

GOD'S TROUBADOUR

**GOD'S
TROUBADOUR**

**THE STORY OF
ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI**

BY

SOPHIE JEWETT

YESTERDAY'S CLASSICS

CHAPEL HILL, NORTH CAROLINA

Cover and arrangement © 2005 Yesterday's Classics.

This edition, first published in 2005 by Yesterday's Classics, is an unabridged republication of the work originally published by Thomas Y. Crowell & Company in 1910. For a full listing of the books published by Yesterday's Classics, please visit www.yesterdaysclassics.com. Yesterday's Classics is the publishing arm of the Baldwin Project which presents the complete text of dozens of classic books for children at www.mainlesson.com under the editorship of Lisa M. Ripperton and T. A. Roth.

ISBN-10: 1-59915-055-7

ISBN-13: 978-1-59915-055-0

Yesterday's Classics
PO Box 3418
Chapel Hill, NC 27515

CONTENTS

A CHILD OF LONG AGO.....	1
THE YOUNG TROUBADOUR.....	7
THE YOUNG SOLDIER.....	11
TO ARMS!	16
THE NEW ROAD	21
“THE OTHER LIFE IS AS MY LIFE”	25
FATHER AND SON.....	31
“LADY POVERTY”	36
THE BIRD SISTERS.....	43
BROTHER WOLF.....	48
THE THREE ROBBERS.....	55
NURSE AND PATIENT.....	61
WITH THE CRUSADERS.....	65
THE CHRISTMAS AT GRECCIO	73
LA VERNA.....	79
THE TROUBADOUR’S LAST SONG.....	86

A CHILD OF LONG AGO

“He prayeth well, who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.

“He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things, both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.”

—*Coleridge.*

Under the arched gate of a city wall, a group of people stood watching the road that wound down the mountain and off across the plain. The road lay dusty and white in September sunshine, and the eyes of the watchers followed it easily until it hid itself in a vast forest, that filled half the valley. On the point where road and forest met, the sharpest eyes were fixed.

The crowd was gay, but not noisy. There were few words and long silences, as always when people are waiting and expecting. Among all the eyes that watched the sunny road that day, the most earnest were those of Madonna Pica Bernardone, and the merriest were those of her little boy Francis, for the

GOD'S TROUBADOUR

company was gathered to see the home-coming of Messer Piero Bernardone, the richest merchant of Assisi, and the lady Pica was his wife, and little Francis was his son. The others were friends and neighbours of Piero. Some were rich customers, who wondered if the merchant had found for them the beautiful stuffs which they had ordered. Certain of the company were only idlers, glad enough to have something happen to break the dulness of the long, warm afternoon.

Assisi, at whose gate the watchers stood, lies far across the sea in beautiful Italy. It is a little city, built on a mountain side, with a great wall all about it, and a castle on the height above, and it looks very much as it did on that September afternoon more than seven hundred years ago, when Francis Bernardone waited for his father. Inside the walls, the stone houses are crowded together, making narrow, crooked streets, so steep, often, that no carriage can drive through them. Some streets, indeed, are simply long flights of stone steps, where the children play, and the patient donkeys climb up, carrying heavy loads of charcoal or faggots. But, though the streets are narrow, Assisi is not gloomy. Everywhere there is sunshine and bright colour. Above the brown tiled roofs rise tall green cypress trees; over a bit of garden wall trail red trumpet-creepers and blue morning-glories; even the window-sills are gay with pink and red geraniums. In the open square the market-gardeners sell ripe grapes and plums and figs, covered over with fresh vine-leaves. Outside the city gates, all the world seems like

A CHILD OF LONG AGO

a fair garden. The hill-sides are covered with olive trees, whose grey leaves twinkle like silver when the wind blows through them. Some of the trees look almost as old as the city walls, for their trunks are only hollow shells through which one sees the blue sky, though their tops still bear fruit bravely every year. From the foot of the mountain stretches the river valley, bright with wheat fields and tall corn, and vineyards where the vines hang in heavy garlands from one mulberry tree to another. Between the rows of trees, in the shadow of the vines, great white oxen move slowly, dragging a clumsy, old-fashioned plough; and down a sunken road that cuts through vineyards and cornfields go strong, brown peasant women with burdens on their heads.

Little Francis Bernardone must have trotted up and down the same steep streets, and have played in the same squares that one sees to-day; but the valley over which he looked, on this autumn afternoon, contained fewer vineyards and cornfields, and far more forest trees. Francis wondered what might lie hidden in the forest, for he had never travelled beyond the place where the white road disappeared.

The hour grew late, and the tired watchers shaded their eyes from the low sun that shone across the valley from the western mountains. Suddenly Francis shouted aloud, and, in a minute, the shout was taken up by many voices: "He is coming! He is coming!" They saw, at first, only a cloud of dust, moving along the road; but soon, horses and riders

GOD'S TROUBADOUR

could be discerned, in a long line, half-hidden still by the dust that rose in their path and turned to gold and crimson haze in the red sunset.

As the horsemen climbed the hill to the city gate, the sight was more like the coming of a prince than of a merchant. Piero Bernardone rode ahead, in a company of soldiers, well armed and mounted upon fine horses. Behind this group followed a train of pack-horses and mules, heavily loaded with the rich goods that the merchant was bringing home. Last of all came another band of soldiers, some mounted, some on foot. All this escort was customary for a rich merchant in those days, for the roads were often held by wandering bands of soldiers or highway robbers. Piero Bernardone needed many swords to defend the silks and velvets, gold embroideries and jewels which he had bought in the great market towns of France and northern Italy.

At the gate of Assisi, Piero Bernardone dismounted gravely. He kissed the Lady Pica and the little Francis; he greeted his friends, somewhat coldly, perhaps, for he was a proud, hard man; but he turned a second time to kiss his boy, whom he loved dearly. Then Francis knew the proudest minute of his little life; for he was mounted upon his father's horse, while Piero and the Lady Pica walked beside him, and all the company, talking eagerly, entered the gate of San Pietro, and wound slowly up the stony streets that led to Piero Bernardone's home.

A CHILD OF LONG AGO

Inside the house, that night, Francis listened with wide eyes to his father's stories, for the merchant had always interesting adventures to tell. He had visited the great fairs, to which other merchants came, from Greece, from Africa, from Syria, from Germany and England. While he bought and exchanged goods, he heard news from all over the world, a world in which news travelled slowly, for there were no newspapers, nor telegrams, nor railroad trains.

On his way homeward the merchant was a welcome guest at the castles of knights and princes. Noble ladies bought his silks and laces, famous warriors begged him for tidings of wars in other lands, and all listened to any new stories which he had learned on his journey.

Of all the merchant's hearers none was so eager as his son Francis. For him the stern Piero remembered all the strange and beautiful tales that he heard by the way; stories of Charlemagne and Roland; of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. For him he learned the gay songs of the wandering poets, Troubadours, as they were called, who sang in the courts of kings and in the halls of nobles. Their songs were of brave knights in shining armour, and of ladies with white hands, beautiful eyes, and sweet, unforgettable names. Piero Bernardone cared little for the courtly words of these Troubadour songs, but, as he listened, he remembered the clear, childish voice at home, always quick to repeat new verses and new melodies. So Piero was glad when he heard the same song many

GOD'S TROUBADOUR

times of an evening; and, next day, in the saddle, while he thought of prices and profits, his rough voice sang, over and over, daintily fashioned rhymes in praise of Isoline and Blanchefleur, of Beatrice and Amorette.

Francis learned all the stories and all the songs. Especially he loved the adventures of King Arthur and Sir Gawain, Sir Tristram and Sir Lancelot. On this September evening he listened till his big eyes were dim with sleep, and, all night long, he dreamed wonderful dreams, in which he became a great man, not a merchant like his father, but a knight like Lancelot.

THE YOUNG TROUBADOUR

“For pitie renneth sone in gentil herte.”

—*Chaucer.*

As Francis Bernardone grew from a boy to a man, he made friends with a company of gay youths, the sons of the greatest and richest families of Assisi. Their fathers were counts, and dukes, and princes, and the lads were vain of the names they bore, and of the palaces where they lived. It was a lawless company, bent on having a good time, and thinking nothing of the comfort of other people. The pranks of these young nobles were so reckless and, sometimes, so wicked that the good people of Assisi lived in terror of what they might do next.

The youths welcomed Francis into their fellowship because, though he had not a noble name, he had splendid clothes to wear, and much money to spend; and because, among them all, no one laughed so merrily or sang so sweetly as the merchant's son. The hours always went more gaily when Francis was of the party, for it made one feel happy just to look at his bright face. Piero Bernardone was proud that his son should be the friend and pet of these young lords, but the lad's gentle mother grieved that her

GOD'S TROUBADOUR

kind-hearted little boy should come to be a wild and wicked man. Her heart ached in the night, when the noisy group went laughing and shouting through the streets, and she could hear the voice of Francis, sweeter and louder than the rest, singing a bit of Troubadour song that he had learned as a child:

“My heart is glad in spring-time,
When April turns to May;
When nightingales sing in the dark,
And thrushes sing by day.”

The mother would listen till the laughter and singing were far away and faint, and the last sound was always the voice of her boy, which, indeed, she seemed to hear long after all was silent in the narrow street. When the neighbours complained that the conduct of the boys was too bad to be endured, the merchant only laughed. “It is the way of the world,” he said. “Francis is no worse than the others. Boys must be boys. What would you have?” But his wife would speak softly, with tears in her gentle eyes: “Wait, I have great hope that he will yet become a good Christian.” The mother knew all that was best in the boy. She thought: “However careless and wild he may be, he has a kind and loving heart.” And she was right. In his gayest moments Francis was always quick to pity any one who was poor or in pain.

But one who is thoughtless is always in danger of being cruel. One day a man, ragged and hungry, crept in at the open door of Piero Bernardone’s shop. Piero was absent, but Francis was spreading out beautiful silks and velvets before two customers,

THE YOUNG TROUBADOUR

for he sometimes sold goods for his father. Standing in his dirty, brown rags among the red and purple stuffs and the gold embroideries, the beggar cried: "In the name of God, give me something, for I am starving!" Francis, whose mind was intent on his bargain, impatiently sent the man away. A moment later, he was sorry. "What would I have done," he said to himself, "if that man had asked me for money in the name of a count or baron? What ought I to do when he comes in the name of God?" Leaving the astonished customers in the shop, the boy ran out into the street, found the beggar and gave him all the money he had in his purse.

Despite his gay life, Francis had times of being thoughtful, and dissatisfied with himself. As he went up and down the streets of Assisi, well dressed and well fed, he saw people sick and hungry and ragged, glad to receive a crust of bread or an old cloak. "These people," thought Francis, "would live for months on the money that I waste in one day." Sometimes he would throw his purse to a starving man, or his bright cloak to a ragged one, and his merry friends would laugh and jest at him for his folly. Then they would all ride away gaily, and even Francis would forget.

He did not forget his old love for the stories of King Arthur and the Round Table. He disliked more and more the thought of being a merchant. He wanted to travel, to see far-away countries, but he wanted to go as a soldier, not as a tradesman. He wanted to storm great castles, to rescue fair ladies, to ride at the head of a fearless band of knights. He

GOD'S TROUBADOUR

loved the knights of the old stories, not alone because they were strong in battle, but because they were gracious in speech, true of their word, and kind to all the unfortunate and weak. Perhaps it was his love for gentle manners and brave deeds that kept Francis from becoming altogether hard-hearted and selfish in these days.

Besides the songs of love and of battle, he had learned wise little verses about the duties of knighthood, and sometimes, when he and his friends had been most rude and unknightly, the old rhymes came back to his mind like a reproachful voice:

“Nowhere is such a noble name
As that of chivalry;
Of coward acts and words of shame
It is the enemy;
But wisdom, truth, valour in fight,
Pity and purity,
These are the gifts that make a knight,
My friend, as you may see.”

THE YOUNG SOLDIER

“Content to take his adventure gladly.”

—*Hakluyt.*

“Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage.”

—*Lovelace.*

There were many and terrible wars in Italy in the thirteenth century, and the chance of trying his fortune as a soldier was not long in coming to Francis Bernardone.

Only fifteen miles away from Assisi stands a larger city, called Perugia. It also is built upon a mountain, and the two towns seem to smile at each other across the green valley. But for hundreds of years there were only bitter looks and hatred between the two. Perugia, higher and stronger, lay like a dragon, ready to spring upon her small but furious enemy. Assisi, like a lion's cub, was always ready to fight. Sometimes the lion was victor; always it was fierce enough to make the huge dragon writhe with pain.

When Francis Bernardone was about twenty years old, there was war between the great dragon

GOD'S TROUBADOUR

and the little lion. Down from one mountain came the Perugian army. Down from the other came that of Assisi. With the army of Assisi rode Francis and most of the company of friends who had been so merry together in times of peace. They were gay as ever, and eager to see what a real battle might be like.

The armies met in the plain, and fought by the river side, near a tiny town called Ponte San Giovanni, the Bridge of St. John.

This time the Perugians were too strong for the Assisians, and the young soldier's first combat was a defeat. One day taught him all the horror of a field of battle. He saw men wounded and dying. He heard the terrified cries of riderless horses. He suffered from blinding sun and parching thirst. War, that he had thought so noble and glorious, seemed somehow confused and cruel and hideous.

The army of Assisi lost heavily that day. Many men were slain, many were made prisoners, and one of the prisoners was Francis Bernardone. He was too tired, too hungry and too thirsty to feel anything keenly except the need of sleep and food; yet he wondered how it had all happened. Could he be the same man who had gone about for days delighting in the song of a warlike Troubadour:

“Luck to the arm that's quickest,
And, if at odds ye strive,
Die where the field is thickest,
But never yield alive”?

THE YOUNG SOLDIER

He knew that he had not been a coward. He had not even been afraid, yet here he was unarmed and captive.

Because of his beautiful dress, and because of his courtly manners, Francis was placed, not among the common soldiers, but among the nobles. For a whole year he was a prisoner of war. It must have been a sad change from the free, wild life in Assisi. Captives, even if of noble rank, were not softly treated in old times; and, though Francis and his companions may not have suffered serious hardships, the long confinement was, in itself, a cruel thing to bear. On Francis Bernardone, however, his misfortune sat lightly. The army of Perugia could not make a captive of his fancy. His fellow-prisoners were astonished to hear him tell of his hopes and plans for the future; of the battles he should fight; of the fame he should win; of the beautiful ladies who should smile on him. The brave knights whom he admired, Gawain, Tristram and Lancelot, had sometimes fallen into prison, but had won their way out again, to fight better than before. So Francis still dreamed of war and glory, and boasted in his pride: "You will see that, some day, all the world will adore me."

Though he was proud and boastful, Francis was still gentle-hearted, and quick to feel sympathy for all who were unhappy. Among the prisoners of war was one man so vain and ill-tempered that his companions would have nothing to do with him. The unfortunate creature sat gloomily apart, with a black frown on his face, and with black thoughts in

GOD'S TROUBADOUR

his mind. The songs and jests and games with which the others whiled away the long hours made him seem all the lonelier in his silent corner. The sight of the sad, bitter face was more than Francis could bear. Many times he slipped away from the noisy group of his comrades to speak cheerily to the solitary knight, and, little by little, with the friendliness that no one was ever known to resist, he won the heart of the miserable man. Through the good-will of the boy whom everybody loved, the victim and his tormentors in the end became friends once more, and there was peace in the great prison.

All through the long winter, from across the valley, the sad eyes of the Lady Pica watched the towers of Perugia. In her heart she questioned what might have been her boy's fate. Was he ill, and suffering and lonely? When would he come back to her? She seemed still to hear him singing, as on the morning when he had ridden out so blithely to his first battle:

“Comrades, let each be ready
To give and take his part;
Shields bright and lances steady,
And all men glad of heart.”

If the breeze that swept down the long valley from Perugia could have carried the prisoner's merry voice, the mother might have been somewhat comforted.

In prison or out of it, the heart of Francis of Assisi was always the heart of the poet, the

THE YOUNG SOLDIER

Troubadour. Because his companions remembered gratefully the songs and laughter that brightened their captivity, the story of his gaiety has come down to us across seven hundred years.

TO ARMS!

“ ’Twere worth ten years of peaceful life
One glance at his array.”

At last there came a day when the prisoners were set free and Francis could return to his home. The wide valley, with its shining rivers, the far blue mountains and the green forest road must have been welcome to eyes that, for a long year, had looked at the world through prison windows. We may be certain that Piero and Pica Bernardone were watching for their son, and that all the neighbours made merry at his coming. We know that his gay young friends received him joyfully and that the old life of feasting, drinking and rioting began again. Perhaps, in his delight at being free once more, Francis was more reckless than ever. At any rate, it is certain that, a short time after his return to Assisi, he suddenly became seriously ill. When, after long days of illness, he began to crawl about slowly, weak and pale, and leaning upon a stick, he was strangely unlike himself. Instead of being happy to be out of doors again, instead of frolicking with his friends, he was silent and sad at heart. He wondered why he cared so little for the feasts and games and songs

TO ARMS!

that he had delighted in only a few weeks before. Now, they did not interest him. It seemed to him that a man ought to have something better to do than simply to eat and drink, and wear fine clothes. Because of his own pain and feebleness he felt sorrier than ever before for the lame, and blind, and hungry beggars who came to his door, and his only pleasure was in giving them money and clothes and food.

As he listened to the talk in the market-place by day, and in his father's house at evening, he heard many stories of the wars. Men told how houses were burned, fields and vineyards trampled and ruined; how women and children and helpless old men were killed, or left to die of hunger and cold. When he lay sleepless at night, he seemed to see again the battle-field of San Giovanni, and the faces of cruel men attacking, and of miserable victims wounded and falling. In these hours Francis doubted if war could be the glorious thing it had always seemed to him.

But when his friends began to tell him of new fighting in the south of Italy, and of a company of soldiers who were going from Assisi to join the army of a famous knight, called Walter of Brienne, all was changed. The old love for battle and glory woke up in his heart, and Francis made haste to grow strong again that he might be ready to go to war.

These were exciting days for the invalid. The colour came back to his cheeks and his eyes danced with joy at sight of the rich clothes he was to wear, the beautiful horse he was to ride, the bright shield

GOD'S TROUBADOUR

he was to carry. He forgot that he was but a page, and that his first fight had ended in defeat. He dreamed of winning great battles; of marrying a beautiful princess; of living in a magnificent palace, or riding to the wars at the head of knights and soldiers of his own.

Assisi was full of noise and battle in these days. Companies of soldiers rode through the narrow streets so recklessly that the folk on foot hurried into doorways, and stood open-mouthed with fear while the riders passed. In the market-place men talked in eager groups. The voices were loud and excited, but louder still rang out the sharp blows of hammer on anvil, for every smith who knew how to make or to mend armour was busy from morning to night. Furnaces stood in the open square, where the fires looked pale in the sunshine. Gay esquires brought from their masters bent or broken pieces of fine wrought steel, common soldiers brought their own clumsier armour; and the small boys of the city stood in admiring circles about the sounding anvils, and thought that, next to being a soldier, one would like to be a smith.

All this hurry of preparation was strong medicine to Francis. He forgot that he had been sick. He forgot that war had ever looked an evil thing to him. With his friends he was once more the gayest of companions, and he needed no urging to sing to them, to their hearts' content. Over and over he sang:

TO ARMS!

“I love the gay spring weather,
And all the trees a-flower,
When a hundred birds together
Make music every hour;
But it sets my heart a-beating
To see the broad tents spread,
And bright-armed warriors meeting,
And banners floating red.
When camp and street are stirring;
When the city gates stand wide;
When bands of knights are spurring
Through all the countryside.

“I know a joy dearer
Than food, or drink, or rest,
When the battle-shouts come nearer,
When flash bright sword and crest;
When above the trumpet’s braying
And shrill cries of distress,
I hear the mournful neighing
Of brave steeds riderless.”

Francis seemed to have become more boastful and more gay than ever, so that even his friends wondered at him, and asked him laughingly: “What is it that makes you so merry?” and he answered proudly: “I know that I am going to be a great prince.”

Vain as he was, however, Francis never quite forgot that brave deeds and not fine garments make a good soldier. Among the company of knights who were going from Assisi, there was one who had for years been a great fighter, but who had suffered misfortune, and was now so poor that his clothing

GOD'S TROUBADOUR

was actually ragged. To him Francis gave his own new coat and mantle, and the other accepted the gift quite simply, knowing that rich clothes are worth little, but that kind hearts are worth much.

When the good-byes were said and the horsemen clattered out of the city gate, no heart in all the company was so light as that of Francis Bernardone.

His mother watched him with grave eyes, remembering how many times she had seen the towers of Perugia fade into the red sky at sunset, and had prayed that her boy might come back to her. Now, he was going again, not to Perugia, but far to the south, to a country that she had never known. She wondered how he could smile at her so gaily as he rode away.