

From Sta. Maria it is about four and a-half kilometres to Assisi. As one drives up to the town, the vast pile of the Church and Monastery of St. Francis dominates the scene. The earthly magnificence of this mass of buildings, started by Brother Elias, soon after the death of the Saint, makes it clear why the Zelanti, that group of brothers most devoted to Francis's Holy Poverty, fought the scheme with all the strength they had.

Swinging left on entering the town itself, one comes up a steep street into the fine Piazza of St. Francis, surrounded by arcades, while at the far end is the Romanesque portal of the lower church. St. Francis is a double church, the lower crypt-like church, built in 1228-32, being largely Romanesque, the upper, finished in 1253, being Gothic. The Lower Church is richly frescoed but so dark that it is almost impossible to appreciate the detail of the paintings. There is a Madonna by Cimabue in the north transept and in the vaulting above the choir is a number of frescoes reputed, rather doubtfully, to be by Giotto. The steps leading down from the nave go to a modern crypt where the coffin of the Saint can be seen. His remains, hidden by Brother Elias to prevent any neighbouring towns stealing them after the genial fashion of the Middle Ages, were only rediscovered in 1818.

After looking round the Lower Church, one can enter the Upper through the Sacristy, a stop being possible on the way to buy guide books, post-cards or souvenirs. The Upper Church is a great contrast to the Lower. High, light and uncluttered, the clear bright colours of the frescoes that cover all the walls give it a gaiety that seems much more in keeping with this happiest of Saints than the tomb-like Lower Church. Here, too, are reputed Giotto's, the lower frescoes of the nave, which record the life of St. Francis. But this ascription is nearly

as doubtful as that in the Lower Church.

Leaving S. Francisco, one follows the street of the same name, between tall old houses in pleasant-coloured stone. No. 11, the Public Hospital, on the right, is built of the remains of an old Pilgrim's Hospital, and has a fifteenth century Madonna and Saints on the facade. Opposite is the Giacobetti Palace, (No. 14), a seventeenth century palace that now houses the Municipal library. The way leads through the old Arch of the Seminary, marking the ancient limit of the walls, to the public square, a good centre for exploration of the town.

In the square itself the first and most striking thing is the Torre Comunale on the left. It is the Gothic bell-tower of the Town Hall, and not in any way connected with the church next door. In the lower courses of the tower are set the old standard brick and tile measures used by the Comune. The church next door, Santa Maria della Minerva, is of interest not



*The double Church of St. Francis*