

once the rapture and despair of the new-born instinct of art. Rome woke to the consciousness of the priceless wealth long buried in her bosom. The earth seemed to renew her youth. There were giants in those days. Michael Angelo, great as poet, painter, and sculptor; Da Vinci, Ghiberti, Cellini, Fra Lippi, Macchiavelli, Petrarch, Politian—a brotherhood of art and letters never equalled in the world.*

But no good or evil is unmixed. This revived learning brought with it a revived paganism. This quickened art contained the seeds of its own moral taint. Social corruption and political tyranny and treachery flourished amid this too stimulating atmosphere. The moral antiseptic of a vital Christianity was wanting. The salt had lost its savour, and moral corruption ensued. The state of the Church was at its very worst. The Papacy was never more Heaven-defying in its wickedness. A succession of human monsters occupied St. Peter's chair. Paul II., Sixtus IV., Innocent VIII., and the infamous Borgia—Alexander VI.—had converted the Vatican into a theatre of the most odious vices. While wearing the title of Christ's Vicars on

earth, they were utterly pagan in sentiment and worse than pagan in life. "They regarded," says Macaulay, "the Christian mysteries of which they were the stewards, just as the Augur Cicero and the Pontifex Maximus Cæsar regarded the Sibylline books and the pecking of the sacred chickens. Among themselves they spoke of the Incarnation, the Eucharist, and the Trinity in the same tone in which Cotta and Velleius talked of the oracle of Delphi, or of the voice of Faunus in the mountains."

Said Leo X.—himself a priest at eight and a cardinal at fourteen years of age—to his secretary Bembo, "All ages know well enough of what advantage this fable about Christ has been to us and ours." The same Bembo cautions a friend against reading the Epistles of St. Paul, "lest his taste should be corrupted." Of the works of Macchiavelli, the foremost writer of the times, says Macaulay, "Such a display of wickedness, naked yet not ashamed: such cool, judicious, scientific atrocity, seem rather to belong to a fiend than to the most depraved of men." Yet the highest honours of his age were heaped upon him, and at the first courts of Italy his atrocious sentiments evoked no condemnation, but rather the warmest approval.

The city of Florence was, not even excepting Rome, the chief seat of the Renaissance revival in Italy. It was the very focus of art, of literature, of commerce. Its revenue was greater than that which both England and Ireland yielded to Elizabeth. Its cloth manufactures employed thirty thousand workmen. Eighty banks transacted its business, and that of Europe, on a scale that might surprise "even the contemporaries of the Barings and the Rothschilds."

"Every place," says Macaulay, "to which the merchant princes of Florence extended their gigantic traffic, from the

* Not among the "giants" of the time, but as one of its tenderest and most loving spirits, is to be mentioned Fra Angelico, whose lovely frescoes of saints and angels and Madonnas still adorn the cells of San Marco. He could not preach, but he could paint such beatific visions as fill our eyes with tears to-day. He never touched his brush till he had steeped his inmost soul in prayer. Overcome with emotion, the tears often streamed down his face as he painted the Seven Sorrows of Mary or the raptures of the saved. He would take no money for his work: it was its own exceeding great reward. When offered the archbishopric of Florence he humbly declined, and recommended for that dignity a brother monk. He died at Rome while sitting at his easel—caught away to behold with open face the beatific vision on which his inner sight so long had dwelt. The holy faces of his angels still haunt our memory with a spell of power. Well did the saintly painter wear the name of Fra Angelico—the Angelic Brother.