

new birth. His preaching was ethical; men must give up unjust gain, be reconciled to their enemies, and love one another. His power over the people was extraordinary; by a look or a word he would gain a disciple. In our days we can hardly realize the adoration bestowed on Saint Francis by men of all ranks. His complete self-renunciation, his tenderness, his boundless love for all, his perfect humility, combined with perfect conviction of divine inspiration which shone forth in word and glance, impressed all with the fact that "this was the power of God." Francis had besides a noble bearing and a voice at once soft and sonorous and full of appealing tenderness. I know of no man who seemed to have so much power to compel the love of the human heart.

The Saint had, at first, no thought of founding a monastic order, or ever of associating with himself companion preachers. But many of all classes—nobles, merchants, peasants—flocked to him, and thus the order of "Brothers Minor" was formed, which afterwards, in spite of the vehement opposition of Francis, developed into a regular monastic order, and was absorbed into the great organism of the Roman Church.

It was through their lives chiefly that the Brothers Minor strove to work. "The true servant," said Francis to a doctor of theology, "unceasingly rebukes the wicked, but he does it most of all by his conduct, by the truth which shines forth in his words, by the light of his example, by all the radiance of his life." To him the greatest thing was "the grace to conquer oneself, and willingly to suffer pain, outrages, disgrace, and evil treatment for the love of Christ."

To those who questioned him as to the source of his mysterious power, he gave answer: "Thou wishest to know why it is I whom men follow? Thou wishest to know? It is because the eyes of the Most High have willed it thus: . . . as His most holy eyes have not found among sinners any smaller man, nor any more insufficient and more sinful, therefore He has chosen me to accomplish the marvellous work which God has undertaken; chosen me because He could find no one more worthless, and He wished here to confound the nobility and grandeur, the strength, the beauty, and the learning of this world."

He would have nothing to do with learning or books, and every brother took the vow of poverty. But these men were no mere ascetics, and Francis had the prophet's contempt for formal observances. "The sinner can fast," he would often say; "he can pray, weep, macerate himself, but one thing he cannot do, he cannot be faithful to God." The lives of the brothers were spent preaching and in

doing menial services among the poor and the sick, and often in private families.

"The Poverello" viewed with alarm Cardinal Ugolini's proposal to replace the corrupt bishops by Brothers Minor. "If my friars have been called *Minors*," he cried, "it is not that they may become *Majores*."

Often he was compelled to assert his inspiration against the authority of the Church; for the Pope was anxious that he should adopt a more elaborate "Rule," and relax the vow of poverty. "Do not come speaking to me of the Rule of St. Benedict, of St. Augustine, of St. Bernard, or of any other," he exclaimed to Cardinal Ugolini, "but solely of that which God in His mercy has seen fit to shew me." This struggle with the Church was his bitterest trial, and the pressure of authority and his failing strength finally compelled him to yield the government to another.

The modern man who has most affinity with St. Francis, is John Ruskin, who, by the way, once dreamed that he had been admitted as a Brother Minor. Had he lived in the twelfth century his dream would have been a reality. The Saint's reverent love of nature is perhaps what so endears him to Ruskin. His love went out to every creature; he felt himself with everything. The sun, the wind, and fire were his brothers; the birds and flowers were his sisters. Many are the pretty stories told of him in this connection. "It is my turn to speak," he cried to the swallows that drowned his voice with their chirpings; "little sister swallows, hearken to the word of God; keep silent and be very quiet till I have finished." The wild creatures would run to him for refuge, and the birds by the roadside gathered fearlessly about him.

Francis, though his influence has been extraordinary, did not accomplish his brilliant dream of regenerating the world. The prophet in his strength, hopes all things, conscious of divine power. He does not realize how big the world is, and how evil and inert men are. Yet his labors and anguish give us what blessedness we have. What would the world be had the prophets not worked and suffered,—did they not work and suffer?

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" 'Tis in the advance of individual minds  
That the slow crowd should ground their expectation  
Eventually to follow; as the sea  
Waits ages in its bed 'till some one wave  
Out of the multitudinous mass, extends  
The empire of the whole, some feet perhaps,  
Over the strip of sand which could confine  
Its fellows so long time; thenceforth the rest,  
Even to the meanest, hurry in at once,  
And so much is clear gained."

—Paracelsus.