

other appointed governors. These same municipal councils have more recently been the refuge of what remained of order and government when foreign invaders were on our soil, or civil dissensions afflicted us with domestic chaos. They sowed the seed of what has become the national consciousness of Mexico.'

Many mighty reverses are recorded

in Spain's history. But perhaps the greatest of all was the drowning in blood of municipal liberty, based on the will of the people. Happily, though crushed in Castile, these liberties survived and flourished in America. Facile talkers still declaim of America's former bondage; but the true bondage after Charles V was not across the Atlantic. It was here in Spain.

## MICHELANGELO BUONARROTI

BY GEORG BRANDES

*[In his monumental work, Michelangelo Buonarroti, just published by the Gyldendalske Boghandel Nordisk Forlag at Copenhagen, Georg Brandes, now nearing his eightieth year, is said by Scandinavian critics to have excelled his previous biographical studies, William Shakespeare, Goethe, Voltaire, and Julius Cæsar. What the Danish critic himself terms the 'overture' to the work, which consists of two massive volumes with many illustrations, is translated here.]*

WHEN to-day one visits Florence for the first time, it is customary, in order to obtain a good view of the city, to take a drive along the Via dei Colli, the road which twists in and out like some broad winding stairway, up the hills where Michelangelo built fortifications for the defense of Florence. If the month is May, the tour is through a veritable flower-garden (which gives Florence its name), through an atmosphere fragrant with the scent of thousands upon thousands of full-blown roses; and at each turn of the road the vista reveals more of the fine and rarified landscape, through which winds the Arno River, and in which, like some mosaic flower in the bottom of a bowl, Florence appears, with its cathedral, with Giotto's bell-tower in black and white marble, with its palaces, equally suited to defense and festival, and with its

wonderfully decorated churches and cloisters.

It was on that hill, in 1875, that a great monument in honor of the four-hundredth anniversary of Michelangelo's birth was unveiled to Florence's greatest son — the greatest still, even though we do not forget Dante. Here, Michelangelo's David in bronze rests high upon its marble base, and from it extend reclining bronze figures, replicas of the Morning, Day, Evening, and Night in the Sacristy of San Lorenzo.

So gigantic are these figures that they can be seen to advantage, even with the illimitable blue of the sky as background. The entire monument makes a mighty impression, though from the strictly artistic point of view, it may be considered sacrilege. There is no artistic excuse for establishing direct contact between figures which have not the

slightest relation to each other, and which were created with an interval of thirty years between them; and it is, moreover, a sin to touch the intellect of Michelangelo, or to reproduce in another material, in which justice cannot be done them, the figures that he conceived, and himself executed, in marble.

Greek antiquity considered bronze a finer stuff than marble; but Michelangelo disdained it. How much simpler and nobler the David appeared, as it was seen in the original at the foot of the Palazzo Vecchio, in 1870, although the height of the place dwarfed it and the rain had ruined the surface! And yet, despite all artistic objections, we must admit that the monument fulfills its purpose; it announces to natives and to strangers that Michelangelo was the man who held dominion over the city of Firenze, has ruled it close upon four hundred and fifty years, and will retain his suzerainty as long as civilization lasts.

The traveler who visits Rome after Florence will see, far in the distance, hovering above the world-city, the dome of San Pietro, the most beautiful on earth—far more beautiful than either of its forerunners, the domes of the Pantheon and of Santa Maria del Fiore. Michelangelo was past eighty when he designed this and superintended the making of a wooden model. Though he never saw the execution of his plan, the majestic curved line of the world's largest and highest dome is due entirely to the master himself. Guided solely by unerring instinct,—as it were, unconsciously,—Michelangelo here solved a problem that his conscious mind could scarcely have comprehended; for it was beyond the mathematics of that time. We must explain the secret of this structure's unique effect by the complete unity of its plastic and mechanical beauty.

At our first glance, then, we find Michelangelo the sculptor ruling Florence, and Rome lying at the feet of Michelangelo the architect. But when we are in Rome itself, we find that it is as a painter that the master unfolds his superiority. In a single building, the Sistine Chapel, he carries out the most important and all-encompassing task of his life, the decoration of the ceiling, a welling-forth of the youthful and yet virile quality characteristic of all his work; and a generation later, his painting of the Last Judgment, witnessing to artistic perfection beyond comparison. Even more powerful than Dante's poetic expression in the *Inferno*, it reveals a despair of humankind. For here, even more than in the *Divine Comedy*, the sorrowful and the terrible detract from the interest in the celestial. The figures of those who have risen from the grave and are raised to eternal bliss are, with Michelangelo, no less terror-stricken than the sinners cast from heaven into the abyss below. We know at the first glance that this artist's crowning aim is the sublime; he seeks to conquer by grandeur, not by emotion. His lips are not made for smiles, nor are the countenances of his figures. For the sake of comparison, reflect what the smile meant to Leonardo and to Luini.

There is in antique art a unity that excluded the individual. The Greek artist aimed in his work to forget personality. When we admire the beauty of the Parthenon frieze, we do not think of Phidias. The work speaks, and the artist is silent.

The art of the Renaissance, and especially that of Michelangelo, is different. His personal idiosyncrasies reveal themselves throughout all his works, the pride of his soul, the wild independence of his mind. He is more personal, not only than any other artist of Greek antiquity, but than any other of the Italian Renaissance.

Like the art of the Egyptians, that of the Middle Ages was a culture art, determined by ecclesiastical domination. Whether it remains identified with the monotonous forms of the Byzantine, or gives itself over to the emotions, it presents saints of both sexes, whose long cloaks cover thin, loose, formless bodies. These beings seem ashamed of possessing bodies at all. They know, as do those who brought them forth, that this bodily world is sinful, and that the mortification of the flesh is of chief importance.

The Renaissance, from the very first, appears as a violent reaction against this conception, and it nowhere finds more violent expression than at the hands of Michelangelo. To him the nude human body was the very crown of existence; not a sinful frame, but the visualization of beauty and the decisive and true subject for ideal art. In this reaction there may be something heathenish. Certainly some ecclesiastical dignitaries were scandalized when the ceiling in the chapel of the Holy Father was thus peopled with swarms of stark-naked youths. But this was no direct exposition of heathenism, nor was it an expression of aversion for Catholicism — it was only the purest enthusiasm for nature.

Three characteristics usually strike the modern beholder who, without preconceptions, finds himself before the art of Michelangelo. The first is its nudity: it is not the face only, but the whole naked body that expresses individuality — for Michelangelo always presents the human form in motion. The secret of this treatment is best expressed by the word *contraposta*, that is, the transference of the underlying principle to the symmetrical two halves of the body. Never was nudity made so expressive as by him; never was so much weight laid upon the language spoken by the play of the muscles.

The next characteristic is Michelangelo's striving for the vast, taking that word in the double meaning of sublime and colossal. He had shown himself capable of sublimity with his Pieta, which dates from the artist's early twenties; the propensity for the colossal crops out in the later twenties, in his David, who, although a dwarf before Goliath, is represented as himself gigantic. Sometimes this yearning for the immense draws him toward the monstrous, as when, in Carrara, he feels the desire to carve a mountain into a statue.

This leaning toward the outwardly great, however, is of secondary importance, and is often caused by necessity. An artist who must decorate a ceiling at a dizzy height cannot make use of miniature, but must produce big figures. One who must decorate an immense wall-surface needs especially to make the upper figures larger than nature, so that they can be seen, and will not lose interest through foreshortening when compared with figures closer to the eye. That is why the Christ and the Madonna in the painting of the Last Judgment are necessarily so gigantic.

But, as has already been said, with Michelangelo the superficially grand was not the most important thing. The determining consideration with him was the inner pride of his soul. Though a votary of nature, he was anything but a realist, anything but an imitator of actuality, like the Florentines before him. In all that he produced, he added the stamp of his own unquestioned superiority. The least of his sketches carry authority; they are subjectively free, lending to the plastic object his own mental strength, or fearlessness, or dignified elegance. Never was he merely natural and human, but always supernatural and superhuman as well. He is always truthful; but he is not

merely truthful: he is truthful and sublime.

In this way we reach the third phase of his character and his art. This art is pathetic. There is an overflowing energy. Everything in it is either bound or loosened passion. At first there are in his character both harmony and peace. Even in the Pièta there is not only balance and clarity, but a quiet earnestness from which every thought of action is excluded. Yes, the Satyr standing next to his Bacchus does show mischief, but as the artist in him develops, the violent seeks an outlet; it attains to the odd, the convulsive. Dignity, however, is his patent of nobility. It is found both in tempestuous passion and in the prophetic inner musings, always existent, whether as emotion or as outward gesture.

Michelangelo is a world in himself. A life-work like his is not to be explained without considering the complex character of the man in its abilities and weaknesses, and without his indescribable, many-sided genius. He cannot be understood without the entire artistic and literary development of the Italy of his time; without the history and art of Tuscany; without humanism; without Ghirlandajo; without Lorenzo de' Medici; without Bertoldo and the garden of San Marco.

That which is fundamental in Michelangelo's art, then, is to be seen first, in the relation which he bears to antiquity, that is, to the sculpture of the Romans and the imaginative world of the Greeks; and secondly, in the attitude which he himself assumed toward the Bible, especially the Old Testament, which seems completely to have filled his mind.

Here, then, we find two influences which are fundamental — Hellas and Palestine. Hellas affects him because of the relics of antiquity which the soil of

Italy has given forth — excavated works like the Discobolos, the torso of Hercules, the Laocoön, and innumerable carved stones. He is influenced by Palestine through the myths of Creation, the prophets, Moses, the legend about the Flood, and finally, through the stories about the Mother of Jesus and her Son, and the latter's sufferings and death.

The New Testament never appealed to him overmuch. As a matter of fact, whatever there is of kindness and tenderness in the gospel is foreign to his own nature. Even his Madonnas are never gentle, but serious, proud, melancholy, lovable without tenderness, even when the Child plays with them. Usually we find them with eyes averted. Michelangelo's understanding of the Madonna is expressed by her controlled grief as she sits with the body of her Son in her lap. To him the Crucified is one unjustly sentenced, who until his last breath rebels against his executioners. Michelangelo's Resurrected is not the superhuman being who calmly and in splendor rises from the grave, but the apparition of a powerful form which, with a single thrust of the shoulder, has caused the stone of the tomb to burst asunder. Two or three times Michelangelo's conception of the Christ figure has been wrong. The naked figure in Minerva was ruined by a pupil. But he has at least stamped the figure of Jehovah for all time.

As is well known, two presentments of Michelangelo exist, those of Vasari and of Condivi, the latter being directly inspired by the ageing artist, with his odd, gruff mannerisms, who was jealous of his unconditioned originality and did not want to seem to owe anything to any teacher. At thirteen the boy had been taken by his father, who had held out as long as he could against his son's desire to enter upon an artist's career,

to Domenico Ghirlandajo, the best teacher of the art of painting that Florence possessed. About this time Ghirlandajo was engaged on the frescoes in the choir of Santa Maria Novella, and made use of a number of his students as assistants. Here, apparently, Michelangelo learned the main principles in fresco painting, so that when Julius II set him his great task, he could show such surprising skill.

Since as an old man he bemoaned the fact that he had not at once been apprenticed to a sculptor, we have a right to believe that his place as a student of Ghirlandajo was not something to be readily given up. However stubbornly he may have maintained that sculpture was merely his avocation, it was not of his own volition that he left the painter's studio. The reason was that Lorenzo de' Medici addressed himself to Ghirlandajo for the purpose of getting some students for a school of sculpture which he desired to establish in the garden of San Marco's cloister. Ghirlandajo chose Michelangelo and his friend Granacci.

After he had set eyes upon the collection of sculpture belonging to the Medici, he never returned to the painter's studio. The antique statues altogether enthralled him. As he wandered there in the shaded walks of San Marco, the boy had before him the masterpieces of the ancients, and he must have felt within him a great desire to deal with marble. The stone-cutters who were building walls and cutting ornaments for the newly established library helped him in his study; for these good people gave him a piece of marble and some sculptor's tools, with which he made his earliest attempt, the head of a faun.

It was Lorenzo himself who showed and explained to the boy his art treasures, gems, and coins. The youth became familiar with what the Florentine

painters before him had achieved. The naïve style that is now called Pre-Raphaelite, could not possibly appeal to him or to his generation, nor could the archaic style which captivated Thorvaldsen and his period. Michelangelo aimed at the perfect, and found it first in statues like the Torso, and later in the Laocoön. He had for these the deepest admiration. They released within him a creative desire for mastery in the presentation of the human body, or of life as a hopeless but energetic fight, the tragically sublime.

Most important of all was the intellectual liberation that Michelangelo experienced, together with his soaring faith in a platonic ideal, joy in that nature which for so long had been condemned; and a passionate love for the human form, its miraculous construction, the wonderful play of its muscles, its entire hidden mechanism, the whole body as an expression of sorrow and happiness, anger, suffering, action, and repose.

Equipped with the traditions of antiquity as both offensive and defensive weapons, Michelangelo found himself before the Old Testament. It is at the cross-road where Hellas meets in his mind with Palestine, that Michelangelo is at his best. Julius II had decided on figures of the twelve Apostles as the decoration of the Sistine Chapel. Michelangelo replied that as a ceiling decoration they would be *una povera cosa*. 'Do as you please,' replied the Pope; and Michelangelo practically eliminated the traditional Christian element.

According to the intellectual traditions of the time, it was customary to look upon heathen sibyls and Hebrew prophets as similar. Michelangelo's comparative indifference to woman as a sex disappeared when she showed herself inspired, divinely spiritualized, as the sibyl was then believed to be. The

prophet was to him an understood and beloved character, for in Michelangelo himself there was something prophetic. The pathos that dwelt within him had this quality, and in it he was kin to some of the chief characters of the Old Testament. But for all that, his intellect was of his own time, heathenish, Greco-Roman.

More important than the fact that he created prophets and sibyls is the fact that he created the Creator. No human being before Michelangelo had been able to present creative activity itself. He could do this because it was his own. The powerful creative force within him found expression in the figure of the Creator, which since that time has stood as the model for all, particularly because Raphael immediately made the type his own.

His genius did not bring happiness

to Michelangelo. He was by nature melancholy, and held aloof from his surroundings. Read his confession in his *Canzoniere*; when he looks back, he does not find a single day that he can call his own. All is a restless whirlpool of human emotions, to none of which he is a stranger. Everything causes him suffering — the transitory nature of all that is, and his own mind, the worst torment of all. When he mentions the history of his own works, it is as a continual chain of disturbance and persecution.

Michelangelo could work only when by himself. He needed neither advice nor assistance. Spectators he could not tolerate. Having always contended that he had himself never had a teacher, he never trained a single pupil; and he closed up his cartoons in the face of those who wished to learn.

## GERMAN UNIVERSITIES TO-DAY

BY LEVIN L. SCHÜCKING

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WHEN the French occupied Strassburg, toward the end of 1918, the German officials who were treated with the most conspicuous harshness were the University professors. Some of them, who were known for their political activity during the war, had to leave the town precipitately before the entrance of the French authorities, who instantly seized all their property and publicly sold the very books from their writing-tables. But even members of the University who had not gone in for pol-

itics at all experienced strange things. A friend told me that he found himself in a situation which makes one remember burning Troy. Not being allowed to take with him more than he could carry in his arms, he had the choice between saving his fur coat or his old mother. Later on, when the French University was reopened, M. Poincaré himself, in a great speech, settled accounts with the German professors on Alsatian soil, and undeceived his audience as to the pretensions of German