Kenneth Clark

CIVILISATION

Vol. 1

Edited with Notes

by

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&

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THE SIGN OF  A GOOD BOOK

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'Man—the Measure of all Things'
'The Worship of Nature'

from

Civilisation by Kenneth Clark

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ま え が き

Sir Kenneth Clark の *Civilisation* (BBC と John Murray の共同出版, 1969) が出版されるや，英国はもとよりアメリカにおいても，いち早く世間の注目を浴び読書界において次第に圧倒的な人気を博するに至ったことは，1970年間を通じて *The Time* 誌のベストセラーズ表によくあらわれている．

Clark のいう "civilisation" に関しては，すでに二度にわたって NHK 教育テレビを通して連続放映された「芸術と文明」によって知る人も多いことであろう．著者というよりは解説者の Clark がパリの Pont des Arts に立ち，一方に the Institute of France，他方にルーブル美術館を映し出すことによって始まった「ヨーロッパの暗黒時代」から，今日の「偉大な物質文明」に至るまでの，十三回にわたるこのシリーズは，教養という名に最もふさわしい，西欧文明の古今の姿を，最も魅力ある形でわれわれに示してくれたものといえよう．

一体「文明」という言葉ほど常識的に使われていて，定義し難いものはない．文明とは何か．「わたくしは知らない．抽象的な言葉でこれに定義を与えることは不可能である」と Clark はいう．「だが，それがどんなものか，目で見て知ることはできると思う．そして私は，今それを見ているのである.」

彼の見ているもの——それは，ローマ帝国崩壊のあとの西欧諸国において創り出された建築であり，彫刻であり，絵画であり，詩であり，そしてさらには，科学であり，技術である．すなわち，これらのものが，文明の中心をなすと Clark は考えるのである．したがってこれらを生み出した偉大な天才たちは，それに新たなエネルギーを与えることによって文明を創造してきたのであり，またわれわれは，彼らの恩恵によって，世界やわれわれ自身に関しての理解を広め，かつ深め得ているのである．Ruskin 愛好家といわれる Clark がこの芸術家から引用した次の文章は，まさに，「文明」に関する Clark の態度をよく示しているといえよう．「偉大な国

家が，その自叙伝をあらわすのには，三通りの形がある．その業績の記録，その言葉の記録，そしてその芸術の記録である．他の二つと合わせて見なければ，そのうちの一つも理解することはできない．しかしこれら三者のうち，信頼性のあるのは，芸術の記録だけである．」

この *Civilisation* が書かれた動機を見れば，もともとこれは，芸術の歴史を根底としたものであった．1969年の春にBBCが，芸術に関するカラーフィルムをシリーズで映す企画を立て，その協力を Clark にもちこんできた．だが，そのとき BBC の担当責任者であった David Attenborough がたまたま 'civilisation' という言葉を使ったことが，大いに Clark の気にいるところとなり，彼はその仕事を引き受ける結果になったのである．(TV 放映が始まると同時に，その script は *Listener* 誌に，やはり十三回にわたって連載されたが，回をかさねるにつれて，熱心なファンがふえたことはその間において頻繁に掲げられた読者からの "Letters" によっても十分にうかがうことができる．)

しかしこの *Civilisation* が，単なる芸術の歴史でないことはいうまでもない．Clark が強調しているのは，芸術という medium を通して，われわれの目に見え，耳に聞こえてくる，あの生命力豊かな信念や思想——その歴史が，すなわち文明だということである．

こういう問題を語るのは，Clark の最も得意とするところだといえるであろう．僅かに22歳のときに出版された彼の *The Gothic Revival* (1928) を見るだけでも，いかに本当の意味での学者としての資質の持主であるか，よくわかるであろうが，その後彼は *Leonardo da Vinci* (1939), *Landscape into Art* (1949)〔邦訳『風景画論』, 1967〕, *The Nude* (1956)〔邦訳『ザ・ヌード』, 1971〕, *Looking at Pictures* (1960), *Ruskin Today* (1967) というような，多くの名著を出している．なかでも，ヨーロッパ全域に関するその驚ろくべき該博な知識と，さわやかな筆法が，この *Civilisation* において，一段と縦横無尽にふるわれているような感が深い．つまり，それはわれわれの概念の中にある歴史とは別種のものである．彼は，総括的な記録を試みているのではなく，文明発展の画期的なエピソードを相互に関連づけながら，それをたどることに，より力を注ぐ．9 世紀頃に Viking の活躍し

たアイオナ島から，12世紀のフランスへ，フィレンツェからウルビーノへ，ドイツからローマ，イギリス，オランダ，アメリカへ，というふうに．そして彼が，この講演を通して強調するのは，文明の盛衰と，自信（confidence）の関連性である．彼によれば，自信は，文明の尺度となるのであり，古典主義とルネサンス時代におけるヨーロッパ社会の満々たる誇りと，今日における自信のなさとのコントラストによって，ヨーロッパ中心主義の終熄を暗示しようとするかの如くである．

Kenneth Clark は1903年 Saltwood の生まれで，Winchester と，Oxford の Trinity College（1968年に Honourable Fellow となる）で教育を受け，フィレンツェで二年間 Barnard Berenson のもとで研鑽を積んだことがある．Clark が，上にのべたように，今日の芸術に関して，ある悲観的な見方をしているとするならば，そこには，Berenson の影響があったと考えることができるであろう．Berenson は明らかに，古典主義とルネサンスの時代を芸術にとっての二つの黄金時代としているのであり，現代を視覚芸術の伝統の失墜の時代であると信じた批評家であったからである．

1934年 Clark は30歳で National Gallery のディレクターの要職に任ぜられ，1945年まで在職，その間にもいくつかの芸術関係の職を兼ね，1949年から50年まで，さらに1961年から62年まで Oxford の Slade 美術教授を二回つとめた．その後，York 大学総長，大英博物館評議員，Victoria and Albert Museum の顧問，London Library の館長というような，いずれも重要な地位につきながら，上にあげたような多くの芸術論を著わし，まさにその方面での国家的重鎮といっていい存在になっているのである．その功績によって1969年に爵位を授けられ，Baron of Saltwood となった．

日本においても，*Landscape into Art* と *The Nude* が翻訳されるなど，Clark の名はようやく世間に知れるようになった．が，彼の名を高からしめる最大の動機となったのは，何といっても *Civilisation* の連続講演である．われわれはテレビを通じて，彼の本領に十分に接することができたのであるが，その原文に接する場合に，その流麗な文体にまた新たな格調が感じられるのはいうまでもない．*Listener* 誌連載の全文を収録し，48枚の

色刷図版と238枚というぼう大な黒白図版入りで編集された *Civilisation* の原書は，その体裁からして実に堂々たるものである．参考までに目次を紹介しておく．

1 The Skin of our Teeth
2 The Great Thaw
3 Romance and Reality
4 Man—the Measure of all Things
5 The Hero as Artist
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7 Grandeur and Obedience
8 The Light of Experience
9 The Pursuit of Happiness
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13 Heroic Materialism

この中から比較的に短期間で読めるものを選ぶとなると，いずれも相互に関係が深く，しかも捨て難い味わいのある内容のものばかりであるだけに，容易な業ではなかった．が，わたくしたちは，その中でもquintessentialなものとして，また今日のわれわれから見ても，最も関心の深い問題を扱ったものとして 4. Man—the Measure of all Things と 11. The Worship of Nature とを選んだ．Clark の深い学識と博引旁証には，注釈上かなり難渋をした．不備な点について大方のご教示を得れば幸いである．なお原著からとり入れた相当数の図版が注の補いとして本文の理解に参考になることを期待したい．

1971年9月　　編　注　者

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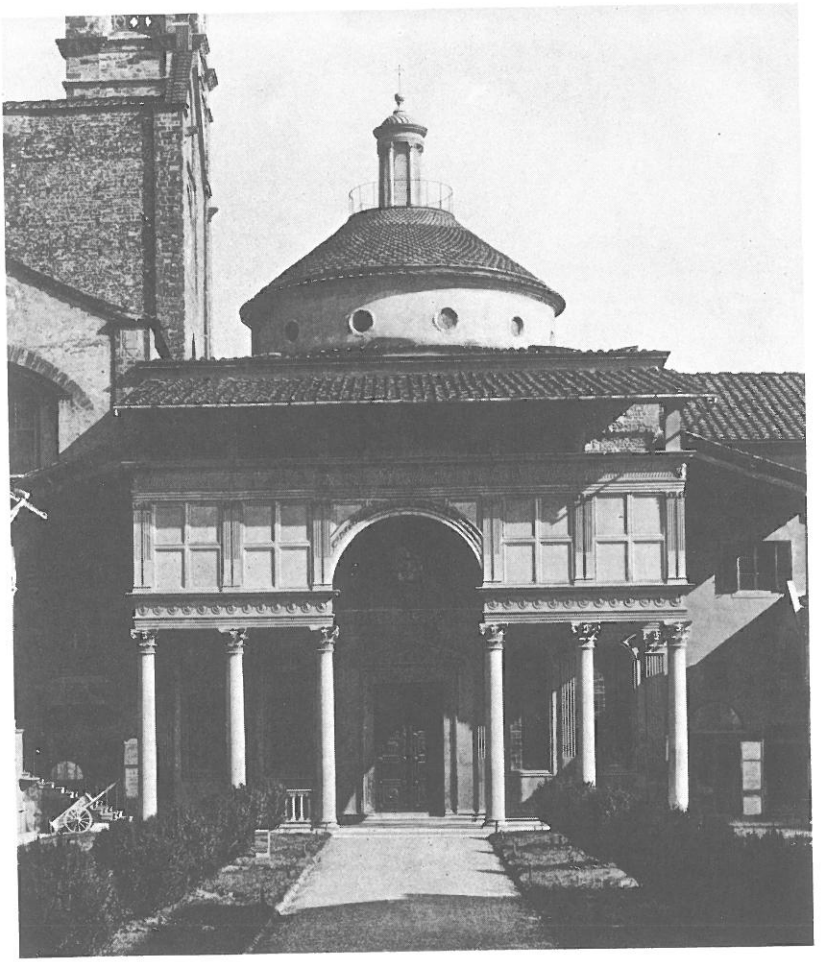
I Man — the Measure of all Things

The men who had made Florence the richest city in Europe, the bankers and wool-merchants, the pious realists, lived in grim defensive houses strong enough to withstand party feuds and popular riots. They don't foreshadow in any way the extraordinary episode in the history of civilisation known as the Renaissance. There seems to be no reason why suddenly out of the dark, narrow streets there arose these light, sunny arcades with their round arches 'running races in their mirth' under their straight cornices. By their rhythms and proportions and their open, welcoming character they totally contradict the dark Gothic style that preceded, and, to some extent, still surrounds them. What has happened? The answer is contained in one sentence by the Greek philosopher Protagoras, 'Man is the measure of all things'. The Pazzi Chapel [1], built by the great Florentine Brunellesco in about 1430, is in a style that has been called the architecture of humanism. His friend and fellow-architect, Leon Battista Alberti, addressed man in these words: 'To you is given a body more graceful than other animals, to you power of apt and various movements, to you most sharp and delicate senses, to you wit, reason, memory like an immortal god.' Well, it is certainly incorrect to say that we are more graceful than other animals, and we don't feel much like immortal gods at the moment. But in 1400 the Florentines did. There is no better instance of how a burst of civilisation depends on confidence than the Florentine state of mind in the early fifteenth century. For thirty years the fortunes of the republic, which in a material sense had declined, were directed by a group of the most intelligent individuals who have ever been elected to power by a democratic government. From Salutati onwards the Florentine chancellors were scholars, believers in the *studia humanitatis*, in which

1. Pazzi Chapel, Florence

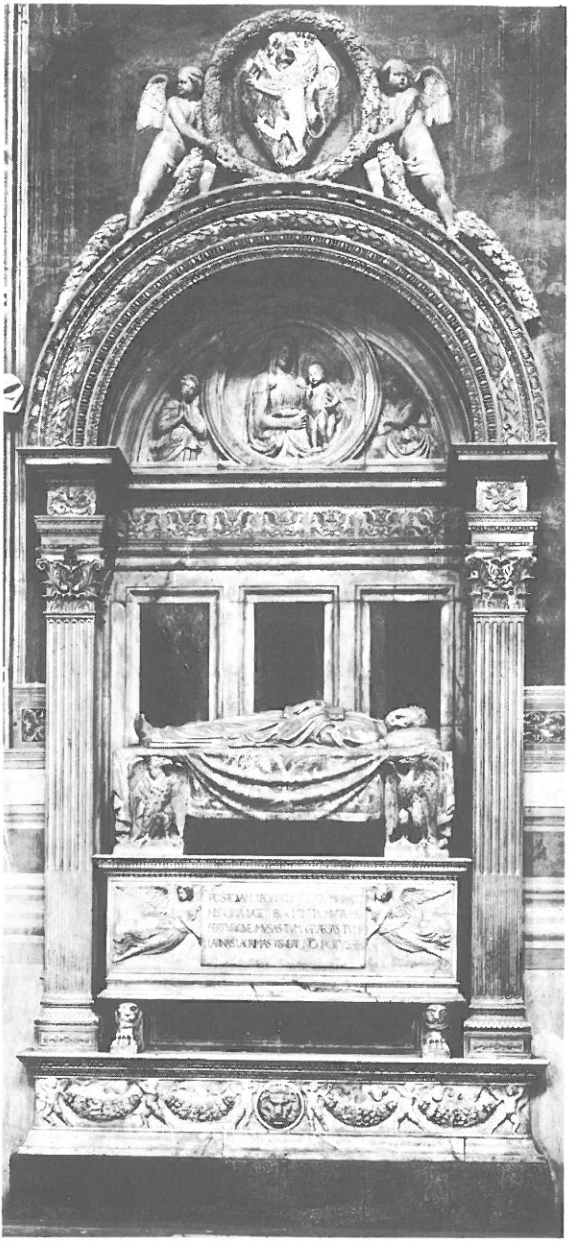


learning could be used to achieve a happy life, believers in the application of free intelligence to public affairs, and believers, above all, in Florence.

The second and greatest of these humanist chancellors, Leonardo Bruni, compared the civic virtues of republican Florence with those of republican Rome. Later he went even further and compared her to Athens in the age of Pericles. Medieval philosophers, insofar as they thought of

their own times in the context of history, were inclined to be gloomy. 'We are dwarfs,' said John of Salisbury, 'standing on the shoulders of giants.' But Bruni saw the Florentine republic as reviving the virtues of Greece and Rome. And on his tomb in the church of Santa Croce are the words, 'History is in mourning' [2]. This inscription is supported by two winged figures which, since they are in a church, one may call angels, but are in fact victories from a Roman triumphal arch; and above them, supporting Bruni's bier, are imperial eagles. It's true that in the lunette there is a Madonna, but the important part of the tomb is furnished entirely with Classical symbols, and expresses an ideal that, in fifteenth-century Florence, was to supplant the idea of chivalry—fame; the ultimate reward of the outstanding individual.

Bruni and his friends had derived these ideals from the authors of Greece and Rome. Much as one would like to say something new about the Renaissance, the old belief that it was largely based on the study of antique literature remains true. Of course the Middle Ages derived a good deal more from Classical antiquity than used to be supposed. But their sources were limited, their texts corrupt, and their interpretations often fanciful. Almost the first man to read Classical authors with real insight was Petrarch, that complex figure of the fourteenth century, that false dawn of humanism, whose love of opposites, of fame and solitude, of nature and politics, of rhetoric and self-revelation, makes us think of him as the first modern man—until we begin to read his works. Petrarch never learnt Greek, but his younger contemporary Boccaccio did, and so there entered into Florentine thought a new, regenerating force and a new example. When Bruni compared Florence to Athens, he *had* read Thucydides. In Florence the first thirty years of the fifteenth century were the heroic age of scholarship when new texts were discovered and old texts edited, when scholars were teachers and rulers and moral leaders. There are plenty of Renaissance pictures of scholars in their studies, usually represented as one of the Church Fathers, Jerome or Augustine. They look fairly snug in their well-furnished studies, their books piled on the



2. Rossellino, Tomb of Leonardo Bruni, Florence

shelves, their texts propped before them, their contemplation of the universe assisted by a celestial sphere. The passionate earnestness of Botticelli's St Augustine [3] was no doubt directed towards the contemplation of God. But the scholar searching for truth in Classical texts was scarcely less intense.

It was to house these precious texts, any one of which might contain some new revelation that might alter the course of human thought, that Cosimo de Medici built the library of San Marco. It looks to us peaceful and remote—but the first studies that took place there were not remote

3. Botticelli, *St Augustine*

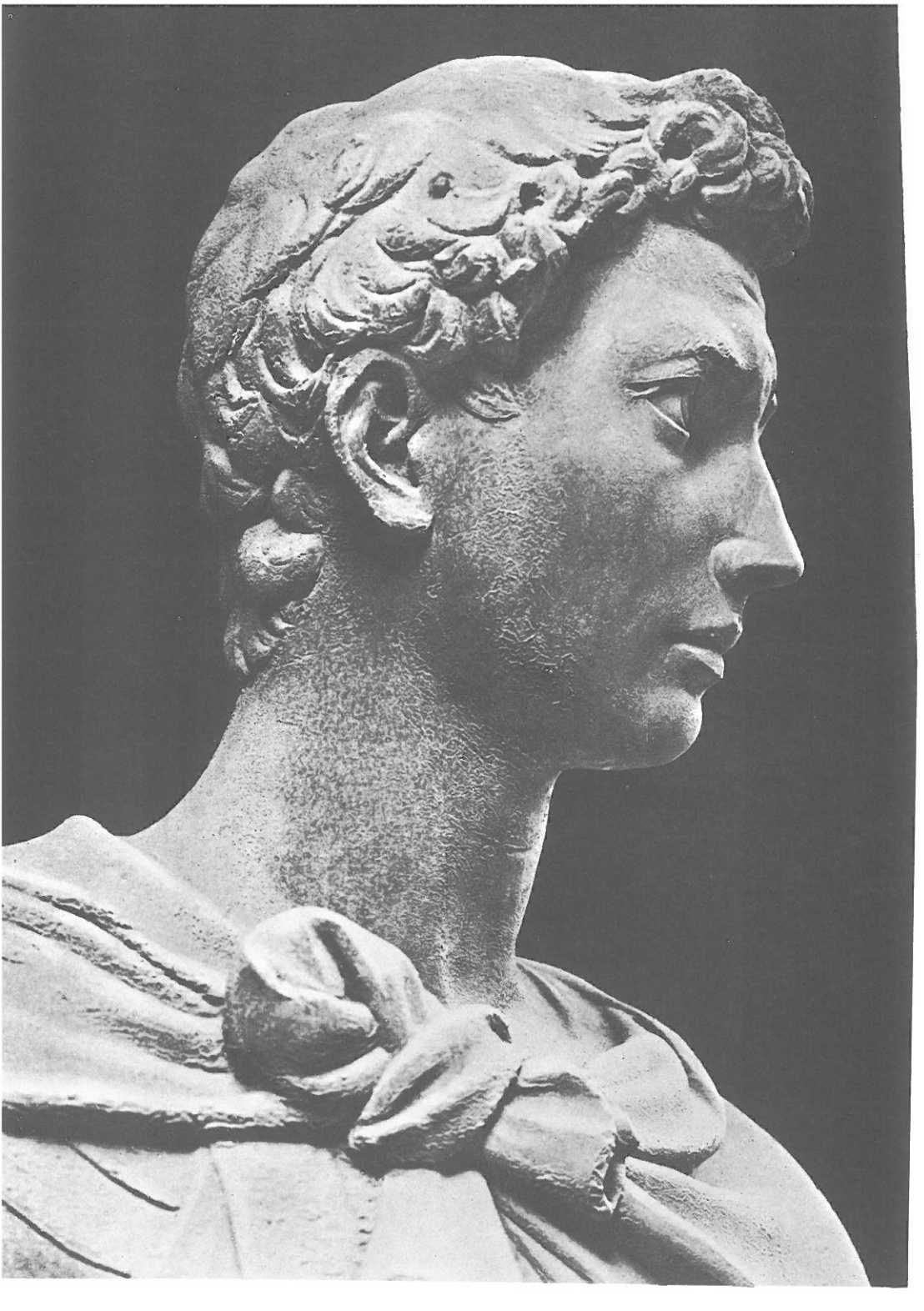
from life at all. It was the humanist equivalent of the Cavendish Laboratory. The manuscripts unpacked and studied under these harmonious vaults could alter the course of history with an explosion, not of matter, but of mind.

But although the study of Greek and Latin influenced the thought and style and moral judgements of the Florentines, its influence on their art was not very far-reaching—it consisted chiefly of isolated quotations. And their architecture, as one sees it in the Pazzi Chapel, isn't antique at all. Where did it come from, this light, economical style which is unlike anything before or since? I think that it was really the invention of an individual—Brunellesco. But of course, an architectural style cannot take root unless it satisfies some need of the time. Brunellesco's style satisfied the need of the clear-headed, bright-minded men who appeared on the Florentine scene at the moment when the discipline of trade and banking, in its most austere form, was beginning to be relaxed, and life—a full use of the human faculties—became more important than making money.

People sometimes feel disappointed the first time they see the famous beginnings of Renaissance architecture—the Pazzi Chapel and the Old Sacristy of San Lorenzo—because they seem so small. Well, so they are, after the great monuments of Romanesque and Gothic architecture. They don't try to impress us or crush us by size and weight, as all God-directed architecture does. Everything is adjusted to the scale of reasonable human necessity. They are intended to make each individual more conscious of his powers, as a complete moral and intellectual being. They are an assertion of the dignity of man.

The dignity of man. Today those words die on our lips. But in fifteenth-century Florence their meaning was still a fresh and invigorating belief. Gianozzo Manetti, a humanist man of action, who had seen the seamy side of politics, nevertheless wrote a book entitled *On the Dignity and Excellence of Man.* And this is the concept that Brunellesco's friends were making visible. Round the merchants' church of Orsanmichele are life-size figures of the saints: Donatello's St Mark, of whom Michelangelo

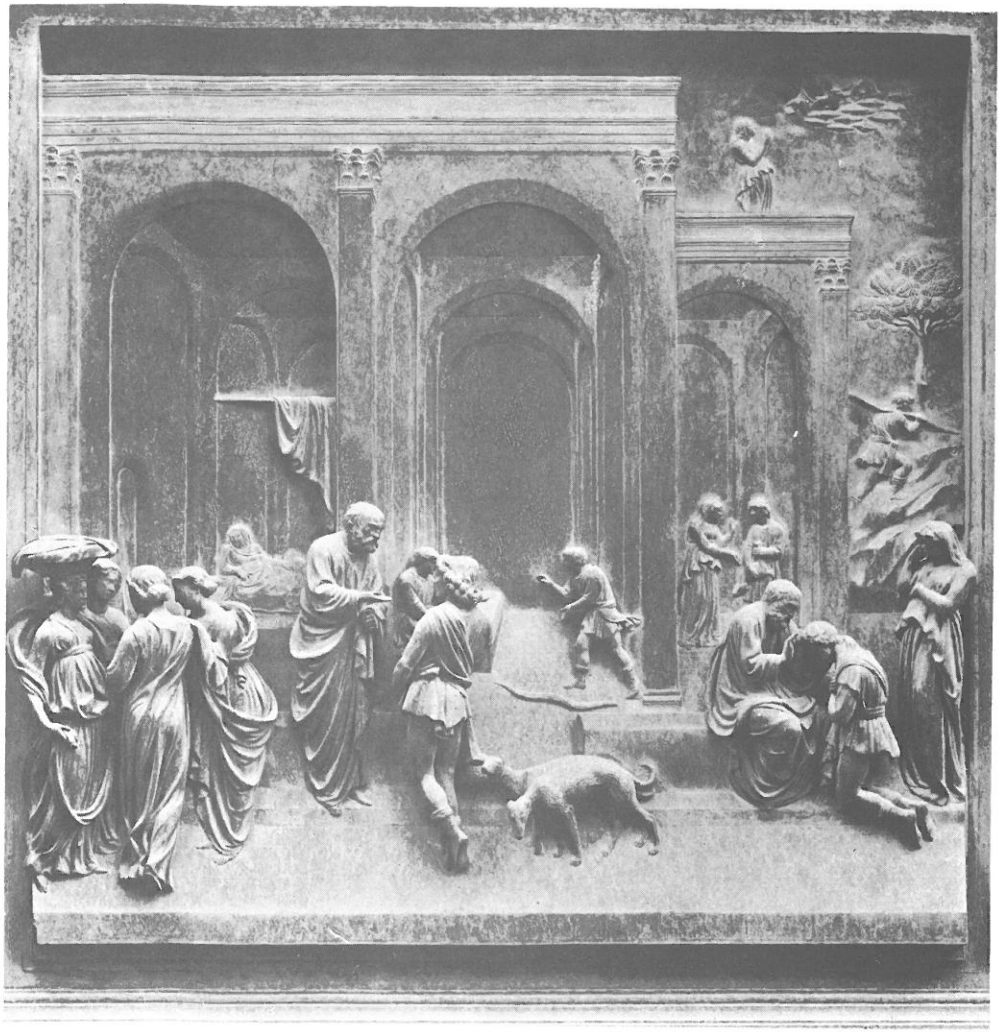
4. Donatello, *St George*



5. Masaccio, *The tribute money*

said: 'No one could fail to believe the word of such a sincere man'; and that 1914 soldier, Donatello's St George [4]. They show the ideal of humanity that presided over these mundane activities. The grandest of all testimonies to the dignity of man is by another member of the same group, Masaccio, in the series of frescoes he painted in the church of the Carmine. What characters they are: morally and intellectually men of weight [5], the least frivolous of men, infinitely remote from the gay courtiers of Jean de Berry—who were only thirty years older. They have the air of contained vitality and confidence that one often sees in the founding fathers of a civilisation—the ones that come first to my mind are the Egyptians of the first four dynasties. But these men are also moved by the concept of Christian charity. As St Peter moves gravely through the streets, his shadow cures the sick. In the balancing fresco Peter and his disciples give alms to a poor woman who is one of the great sculptural creations in painting.

Gravitas, the heavy tread of moral earnestness, becomes a bore if it is not accompanied by the light step of intelligence. Next to the Pazzi Chapel are the cloisters of Santa Croce, also built by Brunellesco. I said that the Gothic cathedrals were hymns to the divine light. These cloisters happily celebrate the light of human intelligence, and sitting in them



6. Ghiberti, *Jacob and Esau*, from the Baptistry doors, Florence

I find it quite easy to believe in man. They have the qualities that give distinction to a mathematical theorem: clarity, economy, elegance. And no doubt early Renaissance architecture is based on a passion for mathematics, particularly for geometry. Of course medieval architects had designed on a mathematical basis, but it seems to have been of immense complexity, as elaborate as scholastic philosophy. The Renaissance architects used much simpler geometrical figures—the square, the circle, forms which they believed to have some ultimate perfection—and they entertained the idea that these forms must be applicable to the human body: that each, so to say, guaranteed the perfection of the other. This idea occurs in the ancient architectural theorist Vitruvius, and it was therefore known to the medieval builders (there was a manuscript of Vitruvius in the library at Cluny), but they had interpreted it differently. There are dozens of drawings and engravings to demonstrate this proposition, of which the most famous is by Leonardo da Vinci. Mathematically I'm afraid it's really a cheat; but aesthetically it has some meaning, because the symmetry of the human body, and to some extent the relation of one part of it to another, do influence our sense of a normal proportion. And philosophically it contains the germ of an idea which might save us—if we could believe in it: that through proportion we can reconcile the two parts of our being, the physical and the intellectual.

The same approach was applied to painting, in the system known as perspective, by which it was thought that with mathematical calculation one could render on a flat surface the precise position of a figure in space. This too seems to have been invented by Brunellesco, but we can see it best in the works of his two friends, Ghiberti and Donatello, whose low-relief sculpture is really a kind of painting. Ghiberti's Jacob and Esau [6] on the famous Baptistry doors in Florence shows perspective used to achieve a spatial harmony that has almost a musical effect. Donatello's relief of St Antony of Padua curing a boy's leg shows the other use of perspective: to heighten emotion by a more intense awareness of space. The Florentines were extremely proud of this invention, which they

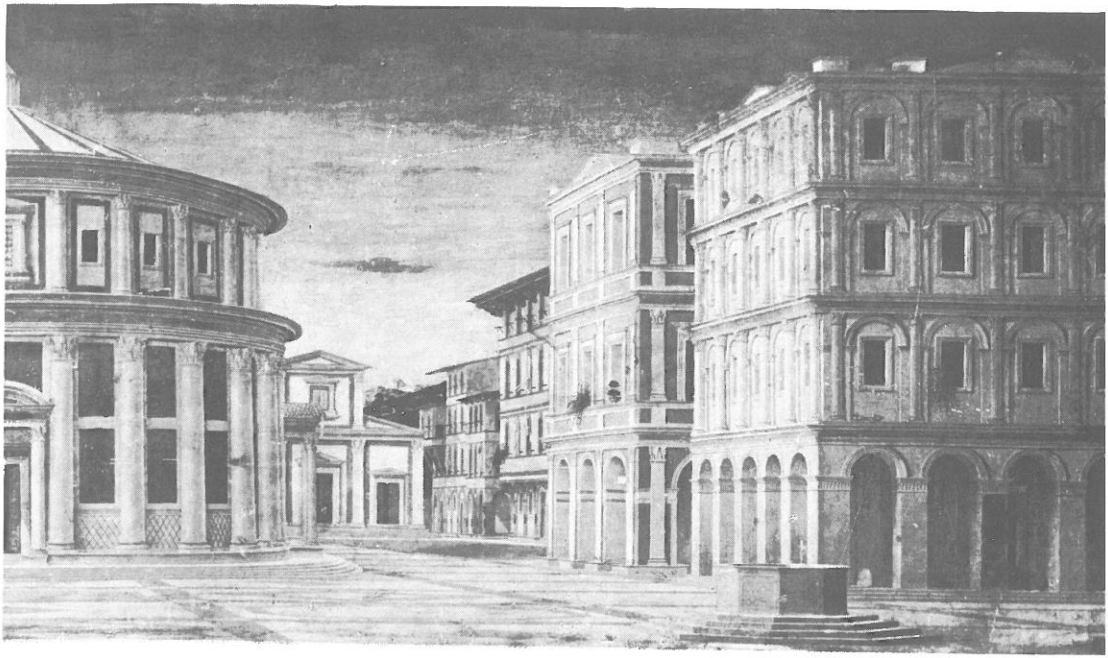
thought (wrongly as it turns out) was unknown to antiquity, and it remained part of an artist's training right up to 1945. But has it anything to do with civilisation? When it was first invented I think it had. The belief that one could represent a man in a real setting and calculate his position and arrange figures in a demonstrably harmonious order, expressed symbolically a new idea about man's place in the scheme of things and man's control over his own destiny.

Perspective was concerned with the representation of towns, if only because it was by the paved floor and receding arcades that the system could show to advantage. Brunellesco's original exercise represented the piazza in front of the cathedral of Florence, with the Baptistry in the middle, but the pure perspectives which have survived represent imaginary towns, architectural harmonies, the perfect setting for social man. Alberti, in his great book on building, describes the necessity of a public square 'where young men may be diverted from the mischievousness and folly natural to their age; and, under handsome porticos, old men may spend the heat of the day, and be mutually serviceable to one another'. I think that Piero della Francesca, who derived so much from Alberti, may well have had this and similar passages in mind when he painted the most harmonious of ideal cities [7]. The early Florentine Renaissance was an urban culture, bourgeois properly so-called. Men spent their time in the streets and squares, and in the shops. A good Florentine, says one of their moralists, *sta sempre a bottega*, 'is always in the shop'. And these shops were completely public. A fifteenth-century engraving [8], representing the activities influenced by the planet Mercury, shows a craftsman's workshop open to the street, so that passers-by could see what was being done, and rival artists make scathing comments.

The Renaissance historian of art, Vasari, when he asked himself (characteristically) why it was in Florence and not elsewhere that men became perfect in the arts, gave as his first answer: 'The spirit of criticism: the air of Florence making minds naturally free, and not content with mediocrity.' And this harsh, outspoken competition between Florentine

7. Piero della Francesca, *Ideal Town*

craftsmen not only screwed up technical standards, but also meant that there was no gap of incomprehension between the intelligent patron and the artist. Our contemporary attitude of pretending to understand works of art in order not to appear philistines would have seemed absurd to the Florentines. They were a tough lot. Many people since Bruni in 1428 have compared them with the Athenians. But the Florentines were more realistic. Whereas the Athenians loved philosophical argument, the Florentines were chiefly interested in making money and playing appalling practical jokes on stupid men. However, they had a good deal in common with the Greeks. They were curious, they were extremely intelligent, and they had, to a supreme degree, the power of making their thoughts visible. I hesitate to pronounce the much abused word 'beauty', but I can't think of a substitute. Like the Athenians, the Florentines loved beauty. This is a constant source of surprise to anyone who knows them. I suppose that market day in fifteenth-century Florence was much the same as it



is today—the same arguments, the same harsh accents. But just above the heads of these shouting, bargaining farmers, on their church of Orsanmichele, is Luca della Robbia's *Virgin and Child*, the quintessence of milky sweetness. Next to the Bruni monument in Santa Croce is a stone relief of the Annunciation by Donatello [9]. That great master of character and human drama, who loved to portray the scholar's furrowed brow, also has the Florentine sense of beauty: his Virgin's head reminds us of an Athenian grave relief of the fifth century BC, and the shape of her chair proves that this resemblance is not accidental. Donatello paid an even more direct tribute to the antique concept of physical beauty in his bronze David [10], whose head is derived from that of the Emperor Hadrian's beloved Antinous, although with a sharper Florentine accent that makes it far more attractive.

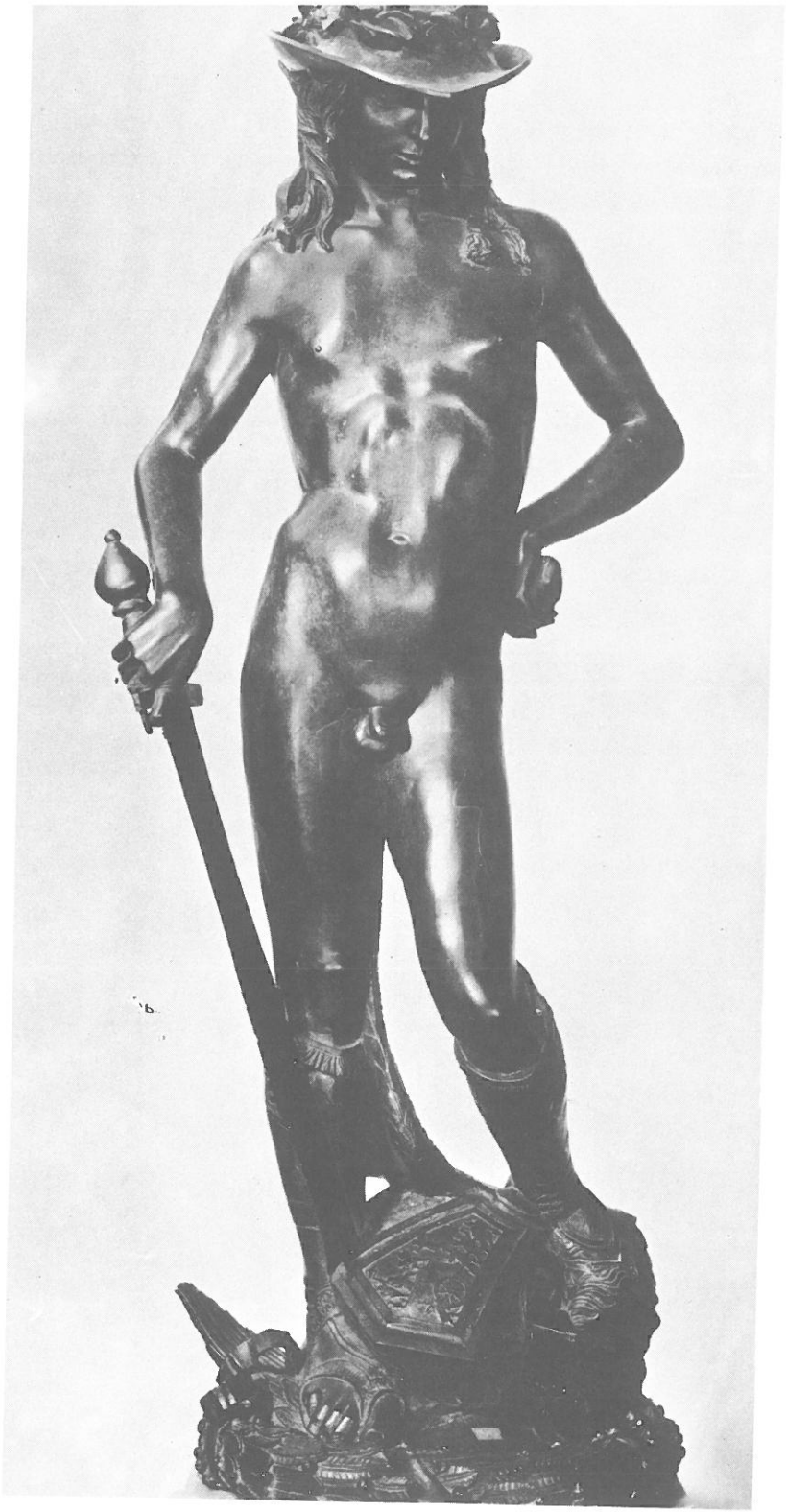
One of the best places to get the flavour of fifteenth-century Florence is the old prison and hall of justice, the Bargello, because it not only contains

8. The Planet Mercury (engraving)

great works of the Florentine imagination, like the David, but also the portraits of famous Florentines. These proudly individual characters wished to record for posterity exactly what they were like. There had been a few likenesses of individuals in the fourteenth century—Dante, Petrarch, Charles V of France, Jean de Berry. But they were exceptional.

As a rule, medieval people were presented to the eye as figures that symbolised their status: the painter of the Spanish chapel in Santa Maria Novella, although he included so much lively detail, made his popes, kings, bishops, into stereotypes—their status would have been recognised all over the Gothic world. To take another example, we know nothing about the lives of the men who built the great cathedrals, but Brunellesco is the subject of a long, detailed biography written by a friend, and we have a replica of his death-mask which, following the example of ancient Rome, Florentines had begun to make in the late fourteenth century. Alberti, the quintessential early Renaissance man, left us his self-portrait [11] on two bronze reliefs. What a face! Proud and alert, like a wilful, intelligent race-horse. Alberti also wrote an autobiography and, as we should expect, he is not inhibited by false modesty. He tells us how the strongest horses trembled under him, how he could throw further, and

9. Donatello, *Annunciation*



11. Alberti, *Self-Portrait*

jump higher, and work harder than any man. He describes how he conquered every weakness, for 'a man can do all things if he will'. It could be the motto of the early Renaissance.

Realistic portraiture, the use of the accidents of each individual face to reveal inner life, was not a Florentine, nor even an Italian invention. It was invented in Flanders, and came to an immediate perfection in the work of Jan van Eyck. No one has looked at the human face with a more dispassionate eye and recorded his findings with a more delicate hand. But in fact many of his sitters were Italians—Arnolfini [12], Albergati—part of the international world of the wool-trade, banking and papal diplomacy; and perhaps it was only in such a society that these evolved and subtle characters could have accepted the revelation of their person-

10. Donatello, *David*

alities. Van Eyck's exploration of personality extended beyond the face. He shows people in their setting and in his double portrait of Arnolfini and his wife he lovingly records the details of their daily life; their wooden pattens for walking in the muddy streets of Bruges, their little dog of nameless breed, their convex mirror and, above all, their splendid brass chandelier. By a miracle that defies the laws of art-history, he was able to show them to us enveloped in daylight as close to experience as if it had been observed by Vermeer of Delft.

This sensibility to atmosphere the Florentines never attempted—they were a sculpture-minded people. But in their portrait busts they came to achieve an almost Flemish realism. How like these Florentine worthies are to the confident faces that we see in Victorian photographs! Antonio Rossellino's bust of Giovanni Chellini is the professional man: a doctor, his face lined with the wisdom of experience—in fact he was Donatello's doctor and saved his life; Benedetto da Maiano's portrait of Pietro Mellini is the business man of any age. A character in one of Alberti's dialogues says: 'A man cannot set his hand to more liberal work than making money, for what we sell is our labour—the goods are merely transferred.' Yes: that was really written in 1434, not in 1850; and contrariwise, if you dressed Mellini in nineteenth-century clothes, he would look perfectly convincing.

But this atmosphere of liberal materialism is less than half the story. After the middle of the fifteenth century the intellectual life of Florence took a new direction, very different from the robust civic humanism of the 1430s. Florence had ceased to be a republic in anything but name, and for almost thirty years it was virtually ruled by that extraordinary character Lorenzo de' Medici. His father and grandfather had prepared the way for him by their activities as bankers. He himself was no financier—he lost a great part of the family fortunes. But he was a politician of genius who could distinguish between the reality of power and its outward trappings. The frontispiece to his book of poems shows him in the streets of Florence, dressed as a simple citizen, surrounded by girls who are

12. Jan van Eyck, *Arnolfini and his wife*

singing his ballads. What a contrast is this modest printed page to the rich manuscripts of the Duke of Berry! In fact Lorenzo was a good poet and a most admirable patron of other poets; also of scholars and philosophers. He was not much interested in the visual arts: the paintings by which his period is remembered were commissioned by his cousin Lorenzino. And it was for Lorenzino that Botticelli painted the works in which the Florentine sense of beauty appears in its most evolved and peculiar form: the *Spring* [jacket] and the *Birth of Venus*. In the *Spring*, the subject is derived from Ovid, but this Classical inspiration is given a new complexity by memories of the Middle Ages. The pagan divinities sway before a background of leaves like a Gothic tapestry. What a marvellous feat of the reconciling imagination. As for the heads, they are a discovery of beauty that means much more to us today than the full, smooth oval of antiquity. The subject of Botticelli's other great allegory, the *Birth of Venus*, is taken from a contemporary poet, Poliziano. He was one of a group of subtle Florentines who were inspired by the late Greek philosophers known as neo-Platonists. It was their ambition to reconcile these pagan philosophers with Christianity, and so Botticelli's Venus, not at all the amorous strumpet of paganism, but pale and withdrawn, dissolves into his image of the Virgin Mary.

The discovery of the individual was made in early fifteenth-century Florence. Nothing can alter that fact. But in the last quarter of the century the Renaissance owed almost as much to the small courts of northern Italy—Ferrara, Mantua and, above all, Urbino, a small remote town on the eastern perimeter of the Apennines. It could be argued that life in the court of Urbino was one of the high-water marks of western civilisation. The reason is that the first Duke of Urbino, Federigo Montefeltro, was not only a highly cultivated and intelligent man, but also the greatest general of his day who could defend his dominions from the surrounding ruffians. He was a passionate book collector; and the portrait he had painted for his precious library shows him reading one of his manuscripts. But he is dressed in full armour, the garter (which he received from

Edward IV) on his leg, and his helmet at his feet. His palace began as a fortress built on an almost impregnable rock and only when he had fought his way to security could he afford to give it the sweet and delicate form which makes it one of the most beautiful pieces of architecture in the world.

The palace of Urbino has a style of its own. The arcaded courtyard isn't swift and springy, like Brunellesco's cloister, but calm and timeless. The rooms are light and airy, and so perfectly proportioned that it exhilarates one to walk through them: in fact it's the only palace in the world I can go round without feeling oppressed and exhausted. Curiously enough, we don't know who designed it. A famous fortress-builder named Laurana did the substructure, but left Urbino before the lived-in part of the palace was begun. All we can say is that the Duke's own character seems to permeate the whole building—and this we know from a life of him written by his bookseller, Vespasiano di Bistici, the man who furnished his library. Again and again he refers to the Duke's humanity. He asked the Duke what is necessary in ruling a kingdom; the Duke replied: *essere umano*—'to be human'. Whoever invented the style, this is the spirit that pervades the palace of Urbino.

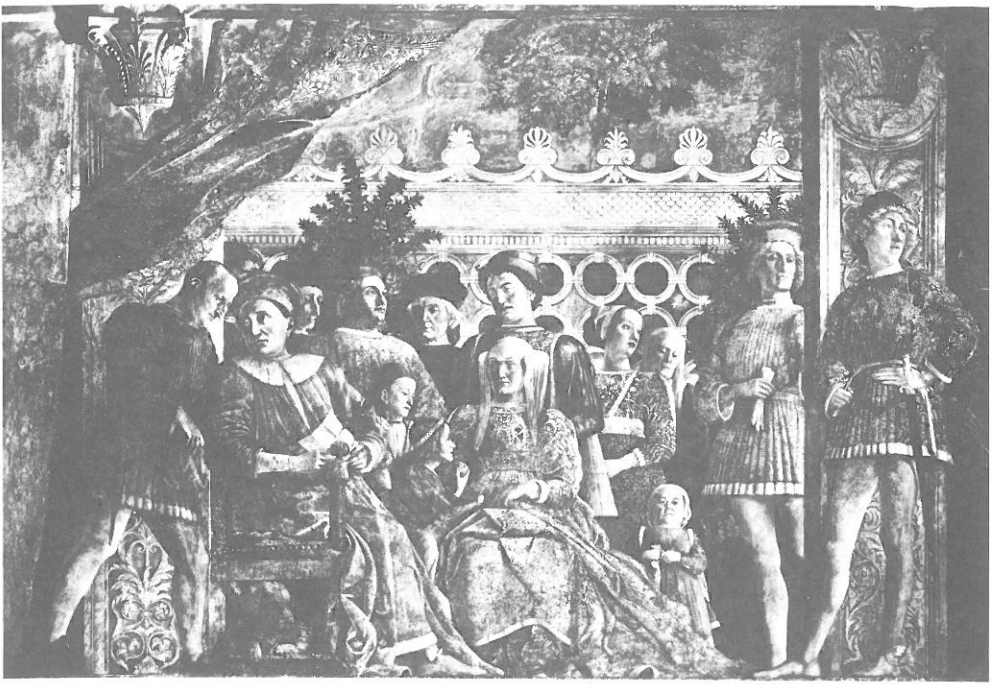
As a part of civilisation the palace of Urbino extended beyond the fifteenth century. The chief architect of the High Renaissance, Bramante, was a native of Urbino and may have worked on the palace when it was being completed. The court painter was a silly old creature named Giovanni Santi, the sort of obliging mediocrity who is always welcome in courts, even in the court of Urbino. No doubt the ladies, when they were in need of a design for embroidery, used to say, 'Let's send for dear old Mr Santi'—and when he came he brought with him his beautiful little son, Raffaelo. And so Raphael, one of the civilising forces of the western imagination, found his earliest impressions of harmony and proportion and good manners in the court of Urbino.

Good manners; that was another product of Urbino. In common with other Italian courts—Ferrara and Mantua—young men went there to

finish their education. They learnt to read the classics, to walk gracefully, speak quietly, play games without cheating or kicking each other on the shins; in short, to behave like gentlemen. Under Federigo's son and successor, Guidobaldo, the notion of a gentleman was given classic expression in a book called *Il Cortegiano*—'The Courtier'—by Baldassare Castiglione. It had an immense influence. The Emperor Charles V had only three books beside his bed: the Bible, Macchiavelli's *Prince* and Castiglione's *Cortegiano*. For over a hundred years it formed everybody's notion of good manners. Actually it is very much more than a handbook on polite behaviour, because Castiglione's ideal of a gentleman is based on real human values. He must not hurt people's feelings or make them feel inferior by showing off. He must be easy and natural, yet he must not be a mere worldling; and *Il Cortegiano* ends with a moving discourse on the subject of love. Just as Botticelli's *Spring* unites the tapestry world of the Middle Ages with pagan mythology, so Castiglione's *Courtier* unites the medieval concept of chivalry with the ideal love of Plato.

There is no doubt that the court of Urbino, under both Federigo and Guidobaldo, was a high point in the history of civilisation. The same is true, in a lesser degree, of the court of Mantua. The palace of Mantua lacks the exhilarating lightness and lucidity of the palace of Urbino. Yet it contains a room in which more than anywhere else, perhaps, one can get an idea of civilised life in an Italian court. It was decorated by the court painter, Andrea Mantegna. On the ceiling are painted busts of the Roman emperors, but the scenes below are not all archaeological. They show the Gonzaga family as large as life (perhaps the first life-size portraits in art), their dogs, their old retainers and one of their famous collection of dwarfs. In spite of the frontal formality of the Marchioness, the spirit of the whole group is remarkably natural [13]. The little girl asks if she may eat an apple, but her mother is interested to know what news the Marquess has just received from his secretary—in fact it is good news: that their son has been made a cardinal. In another scene the Marquess goes to greet him, accompanied by his younger sons. What an agreeably informal

13. Mantegna, *The Gonzaga Family*



reception! One of the younger children holds his father's hand and the little boy takes the hand of his elder brother. It is still without the odious pomposity that was to grow up in Europe during the next century, and reach its zenith at Versailles. I am bound to say that even Mantegna has not been able to make the newly created cardinal look a very spiritual type. Which reminds one of the obvious fact—that this kind of social organisation depended entirely on the individual characters of the rulers. In one state was Federigo Montefeltro, the God-fearing father of his people; in the neighbouring state was Sigismondo Malatesta, the wolf of Rimini, who did things that even the most advanced theatrical producer would hesitate to put on the stage. And yet both of them employed Alberti and were painted by Piero della Francesca.

This was one of the weaknesses of Renaissance civilisation. And the other, no less obviously, was that it depended on a very small minority.

Even in republican Florence, the Renaissance touched relatively few people, and in places like Urbino and Mantua it was practically confined to the court. This is contrary to our modern sense of equality, but one can't help wondering how far civilisation would have evolved if it had been entirely dependent on the popular will. Yeats actually used the example of Urbino when he addressed a poem to 'A wealthy man who promised a subscription to Dublin Municipal Gallery if it were proved that people wanted pictures'.

> And Guidobaldo, when he made
> That mirror-school of courtesies
> Where wit and beauty learned their trade
> Upon Urbino's windy hill,
> Had sent no runners to and fro
> That he might learn the shepherds' will.

One may not like courts, but at a certain stage it is only in a court that a man may do something extravagant for its own sake, because he wants to, because it seems to him worth doing. And it is sometimes through the wilful, superfluous actions of individuals that societies discover their powers. I have often thought that the lath-and-plaster architecture, which men of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries used to erect for the funerals or betrothals of prominent citizens, gave architects that chance to experiment and fantasticate that is so gloomily lacking in the carefully costed buildings of today.

All the same, as one walks through the splendidly extravagant rooms of the palace at Urbino, one can't help thinking, 'What about the people in the fields, or those shepherds whom Mr Yeats rightly supposed that Guidobaldo did not consult on matters of taste and good manners? Could they not have had a kind of civilisation of their own?' Well, there is such a thing as civilised countryside. Looking at the Tuscan landscape with its terraces of vines and olives and the dark vertical accents of the cypresses, one has the impression of timeless order. There must have been a time when it was all forest and swamp—shapeless, formless; and