



VIEW OF ASSISI from the ANCIENT
CITY WALL BELOW S. CHIARA

HOMES OF THE **FIRST FRANCISCANS**

IN UMBRIA, THE BORDERS OF TUSCANY
AND THE NORTHERN MARCHES

BY
BERYL D. DE SELINCOURT



WITH 13 ILLUSTRATIONS
FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

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PREFACE

BY

PAUL SABATIER

NO one can hope to know S. Francis without knowing and loving the places where he lived. And here it is not a question of geographical, external knowledge, but of something more intimate and more vital. Without knowing anything about Greece, one may understand Plato ; but it is not possible to understand S. Francis without knowing Umbria. A knowledge of the places where events occurred is indispensable to political history, but here it is quite another matter. It is not only because the eyes of S. Francis rested, glowing with hope or burning with pain, on these hills which the setting sun leaves so reluctantly, that we want to see them and feel their spirit. It is because, as we look on them in the light of his temperament, a faculty far transcending our intellect comes to birth within us—a beginning of harmony, then communion ; and if we could follow it to the end, there would spring up in us a sincere desire of fellow-service.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THIS book was undertaken at the suggestion of M. Paul Sabatier, to whom I am greatly indebted for the generous loan of his library and unpublished notes, and for much valuable advice ; also for kindly supplying me with a Preface. The completion of the book was due to the generous co-operation of Mildred Bicknell, whose management was responsible for the success of the journey, and whose photographs supplied the illustrations. I am glad of this opportunity publicly to acknowledge my debt to the Professor Milziade Santoni, Canon of Camerino, to the Guardian of Matelica, and Signor Camillo Pace, of Monte Giorgio, for the gift of their own books relating to the subject ; to the Brothers of La Verna, Monte Casale, and Lo Speco ; and to others who materially assisted me by their unfailing courtesy and hospitality, many of them obscure and simple persons whose names are unknown to me.

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HOMES

OF THE

FIRST FRANCISCANS

"Et adducentes eam in quodam colle, ostenderunt ei totum orbem quem respicere poterat, dicentes : Hoc est claustum nostrum, domina" (*Sacrum commercium*, chap. xxii.).

"How can I extend your kingdom, O Mazda?
By tending your poor in their suffering."

ONE of the main obstacles to a vital and intimate appreciation of the value of a man's work is the difficulty of distinguishing what it contains of universal value from the temporal limitations which determine its form. It is necessary to recreate the conditions under which he worked, the climatic and social atmosphere which surrounded him, and the influences which bore upon him; and in proportion to our distance from him in time and geographical conditions is the difficulty of our task.

Not the least valuable part, therefore, of M. Renan's *Vie de Jésus* is that devoted to topographical description. For though one main element in Christ's claim to uniqueness is the

extraordinary aloofness of his character from temporal and transitory impressions and relations, though there is no teacher whose universality is more readily recognisable, much of his teaching was necessarily clothed in a form inaccessible to us but for an interpreter.

Considerably nearer, both in time and geographical position, but infinitely more modified by both, stands the figure of S. Francis of Assisi; still far enough away to make what is of wider significance in his transparently pure and beautiful life, difficult to distinguish from the exuberance of an original and overflowing individuality, or the peculiarities of local habit.

S. Francis did not display his originality in the foundation of any strikingly new system of life; he turned it into the channel of interpretation. He seized on certain aspects of the teaching of Jesus which he thought most suited to the needs of those of his time and land on whom the light of day seemed to shine most dimly, and with incomparable energy and directness he proceeded to vitalise those aspects by translating them into living terms of daily action.

S. Francis became a leader even through the whole-hearted devotion with which he chose to be a follower. His service of men was so radiant with love that it burns through the exaggerated and

sometimes obscuring forms in which his belief found expression, and lives with a freshness which no sober criticism of latter-day reasoning can dispel.

We cannot too emphatically urge that Francis was no protester. The negative element of iconoclasm is entirely absent from his character. We search in vain in him for any breath of hostile criticism in his relations with the world or with the Church. In fact, it is his attitude towards these two great forces—the “saeculari” and the “religiosi”—that distinguishes him so sharply from the ascetic or the Protestant reformer, both of whom he resembles in their positive aspects. In a sense, it is even true to say that Francis never left the world. It held for him all that was humanly beautiful in intellect and physical achievement, and all that was naturally beautiful. He moved constantly in it with interchange of gifts, while concentrating his energies in one direction and deliberately leaving aside what he felt incompatible with his work.

It is an error to think of the glories of art or of science as essentially opposed to the Franciscan spirit; they are so conditionally only, in anticipation of a more equitable adjustment of society.

But it is in Francis' relations with the Church that his originality chiefly shows itself. He did not attempt reforms within it; he accepted all

spiritual privileges it had to offer, even with their attendant abuses (cf. his attitude towards Indulgences). But while fully realising and rejoicing in his dependence on the Church, he realised no less fully his independence. He proposed, in fact, to play the part of the Church's light-infantry—to stand in the same relation to it with his small company as Roland and his paladins to the great empire they represented. Unencumbered by impedimenta, without the elaborate machinery of a great organisation, he would go into places inaccessible to the Church as an ecclesiastical body. He did not see that the Church from her very constitution could not recognise his supplementary position, unless his dependence greatly exceeded his independence; for the existence of this little company outside her control and without papal authorisation was a covert criticism on her own shortcomings, an implied discovery that the cornerstone of the building had been allowed somewhat to moulder away. The need he supplied was the Church's condemnation.

The idea that Francis in the foundation of an Order had in view to supplant the monastic orders or to point the way in which all men should walk, is an entire misconception of his aim. It is true that he resisted all attempts to absorb his Order into those already existing, for he realised that such

an identification would involve the sacrifice of his entire purpose. Nothing could be more emphatic than the refusal with which he met the suggestion that he should adopt the rule of S. Benedict, S. Augustine, or S. Bernard.¹ Leading Ugolino, the brothers' emissary, silently into the assembly at the famous Chapter of Mats, in fervent and eloquent words he declared his intention of remaining faithful to the direct call of God to him and to the form in which it had come. His passionate reply was of the nature of a manifesto.

Francis never sought for followers; indeed, like Christ, he bade various candidates count the costs. The Order grew up independently of his determination, and it is true to say that it passed beyond his control. We are inclined to lament the lack of elasticity, the apparent absence of any germ of development in his idea. But it is a mistake to think that Francis did not realise its limitations; in one sense they were the justification of its existence. Life compels us to recognise that achievement is the child of limitation, that power and serviceableness depend as much on exclusion as on inclusion. We are forced to gauge our powers and adapt our life to their limit. Thus Francis required that his followers should be specialists. He never demanded the

¹ *Speculum Perfectionis*, 68.

renunciation of possessions nor of life's wider interests save from the few who elected to do the particular work that he was doing, and in a modified form the standard he set up for these is permanently applicable, or so long at least as a class exists which it was his life's work to elevate and console.

There is nothing uniquely distinctive in Francis' deliberate choice of absolute poverty as a means of meeting the distress he had set his mind to alleviate: what is unique is the inspiration infused into the idea by his individuality. He had so pictorial and poetic a mind that he could not conceive of methods and means as such, he must visualise and embody his method in personal form till it became a living reality and worshipful in itself. The framing of a rule, or rather the demand for it, was in reality the death-blow of the Order as Francis had conceived it, and he instinctively felt it to be so; for his brotherhood had no other basis of existence than the elective service of love: when this had left it and its members were half-reluctantly bound to observe what had once inspired them with joyful devotion, no organised reform could restore its soul.

At the present time, when many are considering the possibility of applying the principles which underlie the work of S. Francis, and even some

of his methods, to the social needs of to-day, it is, perhaps, particularly necessary to see him in relation to his time and country, to set the portrait of him which has come down to us still further in relief, by filling in some details of the background yet unfamiliar.

Far more even than the historical atmosphere, we must attempt to reproduce the natural conditions in which his life was set; for his debt to nature was no less great than that of the poet-king David, and we cannot enter into the spirit of the man, or appreciate the full significance of his inspiring life, as it has been portrayed in the authentic biographies, or reflected with curious distortions in the less trustworthy records, unless we recognise to what a great degree his being was bound up in the life of Nature, and how much of his strength was wrought out of his contact with her.

And in this case imagination is not our only scene-painter. We are not, as in so many portraits of the remote past, compelled to build up our background from a few fragmentary written indications, impossible to verify. Material is abundant if we will seek it out; for the intervening centuries have dealt kindly with the Franciscan haunts; their remoteness has, in most cases, preserved them from modification by new industrial conditions. We may still penetrate into the heart of the past in the

natural solitudes elected by Francis and his followers for habitation, and by faithfully recording their aspect may perhaps recapture the nature of their appeal to him.

To S. Francis the natural creation did not groan and travail. Love seemed to him to work there unfettered and unobstructed by conflicting personal claims, and no cloud of sin was allowed to mar the serenity of his pantheistic vision. Nature was to him instinct with life and with the joy of an ever-present divinity. His poet-mind saw no division between animate and inanimate in Nature, but endowed the unconscious elements of the great harmony with a living soul, to join in the universal service and act of worship. His attribution of conscious life to what we are accustomed to call inanimate nature was no doubt in practice developed to excess, but it was an expression of his truly poetic realisation of the great principle of love which binds together all members of the vast universe, the spirit of the air and the gnome of the cave, man and the clod of clay, in the great brotherhood of life. The legends which attribute to Francis the powers of an Orpheus not idly symbolise the intimacy of his relation to the natural world and the power of appeal which lies in a penetrating insight and love.

For it was through love that Francis attained his

harmony, to love that he attuned his great canticle. It was in the power of an alert and penetrating sympathy that he achieved that communion with nature which is reflected in the legends setting him before us as the Melampus of the Middle Ages. Francis, who renounced the world (*saeculum*), made a wider world his own through love.

"So passed he luminous-eyed for earth and the fates
We arm to bruise or caress us; his ears were charged
With tones of love in a whirl of voluble hates,
With music wrought of distraction his heart enlarged.
Celestial shining, though mortal—singer, though mute,
He drew the master of harmonies, voiced or still,
To seek him; heard at the silent medicine-root
A song—beheld in fulfilment the unfulfilled."

Thus we cannot always afford to neglect the legends of miracle which soon began to spring up round the Poverello. They do not, on the whole, do violence to our sympathy or imagination; they are, for the most part, an extended application of the principle of illuminating and vivifying love which Francis recognised as his sole guide in action, and they become intelligible in the light of the sober authentic narrative of his life, when located among the scenes which are supposed to have inspired them. For example, however extravagant some of the narratives of the *Fioretti* may seem, they had their birth among these very scenes; they

spring from the heart and mind of the people, and therefore have a claim on our attention ; for they help to bring us into relation with the spirit of the time most fully reflected by the life of the Lesser Brothers.

It is, then, in relation to the natural environment, which so largely modified the current of his life, that we shall best understand the personality of S. Francis. Nothing is more striking in the early records of the Franciscan community than the specification of the scenes in which some of the most vital of their spiritual experiences took place. It was in meditation amid natural scenery—among the most beautiful of Italy—that they fought out their spiritual battles and won the assurance of peace.

And the retreats most intimately connected with them still bear the stamp of their humanising emotion, for these woovers of poverty lived intensely, grotesque as may seem to us some of the expressions in which their energy found vent. The religious belief of their time distrusted reason as a fashioning agent in man's being : thus the passion to which these brothers denied sensual satisfaction found expression in uncontrolled irregularities of action. But the constitution of the Franciscan community demanded that these passions should not spend themselves in mere indulgence of un-

fruitful energy. It was wisely directed by the founder into channels of practical efficacy. He did not countenance contemplation as an end in itself, but as a means to the attainment of strength necessary for sustaining the work which membership of his Order implied. The solitudes were the tiring-room of their spirit for the peopled places, and it is with the solitudes so intimately connected with the life of the Order, with the humble lodges always slightly sequestered from the city walls, that we must familiarise ourselves if we would understand what manner of men they were who, with such joyful inspiration, vivified and quickened the common things of life and the common men who took part in them.

The Speculum and the Legend of the Three Companions are chiefly the work of a man who lived in the closest companionship and intercourse of mind with S. Francis. Leo's understanding of his friend and master seems to have been of that subtle and imaginative kind which seldom demands explanations, and he must remain our directest guide to the character and ideals of S. Francis. Moreover, his intimate knowledge of the scenes which formed the centre of activity for the Franciscan Order, and his specification of local detail, render his topographical descriptions incalculably precious.

With the later inventions of a pedantic and unvital orthodoxy I shall not at all concern myself. They bear the same relation to the early biographies and popular records as the Apocryphal Lives of Christ and the Virgin to the Synoptic Gospels.

ASSISI

THERE are places, as there are people, which possess a potency of appeal altogether independent of the beauty which is apparent. It is not custom which initially binds us to them; the attraction I would define is a sudden kindling of blood and spirit other than the slow, steady growth of a practised love. The initiatory stages of intimacy are superseded, and we are drawn into the heart of their life by an irresistible power.

Assisi possesses in a pre-eminent degree this power of attraction, a power which is realised no doubt in her own inherent beauty and in her artistic treasures, but which transcends these, and moves men to seek her again by an almost human spell of personality.

The city is built on the most northerly and lowest spur of Monte Subasio, yet still high above the great Umbrian plain which spreads before it on either hand, south, down the long valley to Spoleto, and north-west to Perugia, its horizon bounded on every side by soft mountain outlines. It is harmonious in structure; its buildings of warm-

overcome the General, who replied: "Well, since you insist on it, you and I will eat together." So they sat down and ate the porridge, and, the chronicler adds, "were much more refreshed by devotion than by the food."

SAN DAMIANO.—Scarcely a quarter of a mile from the Porta Nuova, the most southerly gate of the city, a steep rough road, leading directly down the mountain slope from the city, brings us to the gates of S. Damiano. The little convent nestles low beneath the level of the city, though still seeming to form part of it, continuing with its wooded garden the graceful outline of the city wall, and sufficiently raised above the plain to have a wide though broken view across it to the mountains. Through a small square courtyard we pass into the ancient church, restored by S. Francis, the door of which is now sheltered by a portico, connecting the convent on the left with an open chapel to the right of the original little church. A deep-set circular window lights the west end of the church, and above this is another window, shaded with a tiny porch, but now blocked up, from which S. Clare is supposed to have repulsed a pillaging band of Saracens belonging to the army of Frederick II. It was not the first time that she had faced armed men without wavering, and had

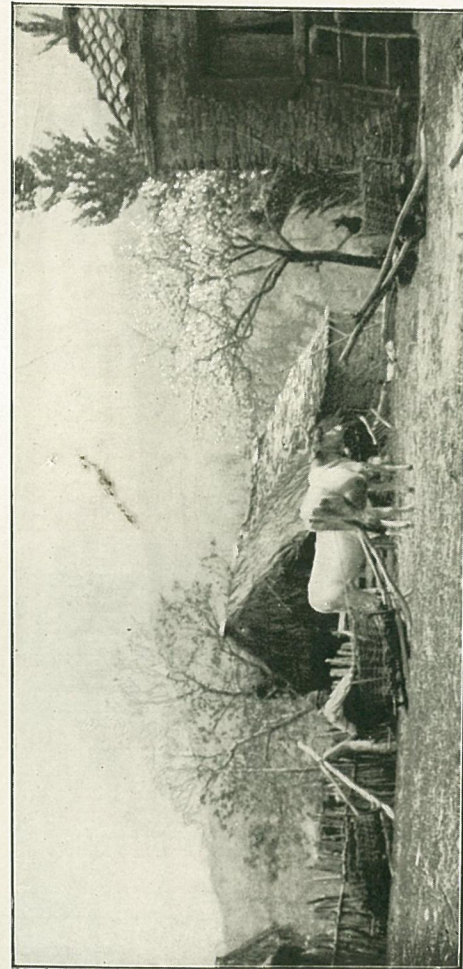


S. DAMIANO
(FROM THE VIA FRANCESCA)

well refuse to read as the personification of natural forces.

MONTE SUBASIO.—No record is kept of Francis' wanderings on the mountain top, save by the shepherds who treasure his memory in their Fifth Gospel, the Gospel of S. Francis. Yet one to whom solitude and wide spaces were so precious must have been familiar with the upper slopes of Subasio, no less than with the lower wooded glades, which are associated with some of his early meditations. In the green, flowery hollows above the Carceri, whence Assisi is seen folded far below, a dark cluster round the hillside, where a solitary lark alone breaks the silence in cover of a creeping bush; and higher still on the broad mountain summit, where forget-me-not of deepest blue grows in the shallow soil round the bare, pink stone, or in more sheltered spaces, narcissus waves above the tall wild grass, no limit is set to the mind's free wanderings. All lassitude seems to fall from body and spirit, and the mind is clear from mists and doubts and personal desire in the sweeping space which gathers it in, and the free mountain air passing across the snow-clad range to the east, flows through the body, supplying new life and energy and food.

Before Monte Subasio all Umbria lies outspread.



BULLOCK-WAGGON

Face page 104

merits, for which reason men began to build houses there and dwell there; and in a short while a good big village was made there, and a place of the brothers, which is called the place of the island, and the men and women of that village still hold in great reverence and devotion the place where S. Francis kept that fast."

Another unifying point may be found for this district in the personality of brother Giles.¹ Perugia, Agello, and Cetona are particularly associated with his memory, and the tract of country extending between them must often have been traversed by him in response to the summons of a superior. The noble expanse of Lake Trasymene, and the green islands set like gems within it, its flat, reed-fringed shore and the wooded and fortified heights rising round it, must have been a familiar landscape to him, both when the lake lay like a calm strip of blue sky in the midst of the land, and when it was stirred on a day of storm into grim and restless motion.

Francis took special delight in brother Giles, whose zeal in the service of poverty equalled his own, and whose joyful fulfilment of the labour-clause of the rule was remarkable for its untiring and fruitful invention of method. He was famous

¹ The "frère Egidé" of M. Sabatier. *Vie de Saint François d'Assisi*.



ASCENT TO MONTE RIPIDO
(LOOKING BACK ON PERUGIA)

LE CELLE.—The account of the foundation of the little hermitage near Cortona may be briefly given from its records based on ancient manuscripts. From these we learn that in 1211 Guido, a citizen of Cortona, belonging to the great house of Vagnotelli, was received into the Order in the Tempio Maggiore of the city dedicated to Santa Maria. With the devotion of the inhabitants to S. Francis increased their desire to provide a lodging for him in the neighbourhood of the city, which he would almost of necessity pass in a journey from Assisi to Siena, or from Cetona and Sarteano northwards past the lake of Thrasymene to Arezzo. Francis agreed to their request, and took counsel with Guido as to a favourable site for such a building a little without the city, and was directed by him to the deeply wooded fold of the mountain about a mile from the north gate of the city. The place seemed well suited to Francis' purpose, the more so, perhaps, as a little church already existed there dedicated to the Archangel Michael, which might form a basis for the cells erected by the brothers. The place was granted him by the city, and he, Guido, and Silvester were the first to enter into possession.

After the death of the Emperor Frederick, patron of brother Elias, the latter returned to Cortona, and, dissatisfied with the humble Celle,

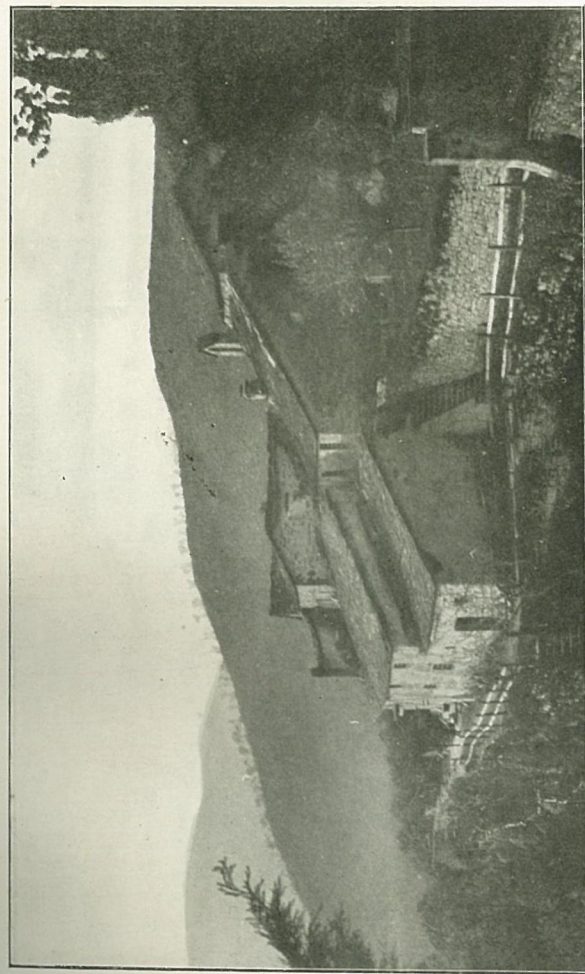


LE CELLE

MONTE CASALE AND VALLINGEGNO

MONTE CASALE.—The first town of importance reached by S. Francis in a journey from La Verna across the mountains to the south-east (the direct route to Assisi), would be Borgo San Sepolcro. It is situated in the Tiber valley, soon after the river has escaped from the mountains which watched over its early course, into the first of its noble stretches of broad, unbroken plain. This plain, vast in its proportions, is impressive in its grand monotony. The mountains withdraw on either side as in reverence for the high destiny of the river which has now escaped their tutelage and rolls serenely forward to its glorious distant goal. The plain is bare of trees, save along the Tiber's banks, where mutilated poplars crowd in gaunt, undisciplined hordes, as spectators of its passage.

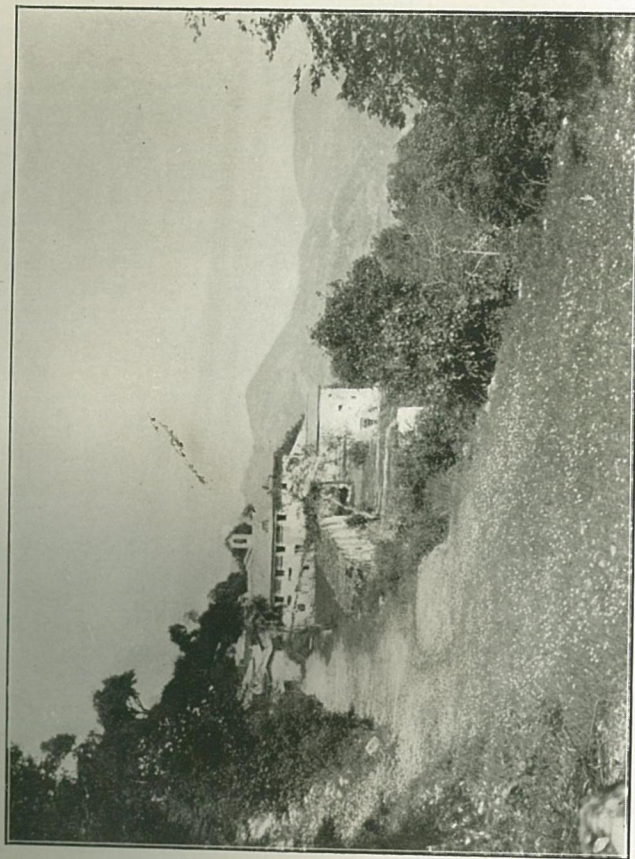
The city lies in the north-east corner of the plain, close under the mountains. It is of ancient but of obscure origin, which one tradition would ascribe to two pilgrims in the tenth century; who, returning from Palestine, built a little oratory in



MONTE CASALE

river-bed hedged with dog-rose, and bordered by low oak woods. Portaria, within its massive girdle of walls, climbs in almost single procession of irregular houses to the ruins of an ancient church or temple which crown its summit. Into the common stones of its masonry are welded massive fragments of Etruscan and Roman work transported from the great city which stood scarcely a mile to the south of this spot.

In Francis' time the Roman road, passing over the site of the vanished Citta di Carsulæ, must have been still the high road from Acquasparta to Rome. The city is laid level with the meadows, though one glorious relic of its past remains in the triumphal arch, which in lonely and solemn splendour towers above the country-side, pronouncing the dirge of the proud and ancient city. The steep road up to it is rough with obstructing blocks of stone, and flanked with ruined fragments of wall and half-defined shapes of masonry. Through the gateway, of which the inner shell alone remains, the paven, grass-grown way passes till it is lost among the meadows, roughly marked only upon the hillside by relics of a lizard-haunted wall. Two young oaks spring up beside each portal of the great arch, their delicate green caressing its hoary age. Conspicuous for miles around, this solemn arch has power to cast a spell upon the

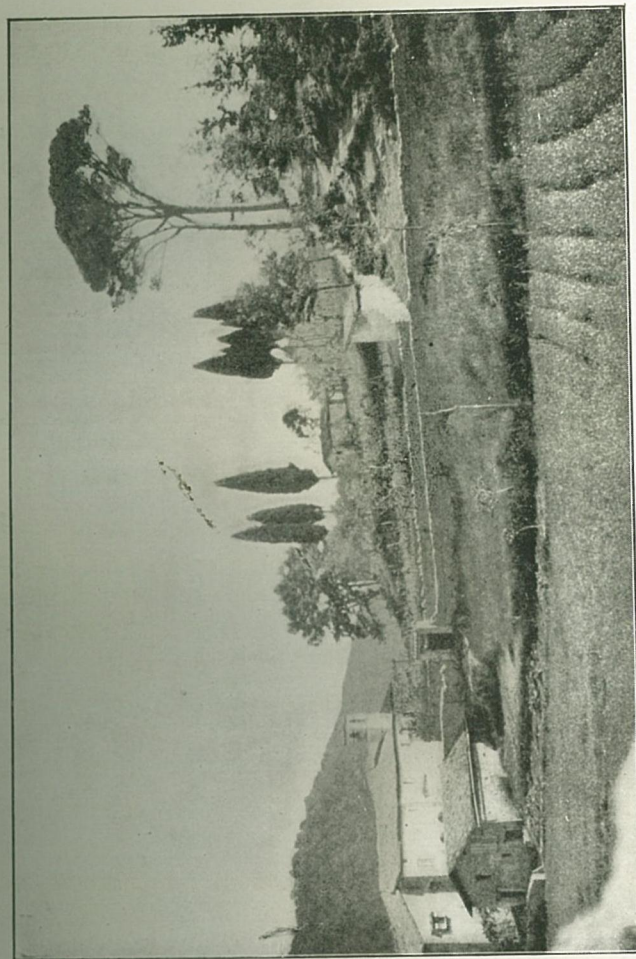


LO SPECO OF MONTE PANCRAZIO
(LOOKING TOWARDS NARNI)

The incident¹ in connexion with which this note occurs, took place in the winter: "On account of the great cold, Francis lined his tunic and the tunic of his companion Roger with some bits of stuff. . . . And a little while afterwards, on returning from prayer, he said with great joy to his companion: 'It is for me to be the pattern and example of all the brothers, and thus, although my body has need of a lined tunic, yet I must consider the rest of my brothers to whom the same thing is needful, and they perhaps have not and cannot have it. Therefore I must needs consider them, so that I may suffer the same necessities as they too suffer; that seeing this in me they may have strength to bear them in great patience.'"

The feeling of responsibility expressed here lay at the root of much apparently exaggerated asceticism in Francis. The joy with which he expressed his decision plainly shows that it did not spring from a morbid impulse to self-mortification. Any real attempt to understand the nature of this man brings increasing conviction that, like all who have profoundly meditated on their mission, he probably chose, at the expense of much which he would approve in other men, the directest, perhaps the only practicable, way of accomplishing it; and it lay at the root of his conception that the lowest

¹ *Spec. Perf.*, 16.



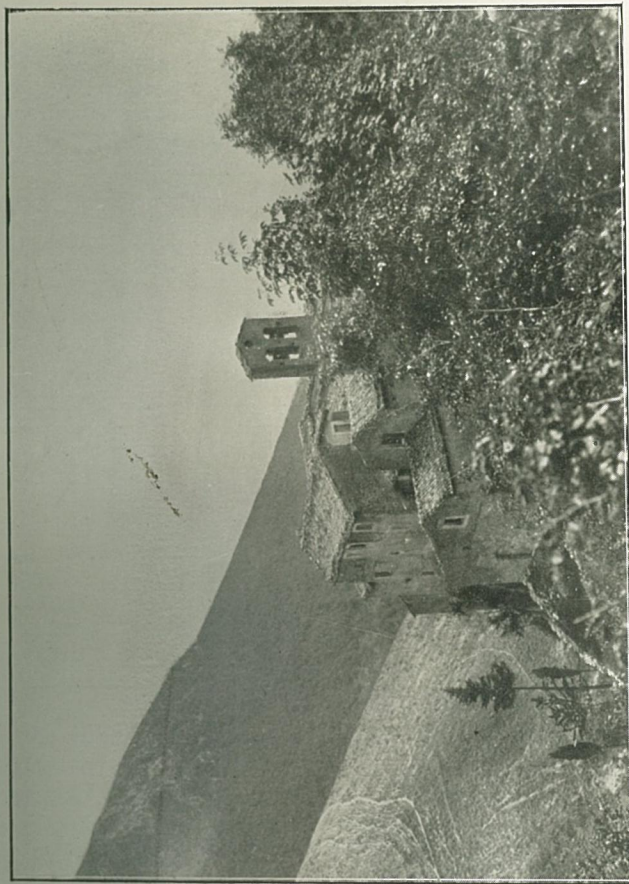
S. MARIA DELLA FORESTA

but exceeded all his hopes. In place of its customary thirteen measures, the vine yielded twenty. The later versions of this story form an instructive illustration of the development of an elaborate prophecy from a simple expression of faith.

POGGIO BUSTONE.—This is the last, and perhaps the most impressive, of the Franciscan "places" in our circuit of the valley. Its proximity to S. Maria della Foresta serves to emphasise the striking contrast between them: the one is as different from the other as the nest of an eagle from that of a woodland bird.

From the plateau of La Foresta, Poggio seems but a little distance, but in reality some miles lie between them; for the main road, itself some distance below La Foresta, goes out far into the plain before the Roman road to Poggio turns from it at right angles, to climb the steep slope to the village; and the apparently shorter way through the hamlet of S. Liberata, which straggles along the mountain side south of Poggio, involves a rough and tortuous climb on rocky tracks round the half-wooded shoulder which separates them.

Poggio is set high above the valley, immediately under the mountain. It is a sombre, almost forbidding little citadel, rising in steep, narrow, ill-paved streets, almost without a break from gate to



POGGIO BUSTONE

"And as he drew near to the place where S. Francis was praying, he began to hear much talk ; and going still closer to see and hear what it was, he perceived a marvellous light surrounding S. Francis, and in it he saw Christ and the Virgin Mary, and S. John the Baptist and S. John the Evangelist and a great multitude of angels, who were talking with S. Francis. When he saw and heard this, the boy fell fainting to the ground : and when the mystery of that holy apparition was ended and S. Francis was returning to the house, he stumbled against the boy, who lay as if dead ; and in pity he lifted him up, and carried him in his arms, as the Good Shepherd His lambs."

SARNANO.—This beautiful town early formed one of the chief Franciscan centres in the Marches. Its narrow streets, shadowed by tall solemn houses which rise in curving lines, tier above tier, seem to belong to times remote. The house which tradition says sheltered S. Francis on his first visit is at the summit of the town, looking out on a piazza grass-grown and deserted, and in the old library opposite, the manuscripts slumber in their shelves for want of an interpreter. Yet its citizens will tell you that their town is not deserted, that every house is full ; certainly its ancient state has gone and its lords of gentle birth.



SARNANO
(FROM S. FRANCESCO DI VALCAJANO)

donors, and is thus rather a collection of buildings than an harmonious whole. But it is picturesque in grouping, lying round three sides of a fine, open piazza, and though large enough to accommodate over a hundred brothers, it is simple and unobtrusive. In the fifteenth century it was partially destroyed by fire, and in the same century suffered desecration during the wars between the rival states of Venice and Florence. During the last century, also, the brothers were disturbed by threatened and enforced dissolution. They continue now in peaceful possession on sufferance of the convent's present owner, who has it on lease from the municipality of Florence.

The Guardian, Padre Saturnino da Caprese¹ is a man of unusual cultivation and large-minded courtesy, eager to welcome and shelter visitors; unstinted hospitality is shown to all pilgrims of whatever degree.

Further description of the commemorative buildings, which, though early, were subsequent to the first settlement, and of the convent itself, would not help us to reconstruct the original scene. The existence of the buildings and the attendant modi-

¹ His *Guida Illustrata della Verna* contains a detailed account of the present convent and its surroundings, the historical and traditional events connected with it, and a complete list of the flora of the mountain.



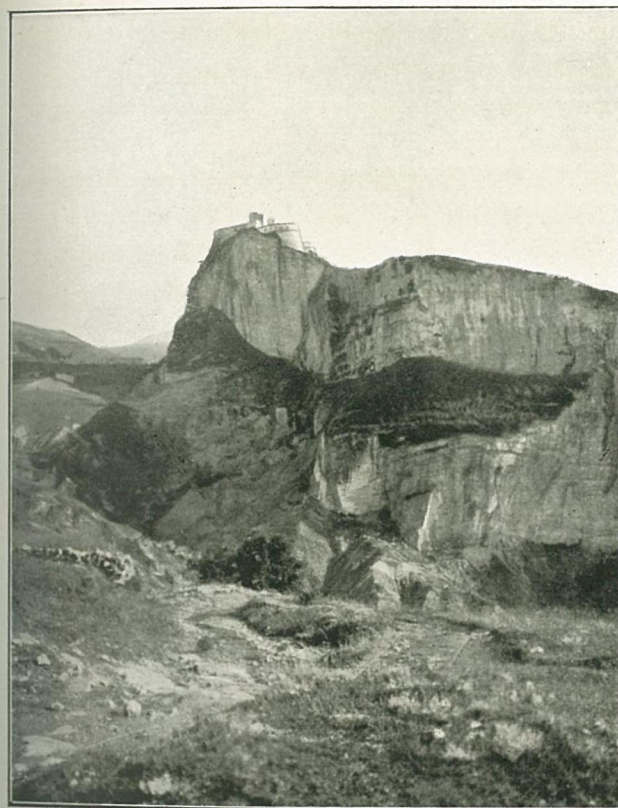
CHAPEL ON LA VERNA

date which is out of place in such a treatise, but it is easy to see that he is using his material with the freedom of an artist, combining in one canvas, for the enrichment of his central theme, the scattered scenes of a prolonged experience. He relates one visit only, and that the last and most vital, of S. Francis to La Verna; round that visit he groups incidents which plainly belong to various dates.

We gather from this source that Francis was journeying from the valley of Spoleto to the province of Romagna, in company with brother Leo; and as they journeyed, they passed on foot by the citadel¹ of Montefeltro, now known as S. Leo.

This little town, lying some miles to the south-west of S. Marino, is one of the most remarkable features of Central Italy. In the midst of a country distinguished by its natural rocky fortresses rising with startling abruptness from the wild mountain valleys and tablelands around, it is

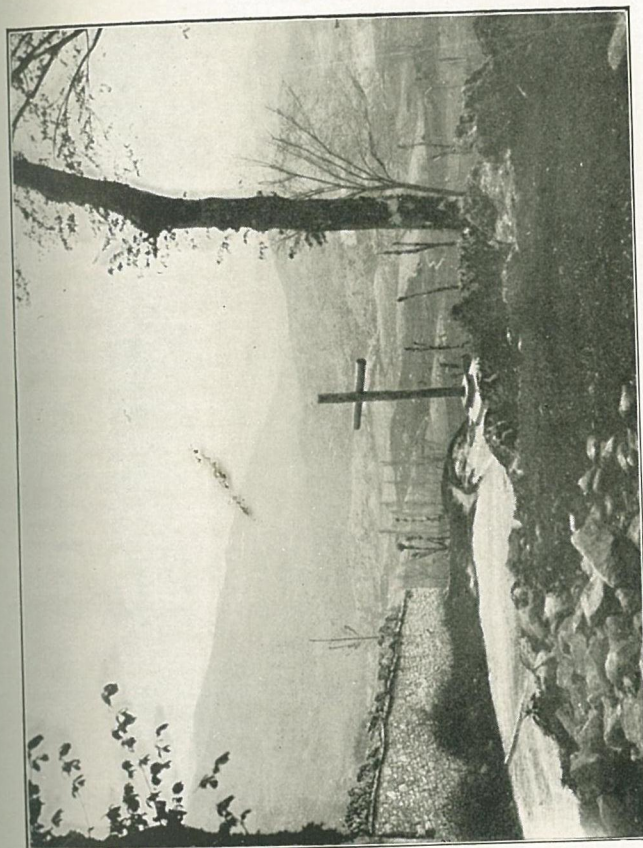
¹ The Italian "castello," like the Latin "castrum," has no exact equivalent in English. It survives only as a suffix which has lost its significance, in such names as Doncaster. The reality, however, still exists throughout Italy. In the Tiber valley, and notably in the Marches and Romagna, every eminence bears its stronghold whose solid masonry is knit fast with the natural rock. It appears, often up to the very gate, like the single castle from which it takes its name, consisting originally of the fortress of some noble, that enclosed for defence within its walls the homes of his dependants.



SAN LEO

A little chapel, known as the Chapel of the Birds, marks the spot of this happy welcoming, at the foot of the last ascent to the convent, in an angle of the way.

News was at once taken to Orlando of Francis' arrival, and next morning he hastened to visit him with provisions for his entertainment. Francis was already in prayer, but not yet withdrawn from the company of the Brothers, and he received his new friend with a joy which must have amply repaid him for his gift, for Francis' joy was infectious, and his delight in the mountain was undisguised. Their mutual salutations were followed by intimate talk, and then Francis proffered his request for a rude cell at a stone's throw from the shelter of the Brothers, in which he might remain alone to pray. The place he chose was below the level of the Brothers' oratory, sheltered from their observation by a great mass of rock, and overshadowed by a magnificent beech; from it he would look out over the wide expanse of mountains to the south-west. By the time Orlando's company had put together a humble cell, evening was drawing on, and Francis, after a short address, dismissed them with his blessing. Then Orlando called the Saint and his companions aside, and exhorted them to send to his castle to supply all their needs, reminding them that bodily neces-

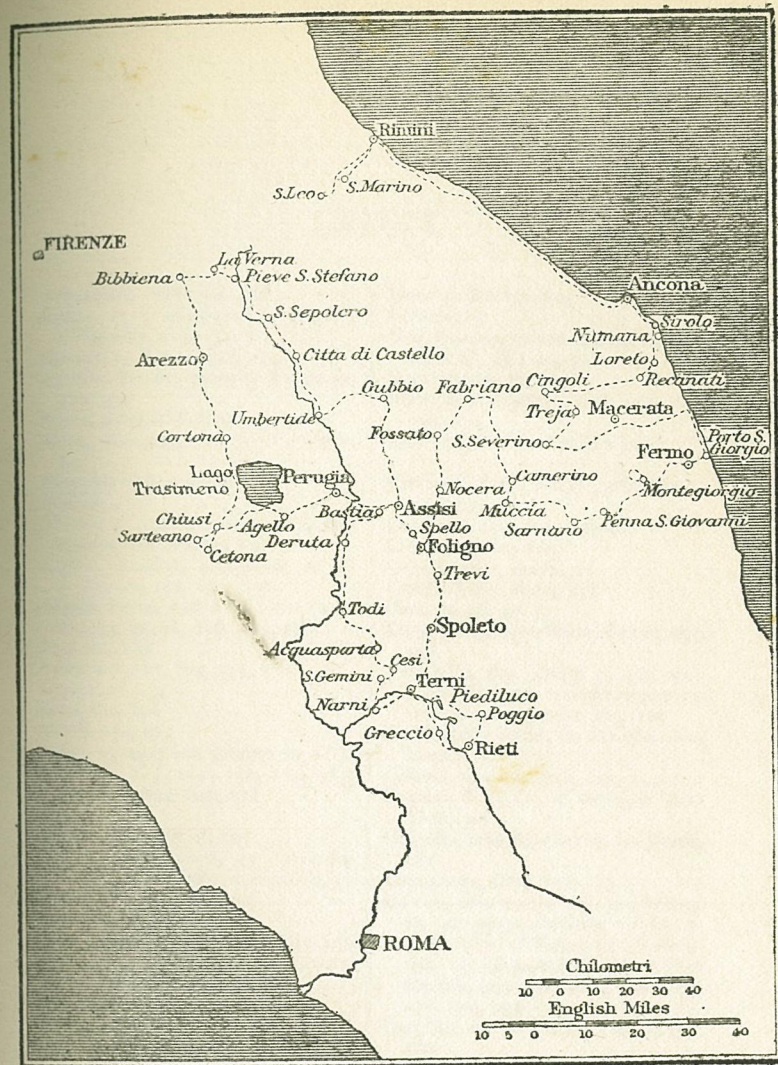


VIEW FROM THE CHAPEL OF THE BIRDS

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to him in such a form; in order that he might understand that not by martyrdom of the body, but by the illumination of his mind, he must be wholly transformed into the express image of Christ crucified as he had thus marvellously appeared to him."

And the light which shone into Francis' soul, assuring him forever of his participation in the love as in the suffering of Christ, and filling his mind with a strength and joy greater than his growing physical pains, seemed to surround La Verna, and illumine all the mountains and valleys; the splendours of the dawn were endowed on that morning with a peculiar radiance, and when the tale was told afterwards to the shepherds, who had been watching on the country-side, they bore witness to the glory transcendent with which day broke upon the mountain.



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