

through him, Orcagna was the pupil of Giotto. It is less obvious who taught him to paint; perhaps his brother Bernardo, as Vasari states; but, evidently, he combined Florentine and Siennese qualities, and at S. Maria Novella, he united the great maxims of Florentine composition, its dramatic force, with the Siennese tenderness, and practise of colour. In this, he marks a new phase of art. It was admitted in his own time,¹ that he was the greatest painter who had lived since Giotto; and though Taddeo Gaddi was inclined to believe that painting had declined after the death of his master, this was true only of himself and of those who, like him, were but humble imitators. Sacchetti has preserved the memory of a meeting of artists at S. Miniato, where, after a pleasant dinner and much drinking of wine, Orcagna, being at that time Capo Maestro of Orsanmichele, suggested as a subject for debate "who, setting aside Giotto, was the greatest master in painting". No one appears to have hinted that Orcagna was himself the person best entitled to election. Yet his name was no doubt at that time well known. He had painted the whole of the choir of S. Maria Novella for the family of the Ricci, a chapel and altarpiece in the same church for the Strozzi; he had furnished, in 1357, the model of the pillars for S. Maria del Fiore; he had been, in 1358, to Orvieto to superintend the mosaics of the cathedral, and had already commenced the carving of the statues and reliefs which were to ornament the tabernacle of Orsanmichele. He was an architect, a sculptor, a mosaist, and a painter, and even in those days, when artists were conspicuous for most varied acquirements, he might be considered as one gifted beyond the measure of his cotemporaries.

The records of S. Maria Novella are silent as to the period when Orcagna decorated the choir of that edifice,³ but Baldinucci authorizes us to believe that the frescos

¹ Sacchetti. ub. sup. Nov. CXXXVI. Vol II. p. 220. | in 1350, but supports his assertion with no proofs. Vide Vol. IV.

² Baldinucci says, this occurred | p. 395.