

town of Assisi. Up to his twenty-fifth year he led a life of gaiety and pleasure. Then came an illness which changed his outlook on life. He began to spend much time in prayer and meditation and in caring for the lepers, and gave away all that he could to the poor. Disinherited by his father, and looked upon as mad by his friends, he cheerfully took poverty "as his bride." At last one day in 1209 came the turning-point of his life. As the priest read at mass the gospel for the day from the tenth chapter of St Matthew, the words came to Francis as a direct revelation. From henceforth he set himself to fulfil literally the command to the disciples, "and as ye go preach, saying the kingdom of heaven is at hand. . . . Get you no gold nor silver nor brass in your purses, no wallet for your journey, neither two coats, nor shoes, nor staff, for the labourer is worthy of his hire."

The preaching of Francis, his winning character, and the example of his self-denial soon resulted in the gathering together of a little band of followers, who renounced their possessions, and clad in rough grey garments, rope-girt, barefoot, and moneyless, went up and down the country preaching and ministering to the poor, depending for their subsistence on the food bestowed on them in charity. They shared the happy spirit of their founder, and called themselves "the troubadours of God."

In 1210, Francis and his twelve companions went to Rome and obtained the sanction of the Pope for their Rule. The humble, loving spirit of Francis is seen in the name which he chose for his followers. They were to be the *Fratres Minores*, or lesser brothers. Their headquarters were at Assisi, where they lived in huts