

Nearly all the great artists of the preceding century had had a hand in the decorations of the Sistine Chapel, in the Vatican, at Rome. It was in this same chapel that Michael Angelo reluctantly executed the remarkable frescoes that are now the chief glory of the place. The chapel is a very ugly shape—a narrow oblong room, with a high tunnel-vaulted ceiling.

The task that the artist had before him was to complete the history of the world, which previous artists had begun in the series of pictures on the side walls. Michael Angelo's first work was to prepare the ceiling for the reception of the pictures. This was done by an elaborate architectural design painted in grays. In the lunettes and arched spaces over the windows, he placed the ancestors of Christ, waiting in different attitudes for the coming of the Saviour. Between the windows are figures of the prophets and the sibyls, each one marked with so strong an individuality that it is scarcely necessary to know their names in order to recognize them. Jeremiah, in a dejected attitude, rests his head upon his hand; Ezekiel seems to see the prophetic vision; Joel reads from a scroll, deeply moved by what he reads; Zacharias turns the leaves of his book; Isaiah, with hand upraised, is awaking from a dream to tell the good tidings; Jonah leans back, rejoicing in newly-discovered life and strength; Daniel writes what he sees in the Spirit. The Delphian Sybil seems to gaze at her prophecy fulfilled before her expectant eyes.

Many years after his first work in the Sistine Chapel, Michael Angelo painted the Last Judgment over the altar, at the request of Paul III.

"Its chief defect lay deep in his very nature. As he had long severed himself from what may be called ecclesiastical types, and a religious tone of feeling; as he always made a man, whoever it was, invariably with exaggerated physical strength."

Michael Angelo opened up an undreamed-of future for his favourite art of sculpture. He aimed at an ideal so high that he never reached it, and all his works are in a measure incomplete. He seems to have been burdened with a restless, insatiable craving to express the mighty thoughts which were surging in his brain, and he seemed to be ever dissatisfied with his achievements. Many of his works were allegorical, meaning more than what appears at first sight; and their very incompleteness gives them a mysterious power over our imagination. He carried the modern idea to an extreme; and, in order to give the fullest possible expression to some abstract thought, he violated all the laws of