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Obijt pridie Kal. Ianuaris anno M.DC.XL. in pago diocesis  
viennensis dicto Lalouuc & ubi plurimi sani fiunt. &c.*

LIFE OF SAINT JOHN  
FRANCIS REGIS

Of the Society of Jesus

*By*

Robert E. Holland, S. J.  
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*To My  
Parents and Sisters*



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## PREFACE

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This life of the sainted missionary, John Francis Regis, of the Society of Jesus, was undertaken by the author very much as a labor of love, and not altogether without a certain sense of justice, so to speak, toward a man highly honored in his own country, but of whom English-speaking readers of sacred biography know scarcely anything at all. Or, if indeed, a few may perhaps have heard of Saint Regis, still their ideas have been so obscured by the clouds of misunderstanding and even calumny which overshadowed the man himself when he lived, that it were better to know nothing at all than to lend credence to some of the things said of this Saint,—for instance, that he was headstrong and untractable, that he was even dismissed from the Society of Jesus.

It is the aim of this biography to tell in a simple and straightforward way the true story of what manner of man Saint John Francis Regis really was. The so-called “ultra-pious” method has been avoided,—yet, on the other hand, the idea of some recent writers, who seem to delight in emphasizing the human failings of the saints, is considered a more serious fault than over-idealization, and so finds no place in this book.

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The author wishes to acknowledge his deep indebtedness to all the French biographers of Saint John Francis Regis: Labroue, Bonnet, Daubenton, Cros, De Curley,—all of the Society of Jesus,—and to others. Practical help, too, and encouragement often came in various forms from Père Michel, S. J., of La Louvesc. Finally, the author wishes to thank many of his brethren for their generous assistance in preparing his work for the press.







THE SAINT IN THE WORLD



## INTRODUCTORY: ANCESTRY AND PARENTAGE

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It was probably on a cold and perhaps cheerless afternoon, the seventh of December, 1616, when a well-dressed but travel-stained youth of about nineteen years entered the city of Toulouse from the south. Having quit his native village, Fontcouverte, forever, he was bound with a light heart for the Jesuit Novitiate. It was indeed this lightness of heart that overcame the heaviness of his weary feet, for the journey had been long and tedious, but the goal, now in sight, was what spurred him onward down the dingy street. Coming at last to a massive pile of ancient architecture, the youth paused a moment before it, gazing up at its broad façade with rapt admiration. He was not much for outward show of emotions, but on this occasion a smile stole to his lips, and ascending the broad steps, he entered the Basilica of Saint Saturninus, whither his devotion was to lead him many times again in the future.

Pressing onward once more after his brief visit, he came at last to the new home of which he had been dreaming for many months. It was a plain and almost unhomelike building situated on a corner. The structure did not run in a parallel right angle with the intersecting streets on which it stood, but a small triangle of the house was cut off, and in this front was the main entrance.

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The door opened suddenly, for the youth was expected, and a man in a black soutane welcomed him with an embrace. The youth entered; the door closed behind him and thus began the noviceship of John Francis Regis.

John Francis Regis entered the Jesuit Novitiate leaving behind him at Fontcouverte a family sprung of ancient and famous stock. The name *Regis* first appears in old records at La Grasse. De Rey, the original ancestors were called; and Jean De Rey, the first of these, together with another Jean and an Ysernus De Rey, had left their names on public records as far back as 1398.

Those who have made careful research in the matter, find it most difficult to establish with certainty which Regis was the great-great-great-grandfather of the Saint; but we know that in 1537 lived Pierre Regis, who was certainly his great-great-grandfather.

Pierre Regis was of La Grasse, and at the date mentioned above, had acquired considerable property at Fontcouverte, where sixty years later the Saint was born. The secret of old Pierre's prosperity lay no doubt in the fact that he was a merchant in wines and oils, as was his elder son after him.

There is record of three children born to Pierre: Jean, the merchant; Antoine, the lawyer; and Antoinette, an only daughter. All three married. By his wife, Anne Martin, Jean had a son who was named for his grandfather, Pierre. Antoine married Marie de Martrin, who bore him two sons, Barthelemy, and Jean, the father of the future saint.

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Antoine built up a successful practice at law, and by careful investment of his money and by some political favor, acquired considerable property at Fontcouverte. His brother Jean was known among the peasantry as "Seigneur," on account of the numerous mills he erected for their use, with the legal provision, however, that the property should remain in the family. Jean's success in his father's mercantile business soon made him a wealthy man. His life was all prosperity until, unhappily, toward the end, he suffered much sorrow at the hands of his own son Pierre.

In 1582 we find Pierre managing his father's business. Three years later he was married to Claire de Mollet. After the marriage, relations between father and son still bore the same aspect of loving trust and filial devotion. It was not until Montmorency established a garrison of Huguenots at Carcassone, June 16, 1590, that trouble arose between Pierre and his father. The son was a loyal and generous Catholic, so that for him, the immediate making of his will and preparations for war were but logical consequences.

The will breathes such a spirit of generosity and practical Catholicism, that we are warranted in reproducing it here, at least in part :

"First of all he fortifies himself with the sign of the cross, saying: 'In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.' And recommends his soul to God the Father, the Son and Holy Ghost, and to all the Saints of Paradise, that they may receive it into the Kingdom

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of Heaven when it shall be released from his body. This same body he is desirous should be buried in the parish church of La Grasse, in the tomb of his ancestors; and should he die in the war or elsewhere he wills that his body be brought here.

“He wills that at his funeral twenty-four priests shall celebrate Mass; to each one shall be given five *sous*. . . He furthermore wills that twenty-four children be invited, dressed in robes of black cloth reaching to the feet, and each bearing a candle of a pound of wax. That there be held a novena for him at which the said twenty-four children shall assist in the aforesaid robes; and when they go out from Mass, he wills that a loaf be given to each, worth six *deniers*.

“Furthermore, he wills that on the ninth day of the novena and on his anniversary, the same honors be paid as at his funeral.

“He wills and ordains that every day for one year succeeding his death there shall be said and celebrated for the repose of his soul, one Holy Mass, and at the end of the said year, that his anniversary be kept.”

Thus Pierre first provides for the repose of his soul and finally comes to his temporal concerns. He makes liberal provision for his father and sister, (a child, probably, by Jean's second wife,) and then for his wife, who is with child. He makes the expected child his heir; and in default of proper delivery of his wife, all his wealth is to devolve upon his father.

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Pierre's courage and enthusiasm in joining the Catholic forces was not to be shared, or in the least understood by his father. The old man could not bear the loss of his beloved son, and thus opposed the project with might and main. All his remonstrances, however, were unavailing, and Pierre left for the war with his father's curse ringing in his ears. In the words of one of the Saint's recent biographers, the old man "avait eu le tort le plus grave de souhaiter malheur à son fils, quand Pierre prit congé de lui."

Pierre Regis fell at the siege of Villemur. The Huguenot leader opened a sudden attack, and rather than show their backs to the enemy, Regis and some of his companions more valiant than the rest, died in the attempt to hold their ground.

At home, too, misfortune settled upon Pierre's family. Claire de Mollet's child died shortly after birth.

Jean Regis, old and blind, broken with sorrow at his son's departure and subsequent death, was living out the remnant of his sad days. Sad days they seemed, but in the event he was blessed with a happiness far beyond his despairing hopes.

A young shepherdess was one day tending her flocks outside the ramparts of Villemur, when she was suddenly startled by the apparition of a soldier bleeding from many wounds. But what was her amazement when the spectre began to speak: "I am of the family of Regis," he told her; "I was killed in the siege of Villemur. I beg of you to go and tell my relatives that I wish to be

buried among my own and in consecrated ground." A search was made, and the body of Captain Pierre Regis, still recognizable, was discovered. Preparations for the burial were made at La Grasse and the body borne thither by hand. Poor old blind Jean was sitting quietly in his home when the melancholy procession approached. As the pallbearers came abreast the house, they felt overcome by a sudden weakness, and were forced to set down the coffin.

The scene that follows recalls David's lament over Absalom. Jean came out into the street crying aloud: "Alas, my son, I remember the time, — and woe the day for me, — when you went away to the war: I cursed you. If God has seen any disobedience in your act and has restored your ashes again to me in reparation, then I declare, my dearest boy, I grant the fullest pardon to your soul."

The rest of the old man's story is short, and we may be pardoned the space it has already taken, since it does not seem to be one of those mere legends that sometimes find their way into the lives of the saints. Jean was reconciled now, if not happy, with regard to the fate of his son. But the consolation of his presence was sorely missed. Hence it was that he adopted and made his brother's younger son, Barthelemy, his heir. Barthelemy took the place of a true son to the old and sightless man, caring for him devotedly until the last summons came.

We must now return to Antoine Regis and his two sons, Barthelemy and Jean. Antoine, the grandfather



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of Saint John Francis Regis, had, as we have said, made a success of his business and done much to make the family name loved and respected throughout the surrounding country. Barthelemy and Jean lived with their father and mother at Carcassone. It was here that Antoine died in 1571. The widow and her two sons then moved to Fontcouverte, where they carried on, until 1586, a sort of partnership with regard to their patrimony and the legacy Barthelemy had received from his uncle Jean. It is in a contract drawn up between the two brothers, relative to their estates, that we find a meagre description of the house in which Saint John Francis Regis was born. We are told that it was situated within the stronghold of Fontcouverte, bounded on the west and south respectively by the château of the Seigneur and the house of Pierre Raynaud; on the east and north by the moat of the stronghold.

Barthelemy Regis was twice married. His first wife, Anne de Baronis, died not long after her marriage with Barthelemy, leaving him the two children of her former husband. The second wife was the amiable Claire Daban, who cared so faithfully for the little stepchildren. Barthelemy, despite the hopes he had cherished, was destined never to have an heir, all his children dying before him. But, as Father Cros remarks, there was born into his family one who was to shed greater lustre on his name than any child of his own; for just twelve days after his marriage to Claire Daban, God sent to his brother Jean and to Marguerite, Jean's wife, a little son, Jean-Fran-

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gois, known to all the world as Saint John Francis Regis of the Society of Jesus.

Before we can begin the story of this great saint, there remains the discussion of a question which none raised until Father Cros, one of the Saint's recent biographers, discovered that Marguerite de Cugunhan was the happy mother of the Saint, not Madeleine d'Arse, as had theretofore been supposed.

There are documents dating back as far as 1402 in which occurs the name of *Cugunhan*. One of a later date, 1543, is the will of Philippe de Cugunhan, of Camplong, in which he makes his son, François, his heir. This François de Cugunhan was the maternal grandfather of our Saint. By his wife Catharine du Ferrier, he had two sons and one daughter, Marguerite, the mother of the Saint.

On the sixteenth of September, 1576, her mother espoused Marguerite to Jean Regis of Fontcouverte. The civil marriage contract was between "Catharine du Ferrier et son fils, d'une part; et Marie de Martrin de l'autre." After mention in the contract of dowries and gifts, among which was the sum of two hundred *livres* payable within eight years from the celebration of the marriage, we find the following agreement: "If Marguerite survives her husband, she shall enjoy the possession of all the goods of Jean Regis. If Jean Regis survives, he shall enjoy during his lifetime Marguerite's dowry, which, however, shall revert, on his death, to the house of Cugunhan."

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Thus far we know that Jean Regis' first wife was Marguerite de Cugunhan. Furthermore, we know from the following that Saint John Francis Regis was born on the thirty-first of January, 1597: "The year 1597, the last of January, on a Friday, was born our child John Francis; and Francis de Turin, called de Brettes, Seigneur and baron of Pecheirie, was his godfather, and damoiselle Claire Daban, wife of my brother Regis, was his godmother; and he was baptized in the church of Saint Julien, in Fontcouverte." This document was signed by the Saint's father. In another document Jean Regis expressly states that Charles Regis is his eldest son by Marguerite de Cugunhan. Now, in order to clinch our argument that Marguerite was the mother of the Saint, let us quote a document with which the invaluable researches of the late Father Leonard Cros, S. J., have favored us. The two things to be borne in mind in order to appreciate the force of this document, are, first, that Saint John Francis Regis was born in the year 1597, and secondly, that the document shows *Marguerite to have been still living in the year 1598*:

"The year 1598 and the twenty-seventh day of May, in the city of Carcassonne, in my presence, royal notary, and that of the undersigned witnesses, themselves personally present, to wit, noble Jean Regis, of Fontcouverte, party of the first part; and noble Charles de Cugunhan, Seigneur of Camplong, party of the second part.

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“These same have stated that they contemplated engaging in a suit: firstly, for the sum of two hundred *livres*, given by the late damoiselle Catharine du Ferrier to her daughter, damoiselle Marguerite, *the wife of the said sieur Regis*: and furthermore on account of other things . . . and wishing to avoid a suit and live on good terms with their relatives and friends, have handed over the case of their differences, —that is, the said sieur Regis into the hands of M. Me. Jean Castaing, doctor, advocate at the court of M. le Seneschal: and the said Seigneur of Camplong into the hands of M. Me. Laurent Matheron, also doctor and advocate at the said court, to decide in the capacity of arbitrators . . . ”

The second document follows:

“The year 1598, the twelfth day of September, in the city of Carcassonne, in my presence, . . . noble Jean Regis, of Fontcouverte, acting in his position as husband and ‘conjointe personne’ of damoiselle Marguerite de Cugunhan, party of the first part; and noble Claude d’Assier, . . . acting in his absence for noble Charles de Cugunhan of Camplong, his son-in-law, party of the second part.

“These have declared that the said sieurs Regis and de Cugunhan are at suit for two hundred *livres turnoïs*, given by the late Catharine du Ferrier to the said Marguerite de Cugunhan, her daughter and *wife of the said sieur Regis*; and also on account of other things which the said sieur Regis and the said damoiselle, *they being*

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*married*, pretend to claim from the said sieur of Camp-long . . . etc., etc.

(Signed) FABRI, notaire."

We have quoted quite enough of these tedious but valuable documents to serve our present purposes. It may now be asked, what claim could possibly be put forward in behalf of Madeleine d'Arse as the mother of the Saint? It is most probable that Madeleine was the second wife of Jean Regis, and if this be so, we must suppose that Marguerite de Cugunhan died when little Jean-François was yet quite young, and that the boy's father remarried not long after his first wife's death, since it was Madeleine d'Arse who brought up the Saint from his earliest years and on whom he ever looked as a good and true mother.

One more point with regard to the Saint's family. His biographers claim for it the distinction of nobility. What, briefly, are the grounds for this claim?

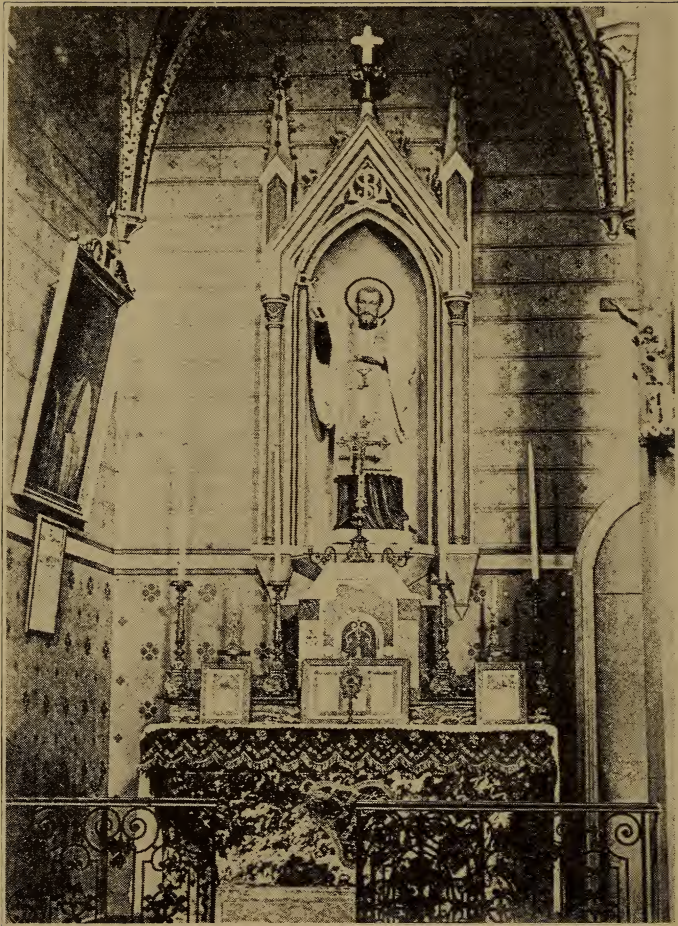
It was only rarely that Jean Regis signed himself "*noble*," but we have seen that title given him in the various documents we have quoted. Antoine Regis, grandfather of the Saint, "*ennobled*" himself, as it were, by the acquisition of property over which he was the lord, as likewise did Antoine's brother Jean, the Saint's granduncle. It would seem, however, that most of the nobility of the family came into it with Marie de Martrin, the Saint's paternal grandmother. She was of a really noble house: the Martrins d'Esplas. In addition, let us remark with Father Cros, that at all events Jean

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Regis and his brother Barthelemy certainly earned as magnificent a title to nobility as could be desired, by their noble service to the Catholic cause as soldiers “dans l’armée des ligueurs.” Finally, there attaches to the name of Regis, a renown far surpassing any earthly glory; for it is not only the people of France that glorifies that name, — and that were great indeed, — but the Universal Church recognizes a scion of the House of Regis as a Saint of God.

It is in the sincere hope that so great a saint may be better known and loved, and glory given to God, as he himself would have wished, that we may now begin the story of Saint John Francis Regis.





CHAPEL AT THE SAINT'S BIRTHPLACE



## JOHN FRANCIS REGIS: THE YOUTH

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Alighting from the railroad at Moux, the modern pilgrim to the birthplace of Saint John Francis Regis, will take the omnibus along nearly two and a half miles of pretty roadway, before he emerges at last from among the vineyards into the little village of Fontcouverte, which lies at the base of one of the foothills of Mount Alarie. Here, built over the ruins of an ancient Carolingian stronghold, he will find the old church in which in the year 911, was held the Council of Fontcouverte, under Arnurst, Archbishop of Narbonne, and in which Saint John Francis Regis was baptized,—the old bell, cast in 1584, ringing out the joyful news. Fontcouverte takes its name from one of its two springs; *fons co-opertus*. Were it not for the Council held there and for the fact that it gave to France a sainted missionary in her dire need of such a man, the little village would have no claim to renown; for as she was in the days of the Saint, so, practically, the stranger will find her today.

The home of Saint John Francis was a house of moderate dimensions consisting of an English basement and one story. Six windows on each floor gave it a fair breadth. It was in this basement, in a room now made into a chapel, that the Saint was born on January 31, 1597.

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The little new-comer had not been long in the world when he was taken in the arms of his Aunt Claire Daban to the church where he put on that white garment of innocence which he was to wear unspotted to the grave. Indeed, it could not well have been otherwise: one ever inclining to what was pious almost from infancy, consecrating himself to Our Lady Queen of Virgins, and in after-life divinely chosen to bring back to repentance poor fallen women,—surely, such must himself be pure and spotless. No one, then, is surprised to hear the Saint's biographers attesting that, while he suffered cruel temptations when contradicted by men, temptations we shall see him manfully conquering, yet never did he feel the sting of the flesh.

Nor was there wanting care and vigilance on his part. He had read and taken to heart the words spoken of the Baptist: "Wine and strong drink he shall not take." And all this notwithstanding the fact that Saint John Francis' native province was Languedoc, whence come hot-blooded and vigorous southerners made for action. All of the Saint's energy, however, was pent up and under control, ready to burst forth in the service of God.

One of such a nature Divine Providence must needs save and protect for future battles in His Name. Thus John Francis was singled out from his earliest infancy for the especial protection of God. Father Labroue, the Saint's first biographer and a writer who professes himself not easily persuaded to believe every legend

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related in the lives of the saints, tells the following: One evening when all in the household had retired to rest and little John Francis had been snugly tucked in his cradle for the night, the nurse turned the lamp low and lay down for a few hours of much-needed rest. Waking suddenly in the night, what was her surprise to find the lamp extinguished. Reaching out for the child, she was horrified to find the cradle empty. The house was aroused at once and a search made for the missing infant. After fruitlessly looking here and there, someone finally hit upon the right place, and there, quiet as a mouse and apparently uninjured, lay the child beneath the nurse's bed. This uncanny occurrence took place there several times in precisely the same way. Where seek an explanation? 'He hath given His angels charge over him,' thought the grateful parents; for the neighborhood of Fontcouverte was infested with gypsies, whose practice it was to steal young children for their incantations and hold them for ransom by the distracted parents.

Among the very few details of the Saint's early days that we have, the following has come down to us. It is indicative of the turn of his thought even at the tender age of five years. While out walking with his mother one day, the little fellow suddenly looking up into her face, remarked with the solemnity of a judge: "Mamma, I shall be condemned!" (*Ma mère, je serai damné!*)

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The astonished mother, (or perhaps it was Madeleine d'Arse) exclaimed: "My dearest child, what are you saying?"

"To heaven, mamma, to heaven!" (*Au ciel, ma mère; au ciel.*)

Soon the time for lessons at home was at an end and John Francis was sent to school. It was not long before his sensitive nature asserted itself. He could not bear the harshly spoken words it was inevitable he should hear. Indeed, when it was seen that he was making but little progress with his books, Jean Regis began to fear his boy was going to be a dullard. But it took a vigilant mother to find out the trouble. The boy tried seriously to please his teacher, a gruff old man who seems to have had little sympathy with the failings of childhood. But try as he might, John Francis was continually getting into trouble. His gentle nature found harshness too hard against the grain. His mother saw that in this condition of affairs her boy could make no progress. That it was indeed his fear of displeasing his teacher that kept him back, and not lack of natural talents, is clear enough from the fact that as soon as the teacher was changed he began to go forward by leaps and bounds, so that by the year 1611,\* he was ready to enter the college of the Society of Jesus at Béziers.

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\*Others say 1613, but supposing John Francis to have filled out the customary five years at college before his entrance into the Society of Jesus in 1616, the date of his going to Béziers should be placed at 1611.

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The College of Béziers had existed some years before it was handed over to the Society of Jesus. The well-to-do citizens of the little commercial town had subsidized the institution out of the municipal treasury. Incompetent management, however, was not the looked-for response to the efforts of the townsmen. Consequently, in 1599, the Town Council passed a resolution giving over the college to the care of the Jesuits.

All necessary arrangements having been made with the Bishop, Mgr. Bonzy, and the Jesuit Provincial, Père Alexandre Georges, the Jesuit staff of professors was installed for the opening of the scholastic year 1599-1600.

Père Jean Gontery was the first Rector under the new regime. He found on the college register the names of only sixty students, but before the opening of classes that number had swelled to three hundred. Twelve years later when the institution had become somewhat of a center of secondary education, the register counted five hundred names, among which was that of Jean-François Regis. The College of Béziers was a boarding school, the boarders living in segregated houses which were under the surveillance of the Fathers.

In one of these "dormitories" John Francis with six companions took up his residence, thus beginning the first of his five years at Béziers—years that were destined to be of paramount importance in the formation of his character, years filled with good works, the fruit of his example to companions and professors alike.

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John Francis Regis' entrance into the College of Béziers marks the point in his life where he really began the work of making a saint of himself. And truly, it was for him, as indeed for us all, make or break! Regis must have become a great saint, or, if he would make no efforts in that direction, he might easily have become a great sinner. But God had given him a susceptible character: he was now to take that high-souled nature and ennoble it, shape it, lopping off here, restraining there, adding to and enhancing the whole. Saint-making, just as soul-saving is essentially a personal work. It consists for the most part in complete correspondence to grace; for neither John Francis Regis, nor any other saint became passively the men they were. Where we are sluggish, they are full of life; where 'temptation makes cowards of us all,' victory was their crown; where we are indifferent to or prodigal of God's graces, they were zealots or misers, so that not a particle of the good gift passed them by.

It was doubtless this earnestness of purpose that placed upon John Francis Regis the mark which made him stand out among the generality of the boys of his age. He preferred his books and the church to sports; he was quiet and retiring, but withal a good companion; his was not a sour-faced sanctity. Though at first not well liked among the boys, and never "popular," still, on becoming better acquainted, he was always welcomed in whatever group he chanced to join. And of course, as is the case with every boy of his character, his ap-

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proach was the signal to hush an unseemly joke or improper word. John Francis was a member of the pious, but strangely named confraternity established at Béziers, known as the *Blue Penitents*; but unsatisfied with the general good he could accomplish in this wider sphere, he got up a little society among the six boys with whom he roomed. As is to be expected among boys, his pious designs at first met with grins and secret laughter, but under the spell of the leader's seriousness, the fun made of his piety soon turned into genuine enthusiasm. Fixed hours were assigned for prayer, study and recreation. Instructive and edifying books were read at table, and every Sunday the little association went to Holy Communion in a body.

The favorite recreation of these seven, whose names unfortunately have not been left us, was fishing. Off they would go on a holiday for an outing along the banks of the Orb. On one of these occasions three of the boys were returning home in the afternoon under a scorching Languedoc sun, when they passed on the roadside a huge stack of wheat. Someone suggested taking a rest in the shade for a while. It was a happy thought and soon the three were stretched out on the grass at the foot of the wheat-stack. Tired out with their long day of sport, one by one they fell asleep.

The Orb ran close by the wheat-stack, and at this particular place its banks dropped sheer to the water's edge. What, then, was John Francis' terror on suddenly awakening to find that he had been walking in

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his sleep and that his next step would have sent him headlong into the river. The frightened boy turned back and fled to his companions, who were still sleeping by the wheat-stack. Hastily awakening them, John Francis begged them to join with him in thanking God for his narrow escape, for once in the swift little river, he must surely have drowned, as he had not yet learned to swim.

And so the school days sped happily on, and with equal pace there was developing in John Francis Regis a strong, manly character. He found it arduous work, no doubt, to begin thus early in his career to carry on a relentless campaign against self. Perhaps there are those who do not envy him. Such cannot have a true concept of what manner of man this saint really was. It cannot be too forcibly insisted upon that John Francis Regis—that no one in fact—was a saint because he did not enjoy life, because he did not enter into the feelings of other men. On the contrary, never has a saint lived so much for men or so much among them: men both good and bad, men who contributed not a little toward making him the saint he was. Indeed it may not be too much to say, that had some far-seeing individual known John Francis as a boy at Béziers, he might have predicted with fair certainty that here was indeed a leader, here was one to cast a spell upon men for good or for evil. Once more let one of the few anecdotes of the Saint's early years illustrate. Who could not have loved and admired the hero of the following incident?



## THE YOUTH

A lively dispute was going on one day among a group of the boys at the College of Béziers. One of the Professors standing nearby decided he would find out the cause of so much fervent speech. Drawing near unnoticed, he overheard a remark from John Francis Regis that the view of the matter taken by his adversary was out of the question, simply ridiculous: "I'll bet you anything I'm right and you're wrong!"

No sooner said than done! There were no stakes to hold, so boy-fashion it was agreed that the loser should owe the other a stated sum of money. But where was the Professor? For was he not the only arbiter possible in the matter of the pronunciation of a Latin word?

John Francis, of course, was wrong. And here, as all thought, the matter ended. But it was not alone the boy's spirit in maintaining his opinion, nor his humility on being declared wrong that won him a place in the hearts of his companions, but most of all it was his sense of justice which prompted him long after the affair was forgotten to seek out his adversary and insist on paying off his bet. "No," he said, when his companion showed reluctance in taking the money, "I bet, and I lost; so you must take the money!"

How small a thing in itself this little incident is, yet how much it presages for the future of Regis. Earnestness, humility, justice: these will be met with frequently in the Saint's after-life.

And it was of his future that the boy now began to think. He was beginning to ask himself that momentous

## SAINT JOHN FRANCIS REGIS

question: "What shall I be?" Speaking from a natural point of view, almost any profession was open to him, and each held out hopes of fair success. But he had learned not to consider the matter from one only angle. The question for him in secret thought and with his director in the confessional, was not: "For what am I best fitted by nature?"—but, "In what state of life, supposing I have both inclination to it and natural aptitude, shall I be most certain of saving my immortal soul and advancing the glory of God?"

It is not likely that any were surprised to hear that John Francis Regis was not to return to the College of Béziers next year, but would begin his noviceship at Toulouse, as a Jesuit. And though his face was gone from among the boys and he was for a time forgotten, still, in later years, the college was always proud that she had nourished so great a saint. Nowhere, perhaps, was devotion to Saint John Francis Regis better fostered than at the College of Béziers, where the boys loved to recite the prayer composed in honor of their patron:

"Glorious Saint, thou who hast been the ornament and glory of this college, and wilt ever be its mainstay and support, I cast myself at thy feet in all confidence and conjure thee to take me under thy protection. Remember that thou wast one day as I am now, and that here it was that thou didst enter upon thy study of the science of the saints. Thou knowest the grievous dangers in which a student is placed: he may possibly become a great sinner. But thou, O vessel of election,

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hast preserved thy innocence in the very face of temptation and evil example. And I, in my wilfulness, my faithlessness to duty, and because of a thousand faults,—hardly had I come to the knowledge of God before I had offended Him! O thou, whom zeal for the salvation of souls did consume, look upon my weakness, have pity, pray for me! Obtain for me the grace of contrition for my sins and that never again may I fall without abundant tears of expiation. Grant that following thy example, I may fly all idleness and thus make progress in learning; that by thy powerful aid I may exhale on all sides the sweet odor of Jesus Christ, to the end that I may praise and bless Him eternally with thee in Heaven! Amen.\*

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\*An echo of this student devotion to Saint John Francis Regis has resounded in New York City, where at *Regis High School*, conducted by the Jesuit Fathers, there flourishes the Guard of Honor, under the patronage of our Saint. The students recite the following prayer:

“O most holy patron, Saint John Francis Regis, most faithful follower of Our Lord in thy unselfish devotedness to promote His Honor and Glory, I beseech thee, through thy ardent love for His Sacred Heart in the Most Blessed Sacrament and through thy tender devotion to His Immaculate Mother, to obtain for me by thy powerful intercession, God’s special blessing upon my labors during the course of my studies. Obtain for me from the divine Source of love and wisdom the strength of will to apply myself constantly and a ready understanding, a quick and retentive memory, an easy and pleasing way of expressing my thoughts. Be thou moved, O most holy Patron, by the deep confidence I place in thy intercession that all my actions may begin, continue and end for God’s greater glory and under thy fatherly protection. Amen.”



THE SAINT IN RELIGION



## JOHN FRANCIS REGIS: THE JESUIT

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The noviceship has been called a kind of forge in which religious are fashioned, and the process of striving for perfection and oftentimes falling short of the ideal, is the hammering that shapes the instrument. Still influenced by his manner of living heretofore, the novice must show what is the grade of his "malleability," by changing his likes and dislikes and looking at things from a spiritual standpoint. He has his one master-principle: constant tendency toward perfection and it is this that will shape and influence his whole life to come. Not indeed that he is expected to arrive at perfection, even after the lapse of many years, but he must, according to his own vow, tend always in that direction.

Such were the dispositions in which John Francis Regis left home for the Novitiate at Toulouse. Under the advice of a wise and experienced confessor he had come to the decision that he must become a Jesuit. He had the inclination and the ability, nor did circumstances forbid. He did not ask a clearer sign of his vocation, but wisely set about making things easier for his entrance into the new and strange life of the noviceship. Prayer and studies were increased and recreations cut down. It must not be thought, however, that he turned

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hermit in preparation for his new life, for we are told that he gave up most of the summer of 1616 to sports. His reason for this, was, perhaps, to gain all the benefits outdoor exercise could afford, for in the early spring John Francis Regis had suffered a severe attack of fever, which had brought him almost to death's door.

The summer's recreation built up the young man's constitution, so that on Monday, December the seventh, the eve of a day in later years to be celebrated as the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, he was able to enter the Jesuit Novitiate at Toulouse. It was at this same time that Saint John Berchmans was entering the Society of Jesus in Belgium.

John Francis Regis had now left home, parents, friends and companions to begin his lifework. But before we watch him as he labors incessantly at his task, it will be of interest to become acquainted with his fellows in the noviceship. We do not know them all by name, but they were eighteen in number. Ignace Arnoux, who was later on to be one of Regis' most valuable friends in need, was a novice at this time. Jean Veyssiere, who died young and in the odor of sanctity; Michel Charbonier and Louis Lascombe, were others of his fellow novices. There also lived with these novices an old gentleman named Armand Boret, who had left the world and was ending his days here in the simplicity of the Novitiate. He was much esteemed by the novices as a man of great sanctity.



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It may on first thought be expected that one so much inclined to silence and prayer as was Regis, might on throwing himself into a life where these were the chief duties, turn out one-sided. Such was not the case with the new novice, if we are to credit the accounts of his biographers. He knew well how to combine seriousness of purpose with affability and loveliness in his dealings with others. Spirituality which loses sight of the fact that we are ever social beings is always repulsive; and the fact that John Francis Regis was so universally liked is indication enough that he had with all his prayer and severity of mortification, a sweetness of disposition calculated to win many a soul to God in later life. True enough, he was silent when it was time for silence, thus, as Saint Ignatius says, showing his humility: but he talked and laughed too, as merrily as the rest when it was time for recreation. He was exact without being wooden, liberal without making specious interpretations of what duty required.

One of Regis' recreations was to stop while out walking, at the magnificent Basilica of Saint Saturninus. This ancient church dated from the beginning of the fifth century and had survived all the ravages of barbarism. It was filled with relics of the most famous saints and martyrs of the Church and rich in privileges for the visitor. John Francis Regis used to go about from altar to altar praying with fervor, now to this saint, now to that, hardly knowing where to tarry longest. It was owing to his visits to Saint Saturninus'

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that he was inspired with the desire for martyrdom. Accordingly, he began to pray with might and main for that grace, not forgetting that he who would shed his blood for Christ, must first and *a fortiori* endeavor to overcome every evil inclination in his soul. This desire of martyrdom was a well-spring for Regis, from which he drew great graces for his advance along the hard road of perfection he had chosen. With martyrdom before him as a goal, John Francis counted the little trials to which his Novice Master, Père Pierre Lacase, subjected him, as little things indeed. But with severe logic he reasoned that if they were little compared to the sacrifice he was one day to make, they ought therefore to be undergone with wholesouled generosity. Hence we find him patiently teaching catechism to the children, and assisting the sick and dying in the hospital with as much earnestness and charity as if there were nothing on earth he so much enjoyed. And all the while John Francis Regis was building up a character. He was downing the old man, taking him off and putting on Christ, not as a man changes his coat—easily—but with much pain to self.

Oftentimes a generous soul as was that of Regis will not bear patiently with the failings of others. Such characters cannot understand why everyone is not as generous and liberal with the Lord as are they themselves: why should anyone wish to cheat the Lord or His Ministers? The natural consequence of such a view is to be harsh with others and blame them for faults

## THE JESUIT

which they do not really intend to commit. But with Regis it was far otherwise: if a thing was not unquestionably wrong, he always managed to find some good in it. Or if he could not excuse the culprit, he said nothing at all, realizing that with what measure you mete, so shall it be meted to you. He only knew that there was a certain John Francis Regis who merited first attention when there was question of reprehending, and accordingly wondered whether he were not himself as deep in the mud as his brother in the mire.

Nearly two years of this life, which in the eyes of the world is foolhardy, passed happily away, leaving John Francis Regis a newer man. He had added much to the already excellent disposition he had brought with him to the Society, and now the time was approaching when he was to seal with his oath the desire ever to increase in holiness and zeal in the service of the Master. This he regarded as a privilege of no small moment, for it is not given to all who desire it to pronounce the vows of religion. The death in 1617 of one of his companions, François Revoult, on the anniversary of his entrance into the Society, made him realize this fact the more clearly.

It was probably in 1618, in the month of October, that Regis was sent with five of his companions to Cahors, where he was to begin his studies, and at the same time to practice in real earnest all the lessons he had learned so well in the Novitiate. He had now the rules of the Scholastics to observe, and these rules reminded him

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that in the hot pursuit of his studies, he must not forget that he is still a religious, and that a religious must always and everywhere, no matter what his occupation, preserve the fervor of his spirit. He must study, yes; but study must be regarded as a means to an end. This new path was not easier than that he had been following, but for that very reason he set out upon it with no less ardor and devotion.

At last the "Dies Promissorum" came, and John Francis Regis could now proudly and happily sign himself a Jesuit.\* This had been his heart's desire—should he not now prove himself worthy in some measure at least to bear alongside his own, the Name of Jesus? Students of medicine, of law; followers of any profession made daily sacrifices of self and worked with untiring labor until the goal of their ambition was reached. His own cousin, as he no doubt had often heard told, had persisted even in the face of a father's anger, in his intention of going off to the Catholic wars, thus making sacrifice of one of the dearest ties that bind man to earth: should he not also therefore—John Francis Regis—of the same blood as Pierre, show himself as generous, nay, more generous still in this same cause of the Lord!

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\*The date of John Francis Regis' first vows was probably December the eighth, 1618, or possibly later in the same month. Father de Curley says that the Saint made his first vows at Cahors "toward the end of the year 1618." The vows were certainly not pronounced before the eighth of the month, as this would have been contrary to the custom of the Society of Jesus, which has always been that the first vows may not be taken even one day before the completion of two full years of noviceship.

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For John Francis was now a soldier of Christ in a sense even more intimate than had been his kinsman, and if for no other reason he would fight the good fight, since to be a brave soldier of Christ was part of the family pride!

Arriving at Cahors, Regis found there one of the Fathers he had known at Toulouse, Père Gaspard Dumas, who was to be his Rector during the one year of his Juniorate to follow. The Juniorate in the Society is the period immediately following the Noviceship. It is a kind of second noviceship in which a careful watch is kept over the young religious in order to make sure, while greater liberty is granted him in smaller details, that he get a good start along the path of his duties. He is no longer a spiritual infant, but must learn to walk, so that henceforth he may depend under God, for the most part upon himself. The time of the Juniorate is usually spent in the study of Poetry and Rhetoric, and if necessary, Grammar. In Regis' case the time was shortened to one year, so that, as Father Daubenton puts it, after having obtained "*quelque teinture de l'éloquence,*" he was ready for his philosophical studies. The Reverend Father Provincial, however, must have needed professors in the colleges, for he interrupted the ordinary course, and instead of sending Regis to his Philosophy, made him Master of the lowest class at the College of Billom, where his old professor of the days at Béziers was Rector, Père Jean Malpoix.

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M. Regis' teaching period was divided into two parts. he spent the years 1620, 1621 and 1622 at Billom, and then went to Tournon for his Philosophy. After three years at Tournon he taught grammar at Puy for two years and at Auch for one.

## JOHN FRANCIS REGIS: THE EDUCATOR OF YOUTH

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The Reverend Herbert Lucas, S. J., has given us an excellent sketch of what the Scholastics in a Jesuit college should be, and, as he says, are in actual fact.

“Now in order to have education it is plain you must have an educator. And Saint Ignatius wished the members of the Society of Jesus in the earlier—though not quite in the earliest years of their religious life—to be competent and trustworthy educators of youth, of course under the guidance of superiors of mature age; and he planned and devised at least the rough draft of a system of education, which, after his death was elaborated, and has since been modified in various particulars, so as to suit the various and changing needs of different countries and times. For the present, however, I am concerned with the man rather than the system, for on the man the efficiency of the system must depend. Of what sort, then, is this comparatively youthful educator of youth—the Jesuit Scholastic, in the best and freshest years of his early manhood—to whom Catholic parents are invited, if so it pleases them, to confide in great measure the training of their boys?

“Let me sketch him as I think he would be according to the mind of Saint Ignatius, and as I believe him to be in actual fact. It would be absurd to pretend that

he is *on the average*, a man of exceptionally brilliant talents, a hero, or a saint. But he is a man who, having a very moderate estimate of his own powers, is quietly and resolutely determined that they shall be devoted entirely and without stint to the service of His Divine Master, and to the service of his boys for the sake of God; a man who makes the law of generosity, not the law of parsimony, towards God, the rule of his life; a man whose habitual question is not: 'How little am I bound to do?' but: 'Is there anything more I can do for God and my boys?' Comfort, amusement, self-indulgence of all kinds, he has learned to despise; or rather hardly thinks of them, except in so far as some measure of relaxation is needful to keep him in condition for the efficient discharge of his duties. And here again his question is not: 'How much of these things can I manage to secure from the indulgence of my Superiors?' but rather: 'How far can I contrive to do without them?' Externally calm and quiet, it is possible that at first sight you might think him lacking in enthusiasm; but, in truth, he has so trained himself to work up to the very limit of his power, that he wastes no energy in useless excitement. And if you could penetrate the secrets of his morning prayer, and of his habitual recollection, you would find that there is indeed a hidden fire of enthusiasm under the calm and modest exterior. For in his novitiate, and in his yearly retreats and daily meditations, he has kindled and kept alive, deep down in his heart, this threefold conviction: (1) that there is one Man and only one, Who is worthy



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of our heart's loyalty, and that Man is Christ Jesus Our Lord; (2) that there is one work and only one that is worthy of man's entire self-devotion, and that is the work that He came on earth to do, the work of the salvation of souls; and (3) that there is one *way*, which He chose, the way of self-denial, suffering, humiliation,—the Way of the Cross. Now our young Jesuit Scholastic knows very well, of course, the heavier crosses, great suffering, grievous humiliations, severe mortifications, are the choice prizes of life, such as fall only to the few. He hardly expects them for himself, at least in the present stage of his life. But if he cannot have humiliations, he can rejoice in obscurity and in the sweet peace of the hidden life; and you could not do him a greater disservice than to make a fuss about him, or pay him empty compliments. If it is not given him to endure severe sufferings, at least he will thankfully bear the cross of daily drudgery, of a somewhat monotonous and wearing existence, in which to something more than the toils of the paid schoolmaster are added the exercises of the religious life; and he wishes for nothing better than to go on working for God in some equally obscure employment, unknown to the world at large, and unnoticed by his neighbor, until the night comes when a man can work no more. He knows that 'it is good to wait with silence for the salvation of the Lord.' He knows that 'it is good for a man when he has borne the yoke from his youth.' '\*

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\**At the Parting of the Ways*: Herbert Lucas, S. J.; London and Edinburgh: Sands & Co.; St. Louis, Mo.; Herder: 1906.

## SAINT JOHN FRANCIS REGIS

It might seem at first sight that we have wandered far from the life of Saint John Francis Regis, owing to the quotation of this excellent passage from the distinguished Father Lucas; but only a little reflection reminds us that the life of the Scholastic just described, was, together with all those ideals and principles, the self-same life that John Francis was now beginning to lead.

From the day M. Regis had taken his vows, he had with all ambition, looked forward to the time when he should be permitted to "reign" over his little kingdom, the classroom, to teach his boys not alone book-knowledge, but the knowledge and love of God. Perhaps he had thought that this time was as yet three years distant, but, as has been seen, the Reverend Father Provincial gave him a surprise by sending him in 1620, to the College of Billom, where he began his teaching in the lowest class. Here was a practical application of something he had learned: perhaps he had had ambitions, just coming from Rhetoric, of teaching that "Queen of the Arts." If so, he was thus practically reminded that one usually begins from the beginning. Whether Regis thought one way or another in this matter, is, of course, mere speculation, but at all events he entered upon these new duties with that full characteristic zeal and earnestness we have thus far continually seen in his life.

M. Regis seems to have been a favorite with the boys, —and they with him. His modesty and unassuming air

excited the deep and cogent esteem one always feels for a man of great holiness. His love of the small boy's character, his delight in being with him, aroused among the students a spirit of loyalty to him and made him the object of that kind of hero-worship of which boys are always guilty with regard to the teachers they like. M. Regis took advantage of his "popularity" to accomplish the principal work a Scholastic among his boys has to do: influence their souls for good, unobtrusively and imperceptibly making deep character-impressions upon them. No boy thought that because M. Regis was kind and always let you do as much as the rules allowed, he would, on that account, overlook a glaring fault or permit a culprit to go unpunished. Sometimes the boys, ever, it would seem, working off animal spirits, tried the professor's patience severely; but he managed to stamp out the first sparks so that a conflagration never took place. Father Labroue, the Saint's first biographer and one of his pupils at Puy assures us that it was impossible to hear Regis talk of pious subjects without being deeply touched. It is indeed a mistaken idea to think that boys do not like to hear "pious talk." They do; as witness in proof, many an upturned, interested, innocent face, as the professor diverts for a moment adroitly away from some pagan hero to show how the real Hero Whom *we* love and adore, so far surpasses the peccable and uninspiring gods of ancient times. Real solid piety was so much a part of Regis' class that he is responsible, we are told, for the custom

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which exists in some Jesuit schools of interrupting the class routine to recite in unison a *Hail Mary*. How sweet this manly devotion on the part of these little Knights to their Lady Mother Mary! How sweet and refreshing to every Catholic parent to think that today also, as in Saint John Francis Regis' time, there are not wanting self-sacrificing men and women to keep this sort of angelic watch and ward over God's little lambs, lest the wolf steal in and tear them!

Such an influence as M. Regis had over his charges—many of whom lived to become great men—was not easily to be forgotten. One of his former pupils at the age of eighty years, spoke of his professor with tears in his eyes and declared that even though the Church had not seen fit (at that time) to raise him to her altars, still she need feel no risk in allowing the veneration of the faithful full sway. Even outside the circle of his class Regis made his influence potently felt. It was his custom to go on a Sunday to the country where he taught the simple peasantry their catechism and preached them little sermons. On one occasion while thus engaged, a woman cried out as did the woman in the Gospel: “Heureuse la mère qui a enfanté un tel fils!”

It is good to read that on these missions, while at table after the services, Regis would be as merry and amiable as the hearts of his simple hosts could have desired, thus not only bringing them the tidings of the Gospel, but showing that saints are not as they are

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sometimes erroneously conceived: an abstraction, but real living human beings on fire with the love of God! The sublimity of true sanctity does not harden the tenderness of the heart!

The Saint's chief work was, however, with his boys. For them he underwent the drudgery of explaining grammar; put up with their failings; for them he spent himself. Once it came about that one of his little men was so unfortunate as to become entangled in some scandalous affair which gave great public disedification. When the matter first came to Regis' ears, his habitual control gave way and he burst into tears. Naturally the boys were much affected, and the professor took advantage of the occasion to warn them of the judgments of God.

Another of Regis' class was taken sick and in fact was soon near to death. The kind-hearted professor went every day to visit the little invalid, cheer him, and sympathize with his parents. One day M. Regis entered the boy's home and found the family gathered around the bed weeping and praying. Without coming farther than the threshold of the sick-room, Regis called out to the dying boy: "Courage, Jacques my boy, courage! You are not going to die!" From the moment Jacques began to improve and was soon back in class and on the campus romping around again with his companions.

Altogether M. Regis spent six years in his teaching period. Surely we may conclude without rashness, even

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from such an imperfect picture as his biographers have left us, that he had made a success of his regency, that he had been a good teacher. What sort of a pupil was he himself to prove?

## JOHN FRANCIS REGIS: THE STUDENT AND PRIEST

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Success had attended almost every effort John Francis Regis had made during the years passed as professor at the Colleges of Billom, Puy and Auch, and he had every right, humanly speaking, to consider himself a person of some importance. It was, however, exactly in this respect that he differed from others who perhaps found it difficult and hard on human nature to become the taught instead of the teacher: he took a generous and supernatural view of the matter. It was his business, as he had learned long before, to gain the maximum amount of human learning with the minimum loss of fervor of spirit. He had too much common sense to be dreaming about the things that *were*, when the things that *are*, cried out for attention. His surroundings at Tournon, the House of Studies, were well adapted to the end set before him: there was a capable staff of professors to direct his progress in theological science, and his Rector was Père Jean-François Suarés. This holy man was Regis' steadfast friend, and he together with the Minister, Père Bernard de Saint-Martin and Père Claude de Saint-Colombe, the Spiritual Father, not only put no obstacle in the young man's way, but encouraged his zeal and fervor in every possible manner.

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First of all Regis was allowed to keep up relations to a certain extent, with the outside world. He was not yet a priest, but, argued Superiors, this man of such exceptional qualities must not be hindered from seconding the efforts of our priests. He was accordingly appointed companion to the Father who ministered to the little village of Andance. Every Sunday and Holyday the two would set out, and whilst the Father would be hearing confessions and visiting the sick, Regis would be ringing his bell to gather about him the children for catechism. The influence he wielded over these children was marvelous. It communicated itself also to their parents, and soon they too began to assemble at the familiar sound of the little bell. The sight of his growing audience was an inspiration to the young missionary. The way he conducted himself is characteristic: we always find him taking advantage of trivial circumstances in order to do good. He called to mind the old school days at Béziers and how he himself had belonged to the Confraternity of *Blue Penitents*. Why not something similar for these simple people? Such was the obvious conclusion from what he saw about him: good, simple folk, anxious to engage in religious exercises. Regis' own devotion to the Blessed Sacrament led him to select this channel into which he might direct the piety of the people. Accordingly he established in the village the Confraternity of the Most Blessed Sacrament. The good effected by this institution among the country-folk is incalculable. Thirty years later when Father Labroue



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was writing the first life of Saint John Francis Regis, he was able to record that the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament at Andance was still flourishing. When the terrible days of 1791 brought with them their religious intolerance, the Confraternity was suppressed; but four years later it was reëstablished and began anew the good work inaugurated by the Saint.

Another outlet for Regis' zeal shows us that he had not forgotten the home he had once known at Fontcouverte.

Many saints have made use of letter-writing as a most efficient means of keeping in touch with those whom they may be able to influence for good. Whether or not some special occasion called for the following letter from Regis to his brothers and sisters, cannot be determined, and indeed, matters not. It shows us his habitual view of the things of life. It is only to be regretted that we do not possess more of Regis' letters. Their quaint style along with their solid spirituality is most refreshing.

“My dearly beloved brothers and sisters:

“It is the love of Our Dear Lord that I bring you: and it is this same love that has impelled me to put before you one or two little considerations that are ever so important and profitable for you. Now at the same time I have convinced myself that you will receive them in exactly the same spirit which prompts me to set them before you, and in no other, surely.

“In the first place I want you to behave toward our dear father and mother much better than I used to when

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I was home. I am sorry for the way I used to act. Next, I want you to be very loving among yourselves, bearing with each other like good brothers and sisters should. Finally, I want you to abhor mortal sin from the bottom of your hearts — mortal sin, the greatest of all evils, since it causes the loss of heaven, which is the greatest of all good things. Why, all the riches of the world are as naught compared with the rewards of heaven given to those who keep the commandments of God. For they are the pavement of the only road to that happy home of ours; while on the other hand, the violation of these commandments is the road to hell. Sin, I tell you again, is what changes us from children of God to children of the devil. Just think a little, what sort of a father a sinner has when he offends God mortally, thus leaving God for the devil. Yes, mortal sin makes us heirs of eternal fire and the pains of the damned! *Oh, how I wish that everybody could realize the seriousness of mortal sin!* Then who could be so unfortunate as to commit even one?

“For this reason I exhort you to go frequently to Confession and Holy Communion, — say, on the first Sunday of every month; for this is the most efficacious means of guarding against sin, and of rising again should one have fallen.

“An evening examination of conscience, too, would be very useful for the same end, that is, to find out how you have sinned in word, thought or act, and humbly beg God’s pardon, being sorry since you love Him so dearly,

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for the faults you may have committed and telling Him how firmly you resolve to amend.

“If you do this, and walk daily in the path of God’s commandments, heaven will be your reward — heaven where it is my hope we shall all be gathered together in eternal bliss.

“Your most affectionate brother in Our Lord,

“JOHN FRANCIS REGIS.

“Please give my best regards to my Uncle and Aunt, M. de Laprade and M. Denos, and my other relatives.”

In the fall of 1628 Regis returned to the scene of his former noviceship days. It seems that besides Tournon, the Society had also a house devoted to Theological Studies at Toulouse.

Hardly had the Scholastic year begun when the plague broke out in Toulouse. At Puy and throughout Languedoc in general the pestilence was raging. Father de Curley tells us that of the sixty Fathers of the Society who offered themselves to serve the plague-stricken, not one was favored with the palm of a Martyr of Charity. The Scholastics who were as yet studying Theology were removed to the summer-house in the country, — familiarly known as the “*Villa*.”

Regis seems to have realized that to obtain permission to serve the plague-stricken was quite out of the question. At least, we have no record of his making the attempt at this date. He began, however, to make up

for this loss in a manner peculiar to the saints. When at home in Toulouse, each Scholastic had his own private room, but when at the summer-house, two and even three had to occupy the same room after the fashion of a small dormitory. It so happened that the companion assigned to Regis was a light sleeper. Every night when the rest were all fast asleep, he would hear Regis get up and go to his *prie-dieu*, there to spend the greater part of the night in silent union with God. At home this austerity had gone unobserved in the privacy of the Saint's room. But now that he had been found out, the Scholastic thought that Superiors should be warned of Regis' excess. The Superior at the time was Père François Tarbes, a man of very mortified life. In consequence, the well-intending Scholastic received an answer perfectly in keeping with the character both of the Saint and of his Superior: "Beware of troubling Regis' prayer or of putting any obstacle in the way of such a sweet union with God. The time will surely come when the Society will celebrate a solemn feast day in honor of the sanctity of your companion."

Was Père Tarbes a prophet?

The year 1629 brought some respite for Toulouse from the ravages of the plague, so that the Scholastics removed again to the city.

It must have been during his long vigils at the Villa that Regis learned to contemplate how utterly unworthy he was of the grand dignity of the priesthood now so fast approaching. But his was not the fallacious argu-

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ment that some misguided souls of our day have used against the daily reception of Holy Communion. He realized, of course, his own unworthiness, but knew it as his own. Never for a moment did he doubt of the reality of his vocation, for he knew it was the Almighty that must supply the deficiencies of the instruments He chooses. It appears that Regis is often held blame-worthy by not a few for his conduct with regard to his ordination, for when a whole year of study yet remained before the time when ordination is usually conferred, he asked to be raised to the priesthood.

There are many possible explanations of the Saint's intentions, which, of course, charity demands we should suppose were good. Some think that he wished thus to avoid the Profession of the Four Vows, — the highest rank in the Society of Jesus. Such means would have been effectual certainly, but it is not likely that Regis should have employed them, since the Society demands of her sons that while they may not ambition the Profession, still they must do all within their power to render themselves worthy of it, that is, become men of extraordinary learning and holiness.\*

What seems more probable is that Regis was anxious and holily impatient to give himself heart and soul to the priest's work he saw all around him; for if the

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\*Clement XI, in the Bull of Canonization, speaks of Regis as "Professed priest of the Society of Jesus." When the Holy Father's attention was called to the error, he replied: "*He is Professed, for I make him so.*"

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plague had abated at Toulouse, it was still raging throughout the rest of Languedoc and hundreds of souls were crying for aid. This, we think, is what carried him to his Superiors, begging to be ordained at once. But does it not almost shock us to hear him bribing the Superior, as it were, with the promise of thirty Masses in case he were ordained?

In point of fact, however, was Regis really ordained before his time? When all the meagre evidence we have has been well considered, it seems that he was not. According to Daubenton the date of the Saint's ordination was 1630, and that of his first Mass the 26th of May in the same year. But there are good reasons forbidding the adoption of these dates. First, there is extant a letter of Regis to his stepmother, Madeleine d'Arse, dated May 23rd, in which he says not a word about the supposedly approaching first Mass. This is most improbable. Secondly, it is not to be supposed that Regis would be writing a letter, the theme of which dealt wholly with the plague, while in the midst of the retreat which always precedes ordination in the Society. Furthermore, we have a letter dated June, 1631, in which he promises his stepmother that he will not forget her in his first Mass, which he is to celebrate on Trinity Sunday, June 15, 1631.

Regis was a priest then, at least by 1631. The long years of preparation had been faithfully spent and he had received the reward so out of proportion with the merits of even the best—the awful power of calling

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down upon our altars the very God of High Heaven and dispensing His tender mercies to a sinful race.

Once ordained the young priest threw himself into the work of his first ministry with all the usual ardor of his generous soul. His first assignment was in the Autumn of 1631, to the newly inaugurated College of Pamiers. Superiors had at first intended to use Regis as a Professor in the schools, owing no doubt to the success he had achieved as a Scholastic. He was again assigned to the lowest class. His stay, however, at Pamiers was destined to be of short duration, as we find him returning to Toulouse in 1632, in order to make his Tertianship or Third Year of Probation.

The young candidate for the Society of Jesus begins his life as a Jesuit by a rigorous two years' noviceship. He then follows the course through which we have traced Regis, and after ordination must spend one more year of probation preparatory to taking the Last Vows, by virtue of which the Jesuit is "complete." This year, familiarly known as the *Tertianship*, is given up entirely, with the exception of some little priestly ministry, to self-examination and correction. If aught of the "old man" remains since the noviceship days, here in the *Schola Affectus* or *School of the Heart*, it is put off, and Christ put on.

Details of Regis' life as a Tertian Father are almost entirely wanting; and indeed, they could contain but little of interest for the general reader. It may be supposed without rashness that as ever Regis gave himself

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entirely to his work. It was a work in which he delighted: the mastering of self.

When the term of the Third Probation was completed Père Regis was assigned a duty that was to be of great importance in determining his future work; for it was owing to the success he achieved in his task that the Very Reverend Father General, Father Mutius Vittelleschi, decided to make Regis a missionary.

Family difficulties had arisen at Fontcouverte, the nature of which is not clearly known. There seems to have been some misunderstanding with regard to the settlement of the family estates. There were in all thirteen persons to satisfy, and since this could not be done by those concerned, Jean Regis wrote to the General of the Society, asking that his son be allowed to come to Fontcouverte as arbitrator in the affair. The Reverend Father General wrote informing Regis that he was to go. Regis had not seen Fontcouverte for sixteen years, namely, since he had left for the novitiate in 1616. He made the journey on foot in true apostolic style, living by alms and camping wherever night overtook him.

Regis' stay at Fontcouvert was not by any means to be one of rest from the ministry. Let us quote a passage from a quaint old life of the Saint, the only one in English heretofore in existence:\*

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\*It is a translation, made in 1738, of Father Daubenton's life, by one "C. M." We have been informed that "C. M." is none other than the famous Father C. Murphy, S. J., of the







FONTCOUVERTE

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“While he stayed there the following was his Method of Life.

“He preached to the People in the Morning, and expounded the Catechism to the Children: after which he heard Confessions of such as presented themselves. In the Evening, a little before Night, he made a second Sermon. The remaining Part of the Day was taken up in visiting the Poor, gathering the Alms of the Rich, and distributing what he had collected to necessitous Families according to their Occasions. The Employ which most delighted him, was to comfort them to a happy Death. He often spent whole Nights with them. When he walked about the Town he was constantly attended with Flocks of Children and Poor. To be with them, to relieve the one, and instruct the other, was his greatest Pleasure.

“His Brothers held considerable Rank among the Chief of that Place; and as they only saw his Conduct under the false Lights of a deluded World, they could not dissemble their Trouble, nor forbear their bitter Reproaches on that Account. They represented that he ought to moderate his Zeal; that there was an Hospital and a Prison in Town, where he could exercise his Charity; that if he desired to succour the Poor in their

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Irish Province of the “Old Society.” After Father Murphy’s book had gone out of print English-speaking readers were dependent, in order to learn anything of the life of Saint John Francis Regis, on accounts in a foreign tongue, until Father C. C. Martindale, S. J. gave us a charming sketch in his little book: “Captains of Christ.”

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Wants, their Purse was at his Service; that it in no Way became him to walk the Streets as a Beggar, mumping from Door to Door, and constantly followed by Numbers of Children and Crowds of Wretches. Regis answered with much Sweetness, that as a Christian, he made it his Glory to serve the Poor; and he respected Jesus Christ in them, he esteemed it a great Honor to have their Company, to converse with them, and beg Supplies for such as Shame, or Sickness hindered from procuring the Relief they wanted.’’

The Saint’s brothers could not but be satisfied with this answer, but only for a time. Regis’ zeal drew forth further expostulations from his brothers, who imagined that Père François was compromising their name.

One day Père Regis was going about among the poor of the town, when he discovered a man reduced to such poverty, that his very bed of sickness was nothing but the bare earth. Immediately Regis was off in search of a mattress. On his return he had to pass a group of soldiers who were loitering near a street corner. The sight of a man laboring along under the weight of a huge and unwieldy mattress would surely be enough to set off a crowd of ruffians. And to this crowd Regis presented such a sorry sight that immediately the soldiers began to cat-call and hoot at him, run after him and pull at the mattress and call him names. Regis did not venture a remonstrance of any kind, but took it all as a huge joke, picturing himself a poor dray-horse.

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Regis' brothers, however could not see the point of jokes such as this. The humble missionary was again called to task. He gave practically the same answer as before, in a calm, unemotional sort of tone. But when his brothers insisted that he must moderate his zeal, he seemed to fire up a little. He gave them to understand that he was a priest of God, and that as such, nothing he could do to relieve the suffering members of Christ was beneath his dignity, even if it cost him a painful humiliation.

Despite their dislike for the Saint's methods his brothers respected Regis highly, and when the time came for his departure, he had settled the family differences to the satisfaction of all concerned. His time at Fontcouverte had not been ill-spent. The change for the better among the townsfolk was so pronounced that reports of it reached the ears of the Father Provincial, who wrote to the Father General that in his opinion a great mistake would be made if Père Regis were not appointed a missionary and allowed to devote all his time to that kind of work. Reverend Father Vittilleschi was much pleased with the result of the undertaking, and sent word that Regis was to be made a missionary without further delay. Henceforward, then, we shall see him as the "Operarius Inconfusibilis" of whom Saint Paul speaks in his second epistle to Saint Timothy.

The Saint's missionary life, like that of his eminent brother, Francis Xavier, did not extend over a long

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period of time—only ten years in the case of each—  
but “in a short time he fulfilled a long space.”

Let us follow him, then, to Montpellier, whither he  
was sent in this same year, 1632.

JOHN FRANCIS REGIS: THE “OPERARIUS IN-  
CONFUSIBILIS”

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“*Sollicite cura teipsum probabilem exhibere Deo, operarium inconfusibilem, recte tractantem verbum veritatis.*” (2 Tim. 2:15).

After the names of many of the priests of the Society of Jesus, one may see in italics the abbreviation: *Oper.* This stands for *Operarius*, and signifies that the Father after whose name it appears is particularly engaged in the functions of the Sacred Ministry or in general parish work, in contradistinction to the other works the Society performs, such for instance as the instruction of youth.

The text which stands at the top of this page: “Carefully study to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth,” has been thus interpreted by the late Father Matthew Russell, S.J.\* Father Russell writes: “. . . . for all men are, or ought to be, workers, toilers, laborers, operatives, *operarii*, of some sort or other; and each in his own special work ought to

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\*Cf. *At Home With God*, Rev. M. Russell, S. J., Longmans.

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aim at being *inconfusibilis*, 'unconfoundable,' confusion-proof, irreproachable, able to face the closest inspection without any fear of being put to the blush. A great deal of the household work of domestic servants, a great deal of the work done by contract at the public expense or by private enterprise, a great deal of the results of human labor of every kind, would be more perfect if every detail of it were sure to be examined at the time and on the spot by some competent and incorruptible overseer. Well, such is precisely the case with regard to all the duties of life in all the various vocations of mankind. *Deus videt*. God sees."

It will be our present task to show how Saint John Francis Regis conformed to the above ideal of an *Operarius Inconfusibilis*.

### I. First Ministry

The College of Montpellier, whither Père Regis was sent in 1632, boasted the distinction of having been established, only a few years before Regis' arrival there, by Louis XIII himself.

Regis was not destined, however, to take part in the activities of the college. His success at Fontcouverte had settled once and for all the field of his future labors; he was henceforth to be an *Operarius Inconfusibilis*. And truly, Montpellier afforded him opportunity enough to test his right to that name. For the city was one remarkable for its admixture of both good and evil.



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Although naturally piously inclined, the people, like the Athenians of old, were greatly given to the pursuit of novelty; whence, it is not surprising that they fell easy victims to both heresy and licentiousness.

It was, then, no small testimony to the virtue of Père Regis and manifestation of the trust placed in him by Superiors, that he was sent to such a dangerous field of operations.

While at Montpellier Regis pronounced his final vows, which made him at last a Jesuit full and complete. The formula of the vows, signed by his own hand, is as follows:

‘‘I, John Francis Regis, promise to Almighty God, in presence of His Virgin Mother Mary, and the whole Court of Heaven, and to you Reverend Father John Martin, proxy for the Provost-General of the Society of Jesus and his successors, holding the place of God Himself, perpetual poverty, chastity and obedience and that peculiar care of the education of youth set forth in the Apostolic Letters and the Constitutions of the said Society. Montpellier, the sixth day of November and the year 1633, in the church of the College.’’

(SIGNED)

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Père Regis had hardly begun his ministry at Montpellier when he had established his reputation as a preacher far above the ordinary. He combined in his person all the qualities and accomplishments so necessary for a good sacred orator: a lifetime of preparation

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in prayer, a penetration of revealed truth that astonished the most able theologians, and, best of all, a heart of burning zeal. It was from this heart that he poured out upon his hearers the unction that brought them penitent in hundreds to the feet of Christ. Finally, the Saint's utter and homely simplicity attracted to his pulpit, not the simple alone, as was to be expected, but persons of every class. William Pascal, a man who had preached from the grandest pulpits of France, was forced to admit: "It is in vain that we spend our time in writing ornate sermons. The catechetical instructions of this sainted missionary hold the people in admiration, and conversions without number are their fruit. Whereas we, after lavishing so much care on our sermons, must suffer the disappointment of but rarely finding anyone to pay us polite attention. More rarely still do we find anyone touched by our sermons or showing emotion."

On one occasion, however, Regis was persuaded to preach a sermon of more than ordinary polish. The incident brings out well the fact that he was far from a man of narrow views. It is another example too of what seems almost innate humility.

While on the missions with one of Regis' younger brethren, it so happened that the conversation turned on sermon-writing. The young Priest held that Father Regis ought to spend more time and care on his sermons. The fact, he maintained, that a sermon is embellished with the arts of the rhetorician, does not make it less

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a sermon, but rather renders the word of God more acceptable to weak human nature. After all, was not Horace right? Was it not the admixture of the agreeable with the useful that told for the best results? The young man could not imagine, so he said, Regis condemning the eloquence of the Fathers of the Church: but had they not preached the word of God?

Regis was not slow to grasp the grain of truth in his companion's arguments: he did not detect the fallacy, however, which lay in the false assumption that simplicity is not the grandest eloquence.

The good missionary set to work, then, and prepared what he considered a grand sermon, and when the time came to preach it, invited with him as critic, the companion of his former journey. When the wonderful sermon had been preached,—and, we are told, not without effect on his audience,—Regis sought out his friend and begged not to be spared, but that he give him plainly his unvarnished opinion. The young man seemed at first reluctant, but as the sequel proves, soon overcame his feelings. The first point to be corrected was the Father's voice; then, his gestures were quite awkward indeed! The tone of his language might be forgiven had he been more careful about one or two points of doctrine. The division, the arguments . . . well, these too might have been better. But his figures! Where on earth had he got them! And so on and on: fault was emphasized and virtue damned with slight praise. It is hard indeed not to picture this critic,

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like so many of his modern successors, finishing off with : “On the whole, though, Father, I think you did quite well.” In all fairness, however, to the critic, it must be admitted that history owes this anecdote to the man himself.

There is no need to tell in what spirit Regis took his friend’s criticism. He thanked him warmly, and when the young priest saw the effect he had produced, began at once to apologize for his harshness. Regis would not hear him. He made a huge joke of it all, considering himself the deserving butt.

It is small wonder that a man like this won persons of all classes to himself, and through himself, to God. One aged woman, reared from her cradle in Calvinism, he brought into the Church in the evening of her life. He espoused the cause of a poor Huguenot girl, a servant, who had been brought to law by her master for a petty theft. Though doubting the sincerity of her wishes to become a Catholic, Regis told himself he was not the one to condemn. He went to the judge and to the girl’s master, begging so earnestly to have her let off that neither judge nor master could resist him; and so the sentence was not carried out. No sooner was the girl free, however, than Regis’ worst suspicions were confirmed: she returned to Calvinism. When reminded of her case the Saint would always stoutly affirm that he could never be sorry for having performed an act of charity.

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The prisoners too were objects of Regis' kindness. In order to make this work permanent and practical, he summoned to his aid from among his friends in the upper classes, some thirty ladies, who took turn about in furnishing dinners at the prison.

All these, however, may justly be termed the lesser manifestations of Père Regis' saintlike charity. What we are compelled to regard as the greatest of his works for sinners, is his care of a class of unfortunates upon whom a cruel world looks with an eye of unpitying scorn. One so preëminently angelic in thought and act as was Saint John Francis Regis, simply could not but shudder when he realized that there were those in the world who had stained the white robe of their baptismal innocence with sins of impurity. But such, sad to say, was very much the case in the France in which Regis lived. Montpellier especially suffered from this curse, and it was the missionary's firm determination not to rest until every poor abandoned woman had been brought back again to that innocence of life which had been hers in the sweetness—the incomparable sweetness of childhood. But with full realization of the magnitude and importance of his task, he took for his watchword that saying of so many saints before him: "If I can prevent but one only mortal sin, I shall not have labored in vain."

Not everyone would have been fitted for the perilous, and some may say, futile work Regis was now about to undertake. The man for this enterprise must not in

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the slightest degree be below the high estimate formed of his brethren even by the enemies of the Society of Jesus. For at what opportunity of slander would the foes of Christ grasp with more avidity than this, where they beheld a man dealing, as Regis did, with persons of the lowest possible character? But the Saint was thoroughly qualified in every way for his dangerous work,—not indeed in his own estimation, for as he himself avowed, without the support of the Most High, this work, as all others, must be doomed to sad and miserable failure.

It was thus that the man's faith shone out as a bright star from dark clouds of foreboding. For while difficulties multiplied and multiplied again, Regis never hesitated a moment, nor doubted but what God in whom he put all his trust, would see him through to a happy end. Human aids, to be sure, he must make use of—and he sought them—but in God alone he placed full confidence. This was the secret of his success.

The principal field of Regis' labors in this work of charity was first at Montpellier, and afterwards at Puy, where even greater success attended his efforts.

The Saint's tactics in the actual carrying out of his work were bold. The district devoted to the miserable traffic he designed to ruin, lay in the suburbs of the city. Thither, then, he went, accompanied by an appointed companion, and fearlessly entered the very houses of the poor unfortunates, (thus he chose to regard them), nor could he feel that lack of sympathy toward

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them shown by such as tried to dissuade him from his purpose. The results were marvelous: hardly two successive days could be counted that did not witness a victory over the demon of impurity, so that before long very few indeed remained to be conquered.

But how was Regis to insure the permanence of these sudden conversions? This was the most difficult portion of his task. For the most part the poor creatures devoted to this kind of life, followed it as a means of livelihood. How were they henceforth to live, if they must now lead lives of purity? Regis was equal to the occasion. He went among his friends of the upper classes and accomplished the well-nigh impossible in persuading them to *take his penitents into their very homes*. This is a marvel of the Grace of God and the work only of one of His Saints. Who could suffer persons of such a character as Père Regis' penitents to have a place in their very homes? Yet we are told as many as ten, fifteen and even twenty were cared for by a single family! True, it was Regis' intention to establish a Refuge at Montpellier, so that the arrangement was only temporary, but this work had to be left for another, for what with his numberless labors in other fields and his subsequent removal to Sommières, he found the Refuge impossible of immediate accomplishment. It was only after he had left Montpellier that the Refuge was built.

At Puy where Regis was stationed in 1634, the same work was carried out with even greater zeal and more

substantial results. He found conditions at Puy as bad, if not worse than at Montpellier; and his knowledge that such was the case was the only signal needed to start him at once in his work of rescue.

He made small beginnings, it is true, placing the few he converted under the care of his friends. Hardly, however, had the good work begun than it met with opposition. The lady who had been his most generous aide in caring for his penitents, came one day to Regis and regretfully told him she could no longer help him by keeping them in her home.

“Both you and I,” she complained, “are getting a bad name.”

“Ah, my daughter,” answered Regis, “let us not take revenge on the Lord for the things we suffer at the hands of men.”

Unaffected by this reply, the good woman insisted that she could no longer keep the penitents, who, she declared, were hardly penitent after all. They would surely go back to their former life, leaving Père Regis and herself the laughing-stock of their enemies.

Regis' only reply was to point to his crucifix.

He saw clearly, however, that a Refuge was necessary if the work was to go on. At that time the idea was novel and required no little planning for its accomplishment. Little indeed did Regis realize the trouble this Refuge would bring upon him, but even had he known all beforehand, it seems impossible that he



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should have hesitated a moment, so much was his heart set upon the saving of abandoned women.

Among the first steps toward the establishing of the Refuge was to take counsel with several friends and ask their financial aid. And while they would not refuse the latter, nearly all foretold failure as the inevitable outcome of the scheme. The Saint's answer to all objections was characteristic: "If I were establishing the Refuge with the aid of man alone, there might be something in what you say."

Up to the present Regis had been merely finding his way: he must now obtain formal consent of his Superiors. It must be frankly admitted that it seems strange to see Regis approaching his ecclesiastical Superiors before asking permission of his more immediate religious Superiors. This is not the ordinary way of conducting such business. Still, an explanation is afforded to such as think one necessary, in the hypothesis that possibly the record of events as handed down to us by the biographers, does not follow a chronological order. At all events, the approbation of the Bishop was sought and heartily given, as was also the support of the Vicar General. With such eminent men on his side Regis could hardly have expected to meet with opposition from his own. But so it was, for his Superior at first refused to allow Regis to have anything to do with the Refuge. The Saint made representation as clearly as he could, but still, the Father Rector held out. The opposition, however, for some reason or other was

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short-lived; consent was finally given and the great work began.

From the very outset peace and order reigned at Saint Agatha's Refuge. Under the care of a competent matron the penitents soon learned to love their new life of virtue. But the Devil, so cleverly cheated by the establishment of the Refuge, was not long inactive. He raised a veritable storm of persecution against the holy man.

The trouble began from without. It was but natural that those most offended by the establishment of the Refuge would be the youth of the city who had been deprived of sinful companions. Numbers of these young ruffians masked themselves and dressing up like Regis went about the streets exhorting people in mock sermons to a virtuous life. The missionary's voice, manner and gestures were copied with ridiculous burlesque.

Knowing that Regis would never refuse a sick-call, no matter what the time of day or night, one of a band of the young men would go to the college and beg to have Father Regis accompany him to some fictitious death-bed. Without hesitation Regis would always accompany his guide, who usually led him into some dark street, where on turning a corner the missionary would be met with shouts of laughter and volleys of filthy remarks. Often enough not even his person was respected, so that he was forced to run the gauntlet amidst cries of derision.

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On one occasion, however, God would not permit His priest to be insulted in the carrying out of a work so pleasing in His sight as was the rescue of the impure. A certain man, enraged at having been deprived of the partner of his sin, determined on a plan of vengeance worthy of the Father of Lies himself. The fellow was shameless.

After dark one evening, a good woman, a friend of the Saint, knocked excitedly at the rectory door and asked to see Regis at once. As usual Regis lost no time in coming to the parlor; he seemed ever on the lookout for sick-calls.

"Mon Père! Mon Père!" the woman cried. "Go at once! You will find them at 'The Rock'—the bad woman and the man! God will be offended!"

"Do not fear, my good friend: the woman of whom you speak is not a woman, but a man in disguise," was the Saint's dispassionate reply.

God was sparing His servant a great humiliation.

If Regis' enemies counted on maltreatment as a means of stopping his work, they soon discovered their mistake and let him alone. For many the very persecution of the Saint turned out to be their salvation. How often a hand was arrested by some invisible force, as it was raised to strike him in the face. One indeed, in the act of thrusting a knife into the missionary's heart was thunderstruck to hear him bid him wait just a moment, that he desired to make a brief act of contrition. The knife fell from the murderer's hand and

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with it the film from his vision ; he beheld in the patient man before him a strong Saint and in his work the Finger of God.

It is not beyond belief that had Regis been asked fairly and honestly, he would have replied that persecution from without ruffled his peace but little. What was a slap in the face, if not a reminder that he for whom he was working had Himself suffered the same insult? To what did adverse public opinion amount, when weighed in the balance with the approval of God? Let insult then be the price he must pay in order to do the work of saving sinners : he would call it cheap. But what of persecution from within? It is not credible that he bore this with the same equanimity with which he met the insults of the rabble. For Saint that he was he was not less human, and must have felt it keenly when even his own turned against him.

A man capable certainly of knowing better, but one undoubtedly impelled by sincere motives, placed himself in the way of Regis' work. He was no other than the Saint's own Superior, Père Sebastian Vineau. In all justice, however, it must not be said that Père Vineau was hard on others without being a tyrant to himself. All things considered it seems an unfortunate circumstance that Père Vineau was placed at the head of the College of Puy. Indeed, had higher Superiors listened to the protestations he himself made during four months after his appointment, things might have been otherwise.

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It will be remembered that at the very outset Père Vineau had given his consent for the work of the Refuge only with reluctance. It is not remarkable, then, that he carefully watched developments, and on beholding the storm of persecution that broke over Regis, took alarm. He feared not only for the bodily safety of his subject, but for the good name and reputation of the college as well. What would people think, nay more, say, when they saw Regis in communication with such an abandoned lot as were the inmates of the Refuge. Let the work, then, go on if it could, but Regis must have nothing to do with it.

In vain did the Saint make to the Rector the representations allowed by the Rule. There was but one way open to him and that the safest, obedience and submission. True son of Saint Ignatius that he was, his compliance was perfect. Nothing could induce him to go near the Refuge or have anything to do with it. In the eyes of the world, what was this? Plainly, weakness and lack of self-assertion, inconstancy. But the eyes of the world looked through colored glass!

Yet, in spite of Regis' perfect obedience, he was plunged into a sea of perplexity. Was the work God had inspired him to do and which in the face of so much adversity had thus far prospered so well, — was this work to see a premature end, all on account of the misguided opinion of one man? Still, what could be done that had not been tried? He had begged the Superior even upon his knees to reconsider his decision. No? Well, then, he would give it up!

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Not as yet recognizing the temptation with which the real enemy of his labors was assailing him, Regis wrote to the Provincial asking to be removed to another college. The letter granting the permission was no sooner in his hands than he saw that he must not make use of it. Such a course would be sheer cowardice. The part of the man and of the Jesuit was to face the trouble. Fortified with this resolution it seemed to Regis that there was nothing he would not gladly endure for the sake of the salvation of the souls of his penitents. And after all, could there be any doubt but what this was the design of Divine Providence? Out of his own suffering his work would grow strong.

The Saint was not to be disappointed in the matter of suffering. His Superior put him through a very martyrdom. He was reprimanded in private and in public for his most ordinary actions; his will was crossed on every occasion. He was not even allowed the consolation of bodily mortification. He was refused permission to assist a dying man who was publicly known to be in the state of mortal sin. (Of course, the Superior sent someone else.) "Very well," said Regis to one of the other Fathers, "but I shall not get a wink of sleep tonight."

Who could blame the Saint for wishing to avoid at least the occasions of persecution? But such was not the case. One of his companions with whom he had been on a missionary excursion, told him on the way home that he knew for certain that the Superior had a new humiliation in store for him on their return. "But

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I know you are not guilty, mon Père; I shall speak to the Rector." Regis begged his friend not to interfere.

This cloud, however, was bound to reveal its silver lining, and the hand that turned it was none other than the Superior himself. True, it was not until the opinion of even the people of Puy demanded different treatment of Regis, that Père Vineau recognized in the missionary a great saint. And as heretofore he had been relentless in persecution, so now there was nothing he was unwilling to do in order to restore to Regis full liberty in his Heaven-inspired work. This sudden reparation came none too soon, for shortly after Regis took charge of the Refuge again, Père Vineau was sent as Rector to Béziers, being replaced at Puy by Ignace Arnoux, the friend of Regis' noviceship days. These two men understood each other perfectly and in consequence the Saint was now more free than ever to go on with the work of the Refuge.

The penitents were overjoyed to have their Spiritual Father restored to them, while on his part Regis spared neither time nor labor in their behalf. He increased the revenue of the establishment and witnessed the beginning of an era of prosperity. Thirty souls now clients of Saint Mary Magdalene and under the patronage of Saint Agatha, were learning to love a life of purity and to thank God for their deliverer. Deliverer indeed he had been, and was now about to show himself their protector.

At about seven o'clock one evening a loud knock sounded at the door of the College of Puy.

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“Tell Père Regis to come at once! The young men are going to turn the penitents out and burn the Refuge!”

In a few moments Père Regis was at his Superior's feet begging permission to go to the Refuge and save his penitents.

“But what can you do singlehanded, mon Père?” reasoned Ignace Arnoux.

“I will stand on the doorstep and they will have to kill me before they can set foot within the house!”

“Ah, mon Père; I cannot allow you to expose yourself so rashly; I will be accountable for any damage they may do.”

Regis was losing time. Even now, perhaps, the ruffians had forced Saint Agatha's. The thought was a torture.

“*Accountable!*” he cried. “Will Your Reverence be accountable for thirty lost souls! Ah, let me go! Let me die for these souls! See! I am worthless; but think of their souls!”

Père Arnoux was himself a man of zeal. He could not resist an appeal like this: “Go,” said he, “and God be with you!”

Regis fairly rushed from the room, confident he was going to his death. But what was death? Had he not implored the Father General to send him to death on the Canadian Missions? Well indeed, he thought, had the General refused, for here was martyrdom at home!



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The zealous man encountered Père Antoine Mangeon at the door, and pausing a moment, made his last will and testament: "Father, the Procurator has some money I gave him. Will you see that it is given to the poor?"

Meanwhile the ruffians had made their attack on the Refuge, but just as soon as they began battering down the door, the screams of the frightened penitents aroused the neighborhood and the band was dispersed. Thus the Saint was a martyr of charity only in desire, and thus Saint Agatha's was saved.

Another and more subtle attack was made on Regis because of the penitents; but it was destined to failure like the rest. Thanks to Père Ignace Arnoux, no amount of calumny that reached his ears, even when his own subjects were its well-intending bearers, could induce him to interfere with the Saint's work. On the contrary, he wrote as follows to the General of the Society of Jesus at Rome:

"I have no doubt, very Reverend Father, that you have received letters in a spirit hostile to Père Regis and complaints against his so-called transports of misguided zeal. I beg you not to be deceived by any false pictures that may have been drawn of this holy man. He is an indefatigable worker, [*Operarius Inconfusibilis!*] a man who draws not a single breath save for the Glory of God. He is animated with the zeal of an apostle, nor can there be any human consideration that keeps him at his work. And indeed, it is this fact that has

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caused so many sinners and men of scandalous life to oppose him; hence also certain Fathers of the college have been alarmed at the hue and cry these men have raised against him throughout the city. But I can assure you in all truth that not only have I not found the least cause for blame in him, but on the contrary, I have found him eminent in many virtues and most deserving of praise. Furthermore, if he is engaged in a warfare against scandal, it is not with more zeal than prudence: he is relentless in rooting out sin, but he manages his penitents with all possible sweetness and charity. Finally he is a man of obedience and people are beginning to call him 'The Saint.' "

A little later the Father Provincial added his own praise to the above magnificent tribute; but it was not necessary, for any fears the General might have entertained must have been allayed by the closing sentence of Père Arnoux's letter: "He is a man of obedience." This was the crowning praise, the last word. If Regis was a man of obedience, and yet bad reports concerning his conduct were in circulation, these must be the result of envy or misapprehension; for fanaticism and true religious obedience will not go hand in hand.

To the perfect satisfaction, then, of his Superiors, and certainly to the untold consolation of the Heart of Christ, Saint John Francis Regis went on with the work so dear to him, and in the end rested triumphant over the three arch-enemies he was combating: the World, the Flesh and the Devil.

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### *II. Various Labors*

The establishment of Saint Agataha’s Refuge was only one phase of the labors of the intrepid ‘‘Operarius Inconfusibilis.’’ All the while his battle against evil was raging, Regis was engaged in other work, the magnitude and intensity of which, to speak with moderation, were marvelous.

When not visiting the sick, to whom he brought not only spiritual but bodily refreshment, oftentimes even restoring health miraculously, Regis was to be seen entering the home of some poor wretch, carrying a basket of food or a bag of grain. And when he had not money enough to purchase his supplies for the poor, and could not beg from his wealthy friends, he did not hesitate to ask of God a miracle.

The year 1637 found the city of Puy without a sufficient supply of wheat. There were of course, no modern means of transportation such as help to keep the wolf away from our door now-a-days. Besides, there had been a bad crop that year and what grain there was to be had, commanded a fancy price, within the means only of the rich. Father Regis had a small supply of grain which he kept at the house of one Marguerite Baud. The grain was stored in a bin under lock and key, and the arrangement between Marguerite and Regis was that no wheat was to be given out except to such as had an order from himself, and only for the amount stated.

In the present crisis the poor soon began to flock to their beloved Father asking for grain, and he in his generosity gave liberal orders on Marguerite's small supply, which obviously could not stand so severe a strain. The supply was soon exhausted, but this fact did not seem to worry Père Regis, who kept giving out orders.

When Marguerite had given away the last measureful, she naturally expected that no one would be sent for more until the bin could be refilled. What was her surprise, then, when a poor woman presented her ticket asking for wheat.

"Why, it's all gone," said Marguerite. "I must go tell Père Regis; he will get some more."

Off she went, and, be it remembered, took along the key of the empty wheat-bin.

"The bin is empty, mon Père; yet you send me orders still?"

"Oh no; there is plenty for others, ma fille; there is plenty."

"But, mon Père, I left it empty."

"And you will find it full!"

Marguerite returned, confident that Regis had made some mistake. There was certainly no wheat in the bin when she had last opened it.

A little later when Marguerite accompanied her poor client to the door after having filled her basket with miraculous wheat, she espied Father Regis coming along the street. Straightway she ran to meet him and began pouring forth a volume of exclamations.

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Regis calmly said to her: "Daughter, the granaries of God are never empty!"

Once more the bin was miraculously filled, and on a third occasion just enough was added to make up the amount usually given out.

Not the sick and poor alone were the Saint's debtors. The working class also came to him in their hour of need and found both a willing and a successful helper. Not indeed that the Saint offered them immediate aid—that he was unable to do—but the event was such that in years to come he was the chosen patron of the French lacemakers.

Beginning in the year 1629 a series of sumptuary laws was promulgated regulating the use of lace and other finery. Ten years later the laws had become so stringent that the manufacture of lace could not be made a paying proposition. It was thus due to these foolish and somewhat Puritanical laws that numbers of the peasantry were deprived of the means of an honest livelihood. Nor this alone, but the Saint had made use of lacemaking as an employment for his penitents at Saint Agatha's. He himself used to bring their products to the merchants.

The lacemakers were in consternation. What now could be done except appeal to the good Father? Accordingly a deputation waited on Regis, begging him to use his influence with those in power. Just what steps, if any directly, the Saint took is not clear from the sources at hand. At all events the lacemakers went

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away satisfied with the following prophecy, borne out, we are told, almost to the letter: "This decree will be short-lived. Your industry will regain its former footing; nor will it become extinct in this section, but on the contrary, it will grow and you will have every means of earning your bread."

Such, in fact, was the event, and in 1661, Louis XIV issued a decree in encouragement of the lacemaking industry. Not even a tax of any kind was levied on lace.

However engrossed in his labors here at Puy, the mind and heart of the Saint were afar off in distant lands. It will be remembered that while still a novice at Toulouse, and while praying in the Basilica of Saint Saturninus, Regis had been inspired to prepare himself for the foreign missions. He had not forgotten his desire, nor had the lapse of years cooled his ardor. So it was that when reports came back to France of the labors and hardships of the Jesuits in Canada, Regis began to dream of evangelizing the savages of North America. He saw himself in the snow-clad forests with his brethren, toiling on toward some mission-station that seemed infinitely distant. He heard the war-whoop of the Iroquois as they sprang out of their ambush to lead him away to torture and to death for Christ. He felt that he could wait but little longer for this dream to come true.

The first of the Saint's letters asking to be sent out on the Canadian Missions is dated December 15, 1634.

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"Very Reverend Father :

"So great is my desire to be sent on the Missions of Canada that should I neglect to tell Your Paternity of it, I should feel guilty of neglecting the call of God Himself. I wish, then, to make you a voluntary manifestation of my conscience. It is my most earnest hope that you will listen with favor to what I have to say, or rather, I have little room to doubt but what through your kindness I shall meet with full success.

"Would to God my virtue were as solid as the robust constitution with which, as Your Paternity is aware, Heaven has blessed me. However, as the saying goes: 'Virtue grows stronger in weakness.' Thus I am not without hope that *my* virtue will prove no exception, but with God's help will strengthen itself in its weaknesses, — weaknesses which in the midst of this perverse people cannot but be great in number.

Very Reverend Father,

Your most respectful son and servant in Xt.,

JOHN FRANCIS REGIS.

Le Puy."

In reply to the above direct, straightforward and honest appeal, the Father General wrote as follows, January 29, 1635 :

"I am much pleased with your generous zeal for the Glory of God and the salvation of souls, and I offer heartfelt thanks to Him who has inspired you. I shall take account of your desires when they shall have

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reached full maturity. In the meantime you must nourish them with prayer and reinforce them with the practice of virtue. Prepare yourself also for conflict with difficulties, not so much those difficulties one might vaguely apprehend in the distant future, but such as one must confront in daily life.

“I am of the opinion that your desires for the missions are God-given, and you are in duty bound to lay them up in your heart, keeping guard over them with the greater fidelity, since you cannot doubt but what they have been purchased with the Blood of Christ. Your own zeal in giving yourself up to this work will be greater, I trust, than anything I can say to spur you on. . . .

Rome.”

The Saint took eleven months in which to make trial of the Father General’s injunctions to wait, watch and pray. By the end of that time he found his desire for the Mission of Canada so much increased that he wrote again to the Father General, November 26, 1636, as follows:

“In answer to my letter on the subject of the Missions of Canada, I have Your Paternity’s very kind reply, in which you promised to take account of my desires when they should have sufficiently matured. A whole year has now elapsed since the time it pleased God, as I heartily believe, to give me the desire of the missions. And throughout all this time it has grown remarkably,



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nourished as it was and warmed on more than one occasion by the fire of the Holy Ghost. The fruit is now ripe, so that I beg most earnestly of Your Paternity to look favorably upon my request. Not a few have advised me to give up my idea of the missions. It is, they say, full of dangers and difficulties. No doubt they think me neither worthy of nor fitted for the work, and I confess that they are right. Still I have not lost hope that my aspirations will see fulfilment, since Your Paternity has bade me to look forward to that end. I beg you by that fire of zeal I know you have for the Glory of God, to bid me take up this work for which you have given me reason to hope. In any case, I shall look upon as best, whatever and all that you shall bid me do, and relying on the goodness of God, shall obey with all my heart.

Very Reverend Father,  
Your most humble servant in Christ,  
and unworthy son.

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Aubenas.’’

Once more to quote from the old English translation of Father Daubenton’s life of the Saint :

‘‘In the meantime, he still followed his first Vocation, with greater Ardour than ever; and his Thoughts were so taken up, Day and Night, with the Conversion of the *Canadois*. Sometimes he would in Confidence say to his Companion: How happy were it for me, to die for

JESUS CHRIST, procuring the Salvation of the *Hurons* and *Iroquois*. Burning with these holy Desires, he made it his first Business, coming into the College, to enquire of F. *Sebastian Vineau*, the Rector, whether he had any Letters for him. The Rector gave him one, which was the General's Answer to his Letter from *Aubenas*. This Letter, dated *January 15, 1636*,\* imported in Substance: that so many French Jesuits solicited the Mission of *Canada*, that the favor could not be granted to all; the Revenues of the Mission, now in its Infancy, not bearing a greater Number of Missionaries. He added that as those Funds improved in Time, the Number of Evangelical Labourers might be increased; and then a particular Regard might be had to the Fervour of his Zeal; that in the meanwhile he must continue to lay up a Fund of Apostolical Virtues, and chiefly of the Love of the Cross, as a necessary Provision to work with

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\*This date is hardly correct,—at least with regard to the year. How the discrepancy escaped such a painstaking writer as Father de Curley, is not easily understood. De Curley gives as the date of Regis' second letter to the Father General, November 20, 1636. This letter is immediately followed in his book, page 77, by the General's second reply, dated according to the same writer, January 10, 1636. No doubt he took his dates from Daubenton, whose edition of 1823, gives January 13, 1636.

In explanation of the original error, two hypotheses are possible: (1) the month is wrong: it should be December instead of January; or (2) the year is wrong: it should be 1637. We prefer the latter, since owing to the usual press of business in the Father General's office, and owing also to the tardy means of transportation in those days, it would take about two months for a letter to reach Regis from Rome.

Advantage in the Missions, where so much was to be suffered.

“The General’s Answer mortified Regis: He thought that to deny him that Mission, was to wrest out of his Hands the Crown of Martyrdom. He attributed this Denial to his Sins; but however sensible his Affliction was, he did not utter a single word of Complaint, submitting to the Divine Will, which he respected in the Order of his Superior. He eased his Grief, with Hopes, that God would open to him another Career, where he might be employed to greater Advantage, and finish a virtuous Course. He was not deceived. Heaven inspired to him the Design of beginning Missions at *Puy* the Capitol of the *Velay*, and continuing them in the Mountains that encompass that Country. And therefore he found abundantly whatever he could have found in *Canada*; great Occasions of Patience, and numberless Souls to be won over to God. The remaining Part of his Life was one continuous Mission, one continued Series of Sufferings.”

### III. *Missions*

True apostleship has not been called utter hardship simply with a view toward making a clever or striking remark. There is a great, and to the apostle himself, an only too evident truth in the saying. If the history of men who have spent their lives in spreading the Christian Religion were not at hand, and we had to fall

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back for a proof of the fact upon the life of Saint John Francis Regis, we should not be disappointed, for the story of the Saint's missionary career is indeed, in the words of the quaint translator quoted above, "one continued Series of Sufferings."

By way of introduction to Saint John Francis Regis' more extensive missions in the country districts, an account must be given of his wonderful work at Sommières, a work that has lasted to our own day.

The people of Sommières had always been noted for their frivolity and gayety of life, and this on the testimony of their own contemporaries. Everyone referred to them as "Les passereaux de Sommières," or, "The Sparrows of Sommières." This trait of the Sommières character was its downfall, for when in 1562, Viret, the ardent zealot of Calvinism, a man whom Calvin regarded as a second self, came to Sommières, he found that only two day's preaching were required to win over the entire population to his sect. There were, however, a few exceptions. Viret had scattered Calvinist corn for the "Sparrows of Sommières," and all had eaten of it except one Martial Guillot and his two sons, who alone remained true to the ancient Faith, taking for their motto: "*Etsi omnes, ego non.*" These loyal men did their utmost to oppose Viret, and after his departure tried courageously to stamp out the effects of his preaching. But in vain. Within twelve years after Viret had left Sommières, the only Catholics to be found there were Martial Guillot and his sons. The Sparrows had found more palatable

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peckings and would no longer eat of the substantial food of Catholicism. Not only did the greater part of the populace go over in a body to Calvinism, but those who refused to adopt the new religion, were, it is said, put to death. We are not told how the Guillots escaped the common lot.

There is no need of further comment in order to describe the state of Sommières when Regis arrived there about the year 1633. The Catholics counted few indeed of the 700 families making up the population, though there were at the time three churches and one or two private chapels in the town.

If love of novelty had been the downfall of the people of Sommières, it was now to be their salvation, for the announcement of a new preacher in town, the very preacher too, whose fame was beginning to spread about, was all that was needed to draw a large audience for the first sermon Regis preached in the city. His plan of campaign was to be very simple, direct and not above the level of his somewhat obtuse audience. He found his way to their hearts by the very door they themselves opened to him. Beginning by reminding his hearers of the gay and pleasant life they were leading, the preacher startled his audience by suddenly asking them if they had ever thought that there must come an end! Had they ever thought of death? But death would surely come! And was there anything after that? Assuredly: judgment and heaven,—or, was it hell? And what was hell? Nothing if not the miserable and eternal

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abode of such as too long deferred the time of repentance. The conclusion was obvious: a sudden halt must be called in this wild rush for pleasure, lest they find in the end, but all too late, that it had been the blazing fire of hell that attracted their moth-like vision.

The immediate result was conversion, not only of born heretics, but of fallen-away Catholics too; for, any who took the trouble to acknowledge themselves as such, were far from examples of what their holy religion demanded of them. Furthermore, that the conversion was permanent is evident from the fact that the good seed took root and sprang up to bear abundant fruit in the shape of further conversions and ardent devotion even to works of supererogation. For when the Catholic community had grown large enough, Regis established at Sommières the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament. So generously did the people take hold of this new devotion that nothing short of a corps of perpetual adorers would satisfy them. As late as 1690 this phase of the devotion was considered as being of very early date, — a fact which shows that the “Sparrows of Sommières” had turned veritable eagles. Perseverance is the surest test of a true conversion.

Regis himself avowed in a letter to the Father General that he was astonished at the marvels God’s grace had worked among the people of Sommières. He assured the General too of the lasting character of the change; it was simply complete. “God is surely great, and I am at a loss to explain how it has all come about.”

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This last, of course, is plainly the Saint's humility speaking; and the General must have realized on reading Regis' letter that the cause of his success, under God's grace, was this same humility. Indeed, the General would have been convinced that such was the case could he have witnessed two events which took place near Sommières, and of which Regis, of course, says nothing in his letter.

The events in question are complete refutation of an altogether inexplicable idea, namely, that in order to become a saint, one must be an anaemic, spineless sort of creature, too phlegmatic to resist injustice. With so many examples in the lives of the Saints of just the opposite, and here another in the life of Saint John Francis Regis, it is strange, to speak mildly, that such a view should still persist, and even among Catholics.

The times with which we are dealing were troublesome both in religious and civil spheres; so that it was deemed necessary by the authorities, such as they were, to use the military as a sort of police. But the remedy was worse than the evil, since more than half the time the soldiers were not paid, and were, after all, only a lawless lot of ruffians, even the Catholic element among them. It was their custom to go about from village to village plundering the poor peasants and extorting large sums from the well-to-do as insurance against raid.

On one occasion the people of Combas got wind of the fact that a band of soldiery was about to make a raid on their village. Immediately all valuables were stowed

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away in hiding-places and the entire village assembled in the church, determined to submit to a siege rather than open to the ruffians.

When the soldiers entered the village they found every house deserted, and on gathering in front of the church, beheld there Père Regis standing motionless before the barred doors, crucifix in hand. Their astonishment was complete. What could the man intend to do?

Regis enlightened them: "I conjure you," he began, "by the Blood of Jesus Christ, to respect this holy place and not to rob these poor people of the little they have for the support of their needy families. Or, if you must despoil *them*, I shall defend the Altar of God with the last drop of my blood, and count it gain to have shed it in so holy a cause."

For a moment there was a dramatic silence; then one of the soldiers, bolder than his fellows, stepped forward. Immediately the rest were at his heels. Regis waited and when the soldier tried to force his way past him to the church door, the Saint grasped him firmly by the arm and cried out: "Stand back sacrilegious man! Stand back, impious fellow! I shall never permit you to violate the House of God in my presence. You will enter this sacred edifice only by stepping over the dead body of a priest of the living God. Strike me, if you will, but understand that God will avenge Himself well of the outrage perpetrated against His Altar, and that vengeance will follow close upon the crime!"



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But this is melodramatic, modern critics will object. Be it so; but earnest and heartily meant, every word of it. It is terrible to think what might have followed had not the soldiers turned away and given up their attempt.

These soldiers were Catholics (save the mark!) and were thus more easily impressed than the set Regis met in another village. This other band, who were Huguenots, had forced themselves upon the hospitality of a well-to-do Catholic. When the spirit finally moved them to take their departure, it occurred to someone that a souvenir of their visit would be most appropriate. Accordingly they suggested to their "host" that if he would prefer handing over a certain fabulous sum of money, instead of granting them leave to walk off with the best of his movable goods,—why, they were not so particular: one way would suit them quite as well as the other.

While the frantic proprietor of the place was arguing with his "guests" that he really did not care for either plan, and the "guests" were insisting that both were good; that he must choose either one or the other, — while all this parley was going on, one of the household ran to tell Père Regis of the matter, and ask him to pray God to make the soldiers depart in peace.

"I will come at once," said Regis, when he had learned the state of affairs.

"No; no, mon Père!" cried the messenger, "That would only make things worse. Do not come, but pray God to send these men away. They are Huguenots; you

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are a Jesuit! They hate the sight of your habit. They will kill you!”

That was enough!

“Then surely I will come!” cried the Saint. “What a happiness to defend a Catholic against a heretic, (Regis’ blood was ancestral!) and even to give my life for him whom Jesus died to save. Ah, but I fear I am not worthy of becoming a martyr of charity!”

The result was as the Saint’s informer had anticipated. Implore or threaten as he might, the holy man could make no impression. He might have done better talking to stocks and stones. Finally, seeing that he was only wasting his breath, Regis went away. No sooner was his back turned than he was followed with shouts of derision, and even vegetables and lumps of dirt were hurled after him by the soldiers. But these worthies had more important business to engage their attention, and they set about it without delay.

Although the damage to the peasant’s property had been done, Regis, on hearing that an officer lived nearby, sought him out and found that the whole affair had been reported to him, even including the insults offered to the Saint himself. The officer treated Regis with great kindness and promised that full reparation would be made to the peasant. And when the Saint made no allusion to the treatment he himself had received, the officer expressed surprise. Hear the answer of a Saint:

“Ah, perhaps you do not understand that the ministers of the Gospel should be ready to take insults as

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compliments, bear them with patience and forgive them with charity. I should never complain of a chance to put the counsels of my religion in practice. I will count it reparation enough for myself if you will restrain your men and protect our people against them."

Such was the work accomplished in and about Sommières, a work which has had a lasting character. As we have seen, the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament established by Regis at Sommières, flourished long after his death, and with perpetual adoration as part of the programme. More, the people clung tenaciously to their reborn Faith, for when in 1702, Cavalier came down from the Cevennes upon Sommières with an army of Protestants, though he was able to murder and pillage, still he could not separate the onetime "Sparrows of Sommières" from their dear religion. Regis' efforts had not been in vain, and even last till our own day, for in 1893 Sommières counted nearly 2400 Catholics against 1500 Protestants.

If Saint John Francis Regis found what was even worse than raw material upon which to work at Sommières, then there are left us hardly adequate words to describe the condition of affairs when in 1633, he was appointed along with Father Jacques Beyssen, to precede the Bishop of Viviers in the pastoral visitation of his diocese. The territory over which Regis was to work was divided into 334 parishes, containing 212,000 souls. But the difficulty of the task before him was to be measured not so much by the numbers, as by the deplorable condition of the people with whom he had to deal.

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A pastoral visitation of the diocese had been made in 1584 by Nicholas de Vesc, Vicar General of Bishop Jean l'Hostel, and in almost every parish the state of affairs was enough to discourage even the heart of an apostle. The churches, so far from being frequented by the people, were often found without a bell to call them to worship, a font at which to baptize their children, or even an altar on which a priest could in conscience celebrate the Holy Sacrifice. In some places the churches were falling to pieces, and in others nothing remained but the foundation stones.

This was the state of affairs fifty years before the good Bishop Louis-François de la Baume-Suse decided to make his pastoral visitation. What must have been the deplorable condition of the people at this later date? "Evils had gathered strength by long delay" and were of such intensity as to force themselves on a less willing attention than that of the Bishop.

Desiring to come directly into contact with his people and of having them well prepared for his visitation, the Bishop asked for and received as his forerunner, Père Jean-François Regis.

Fay-le-Froid was the first place to engage the Saint's attention. This town was a stronghold of Protestantism. Formerly, we are told, it had been a center from which Protestant excursions of all kinds, religious and martial, emanated, much to the detriment of Catholic faith and morals. In 1573 Senéceterre, the Bishop of Puy, had with five hundred men, laid siege to Fay and finally

taken it by assault. Holy Mass was celebrated in the public square even before the roar of the cannon had ceased, and Fay was once more, rightly or wrongly, (we cannot say,) in Catholic hands.

But such methods of reëstablishing the Faith had but little effect toward winning the good will of the heretics. Hence it was that Regis found his task at Fay no easy one. His efforts were as great and zealous as ever, but it was reserved for another time, (later he gave a winter mission at Fay,) to reap the abundant fruit. Still, his work was not without results, for he made a new friend who was to aid him materially on his missions. This friend was no less a personage than the Comte de la Motte-Brion. Regis also converted from Calvinism an old lady whom the flattery of her coreligionists had turned into an apostle and protectress of their faith. At first the conversion of this lady held forth but little hope of accomplishment, but when Regis had talked to her but a short time, she gave in, saying that she felt she had no power of will to refuse.

Ever on the watch for such cases, Regis also converted to a good life a woman of ill repute who had been a public scandal. In fact, so greatly was the Saint feared and detested by one public sinner, that the fellow organized a campaign of calumny against him and nearly succeeded in accomplishing his bitter designs. The preaching and good life of the Saint had been such a rebuke to this man, that he determined to get Regis out of the way as soon as possible. He chose means well

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suiting to his end, for he went to the Bishop and represented that Regis' zeal was misguided, that he was really sowing discord in families hitherto peaceful, that his invectives against vice were directed toward certain persons in particular. Other malcontents were enlisted in the campaign, and came to the Bishop with the same story, but as if independently and without design. A letter in the same strain was sent to the General in Rome.

The outcome was that Regis was summoned by the Bishop and the complaints against him made known. His only answer was that if he had abused the authority given him, at least that had not been his intention; that God was his witness that he had kept His glory and the salvation of souls alone at heart in all he had done.

The Bishop was struck with the good man's humility, and his conviction that the reports must be false was confirmed when the Comte de la Motte and Père Siniane, the Vicar, came and justified Regis completely.

Thus the Saint was free to carry on his good work once more, and this he did until the beginning of 1635, when the Bishop was forced to discontinue his visitation, in order to attend the Provincial Assembly of Vivarais, preparatory to the General Assembly of the Clergy of France.

While on this mission in the Vivarais occurred one of Saint John Francis Regis' miraculous escapes. He was traveling in the direction of the Château of Pradel, a house at the time in the hands of the Protestants. The Saint was suddenly made aware of the fact that he was

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being pursued by Huguenot soldiers. Not knowing whither to go to escape them, the good man entered as if by inspiration, the courtyard of the château. This seemed, as Father de Curley remarks, to be taking refuge in the jaws of a lion. But not so: there in the court stood a small pile of hay. In the depths of the stack Regis concealed himself just shortly before the soldiers entered the yard. Naturally enough they at once suspected that the man they were seeking was within the hay-stack. Approaching, they passed their lances through the pile in all directions, after the manner of the Indian fakir with his sword and basket, but hearing no cry of pain, they went on their way, feeling, we may surmise, that in truth they had been pursuing a wizard.

Tradition has left it that on this mission of the Vivarais Regis evangelized the following villages and towns: Pradel, Mazignon, Chalengon, the Château de Cherville, Giron, Villars, St. Laurent de Coiron, Poucharesse, Dompnac, Jaussac, and the Château de Pradel. In nearly every one of these places in later years was to be found some memorial of the Saint's visit,—a chapel dedicated to his name or a cross: "la croix de S. Regis."

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### *Winter Missions*

Before coming at length to tell of Saint John Francis Regis' last effort as a missionary, that crowning effort which culminated in his death at La Louvesc, there remains to be given some account of that work so dear to his heart, the work of the Winter Missions.

The field of these arduous labors was the country district of the dioceses of Puy, Viviers, Valence and Vienne, and the sentiment which quickened him to action in spite of the difficulties of bitter cold winter, was the following, attributed to the Saint himself: "If God should give me the choice of going to Heaven or of staying here on earth to spread the Gospel, I should prefer to stay here and work for the conversion of sinners!"

But why choose the winter for work that was hard enough in element weather? It was a question of *some-one* making a sacrifice, so that logically (for Regis) *he* must be the one to make it. In the spring the tilling must be done, and in the summer and autumn there was the harvest to occupy nearly all the time of the peasants. Consequently, in order to insure good attendance and to inconvenience the people as little as could be, Regis fixed upon the winter as the most convenient time for his country missions, even though that meant for him pain and suffering, and in the event, his death.

While giving these missions the Saint followed a regular order as much as possible. The morning was spent







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in preaching and hearing confessions. About noon, and by virtue of a special privilege he possessed, even after noon, he would celebrate the Holy Sacrifice. The afternoon was divided between sermons and the confessional. At night he would discipline himself, oftentimes, we are told, to blood, and then lie down for a few hours' rest on a couch or upon the bare floor. He ate but little; yet we are told that he was a man of perfect health: in spite of his manner of life, surely, rather than because of it. He traveled from place to place on foot, and once when forced by a good man to accept a horse and groom, he consented to ride, but only as long as he was within sight of his benefactor. Once out of sight he made the groom mount the horse whilst he himself trudged alongside in the snow. A cloak thrown over his soutane was his only protection against the elements; under his soutane there rasped against his skin a prickly hair-shirt and a barbed chain.

Regis was like the first missionaries sent out by Our Lord Himself: without scrip or purse. On one occasion while traveling through a Huguenot village with his companion, night overtook them and the pangs of hunger soon began to make further travel unpleasant. The following incident took place at Le Chambon de Tence, on one of the Saint's last missions. There was an inn in the village, but, thought the companion, there might as well be no inn at all, for they themselves were penniless and could expect no charity from the Huguenots.

"We'll go to the inn," said the Saint, "and have supper."

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“But the money?” queried Bénzac, his companion.

“I shall pray, and Our Lord will settle our bill,” was the unhesitating reply.

“To be sure,” said Bénzac, not without some bitterness, “Huguenots will take prayers for pay!”

Nevertheless, to the inn they went and Regis ordered supper for Bénzac. Whilst Bénzac, with some misgivings was bestowing himself heartily, but warily to his task, the Saint sought out a table of young men who were playing cards and who paid no attention to his intrusion. Regis sat down as if to watch the game. Never before had such a spectator joined their group, so the young men determined to have a little sport with their visitor. A few significant looks were exchanged and presently remarks were passed,—remarks seemingly innocent but in reality bearing a double meaning. Each brilliant sally was greeted with a roar of laughter. (By this time Bénzac could scarcely have been enjoying his meal.)

Now appears that compelling force which a man of character can exercise upon his fellows. Who could have been more ill-disposed toward Regis than these ruffians? Yet the power of the man and the grace of God that surely was assisting him, bore so weightily upon this uncouth gathering that when the Saint began to talk of civility and charity and the kindness that should characterize our every word spoken about others, especially strangers, these young men gave in at once, actually begged pardon, and as if to make reparation, bade the

innkeeper treat the stranger well, not to take his money, that they would settle for his bill!

Bénzac left the inn that night a man of stronger faith.

There is no need to go into detail with regard to the work Regis accomplished in each of the places he visited during his Winter Missions. The more important stations along his route were as follows: Le Cheylard, St. Martin, Lechamp, Privas, St. Agrève, St. André, Fay-le-Froid (visited before,) Marlhès, Feugerolles, St. Regis-du-Coin, St. Sauveur, Clavas, Bourg-Argental, St. Julien, St. Apollinard, St. Pierre, St. Bennet and Vorey.

It was whilst giving a mission at Marcoux and Mont-Regard that Regis effected the conversion from Protestantism of a very influential young widow, by name, Louise de Romezin. Louise was born at Le Chambon de Tence in 1616,—the year in which Regis entered the Society of Jesus. Her father and mother and grandparents had been Calvinists of the strictest type. The family was one of quality and had great influence. From her earliest years Louise had been instructed by Calvinist Ministers, the burden of whose lessons was that the Catholic Church was false and that Catholic priests were imposters and seducers, bad men. Louise grew up to be a champion of the Calvinist religion. She filled her ready memory with quotations from Scripture calculated to refute anything a Catholic might say in defense of his Faith. She was withal a woman of spotless morals and tender charity.

At the age of twenty-two Louise became the bride of Gilles de la Franchère, a Protestant gentleman belonging

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to a family attached to the Court of Henry IV. In 1639 Gilles de la Franchère died, leaving Louise to care for their only son. It was shortly after the death of De la Franchère that Regis came to Mont-Regard to give a mission. Mont-Regard was not far from the Château de Marcoux, Louise's home at the time.

Regis had travelled all day and arrived at Mont-Regard at night. He went straight to the church, but finding it locked, sat down on the snowy steps and passed the night in prayer. The mission opened the next day and it was not long before Louise de Romezin even in her retirement at Marcoux, heard rumors and stories of "le saint Père." The beginning of her conversion was curiosity. She resolved to hear one of Regis' sermons. She mingled with the common-folk, and so went unnoticed. But ever after that first sermon she went openly, excusing herself to her coreligionists on the plea that she only wished to hear this extraordinary man, but that of course she would never be influenced by him or by any other to change her religion. No doubt this statement represents the true state of her mind at the time.

The Saint was informed of the fact that he had so distinguished a listener in his congregation and expressed a desire to meet and speak with Louise de Romezin. This was exactly what that lady herself desired. Consequently an interview was arranged, during which not a word was spoken about points of controversy between Calvinists and Catholics. Five other interviews followed: in the

second Regis explained the mysteries of the Catholic Faith. In the third he put the true interpretation on the texts of Scripture Louise adduced against the Church. In the fourth and fifth interviews Regis showed his pupil that the Calvinists imputed to the Church doctrines she had never taught. This fact so impressed Louise that we are told she exclaimed: "Can it be possible that a man so enlightened, yet so humble; so zealous for God's glory, yet so dead to himself, can be in error, or that he should wish to lead others astray?"

There followed one more interview in which Louise de Romezin surrendered. Her greatest difficulty had been to believe in the Real Presence. At one word from the Saint, she tells us in her deposition, all the errors of Calvin were obliterated and she believed in the truth of Christ. What that word was she does not say. It must have been, we agree with Father de Curley, some simple expression, humanly speaking, in utter disproportion to the effect it bore. Regis spoke the word, but it was God who gave the light and the grace to believe.

Louise de Romezin kept her conversion secret for a time, but at Regis' bidding made it public, much to the chagrin of the Protestants, and, unhappily, to the grief of her parents, but to the joy of the Catholics.

From Mont-Regard Regis went to Le Chambon de Tence, and thence to Montfaucon, where in the midst of his mission the bubonic plague broke out. Obtaining the permission of his Superior and of Louis de Lagrevol, he at once set to work relieving the plague-stricken, without

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thought or care for himself. After some time, however, Louis de Lagrevol insisted that Regis endanger himself no longer. He must leave Montfaucon to its misery. In vain did the Saint protest, and so left the city only to care for the plague-stricken in another place. But wonderful to relate, as soon as the Saint took his departure, so did the bubonic plague. Not another fatality was recorded, and all the stricken recovered. Before Regis had let Moantfaucon out of his sight, he had turned on the brow of the hill, and looking back had raised his hand in priestly blessing.

When news was brought to the Saint of Montfaucon's liberation he hastened back only to find the entire population at his feet proclaiming him their deliverer. His wish was to continue his interrupted mission, but he was doomed to disappointment, for word came from his Rector, Père Arnoux, that he was to return to Puy to fill the place of one of the Professors of the college. Without a murmur he obeyed. This incident was, however, the occasion of his writing to the General for permission to spend five or six months of the year on the country missions. The permission was readily granted, and encouraged by this success, he ventured a step farther toward the accomplishment of a scheme very dear to his heart. He had conceived the idea of a band of missionaries whose sole occupation would be to traverse the countryside giving missions like those he had been conducting for the past five years. Regis communicated this plan to the General and received in reply a hearty commendation.



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This scheme, however, was never to be put into operation by its originator. It was now the year 1640, the one hundredth anniversary of the foundation of the Society of Jesus. Regis took part in the earthly celebration of this event, but before long he was to bid farewell to the Society of Jesus militant, in order to join his brothers triumphant in Heaven.

JOHN FRANCIS REGIS: "IN MANUS TUAS, DOMINE"

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The portrait of Saint John Francis Regis at the beginning of this volume is taken from the "Galerie Photographique de la Compagnie de Jesus," of Father Alfred Hamy, S. J., and is said to be a true likeness of the Saint. The following is the description of his person given in Father de Curley's biography: "When Regis went to La Louvese for the last time he was forty-four years of age, and in the prime of life. He was tall; his face oblong; his forehead broad and open; his hair light brown; his eyes very wide and very blue; his nose large and aquiline; his mouth wide. The combination of brown hair and blue eyes is a type, we have ascertained, quite common at Fontcouverte."

This is the only description we have of the great man who was now about to terminate his laborious career. Like his namesake, Francis Xavier, he had spent but ten years in the active ministry, but the good he effected is not to be measured in terms of time.

That Regis had a premonition from Heaven of his approaching end, is quite certain. The following incident would scarcely prove this, were it alone the only testimony at hand, but there are other proofs to be seen later. A young girl who had done several works of zeal

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for the Saint, one day demurred when asked to do a similar favor. The Saint told her that of course she must have her own way, but that 'the time would come when she would need him and would seek him afar off.' As it turned out, this young woman was, after the Saint's death, beaten by some young men and severely injured. Her health failed and nothing availed to restore it save a pilgrimage to La Louvesc.

When Regis saw that his time on earth was short, he determined to put all his strength into one last missionary effort. It was the runner's last spurt as the goal hove in sight. Montfaucon was his center and having given a mission there, he went to Racoules and Veyrines. We are told that during the months of September, October, November and a part of December, 1640, the Saint heard 9000 confessions. This is an enormous number considering the fact that his penitents were country-folk who could confess but seldom and who therefore might spend some time in making their confessions. Furthermore, it is to be remembered that Regis preached three and four times a day while on the missions, besides devoting some two hours or more to his own spiritual duties.

Regis now finally announced the Mission of La Louvesc, the only place dependent on the College of Puy which he had not as yet visited.

It is thought that shortly after having announced the Mission of La Louvesc, the Saint was made aware of the design of Heaven that he was to die there during

the course of the mission. As he wished to prepare himself well for the coming event, he interrupted his missions and returned to Puy. He did not, however, go at once to the college, but stopped at the Villa, the Château d'Ours, where he knew he would find some of his confrères.

There was at that time attached to the College of Puy, a certain Père Trail, a man of rare virtue and a friend of the Saint. It was probably Père Trail whom Regis sought as his last confessor.

There are on record four bits of conversation Regis held with his brothers in religion, all of which taken together show that he was aware of his approaching death. The first took place at the Château d'Ours where several Fathers and Scholastics were gathered for a holiday. Regis was invited by the Fathers to spend the Christmas holidays with them at the château. The Saint excused himself by saying that it would be impossible, that he would then be on the missions.

The second conversation was between Regis and his confessor, probably, as we have said, Père Trail. Regis called the Father aside and after exchanging a few words with him, opened to him his whole soul. He gave him the real reason why he had interrupted the missions. He wished, he said, to prepare for a happy death. Hence he was going to make a retreat for three days and at the end of that time make a confession of his whole life past. Would Père Trail hear that confession? The Father was astonished at the Saint's

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words, but reserving his judgment regarding the prophecy of death, promised Regis that he would do for him everything within his power.

Thus far the Saint had made known the following: Not only was he to be at La Louvesc for Christmas, but he was to die there.

Regis, therefore, together with Père Trail, set out for the city, and desiring not to be seen or have his presence known, (this in order to secure seclusion,) he entered the city after nightfall by a circuitous route to the college. He went into retreat on Wednesday, December 19th, and spent that day and the ensuing two in prayer and examination of conscience. At the close of the Spiritual Exercises he made his general confession. Then followed the third conversation: Père Trail enquired of the Saint when he expected to return to the missions. Regis replied that he intended to start on the following day. Père Trail then endeavored to get Regis to stay over till the Feast of the Epiphany, when would be held the semi-annual Renovation of Vows for those who had not as yet made their Last Vows.

“The Master does not wish it so,” was the Saint’s reply.

“‘The Master?’” queried Père Trail; and then thinking that perhaps he referred to the Rector: “I know very well that he does.”

“No, Father,” insisted Regis, (something he seldom did,) “The Master does not wish it. He wishes me to go tomorrow.”

“Oh, well, then,” said Père Trail, “go if you must. But it will not be long; you will return in time for the Renovation.”

“My companion will return,” said the Saint, “but not I.”

Père Trail was astonished. He told Regis that it would not be right to send his companion home and remain on the mission alone.

The Saint’s only reply was: “My companion will return home, but not I.” He would offer no further explanation. Even Père Arnoux, the Rector, tried to dissuade Regis from going to La Louvesc at this time, but the Saint begged permission so insistently that at last the Rector gave way. This last was the fourth conversation of the Saint that indicated his foreknowledge of his death, for if he had not known it, he would, being a man of such unparalleled obedience, have abandoned his project at once when he learned his Superior’s wishes. This we have seen him do before. Now it was different: he had received his orders from a higher Superior than Père Arnoux.

Regis accordingly settled all his business affairs in the city, paid a few debts he had contracted for his poor and set out for his last mission at La Louvesc. His first stop was at Racoules, forty-four kilometres from Puy. He left Racoules the morning of December 23rd. Now began a most trying journey. Louise de Romezin made it later in a carriage and testifies to the difficulty of the route even by that method of travel. Regis and

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his lay-brother companion, Brother Bideau, made it on foot amidst rain and snow and ice and biting winds.

Snow had fallen plentifully; the streams that at intervals crossed the road were frozen. The route was up hill and down dale for over forty kilometres. The holy man arrived at length at Veyrines. He had lost his bearings in the snow and had thus made a detour. He did not remain in the village, however, but passing through, sought out a ruined barn, where he and his companion stopped for the night.

Walking had kept Regis warm, but now that he was no longer moving, his poor clothes availed but little to retain the heat of his body. The straw in the barn was wet; yet here he rested — if freezing nearly to death can be called resting — and during the night was taken with a violent fever and pains in the chest. How his companion escaped a similar fate is known to Divine Providence alone.

Early the next day the two travellers were again on their tedious way, and, says Father de Curley, with a wealth of suggestion: “At last they arrived!” It was the day before Christmas.

Our testimony for the happenings of the next eight days is the following: Brother Bideau, the Saint’s companion; M. le Curé Bayle and his sister; Louise de Romezin; the Jesuit Fathers Lascombe, Chabras and Audibert; and M. de Giraud. Père Arnoux, the Rector of Puy, got his information for his letter to the General from the above witnesses.

The gigantic missionary labors in which Saint John Francis Regis now began to take part seem to have been altogether out of proportion to the condition of his poor suffering body, and indeed they were: it could have been aid from on High alone that supported his weakness. The day before Christmas he held a catechetical instruction, celebrated Holy Mass, heard confessions, preached a sermon, then heard more confessions. Christmas Day he said his three Masses and preached three times. No one suspected the Saint's sufferings, for he went about his work in his usual zealous way in spite of his infirmity. Louise de Romezin attended this mission for the first two days and left for Mont-Regard on the third. She suspected nothing, for had she for a moment thought her Spiritual Father was so near his death, she never would have gone away.

On Wednesday, the 26th, Regis preached three times during the forenoon. He heard confessions until two in the afternoon and then celebrated Mass. This was the last time the Saint was to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice. He could now distinguish a new meaning in the words spoken by Our Savior at the Last Supper: “I shall not drink of the fruit of this vine, until I shall drink it anew in the kingdom of my Father.”

After his last Mass Regis attempted to go to the confessional, but he could not reach it owing to the throng waiting to be confessed. He therefore sat down near the altar and began hearing confessions there. Near the altar was a window, either partly open or in poor re-



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pair, for Regis was for the whole time he sat there, exposed to a draft on his uncovered head.

He suddenly fainted.

Astonishment is a mild term to express the feelings of the throng. As Father de Curley puts it, it was as if one of the giant oaks of their forests had suddenly and without warning toppled over in their midst. Those nearest bore the Saint to the presbytery, and there worked over him for a quarter of an hour. Even then the danger in which their beloved missionary lay did not seem to impress the good people, for they asked him to go on hearing confessions. He did so there in the presbytery, continuing for about two hours. At the end of this time he again fainted.

At last the seriousness of the holy man's condition was realized. The people were dismissed and the Fathers of the Society of Jesus notified. Fathers Lascombe, Chabras and Audibert came at once from Tournon. Others came from Annonay and two physicians and an apothecary were summoned. It was at once seen that the malady was mortal. Saint John Francis Regis was dying from pleurisy.

On December 30th the Saint once more made a general confession to Père Lascombe. He was conscious and in full possession of his senses to the last. The only request he had to make was that he be allowed to die in a nearby stable. When this was refused him he quietly submitted and gave himself to prayer.

“IN MANUS TUAS, DOMINE”

It was nearing midnight on the 31st of December, 1640. The dying Saint lay quiet. Suddenly his eyes seemed to take on an unwonted lustre, (our account follows that of those who were actually present,) and he appeared rapt in ecstasy. That Regis was favored in his last moments with a heavenly vision, he himself is witness, as only he himself could be.

“Oh, my Brother!” he cried, “I see Our Lord and Our Blessed Lady opening to me the gates of Heaven!”

The Saint then lifted his eyes and uttered his last earthly prayer: “In manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum!”

THE SAINT IN THE HEARTS  
OF THE FAITHFUL







MORTUARY CHAPEL AT LA LOUVESC

## THE LAST RESTING-PLACE: LA LOUVESC

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At the time of the death of Saint John Francis Regis, La Louvesc was but a little hamlet, one of many others hidden away among the pines. A few houses bordered the pond, which with its swampy vegetation and stagnant waters was skirted by a very bad road. Still, for all its unattractiveness and solitude, there was one charm in La Louvesc for Regis: its little church. Church indeed it may be called, but only by grace, for the edifice, built, we are told, in the form of a cross, measured only thirty feet long by ten feet wide. Over the main altar, (and the accounts seem to imply that there was more than one,) hung a picture of Our Lady's Assumption. Elsewhere there were pictures of Saint Agatha, Saint John Baptist and Saint Catharine. There was but one chalice, used at Holy Mass by the Pastor, M. Bayle, who resided not at La Louvesc, but at Veyrines.

Adjoining the church was the presbytery: two floors besides cellar and garret. The first floor was used as a kitchen and sleeping room for the Curé. Upstairs was a spare-room.

Round about and along the pond were the cabins that comprised the village of La Louvesc, — La Louvesc, the tomb and last resting-place of the great Saint John

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Francis Regis. It is the glorious tomb of a glorious saint, for, as says Father de Curley: "At La Louvesc was heard for the last time his apostolic voice; it was thence his soul took flight to Heaven; it was there his body was laid; there too his heart lay; and it is there above all that for three centuries he has shown his power and continued his work of saving souls."

Here then at La Louvesc the remains of the Saint were laid to rest on the second day of January, 1641. The news of his death had spread rapidly and before long began the first of those afterwards numberless pilgrimages to La Louvesc. Twenty-two Curés at the head of their flocks came for the funeral. They crowded around the Saint's remains, which were exposed for forty hours in the little church. All his garments they could find they piously filched. The Jesuits managed to save only his cloak and his soutane.

Lying in state in his priestly robes, Saint John Francis Regis was for the last time viewed by his sorrowing people. They recited the Office of the Dead for him between their sobs and from time to time the bell sent its sad message out through the murmuring pines. For years after, we are told, this bell would toll before the approach of a thunder-storm, and never at La Louvesc was anyone known to have been struck by lightning save one, a woman, and this time the bell had failed to toll.

During the Office and the Mass continual sobs might be heard, but when the blessed remains were lowered into the grave, (dug in the church just beneath the



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famous bell,) the cries and lamentations rent the air. No sooner was the grave filled but it was emptied again by the pious faithful, among them Louise de Romezin, who on hearing of her Spiritual Father's death, had returned at once to La Louvesc. Many were the miracles worked in later years through this same earth taken from the Saint's last resting-place.

The funeral was, of course, attended by the Saint's brother Jesuits from the surrounding countryside. But not satisfied with this, the Rector of the College of Puy, Père Arnoux, held public services in the church at Puy, with the Office of the Dead before a catafalque. When the news of this proceeding was sent to Rome as rather extraordinary and as usurping an honor paid in the Society of Jesus only to her deceased Generals, Father General Mutius Vittilleschi wrote back that he most heartily approved of what the Rector had done.

These public honors were but the beginning of the wonderful cult of Saint John Francis Regis which now began to appear on every side. The memory of the saintly missionary was strong among his brother Jesuits. They placed sketches of his life in their Menology, a record of the lives of men of the Order who have distinguished themselves for piety and learning. The Menology is read daily at table in every Jesuit community. In their exhortations to one another the virtues of Regis were held up as a shining example for imitation. The historians of the Society took up the task of writing his life. The first volume, from the pen

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of Father Claude Labroue, S. J., appeared at Annecy in 1650. In 1653 and 1654 other editions of the same life were published. In 1660 it was translated into Latin, so as to make it accessible to all the Jesuits of the world. A life in German appeared as early as 1667. In 1716 we find a life in Polish and in the same year another in German. It was not until 1738 that any account of the virtues of the Saint was given to the English-speaking world. At that date we find a translation of Daubenton's life by Father C. Murphy, S. J., and since that date and the present writing, English-speaking peoples have had to read the life of Saint John Francis Regis in a foreign tongue.

This seeming digression into the field of bibliography may serve to show how Regis' reputation for sanctity began to spread. It soon passed the boundaries of Languedoc into the rest of France, into Flanders, Spain, Germany, Asia and the two Americas.

While the cult of the holy man was thus becoming so widespread, back at La Louvesc, its center of radiation, it was waxing proportionately intense. Rich and poor alike wished to beg official sanction of their devotion from the Holy See. The local municipalities of Vivarais, the General Government of Languedoc, assemblies of the Clergy, two kings of France, the King of Spain, the Queen of France, Cardinals, — all importuned the Holy Father to institute the canonical processes.

And this was done. The first testimonies were taken in the following years: 1672, 1698, 1699, 1701, 1702 and

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1703. More than one hundred and sixteen witnesses were examined and their depositions recorded. Each was required to state how often he frequented the Sacraments, to name his regular confessor, and to take an oath binding under pain of excommunication, reserved to the Holy See.

How affecting were some of the testimonies, may be judged from what the Bishop and Seigneur of Puy, Armande de Bethune, wrote to the Sacred Congregation of Rites: "We have examined eight octogenarian witnesses, all of the soundest sort of judgment and most faithful memory. We had but to see them and to hear them in order to assure ourselves of that. There were two others also, men of high rank, of great piety, virtue and faith. It is impossible for us to describe what ardor of spirit and what animation these old men manifested when they spoke of the virtues of the Servant of God and exalted his sanctity."

There were stories of the blind who saw, the lame who walked, paralytics who regained the use of their limbs, and of spiritual lepers made whole through miracles of Grace.

The Bishop continues: "The people flock to his tomb to get the earth from his grave. Their devotion is astounding; their faith without equal; their vows innumerable; their sacrifices incessant; their voices ever lifted in the praise of the Servant of God. I have never," he concludes, "heard of the like before!"

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Himself cured of an infectious chronic disease, the Bishop found it doubly difficult to restrain the devotion of the faithful within proper bounds. Let the Congregation, he begs on behalf of the people, proceed without delay to the beatification of this holy man of God. Steps were indeed taken, but in the ordinary canonical way, and the virtues of Regis having been proved heroic, lo! one dissenting voice raised itself above the praising acclaim of the multitudes and for a brief moment halted this 'consummation so devoutly wished.'

The voice was that of a disgruntled French ecclesiastic and his calumny in its first form was this: "Regis should not be beatified, for he did not persevere in his vocation. He was dismissed from the Society and died a curate at La Louvesc."

The origin of this infamous bit of lying is as follows: Louis Maille, a French ecclesiastic, was dismissed from the Priory of Dinant. This priory was in some way connected with the seminary directed by the Fathers of the Society of Jesus. In order to get revenge on the Society, Maille allied himself with the Jansenists, the Society's bitterest enemy. He was on this account exiled from France. He now proceeded to Rome where Father Daubenton, author of a life of Regis, was at the time engaged in furthering the cause of beatification. Father Daubenton had been Maille's chief adversary in the affair of Dinant, so here was another score for Maille to settle.

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Maille was shrewd enough to see that he could not stop the beatification in any ordinary or legitimate way, since none was open to him. He therefore sought out Lambertini, Promoter of the Faith, and began his conversation with nothing but the highest praise of the sainted missionary. But what a pity it was, he went on, that the Jesuits were such a jealous body. Too bad they had ousted Regis from the Society. Too bad he had died a simple curate at La Louvesc. What? Had Lambertini never heard of that? What was his proof? Why! Maille's birthplace was near La Louvesc and he had the whole gentry there to substantiate every statement he had made.

Lambertini at once went to the Holy Father, who, without a word of warning to any Jesuit, ordered the seizure of the archives of the Professed House, in which is kept the record of everyone dismissed from the Society, together with full particulars. Year by year, from 1616, when Regis entered the Society, to 1640, when he died, the catalogs of the Province of Toulouse were examined and the name of Regis was found entered in each as an active member.

Louis Maille, who attempted flight, was arrested and put in jail.

The above will be sufficient proof, we believe, for modern readers, that Maille's accusation was utterly groundless. It was enough for the Sovereign Pontiff. Still, there are also a few historical facts which lend added weight to the argument. First, no one ever heard

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of Regis' alleged dismissal from the Society from 1640 to 1712, a period of seventy-two years. Secondly, no contradiction was made when in the canonical processes Regis was declared to have died a *bona fide* Jesuit. Again, just before his death, it will be remembered, Regis was urged to return as soon as possible to Puy for the Renovation of Vows, a ceremony at which none but *bona fide* Jesuits may assist. Fourthly, he was announced in all the houses of the Province of Toulouse as having died in the Society, and his name inscribed in the catalog of 1641 as having so died, whereas the names of certain *others* were put down as *dismissed*.

We have suggested that the action taken by the Holy Father in seizing the archives of the Professed House should have been testimony enough for all thinking men that Louis Maille's charges were false. And this was indeed the case so far as the Holy Office was concerned, but like every other calumny, this too lived on even after death, for on February 10, 1714, a certain French ecclesiastic, "qu'il," as Father de Curley says, "est inutile de nommer," wrote from Rome to one M. Perthuis, Vicar General of Avignon: "I am sure that the case stands with this new saint [*John Francis Regis*] as with Blessed Stanislaus [*S. J.*]. In spite of his great virtue he was expelled from the Society as a useless member. He then returned into Cevennes, where he was a sort of curate. He worked principally on the missions, to which he devoted himself without reserve and it was in this humble and laborious work that he sanctified himself. As you

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are yourself, Monsieur, on the spot where this took place, you can assure yourself of the truth or falsity of the story. Should you find it to be true, you will agree with me, I am sure, that one has to get out of the Society in order to be canonized.”\*

Two years later, in 1716, on the 17th of April, the 5th, 12th, and 19th of June, the *Gazette de Hollande*, published notices on the Beatification of Regis, and referred to him as “Professed of the Society of Jesus.” On August 17th the same magazine came out with the following: “Extract from some letters from Paris, July 30th: ‘Père Regis, who is about to be beatified through the efforts of the Jesuits, died as a curate of a village in Provence. He had joined the Jesuits in his youth, but his attachment to a doctrine stricter than that held by the Fathers, nettled them. He had plenty to suffer at their hands. They kept shifting him from one house to another, but finally recognizing that he would not ally himself to their doctrines, they expelled him from the Society. In consequence he took up the life of a curate in a village and here he died in the odor of sanctity, performing miracles, it is said, after death, as he had when alive.’ ”

Even as late as the Canonization of the Saint a public statement was issued contradicting a Bishop who was so ignorant as to attach an “S. J.” to Regis’ name.

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\*It is hardly necessary to state that Saint Stanislaus died a *Jesuit Novice*, in the Novitiate of S. Andrea, Rome.

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The final form which Louis Maille's calumny assumed was that Regis had not, to be sure, been actually dismissed from the Society, but that the letters of dismissal were in his possession when he died. He had received them while giving his last mission at La Louvese. In fact M. Bayle, the curé of La Louvese found them in Regis' pocket after his death. But being a considerate man, believing in the adage "Nil nisi bonum de mortuis," he destroyed the letters. On this point, Father de Curley, the authority on this part of the Saint's life, remarks: "Only one thought: If the curé of La Louvese spoke to anyone of his discovery, where is the proof that it is true? If he kept his peace, how does anyone know aught about it?"

### *I. Miracles*

Louis Maille's attempts to tear Saint John Francis Regis away from the Society of Jesus have been futile, yet even to this day one at times hears an echo of his calumny. It is hoped that our refutation will do much to bring the truth clearly before the minds of all. One thing at least is certain: no amount of calumny or slander has been able to remove the great man from the hearts of the faithful. They are as devoted to him now as in the days when he walked among his people preaching to them and hearing their confessions, and from the time of his death to our own day, Saint John Francis Regis has remembered his own.



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There are records of hundreds and thousands who have benefited by his powerful intercession at the Throne of Heaven. By calling on his name in moments of danger; by kneeling in prayer before his portrait; through the instrumentality of earth from his tomb and of other relics; by making pilgrimages to La Louvesc; at the old mortuary chapel erected on the site of his death and in the modern basilica, — in all these ways, from time to time miracles have startled the world and thrown new lustre on Regis' sanctity.

We shall review some of the more striking of these miracles. There is, for instance, the history of Miguel Flores, which the unbeliever will cry down as unscientific, a French fairy tale. Miguel lived in Malaga and at the time of which we are writing, he was an altar-boy in his parish church. He was noted for his great vivacity of spirit and his boyishness. He could never be quiet, and though a good lad, was thus troublesome to the Pastor, Padre Salzedo. Now it was this same restlessness of Miguel that led him providentially to become the occasion of a great miracle.

It was the 24th of October, 1716, the eve of the celebration of the Saint's beatification and there was to be Vespers followed by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. A number of young altar-boys were gathered in the sacristy when Padre Salzedo entered and appointed two of their number to ascend the tower to ring the great bell. Miguel Flores, of course, must needs accompany them. He was allowed to go, but on the under-

standing that he ascend no higher than the bells, — the clock must not be visited.

The young trio rushed off to the tower, Miguel, of course, in the lead. Arriving at the top, (some ninety feet above the earth,) all the bells were soon set pealing. The manner of ringing the old Spanish bells was peculiar to that country and needs a word or two of explanation. The bells were constructed with a wooden counterpart, of the same shape and size as the bell itself, fastened by bolts in the reverse position, so that the effect would be that of two bells joined top-to-top, one upside down upon the other. The wooden bell, or so-called “capitellum,” is grasped by the handles at its edge, gently drawn down and allowed to swing back again: Thus the huge instrument is gradually set in motion, so that in a short time it is swinging over and over upon its axis.

This method of ringing the bells the three young men employed with great vigor, so much, in fact, that Padre Salzedo shouted to them to ring no more. Miguel was obedient; indeed he carried his obedience too far. Instead of permitting the bells to die out gradually, nothing would satisfy him but to stop them suddenly. Nor was any small game the object of his ambitions, — he must begin with the largest bell. His companions attempted to dissuade him, but to no avail. His idea was to seize the “capitellum” of the bell and thus, by bearing his whole weight upon it, bring it to a stop. Only a boy of Miguel’s type would have conceived such a plan.

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Needless to say, Miguel overestimated his powers, and instead of dragging back the bell, the iron handles caught in his cassock and lifted him high in the air, as if he weighed no more than an infant. One of his shoes flew to earth and Miguel was soon seen following it through the narrow window. In his flight he carried away with him a piece of stone which was lying on the window-sill.

Miguel's companions watched the disappearance of their fellow bell-ringer with breathless awe. Just at the moment in which the bell lifted the young man into the air, one of his companions, Zimbrana by name, cried out: "May Blessed John Francis Regis protect you!"

The bell suddenly stopped ringing. The boys rushed to the window and beheld below a cloud of dust where Miguel in his fall had dislodged the top of a chimney-piece.

Miguel was picked up from the earth below uninjured, and with no memory of what had befallen him except that he faintly recollected hearing Zimbrana call out: "May Blessed John Francis Regis protect you." For the rest, he declared, it all seemed like a dream, from the time he had grasped the handles of the bell to the present moment.

The above is the account of perhaps the most striking of the miracles performed through the invocation of the Saint. Miguel Flores afterwards became a Jesuit and the story of his providential escape has come down to us from the man himself. The more enlightened, so to

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say, of the present day will perhaps smile, or even laugh at this account; but we of lively and more simple faith may laugh too. There is a proverb about him who laughs last.

Very numerous too are the miracles performed through the use of the dust from Regis' grave,—a grave emptied again and again of the earth placed therein to cover his coffin. One of these miracles was performed in Canada. The recipient of the heavenly favor was a certain Angélique Bruyère, a servant in a hospital at Quebec. The good woman was suffering from a lesion of the brain and the physicians fearing to trepan the skull, had given up the case as hopeless. One of the Sisters, who had herself been cured by Regis, fastened around the dying woman's neck a little bag containing a picture of the Saint and some of the earth from his grave. A novena of prayers was promised. On the fourth day the physicians declared that Angélique could not last longer than the morrow. For four days, however, she lingered, and on the eighth of the novena, when asked how she felt, said she was a little better and expected a great change by the next day.

When asked what gave her such assurance, she replied that a stranger dressed in the garb of the Jesuits, a man of very saintly and noble bearing, holding a wooden cross in his hand, had appeared to her and told her that she would be cured within one day.

“Who was this man?” Angélique was asked.

She tried to pronounce his name, but could get no farther than the first syllable.

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“ ‘Regis,’ is it?’ she was asked.

“That is the name,” replied the sick woman.

The Sister in attendance removed the picture of the Saint from the little bag and placing it indiscriminately among pictures of other Saints of the Society, asked Angélique to select the image of her benefactor. Without assistance from anyone she promptly pointed to the picture of Regis.

The astonishing news of what had taken place was repeated throughout the convent and was even noised about the city. The event would tell: either Angélique was telling the truth, or a pious nature was in this manner finding an outlet for its delirious wanderings.

During the night the girl’s condition became appreciably worse, so much so that the surgeons had all but determined to trepan as a last desperate resort. Toward midnight when things seemed no better, the patient suddenly stirred and in great agitation shrieked aloud: “O my God, my God!” She trembled in every limb; her heart beat violently and she was covered with sweat. Fearing that the end was finally come, those about the bedside began to speak of pious topics, in order to console, as they thought, the girl’s last moments.

The sick woman looked up enquiringly: “Why do you talk to me of death? Do you think that I am already in my grave? It seems that the blood with which my head is filled is coming out of my nose and ears.”

Delirious, thought the bystanders.

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But Angelique continued: "I tell you that I am saved through the kindness of Père Regis."

Rather to quiet her than because they had any faith in what she was saying, they asked the girl to tell how she had been cured.

Here is Angélique's story: "The pains in my head were tormenting me beyond endurance, when for the second time I beheld this religious, this priest of countenance serene and pale. His nose was rather long, and his hair, I should say, something between black and blonde. He kept his eyes cast down. While I gazed intently upon him, he spoke: 'Courage, you are cured. In answer to my prayers God has granted you life and health.'

"Then he went down on his knees and most piously reached out the cross which he held in his hand, and touched my head. This touch caused me unbearable pain and wrung from me the cry which you just heard."

Angélique now fell into a calm and deep sleep and when she awoke she was yet another witness to the power before Heaven of Saint John Francis Regis.

Back across the sea at La Louvesc, we find that the history of the Saint's tomb is replete with narratives of an unbroken chain of miracles, cures of both body and soul. The story of one is refreshing, no less because of the cure itself than for the splendid virtue of the girl cured, one Marie Madeleine Crepet.

The day was a historic one. Fifteen thousand pilgrims crowded the little village, and, as Father de

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Curley picturesquely paints the scene, "thronged the roads and crowned the hills. Eight Princes of the Church were blessing the people. The bells were ringing joyously. A vast murmuring of the crowd,—mingled prayers and thanksgivings,—was mounting toward heaven, for it was the day of the solemn consecration of the new Basilica." It was the 5th of August, 1877, a day well within the memory of our fathers, and on this day, whilst all La Louvesc was rejoicing, a little girl, Marie Madeleine Crepet, was kneeling apart from the throng, before the picture of Regis in the Mortuary Chapel. In her simplicity she had written the Saint a letter. To voice her prayer or hear its answer with the ears of the body was impossible, for Marie Madeleine was deaf and dumb. Yet it was not release from this affliction that she sought. "You would like," she had written to the Saint, "to give me back my hearing and my speech, but I will refuse that, for the greater glory of my suffering Jesus."

What then was the child's plea? Her mother was aged and infirm and had depended on what aid the little one could give her, when lo! in God's mercy, the use of the child's right arm had been taken away by paralysis and even now was bound to her side with bandages. It was the use of this poor member she craved, if only for the space of her mother's life.

The hour was half past twelve, and though Marie Madeleine heard nothing of the pealing of the bells nor of the murmuring of the joyous throng, she knelt in

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prayer to her Saint for this boon. He *must* grant it, she thought. Yes; he had done so, for now she rises and with her left hand removes the bandages; then with her right she blesses herself: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Marie Madeleine, little heroine of France, the land of heroes and heroines, is cured!

A youth who gave his name as Jean-Marie Vianay, came one day to the church of St. Regis at La Louvesc, footsore and weary, having lived by alms, (and those scant indeed,) throughout his entire journey. He too would beg a miracle at the hands of the Saint. He would be a priest of God and asked the favor of being permitted to continue his studies toward that end. His had been a dull mind, slow to take in and still slower to retain the abstruse knowledge he must needs have of philosophy and theology. Jean-Marie returned to his studies with new understanding, and thus we may say that Saint John Francis Regis gave to France the illustrious Curé d'Ars, a man who though he labored incessantly for his dear poor, still always had time for prayers of thanksgiving to his benefactor, and who even when dying, commissioned his housekeeper to make a pilgrimage of thanksgiving in his name to his Saint, saying: "Any good I have done, I attribute to him."

The story of the cure of Marie-Louise Tavernier, as being as remarkable as any ever worked through the intercession of the Saint, may serve as a last example of his power manifested among his people.



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Marie-Louise Tavernier was a native of Aubenas, who, in February, 1878, was taken with a serious case of rheumatism. She was soon rendered helpless by the steady progress of the disease, till at length in spite of much treatment at the hands of competent physicians, she was bed-ridden.

Marie's mother wrote to La Louvesc asking for prayers and procuring a novena of Masses. This favor was granted by the Superior at the time, Reverend P. Cohanier, S. J., but it seems that the time was not yet ripe for a cure. Another treatment was submitted to at Lyons, with the result that the patient was given up by the physicians. She would die during the night, they declared. But when on the following day they found her still alive, they had her placed in a east and prescribed the open air and sunlight as a means of prolonging her life. She was now removed to Cannes where she remained in terrible suffering and unable to move a single joint of her entire body. Naturally a disorder of the stomach set in and Marie was able to retain but little food.

We have the description of Marie's condition of health from her own testimony; and it is from those whose tender devotion kept them near her bedside that we learn something of her appearance at this stage of her terrible malady. We are told that her body had shrunk to mere skin and bones, causing her to look, with the exception of her peculiarly brilliant eyes, more like a mummy than a living person.

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Marie's mother was a woman of intrepid faith. Even now, when hope looked blackest, she determined on one more last appeal to Saint John Francis Regis for aid. Only the heart of a mother, beholding the suffering of her child, could have faith like that. The journey was begun on July 2nd, and in the minds of friends of the family, the most that could be expected would be to keep the girl alive en route. Not so the mother. So great was her faith in the coming cure of her daughter, that she prepared all the girl's clothes that she should have to wear when returning home.

During the journey many hotels and inns refused lodging to the spectre, (as she soon came to be regarded,) for fear she might die on their hands. Even at La Louvesc, at the Hotel Costet, a place presumably inured to the sight of invalid guests, the management was unwilling to receive poor Marie, especially when they learned that she wished to remain for an entire novena. Someone even suggested that the girl was doing the Saint an injustice thus to come here to his very shrine to die.

Madame Travernier sought Père Cohanier in order to obtain the novena of Masses. Here were encountered fresh difficulties. The Superior declared that he had no priest free to say a novena of Masses and was unwilling to ask any to put off his other intentions, even if he might be able to do so.

“Besides,” said the Superior, “your daughter is very ill. Pray to the Saint and return home. Saint Regis

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can cure at a distance as well as here. He has, you know, his own privileged ones,—for the most part he cures the poor.”

The reason for such a cutting remark does not appear. If it was to test the woman's humility, Father Cohanier was not disappointed. She replied:

“Mon Père, the flowers you see on my bonnet do not make a rich woman of me. Nearly every centime I possessed has been spent on my unfortunate daughter. Now Saint Regis can cure her for me, and if I have to wait a whole month, I shall not go away without my novena of Masses.” Are we not reminded of the woman in the Gospel who importuned Our Savior to cure her daughter? Being a woman of faith like to that told of in the sacred narrative, Madame Tavernier would not take *no* for an answer.

M. l'abbé Vacheresse was found to say the Masses of the novena, which began on July 30th. When it was seen that Marie-Louise Tavernier was in earnest indeed, great crowds began to attend the novena. On the morning of the first of August the girl was carried according to custom to the church. It was the seven o'clock Mass she was now attending, not the novena Mass, which was to follow.

Marie's own story of the beginnings of her cure tell us in simple fashion of what took place.

“I was placed in front of the Lady Altar. At the moment of the elevation I felt great pain and feared I would not be able bear it much longer. Yet my con-

fidence did not wane for one moment. I prayed: 'My God, it is Thy will, I trust, to cure me. Do so, I beg Thee, for my family's sake, and I shall give myself up entirely to Thee.'

'The priest was now bringing me Holy Communion. One instant after receiving, (O happy moment!) all pain left me and I now felt that I could move my toes. Turning toward my sister, I said: 'Adèle, I think I must be cured; tell mother.'

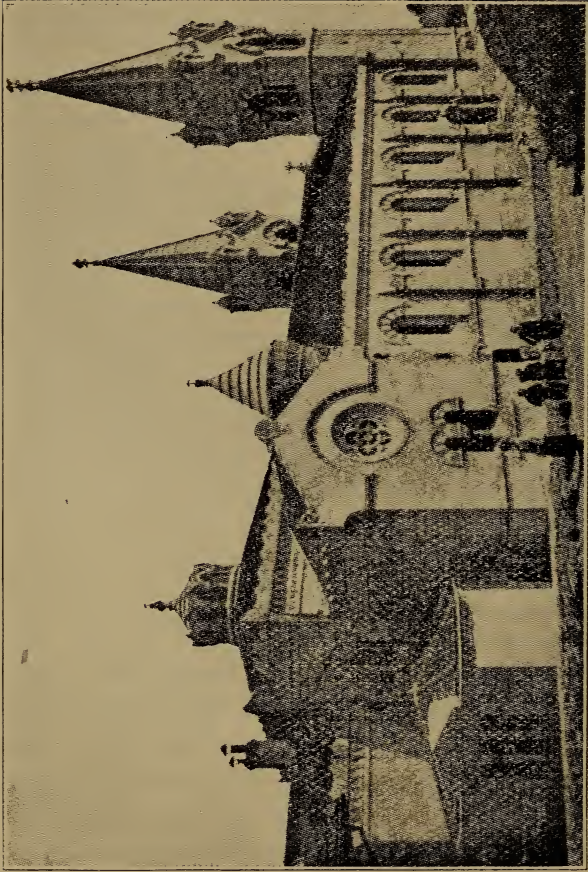
'But mother had seen all; she went immediately to the sacristy and told l'abbé Vacheresse, who was about to begin the novena Mass, that he might now say a Mass of Thanksgiving. — 'For,' said she, 'I believe that my daughter is cured.'''

After the Mass the cast was removed and for the first time in months the girl was able to eat with comfort. The physician who examined her after the miracle, declared that the cure was complete. Said he: "Saint Regis has relieved her pain,—a thing we could not do,—but, believe me, it will come back again. Diseases of this kind always suffer a relapse."

Madame Tavernier's reply may fittingly close this account without further comment on our part. Her own language will preserve the charm of her answer: "Quand c'est *vous* qui les guérissez; mais quand c'est *le bon Dieu*, elles ne reviennent pas."

Only one of the miracles above recounted is of the number of those accepted as "canonical" for the beatification or canonization of the Saint, that namely, of the





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preservation of Miguel Flores. This is the fifth of the seven miracles presented to the Sacred Congregation for the cause of canonization. In all, fifteen miracles were presented: eight for beatification and seven for canonization. Of the eight, two, the required number, were accepted and six rejected as insufficient. Of the seven, three were accepted and four rejected. John Francis Regis was beatified in 1716, and it was on the occasion of the celebration of his beatification that the miracle of Miguel Flores took place. In 1737 Regis was canonized, and from that day to the present there has been no falling off in the devotion shown him, nor, we may add, in the response of the Saint to that devotion.

### *II. Our Own Day*

Not only cult of Saint John Francis Regis manifested in pilgrimages to his birthplace and to his tomb, but imitators of his life and virtues have been evident in many quarters of France. Seven such holy men have particularly distinguished themselves. François de Barry was a great preacher who could be induced to carry on his missions among the poor alone. Jean Chautard lived over again Regis' austerity of life: for forty years he was never known to take more than one meal a day, and this despite the fact that his apostolic labors were heavy. Jacques Montal, though eighty-four years of age when he died, had employed his time

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solely in teaching grammar, hearing confessions, teaching the elements of religion, visiting the sick and poor and reconciling enemies. He is said to have possessed the gift of prophecy and of reading hearts. It is said also that miracles due to his intercession were performed after his death. Jean Paul Médaille was famous for the religious institutes of both men and women founded by him,—among others the “Institute of the Sisters of Saint Joseph.” Anne de Vogué followed in the actual missionary paths trod by Regis. Paul Antoine Dauphin was noted for his devotion to Regis from the days of his childhood. He preached the panegyric of the Saint at Tournon in 1737, the year of the canonization. P. Delmas was another active missionary who also covered the actual field traversed by the Saint.

In 1688, a young man of Avignon, Jean Abbés, eighteen years of age, was cured of dumbness through the intercession of the Saint. He afterwards founded the “Society of Saint Peter of Luxembourg,” devoted to the spiritual interests of young working-men.

The “Society of Saint Regis” was founded in 1824, by M. Gossin, an eminent Parisian lawyer and had for its object the revalidation of marriages improperly performed. M. Gossin founded this society in consequence of a vow made at La Louvesc, whither he had gone to petition perfect health at the hands of the Saint, and whence he had come away cured.

Also in 1824, Mgr. D’Aviau realized his cherished project of founding the “Missionary Secular Priests,”



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who ministered to the pilgrims during the summer months. One of these priests was M. Therme, who later founded the "Ladies of the Cenacle of the Retreat."

On April 20, 1888, His Holiness Pope Leo XIII, in recognition of the still frequent miracles taking place at La Louvesc and because of the great apostolic works, continuations as it were of the Saint's work, radiating from this center, erected the church containing the remains of Saint John Francis Regis into a minor basilica, under the titles of Saint Agatha and Saint John Francis Regis.

The original church at La Louvesc was replaced by a more pretentious edifice begun in 1744 by M. Aulhane, at that time Curé, but finished only in 1770 by M. Claude Bilhot, his successor. This church was finally torn down to give place to the basilica of 1877,\* the work of the famous architect M. Bossan, famous for his churches at Ars and Lyons.

The erection in 1900 of the two spires, by Reverend P. Cohanier, S. J., completed the building as it now stands. To Père Cohanier also is due the credit of building the chapel of Saint Ignatius, which accommodates the faithful of La Louvesc for all purely parochial services, thus leaving the basilica free for the services connected with the cult of the Saint.

In fact so devoted a zealot for the glory of Saint John Francis Regis was this lovable character and hum-

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\*Though consecrated in 1877, it was not till 1888 that the church was made a basilica affiliated to Saint Mary Major.

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ble religious, that a brief sketch of his life and labors at La Louvesc must be inserted even here. Born July 9, 1827, at Nangy, in Savoy, he was educated by his maternal uncle M. le curé Bastian. Cohanier's father had died when the boy was quite young and when twelve years of age he was sent to the famous College of Mélan, near Taninges, conducted by the Jesuit Fathers. When in 1848 the Jesuits were expelled from Savoy, Cohanier, on the advice of his uncle, entered the Seminary of Annecy. During two years at Annecy the thought uppermost in the mind of the young seminarian was the Society of Jesus and how he might join its ranks. Expressing his desires at home, he met with nothing but opposition, especially on the part of his uncle, M. le curé Bastian. Consequently, in the summer of 1849, the young man determined that he must if he wished to follow his vocation, imitate Saint Stanislaus. Accordingly, one day while his uncle was absent on retreat, Cohanier made an excuse of going to Bonneville, and kissing his mother good-bye, set out for the Jesuit Novitiate at Avignon.

Here he finally arrived after a weary journey on foot, but not without frequent and heavy temptations to retrace his steps. But courage was a characteristic of Cohanier, so he had kept manfully on. It is not to be supposed, however, that the new Novice forgot those he had left behind: his letters breathe an affection and a gratitude all the stronger now because of his new purpose. To his uncle, who had gradually become re-

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conciled, he often writes: “Après Dieu, c’est à vous, cher oncle que je dois ce bonheur. Oh, soyez-en mille fois béni!”

Toward the close of his noviceship at Avignon, the young Scholastic was sent in 1850 to the College of Dôle, where for three years he taught grammar. He spent the next year as Director of Musical Studies at the College of St. Etienne. For the next four years Cohanier made his theological studies: two years at Mongré and two at Aix, where in 1858 he was ordained priest. The following two years found him again at Mongré as prefect, after which he made his Tertianship at Notre Dame de Liesse.

After the Third Year of Probation, Père Cohanier spent five years at Boufarick, in Algeria; one year at Moulins; two years again at Mongré, and four years at St. Etienne, until in 1877 he came to La Louvesc. Here he devoted all his great energies to the beautifying of the sacred mementoes of Saint John Francis Regis and to the care of the souls of the thousands who made pilgrimages to La Louvesc. To the natives of the town too he was equally devoted, doing all in his power to make them happy both in body and soul. For instance, thanks to Père Cohanier telegraphic communication was installed at La Louvesc. Trusting, like the great Saint for whom under God he worked, always to Divine Providence to supply him with the temporal means he needed, he was never disappointed. It was marvelous, people said, how he would pray for donations and get

## SAINT JOHN FRANCIS REGIS

them. The Mortuary Chapel was decorated in 1898 by the famous painter from Valence, M. Audrau, who is responsible for the beautiful mural painting representing the flight to heaven of the soul of the Saint.

It was Père Cohanier's intention also to restore the little oratory at the miraculous fountain, but owing to troublesome times and the laws against the Society in France, he was never able to realize his project.

After erecting the Chapel of Saint Ignatius in 1898, Père Cohanier built the two beautiful spires on the towers of the basilica. This was his last great work at La Louvesc. Old age and infirmity were creeping upon him, so in 1902 he was removed to St. Etienne, where he passed peacefully away nine years later, June 23, 1911, at the age of eighty-four years. Père Cohanier will long be remembered at La Louvesc, both by the people of the town and by all who journeyed thither, and surely the great Saint he so loved to honor has not failed to intercede for him at that Throne where he has proven himself so powerful.

\* \* \*

And now this story of the life and labors and of the glory of Saint John Francis Regis, of the Society of Jesus, may be brought to a close. Plain though its manner of telling has been, it is still worthy of consideration by English-speaking readers, for it is the

## THE LAST RESTING PLACE

story of a man who labored, (that is the only word), to make himself the great saint he was. His *name* is widely enough known, (our own Jesuit schools bear it,—and even hotels!) but that is all. May the knowledge of something more than his name, the knowledge of his life and virtues, bring to imitate him, even a few of those who peruse these pages.















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