Michelangelo

A contemporary of Raphael and Leonardo, trained in the humanistic school of Lorenzo the Magnificent and influenced all his long life by the Medici, caught up in the dictates and sometimes the whims of ten different Popes—this was Michelangelo Buonarroti Simoni. How to begin to describe a Giant. He peopled the Sistine Ceiling with a powerful race bursting in magnificence from his own enormous mind. He freed a genre of giants from huge blocks of marble and left a trail of strength and dignity in his wake. He engineered a superlative dome to command and inspire the city of Rome from its pinnacle on St. Peter’s. This was Michelangelo.

The creator of giants, the artist who would work twenty hours a day crouching or lying in agony in order to people the Sistine ceiling, he held his work so vital that the ordinary demands of living and eating and sleeping were side issues and the relationships that human beings find important, secondary to his primary function as an artist. If it seems important, this dedicated colossus of lofty vision and single purpose was himself a rather small man with an ordinary if not an ugly face, dominated by a prominent forehead that projected over a nose broken in youth by a colleague jealous of his gifts.

Michelangelo was born in 1475. He lived first in Settignano, about five miles from Florence, with a family of stone-cutters, and his earliest experience with the stone-cutters tools and the Pietra Serena that they worked was easily developed and transferred later to his life-long passion, the working of marble. His mother died when he was two, explaining his childhood in Settignano, and when he was about ten he returned to Florence to live with his father, stepmother, four brothers and an uncle. At that time he received his only formal education, attending a school kept by Francesco da Urbino.
Michelangelo's artistic career began with difficulty. Lodovico, the father, who traced his family back three hundred years in Florence, considered it a matter of great importance that as a noble burgher neither he nor his sons do menial work, and he dedicated his life to this principle. The artist's brush and the sculptor's tools had no place in this lofty concept; so that when Michelangelo became apprenticed to Domenico Ghirlandaio he did so with neither parental approval or good wines. Michelangelo was thirteen, and Ghirlandaio's was the most bustling and successful bottega in all Italy.

In addition to the twenty five frescoed panels and lunettes for the Tornabuoni choir at Santa Maria Novella, which had to be completed in two years there were also agreements to paint an Adoration of the Kings for the hospital of the Innocenti and to design a mosaic for over a portal of the cathedral. There was no formal method of teaching in Ghirlandaio's studio but no secrets were kept from him. Michelangelo learned the method of fresco, of applying the plaster to the precise area to be painted each day, of outlining the figures with a pointed ivory stick, of mixing the colors, and of making his own brushes. He gained access to Ghirlandaio's portfolio of drawings by Taddeo Gaddi, Lorenzo Monaco, Fra Angelico, Paolo Uccello, Pollaiuolo, Fra Filippo Lippi and many others, and in his zeal to learn, the young Michelangelo copied the drawings, aging them as best he could, and substituting his copies in the portfolio for the originals. He drew continually after the masters and finally restored the original drawings to Ghirlandaio's collection and withdrew his own, an episode well noted by the encouraging master.

Michelangelo lasted as apprentice to Ghirlandaio only a year, and then he and his friend, Granacci, discovered sculpture and the school of young men learning from Bertoldo in the Medici garden. Bertoldo had been a student of Donatello and was the only master of sculpture in Florence. It was no other than Lorenzo, Il Magnifico, who secured the release of Michelangelo and
Granacci from their apprenticeships, and so began Michelangelo’s first real introduction to sculpture and to the powerful Florentine family which was to have such a large role in his destiny. He made clay figures and a free copy in marble, after an antique model, of the head of a Faun, since lost, and in 1490, when he was fifteen years old, he was invited to live as a guest in the Medici palace, where he stayed until Lorenzo’s death in 1492. There Michelangelo met leading humanist of the day who bolstered his own inherent belief in the dignity and nobility of man, and it was there that he executed the relief of the Battle of the Centaurs and the relief of the Madonna of the Stairs. Giovanni de Medici, later Pope Leo X, and Giulio de Medici, later Pope Clement VII, were his associates, and Contessina, Lorenzo’s youngest daughter, became his friend for as long as she lived. Encouraged in this fertile intellectual garden, Michelangelo attempted poetry and continued all his life to write sonnets after the convention of the day and to use the form to express himself with unexpected lightness or with vigor and feeling on emotions deeply experienced.

The best of artist hath no thought to show which the rough stone in its superfluous shell both not include; to break the marble spell is all the hand that serves the brain can do.

In the period following the halcyon Medici palace days Michelangelo embarked on one of the most important, and in those days bizarre, courses of study. While Bertoldo had instructed him in all he knew of sculpture, it was left to Michelangelo himself to discover the exact interplay of bone, muscle and sinew in the human body, which would later make his paintings and statues speak with such authority.

At the end of the fifteenth century it was a crime against God and the Church, automatically punishable by death, for any one to dissect a corpse. Twice a year medical students were permitted public dissection, but this was a poor and unsatisfactory business. Michelangelo became obsessed with the
NECESSITY FOR KNOWING MORE AND STILL MORE OF THE HUMAN BODY. HE APPROACHED
Father Biechellini, prior at San Spirito, a monastery whose hospital received
hundreds of the sick and dying, and presented his obscene desire to do dissection
on human bodies. The good prior dismissed him curtly, and Michelangelo was
thrust back into his ignorance without hope of furthering his knowledge of
anatomy. However, when he met Prior Biechellini next he was confused by the
priest's apparent affability and good humor and readily accepted the prior's
offer to copy the paintings in the monastery and use its library. Michelangelo
had visited the monastery several times before he realized that Father
Biechellini was remarkable careless or indeed making an offer. He was leaving
behind him each time they met one key, EXREXXE casually on a table or marking a
page as a bookmark. On the chance that this was the key he sought, Michelangelo
at last picked it up, and returning surreptitiously at night discovered that
at last he had access to the death room of the hospital. Here, each night
would be a different shroud or perhaps none at all, and night after night
Michelangelo went about the dismal but necessary business of dissection until
he knew exact bone formation and the precise purpose and function of each
muscle. Through his life this preoccupation with anatomy seemed to grow,
so that gradually the body became more and more massive, anatomy more pro-
nounced and the head smaller and less important. Small wonder that Michelangelo's
successors should take up where he left off and carry the exaggeration
to its logical conclusion, the extremes of the Baroque period which followed.

To me who has had no first-hand view of any, the most beautiful of
Michelangelo's figures is the Madonna of the Pieta, in St. Peter's. This
Pieta as done in 1498, commissioned by the French Cardinal and in the contract
it is written, "And I, Iacopo Gallo, do promise the Most Reverend Monsignore,
that the said Michelangelo will complete the said work, within one year, and
that it shall be more beautiful than any work in marble to be seen in Rome
today, and such that no master of our own time shall be able to produce

a better." This is the artist's only signed statue, and the signature chiselled onto the band across the Virgin's breast, was done one night after hearing a group of sightseer's argue the identity of the artist. This first visit to Rome, from 1496-1501, produced, in addition, a five-size marble of Cupid which has been lost and a marble Bacchus which stands in the Bargello in Florence.

On his return to Florence, Michelangelo signed a contract for fifteen figures for the Piccolomini altar in the Siena Cathedral, of which only a few were executed. The most interesting of these from a biographical standpoint is the statue of St. Francis. After agreeing to the commission the sculptor learned that the St. Francis had already been begun and part of his task was to finish it in his own style. But started by such a man, begun by the student in the Medici garden, the handsome companion whose jealousy had led him to throw the nose-shattering blow, making the imperfect face even more imperfect. No wonder then that the figure of St. Francis in Siena wears Michelangelo's enduring mark, his own face with the bridge of the nose caved in at the eyes ubst as it had been made by the same man who had commenced this statue.

With the death of Lorenzo de Medici, Florence had come on hard times. There was no Medici heir to equal Il Magnifico. In Rome a Borgia pope brought corruption to the Church, and in Florence Savonarola was preaching hellfire and damnation to the unrepentent. At last when Florence was threatened by the advance of the French army, Michelangelo fled to Bologna. The Medicis went into exile and Florence became a republic. In 1498 the corrupt pope achieved his aim, intimidating the Florentines to the point where they hanged Savonarola and burned his body. Florence was indeed at low ebb. Then at the turn of the century the Florentine Wool Guild set up a competition and Michelangelo enjoyed one of the most contented periods in his life, with the winning of the commission and the subsequent carving of an enormous
marble David. The only thorn in the pleasure of achieving this work was in the knowledge that Leonardo had withdrawn from the competition on the grounds that he despised marble sculpture as an inferior art, good only for artisans. However, there was great joy in accomplishing the statue of David the giant from the immense, seventeen-foot block which had been undertaken and dropped by Duccio and was now subject to the limitations imposed on it by its first impulsive master. Michelangelo, as was his custom, chose to work in solitude, when the figure was completed and a council of artists, among them Leonardo, Botticelli, Filippino Lippi, Perugino and Piero di Cosimo had resolved to have it replace Donatello's Judith and Holofernes at the entrance to the Palazzo Vecchio, Michelangelo must then supervise the moving of the statue from his studio, a laborious process that took several days. Uneasy about the figure and unable to sleep, he made his way back to the giant, intending to sleep at the base, when a group of vandals began stoning the statue. Michelangelo routed the vandals and secured protection for his masterpiece when they returned once again, but it was an uneasy four days he had until the statue was placed. The sculptor then allowed himself a night's sleep to return to the square in the morning where a large crowd had gathered around the David. As he approached, he saw that bits of paper were stuck to the marble. He walked across the square, through the crowd which quietly made way for him, and began peeling off the notes.

You have given us back our self-respect.
We are proud to be Florentines.
How magnificent is man!
Never can they tell me man is vile; he is the proudest creature on earth.
You have made a thing of beauty.
Bravo!

And finally,

Everything my father hoped to accomplish for Florence is expressed
IN YOUR DAVID,
CONTESSINA RIODOLFI DE' MEDICI

WHATEVER HAPPINESS THE WORLD WAS ABLE TO GIVE HIM MUST HAVE BEEN
MICHELANGELO’S AT THIS MOMENT.

MICHELANGELO WAS NOT A SOCIAL CREATURE. WHILE HIS FATHER TRIED ALL
HIS LONG LIFE TO KEEP CLEAR OF MENIAL LABOR, MAINTAINING AN ENVIOUS RECORD,
HIS FOUR OTHER SONS ADMIRABLY EMULATED THEIR SIRE, AND MICHELANGELO WAS
LEFT WITH THE BILLS TO PAY. THIS DID NOT CULTIVATE A FOUNTAIN OF WARMTH
AND CONTENT FROM THE FAMILY SOURCE. THERE SEEN TO HAVE BEEN ONLY ABOUT
THREE WOMEN OF ANY IMPORTANCE IN THE SCULPTOR’S LIFE, BESIDES HIS STEPMOTHER
WHOSE COOKING HE GREATLY ADMIRE. ONE OF THESE WAS CONTESSINA DE MEDICI
WHOM HE HAD KNOWN AS A BOY IN HER FATHER’S PALACE AND WHOSE OLDEST SON HE
WOULD OCCASIONALLY INSTRUCT IN STONE-CUTTING, AND ANOTHER FRIEND OF HIS
LATER YEARS IN ROME, VITTORIA COLONNA, MARQUESA OF PESCARA, A BRILLIANT
WOMAN WHOSE HE LOVED AND ADMIRE AND TO WHOM HE ADDRESSED MANY OF HIS
SONNETS. AS FOR ASSOCIATES, THESE WERE MOSTLY FELLOW ARTIST OR INTERESTED
PATRONS, AND EVEN THESE HAD A DIFFICULT TIME DRAWING HIM VERY FAR FROM HIS
SUPREME INTEREST, HIS WORK. MICHELANGELO WAS NOT, THEN, A JOINER. YET AT
ABOUT THE TIME HE WAS CARVING THE DAVID HE BECAME A MEMBER OF THE COMPANY OF
THE CAULDRON, A GROUP OF TWELVE ARTISTS NUMBERING AMONG ITS MEMBERS, BOTTICELLI,
DAVID GHIRLANDAIO, FILIPINO LIPPI, IL CRONACA, LEONARDO, AND GIULIANO DA
SANGALLO. WHEN GIOVANNI DE’ MEDICI BECAME POPE LEO X AND WOULD URGE MICHELANGELO
TO PARTAKE IN SOME OF HIS MANY PLEASURES, MICHELANGELO REFUSED, AS POLITELY
AS HIS FORTRESS AND OUTSPOKEN CHARACTER WOULD ALLOW, AND RETURN TO THE
MORE SATISFYING WORLD OF HIS WORK. IT WAS ONLY AS HE APPROACHED OLD AGE
THAT THE ARTIST FORMED THE MOST MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS, ONE WITH VITTORIA
COLONNA, THE OTHER WITH TOMMASO DE’ CAVALIERI, A YOUNG ROMAN OF NOBLE BIRTH.
MICHELANGELO ENCOURAGED TOMMASO IN ART, SENDING HIM MANY DRAWINGS TO COPY.
HE ADMIRE THE GREAT BEAUTY OF THIS YOUNG MAN AND FOUND HIM A SYMPATHETIC
AND A TRUE AND UNDERSTANDING FRIEND.

IT IS INTERESTING TO DISCOVER THE RELATIONSHIP MICHELANGELO HAD WITH ARTISTS OF THE DAY, AND ESPECIALLY WITH THAT OTHER LION, LEONARDO DA VINCI. THAT THEY MET WAS INEVITABLE; THAT THEY ADMired EACH OTHER WAS ALSO INEVITABLE; AND YET WHILE THEY SHARED AN ENORMOUS ENERGY AND GENIUS THEY WERE TEMPERAMENTALLY QUITE DIFFERENT, LEONARDO BEING FASTIDIOUS, HANDSOME, AND SOMETHING OF A DANDY, MICHELANGELO, BRUSQUE AND UNBEAUTIFUL, CARING ALMOST NOTHING FOR THE CLOTHES HE WORE OR THE APPEARANCE HE MADE. THEIR PROFESSIONAL MEETING CAME WHEN LEONARDO WAS AWARDED A CONTRACT FOR A MURAL PAINTING OF THE BATTLE OF ANghiARI IN THE PALAZZO VecCHIO, IN FLORENCE. THE CONTRACT PIQUED MICHELANGELO WHO SOON MANAGED TO HAVE A SISTER COMMISSION OF HIS OWN FOR A BATTLE OF CASCINA, BUT AT LESS THAN A THIRD THE AMOUNT WHICH LEONARDO WOULD BE PAID. UNHAPPILy BOTH THESE FRESCOES WHICH WOULD HAVE BEEN A MAGNIFICENT GIFT TO THE WORLD HAD A DISASTROUS END. LEONARDO WITH CHARACTERISTIC INGENUITY AND EXPERIMENTATION RESORTED TO AN ANCIENT METHOD OF FRESCO, BUT THE PAINTING RAN AND THUS HIS WONDERFUL STUDY OF HORSES HAS BEEN LOST. MICHELANGELO GOT NO FURTHER THAN DRAWING THE CARTOON FOR THE FRESCO WHICH WAS A TWIN MARVEL IN ITS STUDIES OF THE MALE NUDE AND HAD SUCH ARTISTS AS RAPHAEL ADMIRING AND DRAWING FROM IT AND PERUGINO FURIOUSLY JEALOUS OF ITS VITALITY AND POWER. IT IS A GREAT PITY THAT THESE TWO WORKS ARE LOST, FOR THEY WERE UNDOUBTEDLY MAJOR EFFORTS OF BOTH THESE MIGHTY MEN.

WHEN GIULIANO DELLA ROVERE BECAME POPE JULIUS II IN 1503, SUCCEEDING THE CORRUPT BORGIA POPE, ALEXANDER, MICHELANGELO BEGAN A CAREER OF PAPAL PATRONAGE WHICH WAS TO GIVE HIM MANY COMMISSIONS AND ENORMOUS FRUSTRATION. JULIUS AND MICHELANGELO SEEMED TO HAVE BEEN TEMPERAMENTAL BROTHERS. BOTH WERE DYNAMIC, VIGOROUS AND AWESOME MEN. MICHELANGELO UNDERTOOK A CONTRACT FOR A TOMB FOR JULIUS AND ARRANGED UNREALISTICALLY TO CREATE A MAGNIFICENT THING WITH BETWEEN THIRTY AND FORTY MAJOR STATUES. THIS CONTRACT FOR THE TOMB OF JULIUS II WAS TO HAUNT HIM FOR YEARS, LONG AFTER THE POPE HAD DIED,
WITH HIS HEIRSSADGERING FOR THE COMPLETION OF THE TOMB. NEW CONTRACTS
WERE MADE, LAWSUITS THREATENED AND FINALLY AFTER FORTY YEARS THE PROJECT
FINISHED ON A SCALE INFINITELY SMALLER THAN EVER IMAGINED, CONTAINING INSTEAD
OF THE THIRTY OR FORTY MAJOR STATUES ONCE ANTICIPATED MICHELANGELO'S HEROIC
MOSES AND TWO LESSER FIGURES OF RACHEL AND LEAH. THE SCULPTOR WENT HIMSELF
TO CARRARRA TO SELECT THE FINEST WHITE MARBLE AVAILABLE, BUT THESE BLOCKS
WERE TO REMAIN UNUSED FOR A LONG TIME. JULIUS RAPIDLY LOST INTEREST IN HIS
OWN TOMB, FEARING THAT ITS CONSTRUCTION WOULD HASTEN HIS OWN DEMISE, AND
THEN ANOTHER PLAN WAS PRESENTED TO HIM, THE MOST WONDERFUL MONUMENT OF ALL,
THE ARCHITECT BRAMANTE'S CONCEPT OF A GLORIOUS NEW ST. PETER'S. MICHELANGELO
ENDURED THESE FRUSTRATIONS AS LONG AS HE COULD, THEN, HAVING SUFFERED AS MUCH
INDIGNITY AS HE WAS ABLE, LEFT ROME. THE FLORENTINES WERE IN NO POSITION
TO RISK WAR WITH THE POPE OVER AN ARTIST'S BAD TREATMENT SO THAT WHEN HE
WAS RECALLED TO THE VATICAN, THERE WAS NOTHING TO DO BUT GO. THIS WITH THE
GREATEST UNEASINESS AND MISGIVING, FOR NOW JULIUS HAD STRUCK ON THE IDEA OF
HAVING MICHELANGELO FRESCO THE CEILING OF THE SISTINE CHAPEL. IF THE RESULT
WAS A LEGACY OF SUPREME INDIVIDUAL ACCOMPLISHMENT, A MAGNIFICENT WORLD OF
343 GIANTS, THE COST TO THE ARTIST WHO FELT HIMSELF FIRST AND FOREMOST A
SCULPTOR WAS ENORMOUS. THIS WAS A TIME OF PHYSICAL MISERY AND ARTISTIC
FRUSTRATION. YET MICHELANGELO COULD NOT LONG CONTINUE HIS ORIGINAL SCHEME
MERELY TO HIDE THE ARCHITECTURAL DEFECTS OF THE CHAPEL. HAVING ASSEMBLED A
BOTTEGA OF ARTISTS WHOSE PURPOSE WOULD BE TO COVER THE CEILING, HIS INTEGRITY
DEMANDED THAT HE RETAIN ONLY ONE, TO ASSIST IN THE MECHANICAL BUSINESS OF
MIXING AND APPLYING THE PLASTER, AND LED BY HIS OWN EXACTING TEMPERAMENT HE
EMBARKED ON THE ENORMOUS PROJECT WHICH IS CALLED THE GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT
OF ANY ONE ARTIST.

THE SCAFFOLD WHICH HAD BEEN BUILT WAS TORN DOWN, AND MICHELANGELO HAD
A SCAFFOLDING ERECTED WHICH WOULD LEAVE NO BLEMISH ON THE CEILING. THEN HE
began, first with the figures of Noah and his sons, painting for four and a half years, crouching, lying on his back, sometimes in miserable cold, sometimes in intense heat. Many days he would work for as long as twenty hours, taking aloft with him the necessities of life, bluntly, food and a chamber pot. And as he worked the figures grew bigger and more titanic. Gradually he left off painting women entirely as too graceful and subtle for the grandeur he wanted to convey. Something of the remarkable physical endurance of this man we can imagine. It was at this time that he was thrown into a panic, fearing he was going blind. Having received a letter from his father he discovered he could read it only by throwing his head back and holding the letter aloft!

Down the center of the vault, Michelangelo painted nine mighty panels representing the story of creation and the fall of man from grace. Surrounding these are liberated souls in ecstasy. In the triangular spaces below are prophets and sibyls responding to the divine message according to their varying sensitivities. The semicircles over the window, the lunettes, and the sloping dormers which let them into the vault, the spandrels, show spiritless humanity as it crouches down awaiting regeneration. 343 figures, a lifetime of work in four and a half years!

When Julius died in 1513 Giovanni de Medici became Pope Leo X, and when he died in 1521 Pope Adrian VI was head of the Holy See but died in 1523 to be succeeded by yet another Medici, Giulio, who became Pope Clement VII and held the office until 1534. These Medici were not remarkably effective papal leaders, yet for their interest in art and in family we can well be grateful. During this time Michelangelo accomplished the serene beauty of the Medici chapel with the tombs of Giuliano and Lorenzo. Do not think these commissions were made and then executed without interruption and a thousand frustrations. First Pope Leo would have a facade for San Lorenzo which
Michelangelo designed on a grand scale, proceeding then to Carrarra for the marble blocks for his statues. Then it became the Pope's whim to have Pietrasanta marble, a stone even more pure and beautiful than the Carrarra, and infinitely more inaccessible. It became the artist's task to quarry the stone and even to engineer and build a road for its removal. At this juncture the whole project was abandoned by the Pope. If Michelangelo was a man of awesome temper and short ways, episodes like this must have helped to make him so.

In 1534 Michelangelo made his final move to Rome, remaining there for the thirty years left of his life. Cardinal Alessandro Farnese became Pope Paul III in 1534 and lived until 1549. During his papacy, Michelangelo executed the powerful Last Judgment for the Sistine Chapel, the Conversion of Paul in the Pauline chapel, took over the construction of the Farnese Palace on the death of Antonio da Sangallo, and painted the second fresco in the Pauline chapel, the Crucifixion of St. Peter.

In order to have a clear expanse for the Last Judgment, two of Michelangelo's own lunette frescoes were removed as well as three frescoes of Perugino. The fresco is arranged in three zones. The top one is the Kingdom of Heaven, with Christ as Judge of the World enthroned on the center; the middle zone is the realm of those who have been judged, and the lowest zone is the realm of Charon and the demons. In contrast to the enormous impression which it made on contemporary painters was the zealous hostility of theologians and men of letters who were filled with the spirit of the Counter-Reformation. Two of these critics, Biagio da Cesena, and Pietro Aretino, had as a result of their criticism, their portraits incorporated in the fresco, Aretino being represented as Bartholomew with the skin of the flayed martyr, which itself bears a self portrait of Michelangelo, and Biagio being caricatured in the figure of Minos, the supreme judge of hell, with ears resembling a donkey. Under Popes Paul IV and Gregory XIII Michelangelo's fresco was in danger of
BEING COMPLETELY DESTROYED BUT INSTEAD MOST OF THE NUDITIES WERE PAINTED
OVER SO THAT THE STATE IN WHICH THE GIGANTIC WORK HAS COME DOWN TO US IS
ONE OF SUCH MUTILATION THAT IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO FORM A TRUE OPINION OF ITS
ARTISTIC QUALITIES.

MICHELANGELO HAD AN ARCHITECTURAL AS WELL, AND THIS CULMINATED IN HIS
APPOINTMENT IN 1547 AS CHIEF ARCHITECT OF ST. PETER'S. HE HAD DESIGNED THE
MEDICI CHAPEL AND THE LAURENTIAN LIBRARY AND STAIRWAY IN FLORENCE AND IN
1546 MADE A PLAN FOR CAPITOLINE HILL WHICH WAS EXECUTED PRETTY MUCH
ACCORDING TO HIS PLANS AND REMAINS ONE OF THE MOST ADmired PRODUCTS OF THE
SIXTEENTH CENTURY. THEN THE THIRD STOREY AND THE CORNICE OF THE FARNES
PALACE ARE MICHELANGELO'S. BUT THE GREATEST ARCHITECTURAL ACHIEVEMENT WAS
SURELY THE DOME OF ST. PETER'S, BEGUN DURING HIS LIFETIME AND CONSTRUCTED
STRICTLY ACCORDING TO THE WOODEN MODEL HE HAD MADE AND WHICH REMAINS TODAY
IN THE VATICAN. IN UNDERTAKING ST. PETER'S, MICHELANGELO REVERTED TO THE
ORIGINAL GREEK CROSS PLAN OF BRAMANTE. HE STRENGTHENED THE PIERS OF THE
DOME AND REDESIGNED THE SURROUNDING CHAPELS AND APSES. HE PLANNED AND
INDEED COMMENCED THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE GREAT DOME, THE DRUM OF WHICH WAS
COMPLETED BEFORE HIS DEATH IN 1564. THE DOME WHICH DEPENDS FOR SUPPORT ON
FOUR MASSIVE PIERS RATHER THAN ON A CONTINUOUS CIRCULAR WALL, IS CONSIDERED
THE GREATEST CREATION OF THE RENAISSANCE AND IS THE DOMINANT FEATURE IN ALL
VIEWS OF ROME.

IT IS GOOD TO THINK OF MICHELANGELO AS AN OLD MAN WITH ANOTHER GREAT
ACHIEVEMENT IN PROGRESS, SO TOTALLY DIFFERENT FROM HIS DAVID, THE MEDICI
TOMBS, OR THE OVERWHELMING FRESCOES OF THE SISTINE CHAPEL. AND IT IS GOOD
TO THINK OF MICHELANGELO AS AN OLD MAN WITH THE COMFORT OF THE TWO GREATEST
FRIENDS HE EVER KNEW, VITTORIA COLONNA AND TOMMASO DA CAVALLERI, GIVING A
WARMTH AND PERSONAL SATISFACTION HE HAD NEVER SOUGHT OR ALLOWED HIMSELF AS
A YOUNGER MAN. THIS GIANT OF THE RENAISSANCE DIED AT EIGHTY-NINE, WITH HIS
BEST FRIEND, CAVALLERI, AT HIS SIDE.