

A.E.W.S. ARMY HQ.  
APR 1944



# FLORENCE

# IMPORTANT PLACES OF INTEREST

Below is a list of the more accessible places in Florence which are starred in order of relative importance. The ranking is that of the Fine Arts and Monuments and Archives Sub-Commission, A.C.

## CHURCHES

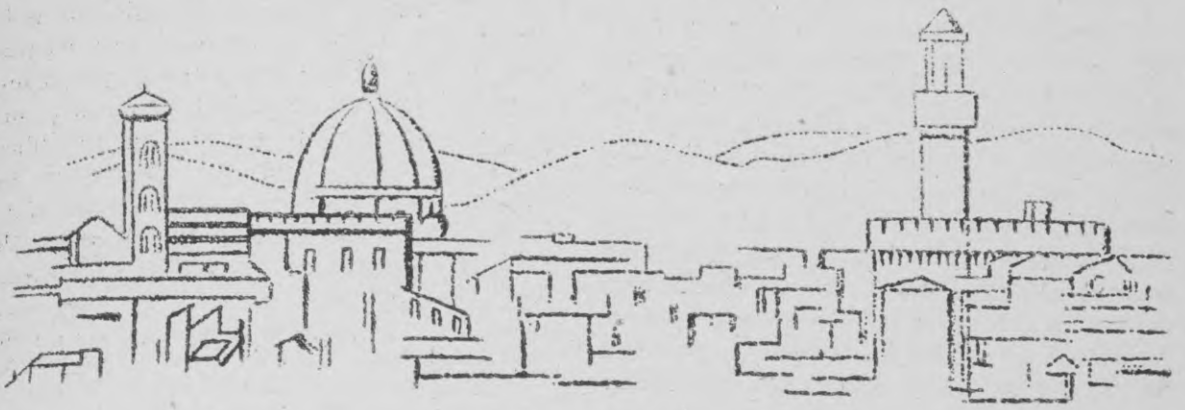
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|--|--|
| *** Cathedral S. Maria del Fiore.<br>The Baptistry and Campanile.<br>SS. Apostoli.<br>Badia (Abbey). | S. Ambrogio.                           |
| * S. Felicita.   | ** S. Annunziata.                      |
| *** S. Lorenzo.  | S. Apollonia.                          |
| *** S. Maria del Carmine.  | *** S. Croce (Museum and Pazzi Chapel) |
| * S. Maria Maddalena dei Pazzi.  | S. Felice.                             |
| S. Maria Nuova.  | *** S. Marco with Fra Angelico Museum  |
| S. Niccolo sopr'Arno.  | S. Maria Maggiore.                     |
| ** S. Michele.   | *** S. Maria Novella.                  |
| S. Salvatore al Monte.   | S. Michele Visdomini.                  |
| * S. Trinita.  | * S. Miniato al Monte.                 |
| ** Spedale degli Innocenti.  | * Ognissanti.                          |
|  | S. Simone.                             |
|  | ** S. Spirito.                         |
|  | Chiostro della Scalzo.                 |

## PALAZZI AND PUBLIC BUILDINGS ETC.

- |                                   |                       |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| ** Piazza della Signoria.         | Medici Museum Chapel. |
| Loggia del Bigallo.               | Riccardiana Library.  |
| ** Ponte Vecchio.                 | Pazzi (Quaratesi).    |
| * Loggia dei Lanzi.               | Rinuccini.            |
| Loggia di S. Paolo.               | ** Strozzi.           |
| *** Vecchio (della Signoria).     | * Guadagni.           |
| *** Del Podesta (Bargello).       | Pandolfini.           |
| * Davanzati.                      | Di Parte Guelfa.      |
| Loggia del Mercato Nuovo.         | ** Rucellai.          |
| ** Medici-Riccardi (del Governo). | Torrigiani.           |

## MUSEUMS AND ART GALLERIES ETC.

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|--|--|
| *** Degli Uffizi (Art Gallery).          | Capponi.                                     |
| * Casa Horne Art Museum.                 | * Corsini (Art Collection).                  |
| *** Galleria dell'Accademia (Art).       | *** Pitti with Art Gallery.                  |
| Bardini (Art).                           | ** Casa Buonarrotti, Michelangelo<br>Museum. |
| * Opera del Duomo (Cathedral<br>Museum). | ** Archaeological.                           |
| University.                              | Conservatory of Music                        |
| Bartolini-Salimbeni.                     |  |



# FLORENCE

*The city of Florence is one of the many whose English name bears little apparent resemblance to the native and yet, as in the case of Livorno, which we call Leghorn, the difference is essentially one of local dialect and Latin origin. Originally Florence was known as Florentia, a name which indicates the profusion of flowers for which the district is still renowned.*

*Florence is situated on both banks of the River Arno, at a point where*

*the hills constrict the lower plain of the Arno Valley to a narrow level, which is entirely filled by the modern extension of the city. This near approach of the hills, which are studded with small villages and many mediaeval and older remains, gives Florence its peculiar charm for, from no matter what part of the town one looks, the slopes of the surrounding hills are clearly visible.*

## FOREWORD

The story of Florence cannot be told easily as a simple chronological story. It is simpler and less tedious to give an outline of the development of the old city and the early communes, to continue with the story of Florence from the XIIIth to XVth century, with notes on its later story. The varied aspects of mediaeval and Renaissance city life; leading personalities; the economic struggle and above all the artistic and creative achievements of the city in commerce, art and administration require separate elaboration and can only be touched upon in this booklet.

As in the case of the Rome booklet issued by ERS no attempt will be made to give more than brief mention of the more important and historical and artistic monuments and collections in the town. For these a guide book and actual visit are necessary. This pamphlet

aims only at giving the historical background against which monuments and collections were created and a short itinerary with notes on the more interesting places.

*The Roman city contained the usual amphitheatre, baths, temples and legionary camp, but little structural evidence of these can be seen today. The outline of the Roman "Castra" can be traced in the street plan of the old city. This influence of the Roman nucleus on the street plans of the mediaeval town is one which can be traced in almost every former province of the Roman Empire including such English cities as York and Chester and in a large number of the Roman provincial centres of Gaul or modern France, where the complex of Roman nucleus, mediaeval church and castle are the chief common characteristics.*

## V CENTURY—X CENTURY A.D.

Florentia commenced its history as a small Etruscan settlement which in no way foresaw its future rapid development, though even in Roman times it soon eclipsed that of its richer and more powerful Etruscan neighbours. The Etruscan origin of Florence, like that of such southern cities as Capua, seems to have strongly influenced the plan and nature of the town, which soon acquired importance as a bridge-town on the Arno. Its founders' works are preserved in the magnificent Etruscan Museum filled with excavators' spoils from all over Tuscany. In peace-time this was one of the most important museums in Italy and reference will again be made to its better known exhibits, many of which have been removed elsewhere for safe-keeping.

Florentia suffered more than many Italian cities in the devastation of Italy which resulted from the Barbarian invasions, though successfully resisting the Vandals in 405, and again in the long wars between the Goths and Byzantines—a period roughly between 536 and 570 A.D. The city was almost completely destroyed and for a time, the population scattered to such nearby centres as Pistoia Fiesole and even the more distant Siena. It would appear that before long the natural advantages of the site and the survival of the Arno bridge led to a slow re-emergence of the town and after the new turmoil of the Lombard invasions, the city slowly developed as a commercial community.

Little is known of this troubled and obscure period of Florentine history. Indeed, only one documentary record exists to confirm that VIIIth Century Florence was in fact populated. A document records that in 785, Charlemagne attended Mass in the city. Little detailed knowledge is indeed available before the early XIIth Century from which time, to quote Niccolo Rudolico, *The history of Florence is the history of civilisation and of Italian and European civilisation of the Middle Ages. Renaissance Florence was for those ages what Athens has been to antiquity.*

Xth Century Florence did not boast of any of the numerous schools which arose

after the conquest of Charlemagne and its near neighbours Siena and Pisa outshone it in learning, architecture, wealth and power. Pisa was already preparing herself for that brief but glorious primacy among the early maritime republics of which she was the successor to Amalfi. The history of Pisa becomes at many points intimately bound up with that of Florence as does that of Pistoia and Arezzo, both of which were more important during the early periods under discussion.

Before the XI Century Florence was quietly building up her industries which were based primarily on woollen manufacture and silk textiles, in addition to a large distributing trade for which the city was geographically well placed. At this stage she was singularly free of the party factions, both political and class, which were already causing blood-shed and disturbance in most of the newly emerged cities of Northern Italy and Southern Germany. She was, indeed, almost the last city in Italy to be affected by the poison of the Guelph and Ghibelline factions.

To this early period of tranquil development much of the future greatness of the city is due and it is probable that the major factor in influencing this early freedom from disturbance was the complete subordination of all classes to the interest of commerce. Trade was greater than feudal nobility and one prime source of friction—nobility versus townsfolk—was suppressed early.

Unfortunately, the later history of the city does not repeat the earlier freedom from internal feuds. *In many ways Florence epitomises the worst features of those political cycles in which the violent removal of the weaker party is followed by the prompt reappearance of divisions in the stronger.*

Knowledge of Italian cities in the XIth Century is greater and more detailed concerning those cities in Lombardy and the south, but similar factors were operating everywhere even though Florence was fortunate in avoiding the more acute disturbances which characterised the political and feudal struggles of the times.



# THE CITIES AND FEUDALISM

Two major factors affected the life of the times.

(1) The struggle between the Popes and the German Emperors and the sovereigns of other states for the right of appointing the higher clergy—the struggle of "Investitures."

(2) The emergence of small towns or communes not dependant directly on any feudal overlord and whose allegiances cut right across the feudal ties—both Church and Secular—to which the mass of the population were subjected.

A study of feudalism has no part in this article, but its influence on the origins of the communes and the way in which the lesser feudal nobility became attached to the town must be understood. Otherwise, later Florentine history appears a confusion of violence and intrigue for which there is no apparent excuse or reason.

During the Barbarian invasions the old Roman cities, decadent since the last two centuries of the empire, survived with scarcely a tenth of their former population though very few were permanently ruined. The fortified villas, manors and castles of the nobles became the natural refuge of the tenants and country folk in time of stress, as indeed feudal obligations compelled.

Some of the cities, especially those which were the seat of a bishop, had maintained some organisation and a few at an early stage, rebuilt their walls and developed a local militia. The bishops in those times were usually drawn from the ranks of the nobility, and it was often difficult to determine whether these fighting count-bishops of Italy and Burgundy or prince-bishops of the Western Empire were not more secular than clerical in outlook and behaviour.

**FEUDAL DIFFICULTIES.**—In Northern Italy feudalism never gained a very strong or complete hold, and during the struggle over investitures, there was a loosening of the already lax ties which bound the lesser nobility to their greater overlords. Many threw in their lot with the small and newly emerging towns which at an early date had developed a

definite and characteristic democratic organisation almost justifying the term "Commune," applied to them.

Unfortunately, these new recruits to the towns soon organised themselves for the natural protection of their own interests and viewpoints. Many even built themselves fortified residences on the outskirts of the town or seized and fortified the remains of earlier buildings, within its walls as in Rome. Quite naturally, the citizens made up of such distinct groups were affected for various reasons by the greater struggle going on between the Papacy and the sovereign.

The Emperor, recognising the new importance of the towns, accorded special privileges to the new communes which were soon able to emancipate themselves to a larger extent from the feudal lords, but not to free themselves from the necessity of some dependence for reasons of security.

In Tuscany, of which Florence was to become the principal city, the leading feudal magnate at the end of the XIth and early XII Century was the Countess Matilda, an ardent supporter of the Holy See. She, likewise, encouraged the new cities, and accorded them privileges, and succeeded, during her lifetime, in retaining the loyalty of the greater number of townfolk. At her death in 1115, when her vast dominions were bequeathed to the Holy See, the Commune of Florence was already firmly established, and its general civic organisation did not differ greatly from that of its neighbours.

**CIVIC ORGANISATION.**—In theory all the citizens had the right to election, and, provided they had the special knowledge necessary, were eligible for any of the city offices. Registers of eligibility were maintained, and elections held regularly. The old Roman system of annual *Consuls* was revived in a new guise and the executive functions carried out by them. A consultative assembly also existed for discussion of policy matters.

The methods of election, however—by popular assembly of all the orders such as then were held in Rome for the

Papacy—were such as led to friction and dispute, and the voting was often called in question and frequently nullified. The consuls, from stress of circumstances, tended to make themselves masters and to perpetuate their power within a class. Soon the communes were copying both the organisation and customs of the feudal fiefs. Their chief consuls acquired the right to levy war in the name of the city.



*The communes, like the city states of Greece, took to fighting each other when not resisting a common foe.*

**GUELPH AND Ghibelline.** The rival parties of Empire and Papacy found their counterparts within the commune, and to these major factions was soon to be added the age-old struggle between the wealthy and poor. Later on, when the poor had been suppressed, struggles for power between rival wealthy families and rival factions of a triumphant party, continued the popular taste for local warfare.

The names of the factions often varied with the cities. Some factions, arising out of the family feuds, long outlasted the elimination of the weaker family, and party names gradually took on a different meaning in different areas. This occurred with the well-known Guelph and Ghibelline parties whose names were common to both Italy and Germany where they had originated during the rivalry between the House of Franconia and Bavaria for the Holy Roman Empire.

The name Ghibelline came from Weiblingen, a castle belonging to the Franconians, Guelph from Welf, the name

of a prince of the Bavarian House. In other words, the parties were dynastic. In Italy, however, the party names had a different significance; the Guelphs were the Papal supporters.

Florence and Tuscany were predominantly Guelph since the time of Countess Matilda, while the Ghibellines were the Emperor's supporters.

**XIITH CENTURY: COMMERCIAL PROGRESS**—Prior to the end of the XIth Century, Florence was slowly building up her industries and consolidating her commercial activities in an atmosphere which was remarkably free from the factional disturbances which provided almost the main outlet for the energies of neighbouring communes. She was, in fact, the last city in Italy to be infected with the virus of the Guelph and Ghibelline factions. This was largely due to a successful suppression of any party activities of the nobility who appear to have been entirely subordinated politically to the interests of the wealthier borghese.

Remarkable steps, many of them extremely undemocratic and contrary to all modern conceptions of the individual's rights, were taken to assimilate the *signorile* or noble elements with the townfolk. Badges of rank, and even family names, where these indicated origins from the territorial nobility, were suppressed. At certain stages this class was even excluded from holding city offices, despite the fact that they might be eminently suitable as candidates.



Even though Florence thus succeeded in avoiding the ruinous struggles which affected other Italian communes in the XIVth Century, she did not avoid creating similar classes from her own citizens nor did she escape the establishment of local tyrants. The vacancy left by the suppression of

the nobles was soon filled by the richer citizens who formed the Popolo Grosso, while the less fortunate were termed the Popolo Minuto. The latter, of course, were infinitely the more numerous.

Once consolidated, the first actions of the outwardly democratic and commercial Commune of Florence was an unprovoked aggression against the nearby fortress and community of Fiesole, which was destroyed in 1125, an act which clearly revealed the future aspirations of the city.

Other signs within the city suggested that a strong differentiation by wealth, power, and interest, was taking place among the citizens.

**THE GUILDS.**—All citizens were incorporated into guilds or corporations, according to their occupation. Gradually, the more important guilds separated themselves from the lesser trade groups. Within the guild, rule was largely in the hands of the master craftsman, a rule which worked well so long as most members could hope ultimately to become masters.

The increased wealth of the city and the operations of successful masters in eliminating smaller ones led inevitably to the creation of classes who were economically dependent on the few—the real cause of the Ciompi disturbances in 1378. Individual guilds endeavoured to restrict the activities of others. One of the best instances of this was when the shoemakers successfully confined the cobblers to the repairs of old footwear. (Union restrictions are nothing new and have operated since at least the Vth Century B.C.).

The more important guilds—Arti Maggiori—included banking, silk weaving, woollen manufacturing, lawyers, bakers, etc. and had the major say in the city's affairs, but the leaders of the Arti Minori, or lesser trades, were not excluded from the general councils of the city even although their vote often carried less weight.

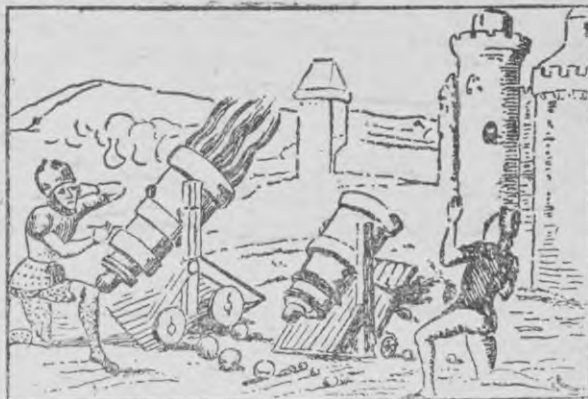
**XIIIth CENTURY—FACTIONAL DISTURBANCES.** Soon after the turn of the XIIIth Century, the rivalry between the families of Buondelmonti and Amedi commenced the long record of civil strife and personal intrigue for control of the administration. It all started when a Buondelmonti, having promised to marry an Amedi, with whom he had perhaps been intimate, changed his mind and married a Donati. The Amedi killed the offender.

The feud started and the now threatened Amedi formed a league with the Uberti, and soon most families of note found it wise to ally themselves with one or other cause. At first it took the form of a struggle for the municipal offices. Later powerful outside interests, led by Frederick II, introduced a radical change. A force of 1600 of the Emperor's cavalry, summoned through Uberti's influence, persuaded the Buondelmonti and their close supporters to flee the city in 1248. From that moment the defeated party embraced the Guelph cause, and their successful opponents became Ghibellines.

On the death of Frederick II, two years later, the citizens were powerful enough to obtain a new city constitution, known as Primo Popolo. This again excluded from office all the nobility. Soon, however, it recalled the exiled factions and with them the feuds.

Meanwhile the city was divided into six wards, or Sestieri, and each selected two representatives who were known as the Anziani—the *ancients* or the *Old Men*. It was about this time that the building now known as the Bargello and then as the Palazzo del Podesta was erected. Although commenced in 1255, it was not finished until about 1367. It was originally intended for the use by outsiders—of the Anziani.

In addition to this committee of 12, there were two offices filled by outsiders—the *Cap-tain of the People*,





and the *Podesta*, who carried out the principal executive and legal functions.

The system was short-lived. The Guelph majority chased the Ghibellines from the city, and they took refuge in Siena. In 1260, two years after their banishment, they received powerful support from King Manfred and crushed the Florentines in the Battle of Monteperti. The defeated Guelph faction fled the city in advance of the victors' arrival.

Thus began the alternating struggle for power which continued in varying forms until the Medici family succeeded in establishing what amounted to a dynasty in the XVth Century. In 1280, an attempt was made to form a coalition council of the two parties. But it was apparent that in spite of successive exiles, peace could not be obtained, and in 1282, a second constitution was created.

The Secondo Popolo passed more extreme legislation to exclude the noble element from city office. It also created

a powerful city police and wealthy citizen's magistracy under a Gonfaloniere of Justice. Registration in one or other of the city's guilds was made a compulsory condition for holding citizenship and much of the legislation had parallels familiar to all in modern times.

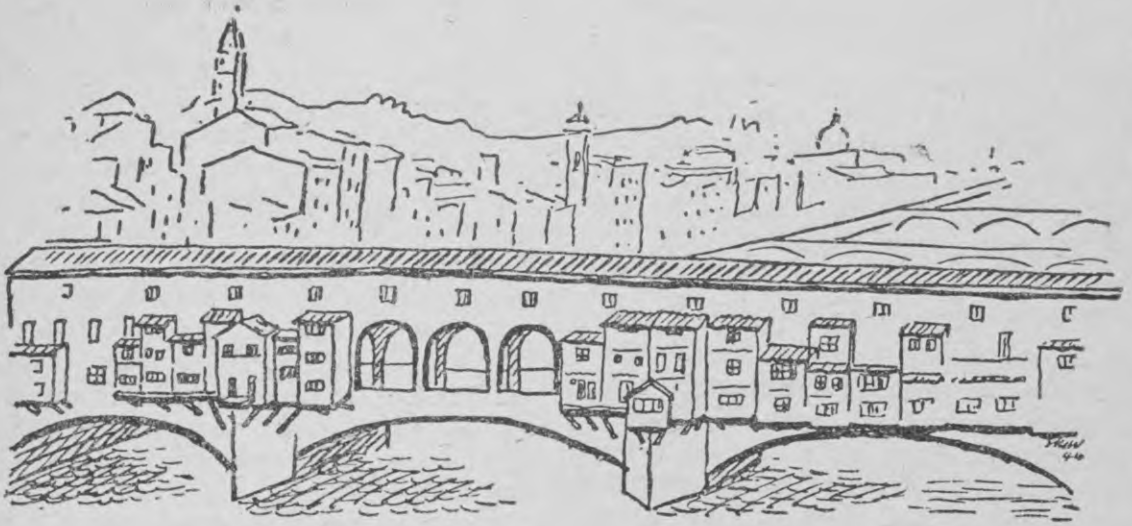
About this time, the city of Pisa was disastrously defeated by Genoa at Meloria. This had obvious effects on the people of Florence. In spite of their internal disturbances the citizens were prompt to seize the advantage from their rival's discomfiture.

Florence was enabled to gain a number of strong points and to threaten Lucca. In 1289, the Florentines won a great victory over Arezzo after which a peace was finally arranged with Pisa on the condition that Pisa recalled her exiled Guelphs and promised never to appoint as *Podesta* anyone who was not from a city friendly to Florence. All these precautions to maintain a one-party system and to avoid factions came to nought.



Bas - relief from Campanile.





## DANTE'S EXILE

### THE BLACKS AND THE WHITES.

Although the nobility of Florence were impotent to provoke a disturbance, there already existed in nearby Pistoia, a serious schism in the ruling Guelph Party. The rift originated among the followers and descendants of the two wives of a Guelph leader, Messer Cancelliere, whose first wife was named Bianca. At the same time the Florentines were divided by a feud between the Cerchi and the Donati families and it was greatly feared that the Pistoia feud might infect Florentine politics. And so it turned out.

The Blacks, or Neri, of Pistoia, combined with the Donati; the Whites, or Bianci, with the Cerchi. The Donati, through the bankers of Boniface VIII, sought Papal intervention. Immediately this was known, the Neri faction were in practice Guelphs, and the Bianci embraced in self-defence the Ghibelline cause. Boniface VIII sent his legate to Florence, ostensibly to mediate between the parties, but secretly to support the Blacks.

It was then that Dante Alighiere, of the *Priori*, made proposals to secure peace without *foreign* intervention. He advised the Signoria to place the leaders of the Neri under restraint at Pieve, and the Bianci, at Sarzana. Unfortunately, the city government did not adhere to Dante's wise proposals. In

due course, the party leaders, once more at liberty, were summoning outside aid. The details of the next 18 months are too complex for intelligible summary, but in the finish some 600 members of the Bianci were exiled, among them Dante himself, against whom several serious charges were preferred.

It is to Dante's exile that the world owes his *Divine Comedy*. In it Dante has obtained a subtle and lasting revenge on those of his fellow citizens and political enemies who abused their temporary power to cause unnecessary humiliation to himself, and others.

*The Florin.* It was during the XIIIth Century (in 1252) that the famous *forino d'oro* was first coined. It was the forerunner of the florin.

### XIV CENTURY RENAISSANCE.—

Following the expulsion of the White faction, the Commune of Florence gradually followed the other Communes of Italy which, by degrees, developed a form of government by the wealthier and more privileged citizens. The Popolo became a *Signoria*, in which comparatively little power was accorded to the lesser orders. There were, of course, intervals of turbulent reaction, but by the end of the century, the way was open for the acceptance of personal rule by the Medici.

For five years, from 1312, Guelph Florence placed itself under Robert

of Naples, owing to the pretensions of the Ghibelline German Emperor in Italy. This protection had to be extended owing to other threats, and in 1326, Walter of Brienne entered the city with 1500 cavalry as a representative of the protecting power. He left the following year, after having cost the city 450,000 florins, yet leaving a favourable personal impression.

Soon the city re-organised itself along semi-popular lines. Representatives of the three classes took part. Magistrates were selected from an approved list of candidates, drawn up by a electoral commission. The names were drawn out of a box. The men chosen held office for a fixed time. Names not drawn remained in the box and were mixed up again with new ones for the next election.

Similarly, leaders were chosen as representatives of the major guilds and for the gonfaloniere of the city companies. A large and unwieldy council of 300 citizens—the Consiglio del Popolo

—and a smaller mixed council of magnates and citizens, the Consiglio del Commune, advised and discussed affairs in general. This had 250 members.

There followed a renewal of war with Pisa, the capture and loss of Lucca, and the second appointment of Walter of Brienne, Duke of Athens, to the *Signoria* of the city. The Duke rapidly lost the affections of the people and was driven out in 1343. In the uprising which led to the tyrant's downfall, the nobles and magnates played a large part and as a recognition of this were allowed once more to hold city offices.

The city was redivided into quarters and each was represented by two citizens and one noble. A recurrence of old vices and a revival of old suspicions led to more disturbances and a reduction in the noble representation. Many noble families accepted five years' loss of right of office as the price for becoming ordinary citizens, and the chance of continuing to exercise their political talents under a new guise.

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## PLAGUE AND DEPRESSION

About 1348, two new disasters affected the city - the plague, whose story is so intimately connected with the origin of Boccaccio's *Decameron* and the failure of the Bardi Bank, which in its turn affected the stability of other mercantile institutions in Florence. The direct causes of the bank failure were the money difficulties of Edward III of England, who at that time owed a half-million to the Florentines—then

lost it. Italian histories still record this as a typical example of English bad faith. It should be noted that the city revenue at that time was some 300,000 gold florins annually.

For some 14 years there was an armed peace, the city being on the alert against any attempt on the part of the Duke of Athens to regain control. In this it was successful.





# THE MEDICI

## THE CIOMPI DISTURBANCES.

Finally, another family feud, between Albizzi and Ricci, renewed the traditional faction politics. The Albizzi had the support of the wealthier Popolo Grosso, and in consequence Ricci, supported by a few leading families including the Alberti and Medici, sought to champion the Popolo Minuto.

In 1378, one of the Medici was Gonfaloniere of Justice and he proposed new laws which in effect would give some legal protection to the dispossessed parties. The laws were made with modification owing to popular insistence.

Later in the same year new disturbances followed and Michele Lando, a wool carder, led a violent movement against the city government and proclaimed himself gonfaloniere. A new *Signoria* was elected — three representatives from each class of nobles, Popolo Grosso and Minuto. The Minuto were resentful as they had hoped to control the city. A deputation to Lando was met with firmness and the ring-leaders were hanged. The city continued with its new constitution, and Lando proved an astute and capable citizen.

## XVth CENTURY.

Florence had now arrived at an interesting stage in its economic development and all the parties which previously held sway were successively broken up by internal dissension or the triumph of

their opponents. The real power was passing inevitably into the hands of a few extremely wealthy bankers and merchants. At the head of these banking families were the Medici one of whom, Cosimo, known as Cosimo il Vecchio, had perceived for some time that ultimately the family which disposed the greatest wealth must come to rule the city.

Cosimo maintained wise and careful relations with all the neighbouring states. To many of these rulers he advanced money. He also conducted business and even delicate diplomatic negotiations. In the city, Cosimo was at first content to see his near rivals spend their strength in rivalry for temporary dominion. He, himself, was prepared to wait until such time as his family inevitably came to the top. Events, however, were precipitated in 1453 by Rinaldo Albizzi, one of the more determined opponents of the Medicis, who found himself with a gonfaloniere disposed to carry out his vengeful designs.

Cosimo was summoned to appear before the *Signoria* upon vague charges of using his wealth to the detriment of the city. After a few days in which he ate nothing for fear of poison, Cosimo, perhaps with the aid of some well-placed bribes, escaped with a sentence of 10 years' banishment to Padua.



Rinaldo was alarmed at the reception which Cosimo received from neighbouring states and a new and more friendly Balia was elected. Some months later Pope Eugenius IV happened to be staying in the Florence area. Rome at the time was not very safe for him, and Cosimo's friends arranged for Rinaldo to be received in audience. The outcome of this strange meeting was the recall of Cosimo and the flight of Rinaldo. Cosimo returned in triumph to Florence, and the city invested him with the *signoria* for life. From this time dates the personal rule of the Medici which persisted with brief intervals for 300 years.

The old form of city government was outwardly maintained. In addition to the College of Priori, the nobles and magnates, a council similar to its predecessors preserved the democratic form of government. Real power, however, passed gradually into the hands of Cosimo and his successors. Cosimo maintained personal rule by a mixture of ability, blandishment and subtle benefactions. At the same time he took the precaution of appointing the leading condottiere of the age to take over the armed forces of the city.

After Cosimo's death, and the brief and bad rule of Piero di Medici, came Lorenzo, the greatest of the Medici, not only as a statesman, but also as a great patron of the arts and a writer of considerable ability. During his reign one attempt was made—at Easter 1478—to murder him and his family during the celebration of Mass in the new sacristy of the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore.

The signal for the uprising was the moment when the Archbishop of Pisa (himself a suspect party to the plot) raised the Consecrated Host. Lorenzo escaped, his brother Giuliano was killed, and the people rose against the plotters who were pursued through the city. The leaders, including the archbishop, were hanged from the windows of the Palazzo Vecchio.

This, in turn, led to the Papal excommunication of Lorenzo, and a ban upon the city. The excommunication was annulled shortly afterwards in 1480, when the Moslems seized Otranto and directly threatened Southern Italy.

Later, Lorenzo married his daughter into the family of Innocent VIII, to whom he lent the services of Pollaiuolo, one of the leading sculptors of his day. Lorenzo systematically spoiled and placated the citizens of Florence by many well-meant indulgences, all of which served to maintain his power.

Under him, it was possible that Italy might have been united during the XVth Century.

Lorenzo ruled the city with the aid of a College of Priori and a consiglio of 70, all of whom were Medici or their followers. On Lorenzo's death in 1492, the city of Florence may be said to have reached the summit of its power and development. In many ways this date also marks the end of an age in Italian and even Southern European history.

XVI CENTURY —The next 30 years were marked by the frequent passage of armies during the wars of succession for the Kingdoms of Naples and Aragon. It was just before this time that the curious figure of the Ferrarese monk Savonarola disturbed the easy-going Florentines with his ascetic preaching and for a time gained control of the city government. Sincere bigot or astute politician, he roused the masses. His puritanical hatred of all and any artistic ostentation led Savonarola to destroy and burn some of the city's paintings and works of art which were to him symbols of luxury and pride. Alexander VI, that great patron of the arts, authorised the excommunication which led to the downfall and burning of Savonarola himself. Florence never again paid heed to similar puritanical excesses which were foreign to the spirit of her people and the traditions of the city.

During the 30 years of war Florence was opportunist and enlarged her territory at the expense of Pisa and the end of the period saw the Medici again firmly established in the city. During this time was born the famous Catherine who became Queen of France. The Medici found not only rulers for Florence, but occupants for the throne of St. Peter, and established connections with many European courts.



Palazzo dell'Arte della Lana.



"Door of Paradise"  
(1st. Panel)  
Baptistry—by Ghiberti (1425).



After another brief return to republican government, the city was besieged successfully in 1530. Alexander di Medici assumed the title of head of the republic being elected Duke shortly afterwards. From then on the city gradually became the centre of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany and, though retaining most of its past spirit and magnificence, underwent no further expansion of any importance until comparatively modern times.

This does not mean that life in the city was uneventful or that it did not suffer periodic alarms and military threats.

*It did mean that the great age of its creative activities ended with the passing of its confused faction politics. The great buildings of its rival guilds and magnates which survive to-day are the product of its turbulent days.*

**XVII-XIX CENTURY**—In the XVIIIth century, Florence must be considered as the capital of Tuscany. The Port of Livorno was founded and the Tuscan Duchy acquired much the same boundaries as the present province. The Medici dukes came to an end in 1737, and were succeeded by Duke Stefano di Lorena who proved as successful, enlightened and progressive ruler. The tradition was maintained by his descendants.

The Grand Duchy of Tuscany played an important, if unwarlike, part in the European wars of the XVIIIth century, and concentrated on its own development. As a result Tuscany has had many close connections with the Royal Navy, especially after the foundation of Leghorn (Livorno), the original population of which was drawn from the outcasts of all creeds of Europe.

This port played a part in the provisioning of almost every British Mediterranean Fleet from the first visit of Robert Blake, in 1655, to those of Horatio Nelson and his successors. Tuscany later became a favourite centre for the then fashionable "Grand Tours" and it has many associations with English literature. Shelley was drowned at Leghorn. Byron, Leigh Hunt and Keats all lived there for a time.

The Napoleonic Wars led in 1799 to the flight of the Grand Duke and the temporary conversion of the Duchy into the Kingdom of Etruria under a Bourbon. In 1808, it was annexed by France and a year later was recreated a Grand Duchy, ruled over by Napoleon's sister. On the fall of Napoleon, the Lorena dukes returned and Florence and Tuscany enjoyed good rule and freedom from civil disturbances, even during the European revolutions in 1848.

The last Dukes of Tuscany were much in advance of their times but were an obstacle to a united Italy. Under external pressure the Grand Duke Leopold fled from Florence in 1849. In the following year, Tuscany became a province of the Kingdom of Italy, of which Florence was the capital from 1865 to 1871.

At this point the history of Florence can be left, although a final note is required. When in August, 1944, Allied troops entered the southern suburbs, the old traditions were in full force—sporadic fighting between Fascist and Partigiani, creditor and debtor were widespread. The tower of the Palazzo Vecchia was serving its traditional role—it had been seized and held by the Partigiani who were able to communicate with the relieving force.

Latest reports do not suggest any serious damage to the city's monuments. Of the destroyed bridges, the Ponte Trinita was certainly of extreme grace and beauty and its statues of the seasons were very fine. The houses near the Ponte Vecchia were certainly of great importance.

The most valuable exhibits of the Uffizi Pitti and other galleries were scattered in numerous repositories around the city. Whatever has been lost, Florence will remain a city of great charm to all who love the best in Mediaeval and Renaissance architectures.



# WHAT TO SEE IN FLORENCE

Most of the important Mediaeval and Renaissance buildings in Florence survive intact, but minor damage has resulted to the fabric of some. It is true, that five of the six bridges have been most efficiently demolished by the retreating Huns, and that a considerable number of buildings have been blown up to impede traffic. Other damage and some looting have undoubtedly occurred during the disturbances in the city, before its final liberation. When the debris has been cleared, the city should appear externally, much as before.

From the museums, picture galleries and churches, all the more important artistic treasures have been removed to safety. Many of those which could not easily be moved, have been covered with protective masonry. The removal of many works of art was a hurried and, perhaps, somewhat of a panic measure.

Several of the hiding places, south of the Arno, have been checked, and the contents found undamaged. Several more, however, are within the area at present occupied by the retreating enemy. There is more than a little risk of accidental damage of thoughtless or deliberate removal or vandalism.

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**SOUTH OF THE RIVER.**—The *Boboli Gardens*, laid out much on the model of Versailles, rise up by the Palazzo Pitti, which formerly housed a famous collection of Florentine and Italian paintings. In the eastern angle of the gardens is the *Fortezzo Belvedere*, constructed in 1590. Not far away is the XIV Century *Porta a S. Giorgio*. Just below the gardens in the Via della Porta S. Giorgio stands *Galileo's house*, on which a memorial tablet records a visit by the Cromwellian poet, Milton.

Three churches and a convent are worthy of attention in the southern part of the city. Luckily, they are in pairs, close together—one to the east and one to the west of the Boboli. To the east, on the slope above the Piazzale Michele Angelo, is the convent of *S. Salvatore Del Monte*.

Above it, on the hill, is the *Church of San Miniato*, whose modernised facade conceals an interesting Romanesque church, commenced in the XIth Century on the foundations of a building known to have existed in the time of Charlemagne (VIIIth Century).

There is a fine floor with geometrical, floral and animal designs. There are also some Della Robbia terracottas in one of the chapels. The chapel of

Cardinale di Portagallo is of importance for its tombs.

To the west are the churches of *Carmine* in the Piazza del Carmine and of *Santo Spirito* not far from the destroyed bridge of the Santa Trinita. Both these are well worth a visit. The *Carmine* contains magnificent frescoes by Masaccio, "The Payment of the Tribute."

The frescoes are in the Brancacci chapel, where the chief of the Florentine artists from A. Castagno and Fra Lippi to Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo, have in turn added to the decorations.

**NORTH OF THE RIVER.**—*The Centre of the City*. On either side of the *Ponte Vecchio* and bounded by the Via Torna-Buoni, the Via Cerretani and its continuation into the Piazza del Duomo, and the Via del Proconsolo and its continuation is the old Roman nucleus of Florence. None of the Roman buildings is visible, but the street plan clearly reveals the area. Within this area, many of the more interesting and characteristic Florentine buildings are to be found.

*The Ponte Vecchio* was built on the site of the original Roman bridge which collapsed during a flood in 1345. Its designer, Gaddi, has achieved perhaps,



Palazzo Vecchio.



unwarranted renown for the picturesque appearance of the bridge with its houses and its gateways. The second bridge above the houses is a more modern addition and it connects the *Uffizi Galleries* with the *Pitti*, both now largely empty.

Proceeding directly northward past the Piazza Vittorio Emanuele, one comes into the Piazza S. Giovanni and Piazza del Duomo around which are to be found five most important buildings:—

1. *The Baptistry*. This octagonal church is the oldest in Florence, and its foundations are said to date from the VIth Century. This building was probably the original cathedral, although possibly, it was always used as a baptistry. It conceals beneath a modern marble facade and bomb protection, some of the finest art in Florence, and the world's finest bronze doors. (See page 12).

There are three groups of bronze doors. An earlier one by Andrea Pisano, facing the Bigallo, with 28 panels, illustrates the life of John the Baptist and the Christian Virtues. On the east side, the Ghiberti doors show in 10 panels, scenes from the Old Testament, including a favourite Florentine subject of the drunkenness of Noah. The north door, like the south, has 28 panels and is also by Ghiberti. The Ghiberti doors are unique and are the first examples of perspective in bronze relief panels. The interior of the cupola is covered with XIII Century mosaics. Many of the other works are stored in the museum nearby.

2. *The Bigallo*. Opposite the baptistry is a decorative and impressive Gothic building, erected in the XIIIth Century for the Compagnia Della Misericordia which concerned itself largely with the rescuing of Florentine sick.

3. *The Cathedral—Santa Maria Del Fiore*. This magnificent example of Italian Gothic was commenced by Arnolfo in the XIIIth Century, continued by Giotto and crowned in 1446 by Brunelleschi's dome. The dome, 300ft. high, is kept in place by massive chains, a precaution that might well have been followed by Wren for St. Paul's, London, to which similar chains were added

during recent restorations.

The facade of the church is modern, but luckily some of the fine original doorways including the Porto del Mandorla have been preserved. The interior has been decorated and adorned by the finest artists and sculptors of Florence—della Robbia, Donatello, Ghiberti, Uccello, Michelangelo and others. There is a portrait of Hawkewood, the Condottiere and help of Conan Doyle's *White Company*. The new sacristy was the scene of the Pazzi conspiracy in 1478.

4. *The Campanile—"Giotto's Tower."* This campanile has always excited intense admiration and often wonder that such a slender structure could indeed stand so long. In the extravagant words of Bertrand: "This slender plant whose flower is in Heaven and whose roots are in the wonderful garden of Tuscany." The campanile was originally intended to carry a 50ft. spire. Indeed from its upper courses project the foundations for the addition which would have made it even more lovely. Around the base are a number of sculptured Old Testament scenes such as that of Noah shown on page 6.

5. *Museo dell'Opera del Duomo*. This contained the most important works of Della Robbia, Donatello, Verrocchio and other sculptors, removed from the cathedral and the baptistry. Some of these treasures have been placed elsewhere for safety.

\* \* \*

Leaving the Cathedral Square by the Via del Calzaioli, turn down Via del Corso into the Via delle Alighiere where *Dante's* house can be seen. Just beyond it, are two important buildings, one with a spire and one with a tower. They are the *Abbey* or *Badia* and the *Bargello*.

*The Bargello* is a somewhat grim structure built with an eye to defence, yet containing some very attractive work. The original *Marzocco* or Lion of Florence, is in the courtyard at the base of the stairway, the walls of which are decorated with many heraldic plaques. These show how very much heraldry is the shorthand of history. Unfortunately, to most of us, these Italian

armorial bearings are merely decorative and we cannot read their story. The *Bargello* was converted into a national museum, and most of its contents are not now on view.

A hundred years ago a portrait of Dante was discovered beneath some old decoration in one of the rooms.

The *Badia* contains some interesting work by Filippino Lippi. It is worth a visit, if only to see the vision of St. Bernard and the Mino Madonna and Child. (See cover).

Continuing toward the river, one comes to the *Piazza dell Signoria* and the *Palazzo Vecchio*. Defence was one of the important considerations in the design of the grim 'yet attractive building whose upper storey projects in a characteristic fashion. The tower also is surmounted by a projecting platform which permits excellent observation. Formerly it was used for the dropping of lethal matters, hot or cold, on any assailants. Tradition was maintained in August, 1944, when the partisans seized and held the tower which was used for observation and communication with the Allied forces south of the river.

The *Marzocco* of the *Bargello* is repeated at the *Palazzo Vecchio*. The principal rooms are magnificently decorated. In the great hall—(Sala del Cinquecento)—there are Vasari frescoes of Medici history and the Michel Angelo victory. The audience hall—Sala delle Udienze—has a fine ceiling and fresco "Hall of the Lilies"—the red lilies of Florence. The Francesco I room has more Vasari frescoes. The other apartments are those of Eleanor of Toledo.

In the *Piazza dell Signoria* is a small plaque commemorating the execution of Savonarola, in 1498. "Impiccato et Arso," hanged and burned on this spot on the top of a tall stake. This is also shown in the well-known picture, a copy of which can be seen in Perugia. (Pinacoteca Vanucci)

On the south side of the Piazza is the *Loggia dei Lanzi*, or *Loggia dei Signori* built in 1376 in Gothic style for the armed forces of the Signoria. Some beautiful statues include the Perseus group of Cellini; the "Rape of the Sabines" and "Hercules with Nessus."

by Giovanni da Bologna; a more modern "Rape of Polixena" and a modern version of an early Greek group, "Menelaus with the body of Patroclus". Of all these, the Perseus is the most frequently illustrated, quoted, and rightly praised.

Returning along the Via Calzaioli one passes the *Or San Michele* originally a guild house and grain store. Its development is an interesting sidelight on Florentine history. It appears that in the XIIIth century a small church was pulled down by the commune who later built in its place a brick loggia to serve as a corn market. As was the custom, on one of its piers hung a picture of the Madonna. In 1292, miracles were reported at this shrine and soon an order—the *Laudesi*—undertook the care of the shrine and the propagation of its fame. The image of the Madonna soon became a pilgrimage site for all Tuscany until fire destroyed the loggia during the riots between Black and White factions.

In 1336, the Silk Guild undertook rebuilding and some 29 years later, Orcagna began the new shrine of the Madonna. The corn market was moved elsewhere on representations from the now rich orders of the Silk Guild and the present building arose. Around its outer walls are niches or tabernacles filled with famous statues by Ghiberti, Verrocchio, Giovanni da Bologna and Donatello, a copy of whose "St. George" is in one of the niches. The original is at the *Bargello*.

Returning toward the river in the Borgo SS. Apostoli, is the *Church of the Apostles*. A little further, just across the Via Porta Trinita, which leads to the ruins of the Trinita Bridge, is the *Church of S. Trinita* which contained some fine ornaments and altar pieces, mostly now in safe-keeping elsewhere. The frescoes of Lorenzo Monaco remain.

From here turn right up the Via Tornabuoni and, on the right hand side, one comes to the *Palazzo Strozzi*, a typical example of Florentine palaces. Built as late as 1489, it still has the severe character and the defensive lower storeys noticeable in the *Bargello* and the *Palazzo Vecchio*. On one of its walls

is a magnificent wrought iron lantern, typical of much similar work to be seen by the observant in many cities of Italy.

To the left, in the Via Della Vigna Nuova, is another Palazzo—the *Rucellai*. It is in all respects more graceful than the Strozzi and its classical pilasters show the Doric, Ionic and Corinthian forms.

*Smaller places of interest*:—Much of the charm of Florence lies in its many little by-ways, vicolas and passages where in odd corners and unsuspected places, there are always fresh surprises to reward the visitor. There are also little things, like wrought-iron lanterns, odd mouldings and cornices, decorated archways, heraldic plaques, and interesting small taverns, probably now out of bounds to the troops. Then there are curious survivals, like the Farmacia di Santa Maria Novella and the austere streets, such as Borgo Albizi.

In addition to the by-ways, some of the small palazzi have many attractions. *The Palazzo di Parte Guelfa* is an example. Commenced in the late XIIIth Century, enlarged and decorated by Giotto, and finally restored by Brunelleschi, who added the delightful little loggetta, it was originally, as its name suggests, the headquarters of the Guelph faction. In 1921, it was restored and later became the headquarters of the Fascist Provincial Federation.

Another little place nearby is the *Loggia del Mercato della Lana*, behind the *Or San Michele*. An additional minor curiosity is the tower, converted to a gate, and, again, in a different sense the Cascines park.

THE OUTER CITY ZONE—We now come to the places outside the area just described. Perhaps the first group to visit should be those to the north. Leaving the cathedral along the Via de Martelli, one arrives in the Via Cavour, where the impressive *Palazzo Riccardi* is on the left. This Medici palace, built between 1446 and 1460, contains much of interest concerning the Medici family. One famous fresco, by Gozzoli, "The Adoration of the Magi," contains a number of Medici portraits. It was the custom for the artist to represent his patron and perhaps members

of the patron's family in pictures for which he had been commissioned.

Consequently, many religious subjects, such as "adorations" have a considerable historical portrait interest. Similarly, Madonnas often represent the well-known beauties of their day and, in more than one famous instance, the patron's mistress has appeared on an altar piece.

Again, Paradise, the Last Judgment and Hell itself, gave admirable opportunities for the none-too-subtle recording of the artist's personal prejudices. A typical example occurs in Michelangelo's Last Judgment.

To the left, in the *Piazza San Lorenzo*, is the church of that name, rebuilt by the Medici in the XVth century containing many important frescoes including the familiar Martyrdom of St. Lorenzo on his grid.

Farther to the west, in front of the railway station is the *Church of Santa Maria Novella*, a Gothic structure commenced in 1278 and originally completed in the following century. This church formerly contained the Rucellai Madonna, which is now in one of the repositories. In the Spanish Chapel are some good XIIIth century frescoes showing the triumph of the Law and of St. Thomas Aquinas. Uccello's Flood is here, and once again Noah's drunkenness is portrayed.

The cloisters of the church are extremely attractive but a detailed description is not possible here. Much of the present church, of course, dates from the XVth century and later. Some XIVth century frescoes of Hell, The Last Judgment and Heaven, by Orcagna are in the *Strozzi Chapel*.

Returning to the Via Cavour, on the right-hand side, is the *Church of St. Marco*, built in 1290 and restored in the XVth Century by Michelozzi, with later additions in the XVIIIth century, when the facade was restored. It is worth a visit for its frescoes and paintings, included in which is work by Fra Angelico and Ghirlandaio. The cell of Savonarola can also be seen.

Farther along the Via Cavour is the *Chiostro della Scalzo*, name derived from the employment of bare-footed crossbearers on feast days. It has some



frescoes, all of one colour.

Returning to the Piazza St. Marco turn left and opposite are situated two interesting buildings, the *Church of Annunziata* with frescoes by Andrea del Sarto and the *Spedale Degli Innocenti*, the foundling hospital with its delightful plaques by Andrea della Robbia of the Infant in swaddling clothes.

ALONG THE RIVER.—There remain the Lungarno and several places of interest in the vicinity of the river which, in itself, has many attractive vistas, although some have been changed by recent demolitions.

To the east, beyond the first bridge above the Ponte Vecchio, is the Gothic *Church of Santa Croce*, adjoining the

Pazzi Chapel. It contains, among innumerable works of art, a wonderful carved pulpit by Benedetto of Maiano. *Santa Croce* is important for its numerous memorials to famous Florentines. Downstream, the Lungarno Amerigo Vespucci recalls the fact that the discoverer of America was a Florentine.

Nearer the *Ponte Vecchio* is the *Palazzo Corsini*, behind which is the *Church of S. Trinita* both of which, in passing, are worthy of a glance. The same locality, in the *Ognissanti*, is well-known for Ghirlandaio's "Last Supper," and works by Botticelli (S. Agostina) and a Ghirlandaio (S. Jerome). The well-known early crucifixes are in the depository.



Palazzo Vecchio—Fountain figure  
by Verrocchio (1476).

# EPILOGUE

*"The history of Florence is the history of civilisation, of Italian and European civilisation of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Florence was for these ages, what Athens had been in Antiquity."*

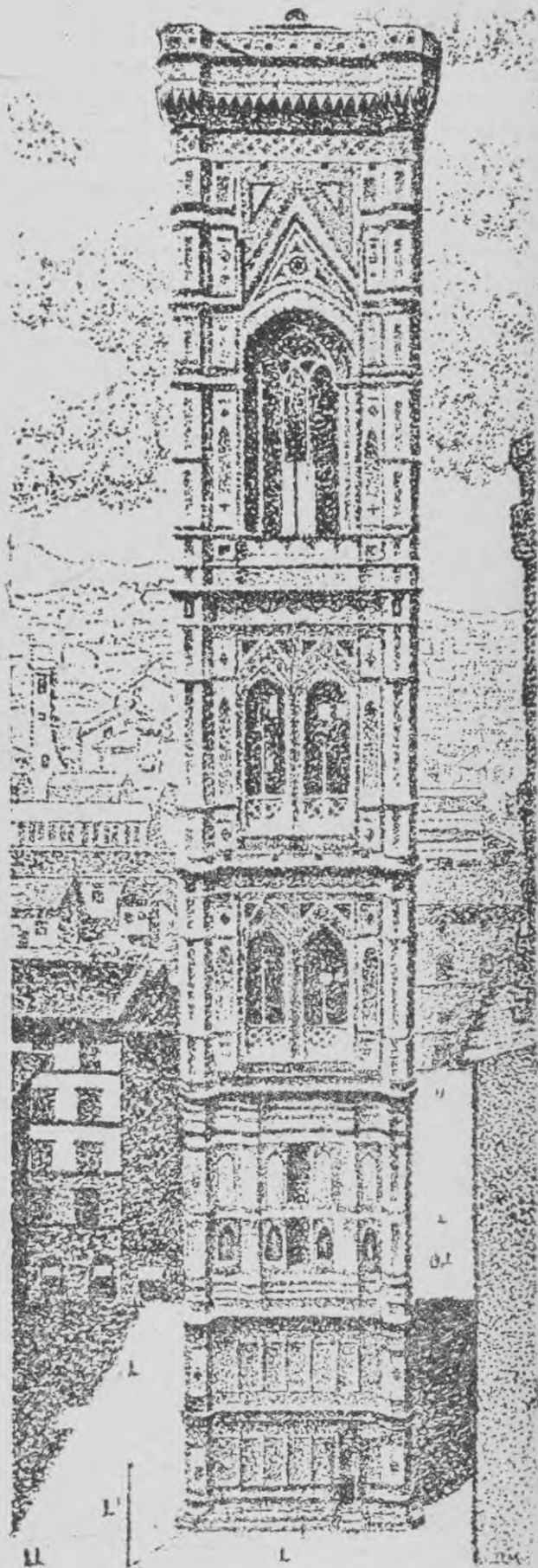
The last sentence of this apt appreciation of Florence's contribution to European culture demands but little further elaboration before concluding this booklet.

Florence, during the height of her power and creative achievement, was a sovereign City-Republic with dominion over other cities, which had once been greater than herself. Despite obvious lapses, her general instincts were always toward the maintenance of liberty and she was in the forefront of communal development. Even her tyrants, when drawn from her own citizens, were benevolent in their intentions and all fostered the best interests of the city's commerce and patronised her artists whenever it was possible for them to do so.

The genius of Florence, unlike that of Rome, was essentially creative. Florence was a pioneer in commerce, a great innovator and leader in banking and exchange, and in the forefront of the creative arts.

In painting, sculpture, architecture, and literature, Florence founded schools from which all Europe drew inspiration. When during the early decline of her fortunes, she no longer held her own artists, Florence continued to produce them, although their work was executed largely in Rome and elsewhere. Politically not so fortunate, Machiavelli advised her rulers.

The comparison between Florence and Athens is truly drawn and it is of interest to note the parallel with Rome. Mediaeval and Renaissance Rome, like its imperial predecessor, remained largely the patron and imitator of the arts, the regulator of the commerce she left to others. Florence was a creator in many spheres and the city preserves its heritage.



Giotto's Campanile.

## ILLUSTRATED BOOKS

For those seeking illustrated souvenirs of Florence, the Touring Club Italiano, Vol V, Toscana, Parte 1, is good and shows many reproductions of pictures now not in public view. Better is No. 77 of "Collectione di Monographe Illustrata Italia Artistica," Firenze, but it is almost unprocurable.

Foto Anderson (in Piazza di Spagna, Rome), has some good reproductions of Florentine subject pictures, etc. The small illustrated numbers of *Novissima Enciclopedia Monografica Illustrata* Nos. 1, 2, 10, 26, 59, 61 and those in the same section covering Italian painting and sculpture, also refer to Florence and Florentine worthies, and are copiously illustrated.



*Fiorino D'oro*

(The Florin.)





This background bulletin was written by Major G. BLAKE PALMER, NZMC and prepared by ERS 2 NZEF for the information and use of NZ troops visiting FLORENCE on leave.



(A MASK—Michelangelo)