CHAPTER VIII

THE UFFIZI: THE BUILDING AND THE COLLECTORS

The growth of a gallery—Vasari's Passaggio—Cosimo I—Francis I—Ferdinand I—Ferdinand II—Cosimo III—Anna Maria Ludovica de' Medici—Pietro-Leopoldo—The statues of the façade—Art, literature, arms, science, and learning—The omissions—Florentine rapacity—An antique custom—Window views—The Uffizi drawings—The best picture.

THE foreigner should understand at once that any inquiries into the history of the Uffizi family—such as for example yield interesting results in the case of the Pazzi and the Albizzi—are doomed to failure: because Uffizi merely means offices. The Palazzo degli Uffizi, or palace of offices, was built by Vasari, the biographer of the artists, for Cosimo I, who having taken the Signoria, or Palazzo Vecchio, for his own home, wished to provide another building for the municipal government. It was begun in 1560 and still so far fulfils its original purpose as to contain the general post office, while it also houses certain Tuscan archives and the national library.

A glance at Piero di Cosimo's portrait of Ferrucci in our National Gallery will show that an ordinary Florentine street preceded the erection of the Uffizi. At that time the top storey of the building, as it now exists, was an open terrace affording a pleasant promenade from the Palazzo Vecchio down to the river and back to the Loggia de' Lanzi. Beneath this were studios and workrooms

where Cosimo's army of artists and craftsmen with (Bronzino and Cellini as the most famous) were kept busy; while the public offices were on the ground floor. Then, as his family increased, Cosimo decided to move, and the incomplete and abandoned Pitti Palace was bought and finished. In 1565, as we have seen, Francis, Cosimo's son, married and was installed in the Palazzo Vecchio, and it was then that Vasari was called upon to construct the Passaggio which unites the Palazzo Vecchio and the Pitti, crossing the river by the Ponte Vecchio—Cosimo's idea (borrowed it is said from Homer's description of the passage uniting the palaces of Priam and Hector) being not only that he and his son might have access to each other, but that in the event of danger on the other side of the river a body of soldiers could be swiftly and secretly mobilized there.

Cosimo I died in 1574, and Francis I (1574-1587) succeeded him not only in rule but in that patronage of the arts which was one of the finest Medicean traditions; and it was he who first thought of making the Uffizi a picture gallery. To do this was simple: it merely meant the loss of part of the terrace by walling and roofing it in. Ferdinand I (1587-1609) added the pretty Tribuna and other rooms, and brought hither a number of the treasures from the Villa Medici at Rome. Cosimo II (1609-1621) did little, but Ferdinand II (1621-1670) completed the roofing in of the terraces, placed there his own collection of drawings and a valuable collection of Venetian pictures which he had bought, together with those that his wife Vittoria della Rovere had brought him from Urbino, while his brothers, Cardinal Giovanni Carlo de' Medici and Cardinal Leopoldo de' Medici (the extremely ugly man with the curling chin, at the head of the Uffizi stairs), added theirs. Giovanni Carlo's pictures, which mostly went to the Pitti,

MADONNA AND CHILD

FROM THE PAINTING BY LUCA SIGNORELLI IN THE UFFIZI

were varied; but Leopold's were chiefly portraits of artists, wherever possible painted by themselves, a collection which is steadily being added to at the present time and is to be seen in several rooms of the Uffizi, and those miniature portraits of men of eminence which we shall see in the corridor between the Poccetti Gallery and Salon of Justice at the Pitti. Cosimo III (1670-1723) added the Dutch pictures and the famous Venus de' Medici and other Tribuna statuary.

The galleries remained the private property of the Medici family until the Electress Palatine, Anna Maria Ludovica de' Medici, daughter of Cosimo III and great niece of the Cardinal Leopold, bequeathed all these treasures, to which she had greatly added, together with bronzes now in the Bargello, Etruscan antiquities now in the Archæological Museum, tapestries also there, and books in the Laurentian library, to Florence for ever, on condition that they should never be removed from Florence and should exist for the benefit of the public. Her death was in 1743, and with her passed away the last descendant of that Giovanni de' Medici (1360-1429) whom we saw giving commissions to Donatello, building the children's hospital, and helping Florence to the best of his power: so that the first Medici and the last were akin in love of art and in generosity to their beautiful city.

The new Austrian Grand Dukes continued to add to the Uffizi, particularly Pietro-Leopoldo (1765-1790), who also founded the Accademia. To him was due the assembling, under the Uffizi roof, of all the outlying pictures then belonging to the State, including those in the gallery of the hospital of S. Maria Nuova, which owned, among others, the famous Hugo van der Goes. It was he also who brought together from Rome the Niobe statues and

constructed a room for them. Leopold II added the Iscrizioni.

It was as recently as 1842 to 1856 that the statues of the great Florentines were placed in the portico. These, beginning at the Palazzo Vecchio, are, first, against the inner wall, Cosimo Pater (1389-1464) and Lorenzo the Magnificent (1450-1492); then, outside: Orcagna; Andrea Pisano, of the first Baptistery doors; Giotto and Donatello; Alberti, who could do everything and who designed the façade of S. Maria Novella; Leonardo and Michelangelo. Next, three poets, Dante (1265-1321), Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374), and Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375). Then Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527), the statesman, and Francesco Guicciardini (1482-1540), the historian. That completes the first side.

At the end are Amerigo Vespucci (1451-1512), the explorer, who gave his name to America, and Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), the astronomer; and above is Cosimo I, the first Grand Duke.

On the Uffizi's river façade are four figures only—and hundreds of swallows' nests. The figures are Francesco Ferrucci, who died in 1530, the general painted by Piero di Cosimo in our National Gallery, who recaptured Volterra from Pope Clement VII in 1529; Giovanni delle Bande Nere (1500-1527), father of Cosimo I, and a great fighting man; Piero Capponi, who died in 1496, and delivered Florence from Charles VIII in 1494, by threatening to ring the city bells; and Farinata degli Uberti, an earlier soldier, who died in 1264 and is in the "Divina Commedia" as a hero. It was he who repulsed the Ghibelline suggestion that Florence should be destroyed and the inhabitants emigrate to Empoli.

Working back towards the Loggia de' Lanzi we find

less-known names: Pietro Antonio Michele (1679-1737), the botanist; Francesco Redi (1626-1697), a poet and a man of science; Paolo Mascagni (1732-1815), the anatomist; Andrea Cesalpino (1519-1603), the philosopher; S. Antonio (died 1461), Prior of the Convent of S. Marco and Archbishop of Florence; Francesco Accorso (1182-1229), the jurist; Guido Aretino (eleventh century), musician; and Benvenuto Cellini (1500-1572), the goldsmith and sculptor. The most notable omissions are Arnolfo and Brunelleschi (but these are, as we have seen, on the façade of the Palazzo de' Canonici, opposite the south side of the cathedral), Ghiberti, Fra Angelico, and Savonarola. Personally I should like to have still others here, among them Giorgio Vasari, in recognition of his enthusiastic and entertaining biographies of the Florentine artists, to say nothing of the circumstance that he designed this building.

Before we enter any Florentine gallery let me say that there is only one free day and that the crowded Sabbath. Admittance to all is charged for and there is no readmission. The King has recently given to the State a number of his pictures to be used in the furtherance of art; but the State gives nothing. Visitors, however, who can satisfy the authorities that they are desirous of studying the works of art with a serious purpose can obtain free passes; but only after certain preliminaries, which include a séance with a photographer to satisfy the doorkeeper, by comparing the real and counterfeit physiognomies, that no illicit transference of the precious privilege has been made.

Infirm, languid visitors should get it clearly into their heads (1) that the tour of the Uffizi means a long walk and (2) that there is a lift. You find it in the umbrella room—at every Florentine gallery and museum is an official

whose one object in life is to take away your umbrella—and whatever fee is charged is worth paying. But walking down the stairs is imperative, because otherwise one would miss Silenus and Bacchus, and a beautiful urgent Mars, in bronze, together with other fine sculptured things.

One should never forget, in any gallery in Florence, to look out of the windows. There is always a courtyard, a street, or a spire against the sky; and at the Uffizi there are the river and bridges and mountains. From the loggia of the Palazzo Vecchio I once saw a woman with some twenty or thirty city pigeons on the table of her little room, feeding them with maize.

Except for glimpses of the river and the Via Guicciardini which it gives, I advise no one to walk through the passage uniting the Pitti and the Uffizi—unless of course bent on catching some of the ancient thrill when armed men ran swiftly from one palace to the other to quell a disturbance or repulse an assault. Particularly does this counsel apply to wet days, when all the windows are closed and there is no air. A certain interest attaches to the myriad portraits which line the walls, chiefly of the Medici and comparatively recent worthies; but one must have a glutton's passion either for paint or history to wish to examine these. As a matter of fact, only a lightning-speed tourist could possibly think of seeing both the Uffizi and the Pitti on the same day, and therefore the need of the passage disappears. It is hard worked only on Sundays.