

FLORENCE'S ART TREASURES



Saint John the Baptist, by Donatello (1386-1466) in stone, in the possession of the Museo Nazionale, Florence.

"There is rather a good story about some gunners from the 5th Field Regiment when we were moving up at dusk towards Florence. They arrived at their area, put the guns in, and went off to a nearby caza and bedded down on some handy looking beds which were leaning against the wall. They spent a very comfortable night, but were somewhat surprised when in the morning some old Italian gents arrived and began shouting and waving their arms. It turned out that the "beds" were pictures from galleries in Florence taken into the country for safety and deposited in this house. So far as we know, no damage was done to the paintings, but imagine a large Kiwi sticking his bottom through a Botticelli. Just like our fellows—they probably wouldn't have recognized it for what it was right way up in daylight."—Letter from a New-Zealander in Italy.

THE FIRST part of the article which follows was written by Sylvia Sprigge in the *Manchester Guardian Weekly* on August 18, 1944, when every one who knows Florence well was thinking of it and probably walking its streets and squares, its churches, cloisters, and galleries in imagination with a continual hope that the fighting would not develop into more than sniping and that the famous walls would never be shelled.

From a popular point of view, she wrote, the precious character of Rome was easier to convey. The first Emperors lived in Rome. The Pope lives in Rome, and Rome is a city with as many early pagan and Christian memories and traditions as Athens, Constantinople, or Jerusalem. In many other ways Rome is a modern city.

We should remember, though, that the Renaissance was born in Florence, not Rome. When the Turks overran Eastern Europe in 1453 and scholars and artists fled from Constantinople to the univer-