

the hero of Appomattox. In 1868, the nation awarded its hero the Presidency, a position for which Grant was sadly ill-suited. The graft and inefficiency of his administration became legend, and Grant's weak efforts to bring ex-slaves into the American mainstream revealed a flaw in character, a reluctance to take unpopular action. Elected by the common man, Grant was manipulated into backing economic policies (such as tight money) that made the Republican Party the bastion of established wealth. But his White House record was partly redeemed, in McFeyly's opinion, by his frank *Memoirs*, completed just a week before his death and regarded by historians as the best recollections ever penned by a U.S. President. Self-knowledge is of value—even when it comes too late.

**THE BUILDING
OF RENAISSANCE
FLORENCE:**

**An Economic and
Social History**
by Richard A. Goldthwaite
Johns Hopkins, 1981
459 pp. \$27.50



From *The Building
of Renaissance Florence*.

Prosperous and powerful, Florence of the early 15th century emerged supreme among the Tuscan city-states. A booming textile industry (wool and silk) and trade network extending from northern Europe to the Levant brought fortunes to many of its manufacturers, bankers, and merchants. With so many "agents of demand," writes Goldthwaite, a Johns Hopkins historian, a great local market for the decorative arts developed. The affluent citizen channeled his surplus wealth not only into bronzes and frescoes but also into monuments and palaces, believing, along with the Florentine engineer Alberti that "we erect great structures that our posterity may suppose us to have been great persons." Scrutinizing all aspects of the Florentine building industry—from patron to stonecutter—Goldthwaite shows how widely this great construction effort distributed the city's wealth, albeit slowly and unevenly. Workmen's wages tripled between the 14th and 16th centuries (though much of this increase was absorbed by rising food prices). Most prosperous artisans attained middle-class status, and architects, once considered simple craftsmen, now took their places, alongside Donatello and Botticelli, as artists.