BOOK III.

Goes back somewhat to tell how the city of Florence was rebuilt by the power of Charles the Great and the Romans.

§ 1.—It came to pass, as it pleased God, that in the time of the good Charles the Great, Emperor of Rome and king of France, of whom above we have made a long record, after that he had beaten down the tyrannical pride of the Lombards and Saracens, and of the infidels against Holy Church, and had established Rome and the Empire in good state and in its liberty, as afore we have made mention, certain gentlemen and nobles of the region round about Florence (whereof it is reported that the Giovanni, the Guineldi and the Ridolfi, descended from the ancient noble citizens of the former Florence, were the heads) assembled themselves together with all the inhabitants of the place where Florence had been, and with all other their followers dwelling in the country around Florence, and they ordained to send to Rome ambassadors from the best among them to Charles the Emperor, and to Pope Leo, and to the Romans; and this was done, praying them to remember their daughter, the city of Florence (the which was ruined and destroyed by Goths and Vandals in despite of the Romans), to the end it might be rebuilt, and that it might please them to give a force of men-at-arms to ward off the men of Fiesole and their followers, the enemies of the Romans,

who would not let the city of Florence be rebuilt. The which ambassadors were received with honour by the Emperor Charles, and by the Pope, and by the Romans, and their petition accepted graciously and willingly; and straightway the Emperor Charles the Great sent thither his forces of men-at-arms on foot and on horse in great numbers; and the Romans made a decree and command that, as their forefathers had built and peopled of old the city of Florence, so those of the best families in Rome, both of nobles and of people, should go thither to rebuild and to inhabit it; and this was done. With that host of the Emperor Charles the Great and of the Romans there came whatsoever master-craftsmen there were in Rome, the more speedily to build the walls of the city and to strengthen it, and after them there followed much people; and all they who dwelt in the country around Florence, and her exiled citizens in every place, hearing the tidings, gathered themselves to the host of the Romans and of the Emperor to rebuild the city; and when they were come where to-day is our city, they encamped among ancient remains and ruins in booths and in tents. The Fiesolans and their followers, seeing the host of the Emperor and of the Romans so great and powerful, did not venture to fight against them, but keeping within the fortress of their city of Fiesole and in their fortified places around, gave what hindrance they might to the said rebuilding. But their power was nothing against the strength of the Romans, and of the host of the Emperor, and of the assembled descendants of the Florentines; and thus they began to rebuild the city of Florence, not, however, of the size that it had been at the first, but of lesser extent, as hereafter shall be mentioned, to the end it might more speedily be

walled and fortified, and there might be a defence like a rampart against the city of Fiesole; and this was the year of Christ 801, in the beginning of the month of April. And it is said that the ancients were of opinion that it would not be possible to rebuild it, if first there were not found and drawn from the Arno the marble image, dedicated by the first pagan builders by necromancy to Mars, the which had been in the river Arno from the destruction of Florence unto that time; and being found, it was placed on a pillar by the side of the said river, where now is the head of the Ponte Vecchio. This we do not affirm nor believe, forasmuch as it seems to us the opinion of pagans and soothsayers, and not to be reasonable, but very foolish, that such a stone should have such effect; but it was commonly said by the ancients, that, if it was disturbed, the city must needs have great disturbances. And it was said also by the ancients, that the Romans, by the counsel of the wise astrologers, at the beginning of the rebuilding of Florence, took the third degree of Aries as the ascendant, the sun being at his meridian altitude, and the planet Mercury in conjunction with the sun, and the planet Mars in favourable aspect to the ascendant, to the end the city might multiply in power of arms and of chivalry, and in folk eager and enterprising in arts and in riches and in merchandise, and should bring forth many children and a great people. And in those times, so they say, the ancient Romans and all the Tuscans and Italians, albeit they were baptized Christians, still preserved certain remains of the fashions of pagans, and began their undertakings according to the constellations; albeit, this we do not affirm of ourselves, forasmuch as constellations are not of necessity, nor can they constrain the free

801 A.D.

Inf. xiii. 146–150. Par. xvi. 145, 146.

Purg. xvi. 65–78. will of man or the judgment of God, save according to the merits or sins of folk. And yet, in some effects, meseems the influence of the said constellation is revealed, for the city of Florence is ever in great disturbances and plottings and in war, and now victorious and now the contrary, and prone to merchandise and to arts. But our opinion is that the discords and changes of the Florentines are as we said at the beginning of this treatise—our city was populated by two peoples, divers in every habit of life, as were the noble Romans and the cruel and fierce Fiesolans; for the which thing it is no marvel if our city is always subject to wars and changes and dissensions and treacheries.

Cf. Inf. xv. 73–78.

§ 2.—*Of the form and size in which the city of Florence was rebuilt.*

The rebuilding of the new city of Florence was begun by the Romans, as aforesaid, on a small site and circuit, after the same fashion as Rome, allowing for the smallness of the undertaking; and it began on the side of the sunrise at the gate of S. Piero, which was where were after the houses of M. Bellincione Berti, of the Rovignani, a noble and powerful citizen, albeit to-day they have disappeared; the which houses by inheritance of the Countess Gualdrada, his daughter, and wife to the first Count Guido, passed to the Counts Guidi, her descendants, when they became citizens of Florence, and afterwards they sold them to the Black Cerchi, a Florentine family; and from the said gate ran a borgo as far as S. Piero Maggiore, after the fashion of Rome, and from that gate the walls proceeded as far as the Duomo, on the site where now runs the great road leading to San Giovanni, as far as the Bishop's Palace. And here was another

Par. xv. 112.

Inf. xvi. 37.
Par. xvi. 97–99.

gate, which was called the gate of the Duomo, but there were who called it the Bishop's Gate; and without this gate was built the church of S. Lorenzo, just as in Rome there is S. Lorenzo without the walls; and within that gate is S. Giovanni, like as in Rome, S. Giovanni Laterano. And then proceeding, as at Rome, on that side they made Santa Maria Maggiore; and then from S. Michele Berteldi, as far as the third gate of S. Brancazio [S. Pancras], where are now the houses of the Tornaquinci, and S. Brancazio was without the city and near S. Paolo, just as in Rome, on the other side of the city over against S. Piero, as at Rome. And then from the said gate of S. Brancazio, they followed on where now is the church of Santa Trinità, which was without the walls; and hard by was a postern gate called the Porta Rossa, and down to our own times the road has retained the name. And afterward the walls turned where are now the houses of the Scali along the Via di Terma as far as the gate of Santa Maria, some way past the Mercato Nuovo, and that was the fourth principal gate, the which was over against the houses which now pertain to the Infangati, on one side; and above the said gate was the church of Santa Maria, called Sopra Porta; and afterwards when the said gate was pulled down, the city having increased, the said church was transported to where it now is. And the Borgo di Santo Apostolo was without the city, and also S. Stefano, after the fashion of Rome; and beyond S. Stefano, at the end of the master street of Porta Santa Maria, they made and built a bridge founded on piles of stone in the Arno, which afterwards was called the Ponte Vecchio, and it exists to this day; and was much more narrow than it now is, and was the first bridge which was made

Par. xvi. 123.

in Florence. And from S. Mary's Gate the walls went on as far as the turret of Altafonte, which was at the extremity of a projection of the city, running out to the river Arno, then running on behind the church of S. Piero Scheraggio, which was so called from a ditch or conduit called the Scheraggio, which received almost all the rain-water of the city that flowed into the Arno. And behind the church of S. Piero Scheraggio was a postern gate, which was called the Peruzza Gate, and from there the walls went on by the great street as far as the Via del Garbo, where was another postern, and then behind the Badia of Florence the walls returned to Porta S. Piero. And within so small a space the new Florence was rebuilt with good walls and frequent towers, with four master gates, to wit, the Porta San Piero, the Porta del Duomo, the Porta San Brancazio, and the Porta Santa Maria, the which were in the form of a cross; and in the midst of the city were S. Andrea, after the fashion of Rome, and Santa Maria in Campidoglio; and what now is the Mercato Vecchio was the Mercato di Campidoglio [Mart of the Capitol], after the fashion of Rome. And the city was divided into quarters, according to the said four gates; but afterwards, when the city increased, it was divided into six sestos, as being a perfect number, for the sesto of Oltrarno was added thereto, as soon as it was inhabited; and when the Porta di Santa Maria was pulled down, the name was dropped, and it was divided by the course of the main street, and on one side was made the sesto of San Piero Scheraggio, and on the other side that of the Borgo; and the three first gates continued to give their name to sestos, as they have done even to our own times. And they gave the sesto of Oltrarno the lead, to go forth with the host with the

Par. xvi. 124–126.

Cf. Par. xv. 97–99.

ensign of the bridge; and then San Piero Scheraggio with the ensign of the carroccio [chariot of war], the which marble carroccio was brought from Fiesole, and stands before the said church of S. Piero; and then Borgo with the ensign of the goat [becco], forasmuch as in that sesto abode all the butchers [beccari], and those of their calling, and they were in those times very prominent in the city; S. Brancazio next with the ensign of the lion's paw [branca], with reference to the name; and the Porta del Duomo next, with the ensign of the cathedral; Porta San Piero last, with the ensign of the keys, and seeing it was the first sesto inhabited in Florence, in the going forth of the host it was placed in the rear guard, forasmuch as in olden time there were always the best knights and men-at-arms of the city in that sesto.

§ 3.—*How Charles the Great came to Florence, and granted privileges to the city, and caused Santo Apostolo to be built.*

After that the new city of Florence had been rebuilt in the small circuit and form, and at the time aforesaid, the captains which were there in the name of the emperor and the commonwealth of Rome ordained that it should be peopled; and as of old at the first building the order went forth at Rome that of the best families of Rome, both of the nobles and the people, some should dwell as citizens in Florence, so was it at the second restoration; and to each one was given rich possessions. And we find in the Chronicles of France, that after the city of Florence was rebuilt after the manner aforesaid, the Emperor Charles the Great, king of France, when he was departed from Rome, and was returning North,

abode at Florence, and caused great festival and solemnity to be held on Easter Day of the Resurrec-
805 A.D. tion, in the year of Christ 805, and made many knights in Florence, and founded the church of Santo Apostolo in the Borgo, and this he richly endowed to the honour of God and of the Holy Apostles; and on his departure from Florence he granted privileges to the city, and declared the commonwealth and citizens of Florence to be free and independent, and for three miles around, without paying any tax or impost, save twenty-six pence yearly per hearth [*i.e.* per family]. And in like manner he enfranchised all the citizens around which desired to return and dwell within the city, and also strangers; for which thing many returned to dwell therein; and in a short time, by reason of the good situation and convenient spot, by reason of the river and of the plain, the said little Florence was well peopled and strong in walls, and in moats full of water. And they ordained that the said city should be ruled and governed after the manner of Rome, to wit, by two Consuls and by a council of 100 senators, and thus it was ruled long time, as hereafter shall be narrated. Verily, the citizens of Florence had for a long time much trouble and war, first from the Fiesolans, which were foes so nigh at hand, and they were ever jealous one of another, and were continually at war together; and afterwards from the coming of the Saracens into Italy in the time of the French emperors, as before has been narrated, which much afflicted the country; and last of all, from the divers disturbances which befell Rome and all Italy alike, from the discords of the Popes and of the Italian emperors, which were continually at war with the Church. For the which thing, the fame of the city of Florence and its

power abode by the space of 200 years, without being able to expand or increase beyond its narrow boundaries. But notwithstanding all the war and trouble, it was continually multiplying in inhabitants and in forces, nor did they much regard the war with Fiesole, or the other adversities in Tuscany; for albeit their power and authority extended but little way beyond the city, forasmuch as the country was all full of fortresses, and occupied by nobles and powerful lords which were not under obedience to the city, and some of them held with the city of Fiesole, nevertheless, within the city the citizens were united, and it was strong in position and in walls, and in moats full of water; and within the little city there were in a short time more than 150 towers pertaining to citizens, and each one 120 cubits high, without counting those pertaining to the city; and by reason of the height of the many towers which then were in Florence, it is said, that it showed forth from afar as the most beautiful and proudest city of its small size which could be found; and in this space of time it was very well peopled, and full of palaces and of houses, and great number of inhabitants, as times went. We will now leave for a time the doings of Florence, and will briefly relate concerning the Italian emperors, which were reigning in those times after the French ceased to be emperors; for this is of necessity, seeing that by reason of their lordship many disturbances came to pass in Italy; and afterwards we shall return to our subject.

§ 4.—*How and why the Empire of Rome passed to the Italians.* § 5.—*How Otho I. of Saxony came into Italy at the request of the Church, and did away with the government of the Italian emperors.* 901 A.D.

END OF SELECTIONS FROM BOOK III.