

Brother Francis; Or, Less than the Least

Eileen Douglas



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All obvious punctuation errors were corrected.

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BROTHER FRANCIS

OR,
LESS THAN THE LEAST.

BY

BRIGADIER EILEEN DOUGLAS.

colophon

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PREFACE.

The following pages have been written by my request with a view to making the Soldiers of The Salvation Army somewhat familiar with the life-story of one of the most remarkable men this world has ever seen.

While many and varied will be the opinions respecting the methods employed by Francis of Assisi, and while some will doubtless strongly dissent from these methods, yet I think no serious follower of Jesus Christ can do otherwise than admire the sincerity, devotion and sacrifice of the man; and further, there can be, I think, no two opinions as to his having taught and manifested to the world what it means to be possessed entirely by the Saviour's spirit.

And what did that spirit produce? Surely it was the same entire devotion of our all to the service of God and humanity which we Salvationists daily teach. The difference between our spirit and that of the subject of this Memoir is, I trust, very slight, although the manifestations of it are widely diverse. We are quite as extreme in our demands as to poverty and solitude as he was, only that we do not value these things for their own sake as he did. We daily induce persons to leave earthly possessions and prospects in order to go and seek the salvation of the poor, amongst whom their future life is to be spent; and we require our Officers to consecrate all they have to the service of the Kingdom of God right through their career, and to live always in a state of readiness to be sent away from all they have known and loved—not, indeed, to live in any cloister or hermitage, but in the solitude amidst the crowd which must ever be more or less the lot of the highest leaders of men.

The system established by Francis was not adaptable to family life, whereas it is our joy to show how as complete a devotion to the good of others can be manifested by the father or mother, who spend most of their hours in toil for the support of those dependent upon them, as by the monks and nuns of old, even when they walked in entire harmony with the rules of their various orders.

We have demonstrated that most people by the very fact of their being engaged in business, and having to fulfil the duties of family life, acquire extra power to capture for God those who are still in the ranks of worldliness and selfishness.

Nevertheless, we must always expect God to require from time to time witnesses

who might step out of the ordinary path altogether in order to revolutionise the world for Him. It were better far to aspire to so high and holy a calling than to excuse in ourselves any less self-denial, any easier life than this man's boundless love to Christ constrained him to adopt.

It is most melancholy to reflect that Francis died almost broken-hearted over what he felt to be the unfaithfulness of his brethren. We believe that God has guided us to plans which, being consistent with the possibilities of modern human life, are capable of being carried out fully and always. But the vital question is the maintenance of that intense spirit of personal devotion to the good Shepherd and His lost sheep, which can alone render any such scheme of life possible. To that great end may this book minister, and God grant us grace and wisdom to raise up generation after generation of soldiers, who will not only drink in, but fully carry out that spirit.

WILLIAM BOOTH.

*International Headquarters,
London.*

BROTHER FRANCIS.

OR,

LESS THAN THE LEAST.



CHAPTER I.

ASSISI AND FRANCIS.

"Hands love clasped through charmèd hours,
Feet that press the bruised flowers,
Is there naught for you to dare,
That ye may his signet wear?"

You will not be likely to find Assisi marked on any ordinary map of Italy. It is far too unimportant a place for that. That is to say, geographically unimportant. Assisi lies half-way up the Appenines. The houses, which are built of a curious kind of rosy-tinted stone, press so closely together one above the other on the rocks, so that each house seems trying to look over its neighbours' head. The result of this is that from every window you have one of the grandest views in Europe. Above, the mountains tower into the sky, and yet they are not so close as to suggest crowding. Beneath lies stretched out the Umbrian plain, the centre and heart of Italy. With its rich harvests, plentiful streams and luxuriant vegetation, it might well be called the Eden of Italy.

The atmosphere is clear and transparent, and the nights, with their dark blue cloudless skies, studded with myriads of shining, sparkling stars, are better imagined than described!

Like a Prince.

It was midway up one of the narrow steep little streets, in one of those rosy-tinted houses, that Francis Bernardone was born, about six hundred years ago. Only he wasn't Francis just then. He was John. As a matter of fact there was no such name as Francis known in Assisi, and some think it was invented there and then for the first time by Pietro Bernardone.

When his baby was born, Pietro was far away, travelling in France. He was a merchant, and his business often took him away from home. As there were no letters or telegrams to tell him the news, it was not till he got back that he found he had a baby son, who had been duly christened John at the parish church. But Pietro had no idea of letting a little matter of this kind stand in his way, and he

told his wife, Pica, that the baby was not to be John, but Francis or Francesca. And Francis he was.

The neighbours didn't like it at all. Why should Pietro set himself up to be so much better than other folks that he must needs invent a name for his baby? In what was his baby better than any of theirs? And so forth. Oh, Assisi was a very natural little town! From his babyhood these neighbours sat in judgment on little Francis. There was nothing much about him that pleased them. They disapproved of his dress, which was rich and fine, and always according to the latest fashion; of his idle, free, careless ways, of his handsome face, of his superabundance of pocket-money.

"Your son lives like a prince," a neighbour said once to Pica.

"What is that to you!" retorted Pica, "our son does indeed live like a prince. Have patience, the day may come when he will live like the Son of God."

But in truth that day seemed long in coming, and the neighbours might well be forgiven when they said among themselves that young Francis Bernardone was being utterly spoiled. It was quite true. Frank, gay, good-tempered, easily led, fond of all kinds of beauty and soft living, the life of indulgence and ease and pleasure that he was brought up in was not the one that would best fit him for the battle of life. Pietro was rich, and he was also exceeding proud of his handsome gay son. It delighted him more than anything else to hear people say that he looked like a prince of royal blood, and he denied him nothing that money could procure.

Young Manhood.

As he grew up into young manhood, Francis nominally assisted his father in his business as cloth merchant. His duties, however, were very light, and he was known more as a leader among the gay youth of Assisi than as a rising business man. He was always chosen as the leader of the sumptuous feasts that the young men of that era wiled away the evening hours with. After the feast was over, Francis used to lead his band out into the streets, and there under those glorious starry skies they finished the night singing the then popular love songs of France and Italy. As Francis was intensely musical, and possessed a very fine voice, he was indispensable at these revelries.

He was almost twenty-five before he had his first serious thought. Up to then life had been an enchanted dream. Francis, with his handsome face, beautiful

courteous manners, and full pockets the centre of it. He had seen life outside Assisi, for he had fought for his country and suffered imprisonment. He had travelled a little, was fairly well educated, and what was rare in those days spoke and sang in the French language. Of God he seems to have had no knowledge whatever. His kindly, polite nature led him to much almsgiving, but that was merely the outcome of a disposition which hated to see suffering.

Francis' lack of religion is not much to be wondered at when we look at the state of the church in his time. Christianity had become old, its first freshness had worn off, and its primitive teaching had fallen into decay. A Christian's life was an easy one, and the service rendered was more of church-going and almsgiving, than purity of heart and life. In many instances those who filled the office of teacher and preacher were corrupt, and lived only for themselves, and the whole tendency of the times was to the most extreme laxity.

When almost twenty-five years old, Francis had a very severe illness. For weeks he lay at death's door, and for weeks after all danger was passed, he was confined to the house too weak to move. As his weary convalescence dragged itself along, one absorbing desire filled his mind. If only he could get out of doors, and stand once again in the sunshine, and feast his eyes on the landscape below him! Francis, like all Italians, was a passionate lover of his native country, and at last, one day, he wearily and painfully crawled out.

Things that Perish.

But what was the matter? The sunshine was there. It flooded the country. The breeze that was to bring him new life and vigor played among his chestnut curls. The mountains towered in their noble grandeur. The wide Umbrian plain lay stretched out at his feet. The skies were as blue, and the flowers as gay and sweet, as ever his fancy painted them. But the young man turned away with a sickening sense of disappointment and failure.

"Things that perish," he said mournfully to himself, and thought bitterly of his past life with its gaiety and frivolity. It, too, was among the "things that perish." Life was a dreary emptiness.

It was the old, old story. "Thou hast made us for Thyself, oh God, and the heart is restless till it finds its rest in Thee." That tide which flows at least once in the life of every human being was surging round Francis. Happy they who, leaving all else, cast themselves into the infinite ocean of the Divine will and design.



CHAPTER II.

A CHANGE.

"In this easy, painless life,
Free from struggle, care, and strife,
Ever on my doubting breast,
Lies the shadow of unrest;
This no path that Jesus trod—
Can the smooth way lead to God?"

As health returned, Francis determined that he would no longer waste his life. He had spent a quarter of a century in ease, and pleasure, and amusement. Now, some way or other, there should be a change. Religion to Francis meant acting up to all the duties of his church. This he had already done, and not for a moment did he dream that there was in what he called "religion" any balm for a sore and wounded spirit. It never occurred to him to seek in prayer the mind of the Lord concerning his future. Oh, no, it was many a long day before Francis knew the real meaning of the word prayer. He was convinced of his wrong, and determined to right it. That was as far as he had got. What to do was now the great question.

Just about this time, a nobleman of Assisi, Walter of Brienne, was about to start for Apulia, to take part in a war which was going on there. All at once it occurred to Francis that he would go too. He was naturally courageous, and visions filled his mind of the deeds he would do, and the honours that would be bestowed upon him.

He hastened at once to the nobleman and begged to be allowed to accompany him. Permission was granted, and Francis set about getting his outfit ready. His rich costume was far more splendid than that of Walter himself, and the trappings of his horse and his general accoutrements were all in keeping, so that altogether Francis was a very magnificent personage indeed!

A Voice.

A few nights before he started, he dreamed a strange dream. He was sleeping,

and he thought somebody called him out of his sleep.

"Francis, Francis," said a voice.

Then it seemed to Francis that he awoke and found himself in a vast armoury. All around him hung shields and spears and swords, and weapons of all kinds. But the most curious part of it was that each weapon was marked with a cross. In his heart he wondered what it could all mean, and as he was wondering, the voice answered his thoughts.

"These are for thee and for thy followers," it said, and then Francis awoke.

It was an age when dreams were counted of much importance, and Francis rejoiced over this of his. Heaven, he said to himself, had smiled upon his enterprise. God had undertaken to lead him by the hand, and to what heights could he not aspire! Dreams of earthly honor and distinction floated through his brain as he dressed, and when he went downstairs everybody asked what made him look so radiant.

"I have the certainty of becoming a great prince," he answered.

Yes, truly, he was to be a prince among men! Could he have seen then the rough road that God was preparing for him, would he have drawn back? Happily for us, we live a day at a time, and further than that our eyes are holden.

With a great deal of pomp and display, at the appointed time Francis mounted his horse and set off. But his journey was a short one. About thirty miles from Assisi he was taken ill with an attack of his life-long enemy—the fever—and forced to lie by. He chafed a good deal at this, and wondered and pondered over the mysterious actions of a Providence which had so manifestly sanctioned his expedition.

The Master or the Servant?

One evening he was lying half unconscious when he thought he heard the same voice that spoke to him before he started.

"Francis," it asked, "what could benefit thee most, the Master or the servant, the rich man or the poor?"

"The Master and the rich man," answered Francis in wonderment.

"Why, then," went on the voice, "dost thou leave God, Who is the Master and rich, for man, who is the servant and poor?"

"Then, Lord, what wilt Thou that I do?" queried Francis.

"Return to thy native town, and it shall be shown thee there what thou shalt do," said the voice.

It was characteristic of all Francis' after life that he never stopped to query what looked like contradiction of orders, but as soon as ever he was well enough he travelled back home again. His ambition for future greatness, and earthly distinction and honor, all seemed to be lost sight of when the Divine voice spoke. For Francis was convinced that God had spoken to him.

It was certainly not easy for a nature like his to return home whence a few short days before, he had departed with such pomp and glory. His father was not over rejoiced to welcome him back, but his friends, who worshipped him, "the flower of Assisi," as they called him, received him gladly. Things had been dull without Francis. His merry songs and jests were missed at the evening feast. For a time he took up the life he had quitted. There was nothing else to do as far as he could see. But he was changed. Even his companions were forced to own that. He sang, and laughed, and jested as usual, but the heart had gone out of his song and laughter, and he was prone to fall into deep fits of meditation.

It was a far from satisfactory life. He cared no longer for what was once his very existence, and he knew not as yet to what God would have him turn. He desired to serve God, and gave himself to almsgiving. He made a pilgrimage to Rome, only to be disgusted with the miserable offerings put into the treasury by the pilgrims.

Conflicts.

"Is this all they spare to God?" he cried, and pulling out his purse flung its contents among the rest.

He was tormented and haunted by recollections of his past mis-spent life, and for days he mourned over what was beyond recall.

There was a certain old woman in Assisi, horribly deformed and hideously ugly. Francis, with his innate love of the beautiful, recoiled in horror every time he met her. She was a nightmare to him, and he would go far to avoid seeing her.

The devil, who is ever ready to work on the weakness of a human soul, used this old woman to torture him.

"See," he said, "a picture of what you will become if you persist in mortifying yourself, and leading a life devoted to God. You will become as ugly and repulsive as that old woman in time."

The bare idea was agonizing to Francis. The old woman turned up continually, and seemed to pursue him like a phantom. The temptation may seem to stronger souls an ignoble one, but it was an intense and severe one to Francis. He conquered by yielding himself up to the will of God. He accepted everything—deformity, ugliness, pain—if it were God's plan for him. Then and only then had he rest.

As soon as he had given up his warlike ambitions and returned to Assisi, he had been in the habit of going off by himself into a cave or grotto, and there being alone with his thoughts. Many a conflict did that cave see, as Francis with tears and cries entreated the Lord to show him how best to employ his life. It was during one of these seasons that his spiritual eyes were opened. Hitherto he had followed blindly an almost unknown God, but he *had* followed and sought, and the end of his faith was sight.

It came upon him all at once. Christ—His love for the sinner, His love for him—Christ, bleeding, dying, suffering, for very love—Christ the pure, long-suffering, merciful, patient—Christ the Son of God made Man for us. A wave of great joy swept over Francis, and he wept for very gladness of heart. Here was his Master, his Lord. He had found Him, and henceforth following was easy.

The Lepers.

Not one of the many translations of the life of Francis, omits to mention his self-imposed mission to the lepers. Assisi, like most foreign towns of the age, was infested with lepers. They were not allowed to live in the towns, but had houses (lazaretti) built for them quite outside. Francis had a deep-rooted repugnance to a leper, and, in passing a lazaretto, always carefully covered up his nose lest any bad odour might reach him, and he always rode far away in the opposite direction, if he chanced to see one in the plains. Nothing shows the change in Francis more than his alteration towards the lepers. One day, when out riding, he saw a leper approaching. His first instinct was his natural one to get away at once. His second, that God required something more of him. Who was he, to

loathe and avoid a fellow-creature. Riding up to the leper, he dismounted, gave him some money, and then without a shudder, kissed the dreadful hand held out to him. He had done the impossible, and from this time he constantly visited the lazaretti, putting himself in personal contact with the lepers, giving them money, and doing all he could to lessen their sufferings.

Of this period of his experience he writes long years after:—

"When I was in sin it was very bitter to me to behold lepers, but the Lord Himself having led me amongst them, I exercised mercy towards them, and when I left them I felt that what had seemed so bitter to me was changed into sweetness for my soul and body."



CHAPTER III.

A LONELY STRUGGLE.

"Thou must walk on, however man upbraid thee,
With Him who trod the winepress all alone:
Thou may'st not find one human hand to aid thee,
One human soul to comprehend thy own."

A rough, stony uphill path, or rather track, under grey-green olive trees, leading to a perfect tangle of cypresses and pines. Somewhere in the tangle of cypresses almost hidden from sight, lay a dilapidated ancient church, which, long ago had been dedicated to the martyr Damian. Up this stony track one day, stumbled Francis.

His was now a solitary life. He was a complete puzzle to parents and friends, and, indeed to a great extent he was a puzzle to himself. His life in his father's house was far from pleasant. Pietro's vanity had received a serious blow from what he regarded as his son's "ignominious" return to Assisi. He had been more than willing to give him ample means for every pleasure, so that he might mingle on an equal footing with the young nobles of the land, but to see his money given lavishly to the beggars in the street, and the lepers in the lazarettos was more than he could stand. A serious, ever widening breach had formed between father and son. Pica, poor woman, knew that, sooner or later, a rupture would come, and much as she loved her strange son, she could do nothing to prevent it. There was literally no one who could comprehend Francis, much less render him any spiritual aid. One faithful companion there had been, who used to follow him round into the woods when he went to pray, and stand at the doors of caves and grottos until his season of meditation was over, but after a time, this friend had been obliged to leave him. Francis tried timidly to tell people a little of what God was dimly revealing to him, but his—to them—vague ideas only resulted in mocking smiles, and assurances that he was rapidly becoming stark, staring mad! So had things come about, that in spite of himself, Francis was thrown entirely and solely upon his new found Lord.

The cross lay heavy upon him that day, as he stumbled up the tiny olive-shaded path, and lit upon the almost ruined church. This was a direction Francis seldom walked in, but to-day he had been so occupied with his thoughts, that he scarcely knew where he was going. Seeing the church, he passed in and knelt to pray.

"Great and glorious God," was his prayer; "and Thou, Lord Jesus, I pray Thee, shed abroad Thy light in the darkness of my mind. Be found of me, Lord, so that in all things I may act only in accordance with Thy holy will."

As he prayed, little by little a sense of peace, and a new feeling of acceptance took possession of him. He had known before that God had pardoned him for the past, and was keeping him in the midst of trials and hourly temptations, but this was something quite different. Jesus accepted him, individually, his body as well as his soul, his time, talents, all his being, and desired his labour and assistance. The poor, lonely, crushed heart, was filled to overflowing. He was conscious of a distinct union with Christ. From this time forth, he was to know what it meant to be crucified with Christ—to die daily.

As he knelt there among the ruins and decay, it seemed to him that a voice spoke to his soul thus—

"Francis, dost thou see how my house is falling into ruins? Go and set thyself to repair it."

"Most willingly, Lord," he answered, hardly knowing what he said.

For the Benefit of St. Damian's.

Now, respecting the incidents we are about to relate, there are many and various theories. Some say the revelation made to Francis, referred to the spiritual work to which he had not as yet received his call, others there are, who blame him and call him rash and hot-headed, and accuse him of running before he was sent. We are not prepared to give judgment one way or the other. God has not promised us that we shall never make mistakes, and if Francis made a mistake, God certainly over-ruled it, and made it work to His glory, as He has promised "all things" to work for those who love Him. Again, God has His own ways of working, mysterious and curious though they often seem to us, and what looks like "the foolishness of men," often redounds to His greatest praise. But to return to what really happened.

Francis rose from his knees, and sought the priest who had charge of St.

Damian's. He pressed all the money he had about him into his hands, begged him to buy oil and keep the lamp always burning, then rushed off home. Saddling his horse, he loaded it with the most costly stuffs he could find, and rode off into a neighbouring town, where they found a ready market, and realized a goodly sum. When his stuff was all sold, he disposed of his horse too, and returning on foot to St. Damian's, he placed a well-filled purse in the priest's hands, told him with much satisfaction what he had done, and begged him to have the church restored at once. To his utter consternation, the priest refused, saying he dare not take so large a sum unless Pietro Bernardone approved.

Poor Francis was in despair. He flung the money on a window seat in disgust, and begged the priest at least to give him a shelter for a few days. That much bewildered man, hardly knowing what to say or do, consented, and Francis took up his abode with him.

But not for long. Pietro, when he found his son did not return home as usual, made enquiries and found where he was located. He was very anxious and uneasy, as he was sure now that his son was afflicted by a religious mania, he would have to renounce all the high hopes he had formed for him. However, he resolved to make a determined effort to recover him, and set out with a large party of friends to storm St. Damian's. They hoped that Francis would listen to reason, and consent to follow them back quietly to Assisi.

A Lonely Struggle.

But Francis never waited to receive them. An uncontrollable fear took possession of him, and he fled and hid himself in a cavern he alone knew of. His father's party ransacked the priest's abode, and all the country round, but they had to return home baffled.

For a month, Francis remained shut up in the cavern. An old servant who loved him dearly, was let into the secret, and used to bring him food. During this month he suffered intensely. It was the first time in his life he had ever suffered contradiction—the first time in his life he had ever had anyone really, openly opposed to him. To be sure, people did not understand him, but they had never shown him any animosity. A sense of utter failure oppressed him. It was a hard trial to one of his temperament, and if his consecration had not been very real, he would never have stood the test.

He wept and prayed, and confessed his utter nothingness, his weakness, his

inability to accomplish anything of himself. Never in his life had he felt weak and incapable before. Then humbly he entreated that God would enable him to accomplish His will, and not permit his incapacity to frustrate God's designs for him. A consciousness of Divine strength was manifested to him as never before. It was as if a voice said, "I will be with thee, fear not." Strengthened with a strength he never knew heretofore, he came out of the cavern and made straight for his father's house.

That day as Pietro Bernardone sat at work indoors, the voice of a mighty tumult was borne in to him. Such a clamour, and yelling, and shouting he never had heard in Assisi in all his time! Rushing upstairs he looked out of the window. It seemed as though the entire populace had turned loose, and were buffeting someone in their midst.

"A madman, a madman," yelled the crowd, and sticks and stones and mud flew from all sides.

"A madman, a madman," echoed the children.

Determined not to lose the fun, Pietro hastened out into the street, joined the crowd, and discovered that his son Francis was the madman in question! With a howl of rage, he rushed upon him, dragged him into the house with oaths and blows, and locked him up in a sort of dungeon.

During the succeeding days, he and his wife did all they could to persuade Francis to return to his old mode of life. Pietro entreated and threatened, Pica wept and caressed, but all in vain.

A Command from God.

"I have received a command from God," was their answer, and "I mean to carry it out."

At last, after some time, Pietro being absent for several days on business, Pica unlocked the dungeon and let her son go free.

When Pietro returned, he cursed his wife and set off to St. Damian's to fetch Francis back. But Francis declined to go. He said that he feared neither blows nor chains, but God had given him a work to do, and nothing, nor nobody would prevent him carrying out that mission. Pietro was struck by his son's coolness, and seeing that force would be no use, he went to the magistrates and lodged a

complaint against his son, desiring the magistrates to recover the money that his son had given to the church, and to oblige him to renounce in legal form all rights of inheritance. The magistrates seem to have been much shocked at Pietro's harshness, but they summoned Francis, who would not appear. When asked to use violence, they said—

"No, since your son has entered God's service, we have nothing to do with his actions," and utterly refused to have anything further to do with the case.



CHAPTER IV.

VICTORY WITHOUT AND WITHIN.

"For poverty and self-renunciation
The Father yieldeth back a thousand-fold;
In the calm stillness of regeneration,
Cometh a joy we never knew of old."

Pietro was not avaricious. He cared nothing for the money as money. His plan now was to cut off all supplies, and when his son, who had always been accustomed to the daintiest and softest of living, and was in no way inured to hardship, found that he was now literally a beggar, he would, after a little privation, come to his senses, and sue his father for pardon. This was his idea when he sought the bishop and made his complaint to him. The bishop called Francis to appear before him.

On the appointed day he appeared with his father. The venerable bishop, who was a man of great good sense and wisdom, heard all there was to hear, and then turning to the young man, he said—

"My son, thy father is greatly incensed against thee. If thou desirest to consecrate thyself to God, restore to him all that is his."

He went on to say that the money was not really Francis', and therefore he had no right to give away what was not his, besides God would never accept money that was an occasion of sin between father and son. Then Francis rose and said—

"My lord, I will give back everything to my father, even the clothes I have had from him!"

Returning into a neighbouring room, he stripped off all his rich garments, and clad only in a hair under-garment, laid them and the purse of money at his father's feet.

One Father.

"Now," he cried, "I have but one father, henceforth I can say in all truth "Our

Father who art in Heaven!"

There was a moment of dead silence. Everybody present was too astonished to speak, then Pietro gathered up the garments and money, and withdrew. A murmur of pity swept through the crowd as they looked at the young man standing half-naked before the tribunal. But no sentiments of pity stirred Pietro. Easy and good-natured when things went according to his liking, he was equally hard and unbending if his will was crossed. It was to him a rude awakening out of a glorious, golden dream, and from his standpoint life looked hard.

When Pietro departed the old bishop threw his own mantle round the young man's shoulders, and sent out for some suitable garment. Nothing, however, was forthcoming except a peasant's cloak belonging to one of the gardeners. This Francis gladly put on and passed out of the bishop's hall—a homeless wanderer on the face of the earth.

He was not inclined to return to St. Damian's at once. He desired solitude, so he plunged into the woods. As he travelled he sang with all his might praises to God in the French tongue. His singing attracted the notice of some robbers who were hidden in the fastness of the woods. They sprang out and seized him, demanding —

"Who are you?"

Francis always courteous replied,

"I am the herald of the Great King. But what does that concern you?"

The robbers laughed at him for a madman, and after they had made game of him for a time, they tore his garment from his back, and tossing him into a deep ditch where a quantity of snow still lay, they made off crying,

"Lie there, you poor herald of the Good God!"

When they had disappeared Francis scrambled out stiff with cold and clad only in his one garment, and went on his way singing as before.

Kitchen Assistant.

Happily his wanderings speedily brought him to a monastery among the mountains. He knocked at the door and begged for help. The monks regarded this strange half-naked applicant with much suspicion, and one can hardly blame

them. Nevertheless they received him, and gave him employment in their kitchen as assistant to the cook, to do the rough and heavy work. His food was of the commonest and coarsest, and it never seemed to occur to any of them that he would be the better for a few more clothes. When his solitary garment appeared in imminent danger of dropping to pieces he left the monastery and went on a little further to a neighbouring town where a friend of his lived. He made his way to this friend and asked him out of charity to provide him with a worn garment to cover his nakedness. The case was manifestly an urgent one, and the friend bestowed upon him a suit of clothes consisting of a tunic, leather belt, shoes, and a stick. It was very much the kind of costume then worn by the hermits.

From here he started back again to St. Damian's. He stopped on his way to visit a lazar-house, and help in the care of the lepers. He had quite gotten over all his early antipathies, and it was a joy to him now to minister to those poor diseased ones. Probably he would have spent a much longer season here if it were not that again he seemed to hear the same voice calling him to repair the ruined church. So he left the lazar-house and proceeded on his way. He told his friend the priest that he was in no way disappointed or cast down, and that he had good reason to believe that he would be able to accomplish his purpose.

There was only one way in which he could attain this end. Money he had none, neither did he know of anyone who loved God and His cause well enough to expend a little of their riches in rebuilding His house. Next day saw him at work. Up and down the streets of his native town he went begging for stones to rebuild St. Damian.

"He who gives me one stone shall receive one blessing, he who gives me two will have two blessings, and he who gives me three, three blessings."

"He is quite Mad."

The people were unable to do anything at first from pure astonishment. Francis Bernardone, the gay cavalier, the leader of feasts and song, suing in the streets like a common beggar! They could hardly believe their eyes! "Truly the fellow was mad," they said to each other! But he did not look mad. His smile was as sweet as ever, and the native, polished, courtly manners that had won for him so many friends, now that they were sanctified, were doubly winning. It was impossible to resist him, and stones were brought him in quantities. Load after load, interminable loads he bore on his back like a labourer to St. Damian. Up the steep little path he toiled between the grey green olives, on and into the tangle of cypress and pine, and there stone by stone with his own hands he repaired the crumbling walls. It was a long wearisome toilsome work, and told considerably on his health.

"He is *quite* mad," reiterated some as the days passed from spring to summer, and from summer to autumn and from autumn into winter again. But there were others who watched him with tears in their eyes. *They* knew he was not mad. They realized that a great power had changed the once refined man into a servant of all—even the constraining power of the love of Christ, and they shed tears when they thought how far they came short.

The priest of St. Damian's was deeply touched at Francis' self-sacrificing work, and often grieved when he saw him doing what he was physically so unfitted for. He conceived a violent admiration for his young lodger, and in spite of his poverty he always contrived to have some dainty dish, or tit-bit for him when he returned to meals. Now Francis always had been particular as to his food, he liked it well served, and he was also very fond of all kinds of sweets and confectionery. For a time he thanked his friend and ate gratefully the pleasant dishes he had provided. One day as he sat at dinner the thought came to him "what should I do if I had nobody to provide my meals." Then he saw for the first time that he was still under bondage to his appetite. He enjoyed nice food, it seemed necessary to him—but was it like that Life he so earnestly strove to copy. Francis sat condemned. The next moment he jumped up and seizing a wooden bowl he went round the streets from door to door begging for scraps of broken meat and bread. The people stared harder than ever, but in a little time his bowl was quite full, and he returned home and sat down to eat his rations.

A Beggar.

He tried hard, but he turned against them with loathing. In all his life he thought he had never seen such a horrid collection! Then, lifting his heart to God, he made another trial and tasted the food. Lo and behold it was not bad, and as he continued his coarse meal he thought that no dish had ever tasted better! Praising God for victory he went to the priest and told him that he would be no further expense to him, from henceforth he would beg his meals.

When Pietro heard that his son had added to his eccentricities by begging for his food his anger knew no bounds! When he met him in the streets he blushed with shame, and often cursed him. But if his family were ashamed of him, there were many among the townsfolk with whom he found sympathy. Help came in on all sides, and at last the walls were repaired, and the church was no longer in danger of tumbling into a mass of ruins. What was needed for the inside was got in the same way as the stones, and pretty soon a congregation was forthcoming.

One of the hardest sacrifices God required from Francis connected with this work was one evening when he was out begging from house to house for oil to light the church. He came to a house where an entertainment was going on, a feast very similar to those he had so often presided over in his worldly days. He looked down on his poor common dress, and thought with shame what a figure he would cut among the gay, well-dressed crowd within. For a moment he felt tempted to skip this house. But it was only for a moment; reproaching himself bitterly, he pushed in and standing before the festive gathering, told them simply how much he had objected to coming in, and for what reason, adding that he feared his timidity was counted to him as sin, because he was working in God's name, and in His service. His request was taken in good part, and his words so touched all present that they were eager to give him the aid he sought.

St. Damian's Finished.

After St. Damian's was quite restored, Francis set to work and did the same for two other equally needy churches in the vicinity. One was St. Peter's, and the other St. Mary's or the Portiuncula. The second one became eventually the cradle of the Franciscan movement. Here he built for himself a cell, where he used to come to pour out his soul in prayer. When his work of repairing came to an end, he gave himself up to meditation, his whole idea being that he would henceforth lead the life of a recluse. But God disposed!

CHAPTER V.

FRANCIS' CALL.

"Oh, my Lord, the Crucified,
Who for love of me hast died,
Mould me by Thy living breath,
To the likeness of Thy death,
While the thorns Thy brows entwine,
Let no flower wreath rest on mine."

But Francis kept a listening ear. God's word was his law, and though he to a certain extent planned what he would do next, yet he left himself entirely free in his Lord's hands, and at His disposal. Had he not remained in this attitude of soul, or had he become wise in his own conceits, or failed to keep his heart and soul fresh with the first vital freshness of regeneration, what would have become of the great Franciscan movement that was destined ultimately to stir the world? God alone knows. *He* keeps count of lost opportunities, calls neglected, soul stirrings lulled to barren fruitless slumber!

The natural tendency of a soul which has been awakened to great action, and accomplished daring feats, is—the first strain passed—to relax, or settle down. It is only the minority that struggle and fight and get the victory over this subtle temptation. The same principle applies in a larger scale, and that is why it is so many glorious religious movements have run a course and then dwindled into mediocrity, the later disciples carving for themselves a medium way.

Francis' life-work might easily have dwindled into nothing just here. He had not the least intimation that the Lord demanded anything more of him but that he should love and serve Him all the days of his life, in an ordinary unobtrusive manner. Two years had been spent in repairing the churches, and Francis was now between twenty-seven and twenty-eight years of age.

His Commission.

It was on the twenty-fourth of February in the year 1209 that he received his call to direct spiritual work. That morning he went to church as usual, and the words

of the Gospel for the day came to him direct from Jesus Christ Himself.

"Wherever ye go preach, saying, 'The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils. Freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither silver nor gold nor brass in your purses, neither scribe, nor two coats, nor shoes, nor staff, for the laborer is worthy of his hire.'"

These words were a revelation.

"This is what I want," cried Francis, as he left the church, conscious for the first time that he had wanted something. "This is what I have long been seeking, from this day forth I shall set myself with all my strength to put it in practice."

Immediately he took up his new commission. He threw away his shoes, his stick, his purse, and put on the coarse dress of the peasant of the Apennines, and girded it with a rough piece of rope, the first thing he could find. Thus equipped, he set out a true Knight of our Lord Jesus Christ, and for the first time in his life began to talk to the people he met about their souls. That eloquent fiery tongue, that was destined to make him one of the orators of the age, had not yet become unloosed, and Francis was simplicity itself. Indeed, he did not at first attempt to make anything like a speech or sermon. His efforts were directed towards people whom he was acquainted with, and these he urged to repent in the name of the Lord. He told his own experience, and spoke of the shortness of life, of punishment after death, of the need of heart and life holiness. His halting words struck home, they pierced like a sword, and many thus convicted, repented and turned from their evil ways.

A Sanctified Leader of Men.

For over two years now, Francis had lived a solitary, and—humanly speaking—a lonely life. He had, however, during that time proved the sufficiency of God. We do not read that he ever longed for a human friend, one that could understand and sympathise with him, so richly had God supplied his every need. But the time had come when his solitude was to end. God was about to raise him up friends. Again he was to take up his old position as a leader of men, only a sanctified one.

Bernardo di Quintavelle was a man of birth and position. He was a few years older than Francis, and as he lived in Assisi, he had full opportunity of watching all Francis' vagaries, for so his actions looked to him at first. However, as time passed, and Francis' supposed mania failed to develop into anything very

dangerous, Bernardo puzzled and wondered. What was it, he asked himself, that had so completely changed the gay, frivolous, ease-loving Francis Bernardone, into a poor hard-working beggar? Was he really as good and holy as the common people began to whisper to themselves? We must bear in mind that vital religion in Assisi was at its lowest ebb, and the kind that worked itself out in daily life and action almost unknown.

Pretty soon Bernardo determined to study Francis close to. Again and again he invited him to his house, and the more he saw of the gracious, humble, God-fearing, Francis, the more he liked him. One night he asked him to stay till the next day, and Francis consenting, he had a bed made up for him in his own room. They retired. In a short time Bernardo was, to all appearances, extremely sound asleep. Then Francis rose from his bed, and kneeling down began to pray. A deep sense of the Divine presence overflowed him, and he could do nothing but weep and cry, "Oh, my God, oh, my God!" He continued all night praying, and weeping before the Lord.

Bernardo.

Now Bernardo, who was only pretending to be asleep in order to see what Francis would do, was greatly touched. God visited him too that night, and spoke to his soul so loudly and clearly that he dare not do ought but follow the light that that night began to glimmer on his future path. Little he thought into what a large place it would ultimately lead him.

Next morning, true to his new-born inspiration, he said to Francis—

"I am disposed in my heart to leave the world and obey thee in all that thou shalt command me."

To say that Francis was surprised is to say too little! He was astonished—so astonished that it was difficult to find words in which to answer. That the people he influenced would rise up and desire to share his life, with its privations, and eccentricities had never as yet occurred to him. His sole and only aim had been that his every individual act and thought should be in conformity to that of our Lord Jesus Christ. But "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me," and Francis, by his humble life and work, had brought that Blessed Life wherever he went. This is the Divine design for every faithful soul that seeks to truly follow its Master. The man who could live and spread holiness as an ordinary day-laborer and stone-mason was now to receive a greater charge. As soon as he

recovered from the first surprise of Bernardo's statement, he said—

"Bernardo, a resolution such as the one thou speakest of is so difficult, and so great an action, that we must take counsel of the Lord Jesus, and pray Him that He may point out His will, and teach us to follow it."

So they set off together for the church. While on their way there that morning they were joined by another brother called Pietro, who said that he too had been told of God to join Francis. So the three went together to read the Gospels and pray for light.

Francis was soon convinced that Bernardo and Pietro were led of God, and joyfully welcomed them as his fellow-laborers. They took up their abode in a deserted mud hut, close by a river known as the Riva Torto. And that mean little hut was the cradle which contained the beginning of a work that spread itself into every quarter of the globe.

Egidio.

"Francis," said Bernardo, a little later, "What wouldst thou do supposing a great king had given thee possessions for which thou afterwards hadst no use?"

"Why, give them back to be sure," answered Francis.

"Then," said Bernardo, "I will that I sell all my possessions, and give the money to the poor."

So he did. Land, houses, all that he possessed he sold, and distributed the proceeds to the poor in the market-place. One can easily imagine the sensation this caused in Assisi, and how almost the entire population thronged to the spot!

The news of this day's doings spread into all the country-side. In a town not far from Assisi, a certain young man, called Egidio, listened intently while his father and mother discussed Bernardo and Francis and went into their history past and present, and speculated on their future. Little they thought as they talked that their cultured, refined son was drinking in every word, and that his soul was being strangely stirred. Before the week was out, Egidio had received the Divine touch that fitted him to respond to the call—"Follow Me." In the marvellously colored dawn of an Italian morning, Egidio rose and "followed."

Arriving in Assisi at a crossway he was at a standstill. Where should he look for Francis? Which of those roads should he take? While he thus alternately debated

with himself, and prayed for guidance, who should he see coming along out of the forest where he had been to pray, but Francis himself! There was no mistaking that curious bare-footed figure, with its coarse robe of the color known to the peasants as "beast" color, girded with a knotted rope! Egidio threw himself at Francis' feet, and besought him to receive him for the love of God.

"Dear brother," said Francis, who during the past week had learned not to be surprised when he received candidates for his work. "Dear brother, God hath conferred a great grace upon thee! If the Emperor were to come to Assisi and propose to make one of its citizens his knight or secret chamberlain, would not such an offer be joyfully accepted as a great mark of honor and distinction? How much more shouldst thou rejoice that God hath called thee to be His Knight and chosen servant, to observe the perfection of His Holy Gospel! Therefore do thou stand firm in the vocation to which God hath called thee."

First Apostolic Tour.

So bringing him into the hut Francis called the others and said—

"God has sent us a good brother, let us therefore rejoice in the Lord and eat together in charity."

After they had eaten breakfast Francis took Egidio into Assisi to get cloth to make him a "beast-colored" uniform robe like the others. On the way Francis thought he would like to try the young man and see what kind of a spirit he had. So upon meeting a poor woman, who asked them for money, Francis said to Egidio—

"I pray you, as we have no money, give this poor woman your cloak."

Immediately and joyfully Egidio pulled off his rich mantle and handed it to the beggar, whereat Francis rejoiced much in secret.

It was a united household that assembled under the rude roof of the mud hut by the Riva Torto. Four young men bound together in love, and resolved to serve God absolutely in whatever way He should show them, we shall see, ere long, how God used these human instruments which were so unreservedly placed at His disposal. They were very happy for a few days, and gave themselves up almost entirely to prayer; then Francis led them into the seclusion of the woods and explained to them how the Divine will had manifested itself to his soul.

"We must," he said, "clearly understand our vocation. It is not for our personal salvation only, but for the salvation of a great many others that God has mercifully called us. He wishes us to go through the world, and by example even more than by words, exhort men to repentance, and the keeping of the commandments." Bernardo, Pietro and Egidio declared that they were willing for anything, and so the four separated, two by two, for a preaching tour. Of Bernardo and Pietro history is silent, but nothing could have been more simple than the Apostolic wanderings of Francis and Egidio in the Marches of Ancona. Along the roads they went wherever the Spirit of God led them singing songs of God and Heaven. Their songs together with their happy countenances and strange costume, naturally attracted the people, and when a number would collect to stare at them, Francis would address them, and Egidio, with charming simplicity accentuated all he said with—

A Sermonette.

"You must believe what my brother Francis tells you, the advice he gives you is very good." But don't for a moment imagine that Francis was capable of giving an address. Far from it; he was, truth to say, very little in advance of Egidio, the burden of his cry being—

"Love God, fear Him, repent and you shall be forgiven;" then when Egidio had chorused,

"Do as my brother Francis tells you, the advice he gives you is very good," the two missionaries passed singing on their way!

But the impression produced was far beyond their simple words. The religious history of the times tells us that the love of God was almost dead in men's hearts, that the world had forgotten the meaning of the word repentance, and was entirely given up to lust and vice and pleasure. People asked each other what could be the object these men had in view. Why did they go about roughly-clad, bare-foot, and eating so little. "They are madmen" some said. Others "Madmen could not talk so wisely." Others again, more thoughtful, said, "They seem to care so little for life, they are desperate, and must be either mad, or else they are aspiring to very great perfection!"

When the four had been through almost all the Province they returned to Riva Torto, where they found three new candidates clamoring for admission. Others followed, and when the numbers had increased to about eight, Francis led them

to a spot where four roads met, and sent them out two and two to the four points of the compass to preach the Gospel. Everywhere they went they were to urge men to repentance, and point them to a Saviour who could forgive sins. They were to accept no food they had not either worked for, or received as alms for the love of Christ.



CHAPTER VI.

FRANCIS' EARLY DISCIPLES.

'Then forth they went....
Content for evermore to follow him. In weariness,
In painfulness, in perils by the way,
Through awful vigils in the wilderness,
Through storms of trouble, hatred and reproach.'

Bernardo di Quintavelle is perhaps the most important of these first followers, inasmuch as he ultimately took his place as Leader of the Order of Friars minor, which was the name the Franciscans first gave themselves. We have already told how Bernardo came to join Francis, and take upon himself the same vows. From that day his faith and trust in God and His call to him never wavered. That was the secret of his tremendous strength of soul. The strength of a man who is sure of his call and its divinity is as the strength of ten.

It was Bernardo whom Francis deputed in the early days of the work to go to Bologna, and labor there. Bologna was the centre of the universe, as far as learning and culture went, to the Italians of that day. As soon as Bernardo and his followers showed themselves in the town, the children, seeing them dressed so plainly and poorly, laughed and scoffed, and threw dirt and stones at them. They accepted these trials manfully, and made their way to the market-place. The children, who followed them here continued to pelt them with stones and dust, and pulled them round by the hoods of their garments. Day after day, and day after day, Bernardo and his little handful returned, though they could never get anybody to give them a civil hearing. Poor fellows, during those first few days, they all but starved.

A Great Saint!

There was a doctor of the law, who used to pass round by the market-place every day, and seeing Bernardo patiently put up with such insult and contempt, wondered much to himself. At last he arrived at a conclusion.

"This man must be a great saint."

Going up to him, he said—

"Who art thou, and whence dost thou come?"

Bernardo put his hand into his bosom, and gave him what was then the rules of the Order. This was in other words the Divine commission that Francis had received through the Gospel for that February day, "Go ye forth and preach the gospel, &c."

The doctor read it all through and then, turning to some of his friends who were standing by, said—

"Truly, here is the most perfect state of religion I have ever heard of; this man and his companions are the holiest men I have ever met with in this world! Guilty indeed are those who insult him! We ought, on the contrary, to honor him as a true friend of God!"

Then addressing Bernardo, he said—

"If it is thy wish to found a convent in this town, in which thou mayst serve God, I will most willingly help thee."

Bernardo thanked him, and said—

"I believe it is our Saviour Jesus Christ who hast I inspired thee with this good intention, I most willingly accept the offer, to the honor of Christ."

Then the doctor took them home with him and entertained them, and presented them with a convenient building, which he furnished at his own expense.

In a short time, Bernardo was much sought after, on account of the holiness, together with the brilliancy of his sermons. The whole town was at his feet, people came from far and near to hear him, and thousands were converted.

When things were at a height, Bernardo turned up unexpectedly one day in Assisi, and presented himself before the astonished gaze of Francis.

"The convent is founded at Bologna," he said, "send other brothers there to keep it up, I can no longer be of any use; indeed, I fear me that the too great honors I receive might make me lose more than I could gain."

Francis, who had heard a great deal of the honor and praise that had been lavished upon Bernardo, thanked God that He had revealed to him the danger his

soul was in, and sent someone else to Bologna.

Elias.

In striking contrast to Bernardo was Elias. Elias was quite as clever and brilliant a man as Bernardo, but he never seems to have become really sanctified. His pride was a constant stumbling-block, and was for ever appearing in some new shape or other. Sometimes it would be in an over-weening desire to rule, and then his rule would go far and beyond that of Francis', in fastings, and similar austerities. Again, we have a picture of him arraying himself in a garment of soft cloth, which could only be said to be "modelled" after that worn by his brethren. Finally, he lapsed altogether, declared that his health was too delicate to stand coarse food and plain living, and left the Order. For some time he was an open backslider, but it is currently supposed he was converted before he died. The story of his life is a sad one. Looking back over these lapse of years, one can easily see what he might have been, and how painfully he fell short. The grace of humility never adorned his character for long. He could not see that in God's sight he was less than least, for him it was impossible—

"To lay his intellectual treasure,
At the low footstool of the Crucified."

Egidio always remained faithful to his first trust. He also never wavered, never looked back. In the different glimpses we get of his life, we see very clearly the mode of living prescribed by Francis. His intention was never that his disciples were to live on charity, but that they should work for their bread, money being totally forbidden. Work brought them down to the level of the common people, and on the same plane they could more easily reach their hearts and consciences.

A Question.

Egidio, refined and educated though he undoubtedly was, seems to have been able to put his hand to anything. When on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, he was detained at Brindisi, he borrowed a water jug, and, filling it, went round the town selling water, and crying "Fresh water! Fresh water!" like any of the ordinary water-carriers. On his way back he procured willows, and made baskets, which he sold to supply himself with food. He was always very particular not to take more than he considered was fair for his work.

Obedience was another of Egidio's strong points. He believed in his call, he

believed in Francis, he never questioned an order, even when it was manifestly not altogether a wise instruction he received, he still considered that "obedience was better than sacrifice."

Masseo appears to have had very little idea what kind of a life he was entering upon, when he first joined the band. He was not a spiritual man by nature, but by degrees he learned to look at the inside of things instead of the outside, and to know a little of the mind of God. Masseo was big and handsome, with a decided gift of speech. We are told that because of his physical attractions the people always gave to him the nicest and daintiest portions of food. It was a matter of no little wonderment to him when he discovered that for all a certain kind of people were attracted by his appearance, yet he had little or no power to convict them of sin, and make them long to be good. Francis by this time had lost all his good looks and become pale and worn and thin with work. Masseo compared himself with Francis greatly to his superior's disadvantage. At last one day he said to him—

"Why is it? Why is it?"

"What do you mean?" asked Francis.

"I mean to ask thee," said Masseo, "why all the world goes after thee? Why all men wish to see thee, to hear thee, and to obey thy word? Thou art not handsome, nor learned, nor of noble birth. How is it then that men go after thee?"

The answer which Masseo received, made him see what kind of a character he had come in contact with, and from that day there was no more faithful and adoring disciple than handsome Masseo.

"Would you know the reason why all men come after me?" asked Francis. "It is because the Lord has not found among men, a more wicked, a more imperfect, or a greater sinner than I am, and to accomplish the wonderful work He intends doing, He has not found a creature more vile than I upon earth; for this reason He has chosen me to confound beauty, greatness, birth, and all the science of the world, that man may learn that every good gift comes from Him, and not from the creature, that all may glory in the Lord!"

Sylvester's Avarice.

Sylvester was the first priest who joined Francis. Though a priest, he was

possessed of very little true religion, and was inclined to be somewhat avaricious. When Francis was rebuilding St. Damian, Sylvester had sold him some stones, for which he had been well paid. Now, he happened to be among the crowd in the market-place when Bernardo was distributing his fortune, and it occurred to him that he would get some of it for himself. So going up to Francis, he said,

"Brother, you did not pay me very well for the stones which you bought of me."

Francis, who had not a spark of avarice in his nature, handed him a handful of coins without stopping to count them, saying,

"Here, are you sufficiently paid now?"

"It is enough, my brother," said Sylvester, taking the money and moving off.

But from that hour he never knew a moment's peace. His action haunted him, he could neither sleep by night nor rest by day. The difference between Francis and Bernardo and himself came vividly before him, he repented of his sin, and as soon as ever his affairs would permit—about a year later—he joined Francis.

There are some historians who declare that Ginepro was mad. The majority, however, dispute this, and say that what looked like madness was simply zeal—zeal, perhaps untempered with discretion. Ginepro was devoted, self-sacrificing and faithful. He mourned over his mistakes, and was always ready to acknowledge himself in the wrong. It was with the greatest difficulty that he was taught that he mustn't give away anything, and everything he could lay hands on. When he saw anyone poor or ill-clothed, he would immediately take off his clothes and hand them over. He was at last strictly forbidden to do this. A few days later, he met a poor man who begged from him.

"I have nothing," said Ginepro, in great compassion, "which I could give thee but my tunic, and I am under orders not to give that away. But if thou wilt take it off my back I will not resist thee."

No sooner said than done, and Ginepro returned home tunicless. When questioned he said—

"A good man took it off my back and went away with it."

It was necessary to clear everything portable out of Ginepro's way, because whatever he could lay his hands on he gave to the poor.

Almost a Murder.

His great humility on one occasion nearly led him to the gallows. There was a cruel tyrant named Nicolas, a nobleman living near Viterbo, whom all the town hated. This man had been warned that someone would come in the guise of a poor beggar and take his life. Nicolas gave orders that the castle was to be strictly guarded. A few days later luckless Ginepro appeared in the vicinity of the castle. On the way thither some young men had seized him, torn his cloak, and covered him with dust, so that he was a sight to behold for rags and dirt! As soon as he came near the castle he was taken as a suspicious character and cruelly beaten. He was asked who he was.

"I am a great sinner," was the answer. He certainly looked like a ruffian!

When further asked his designs he explained,

"I am a great traitor, and unworthy of any mercy."

Then they asked if he meant to burn the castle and kill Nicolas.

"Worse things than these would I do, only for God," he replied. Such a hardened, boldfaced criminal never stood before a bar!

He was taken, tied to a horse's tail, and dragged through the town to the gallows. If it had not been for the intervention of a good man in the crowd, who knew the friars, he would have been hung.

Ginepro's Dinner.

"Brother Ginepro," said one of the friars one day, "we are all going out, and by the time we come back will you have got us a little refreshment?"

"Most willingly," said Ginepro, "leave it to me."

Out he went with a sack, and asked food from door to door for his brethren. Soon he was well laden and returned home.

"What a pity it is," said Ginepro to himself, as he put on two great pots, "that a brother should be lost in the kitchen! I shall cook enough dinner to serve us for two weeks to come, and then we'll give ourselves to prayer."

So saying, he piled in everything, salt meat, fresh meat, eggs in their shells,

chickens with the feathers on, and vegetables. One of the friars who returned before the others, was amazed to see the two enormous pots on a roaring fire with Ginepro poking at them alternately, protected from the heat by a board he had fastened round his neck. At last dinner was ready, and, pouring it out before the hungry friars, he said complacently,

"Eat a good dinner now, and then we'll go to prayer, there'll be no more cooking for a long time to come, for I have cooked enough for a fortnight."

Alas! one historian informs us, "there was never a hog in the campagna of Rome so hungry that he could have eaten it."

But, in spite of all the curious tales we read about the blunderings of this simple soul, his name has been handed down through the ages as that of a saint; for the highway of holiness is such that a wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein.

A True Franciscan.

Leo, whom they called "the little sheep of God," who became Francis' secretary, was one of the best loved of the disciples. In Leo, Francis' soul found rest and help and comfort. His nature was simple, affectionate and refined, and in every respect he was a true Franciscan.

There are others whose names we find among the early Franciscans, but the foregoing are those who stand out most prominently.

CHAPTER VII.

FRANCIS—CALLED TO BE A SAINT.

"God's interpreter art thou,
To the waiting ones below
"Twixt them and its light midway
Heralding the better day."

We have seen Francis as a young man, gay, careless, pleasure loving, kind-hearted, a leader at every feast and revel, known to his companions as a thorough good fellow. We have watched the first strivings of the Holy Spirit in his soul, and marked his earnest attempts to follow the light that then began to penetrate his hitherto dark soul. We have followed that glimmering light with him, step by step, seen him persecuted, mocked, stoned, beaten, watched his lonely wilderness wrestlings when there was no human eye to pity, no human arm to succour. We have seen, too, how, little by little, this thorny pathway led to a closer and more intimate acquaintance with God, for which acquaintance Francis counted his sufferings as nothing, and the world well lost.

"Saint" Francis.

Francis was not an extraordinary character in any sense of the word. He was what he was simply and solely by the grace of God, which is ever free for all men. He was not a man created for the hour. He was a vessel, cleansed and emptied, and thus fit for the Master's use, and God used him, as He always uses such vessels. The whole secret of his sainthood lay in his simple, loving, implicit obedience. Not the lifeless obedience that one renders to inexorable law, but the heart-felt, passionate desire to serve, and to anticipate the lightest want of the One Object of the affections! That baptism of personal love for God and union with Christ was poured out upon Francis in the black hour of what looked to him complete failure; when hunted and pursued, he sought refuge from his angry friends in the caves of the earth. The gift that he then received he never ceased to guard and cherish, and other blessings were added to it, for God has promised, "To him that hath it shall be given." And God gave liberally, good measure, pressed down, and running over. But the gifts which were Francis are ours too,

by right of grace Divine—to be had for the faithful seeking, and kept by pure, faithful, and obedient living—"Called to be saints." The few? One here and there in every century? Oh, no. "Called to be saints," are the myriad souls who have received the Divine touch of regeneration. This is the calling and election of the redeemed; but oh, how few there are that make them *sure!*

Five years had now elapsed since that spring morning, when, weak and ill from fever, Francis dragged himself out of doors, to look again on the glorious landscape that he thought would bring him health and healing. The story of his disappointment we have already told. During those five years Francis made gigantic strides in heavenly wisdom and knowledge, and we feel that we cannot do better than to pause in our narrative and try to give you some idea of the spiritual personality of the man, whose name even now the people were beginning to couple with that of "saint."

In appearance Francis was a thorough Italian. He was rather below than over the ordinary height, his eyes and hair were dark, and his bearing free and gracious. He was chiefly remarkable for his happy, joyous expression. This he never lost: even when illness had robbed him of his good looks, the light in his eyes, and the smile on his lips were always the same.

Holy Boldness.

The most striking points of Francis' character are, perhaps, his humility, his sincerity, and his childlike simplicity. Humble Francis was not by nature. There was nothing in his training to make him so, and everything that would tend to the growth of pride and arrogance. But, with his conversion, humility became one of his strongest convictions. He truly considered himself less than the least, and he held it to be an offence against God if he ever let himself, or his little feelings and prejudices, stand in the way of accomplishing what he believed to be for the extension of the Kingdom. It seemed as though he had no feelings to be hurt. What most people would call justifiable sensitiveness, Francis would call sin. He went straight to the mark, and if he did not accomplish all he wanted to at first, he simply tried again, and generally succeeded sooner or later.

In places where the Friars were not known, Francis often found it a little difficult to get permission to preach in the churches. At a place called Imola, for instance, where he went to ask the bishop for the use of the church, the bishop replied, coldly and distantly:—

"My brother, I preach in my own parish; I am not in need of anyone to aid me in my task."

Francis bowed, and went out. An hour later, he presented himself again.

"What have you come for again?" asked the bishop, angrily. "What do you want?"

"My lord," answered Francis, in his simple way, "when a father turns his son out of one door, the son has but one thing to do—to return by another."

This holy boldness won the bishop's heart.

"You are right," he said. "You and your brothers may preach in my diocese. I give you a general permission to do so. Your humility deserves nothing less!"

Francis never considered himself at liberty to "shake the dust" of a city off his feet unless he had tried and tried again and again, to get a hearing there; indeed, nothing convinced him of the uselessness of his quest unless he were thrown out neck and crop, then it was more than likely he would gather himself up, and try another entrance! He entirely forgot himself in his love for his Master.

His love of truth was with him almost a passion. Between his thoughts, and his words, and his actions there was a perfect agreement, neither one contradicted the other; he saw to it that it was so, knowing that nothing hurt the Gospel of Christ like insincerity or double dealing. Distractions in prayer he looked upon as secret lies, and saying with the lips what the heart did not go with.

"How shameful," he used to say, "to allow oneself to fall into vain distractions when one is addressing the great King! We should not speak in that manner even to a respectable man!"

On one occasion he had carved a little olive-wood vase, probably meaning to sell it for food. But, while at prayer one day, some thought connected with this work came into his mind, distracting his soul for the moment. Instantly he was full of contrition, and, as soon as he left his prayer, hastened to put his vase into the fire, where never again it could come between his soul and God!

One day, on meeting a friend on the road, they stopped to converse. On parting, the friend said, "You will pray for me?" To which Francis replied, "Willingly." Hardly was the other out of sight, when Francis said to his companion,—

"Wait a little for me; I am going to kneel down and discharge the obligation I have just contracted." This was always his habit. Instead of promising and forgetting as so many do, he never rested till he had fulfilled the promise he had made.

A Fox-skin.

During the last two years of his life he was often very weak and ailing. One cold winter, his companion, seeing that the clothes he was wearing were very thin and patched, was filled with compassion on his account. He secretly got a piece of fox-skin.

"My father," he said, showing him the skin, "you suffer very much from your liver and stomach; I beg of you let me sew this fur under your tunic. If, you will not have it all, let it at least cover your stomach."

"I will do what you wish," said Francis; "but you must sew as large a piece *outside* as in."

His companion couldn't see any sense in this arrangement, and objected very strongly.

"The reason is quite plain," said Francis: "The outside piece will show everybody that I allow myself this comfort." They had to give in at last, and Francis had his way.

"Oh, admirable man," writes a friend after his death; "thou hast always been the same within and without, in words and in deeds, below and above!"

A Temptation.

On another occasion, he tore off his tunic, because, for a brief moment of weakness, he harbored the thought that he might have led an easier life, and still serve God. Like other men, he might have had a settled home, and lived a tranquil existence. It was a passing temptation, but Francis, tearing off his coarse garment, emblem of the Cross that he strove to follow, cried—

"It is a religious habit—a man given up to such thoughts would be a robber if he wore it." Nor did he put it on again till he felt he could do so with a pure heart and clean conscience.

With the crystal transparency of his inner and outer life went a simplicity that

was akin to that of a little child. His sermons and addresses were of the very simplest and plainest. Though Francis was undoubtedly one of the orators of the age, his fiery words and burning language were such that even the most unlearned could easily follow. His theme was simply Christ, and Christ crucified for our sins, and an exhortation to repentance and holy living. Learned ones pondered his words and marvelled wherein lay his power, little dreaming that his very plainness of speech was his strength.

His delight in the beauties of nature never left him. Sunset and sunrise, mountain and plain, river and sea alike, filled him with joy, and all spoke to him of the glory of God. Flowers always gave him especial pleasure. He insisted that his disciples should always reserve some portion of their gardens for the growth of flowers as well as vegetables, "to give them a foretaste of the eternal sweetness of Heaven." When the brethren went to the fields to chop wood, Francis always warned them to take care of the roots, so that the trunk might sprout again and live. To take life of any kind was intolerable to him. For this reason he always lifted the worms out of his path and laid them at the side of the road, lest an incautious traveller might crush them.

His love and power over animals are almost too well known to need mention. He always spoke of them as his brothers and sisters. He disdained nothing. All were to him alike beautiful, because the work of his God. For a long time, he had a tame sheep, that followed him about wherever it could get a chance. This sheep always seemed to know exactly how to behave under all circumstances. When the brethren knelt at prayers, it knelt too; when they sang, it joined in with a not-too-loud little bleat!

Near his room, at the Portiuncula, there lived a grasshopper in a fig-vine. This little insect would hop on his finger at his bidding, and when told to "sing and praise the Lord," used to chirp with all its might! Birds, insects, and even fishes and wild animals, we are told, all recognized in Francis a friend, and readily did his bidding.

Two Small Mites.

Francis' love for God was supreme, and his belief that God loved him never wavered. To make people love and know God was his one burning desire. It was not so much God's service he delighted in as God Himself. He never lost sight of the Master in the Work, and to a large extent this was the key to all his success. His work was the outcome of his love. After we have received, the first natural impulse is to give. Francis possessed "two small mites," an ancient historian writes—"they were his body and his soul. He gave them both, bravely and freely, according to his custom."

Whatever came—joy, sorrow, success, failure, pain, weariness, sickness, insult, or favor—Francis took as direct from the hand of God, and blessed Him for all. Why shouldn't he? His heart was right, he had the assurance that his ways pleased God, and his faith was not dependent upon knowledge. He was content, nay, glad to trust where he could not see, confident in the belief that "nothing could hurt a sanctified soul." His disciples could not always follow him so far. Some of them, when they saw their master suffering—as he did suffer severely in his last days—thought that God might have led His beloved Home by a less painful road. One of them once gave expression to his feelings thus:—

"Ah, my brother, pray to the Lord that He may treat you more gently. Truly, He ought to let His hand weigh less heavily upon you."

Hurt to the quick, as well as indignant, Francis cried:—

"What is that you are saying? If I did not know your simplicity I should henceforth hold you in horror! What! you have the audacity to blame God's dealings with me!" Then, throwing himself on his knees, he prayed:—

"Oh, my Lord God! I give Thee thanks for all these pains I endure. I pray Thee to send me a hundredfold more if such be Thy good pleasure! I willingly accept all afflictions. Thy holy name is my superabundant joy!"

Nothing could ever make Francis say that anything in his lot was "very hard." His love was too loyal, his trust too complete.

Rejoice Always.

Joy was one of his cardinal articles of faith. "Rejoice always!" was a divine command, and one not to be overlooked. As a young man, he had been of a

bright, joyous nature, but easily plunged into depths of sadness and melancholy. God taught him upon what to base his joy, and, when he had torn down all earthly external devices, led him to derive his all from the true source. He held joy to be the normal state of those whom God loves—the fruit of Christian life, without which everything languishes and dies.

"The devil," Francis always said, "carries dust with him, and whenever he can, he throws it into the openings of the soul in order to cloud the clearness of its thoughts and the purity of its actions. If joy knows how to defend itself and subsist, then he has had his spite for nothing; but if the servant of Christ becomes sad, bitter or unhappy, he is sure to triumph. Sooner or later, that soul will be overwhelmed by its sadness, or will seek for false joys or consolations. The servant of God who is troubled for any reason" (Francis always allowed that causes for trouble in this world are innumerable) "must immediately have recourse to prayer, and remain in the presence of his Heavenly Father till the joy of salvation has been restored to him, otherwise, his sadness will increase and engender a rust in the soul."

The Duty of Cheerfulness.

This duty of cheerfulness Francis impressed upon all with whom he had to do.

"My brother," he said to a friar, of doleful countenance, one day, "if thou hast some fault to mourn, do it in secret, groan and weep before God, but here, with thy brethren, be as they are in tone and countenance."

His conviction of this duty was so strong that, during one large gathering of the friars, he had this advice written in large letters and posted up.

"Let the brethren avoid ever appearing sombre, sad and clouded, like the hypocrites, but let them always be found joyful in the Lord, gay, amiable, gracious—as is fitting."

Amiability and graciousness he also considered amongst the virtues—courtesy, he called it. And courtesy he always said was akin to charity, her younger sister, who was to go with the elder one and help to open all hearts to her! An historian writes thus of Francis: "He was very courteous and gracious in all things, and possessed a peace and serenity that nothing could disturb. This sympathy and benevolence was expressed on his countenance; his face had in it something angelic."

His songs and hymns were the outcome of his perpetual joy in the Lord. In those days there were no popular religious hymns or songs. People praised God in Latin, with psalms and chants. Francis never found that these gave vent to his feelings, and so, with the help of one of the brothers—Pacificus, a trained musician—he began to write his own; and soon, wherever the friars passed, they left a train of simple melody in their wake. It was Francis, and his brethren, who first turned the Italian language into poetry, and gave it that impetus which has since rendered it the typical language for song.



CHAPTER VIII.

FRANCIS—AS A LEADER OF MEN.

"Thou whose bright faith makes feeble hearts grow
stronger,
And sends fresh warriors to the great campaign,
Bids the lone convert feel estranged no longer,
And wins the sundered to be one again."

Little did Francis think, as he piled up stone after stone upon the walls of St. Damian, that the day was not far distant when he should begin the building of a spiritual temple, built up of "lively stones," with Christ Himself as the "chief corner-stone." Yet it was even so. That day when, in obedience to the heavenly command, he stripped off his shoes and mantle, he laid the first stone. From that hour his spiritual building proceeded, and he who had fancied his work completed, found that it was but barely begun! Dead souls, in whom the Story of the Cross could no longer arouse even the most transient emotion, were awakened and convicted when they saw it lived out before them—a living epistle. We have seen how souls quickened by Divine power, and led only by God, came and joined themselves to Francis, choosing him as their leader, and accepting as their rule of life the revelation made to him, through the gospel, for that memorable February day. To those that followed Francis, God made no more definite manifestation of His will other than that they were to join themselves to him and lead his life. Manifestly, he was their God-appointed leader, and as simply and obediently as he had pulled off his mantle and shoes, he accepted the human trust bestowed upon him. And well he fulfilled that trust!

To the very last hour of his life, Francis was true to his first principles. Never for one moment did he wander out of the narrow path in which God had set his feet at the beginning of his career as a leader and teacher of men. As literally as it was possible he modelled his life on that of our Lord Jesus Christ. One of the most noted Atheist writers of the present century says that in no age has there been so close a copy of the life of Christ as that portrayed by Francis and his followers.

Alms.

The most well-known of all the Franciscan characteristics is their poverty. Though at times they asked alms for Christ's sake from their neighbours, that was not the ideal Francis had before him as their regular mode of life. It was that all should work with their hands at whatever they could best do, and in return receive an equivalent for their labour in food or clothes. "All the brothers who have learnt a trade," Francis said, "will exercise it, those who have not must learn one, and keep to the exercise of it without changing. All will receive everything necessary for the support of life, except money, in remuneration of their work." "When the brothers are in want of the necessaries of life, they shall go and ask for alms like any other poor man," was another of his directions. This was a great trial to some who would have gladly learned the most menial of trades. But there were times when there was no demand for labor, and there was nothing for it but to beg or starve. This latter Francis would not allow, and, repugnant though the former might be, it had to be done. Not that he ever forced anyone. He began by doing this ignominious duty himself, saying as he did so—

"My beloved brethren, the Son of God was far more noble than the noblest of us, and yet He became poor upon earth. It is for love of Him that we have embraced poverty, therefore, we must not be ashamed to resort to the table of our Lord (thus he always spoke of alms). Rejoice then to give good examples to those brethren whose firstfruits ye are, that they in future may have nothing to do but follow you."

Holy Poverty.

But there were other reasons why Francis was so devoted to poverty. In all his doings he is remarkable for clear common-sense. Money and possessions of any kind were in those days a fruitful source of dispute and quarrels of all kinds; therefore, as Francis reasoned, it were better that the Knights of Christ should possess nothing. Then again in the priesthood, though the individuals themselves possessed nothing, yet large sums of money and great possessions had been amassed by convent and monastery, until, at the period of which we are writing, the luxury and gluttony of priest and monk was a favourite joke, and the splendour of their buildings well-known. As to buildings, Francis would very much have preferred to have none. Since this was impossible, he had everything built at the least possible expense. Just rough beams put together, and the joinings filled with sand. Even then this uncouth mass had to be property of

someone outside the community!

"Only on this condition," Francis said, "can we be considered as strangers here below in accordance with the apostolic recommendation." Certainly, no one could accuse them of luxury. The furniture of the houses was of the poorest. Beds, often of straw, cups and plates of wood or clay, a few rough tables, and a small number of books in common to the brothers, were all the rooms contained. Carefully and jealously did Francis guard against the first appearance of relaxation on the part of himself or his followers. He would have thought God's commands to him broken if any new-comer found in his community anything that he had given up upon leaving the world.

As to clothing, we have already seen what were Francis' views in this respect. The rough robe of "beast color," tied in with a knotted rope, is still to be seen today in many parts of the world. But Francis very well knew that a certain kind of vanity can easily lurk in even the coarsest of garments. He was, therefore, constantly on the watch, and was always severe if he saw the least deviation from the rule. "It is an infallible sign," he always said, "that fervour is cooling in the soul." He never allowed his disciples to have more than two tunics.

"It may be that one suffers a little," he said, "but what sort of virtue is that that cannot suffer anything! To try and avoid all mortifications under plea of necessity is a cowardly way of losing occasions of merit. It is what the Hebrews would have done had they gone back to Egypt."

Fatherly Care.

It was more by personal example than anything else that Francis led his followers in the Divine steps that he was so confident had been also marked out for him. And his people believed in him and loved him. They were convinced that through him spoke the Divine voice, and that his way was God's way. And he was worthy of their belief and their love and their esteem. He loved them with a devoted, generous love. By his entire forgetfulness of self and his constant devotion to their needs, he was theirs, always to "serve." Many stories are told of his gentle, delicate kindness and fatherly care. Once, one of his flock had gone a little too far in depriving himself of natural food. That night, in the silence, came a voice from his room which groaned softly, "I am starving, I am starving of hunger!" Francis, who was awake, rose quietly, and, getting together some food, went to the starving brother and invited him to eat with him, so as not to hurt his feelings or let it appear that he had been overheard. After he had eaten,

he explained to him the evil of not giving the body what was necessary for it.

Another brother, who was ill, had a great longing for grapes, but feared to indulge himself in case he should be breaking his vows. Francis found out, some way or other, how he felt, and, going to him, led him out into a vineyard, and, gathering some rich clusters, seated himself on the ground, and, beginning to eat, invited his companion to join him. If any were weak and ailing, it was always Francis who was first to take a vessel and go out and beg for more nourishing food for his ailing comrades. A mother could not have been more tender than he was.

In a very great measure Francis possessed the discernment of spirits. He seemed to know intuitively what people were thinking about. One day, during the last years of his life, when he had been obliged through bodily weakness to ride on an ass, he surprised the brother who was trudging alongside him, by getting off and saying—

Francis' Tact.

"Here, brother, get on, it is more fitting that you, who are of noble birth, should ride, rather than I, who am of humble origin."

The brother immediately fell on his knees and, asking forgiveness, confessed that he had been grumbling to himself that he, whose family would never have had anything to do with that of Pietro Bernardone's, had been obliged to follow the ass of Francis Bernardone!

Another brother was greatly troubled because he thought Francis did not love him. He told himself that Francis hardly ever noticed or spoke to him, and then he began to argue that probably God, too, paid no attention to him. He determined to see his leader about it. As soon as ever he appeared before Francis, and before he could get out a word, Francis said—

"It is a temptation, my brother, believe me, it is a temptation. I have the truest affection for you, and you deserve this affection. Come to me whenever you want, and we will talk things over."

One can easily imagine the joy of the once forlorn brother!

Not only could Francis move the crowds and hold them spell-bound with his fiery words, but he had also the power to reach and touch men's hearts in private.

He was always accessible to that individual, be he saint or sinner, who was in need. In times of darkness and depression, he was the support of the brothers. He knew well the stages that a soul passes through after it has taken the final step of separateness from the world. In critical moments he was theirs to soothe and comfort with prayer and advice. It was not only the faltering saint that he lavished his tenderness upon; he was just as careful of the faulty and ungrateful, and nothing could exceed the love with which he strove to lure them back when he saw they were inclined to go ever so little astray. "A superior," he used to say, "is more of a tyrant than a father if he waits to interfere until a fault has been committed or a fall has occurred!"

No Alternative.

However, in spite of his tenderness, Francis could be iron strong when there was any question of right and wrong. Those who were not of his mind were obliged to get out from among the brothers. There was no alternative, no easier way made for anyone. "Little Brothers" or "Friars Minor" they called themselves, a name which then meant "servant of all" or "least of all," and woe betide anyone who departed from the spirit of this name!

CHAPTER IX.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ORDER.

"Would you know, oh world, these Warriors; Go where the
poor, the old,
Ask for pardon and for heaven, and you offer food and gold;
With healing and with comfort, with words of peace and
prayer,
Bearing His greatest gift to men—Christ's chosen priests are
there."

It was not long before the little hut by the Riva Torto was full to overflowing. The number of brethren had increased so, that there was only just space for them to lie down at night, each under the beam upon which his name had been chalked. It was a poor abode enough, but poor though it was, they were not destined to have its shelter long. One day when they were all engaged in prayer, a peasant noisily threw open the door, and driving his ass right on top of the kneeling occupants cried—

"Go in, go in, Bruno, we shall be better off here."

There was nothing to do but get out. The hut was not theirs, and neither was there room for an extra man and a beast! They next betook themselves to the Portiuncula, where they built themselves huts or cells. The Portiuncula was the last church that Francis restored, and one always especially dear to him. A little later it was given to the friars for their own use.

From the Portiuncula the brothers travelled all round the country-side, two by two, in true apostolic fashion. Some followed the peasants into the fields, and as they shared their labors, sang and talked of the love of Christ. For days, perhaps, they would live and eat and sleep with the field hands, and then pass, always singing, on their way, leaving hearts that had been touched, behind them. Others sought the lazar-house, and spent their time in helping the brothers tend the sick. They were always welcome here, and very often difficult cases were reserved for their care. In the towns they met with a very different reception. There they were considered "fair game" for anybody who wished to tease or persecute or mock

them. Some people called them mad and lazy, others who believed in their good intent said that if they wanted to be religious, there were plenty of Orders they could join which would not be so austere. Even the Bishop of Assisi, who always called Francis his son, said to him once,

"Your way of living, without owning anything, seems to me very harsh and difficult."

On the Right Lines.

Francis, sure that he was on the right lines, replied,

"If we possessed property we should have need of arms for its defence, for it is the source of quarrels and lawsuits, and the love of God and one's neighbor usually finds many obstacles therein! This is why we do not desire temporal goods."

As the months went on, Francis and his doings attracted more and more attention. They were the talk of the country. The families of those brothers who had given away their possessions could not forgive them for so doing, and attacks from these quarters were bitter and severe. Disappointed heirs could find nothing too evil to say against the foolishness and madness of their friar relatives. From this point of view, many families found the brotherhood very alarming, and parents trembled when their sons took any interest in it, lest they too should join it. The clergy naturally felt somewhat distrustful of the doings of these strange lay-workers. So, taking it altogether, whether he liked it or not, Francis was the most talked of man in Assisi. The more people flocked to him and got converted, the more his enemies slandered him.

It was this state of things that led him to take his entire force—numbering twelve—to Rome, and there beg the Pope to sanction their mode of work. It was a bold undertaking, and when it was first presented to the twelve they shrank back in horror at the presumption of such a thing! But Francis had made up his mind and nothing could move him.

How was he, Francis, young, without any interest, and a stranger to all churchly usages, to get to see the Pope? the brethren asked him.

Francis didn't know. Probably he cared less. Anyway, God had told him to go.

Then the brethren pleaded their simplicity. How they should look—travel-

stained, bare-footed, and coarse-robed, at the court of Rome! This argument carried no weight whatever with their leader, and his faith prevailing, they set out. Just as they were about to start, Francis said "Let us choose one of us to be our Chief. We will go whither he wills to go, we will sojourn where he wills us to sojourn." The rest agreeing, Bernardo di Quintavalle was chosen as leader.

Bishop Guido.

As soon as they arrived in Rome they discovered that unexpected help was right at hand. Guido, the good Bishop of Assisi, was in the city, and he met them accidentally just as they arrived. He was a little discomposed at first—seeing the entire brotherhood he immediately jumped to the conclusion that they were about to settle in Rome. However, Francis soon told him the object of their journey, and he promised to do the very best he could for them. Guido had a friend in Rome, Cardinal John, of Sabina. This man was godly and devoted, one who had never been carried away by the grandeur of his position, and he was always a friend of anybody who tried to work for God. Guido had already told him the story of Francis, and said that it was his belief that God meant to do great things through that simple man and his followers. Now that they had turned up so unexpectedly, he hastened to introduce them to John and let him judge them for himself. The Cardinal saw them, and talked to them, and was convinced in his own mind that they were divinely led. Still, he thought he would like to try Francis a little further. Taking him to one side, he asked him a number of questions about his work and its difficulties.

"It is beyond your strength," he said, when he had heard him, and went on to advise him to join some already existing Order, or else, if he liked, lead the life of a hermit. Francis listened politely, but still kept to his purpose.

"You are mistaken," persisted the Cardinal. "It is much better to follow the beaten tracks."

Francis, equally persistent, kept to his point, and then the Cardinal, who would have been sorry had his advice been taken, entered heartily into his plans, and promised to support him with the Pope.

As these interviews occupied several days, Francis became impatient at the delay. Nobody knows how he did it, but he succeeded unaided in getting into the Palace, and presenting himself and his brethren before the astonished eyes of the Pope! The Pope was walking in a secluded gallery, meditating mournfully on the

declension of the Church of God, and trying to think what would remedy the growing evils, when his meditations were abruptly cut short by what looked to him like a troop of beggars. He was annoyed, and sent them off about their business before they could explain what they wanted.

A Dream.

That night the Pope dreamed a strange dream. He thought he saw a tiny palm tree spring up at his feet, which immediately grew and grew till it became a splendid tree. When he awoke, the conviction was strong in his mind that the poor man he had turned away the day before was none other than this little tree. And as he was thinking over his dream, Cardinal John came in, and said—

"I have found a man whom I look upon as very perfect. He is resolved to follow literally the teachings of Christ, and I have no doubt that God intends to make use of him to reanimate faith on the earth."

The Pope was struck with what he said, for he was convinced in his own mind that this was none other than the man he had driven away. He concealed his feelings from the Cardinal, and merely said he should like to see him. The Cardinal sent for Francis and his twelve, who speedily appeared, and the Pope saw at once they were the beggars of yesterday. He welcomed Francis warmly, and went into the rule he had drawn up for his life, and that of his brotherhood. This rule has not come down to us, but from various sources we learn that it was merely a string of Bible verses, Christ's directions to His apostles, including those that had been Francis' own commission. The Pope listened to all that Francis had to say, then he said—

Hesitation.

"My children, the life to which you aspire seems hard and difficult. Doubtless your fervor is great, and we have no anxiety on your account, but it is our duty to consider those who will come after you. We must not impose upon them a burden they cannot bear. All this requires serious reflection." Then he dismissed them, saying he would lay the matter before the Cardinals.

Well, the question was put to the Cardinals, and they talked and talked and talked. One said one thing, another said another, and most of them had some objection to raise. They said he went beyond due limits, that human nature could not long endure such a life, and altogether they showed by their conversation,

how very, very far they, the leaders of a Church who claimed to follow the steps of the lowly Nazarene, had departed from the initial simplicity of the Gospel. Probably some idea of this sort was in Cardinal John's mind when he rose to address the Assembly. He did not say very much, but what he said went straight to the point.

"If we refuse the petition of this poor man on the plea that his rule is difficult, let us beware lest we reject the Gospel itself, for the rule which he desires us to approve of is in conformity with the teachings of the Gospel. For us to say that Gospel perfection contains anything unreasonable or impossible is to rise up against the author of the Gospel and blaspheme Jesus Christ."

The force of his words went home, more especially as the rule was entirely composed of Scripture verses!

Still the Pope hesitated. He could not come to any immediate decision.

"Go my son," he said to Francis, "and pray to God that He may let you know that what you ask is from Him, and if it is we will grant your desire."

For several days Francis gave himself up to prayer, and his next interview with the Pope convinced him that these poor beggars had a mission from God. He withheld his approval no longer. Embracing Francis, he said to the little band—

"Go with God's blessing and preach repentance to all, in the way that He is pleased to inspire you with."

A few days later the little party were on their way home again, overflowing with joy. For a fortnight they lingered in a little town called Orte. Some historians say they rested awhile from their labours, others that they were attacked with fever in crossing the Campagna. Be that as it may, it was here that Francis endured one of the severest temptations of his life. The beauty of the scenery, the delicious quiet, after the anxious time he had just gone through in Rome, all conspired to make him think that after all perhaps a life hidden from the world and devoted to prayer and meditation would be just as acceptable to God as the more laborious one of preaching and teaching. But he did not remain long under this spell, and in a little time they were all back in Assisi.

The Order Established.

It was at this point that Francis began first to shine as an orator. Of course the

news of his visit to Rome spread all around, and more than ever he was an object of interest. The priests of St. George, who had educated him, asked him to preach in their church. This service must have been a success, because when the Bishop Guido returned to Assisi, he asked Francis to preach in the cathedral. Here Francis surpassed anything he had ever done before, and the large cathedral was too small to hold the crowds that flocked to hear the young man. Men and women came in from all the country-side, monks came down from their mountain monasteries, and learned and simple all agreed that "never man spake like this man!"

Yet, as we have said before, his words were of the simplest. He preached repentance, not merely a lip repentance, but kind that worked itself out in daily life. "If you have defrauded any man," he said, "restore unto him that which is his." This sort of plain, practical teaching was rapidly dying out. It came fresh to the people, and they were stirred mightily."

Less than the Least.

After their return from Rome, they began to be known as the Friars Minor. This was the way in which they got their name. One day a brother was reading aloud the Rule of the Order, and when he came to this passage, "and let the brothers be less than all others," it struck Francis very forcibly. He stopped the reader, and said—

"My brothers, I wish from henceforth that this fraternity should be called the Order of Minors." Minor being the word in the original that expresses the idea of "less than the least." And this was the name they bore for many a year. It was an expressive and suitable one. Less than the least of all the brethren—that was what they desired to be. They were essentially of the people, they wore the garb of the poorest, and shared their life with its toils and privations.

There was also another reason for this name, some historians say. Just before Francis formed his Order, there was an Order of Friars established in Italy, who spent their time in working among the poor. "Little Brothers of the Poor," they called themselves, and it was in contradistinction to them that Francis called himself "Minor," or less than the "Little Brothers."

CHAPTER X.

THE STORY OF CLARA.

"So faith grew.... The acknowledgment of God in
Christ,
Accepted by thy reason solves for thee,
All questions in the world and out of it."

One of the most interested listeners in the Cathedral, the day that Francis preached his first sermon there, was a little girl of sixteen. Her name was Clara Scifi, and she was of noble family. From her childhood she had been accustomed to hear discussed among the elders the follies and madness of Francis Bernardone. Clara had always been a good child, and from babyhood delighted to distribute food and alms of all kinds to the poor. When she was old enough to understand all Francis' principles, she was greatly drawn to them, though she kept her feelings to herself. A cousin of hers became a friar, and this naturally intensified her interest in the Friars Minor. But when she went to the Cathedral, and, for the first time saw and heard Francis for herself, it was like a revelation straight from God.

It seemed to Clara that he spoke directly to her, and that he knew all her secret sorrows, and personal anxieties! Oh how she longed to have some part in his great work! In those days such a thing as a girl leaving her home for any reason except to be married or immured in a convent, and never seen, was unheard of, and when Clara made up her mind that she would break away from her idle luxurious life and become a servant of the poor, she knew that she was going to do an unheard-of thing, and that never while the world stood, would she get permission from her father, Favorina, for any such undertaking! Clara's mother, Ortolana, was a pious woman, but even if she were to give her consent, it was quite certain her husband would not. Therefore Clara determined not to tell her mother what she was thinking about doing.

Clara's Decision.

During the year that ensued after that preaching in the Cathedral, Clara saw a

great deal of Francis, and the more she saw of him, and heard him talk, the surer she became that God was calling her to leave home and friends. So one March night, accompanied by two servants, Clara left her beautiful home, and set off for the Portiuncula, where Francis and the brothers were waiting to receive her, and welcome her as a sister in the Lord. Singing hymns, they led her into the little church, and after a short service, during which they read her the Rules, her beautiful long hair was cut off, and she robed herself in a garment of coarse, ash-colored stuff, tied in at the waist with a rope. After this she was conducted to a convent, some two miles away, where the Benedictine nuns gave her a temporary shelter.

Francis was too simple and unworldly to think of the possible consequences of this step of Clara's. He was sure that God had called her, and he was equally sure that her friends would never give their consent to her leaving home and becoming an apostle of poverty; therefore, as God had revealed His will, it must be done at once. It also never occurred to him that this was likely to develop into a second Order of his Brotherhood, and an extension of his work. He only saw a soul anxious to leave the world and all that pertained to it, for Christ's sake, and his only thought was to provide it a way of escape, just as he would have cared for a sparrow escaping from the hawk, or a rabbit from the snare.

Next day Clara's irate parents arrived at the convent. They saw Clara, and begged and entreated, and threatened, but all to no purpose. She would not come away. She was absolutely unmovable. At last, seeing that she was so determined, they gave up any idea of carrying her away by main force, and listened to her while she talked to them, and explained her position that she was consecrated to the living God, and that nothing should come between Him and her. Her parents struck by her words consented to leave her, and went away promising not to trouble her again.

Agnes.

But the troubles of the house of Scifi were not yet over. A fortnight later, Agnes, a child of fourteen, ran away to join her sister. Agnes had always been intensely devoted to Clara, and besides, she too had been longing for some more satisfactory mode of life. It cannot be said that Clara was surprised when Agnes knocked at the door, for ever since her consecration she had prayed that Agnes' heart might be touched too, and that she might be led to follow her out of the world. Therefore she received Agnes with open arms.

"Ah, sweet sister," she cried, "how I bless God that He has so quickly heard my earnest prayer for thee!" Agnes kissed her and declared that she had come never to leave her, and together they braced themselves for the storm that they felt was coming. And a terrible storm it was! Favorina enraged at losing another daughter, took twelve men relatives and proceeded without delay to fetch her home by main force if necessary. However, they smothered their rage at first, as best they could, and said quietly to Agnes—

"Why have you come here? Get ready and come home."

Then, when she refused to leave Clara, one of them fell on her with kicks and blows, and taking her by the hair tried to drag her away.

"Ah, my sister," she cried to Clara, "come and help me; let me not be torn away from my Lord."

Poor Clara could do nothing but follow her weeping. At last, worn out with her struggles—or, as the legend says, she became so abnormally heavy—they were obliged to drop her. Clara, reproaching them for their cruel treatment, begged of them to give the child back to her. Not knowing what else to do they returned, much disappointed at their failure.

The "Poor Ladies."

This action of Clara and Agnes opened the way for many who were hovering on the brink. As soon as they were established at St. Damian's, which the Bishop of Assisi placed at their disposal—they were joined by one woman after another, many their own personal friends, and thus the second Order of what was then called "Poor Ladies," was founded. The rule that they followed was very much like that of the brothers, except in regard to the missionary life. Women in those days never preached! The "Poor Ladies" supplied the passive side of the organisation, and by their prayers and supplications, supported the active workers. Their daily needs were met by what we should call lay-sisters, women for whom a life apart from the world was impossible. At first the people of Assisi brought the ladies the food they needed, but when a little later this first ardour cooled down, the lay-sisters took it upon themselves to provide regularly for their necessities.

However, the Sisters themselves were by no means idle. They spun thread, and made linen altar-cloths, and all that was needed for churches round about. Then Francis was always sending the sick and ailing to St. Damian's to be nursed, and

for some time it was quite a hospital. Clara, who was eventually put in charge of St. Damian's was as rigid as Francis in her conviction as to the advisability of possessing nothing. When her father died, she was his heir. It was a very rich inheritance she came in for, but she commanded that everything should be sold, and the proceeds given to the poor, and not a penny of it went to enrich the convent. After her father's death Clara had the joy of welcoming her mother and younger sister Beatrice into her family!

Clara was always a true Franciscan. All through her life which was a long one, she kept faithful to the principles of the Order, and never would she yield to any dispensation that deviated from the narrow path that Francis trod. When offered certain properties by a Church dignitary, on the plea that the state of the times made it impossible for women to possess nothing, she gazed upon him with speechless astonishment.

"I want no Release."

"If it is your vows that prevent you," the worthy man went on, "you will be released from them."

"No," she cried, "I want no release from following Christ."

She was a staunch defender of Francis. She also defended him from himself! Many a time in hours of dark discouragement, when he was sorely tempted to fly away, and shut himself up to a life of prayer and contemplation, she pointed out to him the sheep who, without a shepherd, were wandering to their own destruction, and drew him back again into his God-marked path. Her teaching, and her mode of caring for her sisters was very similar to that of Francis with his disciples.



CHAPTER XI.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

"No rushing sound we heard,
We saw no fiery token,
Only our hearts were stirred,
For God had spoken."

The temptation to seek a life of quiet and retirement followed Francis all his days. Invariably, after any new departure or special victory he was attacked in that quarter. Why he should have been so troubled when his call to follow Christ was so clear, we are not qualified to say definitely. In all probability this temptation of his was akin to Paul's "messenger of Satan" and thorn in the flesh that buffeted him, lest he should be unduly exalted. The most interesting point to us nineteenth-century Christians is, that by the grace of God Francis never yielded to this temptation—that having once put his hand to the plough, he never turned back, but remained faithful to the end.

We must take into consideration that the Order of which Francis was the founder was in itself unique. It stood alone in the annals of Church history. It was a novelty in the Church. All other existing orders followed a totally different line of action, or rather inaction. Their disciples were shut up in solitude, and devoted themselves to their own sanctification. When they worked for sinners it was by praying for them, by example, and by a little preaching. They never came face to face with the outside world. Their lives were remote, apart. These facts may have had something to do with Francis' periods of darkness and indecision. A pioneer's life has its own peculiar temptations.

Darkness.

Perhaps the worst season of darkness that Francis had was after the establishment of the second Order. An internal agony seized him. Was he, he asked himself, not trying to do something superhuman in uniting a contemplative with an active life. So often he had been told by people much wiser and cleverer than himself that the life he had marked out was humanly impossible! He

wrestled and prayed, but nothing could dissipate the heavy blackness that spread itself over his pathway. He determined to appeal to his brethren and follow their advice. His appeal for help gives us a striking instance of how subtly Satan can take the form of an Angel of Light.

"My brethren what do you advise me?" he asked. "Which do you consider best—that I should attend to prayer, or that I should go and preach? I am a simple man, that speaks without art. I have received the gift of prayer more than of speaking. Besides, there is more profit in prayer. It is the source of grace. In preaching, we only distribute to others the gifts we have received. Prayer purifies the heart and affections. It is the union with the one true and solid Good. Preaching makes the feet of even the spiritual man dusty. It is a work that distracts and dissipates, and leads to relaxation of discipline. In short, in prayer we speak to God, and listen to Him. In preaching we must use much condescension towards men, and living among them it is often necessary to see, hear, think, and speak like them in too human fashion. These are very serious objections. And yet there is a reason that seems to give it most weight with God. It is that His only Son left the bosom of the Father to save souls, and to instruct men by His example and word. He gave all He had for our salvation. He kept nothing for Himself. Therefore it seems to me more in conformity with the Divine Will that I renounce a tranquil life and that I go to work abroad. But what is your advice? Speak! What do you think I ought to do?"

The respective merits of the question had been so equally weighed that it is not surprising that the brethren, one and all, declared themselves unable to give any advice. For several days they conferred, but no clear light shone upon their conferences. It was an important matter to decide, because the whole future conduct of the Order hung upon the decision. As Francis would walk, so also would tread his disciples. This fact, together with the general uncertainty, pressed heavily upon his soul. One of the most spiritual of Francis' historians says that God permitted him to pass through this darkness, because He wanted His servant whom He had already made a prophet, to learn by a striking example, that no inspiration comes to us from ourselves. And more than this. He wished the merit and glory of preaching to be consecrated by a species of oracle that could only be attributed to Him.

How the Answer Came.

This is how the answer came.

Francis, always little in his own eyes, was never ashamed of inquiring of any one, the simple as well as the learned, the imperfect as well as the perfect, if he thought that by so doing he would be the better able to extend the Kingdom. In the present instance, getting no light from the brethren, he sent a message to Brother Sylvester, who was now a very old man, and lived by himself on a mountain, and another to Clara, asking them to pray that God would reveal to them his will. The old priest, and the young girl and her companions, gave themselves up to prayer, and God who declares that He will be inquired of, revealed to them His will.

When the messages came, as they did together, Francis was on his knees praying. Both messengers carried the same message. It was God's will, they said, that he should leave his solitude, and preach the Gospel.

Immediately, without losing a moment, Francis got up, put on his mantle, and set off. All his doubt had vanished at once.

"Let us go, my brethren," he said. "Let us go in the name of the Lord!"

It seemed as if he were possessed by a new spirit. Never had he been so fervent. Never had his ardor been so intense. To all that he did God set His seal in a truly marvellous manner! The inhabitants of the various villages flocked to hear him, and they almost stood upon one another to find places in the churches and cathedrals. In those days the cathedrals and great churches were not seated. The people stood all the time. The men to the front, and the women very often far behind. When there was a large crowd, the crush was fearful.

In Ascoli some thirty men from the Church joined the Minors, and were given the habit. After this event, Francis could not show himself in the street without being surrounded by a crowd. When once he came into a town the population had no thought for any one but him. The churches were filled as soon as ever it was known he was going to speak. Even in the streets they eagerly gathered up his words. Thus it was everywhere he went through Central Italy. His name was in everyone's mouth.

A Great Tree.

It was some time now since the building at the Portiuncula had become far too small to accommodate all who wished to join the Friars. There had been nothing for it but to overflow into the neighbouring provinces. It is a matter of some regret that but little of the history of this extension has been preserved. We shall see how Bernardo of Quintavelle, and Guido of Cortona, established branches of the Order, and no doubt the story of other new ventures would have been equally interesting, but all that history has handed down to us is a list of names. The tiny seed that Francis had sown in weakness was rapidly becoming a great tree. Though this progress was gratifying to him, it also caused him some suffering. By nature he was intensely affectionate, and when one by one he had to send out from him his old companions to take charge of distant branches, his heart was sad indeed.

One day while he was thinking, as he often did, about his absent friends, the thought occurred to him that something might be done to alleviate this separation. Something, too, that would benefit the entire Order. Twice a year it was arranged that all the brethren, new and old, should meet at the Portiuncula. This idea proved to be so good that it became one of the fundamental rules of the Order.

A Curious Scene.

The first of these "Chapters," as they were called, was held after Francis had completed his tour in Central Italy. The brethren came from far and near. They came pouring in from all quarters, up from the valleys, and down from the mountains, and from the shining sea-coast, streams of brown-robed, bare-footed men of all classes and conditions of life. And what were they coming to? A little church and convent as poor as themselves, where there were not even provisions enough on hand to supply one-hundredth part of the hundreds that were flocking there with one meal! But in perfect faith and trust they came, plodding along under the blazing sun, some rapt in meditation, others saluting all they met with their gentle salutation, "the peace of God."

Such a sight was never seen in Italy before, and from castle and city poured glittering vividly-colored groups to see the wonderful sight. The richly-colored garments of the crowd, and the gaily-decked cavalcade from the country and castle formed a brilliant foil to the brown-robed stream of friars. The Portiuncula

is situated on one of the lowest slopes of the Appenine hills, below it stretches the wide plain. This was the guest-chamber. There were no other beds than the bare ground, with here and there a little straw. But we need not pity them as far as sleeping out of doors goes, because the Umbrian nights are of all things most beautiful. The air was soft and warm, and the brilliant blue-starred heavens above did away with any need of artificial light.

Francis met this crowd with great pleasure and cheerfulness, though he had not a crust to offer them. When they were all assembled he told them with sublime faith to give no thought as to what they were to eat or drink, but only to praise God. And his faith was rewarded. The people came from Perugia, Spoleto, Foligno, and Assisi, and from all the neighboring country to carry meat and drink to that strange congregation. They came with horses and asses, and carts laden with bread and cheese and beans and other good things, and besides this they brought plates, and jugs, and knives; and knights, and barons, and other noblemen, who had come to look on, waited on the brothers with much devotion. It was such sight as once seen could never be forgotten.

Three Grades.

In these chapters Francis was at his best, and happily the historians of the time have preserved for us details of his mode of work. He was there to spend and be spent. His one desire was that the brethren should gain a renewal of spiritual strength in the days passed together, and at the same time that the Order in general should be benefited. To attain the first end, he employed what we have pointed out before as being one of his strongest points—private and individual dealing. As we have also already intimated, we feel sure that the greater part of his phenomenal success resulted from this. In his own mind he had the brethren carefully graded. There were three divisions. First, the fervent; second, the troubled in spirit; and thirdly, the tepid. The correctness with which he assigned everyone to his proper place was well-nigh divine. At the time of writing the fervent were numerous, but they were likely to be carried away by an exaggerated zeal. Some of them wore chains, and were ruining their health with over-watchings and fastings. Francis boldly forbade this. He would have none of it. He spoke to such kindly and tenderly, but he also spoke forcibly in commending that reason which must regulate piety, as it regulates human life. By precise and detailed rules he delivered the fervent from exhausting their strength before its time, and thus preserved them for their work. But it was not an easy task that of controlling the fervent, especially when there was a spice of

self-will in addition to the fervency.

In a large community, such as Francis now had on his hands, there is always sure to be a large percentage of troubled ones. Francis well knew this, he knew that the devil was always on the alert, that trials without and within are the lot of every mortal. These troubled ones found in their leader a tower of strength. To him they poured out their most secret confidences. The difficulties they had with uncongenial brethren, their interior doubts and fears, and awful dread that such might one day cause them to fall away. Francis showed all such the sincerest compassion. They knew and felt that he loved them. His sympathy was a remedy in itself. They left him cheered and refreshed and strengthened.

Human weakness is never slow in showing itself, and the tepid were easily recognized. They were generally those who had made a very good beginning, but had allowed their zeal to cool and were becoming unfaithful to the grace God had given them, and to the rules of the Order. Francis was always gentle to these as he was gentle to all, but he knew how to maintain his authority—to reprove, blame, and correct. He followed the Divine recommendation, "If thy brother shall offend thee, go and rebuke him between thee and him alone." His happiness was complete if he could gain the tepid brother.

Duty of Humility.

In the general meetings where all the brethren were assembled he dealt with the interests of the whole work. He was very strong at these times on the duty of humility.

"Make yourselves small and humble to everyone," he would say, "but above all, be humble to the priests. The care of souls has been entrusted to them. We are only auxiliaries, to do what they cannot do." They were never to enter any field of labor without the invitation, or at least the consent, of the local clergy. And then, when they had received this permission they must never act as though they were masters. This policy acted well. The local clergy had no misgivings in seeking their assistance. They knew that these men would not try to make the people discontented with their own pastors, but rather sow content.

Another spirit Francis strove to get into his followers—that was the spirit of tolerance. He warned them against carrying their attitude, in regard to riches, to excess, and to say that all men must see as they did or remain unsaved. Other reformers had done this and were extinguished. The rule of poverty was God's

leading for Francis. All men he recognized were not called to follow this track, though some of his disciples, in their enthusiasm, would have it that they were. To them Francis said—

"Do not use the sacrifices you impose upon yourselves as a weapon. Beware of haughty reproofs. We must show the same mercy that has been shown to us. The God Who has called us may also call them by-and-bye. I wish all that are here never to call the rich anything but brothers and lords. They are our brothers, since they have the same Creator as we, and they are our lords also because without them we could not persevere in the poverty that we have made our law."

This spirit of tolerance was to extend to the sinners. He did not like to hear them berated.

"Many who are the children of the devil to-day," he said, "will become true disciples. Perhaps they will go before us. This thought alone ought to keep us from all violence of language. We have been sent to bring back to the truth those who are ignorant and in error. That is our office, and one that is not accomplished by the use of cutting words and sharp reproaches.... It is not enough that our compassion be in words only. The important thing is that it should be in our deeds, that all who see us may, by occasion of us, praise our common Father, Who is in Heaven."

Holiness.

He was also strong on holiness. He taught that there must be a true light within that shines only from a clean heart, before it can shine on the outer world, and without this no good work could be accomplished. Francis was full of the grace and wisdom of Jesus Christ. Of the spiritual effect of the first chapter a historian writes—

"The brethren valued the gift they had received. Not one of them cared to talk of profane matters. They talked about the holy examples given by some amongst them, and sought together ways of growing in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ."



CHAPTER XII.

SOME OF FRANCIS' CONVERTS.

"Ah, the people needed helping—
 Needed love—(for love and Heaven
Are the only gifts not bartered,
 They alone are freely given)."

It is rather a pity that there have not been more detailed accounts handed down to us of the converts who could point to Francis as their spiritual father. It would have given us yet another side of that life which was the most glorious spiritual light of the dark age in which he lived! From the few that we meet incidentally, here and there, we have no doubt that such documents, were they forthcoming, would be of immense value. But, alas, the age in which Francis lived was not an essentially literary one, and writing was one of the accomplishments left to the few! So we must therefore make the best of such scanty material as we have at our disposal, and try to give you an idea of the different species of humanity that were attracted by the kindly, gracious, Christ-like personality of Francis.

We have seen how at first, he had no idea of his call extending any further than himself and his own life and conduct. Then one by one, at first, and more quickly afterwards, men ranged themselves under his standard, and claimed him as their leader. Naturally, and simply, he took up his new position, and the duties attached thereto. He seemed to know by intuition those whom God had singled out to be his followers, and one after another heard Francis, as the voice of God calling them to leave all and follow the lowly despised Christ.

Soldiers in the Christian Army.

One of the first of these was a laborer named John.

It was always a great grief to Francis when he saw a church left dirty and neglected. It gave him positive pain to think that anyone could neglect the House of God, and give it less care than they would their own homes. When he went on different preaching tours he used to call the priests of the locality together, and beg of them to look after the decency of the churches. He was not content merely

to preach, but often he bound stalks of heather together and made himself a broom, and set to work and showed them an example.

One day he was busily engaged in sweeping out a church when a peasant appeared. He had left his cart and come to see what was going on. After he had stared for a time, he went over to Francis and said—

"Brother, let me have the broom and I will help you." He took the broom, and finished the church.

When his task was ended, he said—

"Brother, for a long time, ever since I heard men speak of you, I have decided to serve God. I never knew where to find you. Now it has pleased God that we should meet, and henceforth I will do whatever you command me."

Francis was convinced that he would make a good friar, so he accepted him. This John was renowned afterwards for his piety, the other friars admired him greatly. He did not live very long, and after his death, Francis used to love to tell the story of his conversion, always speaking of him as Brother *Saint* John.

Angelo Tancredi was a young knight, rich, and of noble family. Francis met him one day in the neighbourhood of Rieti. He had never seen him before, he knew nothing whatever of him, but inspired by God, he went up to him and said—

"My brother, thou hast long worn belt, sword and spurs. Henceforth thy belt must be a rope, thy sword the Cross of Jesus Christ, and for spurs thou must have dust and mud. Follow me. I will make thee a soldier in the Christian Army."

Angelo's heart must have been prepared by God for this call, because we read that "the brave soldier immediately followed Francis as the Apostles followed our Lord."

New Recruits.

Those who lived with him say that he was distinguished by a "glorious simplicity," meaning, no doubt, that while he accepted the humility of his new life, he retained something of his distinguished manners, and chivalrous bearing. He was a personal friend of Francis', and one to whom he could always unburden his soul.

Guido of Cortono is said to have been a born Franciscan. Passing through Cortono, on a preaching tour, Francis found him ready, and almost waiting for him. He was a young man of singular purity of character. He had neither father nor mother, and lived quietly on the means they had left him. What was over from his income, he gave to the poor. After he had heard Francis preach, he went up to him and begged that he would come to his house, and make it his home as long as he stayed in Cortono. Francis consented, and as he and his companion followed Guido home, Francis said—

"By the grace of God this young man will be one of us, and will sanctify himself among his fellow-citizens."

After they had eaten and rested, Guido offered himself to Francis to be one of his disciples. Francis agreed to receive him upon condition that he should sell all his goods. This was done, apparently on the spot, for we read that the three went round the town, distributing the money. After this Francis conducted Guido into the Church, and there clothed him with the "beast" colored robe.

Guido retired to a place outside the city, and became the founder of a branch of the work. A small monastery was built, and such of his converts in the locality, as were called to be friars, Guido received.

Sometimes the very talk about what Francis was doing, was used of God to rekindle the flame of love to Him in hearts where it had nearly been extinguished. Simply hearing of the crowds that were seeking forgiveness of sins, roused others to a sense of their eternal needs. Amongst this number was John Parenti.

Parenti was a magistrate, a clever, thinking man, who lived in the neighbourhood of Florence. He had long been very careless about his soul, and what little religion he ever had had was fast slipping out of his careless hold. He had heard of Francis, and the reformation that was taking place in Umbria, and meditated long and deeply on all that he heard, wondering, no doubt, if there was really "anything in it," or was it not "all mere excitement." Still, he was more than ever convinced that he himself had very little religion to boast of.

The Swineherd and his Pigs.

One evening he was taking a walk in the country when he met a swine-herd. This youth was in great difficulty over his contrary flock. As is the nature of pigs, mediæval or otherwise, they went in every direction except that in which they were wanted to go! Parenti stood looking on amused at the boy's efforts.

With much labor at last he got them towards the stable door, and as they were rushing in he cried—

"Go in, you beasts, go in as the magistrates and judges go into hell!"

It was only the uncouth speech of an equally uncouth swine-herd, but God used it to the salvation of his soul. He began to think about the dangers of his profession, and the state in which he was living, and where he should really go to if he died. The business of salvation looked to him that evening as the only one worth taking up, and the straight and narrow road the only safe place.

He went home and confided all his hopes and fears to his son. Together they decided that they would go and find Francis, and tell him they wanted to change their life. They saw Francis, and before they left him, they had made up their minds to become friars. They came back, sold all their goods, and then put on the garment of the Order. Parenti was a valuable acquisition to the Order, and rose to considerable eminence in after days.

The Prince of Poets.

Perhaps one of the most remarkable of Francis' converts was Pacificus, as he was known in the Order. This man was a noted poet and musician. He was known throughout Italy as "The King of the Verses," and was considered to be the very prince of poets. He excelled in songs, and was greatly appreciated everywhere. His supremacy was so undoubted that several times he had received the poet's crown from the hands of the Emperor of Germany, that very same crown that afterwards adorned the brows of Petrarch and Tasso. He was visiting at San Severino when he met Francis.

A house of "Poor Ladies" had just been founded in this place, and Francis was preaching in their chapel. Some friends of Pacificus had relatives among the "Poor Ladies," and as they were going to visit them they asked him to come along too. He went, and as Francis was preaching they stopped to hear him. The tone, and the eloquence of the preacher, arrested Pacificus, and he could not hide his emotion as one truth after another struck his conscience. Francis perceiving that one hearer at least was touched by his words, turned the point of his discourse straight at him. The longer Pacificus listened, the more he was convinced not only that the hand of the Lord was upon him, but that a great work was required of him. As soon as the sermon was over, he asked to speak with Francis. That conversation completely won Pacificus. Francis spoke to him of

the judgments of God, and the vanities of the world.

"Enough of words," cried the Poet, "let us have deeds! Withdraw me, I pray you, from men, and restore me to the supreme Emperor."

Francis was always a lover of decision, and the next day he gave him the habit, and took him on to Assisi with him. Ever after this the poet was known as Pacificus, in memory of the peace of Christ that that day flowed into his soul. His life was beautiful in its simplicity. His historian writes, "he seemed rather to forget what he had been, than have to make any violent effort to force himself to a new life." In other words, his life "was hid with Christ in God."

This conversion of Pacificus attracted a great deal of attention and did much towards advertising the Franciscans all over Europe.

Professor Pepoli.

Professor Pepoli filled an important chair in the Bologna University. He was converted through the preaching of Francis in Bologna. Of this preaching an eye witness writes:—

"I, Thomas, Archdeacon of the Cathedral Church, studying at Bologna, saw Francis preach in the square, where nearly the whole town was assembled. He spoke first of angels, and men, and devils. He explained the spiritual natures with such exactitude and eloquence that his hearers were astonished that such words could come from the mouth of so simple a man. Nor did he follow the usual course of preachers. His discourse resembles rather those harangues that are made by popular orators. At the conclusion he spoke only of the extinction of hatred, and the urgency of concluding treaties of peace and compacts of union. His garment was soiled and torn, his person mean, his face pale, but God gave his words unheard of power. He even converted noblemen, whose unrestrained fury had bathed the country in blood, and many of them were reconciled."

Professor Pepoli came under the spell of this preaching. A little later all Bologna was electrified by hearing that he was about to give up his professorship and become one of Francis' disciples. His friends did all in their power to keep him. They pointed out to him how much he loved his studies and the glory that was his. All in vain. Professor Pepoli had already been accepted by Francis.

Three years later he died, greatly mourned by an entire monastery of which he had been the founder.

If there were one class of men that Francis took more interest in than another, after the lepers, it was the thieves and robbers that abounded all over Europe. One day a number of them came begging at the monastery. Angelo Tancredi opened the door to them and, true to his soldierly instincts, was very wroth at their impudence.

The Robbers.

"What!" he cried, "Robbers, evil-doers, assassins, have you no shame for stealing the goods of others, but would you devour the goods of the servants of God? You who are not worthy to live, and respect neither men or God. Get you hence, and never let me see you here again!"

The robbers departed, full of rage. Francis next appeared close on their heels, carrying with him some bread and wine that had been given to him. Angelo told him of the impudence of the robbers, and how he had served them. To his surprise, Francis was much grieved at his conduct, and reproved him for his cruelty.

"Go at once," he said, "and take this bread and wine and seek those robbers till you have found them, and offer them this bread from me, then ask their pardon, and pray them in my name to no longer do wrong, but fear God."

Angelo departed, while Francis stayed at home and prayed for the success of his undertaking. The robbers were found, and Angelo brought them back to the monastery where they not only sought the pardon of their sins, but became friars, and lived and died in true holiness.

One day Francis and some of the friars were passing round the foot of a great castle. It was evident there was some festival going on inside! The banner of the house floated over the gates, and the sound of trumpets were heard half over the country-side. The young Count of Montefeltro was about to be knighted.

"Come," said Francis, suddenly inspired, "let us go to the Castle, and with God's help perhaps we may make some spiritual knight."

As soon as the ceremony was ended, and the company began to pour out into the courtyard, Francis stood up on a low wall and began to preach. He spoke of the worthlessness of all earthly pleasures compared to the heavenly ones. He showed what the love of God could do in the human soul, pointing them to the apostles and martyrs as illustration, and contrasting the chivalry of the Christian heroes

with that which was human glory only. It was an appropriate subject, and the people listened attentively.

Amongst the audience was a valiant knight, Count Orlando, Lord of Chiusi. Immediately after the sermon, he went to Francis and said—

"I should like to talk to you about the salvation of my soul."

"Most willingly," replied Francis, always courteous, "but this is not quite a fitting moment. You must honor those who have invited you. First go and dine with them, and after the repast we will converse at leisure."

Count Orlando did so, and returning to Francis they talked together. Very soon Orlando was happier than he had ever been in his life before, because he knew that his sins were all pardoned. Before he parted with Francis he said—

"I have in my domains a mountain called La Vernia. It is exactly suited to men who wish to live in solitude. If it please thee I will give it to thee most willingly."

Francis accepted the offer, and the mountain was used as a place where the brethren could go to pray, and rest when worn out with the fatigue of their work. It was really a huge plateau on top of a steep mountain, covered with trees. Amongst these, some little cells were constructed, and a quieter, more restful place it would be hard to imagine.

The Peasant's Advice.

It was when Francis was climbing this mountain once, that a peasant, who took him up on his ass, asked him—

"Are you the Francis of Assisi that is so much talked of?"

"Yes," said Francis, "I am."

"Well," responded the man, "You will have hard work to be as good as they say you are. They have such confidence in you, it is difficult for you to be equal to it, at least that is *my* opinion."

Francis was charmed with this opinion, and thanked the man for his charitable advice, but before that journey was ended, the peasant was convinced that Francis was as good as "they" said he was.

Our readers must not imagine that Francis' converts were all men. Far from it.

Many women, besides Clara and Agnes, had to thank God that he ever came their way and taught them how to love and serve God.

"Our Brother Jacqueline!"

There was Jacqueline. She was of noble family, and though she did not leave the world like Clara, yet she served the cause right nobly. She was a most unusual woman for her times. We are told that "she was not afraid of business!" She went in person and treated with the Benedictines, and induced them to give up certain buildings in favor of the Friars Minor. All her riches and influence she put at the disposal of the Franciscans, who had no more active patron than Jacqueline. Francis used to call her jokingly "our brother Jacqueline!"

On one of the last tours Francis was able to make, he suffered much from pain and depression. To cheer him, says a historian, God gave him a piece of work to do for Him. He was passing through a place called Voluisiano, when a young lady, the wife of the baron of the place, ran after him. When she caught up with him she was very much out of breath. Francis looked at her with interest, and asked—

"What can I do for you, Madam?"

"I want you to bless me," she said.

"Are you married?" went on Francis.

"Oh, yes," said the girl, "and my husband is very stern. He sets himself against my serving Jesus Christ. He is my great trouble. I have received a right will from Heaven, and I cannot follow it on account of him. Will you pray that God may soften his heart?"

"My daughter," Francis said in great compassion, "Go, I am assured your husband will become your consolation. Tell him this from God and me, 'Now is the time of salvation, recompense will surely come.'"

Then he gave her his blessing.

The lady went home, and finding her husband, gave him Francis' message. The Spirit of God carried it to his inmost soul.

"He is right," he said to his wife, "Let us serve God together, and save our souls in our own house!"

"The Lord be praised," cried his wife, and together they thanked God for the gift of His wonderful salvation. They lived for a great many years in godliness and holiness, and passed away to be with Christ, the one in the morning and the other in the evening of the same day.

A Catalogue of Names.

Other equally interesting incidents, we have no doubt cluster round what, unfortunately, the historians present to us in the form of a catalogue of mere names.

Chapter XIII.

THE STORY OF THE MARTYRS.

"God the Father, give us grace
To walk in the light of Jesu's Face.
God the Son, give us a part,
In the hiding place of Jesu's Heart.
God the Spirit, so hold us up,
That we may drink of Jesu's Cup."

They were five in number. Their names were Berard, Peter, Otho, Adjutorius, and Accurtius. When they first started out for Morocco, a sixth, Vital, was with them, but at an early stage of the journey he fell sick, and rather than the mission should be delayed on his account he insisted on their leaving him behind. He never recovered, but died about the same time as his brothers were martyred.

About these martyrs historians are divided in their minds. Some say that they were foolish and extreme and courted persecution, others declare that they were animated by the Holy Ghost, and others that it was a part of God's great plan for the encouraging of the Franciscan movement. Certain it is, that in their case, the blood thus spilled was fruitful, and brought to life rich fruit, and we have no doubt that to-day they are among that mighty throng who are clothed in white raiment, and bear palms in their hands, who on earth "counted not their life dear to them." The memory of such souls is always fragrant, and supreme love, even though it may appear ill-regulated, is better than a tepid affection which is unworthy the name.

The five travelled by way of Portugal, where they were well received. At Seville they stopped in the house of a Christian merchant for eight days, which time they spent in prayer. At the end of the eight days they informed the gentleman why they had come, and further said that they were about to commence a little preaching in Seville. Seville was at this period in the hands of the Moors. The poor merchant was utterly horrified at their proposals, he threw every obstacle in their way, telling them that they would do no good, and only make it hard for the Christian merchants who were allowed to trade there! Needless to say, such worldly reasoning had no effect upon the disciples of Francis.

Their first attempt was, of all places, in a mosque! While the Moors were engaged in devotion one day, they were electrified to hear a loud voice proclaim to them Jesus Crucified. They immediately rose up and drove the intruders out with blows and curses. The five next repaired to a larger mosque, and sought to obtain a hearing there. Again they were thrown out. Then a brilliant idea occurred to the leader, Berard.

"We will go to the King," he said. "If we gain him, the victory over the others will be easy!"

In spite of all difficulties, they managed to gain admission to the Court, and present their plea. The King was enraged at their audacity, and ordered them to be scourged and beheaded, which was the summary mode in which justice was dealt out in that era. If it had not been for the intercession of the King's son, this sentence would have been carried into effect, as it was they were taken away and imprisoned in a tower.

A few hours later all Seville gathered to see a strange sight! There, on top of the prison tower, stood the five, brown-robed, bare-footed strangers, singing with all their might praises to the one true God! They were then taken and thrust into the darkest and deepest dungeon. But as solitary confinement was unknown then, they found that they had a congregation all ready to listen to them, and, as long as they stayed there, they never ceased to preach repentance to the prisoners.

They were not left in prison very long. The King sent for them again, and began by coaxing them to leave off preaching. He promised them riches and honor, if they would only stop talking about Jesus Christ. They thanked him courteously, and Berard said—

"Would to God, noble prince, you would show mercy to yourself! You need it more than we do. Treat us as you will, you can, at the utmost, only deprive us of life, and that is a matter of little moment to us who hope for eternal joys!"

What to do with these strange men the King did not know! Their courage and heroism he could not but admire, still they were very dangerous. After a consultation with his officers, they decided that the best thing to be done was to get them quietly out of the country. Accordingly they were placed in a vessel bound to Morocco. This exile filled the five with joy! At last they were to begin work in an infidel country!

Don Pedro.

Now, Don Pedro, the brother of King Alphonso of Portugal, a nominal Christian, had had some kind of a dispute with the King, in consequence of which he had come to live in Morocco. Notwithstanding his Christianity, he had been placed at the head of a Mussulman army. To him the missionaries repaired. By this time their personal appearance was anything but improved. Suffering and imprisonment had done their work, their faces were wan and thin, and their garments were all but in rags. Nevertheless, Don Pedro received them kindly, and promised to befriend them. He warned them against being too extreme, cautioned them to moderation, and begged that they would not expose themselves to danger.

But Don Pedro knew nothing about that love, which is as fire in the bones, and is strong as death; so strong that no barriers can keep it within bounds. The next morning found the missionaries hard at work. They had learned that there was going to be some kind of a public procession through the town as the King was going to visit the tomb of his ancestors.

Prison and Torture.

A procession to the five meant people, a concourse of sinners and infidels, a glorious opportunity, and if they did not make the best of it, they would be unworthy the name they bore. Just as the King was passing, Berard, who could speak Arabic, mounted a cart and began to preach. Instead of stopping when the royal train passed, as a Mussulman would have done, he waxed more vehement. To the King this seemed either insolence or madness, and having charitably decided on madness, he ordered the missionaries to be banished. Don Pedro, who by this time had had enough of his troublesome guests, gave them an escort to the nearest seaport, and hurried their departure. Again he reckoned without his host. It was to the Moors the five were sent to preach, and to the Moors they were bound to go, so they escaped from their escort, returned to Morocco, and began to preach again in the streets.

This was too much for the King, and he had them thrown into the vilest of dungeons, where for several weeks they languished in great misery, with barely enough to eat. One of the nobles of the Court who was secretly inclined to the Friars, advised the King to let them out, but place them under proper care. This was done, and they were handed over to the unfortunate Don Pedro, who was far

from cheerful at seeing them back again. He was about to start off on a military expedition into the interior, and not daring to leave his awkward charge behind, he took them with him. Nothing much is known of their doings till they got back again to Morocco, whereupon they began their preaching again without any more delay. Yet again the King commanded that they should be thrown into prison, and this time they were sentenced to torture. Albozaida was the name of the officer who was to carry out this sentence. In his heart he pitied and admired the missionaries, and notwithstanding the order he had received, he merely had them shut up, and begged of the King to pardon them. But it was no use. The King was very angry, and demanded that his will be carried out without delay. So there was nothing for Albozaida to do but to hand them over to the executioner.

The End.

Alas for them! this man was a renegade Christian, and no torture was too great for him to inflict upon them. They were dragged through the streets with cords round their necks, they were beaten, they were rolled over pieces of glass and broken tiles, and when evening came, vinegar was poured into their open wounds, lest the night should bring too much cessation from pain. But they smiled at pain, and praised God in the midst of the greatest tortures. This treatment failing to kill them, the King desired to see them again. He spoke to them at first as though he had never seen them before.

"Are you the impious men who despise the true faith, the madmen who blaspheme the Prophet of the Lord?" he said.

"Oh King," they replied, "far from despising the true faith, we are ready to die for it. It is true that our faith is not your faith."

The King did not appear to be displeased with this bold statement. He had another argument at hand. He sent for a number of richly-dressed women, and presenting them to the missionaries he said, "If you will follow the law of Mahomet, I will give you these women for wives, and you shall have positions of honor and power in my kingdom. If not, you shall die by the sword!"

"Prince," they answered, "We want neither your women nor your honors. Be such things yours, and Jesus Christ ours. Make us suffer all your tortures, kill us. Pain will be light to us. We look to Heaven!"

Maddened by his own insufficiency the King got up, seized a sword, and cleft

their heads as though he were but a common executioner. Thus perished the first Franciscan Martyrs.

And did they accomplish nothing? Was their mission an utter failure, as some historians write it? Let us see for ourselves.

As soon as the missionaries had been killed, the mob took their bodies, and dragged them in the mire, and horribly mutilated them. However, Don Pedro, who up till now had been but a very poor representative of the Church of Christ, was deeply touched by the death of the five, and his once half-sleeping conscience was awakened into activity. He got possession of the battered bodies, and resolving that he would have nothing further to do with the enemies of Christianity, took them, and went back to his own country. As soon as he arrived at Coimbra, King Alphonse came out to meet him, and with great rejoicing the remains of the Missionary Martyrs were carried to the Church.

Fernandez.

Amongst those who followed in the train of the king was a young man some twenty-five years old, of noble family, named Fernandez. This young man was tremendously stirred by the story of the martyred five. Their life and death spoke to his soul as nothing had ever done before, he longed to follow in their steps. He had a great deal of conversation with certain Franciscans who lived in a settlement hut outside the town. They came sometimes and begged at his door, and he used to question them.

One day he said—

"If I became one of you, would you send me to the country of the Saracens, that like your holy martyrs I might shed my blood for the faith?"

They replied, saying, it was the wish of Francis that his people should go and preach to the infidels.

"If that is so," said Fernandez, "bring me the habit of your Order and let me put it on."

Without any pomp or ceremony Fernandez put on the coarse robe, changed his name to that of Anthony, and, bidding good-bye to his family, joined the Franciscans. To go into all the details of his story would take too much space, but Fernandez became one of the shining lights of the Franciscan movement, and

many rose up to call him blessed!

Father of Souls.

He went to Africa, but it was not God's will that he should labor there. A violent fever reduced him to such a degree of weakness that he had to leave the country. He set sail, meaning to return to his native land and get restored in body, but a storm drove the vessel on to the coast of Italy. He preached there for a time and then went on to the Portiuncula, where Francis was presiding over a gathering of the brethren. There God showed him that Africa and a martyr's crown were not for him, and cheerfully accepting the work that God meant for him, he became the father of thousands of souls.

Oh, what, if we are Christ's,
Is earthly shame or loss?
Bright shall the crown of glory be,
When we have borne the cross.

Keen was the trial once,
Bitter the cup of woe,
When martyred saints, baptized in blood,
Christ's sufferings shared below.

Bright is their glory now,
Boundless their joy above,
Where, on the bosom of their God,
They rest in perfect love.

Lord! may that grace be ours,
Like them in faith to bear
All that of sorrow, grief, or pain,
May be our portion here!



CHAPTER XIV.

FIRST FOREIGN MISSIONS.

"They are gone where Love is frozen, and Faith grown calm
and cold,
Where the world is all triumphant, and the sheep have left
the fold,
Where His children scorn His blessings, and His sacred
shrine despise."

It was about the time of the first chapter that Francis began to feel drawn to foreign fields. The Franciscans had now spread all over Italy, and there was a general desire shown by the brethren to extend their ministrations outside that country. It would appear that at its close, a small number of the brethren were sent out to evangelize the various countries of Europe, Portugal, Hungary, Germany, etc.

For himself Francis had a larger and more daring scheme.

It was the time of the Crusades. All Christian Europe was bending its energies to wrest the tomb of our Saviour out of the hands of the Saracens. Band after band of Crusaders had marched into the Sultan's territory—to suffer defeat and death. Francis was too much of a soldier and knight not be stirred by the tales of bravery and daring which were rife everywhere. But he had his own opinions.

"Is there not," he asked himself, "a more beautiful way of gaining the desired end? Why all this bloodshed? why this wholesale hurrying of men to perdition? why all this strife between the children of one Father? Why has no one ever tried to gain these infidels over on Christ's side? How many lives might be spared, and what an increase there would be for His Church if they succeeded!"

It was a noble thought, and one worthy of Francis. The more he pondered these matters the more convinced he became that it was his duty to put his ideas into practice. He told some of the brethren his purpose, and they, convinced that God led him, made no objection, and in a very short time he was ready to begin his difficult and dangerous undertaking. Peter of Cantani was appointed to take the

government of the Order during his absence.

Francis, and his companion, whose name we are not told, embarked at Ancona. How they got their passage without any money we do not know, but it is evident that they managed it somehow. When they were well out to sea, such a storm arose as caused them to seek refuge on the coast of Illyria. It was supposed at first that the delay would only be one of a few weeks, but the stormy weather persistently continuing, it soon became evident that it would be impossible to cross the Levant at that season of the year. This was a great disappointment to Francis, but he was far from being discouraged. He determined to return to Ancona. A vessel was about to sail, and he presented himself as a passenger, but as he had no money they refused to take him on board.

A Dilemma!

Here was a dilemma! But help was at hand. One of the ship's officers, a good man, was touched by the harshness with which the missionaries were treated, so he went to Francis and told him that he would take them on board. He conducted them down into the hold, and hid them behind some horses there. Hardly had they been deposited when an unknown friend brought an enormous basket of provisions, and, giving it to their benefactor, said—

"Take this, take great care of it, and as the need arises, distribute it to the poor brethren you have hidden."

The need soon arose. Another fearful storm beat the vessel about to such an extent that the voyage was prolonged far beyond the usual limit. Provisions were exhausted and a famine threatened the unhappy crew. Then Francis, hearing of the distress, crept out from among the horses, explained his presence, and said that he had food which he would be glad to share with them. The legend tells us that the food was miraculously made to last the voyage; the real fact was probably that the basket contained large supplies of beans, and lentils, and macaroni, and such Italian foods that swell in the cooking, and go a long way.

In Spain.

Arriving at Ancona, Francis began to preach. He had a wonderful time, and a great number of clerics and laymen joined the Order. Part of them Francis took with him to the Portiuncula, and offered them to God as the price of his failure! After watching over them for a few weeks, he left them in good hands, and turned his attention again to foreign mission work. The east had been closed to him, but that was no reason why the west should not open. The enemies of the Christians were as powerful in Spain and North Africa, as in Egypt and the Holy Land. The infidels had just been defeated in battle, and all Europe was talking about the victory gained at Las Navas Tolva. The heart of Francis mourned over these defeated ones. "Supposing they had been defeated," he argued, "their natures were still unchanged, their souls were still unsaved." He began to question if their need was not his call. He thought he heard them crying, "Pass over and help us!" He offered himself to God for this work, and, taking with him his well-beloved Bernardo di Quintavalle, set out for Spain. He had another rough experience of the sea, but this time he reached his goal without any mishap.

It was autumn when they landed in Spain, and without loss of time, they set off for the interior. At the outset of the journey, a little incident occurred which, though unpleasant at the time, God over-ruled for good. They were passing a vineyard, and Bernardo, who was very thirsty, plucked a bunch of grapes to refresh himself with. This was quite an allowable action in Italy, but Spain appeared to have a different code of morals, and one of the servants of the owner seized Bernardo, called him a rogue and a thief, and insisted upon his paying for what he had taken. Bernardo explained that he had no idea of doing wrong, and that he did not possess the smallest piece of money. The man snatched at his mantle, and said that would have to pay for it. But Francis, without discussing the matter with the servant, insisted upon seeing the owner of the vineyard. To him he explained the state of affairs; the mantle was given back, Bernardo was apologized to, and the good Spaniard did even more, he offered his services to Francis, and threw open his house, which became a sort of hostelry for the Order, and any brother was always welcome, night or day, to the best that there was.

The Will of the Lord.

Francis' intention was to go straight to the Mussulmans. He even talked of reaching Morocco. But God led him to stay in Spain longer than he had expected. People were converted everywhere, and branches of the work were established. Who took charge of these new ventures we are not told; doubtless friars from Italy were sent there.

Just as he began to see his way clear to go to the Mussulmans, he was seized with a violent fever. For some time he lay between life and death, and when at last he began to get well, it was perfectly evident that there could be no talk of his going to Morocco. Always submissive, Francis accepted this as the will of the Lord and returned to Italy. The reason why he was led back to the Portiuncula at that particular time seemed to him quite plain afterwards; for, when he got there, he found a number of learned and noble men waiting to offer themselves to him.

Exactly what Francis did after this is not quite clear. Probably he preached round about the North of Italy, and visited the various branches of the work, instructing novices, and establishing fresh centres. At the beginning of the next year we find him attending a conference in Rome, respecting the recovery of the Holy Land. While here, he met Dominic for the first time. Dominic was the founder of another kind of Friar Order. He conceived a great admiration for Francis, and

tried very hard to get him to consent to amalgamate the two. This Francis never would consent to do, and the two always remained distinct.

Ugolin's Visit.

The decision of the conference was that the Pope himself should lead a crusade into the Holy Land. He left Rome in May, and passed through the valley of Assisi, where Francis was presiding over a general Chapter. At Perugia he was taken ill with fever. One of his near relatives, Cardinal Ugolino, accompanied him. This man had heard a great deal about Francis from Cardinal Paul, who had just died, and he thought that now would be a good chance to see for himself. Accordingly, followed by his magnificent suite, he travelled back to Assisi. All he saw filled him with wonder; it bore to him the mark of true holiness. What struck him most was the poverty of it the brethren. He had no idea they carried it so far. He went through the roughly constructed cells, saw the beds made of straw, more like the lairs of wild animals, and he could not restrain his tears.

"Alas!" he cried to those who were with him, "what will become of us who need so many superfluities in our lives!"

Ugolino did not stop there. He felt impelled to offer himself to fill the place of Cardinal Paul as Protector of the Order.

"I offer myself to you," he said to Francis; "if you wish it, I will be your helper, counsellor, and support!"

Francis first of all thanked God, and then he answered, "It is with all my heart I salute you, the father and Protector of our religion. I wish all my brothers to you consider you as such!"

There are some historians who declare that this friendship—for a very real friendship sprang up between Francis and Ugolino—was no advantage to the Order, but rather harmed it. There is no evidence of this among the best authorities; they lean rather to a contrary opinion, and we are inclined to believe ourselves that the Order would never have developed as it did but for Cardinal Ugolino. He went back and told the Pope what he had seen, and the old man rejoiced greatly. It was the last joy he had on earth, for he died a few days later.

Growth of the Order.

Time went on, the Order spread and spread till it was impossible for one man to

do justice to the whole. To meet the growing need for oversight, Italy was divided into several provinces, these provinces were to be directed by brothers who were called "Ministers" or "Provincial Servants." Francis named Peter Catani for Umbria, Elias for Tuscany, Bennet of Arezzo for the Marches of Ancona, John of Stracchai for Lombardy, Daniel for Calabria. Then it was also decided that Bernardo di Quintavalle was to take charge of Spain, and John of Penna, Germany. Francis himself was to take France, a land he had always been especially drawn to. It was through the intervention of Ugolino that he forewent this mission. Francis stopped at Florence on his way to tell him of his journey. Ugolino saw what Francis could not see, that in view of all their new ventures he could not afford to leave the country just then. Francis argued that he could not stay at home in safety and let the brothers go abroad on dangerous missions, it would raise talk. Ugolino wanted to know if Italy wasn't big enough for him. Francis replied that God had raised them up for the good of the whole world.

"Perhaps so," said Ugolino, "but in any case *you* cannot go away yet without imprudence. Your Order is only just started, you know the opposition it met with at first; its enemies are not yet disarmed, and your presence is necessary to defend and maintain it."

Francis saw that Ugolino spoke wisely, and he gave in and stayed at home. For some time he was the guest of the Cardinal, and their mutual liking for each other was greatly increased. The more Ugolino saw of Francis the more he loved him, and though he could not see eye to eye with him in everything at first, he eventually came round to his ways. As much as possible Francis lived his simple manner of life in the Cardinals palace. He prayed and meditated, he went out to preach and to beg, and he even brought back his alms into the palace! One day there were a great many people at the table, and Francis was eating the scraps he had begged. Some of the guests began to joke him about it, but Francis maintained that his food was angels' bread, and if they liked he would share it with them. All—prelates, knights and nobles—accepted willingly, some ate their portion, others put it by to keep as a memento. But Ugolino was a little hurt. He took Francis aside and said—

A Quarrel.

"Ah, my brother, wherefore all this begging; you hurt me. Do you not know that my house is yours and your brethren's?"

"My lord," answered Francis, "I have not affronted you; I think I have honored

you by imitating in your house our Lord Jesus Christ who taught us to love poverty. For, indeed, I mean only to follow the footsteps of my Master!"

The Cardinal bowed his head.

"Do, my brother, what seems good to you," he said, "the Lord is with you!"

This visit of Francis' to Florence resulted in the establishment of a large convent on the borders of Tuscany and Umbria. This is how it came about. The powerful family of the lords of Baschi were divided. The three sons were in open rebellion on account of questions of personal interest, and they were doing their best to drag into this quarrel the numerous friends of their clients and vassals. It was plain to be seen that bloodshed would be the outcome. Francis was very much grieved when he heard of this dissension, and felt that he must do his best to stop it. Accordingly, he visited the three brothers, Ugolino, Buonconte and Ranicu, in turn, and entreated them in the name of Christ to desist. He succeeded in accomplishing his end, they laid down their arms, amicably settled the vexed question, and a charter of reconciliation was drawn up. Then, wishing to show their gratitude to Francis, they presented him with a beautiful hill, and, building a monastery on it, begged of him to send friars to establish a work there.

A little later, the Cardinal presided over what was known as the "Chapter of Mats," so called because the brothers lived under little tents made of matting. He was very much surprised at all he saw, and said he never expected to find a well-disciplined army! This was a very important Chapter, and many new Provinces were formed. It was conducted very much like the preceding ones.

Failure of the German Mission.

It was either in the middle or just before this Chapter, that the German-Hungarian expedition returned. Their mission had been an utter failure! When questioned as to the reason of this failure, they answered, unanimously—

"No one knows us; our dress, our loneliness, excite distrust. The clergy have united to drive us away, they called us heretics, and left us without defence or protection. We fell into the hands of wicked men and thieves, who ill-treated us; we had to come away!"

This sounded very badly, but the explanation of it lay in the fact that they did not understand the language of the people they went to! How it happened that they were sent, not knowing the language, we cannot say. Perhaps Francis thought

that French and Italian would be spoken, or, at least, understood in these countries, or it may be he expected them to be endowed with the gift of tongues. Those who went to Germany knew but one word of the language, "ja"—"yes." In the first town they entered they attracted a great deal of notice, and people asked them if they would like food and a lodging. They did not understand a word of what was said, but they smiled and said "ja." Finding themselves well treated, they determined to use this expression on all occasions.

Unfortunately, the next one asked them if they were heretics, and had come to Germany to preach an evil doctrine. When they again smiled and answered "ja," to their grief and amazement, they were cast into prison, and after having been ill-treated for some time, were driven out of the country.

At the close of the "Chapter of Mats," Francis announced that he was about to proceed to Egypt to preach to the Sultan. Ugolino had decided that things were now on such a solid foundation that he could with safety leave the Order while he took this long journey.



CHAPTER XV.

FRANCIS' VISIT TO THE SULTAN. DISCOURAGEMENTS.

"I must not fail
Nor be discouraged. In the work of God
No man may turn or falter."

Francis and his companion Illuminato set out for Egypt with the intention of making straight for the Sultan. They travelled with one of the Crusading parties, which, by a curious coincidence, was commanded by John of Brienne, brother to that Walter of Brienne whom Francis would have enlisted under, only God sent him back to his native town! That Francis made a good impression upon the Crusaders we know, for one of their number writes of him:—

"We saw Brother Francis, Founder of the Order of Minors, arrive; he is a simple man, but very lovable, and dear to God as well as to men, and is much respected by all."

The impression the Crusaders made upon Francis was not so favorable! There was a great deal of discord among them. The Knights looked down on the men-at-arms, and the men-at-arms called the Knights treacherous. Francis had grave doubts as to the result of *their* expedition from the beginning. Immediately upon landing, the Crusaders had planned to do battle with the Saracens. This line of action was totally opposed to Francis' ideas of Christianity.

"I know, by a revelation of the Lord," he said to Illuminato, "that they will be defeated in this attempt. If I tell them so, they will treat me as a madman; and, on the other hand, if I do not tell them my conscience will condemn me. What do you think I ought to do?"

"My brother," said Illuminato, who was a man of virtue and intelligence, "what does the world's judgment matter to you? If they say you are mad, it will not be the first time they have said so! Do not burden your conscience; fear God rather than man!"

So Francis was true to his conscience, and warned the Crusaders, but they laughed him to scorn! They rushed into a battle, and were utterly defeated. Six

thousand Christians were killed or taken prisoners. During the battle Francis was very anxious and unhappy, and often he wept bitterly for those whom he had tried to save!

Now that force had failed, Francis felt that his time had come. He would go to the Sultan. The Crusaders, what were left of them, in their turn, tried to dissuade him. They told him that he could not get from one camp to another without being killed, and that the Sultan had offered a golden reward to anyone who would bring the head of a Christian. He replied that he did not fear death, and would make the attempt. First though, before he set out, he went to one of the Cardinals who were with the Crusaders, and told him what he proposed doing. A contemporary writer preserves for us this interview. He writes, probably in a letter to some friend—

Two Clerks.

"Now I must tell you that two Clerks (Francis and Illuminato) were in the Army, and they came to the Cardinal. They said that they would go to the Sultan to preach, and they wished to go with his leave. The Cardinal said they should not go with his leave, for he knew well if they went they would not escape. Still they said, would he suffer them to go, and much they prayed him. Then, when he heard that they had so great a mind to go, he said thus: 'I do not know your thoughts at all, but beware if you go that your thoughts are always to God.' They said they only wished to go for great good, if they could accomplish it. Then the Cardinal said they could go if they wished, and they departed from the Christian host into the host of the Saracens."

Francis was full of confidence. As he travelled he sang, "Though I walk in the midst of shadows of death, I fear no evil." On his way he met two little sheep. This sight gave him much cheer.

"Be of good comfort," he said to Illuminato, "it is the accomplishment of the words of the Gospel, 'Behold I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves.'"

The Saracens.

And the wolves were not very far behind. They appeared in the shape of some Saracen soldiers, who taking them at first for refugees or envoys let them go quietly on, but when they found out that the brethren had no message and that they not only refused to give up the Christian religion, but had come to preach it,

they abused them and loaded them with chains. Francis never lost his presence of mind. He knew one word of Arabic, and that was "Soldan"—Sultan. As the soldiers beat him he cried lustily "Soldan, Soldan," and they understood that he wanted to be taken to their Chief.

The Sultan was called by the Arabs, Malek-Camel, or the "Perfect Prince." He was very far from being a perfect character, but for a Mussulman, he was not ferocious. When Francis and Illuminato came before him they saluted him. Malek-Camel saluted them, and asked if they wished to become Saracens, or had they come with a message.

"Saracens we will never be," they said, "but we have come with a message from God that will save your life. For we say that if you die under this law you are lost, and for that we have come to you, and if you will listen to us we will show you that you are lost!"

The Sultan said meekly that he had very good Archbishops and Bishops of his own.

"Of this we are glad," the missionaries replied, "send and fetch them."

So the Sultan actually sent and fetched eight. He told them what they were wanted for, and repeated to them his conversation with Francis. But there was no mercy in this quarter.

"Sire," they said, "thou art expert in the law and art bound to maintain and guard it; we command thee by Mahomet, who gave it to us, that their heads be cut off. We will hear nothing that they say, we command thee to have their heads cut off." With that final decision they filed solemnly away, leaving Francis, Illuminato and the Sultan alone.

"Seigneurs," the Sultan said, "they have commanded me by Mahomet and the law to have your heads cut off. This the law commands. But I will go against the law, for else I should render thee a very poor reward for having risked death to save my soul."

In a second interview he had with them he promised them possessions and lands if they would only stay with him!

"Yes," said Francis, "if you will be converted, with your people I will gladly remain." Then, a bright idea striking him, he went on—

Trial by Fire!

"Your priests will not talk with me, perhaps they would be more ready to act. Have a great fire lighted, I will go into the fire with them, and you will see by the result which faith is the surest and holiest."

When Francis had begun this speech there were a number of priests standing round about, but before he had finished they had quietly taken themselves off! The idea filled them with horror! The Sultan perceiving their absence, remarked sarcastically—

"I do not think that any of *my* priests are inclined to face flames and torture for the defence of their faith."

Francis couldn't understand how anybody with a real faith could refuse to have it tested! He offered to go into the fire alone, and if he were burnt it was to be considered due to his sins, but if God protected him, the Sultan was to own Him as Supreme. But the Sultan would not hear of any such trial. He was amazed and astonished at the absolute faith and trust of the man before him.

With this refusal Francis retired. He was followed by rich presents from the Sultan, all of which were promptly returned. The Sultan begged of him to take them for his Churches and Order, but Francis persisted in his refusal, and seeing that there was no germ of real religion in the Sultan's heart, he returned to the Crusaders' Camp. He was heavy and sore in soul because he felt his mission to be a failure.

Victory.

But if he had failure in one direction, he had victory in another. The news of his visit to the Sultan spread, and wherever he was, people flocked to see and hear him, and recruits such as he had never expected, began to gather round him. The following fragment of a letter written by one of the Crusaders to a friend, shows us how they regarded his work.

"Master Regnier, Prior of St. Michael's, has entered the Order of Friars Minor. This Order is making rapid progress in the world, because it exactly reproduces the form of the Primitive Church, and closely imitates the life of the Apostles. The Superior of these brethren is Brother Francis, a man of such goodness that we all hold him in veneration. After he came among us, so great was his zeal that

he did not fear to go into the Army of our enemies, and preach, during several days, the Word of God to the Saracens. He had not much success, but on his departure, the Sultan King of Egypt asked him secretly to pray for him that he might be guided by an inspiration from above, and attach himself to the religion most approved by God. Colin, the Englishman, one clerk, and two other of our companions, to wit, Michel and Master Mathieu, to whom I have entrusted the care of my Church, have also entered the Order of Minors, and I can hardly keep back the Cantor and several others! As to myself, with my body weakened, and my heart oppressed by all these separations, I aspire to end my life in peace and quiet."

Thus when Francis failed, God caused even that failure to be productive of good. The whole question of failure is a very subtle one, and it is a matter of grave doubt as to whether God's errands ever do really fail—what we call failure according to our preconceived ideas, may simply be God's way of working. True, the Sultan was not converted (though there is a legend to the effect that when he was on his death-bed he sent for a Franciscan friar, and professed conversion), but to-day, at time of writing, the Franciscans are spread out all over the Holy Land. They have schools and churches and orphanages in every part of the country.

Seventeen years later, John of Brienne, the Commander of the Crusade, after fighting many battles, and rising to great earthly glory, became converted and entered a branch of the Franciscan brotherhood then established in the Holy Land. This was no doubt due to the influence of Francis, who by the power of God alone, subdued the enemies of Christ.

A Trial.

Upon returning to Italy, a sad trial awaited Francis. He had determined to visit Bologna on his way back. The long sea-voyage and hot climate of Egypt had weakened him very much, so much so that it nearly happened that he passed on without paying the promised visit. Several of the brethren round about had met Francis on his way, as naturally he halted at any monastery on the route. The conversation that he heard among these brethren troubled him not a little. He heard that there had been important additions made to the humble house the lawyer had given to Bernardo when he came first to Bologna. What put the finishing touch to his sadness was when an inhabitant of the city alluded to the building as "the Friars' house," then he knew they had departed from their first principles, for there was no "me" or "mine" in the Order of the Friars Minor. It

was a heavy blow to him, sick and smarting under a sense of failure as he was, and he declared that he would not shelter under its roof, but would go elsewhere and beg for hospitality. He sent a message to the monastery to command every one of them to turn out at once! This was done instantly, and even those who were ill were carried into the street! A historian, who was a friar at the time, writes, "he who writes this history was one of the number; he was taken out of his bed and laid in the street like the others."

This summary proceeding naturally caused a tremendous stir in the city, and what the outcome of it would have been we cannot say if Ugolino, who seems to have had a knack of turning up at every crisis, had not appeared just then. He went to Francis, and with great difficulty succeeded in quieting him. He would never have done this had he not been able to assure him that the house was his and in no way belonged to the friars. When Francis saw that the brethren were in no danger of becoming proprietors, he allowed them to go back and consented to preach in the city. History tells us that that preaching was one of the most glorious on record. It was through it that Professor Pepoli joined the Friars Minor. But Francis felt keenly that the government of a multitude is difficult and that increase of followers does not invariably mean increase of joy. For several years after this he rather discouraged than encouraged people to enter the First Order.

Orphans.

But the whole Bologna affair made a deep impression upon Francis. For the first time in his career his brave spirit suffered defeat, the first declension in principle, together with his own failing strength was too much for him. At the next Chapter he presided over, which was soon after his return from Egypt, he publicly resigned from the position of Minister General. No one seems to have been prepared for this action beforehand.

"From this moment," he said, "I am dead to you, but here is our brother, Peter Cantani; he it is whom both you and I will henceforth obey."

The brethren were broken-hearted.

"What!" they said through their tears, "are we to lose our father and become orphans?"

Then Francis stood up and prayed—

"Oh my Lord, I commend to Thee this day, this family which Thou hast entrusted to me. My infirmities, Thou knowest, make it impossible for me to take care of it. I put it into the hands of Ministers. If it come to pass through their negligence, their scandals, or their too great severity, one of the brethren perish, they will give account to Thee at the Day of Judgment."

No entreaty or argument could get Francis to alter this decision. He was a man in the prime of life, and, humanly speaking, he ought to have had long years of service before him. Perhaps he felt that already his days were numbered, and that it was only a question of a few years at most.

As long as he lived his successors were known as Vicar-Generals. He would only consent to preserve the title and rights of Minister General. This arrangement had no serious results as far as Peter Cantani's government went. He was a good man, and carried out Francis' idea exactly, so that Francis could leave all to him, and with a clear conscience, devote himself to visiting the centres and preaching. But, unfortunately, Peter Cantani's reign was a brief one; he died a very short time after his promotion to the Vicar Generalship.

Storm Clouds.

From the death of Peter Cantani till his own death, the storm-clouds of internal struggle gathered round Francis' path. His life was not to be all one long, if hard worked for, success. No! life is not lived thus; there is the dark as well as the bright in its mosaic, but it is sad, we say in our humanity, when the dark work is done at the end. But God, Who is the chief Workman, knows best how He wants His work ordered; He has His eyes on the beautiful end, while we fix ours tearfully at the unfinished, and, therefore, inexplicable pattern.

There was yet, however, one unalloyed joy in store for Francis before he entered upon his last dark years of service, one of the greatest social reforms the world has ever known—the establishment of the Third or Tertiary Order of Brothers Minor.

CHAPTER XVI.

"BRETHREN OF THE MILITIA OF JESUS CHRIST."

"A dream of man and woman,
Diviner but still human,
Solving the riddle old,
Shaping the Age of Gold.

The love of God and neighbor,
An equal handed labor;
The richer life where duty
Walks hand and hand with beauty."

The idea of this Third Order had been in Francis' mind for a long time; in fact, as far back as his first journey to Rome, when the entire brotherhood numbered twelve! On his way home to Assisi he had preached in every village and town he passed. One day, as he was preaching in the vicinity of a large feudal castle, the whole establishment turned out to hear him, and when he had finished, his listeners, lords and ladies, officers and retainers, threw themselves at his feet, announcing their intention to follow him wherever he went, and renounce the world for ever. Never was preacher in such a plight! There they stood, the tears running down their faces, husbands and wives and little children, soldiers, bower-maidens and pages, the entire retinue that ordinarily made up the household of a mediæval lord. Francis knew that it would not be possible to carry off the lot; beside, there was no Second Order then, and what could he do with the women and children? So he calmed them by telling them that he would endeavor to create an Order into which they could come without shaking the foundations of the universe!

Little he thought that the Third Order was destined to make even more stir in the world than the First or Second.

What must we do?

As the years passed by, Francis was continually met with the question, "What must we do now we are converted? Teach us how to live!"

It was a very important question, and a very natural one, for the first instinct of a healthy, newly-converted soul is to spend and be spent for its Master. Strange as it may seem to us in these days of Bible readers, district visitors, and lay workers of all kinds, it was a very difficult question to answer. The Church, which as yet was the Church Universal, not having suffered any disruption, knew nothing of lay help, other than setting its members to pray, and give alms. A change of life and action had long since ceased to be preached. Francis and his followers had revived the old Apostolic doctrine of repentance and conversion and holiness of life and thought. As many as could join the First and Second Orders were well disposed of, but the countless multitude who were unable to leave home and friends, were the, as yet, unsolved problem. Francis soon saw that his work would be, to a large extent, a failure if something were not done in the way of organizing his converts. This fact was again pressed home upon him the year after Peter Cantani was appointed Vicar General.

He was preaching in a little village called Cannara, and his hearers, who comprised the major portion of the village, were so carried away with his words, that they besought him with tears to take them into his brotherhood. This he refused to do, saying—

"You are not able, nor ought you to do anything of the kind. I will think of you, and I will seek, and with God's blessing I will find a life more within your compass."

This promise he found he had to renew wherever he went.

"What must we do?" the people asked him..

"We cannot forsake our wives!" said the husbands, and "We cannot leave our husbands!" said the wives. "How shall we save ourselves?"

The Third Order.

After a little, the active mind of Francis found the way out. He would form a new Order of converted men and women, who would be linked on to the First, and so, without leaving the world, they could enjoy the peace and strength of a truly religious life. Such an idea had never been heard of before, and the success of the new institution far surpassed all expectations. It seemed as though men's hearts and minds had been waiting for it, to judge by the numbers that sought admission.

The rules of the Order were very simple and based almost entirely on the Sermon on the Mount. The "Tertiaries," as they were called, were required to put an end to all hatred, and to restore all ill-acquired gain, not to engage in lawsuits, to practise the commandments of God, to wear a plain dress, and abstain from all worldly gaieties, such as theatre-going, dancing, etc. No one might speak of his or her neighbor's faults. They were to eat the plainest of food and to avoid a variety of dishes. Then there were various advices given as regards cleanliness. Mediæval folk seldom reckoned cleanliness among the virtues to be cultivated. No one was to appear in Church in soiled or torn clothes, because, in so doing, they showed disrespect to God, and never should there be stain or spot on their garments, for outside purity is in some sort a reflection of inward purity. Houses and furniture also had to be plain and clean. They spent what time they had in visiting the sick, and helping those who needed help out of the surplus of their goods.

Before anybody was admitted into the Order, an investigation was made into his or her life, respecting personal character and relations with their neighbors. If he were found with goods not belonging to him, or to be at enmity with anyone, he was not admitted until he had repented and done his first works.

In every place where a congregation of the Third Order existed, there was a "Visitor" who was also a Minor of the First Order. It was his duty to oversee these "Tertiaries," and give them instruction.

Such was the Order in which people of all grades and classes hastened to enrol themselves. It was first opened in June, and at the end of that year we find branches of it in Tuscany, Umbria, and the Marches of Ancona. A wave of blessing seemed to pass all over Italy. It does not appear that Francis established any other fraternity of the Third Order except the First, and from that the others spread out into all the earth.

A Strong Order.

The "Tertiaries," or "The brethren of the Militia of Jesus Christ," as someone called them, multiplied to such an extent that very soon they attracted more attention than was altogether pleasant. The different bishops of Italy opposed them, and wrote to the German Emperor, Frederick II., who was a man of bad character and openly irreligious.

"The Friars Minor have risen up against us!" they wrote. "They have publicly

reproved our life and conversation. They have destroyed our rights, and brought us to nothing. And now, as the finishing stroke against our power, and to deprive us of the devotion of the people, they have created two new confraternities, which include men and women. Everyone runs into them!"

Frederick was frightened. He saw a gigantic army ready to fight for the Church at a word of command, because one of the bye-laws of Tertian rule forbade the Tertiaries to carry offensive weapons save in the defence of the faith of Jesus Christ, or in defence of their country. From this time Frederick, who was always fighting against the Church, became their bitterest enemy, and persecuted them wherever they were to be found. If it had not been for the influence of Cardinal Ugolino, who vigorously protected the Third Order after Francis' death, Frederick would, probably, have been able to wipe it out of existence, or what would have been worse, it might have existed only in name. As it was, it grew and spread and struggled for its rights, till it became one of the most powerful religious, social and political influences the world has ever felt. To go into the details of this would occupy too much space, therefore, we shall turn our attention to a few of the first Tertiaries.

Lucchese.

The very first was a man called Lucchese. This man was young, good-looking, and ambitious. He was a tradesman, and his ruling motive in life was to vie with the nobles. This, after a time, became a passion with him. He knew the only way to success lay through riches. Therefore, he determined to be rich. He began to speculate in grain, and bought up as much as he could, and thus created an artificial famine in his village. Then, when the want was greatest, he resold his stores at enormous prices, and his fortune was made.

But God was looking after him, and, one day, when he was sitting alone, the thought of what he had done came before him in all its hideousness. He saw that there was something more in life besides merely pursuing riches, and "what would it profit him," something asked him, "if he should gain all his heart was set on, and be eternally lost in the end?" From that hour he was a changed man.

After consultation with his wife, Bonadona, he sold the greater part of his goods, and distributed their price to the poor. He kept only a house and a garden of four acres, which he cultivated with his own hands. This was a hard life for one who had been used to luxury. His house soon became the "poor man's inn" for the district. Thither came the poor and needy in troops, and never were they sent

empty away.

Such was Lucchese's life when he met Francis, just at the time when the necessity for the Third Order was pressing most heavily upon him. Lucchese opened his heart to Francis, and told him how much he longed to make up for the wrong he had done in the past, and live a life well-pleasing to God.

"For some time," said Francis, who felt, as Lucchese talked with him, that the man and the hour had both arrived, "I have been thinking of founding a Third Order, in which married people will have an opportunity of serving God faithfully. You can be the first to enrol yourself."

Lucchese's Work.

Then he explained the form which he intended to give this Order, and Lucchese gladly enrolled himself, and Bonadona declared that she would join her husband. Encouraged by this good beginning, Francis publicly announced his intentions, and a number of men and women came and offered themselves to him. So, one day, in the Church, in the sight of many spectators, he clothed them in a simple, modest dress of ash-grey, and the first group, or rather the first fraternity, was formed.

Lucchese persevered nobly in his good works. He was no longer content with merely helping those who came to him, but he travelled great distances to find the suffering. Sometimes he was to be seen leading three or four poor creatures, and carrying the weakest of them on his back! When once they were in his house, he cared for them, body and soul, and many of them were converted, and some joined the Third Order. Close to where Lucchese lived, there were large tracts of swampy, malarial country. Every summer fever was sure to break out there. Lucchese saw this place now as a beautiful field for Tertiary labor. He bought an ass, and, loading it with suitable drugs and food, he went down into the fever swamps, and did his best in the capacity of doctor and nurse and priest all in one. His wife was always ready to help him in all his good works.

His death is reported to have been "serene and grand as that of a patriarch." He and his wife were both taken ill together. She got worse rapidly, and they came to tell him of it. They carried him to her side. Kissing her an affectionate farewell, he said—

"Oh, my beloved and devoted companion, we have served God together in all affection. Wait for me, we shall be permitted to go together to the unspeakable

joys!"

He returned to his room and lay down in great weakness. Those around saw that his last hour had come.

"My dear brother," said one of the Friars Minor, who stood beside him, "be strong and prepare thy soul to appear before thy Saviour."

Lucchese raised his head a little and smiled.

"My good father," he said, "If I had waited till now to prepare my soul I should still have confidence in God's mercy, but to tell the truth I should leave the world with less security, on account of the terrors of the passage."

But the passage had no terrors for Lucchese. He raised his arms and said—

"I feel myself free and ready, not through my merits, but through those of our Lord Jesus Christ." A few minutes after the death of his wife, he, too, followed her to Heaven.

A Dinner Party.

Once, when passing through Rome, Francis was asked by the chief of a powerful house to dinner. As he was going into the palace of the noble, he descried a number of poor people congregated in the court, to whom food was being distributed. Unable to resist the opportunity, he went down and sat among them! Matthew de Rubeis, his host, was looking out of the window and saw this, so he came out and joined him, saying—

"Brother Francis, since you will not come to me, I must come and sit with you." And with the most courtly air he announced to the astonished crowd that he and Francis would eat with them.

After that dinner, during which no doubt Francis expounded his doctrines, Matthew de Rubeis was enrolled in the "New Militia." He was the first Tertiary in Rome.

Little Rose.

Little Rose, though not actually a contemporary of Francis, is always reckoned in as one of the first Tertiaries. She was one of those children who seem born with deep religious feeling. She always, from her earliest dawning intelligence,

loved God with all her heart and soul. She was a beautiful child, very lively in disposition, and she loved to go out into the streets and sing hymns. Before she was ten years old, she began to preach against those who tried to undermine the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the chief was the German Emperor, Frederick II. The Archbishop of the town had written a letter warning his people against the dangers that beset them, and nowhere did his appeal take deeper root than in the heart of little Rose. She, childlike, spoke out boldly what her friends were thinking in their hearts. Standing in the street, on a large stone, she preached that the Emperor was an enemy of the true faith, and must be resisted, and that the standard of the faith must be kept high at all costs. Those who thought just so encouraged her, but those who were staunch supporters of the wicked Emperor went to the Prefect of the town, who belonged to their party, and declared—

"If you do not send away Rose and her parents, we will drive you away yourself."

The Prefect was frightened. He sent for Rose and her parents, and when they appeared he ordered them, on pain of being cast into prison, and having their goods confiscated, to leave the town. It was then the middle of winter, snow had been falling for some days, and the roads were nearly impassable. The parents begged to have the sentence postponed for a little.

"It is death," they said, "to go now."

"Well, you can die then," answered the Prefect. "I want nothing better."

So they took their child and set off. They did not die, however. God took care of them, and they safely reached Soriano, where they lived in peace and quiet, till the death of the Emperor, a year later, allowed them to return home again.



CHAPTER XVII.

CLOUDS.

"For gold must be tried by fire,
As a heart must be tried by pain."

It seems a rather strange turn of events that put Elias in the place of the gentle, devout, Peter Cantani. No one could doubt Elias' efficiency. That was beyond all question, but that he had a proud, self-willed spirit was also indisputable. Francis' mind at first turned towards Bernardo di Quintavelle as Peter's successor. He always had a peculiar love for this, his first son. But though Bernardo had risen to considerable importance in the Order, yet for some time he had been harassed with interior temptations, and had been subject to great darkness. Though Francis was not troubled very much by this experience of Bernardo's, saying "It is a trial, he will come out of it, and be the greater for it afterwards," yet he did not think it wise to put him in any new position of authority, as his own trials would not leave him quite free for his work. So Bernardo was passed over, and Elias filled the vacant Vicar Generalship.

Elias' Government was active. Splendid order reigned in all the communities. He was unequalled for clearness of business views, and his preaching was greatly sought after.

Some historians say that with all Francis' gifts of perception he never until it was too late saw into Elias' character, and that the pride and self-will which were so evident to others were hidden to him. Elias loved show and external greatness rather than interior goodness and holiness. He loved Francis, but he thought he was far more capable of filling the Vicar Generalship than he. He regarded Francis as one to be admired, not imitated. It is quite certain that if Francis had had the faintest idea that the Order would suffer through Elias, he never would have elected him.

Germany Again.

Elias entered his new appointment in a blaze of glory. He had come from the Minister Generalship of Tuscany, the most important post in the Order, which he had managed in a very skilful manner. Then another event had just happened which added to the lustre of his reputation. A celebrated German preacher, Cesar of Spiers, had attended his preachings and entered the Order. Elias was installed at the next Chapter before five thousand brethren. It was at this Chapter, that on the seventh day they had to beg of the people not to bring them any more food, and even then they had to prolong the Chapter two days, in order to eat up all the

provisions that had been donated! Elias presided at the last sitting, which was the one when the brethren received their appointments. We have told you how unfortunate the first German expedition had been and how the poor brethren returned more dead than alive with fright. Well, during the course of this last sitting, Francis felt impressed that they ought to make another attempt for the salvation of Germany. As he was not very well that day, and unable to make himself heard, he pulled Elias by the tunic, and whispered to him aside. Elias stood up and said—

"My brethren, this is what the Brother tells me," they always called Francis "The Brother." "There is a country, Germany, whose inhabitants are Christians, and full of devotion. You have often seen them passing through our country walking in the sunshine with long sticks and great boots, singing the praises of God. Several of our brethren have already been amongst them. They did not succeed, and had to come back. Now I compel none of you to undertake this mission again, but if anyone is sufficiently filled with zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls to venture upon it they can give in their names."

An Unwilling Volunteer.

A wave of horror ran through the assembly, for no mission was more dreaded, but very soon they recovered themselves, and about ninety gave in their names, several of whom were of German origin. Among this last number was Cesar of Spiers, who was appointed Minister for Germany. A rather amusing incident occurred in connection with this expedition.

The ninety volunteers were all told to come out of the ranks, and stand together till those who were to go were chosen. As they stood waiting there a certain brother called Giordano, who was one of those most scared at the idea of a mission to Germany, and had taken good care not to volunteer, thought he would go and have a look at them.

Giordano had a spirit of investigation that would have led him into the ranks of journalism had he lived only a few centuries later!

"They will certainly die," he said to himself, "and it will be as with the martyrs of Morocco. I shall not even have known them by name."

With that he took himself off on an unauthorized interviewing tour, and accosting each one he said,

"Who are you? What is your country?" Then, as he told himself, when he heard of their martyrdom, he could say, "Oh, I knew this one, and the other one." It was not a very lofty object, but it was an exceeding natural one.

In time his investigations brought him to a brother who was a bit of a wag, and who, unluckily for Giordano, knew of his horror of Germany.

"I am called Palmerio, and I come from Gargano," he replied meekly, when questioned, "but, my brother," he continued, "you are one of us, you are going too."

"No, no, I am not," cried Giordano. "I only want to know you."

"Oh, but you are," insisted Palmerio, and taking him by the shoulders, he held him amongst the volunteers. Giordano was still struggling for liberty when Cesar was appointed Minister, and told to choose those out of the ninety whom he would like to have with him. Several of the brethren who had entered into the joke with Palmerio surrounded him, and begged him not to leave out brother Giordano.

To go, or not to go.

"I'm not going. I'm not going," cried Giordano.

Cesar looked at him, and seeing he was a suitable candidate, was inclined to have him. He, knowing that his countrymen were neither savages nor man-eaters, and that there was not the slightest danger to fear, was rather at a loss to understand the fuss.

"Will you or will you not go to Germany? You must decide," he said to Giordano.

This threw Giordano into great perplexity. If he did not go to Germany, he feared his conscience would condemn him, seeing that he was chosen, and if he went, the Germans were ferocious, and he *knew* he would not make a good martyr! He consulted a Brother who had been robbed fifteen times during the last Hungarian mission.

"In your place," advised the man, "I should not choose. I would say I shall neither go nor stay. I will do as you say."

Giordano followed this advice, and was chosen for Germany! He got the better

of his fears and worked bravely, and his journalistic talents were used in compiling a valuable chronicle, which tells how the Minors were established in Germany.

The next most important event in the history of the Order was the establishment of a school for theology and training. This was begun by Anthony, whom you will remember best under the name of Fernandez, and who was led into the Order by the death of the five Morocco martyrs. He was not only deeply religious, but very learned. Upon hearing him preach one Easter, some of the brethren who were present got the idea that a school was needed in the Order, and that Anthony would make a splendid head. They laid this plan before Elias, who highly approved of it, and undertook to present it to Francis. To convince Francis was quite another matter, and for some time he would not hear of it. But Elias was a clever reasoner, and he got Francis at last to listen to the plans. Still he hesitated. His ideal had always been Apostolic preaching, and he dreaded any change in his beloved Order. At last he gave in, and wrote his consent to Anthony thus—

A Definite Rule.

"I consent to your teaching holy theology to our brethren, on condition that such teaching does not stifle the spirit of prayer, either in yourself or others. I hold firmly to this point, for it is our rule."

Whether this step was a good or bad one, we cannot say. We only know that under Anthony no harm came of it, but rather good. With all his brilliancy and keenness of intellect, and in spite of the way men ran after him and honoured him, he still kept his simple faith and humble spirit.

After the Chapter we have already described, Francis took a tour with Elias into his late province, Tuscany, and then, on his return, he set himself down to compile a definite and comprehensive rule for the benefit of posterity, and to which future generations would be able to refer. Probably the laxities of Elias, which were beginning to make themselves manifest, strengthened Francis in his determination to leave his articles of faith behind him in such tangible form that there could be no questioning the principle and line of action. Elias' influence was being felt all round. The devotion to poverty was not what it once was, and the love of authority and office was doing its deadly poisonous work in the hearts of some. Francis' decision to draw up a definite rule was far from agreeable to Elias and his set.

Nevertheless, it was done. Taking with him Leo and Bonizio, Francis went off to a hermitage, and there he dictated the new rule. On his return to Assisi he gave it to Elias to read, telling him to take care of it. When Elias read it, he found that it entirely did away with many of his most cherished plans, so a few days later, when Francis asked him for the rule again, he said that he had lost it. Francis answered never a word. He returned to the same solitude with the same companions, and dictated the Rule a second time. This Rule has been handed down to us intact. It is very largely an amplification of those first verses of the Gospel which were to Francis his call to his life-work. It is remarkable for its clearness. If any Brother transgressed this Rule, he did it with his eyes open, and knew what he was doing too. There is no sign of any laxity in it. As Francis advanced in years, he became more and more strongly attached to that simplicity of faith and work which was the light of all his life.

At the next Chapter a copy of the Rule was given to all the Brethren. They were told to carry it about with them always, and learn it by heart, and repeat it often to themselves.

Keeping Christmas.

It was drawing near Christmas time when this Rule was finally passed by the Church, and as Francis was in Rome just then he determined to put in practice an idea which long had been simmering in his brain. It was an innovation, but then he was convinced that it would make men think more deeply of the Holy Baby that was born to bring peace and goodwill to earth. Accordingly, he sent the following message to a nobleman named John, who was devotedly attached to Francis:—

"I wish to keep Christmas night with you, and, if you agree, this is how we will celebrate it. You will choose a place in your woods, a grotto if there is one, you will put in it a manger and hay: there must be an ox and an ass also. It must as much as possible be like the manger at Bethlehem."

All was prepared, and when Christmas night came an immense multitude, carrying torches and lighted tapers, poured through the dark, midnight woods to the grotto. The Brethren sang carols as they came, and these were caught up by the people till the forest resounded again and again. Francis himself led this mighty procession to the manger, and there, standing at its head, the oxen and asses pressing close beside him, and the flaring torches lighting up the whole with an unearthly lurid light, he preached to them about the meek and lowly

Jesus, Who came to earth to be despised, persecuted, and put to death. It was a time of much blessing, and that night saw a dawning of "peace and goodwill" in souls once darkened and lifeless.

A Great Task.

But all this time, ever since he returned from Egypt, Francis' health was slowly but surely failing. Weak and ill, and with the lurking fear that the principles of the Order were being undermined, his last two years of life were anything but peaceful ones. Not that there was anything done openly—that was the misery of it; an open, bold innovation could have been taken hold of and dealt with, but Elias was far too politic and clever to do anything that might lead to his being put out of office. Any question of departure from the rules that came up, he always blamed on the Provincial Ministers, and professed to be as grieved over their failure as Francis himself though secretly he supported them. He carefully gave all the truest Franciscans appointments far away from Assisi and Francis, and kept those of his own mind near home. This was not a bad thing for the ultimate success of the Order, because it preserved the real spirit abroad, and when Bernardo di Quintavalle stepped into Elias' place, ultimately, he had all his foes close to hand round home, where the Franciscan principles had taken deepest root.

It was hard for Francis when one after another of his faithful followers came to him, and with tears reproached him for having given them into the hands of another. When they at last took in the fact that though the spirit might be willing, the flesh was too weak to do what it had once been able to do, their sorrow knew no bounds. Some of them were almost a little selfish in their grief.

"You will pass away," said one. "Your family will remain in the valley of tears. Who can take charge and direct it after you? If you know of one on whom your mind can rest, I conjure you to tell me."

"My son," said Francis, with tears, "I see no one around me equal to this task of being shepherd to so great a flock."

Foes.

Thus, tortured by bodily pain and weakness, and tormented by unseen foes and enemies of all that he counted dearest and most sacred, he entered upon the two last dark years, which were his Valley of the Shadow before the Eternal Sun

rose, never to set again.

God of my life, through all my days
My grateful powers shall sound Thy praise,
My song shall wake with opening light,
And cheer the dark and silent night.

When anxious cares would break my rest,
And griefs would tear my throbbing breast,
Thy tuneful praises, raised on high,
Shall check the murmur and the sigh.

When death o'er nature shall prevail,
And all the powers of language fail,
Joy through my swimming eyes shall break
And mean the thanks I cannot speak.

But oh, when that last conflict's o'er,
And I am chained to earth no more,
With what glad accents shall I rise
To join the music of the skies!

The cheerful tribute will I give
Long as a deathless soul shall live;
A work so sweet, a theme so high,
Demands and crowns eternity!

CHAPTER XVIII.

LAST DAYS.

Sin can never taint thee now,
Nor doubt thy faith assail,
Nor thy meek trust in Jesus Christ
And the Holy Spirit fail;
And there thou'rt sure to meet the good,
Whom on earth thou lovedst best,
Where the wicked cease from troubling,
And the weary are at rest."

Slowly, but surely, the time came when Francis was compelled to drop all attempt at work. We do not read that he suffered or grieved over this—not even when the blindness which had been gradually creeping upon him suddenly climaxed, and he was plunged into almost total darkness. In the midst of all, his faith shone brighter and brighter, and his love for God grew in intensity. His confidence in God was such, that when he found himself, in what ought to have been the prime of life, a broken-down, pain-tortured wreck, not the faintest shadow of a regret for the golden years that "might have been," had his path been a less stormy one, ruffled the interior calm of his soul. His life had been lived, and was being lived in the will of God, and nothing outside that will could possibly happen to him. So, in the serene confidence that *all* things—no matter how disastrous they might appear to human understanding—would surely work together for good, he lay down in his narrow cell at the Portiuncula, to *suffer* the Divine will with the same glad, ready obedience with which he had heretofore hastened to perform it. In no instance do we read of his faith failing him. Not for the smallest fraction of a second. The story of his last days is one of the most vivid pictures of the triumph of a soul over every earthly hindrance. It has its parallel in the story of Gethsemane and Calvary.

"*Thy Will be Done.*"

Before we continue our narrative, let us for a moment take a realizing view of Francis, his condition and circumstances. As we have said before, his health was

utterly undermined. We are told that "the stomach could ill bear food, the internal organs were the seat of constant sufferings, and all the members were weakened and painful." Add to this almost total blindness, and we have a state of body that would in itself be sufficient excuse for any phase of soul-difficulty, darkness, or depression, had such assailed him. But how much worse than his bodily pains must have been the heart-agony he suffered through the insidious, elusive disease that was sapping the vitality of the vast organization of which he was the tender Father. To the very dregs Francis drained that cup of failure and defeat, which all who are called to lead the vanguard of Christ's conquering host, have at some time or another to drink more or less deeply. That is the time when the cry, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me," is wrung from the tortured soul, and thrice happy are those who, out of an intimate knowledge of God, can add, "Not my will, but Thine be done," assured that it is best simply because it is His. But it is only those who know God and enjoy Him, who have confidence enough in Him not to demand His reasons—those whose lives have not been mere service alone—who can triumphantly and victoriously cry, "Thy will be done." Such was Francis. Such were those of the whitest of God's saints, and a like eternal, triumphant victory is ours, if we, too, are willing to pay the full price—a life of utter self-renunciation.

An Operation.

But to return. Up to the time when Francis became blind, he had steadily refused to see any doctor or take any medicine; but after much persuasion, on the part of the brethren and Ugolino, who firmly believed that the Order would suffer collapse if Francis died, he gave in to their request, and tried every remedy the Assisian doctors presented. But he became no better, and from Assisi he was taken to Rieti, to consult an oculist there. He suffered everything from the rude, barbarous surgical treatment of the times, which knew little beyond cauterization, bleeding, and drawing-plasters. But, as he became rather worse than better, the Rieti oculist, who had learned to love him, took him on to Siena, to see an old, celebrated oculist who lived in that town. This man said that there was nothing for it but an operation—a very painful one, too, for he would have to cauterize his patient from the eyebrows to the ears. Francis said he was ready to undergo it. He thought to himself that this was a glorious chance to show that Christ's soldiers could be as brave as any others. One moment only he shuddered. This was when the doctors were heating their instruments in the fire, and he knew that soon he would have to endure them. In those days only the very stoutest-hearted submitted to operations, the majority preferring to die

untortured. One can hardly blame them, as there were no means known by which the faculties could be deadened.

Before the hot irons touched him, Francis prayed, and then addressed the fire thus:

"My brother fire: among all beautiful things the Lord has created thee, beautiful, strong, useful. Be gentle to me this hour. May God, who created thee, temper thine ardour, that I may be able to bear it." With that he gave himself into the surgeon's hands, and without a groan he underwent the operation. The brethren who were with him, ran away the moment it began. Francis called them back.

"Oh, faint-hearted cowards!" he said, "Why did you run away! I tell you in truth the iron did not hurt me! I felt no pain."

Then, turning to the doctor he said, "If it be not well burnt, thrust it in again."

The doctor, who knew the terror most people felt at such operations, exclaimed in amazement—

"My friends, this day I have seen wonders!"

Failing Health.

For a little time the operation seems to have succeeded, and the winter passed away with alternations of good and bad health. Francis spent the largest portion of his time in prayer and meditation, and after that he was able to see the number who daily begged for the privilege of visiting him for consultation and help. His memory, writes a historian, served him for a book, and furnished him with the principles and facts he needed on every subject. "The important thing," Francis used to say to himself, "is not to have understood a great number of truths, but sincerely to love each truth—to let each one penetrate the heart by degrees, to let it rest there, to have the same object in view for a long time, to unite one's self to it more by the sentiment of the heart than by subtle reflections."

In the early days of spring Francis was seized with such a violent hemorrhage that everyone thought his end had come. Elias was hastily sent for, but before he could arrive all immediate danger was past. However, as soon as he was able, Francis determined to travel back to Assisi. His was the true Italian nature, whose heart always turns towards home, as a sunflower to the sun! He must have had a revival of strength just here, because we read of his standing on a stone in

the cemetery at Cortona, preaching to the people. But he was not deluded into thinking that this meant recovery. Oh, no, he told the people plainly that he was on his way to Assisi to die.

For two months he stayed in Cortona, detained there by the people, who refused to part with him, and then he was seized with dropsy and fever. He begged to be taken back to his native land. It was his last wish, and they at once carried out his desire. For fear the Perugians—through whose town they had to pass—would also try to detain him, Elias sent a messenger to the magistrates of Assisi asking them for an escort back. The magistrates immediately sent a party of armed men on horseback, chosen partly from the nobles, and partly from the principal men of the town. They surrounded the litter in which Francis was laid, and the journey commenced. It was a curious procession, the worn invalid, lying on his hard couch, and borne by his brown-robed, bare-footed brethren, and round them the brilliant costumes and gay trappings of the nobles and their prancing horses. Did Francis, we wonder, compare his present position with that day some twenty years back, when hunted and hounded through his native town, he was glad to take refuge in a cave! If he did, we may be sure that to God he gave all the glory.

"For the Love of God."

Francis took a keen delight when as it happened he was able to prove to his gay escort by ocular demonstration the power of his beloved poverty. They were stopping at a tiny mountain village in order to let him rest, and as they had no food, the men set out to buy some. They came back a little later, very discomfited and not a little cross. The people had refused to sell them any, saying loftily, "We are not shopkeepers."

"We are reduced to living upon your alms," the men said to Francis, "we cannot find anything to buy."

Francis enjoyed their dilemma hugely.

"You have found nothing," he explained, "because you have trusted in your money more than God. But return where you have been, and instead of offering money ask food for the love of God. Do not be ashamed; since sin came into the world all we have is alms, it is of the charity of the Great Almoner that we receive what we call our possessions."

The knights took courage, and became for the time beggars, and, asking food "for the love of God," received all they wanted!

After this halt they reached Assisi in another stage. The old Bishop Guido came to see his "son" as soon as he arrived. The moment he looked at him he knew that his days were numbered, and he entreated him to let himself be moved to his house, where he could have more comfort. This was done, but nothing could really ease Francis' sufferings. The swelling that had begun at Cortona disappeared, and he rapidly became terribly thin. He could not make the slightest effort without terrible suffering, and his eyes were so bad that he could barely distinguish light from darkness—feeling alone remained, and we are told that every part of his body was the seat of sharp pains! The doctors declared they could not tell what kept him alive!

Farewell to Assisi.

"My father," said one who was tending him once, "Do you not think you would suffer less under the hands of an executioner?"

"My brother," answered Francis, "my dearest and sweetest wish has always been, and still is, to do what God demands of me; with all my soul I desire to conform myself in all things to His pleasure and will, but martyrdom would be less difficult to bear than three days of this illness. I mean speaking of the suffering it brings, not of the recompense it merits."

As the suffering days lengthened into months, Francis seemed to rise above himself. He lay there smiling and calm, and every hour his soul became more strong and vigorous. Not that he was by any means free from temptation. We read that "his soul bore the most violent assaults without flinching."

In October he was taken back to Portiuncula. His one desire now was to die near the spot where God had first revealed Himself to him. He was placed on a litter, and slowly the bearers descended the mountain.

"Turn me towards the town," he said when they reached the valley, and sitting up with a painful effort, he gazed for the last time in the direction of Assisi.

"Be blessed of the Lord," he said solemnly, "O town faithful to God. Many souls shall be saved in you and by you."

His first duty when he arrived at home was to make what he called his will! This is a recapitulation of the fundamental principles of his life, and a short account of the first early days of the brotherhood. He charges all to be true to the one rule of the Order.

"I absolutely forbid," he writes at the close, "all my brethren, whether clerks or laymen, to put glosses on the Rule, or on this writing, saying, 'thus it ought to be understood,' but as the Lord has given me grace to dictate purely and simply, understand them simply and without gloss, and put them in practice unto the end."

Light at Eventide.

Wise Francis, his knowledge of human nature was only equalled to his charity and long-suffering!

After this piece of work was accomplished he quietly resigned himself to die, and holding up his hands to Heaven, cried—

"Now, Oh Christ, I have nothing to keep me back! I shall go freely to Thee."

The end came rapidly. Each day found him weaker than the preceding one, and it was with difficulty that he was able to speak to those around him. Fifty of the brethren, who were then at the Portiuncula, knelt round his bed.

"My father," said one of them, bending over him, "your sons will have no father. In you we lose the light of life. And now forgive those present and those absent for all the sins they have committed. Bless them once more."

"My son," said Francis, "God is calling me! I forgive my brethren, those present and those absent, all their sins and faults. I absolve them as much as I can. Tell them so, and bless them in my name."

He then asked them to read him the history of the Passion in St. John's Gospel, and then a part of the one hundred and forty-second Psalm. As they were reading the seventh verse:

"Bring my soul out of prison that I may praise Thy name," he closed his eyes and slept peacefully in Jesus.

His glorious death took place just a few days before he entered his forty-sixth year, twenty years since he received his call to repair the Church, and eighteen since he founded the Order of Friars Minor.

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