

Michael Angelo.

About the names of the great, whether of places or of people, there lies a magic charm. The same charm clings to certain periods of the world's history and to none more closely than to that period which we call the Renaissance. During this age of the world's awakening when brilliancy of intellectual achievement and maritime enterprise marked the change from the oppression and despotism of the Middle Ages to the liberty of thought and action of the Modern Era, a number of European cities became prominent. Even now the mention of their names brings before our imagination a power and a glory undimmed, though they have lost much of their material greatness in the progress of the centuries.

Of these cities Florence must always stand first. Not because of her political power, for Venice then "sat throned in state" and exercised an influence far more potent than that of her sister city; not because of her natural beauty, for though indeed beautiful Naples was far more lovely; not for any of the many causes which one might naturally assign, but because of the number of great men which she produced—men of ability, of genius, and, more than all, of a determination to force their way through the intricacies of politics and art, until they and their city stood supreme, rivalled only by ancient Athens and her citizens.

From that time Florence has been a centre of refinement and culture, and on the walls of her churches and palaces and in her squares and piazzas, we may trace the history of art from the first crude efforts of Cimabue and Giotto, down through the ages with ever increasing power until we stop, amazed, before the works of that wonderful man—poet, architect, painter, sculptor—the crowning genius of the age, Michael Angelo Buonarrotti.

The lofty elements of character, which marked the life of this great man, began to manifest themselves very early in his career. His proud passionate nature was shown no more strongly when in Rome he unceremoniously left his work on the mausoleum of a pope, because that official tried to overawe him with his dignity, than when as a child in Florence, he allowed no discouragement to daunt him in the determination to work out his career as an artist. Great earnestness of purpose; lofty conceptions and ideals for whose attainment he would sacrifice every bodily comfort; a grandeur of spirit which made him as distinct among his fellow men as his own massive statues among the weaker attempts of his jealous rivals—these were the distinguishing traits of Michael Angelo. He was preëminently a sculptor, and the first happy years of his artist life were spent under the kindly influence of Lorenzo de Medici. With the death of this munificent patron, Michael Angelo's real life began; the first step in it was a visit to Rome.