

## WHY GO WE TO ITALY? \*

By PERCY E. NOBBS, M.A.

HAVING had the good fortune last autumn to travel in North Italy for the study of the architecture and decoration there to be found, we feel we cannot do better than put our remarks in the form of an answer to the question, "What went we out for to see?" This treatment of our subject was suggested immediately on our arrival there by the fact that everything was so different from what we had expected. We had imbibed the idea that the land was full of good architecture and that fine taste was an instinct of the people. We found the good mixed with the bad in just the same proportion as elsewhere—gems here and there, usually in unexpected corners, buried in a mass of the most utterly futile, insincere and vulgar rubbishry which depraved taste has ever produced; and our chagrin is not lessened by the fact that good and bad alike are usually very well executed. Our disappointment was

prejudice may have thought it was, but that it is the best place for us to go to (after doing our own islands) nevertheless; and as a side issue we shall argue that the architectural work we would study there is not typical of the Italian character, but the work of exceptional men.

Our route lay through Milan, Verona, Venice, Ravenna and Florence, and many smaller places were touched on the way. As work of all periods occurs in nearly every town we shall abandon any attempt at historical sequence in dealing with what we have seen, and shall take things up pretty much in the order in which we have found them.

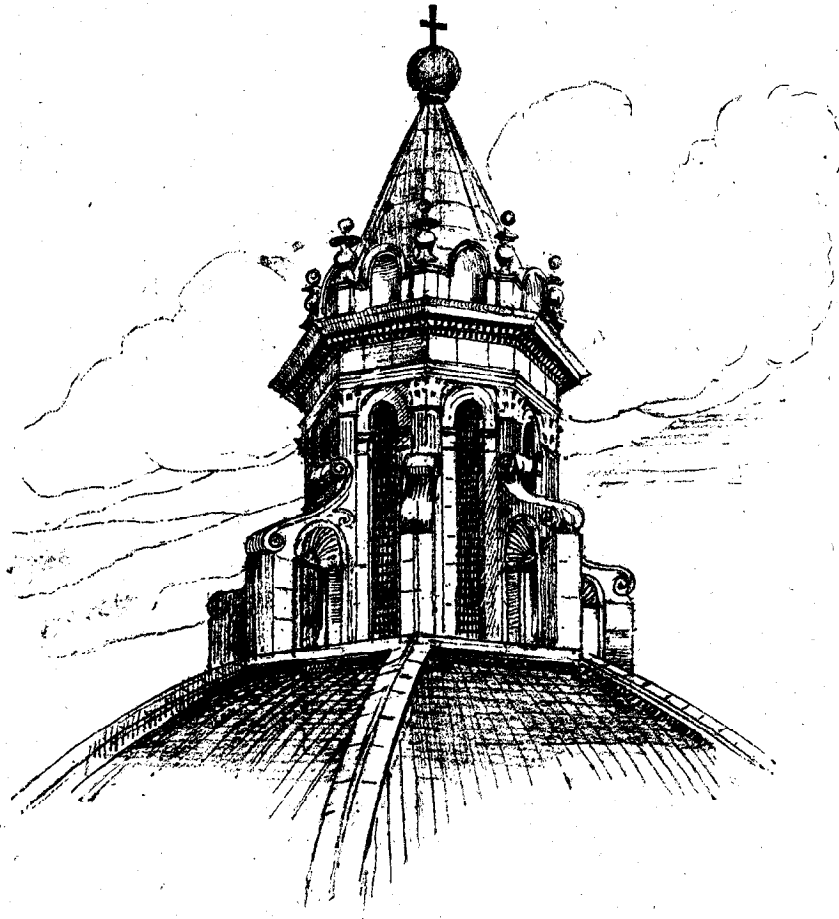
It is not to be supposed that the foundations of the Italian character to-day are very different from what they were in the thirteenth century. The keynote seems to be a faculty for drowsily existing when not roused and for living at double the rate of the northerner when enthusiasm or interest is stimulated. Your Italian lacks mental stability and seems incapable of acting except directly in response to external stimulus, but then he is like new

Before answering our main question, "Why go we to Italy?" it may be well to touch on what constitutes the architectural pabulum which the student would fain find and digest. When travelling for study there is a pretty constant strain on the critical faculties. We all agree that there is no use wasting time and energy studying bad work. To define it is not an easy matter, however; what goes into that category depends largely on personal taste and training; still there is in art as elsewhere a distinction between good and bad, and it has already been hinted that Italy is particularly well provided with examples to which the latter epithet is applicable. Moreover, Italy is peculiarly rich in objects of mere antiquarian or historical interest, which are thus, as it were, hoisted up on a pedestal before us. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the artistic qualities of such objects are vastly overrated. To the man about to travel in Italy we would say "Beware! take these things for what they are worth; weigh their beauty in the balance of your reason and ignore the other interest, except it attach to the personality of the artist." True, the why and wherefore of a thing often depend on its history; but in Italy circumstantial and accidental historical interest of dubious origin is very apt to give undue prominence to inferior work, and it is the charm of Italy that there is plenty of good work in out-of-the-way corners quite unexploited or written up. Long may it lie hid to give zest to the otherwise very weary labour of an architectural tour.

Of course the first phase of Italian work with which we came in contact was the semi-domestic modern style in vogue in the hotels. Here the plague of feigned mouldings first assailed our eyes, and after suffering many shocks and a few take-ins we came to the conclusion that there were no two ways about the cleverness of the execution or the wickedness of the perpetrators. We take this opportunity of denying that the Italian school of feigned architectural ornamentation has any claim to be regarded as decorative art. We have often been deluded by its cleverness and shocked by its daring, and we have occasionally been sardonically amused by its impertinence, but never have we experienced the faintest gleam of pleasure even from such stupendous efforts as the ceiling in the Church of the Ognisanti at Florence. It is salt that never had any savour.

The Italian tradesmen are rather a puzzle to us. The fashioning of stone, whether marble or coarser material, is invariably good, the rougher dressings often presenting charming textures. In joinery, on the other hand, your Italian is far behind his brethren here. His work in this respect is characterised by slovenly fitting and an utter want of "gumption." Italian plaster work is nearly as debased as Italian decoration. The chief vocation of the plasterer is the imitation of materials superior to those actually in use. To his credit let us add that some of his mixtures seem imperishable and indestructible, but we could not find out the specifications for them for love or money.

To leap back 800 years, the pre-Gothic work of Lombardy and Tuscany—if we may be pardoned for so sudden a shift from the ridiculous to what is often not far short of the sublime—affords us countless examples of a simple arched construction giving most excellent effects, especially internally, where a dignified and spacious solemnity is the rule. Externally impressiveness is due to mass and scale alone, the busy treatment of banded marbles and blind arcading, however picturesque and beautiful in colour, being in many cases exceedingly distracting owing in a measure perhaps to the casual and capricious schemes of proportion. One external treatment of wall faces seems very happy. The wall is banded in two colours in the usual way; a strong plinth or base course and the cornice are connected by pilasters or little buttresses at frequent intervals. These for a 30ft. wall head often do not exceed 6in. in width with a 4in. projection. The banding runs right through the pilasters. Thus we have the horizontal stripe broken by the shadow and perspective of these slim verticals, and when this treatment occurs on an apex of tall proportions, and the sweep of the banding



THE DUOMO, FLORENCE: BRUNELLESCHI'S LANTERN. DRAWN BY PERCY E. NOBBS.

rather due to the popular prejudice in favour of the Italians as a nation of artists than to their natural delinquencies. Moreover, we shall touch as lightly as may be on these enormities and confine ourselves to the many phases of superlatively good work we were privileged to see. And when a gem of Italian art is at last unearthed it is well worth the hundred and one difficulties that bar the way of the seeker. These difficulties, we hasten to explain lest we be thought guilty of discouraging travel in Italy, become gradually less as the wanderer becomes more fluent in the language, more used to the ways of Italian officialdom, more inured to the pain of parting with the coin of the realm at every turn, and more habituated to the everlasting delays which the formula "Si, signor, subito" ("Yes, sir, directly") always seems to herald.

But we are getting too general. Our object is to show that Italy is not just what we and possibly others equally exposed to popular

opened champagne—neither to hold nor to bind—he is all feeling, life, energy. But "self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control"—these three he knows not.

Now Italian art as a whole is the fruit of the live active side of Italian character; in his other state he is incapable of doing anything well enough to be called by that sacred name. All his conscious subtlety and judgment, however, seems confined to his semi-conscious state. When aroused the furnace of his imagination begins to glow and the light of his reason pales before the holocaust of his passion. If roused to admiration, he praises till the gods should blush; if to hate, blood alone will satisfy him. So in art, he is ever prone to overdo the matter he has in hand. Blessed with eyes and hands which as instruments are well-nigh perfect, your Italian as a rule lacks the mental qualities without which the most subtle appreciation of form can lead to naught. No, the Italians are not a nation of artists, and probably never were. And all the great architects of the Renaissance were eminently gifted with very instinctive qualities of mind.

\* A paper read before the Edinburgh Architectural Society on February 27th, 1901.

and varied angles of the breaks comes into play, one of the most charming effects possible in plain stone masonry is at once obtained.

To pass on a stage, we next deal with the thirteenth and fourteenth century Italian Gothic. My readers are no doubt all aware that in Italy Gothic art as a system of construction never obtained at all. Street, in his famous essay on the thirteenth century in Italy, points out that the only works of this period in Italy possessing architectural qualities were the work of foreigners. Italian Gothic was a mere decorative fashion, and it is not too much to say that wherever ambition is shown failure is proportional thereto. Gothic was evolved by the cool-headed intellectuality of the North. It was a seed designed to thrive in a temperate climate on a firm light soil; beneath the fervid sun of Italy, on clay rich with undecomposed traditions, a rank growth was inevitable—the riot of autumn was in its verdure before the fruit had set. Exquisite detail and thoroughly feeble design are the main characteristics.

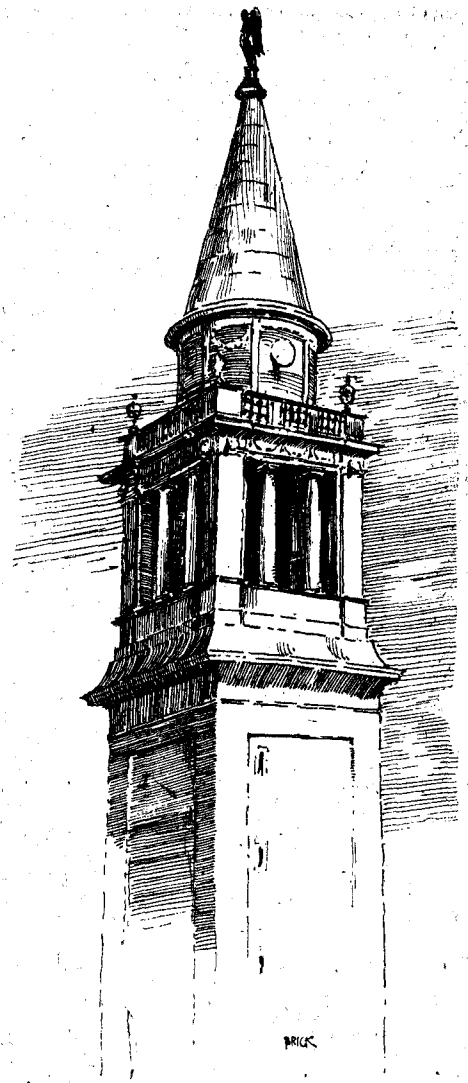
A glance at the Cathedral of Milan, or at the way in which the windows of the Duomo at Florence occur regardless of the design of the marble panelled wall facing, will bear out what we mean. Here we have not the accidental charm so frequent in our own Gothic, but deliberate want of consideration—stupidity, and this is characteristic of the Italian architect whenever a departure from the ruled formality of mere facading sets him free. He does not regard a difficulty as a thing to be overcome with grace, but just cuts off an arcade anywhere or botches an awkward angle in a most petulant spirit.

What some Italian Gothic churches do teach us is the beauty of simple but emphatic form. There are at Verona several plain brick churches of the most charming and dignified proportions, externally and internally fine and spacious. The inspiration for St. Agnes, Kennington, by the younger Scott, and for Pendlebury Church, near Manchester, by Mr. Bodley, seems to be derived from this school of work. Simple to a degree in form and detail, their plain brick walls sparingly broken by window openings or stone dressings, and their horizontal massive-

ness relieved by the repeating shadows of the slim straight buttresses, these churches possess eminently that charm of austere beauty which has its very foundations in sincerity of design and which, alas! so seldom obtains in the sacred buildings of Italy. On the question whether these are works of architecture in the sense that their constructors tried consciously for the effect attained so happily, or merely examples of exteriors left to look after themselves and "turn out," we shall not venture a definite opinion, but we suspect the latter to be the correct surmise. There they rise, these great red churches, sheer up like ships at anchor amid a sea of red roofs, each with its stately campanile guarding it hard by, and above them all the queen of clock towers shoots up into the blue—the Campanile del Municipio, calmly recording the gentle flight of time in spite of the protest of the rushing Adige, for in Verona there is no hurry outside the bosom of the stream. There they stand, whether works of conscious or unpremeditated art it matters not—a sufficient reason, indeed, why all who would build truly and well should hie themselves off to Italy to see them.

We cannot leave Verona without a word on the works by Sanmichele there. Two or three façades, an unfinished tower and the famous gates in the city walls are the chief works he has left his birthplace. These gates are superlatively fine examples of the forcible and stern in building. The great rusticated archways knit their brows not in a savage scowl but in a firm determined frown. The lesser openings, contracted to their minimum, echo in a shriller key the sentiment of the main portal.

Rustication in Italy is invariably more or less roughly dressed—polished rustication, so common and perhaps necessary in our smoky cities, was there all but unknown in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when it was the custom to hammer-dress or leave entirely natural the body of the stone, though the joints were carefully wrought. In fortified work, cubic stones wrought with intersecting bellied rustication showing a saltire mitre are common, and we find entire façades at Ferrara and elsewhere faced in this manner. The most extravagant rustication known is at the Pitti Palace, in the

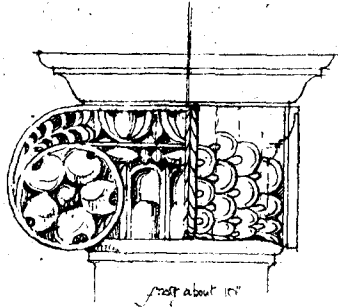


CAMPANILE OF SAN GIORGIO MAGGIORE, VENICE, FROM THE LAGOON.

plinth of which blocks occur showing a face of 14ft. by 2ft. 3in., projecting more than 2ft. in places. In the work of Sanmichele the blocks are flat on the face and rounded not too finely into the joints, which are executed with great care.

We spoke just now of the campaniles of Verona, and it is an interesting fact showing the power of local traditions in architecture that each district in Italy has its special type of tower, just as at home we find special characteristics in the towers of Warwickshire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, and other districts. Round Venice there is one recognised type of which the fine tower of S. Giorgio Maggiore is a good example, varying from the traditional form only in having a circular conical roof and in the heavy sweep outwards above the main cornice. Further west the circular conical roof, composed of bricks semicircular in plan at their exposed ends, is all but universal. Dr. Anderson, as we all know, has adopted this type for his tower at Free St. George's, Edinburgh, with less reason perhaps than did Palladio for S. Giorgio, Venice, but with quite equal success—indeed, we did not see the Edinburgh example excelled anywhere in its native district.

Venice has many lessons for us in spite of the altogether unique conditions there prevailing. Much of Palladio's best work faces on her canals, and as English seventeenth-century work owes so much to this master, the study of his dignified, restrained, but somewhat frigid manner must help us to understand our own developments on these lines. Many of his Venetian façades are experimental, and of these not a few are failures. The problem which seemed to trouble him was the mingling of a main and subsidiary order for doors, &c., in the same style. This is beautifully solved in the



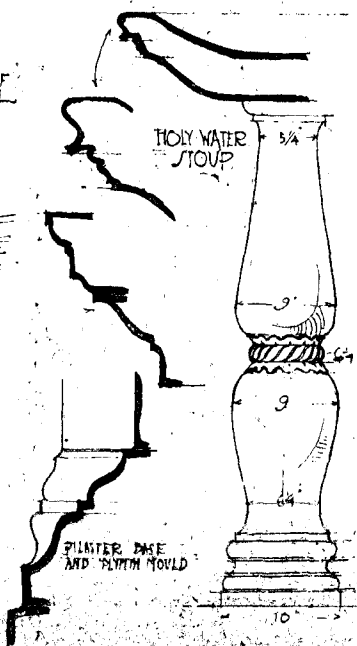
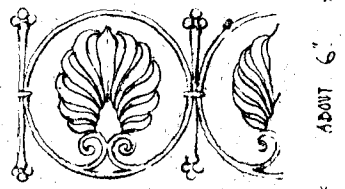
IONIC CAP IN THE CRYPT

THE CATHEDRAL AT TREVISO NOTE



CORDEL BY MING CARPENTING NEW OF A BISHOP

TREZZI ST. ALVARO BY MINGO



case of the nave arcade of S. Giorgio Maggiore, where the main order is on a pedestal. Note in the accompanying sketch the way in which the base of the lesser order and the plinth mould of the pedestal combine. Here the question is, of course, complicated by the arcading. In some cases the lesser order is elevated on a podium and sometimes the bases of both line, but there are objections to both practices. Into the many dodges or "cute fakements" of this master we cannot now enter. They can only be studied with profit in position, and thus we have another excellent reason for going on pilgrimage beyond the Alps.

On St. Mark's we shall not dwell at any length, because, in a practical sense, it is useless to English architects. We are of those, however, who hold that the study of a theme has educational value inversely as it possesses practical utility. St. Mark's is for us a place in which to sit down and look, and the more we look the less are we inclined to rise and go.

Few interiors can so whet the appetite for their own consumption. Gorgeous, rich and sombre, it is rather picturesque than beautiful, being eminently formless, and hence, perhaps, its mystery. As architecture, it is big with the bigness, not of the vast, but of the clumsy, and we can see little thought in its conception as a building; but this is amply compensated for by the pains lavished on the wall-covering of marble veneers and stori-d mosaics. But Ruskin has told it all as well as it ever will be told, so we will out into the sun and see the outside. Here the restored mosaics set the teeth on edge with their vulgar debauch of colour. There is much excellent marble veneer, so that the beauty of the material provides a perfect feast for the eye, happily distracting the attention from a critical study of the architecture. We fully acknowledge that when colour is introduced into architecture form must play a less important part in the composition; but this should be in the nature

of simplification, not a general deterioration of proportions as here exemplified. In Byzantine work we usually find the above principle accepted and acted on. Great wall surfaces are provided for marble or mosaic decoration. Mouldings almost vanish from the work, occasional small strings chamfered and enriched with a block, or a running pattern sunk in the face, being all that here represents the most potent means for architectural effect, after the proportioning of parts, in the more sombre styles. This general formlessness, however, which is necessary when materials of great intrinsic beauty are employed, is in no way incompatible with the fine proportioning of the structure, which is behind all surface things the soul of architectural design, and of which we have excellent proof in the lesser Byzantine churches near Venice at Murano and Torchello.

The St. Mark's mosaics, though far inferior in every way to the Ravenna examples from the fifth and sixth centuries, are most worthy of study as a decorative scheme. The arrises where arches or groins occur are always bull-nosed, the mosaics being carried smoothly round; the form of the vaults is only sometimes emphasised with borders or running patterns; usually the gold cubes are carried round the bull-nose and reflect more or less light from all points to all points, and so a soft gleam of radiance shows where soffit and pendentive coincide.

It is impossible to refer to Italian mosaics without lodging as strong a protest as possible against the wholesale reconstruction of these invaluable examples of a unique and glorious phase of decorative art at Ravenna. The procedure of the restorers now at work is to knock down the old work and re-execute the designs as far as may be in new glass (drawing on their imaginations where gaps occur). The work is certainly being well done by capable artists, but such restoration destroys the authenticity entirely. Moreover the old cubes were often very small and have a mellowness not possessed by the new ones. The restorers assure us that they are matching the original colour of these weathered cubes: perhaps they are—we prefer the weathered tints, and the use of larger cubes has only rapidity of reconstruction to commend it.

Passing now to Florence—the most beautiful town in the world and the birthplace of modern architecture—the student feels himself at once face to face with a big personality—Brunelleschi. His lesser works meet us on all sides testifying to his industry, and his great dome pervades the whole city, yes, and the hills around. Go where you will in Florence it is ever within your ken. From the Fiesole road or any of the heights, from up the river or from down the river, it is ever the centre of interest in the enchanting scene on which we have had the privilege to gaze. There are other great domes in Florence, but mere pigmies by the side of this serene giant. Tall and straight beside it Giotto's Tower soars into the bright clear air, beautiful as a slim girl is beautiful, and trivial a little, yet losing nothing by comparison, but rather gaining by contrast with the vast dome behind—the two serving but to accentuate, on the one hand, grace, and on the other, grandeur. Suppose we walk to the Piazza del Duomo from the cypress-lined vista whence we saw it just now, across the vineyards and olive gardens all russet and dusky in their winter dress. As we enter the town the great dome shows at intervals when the narrowing streets point that way, rising, ever rising, above the nearing roofs and chimneys, till at last we see it at the end of a straight street blocking out the very sky, and the eaves of the tall houses and grim palazzi in steep perspective point little above the basemould of the mighty pile.

And now the glorious colour of the tiles begins to tell in all its mellow charm—dull flushing red lined with long weather stains—and the sweeping curves are crisply shown on the angles where the eight great marble ribs converge to bear the dainty lantern now gleaming pink in the waning light.

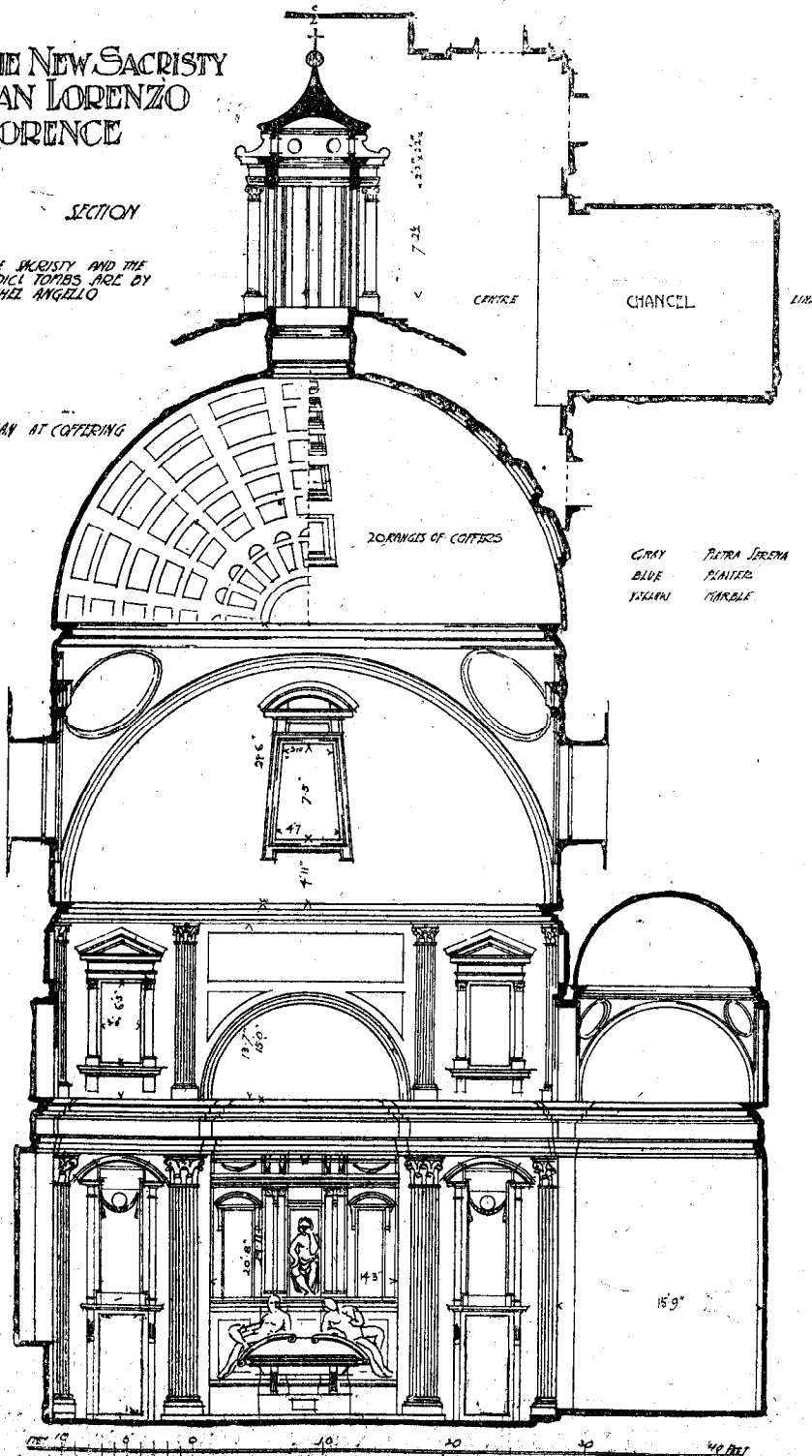
At last a man in whom the native enthusiasm was tempered by a balanced intellect had sprung up among Italian builders. In his work there is more of a great individuality than

THE NEW SACRISTY  
SAN LORENZO  
FLORENCE

SECTION

THE SACRISTY AND THE  
MEDICAL TOMBS ARE BY  
MICHEL ANGELO

PLAN AT COFFERING



MEASURED AND DRAWN BY FREDY E. NOBBS



FIGURE OF DAWN, MEDICI TOMBS, FLORENCE.

of the classic traditions he studied with such loving care. The first great modern exponent of style, in the real, live personal sense, independent of conventions and manners, in which Viollet-le-Duc so rightly understands the term, had arisen, and the practice of modern architecture as a profession and an art became assured.

Over and over again does Brunelleschi show us (most notably perhaps in the church of the Badia at Fiesole) that perfect architecture can be composed independent of coloured marble or carved ornament; yet, when so minded, with what taste and judgment does he apply his decorations and what exquisite beauty of design and execution does he attain in them! Ornament was undoubtedly the pitfall of the Italian architects, and it is hardly too much to say that more buildings were spoiled than improved by embellishments in themselves most beautiful. As ornamentalists the men of the Cinquecento or sixteenth century were supreme, and the study of this charming school of work is to-day the main attraction for the student of architecture in his pilgrimage to Italy. The best work of this style was really done from 1470-1500, and when we say it reaches the same high level attained by English work in that brief period of perfection, 1300-1370, there is nothing left to be said in its praise. Minerva da Fiesole was, perhaps, the most famous stone carver of the period, but when we remember that those versatile artists, Donatello, Brunelleschi himself, Ghiberti, and Andrea della Robbia, were all decorative sculptors, we can appreciate the reasons for the general excellence. We are all familiar with this type of ornament—our schools are full of it (often to the exclusion of other equally worthy things), but what we wish to insist on is the need to see these things where they grew, in the "pietra serena," or creamy marbles, that gave them birth. Thus to have seen and felt the beauties of a bygone style must ever impress on the mind a standard of excellence, unsurpassable indeed, yet to which it is possible to attain in the work of to-day, even without imitating the phenomena in question. Beauty in ornament depends on the spirit, the imagination, and the execution of the work, and is not monopolised by any one school; yet nowhere in the world are these qualities to be found in stronger essence than among the tombs, pulpits, galleries, portals and fountains which grow in as natural profusion in the sombre aisles of Italian churches as do the vine and olive on the terraced hillside or the plain beyond the city wall.

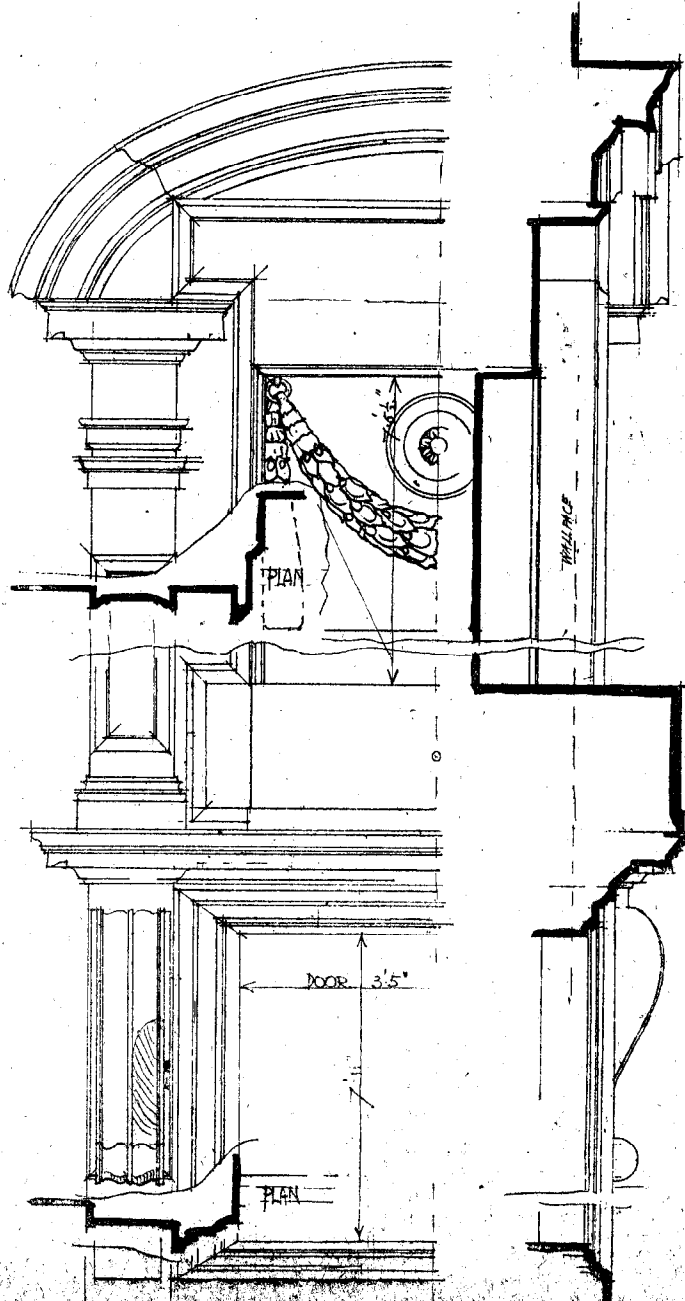
The old street architecture of Italian cities is always picturesque and charming, and every town has its own types and idiosyncrasies. Some of the brick palazzi of Ferrara with strong bold terra-cotta cornices and entrance doors, emphasised with some daring play of archway column and cornice, seem to evidence the limit of dignity obtainable in what must ever be regarded as a material inferior to stone for

though the scale frequently suffers from the size of the blocks and the enormous proportions of the storeys. The Strozzi, Riccardi, Rucellai, and Pitti palaces, of which it is superfluous for us to carol the praises, do not represent the vernacular architecture, being examples of exaggeration of the local manner of their time affected by architects very consciously and very successfully striving after effect.

We have in the accompanying rough elevation sketch of the Palace Davanzati a far more typical example. The great dignity of this façade depends on the extremely simple architecture, which gives full prominence to the proportions and the charming textures of the masonry, the variety of which seems to tempt the eye to explore each surface, with the result that the bigness of the thing becomes very apparent. That, we take it, is the latent power in the various kinds of rubble and ashlar face-work which we are only too often accustomed to specify without any regard for their scale-giving natures when rightly employed. The various dressings are noted on the sketch. The severity of the scheme is relieved, while at the same time the monumental effect is heightened, by the enormous cartouch on the first storey, which is near enough to the passerby to be readily compared with the human unit of scale. Had it occurred at the top of the building it would lack this faculty of linking the bigness of the whole with the smallness of the creature that built it. But this is only one

of many Florentine examples of simple buildings adorned by the light of pure reason and subtle proportioning, and absolutely innocent of constructed adornments and the four blessed orders, and, best of all, entailing no fraud on the beholder. How many modern street fronts could plead not guilty on this last count? There are probably no streets in the world where one can better study the inherent beauties of stone construction than in the shady lanes of Florence; and how it comes about that the same breed of men who built these honest old walls came to be responsible for such extreme crudities as some of the church façades of the same town evince passes our comprehension. The Italian character has always shown itself capable of splendid infamy—perhaps this is the architectural statement of the same fact.

The Renaissance in Italy, as far as the architect is concerned with it, culminates in the wonderful works of Michel Angelo, and though well aware that it is an impertinence to attempt to say anything about so great an artist in the few moments at our disposal, we feel these notes would be very imperfect without a word about so potential a force in art since his day to ours and on through the ages to come. It not infrequently happens, in other walks of life besides the practice of the arts, that a very great exponent may exercise a prejudicial influence on his branch of human activity by exciting the emulation of less capable followers in schemes too daring for



their powers. Such we reluctantly pronounce the influence of Michel Angelo to have been. To consider one of his works—the new sacristy of San Lorenzo. It is here that the Medici tombs stand merely eloquent to the public of the glory of the Medici—to the student of perfect skill—no! we hold the truth is quite other—to the public they proclaim the glory of Michel Angelo's cunning, and to the other section of mankind the shadow of the rock on which civilised taste was wrecked.

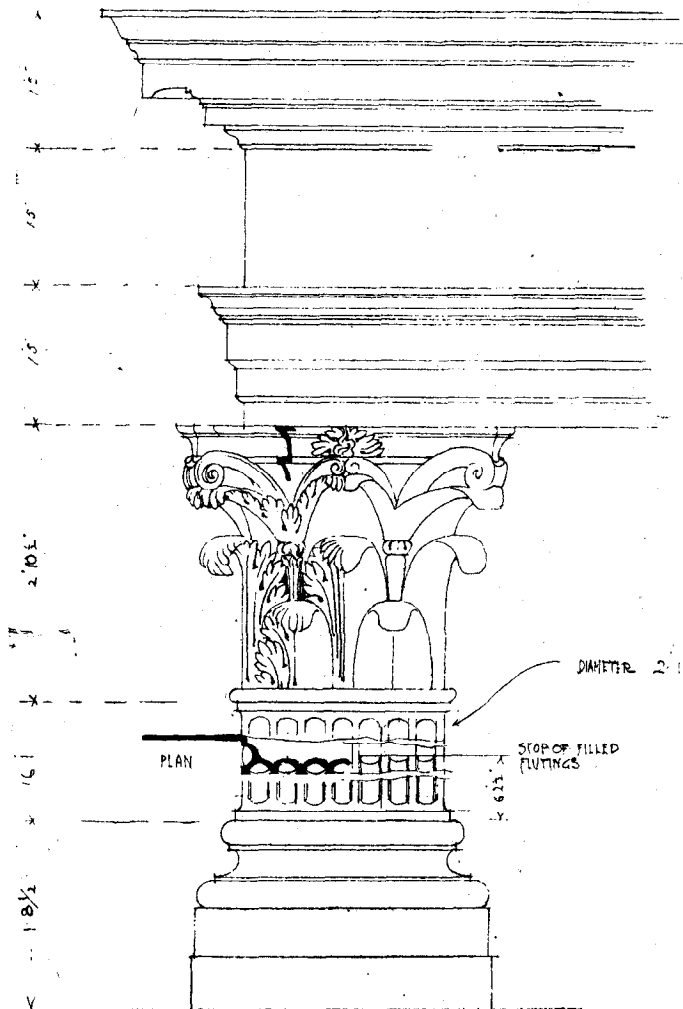
The sacristy itself affords an example of fine simple classic detail in "pietra serena," the "non-architecturalised" portions of the walls being plain white plaster. The domed interior is of very tall proportions, there being on order or storey more than is usually found in buildings of its class. The acoustic properties of the place are terrible. The whole interior struck us as so interesting that we measured it up as the surest way to come to any conclusions

of imitation—the familiar classic forms have all been strained and improved upon in a spirit so adroit that the plotting of the actual sections causes a shock—they are so very unlike what they look. We had frequently heard this architectural background damned with faint praise here at home, and concluded it was unimportant. This was quite a misconception. The quality of the execution and extreme originality and cunning of design show that the master was doing his utmost—the architecture was no mere adjunct of the memorial—it was in its way as laborious in execution and as full of intellect as the superb statuary which ranks with any sculpture in the world. The only solution we have to offer is that as an architect Michel Angelo was an amateur. His great powers as painter and sculptor gave him architectural opportunities to which he was not capable of rising, though no mean exponent of ours, the mother art. We have in him the Italian character

rather than in a proper spirit of decoration. The next generation seem to have treated the work of decoration in a still lighter vein—as an amusement. Feigned architecture is now the traditional decoration of the Italians, and no words can convey the baseness of the architecture so feigned or the puerile silliness of its application.

In conclusion, then, we hope that good reason has been shown why the Italian tour should be undertaken in spite of the general strictures we have felt compelled to pass on Italian taste both of to-day and of the great periods of the past. Apart from the mere development of critical faculty and judgment which the seeing of great quantities of architectural or any kind of work must engender, modern architecture can best be understood by knowing how it grew—and it was in Italy that this took place. Here a couple of streets will often show us far more clearly than any couple of volumes could how men began to build for effect combined with use how they went on to build for effect only; how grandeur first real became in a few generations grandeur merely simulated; how designers tried to be funny in the days of the rococo, and how they have ended by being only vulgar at the close of the nineteenth century.

Apart from thus having the pages of architectural history unrolled in living stone before us (and especially those interesting pages of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries which are the key to all that happened since, excepting the Gothic Revival)—apart from this we have in Italian work of every century carving and decoration of a standard never excelled, and equalled elsewhere only for brief bright periods. Never before did we realise how little decoration and architecture had to do with each other. The finest Italian architecture is devoid, or almost devoid, of embellishment, and we are forced to the conclusion that great excellence in decoration militates against architectural design either in a nation or an individual. We do not mean to suggest that great beauty of ornament is incompatible with good architecture in any way, but when they are combined—as they have only been on rare occasions (when we look at things in their true proportion and think how little wheat there is among the chaff in the cities of this world)—when they are combined the result has been so astonishing that the whole world recognises it. Italian ornament is a matter so fascinating that it is positively difficult to restrain the temptation to go and do likewise for the sake of its very sweetness. But if it is to do us a whit of good it must be studied in spirit as well as be put down on paper; and such is its subtlety and delicacy, so dainty and magical its use, that we promise the brains and eyes and fingers of the happy students of next year a rare treat. As we find it in plaster in our museums it is only the eyes and fingers that have any good of it—these things must be seen in position.



THE NEW SACRISTY OF SAN LORENZO, FLORENCE: THE MAIN ORDER.

on its merits. So far there is nothing extraordinary, but the virile quality of the detail makes it well worth the trouble of reaching.

There are eight doors to the floor of the building, six of which we suspect of never having been opened; all are architecturally treated with a square-headed niche above enclosed in a curved pediment in white marble. The proportion of these highly-organised features is altogether excellent, and the detail and execution quite irreproachable; but is the interior one whit the better for having eight of them? This part dates with the building, 1523-29; the tombs were not placed till about fifteen years later. There is, moreover, ample internal evidence in the detail to suggest several years between the design of these doorways and the screens behind the statuary of the tombs.

We must say at the outset that in all the realm of art, detail containing more exquisite enrichments has never been designed or executed. In the profiles we see nothing worthy

aggravated by the energy and power of a giant evincing itself in a genius nor merely impatient of, but incompatible with, the idea of restraint—and was good architecture ever produced where restraint had no place?

In these architectural backgrounds the triviality of the scale, which constitutes their worst fault after the artificiality of the design has been admitted, may perhaps be accounted for as a conscious attempt to add scale to the sculpture. Be this as it may, we feel their effect as a whole to be unfortunate, and the importance we have given to this conclusion is justified by the very pretentious nature of the work; we repeat it was meant to be the best up to its date.

We had not the good fortune to see Rome, and so will not express an opinion on the legitimacy of the scheme in the Sistine Chapel. Of the terrible effect on architecture of this venture no one who has travelled in Italy can be in doubt. We suspect the scheme was embarked upon to show the power of the artist

A new Church at Foulridge is to be erected at a cost of over £5,000.

A Rowton House in Italy.—A deputation from Milan came to this country some time ago for the purpose of inspecting the Rowton Houses in London. They were furnished by Lord Rowton and Sir Richard Farrant, the managing director of Rowton Houses (Limited), with full details of the construction and working of the company's houses. A limited liability company (Societa Anonyma) was shortly afterwards formed in Milan under the title of "Alberghi Popolari" to "erect and carry on hotels for persons of small means similar in all respects to the Rowton Houses of London." This company has just completed the erection of one of these houses, containing 600 rooms, in the centre of the city of Milan, at a cost of over a million lire (£40,000). Not only have the details of construction of the London houses been adopted, but the fittings and furniture are precisely similar. The house will be opened in the course of the next few days, and will be managed upon English lines. The price to be charged will be 50 centesimi per night, or three lire and a half weekly, as compared with 6d. and 3s. 6d. respectively here.