

# THE ITALIAN CITY-STATES OF THE RENAISSANCE

In studying the Renaissance, the student encounters problems that are not present with many other historical periods. The chief problem is that of defining what is meant by the word Renaissance itself. More will be said about this problem in Chapter 8, so that for the moment only a preliminary working definition will be required. Let us say that the Renaissance is the age of European history that marks the transition from the medieval world to that which we are accustomed to call modern. The Renaissance began in Italy and from there spread to transalpine Europe, where it was variously affected by the differing character and traditions of the countries to which it came. We start then with Italy. During the Middle Ages, Italy had remained in some ways different from the areas to the north of it, largely because of the persistence of the ancient Roman tradition. Italy was more urban, for one thing; vigorous towns existed there from at least the tenth century, taking advantage of every opportunity to shake themselves loose from the grip of their overlords and achieve virtual independence. This movement sometimes took the form of an uprising against a ruling bishop; at other times it might mean resistance to the claims of the Holy Roman emperor.

The growing spirit of self-conscious independence can be observed in the history of Milan, the greatest city in Lombardy, which asserted itself against archbishop, pope, and emperor. Because of its resistance to the claims of Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa, it was destroyed in 1162. Nevertheless, it was rebuilt in time to lead the Lombard cities in their great victory over the emperor's forces in 1176 at the battle of Legnano.

When trade began to revive in medieval Europe, giving powerful impetus to the growth of cities, the revival began in Italy. Some of the Italian cities became great centers of banking, commerce, and industry. Genoa, Pisa, and Venice early became important in the Mediterranean trade, and of the three, Venice, aided by the stability of her government, became the most prosperous. Florence became outstanding in banking and woolen manufacture. In the fifteenth century, Naples, Milan, and Venice ranked among the five most populous cities in western Europe. Numerous other cities grew and flourished, making Italy the most highly urbanized area in western Europe in the fourteenth century. Feudalism had never been so firmly established in Italy as in the north. It was, therefore, relatively easy for the growing cities to expand into the surrounding countryside by subduing the nobles and annexing their land. In Italy, to a greater extent than was customary elsewhere, the land-owning nobles took up residence in the towns and became a part of city life. Within these towns and cities, political power belonged to the possessors of urban wealth, that is, to bankers, merchants, and businessmen. The political life of these cities was filled with struggles for power, and these struggles were intimately connected with the rise of new classes as the result of economic growth. When cities began to take control of their own affairs, they were usually ruled by an established governing class which had ties with the land and the feudal nobility, although members of this class might be engaged in business activity. With increasing wealth and prosperity, however, the members of the guilds, commoners by birth but often rich and powerful, demanded a greater share in government. The old ruling class might be called the *grandi*, or great men, while the guildsmen took the name of *popolo*, that is, the people. The name *popolo* is a bit misleading both because some members of this group were very rich and because the great mass of the population was really not represented in the so-called popular party.

The normal result of the conflict between *grandi* and *popolo* was the victory of the latter. This triumph of the "popular" party, in time, led to the rise of a despotism or one-man rule. In the Italian city-states, the *popolo*, in its struggle for supremacy, tended to choose as its leader a member of the opposing party, the nobility, and give him a title such as captain of the people. Once the party had won out, its leader would be likely to become head of the state. Having achieved this position, his next aim was to make his power absolute, suppressing all other sources of authority. If he was able to do this, he then

proceeded to make his rule hereditary. In this fashion arose many of the ruling families in the Italian towns. The tendency toward hereditary despotism was universal, but it did not always come about in the manner just described.

Another source of despotic rule was the office of podest. This official became common around 1200, as a result of the intense factional strife that sprang up throughout the Italian towns. This strife was ferocious in its intensity; in their hatred of their political foes, men behaved like wild animals, going to any extreme of murder, torture, and treachery. To be defeated in a political struggle did not mean getting a minority of the vote and waiting for the next election; it was likely to mean being defeated in a political battle and then, if one escaped with his life, going into exile and conspiring with fellow exiles to seize power from the present victors.

In these circumstances many cities called in a podest, who was invariably a foreigner that is, he came from another Italian city and entrusted him with carefully defined powers for a limited period of time. He was not allowed to become associated with any of the local factions or to marry into any of the local families, and at the end of his term a year or six months his conduct in office was subjected to a thorough scrutiny. In spite of these safeguards, some podests made their position permanent and hereditary.

The internal struggles were, at least in the beginning, connected with the rivalry between popes and Holy Roman emperors a rivalry of which Italy was one of the main prizes. In the Italian cities, the faction which sided with the emperor was known as the Ghibelline party; the adherents of the popes were called Guelfs. The terms, which may have come from the German Welf and Waiblingen, seem to have originated in Florence in the thirteenth century and from there spread to other areas. Thus there were Guelfs and Ghibellines in many Italian cities, and, since one side or the other eventually won out, there came to be Ghibelline cities, of which Milan is an example, and Guelf cities, most notably Florence. A defeated faction could, therefore, usually find refuge in a friendly city while it laid its plans for a return to power at home. With the passage of time, the original connection with pope or emperor came to be obscured, particularly since the emperors were not a serious force in Italian affairs from the death of Frederick II in 1250 to the reign of Charles V in the first half of the sixteenth century. The names remained, designating factions whose conflict rested on no basis of principle but simply on their desire for power. In the long run, neither pope nor emperor became dominant in Italy. Their agelong conflict did have the effect of enabling the Italian cities to achieve what amounted to total independence, though they might still acknowledge a nominal connection with emperor or pope. This statement must be qualified; as we shall see, independence was the prize only of those cities that were strong enough to hold it.

Another key to supreme rule in the Italian city-state was military command. By the fourteenth century, the citizens' army had given way to hired, or mercenary troops. This change was in part the result of internal class conflict; whichever faction won out in the struggle for power was reluctant to allow its defeated enemies to bear arms. The leaders of these hired troops were called condottieri (condottiere in the singular). Machiavelli, who was bitterly opposed to them, pointed out that if they lost, the city that hired them was at the mercy of the enemy; but if they won, the city was at the mercy of the condottieri themselves. This proved true in certain cases, most noticeably that of Milan, where Francesco Sforza, hired to defend the city against external dangers, turned on his employers and made himself master of the city in 1450. So by numerous methods and in a wide variety of constitutional forms, republican liberty was overthrown in the city-states of Italy, and some form of narrowly restricted, hereditary rule was established. Even in those states which preserved the name of republic Florence and Venice the reality was something quite different from the outward forms.

Constant conflict was the fate of these vigorous urban societies. In addition to the internal struggle, and the struggles for independence from emperor and pope, there was the constant fighting of the cities against one another. They fought for commercial supremacy, control of trade routes, access to seaports, territorial expansion, and possession of natural resources; like their internal conflicts, these intercity wars and rivalries were likely to be prolonged, bitter, and ruthless. Reference has been made to the commercial rivalry of Genoa, Pisa, and Venice. Florence fought for centuries for control of Pisa and was frequently engaged in war with other Tuscan neighbors and rivals, such as Lucca and Siena.

A convenient way to trace the long-term results of these changes is to compare the maps of Italy in the mid-fourteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Numerous cities that were independent at the earlier date have been absorbed into the territories of larger and more powerful neighbors. A few relatively small states, for example Ferrara, Mantua, and Siena, have retained their independent status. However, Italy has come to be dominated by five great states: Venice, Florence, and Milan, the Papal States, and the kingdom of Naples.

A similar process of consolidation can be traced in the history of modern Europe as a whole. Between about 1500 and about 1900 the number of independent entities on the map of Europe greatly diminished, and by the latter date the European world was dominated by a half-dozen nations, which were referred to as the Great Powers. This parallelism of development indicated that, in the political field as in others, Renaissance Italy led the way into modern times. Within the limited confines of the Italian peninsula, one sees acted out the developments which would later unfold on the larger stage of the European continent, where the great nations would take over the roles of the city-states. This means that the relationships between the Italian cities exhibited the elements of international relations in modern Europe. Diplomacy is one. It was the Italians who first maintained permanent ambassadors in foreign courts, and some of the early Italian diplomatic representatives sent back to their home governments reports that are still of value today. Machiavelli's dispatches from his foreign missions show the acuteness of observation and penetrating judgment of that political genius. The Venetian ambassadors were particularly gifted, and their reports remain a valuable source of knowledge about the countries to which they were accredited.

Again as in modern Europe, there were recurrent crises caused by the efforts of one state to dominate all the others. About 1400, it was Milan which sought hegemony. A hundred years later, Italian states feared the expansionist tendencies of Venice. Numerous other aggressors, generally on a smaller scale, came and went. Finally, by the middle of the fifteenth century, a delicate equilibrium was reached, which, according to some historians, brought into play another principle of modern international relations: the balance of power. To interpret these developments, there were two sixteenth-century observers whose outlook was so free from traditional preconceptions that they can be called the first truly modern political thinkers. These men were the Florentines Machiavelli and Guicciardini. To give some flesh and bones to all these general observations, it is desirable to sketch the history of each of the five dominant states and to outline the careers and thoughts of the two great observers.

## MILAN

**L**ong before the Renaissance, Milan, the city of St. Ambrose, was one of the greatest of the Italian towns. In the eleventh century, it was an important area of conflict between pope and emperor, nobles and plebeians, conservatives and reformers in the church. It was also in the eleventh century that civil conflict brought about the beginning of the tripartite constitution of Milan; each of the three main classes had its own political organization. The three classes were the great nobles; the lesser nobles, or knights and squires; and the non-nobles or plebeians. Each of the three had its own council and officers, and the government of Milan developed into an elaborate working compromise between the

classes. The chief officers of the plebeians were the captain and podest of the people. These officers, like similar officers elsewhere, became the stepping-stones to tyranny, in the hands of the family of Della Torre, the first despots of Milan, who dominated the city during much of the thirteenth century. They were leaders of the Guelf faction, opposed by the Ghibellines under the family of the Visconti. In 1277, Archbishop Ottone Visconti became lord of Milan and began one of the most famous of Renaissance dynasties. Later in the century, one of the Visconti was appointed by the emperor to be vicar of Lombardy; this connection with the emperors was to prove useful to the family in succeeding years. Early in the fourteenth century, after the Della Torre had returned to power, the visit of Emperor Henry VII to Italy was used by the Visconti to regain their dominant position.

Early in the fourteenth century the Visconti embarked on the policy of territorial aggression that became characteristic of their house. This brought them into constant conflict with the papacy. The popes invoked such weapons as excommunication and Crusades in the effort to subdue and intimidate them, but the Visconti remained defiant, continuing their expansionist policy whenever possible and building up a great territorial state. Among the most important acquisitions of the family were Pavia, Piacenza, Bergamo, Brescia, and Parma. Whenever possible, cities were acquired peacefully, by purchase or voluntary surrender. Attempts were made to acquire dominion over the great cities of Genoa and Bologna, but with only temporary success. At the same time the Visconti looked after the prosperity and security of Milan and became popular with their subjects, so that by the middle of the fourteenth century their role was recognized as hereditary.

The great period of the Visconti began in 1354 when two brothers, Galeazzo and Bernab, became joint rulers. Galeazzo received the western part of Milan and the western part of the Milanese possessions; Bernab received the eastern part of the city and the eastern part of its territories. In 1359 the brothers united to take Pavia, where Galeazzo set up his residence and founded a university. Pavia was to remain the second city in the Milanese domains. The prestige that the family had attained can be seen in the marriages of Galeazzo's children, who married into the French and English royal families. In 1378 Galeazzo died, leaving his domains to Gian Galeazzo, a young man of about twenty-seven. Meanwhile Bernab was ruling in Milan. He laid claim to twenty illegitimate children (besides sixteen legitimate ones), was noted for the violence of his temper, worked hard at the business of government, and issued game laws of inhuman severity. He was said to have five thousand hunting dogs which he billeted on the citizens, who were liable to terrible punishments if any harm should come to the animals. Boars were Bernab's favorite game, and whoever killed one was either blinded or hanged. His justice, though ferocious, was praised, and he was thought of as the defender of the poor. A famous incident of 1361 illustrates his temperament as well as his relations with the papacy. When ambassadors from the pope were sent to him with a bull of excommunication, they found him on a bridge over the rushing water of the Lambro River. Receiving the bull, Bernab asked them if they wished to eat or drink: in other words, eat the bull or be thrown into the river. They naturally accepted the former alternative; one of them later became pope. Bernab's conflict with the papacy over possession of the city of Bologna meant that he lived under excommunication and that his territories were subject to the interdict or ecclesiastical censure.

After the death of his brother, Bernab desired to become ruler of the entire Visconti territory. The only obstacle was his late brother's son, Gian Galeazzo, who appeared to be a pious and quiet youth. But the outcome was just the opposite of Bernab's intentions: Gian Galeazzo tricked him, took him prisoner in 1385, and put him in prison, where he died not long afterwards. Gian Galeazzo then made himself the master of the entire Milanese state.

Thus was launched the career of the greatest of the Visconti, and one of the most remarkable political figures of the Renaissance. Like other princes of the time, he was a patron of the arts: The cathedral of Milan and the Certosa (Carthusian monastery) of Pavia were started in his reign. He purchased from

the Holy Roman emperor the title of duke of Milan. His prestige is shown in the marriage of his daughter Valentina to a brother of the French king. One of the descendants of this marriage in time became king of France; this was the origin of the French claim to Milan, which was to have enduring consequences. He pursued the family policy of territorial aggrandizement with unprecedented success. He conquered many cities in northern and central Italy, and many others submitted to him peacefully. He employed not only the sword but also the pen: Paid propagandists extolled the blessings of Milanese rule. He was able to dominate northern Italy (except Venice) and much of central Italy as well, until the only enemy left in the field against him was Florence, to which he laid siege in 1402. Florence would surely have fallen had Gian Galeazzo himself not become sick and died in the same year. For the Florentines it was a great victory of freedom over tyranny; for Italy, it was the loss of perhaps the best chance of becoming unified during the Renaissance. Whether unity on these terms would have been worth the cost is a controversial matter. It has been asserted that the domination of Florence by Milan would have been a severe blow to the revolutionary cultural developments that were going on in Florence at the time. On the other hand, the results of the continued disunity of Italy were, as we shall see, tragic.

On the death of the great duke, his domains were divided among his sons, and his empire began to disintegrate, as many of the conquered cities resumed their independence and others fell under the rule of Venice. The oldest son, Giovanni Maria, who received the title of duke and the bulk of the territory, proved to have more than his share of the family streak of cruelty and was murdered in a church in 1412. Dying childless, he was succeeded by his brother, Filippo Maria, who was to be the last of the Visconti dukes, since he had no sons, but only an illegitimate daughter.

This able and cunning prince devoted himself to regaining his father's territories, and Milan once again became the great threat to the peace and freedom of Italy. Once again Florence became an enemy. Filippo Maria enjoyed a great measure of success, partly because he employed the best mercenary captains available, one of whom was Francesco Sforza, who eventually married the duke's daughter. When Filippo Maria died in 1447 without leaving any provision for the succession, a number of claimants appeared. The people of Milan proceeded to set up a republic and hired Sforza to defend it. Instead, he laid siege to the city and, in 1450, became its ruler, establishing a new dynasty. He was assisted by Florence, which, under the rule of Cosimo de' Medici, in this way reversed its long-standing anti-Milanese policy. Florence also helped Sforza in the ensuing war against Venice and Naples, and enabled him to hold on to his new state.

The Peace of Lodi of 1454, ending the conflict, became the basis of a league of all the Italian states, which maintained a precarious peace in Italy until 1494. Though there were conflicts during these forty years, they were all contained without foreign intervention on a large scale. Some historians have seen in this situation the first instance of the modern balance-of-power principle. During most of the time, a combination of Florence, Milan, and Naples worked to keep the peace. This is not a unanimous opinion, and at least one authority has claimed that the Italians owed their freedom from foreign intervention during this time to luck rather than statesmanship.<sup>2</sup>

Sforza ruled Milan successfully until his death in 1466, maintaining good relations with Florence and with France. From France he secured control of Genoa. In Milan he was careful to have his position, which he had gained by force, validated by an assembly of the people. His son and successor, Galeazzo Maria, was less fortunate. Though in some ways a good ruler, he showed tendencies toward absolutism, combined with such qualities as cruelty and extravagance. Three conspirators, inflamed by their study of the classics with a love for republican liberty, murdered him in church in 1476. The late duke left behind him an seven-year-old son, Gian Galeazzo, who became duke, and several brothers, one of whom was the famous Ludovico the Moor (an epithet which had nothing to do with his complexion). Ludovico was clever enough to be able to take over the real power in the state and to become, in fact

though not in name, the ruler of Milan. He established one of the most brilliant of Renaissance courts, with Leonardo da Vinci and the great architect Bramante as its chief ornaments. He encouraged the University of Pavia, founded a college where Greek was taught, and fostered the prosperity of Milan by irrigation works.

In 1488 the young duke was married to a princess of the ruling house of Naples, and this marriage cast a shadow on Ludovico's security. The duchess resented her husband's (and her own) subordinate position; she wanted them to be duke and duchess in fact and not just in name. To this end, as Ludovico became aware, she intrigued for help with her family in Naples. This broke up the old alliance of Milan, Naples, and Florence, while the death of Lorenzo the Magnificent of Florence in 1492 removed an influence for peace. Ludovico negotiated with both Italian and non-Italian powers in order to protect himself from the danger posed by Naples, but the most fateful of his dealings were with the king of France, Charles VIII (1483-98). The French could claim the throne of Naples on the basis of the rule of the house of Anjou, in the thirteenth century, which will be discussed later. Ludovico encouraged the French king to come to Italy to make good this claim. As we shall see, this plan was only too successful; it brought the beginning of the invasions that were to end Italian freedom and subject the peninsula to foreign domination for centuries.

## VENICE

From the very start, the history of Venice took on a special character, as a result of the city's location in the islands of the lagoons at the head of the Adriatic Sea. These islands were settled in the fifth century A.D. by refugees from the mainland, fleeing from Hunnish and German invaders. The fate of the city was bound up inextricably with the sea, in which it lived and from which it drew its sustenance in the form of trade.

Venice faced eastward, having close relations with the emperor at Constantinople. The Venetian merchants, from the tenth century, became the intermediaries between East and West. They received trading privileges from the Byzantine and German emperors, and even the Mohammedans. They supplied Italy, France, and Germany with the goods of the East and became rich and powerful in the process. Thus arose the Venetian merchant aristocracy, which in time took over the government of the city. In the sixth century, Venice was governed by tribunes, overseen by a duke, or doge. There was also an assembly of the people, which became powerless long before it was formally abolished in the fifteenth century. Until the eleventh century the doge's power increased, but it weakened until he became only the presiding officer in a state governed by a merchant oligarchy. The oligarchy exercised its power through a Great Council and a Small Council. The Small Council of six was a permanent adviser. The Great Council, which came to have well over two thousand members, was the seat of sovereignty, in which supreme power resided and from which other governmental bodies were formed. One was the Senate, which by the fourteenth century was the center of public administration, handling the day-to-day business of government.

The victory of the aristocracy was sealed by the "closing" of the Great Council in 1297. The essence of this act was to restrict eligibility for the Great Council to the members of about two hundred of the great merchant families. This restriction of political rights caused some discontent, which led, in 1310, to a serious conspiracy against the government. It was successfully repressed, but led to the formation of the Council of Ten, which had the purpose of guarding against further attempts of the same sort. In time the council became a permanent part of the Venetian government and acquired control over all aspects of the administration. The Council of Ten gave to the government of Venice the outlines it has always had in historical imagination: silent, efficient, watching with untiring vigilance over the affairs of the state, and ferreting out and punishing with deadly and ruthless speed all attempted conspiracies.

No public hint of its actions would be given until, one morning, passersby would see the bodies of the plotters hanging in the Square of St. Mark. The trials, though secret, were scrupulously fair, and judgment was based on a thorough effort to get the facts. The most famous conspiracy was that of the doge Marino Faliero in 1355. Like all the others, it failed, and the doge was executed. The chief activity of Venice was always trade, and this brought relationships, sometimes hostile, with commercial rivals in Italy, chiefly Genoa and Pisa, and sometimes with the Byzantine emperor at Constantinople. In the later years of the twelfth century, relations between Venice and the emperor in the East deteriorated. To recoup their position, the Venetians performed one of the most spectacular feats in their history. They diverted the Fourth Crusade, in 1204, from an attempt to regain the Holy Land to a successful attack on Constantinople, which for a while left Venice master of the Byzantine Empire. Venetian merchants were able to penetrate Russia, the Crimea, and Asia Minor.

In the second half of the thirteenth century, the great conflict began with Genoa, which was becoming a dangerous rival for the eastern trade. In 1294 Venice declared war, and in the following century there was constant conflict between the two cities. By 1381, peace was made, and Venice was enabled to regain her former prosperity. The Genoese, however, because of internal troubles and French domination, which began in 1396, found themselves at a disadvantage. In the thirteenth century, the Mongols conquered most of Asia, and Venetian merchants found their way to their dominions. The most famous was Marco Polo, who lived in the Mongol Empire as an official of the Great Khan from 1275 to 1292. The breakdown of the empire prevented other Europeans from following the same route.

In the fifteenth century Venice was at the height of its glory. Its wealth was enormous, and it had an empire extending in an unbroken coastline from the islands in the lagoons to Constantinople. Its gold coin, the ducat, minted since 1284, was valued everywhere for its sound, reliable worth. It was the greatest trading center in Europe. With a population of about one hundred thousand, it was one of the largest European cities. The stability and efficiency of its government were the envy of other states. The trading aristocracy looked after the commercial interests of the city with patriotic devotion, though not without a strong spirit of suspicion and distrust among themselves. The masses, though excluded from political life, shared in the general prosperity and were for the most part content with their lot.

The sixteenth century saw the beginning of the long decline from this position of pride and splendor. One reason was the advance of the Ottoman Turks into eastern Europe, where they encroached on territories under Venetian control. The conflict between Venice and the Turks, which began in the early fifteenth century, was to continue for hundreds of years. When the Turks took Constantinople in 1453, the Venetian colony was destroyed, and many Venetians were executed, imprisoned, or sold into slavery. As the fighting continued, more and more Venetian territory was lost. By 1540 the Morea and most of the Greek islands had fallen.

When the Portuguese found an all-water route to the East late in the fifteenth century, they began their drive to take over the immensely lucrative trade in spices, which had been largely in the hands of the Venetians. From that time on, the Venetian position in that trade was more and more precarious, a situation that was aggravated by the entrance of the French, and later the Dutch and English, into the eastern trade. Though this was a serious blow, Venetian prosperity did not suddenly decline. In fact, the cargo-carrying capacity of the Venetian international merchant fleet actually grew in the sixteenth century. Before the end of the century, however, various factors combined to weaken the city's position: the continued war with the Turks, a severe outbreak of the plague, and the exhaustion of the supply of timber for shipbuilding.

From the fourteenth century Venice had been acquiring control over territory on the Italian mainland, a process which was greatly accelerated after about 1380. There were several motives: to secure routes of trade and the Venetian food supply, and, with the Turkish advance, to recoup losses in the East. The

growing intervention of the Venetians on the mainland was highly unwelcome to the other Italians, who had long thought of Venice as a foreign state and now feared her power. In the latter part of the fifteenth century, Venice came to be regarded as the great threat to the peace and freedom of Italy, as had been true earlier of Milan. The aggressive policies of both Venice and the Visconti made it inevitable that Venice and Milan would become enemies. During the last years of Visconti rule, Venice allied with Florence against them, but with the coming of Francesco Sforza, as we have seen, Florence abandoned the Venetian alliance and aided the new ruling house of Milan.

By 1500 Venice controlled a vast area in northern Italy, and many important cities, formerly independent, were under her rule, including Padua, Verona, and numerous others. The result of her power and aggressive tendencies was, as we shall see later, to unite most of Italy and even some foreign states against her in the effort to break her power. Nevertheless, she remained independent, strong, and prosperous throughout the century. The decline we can observe was much less noticeable at the time. Long after the rest of Italy had been subjugated by Spanish power, Venice remained independent, until finally conquered by Napoleon at the end of the eighteenth century. The final fall of Venice called forth the famous sonnet of Wordsworth. Though the glories of Venice had decayed by then, he wrote, "Men are we, and must grieve when even the Shade / Of that which once was great is passed away."

In his sonnet, Wordsworth refers to Venice as "the eldest Child of Liberty," and indeed the Venetians did not lose sight of the fact that their city was a republic. Professor William J. Bouwsma has shown that the conscious expression of Venetian republicanism, though it has roots in an earlier period, came largely in the sixteenth century, under the impact of political crises which stimulated thought on the meaning of Venetian ideals and values. Here it was following the example of the other great Renaissance republic, Florence.

## **FLORENCE**

**F**lorence in the Renaissance was the home of a galaxy of men of talent and genius who find no parallel in history except in ancient Athens. A sketch of the history of the city cannot "explain" the presence of so many outstanding individuals nothing can do that. It can only present some idea of the conditions in which they flourished.

From at least as far back as the eleventh century we can discern some features of Florentine history that were to remain fairly constant. The governing class at this time consisting of small nobles and rich merchants was divided by bitter conflicts among its members; the city was expanding into the surrounding countryside, and it was coming into conflict, economic and military, with neighboring cities. The struggle with Pisa was to last for centuries. Until 1250, when the last great medieval emperor, Frederick II, died, Florence had to struggle against the attempts of emperors to assert lordship over the city. That none of these struggles prevented Florence from prospering is shown by the coinage in 1252 of the gold florin, which became a medium of international exchange, like the Venetian ducat already mentioned, because of the consistency and reliability of its gold content. The Florentine coin may not be the earliest gold coin created in this period; at about the same time, and perhaps a little earlier, Genoa began issuing its first gold coins. In the next century, the example was followed not only by other Italian cities but by the states of Europe, testifying to a general revival of trade and economic life.

During the struggles between Guelf and Ghibelline factions in Italy, Florence became a Guelf city, which means that it was on the side of the papacy in its struggle against the empire. This alliance with the popes, which became traditional, secured for the Florentine bankers the banking business of the

papacy, and for the Florentine merchants special privileges in areas in which the popes had particular influence. The growing prosperity of the Florentine class of merchants and bankers eventually enabled them to take over the government of the city in 1282-83, from an old ruling class, that of the magnates, weakened by its own internal disunity.

The new ruling class, called the *popolo*, or people, was divided into guilds. There were twenty-one of these, consisting of the seven greater guilds and the fourteen lesser guilds. The members of the greater guilds were commonly known as the *popolo grasso*, or fat people, as distinguished from the *popolo minuto*, or little people, who belonged to the lesser guilds. It was the former who dominated the government of Florence from this time on, though the *popolo minuto* were allowed some authority. Among the greater guilds were those of the wool manufacturers, the wool finishers, the silk merchants, and the bankers. As the instrument of their domination, they established an executive body of six priors (the number was later increased to eight). Their term of office was two months, and they came to be chosen by lot, according to a system that strengthened the hold of the greater guilds. This fact, combined with the short term of office, helped to place real power securely in the hands of the great merchants, manufacturers, and bankers. Thus Florence, though bearing the name of a republic, can with more justification be called an oligarchy. There was also a large class with no political power whatever, the workers, especially those employed by the wool manufacturers. They were not members of any guilds, were forbidden to form guilds of their own, and were the worst sufferers in time of economic depression. They were one of the earliest examples of a modern industrial proletariat. Their discontent might break out from time to time, but they never succeeded in acquiring permanent political status.

The victors of 1282 consolidated their position by means of the Ordinances of Justice of 1293, which penalized the members of the former ruling class of magnates. A *gonfaloniere* (standard-bearer) of justice was established as the seventh prior and chief of the priors, with the function of executing sentences pronounced in court against the nobles. He was given a force of a thousand men to assist him in this purpose. Furthermore, nobles could not be elected priors or hold office in the guilds, and they were severely punished for crimes against members of the *popolo*. Though some of these restrictions were later lifted in 1295 nobles were given permission to become priors if they were guild members there remained a permanent stigma on the nobles. Some members of the class formally renounced their noble status, and one way to attack political enemies henceforth was to have them officially declared magnates.

The Guelfs, now victorious in Florence, did not remain united, but split into the Black and White factions. With the help of Pope Boniface VIII and a French prince, Charles of Valois, whom he sent to Florence in 1301, the Blacks won out, and the Whites were savagely persecuted. Many went into exile, including Dante and the father of Petrarch. Since the second half of the thirteenth century, popes had been calling in members of the French royal family to defend papal interests in Italy. This established one of the precedents for the later disastrous invasions of Italy.

In about 1338, Florence had reached a peak of prosperity. According to the chronicler Giovanni Villani, the population was about ninety thousand, making Florence one of the largest cities in Europe. Its wealth, based largely on woolen cloth, was immense. It is also true that Florentine bankers were among the greatest of all, involved in far-flung transactions. This fact was to be one of the causes of the great disasters which befell the city during the fourteenth century, for the two greatest banks, those of the Bardi and Peruzzi, had loaned money to the king of England, Edward III, who defaulted in 1339, thus weakening the whole financial structure of the city. Meanwhile a war against Lucca, which was going badly for Florence, was costing so much that the government was forced to suspend payments on its loans, thus deepening the financial crisis. Possibly in an attempt to avert disaster, the city called in a member of the ruling family of Naples, Walter of Brienne, duke of Athens, to take temporary charge of the affairs of the city. (On previous occasions members of this family had been given temporary

authority in Florence.) Walter arrived in 1342, tried to make himself a tyrant, and was driven out in 1343 in an uprising that united the various elements of the population.

Not long afterwards, a successful rising inaugurated an interlude of thirty-five years during which the lesser guilds exercised the dominant power in the city. It was a period of factional and class struggle, of conflict abroad, and of the reversal of the old alliance with the papacy, which culminated in the War of the Eight Saints, from 1375 to 1378, when Florence and the pope were actually at war. At the beginning of the period, in the 1340s, two catastrophic events helped to shatter the well-being of the city. The weakened financial structure finally collapsed, when the Bardi and Peruzzi went bankrupt, dragging many other firms down with them. In 1348 came the Black Death, which may have killed as many as fifty thousand Florentines. These disasters contributed powerfully to the internal strains in Florence during the following years.

The poor, as always, suffered most from economic depression and plague, and these factors helped to swell the discontent among the unenfranchised workers. This discontent came to a head in 1378 in the so-called Revolt of the Ciompi, a rising of the workers, especially the wool carders. It enjoyed a brief success, and for a few years the workers were able to form their own guilds and exercise some political power. This episode ended in 1382, when the *popolo grasso* seized by force the power they had originally acquired just a century before. The workers' new guilds were abolished, the dominance of the lesser guilds that had prevailed since 1343 came to an end, and the merchant oligarchy recovered its rule. It was under the government of this oligarchy that Florence had to face the threat from Gian Galeazzo Visconti of Milan. In this conflict the Florentines claimed to be standing for freedom against tyranny, and regarded their deliverance from the great duke through his death in 1402 as being due to their steadfastness in the cause of liberty. Devotion to freedom was an essential part of what might be called the Florentine political ideology. In this ideology the expulsion of the duke of Athens in 1343 played an important part, as the Florentines looked back on the time when their city had lived up to its ideals by expelling a tyrant. Even the official diplomatic documents of Florence contain many references to liberty. During the fourteenth century Florence claimed to be defending freedom not only for herself but also for the rest of Tuscany, and even for Italy as a whole. It is true that Florence alone held out to the end against Gian Galeazzo; other cities yielded to him, voluntarily or otherwise, or stood aloof.

When Filippo Maria Visconti resumed the aggressive policy of his father, Florence opposed him, still professing the ideals of liberty. In 1425 Venice joined the fight against Milan, so that for a while the two great republics fought side by side, each proclaiming its devotion to freedom. With the death of the last Visconti and the coming of Francesco Sforza the alliance was broken when Florence opposed the Venetian expansion into Milanese territory and aided Sforza.

In the first half of the fifteenth century, under the influence of the resistance to the Visconti, there developed in Florence what has been called civic humanism. The humanistic scholars of Florence, who will be discussed at length in Chapter 5, adopted the ideal of the active civic life in the service of the state, and some of the leaders held important civic posts. They praised Florence for her devotion to liberty, and sought the origin of the city in the days of the Roman republic. This represented a change from the customary attribution of the origins of the city to Caesar, whose reputation now began to change until he was regarded as a destroyer of Roman liberty. Instead, the beginnings of the city were traced to a settlement by Sulla's soldiers in the last years of the Roman republic. All these ideals were still alive in the thought of Machiavelli in the sixteenth century. To what extent the vaunted liberty of Florence squared with the facts is another question. In any case, civic freedom was forfeited in 1434 when Cosimo de' Medici came to power. Until then he had been the leader of a faction among the ruling class. For a while he had been exiled in Venice, but when his enemies at home became unpopular he had been called to power. From 1434 to his death in 1464 he was the effective ruler of

Florence. He was born in 1389, and was a member of one of the richest families in the city, a member of the ruling merchant-banker oligarchy. The basis of the family fortune was the Medici bank, which had been built up by Cosimo's father. The Medici family was the only one of the great ruling houses of the city which enjoyed much support among the poor, to whom they had shown themselves sympathetic during the troubles of 1378.

Cosimo knew his Florentines, and if he was to deprive them of their republican freedom or such of it as they actually possessed he knew that he must at least leave them with the appearance of it. He, therefore, took no title that would indicate supreme power, nor did he change the established organs of government. He lived simply, for a member of his class, and remained affable and accessible. He did not have his enemies executed, but destroyed their power to harm him by subjecting them to exile and confiscation. He was a patron of culture. The presence of learned Greeks in Florence at the church council of 1439 stimulated Cosimo to encourage the study of Plato, and this was to have important consequences. He was generous to humanistic scholars, inviting two of the most distinguished ones to hold the important position of chancellor of the city. He was similarly generous to artists and architects. He founded the first public library in Europe in the monastery of San Marco, which he had rebuilt. He also built and improved many other churches and monasteries, including the Medici parish church of San Lorenzo, much of which was built under his patronage by the greatest architect of the time, Brunelleschi. Among the other great artists patronized by Cosimo were the sculptor Donatello and the painter Fra Angelico.

During the thirty years of Cosimo's ascendancy the city was quiet internally, though there were no doubt many who chafed under one-man rule, no matter how skillfully disguised. In foreign policy, as we have seen, he helped Francesco Sforza take over the government of Milan, which ended threats to Florence from that quarter, and helped to bring about the peace settlement of 1454, which gave Italy some respite from serious conflict and external interference for forty years. At his death, he was buried in the church of San Lorenzo. His body was placed in the nave, and over it is a simple inscription which hails him as Pater Patriae, the Father of the Fatherland.

He had done his work so well that he was succeeded by his son, Piero (1464-69) and Piero's son Lorenzo (1469-92). Piero (the Gouty) was an able man who brought the family bank to the height of its prosperity and successfully checked a conspiracy against his rule by some disaffected Florentine families and several Italian cities, including Venice. He died after only five years of rule.

His son Lorenzo, later called the Magnificent, was only twenty when he was asked to assume his father's place at the head of the city government. This brilliant man was not only a patron of scholars, poets, and artists, but was himself a poet whose verses are important in the history of Italian literature. He was less successful as a businessman, and the Medici bank suffered great reverses in his time.

Not long after he had assumed power, he was threatened with a very serious conspiracy, which takes its name from the Pazzi, one of the great Florentine families that resented Medici domination. The Pazzi were encouraged by the pope, Sixtus IV, whose nepotism had placed relatives of his in territory too close to Florence for comfort. The plan was evolved of killing both Lorenzo and his younger brother Giuliano at Mass in the cathedral on April 26, 1478. The plotters succeeded in murdering Giuliano; Lorenzo was wounded, but not seriously. The city then rose against the conspirators, who were tracked down and killed. Lorenzo's hold on the city was strengthened.

His troubles were not over, however, for the pope excommunicated him and the priors, laid an interdict on the city, and, in conjunction with Naples, declared war on Florence. Most of the Italian cities took one side or the other, and war went on during 1478 and 1479, with results generally unfavorable to Florence. At this point Lorenzo undertook perhaps the most spectacular venture of his career. In

December 1479 he went to Naples without prior consultation with the officers of the Florentine government to negotiate directly with the Neapolitan king Ferrante. The move was a bold one and involved some risk, although there had been preliminary negotiations, and Ferrante had his own reasons for wanting peace, among them the Turkish threat and the fear of French intervention on the side of Florence. Thus by February 1480 Lorenzo was able to obtain a peace settlement. In August the Turks occupied Otranto, causing the Italian cities to lay aside temporarily their conflicts with one another. The death in the following year of the sultan Mohammed II brought peace to Italy.

Thereafter Lorenzo, at the height of his influence, strove to maintain the traditional Medici alliance with Milan and Naples, preserve peace throughout the peninsula, and prevent foreign intervention, while preserving good relations with France. Opinions among scholars are divided as to how much Italy owed its relative calm to Lorenzo; in any case, it was only after his death that Italy was forced to submit to foreign domination.

Within Florence, Lorenzo took advantage of his added prestige to make constitutional changes that further strengthened his hold on the state. A Council of Seventy, set up in 1480 and controlled by him, was given charge of the main functions of government. In 1490 a committee of seventeen, similarly controlled by Lorenzo and including him among its members, was established to nominate the priors.

There was some discontent with Lorenzo's conduct of affairs in the later years of his life. The wool trade in Florence was declining. The growing troubles of the Medici bank may have forced Lorenzo to use public money for private purposes, something his predecessors had been careful to avoid. Whether this was true or not, it was believed. The basic problem, of course, was that Lorenzo, although exercising public functions, was still technically a private citizen and thus not entitled to use public money in the pursuit of his work. Whether he or anyone else could have held off the foreign invasions indefinitely is not known, but it is unlikely. The French monarchs were showing increasing interest in Italy. Ferdinand and Isabella were beginning the creation of a strong Spanish monarchy, and a member of a branch of the house of Aragon, to which Ferdinand belonged, already ruled Naples. Ferdinand himself was king of Sicily. There were continued conflicts among the Italian states, but during Lorenzo's lifetime they were settled without outside interference.

Lorenzo himself died young on April 8, 1492, at the age of forty-three. His successor, as we shall see, proved inadequate to his task.

## **NAPLES AND SICILY**

**S**outhern Italy followed a somewhat different line of development from that of the center and north. Though there were important cities, urban life was less highly developed, feudalism and the nobility had a stronger hold, and the king of Naples was the only king in Italy. During the Renaissance, "the kingdom," when Italy was referred to, meant the kingdom of Naples. One reason for the relative backwardness of the development of this region was that it had been a battleground for centuries; in Naples or Sicily or both, there had been Byzantine armies, Moslems, Normans, Holy Roman emperors, and popes. The popes took a particular interest in the affairs of this area, and their interference had far-reaching and often harmful effects. The kingdom of Naples was a vassal state of the papacy, a fact which justified and encouraged papal interference. In 1265, to protect his interests, which were threatened by the German imperial family of Hohenstaufen, the pope called into Italy Charles of Anjou, brother of King Louis IX of France (St. Louis). Charles succeeded in freeing the pope from the German menace and was rewarded by being made king of Naples and Sicily.

The government of these territories by French officials was thoroughly hated by the native population. This situation encouraged still another foreign power, in this case the house of Aragon, to intervene. The climax was a terrible rising in 1282, known as the Sicilian Vespers, which delivered Sicily to Aragonese rule, while the mainland, or Naples, remained in the hands of the house of Anjou, the Angevins. Since each attempted to conquer the other and reunite the territory, there followed an incredibly complicated story of conflict and intrigue, made even more confusing by the active interference of the pope. The mainland and Sicily were finally brought back under unified rule when Alfonso of Aragon, known as Alfonso the Magnanimous, conquered Naples in 1442. Alfonso was a lover of the classics and a patron of scholars and men of letters, of whom the most famous was Lorenzo Valla. It was in Alfonso's service, when the latter was fighting the pope, that Valla wrote his treatise on the Donation of Constantine, which will be discussed in Chapter 5. Alfonso attempted to use his Italian position to further the interests of the merchants of Catalonia, a part of the kingdom of Aragon that was becoming one of the great Mediterranean commercial powers. To this end he attempted, by force and bribery, to acquire bases on the Italian coast from which to harass the great Italian commercial cities. His success in this area was limited, and had little effect on Italian merchants and their trade. Alfonso also tried, with some degree of success, to assert his independence of the pope; he would have liked to end his vassal status, but did not manage to do so. The pope, to placate the king, appointed one of Alfonso's subjects also named Alfonso to the College of Cardinals. This Spanish bishop, a member of the Borgia family, later became Pope Calixtus III and in turn raised to the cardinalate his nephew, who became Pope Alexander VI.

Strangely enough, after fighting to unite Naples and Sicily, Alfonso divided them again at his death in 1458. He left Sicily and Sardinia (an earlier Aragonese conquest), together with his Spanish possessions, to his brother John; Naples he left to his illegitimate son Ferdinand, or Ferrante. Ferrante's harshness and tyranny precipitated revolts of the Neapolitan nobility, which were suppressed with characteristic cruelty. It was Ferrante's granddaughter Isabella, daughter of his son and successor, Alfonso, whose marriage to the young duke of Milan helped to precipitate the chain of events that brought the French into Italy in 1494.

## **ROME AND THE PAPAL STATES**

**T**he popes of the Renaissance had a dual position. On the one hand, they were, as rulers of the church, entrusted with the spiritual welfare of Christendom; on the other, they were the heads of an Italian city-state. Their failure to reconcile these two positions or rather, their devotion to the second at the expense of the first secularized the papacy and brought the loss of much of its moral and spiritual authority.

With the awakening of the spirit of civic independence in medieval Italy, the people of Rome became subject to periodic fits of restlessness under papal rule. From time to time movements occurred in the city that repudiated the pope's authority and occasionally drove him out of the city. With the papacy at Avignon in the fourteenth century, the way was prepared for the career of Cola di Rienzo. During this period Rome was in decay and torn by rival factions. Cities in the Papal States were becoming independent, and the foreigners sent from France to rule in the pope's name were bitterly disliked.

Cola di Rienzo was a young Roman of humble origins who read the ancient Roman classics and, because of his reading, had become intoxicated with ideals of Roman freedom. He became the head of a conspiracy to take over the city for the "people" and dispossess the great noble families that had been in control. He even secured papal approval, and in 1347 his plot succeeded. He became head of the city government, assuming the title of "tribune." Petrarch for a while regarded him with hope, for Petrarch too dreamed of restoring the greatness of Rome. Cola began to plan for some sort of Italian federation with Rome as the recognized head; he even seems to have entertained some idea of having Rome

recognized as head of the entire world. Unfortunately, power went to his head, and his arrogance, together with the latent hostility of those whom he had deprived of power, brought his overthrow and expulsion from the city in 1348. He then wandered about for a while, eventually presenting himself at the court of Emperor Charles IV at Prague, possibly to urge the emperor to assert his rights in Italy. Charles imprisoned him for a time, then sent him to the pope at Avignon. One of the popes tried to make use of him by sending him back to Rome in 1354 as his own representative. Again the position of authority was too much for Rienzo to handle, and this time the uprising against him resulted in his murder. The episode of his career, brief as it was, illustrates the power of the classics to affect even political life and the restlessness of the Romans under papal rule or misrule.

Despite efforts by the popes to restore their authority in Rome, this goal eluded them even after the end of the Great Schism in 1417 with the election of Martin V at the Council of Constance. Because of the involvement of the popes in Italian political struggles, enemies of the papacy managed to keep Martin from entering Rome until 1420. Because of the ruined condition of Rome and its scanty resources, Martin was compelled to devote himself to rebuilding the city, restoring order, and developing the temporal power of the papacy. Thus it was that the popes of the period embarked on their policy of looking first of all after the interests of their state in Italy rather than of the church as a whole.

Martin's successor, Eugenius IV, was driven from Rome in 1434 by a republican revolt, spent many years in exile, and had to reconquer the city by force. From this time on for almost a century, the popes tended to be secular, but secular in different ways. Nicholas V (1447-55) was the first humanist pope and the real founder of the Vatican Library. He brought distinguished scholars and artists to Rome, which he wanted to make into the cultural center of the day. He also had great plans for rebuilding the city architecturally, and began the process which resulted, among other things, in the new St. Peter's and the new Vatican. After the three-year pontificate of Calixtus III, another scholar ascended the papal throne, Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, who became Pius II (1458-64).

Aeneas Sylvius is one of the more fascinating characters of the Renaissance. As a young man, he had made his way by means of a wide knowledge of the classics, a graceful Latin style, personal charm, and an eye for the main chance. At the Council of Basel he had written in favor of the council instead of the pope, but when he saw the tide turning against the conciliar movement he deftly changed sides. As pope he issued a bull condemning conciliarism in the strongest terms. He had served at the court of the Holy Roman Empire, helping to spread humanism to Germany. He wrote an extensive history of his times. As a young man he was gay and fun-loving. But when he was elected to the papacy, he repudiated his former concerns, disappointed the scholars who had expected patronage from him, and threw himself into a single-hearted attempt to induce the Christian rulers of Europe to mount a new crusade against the infidel who had recovered the Holy Places. The time had passed for such expeditions, and Pius wore himself out in the futile attempt to revive something that was so definitely of the past.

Sixtus IV (1471-84), a member of the family of Della Rovere, illustrates some of the most prominent characteristics of the Renaissance papacy. He practiced nepotism on a scale heretofore unknown among popes, and worked to make the Papal States a strong temporal power. He, therefore, became involved in the diplomatic intrigues and conflicts among the Italian cities. His part in the Pazzi conspiracy has already been shown. In 1481 he took part in the war over Ferrara, which Venice was trying to annex. Peace was made without the pope's participation in 1484, and Sixtus died shortly after. A Latin couplet said that this terrible man, whom no force could subdue, died on merely hearing the name of peace. Sixtus did perform great services for art. The Sistine Chapel was built for him and named after him, and to decorate it he brought to Rome the greatest painters in Italy.

In 1492 the Spanish cardinal Rodrigo Borgia became pope by means of a simoniac election: That is, he managed to purchase the votes of a sufficient number of cardinals. He took the name of Alexander VI. He had many children, to whom he was deeply devoted. Two of them are of historical importance, a daughter, Lucrezia, and a son, Caesar or Cesare. Lucrezia was a woman without strong character who was used as a tool by her father and brother in the pursuit of their political plans; they even had one of her husbands murdered when he became an obstacle to their purposes. She finished her life as duchess of Ferrara, acquiring a reputation for piety and good works.

Alexander VI has become synonymous with the moral degradation of the Renaissance papacy, and with some justification. He made no attempt to conceal his flagrant sexual immorality; at the time he became pope, his mistress was a girl of eighteen. The Vatican was filled with gay parties in which the pope took a prominent part. It could be argued that the Renaissance popes constituted a graver danger to the church than would be posed by the Protestant reformers. The Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt expressed the opinion that the Reformation saved the papacy, presumably by awakening it to the need for reform before it was too late.

Alexander found the Papal States in great disorder; the conflicts of the noble factions, led by the families of Colonna and Orsini, had reduced Rome to anarchy under the previous pope, Innocent VIII. Alexander restored order, waging a regular war against the Orsini.

Throughout his pontificate, Alexander worked to help his son Cesare build up a state of his own in central Italy. To do this, the pope secured the help of the king of France and placed the resources of the papacy at Cesare's disposal. With a ruthlessness that has been made famous by Machiavelli in *The Prince*, Cesare set out to carve out a dominion for himself while his father was still on the papal throne. He conquered the Romagna, which had long been misruled by petty tyrants, and instituted a firm and effective administration. He proceeded to extend his power into Tuscany, and by 1501 was a threat to Florence. It was for this reason that Machiavelli was sent on missions to him in 1501 and 1502, and had opportunities to talk with him and to witness his methods of operation. Until the death of his father, Cesare was making progress toward the realization of his designs. The full extent of his ambitions is not known; possibly he wished to dominate all Italy. He had attempted to win over the cardinals, so that he could assure the election of a successor to his father who would be favorable to him. However, at the time of the pope's death in August 1503, Cesare himself was critically ill and for a while was not expected to survive. Thus he was in no position to influence the papal election.

Alexander's immediate successor, a nephew of Pius II who took the name of Pius III, was already ill and did not survive his election a month. The next pope, also elected in 1503, was the forceful Giuliano della Rovere, also a papal nephew Sixtus IV was his uncle and an enemy of the Borgias. Julius II, to use his papal name, was determined to break the power of Cesare Borgia and to incorporate Cesare's conquests in the Papal States. At this critical point in his career, Cesare failed to show his accustomed vigor and resolution. The pope stripped him of his possessions and imprisoned him. The rest of Cesare's life is an anticlimax; he died obscurely in 1507, fighting in Navarre. Julius was a great patron of the arts, employing both Michelangelo and Raphael and making Rome the cultural capital of Italy. In his political activities, he was particularly interested in strengthening the temporal power of the papacy. He restored the papal supremacy in the Romagna and became the center of Italian diplomacy, organizing the campaigns against Venice and France that will be discussed later. He is preeminently the "warrior" pope. He died in 1513. His successor, Leo X (1513-21) was Giovanni de' Medici, son of Lorenzo the Magnificent, not yet thirty at the time of his elevation to the papal throne.

He was only a deacon and had to be ordained a priest before he could be consecrated. He was a patron of arts and letters, and such a lavish spender of the revenues of the church that at the time of his death the papacy was deeply in debt. Much of the expense went for luxury and entertainment; the pope set a

splendid table, and with banquets, balls, carnivals, and theatrical entertainments made Rome a city of pleasure. His generous patronage kept Rome the artistic center of Italy. Distinguished scholars served as papal secretaries. Leo's chief aim was the aggrandizement of his family, the Medici. As head of the family, he was the real ruler of Florence. He made his cousin Giulio a cardinal and put him in charge of the Florentine government. He also had the grandiose scheme of becoming the arbiter of European politics, and engaged in continual intrigues, making alliances, betraying allies, and becoming distrusted by all. He did not concern himself with religious or spiritual matters, and was unable to understand the importance of the troubles that were reported to him from Germany because of an obscure German friar named Martin Luther.

When Leo died, still young, in 1521, the conclave was deadlocked for a long time. His successor, who was not chosen until the following year, was a Dutchman named Adrian of Utrecht, who was not even present. He owed his election to the fact that he was a compromise candidate and had the support of the emperor Charles V, of whom he was a counselor and former tutor. He took the name of Adrian VI, thus keeping his lay name, which was unusual. He was also unusual for that period by being devoted to religion and earnestly desiring reform. He did not patronize artists and scholars nor did he give elaborate entertainments. Naturally, this made him very unpopular in Rome and subjected him to a great deal of mockery. He failed to obtain the needed reforms, and his early death in 1523 was not lamented.

From 1523 to 1534, the pope was Giulio de' Medici, Clement VII, illegitimate son of Giuliano, the murdered brother of Lorenzo the Magnificent. It was during this time that the papacy, having involved itself deeply in the diplomacy of Europe at the expense of its spiritual functions, now reaped the whirlwind. In the struggle over Italy between France and Spain, the pope committed the tactical error of being on the side of France just as Charles V, emperor and king of Spain, was becoming master of Italy. The result was the Sack of Rome in 1527 by the unpaid and mutinous soldiers of Charles, which caused untold destruction and death, as well as the desecration of sacred places by the German Lutheran mercenaries in Charles's service. Many contemporaries were convinced that the sack, which had a profound psychological effect, was God's punishment visited on the popes for their wickedness. It was a significant step in the process by which Spanish domination was fastened on Italy, and it had at least one salutary effect: It convinced the pope of the bankruptcy of his diplomatic policy and, in time, turned the popes away from their excessive involvement in European diplomacy. Clement's successor, Paul III, although not a model of sanctity and guilty of nepotism, may be considered the first pope of a new era, that of the Counter Reformation. Thus our brief survey of the Renaissance papacy can conveniently conclude at this point.

## **OTHER STATES OF ITALY**

**O**ur necessary concentration on the five major Italian city-states should not cause us to overlook the other important centers which, although less powerful and influential politically and culturally, made their own indispensable contributions. Though the expansionist policies of the cities so far discussed reduced many important places to dependency, there were some smaller states that maintained their independence. A few may be mentioned here.

The Tuscan city of Siena, not far from Florence, though in frequent conflict with her more powerful neighbor, maintained her independence and her republican government. Siennese painting was important, especially in the early Renaissance. The court of Ferrara, presided over by the ruling Este family, patronized two outstanding poets, Boiardo and Ariosto. Ferrara also became the scene of the educational labors of the great scholar and educator Guarino da Verona, who helped to give the new University of Ferrara great prestige. At Mantua, ruled by the Gonzaga, another great educator,

Vittorino da Feltre, carried on his activities. Isabella d'Este, wife to the marquis of Mantua, was an active and important patron of art. Urbino, ruled by the Montefeltro family, was the birthplace of Raphael and the scene of the conversations that form the basis of Castiglione's *Courtier*. Federigo, the most outstanding member of the ruling family (1444-82), is familiar to us from many Renaissance portraits, including that by Piero della Francesca. (Illustration page 58) His powerful features are those of a successful ruler, a famous condottiere, and a lover of art and learning, and the possessor of one of the finest libraries of the time. These examples, to which many more could be added, help to give some idea of the extraordinary richness and variety of Renaissance culture and the range of its achievements.

Federigo da Montefeltro by Piero della Francesca