

**FOLLOWERS OF ST.
FRANCIS: FOUR
PLAYS OF THE EARLY
FRANCISCAN LEGEND**

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Followers of St. Francis: four plays of the early Franciscan legend by Laurence Housman

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LAURENCE HOUSMAN

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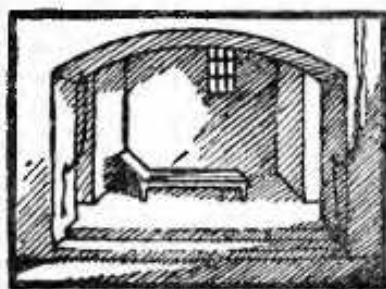


FOLLOWERS of St. FRANCIS

Four Plays of the Early Franciscan

Legend, by

LAURENCE HOUSMAN



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PREFACE

ONLY one of the four Franciscan plays which here follow has any close incidental connection with the life of St. Francis; and that is the only one which might properly have a place found for it in the *Little Plays*. But while continuing to illustrate the Franciscan legend in dramatic form, I did not intend to make a constructive sequel, and would sooner have let the *Little Plays* stand without further addition, if this small overflow had not come quite spontaneously, and rather against my arranged plan, which gave the preceding Cycle a fairly definite starting-point and a still more definite end. To force these other plays into the series would be a dislocating process, since all but the first would have to follow 'Sister Death,' an obvious anti-climax, destructive to the main scheme.

I would therefore ask my readers to regard these additional plays rather as commentaries on what has gone before, brought to life by the fact that Franciscanism retained its dramatic character after its founder was dead. More especially is the scene representing the death of Brother Leo a commentary

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rather than a self-contained play—so many of the dying man's words depending for their meaning on what has gone before. Those who have read the *Little Plays* will not, I hope, find the reminiscent passages uninteresting; those who have not may feel that a clue is missing to which they have some sort of a claim. This I have done my best to meet by adding an explanatory footnote, giving reference to previous events. In adopting the suggestion of M. Paul Sabatier, in his annotated edition of the *Speculum Perfectionis*, that 'Sister Giacomina' was the watcher and death-bed companion of this last and most faithful of the Poverello's disciples, I have rather strained my own chronology, since, in the *Little Plays*, the Lady Giacomina appears as a matronly figure at too early a stage of the story for her survival fifty years after the death of St. Francis to be possible. But as there is definite record that a lady bearing her name was still living at Assisi in the year 1273, it is more than probable that I dated her first meeting with Francis too early in his life and too late in hers; and it would be a sin against charity to deprive Brother Leo of his best possible comforter, merely to keep up the fiction of a chronological accuracy to which I do not pretend.

But if, for the reasons given, three of these scenes stand at a remove from the main scheme of what went before, 'Cure of Souls' could quite appropri-