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Father Finn Dies - Creator of the American Catholic Boy

The Jesuit Bulletin

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Recommended Citation

The Jesuit Bulletin, "Father Finn Dies - Creator of the American Catholic Boy" (1928). *The Legendary Musketeer Documents*. Book 5. http://www.exhibit.xavier.edu/tlm_2015_documents/5

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The Jesuit Bulletin

Vol. VII

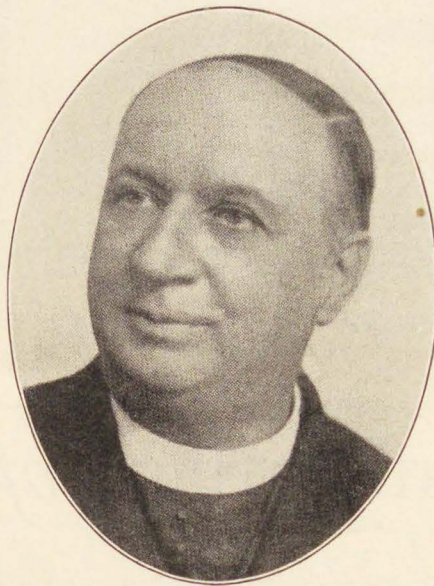
DECEMBER, 1928

No. 5

Father Finn Dies • Creator of *the American Catholic Boy*

*A Leader
among Social
Workers of
Cincinnati*

*Golden Jubilee
Was to be
Celebrated
next March*



Rev. Francis J. Finn, S. J. 1859—1928

THE "Creator of the American Catholic Boy", the author of *Tom Playfair* and *Claude Lightfoot* was known to tens of thousands not of the present generation of boy readers. They were boy readers twenty, thirty years ago, and know Tom Playfair as well as any boy of twelve does today. To some of these "old folks" THE JESUIT BULLETIN brings the news of Father Finn's death—the death of an old friend.

Father Finn is too well known as the creator of boy characters, American to the core and Catholic in heart, to have this, his greatest achievement recounted at any great length. But what is not so well known, though it is the writer's deep conviction, is that Father Finn is also the creator of the "American Jesuit."

Yes, the Jesuit of fiction—but American style. "Mr. Middleton" is as distinct a creation as any other character in Father Finn's books. He is revealed as a splendid type of Jesuit, of what a Jesuit wishes to be; and moreover he represents the Jesuit ideal as it can best be interpreted in terms of American character.

"Creator of the American Jesuit of fiction" is only the half of what the writer has in mind. For in a sense Father Finn is creator of the American Jesuit of fact. But how indeed?

Well, it is thirty and more years since Mr. Middleton first appeared. He was, at least in all probability, the first Jesuit that many Jesuits themselves ever knew. Certainly he was the first with whom the writer ever came in contact. We met a man who understood boys, knew what might be expected of them, and was wise in requiring it of them.

Above all he was a man who liked the boys under his care; his was no officious, pedagogical interest; his charity was, not indeed higher, but something added to and more "human" than a conscientious sense of duty toward his boys. We, in turn, liked Mr. Middleton, and later on when we met the Jesuit of fact, we were able to understand him for having understood Mr. Middleton. Indeed, the writer thinks, Mr.

Middleton was the character on which was founded, for many of us, our understanding of Jesuit life, our appreciation of it, and, however unconsciously, our ideals of what we could be as American Jesuits.

How Father Finn reached the heart of the American boy is still the mystery of genius. Some years ago the writer picked up an installment of "Cupid of Campion" which was then coming out. It seemed very evident that the old story-telling facility had "gone off." Still later while teaching a class of younger boys, the writer suggested for reading only Father Finn's earlier books—those being the best, he thought. What was his surprise to find that the boys were already reading—devouring—Father Finn's newest books! The boys evidently knew better than the teacher that Father Finn was as good a story-teller as ever.

May the American boy continue as wise in his generation as he is; and may he discover in Mr. Middleton an ideal that he may some day wish to follow. Thus would Father Finn's life-work continue to be fruitful; and it shall, at least so long as the American boy remains the American boy.