozzoli frescoes—Giovanni de' Medici (di Bicci)—Cosimo de' Medici—The first banishment—Piero de' Medici—Lorenzo de' Medici—Piero di Lorenzo de' Medici—The second banishment—Giuliano di Lorenzo de' Medici—Leo X—Lorenzo di Piero di Lorenzo de' Medici—Clement VII—Third banishment of the Medici—The siege of Florence—Alessandro de' Medici—Ippolito de' Medici—Lorenzino de' Medici—Giovanni delle Bande Nere—Cosimo I—The Grand Dukes.

THE natural step from the Baptistery would be to the Uffizi. But for us not yet; because in order to understand Florence, and particularly the Florence that existed between the extreme dates that I have chosen as containing the fascinating period—namely 1296, when the Duomo was begun, and 1564, when Michelangelo died—one must understand who and what the Medici were.

While I have been enjoying the pleasant task of writing this book—which has been more agreeable than any literary work I have ever done—I have continually been conscious of a plaintive voice at my shoulder, proceeding from one of the vigilant and embarrassing imps who sit there and do duty as conscience, inquiring if the time is not about ripe for introducing that historical sketch of Florence without which no account such as this can be rightly understood. And ever I have replied with words of a soothing and procrastinating nature. But now that we are face to face



THE TOMB OF LORENZO DE' MEDICI, DUKE OF URBINO
BY MICHELANGELO IN THE NEW SACRISTY OF S. LORENZO

with the Medici family, in their very house, I am conscious that the occasion for that historical sketch is here indeed, and equally I am conscious of being quite incapable of supplying it. For the history of Florence between, say the birth of Giotto or Dante and the return of Cosimo de' Medici from exile, when the absolute Medici rule began, is so turbulent, crowded, and complex that it would require the whole of this volume to describe it. The changes in the government of the city would alone occupy a good third, so constant and complicated were they. I should have to explain the Guelphs and the Ghibellines, the Neri and the Bianchi, the Guilds and the Priors, the gonfalonieri and the podestà, the secondo popolo and the Buonuomini.

Rather than do this imperfectly I have chosen to do it not at all; and the curious must resort to historians proper. But there is at the end of the volume a table of the chief dates in Florentine and European history in the period chosen, together with births and deaths of artists and poets and other important persons, so that a bird's-eye view of the progress of affairs can be quickly gained, while in this chapter I offer an outline of the great family of rulers of Florence who made the little city an æsthetic lawgiver to the world and with whom her later fame, good or ill, is indissolubly united. For the rest, is there not the library?

The Medici, once so powerful and stimulating, are still ever in the background of Florence as one wanders hither and thither. They are behind many of the best pictures and most of the best statues. Their escutcheon is everywhere. I ought, I believe, to have made them the subject of my first chapter. But since I did not, let us without further delay turn to the Via Cavour, which runs away to the north from the Baptistery, being a continuation of the Via de' Martelli, and pause at the massive and dignified palace at

the first corner on the left. For that is the Medici's home; and afterwards we will step into S. Lorenzo and see the church which Brunelleschi and Donatello made beautiful and Michelangelo wonderful that the Medici might lie there.

Visitors go to the Riccardi palace rather to see Gozzoli's frescoes than anything else; and indeed apart from the noble solid Renaissance architecture of Michelozzo there is not much else to see. In the courtyard are certain fragments of antique sculpture arranged against the walls, and a sarcophagus is shown in which an early member of the family, Guccio de' Medici, who was gonfalonier in 1299, once reposed. There too are Donatello's eight medallions, but they are not very interesting, being only enlarged copies of old medals and cameos and not notable for his own characteristics.

Hence it is that, after Gozzoli, by far the most interesting part of this building is its associations. For here lived Cosimo de' Medici, whose building of the palace was interrupted by his banishment as a citizen of dangerous ambition; here lived Piero de' Medici, for whom Gozzoli worked; here was born and here lived Lorenzo the Magnificent. To this palace came the Pazzi conspirators to lure Giuliano to the Duomo and his doom. Here did Charles VIII.—Savonarola's "Flagellum Dei"—lodge and loot, and it was here that Capponi frightened him with the threat of the Florentine bells; hither came in 1494 the fickle and terrible Florentine mob, always passionate in its pursuit of change and excitement, and now inflamed by the sermons of Savonarola, to destroy the priceless manuscripts and works of art; here was brought up for a year or so the little Catherine de' Medici, and next door was the house in which Alessandro de' Medici was murdered

It was in the seventeenth century that the palace passed to the Riccardi family, who made many additions. A century later Florence acquired it, and to-day it is the seat of the Prefect of the city. Cosimo's original building was smaller; but much of it remains untouched. The exquisite cornice is Michelozzo's original, and the courtyard has merely lost its statues, among which are Donatello's Judith, now in the Loggia de' Lanzi, and his bronze David, now in the Bargello, while Verrocchio's David was probably on the stairs. The escutcheon on the corner of the house gives us the period of its erection. The seven plain balls proclaim it Cosimo's. Each of the Medici sported these *palle*, although each had also his private crest. Under Giovanni, Cosimo's father, the balls were eight in number; under Cosimo, seven; under Piero, seven, with the fleur-de-lis of France on the uppermost, given him by Louis XI; under Lorenzo, six; and as one walks about Florence one can approximately fix the date of a building by remembering these changes. How many times they occur on the façades of Florence and its vicinity, probably no one could say; but they are everywhere. The French wits, who were amused to derive Catherine de' Medici from a family of apothecaries, called them pills.

The beautiful lantern at the corner was added by Lorenzo and was the work of an odd ironsmith in Florence for whom he had a great liking—Niccolò Grosso. For Lorenzo had all that delight in character which belongs so often to the born patron and usually to the born connoisseur. This Grosso was a man of humorous independence and bluntness. He had the admirable custom of carrying out his commissions in the order in which they arrived, so that if he was at work upon a set of fire-irons for a poor client, not even Lorenzo himself (who as a matter of fact often tried) could

induce him to turn to something more lucrative. The rich who cannot wait be forced to wait. Grosso also always insisted upon something in advance and payment on delivery, and pleasantly described his workshop as being the Sign of the Burning Books,—since if his books were burnt how could he enter a debt? This rule earned for him from Lorenzo the nickname of "Il Caparrá" (earnest money). Another of Grosso's eccentricities was to refuse to work for Jews.

Within the palace, up stairs, is the little chapel which Gozzoli made so gay and fascinating that it is probably the very gem among the private chapels of the world. Here not only did the Medici perform their devotions—Lorenzo's corner seat is still shown, and anyone may sit in it—but their splendour and taste are reflected on the walls. Cosimo, as we shall see when we reach S. Marco, invited Fra Angelico to paint upon the walls of that convent sweet and simple frescoes to the glory of God. Piero employed Fra Angelico's pupil, Benozzo Gozzoli to decorate this chapel.

In the year 1439, as chapter II related, through the instrumentality of Cosimo a great episcopal Council was held at Florence, at which John Palæologus, Emperor of the East, met Pope Eugenius IV. In that year Cosimo's son Piero was twenty-three, and Gozzoli nineteen, and probably upon both, but certainly on the young artist, such pomp and splendour and gorgeousness of costume as then were visible in Florence made a deep impression. When therefore Piero, after becoming head of the family, decided to decorate the chapel with a procession of Magi, it is not surprising that the painter should recall this historic occasion. We thus get the pageantry of the East with more than common realism, while the portraits, or at any rate re-

presentations, of the Patriarch of Constantinople (the first king) and the Emperor (the second king) are here, together with those of certain Medici, for the youthful third king is none other than Piero's eldest son Lorenzo. Among their followers are (the third on the left) Cosimo de' Medici, who is included as among the living, although, like the Patriarch of Constantinople, he was dead, and his brother Lorenzo (the middle one of the three), whose existence is forgotten so completely until the accession of Cosimo I, in 1537, brings his branch of the family into power; while on the right is Piero de' Medici himself. Piero's second son Giuliano is on the white horse, preceded by a negro carrying his bow. The head immediately above Giuliano I do not know, but that one a little to the left above it is Gozzoli's own. Among the throng are men of learning who either came to Florence from the East or Florentines who assimilated their philosophy—such as Georgius Gemisthos, Marsilio Ficino, and perhaps certain painters among them, all protégés of Cosimo and Piero, and all makers of the Renaissance.

The assemblage alone, apart altogether from any beauty and charm that the painting possesses, makes these frescoes valuable. But the painting is a delight. We have a pretty Gozzoli in our National Gallery—No. 283—but it gives no indication of the ripeness and richness and incident of this work; while the famous Biblical series in the Campo Santo of Pisa has so largely perished as to be scarcely evidence to his colour. The first impression made by the Medici frescoes is their sumptuousness. When Gozzoli painted—if the story be true—he had only candle light: the window over the altar is new. But think of candle light being all the illumination of these walls as the painter worked! A new door and window have also been

cut in the wall opposite the altar close to the three daughters of Piero, by vandal hands; and "Brutto, brutto!" says the guardian, very rightly.

The landscape behind the procession is hardly less interesting than the procession itself; but it is when we come to the meadows of paradise, with the angels and roses, the cypresses and birds, in the two chancel scenes, that this side of Gozzoli's art is most fascinating. He has travelled a long way from his master Fra Angelico here: the heaven is of the visible rather than the invisible eye; sense is present as well as the rapturous spirit. The little Medici who endured the tedium of the services here are to be felicitated with upon such an adorable presentment of glory. With plenty of altar candles the sight of these gardens of the blest must have beguiled many a mass. Thinking here in England upon the Medici chapel, I find that the impression it has left upon me is chiefly cypresses —cypresses black and comely, disposed by a master hand, with a glint of gold among them. (see opposite page 38).

The picture that was over the altar has gone. It was a Lippo Lippi and is now in Berlin.

The first of the Medici family to rise to the highest power was Giovanni d'Averardo de' Medici (known as Giovanni di Bicci), 1360-1429, who, a wealthy banker living in what is now the Piazza del Duomo, was well known for his philanthropy and interest in the welfare of the Florentines, but does not come much into public notice until 1401, when he was appointed one of the judges in the Baptistery door competition. He was a retiring, watchful man. Whether he was personally ambitious is not too evident, but he was opposed to tyranny and was the steady foe of the Albizzi faction, who at that time were endeavouring to obtain supreme power in Florentine affairs. In

1419 Giovanni increased his popularity by founding the Spedale degli Innocenti, and in 1421 he was elected gonfalonier, or, as we might now say, President of the Republic. In this capacity he made his position secure and reduced the nobles (chief of whom was Niccolò da Uzzano) to political weakness. Giovanni died in 1429, leaving one son, Cosimo, aged forty, a second, Lorenzo, aged thirty-four, a fragrant memory and an immense fortune.

To Lorenzo, who remained a private citizen, we shall return in time; it is Cosimo (1389-1464) with whom we are now concerned. Cosimo de' Medici was a man of great mental and practical ability: he had been educated as well as possible; he had a passion both for art and letters; he inherited his father's financial ability and generosity, while he added to these gifts a certain genius for the management of men. One of the first things that Cosimo did after his father's death was to begin the palace where we now are, rejecting a plan by Brunelleschi as too splendid, and choosing instead one by Michelozzo, the partner of Donatello, two artists who remained his personal friends through life. Cosimo selected this site, in what was then the Via Larga but is now the Via Cavour, partly because his father had once lived there, and partly because it was close to S. Lorenzo, which his father, with six other families, had begun to rebuild, a work he intended himself to carry on.

The palace was begun in 1430 and was still in progress in 1433 when the Albizzi, who had always viewed the rise of the Medici family with apprehension and misgiving, and were now strengthened by the death of Niccolò da Uzzano, who, though powerful, had been a very cautious and temperate adviser, succeeded in getting a majority in the Signoria and passing a sentence of banishment on the whole Medici

tribe as being too rich and ambitious to be good citizens of a simple and frugal Republic. Cosimo therefore, after some days of imprisonment in the tower of the Palazzo Vecchio, during which he expected execution at any moment, left Florence for Venice, taking his architect with him. In 1434, however, the Florentines, realizing that under the Albizzi they were losing their independence, and what was to be a democracy was become an oligarchy, revolted, and Cosimo was recalled, and, like his father, was elected gonfalonier. With this recall began his long supremacy; for he returned like a king and like a king remained, quickly establishing himself as the leading man in the city, the power behind the Signoria. Not only did he never lose that position, but he made it so naturally his own that when he died he was able to transmit it to his son.

Cosimo de' Medici was, I think, the wisest and best ruler that Florence ever had and ranks high among the rulers that any state ever had. But he changed the Florentines from an independent people to a dependent one. In his capacity of Father of his Country he saw to it that his children lost their proud spirit. He had to be absolute; and this end he achieved in many ways, but chiefly by his wealth, which made it possible to break the rich rebel and to enslave the poor. His greatest asset—next his wealth—was his knowledge of the Florentine character. To know anything of this capricious, fickle, turbulent folk even after the event was in itself a task of such magnitude that almost no one else had compassed it; but Cosimo did more, he knew what they were likely to do. By this knowledge, together with his riches, his craft, his tact, his business ramifications as an international banker, his open-handedness and air of personal simplicity, Cosimo made himself a power.

For Florence could he not do enough. By inviting the Pope and the Greek Emperor to meet there he gave it great political importance, and incidentally brought about the New Learning. He established the Platonic Academy and formed the first public library in the west. He rebuilt and endowed the monastery of S. Marco. He built and rebuilt other churches. He gave Donatello a free hand in sculpture and Fra Lippo Lippi and Fra Angelico in painting. He distributed altogether in charity and churches four hundred thousand of those golden coins which were invented by Florence and named florins after her—a sum equal to a million pounds of to-day. In every direction one comes upon traces of his generosity and thoroughness. After his death it was decided that as Pater Patriæ, or Father of his Country, he should be for ever known.

Cosimo died in 1464, leaving an invalid son, Piero, aged forty-eight, known for his almost continuous gout as Il Gottoso. Giovanni and Cosimo had had to work for their power; Piero stepped naturally into it, although almost immediately he had to deal with a plot—the first for thirty years—to ruin the Medici prestige, the leader of which was that Luca Pitti who began the Pitti palace in order to have a better house than the Medici. The plot failed, not a little owing to young Lorenzo de' Medici's address, and the remaining few years of Piero's life were tranquil. He was a quiet, kindly man with the traditional family love of the arts and it was for him that Gozzoli worked. He died in 1469, leaving two sons, Lorenzo (1449-1492) and Giuliano (1453-1478).

Lorenzo had been brought up as the future leading citizen of Florence: he had every advantage of education and environment, and was rich in the aristocratic spirit which often blossoms most richly in the second or third generation

of wealthy business families. Giovanni had been a banker before everything, Cosimo an administrator, Piero a faithful inheritor of his father's wishes; it was left for Lorenzo to be the first poet and natural prince of the Medici blood. Lorenzo continued to bank but mismanaged the work and lost heavily; while his poetical tendencies no doubt distracted his attention generally from affairs. Yet such was his sympathetic understanding and his native splendour and gift of leadership that he could not but be at the head of everything, the first to be consulted and ingratiated. Not only was he the first Medici poet but the first of the family to marry not for love but for policy, and that too was a sign of decadence.

Lorenzo came into power when only twenty, and at the age of forty-two he was dead, but in the interval, by his interest in every kind of intellectual and artistic activity, by his passion for the greatness and glory of Florence, he made for himself a name that must always connote liberality, splendour, and enlightenment. But it is beyond question that under Lorenzo the Florentines changed deeply and for the worse. The old thrift and simplicity gave way to extravagance and ostentation; the old faith gave way too, but that was not wholly the effect of Lorenzo's natural inclination towards Platonic philosophy, fostered by his tutor Marsilio Ficino and his friends Poliziano and Pico della Mirandola, but was due in no small measure also to the hostility of Pope Sixtus, which culminated in the Pazzi Conspiracy of 1478 and the murder of Giuliano. Looking at the history of Florence from our present vantage-point we can see that although under Lorenzo the Magnificent she was the centre of the world's culture and distinction, there was behind this dazzling front no seriousness of purpose. She was in short enjoying the fruits of

LOOKING ALONG THE VIA CALZAIOLI FROM THE BAPTISTERY, SHOWING THE BIGALLO AND THE TOP OF OR SAN MICHELE

her labours as though the time of rest had come; and this when strenuousness was more than ever important. Lorenzo carried on every good work of his father and grandfather (he spent £65,000 a year in books alone) and was as jealous of Florentine interests; but he was also "The Magnificent," and in that lay the peril. Florence could do with wealth and power, but magnificence went to her head.

Lorenzo died in 1492, leaving three sons, of whom the eldest, Piero (1471-1503), succeeded him. Never was such a decadence. In a moment the Medici prestige, which had been steadily growing under Cosimo, Piero, and Lorenzo until it was world famous, crumbled to dust. Piero was a coarse-minded, pleasure-loving youth—"The Headstrong" his father had called him—whose one idea of power was to be sensual and tyrannical; and the enemies of Florence and of Italy took advantage of this fact. Savonarola's sermons had paved the way from within too. In 1494 Charles VIII of France marched into Italy; Piero pulled himself together and visited the king to make terms for Florence, but made such terms that on returning to the city he found an order of banishment and obeyed it. On November 9th, 1494, he and his family were expelled, and the mob, forgetting so quickly all that they owed to the Medici who had gone before, rushed to this beautiful palace and looted it. The losses that art and learning sustained in a few hours can never be estimated. A certain number of treasures were subsequently collected again, such as Donatello's David and Verrocchio's David, while Donatello's Judith was removed to the Palazzo Vecchio, where an inscription was placed upon it saying that her short way with Holofernes was a warning to all traitors; but priceless pictures, sculpture, and MSS. were ruthlessly demolished.

In the chapter on S. Marco we shall read of what experiments in government the Florentines substituted for that of the Medici, Savonarola for a while being at the head of the government, although only for a brief period which ended amid an orgy of lawlessness; and then, after a restless period of eighteen years, in which Florence had every claw cut and was weakened also by dissension, the Medici returned —the change being the work of Lorenzo's second son, Giovanni de' Medici, who on the eve of becoming Pope Leo X procured their reinstatement; thus justifying the wisdom of his father in placing him in the Church. Piero having been drowned long since, his admirable but ill-starred brother Giuliano, Duke of Nemours, now thirty-three, assumed the control, always under Leo X; while their cousin, Giulio, also a Churchman, and the natural son of the murdered Giuliano, was busy, behind the scenes, with the family fortunes.

Giuliano lived only till 1516 and was succeeded by his nephew Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino, a son of Piero, a young man of no more political use than his father, and one who quickly became almost equally unpopular. Things indeed were going so badly that Leo X sent Giulio de' Medici (now a cardinal) from Rome to straighten them out, and by some sensible repeals he succeeded in allaying a little of the bitterness in the city. Lorenzo had one daughter, born in this palace, who was destined to make history—Catherine de' Medici—and no son. When therefore he died in 1519, at the age of twenty-seven, after a life of vicious selfishness (which, however, was no bar to his having the noblest tomb in the world, at S. Lorenzo), the succession should have passed to the other branch of the Medici family, the descendants of old Giovanni's second son Lorenzo, brother of Cosimo. But Giulio, at Rome,

always at the ear of the indolent, pleasure-loving Leo X, had other projects. Born in 1478, the illegitimate son of a charming father, Giulio had none of the great Medici traditions, and the Medici name never stood so low as during his period of power. Himself illegitimate, he was the father of an illegitimate son, Alessandro, for whose advancement he toiled much as Alexander VI had toiled for that of Cæsar Borgia. He had not the black, bold wickedness of Alexander VI, but as Pope Clement VII, which he became in 1523, he was little less admirable. He was cunning, ambitious, and tyrannical, and during his pontificate he contrived not only to make many powerful enemies and to see both Rome and Florence under siege, but to lose England for the Church.

We move, however, too fast. The year is 1519 and Lorenzo is dead, and the rightful heir to the Medici wealth and power was to be kept out. To do this Giulio himself moved to Florence and settled in the Medici palace, and on his return to Rome Cardinal Passerini was installed in the Medici palace in his stead, nominally as the custodian of little Catherine de' Medici and Ippolito, a boy of ten, the illegitimate son of Giuliano, Duke of Nemours. That Florence should have put up with this Roman control shows us how enfeebled was her once proud spirit. In 1521 Leo X died, to be succeeded, in spite of all Giulio's efforts, by Adrian of Utrecht, as Adrian VI, a good, sincere man who, had he lived, might have enormously changed the course not only of Italian but of English history. He survived, however, for less than two years, and then came Giulio's chance, and he was elected Pope Clement VII.

Clement's first duty was to make Florence secure, and he therefore sent his son Alessandro, then about thirteen, to join the others at the Medici palace, which thus now

contained a resident cardinal, watchful of Medici interests; a legitimate daughter of Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino (but owing to quarrels she was removed to a convent); an illegitimate son of Giuliano, Duke of Nemours, the nominal heir and already a member of the Government; and the Pope's illegitimate son, of whose origin, however, nothing was said, although it was implied that Lorenzo, Duke of Nemours, was his father.

This was the state of affairs during Clement's war with the Emperor Charles V,[1] which ended with the siege of Rome and the imprisonment of the Pope in the Castle of S. Angelo for some months until he contrived to escape to Orvieto; and meanwhile Florence, realizing his powerlessness, uttered a decree again banishing the Medici family, and in 1527 they were sent forth from the city for the third time. But even now, when the move was so safe, Florence lacked courage to carry it out until a member of the Medici family, furious at the presence of the base-born Medici in the palace, and a professed hater of her base-born uncle Clement VII and all his ways—Clarice Strozzi, née Clarice de' Medici, granddaughter of Lorenzo the Magnificent—came herself to this house and drove the usurpers from it with her extremely capable tongue.

To explain clearly the position of the Florentine Republic at this time would be too deeply to delve into history, but it may briefly be said that by means of humiliating surrenders and much crafty diplomacy, Clement VII was able to bring about in 1529 peace between the Emperor Charles V and Francis I of France, by which Charles was left master of Italy, while his partner and ally in these transactions, Clement, expected for his own share certain

[1] It was Charles V who said of Giotto's Campanile that it ought to be kept in a glass case.

benefits in which the humiliation of Florence and the exaltation of Alessandro came first. Florence, having taken sides with Francis, found herself in any case very badly left, with the result that at the end of 1529 Charles V's army, with the papal forces to assist, laid siege to her. The siege lasted for ten months, in which the city was most ably defended by Ferrucci, that gallant soldier whose portrait by Piero di Cosimo is in our National Gallery—No. 895—and then came a decisive battle in which the Emperor and Pope were conquerors, a thousand brave Florentines were put to death and others were imprisoned.

Alessandro de' Medici arrived at the Medici palace in 1531, and in 1532 the glorious Florentine Republic of so many years' growth, for the establishment of which so much good blood had been spilt, was declared to be at an end. Alessandro being proclaimed Duke, his first act was to order the demolition of the great bell of the Signoria which had so often called the citizens to arms or meetings of independence.

Meanwhile Ippolito, the natural son of Giuliano, Duke of Nemours, and therefore the rightful heir, after having been sent on various missions by Clement VII, to keep him out of the way, settled at Bologna and took to poetry. He was a kindly, melancholy man with a deep sense of human injustice; and in 1535, when, after Clement VII's very welcome demise, the Florentine exiles who either had been banished from Florence by Alessandro or had left of their own volition rather than live in the city under such a contemptible ruler, sent an embassy to the Emperor Charles V to help them against this new tyrant, Ippolito headed it; but Alessandro prudently arranged for his assassination en route.

It is unlikely, however, that the Emperor would have

done anything, for in the following year he allowed his daughter Margaret to become Alessandro's wife. That was in 1536. In January, 1537, Lorenzino de' Medici, a cousin, one of the younger branch of the family, assuming the mantle of Brutus, or liberator, stabbed Alessandro to death while he was keeping an assignation in the house that then adjoined this palace. Thus died, at the age of twenty-six, one of the most worthless of men. And, although illegitimate, the last of the direct line of Cosimo de Medici, the Father of his Country, to govern Florence.

The next ruler came from the younger branch, to which we now turn. Old Giovanni di Bicci had two sons, Cosimo and Lorenzo. Lorenzo's son, Pier Francesco de' Medici, had a son Giovanni de' Medici. This Giovanni, who married Caterina Sforza of Milan, had also a son named Giovanni, born in 1498, and it was he who was the rightful heir when Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino, died in 1519. He was connected with both sides of the family, for his father, as I have said, was the great grandson of the first Medici on our list, and his wife was Maria Salviati, daughter of Lucrezia de' Medici—herself a daughter of Lorenzo the Magnificent—and Jacopo Salviati, a wealthy Florentine. When, however, Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino, died in 1519, Giovanni was a young man of twenty-one with an absorbing passion for fighting, which Clement VII (then Giulio) was only too keen to foster, since he wished him out of the way in order that his own projects for the ultimate advancement of the base-born Alessandro, and meanwhile of the catspaw, the base-born Ippolito, might be furthered. Giovanni had already done some good service in the field, was becoming famous as the head of his company of Black Bands, and was known as Giovanni delle Bande Nere; and his marriage to his cousin Maria Salviati and the birth of his only son

Cosimo in 1519 made no difference to his delight in warfare. He was happy only when in the field of battle, and the struggle between Francis and Charles gave him ample opportunities, fighting on the side of Charles and the Pope and doing many brave and dashing things. He died at an early age, only twenty-eight, in 1526, the idol of his men, leaving a widow and child in poverty.

Almost immediately afterwards came the third banishment of the Medici family from Florence. Giovanni's widow and their son Cosimo got along as best they could until the murder of Alessandro in 1537, when Cosimo was nearing eighteen. He was a quiet, reserved youth, who had apparently taken but little interest in public affairs, and had spent his time in the country with his mother, chiefly in field sports. But no sooner was Alessandro dead, and his slayer Lorenzino had escaped, than Cosimo approached the Florentine council and claimed to be appointed to his rightful place as head of the State, and this claim he put, or suggested, with so much humility that his wish was granted. Instantly one of the most remarkable transitions in history occurred: the youth grew up almost in a day and at once began to show unsuspected reserves of power and authority. In despair a number of the chief Florentines made an effort to depose him, and a battle was fought at Montemurlo, a few miles from Florence, between Cosimo's troops and the insurgents. That was in 1537; the victory fell to Cosimo; and his long and remarkable reign began with the imprisonment and execution of the chief rebels.

Although Cosimo made so bloody a beginning he was the first imaginative and thoughtful administrator that Florence had had since Lorenzo the Magnificent. He set himself grimly to build upon the ruins which the past forty

and more years had produced; and by the end of his reign he had worked wonders. As first he lived in the Medici palace, but after marrying a wealthy wife, Eleanora of Toledo, he transferred his home to the Signoria, now called the Palazzo Vecchio, as a safer spot, and established a bodyguard of Swiss lancers in Orcagna's loggia, close by.[1] Later he bought the unfinished Pitti palace with his wife's money, finished it, and moved there. Meanwhile he was strengthening his position in every way by alliances and treaties, and also by the convenient murder of Lorenzino, the Brutus who had rid Florence of Alessandro ten years earlier, and whose presence in the flesh could not but be a cause of anxiety since Lorenzino derived from an elder son of the Medici, and Cosimo from a younger. In 1555 the ancient republic of Siena fell to Cosimo's troops after a cruel and barbarous siege and was thereafter merged in Tuscany, and in 1570 Cosimo assumed the title of Cosimo I, Grand Duke of Tuscany, and was crowned at Rome.

Whether or not the common accusation against the Medici as a family, that they had but one motive—mercenary ambition and self-aggrandisement—is true, the fact remains that the crown did not reach their brows until one hundred and seventy years from the first appearance of old Giovanni di Bicci in Florentine affairs. The statue of Cosimo I in the Piazza della Signoria has a bas-relief of his coronation. He was then fifty-one; he lived but four more years, and when he died he left a dukedom flourishing in every way: rich, powerful, busy, and enlightened. He had developed and encouraged the arts, capriciously, as Cellini's "Autobiography" tells us, but genuinely too, as we can see at the Uffizi and the Pitti. The arts, however, were not what they had been, for the great period had passed and Florence was in the trough of the wave. Yet Cosimo found the best

[1] Hence its new name, Loggia de' Lanzi.

men he could—Cellini, Bronzino, and Vasari—and kept them busy. But his greatest achievements as a connoisseur were his interest in Etruscan remains and the excavations at Arezzo and elsewhere which yielded the priceless relics now at the Archæological Museum.

With Cosimo I this swift review of the Medici family ends. The rest have little interest for the visitor to Florence to-day, for whom Cellini's Perseus, made to Cosimo I's order, is the last great artistic achievement in the city in point of time. But I may say that Cosimo I's direct descendants occupied the throne (as it had now become) until the death of Gian Gastone, son of Cosimo III, who died in 1737. Tuscany passed to Austria until 1801. In 1807 it became French, and in 1814 Austrian again. In 1860 it was merged in the Kingdom of Italy under the rule of the Monarch who has given his name to the great new Piazza —Vittorio Emmanuele.

After Gian Gastone's death one other Medici remained alive: Anna Maria Ludovica, daughter of Cosimo III. Born in 1667, she married the Elector Palatine of the Rhine, and survived until 1743. It was she who left to the city the priceless Medici collections, as I have stated in chapter VIII. The earlier and greatest of the Medici are buried in the church of S. Lorenzo or in Michelangelo's sacristy; the later Medici, beginning with Giovanni delle Bande Nere and his wife, and their son Cosimo I, are in the gorgeous mausoleum that adjoins S. Lorenzo and ought to be steadily enriched with precious marbles; but is not.

Such is an outline of the history of this wonderful family, and we leave their ancient home, built by the greatest and wisest of them, with mixed feelings of admiration and pity. They were seldom lovable; they were often despicable; but where they were great they were very great indeed.

A Latin inscription in the courtyard reminds the traveller of the distinction which the house possesses, calling it the home not only of princes but of knowledge herself and a treasury of the arts. But Florence, although it bought the palace from the Riccardi family a century and more ago, has never cared to give it back its rightful name.