SAINT FRANCIS
AND HIS FRIENDS
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RENDERED INTO ENGLISH FROM FRANCISCAN CHRONICLES

BY

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TO
ALL FRIENDS OF SAINT FRANCIS
THIS LITTLE BOOK
IS INSCRIBED
WITH BROTHERLY GREETINGS.
No narrow heart is a shrine of the Lord Divine.
He who is Love saith "All, not a part, must be Mine."
Thou, whose large heart all with tender love embraceth,
Thou in that heart dost shelter Him who all createth.

JACOPONE DA TODI.
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INTRODUCTION.

SAINT Francis was led away from earth by Sister Death in the year 1226. He had been born in 1182. The forty-four years of the saint's earthly life included the last seven years of the reign of Henry II, the whole of the reigns of Richard Cœur de Lion and of his brother John, and the first ten years of the reign of Henry III. During those forty-four years Englishmen were thus passing through the early days of their devotion to a saint of their own, Thomas à Becket, slain by knights in Canterbury Cathedral; they were excited by the crusading prowess and adventures of Richard, whom they eagerly ransomed when imprisoned in an Austrian castle; they were stirred by the barons' revolt against John, who had invaded his subjects' rights, and endangered the national independence of the English Church. And too there was then living in England a gentle scholar, Edmund Rich, destined to be a successor to Thomas à Becket in the archbishopric of Canterbury, and to seek refuge
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as he had done from a king's displeasure in the Abbey of Pontigny, and soon after his death in exile to be acknowledged also as a saint of the Christian Church.

At an earlier date a merchant of Lucca, Bernardo Moriconi, settled at Assisi, the hillside city of Umbria, in which this Introduction is being penned, and carried on there his trade in silk stuffs and cloth. Being tall and massive, he was known as Bernardino, the big Bernard. In Italy such familiar names often perpetuate themselves. Bernard's did. His real surname ceased to be mentioned. He had a son Pietro. This son was always known as Pietro Bernardino. He succeeded to his father's prosperous business. He travelled about with his rich fabrics from castle to castle. He was thus wandering through Provence when he met with her who became his wife. Pica was her name. A son was born to them at Assisi. To this son, Francis, Pica taught the Provençal language. He was ever fond of it. It was the language in which he would often sing as he moved along the Umbrian roads. He was of a gay, troubadour spirit. It was possible for those who acquired wealth as traders in costly products to become in time ennobled. Francis, with his gay temperament and bright prospects, was a welcome companion of the young nobles.
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of Assisi. With such he took part in a conflict with the men of Perugia. The result for his companions and himself was defeat and a year's imprisonment in Perugia. During the imprisonment he cheered his companions with his songs and his gay indifference to his lot.

After his return to Assisi he was ill with fever. The illness was the commencement of a change in Francis. The change is sometimes called his conversion. To his natural brightness of disposition there was added a new feeling—a longing, an aspiration towards things spiritual. There was added too a desire to minister consolingly to the poorest of his fellow-creatures, to those most wasted by disease and misery. After a short period of uncertainty as to the pathway along which the spiritual treasures that had been revealed to him in vision should be sought, and as to how he might best plan out his life for the good of others, his decision was made. This was in 1209, when he was present at Holy Communion in the chapel of the Portiuncula.

He resolved that henceforth his life should be conformed to a rule of Gospel simplicity, of evangelical poverty. He would live only on the bread of charity. He would clothe himself only in a coarse gown, girded with a knotted cord. His feet should always be bare. He would
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salute every one he met with a new greeting, “The Lord give thee peace.”

His father, grieved at his conduct, became alienated from him. In the home of his youth, only his gentle mother Pica kept her love for him. His friends were perplexed with his changed demeanour. Boys in the streets called after him, and threw at him mud and stones.

Gradually the surprise and astonishment of his friends changed into admiration. His gentle endurance of suffering, his self-chosen toil in helping with his own hands to rebuild ruined sanctuaries, his bright earnestness, drew others to him. Soon there were twelve companions, one an Englishman. The twelve before long increased to a numerous band of followers.

They lived first of all in huts, such as had been assigned as refuges for lepers, who had to live apart from others, until at length the chapel of Saint Mary of the Portiuncula was bestowed upon them. Around this they built little cells, with walls of wattle, rudely plastered, and roofs of straw; the earth being the floor.

Francis thought it well to write down a rule for the guidance of his followers. This rule was confirmed at Rome in 1210 by Pope Innocent III., with whom Francis had a memorable interview. The brotherhood then began its mission-work xii
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amongst the people of Umbria and Central Italy. Many others were attracted by Francis's simple but touching appeals to adopt his rule of life.

In Assisi one presented herself to Francis, so that he might listen to her vow of renunciation of the world, and receive her into a life of seclusion and humiliation. She was the daughter of Count Favorino Scifi. Her name was Clara. Soon after, her sister Agnes joined her, and later on her aunt and her mother. A sisterhood was formed, dwelling ultimately in the convent of San Damiano. This is generally spoken of as the Second Order founded by Francis—the Order of the Poor Clares.

Francis, as he carried on his mission-work, preached in market-places, or from the steps of churches. He ventured up to castle courtyards, even on days of festivity, to proclaim the gospel of simplicity and brotherly love. He aroused a widespread enthusiasm. Attracted by the magnetic spell of his presence and by his gentle appeals, more desired to follow him than could be received into the Order, or than could with any prudence leave their homes or desert their wonted avocations. Francis decided to form another Order for such. The members of this
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Third Order, which later on included Saint Louis of France and Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, lived in obedience to rules of devotion and duty tending to beneficently transform their daily lives.

Francis planned schemes to carry out which would have taken him to the farthest bounds of Christendom, and even beyond. They cannot be further referred to here.

Francis retired often to lonely scenes. There even the birds and creatures of the woods were susceptible to the charm of his gentle, caressing ways, and entered into loving companionship with him.

The story of his dwelling amid the solitudes of La Verna is reproduced in the following pages from "The Little Flowers of Saint Francis." A brief narrative is given too of his ecstasy there. Then is told how from La Verna, ever since looked upon as a sacred mountain, he came down to Assisi, to die at Saint Mary of the Angels, on the 4th of October, 1226, a day that since Francis’s canonization in 1227 by Pope Gregory IX. has been observed with beautiful and impressive devotions as the Festival of Saint Francis.

The Franciscan Order speedily established itself in the principal countries of Europe. It
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was in September, 1224, that a little company of nine Franciscan friars arrived in England. And thus it happened that during the lifetime of the Saint, Franciscan houses were started in Oxford and Cambridge and in East Anglian towns.

The impress that Saint Francis made upon the mind of Christendom is borne witness to not only by the appealing art of great painters, but also by the various chronicles and legends written by his companions and their successors in the Franciscan brotherhood. In this book selections have been made from: “The Legend of the Three Companions,” written in 1246 by Brothers Leo, Angelo, and Rufinus; “The Little Flowers of Saint Francis,” written between 1330 and 1385 by an author unknown; “The Mirror of Perfection,” written by Brother Leo in 1228; “The Two Lives of Saint Francis” by Thomas of Celano (1228 and 1246); “The Life of Saint Francis” by Saint Bonaventura (1263); and “The Holy Converse of the Blessed Francis with Lady Poverty,” attributed to John of Parma.

The chapel of Saint Mary of the Portiuncula, or Saint Mary of the Angels, the first real home of Saint Francis's Order, and the hut too in which he died, are still to be seen beneath the dome of
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the great church built in more recent times as a sacred protecting enclosure. So, also, within the great convent of La Verna, are still to be seen the rocks, cells, and caves associated with Saint Francis's devotions and ecstasies on the sacred mountain.

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