The Wealth of St. Francis; A Study in Transcendental Economics: By Ernest H. Crosby

One of the frescos of Giotto in the upper Church of St. Francis at Assisi represents the saint at the turning point of his career, when he abjures all rights of property forever and determines to devote his attention to matters usually considered less important. You may remember that Francis had contracted the highly reprehensible habit of giving his money away to all who asked, regardless not only of his own needs, but of the pauperizing effect of his alms on the recipients. There were no Charity Organization Societies in those days, but the saint’s father, Bernardone, naturally scandalized at his son’s behavior, did his best to anticipate their functions. He summoned the young man before the magistrates, but as the culprit claimed to be the servant of the church, they handed him over to the bishop. Giotto’s painting depicts the trial before this prelate. Francis, instead of denying the charge, has just renounced all right to his inheritance. He has even stripped off his clothes and returned them to his father. The old man stands on the left with his son’s garments on his arm; with his other hand he is striving to strike his rebellious boy, but his friends hold him back. On the right we see the good bishop, covering the youth’s nakedness with his mantle. Francis himself is looking with rapt countenance up at the sky whence we see the hand of his Heavenly Father emerging. The crowd watches the scene with idle curiosity, and two children armed with small stones are waiting an opportunity to cast them at the “pazzo.”

The same artist has represented the event allegorically in a large fresco in the lower church. Here we see the marriage of Francis and Poverty. The bride, whose fair features are emaciated, stands in the centre clad in rags. The saint, standing on the left and clad in monkish garb, is placing the wedding ring on her finger while he gazes at her lovingly. Between them is the figure of Christ who joins them in matrimony and supports the arm of Poverty with his hand. A dog is barking at the maiden and a boy is throwing stones at her, while another is threatening her with a stick. The hands of God are again seen above, accepting from two angels the
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property of the bridegroom, namely, his purse and tunic, and his house and garden. Over the head of Poverty lilies and roses are blooming. It would be impossible to assert positively what Giotto intended to symbolize by the flowers growing above the head of Poverty. He probably had in mind the various Christian virtues for which Francis was justly famous. It did not strike him perhaps that his own artistic triumphs—that the very picture he was painting—were blossoms which drew their life from that same act of self-devotion, and that much of the wealth of Christian art, poetry and philosophy for centuries would be the dowry of this most unpromising of brides.

The influence of St. Francis upon art has been noticed by several authors. Ozanam calls him the inspiration of his age and notes the fact that he left behind him a school of poets, architects and painters. A writer in the *Nuova Antologia* traces at length his relations to Giotto and Dante. Hermann Hettner, in an article entitled *Die Franciscaner in der Kunstgeschichte*, ascribes to the saint a preponderating influence in the artistic and literary history of the subsequent centuries. But the fullest and most suggestive appreciation of the significance of St. Francis in the world of art and letters is to be found in the great work of Henry Thode which bears the title, *Franz von Assisi und die Anfänge der Kunst der Renaissance in Italien*. This volume, with its many illustrations of paintings and churches, gives, in most interesting form, a clear view of the marvellous results upon civilization in all its breadth and depth of the Franciscan movement. It was with genuine sympathy for Francis that Thode went to Assisi, “the home of that great man in whom as in no other the inmost spirit of Christianity shone forth.” Indeed, it would be difficult for any one to visit the “Galilee of Italy,” as Renan calls the Umbria of Francis, without sharing that sympathy, as the present writer can testify from his own experience. Thode tells us that as he sat in the quiet church in which the saint is buried, he seemed to see dimly the meaning which St. Francis and his boundless love had assumed for humanity—nay, he felt the influence living in himself. The familiar legends which he read here again, the old frescos before which he passed hours and days, ap-
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peared now in a new light. A mysterious connection between Francis and Giotto—between the essential truth of the Franciscan movement on the one hand and that of the young Tuscan art on the other—became clear to him. He recalled Jacopone's songs, the mystic writings of Bonaventura, the preaching of Berthold of Regensburg; he saw in his mind's eye the great Franciscan churches, the innumerable paintings representing the life of the saint, and at last the manifold relations between the Italian culture of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and the deeds and ideas of St. Francis stood out definitely before him, and he was deeply impressed with the vast indebtedness of the world of art and literature to the saint of Assisi.

The Franciscan movement was more then, according to Thode, than a mere religious phenomenon in the ordinary sense of the words; it was rather a movement of humanity. Mankind was gradually waking to a consciousness of the value of the individual, to a realization of individuality, to an appreciation of the relations of the individual to God, to nature and to other men. This feeling culminated in Francis in a burning love for God, man and nature, which afforded a new basis for union and communion between them. All his feeling was summed up in love. The love for God extended itself to all creatures; beasts and plants and inanimate objects became his brothers and sisters; the animals themselves showed a strange confidence in him and seemed to know that he loved them. For him all nature was the face of God and from the narrow limits of sense he rose to a timeless and spaceless feeling which he called the love of Christ. It was in fact a feeling of communion with the Eternal. In preaching such a love to the people, Francis and his disciples were really freeing them from the bondage of the circumstances in which they were living, and he was pointing them to a spiritual liberation which had its social as well as its religious aspect. He gave to the lower classes a sense of individual freedom for which they had been yearning, and he gave it to them in the bosom of the church, without running into the excesses of the heretical sects. His aim and methods were quite dissimilar from those of his great contemporary, Peter Waldo. Fran-
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cis preached a holy life, Waldo, the ten commandments; Francis proclaimed the love of Christ, Waldo, the law of God; Francis spread abroad the joy of the children of God, Waldo reprimanded the sins of the world; Francis attracted to him those who longed for salvation and left the rest alone, Waldo attacked the godless and exasperated the priests.

In many ways the teaching of Francis produced an effect upon art which the more austere doctrines of the sects could never have had. His religion of love became the ideal of the burghers of the towns. The Franciscan friars needed churches and convents, and these burghers built them. This was the opportunity of art. Francis also reconciled religion with nature. Hitherto earthly love had been considered impious, but now comes the saint, and with a poet’s vision sees in it only a reflection of the divine love. Everything temporal is but the likeness of something eternal, and he who feels himself one with all that lives and moves, sees in creation the image of God. The old daylight of ancient culture appears again, but it radiates from a warmer sun, the all-embracing divine love. The oneness of God and the world was the ground-thought of St. Francis’s teaching, and the idea was everywhere received with joy and became the fundamental conception of modern thought and of modern art.

Francis was the prince of peace-makers. As he had reconciled nature and religion, so he brought together the burghers and the nobility, the Church and the reformers. His democratic institution of beggar-monks bridged the chasm between an aristocratic clergy and the common people. Nor did he intend that his monks should beg except in case of necessity. He labored with his own hands and taught his followers to do the same; for idleness, he said, was the enemy of the soul. Francis inspired thousands of his disciples with his universal love and they preached his ideas to all Europe. Their preaching, in so far as it has come down to us, is marked by the same invariable features; they all glorify love, declare the unity of God and the world and the pure humanity of Christ, while the language used is simple, popular, and rich in striking similes and parables.
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The first department of art which responded to the quickening power of Francis was architecture. He had from the time of his conversion taken a deep interest in church-building. One of his first tasks was the restoration of the little chapel of San Damiano near Assisi, and he afterwards performed the same service for the neighboring churches of San Pietro and Santa Maria-in-Portiuncula, laying and fitting the stones with his own hands. Thode calls attention to the fact that these three churches differ from other Italian churches of the period in having pointed arches which resemble those of southern France. On July 16th, 1228, two years after the death of St. Francis, Gregory IX came to Assisi to canonize him, and on the following day he laid the first stone of the great double church of St. Francis. It was one of the earliest examples of Italian Gothic art and marked an epoch in the history of Italian architecture. Philippo da Campello was probably the designer and he seems to have come from Lombardy, although Vasari assigns the honor to one Master Jacopo Tedesco. Thode gives a detailed account of the spread of this new style of architecture throughout northern Italy, and he goes so far as to say that to study the history of the mendicant orders is to study the course of Gothic architecture in Italy, and that to the Franciscans is due the greater part of this influence, which may be traced back to Umbria and Assisi.

One peculiarity of the Franciscan churches was the large extent of wall-space which they afforded and which naturally invited fresco-painting. The best artists were called in to decorate the walls of the new church at Assisi. Some fifty years after the saint's death we find Cimabue painting in the upper church with a number of his pupils. Among these Giotto has his place, and he alone paints there twenty-eight scenes from the life of St. Francis. Giotto's art is incarnated in this church, and the names of Francis and Giotto are the two, says Thode, which come to the lips in grateful remembrance as one sits there in silent contemplation. Here the hand of Francis blessed the new-born Christian art in its cradle. Tradition tells us that St. Francis was a painter too. On the antependium of the altar of the little church of St. Mary which he built, he is reported to have painted the figures of angels, boys, birds, and other
creatures, with an inscription beneath, calling upon them all to praise the Creator. The Tuscan people were artistic by nature and the seed sown by Francis fell upon good ground. They were ready to accept the harmony of religion and nature and to sympathize, to some extent at least, with the saint's consciousness of God in His world, although they could not follow him to his lonely height of self-renunciation and ecstatic meditation. The earliest paintings in the church at Assisi show the new influence, if we compare them with the contemporary art of Siena. They already exhibit freedom from the conventions of the past. But the first monumental work of the new art is to be found in Giotto's rendering of the legend of Francis. This series really celebrates the reconciliation estranged hands in each other and blessed the union. Thode of man and nature. Francis embraced both in his love, laid their thinks that an allegorical picture of the kind would have formed a fit pendant to the Marriage of Poverty, and that it would have been equally worthy of the genius of Giotto. Now that the figure of Francis has made its appearance in art, it becomes at once a favorite subject of the painters. It is not by accident that the earliest portraits of the new art are those of St. Francis, for his features had seized upon the imagination of the artists of the day. Thode gives a list of these portraits and traces the likeness of the saint from the first attempts which represent him as a man of middle size with a blonde beard and a thin, long face, to the later idealized portraits in which the beard has disappeared and the features have become more ascetic. The art of portraiture, thus revived in Francis, is called by Vasari a "cosa nuova."

It is however not in portraiture, but as a subject for popular art, that Francis becomes especially conspicuous. His legend affords the first popular material for the artist since the life of Jesus. In his youth Giotto was fortunately captivated by this legend and it freed him from the close atmosphere of the old art. It provided him with many artistic and dramatic scenes, exhibiting all the feelings and passions of the heart in turn—love, sympathy, pity, hope, gratitude, devotion, humility, as well as fear, horror, misery, despair and rage. As the subject was new, he felt at liberty to treat it
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in a novel way; nor was this all. Francis had brought the man Jesus to the foreground and this involved the deifying of man. It became necessary to form a new ideal of the human body worthy of the divine, and to this end to study the human form afresh. This impelled the artist to examine nature for himself. When afterwards Giotto went to Padua, he applied his new method to the life of the Madonna, and again to the life of Christ in the lower church at Assisi—a liberty which he could never have taken if he had not learned the lesson from St. Francis. Thus the whole field of Christian art was made to bloom anew.

The Franciscan legend also introduced Giotto to the real form of mountains, trees, houses and cities. He was depicting scenes which were familiar to the public and it was necessary to paint them so that they might be identified. This necessity cut him loose from the conventional backgrounds in which the scenes from the life of Christ had been set from time immemorial. Through Giotto, Francis opened the way to Christian art. Nor should we forget in this connection that Giotto became also the greatest of architects and designed the incomparable Campanile at Florence. Thode declares, and with good reason, that to him who contemplates the frescos in the upper church at Assisi with sympathizing love, the secret of the development of art reveals itself as nowhere else in the world. This church is indeed the cradle of the new art; here we find the key of the great artistic movement, namely, the loving study of nature. Giotto started out upon a path which led eventually to the master-pieces of Raphael and Titian. The figure of Francis remains a favorite—we may almost say, after Jesus and Mary, the favorite—of the painters. We might, by following his familiar form, construct a history of Christian art from the predecessors of Cimabue down to Guido Reni, Rubens and Van Dyck, and some artists, such as Cardi da Cigoli, devoted nearly their entire lives to him. The same spirit speaks in the frescos of Giotto at Assisi as in the highest art of the Renaissance. The thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries form a single art-epoch, and there is one progressive, logical evolution from Giotto to Raphael, which makes it impossible to draw the line anywhere between them. And Thode
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extends the influence of Francis to the art of sculpture, which was especially in request to provide pulpits for the new orders of preaching monks. Niccolo Pisano is for him no belated representative of the ancient Italian art, but he too was inspired by the new conception of God and nature which he had learned directly or indirectly from St. Francis and his friars. Our author likewise contends that it was due to the saint that the art of the fifteenth century continued to be Christian in spite of the pagan influences of the Renaissance.

If from painting and sculpture we turn to poetry, we shall still detect the all-pervading inspiration of the monk of Assisi. He was himself a poet. His "Hymn to the Sun" is one of the earliest and most beautiful examples of Italian poetry, and Renan calls it "the finest religious poem since the Gospels." "The Lord be praised," the saint cries, "for brother Sun and sister Moon, for brother Wind and sister Water, for brother Fire and for our sister, Mother Earth, nay, even for our sister Death." Among all the poets no one but Whitman has shown an equal tenderness and affection for death. Walt sings of "the joy of death, the beautiful touch of death," and indeed there is much in his verse that recalls St. Francis. No nobler expression could be given to the unity of God, nature and man than in the "Hymn to the Sun," nor could a more powerful stimulus have been applied to the composition of poetry in the popular tongue rather than in Latin. Thode calls his hymn the réveille of Christian art. Two of the immediate disciples of Francis were also poets: Fra Pacifico, who had been a troubadour before his conversion and had been crowned Rex Versuum by the Kaiser, and Thomas of Celano. The latter was the author of the grand Dies Irae, a poem which, although it is written in Latin, is full of genuine popular feeling. St. Bonaventura, better known, as we shall see, as a mystic and philosopher, was a poet too. The Franciscans wrote most of their poetry in the vulgar tongue, Giacomino for instance making use of the Veronese dialect. Umbria became the special home of religious poetry. A popular kind of song called Lauda was in vogue there, passing from mouth to mouth, and its origin was undoubtedly Franciscan.
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The poems of the great Franciscan poet, Jacopone da Todi, give a good idea of these songs. Crazed by the sudden death of his wife, he gradually recovered his reason, and in 1278 he gave away all his property and joined the order. In his poems he ridicules the learning of his time and satirizes Pope Boniface VIII, who imprisoned him in 1298. After five years of confinement, he was released by the death of the Pope, and in 1306 he died, his heart broken, it was said, from too great love for Christ. The idea of love had gained full possession of him. Asked once why he wept, he answered, “Because love is not loved.” “The greatest joy which the soul can possess in this life,” says an old chronicler, “is to be continually fixed on God, and it is believed that his soul attained to this condition.” Jacopone was one of Italy’s foremost poets. Written in the language of the people, as most of his poems are, they are marked by rude originality and impetuous feeling. In this they differ radically from the stilted rhymes and plays upon words of the Troubadours. Eternal love, the mystic union of the soul with God, these were his constant themes. His best known Latin poem is the Stabat Mater Dolorosa. Among the other Franciscan poets we may mention Fra Ugo Panziera, Fra Francesco da Fabiano and Fra Angelico da Camerino. The poetry of the Troubadours, which began to flourish in Provence about the time of Francis’s birth, never appealed to the Italian populace. Their instinctive preference was for the native-born religious hymns of the Franciscans, and the depth of its feeling raised this Umbrian poetry far above the artificial conceits of the Provençal bards.

While Jacopone was composing his last verses, Dante was at work at his “Divine Comedy.” Some authors have gone so far as to call this a Franciscan song, and, although this is doubtless claiming too much, there is some truth in the statement. If Dante owed his philosophy to St. Thomas, he learned his “amor divina” from St. Francis, or from his follower, St. Bonaventura. To the influence of Francis we may perhaps also attribute the fact that the great poet chose the Italian language in preference to the Latin. At any rate, the common spirituality of the Italian people found a voice in Dante and this spirituality had been called to life by the Umbrian
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saint. It is interesting to note the connecting links between the poet and the monk. Tradition has it that Dante became a member of the third order of Franciscans, but this statement, to say the least, is dubious. Vasari is authority for the statement that Dante suggested to Giotto some of the subjects in the Francis series of frescos at Assisi, and the poet writes of that town in the Paradiso as if he had visited it. In the same poem he shows his great admiration for St. Francis, and in naming him with Benedict and Augustine places his name first. In the eleventh Canto he gives an account of the saint’s courtship of Poverty, who had lost her first husband, Christ, eleven hundred years before, and had never been sought in marriage since:

"Questa, privata del primo marito,
Mille e cento anni e più dispetta e scura,
Fino a costui si stette senza invitito."

Among the many converging circumstances which produced the “Divine Comedy” we may safely assign a commanding place to the influence of St. Francis.

Oratory is an art of itself, and the preaching of the Franciscans is worthy of notice, not only as the main factor in reviving the other arts, but also for its own sake. Preaching was the principal occupation of the begging friars, and by it they gave currency to their new Gospel, the good tidings to the poor of the almighty power of love to make men free, happy and great. All true Christian preaching is the preaching of love, Thode asserts; and he asks, “Was there ever such preaching of love as that of the Franciscans?” By means of it they took Europe by storm. Men felt their noblest sentiments quickened; they came out into the open air from the shelter of their conventions and saw the whole world changed before them. How beautiful it all was; how happy mankind might be; how great was the kindness of the Lord! Hitherto preaching had usually been confined to the churches and had treated of doctrinal subjects in the Latin tongue. Now all this was altered. The friars preferred to preach out-of-doors; they spoke the dialect of the people, and they addressed themselves to the affections of their audiences. After Francis, St. Anthony of Padua was the most distinguished
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preacher of the Franciscans, having joined the order some years before its founder died. When he was to preach before the gates of Padua, the people gathered together from great distances round, coming in, on the night previous, from all the country-side. As many as thirty thousand sometimes listened to him at once, and he touched their hearts so effectively that crowds were eager to confess, and priests enough could not be found to hear their confessions. Salimbene, the Franciscan historian, mentions other preachers of the order, such as Girardo da Modena and Ugo da Bareola, but in fact nearly all the friars were preachers. Berthold of Regensburg, who was a Franciscan as early as 1246, was the orator of the order in Germany, and his sermons are still an ornament to German literature and might be read with profit in the village churches of to-day. Their spirit, like that of the Gospel, is ever young, for they breathe the same artless, universal Christian love and inculcate the same practical morality. They have something of Luther’s eloquence, but a broader basis which fits them for Catholic and Protestant alike. He taught that God had revealed himself in two ways, to the clergy in the Old and New Testaments, and to the laity in two other “great books,” namely, the earth and the sky, in which they can read all wisdom, “on the earth by day, and in the sky by night.” Thus, true to the Franciscan tradition, he unites religion and nature. He pictured Jesus as an elder brother, to be loved as such, and he aroused a new interest in every event of his life. All men were equal before God, he said, and the great were to answer in the presence of the Judge of all for their oppressive conduct. The idea which Berthold held up before the people was the reign of peace and love, for war and strife were abominations to him. We may readily conceive the effect of such preaching upon the imagination of the public and of its ultimate results in art. The story of Jesus took on a new life and called forth a new love. New living pictures were presented to the fancy and it was but natural that artists should be inspired to paint them. The dramatic element predominates in all the artistic productions which can be ascribed to the influence of St. Francis. Giotto’s painting is dramatic in the extreme and so is all the Franciscan
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preaching of which we have any record. The allegory, too, holds an important place in the literature of the order. The saint delighted in suiting his action to his thought. He founded a Christian festival at Greccio which Salimbene calls a receptatio. Thomas of Celano relates how Francis read the Gospel, the people responding with singing, how he then knelt before the manger and took the babe in his arms. This is the first mystery-play of which we hear in Italy, and it seems likely that St. Francis contributed to the revival of the drama. Ozanam finds in certain poems of Jacobone the earliest efforts of the Italian popular stage. These were dialogues prepared for feasts of the church. In one of them the characters are St. Francis, Poverty, and the poet; in another we see Christ, Mary, Mercy, an angel and others. It is probable that the passion plays performed at Pra della Valle near Padua in 1243, at Treviso in 1261, at Rome in 1264, at Cividale in 1298 and 1304, and at Florence also in 1304, had their origin in the Franciscan movement.

The influence of the order of St. Francis upon the learning of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was far reaching. Alexander of Hales, the irrefragable doctor (died 1245); Roger Bacon (1214-1292), the doctor mirabilis, founder of modern science and first of modern investigators and inventors; Duns Scotus (died 1308), the doctor subtilis and leader of the realists; William of Occam (1270-1347), the doctor singularis et invincibilis and champion of the nominalists, all of them Britons, were Franciscans. They were the greatest thinkers of their time and hardly a name of equal rank is omitted from the list, while their various theories covered the whole field of contemporary philosophy. Thode draws a comparison between Occam and Giotto. They flourished at the same time and Occam's philosophy, like Giotto's art, was essentially true to nature, placing the individual fact above the abstract idea of scholastic logic; both of them did what they could to free the human mind from the trammels of a conventional past. Occam did for thought what Giotto did for art, and both are children of Francis of Assisi.

A few words must be devoted to St. Bonaventura, the doctor seraph-
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icus, who became general of the order in 1256. He was born in the year 1221, and at three years of age was cured of a disease by St. Francis. At two-and-twenty he fulfilled a vow which his mother had made on that occasion, and joined the Franciscans. He studied at Paris and became distinguished as a mystical philosopher, absorbing to a high degree the spirit of the founder of the order. He was a man of noble character and exerted a deep influence on Italian poetry and art. Thode maintains that the true mystic has within him all the attributes of a painter, poet and musician. He has the power of visualizing his impressions and thus of picturing things as an artist. In his boundless feeling of oneness with God lies the source of the highest poetry, and when the mind altogether loses itself in contemplation of the divine, music remains the only form of expression possible. The mysticism of Francis and Bonaventura led naturally to allegory and to a life-like representation of the life of Jesus. The Meditationes Vitae Christi, usually ascribed to Bonaventura, were widely read by the people and did much to stimulate poetry and art among them. The time for the greatest triumphs of music had not arrived when Francis was alive. He was, however, very fond of the art, and when he was ill he would call for his lyre. Salimbene says that music was much cultivated in the Franciscan convents, and he mentions Fra Enrico Pisano and Fra Vita da Lucca as famous musicians and composers. It remained for Luther, however (says Thode), to do for music what Francis had done for the other arts. Bach was his Giotto, and as in Giotto the spiritual emotion of Francis found articulate expression, so in Bach the deep faith of Luther uttered itself forth, and as Francis introduced the great age of Italian art, so Luther inaugurated the era of German music. "Francis and Luther!" he cries. "When will the third come? The time is ripe and he that hath ears to hear must needs give heed to the longing cry of the people—this time the fourth estate—demanding its rights. What else does it require but a new power of faith, a new invigoration of feeling? Mankind stands once again in need of a Francis—a Luther."

We may now form some conception of the enormous influence
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which St. Francis exercised upon the history of his own and of succeeding times. All the threads of civilization in the subsequent centuries seem to lead back to him. Various authors, as we have seen, have pointed this out, but none of them has, I think, called attention to the fact that much of the most precious wealth of the world, including the priceless works of art of the great galleries of Europe, the architectural wonders of Italy, the beauties of the "Divine Comedy" itself—nay, even many of the fruits of our modern scientific progress—that much of all this is due to the beggar-monk of Assisi and was actually produced by his disregard for property. Thode remarks that it was "only by freeing himself from earthly cares and by following the example of the propertyless apostles," that Francis was enabled to give full scope to his love for God and man. Francis, in replying to the question of a bishop, said, "Sir, if we wished to own property, then we should be obliged to have arms to defend it, and in that case we should have quarrels and strife, which often hinder love to God and neighbor, and for these reasons we desire to own nothing in this life." It is true that the artistic spirit, which sprang from this all-renouncing love, at last demanded rich material upon which to work, and that the new art took shape in magnificent buildings and decorations. Francis did not appreciate to what an extent expenditure for beauty might be justified when devoted to public uses. When the brothers sent to Siena, where he lay ill, asking him for advice as to how to build a church and convent, he told them to construct huts for themselves and always to make their churches small and narrow and not to ornament them. In 1260 the Chapter General of the order, under the direction of St. Bonaventura, adopted rules for securing simplicity in the building of churches, but what, asks Thode, could even a Bonaventura do against mankind's new delight in color and form for which they were indebted to the Franciscans themselves?

The lesson which we must draw from St. Francis's example is quite subversive of all orthodox principles of political economy. If he had kept his property, and bought with it in the cheapest market and sold in the dearest, and if his heirs had preserved it intact until

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to-day, would not the world be much the poorer for it? We may have different opinions on the subject of poverty; even Giotto, loyal as he was to his saint, was disgusted with some of the beggar monks of his day and wrote a poem against them and their vow of poverty; but the fact remains that Francis, by his love which rose above all considerations of mine and thine, endowed the world with its greatest riches. We should do well to remember this when we hear it stated, as we often do, that civilization with all its triumphs, literary and artistic, is bound up in private property—that communism and socialism are impossible because they do not give free scope to the instinct of possession, in short, that living and getting are one and the same thing. These arguments need not disturb us, for we can still point to St. Francis, who enriched the world for all time by refusing to possess anything for himself. He had that supreme virtue which Walt Whitman admired in animals.

"Not one is demented with the mania of owning things."

And is our civilization, founded as we see it upon this most miserable of manias, so necessary after all to the success of art and letters? If we look about us, we shall see that during our scramble for ownership, the highest art and literature have well-nigh departed from among us. Even music, the youngest of the arts, is gradually withering away like the belated chestnut blossoms in summer, and genius no longer flourishes in the land. We need a new creation in the realm of thought and beauty, and it must come as it did in the time of Francis, from the moving of the spirit of love on the face of the broad waters of humanity. Art and literature with us have become the idle amusement of a sickly few, leading an unnatural life by themselves, subsidized by private wealth more or less unjustly amassed and cut off from the only real base of supplies, the common people. The tongue cannot sing nor the right hand wield pen or brush, when head and arm are lopped from the trunk. The first condition for true art is that men should become conscious of their solidarity and convinced of the value of simple manhood as over against all other values whatsoever; and then that, imbued as St. Francis was with this new esprit de corps,
they should proceed to live the truth as they see it. The result would be, now as then, that the life itself would become the crowning work of art and that its strong current would fructify the coming ages with the truest wealth.