

But strange as it may seem, it is neither as painter nor sculptor that Buonarroti's name is most frequently mentioned but as an architect. His ability in this direction was first shown by the way in which he designed the ceiling for the Sistine chapel. Before this, arched ceilings had been divided into different compartments; but Michael Angelo ignored the dome, arranged his pictures as if the space above were open, and built an architecture out into the air by means of perspective illusion. Thus the whole ceiling could be seen at once from any point of view. The great dome of St. Peter's, at which we gaze with reverential awe is but a continuation of this plan. Bramante laid the foundation of St. Peter's in 1506 and since then many artists have beautified or disfigured it by their contributions of arch or pillar, but all through the centuries the dome, its crowning wonder, has remained unchanged. It towers far above all other buildings in Rome, so grand in its isolation that in comparison all else fades into insignificance. This was Michael Angelo's last great work.

He did not return to Florence after her defeat but lived for twenty years in Rome. During this period the stormy, troubled life became calmer; though sad he was much happier than ever before. It was now that he formed the acquaintance with the noble Vittoria Colonna, the only woman whose softening influences seem to have touched his life. But it was only for a short time. At the end of two years she died, and it is for the old man in the twilight of his lonely life that we have the warmest sympathy. His feelings are best expressed in one of his own sweet sonnets:

"The course of life has brought my lingering days
In fragile ship over a stormy sea
To the common port, where all our works must be
Counted and reckoned, works for blame or praise,
Here ends life's tender fantasy that made (I know the error of the thought)
Great art my idol and my monarch,
Now my heart perceives how low is each man's longing laid.
Oh thoughts that tempt us, idle, sweet and vain
Where are ye when a double death draws near?
One sure, one threatening an eternal loss.
Painting and Sculpture now are no more gain
To fill the soul turned to the God head
Stretching great arms out to us from his cross."

More than three hundred years have passed, since Michael Angelo gave to the world the products of his unrivalled genius, and yet to-day men are as keenly interested in him as when he lived, the leading spirit of all that was strong and noble in art. We feel, intuitively, that it is not the paintings and statues hidden away in some Old World city, but the man himself who commands our highest admiration, a man who measured by whatever standard was truly great, standing apart from the world, yet always enriching humanity by beautiful thoughts expressed in song or statue or painting. All Italians willingly grant him a place in their trio of great men—Raphael, Dante, Michael Angelo. But he is great in a different sense from these. He is unique. In three of the great arts he is easily first. Men may learn of him, may imitate, but can never hope to equal him. He is forced upon us from every point of view as foremost among men and not until the nations realize that Art alone marks a country's prime, will the works of Michael Angelo be truly appreciated.

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