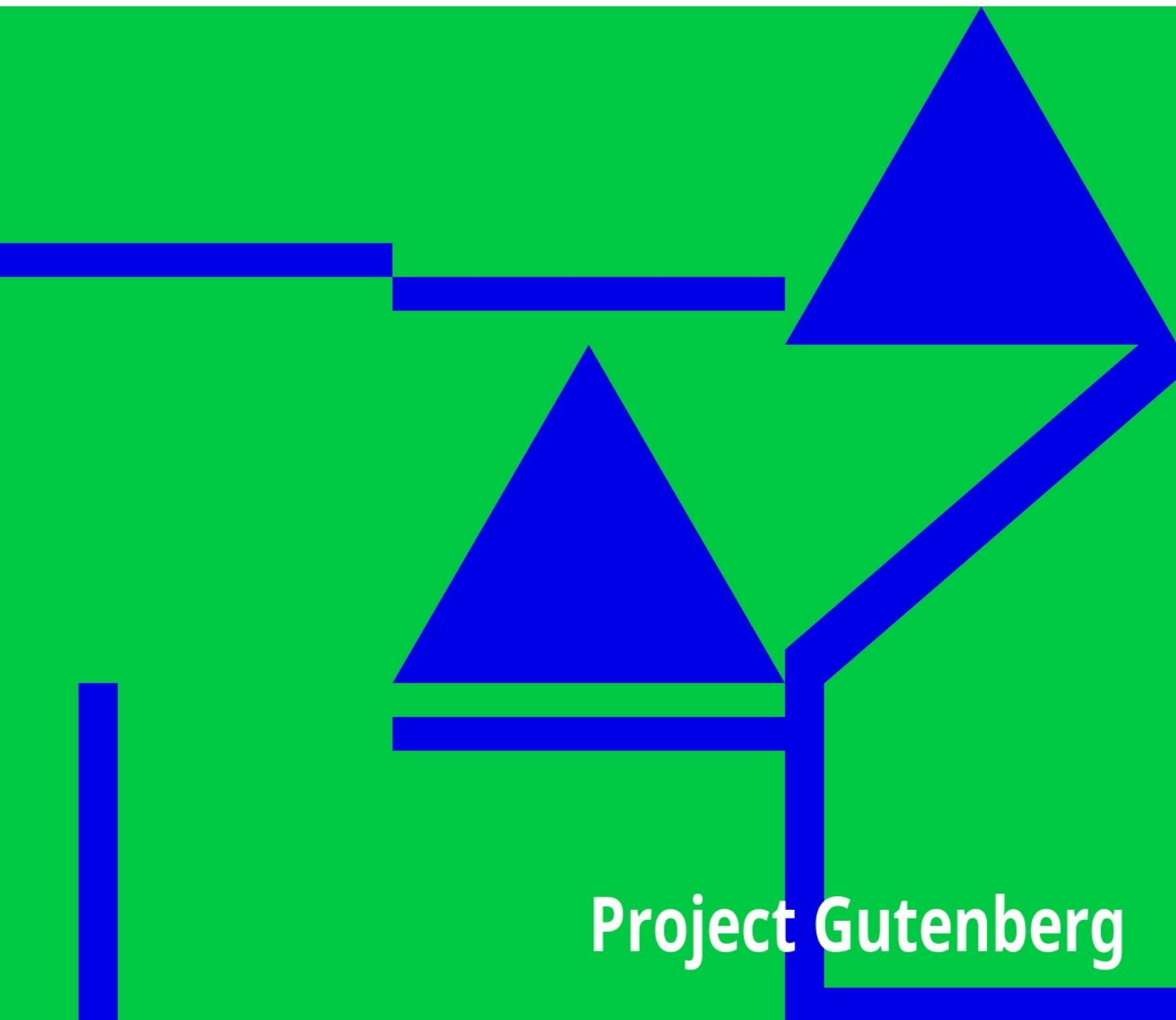


# Fra Angelico

A Sketch

Jennie Ellis Keysor



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*"Art manifests whatever is most exalted, and it manifests it to all"—TAINÉ*

# FRA ANGELICO

## A SKETCH

BY

JENNIE ELLIS KEYSOR

*Author of "Sketches of American Authors"*

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"The art of Angelico, both as a colorist and a draughtsman, is consummate; so perfect and so beautiful that his work may be recognized at a distance by the rainbow-play and brilliancy of it: however closely it may be surrounded by other works of the same school, glowing with enamel and gold, Angelico's may be told from them at a glance, like so many huge pieces of opal among common marbles."

—JOHN RUSKIN.

"The light of his studio came from Paradise."

—PAUL DE ST. VICTOR.

"His world is a strange one—a world not of hills and fields and flowers and men of flesh and blood, but one where the people are embodied ecstasies, the colors tints from evening clouds or apocalyptic jewels, the scenery a flood of light or a background of illuminated gold. His mystic gardens, where the ransomed souls embrace and dance with angels on the lawns outside the City of the Lamb, are such as were never trodden by the foot of man in any paradise of earth."

"Fra Angelico's Madonnas are beings of unearthly beauty, and words fail to convey any idea of their ineffable loveliness and purity. His angels too are creatures of another sphere, and purer types have never yet been conceived in art. The drawing of the hands of his angels and Madonnas is most exquisite—charming in tender yet subtle simplicity of outline."

—TIMOTHY COLE.

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FRA ANGELICO  
FRA ANGELICO

# FRA ANGELICO.

## 1387—1455.

Let us for a few moments turn our attention to a monastery a short distance from Florence. From its elevated position on the hills which skirt the vale of the Arno it commands a panoramic view of the "Lily City." It is the time when the Renaissance is virgin new to the world. Faith was still so real and living a thing that men and women shut themselves up from the world in order to live holy lives and devote themselves entirely to the service of God.

It is a body of such men on the heights of Fiesole that interests us. They are Dominican monks, of the order of great preachers, founded long ago by St. Dominic. Over long white robes the brothers, or frates, as they are called, wear black capes and back from their tonsured heads fall hoods, which protect them in inclement weather. It is a prosperous monastery surrounded by goodly fields. In some, the olive groves blossom in the spring-like snow, or wear foliage of richest green as the season advances. In others, the yellowing grain waves in the upland summer breeze. The monks are busy people, many without in the fields tilling the fruitful soil or gathering in the abundant harvest.

Indoors there is the silence which attends toil, intense and absorbing. The cellar and kitchen are in perfect order and in the refectory, or dining room, the table is spread for the next frugal meal. In the scriptorium, or writing room, several monks are busy copying ancient manuscripts on parchment. One does this work, using the most exquisite lettering, while another indites the hymns long loved by the church. This other, bending over his task, from a rich palette makes the vine to run, the dragon to coil, the angel head to shine, the tropic bird to fly from out the lettering of his book or, more ambitious still, he decorates a broad margin with an elaborate design. Mayhap he devotes an entire page to the deliniation of some favorite saint.—

"What joy it is to labor so,  
To see the long-tressed angels grow

Beneath the cunning of his hand,  
Vignette and tail-piece subtly wrought!"

Here in the walk of the cloisters, his pallid face lit up by fiery eyes, strolls another, the preacher of the monastery. To-night he will electrify his audience with the eloquence of his sermon that shall tell of the curse of evil, of the saving power of love.

Yonder, with the face and attitude of one who prays, painting a lovely angel with flame upon her forehead, with stars upon her robe and with a golden trumpet in her hand, is a man whose fancy has outgrown the margin, the full page even, of the beloved parchment book, and so he fills a whole wall with his vision from Paradise. Little need is there to name this painter-monk. It is Fra Angelico, the "Angelical Painter," *Il Beato*, "The Blessed."

To this man, who prays as he paints and who paints as he prays, we are to give our attention for a time. It is particularly delightful to find such a character in a time when holy men and women sometimes forgot their religious vows and ordinary citizens, in their scramble for place, lost sight of the laws of honor and manhood. In a time of greed it pleases us to find a man, who, though his art was the fashion of his period, would take no money for his pictures; in a time of ambition for place, to find one who could refuse an elevated position because he did not think himself fitted to fill it; to find a man so simple and yet so wise that he knew the work allotted to him in life and had the devotion to stick to it in spite of inducements to give it up.

FLORENCE.  
FLORENCE.

Such a man was Fra Angelico, the sweet character, the beautiful artist of heavenly visions, the man to whom Ruskin goes back as the embodiment of correct principles in art, even beyond Raphael, the idol of the ages. Fra Angelico is the last figure of the old simple time in art when the spirit counted for most. He lingered long on the threshold of that later time, when men forgot the spirit in their enthusiasm for copying the real thing as it presents itself in nature.

Now that we know what the prosaic artists of that prosaic time taught, namely to draw correctly, we go back to the visions of the angelical painter and hug them to us as a rich bequest, a glimpse, as it were, of that paradise closed to mortal eyes. Along other lines too, it is good for us to study the men and women who were great enough to be simple, to be devoted. In art it is quite as good and

equally delightful.

Whoever tells the story of Fra Angelico's life has few dates and events with which to entangle his reader's treacherous memory. The story is told when the man and his spirit have been portrayed, when his surroundings at various periods have been described. It is forced home to us, therefore, that we ought to know well the history of the company of men to whom he belonged and was devotedly attached for almost fifty years of his life.

We have already spoken of these monks at Fiesole and of their pursuits. As they gazed out upon Florence, the matchless city of the Arno, it was with longing hearts as homesick children, for they had been banished from the loved city as a matter of discipline, years before. As they looked out from their commanding windows, they forgot the glorious scenery about them in an intense desire to be at home again. In a small way they shared the agonized grief of Dante, an exile in Ravenna's drear waters, when he knocked in vain at the closed gates of his loved and native Florence. Theirs, however, was a kinder fate than that which befell the renowned poet, for they were recalled to Florence.

The monastery of San Marco was emptied of some monks of another order and the place given over to the reformed Dominicans. Singing hymns of praise, arrayed in their black and white, they filed down from the heights of Fiesole to San Marco, while the expelled monks departed with downcast mien and sore lamentations.

The restored monks found San Marco hardly fit for habitation, so ruinous was its condition. Cosimo de Medici came to their relief and repaired and beautified the building. In addition, he had a sort of chapel or retiring room fitted up in it for himself to which he might come for quiet and for consultation. Willingly the monks dwelt in huts while the repairs and decorations were going forward. We shall learn later how Angelico embellished the walls of cloister and cell until the thoughts of the angelical brother were laid bare to his companions, so that, to-day, perhaps the chief reason for the throng of visitors to this unattractive building is the fact that here Fra Angelico lived and painted.

The Dominicans were restored to Florence and their home, San Marco, began its career, if, indeed, we may say that a building can have a career, as an essential factor in Florentine history.

We may love Fra Angelico but, after all, the most interesting association in many minds for San Marco is not his sweet life in its brotherhood or his

heavenly faces upon its walls, but rather that here studied, taught, preached and died Savonarola, that pure patriot, that noble, although often mistaken man, that most eloquent orator that Florence has given to the world. As simple as Angelico and as free from place-seeking, he was the soul and voice of the Florentine people when faction rent the city and threatened its very existence. That clear voice, prompted by a magnificent love, by a burning zeal, sometimes makes us forget that the zeal was often misguided, and that disobedience to authority is not always the best way of effecting reform.

DUOMO, FLORENCE (SANTA MARIA DEL FIORE)  
DUOMO, FLORENCE (SANTA MARIA DEL FIORE)

San Marco, standing off there from the Duomo, is a plain building, but to the thoughtful visitor to-day there are echoes of footfalls sounding down those tenantless halls, which make the heart quicken its beating, the cheek flush, and the eye dim; for it is Savonarola's voice that he hears, Angelico's brush that he marks, the wise counsel of Antonio that falls on his ear, instead of the sights and sounds of sense.

Three times, at least, in the history of Italian art a pure light, a fresh stream has flowed in from the hills—Raphael from Urbino among the heights of Umbria, Titian from the crags of Cadore and now Angelico from the slopes of the Apennines in the fertile district of Mugello. Each brought with him from his native hills a vigor and devotion new to the dwellers below.

At Vecchio, a small town crowning one of the spurs of the Apennines, Fra Angelico was born, in 1387. His father was a certain Pietro, or Peter, and there was an older son who afterwards bore the name Benedetto. Now, the name *Angelico*, by which we love to call our angel painter, was really not his name at all. He was simply Guido, the son of Pietro, and when he entered the monastery he was given yet another name, Giovanni, or John. Fate, or fame rather, destined that he should not be known either by his birth name or by his religious name. What his hand could do, what his heart could show were the things which determined his name. Because he painted angels so matchlessly they called him Brother or Fra Angelico, because his heart opened so unselfishly to his fellow men they called him *Beato*, "The Blessed," and by these names we know him to-day.

From what Vasari tells us, that Guido might have lived at ease had he so desired, we know that his father was a man of means. What the boy's education was we are unable to tell definitely. From the surroundings of his home at



Vecchio we can infer much, especially in the light of Angelico's later work. Hardly twenty miles from Florence, on the road to Ravenna, the hill town of Vecchio must have taken a keen interest in the stirring events ever going on in the Florence of the early Renaissance.

We can imagine, however, that, though these things impressed the young Guido, the beautiful scenery surrounding his home held a deeper meaning for him. Here were fine olive groves, there rocks grew bare and jagged, refusing to produce anything except scrubby underbrush. A frowning precipice yonder lost none of its forbidding character because of the crown it wore—a fine castle, which told by its towers and turrets, where watchmen stood or paced throughout the lonely hours, that the age when lusty knights rode forth to harry each other's domain was not wholly past.

### THE ANNUNCIATION THE ANNUNCIATION

That castle, gleaming white and menacing through the olive trees, is one of the country seats of the powerful Medicean family. The boy Guido and his brother have often seen the great Cosimo walking in his garden or riding on the highway. Indeed, the boys have been accosted by him and questioned regarding their sports.

It was not, however, the power of man, who plants his dwellings on the heights of the earth or grows fat upon the produce of her soil, that most deeply impressed our young artist. To him the pearly white of the summer cloud, the cerulean blue of the endless depths of air, the amethyst, ruby and topaz of the sky at sunrise or sunset were more. They seemed but reflections of a glory beyond cloud and sky, where the hosts of the blessed forever praise their redeeming Lord. Those soft and melting colors slid into his soul and years later he poured them forth in the garment of some trumpeting angel, blessed Madonna, or rejoicing brother.

In his tenderness for nature we can imagine that the little creatures of the woods fled not at his approach but rather stayed to receive from his hand food or a loving caress. The flowers that bespangled the soft Tuscan turf sprung up after his foot had pressed them, so light was his step, so gentle the thought that in him reigned. The boys were constantly together, sharing in the rambles and sports which their home region encouraged. Their love increased until it was sealed by the vow that made them brother monks as well as brothers in flesh and blood.

At the age of fourteen Guido left home, probably for purposes of study, but we cannot trace his course during the next six years. We know not if, like Titian, he crushed flowers to obtain their colors to paint with, in his boyhood days, but somehow, somewhere in those early years he learned the rudiments of the art by which the world knows him to-day.

With such a boyhood, remote from the marts of trade, surrounded by all that is loveliest in nature, we are not surprised to find him at the age of twenty anxious to follow a religious life. It is possible that, during those six years just previous to his entering the convent, he may have studied miniature painting or illuminating in some monastery, where his purpose to become a monk took definite form. However that may be, in 1407, he sought out the monastery of Fiesole and entered as a novice, to begin the study and privations which should prepare him for the life of a Dominican friar. To his great joy his elder brother joined him soon after and was given the name Benedetto.

The novices were sent for a time to the older convent of Cortona. Here the training in the love of Nature, which began in the hills of Vecchio, was continued. The convent of Cortona stood upon an elevation overlooking the placid waters of Lake Trasemene, where, in ancient times, Hannibal gained a great victory over the Romans. All about were the remains of massive masonry, built in the remote past by the Etruscans. Three islands broke the quiet surface of the little lake and on one of them stood a monastery. I wonder if, on days of relaxation, the holy men, rowing across to visit their brothers of the island, did not catch some of the finny tribe that inhabited the lake, or snare some of the wild fowl that lived along its margin.

Our angelical painter probably was not attracted by such matters. The prospect of lake and hill and wood, which daily opened before him, deepened all his early impressions and so, almost unconsciously, the training for his future work continued. Meanwhile, too, he probably practiced assiduously in the parchment books of the monastery the art of illumination.

Shortly after Angelico took upon himself the full vows of a monk, the whole religious body of Fiesole was removed to Foligno. Here they remained for several years, until the plague broke out and they fled to Cortona, the same town where Angelico had spent several years of his novitiate. By this time he had become a full fledged painter, as is shown by the work he left in two Dominican churches of Cortona. There is reason to believe that when Angelico, an old man,

was on his way to Rome to paint for the Pope, he gave, in exchange for the courtesies of the convent of Cortona to a traveller, some pictures of the Madonna which are still to be seen in the church of St. Dominic in Cortona.

The brotherhood was later recalled to Fiesole. Angelico must often have gone down to Florence and there have seen the work of his great contemporaries in art. Massaccio was the artist, above all others, who was attracting attention at this time. His work was the most accurate representation of real things that had yet been made by any artist in Italy. Fra Angelico must have seen his work and profited by it, too.

But he never forgot his early inspiration drawn from the hills and from the morning and evening skies, and so he went back, in spite of any small influence of the new art, to pore over the parchment page and to make the vision of his soul write itself down in fadeless color on golden backgrounds. What he saw of artists' work outside of the convent had one marked influence, however. Our devout painter began to feel trammelled by the narrowness of a margin, indeed of an entire page, and he turned to the ample space furnished by the walls of convent and church.

It was shortly after the return of the brotherhood from Cortona that they were given the church and convent of San Marco in Florence. After long absence they were to return home and their hearts were lifted in song. When the repairs were completed, Cosimo bethought him of the painter-monk of the brotherhood, and asked him to make the house beautiful for his brethren. Whether Cosimo remembered those early days when he had accosted two boys in the vicinity of his castle we do not know, but it seems certain that he knew of the mature artist's work and his reputation throughout Tuscany.

It must have been a great joy to Fra Giovanni to be given this congenial task in which he could glorify God and gratify his own passion for art. Henceforth he left the parchment books to his brother to embellish while he occupied himself on the larger space his soul had long craved.

Lest this work, which he loved so dearly, should be done in a spirit of self-indulgence, he laid certain strictures upon himself in carrying it on. He believed that he had a message direct from God to bear to men through his pictures, so he never undertook one of them without prefacing the work with a season of fasting and prayer, and then, when he began his work, he never changed a stroke lest he prove disobedient to the heavenly vision. Often and often his lips moved in

prayer while his hand laid on the colors of the robes or the gold of the background.

While he painted the Crucifixion tears streamed down his cheeks in sympathy with the agony there endured. The pictures of a man who painted in such a spirit are not mere works of art. They are more, for they lay bare to us a human soul, making the thoughts he thought our own, the devoutness and sympathy he felt a part of our own lives.

## THE CRUCIFIXION

### THE CRUCIFIXION

Savonarola thundered forth his message from the pulpit of San Marco; Angelico delivered his, more enduring, though hardly less eloquent, on his knees, through the rainbow colors on his palette. In an age when monasteries and convents were an essential part of civilization, it was a mighty contribution that San Marco gave to the world in the earnest preacher, in the angelic painter. Both were simple men, great in their devotion, leaders of their age in their respective places, but the one was wending along a quiet way that should terminate peacefully in a secluded grave in Rome, while the other was moving on like a whirlwind, tearing up many things sacred in its course and ending in a violent death.

Everyone talks of Angelico's work in San Marco. Let us see what it was, what we should look for were we to go there to-day. In the cloister, where the monks were constantly passing to and fro, are many of his best works. Here above a doorway, is "*St. Peter, Martyr*" standing with his finger on his lips in token of the silence that should reign in a holy house. Above another door two of the brotherhood welcome their Lord, a weary traveller.

## DETAIL FROM THE CRUCIFIXION

### DETAIL FROM THE CRUCIFIXION

In a larger space he has painted the angel Gabriel announcing the coming of the Christ Child to the youthful Mary. The sweet submissiveness of Mary together with her mild surprise at the angelic appearance, the grace and earnestness of Gabriel, with his wings still spread, as if just alighted from heaven, are wholly to our satisfaction for representing this naive scene from sacred history.

Here, too, we find the solemn last scene in the Christ-drama, as "*The Annunciation*" was the first. "*The Crucifixion*," which we find here, was simply portrayed, but with a pathos that Angelico's sympathetic nature would naturally

show. It was afterwards reproduced in each of the cells.

In the chapter house we find a more elaborate representation of the Crucifixion. Here it is large enough to fill an entire wall and its excellence hardly in proportion to its size. The attention is drawn from the great central figure to the figures at the foot of the Cross, whose awe and adoration are well expressed by the painter. It was in the room adorned-with this great fresco, that George Eliot had Romola and Savonarola meet in their famous interview. That the presence of the solemn picture added force to that powerful scene goes without saying.

Into the cloisters, the chapter house, the chapel, men of the world might enter and look about. Not so the narrow cells, huddled together, where each monk was supposed to commune with his Lord in uninterrupted silence. For these narrow cells, forty in number, Fra Angelico did his best work, believing, doubtless, with the ancient builders that "The gods see everywhere." The subjects selected were the events in Christ's life and to each cell was given one chapter, as it were, from the wondrous story. Nothing could more forcibly prove the absolute devotion of the painter, his total disregard for the attention of men, than his dedication of his best work to the narrow and dimly lighted cells of San Marco.

### MADONNA DELLA STELLA MADONNA DELLA STELLA

Long ago the good brothers of San Marco were sent away and the doors thrown wide to the public, who now call it the Museum of San Marco. Easel pictures have been gathered here to swell the number of Angelico's works in the place that was so long his home. One of these is a small copy, made by the artist, of what is known to us as the "*Tabernacle Madonna*" which is in the Uffizi gallery in Florence. The glory of this work is not in the Madonna or the child she holds but, strange to say, in the frame which encloses the picture. A broad band of smooth gold intervenes between the outer and inner molding of the frame and in this space are painted the twelve angels playing various musical instruments, which are so familiar to us to-day.

Since Angelico's time, no matter what artist has essayed the task of angel painting, none has approached so nearly as the angelical painter of San Marco to our ideal of these heavenly beings. We all of us have some more or less definite notions of how angels should look. We may be painfully literal on other subjects but, though there is no science on which to base our demand, we want them with white or jeweled wings. Sometimes, in our most rapt moods, the air about us seems filled with these ethereal beings, tending on the sick and dying, leading

little children, ministering to prisoners as to Peter of old, bringing comfort to us in our sorrows. This, of course, is a fancy and yet it is such fancies that have made Fra Angelico's representations of angels a real joy to man through all the centuries since he painted them with more than mortal power.

His angels that we enjoy most are not those entrusted with some special mission, but they are of that great multitude whose joy it is to bring good tidings of great joy to men. Here is one glowing in ruby red, the color of passion. She lifts on high her golden trumpet and we know that God is a ready helper, waiting only to be summoned to our rescue. Another, arrayed all in green, the color of spring, brings us hope, without which man would be crushed by the iron weight of his sorrows. This one in blue bears her message of heavenly love and fidelity. That one in yellow, the color of the sun itself, brings light to those who sit in darkness. Truly they are a ministering band with their halo-encircled heads, their heavenward-lifted eyes, their star-bespangled robes.

### CORONATION OF THE VIRGIN. CORONATION OF THE VIRGIN.

What matter if critics tell us that Angelico's knowledge of anatomy was defective and that it is fortunate for his angels that their creator represented them all closely draped? Their talk for centuries has not made the devout painter's fame one whit less, while all the time his angels have been bringing comfort to generations of men and women.

Another picture in San Marco we scan carefully. It is "*The Coronation of the Virgin*." This was a favorite subject with the painter, perhaps because it represents the final reward of the world's great mother—the crown placed upon her head by her enthroned Son. We remember how exquisitely Correggio depicted the same event, with what supreme grace his lovely virgin bends her matchless head to receive the diadem. Hardly less beautiful are Fra Angelico's pictures of this subject, even though they were painted half a century before Correggio's birth. The best of Angelico's pictures of "*The Coronation of the Virgin*" is now in the Louvre, where the beautiful Virgin is surrounded by tier upon tier of rejoicing angels.

For nearly forty years Fra Angelica had served his convent faithfully, with devout life and the work of his hand. Everything paid for his pictures went to swell the income of the convent. He never took an order without first consulting his prior.

His fame had long ago reached Rome. The art-loving Popes of that time could not remain oblivious to his great ability. In 1445, the quiet life of the monastery was interrupted by Pope Eugenius, who called Angelico to Rome to assist in decorating the Vatican. We can easily imagine that there was some shrinking on Angelico's part at severing the ties that had held him so long among the brothers of his order. This may have been somewhat offset by a vague desire to see Rome, the pilgrim city of the Christian world.

However that may be, he obeyed the call of the Pope and journeyed by easy stages, passing from convent to convent, until the Holy City was reached. It would have been an interesting journey to have taken with the pious monk. One could have seen how the various monasteries exercised one of the most beneficial purposes of their organization, that of ministering to tired and hungry travellers. At many convents at whose doors he appeared, a stranger, he probably left pictures and certainly the memory of a charming personality. Perhaps he relieved for an hour some weary illuminator of the parchment and left a page of his work to encourage the tired monk.

The Pope who called Angelico to Rome did not live long after the painter's arrival there, but he did not die before he had shown special favor to the monk of San Marco.

Taking for granted that, because Angelico could paint such beautiful pictures he could do everything else equally well, he asked him to become the Archbishop of Florence, one of the most important church offices within the gift of the Pope. How we admire the good brother when he responded, with the simplicity which was so marked a characteristic of him, "I can paint pictures but I cannot rule men." And further, how we delight in him as he recommends another brother of his order, Fra Antonio. That his judgement in this matter was equal to his generosity is proved by the fact that Antonio became the wisest archbishop Florence had ever had.

The successor of Pope Eugenius, Nicholas V., also extended his friendship and protection to the painter. Here in Rome he lived for the last ten years of his life. His work here was largely confined to the chapel of Nicholas V., in the Vatican, which he decorated with scenes from the lives of St. Lawrence and St. Stephen. For years this chapel was closed to the public and the key lost, so that when it was re-opened it seemed as if a new set of works belonging to Fra Angelico had been discovered.

## FLIGHT INTO EGYPT FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

When the heat of summer came on in Rome, the painter from the hills of the Arno wilted under the depressing influence and he longed for his native heights. An opportunity for release from the stagnant weather of Rome during the months of June, July and August came from an unexpected quarter. It was the time of the building of the great Italian cathedrals. Every large community seemed bent on excelling its neighbor in the splendor of the church it erected. Florence reared her Duomo, the Santa Maria del Fiore, Siena built her fine cathedral, striped black and yellow like a tiger.

Orvieto, near by, had witnessed a wonderful miracle, and in remembrance of it her citizens determined to build a cathedral that should be more beautiful than any other in Italy. So much in earnest were the people of Orvieto in undertaking this work, that they gave their holidays to drawing materials for it from the hills near by. In eight years, an incredibly short time in the building of a mediaeval cathedral, it was sufficiently finished for holding religious services. It was three hundred years, however, before the people had made it the wrought jewel that it stands to-day.

In the delicacy and elaborateness of its ornament it is the most splendid church in Italy. A hundred and fifty skilled sculptors worked their best on the carving. Nearly a hundred workers in mosaic put together cunningly the bits of glass and precious stones which make its rich and vari-colored mosaic. Almost as many master painters added their work to the precious structure. The facade is like some grand screen, with its exquisite bas-relief, its glistening and intricate mosaic and its delicate pinnacles, every one crowned with a statue.

Such a beautiful and substantial structure was a fine crown for this ancient town, rising almost like a rock-cube from the barren ravines below. It was to help adorn this wonderful church that the building council urged Fra Angelico to quit Rome each year through the sickly summer. All arrangements were completed and our artist once more breathed the hill air to which he was born.

On one of the walls he planned to represent "*The Last Judgment*" a subject which he had previously painted. He never proceeded further than to the completion of the figure of the judging Christ. This fragment is the strongest piece of work Angelico ever did. It is probable that the mighty Angelo studied this figure before painting his own "*Last Judgment*." The critic who compares the two Christs must, it seems to me, ever decide in favor of the one made by the



Angelical painter. The combination of strength and compassion in Angelico's is far more to our notions of the gentle Christ, sitting as Judge of all the world. If Angelico had finished the work at Orvieto, it would doubtless have been much like the one we may study to-day in the Academy in Florence. Let us consider that for a moment.

PARADISE. (DETAIL OF LAST JUDGMENT)  
**PARADISE. (DETAIL OF LAST JUDGMENT)**

It was a strange subject for one with so mild and loving a nature to undertake, but we must remember that it was the favorite theme of the age, so that all sorts of painters tried their hands at it. Here Christ sits enthroned, encircled by angels, while below him, divided by a long line of unopened graves, are the blessed and the condemned. In depicting the former our angel painter was perfectly at home. What a joyous host they are as they tread the flowery meadows and appear in the searching rays of heaven's own light! One group, a monk embraced by an angel, is reproduced in this sketch.

Even if for a time Angelico was able to summon the power by which he could portray an avenging and yet pitying Christ, he lost that power when he tried to image forth the agony of the condemned, the wickedness of Satan. So the picture stands, half in the glory of fine and characteristic execution and half in the darkness of inadequate workmanship.

Just why Angelico never went back to Orvieto we do not know. It is probable that the infirmities of age were pressing upon him. Perhaps, too, he was reserving his surplus strength for a last visit to his beloved Florence. Hither we know he came, in the last years of his life, and painted for the Church of the Annunciation a little cupboard to hold the gold and silver vessels used about the altar. It was a delicate task not wholly unlike the miniature work with which, in his early years, he had adorned the parchments of his monastery.

FACADE OF ORVIETO CATHEDRAL  
**FACADE OF ORVIETO CATHEDRAL**

Thirty-five panels were filled with scenes from the life of our Lord. The series is done in the spirit of a man who knows the Scriptures and medieval legend to a point, and all the time there shines through the painted figures the saintliness, the mystic, far-away thoughts of the artist. It was a beautiful work to give to his home city in the evening of his quiet life.

The work completed, he wended his way back to Rome where he died, in 1455,

or, as a contemporary historian says, "Envious death broke his pencil and his beautiful soul winged its way among the angels to make Paradise more joyous." He was buried in the Church of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva where he had lived since his first coming to Rome. His tomb is simple enough, enriched merely with the quaint figure of a Dominican monk, with his hands crossed, and wearing the dress of his order. At the feet of the stone monk is this epitaph, composed by Nicholas V., Angelico's friend and patron—

"Not that in me a new Apelles lived,  
But that thy poor, O Christ, my gains received;  
This be my praise: Deeds done for fame on earth  
Live not in heaven. Fair Florence gave me birth."

What his appearance was we cannot tell with certainty as no authentic portrait of him remains to us. From imaginary and traditional portraits we get our only notions of how the angelical painter looked, and these are likely to fall far short of giving us correct ideas of the face of one whose character was well-nigh faultless.

Living the secluded life of a monk, we should hardly expect to find many pupils to continue his work after him. One there is, however, who is always spoken of as Angelico's pupil, and that is Benozzo Gozzoli, whose angels at times approach in beauty those of the master-painter of angels. Benozzo was the artist who completed the work that Angelico began at Orvieto.

We have found the facts of Angelico's life few and not at all startling and yet his character was such that it left an indelible impress on his age. We cannot better close this sketch than by quoting from Vasari, who thus sums up the character of his devout countryman:—

"This father, truly angelic, spent all his life in the service of God and for the good of the world and his neighbor. In truth, the great and extraordinary powers possessed by Fra Giovanni could not have existed except in a man of most holy life. He was a man of simplicity and most holy in his ways.... He withheld himself from all worldly deeds, and living purely and holily, he was such a friend to the poor that I think his soul is now in heaven.

"He worked continually at his pictures and would never treat any but religious subjects. He might have been a rich man but he cared not to boast, and used to say that true riches consisted in being content with little. He might have had

command over many but would not, saying that there was less trouble and risk in obeying than in commanding.... He was most gentle and sober, and, living chastely, freed himself from the snares of the world; and he was wont to say that whoever followed art had need of peace and to live without distracting thoughts, and that he who does work that concerns Christ must live continually with Christ.

"He was never known to get angry with the monks; if anyone desired work from him he would say that he would obtain consent of the Prior to it, and then would not fail to fulfill the request. In fact, this father, who cannot be sufficiently praised, was in all his works and conversation most humble and modest, and in his painting dexterous and conscientious, and the saints of his painting have more the air and resemblance of saints than those of any other painter."

### **SUBJECTS FOR COMPOSITION AND SPECIAL TOPICS.**

1. Angels in Art.
2. Savonarola, the Orator of San Marco.
3. Antonio, the Good Archbishop of Florence.
4. The Angel-Painter of San Marco.
5. An Illuminated Manuscript.
6. With Angelico on His Way to Rome.
7. In the Cells of San Marco.
8. How Monasteries Have Served Civilization.
9. A Day with the Dominicans at Fiesole.
10. Some Hill Towns of Tuscany.
11. Two Gothic Cathedrals of Italy. (Siena and Orvieto,)

### **REFERENCES FOR FRA ANGELICO.**

- |   |                   |
|---|-------------------|
| 1. Life of Fra Angelico                               | <i>Sweetser.</i>  |
| 2. Life of Fra Angelico                               | <i>Phillimor.</i> |
| 3. Makers of Florence                                 | <i>Oliphant.</i>  |
| 4. Sketches and Studios in Southern Europe. (Orvieto) | <i>Symonds.</i>   |
| 5. The Fine Arts                                      | <i>Symonds.</i>   |
| 6. Old Italian Masters                                | <i>Cole.</i>      |
| 7. Friar Jerome's Beautiful Book                      | <i>Aldrich.</i>   |

- 8. Art and Artists
- 9. Angels in Art
- 10. The Monk as Civilizer

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