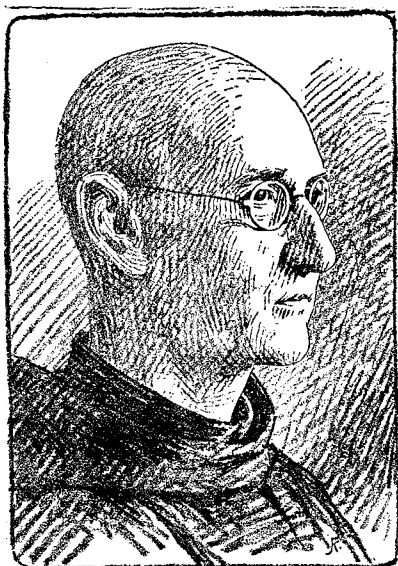


SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI

In the Pictures of Pedro Subercaseaux

By JOHANNES JORGENSEN



DOM PEDRO SUBERCASEAUX

NO life of man, perhaps not even the life of Christ was more subject to illustration than the life of the little Poor Man from Assisi. From the first rough picture on the coffin of the Saint down to the splendid and refined art of Maurice Denis in his masterly illustration on the Little Flowers of Saint Francis, all the greatest names of art follow each other in uninterrupted procession.

Herr Thode, in his voluminous book on the Beginning of Italian painting, gives us the first of the series, and century after century is adding fresh names to the glories of Renaissance and Baroque art.

No wonder then that Franciscan inspiration is producing new works even in this century. The present lines are meant as an introduction (if such a one be necessary) to a new pictorial life of the Umbrian Saint. Pedro Subercaseaux—this is the name of the artist—is no child of Europe. He comes to us from over the ocean, and his cradle stood on the shore of another ocean—yet farther away—he is a native of Chile. But there is European blood in his veins, and his spiritual youth took place on entirely old world ground. The Church of Rome gave him his intellectual and sentimental education, and Roman Catholic countries were the first goal of his wandering desires. The South American became a South European. The great shrines of Spain, the holy places of Italy saw the young pilgrim from over the sea dropping his staff and kneeling down in prayer.

Kneeling down in prayer—and rising to work! The old maxim runs—*Ora et labora*—"pray and work." And Pedro Subercaseaux was no lazy idler, no sight-seeing esthete, enjoying things of beauty only to himself. He was an artist, that is, a poet, whose materials are not verse and rhyme, but line and color. His sketchbook was a volume of hymns on the beauty of Italy. Not that tourist-haunted Italy that goes from Borlighera to Sorrento and is only a continuation of the French Riviera, with or without Monte Carlo's

demi-mondaines and suicides. But real Italy, true, rough, old-fashioned Italy—Italy of the small towns and the barren mountains, Franciscan Italy to say all about it—Italy in the grey frock of the friar and the worn coat of the peasant. This Italy is the Italy of Pedro Subercaseaux. There he is at home and at ease. There he sought the Saint he loved—and there he found him.

Because this is the truth about the work of the South American painter—Saint Francis *lives* in it. This is no lifeless revocation of a story from the past. Turn the pages of the volume, and you will find yourself not only in full, real Italy, but also in full, real thirteenth century. You will remark (and how could you not?) the historical exactitude of these pictures. See for instance Francis represented as *rex festi*, king of the festival—the garments, the musical instruments, the vessels and cups on the table—all is as it really was in thirteenth century Umbria. Or look at the splendid historical reconstruction of the old basilica of St. Peter's with the pigna in the midst of the paradiso. But—well, another might do the same! I think Eugene Burnaud did—although with less detail. This is not the thing.

If you feel so great a difference between the cold, well-drawn pictures of the Swiss painter and the work of Subercaseaux, it is because the latter of the two artists *lived* it all by himself. He is in the same relation to the Umbrian Saint as for instance Boutet de Monvel was to *his* heroine, Jeanne d'Arc. Works such as those are not only expressions of art—they are expressions of life.

They are not only speaking to the eyes—they are speaking to the soul.

And this is the reason why I appreciate so highly this new pictorial life of Saint Francis. Look at the young Assisi—merchant, praying down at San Damiano, before the old crucifix, and receiving the divine order "Go, Francis, and build up My Church—you see, it is falling in ruin!" Follow him to all the places of passion (but of triumph too) which marked his short existence. See him—then at the end of his life, in the hut of branches and mud, listening to the angel, rapt in ecstasy—"and if the angel had sounded one note more, it should have been death!"—and you will understand with all your soul and all your heart, what a great thing Christianity is, and what a great Christian Saint Francis was. And this, I suppose, was just what Pedro Subercaseaux would have you understand.

SUBERCASEAUX AND UMBRIA

By THOMAS J. SHAHAN

(Rector, the Catholic University)

FOR the first time since Cigoli a painter has satisfactorily revealed to the eye of faith the story of that

holy youth who long ago shed such a spiritual glory on all the slopes and vales of Umbria. In these remarkable scenes Saint Francis moves and acts with a higher truth—in an atmosphere of light and peace that could be caught only by a spirit akin to his own—one who



ST. FRANCIS DISOWNS HIS FATHER