

accept the guidance of some strongly directive force. Naturally, there will be experiments and mistakes, but by a system of trial and mistake, it appears that we shall attain a working plan based on fidelity to fact.

It is most interesting to note this reaching forth for better things in the gropings of modern writings. As a barometer of thought, contemporary literature is curiously diverse and certainly at extreme cross-purposes. Yet even the occasional reader is forced to recognize the odd fact that an increasing importance of treatment and position is given to the person of a gentle bird-lover who, some seven centuries ago, prayed on the brown slopes of the Umbrian hills. In view of this distinctive trend of thought, does it not seem that society is more interested in the arriving at stability through simplicity rather than through complexity? For Francis Bernadone was essentially a simple man whose life teaches a lesson, not of idealism and systemology, but of an Ideal.

Since in their choice of Saint Francis as a poetic or romantic figure modern writers are inspired by reasons as varied as those which motivate our active social workers, it is significant that he has not been chosen as the naughty subject of the scurrilous "debunkers": neither has he been considered a worthwhile biological specimen for the biographers who so ingeniously attribute all the intricacies of human nature to chemical secretions and mental complexes—and this during a period when these groups dominate the field of literary biography. It must be that St. Francis is far too simple for such an approach. To the great majority of authors, he is a symbol of escapism—a synonym for birds, clouds, trees and sky—a glorified naturalist. As such he is not at all repellent; rather is he a "nice" person and the accident of his religious views matters not at all. Perhaps you remember Armel O'Connor's evaluation of this pollyanna element in appreciation of the saint:

*A Lady in the latest gown
Speaks to me thus in London Town:
"Of all the saints that really were,
I almost think that I prefer
Francesco of Assisi. He
Seems absolutely sweet to me."
Then to her looking glass she goes
And puts fresh powder on her nose.*

Well, well . . . we are so glad that she is pleased. One can imagine the little brown company rocking with charitable glee had the sweet Lady of the Portiuncula whispered to them that they were to be known as "cute." Still I am fairly sure that the mean looking mendicant must enjoy his new role of boudoir adornment even though the poet rather touchingly concludes,

*Many a mile from London Town
A happy spirit clad in brown,
Ragged but woodland-scented, clean,
Dances and sings before his Queen,
Phantom but ringing laughter fills
Wide heavens over noble hills,
When Fashion deigns to call him sweet.
Who bled from heart and hands and feet.*

The attitude of Fashion is so lacking in taste that it must be passed over hurriedly. Yet a pertinent remark is in order: one must never be too optimistic of reconversion in the case of our brethren of our religious affiliations who profess an exquisite devotion to the Franciscan Ideal. Oftentimes, such men admire a spiritualized Pied Piper who had an amazing power over the gentle birds and beasts of the fields. Their position is germane to that entertained by the dilettantes of literature.

There is a small group of writers, truly spiritual thinkers and visioners of greatness, to whom Il Poverello is a living force for the improvement of individual and social conduct. They look to him today particularly and relive the life of their model, urgently desiring that they

*" . . . might wake St. Francis in you all
Brother of birds and trees, God's Troubadour,
Blinded with weeping for the sad and poor:
Our wealth undone, all strict Franciscan men,
Come, let us chant the canticle again
Of mother earth and the enduring sun.
God make each soul the lowly leper's slave;
God make us saints and brave."*

It is from such sentiments as these that really constructive thinking follows. When society realizes that it needs most badly the freedom of companionship with fellow-men so that "each soul (is) the lowly leper's slave" and that in order to be saints we must necessarily be brave, then there will be hope for relative surcease from the disease of our times. With such writers there is the permanent knowledge that Francis is as ageless as the perennial Peter Pan, and without being irreverent, as delightful and charming as that literary creation. They have learned from their subject that life cannot be divorced from God; that the easiest way to Him is not through the noise of words or the expression of fine formulae but by way of folly and childishness, for God so loves the simple child and him who becomes so cheerfully a fool for His sake. So Francis never attempted to appear other than a fool, but to us, through the lenses of time, he is a glorious fool who did not recognize limits to love. He has taught that a single soul with a simple purpose, from which