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NOTES ON OUR ART COLLECTION.

I. MICHELANGELO (1475-1564).

THE first thing to consider is the Michelangelesque manner of treating the human figure, the basis it had in scientific or technical study and the way in which the artist used it to express his thoughts. Michelangelo had studied the life of the body as the great sculptors of Greece had studied it, with the same thoroughness and enthusiasm. In his hands as in theirs it is of the same value as the face or head in expressing the intellectual character and the soul of his subject. He has nothing, certainly, of the moderation and calm self restraint with which the best Greek art accepted the limits of nature. You must take the spiritual force of his conceptions and the transcendent grandeur of his figures as some compensation. The endeavour to express transcendent power, for example, in his Prophets and Sibyls, draws him beyond nature into something which you may call exaggeration or higher interpretation according to your sympathies. But his knowledge is perfect. These ideal forms of his are founded on a profound and scientific knowledge of the laws of life which shows itself in every part, from the general scheme of the figure to the minor details of muscles and internal structure. His grand

manner was no mere formal ambition in him, as it was in some of his imitators, but the natural language of a soul struggling with conceptions so profound as to require an almost unnatural and superhuman form for their expression. Look at his *Cumæan Sibyl* with the strange terrifying mass of her body and her lean, grim, strenuous visage reading unchangeable fate out of her volume. She is almost masculine in the muscular salience and strong curves of her figure. The powerful shoulder blade, the arm awful in its strength yet betraying something of the lean and wasted outline of age, the nervous power in the bent forefinger, the lean exposure of the muscles of the neck, the withered cheek and sinister lines about the chin and mouth form a strange combination. It should be an old crone, a hag mixing potions and gathering poisonous simples in a drama of Shakespeare's. But it is not; it is a prophetess gifted with something like immortal and superhuman force even in the decay of her mortal frame. Under less skilful hands the gigantic mass of the bust and arms would seem discordant and monstrous, but Michelangelo has succeeded in giving it not only something of the beauty of vigour and strength but even, as Vasari notes, a