

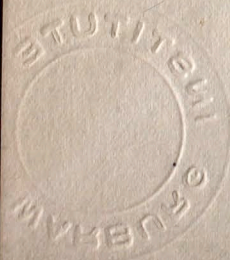
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THE LANGHAM SERIES
AN ILLUSTRATED COLLECTION
OF ART MONOGRAPHS



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London, National Gallery.

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MARS AND VENUS.

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SANDRO BOTTICELLI

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BY
E. SCHAEFFER

TRANSLATED BY
FRANCIS F. COX

SIEGLE HILL & CO.

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1910



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CONTENTS

Introductory—Botticelli's Place in Florentine Art—His Early History—Filippo Lippi, the Pollajuoli, Verrocchio—*Fortitude*—*Judith* and *Holofernes*—*S. Sebastian*—Botticelli, Landscape Artist—Painter of Madonnas—Influence of Dante—The *Magnificat*—*Madonna of the Palms*—*Adoration of the Magi*—The Medici at Florence—*S. Augustine*—Botticelli Summoned to Rome—The Frescoes of the Sistine Chapel—The Louvre Frescoes—Leone Battista Alberti—*Pallas Subduing a Centaur*—*Spring*—*Birth of Venus*—*Mars and Venus*—*Calumny of Apelles*—Savonarola—The *Nativity*—The *Divina Commedia*—Poverty and Neglect—The End—List of Works.

ILLUSTRATIONS

MARS AND VENUS. London, National Gallery (Photogravure)	Frontispiece
	Facing page
FORTITUDE. Florence, Uffizi	6
S. SEBASTIAN. Berlin, Royal Gallery	10
HEAD OF THE MADONNA. Florence, Uffizi (From the "Magnificat")	20
THE DAUGHTERS OF JETHRO. Rome, Sistine Chapel (Detail from the History of Moses)	36
SPRING. Florence, Accademia	44
THE BIRTH OF VENUS. Florence, Uffizi (Photogravure)	46
SALOME. Florence, Accademia	50
THE CALUMNY OF APELLES. Florence, Uffizi	52
THE NATIVITY. London, National Gallery	60

SANDRO BOTTICELLI

I

IN a chapel of the church of S. Maria Maggiore at Florence there was preserved during long centuries a painting of the *Assumption of the Virgin*, the creation of Sandro Botticelli. The Holy Inquisition had detected in this apparently pious work the taint of an abominable heresy, and shrouded it by means of a curtain from the gaze of true believers. For Botticelli in his conception of the angels had adhered to a damnable doctrine of Origen, who maintained that the souls of those angels who remained neutral at the time of Lucifer's rebellion were doomed by the Deity to work out their salvation by undergoing a period of probation in the bodies of men. To be consistent in its severity, the Inquisition should have sequestered or burnt every picture that came from the hand of Botticelli; for all are open to the same reproach; in each we divine beneath the forms of men the souls of banished angels.

"Child of the Sun, far from my father's kingdom,
Longing for home . . ."

It is thus that we interpret the wistful gaze of Botticelli's men and women; this is the feeling that speaks in their lofty gestures, and yet more eloquently in their buoyant forms, so free from the taint of earth's heaviness, music in line and colour. Christian Saints and pagan Graces, they pace forlorn with alien footsteps through this vale of tears, chilled by vain yearnings for a lost homeland where all is sunshine and brightness.

In order to recognise as an historical necessity the apparition of Botticelli in the development of Florentine culture, we must carry our thoughts very far back. Throughout the whole of the Middle Ages, up to the beginning of the Quattrocento, barren party strife ran high in the narrow streets of the city on the Arno. Her strongly-built, battlemented houses were often enough converted into fortresses, and the swords of those who dwelt therein seldom rusted through want of use. To this very day the tower of the Palazzo Vecchio rears its head far above the roofs for a token of those stormy times, as though it still kept watch and ward against the foe. The very chronicles of the Trecento would seem to have been written not with the pen but with the sword, and in their sonorous periods we

hear at times the menacing rattle of the panoply of War.

"Liberty" was the all-potent watchword of the day. It comprised all that the Florentines ambitioned on this side of the tomb; beauty was the hoped-for heritage of a world beyond the grave. Yet were there few so learned that the written word had power to convey to them any comprehensible idea of the joys of Heaven; and it became the task of Art to foreshadow in rich gold and glowing colour, for the benefit of the "*uomini grossi, che non sanno lettere*," the glories of the Life to come. This could, of course, only be accomplished by means of imagery borrowed from the material life of this world, but there was never a question of depicting that life for its own sake alone.

By degrees the turmoil of strife was stilled, and Peace reigned once more in Florence. No longer obscured by the mists of angry passions, the eyes of the Florentine citizen fastened with joyous eagerness upon the glories of this mortal world. This newly developed sense found expression in a new departure in Art. From henceforth it is the beauties of our earthly existence—Man and the things about him—that claim the tribute of the painter's skill. Artists arose who, following in the

train of Donatello and Masaccio, achieved mastery over all the forms of expression known to Art, and brought whole realms of fresh material within their scope. Those mighty masters whose imagery still breathed all the sinister but epic turbulence of the Trecento were followed by disciples who were already in a position to reap where their forerunners had sown. The realm of the earthly was annexed to the domain of Art, and they discoursed in glowing compositions of the charms of this New World. Fra Filippo Lippi's fresco of *Herod's Feast* in the Duomo of Prato embodies all that makes for *joie de vivre*. The radiantly lighted halls resound with melody, youths arrayed in festal attire meet the eye on every side, and fluttering draperies suggest the gracious lines of slender virgin forms. "Wise men" declared this age, for which Cosimo de' Medici stood sponsor, "to be the best that had ever fallen to the lot of Florence." But no later than in the next generation there were to be found unwise men, who no longer delighted in mere existence, to whom reality was stale and repellent, who yearned for a life of greater spirituality, and demanded sensations of a higher degree of rarity and refinement.

Now the first artist to reject beyond the pale of his art all that belonged to the material world—

timidly and tentatively at first, but as time went on, with ever-increasing vehemence—and to fix on his canvas in form and colour a dream of plaintive beauty, was Sandro Botticelli. His aristocratic nature was certainly not inherited from his father; for old Mariano Filipepi plied the honest trade of a tanner, and vented his displeasure freely enough on his youthful Sandro. For the latter learning had no charms; neither could he reconcile himself for long to the routine of a goldsmith's workshop. So the old man brought the lad, who had acquired in the meantime—no one knows why*—the surname of Botticelli, to Fra Filippo, the jovial painter-monk. But the joyous sensuousness of the Master's style remained all his life long uncongenial to Sandro. He admired the Frate's compositions, but his robustly healthy types excited in him no feeling but that of repugnance. All Botticelli's aspirations lay in the direction of charm and graceful elegance, and these were precisely the qualities in which Fra Filippo's creations were lacking; hence it was that Sandro at an early stage in his career chose out Antonio Pollajuolo and Andrea del Verrocchio to

* It is commonly accepted that Sandro derived his surname of Botticelli from the goldsmith to whom he was apprenticed.

be his models. Pleasing to him indeed were the plastic modelling of Antonio's figures, the firmness and certainty of his line, his joy in the delicate moulding of youthful forms. Verrocchio, too, appealed to him by his sense of all that was bright and pleasing, which yet never degenerated into meticulous trifling, and it is to Verrocchio's influence that modern critics are prone to impute all such details as the rounded type of face encountered in Botticelli's early compositions, the protuberant, bulging foreheads of his earlier Madonnas, their elevated brows and drooping eyelids. But even though the sight of Sandro's more youthful efforts may at times suggest to us the names of Filippo Lippi, Antonio Pollajuolo, and Andrea del Verrocchio, there is never wanting to such works a full measure of that individuality of Botticelli's which constitutes their peculiar charm.

Take for instance his allegory of Valour, that *Fortitude* of the Uffizi, which once adorned, in company with five other "Virtues" by Antonio and Piero Pollajuolo, a wall in the Florentine Mercanzia. The creations of the two brothers may likewise now be studied in the Uffizi. Comparable, in their masculine sternness and severity, with the hieratic Madonnas of the Primitives, the "Virtues"



Florence, Uffizi

FORTITUDE

of the Pollajuoli sit enthroned in niches of marble, whose finely chiselled ornamentation betrays the skilled hand of the goldsmith. *Hope* raises her eyes in conventional fashion toward Heaven, while the others gaze with cold and lofty serenity straight before them into the infinite. The background of Sandro's *Fortitude* also consists of a niche of bright-hued shining marble, wherein she sits—by no means “enthroned,” but with her head sideways inclined, idly dreaming. A mace lies in her hands, but this woman, in whom there is no trace of the virago, could never brandish the weapon in wrath. Botticelli clave to the Pollajuoli's style of composition, to their types, even to their technical methods, and yet he has painted here simply a maiden lost in meditation. His nature was essentially lyric; a woman meant more to him than a mailclad abstraction.

Yet he loved the glitter of weapons; not, however, like Castagno and Uccello, as the stern embodiment of a living principle, but purely from the painter's point of view. The sullen gleam of highly polished steel thrilled him from the first with artistic delight, and here in his *Fortitude* the glitter of the metal vambrace blends with white and blue into a delicate harmony which we should seek in vain throughout the whole range of the Pollajuoli's

compositions. Sandro's absolute mastery of line is universally recognised, but we are seldom reminded that Botticelli was also the most gifted colourist, the greatest master of technique of the Florentine Quattrocento. We may search any portion, any detail, any corner of his compositions for evidences of superlative craftsmanship, and find of a certainty more rich reward than in the entire pictures of most of his contemporaries.

Of the greatness of Botticelli's powers even in his youth we have still clearer evidence in two small pictures which found their way from Bianca Capello's "Studio" to the Uffizi. They portray two episodes in the legend of Judith—the return of the Hebrew heroine from the Assyrian camp, and the discovery of the dead body of Holofernes. Botticelli's specific qualities assert themselves here, especially in the former picture, yet more unmistakably than in the *Fortitude*. The orange and violet of the draperies harmonise with the grey of dawn in a colour-scheme which no other Florentine artist could have evolved; neither could any other have been capable of such an original conception of the figure of Judith. In republican Florence she stood for the emblem of civil liberty; but the "Liberatrix patriae suae" who lives in Donatello's

bronze—her pathetic gloom, her noble rage—left the youthful Botticelli cold. Once again he painted a dreaming woman, with all the charm that might attend a softer sister of his *Fortitude*. Like her, too, she droops her fair head, while her maiden orbs, deep sunk in reverie, reflect the grisly horror of the night that is past. Behind her the peaceful calm of dawn is shattered by the din of battle; she hears, but she heeds not. Neither fear nor joy lend wings to her footsteps. She wanders on with slow and loitering tread towards Bethulia. Botticelli appreciated to the full the charm of contrast, and therefore he gave to this patrician creature for a companion a dull-witted waiting-maid, who bears the head of Holofernes poised upon her own with the indifference of one carrying a pitcher of water. Her plebeian stride, too, stands out in sharp contrast with Judith's queenly gait.

In the *Discovery of the Body of Holofernes*, also, many traits are preserved which indicate, like finger-posts, the road of Botticelli's later development. Here, for instance, his horror of what may be described as blank spots in the composition is clearly apparent. Every single one of the Assyrian warriors surrounding the headless trunk seems to quake in his very marrow at the grisly spectacle.

Each expresses in his pose the stupefaction that overwhelms him, and every gesture reveals the individuality of the artist. This virtue Sandro occasionally elaborates into a fault. In his anxiety to portray with the highest degree of vividness the individual character of each unit, he loses sight of the general effect of all these varied expressions and gestures. The pose of one figure cramps the freedom of his neighbour's arm; the heads are squeezed together, the space seems overcrowded and the composition confused.

How close was the connection between the Botticelli of those days and Pollajuolo, the greatest Florentine master of the nude, is shown by his rendering of the corpse of Holofernes, and still more clearly by his single figure of *S. Sebastian*, dating from the year 1473, in the Berlin Museum. At one time this picture even bore the name of Antonio Pollajuolo; strangely enough, for it is full of the spirit of Botticelli! Think but for a moment of Pollajuolo's *S. Sebastian* in the National Gallery. Antonio, the sculptor-painter, saw the Saint merely as a posed figure, and his executioners only as a combination of various problems of motion. For Sandro, on the contrary, the spirit of the work was the first consideration. The minions of the law have already left the place of execution, and are



Photo. Hanfstaengl

Berlin, Royal Gallery

S. SEBASTIAN

disappearing in the distance. All is over. No one pays any further heed to the Saint, pierced with arrows and still fettered to his tree. Yet he seems unconscious of his pain. His nobly cut features, with the fine lines of suffering about the lips, are only slightly bowed. We are rather reminded of an ephebe of Praxiteles than of a Christian martyr. A few paces behind the Saint a young tree stretches its leafless branches, as though in accusation, into the air. A cypress or two, barren rocks and sea form the background of the picture. This whole setting is impressive in its dreary poverty, but are we not told that "Botticelli had no real sympathy with Nature, and always treated landscape as a mere accessory"! This maxim represents one of those evergreen fallacies of art criticism which are handed down intact from one generation of writers to the next! And no wonder! for is it not written in Leonardo da Vinci's "Treatise on Painting: "Thus said our Botticelli, that the study of landscape is a vain pursuit, and that did one but throw a sponge filled with varied colours against the wall, it would leave there a stain which would present all the features of a landscape . . . and truly that painter wrought but very dismal landscapes"?

Whether Sandro uttered these words in earnest or out of pure joy in paradox, at this distance of

time who shall decide? But if we base our judgment, not on Leonardo's phases, but on Botticelli's own compositions, we find the creator of those "tristissimi paesi" transformed into a great landscape painter. His Graces and Goddesses wend their way through a very carpet of flowers, bright with a thousand varied hues. Violets, anemones, tender young grass quivering beneath the zephyr's kiss—all are portrayed with the most painstaking observation of the individual forms of each plant and flower. Sandro paints "the golden orange in its dusky bower": many a picture of his exhales the perfume of snowy lilies and of blushing roses, and four centuries ago Botticelli had already mastered a truth that passes for a modern discovery—the poetry of barrenness, the solemn awesomeness of desolation. Seas leaden of hue and motionless, blue-grey skies, rocks cleft in deep ravines, stretches of brown sand—such "symphonies in silence," to use the language of to-day, Botticelli many a time and oft composed. There is in his landscapes a certain quality of primæval grandeur, of chaste mystery. Saints and divinities alone should dwell therein: there is no place there for those beings of mortal mould who lend such appropriate animation to the topographically conceived "views" of Baldovinetti and the Pollajuoli, or the scenery of Ghirlandajo and his school.

II

BOTTICELLI died unmarried. "One day," relates a Florentine writer of the Cinquecento, "Messer Tommaso Soderini was urging him to enter into matrimony, but Sandro answered: 'I will tell you a thing. A few nights since I dreamt that I had taken a wife. Thereupon such anguish seized me that I awoke, and, lest I might again fall asleep and once more dream the like, I arose and ran like one possessed all night long through the streets of Florence.'"

This charming anecdote, an epitome of all that has come down to us of Botticelli's attitude toward women, merely shows how Sandro, after the manner of many other great men, entrenched himself against well-meaning importunities behind a bulwark of airy badinage. In very truth an important rôle in his life was allotted to the feminine idea, and his works—more especially his Madonnas—proclaim distinctly enough that which bashfulness of spirit prevented his acknowledging. Mary, blessed and holy, remains the central figure of his creations,

but she is never the unapproachable "Regina Coeli" of the Middle Ages, enthroned in stiff, unbending glory; rather is she the timid "Ancilla Domini," doomed to suffer as no other mortal woman had suffered, and therefore better able than any other to fathom the uttermost depths of human woe.

"Vergine Madre, figlia del tuo figlio,"*

the opening line of that jubilant hymn to the Virgin which Dante put into the mouth of his S. Bernard, was inscribed by Botticelli upon the pedestal of Mary's throne in a great altar-piece of the Florentine Accademia. Taken in conjunction with the next line,

"Umile ed alta piu che creatura,"

we have here the key-note of all Botticelli's Madonnas. Majesty and humility, virgin modesty and maternal affection, spiritual self-surrender to the sacred Son—Botticelli welded the whole into an indissoluble entity. In his soul there was something both of

* "Oh, Virgin-Mother, daughter of thy Son!
Created beings all in lowliness
Surpassing, as in height above them all." . . .
(Cary's Translation.)

the monk and the troubadour; in his religious pictures Sandro seems a lyrical ascetic, with all the earnestness of conviction, and yet full of sweet melody. The lyric painter developed with the years into the master of pathos. His powers of expression became richer and fuller. The subdued and plaintive note of his earlier period now swelled into sonorous organ-tones, but even in these later creations his aim is still the same. Dante's verses shine like lode-stars above every path trodden by Sandro Botticelli, painter of Madonnas.

The art of the Middle Ages knew only the solemn Queen, about whose throne the "barons of Christ" stand arrayed like holy Paladins. Fra Filippo, Sandro's master, was the first to break with the severely conceived picture of devout ceremonial, and painted a youthful Florentine caressing her *bambino*, while a couple of merry angel-boys watch the twain at their familiar sport. Botticelli adopted this idea of his teacher's, but in accordance with his own innermost nature spiritualised it, and turned the family idyll into a tragedy. An early Madonna of Sandro's, which once belonged to Prince Chigi, reveals the entire essential difference between Botticelli and his master all the more clearly, in that its composition reveals throughout

faint traces of the Frate's style. Fra Filippo's joyous angel has been transformed into a pale celestial squire of dames. Bearing ears of corn and bunches of grapes, the symbols of the Eucharist, he advances with a joyless smile, his eyes half closed, into the presence of the Madonna and her divine Son. Lost in deep thought Mary grasps a single stalk, while the Child Jesus reclining in her lap blesses with His infant hand the emblems of His Passion. Here we recognise that Botticelli of the heavy heart, to whom laughter is unknown, and whose lips seldom curl even into a mournful smile. His Madonna and his Child Jesus alike have ever the Cross of Golgotha before their eyes. Hence the solemn earnestness of the Child, and hence the hopeless resignation that dwells unchanged in Mary's eyes. Hence it is that for very anguish of spirit the Madonna often dares not look upon her own Child; hence it is that she clasps Him anew in a convulsion of agony to her bosom, and there holds Him fast with both arms, as though she would shield him from some wanton marauder.

The angels, too, descending from high Heaven to draw near in lowly homage to the Son of Man, those neurotic creatures whose eyes glow with the flickering flame of fever—they know only too well

the doom that awaits the Redeemer. Their locks are twined with garlands, but the pale lips that strive in vain to intone hymns of jubilation are twisted by the pangs of suppressed anguish, and we seem to catch instead the hollow tones of a funeral dirge.

Botticelli gave to the Child Jesus for a playmate the infant S. John, an hysterical boy with eyes that glitter with disease. He likewise is haunted by a foreboding of the path of sorrow that both Jesus and he must tread. For at times he kneels before the Heaven-sent Child, and consecrating himself to his service lays his right hand upon his heart, or folds his tender arms across his childish breast in the Oriental attitude of willing submission. Or, again, these two boys, over whose heads broods the shadow of an early doom, embrace as though in an eternal farewell.

We possess many paintings of this description, which were intended for the most part as aids to private devotion. In nothing but their design, however, do they display the true Botticelli spirit. Sandro committed their execution, after the custom of the studio, to his assistants, and such pictures can only be considered in the light of more or less successful examples of the work of his School.

Unfortunately, compositions of this kind which are the work of Sandro's own hand, and which combine poetic conception and consummate technical execution in one triumphant whole, are rare.

Of such as exist, we may without fear of contradiction bestow the palm of beauty on the so-called *Magnificat* of the Uffizi. This painting is a *tondo*, that is to say, of that circular form which may be considered characteristic of Botticelli and his School. Putting aside plastic art, however, even in this particular Fra Filippo was the forerunner of Botticelli. His *Madonna and Child* in the Pitti is in fact the earliest religious *tondo* that occurs in Florentine painting. But the Frate saw in this circular form nothing but a fortuitous external feature, without the slightest influence upon the general composition of the picture. Sandro's *Magnificat*, on the contrary, was expressly conceived as a *tondo*. The pose of the Virgin herself and of one of the Angels, with the arms of two others, repeat to a slight extent, yet with obvious intention, the circular outline of the frame, while a rare softness of modelling prevails throughout the composition. These are without doubt superlative qualities, but even the *Magnificat* is marred by that inevitable weakness of Botticellian *tondi*, that

crowded and at the same time confused composition which is always so apparent where the artist is dealing with life-size figures—more so, for instance, than in the small *Holofernes* described above. In the presence of these large heads, massed together in clusters, we are hardly aware of the bodies. We see an open Bible on which the Virgin is inscribing the hymn identified with herself; but it would be impossible precisely to determine upon what it is resting, and the inkstand would infallibly slip from the hands of the Angel who is offering it to Mary. The crown above the Madonna's head is supported upon the outstretched fingers of angels, and the latter make not the slightest attempt to grasp or to hold it.

Such are the criticisms frequently heard in the presence of this picture. But may not Botticelli in this latter instance have availed himself of the privilege reserved to the greatest masters, and deliberately executed these details "out of drawing"? This painting appears marvellously free from the grossness of earth. Had he, for instance, like Fra Filippo in his *Coronation of the Virgin* in the Accademia, depicted the crown as a ponderable circlet of gold, weighing heavily upon the fingers, he would have struck a discord—a *forte* in the

pianissimo of his composition. Hence Sandro did not, after the manner of other painters, represent the crown as a tangible mass of metal, but as it were etherialised, transformed into a golden radiance emanating from the Holy Spirit above, and condensed in its descent into innumerable stars floating unsupported with solemn lustre high above the Virgin's head. In contrast with the heads of Judith and *Fortitude*, this crowned handmaiden of the Lord recalls no single feature of the Pollajuoli type of countenance—rounded, yet bony. A slightly inclined, oval face, dreamy in its soft pallor ; full, yet finely-cut lips opening as though in soft inquiry ; a mouth with corners unusually rounded ; eyes that seem to search the past or the future, but never the present ; silky tresses twisted first of all into heavy coils and escaping thence to ripple in waves of golden brown from under a white veil down the cheeks, and fall upon the shoulders—such are the attributes which go to make up that Botticellian type, of whose beauty such a catalogue is truly powerless to convey the faintest conception.

Botticelli's pictures do not in fact lend themselves to precise description. We may indeed investigate by a process of pedantic analysis the



Florence, Uffizi

HEAD OF THE MADONNA
(From the "Magnificat")

secret of their spell, but their charm is no more to be expressed in written language than is a melody or a chord of music. This truth is rooted in the very essence of Botticelli's art.

Previously the painters of the Quattrocento had confined themselves to the representation of the material world; their art, to use a definition of Leo Battista Alberti's, was a reproduction of "cose vedute"—things seen and visible. The art of Botticelli, however, has nothing in common with the epic and descriptive style of the other Florentines. The portrayal of the external world is never with him an object in itself; on the contrary it is his wealth of sentiment that strives to find expression in pictorial form. And with this end in view Botticelli relied on line as a medium of expression. "The term 'outline,'" again to quote Alberti, "signifies in painting the containing lines of a figure," and in the objective painting of the Florentine masters no other significance attached to line. But Botticelli's outline is far more than a mere boundary-line; like a melody it conveys the expression of his spiritual individuality, freed from all physical trammels. We feel it not as the mere "containing line of a figure," but as something non-material, as a mirror of the workings of his

very soul. Melancholy, depression of spirit, the mystic awe begotten of religious ecstasy, and every similar shade of feeling, however elusive, found in Botticelli's line clear and definite expression. Sandro strove to enhance by all possible means the capabilities of expression inherent in line. He avoided all that was heavy and massive. His favourite models were found in forms of extreme slenderness, glowing as it were with the illumination of the soul within them. He preferred soft, clinging draperies, with the texture of spiders' webs, which neither cumber the body, nor rob it of its freedom of motion; for beyond all he loved movement for its own sake.

Nevertheless Botticelli never possessed that pure joy in gesticulation peculiar to the artists of the Cinquecento. The slightest gesture of his figures arises, just as much as those convulsions which bow or distort the entire frame, from some spiritual necessity; all reflects that restless inner consciousness which no Florentine artist before Botticelli had ever succeeded in expressing within the limitations of a picture. In all cases where he has been prevented from following his temperament, where, as in the case of important altar-pieces, he has had to abstain from the expression of motion, or where

he has been unable to give adequate expression to his feelings, his art appears empty and tedious. The language of convention had no message for Sandro Botticelli.

In spite of this, Sandro's large religious paintings present an abundance of novel and captivating features. His feeling for the tone-values of costly ornaments and luminous flowers, his capacity for conveying impressions that are now solemnly religious in character, now visionary and dreamily remote—all these qualities must be admired in detail. For the means he employs he has recourse on the one hand to the most distant past, and on the other seems to anticipate many masters of a remote and yet remoter future. We possess only four extensive altar-pieces from Botticelli's own hand, but each bears the stamp of the great master of tone, or at the least of the religious painter in the strictest sense of the word. An early *Sante Conversazione* of the Florence Accademia, unfortunately sadly disfigured by retouching, shows the youthful Sandro still anxiously following in the footsteps of the Pollajuoli—"cose vedute."

Totally different is the effect of the so-called *Madonna of the Palms*, dating from the year 1485, which found its way from the Florentine Church

of S. Spirito into the Berlin Museum. Here the Virgin is seated upon a marble throne raised by a step. Slightly in advance of her stand John the Baptist and John the Evangelist. Botticelli needed to alter nothing in this ancient traditional scheme of composition for *Sante Conversazioni*, and yet the picture has hardly anything in common with any other of the numerous Florentine painters who were at that time handling the same material. Every colour seems to exhale perfume, as though we wandered in Southern groves. Palms and rushes form a niche behind the Madonna; branches of myrtle and cypress intertwine; four baskets full of roses stand upon the marble balustrade: bunches of olive are seen in vases of noble design, while from the midst of their dusky green beauty rise the tall stems of snow-white lilies—and within all this glory the stainless virginity of Mary is enshrined. Botticelli gives expression in this painting to our own aspirations, and yet he has only drawn upon the bygone Gothic Middle Ages, whose super-sensuous hymnology teemed with comparisons between Mary and the flowers. In his picture Sandro gave artistic form to that Scholastic conception of the "hortus conclusus," which no Humanist any longer thought worthy even of a jeer:

"Tu rosa, tu liliū
Cujus Dei Filium
Carnis ad connubium
Traxit odor . . ."

The other Florentine painters of the Quattrocento strove to create the illusion of the real, Sandro that of the unreal. Hence, like the masters of the Trecento, he often employed gold as a factor in his colour-scheme, and, wherever it is practicable, beams of dazzling radiance descend from Heaven upon the earth below.

"Veni, Sancte Spiritus,
Et emitte coelitis
Lucis Tuae radium . . ."

In the great *Coronation of the Virgin* of the Florence Accademia the heavenly Jerusalem has opened wide its portals, and we perceive Mary seated in gilded state, while God the Father sets the crown upon her head. The Mater Dolorosa thrills with blissful rapture; jubilant angels order the dance around their new mistress, casting roses before her in joyous welcome. Never again did Sandro conceive a dance so divinely ethereal, never again did he depict angels so purified of all earthly taint. Striking indeed is the contrast between the radiant golden glory of the Beyond and the rock-

bound shore upon which the four Saints are left to mourn. Even the very solidity of the latter may have been intended by Sandro as a deliberate foil to the buoyant grace of his angels. Unfortunately the effect produced by these figures is decidedly unsatisfying. Whenever Sandro was debarred from endowing his figures with action, and when in addition he must needs clothe them in priestly array—dalmatic, chasuble, and cope—little resulted except possibly some effective draperies and a few colour-effects. Sandro's art was powerless to breathe life into a head adorned by a mitre or a Cardinal's hat; superlatively as he knew how to portray men who sought the face of their God, mere dignitaries of the Church utterly failed to inspire his brush.

Observe in this connection that great altar-piece of the Accademia, in which seven Saints are grouped about the Madonna. The dark purple of the canopy, the dull gold of the reliefs, and the impressive architecture all combine to produce a colour-effect never again attempted in such decorative magnificence until the dawn of the *barocco*. The cuirass of the Archangel Michael is treated with a joy in the purely picturesque to which most Italian painters of the Quattrocento were strangers, and the singularly cool beauty of a combination of

colour such as that presented by the white glove of S. Ambrose, the blood-red jewel upon it, and the blue binding of a book, will be sought in vain at any period previous to the French art of the nineteenth century. The figure of S. John is the most virile ever conceived by Botticelli; full of force, and yet glowing through and through with the smouldering fire of the ascetic. And yet this painting, in which the balance of the composition has been thrown out of its proper proportion by unintelligent patching, excites but a moderate enthusiasm. Mere interpretation, especially when expressed in life-size figures, was never Botticelli's forte. Had he been allowed to work on a smaller scale in his ritual pictures, to resolve their solemn formality into movement, then even in this domain of art, so uncongenial to the lyrical bent of his genius, he might have produced a work such as that *Adoration of the Magi* in the Uffizi which, considered purely with reference to its drawing and colouring, must rank as the high-water mark of Botticelli's achievement.

During the Quattrocento the "Adoration of the Magi" was a very favourite subject with Florentine painters. It afforded them great opportunities of gratifying their taste for portraiture, and of includ-

ing the likenesses of prominent citizens among the retinue of the Kings. None of the earlier artists, however, ventured so far in this direction as Botticelli; he was the first to replace the conventional figures of the Wise Men by actual portraits. This new departure is closely connected with the story of the origin of Botticelli's great picture.

In the year 1469 the son of Cosimo de' Medici, the gouty Piero, died, and his sons Giuliano and the dashing Lorenzo swayed the destinies of the Florentine Republic. Both young men were high-minded, full of youthful vigour, gracious to women; the doors of their palace stood open to every man of merit. Poets and æsthetic lovers of beauty though they were, they could none the less, in case of necessity, assume the rôle of the cold and calculating practical politician, and well did they maintain the reputation of the State beyond its borders. The common folk adored them, and Lorenzo, the elder and to all appearance the more energetic, fostered this affection with great skill. He regaled the populace with entertainments of every description. On the one hand this policy stifled their regrets for the loss of their civil liberty, and on the other afforded the Medici an opportunity of gratifying their own æsthetic tastes, and of transforming this

workaday world during a brief span into a beautiful land of dreams. When they rode to the Piazza of Santa Croce, escorted by the flower of the youthful Florentine nobility, there to break a lance in honour of their liege ladies, it was Antonio Pollajuolo who designed the trappings of their steeds. Silken banners, painted by Verrocchio or Botticelli, fluttered against the blue sky, and the sonorous stanzas of the Medicean Court poets likened their patrons' mighty deeds to those of Scipio and Alexander.

This gilded splendour did not, however, dazzle every eye. Many there were who endured the brothers' rule with rage and envy in their hearts, and the Pazzi, themselves the most illustrious family of Florence after the Medici, pursued them with irreconcilable hatred. They gained the support of the Pope, and determined to assassinate Lorenzo and Giuliano during the celebration of solemn High Mass in the Duomo on Easter morning of the year 1478. But it was the blood of the hapless Giuliano only that flowed "from countless wounds" upon the consecrated floor. Lorenzo fled by the sacristy door, called his faithful followers to arms, and took fearful vengeance on his adversaries.

Botticelli's *Adoration of the Magi*, commissioned by a thoroughgoing partisan of the Medici, attests the gratitude of a friend for Lorenzo's marvellous escape. In this picture his departed ancestors and his living comrades all join with Lorenzo in adoration of the Almighty protector; hence Botticelli set before him as his principal object that which had hitherto merely served to enhance the illusion of reality. In fact it seems to have been undertaken solely for the sake of its twenty-nine portraits. It is true that Mary, Joseph, and the Child—possibly following Leonardo's precedent in his *Adoration* of the year 1478—no longer occupy, according to long-standing usage, a corner of the composition, but its exact centre. Botticelli, however, for the first and last time, has not allotted the chief rôle to the Holy Family. They are hardly noticed; for the eye is involuntarily arrested by the portrait groups in the foreground, which display so much restraint and charm in their movement as to have compelled the admiration even of the Cinquecento, a period of no small pretensions in such matters. We remark, first of all, the aged Cosimo de' Medici, dead long before, a magnificent head, the personification of a distinguished senator, who bends with but a moderate degree of fervour to kiss the foot of

the Child; in like manner some mighty vassal might pay homage to his youthful sovereign. His two sons, likewise dead, Piero and the no less handsome than dissolute Giovanni, kneel behind their father. In the left-hand corner of the immediate foreground the dashing Lorenzo stands with his hand on his sword, as though lost in reverie, and the corresponding place on the other side of the composition, facing the most illustrious of the Medici, and not far from the murdered Giuliano, Botticelli reserved for himself. He knew his own value, and had a keen appreciation of what was due to himself. These principal actors are supported on either side by their suite in the character of supernumeraries. Notable indeed was the part allotted to every one of these personages upon Life's stage, in the "Teatro del mondo"; it were an engrossing task to identify them all, and, with Botticelli's picture as a starting-point, to sketch the history of Medicean culture.

Not alone the triumph of the victors, but also the ignominy of their vanquished adversaries was Botticelli called upon to proclaim to the whole world. He was commissioned to paint certain members of the Pazzi family with their adherents, after the ancient Tuscan custom, in the guise of

traitors, that is to say, head downwards, upon the walls of the Palace of the Podestà. A drawing of Leonardo's in the Bonnat Collection recalls the memory of that frescoed monument of shame, which Botticelli himself was yet to see demolished, assuredly without a pang.

At the present time Florence possesses but one surviving specimen of his fresco-painting, that *S. Augustine* which he painted in the Church of Ognissanti for a member of the Vespucci family. "He succeeded excellently in this work," Vasari considered, "since the countenance of the Saint reveals deep meditation and that extreme refinement of intellect peculiar to men of ability, who are continually concerned with the investigation of lofty and difficult problems." On the opposite wall appears the single figure of *S. Jerome*, painted there in fresco by Domenico Ghirlandajo, also a commission of one of the Vespucci. One glance at this work enables us to comprehend the characteristic temperament of Botticelli, and also Vasari's praise. Ghirlandajo's Jerome, from an artistic point of view, is an unsuccessful attempt to combine the elaborate detail of the Flemish masters with the monumental character of fresco-painting. And, turning to the spiritual side of the subject, what has

this phlegmatic, matter-of-fact old gentleman in common with the lowly penitent of Bethlehem? Who would dream of crediting him with the pathos of the "Letters"? Botticelli's Saint, on the other hand, is the very personification of that Bishop of Hippo whom we encounter, so superbly alive, in the pages of his "Confessions"—the man whose soul was ravaged by spiritual tempests, who knew only too well the tyranny of the passions, and kept perforce vigilant watch and ward against the snares of his own intellect.

In the presence of this figure, so boldly conceived and broadly executed, who would give a thought to the sleek and complacent Saints of the Renaissance? Like most of Botticelli's Saints, like his *S. John the Evangelist* of the *Madonna of the Palms*, or his *S. Eligius* of the *Coronation of the Virgin*, his *S. Augustine* too is a reversion to the type of those morose and gloomy ascetics who figure in the altarpieces of the Trecento. For Botticelli loved the Gothic painting so lightly esteemed by his own times, and it possibly created in his mind the impression of a characteristically Christian art. He has even been called the "last of the mediæval painters." But this description fails in accuracy. He merely desired—in those days, at least—to purge that

which was immortal in the art of the Trecento from all that was merely transitory or incidental to the period ; or, in modern language, to breathe into his own work the living fragrance of a dead Past. Botticelli's relations with the Middle Ages were always of a purely æsthetic character, and resembled that bond which existed, four hundred years later, between Rossetti and Burne Jones and his own art.

In the meantime Botticelli's name had come into prominence even beyond the Florentine borders. His native city desired to entrust Sandro with the fresco decorations in the Sala d' Udienza of the Palazzo della Signoria ; but before this work was even commenced, when he had just completed his five-and-thirtieth year, the most flattering commission that could fall to the lot of any artist in Christendom summoned him to Rome. There Giovanni de' Dolci had lately built for the learned and warlike Franciscan who was then Pope Sixtus IV. that Chapel which has rendered his name immortal. Upon its decoration the greatest masters of Italy were to lavish all the resources of their art, and a list of painters which included the names of Ghirlandajo, Cosimo Roselli, and Pinturicchio, of Signorelli and Perugino, would have been incomplete without that of Botticelli.

The task which awaited him was as formidable as it was thankless and difficult. In addition to certain unimportant portraits of Popes, he was to paint three important frescoes, on themes prescribed to him by theologians of the Papal Court, learned in the Scriptures. The "Temptation of Christ" and the "Healing of the Leper" formed the subject of the first of these frescoes, and episodes from the history of Moses that of the second ; while the third was devoted to the "Punishment of the Company of Korah," and it was stipulated that the whole should be brought up to date by allusions drawn from contemporary history. Sandro was to glorify the Pope in his qualities of warrior, builder, and scholar, and at the same time to insert the portraits of various Papal dignitaries in favourable positions.

Even a greater than Sandro might well have come to grief over the task. Botticelli wrestled with this unpromising material to the best of his ability, but he was wanting in the repose of the narrator, and the frescoes suffer from many weaknesses of composition. Moses, for instance, appears seven times in the second fresco. Nevertheless the eye is richly compensated for all these defects by the many beauties of detail. Sundry of the youths

and the women bearing wood in the first fresco count among Sandro's finest conceptions. The epic tone of the second is relieved by enchanting lyrical passages. In the third the glowing dramatic spirit at last finds an outlet, and Botticelli's Moses, full of that majesty with which God Himself had invested him, stretching forth his right hand to call down destruction upon Korah and his company, is only excelled by that of Michelangelo.

But even in Rome Botticelli remained faithful to his natural temperament. None but he could have devised, in addition to the three Temptations of Christ, the parting of the Saviour and the Angels as a fourth; while in the fresco depicting the History of Moses it is neither the exodus of the Children of Israel nor the apparition of the Lord in the Burning Bush that occupies the greatest space; it is the scene with the daughters of Jethro at the Well that Sandro has made the central point of the whole composition. "But Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock." These few lines from Exodus sufficed to inspire Sandro with that idyll whose lofty simplicity can only be conveyed by the word "Biblical." Creatures of haze and sunshine are these golden-haired maidens in their strangely weird and melancholy beauty,



Rome, Sistine Chapel

THE DAUGHTERS OF JETHRO

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(Detail from the History of Moses)

children as it were of some land of flowers. For such this mortal world were cold and drear indeed. It is in the contemplation of forms of loveliness like these that we grasp the personal and individual character of Botticelli's art. In subjects such as these he owed nothing to those who went before him, and towers above those who came after him. As Hamlet remarks of Laertes, his spiritual endowment was so rich and rare that naught but his mirror could yield a resemblance to himself.

III

POPE SIXTUS, according to Vasari, showed his appreciation of Botticelli's work by lavishing large sums of money upon the artist; but the latter "according to his custom, dissipated it all in reckless extravagance even before the conclusion of his Roman visit, and as soon as he had completed his commissions, returned forthwith to Florence."

Here he quickly had occasion to show himself once more a master of fresco. It now became his task to glorify the marriage of Lorenzo Tornabuoni with the beautiful Giovanna degli Albizzi. In one fresco the young Lorenzo is introduced to the circle of the seven Liberal Arts. With a countenance full of noble modesty he gazes upon the wise sisters, while Dialectics, leading him by the hand, presents him to Philosophy, a staid and sober matron. In the other fresco the four Cardinal Virtues greet Giovanna degli Albizzi. Here Botticelli draws an exquisitely delicate distinction. The Arts, calm

and inquisitorial, await the approach of the youth, whose part is that of a suppliant for their favour, but the Virtues advance to meet Giovanna, as four sisters might hasten to embrace a fifth returning after long absence. In our day a staircase in the Louvre affords shelter to these half-obliterated frescoes; once upon a time they adorned Chiasso Macerelli, a villa of the Tornabuoni in the neighbourhood of the Fiesole hills, and here, among the cypresses and wild roses of that still and sun-bathed solitude, their ethereal poetry must have exercised an infinite charm upon the beholders.

Giovanna's garment of red flows in severe and unbroken lines the length of her tall figure. The slender maidens who personify the Virtues are clad in orange, white, yellow, and green draperies, and their appearance recalls the remark of Alberti in his "Treatise on Painting": "It were well for one desiring to paint Diana leading her band of nymphs, to clothe one nymph in green, a second in white, a third in rose, and a fourth in yellow, so that every nymph may be arrayed in a different colour." Leone Battista Alberti, the great theorist of the Early Renaissance, completed his "Treatise on Painting" as early as the year 1435, but Botticelli, who came into the world full eleven years later, was the

first painter to utilise his suggestions. That he generally did so is fully in accordance with his unique position in Florentine painting. The imitation of the real, which represented to others the end and aim of all art, with Botticelli was only a means; for he believed with Alberti that an artist "should represent that which affords the mind food for thought, not merely that which is visible to the eye."

Sandro possessed the most exquisite sense of form and feeling for colour values; he was richly endowed with creative imagination, and all these artistic qualities went together with a certain sterile scholasticism to form a no less captivating than complicated combination. He was a *letterato*, and had all the respect of the half-educated for the written and printed letter, and only his artistic genius saved him from becoming the first academic painter, and the founder of a traditional school of painting. It is easy to understand the precise influences which inspired Botticelli's mind with such tendencies. In Lorenzo de' Medici's hospitable palace, where he was received on the footing of a friend, he encountered poets and scholars, and these high personages thus conversing on equal terms with the painter, their social in-

ferior, opened up to him fresh paths in bygone worlds, galvanised into new life by the magic of their language, and thereby endowed his art with many new themes.

For his religious compositions—to Vasari he had already become a "*persona sofistica*"—Botticelli dons the gown of the mediæval scholar. He paints the Virgin's "*hortus conclusus*," and in another picture from his studio, in the Berlin Gallery, the Seven Spirits of God from the *Divina Commedia* appear as angels bearing candelabra. Again drawing on Dante for his material he designs a scene of celestial glory; in the same picture he adopts the learned suggestions of Matteo Palmieri, and Sixtus IV. well knew the precise reason that induced him to entrust to Botticelli the fresco of the Purification of the Leper; no other painter could have expressed in terms of art a theological disquisition on the atoning properties of blood. Even in externals and trifling details Sandro's leanings toward scholarship may be detected. He carves Dante's verses on marble thrones; wherever possible, he introduces into his pictures open books, rolls of manuscript, and inkstands. In the Berlin *Madonna of the Palms* the olive branches in the vases are tied, not with cords, but with ribands bearing Latin mottoes.

Jewels of impossible dimensions adorn the gloves and mitres of his bishops, and it is very possible that a reference to some "Liber gemmarum" might reveal, on the authority of mediæval symbolism, a mystic connection between these gems and the spiritual nature of their wearers.

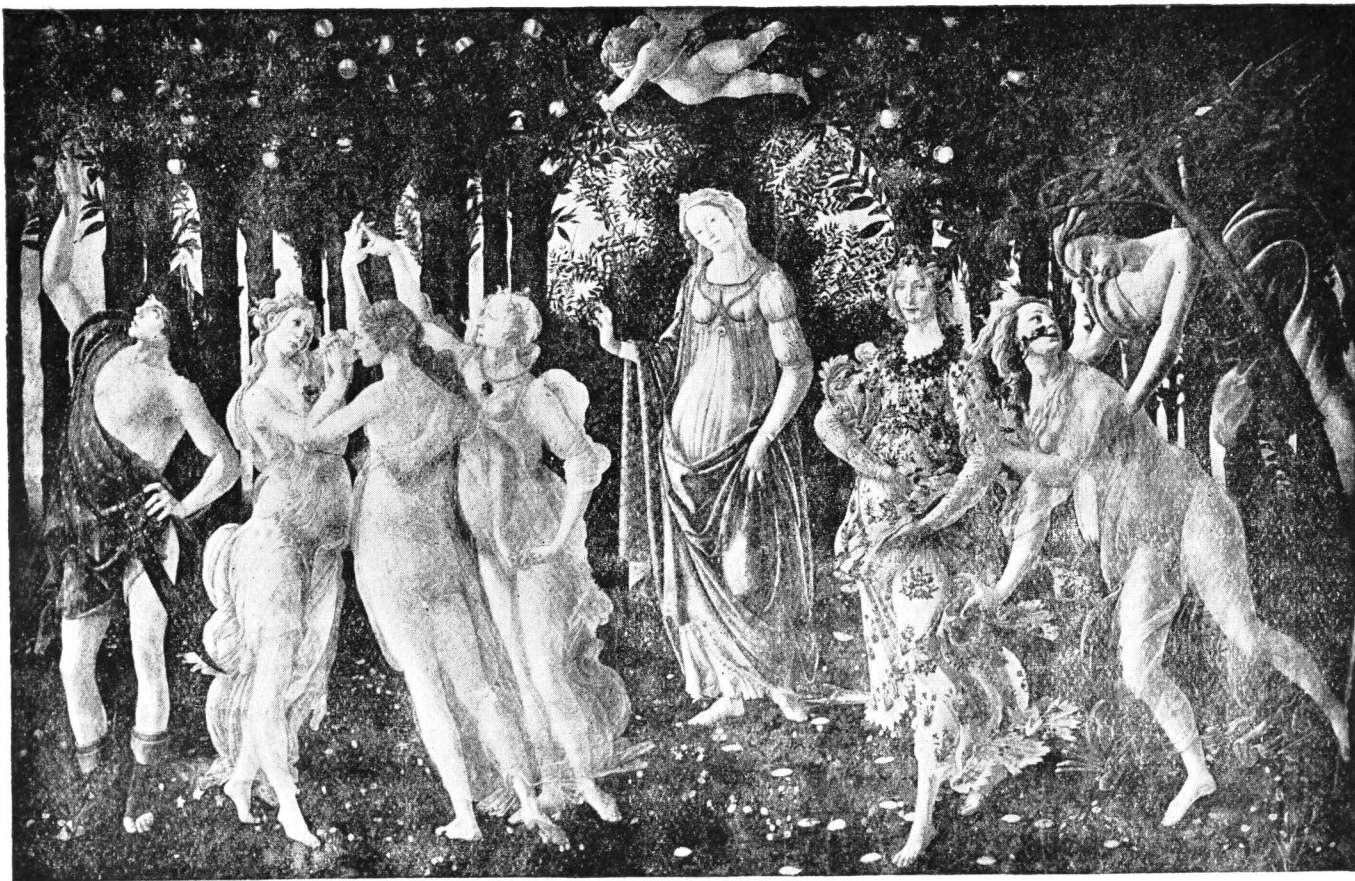
It was this scholasticism of his, too, that determined Botticelli's characteristic attitude toward the antique. His contemporaries, the Pollajuoli, Ghirlandajo and his pupils, filled their compositions with reproductions, more or less free, of ancient buildings. This was, as a rule, by no means Botticelli's idea. True that in the fresco representing the Destruction of the Company of Korah, the Arch of Constantine occupies the centre of the scene; but the Latin inscription borne by its façade, "Nemo sibi assumat honorem nisi vocatus a Deo tanquam Aron," tones down this anachronism and establishes the connection between the ancient Roman edifice and the Old Testament story of the fresco.

Sandro was never a slavish copyist of the antique, although it exercised a far-reaching influence upon his art; Leo Battista Alberti's treatise was his sole mentor and guide in the direction of the arts of the ancients. We read in this æsthetic gospel of

Sandro's: "Pleasing it is to behold in the hair of men and of animals, in branches, in foliage, and in draperies a certain movement," and for such "movement" in the representation of hair, and more especially of draperies—but only in this connection—the reliefs on later Roman sarcophagi served him as models. Yet Sandro, consciously or unconsciously, ever preserved his independent attitude toward the antique. This is very clearly shown by an ideal female portrait in the Staedel Institute at Frankfort. Here Sandro modified the individuality of his model's features into harmony with the severe regularity of a classical gem, and by means of bands, heron's plumes, and interwoven pearls imparted to the blonde hair, which escapes from its plaits to ripple loosely over the cheeks, that "movement" so desired by Alberti.

A typical example, affording an even better illustration of Botticelli's characteristic style, is that long-lost *Pallas subduing a Centaur* which now adorns a chamber in the Pitti Palace. This composition, too, glorifies the suppression of the Pazzi, and is significant of the purely æsthetic attitude of Medicean society both to Christianity and to Paganism. The same Botticelli celebrated the escape of Lorenzo de' Medici both in a Christian

votive picture, the *Adoration of the Magi*, and in a classical allegory, this very Pallas with the Centaur. The latter painting is full of symbolism. The Centaur, whom Pallas subdues with her right hand twisted into his hair, had been since the time of Dante an emblem of discord. In her left the Goddess holds a halberd and an olive-branch, the latter of which twines in single lines of beauty about her draperies. Hereby Power and Peace are symbolised ; in the union of these qualities lies the secret of beneficent government, and only the Medici can confer this blessing upon the City by the Arno. In order to convey this idea the robe of the Olympian divinity bears a pattern of three rings intertwined, a device of Lorenzo's. This all sounds pedantic and high-flown ; but Botticelli was an artist to whose inner consciousness everything appealed that he created, even a political allegory. He was a painter, and that implies that every inch of his canvas, long before it acquires a symbolical meaning, has been endowed with a definite palpable significance ; everything, before it became an allegory, has been thought out from the point of view of form and colour. Thus we can always admire the pathos of the Centaur, and the charming effect of the Goddess's white hand among the



SPRING

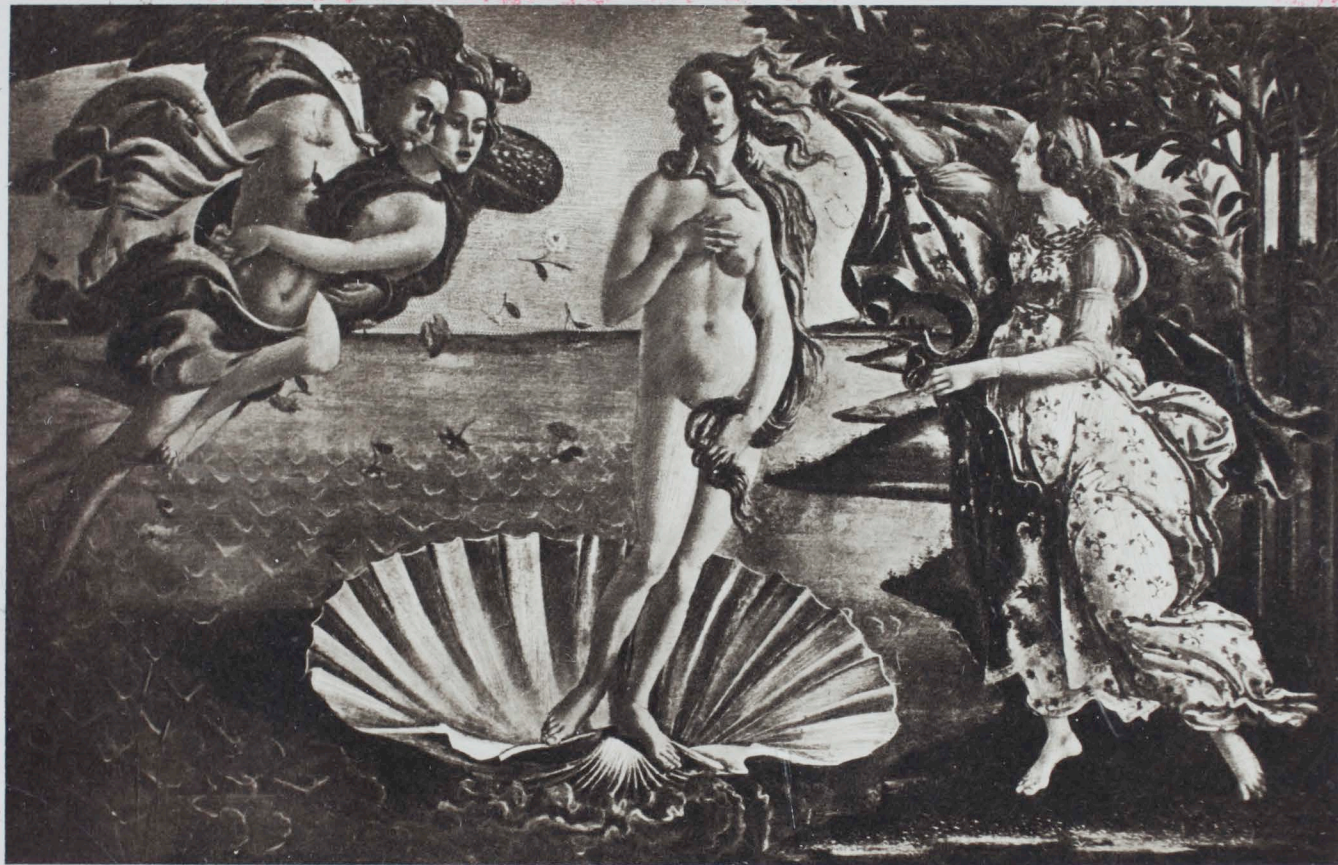
Florence, Accademia

dark hair of the monster ; likewise we may well be enthralled by the melancholy beauty of the Pallas, without possessing even the rudiments of literary or historical culture.

No less true is this in the case of that most glorious of Botticelli's allegories, the *Spring* in the Florence Accademia. In a grove remote from the haunts of men Spring is stirring, and a thousand gaily tinted flowers raise their heads above the soil. Graces veiled in gold-embroidered draperies join hands in the mazes of the dance. A flower-decked nymph picks her dainty way through all this vernal beauty, where even the restless Hermes seems content to linger. Cupid flits through the air like a butterfly above his mother's head, and Venus gazes with a musing smile upon her eternal realm . . . "ridegli intorno tutta la foresta."

All who have ever marked its lovely details of form and colour, blending into poetic harmony, may well have admired in this picture the poet turned painter, the painter turned poet ; but it will have occurred to few to question themselves as to what is its precise meaning. And yet whole books and treatises have been written on the subject, even in quite recent times feuds have been carried on, and the gates of Aphrodite's realm are besieged by

squabbling scholars endeavouring to prove to us by means of quotations from Ovid and Horace, Alberti and Politian, by references to the reverse of medals and Milanese woodcuts, the real significance of a picture which to every lay mind itself proclaims its own interpretation. The whole composition and its varied details are equally popular as subjects of dispute. Attempts have been made to connect the origin of the picture with some event in contemporary Florentine history, but uncertainty prevails as to whether it is the death of the beautiful Simonetta Vespucci, the Muse of Medicean society, or the marriage of Lorenzo Tornabuoni that is here allegorically treated. It has been very shrewdly and convincingly proved that Sandro was indebted for many suggestions to the brilliant stanzas of Angelo Poliziano's "Giostra"; Alberti may have prompted him to portray the Graces "smiling, arrayed in ungirded and transparent garments, holding one another by the hand"; but those who seek to "justify" the presence of Hermes in the realm of Venus by a reference to an Horatian Ode to the Goddess, in which occurs the line "Love and Hermes are thy guides," prove only too conclusively that they have failed to understand a great artist. Was Botticelli compelled, before intro-



Florence, Uffizi

THE BIRTH OF VENUS.

ducing even a youthful divinity into the realm of Venus, to obtain first of all the sanction of some duly authenticated classical quotation, and is it not possible to explain on purely artistic grounds his choice of this figure, to which such widely varying interpretations have been attached?

Possibly these female figures, deprived of their contrast with a masculine pose, might have lost much of their impressive effect. And how could that movement which passes in a gradual *diminuendo* from right to left of the picture strike a nobler note than in the line of the erect figure of the youthful Hermes? Can it be seriously maintained that a combination of illustrations from five or six different authors could ever have been blended into a composition of such imperishable harmony.

Strongly akin in sentiment to the *Spring*—for which “The Realm of Venus” were a more appropriate title—is the *Birth of Venus* in the Uffizi, belonging to the same Medicean type. In Vasari’s time the two pictures adorned one room, and this masterly painting, although there is a slight difference between them in height, was doubtless intended by Botticelli as a pendant to the *Spring*. Roses float through the lambent air, and Wind-gods waft the Anadyomene, who stands upright in a

white shell, over the blue-green sea toward the shore. A golden-haired nymph, clad in a flowery vesture, is waiting to veil the gleaming nudity of her mistress with the royal mantle. In the *Spring*, on the other hand, the sovereign makes queenly progress through her realm; Flora seeks in vain to flee the tumultuous ardours of Zephyr; the virgin Graces twine in sober wistfulness the circling dance; the quickening sap and all the powers of Spring awake to life—"Love and Spring are one."

Suggestions derived from Politian and Alberti may again be detected in this *Birth of Venus*, but Sandro retained nevertheless his artistic liberty. For example, to quote a pregnant instance, Politian's Venus, following Homer's "Hymn to Aphrodite," is received by three nymphs; Botticelli painted but one, and perhaps it is hardly necessary to excuse Sandro's omission, as one well-meaning art critic has done, as an "oversight"!

To this culminating period of Botticelli's creative powers we also owe that marvellous idyll of *Mars and Venus* in the National Gallery. Once more we catch faint echoes of many a rhyme from the "Giostra," but this painting will inspire no beholder with reminiscences of Homeric verse; the Hellenic Gods laugh loudly, but Sandro's Olympian

divinities barely curve their lips in a dreamy smile. Around the sleeping God of War—the finest masculine pose that Botticelli ever drew—youthful goat-legged satyrs play wild but graceful pranks with the weapons of the Lord of Battles. But the countenance of the God, drawn by pain, presents a strange contrast to their gambols, and Aphrodite, who gazes from her gold-embroidered cushion with smiling gravity upon her sleeping lover, is fair indeed to look upon, but not, like her Homeric sister, "of an indomitable heart." Sandro has not endowed his Venus with that antique sensuousness which is inseparable from healthy and vigorous beauty; neither has she anything in common with the vampire-like "Lady Venus" of the Middle Ages. Sandro approaches Olympus in the reverent spirit of an admirer of the antique: to him even the dethroned Aphrodite remains ever a sublime divinity. She resembles Mary of Nazareth, and the sight of a halo encircling her head would strike no one with a sense of incongruity.

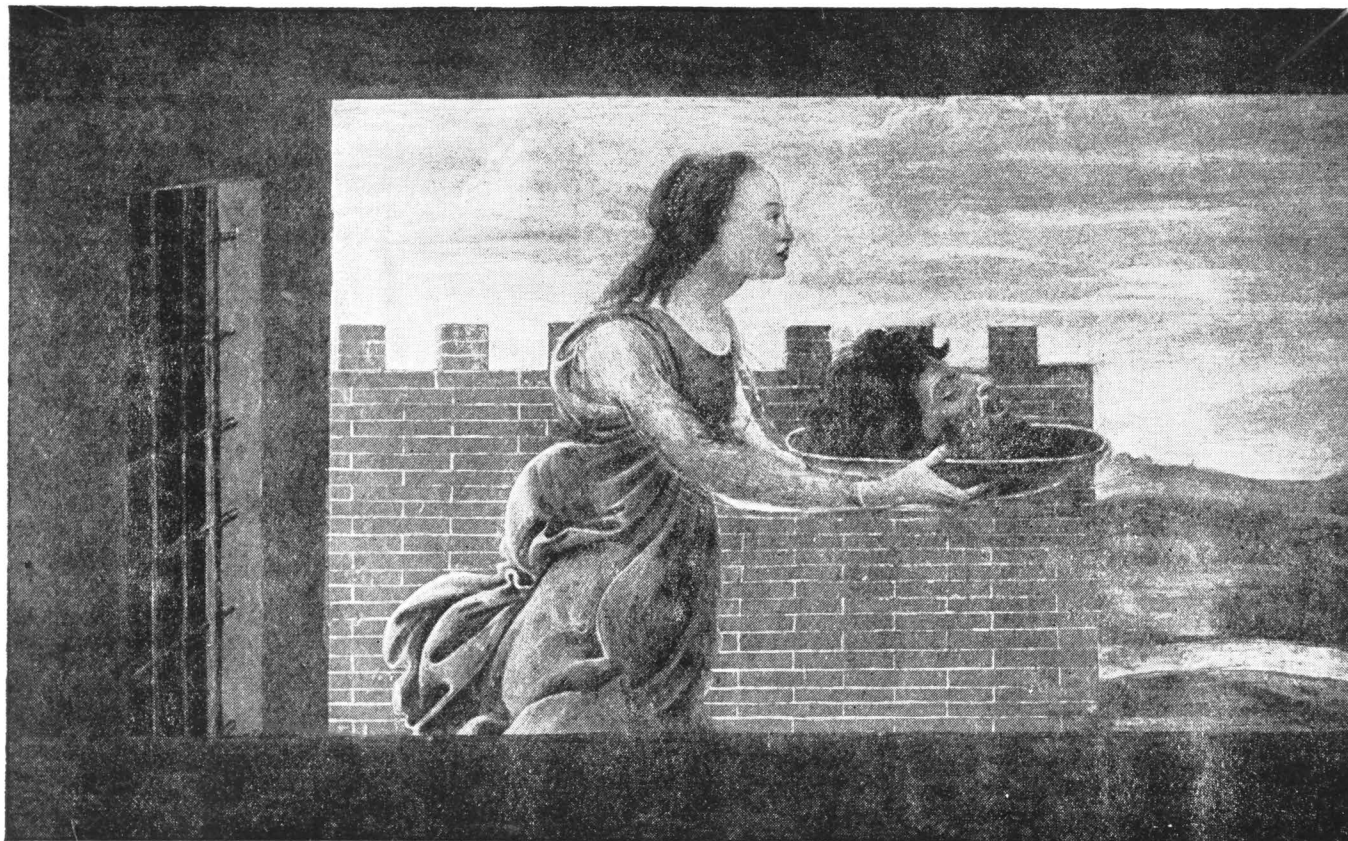
Sandro created in his Venus the chastest of all nude female figures, but the "simple old Master" knew well that there were other types of women, diabolical in their unholy fascination, the negation of every quality but that of sex. Consider the *Salome*

D

of the Accademia, with ruddy locks, lickerish eyes, and lips that tremble with wanton appetites. There is no slightest link between antique art and this small and unfortunately neglected predella. Botticelli's Salome is not the "damsel" of the Bible; she has no single feature in common with the ecclesiastical severity of Giotto's princess, or with the joyous young dancer of Filippo Lippi. It was with the far distant future that this Salome was destined to claim kinship—with the perverted eroticism of Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley. In another predella we are shown how temptation assails S. Eligius; but here the horns which shine with a metallic gleam amid her golden hair betray the diabolical origin of the enchantress. Her laughing eyes and lascivious ruby lips will never seduce the man of God, for he knows that "mulier est confusio hominis, bestia insanabilis . . . foetens rosa, tristis paradisus, dulce venenum." *

When Botticelli painted his *Birth of Venus* he may possibly have intended as it were to create anew a picture of Apelles much esteemed by the ancients. His *Calumny of Apelles* in the Uffizi reveals quite clearly this aspiration toward the re-

* "Woman is man's bane, irredeemably bestial . . . a stinking rose, a dreary paradise, a sweet poison."



SALOME

Florence, Accademia

construction of a lost masterpiece. Lucian in his "Dialogues on Calumny" gave a precise description of the picture of Apelles. Alberti quoted this account in his "Treatise on Painting," and obviously it was hence that it became known to Botticelli. Here, where it was treated from the point of view of its artistic design, Sandro followed with close attention the words of Lucian as given by Alberti. Let us compare.

"The picture represented a man with very large ears, at whose side two women were standing, one named Ignorance and the other Suspicion. Then came Calumny. This was a woman fair to look upon, but her countenance was marred by excessive cunning; her right hand held a blazing torch, and with the left she dragged by his hair a youth who stretched out his hands to Heaven in supplication. Then there was a man, pale of countenance, hideous and foul, repulsive to behold; this man was the conductor and guide of Calumny, and he was called Envy. Other two women were decking Calumny with ornaments; Cunning and Deceit were their names. These were followed by Remorse, a woman clad in mourning, tearing her own flesh. Last of all came a maiden, bashful and timid—Truth." In this figure alone did Botticelli

make any change, and then certainly to the advantage of the picture ; he has represented Truth as a woman undraped, raising her right hand as though in accusation and appeal to the eternal Gods.

As a setting for this classical scene Sandro designed a Renaissance hall flooded with sunlight, with gilded niches in which stand statues unusually plastic in their conception, several of which are direct copies of subjects treated by Castagno and Donatello. Vasari commends this painting in brief but inspired terms, but is it certain that Leone Battista Alberti would have equally nodded approval to his disciple? "All movement," we may read in the "Treatise on Painting," "and I insist ever anew upon this, should be measured and gentle. . . . For violent gestures not only deprive painting of all its grace and sweetness, but also cause the spirit of the artist to appear over-boisterous and ardent." And in Sandro's picture every single figure is a-quiver with inward tumult, which manifests itself outwardly in violent gestures.

Botticelli well knew this precept of Alberti's, and had faithfully observed it during many years. But the days when the wishes of the æsthetic fraternity were laws to Sandro lay far behind him. During the very period in which he was painting



Florence, Uffizi

THE CALUMNY OF APELLES

the *Calumny* his spirit reached the decisive phase of its transformation. The Medicean Sandro—he who willed only to create perfect works of art, and to disinter with his sensitive fingers the treasure of a dead culture—died, and in his stead we now behold a creature weighed down by the consciousness of sin, whose pictures are no longer “beautiful,” but glow with religious fervour, and who seems to have dipped his brush in his own heart’s blood.

The man who thus brought light into the soul of Botticelli, and reclaimed him for the Christian faith, was named Girolamo Savonarola.

IV

THE people of Florence—even in the days of the Renaissance—had always been religious, or, in the language of Vespasiano da Bisticci, “addicted to the way of truth.” Long before the advent of Savonarola, Fra Bernardino da Massa erected in the Piazza Santa Croce a funeral pyre, for the burning of “women’s false hair, toys, and other vain things.” The Medici themselves were members of religious confraternities, and the sorrows and humility of Christ afforded even the frivolous Politian opportunities for the display of his polished Latin style.

In very truth, however, the relations between the Deity and his servants and those friends of Lorenzo de’ Medici who foregathered at the Palazzo of the Via Largo and in the groves of Careggi, were of an extremely superficial character. The function of the preacher was the same to them as that of the rhetorician to the men of old, or that of the actor to those of our own time. The matter

of his discourse counted for naught; the manner was everything. Whether the man in the pulpit himself believed in the doctrine he preached, no one either asked or cared. Angelo Poliziano in one passage passes this supremely characteristic comment on the impression produced upon him by a sermon of Fra Mariano da Genazzano: “I am all ears [tutto orecchi] for the melodious delivery, the well-chosen words, and sonorous periods. I distinguish the pauses, the construction of the sentences, and am enthralled by harmonious cadences.” Savonarola despised the charlatanry of such *virtuosi* of the pulpit. “Elegance and all flowers of discourse,” he once declared, “must be relegated to the background, if one is to preach the simple gospel of salvation.” Even Botticelli may well have attended Savonarola’s first sermon for the sole purpose of admiring resounding periods or elegant gestures, and found instead a monk—who believed. Lorenzo de’ Medici was surrounded by men of universal accomplishments—brilliant artists in speech, skilled and tasteful actors of emotions and sentiments—but their soul had no share in the workings of their intellect.

Savonarola’s words burned with righteous conviction; hence their power to convince. It was

because he himself believed that he was enabled to kindle belief in the minds of others. But to imagine that Sandro, the artist, should ever have become so fervent a disciple of that priest who regarded all art solely as the handmaiden of faith! There is in the soul of every artist an abiding capacity for hero-worship; he is an ardent admirer of a great personality—even though it be devoid of sympathy with Art. Thus the Prior of San Marco furnished the artist Botticelli with a character-study whose masterful lines were well qualified to compel his veneration; the magnetism of popular enthusiasm, which persons of an emotional temperament rarely escape, was not without its influence; and, above all, Sandro Botticelli suddenly found himself the centre of a growing solitude. He had seen Lorenzo de' Medici borne to the tomb, and two years later, in 1494, Politian had followed his Mæcenas. Shortly afterwards the yelling mob stormed the Medici palace, and its owner, Piero, Lorenzo's son, was compelled amid ignominy and insult to fly the city. But in the pulpit the erect and powerful figure of the Dominican still held sway, and when he stretched forth the crucifix to the trembling crowd, thousands knelt before it sobbing, "Miserere, Domine!"

Botticelli, too, had much to atone for. "What shall I say of you, ye painters, who expose half-naked figures to public view?" stormed Fra Girolamo, and Botticelli well knew that "many pictures of naked women" which then "disfigured the houses of the citizens" had first seen the light in his studio. "Not a merchant can order a wedding," Savonarola thundered on another occasion, "but his daughter must needs bestow her furbelows in a coffer painted with heathen fables; so that a Christian bride makes earlier acquaintance with the perfidy of Mars and the wiles of Vulcan than with the deeds of the holy women of either Testament." Now Sandro had in truth celebrated the illicit amours of Mars and Venus, and had been the first to devote life-size pictures to the doings of Pagan Gods. "But," demanded Savonarola, "are we to preach Ovid here, or the Christian faith?"

So Botticelli banished from his abode the joyous world of fable, decorated his "coffers for the newly wedded" with the miracles of S. Zenobius or the chaste sacrifice of Virginia or Lucretia, and went about preaching the Christian faith, no longer according to the precepts of Alberti, but after the dictates of his own fervent spirit. The lyric artist whom we have hitherto known, the troubadour

whose lute was tuned to celestial love-lays, now arrays himself in the hair shirt of the penitent, and proclaims the gospel of suffering.

Compare the two renderings in the Uffizi of the *Adoration of the Magi*. One, the apotheosis of the Medici, was painted by an artist for Art's sake; the other, now sadly damaged, is the work of a fanatic who aimed at converting a sinful world to the true faith. As though lashed by invisible scourges, in an ecstasy of excitement, the people surge from every direction about the Son of Mary; kneeling, prostrating themselves, with burning and rapturous eyes, before the Christ Child; waving towards the hallowed group arms that tremble with joy; beckoning one to another in that arid wilderness of rocks, where the Redeemer has manifested himself to the sons of men. Here speaks the voice of Fra Mariano, of Savonarola.

The religious fever which had inflamed not only Botticelli but all Florence, died out; the political adversaries of the Prior of San Marco gained the upper hand and Botticelli lived to see Savonarola, the "second Saviour," seal his doctrine, on the 23rd of May in the year 1498, with his blood. Sandro never recovered from the shock. In the chronicle of his brother Simone Filipepi we read, under the

date of All Souls' Day, 1499: "As we were sitting round the fire at three o'clock of the night in my house, my brother Sandro di Mariano Filipepi, one of the good painters who then dwelt in our city, related how he had conversed in his workshop with Doffo Spini concerning the fate of Fra Girolamo. And because Sandro knew that Doffo had been among the most zealous at his trial, he begged him to tell him in all truth whether Fra Girolamo had been found guilty of any sin worthy of being punished by such a disgraceful death. And Doffo answered him: 'Sandro, shall I tell thee the truth? We not only found him guilty of no mortal sin, but also of none even that was venial.' Whereupon Sandro asked, 'Why then did ye let him die so miserable a death?'"

How faithfully Sandro the disciple clave to the memory of his martyred master is shown by the only signed and dated painting of Botticelli's now extant—that small, ineffably solemn rendering of the *Nativity* in the National Gallery, perhaps the last picture ever wrought by Sandro's own hand. Instinct with vigorous movement, and yet at the same time full of mournful peace, of Christian feeling, and dark symbolism, this painting resembles rather a work of his Medicean epoch translated into

the form-language developed under the influence of Savonarola. High and low, Kings and shepherds alike crowned with the olive wreath of peace, all are conducted by angels to that sacred hovel, while other celestial choristers poised upon its thatched roof raise the triumphant "Gloria in excelsis!" Above their heads yet other angels bathed in a golden radiance join hands in the circling dance. But these angels no longer float serenely through the air, like those whom Sandro painted once upon a time with such unique art in the *Coronation of the Virgin*: rather might this soaring, whirling dance be described as a religious orgy, the bacchanalia of faith. Three golden crowns glitter in that gleaming sea of light, destined to adorn the heads of three pilgrims who are being tenderly embraced and kissed by three angels, while crawling demons seek refuge, like moles, in the recesses of the earth. These three pilgrims represent Savonarola and the two companions of his martyrdom. A Greek inscription, its mysterious tone in conscious harmony with that of the Revelation of S. John, bears moving witness to Sandro's hope and despair: "I, Alessandro, painted this picture at the end of the year 1500, during the disorders in Italy, in the half time after the time, according to the eleventh chapter of



Photo, Hanfstaengl

THE NATIVITY

London, National Gallery

S. John, in the Second Woe of the Apocalypse, whilst the Devil was let loose for three and a half years, but then shall he be chained up, according to the twelfth (chapter), and we shall see him trodden under foot, as in this picture."

Sandro had now left far behind him for ever those days in which he delighted in "the perfidy of Mars and the wiles of Vulcan." The sparkling fountain of classical lore no longer had power to intoxicate him ; in its place he drew deep draughts from a fresh spring of Christian beauty—the "Divine Comedy" of Dante. Of those pen-and-ink drawings wherewith he adorned a copy of the *Divina Commedia* for Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, ninety-six remain to us ; eight of these are preserved in the Vatican Gallery, and the remainder are the proud possession of the Berlin Cabinet of Engravings. Possibly Sandro may have commenced this gigantic undertaking before his visit to Rome ; but it undoubtedly covered a period of many years, probably including the death of the Medici, while the best work of the series dates from those days when the Faith had but lately set its seal upon Botticelli. Sandro devoted, with one single exception, a drawing to each Canto. But the superabundance of material overwhelmed him.

The consecutive character of the delineation does not always adapt itself to the requirements of composition, and thus many of the subjects—more especially the early illustrations to the *Inferno*—suffer from their obscure and confused arrangement. And yet we are forced to acknowledge, reversing the saying of Goethe, that where there are deep shadows, there is also much light. His drawings contain, as it were in concentrated form, all the excellences of his paintings. The overflowing riches of his inner consciousness find in plasticity of form, animation of outline, and speaking gesture even more direct expression in the former than in the latter. The sinister giants of the *Inferno* are just as convincing as the loveliness of his dancing angels; when Sandro suggests the infinity of the ether or creates the effect of unfathomable distance in a couple of lines, our Florentine seems metamorphosed into a Japanese; and when at last, in the illustrations to the *Paradiso*, Dante's eyes reflect in turn the emotions of anguish, confusion, self-abasement, hope, and intense spiritual ecstasy—art such as this can have but few rivals, if any.

Botticelli was able to devote the evening of his life unhindered to his studies from Dante; for patrons no longer thronged his studio. The

Florentines ever maintained a respectful attitude toward the painter whom a Pope had honoured by his commissions. Occasionally they consulted his opinion in matters of art, but Sandro's own style now seemed out of date. His art could not take root in the fertile soil of the Florentine people; it resembled some aristocratic exotic from Careggi, that grove of the Medici where the artists were scholars and the scholars artists. Sandro's creations were the materialised visions of those æsthetes who there dreamed under the cypresses, at the feet of some marble Greek god, the eternal dream of a vanished world of beauty. When Lorenzo de' Medici died, and his humanistic friends turned their backs on the Florence of Savonarola, Sandro lost all the admirers of his art. Taste, too, had undergone a change. Botticelli's works had no further message for a generation that admired the pompous poverty of conception which marks the compositions of Fra Bartolommeo. The younger painters swore by Michelangelo; and as for the Philistines—of whom there was doubtless no lack even during the Renaissance—what could they have in common with the tender poetry of the *Spring* or the *Magnificat*?

And so our Sandro dragged out his remaining

years in loneliness and poverty, and when he was buried on May 17 of the year 1510 in the Church of Ognissanti, many must have been amazed to hear that he had lived until so lately. He was soon forgotten. We seek in vain for the faintest trace of his spirit in the Florentine art of the Mid-Renaissance and the *barocco* periods, and even the most refined lovers of the *rococo* passed the works of Sandro carelessly by. It was left for the nineteenth century to discover the art of Botticelli, and to find in the yearning beauty of his pictures a reflection of its own fairest dreams.

LIST OF THE WORKS OF SANDRO BOTTICELLI

[Only works by Botticelli's own hand are included in this list. The numbers prefixed to titles of pictures refer to the catalogues of the galleries to which they respectively belong. The dates in brackets are those at which, so far as can be ascertained, the works in question were executed.]

BERGAMO.

Morelli Gallery.

- 84. The Story of Virginia.
- 85. Head of Christ.

BERLIN.

Royal Gallery.

- 106. Madonna and Saints.
- 1128. S. Sebastian.

Kaufmann Collection.

Judith.

Raczinsky Collection.

Madonna with Angels. *Tondo.*

E

BOSTON, U.S.A.

Mrs. J. L. Gardner's Collection.

Death of Lucretia.

Madonna with Child and Angel.

(The "Chigi Madonna.")

DRESDEN.

Royal Gallery.

12. Scenes from the Life of S. Zenobius.

FLORENCE.

Accademia.

46. Sante Conversazione.

73 & 74. Coronation of the Virgin, with Predella.

80. Spring.

85. Madonna with Saints and Angels.

157. Dead Christ.

161. Salome.

158. Death of S. Augustine.

162. Vision of S. Augustine.

(The four small pictures last mentioned form part of the same predella.)

Uffizi Gallery.

39. Birth of Venus.

1156. Judith.

1158. Discovery of the Body of Holofernes.

1179. S. Augustine.

1182. Calumny of Apelles.

FLORENCE (*continued*).

1276B. Madonna with Child and Angels.

(The "Magnificat.")

1286. Adoration of the Magi

1289. Madonna with Angels.

1299. Fortitude.

(No number) Adoration of the Magi.

Pitti Palace (Appartamento Reale).

Pallas subduing a Centaur.

Church of Ognissanti.

S. Augustine. (Fresco.)

FRANKFORT-ON-MAIN.

Staedel Institute

11. Ideal Portrait of a Woman.

LONDON.

National Gallery.

Adoration of the Magi.

Birth of Christ (1500).

Mars and Venus.

Mond Collection.

Scenes from the Life of S. Zenobius.

MILAN.

Ambrosiana.

145. Madonna with Angels.

Poldi-Pezzoli Museum.

Madonna with Child.

PARIS.

Louvre.

1297. Lorenzo Tornabuoni presented to the Liberal Arts. (Fresco).
1298. Giovanna degli Albizzi greeted by the Four Cardinal Virtues. (Fresco.)

ROME.

Sistine Chapel.

Purification of the Leper and Temptation of Christ.

History of Moses.

Punishment of the Company of Korah.

Portraits of the early Popes.

(All the above are in fresco and were painted 1481-1482.)

Collection of the Marchese Pallavicini.

The Wife of the Levite.

ST. PETERSBURG.

The Hermitage.

163. Adoration of the Magi.

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