

2 STORIES OF THE FRENCH ARTISTS

civilising influences which were springing up all over Europe. We feel, on coming into contact with the Italian renaissance, that the men who produced these wonderful manifestations of the inner soul of man must have played a great part in the making of the history of their own age. Viewed in the perspective of time, they loom as giants; their work far surpassed in grandeur the puny achievements of their patrons. Florence herself would be shorn of much of her glory had she not been mother or foster-mother of that mighty array of painters and sculptors whose names are household words. Italian art can be gauged by a universal standard; for though from one point of view it is intensely national, in the truer sense it is universal. The stupendousness of its ideals, and the means it makes use of for the translating of those ideals into communicable language, compel universal wonder.

Italian art is, perhaps, the only art which can be studied or understood apart from its historical setting. French art is quite different. It is indissolubly bound up with the history of France. To approach it without consideration of the historical events which called it into being is surely to deprive it of the greater