

people. False ideas on religion and government were brought to her by foreign armies; and secret societies, under the protection of foreign powers, have been trying to destroy her religion and conservative institutions. Her political life is kept in agitation by a bold faction, but, as all travellers tell us, her people are still Catholic to the core.

THE INFLUENCE OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI ON MEDIÆVAL ART.

"We owe to the mind of St. Francis that inspiration, nobler than human, which stirred the emulation of the greatest artists."—LEO P. P. XIII., *Encycl.*, 17 Sept., 1882.

AT times convictions take possession of a human soul and develop therein with such astonishing power over and beyond all that surrounds it, assuming dimensions in their ultimate results which are out of all proportion with the source whence they appear to spring, that we are forced to look for their reason in some design of Providence bearing testimony to the unfailing truth on which they rest, and giving assurance of their predestined accomplishment. The Catholic Church is the soil on which such souls ordinarily grow. The fact of Calvary, of all human failures in an earthly point of view the most complete, yet with its prodigious effects, unaccountable unless in the light of a higher principle, has established a norm by which we may measure like phenomena.

When St. Francis of Assisi suddenly departed from the common course of men about him, those who loved him best mourned, because, as they said, the beautiful youth had grown mad. But he had turned to follow a master, whom with less reason the enlightened world of old Rome had pointed out as a fool; and so he went on securely in his way, "*ce fou sublime, dont la folie confondit la sagesse du monde.*" And when the few short years of his earthly life had come to their end, he had set into motion and given a lasting impulse to a revolution, which in due time overturned the political, social, and religious world from its existing state. Like the sun, which he affectionately calls his brother, and to which Dante aptly compares him, he, "when not yet much distant from his rising, began to bless the earth by his good influence."¹ He illumined

¹ *Paradise*, Cant. XI., 53.

the darkness into which the world of those days was deeply merged, and created a new growth upon its face, breathing by the genial warmth of his spirit fresh life into the decaying members of society. Popes, emperors, nay, the obstinate princes of the East, who hated with a natural and religious hatred alike whatever bore the Christian name, bowed to his will and vied with one another in showering favors upon him to whom nothing was dearer than the contempt and poverty of Christ. Even St. Dominic, if we may believe the annalist of a past day,¹ intimate and familiar friend of our saint, seemed for a moment to have lost confidence in his own distinct and stupendous mission, when he came within the circle of that radiant fire of seraphic love.

But it is not our purpose to measure the influence of St. Francis upon his own or later times except in so far as it caused the revival of the fine arts, which in point of time and place assumes definite form immediately after the death and at the tomb of the Saint. It were strange indeed if we could not trace the cause of this sudden change in the sphere of taste to the direct influence of him who from that time forth appeared for several generations at once the devout object and the patron of the fine arts. And no doubt it will be well to recall to mind the means which served to raise so admirable a structure as that which the school of Christian art presents to us in the 13th century, at a time when at least the outward conditions of society are much the same as they were then, with perhaps this difference in our favor, of a far more eager search after a high standard of taste.

In order to estimate correctly the influence of St. Francis upon the life of the fine arts for several centuries after his death, it will be necessary to cast a brief glance upon the character of the man who, by the sole force of his personal endowments, without any assistance from without, was able to produce such gigantic effects. We shall next consider this influence in its further results.

I.

The most superficial reader of the life of St. Francis will be impressed with two features in the singular career of the Monk of Assisi: that peculiar asceticism, from which, as we know, arose the mystic school of thought, whose best exponent in theology became St. Bonaventure, and which found its truest illustration in the whole range of Christian schools of art, beginning in faint outlines with Giunta Pisano, the friend of St. Francis, and ending, at least for a considerable time, with Raphael, in his earlier works. The other trait, which aside from this strikes us, is the intense love of and sympathy with nature manifested by the Saint on every occasion.

¹ Vita S. Francisci, Bolland.

Nature was, so to speak, poverty, whom he had chosen as his bride, in her fairest apparel. When he had relinquished all for Christ, he had gained all; the whole great world was now his own, and he felt this possession, and it made him happy beyond earthly happiness.

One day, before he had made his choice, when he was returning from a festival, his companions, seeing him strangely pensive and tarrying behind, asked him laughingly what could absorb the light-hearted Giovanni so profoundly at this time. "I was thinking," said he, "of taking a spouse, but one so noble, so beautiful, that I know none like her on earth." From that day the fair young Bernadone changed. "He is lovesick," they said, and so he was. He had seen a glimpse of some beautiful being, a quick vision of some magnificent reality, and his heart went out to it; went out to God, that Beauty everlasting and surpassing all His creatures. And the Saint loved only the more these creatures, now that he recognized them as love-tokens of God's munificent affection towards his humble spouse. He would cast aside the gilded deckings and don the wedding garment to please but his new choice. So by vigils and fasts, terrific stripes and crucifixions of his tender flesh, he called to heaven for a spotless robe, until the folly of a thoughtless boyhood had been wholly wiped out.

As sin disappears in man, its consequences vanish one after another, or lose their hold on him, and the former state of sinless happiness returns. In Paradise all nature had been subject to Adam. But once he rebelled against his Maker, creation declared enmity to its former master, man. Henceforth his life was one continued toil, and sorrow became as his daily companion. Then, as he bore the burden meekly, it lightened, or perhaps his strength increased, and he felt less of the old crushing weight. Nature grew more kind, the ground yielded more readily to the pressure of his spade, and it brought forth fruit and flower, which lighted up once more his aged care-worn features, and labor, duty, sacrifice, became a consolation. And when the end came they brought to the saintly patriarch the last born of his grandchildren that he might bless it. But he looked strangely out into the open field where stood the tree which he had planted, a twig of Eden's sad tree of life. And in prophetic vision he discerned the fruit that was one day to grow thereon—*arbor decora et fulgida!* And he saw how the curse which he had brought upon his progeny was to depart by the strength of that fruit. It was a rapturous thought, and he loved the tree for its destiny, and the birds that nestled in it, and the flowers that grew beneath its shade; he loved all nature, for he saw in it expressed the ineffable love of his Maker. Then his dying hand blessed the babe with the strength of the expected Redeemer, and when with his last look he gazed into that blessed child's eyes he

saw there the joy which he had seen in Eve before the fall, the joy of innocence, like to no other joy on earth. How often has that process been repeated in the penitents, saints of the Catholic Church! It was in a manner the process which the soul of St. Francis experienced. He had become again a sinless child, in the baptism of penance, in the strength of his Redeemer's Precious Blood. Nature spoke to him, and like a child he spoke to her, until both understood and loved each other as brother and sister of the same heavenly Father. See how it comes out, this love, in all its virginal freshness and innocence as we meet him in the by-ways around Assisi, sweetly caressing a rescued pair of turtle-doves: O sirocchie mie tortole, semplici, innocenti e caste—ora io vi voglio scampare da morte e farvi i nidi.¹ Or as we see him stooping to gather up the little worms from the road, lest they be crushed beneath the foot of some unthinking traveller; for he remembers how his Master had once said: I am a worm and not a man.

Such was his tender love for the works of God's hand, and like some magic spell it accompanied him wherever he journeyed, and where his shadow fell the ancient curse seemed forthwith to depart from the earth. The birds of the air, the beasts of the forest, came gladly at his call; the timid roe looked trustingly into that beautiful face and gathered its food from the hand that gave a blessing upon the dumb creature. All nature rejoiced when with him, and the lay "Laudate"² of the royal prophet seemed forever on his lips. Well could he write of "true and perfect joy,"³ for it was always in his heart and round about him.

But this intense love of nature, this perfect harmony between his inner being and the rest of God's image in the outward creation, made St. Francis a poet, we might say an artist, in the truest sense of the word. Every artist is a poet. The history of the great masters amply illustrates this. We know how the genius of Giovanni Santi followed that of Petrarch and Dante, and how the father of the immortal Raphael was celebrated in his day alike for his verses and his paintings. Young Raphael himself was, as Lanzi informs us, a poet. Even Leonardo da Vinci, in spite of his practical turn of mind, has left us some verses. And most of the great painters of the early Italian school were enthusiastic students of Dante.

On the other hand, there exists a close and necessary connection between true art and Religion. Indeed art is a species of religion, in which man pays homage to the divine Beauty. Such was the idea of art even among the Greeks in its best days. When high ideals in religion are united to most perfect natural forms, whether

¹ My dear little sisters, sweet innocent doves,—yes, I am going to save you from death and build you little nests.

² 148 Ps.

³ De vera et perfecta laetitia—cited by Wadding.

expressed in harmony of sound, or in painting, or in sculpture, we have art in its truest sense.¹ The mystic school of art had its source in the realization of the highest ideal of divine love expressed in the purest types of nature. If we trace the origin of the two most characteristic fruits in the life of St. Francis, his asceticism and his love of nature, we shall find the one source an intense love, which made him identify everything about him with the motives of his Maker. This love terminates in a complete union with the divine will, and produces that harmony between the creature and his creator, identical in a manner with intuition, wherein the soul communes with God directly and faith yields to limited vision. No better argument than the fact of St. Francis can be brought against the assertion of Victor Cousin, that "he who pretends to commune with God in this mystic way, does thereby ignore Him in his manifestations in nature," and that such communication "is a dream and an incredible rashness."² Surely no one could have believed in God more essentially through "His manifestations in nature," whilst few saints were more closely united to Him, receiving, as he did, almost all the important commissions regarding the institute of his order, like Moses, directly from God. With St. Francis self no longer existed. It was merged in God. And when he looked upon nature he saw it, too, acting in harmony with that sublime sentiment of entire unselfishness, so beautifully expressed in the lines of a German poet :

O welcher reine heilige Edelmuth
In der Natur und rings im All,
Wo Eins dem Andern, und wo Alles Allen
Mitwirkung, Hilfe, alle seine Kraft
Und Liebe, selbst sein eignes schoenes Dasein
Herzinnig treu, mit stiller Freudigkeit
Dahingibt, ohne je daran zu denken
Ob auch ein Stäubchen nur dadurch bezahlt sei.

In reality this spirit has always done more, for art as even for abstract science, than did brush, or chisel, or toiling brain. The most devout painters have been more successful as Christian artists than those who possessed the secrets of perfect technique or the most accurate knowledge of anatomy. We know³ how Cardinal di Lugo, that giant mind, went in his subtle perplexities of theology to consult the boyish novice John Berchmans, that God might re-

¹ Ruskin goes so far as to maintain that the realization of the divine presence in nature, and the love of nature which springs from and accompanies this consciousness are essential to and the only promise of true art.—*Mod. Painters*, vol. iii., p. 313.

² *Vict. Cousin's Lect.*, Wright's translation, p. 103.

³ *Essay on the interest and characteristics of the Lives of the Saints*, by F. W. Faber.

veal to the prayers of the saint the science withheld from his own comprehensive intellect. Hence, when we come to judge of the effect of this asceticism upon art, we must lay aside the rules of the connoisseur. "Mysticism," says Rio,¹ "is to painting what ecstasy is to psychology. It is necessary, in order to estimate it correctly, to associate ourselves by a strong and profound sympathy to certain religious ideas, with which this artist in his studio, or that monk in his cell have been more particularly preoccupied, and combine the results of this preoccupation with the corresponding sentiments in the minds of their fellow-citizens."

As St. Francis worshipped beauty because it spoke to him of God, the eternal Beauty, reflected in nature, so he found himself drawn to rival nature, or to seek its choicest types, and to beautify, by his own hand, whatever was, in an especial manner, to image forth that heavenly splendor, or to enhance its appreciation among men.

The habitations of his monks were to be severely simple. "*Habentes quibùs tegamur his contenti sumus,*" he said, with the apostle. We remember how, on one occasion, he became all aglow with holy indignation when, on one of his visitations, he found that the monks had, with much labor, built a magnificent convent; and how it took all the influence of Cardinal Hugolino, the then protector of the order, to pacify him. "*Nostram hanc domum non agnosco,*" he called out, "*neque meos fratres reputo qui in illa permanerint.*"² But when he reared altars and temples to the Most High, his zeal for their adornment knew no limit. He wanted to be poor, and no other saint in the Church has so entirely made that title of *il povero di Dio* his own. His patrimony he gave for the restoration of a church. Long before he had laid the foundation of the order of Friars Minors, he had devoted himself entirely to the reconstructing and beautifying of the house of God. He went from door to door begging alms, crying aloud in the market-place: "Come, help me to build the Church of St. Damian." It was a passion with him, and people wondered what he meant. Yet he went on restoring. Church after church arose, newly adorned; St. Damian, St. Peter Apostle, and the Portiuncula, in his native city of Assisi. Cardinal Newman tells us somewhere that it was architecture which directed the thoughts of one of the most zealous priests³ he ever knew towards the Catholic faith. Well, it was architecture which, though in another way, led our Saint to the reform of the spiritual edifice that was swaying to and fro amidst many conflicting elements. When, prostrate before the crucifix in the church, he had first heard the voice of his Lord, bidding him rise and uphold his

¹ The Poetry of Christian Art. p. 122.

² Vita S. Francisci, Boll.

³ The Rev. Hutchison, of the London Oratory.

tottering house, he applied the command as referring entirely to the material church. Yet God had meant it in another sense, and the saint was imperceptibly drifting towards the accomplishment of God's will by beginning his task in this way. With his own hands he set in order and embellished whatever about God's habitation was out of order, and when in after days he found a lovely spot, he would dedicate it to the special glory of the Most High, by raising there a chapel or an altar, or a niche in which to place the statue of some saint, so that it might remind the passing wanderer how good God is in giving us such beautiful things. In a lovely grove between Gemini and Porcaria he erected a church in honor of the Blessed Virgin, very like to the one of St. Maria de Angelis, in Portiuncula. We read, in his life, how, returning from Arezzo to Florence, he was compelled by sickness to stop a few days at Gangeretti. God had blessed the place by causing a fountain to spring up at the request of the languishing saint. As if to guard and beautify the spot where "God had been," he employed the brief time of his convalescence in building a wall about and adorning it.

Thus his love made him happy, for he was ever in full harmony with all that surrounded him. We said above that St. Francis was a poet. In point of time he is one of the first of Italian poets; no less in point of true and deep inspiration. "He burned, all on fire with love," says the author of the last life of St. Teresa,¹ "and that heavenly flame inspired simple but immortal verses." What he has left us of his unquestioned compositions shows that he was not neglectful of form. Poetry in all ages has had two principal sources, one secular, the other religious. Thus, at the time of St. Francis, the Provençal minnesinger sang in glowing words of his lady-love, and the Oriental element imported by the returning crusaders had done nothing to change the existing tendency towards the creation of a voluptuous literature. On the other hand, we find in Italy a healthy element of Christian poetry, asserting its sway from Dante down to Tasso, and beyond. And the sources of this stream, says Brockhoff,² we find in St. Francis and his disciples. A celebrated troubadour, whose real name has not come down to us, but who passed among the people as the "king of poets" (*rex versuum*), went one day, in frivolous mood, to hear the strange Assisian preach. Then he laid down his gold-and-purple-trimmed mantle, and begged the garb of a Franciscan monk from our saint. No longer did Brother Pacifico delight the princes in their banquet halls, or the people at high harvest-time; yet we cannot doubt that he sang for the monks, or that he taught St.

¹ Cited in the *Civiltà Cattolica*, Quad. 774.

² Brockhoff, *Die Kloester*.

Francis to put into rhyme the hymns which the saint uttered in his wanderings, and which Brother Leo, who generally accompanied him, always noted down. St. Bonaventure tells us that amidst his frequent infirmities St. Francis often expressed a desire to hear music.¹ Wadding cites among his writings canticles in the vernacular and hymns for the use of the nuns of St. Clare. If we may judge from the few specimens yet remaining and accredited to him, they must have been exquisitely beautiful. There is a peculiar simplicity of style, a sweet flow of melody, in the Italian of that day. Anyone familiar with Latin will be able to enjoy the following prayer, which the saint is said to have used every day :

" O altissimo omnipotente glorioso Idio,
 Illumina le tenebre del core mio.
 Doname te prego per tua gran bontade
 Fede drita, speranza certa, con perfecta charitade.
 E fame da mi havere perfecto cognoscimento
 A ciò che sempre obserua el tuo sancto comandamento."²

" His canticum solis (*de lo frate sole*) is unquestionably," says Schlosser, in his translation of *I Cantici di S. Francesco*, "one of the finest productions of sacred poetry." The hymns *In foco amor mi mise*, and *Amor de caritade*, found in the works of St. Bernadine of Siena, are, by the weighty authority of Ireneo Affo, attributed to Fra Jacopone, the worthy forerunner of Dante. Yet they breathe all the spirit of St. Francis. Thus sang the Saint. Like a prophecy, reminding us of holy Simeon at once and Zachary, are the last words, the song of the dying swan, when prostrate on the ground, blind, and too weak to reach his beloved Assisi, he turns towards the cherished city with these prophetic words :

" Benedicta tu civitas a Domino
 Quia per te multæ animæ salvabuntur
 Et in te multi servi altissimi habitabunt
 Et de te multi eligentur ad regnum æternum."³

How soon the blessing was verified. Less than forty years after, Assisi had sent out of her noviciate 200,000 monks, bearing the seeds of the spirit of St. Francis into every land on the globe.

¹ Ad jucunditatem spiritus excitandam alicujus audiendi soni harmoniaci desiderium habuisset. Vita S. Francisci.

² " O almighty, glorious God on high, enlighten the darkness of my heart. Grant me, I pray Thee, in Thy bounty, right faith, firm hope, and perfect charity. And let me plainly know myself, so that I may ever observe Thy holy laws."—This prayer appeared first in an ancient life of St. Clara, printed in Milan, 1492. It is not stated that St. Francis himself composed it, though there can hardly be a doubt of it.

³ " Blessed art thou, O city, by the Lord, for through thee many souls shall be saved. In thee shall dwell many servants of the Most High, and out of thee many shall be chosen for eternal glory."

During his lifetime the saint had exercised great power over men. As Irnerius drew disciples around him by the fame of his learning, so St. Francis had attracted them by the rumor of his sanctity. Once they had seen him he kept them spellbound by his lovely ways. He was a beautiful man. His broad, chaste brow, and finely-chiselled features, his eyes, with their deep-dreamy joy, catching a spark whenever holy zeal prompted his heart to light them, the grace of his manner, and yet withal, his humble readiness to serve as beast of burden to the first that chose to claim such service,—all these things charmed the men that approached him, and they learned to love the things he loved, they hardly knew why; but there seemed to be so much superior wisdom and happiness in his choice. Now that he was dead, men wandered to his tomb. Assisi became the centre of inspiration, the fountain-head whence

“Many rivulets have since been turned
Over the garden Catholic to lead
Their living waters, and have fed its plant.”¹

II.

“Sanctitatis nova signa
Prodierunt laude digna
Mira valde et benigna
In Francesco credita,”

sings Brother Thomas à Celano, in his sequence of the Saint. In truth, the effects of that sanctity were at once wonderful and new. Still in the bloom of manhood, according to years, when he left the scene of his activity, his mark was there indelibly. And its impress only deepened and intensified by the shock which his sudden summons to heaven created among those who had felt dependent on him. If there was one thing more pronounced than another, in this influence, it was the fact of a new tendency towards the love of the beautiful as it is in nature, and of its dedication by a unanimous impulse to the highest ends of man. St. Francis was, as we have seen, a poet, and his poetry pervaded, impersonated everything, so that the very atmosphere of Assisi seemed sufficient to create and nourish the inspiration of Christian art.

Let us hear the Protestant Milman on the subject, who yet fails in his attempt to explain the singular phenomenon of this influence:

“Strange it might appear that the arts, the highest luxuries, if we may so speak, of religion, should be fostered, cultivated, cherished, and distributed by those who professed to reduce Christianity to more than its primitive simplicity, its nakedness of all

¹ Paradiso, Cant. xii., 96.

adornment, its poverty. Strange that these should become the most munificent patrons of art, the most consummate artists; that their cloistered palaces should be the most sumptuous in architecture, and the most richly decorated by sculpture and painting; at once the workshops and the abodes of those who executed most admirably. Assisi, the birthplace of St. Francis, the poor, self-denying wanderer over the face of the earth, who hardly owned the cord which girt him, who possessed not a breviary of his own, who worshipped in the barren mountains, whose companions were the outcasts of human society,—Assisi becomes the capital, the young, gorgeous capital of Christian art."¹

He tells us, further on, that men who had an irresistible calling to be artists became Franciscans, because in that order they found those emotions which were to express themselves in art awakened, cherished, and strengthened. And no doubt, as the youth of Europe eager after science journeyed to Bologna, so that in a short time the two great bodies of the university, the Citramontani and the Ultramontani, counted among their hearers students from more than thirty different nationalities, so the youth that loved the arts came from afar to Assisi, there to gather inspiration and gain schooling. And in this concourse of the best geniuses a pious rivalry arose, giving an ever fresh impulse to the work that was going on. With noble generosity each left a monument of his achievements at the tomb of St. Francis as a token of gratitude to him to whom they felt that they owed all. Not a church or chapel, not a convent wall or ceiling in that favored city which is not sacred with the touch of some inspired brush. It is one vast academy, containing the noblest creations of human genius and piety; and though age has destroyed much of that which, after all, was but the faint expression of so much that is noble and admirable in the Christian's soul, yet there remains enough to make that single town of Assisi, even at this day, the choicest collection of purely Christian art.

The disciples of St. Francis, who in his own day could be counted by thousands, who could be met with in every town and city throughout Italy, and even beyond the Alps and the sea, these perpetuated the spirit of their holy founder. It was not strange, then, that in the face of this new growth of feeling and devotion, the old mummy-like images of the Byzantine school were unable any longer to awaken a responsive echo in the soul of the Christian. Painting up to that time had been entirely in the hands of the Greeks. Their stiff, often grotesque forms, conventional coloring, and unnatural drapery had nothing in them of the ancient grace of their early masters. The new generation, growing up under the monastic discipline and general influence in all spheres of life of the Friars Minor, missed the freshness, the life, the something with a seraph touch in it at which their own hearts could catch fire.

¹ Milman's *Latin Christianity*, vol. viii., p. 477.

But the young artist, the devout painter who drew the breath of inspiration from the hallowed Grotto of Alvernia, him they understood, and quickly his fame spread, and the builders and the guardians of God's house sought him out, that he might breathe life into the walls, which were to instruct their people and at the same time fitly enshrine the holy of holies.

Some writers have dated the beginning of the mystic school from Gentile da Fabriano, perhaps because at that time it presents a more marked contrast to the Florentine and Bolognese schools, to which the anything but beneficial patronage of the Medici gave eventually so dangerous a direction that it actually undid much of the work of St. Francis by substituting the love of nature for its own sake in place of that love for God's sake. Other writers place Oderisio Gubbio at the head of this school, whilst the honor of having been the first at least to abandon the manner of the Greeks is generally accorded to Cimabue. And yet such men as Giunta Pisano, Guido of Sienna, and others of the same day, unquestionably pointed the way to this departure. An old inscription, mentioned by P. Angeli, says of Giunta that he was the first Italian artist.¹

It is true that in the works of these early painters there is still a great deal of indecision. It could hardly be otherwise. Art is not in every stage of its life the complete expression of either the spirit or the time that produces it. The soul may be said to be breathed into the rough mass of solid stone in the very conception of the artist, but it wants time to assume shape and form and become the perfect reflection of the original mind. It is in the mature man's face that we trace the peculiar character which is his, developed, indeed, in action, but there in all its peculiarity from the days of his babyhood. Thus these artists served as the connecting link between St. Francis and the most perfect exponents in art of his spirit. They gathered the seed and scattered it about the surrounding mountains and valleys, and it was some time before the new flowers grew up to perfume the air about with their sweet odors. As for Giunta, he was certainly under the direct influence of St. Francis. We know that he went to see him at Assisi, where, as we gather from Lanzi, he painted the first known portrait of the Saint. Soon after the death of the latter he returned to Assisi, and here has left us his best pictures. His paintings in the Church of the Angioli are far superior to the best efforts of the Byzantine school, both in truth to human expression and in disposition of the drapery. He also directed the paintings that were to honor St. Francis in his church at Pisa, which Cimabue and Giotto, it appears, afterwards completed. "These paintings may

¹ Juncta Pisanus ruditer a Græcis instructus
Primus ex Italis artem apprehendit circa. Ann. Sal., 1210.

be ruder, but they are not less expressive than the floating forms of Guido or Murillo."¹

Next in order we have Cimabue. He also had learned his art from the Greeks, and his early manner strongly betrays their style. All at once, however, he seems to have come under the spell of St. Francis. There is a picture of the Saint and various little legends surrounding it in the Church of Santa Croce accredited to him, and bearing decided marks of Byzantine training. If it be authentic, which Lanzi doubts, it certainly indicates the direction which his genius took. It seems as if he had vowed henceforth to paint only for the glory of our Saint. In Pisa he completed an altar-piece for the Sons of St. Francis. He then went to Assisi. Here, as in the case of Giunta, we find his best productions. "None of his frescoes," says Lanzi, "give so good an idea of Cimabue's power as the truly magnificent paintings in the Church of Assisi." Here we see the evangelists and doctors of the Church instructing the monks of the Franciscan Order, executed with an originality of conception and arrangement altogether new in the light of contemporary works.

But Giotto still excels him. The paintings of both masters are side by side. Giotto too, true to the love that gave birth to his conceptions, chose for the principal subject of his brush the life of St. Francis. He became the model for generations throughout Tuscany. With him at the same fountain drank Dante. As in the days of Pericles, so there existed at this time a close resemblance of spirit between the art of poetry and that of painting. It was but natural, then, that there should likewise exist an intimate friendship between men of similar talent and like aims. Dante seems even at one time to have given his attention to painting under Giotto's guidance. He certainly was a master in the art of drawing, and we have it on the authority of Benvenuto da Imola² and of Baldinucci, in his *Life of Giotto*, that the latter painted at Naples from designs drawn for him by Dante. We may here add the name of Oderisio da Gubbio, who painted with Giotto. Imagine the intercourse of these three men, great souls, inspired by the same noble motives, they pictured, each in his way, yet all in the same grand way, the glories of St. Francis. They have likewise immortalized each other. The undoubtedly most correct portrait of Dante which we have is from the hand of Giotto, whose praises in turn, together with those of Oderisio, are chanted in the melodious stanzas of the *Divina Commedia*.

Restless in his activity and zeal, we see Giotto, so like his holy

¹ "Schools and Masters of Painting." A. G. Radcliffe.

² "Comento al Canto XI. del Purg.," cited from "Vita di Dante," Leon. Aretino.

patron, spreading the newly-learned gospel of his art in all the cities of Italy, from Naples to Lombardy, and beyond.

We must pass over a host of great painters, masters such as Orcagna, Gentile da Fabriano,—so truly the gentle, in name and in character,—the Bartolos, especially Taddeo, and that remarkable devotee of St. Francis, Margaritone of Arëzzo, all in turn continuing and swelling the stream that had its source on Mount Alverno. Following the central line of the Apennines, we see it dividing, one branch with sportive and sounding current passing up into the Romagna, the other peacefully and gently flowing southward through Umbria and towards the Eternal City, both reaching out far into the next century, and inundating with their sweet fresh waters the charming valleys of Italy. And looking north, we meet an angel keeping guard over the waters. His white robe is that of the Sons of St. Dominic. With Fra Angelico the Dominicans take the lead in the field of Christian art. Did the angelic youth of Fiesole, so superior in his way, owe aught to St. Francis of Assisi? We shall see.

It is admitted on all hands that Fra Angelico studied Giotto's manner of painting with great assiduity. His angels—and in these he excels—are imitations of the great-master-disciple of Assisi, with only the difference that Angelico applied purer colors. This fact alone might be sufficient to convince us that the genius which St. Francis had diffused about him must likewise have touched the young Dominican. We have seen how the flame that issued from the seraphic patriarch had laid its hold even on St. Dominic, in spite of his totally different genius; how he had sought out St. Francis, sat at his feet to listen to his tales of divine love, and eagerly asked permission to be present at the general chapter of the Friars Minor. He wished to learn from men who had no other school than that of charity, no training but that of unlimited obedience in executing works of love, no doctrine but that of Christian poverty and humility. Whilst his was the lofty intellect appointed by God to gather the straying minds, to confound the heresy of the Albigenses, to crush the serpent's head of a false philosophy, St. Francis was the heart overflowing with affectionate sympathy for his fallen brethren, at war with one another, and without peace in themselves. To him had been assigned the giant task to stay the tide of the lust of the eyes, the passions of the flesh, and to counteract the false asceticism which had taken form in the vagaries of the Waldenses. Yet if we may be permitted to judge the comparative strength of two such giants, so different in parts yet exercising a mutual attraction towards each other, we should incline to call St. Francis the stronger. Love informing the will exercises a greater strain than intellect, convincing and moving to action. And like his

master must have felt the disciple, the pure, the simple-hearted Fra Angelico. How often he traversed, as we read in his life, the beautiful valley between Foligno and Assisi to where St. Francis lay entombed and his daughter in Christ, St. Clare; and there, before the masterpieces we have mentioned, he kindled his devotion and animated his genius, for both were one with him; the handling of his brush was but a prayer of the uplifted soul in contemplation. Looking at his own pictures, and there are comparatively few that remain, we find St. Francis introduced wherever the unity in the conception of his subject permitted it. In almost all his more remarkable pictures of the Blessed Virgin the seraphic saint figures prominently.

If the teacher ordinarily transmits his predilections and his zeal to his pupils, Benozzo Gozzoli, the cherished disciple of Fra Angelico, stands as another proof of the spirit which animated the holy friar of San Marco. "Gozzoli," says Rio,¹ "is another star which contributed to the formation of the crown of glory by which the arts encircled the tomb of St. Francis." His pictures are almost transparent in their chaste purity, singularly so those found in the Franciscan church at Montefalco. When he had to paint the portrait of St. Francis he frequently copied the picture at San Marco. Strange to say, when Benozzo left these pure mountain regions to go to Florence, he seemed to lose his inspiration. His works executed between 1464 and 1467 are said to rise scarcely above mediocrity. Yet the frescoes at Pisa, painted in the decline of his years, are simply marvels of what has been called the patriarchal style of Christian art.²

We might go on recounting painters, not only such as nourished their talents with the spirit communicated to them by men who had stood in direct relation to the Saint and his order, but such as were devoted to St. Francis as if he were still their only master; who learned nothing from those whom he had taught, but all from himself; artists who flocked to the place of his birth, to the principal scene of his activity and now his earthly resting-place, as if to invoke the aid of his spirit where they could be nearest to his remains—Pinturicchio and Perugino, whose art was so exquisite that it seemed altogether new—*perdita si fuerat pingendi hic retulit artem; si nusquam inventa est, hactenus ipse dedit*,³ Francia also, friend and rival of Raphael, with Giacomo his son and Giuglio his relative, who sought shelter even in death in the Church of St. Francis, where they are buried. Raphael himself, in his earlier works, has acknowledged the tribute he owed to St. Francis. And

¹ "The Poetry of Christian Art," p. 133.

² These have been restored lately, but, according to accounts, to their utter ruin.

³ Inscription cited by Orsini.

when the Renaissance had given a new turn to art, even then Assisi was still the place where best men sought inspiration, and St. Francis still remained the subject and his glory the object of their labors. There was always enough to allure the artist to that singular spot, independent of the devout memory he might entertain of the saint. The eleven or twelve communities of Franciscans, in devout procession moving to the tomb of the Saint, their solemn chants, above all, the stirring harmonies of the patriarchal choir, famous by the traditions of several ages, would attune the soul to the right appreciation of those marvellous frescoes that adorn the walls. Wherever the eye turns, from chancel to choir, naves all and dome, even the mosaicked floors, are wrought by the hands of the Umbrian masters. Nay, the streets of the city itself are full of devout representations in painting, many of rare artistic merit, all breathing the love and spirit of St. Francis.

Even architecture contributes here in an altogether unique way to verify what we have said in the beginning, that the genius of St. Francis had impersonated everything. The architectural structure of the Grand Basilica in Assisi expresses perfectly the idea of the life of St. Francis. "An Italian writer," says the Abbé Riche,¹ "sees in the creation of so wonderful a monument a supernatural effect of divine Providence. He finds himself unable to explain in any other way its appearance at an age when mankind appeared scarcely to awake from barbarism and ignorance."

Roman architecture, such as it existed before this time, expressed on the whole the idea of rest, of strength. It was, as such, not unworthy as an expression of the Christian faith and the security which it had begotten. But lately, the times had become troubled, not, indeed, with the troubles of the early persecutions, when men felt safest as they approached the torture-block—no, these were other troubles. Darkness of pride and strifes and false lights had dimmed the air, and they that felt the stifling atmosphere looked up and sought the pure light of the noonday, and prayed with raised heart and eye, as we see St. Francis pray, in ecstatic longing for the light. The Gothic architecture expressed, so to say, the new feeling. It was a striving upwards. Its long slender columns supporting the pointed arch seemed to end in heaven, all pointed to the infinite that awaits man. But we see much more than this in the temple which enshrines the remains of St. Francis. There are here two churches,—we might say three,—one within the other. In them we have the twofold aspect of his life. His penitence, with its train of voluntary poverty, sacrifices, and suffering resignation, symbolized in the tomb of the saint, who lies there on the ground as he had desired to die, poor, with barely a shroud to cover him;

¹ "Fioretti," by Abbé Riche.

and his monument, the little church of Portiuncula, built with his own hand and still untouched as he had left it. And high above it there tower in noble proportion the marble columns and Gothic dome, speaking to the beholder without his asking for the meaning of the symbol, of glorious and immortal transfiguration. Whilst the inner edifice pronounces the idea of humility, of sweet sadness, that plaintive, childlike hope which is at once full of diffidence in self and trust in the strength on which it leans; the other expresses that ineffable joy which knows no limits and no bounds, rising higher and higher until it touches immortality. It was a beautiful but difficult thought to express. Nowhere has it been more successfully done than in this epic in stone at Assisi.

How much more might be said to show how the spirit of St. Francis was the mainspring which produced not merely the enthusiasm and true love for the beautiful in art, but which gave to it at the same time subject, style, and artist, all, in fact, that made Christian art what it was in the Middle Ages.

And wherever the Sons of St. Francis went, whatever the name or garb or particular rule under which they perpetuated throughout long ages his teachings and his spirit, everywhere we see traces of that same enthusiasm for the arts. The convents and churches of the monks became the treasure-houses and nurseries of painting and sculpture. Raphael, Guido Reni, Domenichino, gave them the best of their pencils in Rome. The Church of St. Francis at Rimini became one of the wonders of the age, for here worked, next to Giotto, his most illustrious disciples, and Giorgio da Rimini, who loved to call himself Giorgio Francesco. But it is time that we conclude our sketch.

Perhaps the reader has, to some extent, realized what the love of God in a single individual is able to effect for the benefit of succeeding generations. Art is certainly a valuable element in the production of human happiness, and the very eagerness with which even its shadow and its counterfeit are sought, stands in confirmation of this truth. May we not hope for a chaster growth of true and elevated taste from the intercession of St. Francis? Our venerable Pontiff, Leo XIII., has seen opportune to recommend, with fatherly solicitude, devotion to the Saint as a powerful means of counteracting the existing evils of modern society. And whilst in reality the conditions of our present society are fundamentally different from those in the thirteenth century, when there was still a strong faith underlying all the vagaries of the human intellect and heart, yet the spirit of St. Francis, if we could revive it in its freshness, would heal many wounds, would undoubtedly diffuse a purer atmosphere round about the world of art. The humble monk out of the dark ages, he could bring light to us. May he vouchsafe to do so!