

**STORIES OF THE  
PAINTERS**



“THE MADONNA AND CHILD,” BY FILIPPO LIPPI

*“The Infant Christ had the curly golden hair of the baby Filippino.”*

# STORIES OF THE PAINTERS

by

*Amy Steedman*



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TO  
MARGARET JUNE



## ABOUT THIS BOOK

IN his *Child's Garden of Verses* a great writer, Robert Louis Stevenson, once told the children for whom he wrote that:

“The world is so full of a number of things  
We all ought to be as happy as kings.”

There are indeed all kinds of interesting and beautiful things in the world to delight us, and we need never go far to find them. There are the poems and stories of great writers, for instance. What a perfect treasure of happiness can be found between the pages of a book! But to understand and appreciate the loveliness of the poem or the grandeur of the story it is often necessary for us to learn the language in which the poem or story is written, and this may be a difficult task. So the wide world Kingdom of Literature, full of delight as it is, is fenced round with difficulties for those who know no language but their own.

There is, however, another magic kingdom of delight which needs no knowledge of foreign tongues to open wide its gates to us, and that is the Kingdom of Art, about which this book will tell you.

We do not need to understand Italian to have our hearts touched by the beauty of a Madonna and Child by Botticelli, or Spanish to be impressed by the dignity and splendour of the figure of a Spanish king painted by Velasquez. Art, like music, speaks a universal language; to appreciate its loveliness we have only to use our eyes.

But our eyes need to be trained, and the best way of training the eye to see and understand beauty is to put constantly before it beautiful things to look upon. In this book you will find reproductions of some of the most beautiful paintings in the world, and my hope is that, living in company with these beautiful paintings, and studying them carefully from time to time, you may learn by degrees to unlock the secret of their loveliness and delight.

Side by side with the pictures you will find the stories of the men who painted them, for it is well for us to know what manner of men these painters were, how and when they lived, and what it was that made them great. They are among the world's best benefactors. They have shown us "the beauty and the wonder and the power, the shape of things, their colour, lights, and shades, changes, surprises," and we owe to them more than we can ever pay, in gratitude and love, for the great heritage they have left us.

AMY STEEDMAN

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# THE ITALIAN SCHOOL OF PAINTING

## GIOTTO

*(1276–1337)*

IT was more than six hundred years ago that a little peasant baby was born in the small village of Vespignano, not far from the beautiful city of Florence, in Italy. The baby's father, an honest, hard-working countryman, was called Bondone, and the name he gave to his little son was Giotto.

Life was rough and hard in that country home, but the peasant baby grew into a strong, hardy boy, learning early what cold and hunger meant. The hills which surrounded the village were grey and bare, save where the silver of the olive trees shone in the sunlight, or the tender green of the shooting corn made the valley beautiful in early spring. In summer there was little shade from the blazing sun as it rode high in the blue sky and the grass which grew among the grey rocks was often burnt and brown. But, nevertheless, it was here that the sheep of the village would be turned out to find what food they could, tended and watched by one of the village boys.

So it happened that when Giotto was ten years old his father sent him to take care of the sheep upon the

## *THE ITALIAN SCHOOL*

hillside. Country boys had then no schools to go to or lessons to learn, and Giotto spent long happy days, in sunshine and rain, as he followed the sheep from place to place, wherever they could find grass enough to feed on. But Giotto did something else besides watching his sheep. Indeed, he sometimes forgot all about them, and many a search he had to gather them all together again. For there was one thing he loved doing better than all beside, and that was to try to draw pictures of the things he saw around him.

It was no easy matter for the little shepherd lad. He had no pencils or paper, and he had never, perhaps, seen a picture in all his life. But all this mattered little to him. Out there, under the blue sky, his eyes made pictures for him out of the fleecy white clouds as they slowly changed from one form to another. He learned to know exactly the shape of every flower and how it grew; he noticed how the olive trees laid their silver leaves against the blue background of the sky that peeped in between, and how his sheep looked as they stooped to eat, or lay down in the shadow of a rock.

Nothing escaped his keen, watchful eyes, and then with eager hands he would sharpen a piece of stone, choose out the smoothest rock, and try to draw on its flat surface all those wonderful shapes which had filled his eyes with their beauty. Olive trees, flowers, birds, and beasts were there, but especially his sheep, for they were his friends and companions who were always near him, and he could draw them in a different way each time they moved.

## GIOTTO

Now it fell out that one day a great painter from Florence came riding through the valley and over the hills where Giotto was feeding his sheep. The name of the great master was Cimabue, and he was the most wonderful artist in the world, so men said. He had painted a picture which had made all Florence rejoice. The Florentines had never seen anything like it before, and yet it was but a strange-looking portrait of the Madonna and Child, scarcely like a real woman or a real baby at all. Still, it seemed to them a perfect wonder, and Cimabue was honoured as one of the city's greatest men.

The road was lonely as it wound along. There was nothing to be seen but waves of grey hills on every side, so the stranger rode on, scarcely lifting his eyes as he went. Then suddenly he came upon a flock of sheep nibbling the scanty sunburnt grass, and a little brown-faced shepherd-boy gave him a cheerful "Good-day, master."

There was something so bright and merry in the boy's smile that the great man stopped and began to talk to him. Then his eye fell upon the smooth flat rock over which the boy had been bending, and he started with surprise.

"Who did that?" he asked quickly, and he pointed to the outline of a sheep scratched upon the stone.

"It is the picture of one of my sheep there," answered the boy, hanging his head with a shamefaced look. "I drew it with this," and he held out towards the stranger the sharp stone he had been using.

"Who taught you to do this?" asked the master, as

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he looked more carefully at the lines drawn on the rock.

The boy opened his eyes wide with astonishment. "Nobody taught me, master," he said. "I only try to draw the things that my eyes see."

"How would you like to come with me to Florence and learn to be a painter?" asked Cimabue, for he saw that the boy had a wonderful power in his little rough hands.

Giotto's cheeks flushed, and his eyes shone with joy.

"Indeed, master, I would come most willingly," he cried, "if only my father will allow it."

So back they went together to the village, but not before Giotto had carefully put his sheep into the fold, for he was never one to leave his work half done.

Bondone was amazed to see his boy in company with such a grand stranger, but he was still more surprised when he heard of the stranger's offer. It seemed a golden chance, and he gladly gave his consent.

Why, of course the boy should go to Florence if the gracious master would take him and teach him to become a painter. The home would be lonely without the boy who was so full of fun and as bright as a sunbeam. But such chances were not to be met with every day, and he was more than willing to let him go.

So the master set out, and the boy Giotto went with him to Florence to begin his training.

The studio where Cimabue worked was not at all like those artists' rooms which we now call studios. It

## GIOTTO

was much more like a workshop, and the boys who went there to learn how to draw and paint were taught first how to grind and prepare the colours and then to mix them. They were not allowed to touch a brush or pencil for a long time, but only to watch their master at work, and learn all that they could from what they saw him do.

So there the boy Giotto worked and watched, but when his turn came to use the brush, to the amazement of all, his pictures were quite unlike anything which had ever been painted before in the workshop. Instead of copying the stiff, unreal figures, he drew real people, real animals, and all the things which he had learned to know so well on the grey hillside, when he watched his father's sheep. Other artists had painted the Madonna and Infant Christ, but Giotto painted a mother and a baby.

And before long this worked such a wonderful change that it seemed indeed as if the art of making pictures had been born again. To us his work still looks stiff and strange, but in it was the beginning of all the beautiful pictures that belong to us now.

Giotto did not only paint pictures, he worked in marble as well. To-day, if you walk through Florence, the City of Flowers, you will still see its fairest flower of all, the tall white campanile or bell-tower, "Giotto's tower" as it is called. There it stands in all its grace and loveliness like a tall white lily against the blue sky, pointing ever upward, in the grand old faith of the shepherd-boy. Day after day it calls to prayer and to

## *THE ITALIAN SCHOOL*

good works, as it has done all these hundreds of years since Giotto designed and helped to build it.

Some people call his pictures stiff and ugly, for not every one has wise eyes to see their beauty, but the loveliness of this tower can easily be seen by all. There the white doves circle round and round, and rest in the sheltering niches of the delicately carved arches; there at the call of its bell the black-robed Brothers of Pity hurry past to their works of mercy. In the square below the little children play, and sometimes stop to stare at the marble pictures, set in the first story of the tower, low enough to be seen from the street. Their special favourite is perhaps the picture of the shepherd sitting under his tent, with the sheep in front, and with the funniest little dog keeping watch at the side.

Giotto always had a great love for animals, and whenever it was possible he would squeeze one into a corner of his pictures. He was sixty years old when he designed this wonderful tower and cut some of the marble pictures with his own hand, but you can see that the memory of those old days when he ran barefoot about the hills and tended his sheep was with him still. Just such another little puppy must have often played with him in those long-ago days before he became a great painter and was still only a merry, brown-faced boy, making pictures with a sharp stone upon the smooth rocks.

Up and down the narrow streets of Florence now, the great painter would walk and watch the faces of the people as they passed. And his eyes would still make



RELIEF IN MARBLE, BY GIOTTO

*“The shepherd sitting under his tent, with the sheep in front.”*

## *THE ITALIAN SCHOOL*

pictures of them and their busy life, just as they used to do with the olive trees, the sheep, and the clouds.

In those days nobody had thought of having pictures in their houses, and only the walls of the churches were painted. So the pictures, or frescoes, as they were called, were of course all about sacred subjects, either stories out of the Bible or of the lives of the saints. And as there were few books, and the poor people did not know how to read, these frescoed walls were the only story-books they had.

What a joy those pictures of Giotto's must have been, then, to those poor folk! They looked at the little baby Jesus sitting on His mother's knee, wrapped in swaddling bands, just like one of their own little ones, and it made Him seem a very real baby. The wise men who talked together and pointed to the shining star overhead looked just like any of the great nobles of Florence. And there at the back were the two horses looking on with wise interested eyes, just as any of their own horses might have done.

It seemed to make the story of Christmas a thing which had really happened, instead of a far-away tale which had little meaning for them. Heaven and the Madonna were not so far off after all. And it comforted them to think that the Madonna had been a real woman like themselves, and that the Jesu Bambino would stoop to bless them still, just as He leaned forward to bless the wise men in the picture.

How real too would seem the old story of the meeting of Anna and Joachim at the Golden Gate,



THE VISIT OF THE MAGI, BY GIOTTO

*“He leaned forward to bless the wise men.”*

## *THE ITALIAN SCHOOL*

when they could gaze upon the two homely figures under the narrow gateway. No visionary saints these, but just a simple husband and wife, meeting each other with joy after a sad separation, and yet with the touch of heavenly meaning shown by the angel who hovers above and places a hand upon each head.

It was not only in Florence that Giotto did his work. His fame spread far and wide, and he went from town to town eagerly welcomed by all. We can trace his footsteps as he went, by those wonderful old pictures which he spread with loving care over the bare walls of the churches, lifting, as it were, the curtain that hides Heaven from our view and bringing some of its joys to earth.

Then, at Assisi, he covered the walls and ceiling of the church with the wonderful frescoes of the life of St. Francis; and the little round commonplace Arena Chapel of Padua is made exquisite inside by his pictures of the life of our Lord.

In the days when Giotto lived, the towns of Italy were continually quarrelling with one another, and there was always fighting going on somewhere. The cities were built with a wall all round them, and the gates were shut each night to keep out their enemies. But often the fighting was between different families inside the city, and the grim old palaces in the narrow streets were built tall and strong that they might be the more easily defended.

In the midst of all this war and quarrelling Giotto lived his quiet, peaceful life, the friend of every one

## GIOTTO

and the enemy of none. Rival towns sent for him to paint their churches with his heavenly pictures, and the people who hated Florence forgot that he was a Florentine. He was just Giotto, and he belonged to them all. His brush was the white flag of truce which made men forget their strife and angry passions, and turned their thoughts to holier things.

Even the great poet Dante did not scorn to be a friend of the peasant painter, and we still have the portrait which Giotto painted of him in an old fresco at Florence. Later on, when the great poet was a poor unhappy exile, Giotto met him again at Padua and helped to cheer some of those sad grey days, made so bitter by strife and injustice.

Now when Giotto was beginning to grow famous, it happened that the Pope was anxious to have the walls of the great Cathedral of St. Peter at Rome decorated. So he sent messengers all over Italy to find out who were the best painters, that he might invite them to come and do the work.

The messengers went from town to town and asked every artist for a specimen of his painting. This was gladly given, for it was counted a great honour to help to make St. Peter's beautiful.

By-and-by the messengers came to Giotto and told him their errand. The Pope, they said, wished to see one of his drawings to judge if he was fit for the great work. Giotto, who was always most courteous, "took a sheet of paper and a pencil dipped in a red colour, then, resting his elbow on his side, with one turn of the



THE MEETING OF ANNA AND JOACHIM, BY GIOTTO

*“Two homely figures outside the narrow gateway.”*

## GIOTTO

hand he drew a circle so perfect and exact that it was a marvel to behold." "Here is your drawing," he said to the messenger, with a smile, handing him the drawing.

"Am I to have nothing more than this?" asked the man, staring at the red circle in astonishment and disgust.

"That is enough and to spare," answered Giotto. "Send it with the rest."

The messengers thought this must all be a joke.

"How foolish we shall look if we take only a round O to show his Holiness," they said.

But they could get nothing else from Giotto, so they were obliged to be content and to send it with the other drawings, taking care to explain just how it was done.

The Pope and his advisers looked carefully over all the drawings, and, when they came to that round O, they knew that only a master-hand could have made such a perfect circle without the help of a compass. Without a moment's hesitation they decided that Giotto was the man they wanted, and they at once invited him to come to Rome to decorate the cathedral walls. So when the story was known the people became prouder than ever of their beloved painter, and the round O of Giotto has become a proverb to this day in Tuscany.

"Round as the O of Giotto, d'ye see;  
Which means as well done as a thing can be."

Later on, when Giotto was at Naples, he was painting in the palace chapel one very hot day, when the king came in to watch him at his work. It really was almost

## *THE ITALIAN SCHOOL*

too hot to move, and yet Giotto painted away busily.

“Giotto,” said the king, “if I were in thy place I would give up painting for a while and take my rest, now that it is so hot.”

“And, indeed, so I would most certainly do,” answered Giotto, “if I were in your place, your Majesty.”

It was these quick answers and his merry smile that charmed every one, and made the painter a favourite with rich and poor alike.

There are a great many stories told of him, and they all show what a sunny-tempered, kindly man he was.

It is said that one day he was standing in one of the narrow streets of Florence talking very earnestly to a friend, when a pig came running down the road in a great hurry. It did not stop to look where it was going, but ran right between the painter’s legs and knocked him flat on his back, putting an end to his learned talk.

Giotto scrambled to his feet with a rueful smile, and shook his finger at the pig, which was fast disappearing in the distance.

“Ah, well!” he said, “I suppose thou hadst as much right to the road as I had. Besides, how many gold pieces I have earned by the help of thy bristles, and never have I given any of thy family even a drop of soup in payment.”

Another time he went riding with a very learned lawyer into the country to look after his property. For when Bondone died, he left all his fields and his farm to his painter son. Very soon a storm came on, and the

## GIOTTO

rain poured down as if it never meant to stop.

“Let us seek shelter in this farmhouse and borrow a cloak,” suggested Giotto.

So they went in and borrowed two old cloaks from the farmer, and wrapped themselves up from head to foot. Then they mounted their horses and rode back together to Florence.

Presently the lawyer turned to look at Giotto, and immediately burst into a loud laugh. The rain was running from the painter’s cap, he was splashed with mud, and the old cloak made him look like a very forlorn beggar.

“Dost think if any one met thee now, they would believe that thou art the best painter in the world?” laughed the lawyer.

Giotto’s eyes twinkled as he looked at the funny figure riding beside him, for the lawyer was very small, and had a crooked back, and rolled up in the old cloak he looked like a bundle of rags.

“Yes!” he answered quickly, “any one would certainly believe I was a great painter, if he could but first persuade himself that thou dost know thy A B C.”

In all these stories we catch glimpses of the good-natured kindly painter, with his love of jokes, and his own ready answers, and all the time we must remember that he was filling the world with beauty, which it still treasures to-day, helping to sow the seeds of that great tree of Art which was to blossom so gloriously in later years.

## *THE ITALIAN SCHOOL*

And when he had finished his earthly work it was in his own cathedral, “St. Mary of the Flowers,” that they laid him to rest, while the people mourned him as a good friend as well as a great painter. There he lies in the shadow of his lily tower, whose slender grace and delicate-tinted marbles keep his memory ever fresh in his beautiful city of Florence.

## FRA ANGELICO

(1387–1455)

NEARLY a hundred years had passed by since Giotto lived and worked in Florence, and in the same hilly country where he used to tend his sheep another great painter was born.

Many other artists had come and gone, and had added their golden links of beauty to the chain of Art which bound these years together. Some day you will learn to know all their names and what they did. But now we will only single out, here and there, a few of those names which are perhaps greater than the rest. Just as on a clear night, when we look up into the starlit sky, it would bewilder us to try and remember all the stars, so we learn first to know those that are most easily recognized—the Plough, or the Great Bear, as they shine with a clear steady light against the background of a thousand lesser stars.

The name by which this second great painter is known is Fra Angelico, but that was only the name he earned in later years. His baby name was Guido, and his home was in a village close to where Giotto was born.

He was not a poor boy, and did not need to work

## *THE ITALIAN SCHOOL*

in the fields or tend the sheep on the hillside. Indeed, he might have soon become rich and famous, for his wonderful talent for painting would have quickly brought him honours and wealth if he had gone out into the world. But instead of this, when he was a young man of twenty he made up his mind to enter the convent at Fiesole, and to become a monk of the Order of Saint Dominic.

Every brother, or frate, as he is called, who leaves the world and enters the life of the convent, is given a new name, and his old name is never used again. So young Guido was called Fra Giovanni, or Brother John. But it is not by that name that he is known best, but that of Fra Angelico, or the angelic brother—a name which was given him afterwards because of his pure and beautiful life, and the heavenly pictures which he painted.

With all his great gifts in his hands, with all the years of youth and pleasure stretching out green and fair before him, he said good-bye to earthly joys, and chose rather to serve his Master Christ in the way he thought was right.

The monks of St. Dominic were the great preachers of those days—men who tried to make the world better by telling people what they ought to do, and teaching them how to live honest and good lives. But there are other ways of teaching people besides preaching, and the young monk who spent his time bending over the illuminated prayer-book, seeing with his dreamy eyes visions of saints and white-robed angels, was preparing



THE ANNUNCIATION, BY FRA ANGELICO

*“The gentle Virgin bending before the Angel messenger.”*



THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT, BY FRA ANGELICO

*"The Madonna in her robe of purest blue  
holing the baby close in her arms."*

## *FRA ANGELICO*

to be a greater teacher than them all. The words of the preacher monks have passed away, and the world pays little heed to them now, but the teaching of Fra Angelico, the silent lessons of his wonderful pictures, are as fresh and clear to-day as they were in those far-off years.

Great trouble was in store for the monks of the little convent at Fiesole, which Fra Angelico and his brother Benedetto had entered. Fierce struggles were going on in Italy between different religious parties, and at one time the little band of preaching monks were obliged to leave their peaceful home at Fiesole to seek shelter in other towns. But, as it turned out, this was good fortune for the young painter-monk, for in those hill towns of Umbria where the brothers sought refuge there were pictures to be studied which delighted his eyes with their beauty, and taught him many a lesson which he could never have learned on the quiet slopes of Fiesole.

The hill towns of Italy are very much the same to-day as they were in those days. Long winding roads lead upwards from the plain below to the city gates, and there on the summit of the hill the little town is built. The tall white houses cluster close together, and the overhanging eaves seem almost to meet across the narrow paved streets, and always there is the great square, with the church the centre of all.

It would be almost a day's journey to follow the white road that leads down from Perugia across the plain to the little hill town of Assisi, and many a spring morning saw the painter-monk setting out on the convent donkey before sunrise and returning when

## *THE ITALIAN SCHOOL*

the sun had set. He would thread his way up between the olive trees until he reached the city gates, and pass into the little town without hindrance. For the followers of St. Francis in their brown robes would be glad to welcome a stranger monk, though his black robe showed that he belonged to a different order. Any one who came to see the glory of their city, the church where their saint lay, which Giotto had covered with his wonderful pictures, was never refused admittance.

How often then must Fra Angelico have knelt in the dim light of that lower church of Assisi, learning his lesson on his knees, as was ever his habit. Then home again he would wend his way, his eyes filled with visions of those beautiful pictures, and his hand longing for the pencil and brush, that he might add new beauty to his own work from what he had learned.

Several years passed by, and at last the brothers were allowed to return to their convent home of San Dominico at Fiesole, and there they lived peaceably for a long time. We cannot tell exactly what pictures our painter-monk painted during those peaceful years, but we know he must have been looking out with wise, seeing eyes, drinking in all the beauty that was spread around him.

At his feet lay Florence, with its towers and palaces, the Arno running through it like a silver thread, and beyond, the purple of the Tuscan hills. All around on the sheltered hillside were green vines and fruit trees, olives and cypresses, fields flaming in spring with scarlet anemones or golden with great yellow tulips,

## *FRA ANGELICO*

and hedges of rose bushes covered with clusters of pink blossoms. No wonder, then, such beauty sunk into his heart, and we see in his pictures the pure fresh colour of the spring flowers, with no shadow of dark or evil things.

Soon the fame of the painter began to be whispered outside the convent walls, and reached the ears of Cosimo de Medici, one of the powerful rulers of Florence. He offered the monks a new home, and, when they were settled in the convent of San Marco in Florence, he invited Fra Angelico to fresco the walls.

One by one the heavenly pictures were painted upon the walls of the cells and cloister of the new home. How the brothers must have crowded round to see each new fresco as it was finished, and how anxious they would be to see which picture was to be near their own particular bed. In all the frescoes, whether he painted the gentle Virgin bending before the angel messenger, the Presentation in the Temple, or the glory of the ascended Lord, the artist-monk would always introduce one or more of the convent's special saints, which made the brothers feel that the pictures were their very own. Fra Angelico had a kind word and smile for all the brothers. He was never impatient, and no one ever saw him angry, for he was as humble and gentle as the saints whose pictures he loved to paint.

It is told of him, too, that he never took a brush or pencil in his hand without a prayer that his work might be to the glory of God. Often when he painted the sufferings of our Lord, the tears would be seen running



THE PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE,  
BY FRA ANGELICO

*The heavenly picture painted upon the wall of a cell.*

## *FRA ANGELICO*

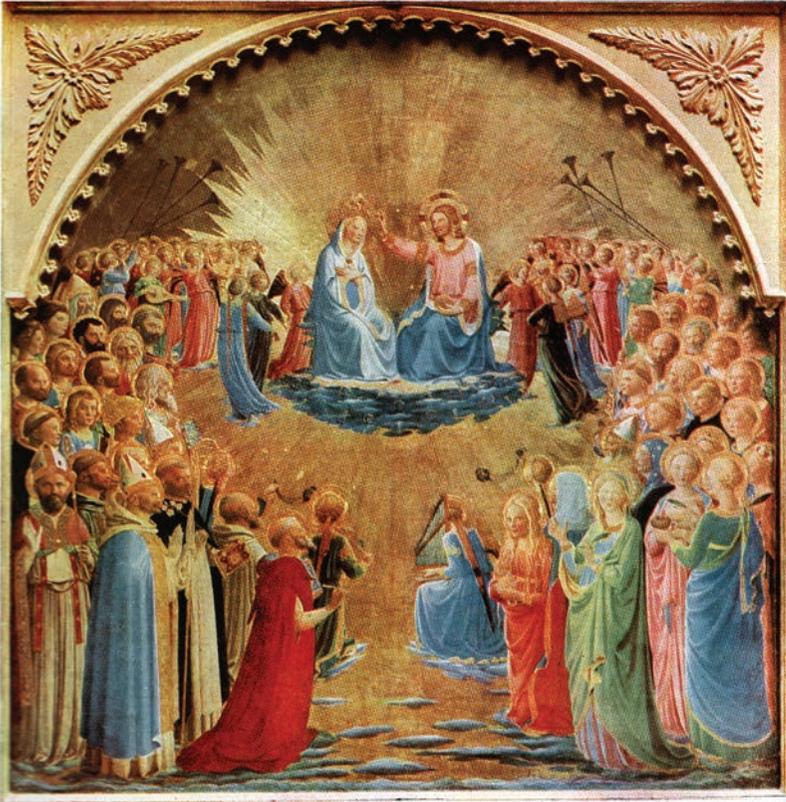
down his cheeks and almost blinding his eyes.

There is an old legend which tells of a certain monk who, when he was busily illuminating a page of his missal, was called away to do some service for the poor. He went unwillingly, the legend says, for he longed to put the last touches to the holy picture he was painting; but when he returned, lo! he found his work finished by angel hands.

Often when we look at some of Fra Angelico's pictures we are reminded of this legend, and feel that he too might have been helped by those same angel hands. Did they indeed touch his eyes that he might catch glimpses of a heaven where saints were swinging their golden censers, and white-robed angels danced in the flowery meadows of Paradise? We cannot tell; but this we know, that no other painter has ever shown us such a glory of heavenly things.

Heaven was a very real place to the angelic painter, and he seemed to live in the very spirit of it as he painted his saints and angels circling round the throne of the Majesty on high against his wonderful backgrounds of shining gold. The very colours he used were purer and more flower-like than what we see in other paintings. One might almost imagine that it was with flowers he painted—the blue of delphiniums, the tender green of young leaves, the red of the roses, and the transparent yellow of fair daffodils. Purity of colour was matched to purity of design and both to purity of thought.

He did not care for fame or power, this dreamy painter of angels, and when the Pope invited him to



“THE CORONATION OF THE VIRGIN,”  
BY FRA ANGELICO

*“A heaven where saints were swinging their golden censers.”*

## *FRA ANGELICO*

Rome to paint the walls of a chapel there, he thought no more of the glory and honour than if he was but called upon to paint another cell at San Marco.

But when the Pope had seen what this quiet monk could do, he called the artist to him.

“A man who can paint such pictures,” he said, “must be a good man, and one who will do well whatever he undertakes. Will you, then, do other work for me, and become my Archbishop at Florence?” But the painter was startled and dismayed.

“I cannot teach or preach or govern men,” he said, “I can but use my gift of painting for the glory of God. Let me rather be as I am, for it is safer to obey than to rule.”

But though he would not take this honour himself, he told the Pope of a friend of his, a humble brother, Fra Antonino, at the convent of San Marco, who was well fitted to do the work. So the Pope took the painter’s advice, and the choice was so wise and good, that to this day the Florentine people talk lovingly of their good bishop Antonino.

It was while he was at work in Rome that Fra Angelico died, so his body does not rest in his own beloved Florence. But if his body lies in Rome, his gentle spirit still seems to hover around the old convent of San Marco, and there we learn to know and love him best. Little wonder that in after ages they looked upon him almost as a saint, and gave him the title of “Beato,” or the blessed angel-painter.

## MASACCIO

(1401–1428)

IT must have been about the same time when Fra Angelico was covering the walls of San Marco with his angel pictures, that a very different kind of painter was working in the Carmine church in Florence.

This was no gentle, refined monk, but just an ordinary man of the people—an awkward, good-natured person, who, as long as he had pictures to paint, cared for little else. Why, he would even forget to ask for payment when his work was done; and as to taking care of his clothes, or trying to keep himself tidy, that was a thing he never thought of!

What trouble his mother must have had with him when he was a boy! It was no use sending him on an errand, he would forget it before he had gone a hundred yards, and he was so careless and untidy that it was enough to make any one lose patience with him. But only let him have a pencil and a smooth surface on which to draw, and he was a different boy.

It is said that even now, in the little town of Castello San Giovanni, some eighteen miles from Florence, where Tommaso was born, there are still some wonderfully



DRAWING, BY MASACCIO

*"His models were ordinary Florentine youths."*

## THE ITALIAN SCHOOL

good figures to be seen, drawn by him when he was quite a little boy. Certainly there was no carelessness and nothing untidy about his work.

As the boy grew older all his longings would turn towards Florence, the beautiful city where there was everything to learn and to see, and so he was sent to become a pupil in the studio of Masolino, a great Florentine painter. But though his drawings improved, his careless habits continued the same.

“There goes Tommaso the painter,” the people would say, watching the big awkward figure passing through the streets on his way to work. “Truly he pays but little heed to his appearance. Look now at his untidy hair and the holes in his boots.”

“Ay, indeed!” another would answer; “and yet it is said if only people paid him all they owed he would have gold enough and to spare. But what cares he so long as he has his paints and brushes? ‘Masaccio’ would be a fitter name for him than Tommaso.”

So the name Masaccio, or Ugly Tom, came to be that by which the big awkward painter was known. But no one thinks of the unkind meaning of the nickname now, for Masaccio is honoured as one of the great names in the history of Art.

This painter, careless of many things, cared with all his heart and soul for the work he had chosen to do. It seemed to him that painters had always failed to make their pictures like living things. The pictures they painted were flat, not round as a figure should be, and very often the feet did not look as if they were standing

## MASACCIO

on the ground at all, but pointed downwards as if they were hanging in the air.

So he worked with light and shadow and careful drawing until the figures he drew looked rounded instead of flat, and their feet were planted firmly on the ground. His models were taken from the ordinary Florentine youths whom he saw daily in the studio, but he drew them as no one had drawn figures before. The buildings, too, he made to look like real houses leading away into the distance, and not just like a flat picture.

He painted many frescoes both in Florence and Rome, this Ugly Tom, but at the time the people did not pay him much honour, for they thought him just a great awkward fellow with his head always in the clouds. Perhaps if he had lived longer fame and wealth would have come to him, but he died when he was still a young man, and only a few realized how great he was.

But in after years, one by one, all the great artists would come to that little chapel of the Carmine there to learn their first lessons from those lifelike figures. Especially they would stand before the fresco which shows St. Peter baptizing a crowd of people. And in that fresco they would study more than all the figure of a boy who has just come out of the water, shivering with cold, the most natural figure that had ever been painted up to that time.

All things must be learnt little by little, and each new thing we know is a step onwards. So this figure of the shivering boy marks a higher step on the golden ladder of Art than any that had been touched before.

*THE ITALIAN SCHOOL*

And this alone would have made the name of Masaccio worthy to be placed upon the list of the world's great painters.



ST. PETER BAPTIZING THE YOUNG MAN,  
BY MASACCIO

*The figure of a boy shivering with cold.*