SAINT FRANCIS AND HIS FRIENDS.

I. SAINT FRANCIS IN THE DAYS OF HIS YOUTH.

Francis, born in the city of Assisi, in the Vale of Spoleto, was by his mother first called John; but by his father, in whose absence he had been born, on his return from France, he was afterwards named Francis.

After he had grown up, and had shown himself to be of a refined turn of mind, he practised his father's calling, that is, his business. But he was very unlike his father, since he was more generous, and more given to merriment, fond of jokes and songs, loving to wander through Assisi by day and by night, with those like unto himself as his companions. He was lavish with money, so that what he could get into his hand, or could earn, he would spend in feasting and in other

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ways. For this reason he was many times scolded by his parents, who used to tell him that he spent so much on himself and others that he did not seem to be a son of theirs, but of some great prince. Since, however, his parents were rich, and had very tender love for him, they bore with him, not caring to vex him in such matters.

His mother, when she heard the neighbours talk about his extravagance, would reply: "What is that that you think of my son? He shall yet be, by grace, the son of God."

Francis was, however, by disposition courteous both in manners and in speech; according to the intent of his heart speaking to no one a hurtful or disgraceful word. Indeed, even when he was merry and lighthearted, he purposely scarcely answered those who talked to him of shameful things. From this the report of him through well-nigh the whole district was so carried about that by many who knew him it was said that he would in the future be something great.

By which grades of natural goodness he advanced towards such grace that he would thus address himself: "Inasmuch as thou art generous and courteous amongst those from whom thou receivest nothing but some slight and fleeting favour, it is right, since that God is most generous in His rewards, that thou shouldst be courteous
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and liberal to the poor." Whence from that time did he regard the poor with kindliness, distributing alms to them with eagerness.

When he was one day in the stores where he sold cloth, and was anxious as to the business of the kind there carried on, a poor man came to him, asking alms for the love of God. And when, held back at the moment by the desire for riches and by the thought of selling his wares, he refused alms to the poor man, he forthwith chode himself for his great churlishness, and coming under the influence of divine grace, he said: "If this poor man had demanded from thee something for a great Count, or a Baron, thou wouldst certainly have bestowed on him what he asked for. By how much more then oughtest thou to have given him alms for the sake of the King of Kings and the Lord of all?" For which reason he decided in his heart that henceforth he assuredly would not refuse anything asked for for the sake of so great a Lord.

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At a time when war was going on between Perugia and Assisi, Francis was taken captive with a number of his fellow-citizens, and kept in prison in Perugia. As he was noble in his manners, he was placed as prisoner among the knights. When, however, on a certain day his fellow-
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prisoners were oppressed with sadness, he, who naturally was merry and lighthearted, did not seem to be sad, but in a way inclined to be sportive; for which reason one of his companions found fault with him, as though he thought him not in his right mind, since forsooth he was glad of heart when shut up in prison. To this one Francis spoke out plainly: "What art thou thinking of me? I shall yet be thought well of by the whole world."

And when one of the knights with him had wrought some harm to a fellow-prisoner, and for this was shunned by the others, who wished to keep themselves apart from him, Francis was the only one not to keep away from him, and encouraged others to do as he did.

At the end of a year there was a restoration of peace, and Francis and his fellow-prisoners returned free to Assisi.

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After a few years a certain nobleman of the city of Assisi, prepared as for war, and essayed to go unto Apulia, seeking to add to his wealth or to gain renown. Hearing of this, Francis had a longing to go with him, and desiring that by a certain count, named Gentile, he might be made a knight, he made lavish preparations for the enterprise.
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One night, when he had given himself up to thinking out how to carry out his desire, and was feverishly longing to start on the adventure, he was visited by the Lord, who as though he were one yearning for glory, allured him onwards and exalted him by the vision to the utmost height of glory.

For, when he was sleeping that night, there appeared unto him one calling him by name, and leading him into a spacious and pleasant palace, full of knightly armour, forsooth dazzling shields and other apparel hanging on the wall, as though in readiness for knights to array themselves therewith. When he, in greatness of joy, looked around in silent wonder as to what it all meant, he asked whose might be the arms shining with such splendour, and the palace so delightful. And answer was made to him that all those things and the palace were for himself and his knights.

And then arising from sleep he bestirred himself early, with gladness of heart, pondering in a fashion as of this world, as one who had not yet fully tasted of the Spirit of God, that he should be ere long comporting himself magnificently as a prince, and counting the vision as a presage of great prosperity, he began to plan a hasty journey to Apulia, so that he might be made a knight by the said count. And so much more gladness
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than was usual did he manifest that to the many
who marvelled and asked whence came such
great joy, he answered: “I know that I am to
be a great prince.”

But when, after setting forth on his travels, he
reached Spoletto, so that thence he might proceed
towards Apulia, he was seized with a little sick-
ness. Still, not the less anxious about his journey,
when he had given himself up to sleep, he heard,
while only half asleep, someone asking him whither
he desired to go. When in reply he had disclosed
his whole plan, the voice added: “Who is able to
render thee the more good, the Lord or the ser-
vant?” When he had answered: “The Lord,”
the voice further said: “Why then dost thou leave
the Lord for the servant, the Prince for a retainer?”
And Francis said: “What dost Thou wish me to
do, Lord?” “Return,” said He, “to thine own
country, and it shall be told thee what thou shalt
do; for the vision which thou hast seen, it behoveth
thee to interpret differently.”

When he awoke he began most intently to
think upon this vision. And as in the first vision
he had been as it were borne out of himself by
great joy, while he was then desiring temporal
prosperity, so in this he retired within himself
entirely, marvelling at its weighty impressiveness,
and pondering on it with such absorbed attention
that on that night he was unable any longer to sleep.

And so when morning came he returned hastily to Assisi, glad and rejoicing to the utmost, looking for the will of the Lord, who had pointed out to him his way thus far, and trusting that the divine counsel would be given to him concerning his salvation. Being now changed in his mind, he shrank from going to Apulia, and desired to conform himself to the Divine will.

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After he had returned to Assisi—and not many days after—on a certain evening he was chosen by his companions as master of their revels, so that he might arrange for the spending of the money devoted to their festivities, at his discretion. He accordingly then caused a rich feast to be prepared, as he had done many times before. When they had regaled themselves, they went forth from the house where they had met, and his companions in a band went on before him, singing as they went through the city, he himself carrying in his hand a wand as their master. He walked after them, just a little in their rear, not singing, but rapt in meditation.

And lo! suddenly he was visited by the Lord, and with so much sweetness was his heart filled, that he was able neither to speak nor to move,
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and could not be conscious of anything or hear anything, but that sweetness which so alienated him from carnal sense, that, as he himself afterwards said, if he had then been sliced into pieces, he could not have stirred from the spot.

But when his companions looked behind and saw him so far away from them, turning back towards him, they in their fear took him to be as it were changed already into another man. And they questioned him, saying: "What hast thou been thinking of? Why hast thou not come up to us? Perchance thou hast been thinking of taking to thyself a wife!" He with a loud voice replied to them: "Ye have spoken truly, since I have been thinking of taking to myself a spouse, nobler, richer, and more beautiful than ever ye have seen." And they laughed at him. He however said this not of himself, but inspired by God; for that spouse was true Religion, nobler and richer and more beautiful than others in her poverty.

Thus from that hour began he to grow worthless in his own esteem, and to despise those things which aforetime he had had a fondness for; not however fully, since not yet was he entirely set free from worldly vanity. But withdrawing himself little by little from worldly confusion, he devoted himself to enshrining Jesus Christ in the inner
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man, and to withdrawing from the eyes of the frivolous, the pearl which he, by selling all things, desired to buy.

Many times and almost every day he went secretly to prayer, constrained thereto by the said sweetness, which visiting him wherever he might be, whether in the piazza or in any place of concourse, urged him irresistibly to where he might be alone and pray.

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Although for a long time now he had been a benefactor of the poor, nevertheless henceforth he proposed more firmly in his heart to no longer refuse alms to any poor man asking for them in God's name; but to bestow them more freely and abundantly than he had been wont to do. Therefore, always, whatever poor man asked alms from him out of doors, he supplied him with pennies, if he had any; but if he had none, he would give him a girdle, or a buckle, lest he should send the poor man empty away. But if he had none of such things, he would go to some retired place, take off his shirt, and then send the poor man there secretly, so that he might take it for himself, for the love of God.

He also would buy vessels that were necessary for the adorning of churches, and these he would send to poor priests with the utmost secrecy. But
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when, in the absence of his father, he remained in the house, even if he alone with his mother were eating, he would cover the table with bread, as if he were preparing for the whole family. Wherefore, when asked by his mother why he placed so many loaves on the table, he would reply that he did so that there might be alms to give to the poor, inasmuch as he purposed to give to everyone asking for alms for the love of God.

But his mother, who loved him more than she did her other sons, bore with him in such things, observing what things were done by him, and wondering much over them in her heart. For as it had been his wont to set his heart on going after his companions when he was called by them, and had been so much attracted to their society that many times he would get up from table, though he had eaten but little, leaving his parents distressed at his disappearing so unceremoniously, so now all his heart was intent upon seeing or listening to the poor on whom he might bestow alms. For so changed was he by divine grace, albeit he was still in secular attire, he desired to be in some city, where as one unknown he might divest himself of his own clothes and put on, by mutual exchange, the garments of some poor man, and so by experience know what it was to ask for alms for the love of God.