



Another Time When • Florence Was News

HISTORY is important, but it can make dull reading, so when our contributor, A.D.L., came into the office the other day and suggested that he should be allowed to describe a former battle for the city of Florence, using for the reader understanding of our readers the familiar language of the daily news-broadcasts and cable pages, we agreed on condition that he did not alter the essential historical facts. He had explained to us that conquering armies in the 16th century had advanced from the south, as the Allies have done, using as vantage points the same hills, and that a man whose name must surely be known to every one of our readers had taken a prominent part in the defence of the city—the chief engineer and designer of fortifications, Michelangelo.

Here, then, is a series of "news items." Our readers may believe, if they choose to, that these appeared in Florentine "newspapers" or that they were messages written inside the city by accredited war correspondents and BBC reporters in the years 1529-30. They are certainly authentic, even to dates, so far as the broad historical picture is concerned.

Florence, April, 1529

IT is reported by reliable spokesmen in Florence that a state of alarm exists among responsible citizens and members of the City Council. At a recent meeting of the Council, members emphasised the danger to the city from the Imperial Armies in the South. It was pointed out that the Pope, a member of the family of Medici, is in alliance with the Holy Roman Emperor, and hopes to restore Medici rule in Florence . . .

Florence, April, 1529

THE alarm felt by responsible citizens in Florence took practical form yesterday when, at a special meeting of the City Council, it was decided to appoint Michelangelo Buonarroti to the position of Chief Engineer, his duties being to design fortifications around the city and to supervise their construction.

The appointment was greeted with approval in the city to-day. Messer Michelangelo, while a poet and an artist, has a high reputation as an engineer . . .

Florence, May, 1529

THE form which the city's fortifications will take is no longer a secret, and correspondents were to-day granted an interview with the Chief Engineer, Michelangelo Buonarroti. It was true that the numerous hills to the south of the Arno afforded natural protection, the Chief Engineer said, but their usefulness was being increased by the erection of a stout wall with battlements, and a limited number of gates. . . .

Florence, July 21, 1529

THE people of Florence were yesterday instructed to provide themselves with stocks of food sufficient for an indefinite period. Official quarters are now making no secret of the possibility of a siege. Extra transport facilities are being arranged to enable the speedy accumulation of stocks of certain foods approved by the Emergency Health Committee.

Florence, July 21, 1529

WORK on the city's fortifications is being pushed forward with all possible speed. In a report submitted to the City Council by the Overseer of Works, it is stated that 3000 men are employed for almost 20 hours a day, including holidays. . . . Mercenary soldiers to the number of 10,000, under the command of General Malatesta, have been engaged to aid in the defence of the city. . . .

Florence, August, 1529

IN pursuance of the order issued on July 24, total destruction of the southern suburbs of Florence is now in progress. All dwellings outside the walls, and buildings which could be useful to the enemy are being demolished. . . .

What might have been a tragedy in the history of Florentine art was narrowly averted when members of a demolition gang engaged in obliterating the monastery of San Salvi halted in front of a painting by Andrea del Sarto. Before proceeding with their work

★ Giorgio Vasari's fresco showing Imperial armies attacking Florence from the south in 1529. The San Miniato Hill is well to the right (this side of the river) and Michelangelo's fortifying wall is clearly seen. Allied troops recently used these hills in the foreground, just as they were used in 1529. ★

they informed the Chief Engineer, Messer Michelangelo, who instructed them to destroy all the walls except the one bearing the painting.

Florence, September, 1529

EXCLUSIVE pigeon-messages received this week state that the town of Perugia is now in Imperial hands. . . . The implications of this reverse should not be minimised, according to well-informed circles. . . .

Florence, September, 1529

IT is reported in the city that representations were recently made to the Government by supporters of the Medici in favour of a negotiated peace. Indignation is being expressed at the activities of traitors within the walls, and the internment of persons known to speak with a Roman accent is being urged.

Florence, October, 1529

FLOWERS, wine, and kisses greeted the arrival of General Malatesta's force of mercenary soldiers this week. . . .

Florence, October, 1529

THE Chief Engineer, Michelangelo Buonarroti, made sensational allegations before the City Council this week. General Malatesta had, he declared, given nonsensical instructions for the positions of the cannon on San Miniato. The instructions were so absurd that they might have been issued by a traitor, the Chief Engineer went on. . . . Members of the Council, who had been guests of General Malatesta at a banquet at his headquarters a few hours previously, ridiculed the suggestion. . . . Yesterday morning it was learned that the Chief Engineer had left the city under cover of darkness with some friends, believing the cause of Florence to be lost. . . .

Florence, October, 1529

TRAITORS to the cause of Florence were recently discovered by General Malatesta's men driving spikes into the

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