

## THE VATICAN.<sup>1</sup>

BY F. MARION CRAWFORD.

WITH PICTURES BY A. CASTAIGNE.



HE Mons Vaticanus is sometimes said to have received its name from Vaticanum, an oracle or prophecy; for tradition says that Numa chose the Vatican hill as a sacred place from which to

declare to the people the messages he received from the gods. It is not, however, one of the seven hills on which ancient Rome was built, but forms a part of the ridge beginning with the Janiculus and ending with Monte Mario, all of which was outside the ancient limits of the city. In our day the name is applied only to the immense pontifical palace adjacent to, and connected with, the basilica of St. Peter's.

The present existence of this palace is principally due to Nicholas V, the builder pope, whose gigantic scheme would startle a modern architect. His plan was to build the church of St. Peter's as a starting-point, and then to construct one vast central «habitat» for the papal administration, covering the whole of what is called the Borgo, from the castle of Sant' Angelo to the cathedral. In ancient times a portico, or covered way supported on columns, led from the bridge to the church, and it was probably from this real structure that Nicholas began his imaginary one, only a small part of which was ever completed. That small portion alone comprises the basilica and the Vatican Palace, which together form by far the greatest continuous mass of buildings in the world. The Colosseum is 195 yards long by 156 broad, including the thickness of the walls. St. Peter's Church alone is 205 yards long and 156 broad, so that the whole Colosseum would easily stand upon the ground-plan of the church, while the Vatican Palace is more than half as large again.

Nicholas V died in 1455, and the oldest parts of the present Vatican Palace are not

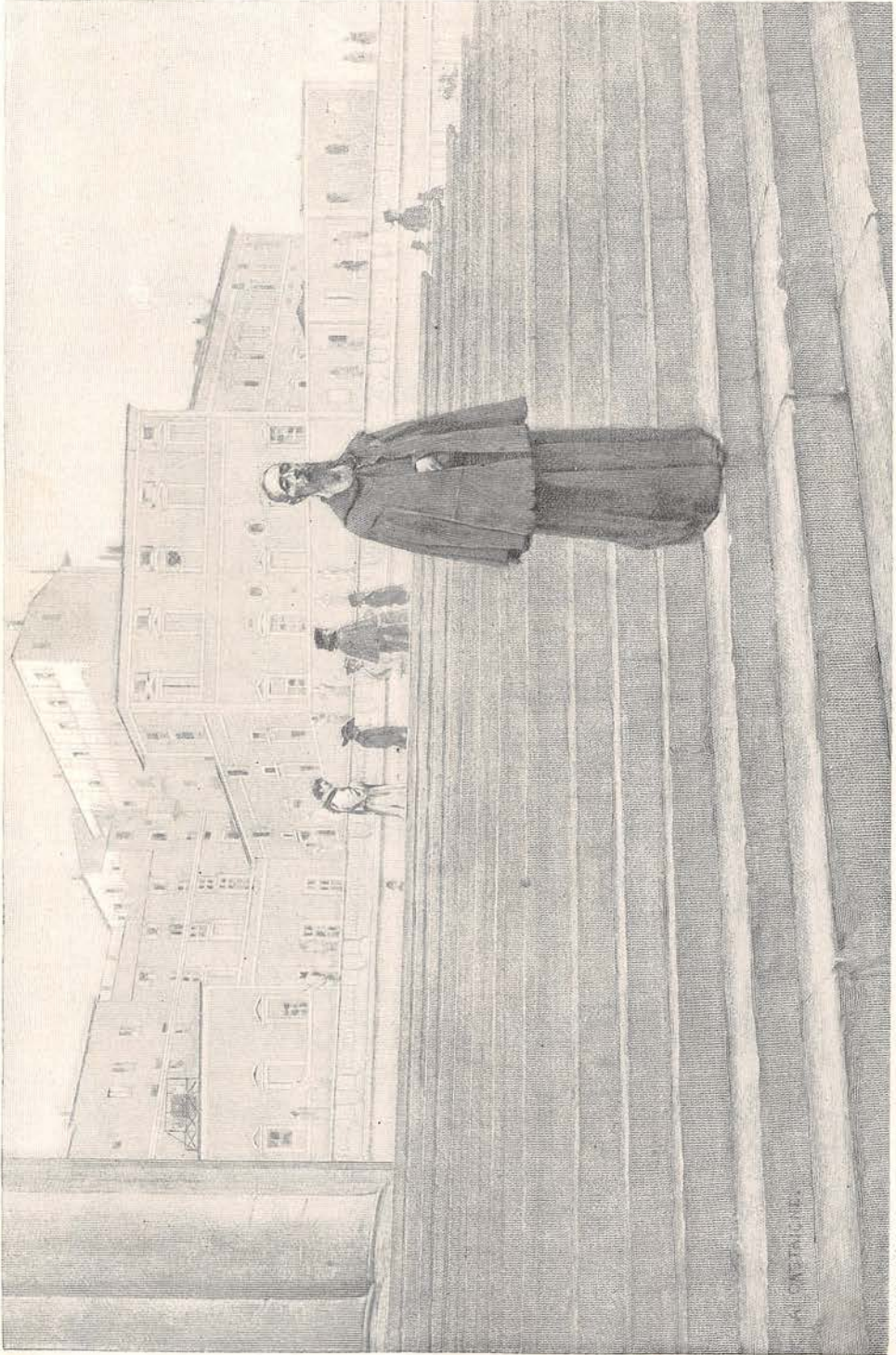
older than his reign. They are generally known as the Torre Borgia, from having been inhabited by Alexander VI, who died of poison in the third of the rooms now occupied by the library, counting from the library side. The windows of these rooms look upon the large square court of the Belvedere, and that part of the palace is not visible from without.

Portions of the substructure of the earlier building were no doubt utilized by Nicholas, and the secret gallery which connects the Vatican with the mausoleum of Hadrian is generally attributed to Pope John XXIII, who died in 1417; but on the whole it may be said that the Vatican Palace is originally a building of the period of the Renaissance, to which all successive popes have made additions.

The ordinary tourist first sees the Vatican from the square as he approaches from the bridge of Sant' Angelo. But his attention is from the first drawn to the front of the church, and he but vaguely realizes that a lofty, unsymmetrical building rises on his right. He pauses, perhaps, and looks in that direction as he ascends the long, low steps of the basilica, and wonders in what part of the palace the Pope's apartments may be, while the itinerant vender of photographs shakes yards of poor little views out of their gaudy red bindings, very much as *Leporello* unrolls the list of *Don Giovanni's* conquests. If the picture peddler sees that the stranger glances up at the Vatican, he forthwith points out the corner windows of the second story, and informs his victim that «Sua Santità» inhabits those rooms, and promptly offers photographs of any other part of the Vatican but that. The tourist looks up curiously, and finally gets rid of the vender by buying what he does not want, with the charitable intention of giving it to some dear, but tiresome, relative at home. And ever afterward, perhaps, he associates with his first impression of the Vatican the eager, cunning, scapegrace features of the man who sold him the photographs.

To fix a general scheme of the buildings in the mind, one must climb to the top of the dome of the church, and look down from

<sup>1</sup> See recent articles in THE CENTURY by the same writer: «A Kaleidoscope of Rome,» in the January number; «Pope Leo XIII and his Household,» in February; «St. Peter's,» in July; also in May, «The Election of a Pope,» by W. R. Thayer.



THE VATICAN AS SEEN FROM THE STEPS OF ST. PETER'S.

DESIGNED BY A. CASTA OVE.



DRAWN BY A. CASTAIGNE.

THE GARDEN OF THE POPE FROM THE DOME OF ST. PETER'S.

the balcony which surrounds the lantern. The height is so great that even the great dimensions of the biggest palace in the world are dwarfed in the deep perspective, and the wide gardens look small and almost insignificant. But the relative proportions of the buildings and grounds appear correctly, and measure each other, as it were. Moreover, it is now so hard to obtain access to the gardens at all that the usual way of seeing them is from the top of St. Peter's, from an elevation of four hundred feet.

To the average stranger «the Vatican» suggests only the museum of sculpture, the picture-galleries, and the Loggie. He remembers, besides the objects of art which he has seen, the fact of having walked a great distance through straight corridors, up and down short flights of marble steps, and through irregularly shaped and unsymmetrically disposed halls. If he had any idea of the points of the compass when he entered, he is completely confused in five minutes, and comes out at last with the sensation of having been walking in a labyrinth. He will find it hard to give any one an impression of the sort of building in which he has been, and certainly he can not have any knowledge of the topographical relations of its parts. Yet in his passage through the museums and galleries he has seen but a very small part of the whole, and, excepting when in the Loggie, he probably could not once have stood still and pointed in the direction of the main part of the palace.

In order to speak even superficially of it all, it is indispensable to classify its parts in some way. Vast and irregular it is at its two ends, toward the colonnade and toward the bastions of the city, but the intervening stretch consists of two perfectly parallel buildings, each over 350 yards long, about 80 yards apart, and yoked in the middle by the Braccio Nuovo of the museum and a part of the library, so as to inclose two vast courts, the one known as the Belvedere,—not to be confused with the Belvedere in the museum,—and the other called the Garden of the Pigna, from the bronze pine-cone which stands at one end of it.

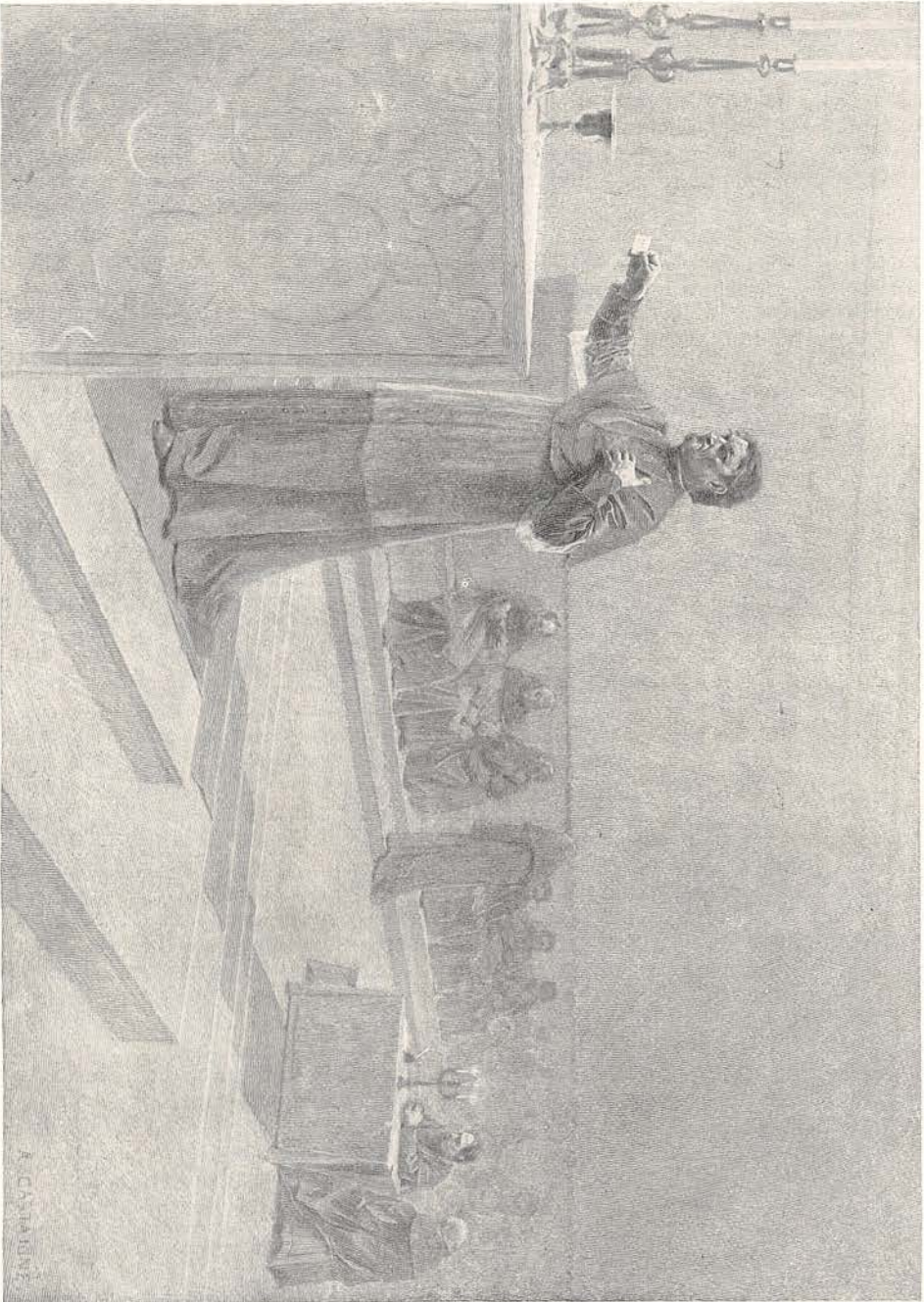
Across these parallel buildings, and toward the city, a huge pile is erected, about two hundred yards long, very irregular, and containing the papal residence and the apartments of several cardinals, the Sistine Chapel, the Pauline Chapel, the Borgia Tower, the Stanze and Loggie of Raphael, and the court of St. Damasus. At the other end of the parallelogram are grouped the equally irregular but

more beautiful buildings of the old museum, of which the windows look out over the walls of the city, and which originally received the name of Belvedere on account of the lovely view. This is said to have been a sort of summer-house of the Borgia, not then connected with the palace by the long galleries.

It would be a hopeless and a weary task to attempt to trace the history of the buildings. Some account of the Pope's private apartments has already been given in these pages.<sup>1</sup> They occupy the eastern wing of the part built round the court of St. Damasus; that is to say, they are at the extreme end of the Vatican, nearest the city, and over the colonnade, and the windows of the Pope's rooms are visible from the square. The vast mass which rises above the columns to the right of St. Peter's is only a small part of the whole palace, but is not the most modern by any means. It contains, for instance, the Sistine Chapel, which is considerably older than the present church, having been built by Sixtus IV, whose beautiful bronze monument is in the Chapel of the Sacrament. It contains, too, Raphael's Stanze, or halls, and Bramante's famous Loggie, the beautiful architecture of which is a frame for some of Raphael's best work.

But any good guide-book will furnish all such information, which it would be fruitless to give in such a paper as this. In the pages of Murray the traveler will find, set down in order and accurately, the ages, the dimensions, and the exact positions of all the parts of the building, with the names of the famous artists who decorated each. He will not find set down there, however, what one may call the atmosphere of the place, which is something as peculiar and unforgettable, though in a different way, as that of St. Peter's. It is quite unlike anything else, for it is part of the development of churchmen's administration to an ultimate limit in the high center of churchmanism. No doubt there was much of that sort of thing in various parts of Europe long ago, and in England before Henry VIII, and it is to be found in a small degree in Vienna to this day, where the traditions of the Holy Roman Empire are not quite dead. It is hard to define it, but it is in everything: in the uniforms of the attendants, in their old-fashioned faces, in the spotless cleanliness of all the Vatican,—though no one is ever to be seen handling a broom,—in the noiselessly methodical manner of doing everything that is to be done, in the scholarly rather than scientific arrangement of the objects in the museum and galleries—above all,

<sup>1</sup> See THE CENTURY for February, 1896.



DRAWN BY A. CASTALONE.

A CARDINAL VOTING AT THE ELECTION OF A POPE.

A. CASTALONE

in the visitor's own sensations. No one talks loudly among the statues of the Vatican, and there is a feeling of being in church, so that one is disagreeably shocked when a guide, conducting a party of tourists, occasionally raises his voice in order to be heard. It is all very hard to define, while it is quite impossible to escape feeling it, and it must ultimately be due to the dominating influence of the churchmen, who arrange the whole place as though it were a church. An American lady, on hearing that the Vatican contains eleven thousand rooms, threw up her hands and laughingly exclaimed, «Think of the housemaids!» But there are no housemaids in the Vatican, and perhaps the total absence of even the humblest feminine influence has something to do with the austere impression which everything produces.

On the whole, the Vatican may be divided into seven portions. These are the pontifical residence, the Sistine and Pauline Chapels, the picture-galleries, the library, the museums of sculpture and archæology, the outbuildings, including the barracks of the Swiss Guards, and, lastly, the gardens with the Pope's Casino. Of these the Sistine Chapel, the galleries and museums, and the library are incomparably the most important.

The name «Sistine» is derived from Sixtus IV, as has been said. The library was founded by Nicholas V, whose love of books was almost equal to his passion for building. The galleries are representative of Raphael's work, which predominates to such an extent that the paintings of almost all other artists are of secondary importance, precisely as Michelangelo filled the Sistine Chapel with himself. As for the museums, the objects they contain have been accumulated by many popes, but their existence ought, perhaps, to be chiefly attributed to Julius II and Leo X, the principal representatives of the Rovere and Medici families.

On the walls of the Sistine Chapel there are paintings by such men as Perugino, Luca Signorelli, Botticelli, and Ghirlandajo, as well as by a number of others; but Michelangelo overshadows them all with his ceiling and his «Last Judgment.» There is something overpowering about him, and there is no escaping from his influence. He not only covers great spaces with his brush, but he fills them with his masterful drawing, and makes them alive with a life at once profound and restless. One does not feel, as with other painters, that a vision has been projected upon a flat surface, but rather has the impression that a mysterious reality of life has been called up

out of senseless material. What we see is not imaginary motion represented, but real motion arrested, as it were, in its very act, and ready to move again. Many have said that the man's work was monstrous. It was monstrously alive, monstrously vigorous at times, over-strong and over-vital, exaggerative of nature, but never really unnatural, and he never once overreached himself in an effort. No matter how enormous the conception might be, he never lacked the means of carrying it to the concrete. No giantism of limb and feature was beyond the ability of his brush; no astounding foreshortening was too much for his unerring point; no vast perspective was too deep for his knowledge and strength. His production was limited only by the length of his life. Great genius means great and constant creative power before all things; it means wealth of resource and invention; it means quantity as well as quality. No truly great genius, unless cut short by early death, has left little of itself. Besides man's one great masterpiece, there are always a hundred works of the same hand, far beyond the powers of ordinary men; and the men of Michelangelo's day worked harder than we work. Perhaps they thought harder, too, being more occupied with creation, at a time when there was little, than we are with the difficult task of avoiding the unintentional reinvention of things already invented, now that there is much. The latter is a real difficulty in our century, when almost every mine of thought has been worked to a normal depth by minds of normal power, and it needs all the ruthless strength of original genius to go deeper, and hew and blast away through the bed-rock of men's limitations to new veins of treasure below.

It has been said of Titian by a great French critic that «he absorbed his predecessors and ruined his successors.» Michelangelo absorbed no one and ruined no one; for no painter, sculptor, or architect ever attempted what he accomplished, either before him or after him. No sane person ever tried to produce anything like the «Last Judgment,» the marble «Moses,» or the dome of St. Peter's. Michelangelo stood alone as a creator, as he lived a lonely man throughout the ninety years of his life. He had envy, but not competition, to deal with. There is no rivalry between his paintings in the Sistine Chapel and those of the many great artists who have left their work beside his on the same walls.

The chapel is a beautiful place in itself, by its simple and noble proportions, as well as by the wonderful architectural decorations



DRAWN BY A. CASTAIGNE.

LEO XIII. SKETCHES FROM LIFE.

of the ceiling, conceived by Michelangelo as a series of frames for his paintings. Beautiful beyond description, too, is the exquisite marble screen. No one can say certainly who made it; it was perhaps designed by the architect of the chapel himself, Baccio Pontelli. There are a few such marvels of unknown hands in the world, and a sort of romance clings to them, with an element of mystery that stirs the imagination, in a dreamy way, far more than the gilded oak-tree in the arms of Sixtus IV, by which the name of Rovere is symbolized. Sixtus commanded, and the chapel was built. But who knows where Baccio Pontelli lies? Or who shall find the grave where the hand that carved the lovely marble screen is laid at rest?

It is often dark in the Sistine Chapel. The tourist can rarely choose his day, and not often his hour, and, in his hard-driven appreciation, Michelangelo may lose his effect by the accident of a thunder-shower. Yet, of all sights in Rome, the Sistine Chapel most needs sunshine. If in any way possible, go there at noon on a bright winter's day, when the sun is streaming in through the high windows at the left of the «Last Judgment.» Every one has heard of the picture before seeing it, and almost every one has formed a picture of the picture in imagination. Consequently almost everybody is surprised or disappointed on seeing it for the first time. Then, too, the world's ideas about the terrific subject of the painting have changed since Michelangelo's day. Religious belief can no more be judged by his work than his work should be judged by the standard of religion. It is wiser to look at it as a work of art alone, as the most surprising masterpiece of a master draftsman, and as a marvelous piece of composition.

In the lower part of the picture, there is a woman rising from her grave in a shroud. It has been suggested that Michelangelo meant to represent by this figure the Renaissance in Italy, still struggling with darkness. The whole picture brings the times before us. There is the Christian heaven above, and the heathen Styx below. Charon ferries the souls across the dark stream; they are first judged by Minos, and Minos is a portrait of a cardinal who had ventured to criticize the rest of the picture before it was finished. There is in it all the whirling confusion of ideas which made that age alternately terrible and beautiful, devout and unbelieving, strong and weak by turns, scholarly upon a foundation of barbarism, and most realistic

when most religious. You may see the reflected confusion in the puzzled faces of most tourists who look at the «Last Judgment» for the first time. A young American girl smiles vaguely at it; an Englishman glares, expressionless, at it, through an eye-glass, with a sort of cold inquiry—«Oh! is that all?» he might say; a German begins in Paradise at the upper left-hand corner, and works his way through the details to hell below, at the right. But they are all inwardly disturbed or puzzled or profoundly interested, and when they go away it is the great picture which, willingly or unwillingly, they remember with the most clearness.

And as Michelangelo set his great mark upon the Sistine, so Raphael took the Stanze and the Loggie for himself—and some of the halls of the picture-galleries too. Raphael represented the feminine element in contrast with Michelangelo's rude masculinity. There hangs the great «Transfiguration,» which, all but finished, was set up by the young painter's body when he lay in state—a picture too large for the sentiment it should express, while far too small for the composition, and yet, in its way, a masterpiece of composition. For in a measure Raphael succeeded in detaching the transfigured Christ from the crowded foreground, and in creating two distinct centers of interest. The frescos in the Stanze represent subjects of less artistic impossibility, and in painting them Raphael expended in beauty of design the genius which, in the «Transfiguration,» he squandered in attempting to overcome insuperable difficulties. Watch the faces of your fellow-tourists now, and you will see that the puzzled expression is gone. They are less interested than they were before the «Last Judgment,» but they are infinitely better pleased.

Follow them on to the library. They will enter with a look of expectation, and presently you will see disappointment and weariness in their eyes. Libraries are for the learned, and there are but a handful of scholars in a million. Besides, the most interesting rooms, the Borgia apartments, are not shown.

Two or three bad men are responsible for almost all the evil that has been said and written against the characters of the popes in the middle ages. Farnese of Naples; Caraffa of Maddaloni, another Neapolitan who reigned as Paul IV; and Rodrigo Borgia, a Spaniard, who was Alexander VI, are the chief instances. There were, indeed, many popes who were not perfect, who were more or less ambitious, avaricious, warlike, timid,





DRAWN BY A. CASTAIGNE.

POPE LEO XIII IN THE GARDEN OF THE VATICAN.

headstrong, weak, according to their several characters; but it can hardly be said that any of them were, like those I have mentioned, really bad men through and through, vicious, unscrupulous, and daringly criminal. Paul IV outlived most of his vices, and devoted his last years to ecclesiastical affairs, but Alexander died poisoned by an accident.

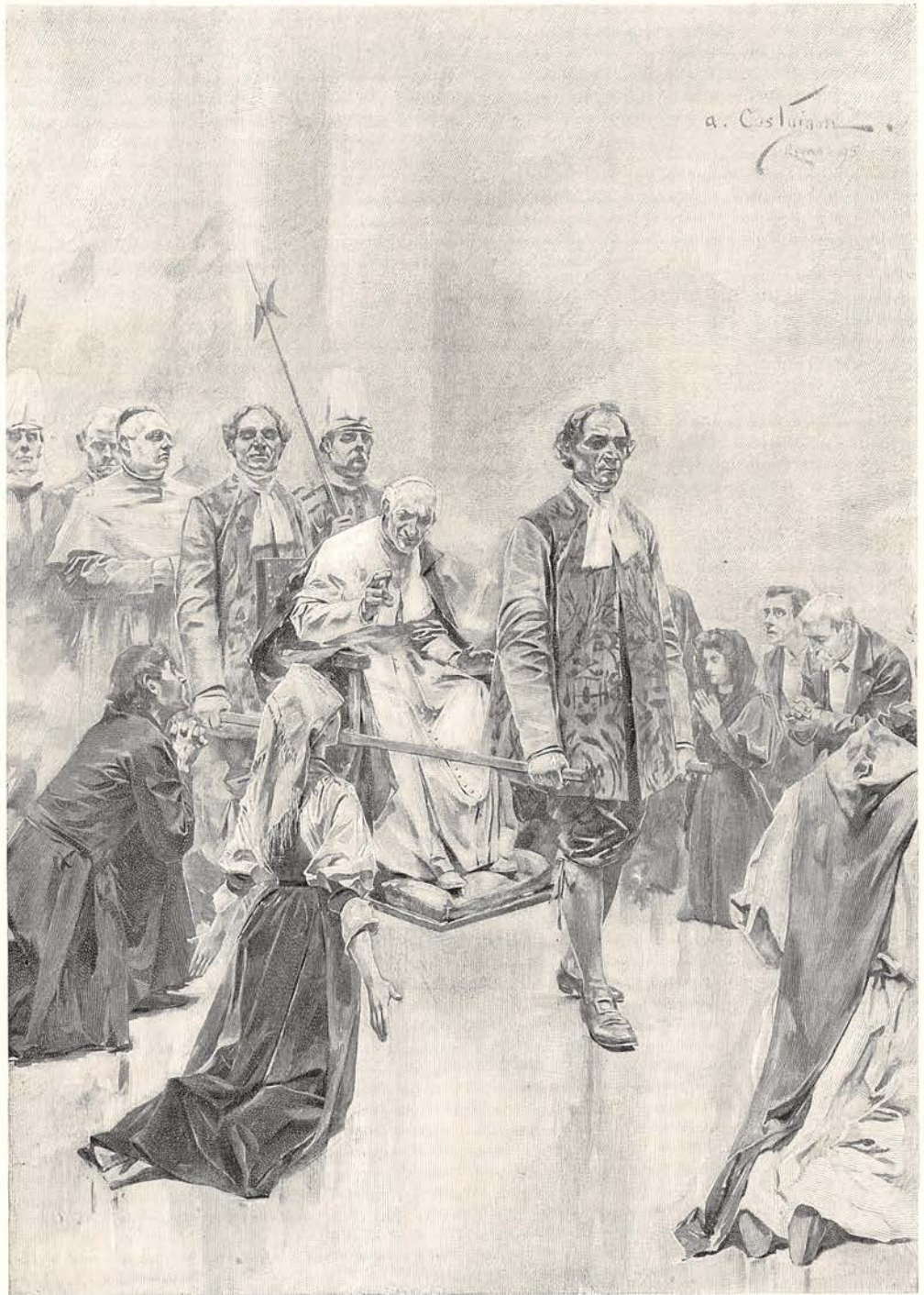
According to Guicciardini, the Pope knew nothing of Cæsar Borgia's intention of poisoning their rich friend, the cardinal of Corneto, with whom they were both to sup in a villa on August 17, 1503. The Pope arrived at the place first, was thirsty, asked for a drink, and by a mistake was given wine from a flask prepared and sent by Cæsar for the cardinal. Cæsar himself came in next, and drank likewise. The Pope died the next day, but Cæsar recovered, though badly poisoned, to find himself a ruined man and a fugitive. The cardinal did not touch the wine. This event ended an epoch and a reign of terror, and it pilloried the name of Borgia forever. Alexander expired in the third room of the Borgia apartments in the raving of a terrible delirium, during which the superstitious bystanders believed that he was conversing with Satan, to whom he had sold his soul for the papacy, and some were ready to swear that they actually saw seven devils in the room when he was dying. The fact that these witnesses were able to count the fiends speaks well for their coolness, at all events.

It has been much the fashion of late years to cry down the Vatican collection of statues, and to say that, with the exception of the «Torso,» it does not contain a single one of the few great masterpieces known to exist, such as the «Hermes of Olympia,» the «Venus of Medici,» the «Borghese Gladiator,» the «Dying Gaul.» We are told that the «Apollo» of the Belvedere is a bad copy, and that the head of the original is in St. Petersburg; that the «Laocoön» is a copy, in spite of the signatures of three Greek artists, one on each of the figures; that the «Antinous» is a bad Hermes; and so on to the end of the collection, it being an easy matter to demolish the more insignificant statues after proving the worthlessness of the principal ones. Much of this criticism comes to us from Germany. But a German can criticize and yet admire, whereas an Anglo-Saxon usually despises what he criticizes at all. Isaac Disraeli says somewhere that certain opinions, like certain statues, require to be regarded from a proper distance. Probably none of the statues in the Vatican is placed as the sculptor would have placed it to be seen to advantage.

Michelangelo believed in the «Laocoön,» and he was at least as good a judge as most modern critics, and he roughed out the arm that was missing,—it lies on the floor in the corner,—and devoted much time to studying the group. It is true that he is said to have preferred the torso of the «Hercules,» but he did not withhold his admiration of the other good things. Of the «Apollo» it is argued that it is insufficiently modeled. Possibly it stood in a very high place and did not need much modeling, for the ancients never wasted work, nor bestowed it where it could not be seen. However that may be, it is a far better statue, excepting the bad restorations, than it is now generally admitted to be, though it is not so good as people used to believe that it was. Apparently there are two ways of looking at objects of art. The one way is to look for the faults; the other way is to look for the beauties. It is plain that it must be the discovery of the beauty which gives pleasure, while the criticism of the shortcomings can only flatter the individual's vanity. There cannot be much doubt but that Alcibiades got more enjoyment out of life than Diogenes.

The oldest decorated walls in the palace are those by Fra Angelico in the chapel of Nicholas. For some reason or other this chapel at one time ceased to be used, the door was walled up, and the very existence of the place was forgotten. In the last century Bottari, having read about it in Vasari, set to work to find it, and at last got into it through the window which looks upon the roof of the Sistine Chapel. The story, which is undoubtedly true, gives an idea of the vastness of the palace, and certainly suggests the possibility of more forgotten treasures of art shut up in forgotten rooms.

One other such at least there is. High up in the Borgia Tower, above the Stanze of Raphael, is a suite of rooms once inhabited by Cardinal Bibbiena, of the Chigi family, and used since then by more than one assistant secretary of state. There is a small chapel there, with a window looking upon an inner court, which was once the luxurious cardinal's bathroom, and was beautifully painted by Raphael in fresco, with mythological subjects. In 1835, according to Crowe and Cavalcaselle, Passavant saw it as it had originally been, with the frescos, though much damaged, still beautiful, and the marble bath still in its place in a niche painted with river-gods. In one of the Vatican's periodical fits of prudery, the frescos were completely hidden with a wooden wainscot, the bath-tub was taken away, and the room was turned into a chapel.



DRAWN BY A. CASTAIGNE.

THE POPE RECEIVING AND BLESSING PILGRIMS.

It is believed, however, that the paintings still exist behind their present covering.

The walk through the museum is certainly one of the most wonderful in the world. There are more masterpieces, perhaps, in Florence; possibly objects of greater value may be accumulated in the British Museum, though that is doubtful; but nowhere in the world are statues and antiquities so well arranged as in the Vatican, and perhaps the orderly beauty of arrangement has as much to do as anything else with the charm that pervades the whole. One is brought into direct communication with Rome at its best, brilliant with the last reflections of Hellenic light; and again one is brought into contact with Rome at its worst, and beyond its worst, in its decay and destruction. Amid the ruin, too, there is the visible sign of a new growth in the beginnings of Christianity, from which a new power, a new history, a new literature, and a new art were to spring up and blossom, and in the rude sculpture of the Shepherd, the Lamb and the Fishes, lies the origin of Michelangelo's «Moses» and «Pietà.» There, too, one may read, as in a book, the whole history of death in Rome, graven in the long lines of ancient inscriptions, the tale of death when there was no hope, and its story when hope had begun in the belief in the resurrection of the dead. There the sadness of the sorrowing Roman contrasts with the gentle hopefulness of the bereaved Christian, and the sentiment and sentimentality of mankind during the greatest of the world's developments are told in the very words which men and women dictated to the stone-cutter. To those who can read the inscriptions the impression of direct communication with antiquity is very strong. For those who cannot there is still a special charm in the long succession of corridors, in the occasional glimpses of the gardens, in the cool magnificence of the decorations, as well as in the statues and fragments which line the endless straight walls. One returns at last to

the halls, one lingers here and there, to look again at something one has liked, and in the end one goes out, remembering the place rather than the objects it contains, and desiring to return again for the sake of the whole sensation one has had rather than for any defined purpose.

At the last, opposite the iron turnstile by which the visitors are counted, there is the closed gate of the garden. It is very hard to get admission to it now, for the Pope himself is there almost every day when the weather is fine. In the Italian manner of gardening the grounds are well laid out, and produce the effect of being much larger than they really are. They are not, perhaps, very remarkable, and Leo XIII must sometimes long for the hills of Carpineto and the freer air of the mountains, as he drives round and round in the narrow limits of his small domain, or walks a little under the shade of the ilex-trees, conversing with his gardener or his architect. Yet those who love Italy love its old-fashioned gardens, the shady walks, the deep box-hedges, the stiff little summer-houses, the fragments of old statues at the corners, and even the *scherzi d'acqua*, which are little surprises of fine water-jets, that unexpectedly send a shower of spray into the face of the unwary. There was always an element of childishness in the practical jesting of the last century.

When all is seen, the weary tourist gets into his cab and drives down the empty paved way by the wall of the library, along the basilica, and out once more to the great square before the church. Or, if he be too strong to be tired, he will get out at the steps, and go in for a few minutes to breathe the quiet air before going home, to get the impression of unity, after the impressions of variety which he has received in the Vatican, and to take away with him something of the peace which fills the cathedral of Christendom.

*F. Marion Crawford.*

