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THE

BIBLIOTHECA SACRA

AN ANCIENT STORY OF POLITICS AND REFORM.

BY PROFESSOR HENRY HUNTINGTON POWERS.

LET us begin by taking a walk through the famous old city of Florence,—not as we find it to-day, but as it was six centuries ago. We could walk all around it in a couple of hours, though it counts its inhabitants by the hundred thousand. But the walls, built long ago when the city was small, have not grown with its growth, and the teeming life of this most modern of cities has had to accommodate itself to narrow quarters. The streets, often too narrow for two carts to pass, are grudgingly allowed only on the ground level. Projecting upper stories economize the precious space above, and afford shade from the somewhat too faithful sun. The houses, built on surprisingly small foundations, rise to an imposing height, and, as if that were not enough, they are surmounted by a tower half as big as themselves, square and plain and bare of ornament, but crowding menacingly to the front as if they needed no excuse for their existence. We wonder what such a house is like inside. Perhaps we can get some idea through the windows. But now that we look for the windows we notice for the first time that there are none which will serve our purpose. The lowest are from eight to twelve feet from the ground, and even so they are scarce large enough for cellar windows, and are barred with iron rods, an inch thick, set upright and crosswise and close together. Higher up there

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are real windows, but still small, and with very businesslike shutters, which can be closed in case of need. Even the door is barely large enough to admit a single person, and most forbiddingly ironclad. Perhaps we have struck the jail by accident. But no; they are all alike. Decidedly the Florentine is prepared for emergencies.

The nature of these emergencies is made clear as we turn the corner. There is a clamor and a din of arms, as well as voices, between two groups who are ranged around two prominent contestants armed to the teeth. There are bruises and cuts and fallen partisans, and finally, of course, a beaten party, which falls back sullenly down a narrow street. We have scarce time to recover from our surprise at this flagrant breach of the peace when the door of a high house opens, and the beaten leader backs into it. There is a rush of the victors to enter, a slamming of the door and creaking of bolts, and meanwhile a shying of stones or hot water from the top of the tall tower already referred to, and the baffled victor withdraws, muttering and cursing.

Who are these brigands who thus disturb the peace? Brigands! These are the heads of noble Florentine families maintaining the honor of their house and Florentine tradition. Disturbers of the peace! What peace? The household is the place for peace. Behind those grim walls and prison doors there is law, order, obedience, the will of a master. But the streets own no master. They are the place for war. But what need of a place for war? What is all the war about? The answer is not easy. It is of very long standing, and the sons grow up to fight because their fathers fought before them. The fighting is quite inevitable, and, for that matter, quite congenial, and just what it is about is of little importance. To an outsider the real things do not seem so very important, nor the im-

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portant things so very real. In a general way we discover that there are two great factions,—each with its catchword,—Guelf and Ghibelline. The Guelfs are the party of the pope, who claims a sort of suzerainty over Florence; while the Ghibellines are the party of the emperor, whose shadowy claim to Florentine allegiance is in theoretic conflict with papal prerogative. But nothing is clearer than that, with all their talk of the good emperor or the pope angelico who shall some day come and set things right, these warring factions are perfectly agreed on one point, namely, that they want no interference from these or any one else. They want to be left alone to fight it out as they see fit. So long as pope and emperor do not take their rights too seriously, they can count on lusty partisanship from their respective parties; but woe to either if he seriously attempts to meddle with Florentine affairs. There is one thing that every Florentine loves better than his party, better even than his feuds and his fightings, and that is Florence and her liberties. It is a strange combination, this primitive simplicity of household rule coping unsuccessfully with the infinite restiveness of modern life. The new wine has been put into old bottles, and the bottles are ready to burst.

But our walk must go further, or it will leave us more puzzled than enlightened. A few steps bring us to a maze of streets packed with tiny shops filled with the busiest and cleverest artisans in the world. Here one is giving the last touches to an artistic copper vessel which without joints or solder he has fashioned from a single piece. Another is riveting a piece of armor, another engraving with infinite deftness a golden brooch. There are whole streets given over to cloth-dressers, who give work to the spinners and weavers and fullers and dyers in numberless backrooms and attics. There are smiths,

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and carvers of wood, and gilders, and joiners, and fashioners of beautiful things in clay and wood and iron and bronze and gold, in marble from Carrara, and alabaster from Volterra. Buyers throng the shops or congregate in the crowded markets, laying in store of precious wares for distant India or semi-barbarous Britain; and, strangest of all, they pay for their purchases in coins that do not have to be weighed, and which, bearing the stamp and seal of Florence, are called "florins," that is short for Florentines.

As we watch the infinite dexterity of these artisans, we cannot but be impressed by their resoluteness and self-sufficiency. They never hesitate, fumble, or spoil. They work with automatic precision, as though they had fashioned the same thing and wrought the same design a thousand times before. But, if we look for the design they are copying, we shall find to our amazement that this design was never fashioned before and will never be fashioned again. Each article is an invention, each design a creation, and all the work of one man, an average Florentine at that. As we watch these men, our wonder and our admiration increase. The brain is as busy as the hand, and does its part as easily and as well. There is no waiting for another to suggest or direct, no helplessness or dependence. From childhood up they have learned to think their own thoughts, to be self-sufficient, independent, and alert. And how plain it is that this habit of mind, once deeply implanted, will assert itself in other than industrial connections. A nation of tillers of the soil, or of factory hands and automatic machine-stuffers, may tolerate a Cæsar: a nation of artisans never. Will democracy survive the extinction of artisanship? There is nothing in history to warrant the hope.

This, then, is the new wine that is bursting the old bottles.

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Mediæval Florence has awakened from her long sleep, and has become the center of that modern life which we call industry. Infinitely more live and creative, life has become,—infinitely more noble, perhaps we should say, for the change is very much to our liking,—but with it has come the microbe of turbulence and unrest. The mediæval aristocracy has already disappeared; and now the powerful families of the new order are trying, singly and in groups, to devise a form of government which shall be adapted to a people whose dominant characteristic is that they do not wish to be governed at all. A beginning has indeed been made; and under such a mayor as we began with in this year of our Lord 1300 the government was a force to be reckoned with. He was a man of uncommon parts, this gonfalonier or standard-bearer, one Alghieri by name, more familiarly known as Dante; but Florence was too much even for him, and he is now an exile.

But there are not a few indications that farther changes are impending. Florence is growing tired of herself. It is not so very long since, in one of these street frays already referred to, one party carried the matter to disastrous excess by setting fire to the shop of a hated rival when the wind was high. The flames had spread to neighboring shops, and soon a whole quarter was in ashes. The flames even laid hold of a church, in their path, which was packed, according to the custom of the time, with waxen images of worthy burghers, who, careful for their soul's salvation, had commended themselves to their patron saint by these tangible reminders of their importance. With impartial fury the fire consumed the fruits of industry and the emblems of piety alike. There was many an impoverished Florentine that night who, while not questioning the natural and inalienable right of men to fight out their own feuds, queried whether it was not possible to have too much of

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a good thing, and whether a strong man might not be needed to umpire the game and keep the contestants inside the ring. The malady was working out its own cure. Industry had bred independence, and this had resulted in turbulence and disorder. But industry had created wealth, and wealth was begging then, as always, for order and protection. The man who owns property has given bonds to keep the peace, which is one of the best of reasons why every man should own some.

And now we will go to sleep, Rip Van Winkle-like, and give Florence a century and a half to work out her salvation.

Strangely transformed is this city of the fifteenth century. The Florentines have not been idle, if we may judge by the vast marble churches whose stately façades and slender campaniles and towering domes look down upon the tallest towers of the old castle houses, and dwarf the quaint old cathedral of St. John, which used to seem so imposing. Even the old cathedral, though superseded, has gotten a sheathing of marble and new doors, such doors as the sun never saw before since it made the rounds of the planet. The castle houses are still there, most of them; but they are plainly out of date, and upon the towers, where of old were kept the handy piles of stones for warlike use, are now seen flower-pots and clothes-lines, that point to the decay of martial spirit. And now we notice that we see no battles in the streets, and that certain functionaries, owning allegiance to a "captain of the people," seem inclined to interfere with those who would carry their disputes beyond the point of wordy altercation. Our walk takes us, also, through more spacious streets, lined with vast palaces, whose cut-stone fronts and rich overhanging cornices and spacious doorways are but elegant reminiscences of the stern castles which they have displaced. Evidently wealth has increased in the interval, as these spacious struct-

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ures, with their prodigal occupancy of precious space, attest; and yet not universally, if we may judge by what we see in the less-favored streets. Here again the workmen swarm as of old, but affluence is not universal. It is even rumored that a young man cannot start now, as once he could, by earning skill and outfit for himself; but that it has become customary to borrow money for the outfit from certain persons who make a specialty of such loans, and that the relations thus established are often long continued and sometimes irksome. We wonder how these less-favored citizens get along with their affluent neighbors who live in the big houses in the broad streets. Does the old method of drawing the name of the gonfalonier by lot from a representative list of citizens still persist? If so, there must be awkward predicaments sometimes when an artisan bears rule over the millionaire to whom he is in debt for his tools.

But it is plain we are novices. We are told that no such embarrassment occurs. Chance has willed for a long time that the name drawn should be that of a wealthy citizen more or less experienced in public affairs,—a citizen, too, who was in uniform agreement with the ruling policy and spirit of the republic. Just why this happy discrimination of chance no one seems to know. Perhaps Providence guides the choice according to the old and long-discarded view, or perhaps something has happened to the names in the box. No one seems to know, and, stranger still, no one seems greatly to care. We are told that it does not amount to so much now to be gonfalonier as it once did, and that people care less about it since they have gotten in the way of referring all important matters to Cosimo. Cosimo! Who is that? Evidently we have found a clew that it will pay us to follow up. And this, in brief, is the result of our inquiry.

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Cosimo is the head of a very old and wealthy family, one of the families, indeed, that lived in a high-tower house in Florence when we saw it first. The foundations of their fortune had been laid in the combined occupation of pillselling and doctoring, and so, in default of our modern handy device of family names, they were known as the pillsellers, or Medici. It was, to be sure, a very long time since they had done any pillselling; so long, indeed, that the name, associated with their later and greater doings, had acquired a new meaning. But they seemed nowise ashamed of it, and even decorated their new coat of arms with pills. Like many another Florentine family, they had lent their surplus capital on favorable terms, rather against the rules of the church, to be sure, which forbade the taking of interest; but in this case, as in so many others, the church was mistaken in its judgment of business ethics, and the pillsellers saw it. Unlike most wealthy families, however, the pillsellers specialized in a line of investment commonly regarded as precarious. While others sought borrowers of means, who could give tangible security for the loan, the pillsellers early began to choose promising young men, and start them in business with only a character security. Sometimes, of course, they lost, but no oftener, probably, than the rest. Moreover, their *protégés* were sure to be business clients for the rest of their lives, and to recognize a debt of gratitude long after the other debt was paid.

Bit by bit informal money-lending grew into banking. In common with other wealthy families, the pillsellers elaborated the great science which, more than any other, is the foundation of modern industry. They helped to bring about the coinage of the golden florin; they devised bills of exchange to save transporting money; they undertook the safekeeping of other people's money, and, finding that they could count on

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large sums pretty constantly from this source, they loaned it on interest. Their transactions grew to immense proportions, and they became the creditors of kings, not neglecting, however, the promising youth, whose interests they could safely promote, and who would become a staunch Medicean, a pillsellerite, forever afterward, in consequence of their assistance. The pillsellers, you see, were good business men, gifted with unfailing good sense, and favored with uninterrupted good fortune, for the two are not greatly different.

But the pillsellers were more than business men. From a very early date they had shown a large interest in public affairs. Before the days of Dante, a pillseller had been gonfalonier of Florence; but, for the most part, they do not seem to have been aspirants for office. They were merely influential citizens, whose word carried weight with the novice rulers simply because they showed unerring judgment in questions of public policy. Their supremacy rested in the first instance simply upon their record for sagacity and wisdom, the most legitimate of all possible titles to power. Nor is there reason to doubt their disinterestedness, as such things go. Of course they based their decisions very largely on their own business interests, but they sincerely believed that what was good for them was good for all; and, as matters stood, they were substantially correct. The fact that a man gains by a given policy does not prove that he is selfish in supporting it. Who is a manufacturer and does not believe that the welfare of the nation depends on the policy of protection! Who is the receiver of a fixed salary and does not feel that it would be disastrous to lessen the purchasing power of money! The pillsellers were human, and judged public interests by their own; but they judged broadly and wisely, and Florence found her interest in following their judgment.

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Toward the time we are now considering, this guidance of public affairs had become their dominant function. A certain John the pillseller, through his long life, acquired a reputation so great that deference to his judgment became a habit. Almost without knowing it, he became the responsible head of the state, and found himself compelled to do what was doubtless sufficiently to his liking, namely, to organize a compact body of supporters, put down opposition, and become responsible not only for suggesting, but for executing, the policy of the government. Something of the sort had, of course, been done already, but the policy of the pillsellers now took more definite shape. Loans were placed systematically where they would win an adherent or embarrass an opponent. Nothing did so much to disarm an irreconcilable as to get a mortgage on his property. If he could not be induced to become a debtor, he suddenly found his competitors underselling him, presumably because they were securing funds on more favorable terms than he. Careful planning predetermined the results of popular elections. In all there was much that would not bear the light. There is apt to be in practical politics. It is perhaps only fair to remember that the opponents thus silenced and circumvented were often selfish, short-sighted, and demagogic; that the methods used against them were perfectly acceptable to them; that no agreement on a wise policy could have been effected by purely rational means; and, finally and above all, that the policy actually adopted was wise and just, that no effort was made to rob the state for private ends, and that Florence prospered under the new *régime*. As the representative of wealth the new management was the uncompromising foe of disorder and anarchy. Private feuds smouldered low, street riots were suppressed, justice was meted out in the courts, and industry prospered in all her goings.

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John the pillseller was no idealist, though he had his ideals. He took men as he found them, never asking the impossible of them, playing off their meannesses and sordid passions against each other, and giving to each the incentive suited to his nature. He was no reformer, no zealot. He strove to make a working arrangement with the material at hand. He was disinterested and sagacious beyond the measure of most. It was with not a little anxiety and regret that the Florentines laid him to rest, full of years and of honors, not knowing what would be the outcome under the leadership of the youthful grandson, Cosimo, who succeeded to his fortune and his responsibilities.

It was indeed a perilous moment for the untried youth, for the opposition, always powerful, now saw its opportunity. A swift alliance of rivals in business and politics, headed by men of ability and decision, overthrew the established order, and gave Florence new masters. Cosimo was thrown into prison, and his friends scattered. A part of the new cabal urged his execution, but the conscience that doth make cowards of us all was too much for these men, who were by no means dead to traditions of honor, and exile was decreed instead. Now the sagacity of the pillsellers became apparent. Suddenly the traders and artisans of Florence found that the people's bank was closed to them. The banks with aristocratic affiliations would not, and could not at once, take its place. Above all they could not at once create a constituency of men who owed to them their business existence. The new rulers found that they had the aristocrats, or a part of them, on their side, but the people were on the side of the family which had so conspicuously identified its fortunes with the welfare of humble citizens. There was brief but sullen acquiescence in the new order of things, during which the new leaders vied

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with their predecessors in sagacity and statesmanship. But the first slip produced a clamor, a demonstration, then a revolution ending in the recall of Cosimo and the expulsion of his enemies. The young man returned in state and with increasing splendor till, when he entered Florence, his retinue was that of a prince. But, if he lacked humility, his head was not turned. He set to work with the utmost energy to restore the working efficiency of the organization and intrench its power. The first thing was to fix the box of names from which the officers were drawn by lot, for it must be remembered that during all this time the pillsellers and their chief supporters held no office. The offices were apportioned to faithful but docile men, who would be gratified by the semblance of power and would faithfully obey orders. Such arrangements are not unknown in our day, though my impression is that they seldom work quite so smoothly as under Cosimo. The box of names once fixed, this gave no further trouble. Affairs of state were managed with the same sagacity and public spirit as before, as the growing power and broadening influence of Florence attested. The family fortunes, too, were not neglected, and Cosimo found that things came decidedly his way. Not only did the bank prosper in common with the city, but new sources of profit opened. There were chances for foreign loans, and what could be more natural than that these loans should be placed with a bank which had so much power to insure Florentine friendship? Cosimo knew how to turn everything to hand, weaving the gossamer web of debt about states and princes, as his forefathers had done about the burghers of Florence, until they were helpless in the toils of his subtle diplomacy. Not that diplomatic ends ever blinded him to the importance of getting good interest, but he possessed the rare faculty of killing two birds with every stone he threw. There

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was a great council of the empire up at Constance, where the emperor presided over grave discussions of theology, the principal result of which was the burning of one more heretic. Cosimo was present as a pillar of the orthodox party—Cosimo and his kind are always orthodox—and incidentally he arranged a loan with the ever-impecunious emperor, on which he cleared several million florins. It was all right enough. He was sincere in his orthodoxy even if it was not the thing he lay awake nights to think about. There are those who have the real microbe who do not have it very hard. Meanwhile Cosimo was false to no trust reposed in him. The citizens of Florence knew that he would return with added wealth and prestige, and were sure that both would accrue to their benefit, and they were right.

But now we have to note a new departure in the pillseller policy. Florence had grown rich, and habits had changed accordingly. Men need much of guidance in making money, but they need much more in spending it. It suited both the tastes and the interests of Cosimo to assume the leadership in the formation of those tastes and habits which are the necessary condition of wealth's doing us any good. Florence, in her wealth-getting, had been as materialistic and parvenu as any American city, and she owed it in no small degree to this wonderful family that she became cultured as well as rich. Cosimo was admirably fitted to lead in this new development. He was shrewd and sagacious, but he loved beauty, culture, refinement,—in short, the higher things in life. It was his pleasure to patronize learning and art, and he did so discriminatingly. No man can ever successfully teach men to love the best things unless he himself loves them. Equally free from asceticism and voluptuousness, he played to perfection a rôle which fortune had assigned him.

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But it was also good policy. There were disappointed and sullen rivals in Florence who might nurse dangerous ambitions. There were still those who remembered that Florentines were once free, and who aspired to be liberators. Nothing could be more desirable than to turn these dangerous rivalries into new channels, and to substitute culture ideals for political ideals as the goal of private ambition. And so Cosimo adopted that policy which Pisistratus and Pericles had adopted before him for the same purpose, and with even greater success. We are amazed at his liberality and the wide range of his interests. All the great painters and sculptors of the time were pensioners on his bounty. Agents were permanently stationed in Constantinople to buy any Greek manuscript that came to light. In some cases scholars were given a standing account at the bank and their checks honored without limit. Think of an open account with Rockefeller or Carnegie, you whose devotion to the cause of learning has laid upon you a vow of poverty. It is easy to understand that art flourished, for back of this boundless liberality was discrimination, devotion, real interest. And the liberality was contagious. New rivalries brought new gifts, and forced with hothouse rapidity the æsthetic education of a singularly æsthetic people. It was with the consciousness of a great task greatly accomplished that Cosimo prepared for the last reckoning. It was with reconciliation and sincere gratitude that mourning Florence laid him to rest before the high altar of San Lorenzo, and inscribed upon the marble above him, "Cosimo, Pater Patriae."

And now again, after a brief interval, the fortunes of Florence and of the Medicean house were committed to the hand of a youth and a grandson,—the magnificent Lorenzo. He, too, was put to the test, but it is significant of the change that

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Cosimo had effected, that the conspiracy with which he was confronted was not one of Florentine citizens, but of rival states. His first move was to balk the pope in an ambitious scheme of state-building which seemed inimical to Florentine interests. The pope thereupon entered into a conspiracy with certain disaffected Florentines to kill both Lorenzo and his brother. It is characteristic of the times that the arch-conspirator in such a scheme should have been the pope, that his local manager should have been the archbishop of Florence, that the place chosen should have been a church, and the person selected to strike the blow should have been a priest. Characteristic of the times, I say, not of the church. They do not do such things in the Vatican now, any more than we run lotteries in church or treat the minister to rum when he calls. They have improved there as much as we have here, perhaps more. Let us look to ourselves that they do not get ahead.

The plot failed in its main object. The brother was killed, but Lorenzo escaped. Then Florence, the old-time Guelf stronghold and chief partisan of the pope, broke forth in fury at this attack upon her national independence. Divining the source of the attack, she hung the archbishop by the neck from the window of his own palace. Popular fury raved itself out. The pope was furious but dissembling. More effectual measures must be adopted. Soon Florence found herself confronted by a powerful coalition of states, which could easily have overwhelmed her. Lorenzo calmed the popular fury, realizing the futility of armed resistance. Unarmed and alone, he embarked at Pisa and sailed to Naples, the capital of the most perfidious of his foes. He was still a boy, sickly and homely to look upon, but he knew his power. He knew that the very perfidy of the King of Naples made it easy to detach him from the alliance, if he could see his interest in betraying

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his allies. We shall never know the secret of that encounter between coarse self-interest and subtle intellect. We can but guess what were the arguments used, what the nameless charm by which this most gifted of Florentines drew the toils about his clumsy antagonist. Suffice it to say, that, when Lorenzo disembarked again at Pisa, he bore with him the documents, signed and sealed, of an alliance with the King of Naples. This threw the balance heavily on the side of Florence, and made peace inevitable. Again the pope was baffled and impotent.

It is easy to imagine what Florence thought of this wonderful youth, risking his life in a self-assumed rôle, saving his country in a bloodless encounter, snatching the laurels from heads grown gray in scheming and diplomacy. Lorenzo's throne was now the firmest in Europe. Every subsequent move confirmed his power. The other states found themselves entangled in the meshes of diplomacy, played off one against another, till independent action became impossible. Florence became the arbiter of Italy.

And now the Medicean policy received the farther development that changing circumstances and the new personality of Lorenzo required. The function of the great head of the house became more avowedly public. He was more completely busied with affairs of state, and less free to attend to business of his own. Inevitably the family fortunes suffered, partly from neglect, more from the heavier outlay required by the princely rôle which the genius of the family had created. The splendor of the throne was inseparable from its grandeur and power. Insensibly the royal function of the family became a charge upon the state. Doubtless definite items were first charged to public account,—items easily justified in connection with definite services,—then more and vaguer items, and

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finally a princely income was systematically diverted into the family coffers. Technically this was embezzlement, for Lorenzo was in name only a private citizen. But in fact he was a prince and his functions wholly public. His services were indubitable and his resources inadequate. The laborer, it might be argued, was worthy of his hire. But it was a weakness that the laborer could show no regular credentials and had to be paid on the sly. It was a moment of transition from citizenship to kingship, a moment in which neither the ethics nor the mechanism of finance was sufficiently elaborated to suit the occasion. How could he enter the field of competitive business with any fairness to his private rivals? Yet how could he meet his enormous responsibilities in default of the income which he was thus forbidden to secure? It was a difficult situation, in which transactions that seemed necessary and just to the sympathetic were sure to wear the ugly guise of theft to the envious and the unreconciled. The situation was handled with tact and considerateness. It is a delicate matter for an unofficial public servant to determine his own remuneration, and help himself from the public chest without treasury warrant or audit for his account. I should hesitate to say that Lorenzo was equal to the requirement. It is a complicated question, not easy to settle, and we may as well wait till the judgment-day.

It was in the new rôle of art patron and culture leader of Florence that Lorenzo attained his highest eminence. Liberal by nature, and now having the resources of a rich state at his disposal, his patronage of art became most munificent. But the patronage of art means more than the spending of money. Great as is the power of wealth, it can as easily hinder as help the cause of culture. It all depends on what you spend your money for. Lorenzo was in his tastes a refined Epi-

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curean. For him puritanism and asceticism had no attractions. But the spirit of indulgence was so tempered by refinement and good taste that the love of pleasure seldom wore the ugly aspect of vice or sensuality. The coarser lusts were not so much wicked as vulgar and inartistic. Good taste will go a long way toward doing the work of conscience, and it was the corner-stone of Lorenzo's character. Under his subtle leadership, the Florentine love of pleasure grew into a beauty cult, in which art flourished as it has flourished but once before or since in human history. Himself a poet and scholar of no mean attainments, Lorenzo never mistook an artist, a philosopher, a scholar. His dreamy eye unerringly detected beauty in all its forms, distinguished the true from the false, the fundamental from the local and temporary, the beautiful from the whimsical, the sensational, and the clever. As a crowning achievement it was vouchsafed to him, in the last year of his life, when the shadows were falling thick about him, to discern in the work of a boy of seventeen the genius of Michelangelo. Shallow criticism finds an easy mark in the great magician. It is easy to point out his disparagement of austere righteousness, his compromises with conscience, his too complacent acceptance of the foibles of men, which he knew so well how to manipulate for his purpose. It is not so easy to estimate his services to the cause of order in his day, or the value of that ideal of beauty which he so consistently kept before him and in which he saw a good that to us is perhaps not yet revealed.

But, none the less, the brilliant *régime* of the Medici was weighed in the balances and was found wanting. The cult of pleasure which had impelled the few to the noblest flights of fancy and the highest inspiration had meant for the many the complacent gratification of passion. The subtle philosophy

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of the time had wrought havoc with the simple faith which had once kept men in the fear of the Lord. Right and wrong, become matters of taste, had lost their cogency to the minds of the many who regarded matters of taste as but personal liking and caprice. Undeniably the urbanity of the times hid much that was unsightly in private life. Even in the church and the cloister, culture and intellectual subtlety took the place of devotion and chastening of spirit.

And there was protest. It was in the same year of our Lord 1492, when Lorenzo, having set his house in order, awaited the summons which could not be long delayed, that Nathan appeared unto David. A monk, already famous for his boldness and uncompromising character, began his first great series of sermons in Florence. Having been made prior of San Marco, one of the most complacent of Medicean strongholds, he had effected an almost immediate revolution. The artistic dilettantism, the mundane philosophizing and political scheming and ambition, of this modernized cloister, gave place to systematic devotion and to the stern *régime* of St. Dominic. There were probably some mutterings and backbitings, probably some plottings and open revolts, but nothing availed. The monks had found their master,—a man, too, who, with all his inflexibility, was infinitely compassionate and persuasive, and whose blameless life silenced the cavils of the few who resisted his magic spell. Touched by his transforming eloquence, the forgotten ideals of monk and Christian again became glorious, and fired the imagination of men. In all this, too, it must be remembered that Florence was still at heart profoundly superstitious; that the humanist culture had been but a hothouse growth, and was by no means acclimated to the persistent conditions about it; finally, that the long emphasis upon the æsthetic, to the disparagement of the ethical,

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had prepared the people for reaction, while new and strange portents were appearing on the political horizon. Into these conditions the character of Savonarola fitted as the torch in dry stubble when the wind is high. The agelong superstition of the people was with him a passion. He believed not only in God and conscience, but in dreams and portents, in miracles and divine intervention in immediate and concrete forms. The vision of a flaming sword was a prophecy of war and disaster; the coming of the French king was no political accident, but a divine judgment. To the noblest spirits he appealed by his lofty ideals of purity and his unflinching self-abnegation, while to the base and sordid he seemed to promise the fulfillment of vindictive desires and the gratifications of a sensuous heaven. The image was part of gold, and part of iron, and part of clay, and each found in it after his kind. Savonarola and Lorenzo, as they reached out for the multitude and wrought them into the structure of their ambitions, had much more in common than they knew; but in their appeal and seeming purpose they were the most absolute of irreconcilables. Savonarola, ascetic, narrow, intense, absolutely believing in popular government, though unconscious that his power to manipulate the assembly lay at the root of his belief, stood for conscience, self-denial, purity, and fervid religious faith. Lorenzo, refined, subtle, cool, calculating, profoundly distrustful of popular judgments, and trusting in the discipline and shrewdness of the chosen circle of which he was the master spirit, stood for culture, beauty, cleverness, and intellect. It was the cleverest of politicians pitted against the most uncompromising of reformers.

Savonarola's preaching made a stir at once. An attempt was made to counteract his influence by counterpreaching of the less strenuous sort, but to no avail. Then the great Lorenzo

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himself deigned to pay San Marco a visit. Breathless with excitement, the monks reported to Savonarola, "Lorenzo is in the garden." "Has he inquired for me?" "No." "Well, then, don't disturb him at his devotions." Whatever the clever move which the astute Lorenzo had planned, however sincere his desire may have been to reach an understanding with the stern monk, this refusal to negotiate, even to meet, made understanding impossible. Perhaps later efforts might have resulted differently. We may well imagine that Lorenzo was not at the end of his resources. But his time was short. The feeble frame that had long trammeled the restless spirit now refused even its halting service. Stretched upon his bed at Carreggi, a villa near Florence, he awaited the end that soon declared itself imminent. It was a time for serious thoughts, and reflection could not but be disquieting and bring reaction of spirit. There were haunting spectral notions of God as the great avenger of wrong-doing, which in this moment no philosophy or beauty worship could lay. The deepening sense of disloyalty and the need of reconciliation came to him as it has come to so many when the flames of passion have died out and conscience sits solitary among the embers.

And now the monk, who alone had never fawned or flattered, seemed the one to help him in his need. Perhaps, too, there was the consciousness of the struggle which he was bequeathing to a headstrong son, and hope that the monk might find in reconciliation with himself a pathway to reconciliation with his house. Men seldom act from wholly simple motives, and even in death cannot ignore the habits that have ruled their lives.

So the monk was called, and asked wherefore he had been summoned. "To shrive my soul," said the dying man. "That I will do on three conditions," said the monk. "What

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are they?" "First, that you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour." To this, Lorenzo gave immediate assent. We may doubt whether the phrase was very meaningful to one who had spent a lifetime in philosophical skepticism; but, like Savonarola, we can hardly do otherwise than take him at his word. "And the second condition?" "That you restore all moneys illegally taken from Florence." Lorenzo knew what that meant. Savonarola was not one who saw in the rôle of the Medici a justification for the income they had received from the state. To him, as the Medicean rule was plain tyranny, so the Medicean appropriation of funds was plain theft. We may well imagine how the feeble pulse quickened as Lorenzo contemplated the bankruptcy of his family as a condition of his salvation. But if so heavy a price could assure his soul's peace, and possibly the immunity of his house from further attack by this implacable foe, it might be worth the sacrifice. Long was the pause and very different the final assent of this sorely troubled spirit. But at last the assent was given. "Third," said the terrible monk, "you must give back to Florence her liberties." This time there was no struggle, no hesitation. Lorenzo turned his face to the wall, and died unshriven.

The story is commonly told as a glorification of Savonarola, the triumph of uncompromising righteousness over stricken and despairing sin. With no disparagement to the moral grandeur of Savonarola, I fancy we may see in it another meaning. The dying lips never gave up their secret; but, if they could have spoken, might they not have told us something like this: "I accept the shadowy faith you offer as a man may do who has spent his life in a world of realities and of alien thoughts. I even sacrifice fortune and family as atonement for wrongs more nominal than real. I make no mention

of services that once seemed to justify my emoluments. I see no plain case of theft as you do, monk; but the title is not clear, and conscience shall have the benefit of the doubt, even though ruin be the result. Myself I sacrifice and those that I may call my own. But give back to Florence her liberties! Do you know what that means, O monk? Are you unmindful of the passions that ran riot in the streets, of the war of factions, the chronic feuds, the chaos in industry, in government, in religion, and in private life? Was it for naught that the strong arm took the helm when the ship was sore bested? The liberty of Florentines; what is it but the privilege of anarchy, chaos, and murder? It is easy for you, wrought upon by fastings and visions in the night, to exhort to righteousness and reform. But think you that, in a lifetime in which I have wrought to fashion a state from crude humanity as I found it, I have had no conscience, no thought for others' weal? You would make Florence into a heaven; I have saved Florence from being a hell. Take the price of my doing, just or unjust, but not the thing I have done. Shrive me not, O monk, if you will not. I appeal unto God."

The practical and the ideal; between these two there is no reconciliation, save in the finished work which their common effort has wrought. In this world of ours there is instant need of something being done with crude men and imperfect conditions. Somebody must take men as they are, appeal to them with arguments that they can understand, organize them for purposes they can grasp and appreciate. Selfish and coarse, they must be gratified, indulged, wheedled, and cajoled. Envious, petty, and dull, they must be managed by hidden forces, and hoodwinked into welldoing. Endless compromise, patchwork, and inconsistency enter into every

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working plan. There is much that defies the simple rules of right, much that will not bear the light, much that grates against our sensibilities in the workings of every party, every business, every church. There are no ideal organizations, because there are no ideal people to organize. He who would be a doer of real things with real folks must be a practical man, he must take men as they are. But while we must take them as they are, we must make them as they ought to be. Take them as they are, or you will not take them at all. Make them what they ought to be, or they are not worth the taking. Yet it is the fatality of human naure to divide and antagonize these two functions, either of which is worthless without the other. The practical man who takes men as they are, adjusting himself to their foibles and skillfully manipulating them for his ends, becomes very well content with them as they are. Broad plans for regeneration disturb his working program, and put him out of his reckonings. Insensibly but inevitably he becomes an obstacle to reform and progress. The idealist just as inevitably falls into the opposite error. Mistaking the ultimate ideal for a working program, he demands the impossible, and sacrifices the feasible in an effort at the ideal. In temperance he demands absolute prohibition, in business conscious altruism and avowed stewardship, in politics only philanthropic organization and public-spirited, self-denying service. All this is good, but it is not a working program. If by impassioned eloquence majorities are won for these ideals, they melt before the rising tide of human passion as the morning dew disappears before the sun. There is an infinite pathos in that solemn vote by which the Florentine people, under the leadership of the great idealist, at a regular municipal election chose Jesus Christ for their king. Might not the most devout adherent of the older order

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have smiled at the simplicity of these children of the ideal! And so the great struggle continues between the men of the moment and the men of the ideal. Misunderstood, dreaded, and hated of each other, they are, none the less, useful only in coöperation. Neither can shrive the other's soul. Each must appeal unto God.

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