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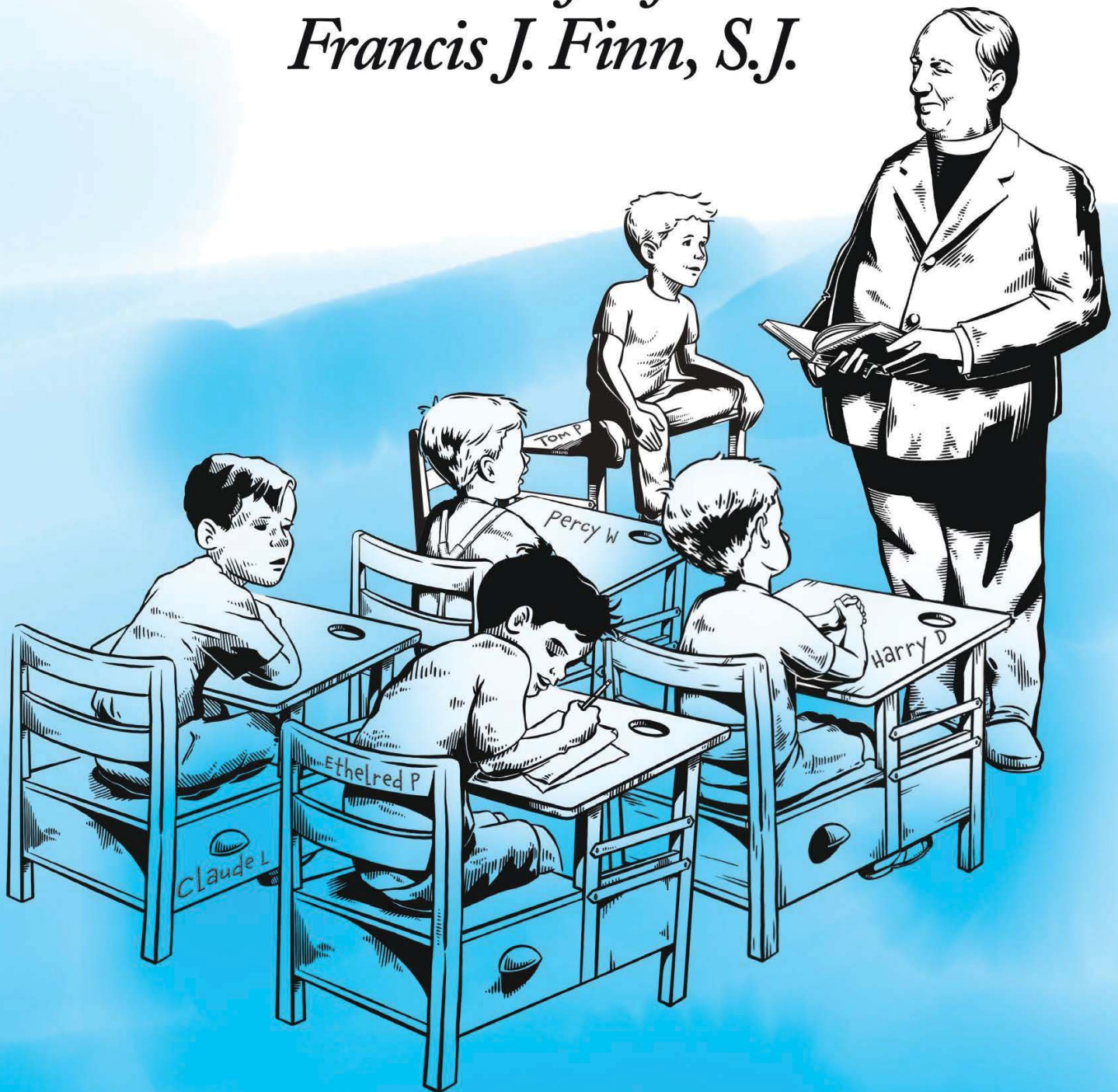
Unless You Become Like Little Children: The Life of Francis J. Finn, S.J.

Thomas P. Kennealy

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UNLESS YOU BECOME LIKE LITTLE CHILDREN

*The Life of
Francis J. Finn, S.J.*



THOMAS P. KENNEALY, S.J.



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LIKE LITTLE CHILDREN**

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THE LIFE OF FRANCIS J. FINN, S. J.

BY

THOMAS P. KENNEALY, S. J.

published by Xavier University Library
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*In loving memory of my parents,
Anne and George Kennealy,
My first and best teachers
Departed, but not forgotten*

i.
The Early Years

At the time of his death, *The Cincinnati Post*, one of the city's evening newspapers, paid Father Francis J. Finn this editorial tribute: "His heart embraced mankind...The Jew called him 'father' and the Protestant called him 'father' in deference to his loving kindness, the gentle voice, the mellow wisdom that were his distinctions. He was a...most human being, tolerant of the weaknesses of people and seeing good in the worst. There is much written about his merits as a writer of books, but the Rev. Francis J. Finn will be remembered best by his qualities as a noble gentleman" (1).

Fr. Finn was a pioneer in the field of juvenile fiction, a visionary and innovator in the field of education, and a social apostle before the term was coined. But most of all, he was a humble priest with an abiding love of God and a deep compassion for the neediest of God's children,

especially the little ones. He was a warm, gracious man who, in spite of unremitting bad health, “wrote a small library and carved for himself lasting monuments” (2). What follows is the story of that “noble gentleman” and the “small library” and “lasting monuments” he created.

Francis James Finn was born in St. Louis, Missouri on October 4, 1859, the feast of Saint Francis of Assisi, and he was baptized shortly thereafter. He was named Francis in honor of the saint on whose feast day he came into this world. Father Finn was the first child of John and Mary Josephine (Whyte) Finn, both immigrants from the town of Ballinasloe, County Galway, in western Ireland. In his memoirs he shares that his parents “left Ireland, poor famine-ridden Ireland, to wage the battle of life under more favorable circumstances” (3).

His father, an orphan, was one of eight children, seven boys and one girl, and was, in fact, the head of the family for some years. John and Mary Finn met and married in New York City. Shortly thereafter, they moved to St. Louis, Missouri, where they spent the rest of their lives and raised their family. John Finn was a man of energy and ambition. He served for a time as the president of the Board of Health in St. Louis. While he held that position the city suffered a severe outbreak of cholera. John fulfilled his responsibilities so admirably during the crisis

that the grateful citizens of the city presented him with a silver set “in commemoration of his heroic activity” (4). Around 1874, he was elected sheriff of St. Louis, a position he held for some years. He once ran for mayor of the city on the Democratic ticket. He was defeated.

In addition to Francis, their first born, John and Mary had five other children: Mary Teresa; Catherine Josephine, whom the family called Kate; John Richard, who died shortly after birth though he lived long enough to be baptized; William; and Louis Ignatius, who was the baby of the family.

In April 1861, the United States was torn apart by the Civil War. Young as he was at the time, Frank, as he was called, remembered the War vividly. Indeed, the conflict was a traumatic experience for all Missourians. Missouri had become a territory of the United States as part of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. On August 10, 1821, Missouri was admitted into the Union as a slave state as a result of the Missouri Compromise the year before. Although Missouri remained in the Union throughout the Civil War, its citizens were sharply and bitterly divided both on the subject of slavery and allegiance to the United States. The state supplied soldiers to both sides during the course of the conflict. John and Mary Finn sided with the Union. Not so with Frank’s nurse, a widow named Mrs. Condon,

whom the children called “Connie.” Connie was a “fire-eating Southerner” (5).

However, there were also happy memories from his childhood, like memories with his grandfather and books. His grandfather had been reading the novel *Dombey and Son* by Charles Dickens. As he finished it, he closed the book, looked up and said, “This is the finest book I have ever read in my life” (6). Young as he was, Frank was impressed. After all, grandpa had been reading for many years. If *Dombey and Son* was the best he had ever read, then it must truly be a wonderful book. Frank never forgot grandpa’s comment.

Somewhere around the age of six Frank was enrolled in the newly created parish school of Saint Malachy’s, the local Catholic church. “My first experience of school was not especially agreeable,” he tells us in his memoirs (7). The teacher was the major problem. He was, in a word, hopeless. It is not clear how long Frank remained at Saint Malachy’s School; but, somehow, he learned to read despite the teacher. Reading opened the door to a new and exciting world where he spent many happy hours.

About this time, Connie, his nurse, became quite ill. Certain that her days were numbered, Connie decided to part with her worldly possessions. She gave Frank several of her favorite books including *Fabiola*, a novel by

Nicholas Cardinal Wiseman. *Fabiola* is a story about the early Christian martyrs, and reading it had a profound influence on Frank. For one, religion became much more important to him. Additionally, the novel left him with the life-long conviction “that one of the greatest things in the world is to get the right book into the hands of the right boy or girl. No one can indulge in reading to any extent without being largely influenced for better or for worse” (8). Fortunately, Connie recovered from her illness, but Frank kept the book and was soon an avid reader.

Shortly thereafter, Frank’s father enrolled him in a neighborhood select school, which had been recently created by a Miss Carmenia Hood. This time he liked the teacher very much but took little interest in his studies. His only claim to fame at that time was a remarkably well-developed vocabulary for an eight-year-old, the result of his reading so avidly. He remained in Miss Hood’s school for a year or two.

In 1870, one month before his eleventh birthday, Frank entered Saint Louis University. Saint Louis University had been founded in 1818 by the Very Reverend Louis William Dubourg, the Catholic Bishop of Louisiana and the Floridas, in whose diocese the city of St. Louis was then located. In 1827, Bishop Dubourg entrusted his school, then called Saint Louis College, to the

fathers of the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits. In 1832, the College received its charter as a university by an act of the Missouri legislature.

Saint Louis University owns the distinction of being the oldest university west of the Mississippi River and the second oldest of the twenty-seven Jesuit universities in the United States. Only Georgetown University, founded in 1789, is older. In 1886, Saint Louis University established the first medical college and, in 1843, the first school of law west of the Mississippi River.

Despite its graduate programs and its professional schools, Saint Louis University was little more than a high school in 1870. The educational principles on which its curriculum was structured were those of all Jesuit schools of the time, and, had their origins in the Renaissance humanism of the sixteenth century with its emphasis on the study of literature, especially the ancient Latin and Greek authors. The other liberal arts, such as mathematics, history, philosophy, and the sciences, were also taught. This Classical Program, which was normally completed in seven years, though few students stayed that long, consisted of two departments. There was the Academic Department, which consisted of three classes or years: Academic Three, Academic Two, and Academic One. This path was followed by the Collegiate Department with four

classes or years: Humanities, Poetry, Rhetoric, and, finally, Philosophy. There was also a Preparatory or Rudimentary Class for students who were not sufficiently advanced to enter the Academic Department.

In addition, Saint Louis University offered an alternate program of studies called the Commercial Department. The Commercial Department was designed for young men who wanted practical training for entrance into the business world. Its curriculum consisted of such subjects as stenography, arithmetic, penmanship, grammar, and book-keeping. Many of this department's classes were offered in the evening.

On his first day at Saint Louis University, Francis was ushered into the Preparatory or Rudimentary Class, the equivalent of the seventh grade in today's schools. He was almost eleven years old at the time, about the age of most of the pupils in his class. He walked to school each day, but soon learned that the University was also a boarding school with many students from Mississippi, Louisiana, New Mexico, and even the country of Mexico. His teacher was a Jesuit scholastic by the name of Mr. Ignatius Wienmann, a scholastic being a young Jesuit in training who has not yet been ordained a priest. Frank liked Mr. Wienmann very much, but Mr. Wienmann was less enthusiastic about Frank or his performance in class. As

Frank admits in his memoirs, he was not a good student. He was a dreamer, found the lessons boring, and did not do well.

Frank's disappointed father came to the conclusion, with considerable justification, that Frank spent too much time reading. It was just about this time that Frank discovered Charles Dickens. He began with *Nicholas Nickelby* and loved it. In fact, over the next few years he reread it at least a dozen times. Next he read *Pickwick Papers* and, of course, *Dombey and Son*, which his grandfather had praised so highly. He could read for hours, living in a dreamland, as he readily admitted. There were other authors whose works he devoured such as James Fenimore Cooper, Washington Irving, William Makepeace Thackeray, and George Eliot. Shakespeare was also one of his favorites.

Finally, his father resorted to drastic measures and restricted his reading to one hour a day. His whole family seemed united against him, until one of the Jesuit scholastics at the University, Mr. John Van Krevel, came to his defense. He told his parents, "Let the boy read. When he grows up, who knows but he may become a writer" (9). His father relented reluctantly.

Two other significant events occurred during his initial year at Saint Louis University. First, Francis made his first

holy communion – probably in the spring of 1871.

Secondly, he joined the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary. No single event played a more central role in his life than his entrance into the Sodality. As he states in his memoirs, the Sodality led to his vocation to the Society of Jesus, and this vocation “is the one thing that saved me from a life, as I now believe, far below mediocrity” (10).

Frank was hardly the only person who esteemed the Sodality so highly. For centuries, Jesuits all over the world had established Sodalities as a means of helping Catholics, of all walks of life, grow in the knowledge and practice of their Catholic faith. In every Jesuit college, parish, or mission throughout the world there were Sodalities of young men and young women, married men and married women, priests, merchants, and laborers. The Sodality of Our Lady, which is almost as old as the Jesuit order itself, was founded in 1563 by Mr. Jan Leunis, a young Belgian Jesuit, at the Jesuit Roman College, now the Pontifical Gregorian University of Rome. In later years, the Sodality also played a major role in Father Finn’s priestly ministries.

The following year, 1871-72, Frank was placed in the Third Academic Class and began the study of Latin, his teacher being an amiable priest by the name of Martin M. Harts, S.J. Soon, however, Fr. Harts, amiable though he was, complained to Frank’s parents about their son’s

performance, saying he was often inattentive. Fr. Harts taught Frank the following year as well. Once again, Frank managed to escape any sort of class honors, and finished the year below the medium of the class. In fact, he tended to regard all class matters as an unwelcome interruption to his reading.

Around this time Frank began violin lessons and was soon taken by the sweet sound of the instrument. His love of music went back to his earliest years. In fact, one of his first childhood memories was of a brass band that one day paraded down the street in front of his home leading a unit of soldiers. The blare of the trumpets and the boom of the bass drum fascinated him. Captivated by the thrill of the music, he fell in behind the procession and followed the soldiers all the way downtown to the levee where they boarded a gun boat. By that time, he had no idea where he was. Thanks to a friendly policeman he eventually found his way back home where his irate father greeted him with some stern words.

Now at the age of twelve he was creating music himself, not on a trumpet or a bass drum, but on a violin. Every day after school he played his violin for an hour or more. Although he took lessons for only a year or so, his teachers were “all unanimous in stating that [he] had a real talent for music.” He soon learned to play his violin by ear.

As he explained, “To play it I needed ordinarily no music. What I had once played carefully I knew by heart without consulting a music sheet of any sort” (11). As the years passed, Frank played his violin less frequently, but his love of music remained with him a lifetime, and he often used it in his work with children.

The next year found him in the First Academic Class with a teacher by the name of Mr. John P. Frieden, S.J. Frank and Mr. Frieden did not get along. Frank felt that Frieden picked on him and he cordially disliked him. As the year progressed, he became deeply discouraged and his classroom work suffered accordingly. Soon his depression carried over to other areas of his life, and he stopped going to the weekly Sodality meetings. At the same time his father’s pork-packing business was not doing well. The totality of these situations led Frank to drop out of school at the end of the academic year.

For ten months he worked as an office boy in the business of his uncle, John J. Daly, where he “was quite successful as a bill collector for the firm and became proficient in smoking cigarettes” (12). Gradually, his mood and attitude changed. His father was elected sheriff of the city, and in May of 1875, Frank returned to Saint Louis University in the Commercial Department. This time he loved his teacher, Fr. John F. X. Tehan, S.J.

In the fall of 1875, Frank was back at the University and once again in the Classical Program. On his own initiative, and despite the advice of his counselors, he decided to repeat the First Academic Class. During his year with Mr. Frieden, he had not made much progress and felt unprepared to move ahead. His teacher in 1875 was Mr. Edward J. Gleeson, S.J., whom he did not like and to whom he found it difficult to relate. However, he had learned a lesson and tried his best to make sure his feelings toward the teacher did not interfere with his studies.

The following year, 1876-77, Frank entered the Poetry Class with Mr. William Poland, S.J. Interestingly, in moving directly to Poetry, Frank skipped the Humanities Class altogether. He never shared how he managed to avoid the Humanities Class. But, as it turned out, the Poetry Class with Mr. Poland was his best year at the University by far. Mr. Poland shared his love of literature and when Poland spoke, Frank listened attentively.

As the year progressed, Frank found himself more and more attracted to the Jesuit way of life and began to feel that God was calling him to the priesthood and religious life in the Society. Then a disturbing thing happened. Fr. Charles Coppens, S.J. – Frank’s confessor and director of the Sodality to which he belonged – summoned Frank to his office one day. Coppens told him about a recent

conversation among several Jesuits in which it was mentioned that Frank Finn was giving thought to becoming a Jesuit. Fr. Thomas O'Neill, who happened to be the Provincial Superior of the Jesuits at the time, heard the remark and observed that he thought Frank would hardly fit in the Jesuits. "He doesn't have brains enough to be admitted" (13).

Frank had to admit that the Provincial Superior might well be right. His academic record at the University was hardly impressive. Nonetheless, he was crushed. Fr. Coppens tried to console him by pointing out that, while Frank performed well in English, he had been neglecting Latin, a subject every Jesuit had to master. Furthermore, Fr. Coppens had a plan. He would tutor Frank in Latin. In addition, he recommended several Latin prayer books for Frank's daily use. Not only would the books help him to pray, but they would build his Latin vocabulary at the same time. One of these books was titled *Coeleste Palmetum*, a collection of litanies, religious reflections, and prayers compiled by a seventeenth century German Jesuit, Fr. Wilhelm Nakatenus. Fr. Coppens' tutoring, along with the Latin prayer books, did the trick. Equally helpful was the fact that, for the first time in his life, Frank began to study earnestly with the intention of actually learning, and not

just getting by. In short, “a revolution had occurred in my life,” as he shares in his memoirs (14).

The new work ethic paid off handsomely. At the end of the school year when the awards for academic achievement were presented, “I, who had never been mentioned for distinction in the class, received second premium [prize], much to the amazement of my classmates” (15). Further, when he made formal application for admission to the Jesuits the following month, Father Provincial O’Neill, whose doubts had been laid to rest, accepted him. “I departed his room a very happy boy” (16).

As Frank looked back over his years at the University, he singled out three major influences for which he was particularly grateful. The first was his acquaintanceship with Mr. John Van Krevel. When everyone else, except his mother, had given up on him in his first years at the University, Mr. Van Krevel stood by him and encouraged him. “Wait,” he said, “The boy will turn out well if he continues his studies” (17). The second strong influence in his life was Fr. Charles Coppens, S.J., his confessor and director of the Sodality. When Frank returned to Saint Louis University in 1875, Coppens took him under his wing. He counseled Frank and helped him to find God in his life. He also recommended Catholic books, which gave

direction to his reading and had their own good spiritual effect on his development. Finally, there was the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Sodality meetings took place on Sunday afternoons and attending them meant giving up games and other forms of entertainment. But the prayers, the sermons, and the sacraments that made up those Sunday afternoons planted the seed of a devotion to Our Lady that remained with him a lifetime and played a central role in his Jesuit vocation.

ii.

Jesuit Formation

On July 10, 1877, Frank entered Saint Stanislaus Novitiate of the Society of Jesus. He was seventeen years old. The novitiate was located in Florissant, Missouri, today a second ring suburb of St. Louis. His novice master was Fr. Isidore J. Boudreaux, “one of the saintliest and most engaging men I have ever met” (1).

The novitiate is the first stage in Jesuit training and lasts for two years. It is a time of formation in which the novice learns about the Society, its mission, its history, its charism, and its way of proceeding. The novitiate is also a time of intense prayer, spiritual reflection, and study as the novice tries to deepen his relationship to God. But most of all, it is a time of mutual discernment in which the novice seeks to learn whether God is indeed calling him to a life of poverty, chastity, and obedience in the Society, and the Society, for its part, decides whether the novice has the

gifts and talents, both natural and supernatural, to live joyfully, peacefully, and productively in the order.

In January 1878, Frank made the “long retreat,” thirty days of silence, meditation and solitude, under the direction of his novice master. During those thirty days he followed the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits. Frank found the experience very moving and life changing as he meditated on the life and teachings of Christ in order to know Jesus more intimately, love him more intensely, and follow him more closely. As Frank wrote in his memoirs, “In that long retreat we saw Our Lord in a new and more intimate way. It was the Vision Splendid” (2).

Of course, the novitiate life imposed restrictions and sacrifices. The daily routine was rigorous. Novices rose at 4:30 in the morning and retired to bed at 9:30 in the evening after a busy day with little free time. Giving up the smoking of cigarettes was difficult for Frank, and he missed playing his violin. Since the age of twelve his violin had been his companion. For now, however, he had to put it aside.

But a more serious problem surfaced shortly after the retreat. His health began to fail, and he suffered one ailment after another. He never seemed to be well, though in his memoirs he does not identify the nature of his

illnesses. He was sent to consult a doctor in St. Louis, but nothing the doctor prescribed proved effective.

Eventually, the Provincial Superior despaired of his health and concluded that Frank was physically unfit for Jesuit life. So, in October 1878, after fifteen months as a novice, he left the novitiate and the Society. The novice master, however, assured Frank that should his health improve, he would be welcome to return. Deeply saddened and with eyes full of tears he departed. His parting words, as reported by a fellow novice, expressed his feelings at the time, "I'll be back in a few months; no one can keep me out of the Society" (3).

Immediately after his departure, Frank visited Dr. Jerome K. Bauduy, his family doctor, in St. Louis. After examining him, Dr. Bauduy was of the opinion that nothing was seriously wrong and that rest, exercise, and good food would soon restore him to good health. With this prescription in mind, Frank visited Fr. Edward A. Higgins, the newly appointed Provincial of the Missouri Province, in early January 1879 to discuss his desire to return to the novitiate. The Provincial listened attentively and finally proposed an idea to him.

Another young novice had developed a serious case of tuberculosis and was being sent to live in a small Jesuit community in Seguin, Texas, where the Provincial hoped

the arid climate would restore him to good health. The Provincial invited Frank to accompany the novice. Frank was delighted with this suggestion and immediately accepted. Within a few days the two young men were on a train bound for Texas.

The Jesuit community at Seguin, Texas consisted of five or six Jesuits of the Mexican Province who had been expelled by the anti-Catholic, anti-clerical government of Mexico. For about a decade they lived in Seguin as exiles. Frank and his companion spent about a month living and working in the community, which welcomed them with open arms. Both benefited immensely from the dry, warm climate and Frank returned to St. Louis much healthier and stronger than he had been in some time, or so it seemed.

With the permission and blessing of Father Provincial Higgins, Frank returned to the Novitiate in Florissant on March 24, 1879, after a five-month absence. His fellow novices warmly greeted him.

The next few months passed smoothly enough. On the feast of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, July 31, the group of novices with whom he had initially entered took their first vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and a few weeks later, on the feast of the Assumption of Our Lady, the rest of his class pronounced their first vows. While he was happy for all of his companions, he felt a bit lonely, like

“the last rose of summer left blooming alone” (4). On August 25, however, Fr. Boudreaux summoned Frank to his office and informed him that he was moving to the juniorate to begin his formal studies with his classmates.

In those days, the juniorate was the stage of Jesuit training immediately following the novitiate. For two years the young scholastic, as he was called, studied the classical languages of Latin and Greek, along with English, history, and speech. The heavy emphasis on literature was in the spirit of traditional Jesuit education. Frank relished the English literature. He had already become something of a writer, so English composition was fun for him. But studying the writings of the ancient Latin and Greek authors was another matter. One gets the impression that he did well enough, but hardly excelled.

There was one aspect of his juniorate, however, that proved quite pleasant for him. He was charged with planning and staging plays for the entertainment of the community on special feast days. Frank took this opportunity to write and direct these presentations himself, one of which was a dramatic adaptation of *Oliver Twist*. By his own admission they were not particularly original, but they were well received and warmly applauded by the audience.

In August he began his second year of juniorate studies. The year started well enough, but after a few weeks his health began to deteriorate again. He suffered from chronic dyspepsia and almost constant headaches. As a result, he had to give up the study of Greek and “did just enough in the other branches to avoid failure” (5). To make matters worse, he experienced a fall of some kind in January 1881. He does not describe the nature of the accident, but it handicapped him even further.

Finally, he was sent to consult a doctor in St. Louis. After examining him, the doctor wrote a letter to Fr. Higgins, the Provincial Superior, stating his opinion that Frank should be removed from the juniorate immediately and “put into more active work” (6). Fr. Higgins heeded the doctor’s advice, and in February 1881, he assigned Frank to teach at Saint Mary’s College, a Jesuit boarding school in Kansas. So once again, bad health had interrupted Frank’s Jesuit training, and he boarded a train for Saint Mary’s College to begin his teaching career, the “more active work” that the doctor had recommended.

iii.

Saint Mary's College

Saint Mary's College was a relatively young institution when Frank Finn arrived in February 1881. The College was located on the north shore of the Kansas River, sometimes called the Kaw River, along the Oregon Trail, a short distance from Topeka, Kansas. Saint Mary's school had been founded in 1848 by the Jesuits as a mission school for the children of the Pottawatomies who inhabited the Kaw Valley at the time. The school consisted of two buildings, one for the girls who were taught by the Religious of the Sacred Heart and the other for the boys taught by the Jesuits. In time, however, the Pottawatomies were displaced as white settlers from the eastern states began their westward march. In the 1860s, the Kansas Pacific Railroad was built from Kansas City to Denver. The rail line reached Saint Mary's in 1865, and with the railroad the flow of white immigrants into the Kaw Valley

increased significantly. Shortly thereafter, the Pottawatomies lost their tribal status and gradually disappeared from the Valley.

In 1869, Saint Mary's College received its charter from the state of Kansas. Incorporation by the state marked the end of the mission school for Native Americans, and Saint Mary's became a boarding college for the sons of the newly arrived settlers from the east (1).

Frank's first impressions of Saint Mary's were not favorable. The housing was inadequate and the yards were in serious disrepair. The playgrounds were frequently covered with pools of water, which meant that the boys tracked mud everywhere in the buildings when it rained. However, he was warmly welcomed by his Jesuit brothers and was quickly put to work. If he was expecting rest and relaxation, he was quickly disillusioned. Quite the contrary, he was assigned to teach the Preparatory or Rudimentary Class of 48 boys who, as he soon learned, had a reputation for rowdiness. They certainly challenged their teacher, but despite his workload, Frank's health improved, and in a few weeks, he was feeling much better.

Fr. Coppens, who was then the prefect of studies at Saint Mary's and whom Frank knew well from his days at Saint Louis University, introduced Frank to his class on his first day. Fr. Coppens warned the pupils that their bad

reputation was known and any further misbehavior would not be tolerated. Next, the president of the College entered the room and addressed the boys with equally stern words. Such was Frank's introduction to teaching.

In his first remarks to the class, Frank took a different approach. He told the boys that he was going to give them an opportunity to prove themselves. He also proposed a deal for them. He told them that if they behaved and completed their work, he would spend the last half hour of the school day reading a story to them. In those days, before television and movies, storytelling was a popular form of entertainment. His proposal generated some interest. For the rest of that first day the boys were attentive and on their best behavior. So, as a reward, he ended the day by reading to them a chapter from *Oliver Twist*. They loved it.

He continued the same routine throughout the first week, and all seemed to be going well until the following Monday when a boy who had been in the infirmary the previous week returned to class. Unaware that a new day had dawned in the classroom, the young man became disruptive and troublesome. Frank warned him several times to no avail. So, finally, he announced to the class that, due to the bad behavior of one, there would be no story that day.

Recess occurred shortly thereafter during which the boys took the matter into their own hands. The class seized the culprit and dragged him to a water pump in the school yard where they gave him a good dunking. This “baptism” proved redemptive. The young renegade learned his lesson and caused no more trouble. When the school year ended in June, Frank could look back on it with a sense of accomplishment.

One other notable event occurred during his first semester at Saint Mary’s. On March 25, 1881, he pronounced his first vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. He was now a Jesuit scholastic committed to the Society of Jesus for life. Curiously, he does not mention this event in his memoirs, which, given its significance, is surprising. Perhaps the reason is simple enough. At the time, he was frantically trying to survive his first experience in the classroom.

The following school year brought a number of changes at Saint Mary’s. Fr. Coppens, who had been Frank’s spiritual director at Saint Louis University, was appointed president of the school. The makeup of the faculty also underwent significant changes. At the same time enrollment increased dramatically to over 200 boys. A number of the new pupils had transferred from another boarding school in the state, and several boys who had

previously been dismissed from Saint Mary's for disciplinary reasons were allowed to return. But the most surprising change of all affected Frank personally. He was appointed head prefect of the College in charge of discipline for the entire school.

The job of head prefect was challenging to say the least. The duty meant that he slept in the dormitory with the boys at night and spent much of the day with them either teaching or supervising. Early in the semester, it became evident to him that he had a serious problem on his hands. While most of the boys were well behaved, studious, and respectful, there soon developed a group of about fifteen to twenty troublemakers who threatened the morale and good order of the College. Frank was only twenty two years old and some of the boys were even older. He came to the conclusion that something had to be done. He approached Fr. Coppens to discuss the situation.

Fr. Coppens listened patiently and attentively but was unconvinced. He took a more optimistic position. It was early in the school year, he pointed out. The boys were adjusting to a new regime, but he felt sure that they would soon settle down and behave. Frank was not persuaded, but decided to give the "gang" another chance. As time went on, however, the situation, as Frank saw it was not only getting worse, but was becoming dangerous. Finally,

he informed the president that he was going to appeal his case to Fr. Edward Higgins, the Provincial Superior in Saint Louis. To his credit, Fr. Coppens did not object and Frank wrote to the Provincial describing the situation as he saw it. The move was bold for such a young and inexperienced Jesuit. But Frank felt he had no choice. Fr. Higgins responded by traveling to Saint Mary's personally to investigate the situation firsthand. He questioned both Fr. Coppens and Frank at length, and he concluded that Frank had good reason to be alarmed. The result was that Fr. Coppens summoned Frank to his office and asked for a list of the boys he thought were dangerous. Fr. Coppens assured Frank that any of the young men on the list who caused further trouble would be promptly dismissed.

Fr. Coppens was as good as his word. Before Christmas seven or eight of the ringleaders were gone. Soon the message got around among the boys that rowdiness was not going to be tolerated. Good order and discipline were slowly restored to everyone's satisfaction. The incident gives us good insight into Frank's personality. He gave the impression of being an easy going, mild-mannered person as, indeed, he was. But when circumstances demanded it, he could be firm and decisive. It was a trait that served him well throughout his life.

For two years, Frank served as the head prefect of the College. In addition, he taught the Second Grammar Class which was in the Commercial Department. Teaching in the Commercial Department meant no Latin or Greek which made his teaching load less strenuous and demanding.

Gutzon Borglum, one of Frank's pupils during this period, went on to become one of America's most famous sculptors. Borglum is best known for his colossal sculpture of Presidents Washington, Lincoln, Jefferson, and Theodore Roosevelt at the Mount Rushmore National Memorial in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Frank admits that he did not understand Borglum and did not get along with him. In the course of the year, he received a pointed letter from Borglum's father (apparently Borglum wrote to his father complaining about Mr. Finn). Frank wrote a response back to the boy's father explaining his side of the story. The father quickly wrote back and apologized for much of what he had said in his first letter and indicated that he was quite satisfied.

Many years later when Frank was the director of the Saint Xavier Parochial School in Cincinnati, he received a phone call from Gutzon Borghum inviting him to a luncheon at a Cincinnati hotel. Borglum was in town to promote a "big deal" he had in mind with several leading figures of the Cincinnati community. Frank accepted the

invitation and attended the lunch during which Borglum presented his proposal to his guests in a forthright, but not too tactful manner. The guests were not impressed and Borglum's "big deal" fell through.

iv.

Philosophy Studies
at Woodstock College

In the fall of 1883, Frank was ready to proceed to the next phase in his Jesuit training. Apparently in the best of health, he traveled east to Woodstock College in Maryland to begin his philosophical studies. Woodstock College was located in Maryland's Patapsco Valley about twenty-five miles west of Baltimore. The College was founded in 1867 by Fr. Angelo Paresce, S.J., the Provincial Superior of the Maryland Province, and served as the common seminary or scholasticate to which all the young Jesuits in the United States came for their philosophical and theological studies. Paresce had selected the location carefully. He wanted an isolated spot removed from the distractions of a large city, so that the scholastics could devote themselves to their studies undisturbed. It should be said; however, that not everyone was thrilled with Woodstock's bucolic setting. One faculty member remarked that Woodstock offered its

residents only two options, “aut studium, aut suicidium” (“either study or suicide”) (1).

The first dean of the College, Fr. Camillo Mazzella, S.J., modeled the school’s curriculum on that of the Jesuit Roman College. The philosophy program was a three-year course and theology was four. Both programs were structured on the neo-scholastic system, which emphasized the teaching of Saint Thomas Aquinas. Thomism, as his teaching was called, had enjoyed a renaissance in nineteenth century Europe and Fr. Mazzella was eager to introduce it to the American Church.

Woodstock College had its own print-shop, and in 1872 the College began to produce *The Woodstock Letters*, a periodical that featured news about Jesuit activities around the world. The College also published *The Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, a popular periodical founded and edited by Fr. Benedetto Sestini, S.J., who resided at the College and was a member of its faculty. In 1876, Woodstock College acquired Saint Inigo’s Villa, a holiday house in southern Maryland where the scholastics vacationed in the summer. Saint Inigo’s Villa was destined to play a very memorable role in Frank’s life (2).

Shortly after his arrival at Woodstock College, a good friend who knew about Frank’s love of writing, casually encouraged Frank to write a story for *The Sacred Heart*

Messenger” (3). Frank had never thought about it. The friend, Mr. John Weir, said “Go on and do it. Fr. Sestini needs good short stories, and you are the one to write them” (4). So, Frank did. He sat down and dashed off a story, which he entitled “Charlie’s Victory,” and submitted it to Fr. Sestini. Despite not knowing Frank, Fr. Sestini read the manuscript. Several days later he returned it saying he had no need for it.

When Mr. Weir heard this news, he was not pleased and decided to take the matter into his own hands. Weir took the story to Fr. Shallo, another member of the faculty who was a close friend of Fr. Sestini. Fr. Shallo read Frank’s story and liked it so much that he approached Fr. Sestini and urged him to reconsider. Fr. Shallo’s intervention worked. Fr. Sestini reread the manuscript at his friend’s request and accepted it for publication in *The Sacred Heart Messenger*.

Frank, of course, was delighted. He promptly sat down and wrote another story called “Bertie and Sophie,” which Fr. Sestini also published. In fact, the two stories were reprinted in other Catholic magazines. His career as a writer had been launched.

In September, the academic year began at Woodstock and Frank was soon introduced into the speculations of Thomistic philosophy. All seemed to be going well until

October 2 when everything changed. While playing baseball that afternoon he fell as he was running the bases and injured his back. Several days of rest in the infirmary did no good as the pain worsened. He visited doctors in both Philadelphia and Washington, but neither was able to help, and soon sleepless nights turned into chronic insomnia. During the fall semester he missed many classes. Fortunately, Charles Macksey, a fellow scholastic, agreed to tutor Frank regularly and this enabled him to keep up with the classes. After Christmas, Fr. Pierre O. Racicot, S.J., the Rector of Woodstock College, suggested moving a bed into the classroom so he could attend the lectures in relative comfort. This tactic also helped, but it must have created a humorous sight. The other members of the class were all seated in straight back chairs occasionally struggling to stay awake during a long lecture in Latin on some profound point of metaphysics, while Frank, lying on his couch, remained wide awake with insomnia.

To fill up those long hours of sleeplessness, Frank began to write another story which he titled “Ada Merton,” and which Fr. Sestini obligingly published in the *Messenger*. “Ada Merton” later appeared in book form. In his memoirs, Frank mentions that many have told him “Ada Merton” was the best story he ever wrote, while others thought it was his worst. However, he was certain

of one thing, “I know that ‘Ada Merton’ has done a great deal of good... It has proved to be an excellent story for children preparing for their First Communion and has inspired them to greater love of Our Lord” (5).

As the school year continued, Frank’s back showed no signs of improvement. The doctors were puzzled as was his superior. Frank experienced pain while standing still or sitting, and he got relief only when lying down. In his memoirs he says his superior probably regarded him as a hypochondriac. He admits that he became depressed and deeply discouraged. Occasionally, he would lock the door of his room and bury himself in some interesting book.

When spring arrived his spirits improved somewhat, and he began to prepare for final examinations with more energy than he had experienced in months. He was also immensely consoled by the encouraging words of an elderly priest in the community, Carlo Piccirillo, S.J. Fr. Piccirillo had held many important positions in the Society of Jesus in Italy, and had served at one time as the confessor of Pope Pius IX. Fr. Piccirillo summoned Frank to his room one day to offer words of advice and encouragement. “Don’t give up,” Fr. Piccirillo said. “You have splendid intelligence” (6). This compliment was a real tonic for Frank. No one had ever spoken to him before in those terms.

All seemed to be going better until shortly before the examinations when he suffered a relapse. Insomnia returned, he lost his appetite, and migraines assaulted him. Deeply discouraged, he wrote to his Provincial Superior in St. Louis to say that he felt he could not continue his studies until he recovered his health. The Provincial, Fr. Leopold Buschart, responded immediately. In a letter to Fr. Racicot, Fr. Buschart directed Frank to return to St. Louis as soon as practical. The news came as a relief to Frank. Thanks to the solicitude and concern of Fr. Racicot, Frank completed his examinations within a few hours after the receipt of the letter. Afterwards, he had no idea about the outcome of the exams, but at that point, he did not care. He was simply relieved the ordeal was over.

He soon boarded the Baltimore and Ohio train that took him back to St. Louis and his own province. Years later, he remembered going to the dining car of that train and enjoying a “hearty meal,” his first in several weeks (7).

His superiors must have been deeply concerned about Frank. Was he really suited to life in the Society? Given his fragile health, could he ever complete the rigorous course of Jesuit studies and, even if he did, for what ministerial works would be suited after ordination? As Frank would later learn, Fr. Racicot wrote a letter to Fr. Buschart about his academic performance at Woodstock. The letter was

neither flattering nor reassuring. Fr. Racicot felt certain that Frank would not pass his examinations because he had missed so many classes. He also pointed out that even when Frank was well, he spent too much time in light reading and writing stories.

Fr. Buschart must have been equally perplexed. According to Frank's own account, Fr. Buschart "looked with suspicion upon budding poets and authors.... At the least, he considered me a dreamer" (8). However, one bit of good news reached Frank on his arrival in St. Louis. Somewhat surprisingly, he had passed his examinations at Woodstock and had finished his first year of philosophical studies satisfactorily, if not brilliantly.

v.
Back to Saint Mary's College

For the fall 1884, Frank was reassigned to Saint Mary's College in Kansas, where he was to serve as assistant prefect of discipline and teacher of logic to the graduating class in the Commercial Department. Although the year started promisingly enough, his health once again began to deteriorate. He grew weaker and weaker, and the superior of the Jesuit community, observing the situation, relieved him of his responsibilities as assistant prefect and assigned him to teach the Third Academic Class for three hours a day. This move turned out to be providential.

Sick as he was, Frank never lost his yearning to write stories for young people. The writing bug had clearly bitten him. In a conversation one day with Fr. William T. Kinsella, S.J., a fellow Jesuit in the community, Frank happened to mention that he loved to write and had, in fact, published several stories in *The Messenger of the Sacred*

Heart. Fr. Kinsella, who had a well-deserved reputation as a literary critic and rhetorician, kindly agreed to read the stories and give Frank his honest evaluation of them.

Several days later, Fr. Kinsella, having studied the stories carefully, summoned Frank to his room. In a kind but candid manner, Fr. Kinsella pointed out what he regarded as flaws in the stories and ended by advising Frank to give up the idea of writing for publication. In effect he said, “There is nothing in your work to show that you will ever make a writer” (1). Frank left the room disappointed and firmly convinced that his dream of becoming an author was pure fantasy. God must have other plans for him.

Several days later, however, Frank was seated at his desk in the classroom while the boys in front of him wrote their weekly composition. The thought suddenly came to him: “Why could I not put on paper such boys as were before me in the flesh” (2). On an impulse, he took out some paper and a pencil and began to write. His pencil flew across the pages in an almost effortless manner, and soon he had written what would turn out to be the first chapter of his most beloved novel, *Tom Playfair*. He completed it in just ten minutes. By this time the boys had finished their compositions. So, Frank read to them what

he had just written. They were all ears and their “enthusiasm left nothing to be desired” (3).

As Frank had been suffering from insomnia for many weeks, he devised a plan. He would devote two of these sleepless hours each night to writing more chapters of *Tom Playfair* while lying on his back in bed. One chapter suggested another, and his imagination was alive, as his pupils eagerly awaited the next adventure of their new-found hero, Tom Playfair.

He had no plans to publish any of these chapters. Fr. Kinsella’s words had shattered that dream. He wrote merely to while away long hours of sleeplessness and to entertain his class of young boys. For forty or fifty days this routine continued until the novel *Tom Playfair* was virtually finished.

Unfortunately, his writing did nothing to improve his health and he became progressively weaker. His superiors grew alarmed and on February 1, 1885, at their direction, he departed for St. Louis to consult with doctors once again. In his memoirs he describes himself as “a broken-down man, a failure and without anything to show but a thick bundle of manuscript containing neither beginning, middle nor end, a series of adventures and episodes concerning my little friend Tom Playfair” (4).

From February to August of that year Frank remained in St. Louis. As planned, he consulted with Dr. Bauduy whom he respected and trusted. His description of his consultation with the doctor in his memoirs is revealing both for what it says and what it omits. There is no mention of his symptoms except that he was weak and suffered from insomnia, nor does he mention the doctor's diagnosis. He writes that the doctor asked many questions after which he expressed his opinion that Frank was attempting a style of life for which he was simply not suited. In a word, he told Frank that he was not physically capable of the rigors of Jesuit life and should look for a fulfilling vocation elsewhere.

Frank heard the doctor's warnings clearly, but strongly disagreed. At no point in his life did he ever doubt that God had called him to the Society of Jesus, and, with God's grace, he could and would persevere in the Society to the end of his days. Fragile health would be a cross he would have to carry, a mountain he would have to climb. But he was determined to do whatever it took, with God's grace, to live and die a Jesuit.

One consoling event occurred during these months of convalescence in St. Louis, a "balm of Gilead," as he called it (5). He had an opportunity to read *Tom Playfair* to a group of boys at Saint Louis University. To Frank's joy,

they reacted with as much enthusiasm as his class at Saint Mary's. Needless to say, this audience feedback lifted his spirits enormously. By June he was feeling better. Shortly thereafter, he learned that he had been assigned to teach at Saint Xavier College in Cincinnati the next academic year. So, in August off he went to Cincinnati.

In those days, Saint Xavier College was located on the west side of Sycamore Street between Sixth and Seventh Streets in downtown Cincinnati. Next to the College stood Saint Xavier Church where Frank was destined to serve most of his priestly years as assistant pastor and director of the grade school. Saint Xavier College, originally called the Athenaeum, had been founded by the first bishop of Cincinnati, Edward Fenwick, O.P., in 1831. In 1840, his successor, Bishop John Baptist Purcell, entrusted the school to the Jesuits who changed its name to Saint Xavier College. In 1845, the adjacent church, which had been the Cathedral of Saint Peter's, became Saint Xavier Church when the Cathedral was moved to a new location at Eighth and Plum Streets.

Fr. Henry Moeller, S.J. was president of Saint Xavier College at the time. Frank knew him well because Moeller had been prefect of studies at Saint Louis University during Frank's days there as a student. Frank was pretty sure that Fr. Moeller had a low opinion of his abilities and

did not expect much from him as a teacher. Frank was placed in charge of the Third Academic Class, roughly equivalent to first year high school today. There were about forty-five boys in his class and from the beginning Frank got along well with them.

Shortly before Christmas, his students gave a specimen of their work in Latin and Greek. A specimen consisted of a public exhibition of what the young men had learned in their classes. Fr. Moeller and the other Jesuits on the faculty were invited to attend. Much to the surprise of everybody, including the president, the boys performed exceptionally well, and Frank felt that he had been rehabilitated at least somewhat.

And, of course, he managed to find time during the year to read his treasure *Tom Playfair* to his class. Once again, the story was enthusiastically received much to the author's satisfaction. As the academic year came to an end in June, Frank could look back on it as the most successful year he had enjoyed in his career as a Jesuit. His health had improved, his students excelled, and his superiors had been reassured. So, in late August 1886, with the blessing of the Provincial, he returned to Woodstock College in Maryland to resume his interrupted study of philosophy.

vi.

*Back to Philosophy
at Woodstock College*

The year got off to a promising start. Frank was healthy again and he threw himself into his studies with enthusiasm. As he admitted on several occasions, the speculative nature of philosophy did not appeal to him. But he took his studies seriously because he knew they were essential to his Jesuit training and to his preparation for the priesthood he earnestly desired. In his memoirs, he does not say much about the classes he took. He certainly studied logic, epistemology, metaphysics, cosmology, natural theology, ethics, and rational psychology, but says little about them. He does mention the problems he had with trigonometry, a subject he had to study in conjunction with the natural sciences. Both mathematics and science remained mysteries to him all his days.

Writing, however, was another matter. Early in the academic year he was asked to read a segment of *Tom*

Playfair at a Jesuit community celebration. He chose the chapter in which the hero tries to exorcise the character Jimmie Green, and he embellished his reading of the story with some appropriate sound effects provided by a fellow Jesuit off stage. His brother Jesuits “were lavish in their praise” of the performance, and a number of them urged him to continue his writing (1).

Somewhere toward the end of his first school year back at Woodstock, he received a letter from the editor of *The Orphan’s Friend*, a Boston publication, asking him to submit a story for publication in the magazine. Frank jumped at the opportunity and, taking another chapter from *Tom Playfair*, he proceeded to refashion it as a short story. As soon as he finished the revision, he sent the reworked manuscript to Fr. Rudolph J. Meyer, the Provincial Superior, for his permission to publish it in *The Orphan’s Friend*.

Fr. Meyer’s response brought gratifying news. Father praised the story “generously” and congratulated Frank on his work. The Provincial did have one reservation; however, which he expressed this way: “I would suggest only a few changes in the rather slangy expressions of the little heroes. They are indeed very natural - just such as boys would use. But a college is supposed to correct at least the more glaring vulgarisms, or if you will, boy-talk or

lingo. Introduced into a beautiful composition like yours, they are likely to become more general instead of being corrected and avoided by the young readers” (2). Whether Frank heeded this suggestion was and is a matter of opinion. In any event, the story appeared in *The Orphan's Friend*, and, as Frank expressed it, the second period of his writing career had been launched.

The 1886-87 academic year was, in general, a good one for Frank. Despite occasional health issues, he performed sufficiently well in his classes thanks to the help of several generous tutors including Mr. James Dawson, S.J., later a professor at Woodstock, and Mr. Elder Mullan, S.J. Insomnia returned from time to time, but he had found a new remedy. As he explains in his memoirs, “I had recourse to two volumes written by a very learned German Jesuit on difficult questions of philosophy. The matter he treated was highly metaphysical, and the manner in which he treated it was extremely heavy. Two or three pages of this learned Jesuit’s writing generally succeeded in putting me to sleep” (3).

The following school year, 1887-88, also proved to be a successful one academically for him, although his old nemesis insomnia returned occasionally along with other maladies. But the urge to write never abandoned him even in bad health. At some time during this year, he managed

to write in just a few days one of his most famous and charming novels, *Percy Wynn; Or Making a Boy of Him*. Speed remained a characteristic of his writing throughout his career. Once an idea for a plot and characters came to him, he gathered a pencil or pen and some paper and wrote furiously until the tale was told. He would sometimes average as many as 8,000 words a day.

Where did the character Percy Wynn come from? Frank explained. “I had traveled to Washington, D.C., to consult a doctor,” he writes in his memoirs. “And there, on a streetcar, I met a little boy, a dainty little fellow, dressed like a little prince, with bright blue eyes and long golden hair. He was a glib talker and constantly interlarded his remarks with ‘Yes, indeedy’ and ‘No, indeedy’” (4). Frank did not know his name, but Percy seemed to fit the boy perfectly. So, Percy Wynn was born.

During that same year, he reworked another episode of *Tom Playfair*, and published it in a magazine called *The Youth’s Companion*. In addition, he assisted a chemistry professor at Woodstock, an Italian Jesuit, who regularly published articles in *The American Catholic Quarterly*. Since English was not the professor’s native language, he asked Frank to correct his English and adjust his manuscripts into readable shape before he submitted them to the journal for publication. As a result, for two years learned

articles on chemistry appeared in a learned magazine from the pen of one who was, by his own admission, among the worst scientists in the history of Woodstock College.

One further opportunity for publication occurred shortly before Frank left Woodstock. Two recent graduates of Saint Xavier College in Cincinnati contacted him with a proposal. They were in the process of creating a new magazine for children and asked him for permission to publish *Percy Wynn*, serially, in their new publication. The idea seemed like a good one, so Frank agreed. A decision he later regretted.

vii.

*Teaching at Marquette College
in Milwaukee*

In the system of Jesuit formation, a scholastic who has just finished philosophy is normally assigned to work in some Jesuit apostolic ministry for two or three years before he begins his theological studies. In Jesuit parlance, this period of training is normally referred to as the “regency” period. In the late nineteenth century, regency almost always meant teaching in one of the order’s colleges. In Frank’s case, however, the superiors had decided to make an exception, since he had already taught for three years. So, when he returned to Woodstock College in 1886, their plan was to have him complete philosophy and then begin theology immediately after philosophy. However, because of his uncertain health in the spring of 1888, they determined that two more years of teaching would be beneficial.

Thus, it happened that in September of 1888 Frank found himself in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he was assigned to teach at Marquette College, as Marquette University was then called.

Marquette College was founded by John Martin Henni, the first Catholic bishop of Milwaukee, in August 1881. At the same time, he entrusted the administration of the school to the fathers of the Society of Jesus, who opened its doors to students the following month. The College was named after Fr. Jacques Marquette, S.J., the seventeenth century French missionary who, along with his companion Louis Jolliet, explored and mapped the upper regions of the Mississippi River valley.

When Frank arrived at Marquette in the fall of 1888, the College was only seven years old. He was assigned to teach the Poetry Class, the equivalent of today's college sophomore year. Prior to this opportunity, he had never taught above the high school level, but he felt that he was more than up to the challenge. During his years at Woodstock, he had read the works of the Latin poets regularly, Horace's odes in particular, and had made a habit of reading the New Testament in Greek daily. So, he had kept up his study of Latin and Greek and felt ready to teach the Poetry Class he had been assigned. In addition, he found his students friendly and eager to learn.

As it turned out his class performed very well. One of his students won the Latin medal in the annual inter-collegiate competition that took place among all the colleges in the Missouri Province, and all of his boys made an excellent showing in the competition.

In addition to his classroom work, Frank conducted the Marquette choir and continued to write as his schedule permitted. He published a series of stories in *The Catholic New World*, the newspaper of the Archdiocese of Chicago. These stories were mostly chapters taken from *Tom Playfair*, which he reworked as short pieces. He also wrote a ghost story, a murder mystery, of which he was quite proud, although it scared some of the children to whom he read it. This “hair raising” tale would evolve into the beginning of his novel entitled *Harry Dee*.

However, what should have been the high point of his first year at Marquette turned out to be a major disappointment. For the first time, a book of his, *Percy Wynn*, appeared in print, but in a very unsatisfactory form. How this issue came about is an interesting and somewhat complicated tale. Before he left Woodstock in the early summer of 1888, Frank had granted two graduates of Saint Xavier College in Cincinnati permission to publish *Percy Wynn*, serially, in a new children’s magazine they were creating. The magazine soon failed, but one of the young

men involved in the project, Augustine J. Schmil, then proposed to publish *Percy Wynn* in book form. It sounded like a good idea, so Frank agreed.

Sometime in 1889, *Percy Wynn: Or Making a Boy of Him* appeared in print for the first time, but there were problems: “The story came out a tiny volume with gilt-edged paper. It looked pretty; but abounded in all kinds of printer’s errors” (1). In addition, the author of the novel was listed as “Neemah,” presumably a pen name of some kind, with no acknowledgement of Francis J. Finn’s authorship, whatsoever. Furthermore, Augustine J. Schmil claimed the copyright to the book. As Frank expressed it in his memoirs, he had found a printer, but not a publisher, and the book remained largely unknown to the general public.

For over a year Frank tried to recover the rights to *Percy Wynn* from his Cincinnati printer, but Schmil was unwilling to relinquish his claim to the sale of the book. Frank even considered suing Schmil, but he decided against it because “we Jesuits avoid lawsuits whenever possible” (2). It took time with an exchange of many letters before the matter was finally settled.

On a more pleasant note, Frank’s second year at Marquette College was a successful one. In August, Fr. Joseph Grimmelsman, the superior of the community,

assigned him to teach the Rhetoric Class, which in today's terminology is the junior year of college. Rhetoric, or oratory, was not a subject he particularly enjoyed or was interested in, but he was teaching the same group of boys as the year before, and this familiarity made his task all the easier and more pleasant. And so, with the arrival of summer, 1890, his regency assignment in Milwaukee came to an end, and "once more, feeling in fine feather and with high aspirations, I left the west for Woodstock College, there to take up my studies in theology" (3).

viii.
Theology Studies
at Woodstock College

On the first day of September 1890, as Frank was sitting in his room at Woodstock College smoking a cigarette, an idea for another novel came to him. During his first year at Marquette, he had written a murder mystery which he liked, although it terrified some younger children. The thought occurred to him to take the hero of this tale, Harry Dee, send him to Saint Mary's College in Kansas to make the acquaintance of Tom Playfair and Percy Wynn and, with their assistance, solve the mystery of his uncle's murder.

He immediately sat down at his desk and began to write what turned out to be his longest novel, *Harry Dee: Or Working It Out*. For the next ten days he wrote feverously, averaging eight to nine thousand words a day, and by September 11, the day that theology classes were scheduled to begin, he finished.

By this time, he had overcome his previous hesitations about publishing and, in fact, had been bitten by the publishing bug. Since both *Tom Playfair* and *Harry Dee* were now almost ready for publication, his next task was to regain control over *Percy Wynn*. Once that task was achieved, he hoped to submit all three novels to a reputable publishing house that would print and advertise them properly.

But Augustine Schmil remained adamant. Frank could not convince him that he was not a publisher and Schmil refused to relinquish his right to the publication and sale of *Percy Wynn*. In desperation, Frank did what all people of faith do in such circumstances: he resorted to prayer. In particular, he turned to Saint Joseph who had never failed him. After some days of fervent prayer, he sat down and wrote one more letter to Schmil hoping that Saint Joseph's intercession would make a difference.

To his immense joy, it did. On February 2, 1891, Schmil wrote back acknowledging that the copyright to *Percy Wynn* did not belong to him. In a subsequent letter written that month, he formally released the copyright to Finn, and the problem was finally solved. At last, one major hurdle had been cleared. The next task was to find a reliable, reputable, publisher for his beloved trilogy (1).

Frank obtained the names and addresses of all the publishers of Catholic books in the United States and wrote to each of them, enclosing with each a copy of *Percy Wynn*. The responses, however, were universally disappointing. Most indicated that they had abandoned Catholic juvenile fiction altogether because there was no market for it. Only one publisher expressed any interest, and that was Benziger Brothers of New York. They too had found Catholic fiction for boys and girls unprofitable, but they were willing to take a chance on *Percy Wynn*, under certain circumstances, which Frank found not altogether acceptable. However, after further negotiations, he reached an agreement with Benziger Brothers; *Percy Wynn: Or Making a Boy of Him* was properly, correctly, and impressively published in early 1891. This business decision was one of the smartest Benziger ever made.

The Catholic community received the novel with enthusiasm. The critics praised it and the novel sold very well. Curiously, some Jesuits were less impressed. They felt that books of this kind were not a suitable undertaking for Jesuits, while others thought that Frank should stick to poetry. But his superiors, both Fr. Rupert G. Meyer, the Provincial, and Fr. Boursaud, the Rector of Woodstock College, were very pleased and offered generous praise.

At the same time that *Pery Wynn* was making his debut, *Harry Dee* appeared in *The Chicago New World* in serial form. So, between his literary efforts and his study of theology, Frank's first year back at Woodstock proved a busy, but productive one, even though he suffered from bronchitis for much of the winter. Final examinations occurred in June and he did quite well for a change. By July he and all the other theologians were ready for a well-deserved vacation at Saint Inigo's, Woodstock's villa house, on the Maryland shore.

As it transpired, the vacation was marred by tragedy, one that Frank would remember all his life. One evening in early July, shortly after the scholastics arrived at Saint Inigo's, a furious storm hit the three-story wooden structure. Around midnight, everyone was awakened by a "blinding flash of lightning and simultaneously a terrific clap of thunder. Following hard upon this, there was a crash above as though several men had fallen to the floor" (2). Lightning had struck the building and had killed three of the young Jesuits on the third floor, while two others were severely injured. One was so badly burned that his life was in danger for several days.

This tragic incident was a terrifying moment. For several weeks, Frank experienced nightmarish dreams about the tragic incident and got little work done. By mid-

August, however, he was able to turn his attention once again to editing and preparing *Tom Playfair* for publication. One morning, as he was staring at the Playfair manuscript on his desk, an idea came to him. Why not incorporate the “lightning incident” he had recently experienced into the story of *Tom Playfair*? The victims of the lightning strike would not be Jesuit scholastics, but several of Tom’s classmates at Saint Mary’s College. Tom too would be injured by the bolt and would have to travel to Cincinnati for medical treatment.

To add several chapters to *Tom Playfair* narrating the lightning incident was the labor of only a few days. With that addition, the novel was finally finished. Frank was pleased with the work, and promptly sent it to Fr. John P. Frieden, the Provincial Superior of the Missouri Province, seeking permission to publish it. The Provincial was the same John P. Frieden who had taught Frank at Saint Louis University years ago, and whom Frank did not especially like. But time cures many ills and dispels many misunderstandings, and in the meantime, Frank had grown to admire Fr. Frieden.

Fr. Frieden returned the manuscripts quickly and “stamped them with his hearty approval” (3). Benziger Brothers was only too eager to publish the novel since *Percy Wynn* had been such a commercial success. And so,

before the end of the year 1891, *Tom Playfair: Or Making a Start* was published and in the hands of the young people for whom it was intended.

Initially, *Tom Playfair* was not as warmly received by the public as *Percy Wynn*. Some critics felt that the episodes of the story did not hang together well. Others complained that the novel contained too much slang and was “vulgar” in places. But these critiques have not been the judgment of history. *Tom Playfair* proved to be immensely popular, and many generations of Catholic children have found it both entertaining and inspiring. The novel has gone through many editions and has been translated into at least seven languages. Its publisher claimed that “it is beyond question the most successful Catholic book written for boys and girls ever published in the English tongue” (4).

Frank’s purpose in writing the novel was simple enough as he made clear in his memoirs. “In *Tom Playfair* I undertook to put down once and for all what I considered would give the reader the idea of a genuine Catholic American boy” (5). In later books he would give us his idea of a “genuine Catholic American girl.”

His second year of theological studies at Woodstock in 1891-92 went well enough, although he experienced bouts of sickness from time to time. The following year, 1892-93, proved to be more difficult. Through much of the

winter he suffered from what the doctor called bronchitis, and he was generally in bad health. Adding to the problem was the fact that this year was to be his year of ordination to the priesthood. On the other hand, there was one bright moment: on September 17, 1892, he signed a contract with Benziger for the publication of *Harry Dee*, his third novel. About a month later, *Harry Dee: Or Working It Out* made its appearance on bookshelves. The novel received very favorable reviews and sales were brisk.

In the early spring of 1893, the rector approached Frank with a proposition. He suggested that Frank go to Philadelphia to work for several weeks at *The Messenger of Sacred Heart*, which had moved its base of operations from Woodstock College to Philadelphia. Frank thought this proposition was a good idea. A change of climate, diet, and lifestyle might be just what he needed to recover his good health in preparation for final examinations and ordination. So, he accepted the rector's suggestion and left for St. Joseph College, Philadelphia, where he resided while he worked at *The Messenger*.

During his stay in Philadelphia, Frank decided to consult a doctor, a specialist, to see if he could get to the bottom of his persistent illnesses. After a thorough examination, the specialist informed him, much to his surprise, that he had a "clear case of Bright's disease," and

would have to spend the rest of his life on a milk diet (6). Bright's disease is an illness of the kidneys. The specialist was quite certain of his diagnosis and, further, recommended that Frank consult an eye doctor who would undoubtedly confirm the specialist's conclusions.

Shortly thereafter, Frank visited an eye doctor who found no effects of Bright's disease in his eyes. He did warn Frank, however, that his eyes were in very bad condition and that a life of study and reading would lead to serious eye problems. Frank then returned to the specialist with the eye doctor's report. After examining him once more, the specialist was amazed. He could find no signs of Bright's disease. The new milk diet had clearly worked and had affected a cure. Frank left the office relieved, though he soon abandoned the milk diet with no apparent ill effect. The entire episode is somewhat bizarre and might be easily dismissed except for the fact that the cause of Frank's death in 1928 was chronic renal failure. Perhaps the specialist was not altogether wrong.

How long Frank remained at *The Messenger of the Sacred Heart* in Philadelphia is not clear, but it could not have been long because by late spring he was back at Woodstock feeling much better and preparing for his final examinations and ordination. However, he had missed many classes in the course of the year, and he had studied

very little. He studied frantically in the last few weeks of the academic year, and he tried to make up for lost time despite persistent insomnia. In the end, however, “sleepless nights begot muddleheaded days,” and his performance in the final examinations was not impressive (7). Nonetheless, he managed to pass – just barely.

With examinations behind him, Frank entered into an eight-day retreat in preparation for his ordination to the priesthood, which took place in the community chapel of Woodstock College on June 29, 1893. Surprisingly, he says little about his ordination in his writings. Perhaps his feelings on that occasion were simply too personal to put on paper. After all, Frank Finn was Irish, and the Irish are not known for wearing their hearts on their sleeves.

The ordaining prelate was James Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore. Gibbons had been appointed the ninth archbishop of Baltimore in 1877, and he served in that position for 44 years until his death in 1921. He was elevated to the College of Cardinals by Pope Leo XIII in 1886, only the second American to be so honored, the first being Cardinal John McCloskey of New York. By the time of Frank’s ordination in 1893, Cardinal Gibbons was one of the most revered and influential figures in the American Catholic Church.

ix.

Back in St. Louis, Missouri

For his fourth year of theological studies, Fr. Finn left Woodstock and returned to St. Louis. The reason for this unusual move was undoubtedly his precarious health. As it turned out, the 1893-94 school year was his most successful academically. For one thing, he enjoyed much better health throughout the year. He raised his weight from 165 pounds to 195. Clearly his appetite had returned.

He writes that during this year he studied theology privately. Just what this meant he does not say. Undoubtedly, he was tutored by one or more of the professors of theology at Saint Louis University. For him, tutoring was a more agreeable arrangement than sitting in a lecture hall for hours on end. In May of 1894, he sat for his final oral examinations. “Luckily for me my head was clear, and the examiners were most affable” (1). The two-hour ordeal went quite well except for the last few

minutes, which were devoted to the natural sciences. Frank knew nothing about the natural sciences as became evident very quickly. Except for that subject, his performance was quite satisfactory.

His final year of theology was also marked by the publication of yet another full-length novel. On September 8, 1893, he signed an agreement with Benziger Brothers for the publication of *Claude Lightfoot: Or How the Problem Was Solved*, and shortly thereafter the book appeared. In just three years he had managed to publish four highly popular novels. No insignificant achievement for a chronically sick person.

By the time he finished his theological studies in 1894, Frank had an international reputation as an author of juvenile fiction. His first four novels were widely read and praised, and one of them, *Tom Playfair*, had already been translated in German. Concerning the novel *Percy Wynn*, one critic said:

“I have read and reread *Percy Wynn* and I am going to read it and study it again and again. Of all the books I have read for the last forty years there is none that has given me more genuine and wholesome pleasure than this beautiful and beautifully written little work.

Almost every page in it makes one laugh and cry at the same time” (2).

About *Claude Lightfoot*, another critic wrote, “There is humor or pathos running through every line of Father Finn’s works, but a shade of dullness, never” (3). Still another commentator described Finn’s work in these words: “These stories were written primarily for children, but we see no unarguable reason for keeping them from adults. They entertain, they are life-like, and they carry a cheering thought” (4).

What was the secret of Fr. Finn’s success as a writer? First of all, he never failed to keep his youthful audience in mind. He filled his stories with action and adventures that caught and held their attention. Furthermore, his characters were real boys and girls with whom the young readily identified. His characters spoke the language, the lingo, of the young. It is no exaggeration to say that he practically invented Catholic juvenile fiction in the United States. Prior to him there was little children’s literature, especially religiously oriented children’s literature, and most of it was sugary, overly pious, and unreal.

At the same time, his stories conveyed a moral and religious message. The setting and background of each tale was emphatically Catholic with all the practices, devotions,

ceremonies, and traditions of the Church Fr. Finn loved and served all his life. Fr. Daniel Lord once recalled his own personal reaction to Fr. Finn's books when he first read them as a boy. "From these boys of fiction, I learned much of honor and courage and cleanness of mind and body. I came to believe in the manliness of piety. In their company I spent happy hours, and never did I leave them without the implicit resolve to live as they lived and do as they did" (5). Fr. Lord's reaction was typical of many boys and girls around the world.

Fr. Finn's books sold well from the very beginning. In July 1893, Benziger Brothers reported to him that in a period of eighteen months from January 1, 1892 to July 1, 1893 it sold 3,176 copies of *Tom Playfair* and 2,558 copies of *Percy Wynn*. Between November 12, 1892, when the book first appeared, to July 1, 1893, a period of only eight months, Benziger sold 2,056 copies of *Harry Dee*.

According to the conditions of his contract, Fr. Finn was paid a royalty of eight cents per sold copy, which means he earned \$623.20 in a period of eighteen months. That comes to about \$17,000.00 in today's money. Not too bad for a neophyte author (6).

x.

Early Years as a Priest

In 1894, a young Jesuit priest just finishing his theological studies would have normally proceeded to the next phase of Jesuit training called tertianship, but Fr. Finn did not follow this path. Instead, he was sent back to Saint Mary's College in Kansas to teach the Rhetoric Class. The uncertain state of his health was undoubtedly the reason. Since his earlier tour of duty at Saint Mary's College in 1885, the school had grown and several new buildings had been added. "A three-story stone structure, north of the faculty building, housed the student dormitory, senior reading room and science rooms. A small gymnasium provided indoor playing space... The students watched the sporting events from a new grandstand. Electric lights and a telephone system were the final material improvements of the period" (1).

In addition to his teaching at Saint Mary's, Fr. Finn had other responsibilities. He directed the College band and choir, and moderated *The Dial*, a student publication that had been introduced several years earlier. "His term as moderator [of *The Dial*] marked one of the high sierras in the history of this monthly magazine" (2). In the course of the year, he contributed a short story and a regular column called "Literary Notes." In its November issue, *The Dial* featured an interesting debate on the subject of college football. Several student contributors opposed the sport because, in their opinion, it was too rough and injury prone, while others found no objections to the game. The following issue, however, put such theoretical considerations aside and proudly reported on the victories of the Saint Mary's football team over such formidable rivals as Kansas State and Fort Riley. The academic year of 1894-95 proved to be a happy and rewarding one for him.

Fr. Finn spent the following school year in Milwaukee, once again, where he taught the Rhetoric Class at Marquette College. In his free time, his pen was as busy as ever and stories continued to flow from it. Sometime in the course of 1896 he entered into agreements with Benziger Brothers for the publication of two more books: a collection of short stories entitled *Mostly Boys*, and a full-length novel called *Ethelred Preston: Or the Adventures of a*

Newcomer. Both books were warmly received by his youthful readers.

The 1896-97 academic year found him back at Saint Stanislaus Seminary in Florissant, Missouri where he had made his novitiate and juniorate at the beginning of his Jesuit career. Tertianship is the last stage of a Jesuit's training prior to his final vows. This last stage is sometimes referred to in Jesuit terminology as the "period of third probation," the novitiate representing the first and second periods of probation. In Fr. Finn's time, tertianship lasted about ten months, normally running from September to June of the following year. Tertianship is meant to be a time of intense prayer, meditation, and discernment during which the Jesuit strives to deepen his commitment to God and the Church in the Society of Jesus. As part of the program the tertian follows the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola for a period of thirty days, just as he did as a novice. In addition, he studies the Constitutions of the Society and other foundational documents of the Jesuit order, and completes at least one short-term ministerial assignment called an experiment.

During his tertianship year at Florissant, Fr. Finn did not write. However, on June 14, 1897, soon after tertianship, he signed a contract with Benziger Brothers for the publication of yet another book, *That Football Game:*

And What Came of It. That Football Game tells the story of the further adventures of Claude Lightfoot and his friends. Fr. Finn wrote the novel while vacationing one summer at Waupaca, a Jesuit villa in Wisconsin. His imagination often awakened while he was relaxing, boating, and fishing with his brother Jesuits, and once the idea for a story came, he wrote feverishly until it was told, usually in a period of a few weeks. The speed with which he composed is all the more amazing when one recalls that there were no typewriters or laptops in his day. His manuscripts were all laboriously hand-written.

His tertianship completed, Fr Finn was assigned to Saint Xavier College in Cincinnati where he arrived in the fall of 1897 with, as he tells us in the memoirs, “a light heart” (3). Little did he know it at the time, but he was destined to spend the rest of his days in Cincinnati, the city he came to love and the city that soon embraced him as one of its own.

xi.

*Assignment:
Cincinnati, Ohio*

For the next two years, from 1897 to 1899, his primary assignment was teaching at Saint Xavier College. The first year he taught the Humanities Class in the Collegiate Department. Additionally, he was called upon to serve as a lecturer of literature in the Post Graduate Course, a new program that the College had introduced just a few years earlier. During the summer that followed his first year at Saint Xavier College, he pronounced his final vows as a professed father of the Society of Jesus. This act formally and definitively incorporated him into the Jesuit order. His final vows took place on August 15, 1898, the feast of Our Lady's Assumption. He was now a Jesuit in every sense of the word. The journey had been a long, difficult struggle. But with God's grace he had arrived, and as he pronounced his solemn vows, he experienced much spiritual consolation.

The following academic year he taught the Rhetoric Class while continuing his lectures on literature for the Post-Graduate students. This year was to be the last time he would teach on a full-time basis. God had other plans in mind.

Sometime in the early months of 1899, he had a conversation with Fr. Joseph Grimmelman, the newly appointed Provincial of the Missouri Province, whom he had first met at Marquette College. As a result of that discussion, Father Provincial removed him from the classroom and designated him a “scriptor” or writer. In this new assignment he was to devote himself primarily to the work of writing. This delighted him immensely because he could now commit himself to what he felt he did best, namely, creating stories for the young.

Unfortunately, Fr. Finn’s two years as a scriptor did not work out as planned because other pastoral activities constantly interfered. He served as chaplain at a nearby convent of religious women where he celebrated Mass daily. In addition, he preached and heard confessions on a regular basis at Saint Xavier Church, not to mention the fact that he continued his lectures on literature for the Post-Graduate Course. For a person who was frequently ill, these tasks deprived him of the leisure that creative writing demanded.

But even more assignments came his way. During his first year as a scriptor, 1899-1900, he was named director of the Young Ladies' Sodality at Saint Xavier Church. As was mentioned earlier, the Society of Jesus had from its earliest years placed much emphasis on the Sodalities of the Blessed Virgin Mary as a way of promoting the spiritual life of the faithful. The Sodality encouraged its members to frequent reception of the sacraments, to practice mental prayer or meditation according to the methods proposed by Saint Ignatius of Loyola in the *Spiritual Exercises*, and to practice the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Wherever they ministered the Jesuits created Sodalities; Saint Xavier College and Church sponsored a number of them.

Taking charge of Saint Xavier's Young Ladies' Sodality proved challenging. Formed in 1851, The Young Ladies' Sodality was composed of unmarried women and working girls who for decades had actively contributed time and treasure to the support of Saint Xavier parish and parochial school. Fr. Francis X. Kuppens, S.J., the previous director, was very popular with the members and the organization had prospered under his careful direction. However, his health was failing. He was crippled with rheumatic pain and could no longer function as he once did. Replacing an icon was no small challenge. But if

anyone was up to the task, it was Fr. Finn. With his habitual tact, deftness, and patience, he gradually won over the young ladies, and in time became as indispensable to the organization as his worthy predecessor had been. He remained the director of the Young Ladies' Sodality for the rest of his life, and often turned to its members for help with his many projects.

However, all these pastoral activities, the Masses, confessions, sermons, lectures, and sodality deprived him, he was convinced, of the time and leisure that creative writing required. Nonetheless, his complaint is somewhat surprising in light of the fact that he managed to write two more books during his time as a scriptor. *His First and Last Appearance* was published in late 1900, and *But Thy Love and Thy Grace* the following year. However, he was disappointed that he was unable to write more. He told the Provincial that he would prefer to have regular work and try to find some time during the summer months to do some writing.

In late January of 1900, his father, John Finn, died in St. Louis at the age of 71. Fr. Finn returned to his native city to preside at the funeral. *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* described the ceremony this way: "Many pioneer citizens of Saint Louis and prominent representatives of later generations whose lasting friendship ex-Sheriff John Finn

had earned, gathered at the Church of the Immaculate Conception Tuesday morning to pay a last tribute of respect to their dead comrade” (1). Fr. Finn was the celebrant of the solemn requiem Mass and Fr. James Powers preached the sermon. “He died rich in the esteem of his associates and the community which he had served so long and so well,” Fr. Powers said. “His record as a public officer was irreproachable” (2).

Two of John Finn’s children had preceded him into eternal life, baby John who died shortly after birth in November 1869, and William J. Finn who died at the age of twenty-four in 1895. Surviving John were his wife, Mary Josephine Whyte Finn, and four children, Catherine Finn Dean, Mary Teresa Finn, Louis Finn and Fr. Francis.

xii.
Director of
Saint Xavier Parochial School

Fr. Finn's two years as a scriptor came to an end in mid-1901 when, to the surprise of everyone, he was appointed director of Saint Xavier Church's Parochial School. Fr. Finn was a very unlikely choice for the job. He was justly admired for his writings. But he had never held an administrative position, and he had no experience or apparent aptitude for financial matters. Furthermore, his frequent bouts of illness seemed to make him an unfit candidate for such a demanding job as the director of a large school. As he learned later, many predicted that his tenure would be brief, and that the school would probably be on the rocks financially in six months. He too was surprised by the appointment but was determined to give it his best effort and leave the rest to God.

As he studied his new position and its challenges, he noted several bright spots. First of all, the school was

housed in a new, beautiful, three-story brick building which was located on the east side of Sycamore Street between Fifth and Sixth Streets, just a short walk from Saint Xavier Church. The old school buildings had been razed in the summer of 1901, and the new structure, with twenty-two classrooms and a spacious basement, opened its doors at the beginning of the 1902-03 school year. The formal dedication of the building took place a few weeks later on November 23, 1902, with the Rev. William Henry Elder, the Archbishop of Cincinnati, officiating. Secondly, the school was blessed with a faculty that was more than satisfactory. The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur from a nearby convent taught the girls and the Brothers of Mary instructed the boys. But as soon as he turned his attention to the finances of the school, problems surfaced in abundance. Enrollment was high, perhaps as many as 1,100 in 1901, and the children who attended were mostly from poor families that could scarcely afford the monthly tuition of twenty-five cents. In fact, the school had become a serious drag on the finances of Saint Xavier Church, which was itself poor.

In those days, Saint Xavier parish was one of the largest in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. On its south side, it extended from the church all the way down to the Ohio River, embracing one of the poorest neighborhoods in the

city's basin, often referred to as the Bottoms. The Bottoms consisted of old, overcrowded tenements alongside factories and warehouses, and it was home to poor, immigrant families who had recently arrived in the city. As many as twenty-one different nationalities were represented at Saint Xavier School in 1904.

After studying the financial situation, Fr. Finn's first thought was to eliminate all tuition charges and declare the school free to all the children of the parish. The school would rely on the charity and generosity of friends and benefactors to pay the bills. He discussed this bold idea with several parishioners whose business sense he respected. Some thought that the plan was worth a try, given the difficulty of collecting the tuition and the excuse it gave parents for not sending their children to Saint Xavier School. Others thought the plan was impractical, utopian, and even foolhardy. But as he says in his memoirs, "I was young and reckless. Throwing caution to the winds, I announced that the school would be free" (1). If critics had questioned his fitness for the job when he was appointed, what must have been their reaction when they heard this startling news? But Fr. Finn charged ahead trusting that God would provide. As a result, Saint Xavier became the first free parochial school in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.

A review of the school's financial books revealed that the new building and its equipment were going to be more expensive than the old. The cost of the new heating plant and the addition of more teachers at higher pay was going to raise the school's annual expense to at least \$9,000.00. The task of paying this bill seemed formidable.

In order to deal with the financial issues, his first step was to create a Board of Trustees for the school with himself as its chairman. The board consisted of four parishioners, all of whom had business experience and good connections. They met frequently in those early days, and Fr. Finn, careful listener that he was, paid close attention to their advice and heeded it.

Possibly at their suggestion, he established what he called the Saint Xavier School Association in 1902. The objective of the Association was to give free schooling to the children of the parish. Members were expected to contribute at least \$3.00 annually. The benefits were two Masses celebrated weekly for all the members. At a later date, he added one more feature which turned out to be profitable. For \$100.00 one could purchase perpetual membership in the Association for either the living or the dead. Perpetual memberships proved very popular.

He next turned for help to the Young Ladies' Sodality. For years the Sodality had raised money for the grade

school in a variety of ways. Now it redoubled its efforts at the urging of Fr. Finn, its moderator. The Sodality sponsored weekly “euchre parties” that brought in a steady flow of money for many years. Secondly, it organized and hosted an annual Thanksgiving celebration which became a tradition at Saint Xavier and brought thousands of dollars into the school.

But the Sodality’s third contribution to the financing of the school was the most significant of all. At Fr. Finn’s suggestion, the ladies of Sodality introduced what they called the Lenten Self-Denial Fund. Here’s how the fund worked. During the Lenten season, the sodalists, like Catholics generally, abstained from such pleasures as candy or movies or parties as a form of penance. Clearly money was saved by these acts of renunciation. Why not apply these saved dollars, Fr. Finn suggested, to some worthwhile cause such as funding Saint Xavier School? The ladies of the Sodality took to the idea of the Lenten Self-Denial Fund enthusiastically, raising \$800.00 for the school in its very first year. Nicholas Walsh, a friend of Fr. Finn’s, was so impressed by the generosity of the Sodality that he contributed an additional \$700.00 to the Fund, thus raising the total to an impressive \$1,500.00.

Instead of spending this sum, however, Fr. Finn added it to the money that the School Association had

accumulated through its membership fees, and invested the entire amount to create the School Association's endowment fund. Over the years the endowment grew steadily and by the time of his death in 1928, it had increased to over \$100,000.00.

Still the doubters persisted in having reservations about Fr. Finn's plans. In fact, one of the Marianist brothers at the school told him about a rumor circulating to the effect that Father Provincial in St. Louis was planning to stop the free school and reintroduce tuition.

However, in December of that year when Fr. Finn published his first financial report in the parish bulletin, the report created a sensation. Contrary to rumors, the school was healthy. The bulletin had scarcely appeared when Fr. Van Kregel, his old friend and pastor of Saint Xavier Church, visited his office to congratulate him on the excellent report. What's more, in the spring of the following year when the Provincial Superior paid his annual visit to Cincinnati, Fr. Finn asked him if it was true that he intended to reintroduce tuition at the school, to which the Provincial replied: "It will remain a free school as long as you are in charge of it" (2).

During his twenty-seven years as Saint Xavier's director, Fr. Finn proved to be a good steward of its finances. "I have met few men with his shrewd business

sense,” his friend Fr. James J. Daly, S.J. once wrote of Fr. Finn. “He had all the qualities which bring success in business. He could promote enterprises because he had vision to see opportunity afar; he was patient in details; and although he met all men with a buoyant and cheerful trustfulness, he knew how to detect and discourage knavery and impudence... He brought the resources of his practical talents to the humble work of running a parochial school, and he turned it into a prominent civic enterprise of a great city” (3).

Just how much of the school’s annual budget did the endowment fund actually cover? Some have claimed that the endowment fund took care of much of the yearly expenses and that, if it continued to grow, would someday cover them all. In 1928, Fr. Joseph P. DeSmedt, S.J., who was pastor of Saint Xavier Church, summarized the school’s finances in this manner: “As it stands at present about one-third of the expenses of the school are met by this [endowment] fund. The School Association and the socials take care of the rest. The parish at large takes care of the extraordinary expenses” (4).

xiii.

*The Saint Xavier
Commercial School is Born*

But his years of service at Saint Xavier Parochial School were not his only pioneering venture in the field of education. Early in his tenure as director of the grade school he became aware of a problem that he felt needed immediate attention. He noticed that many of the girls were dropping out of school after the fifth or sixth grade to go to work in one of the factories located in downtown Cincinnati. This situation displeased him greatly for two reasons. First, he felt that it was in the best interests of young women if they remained in school until at least the age of sixteen. These years gave them time to mature and to obtain the education that they would need in later life. Secondly, he felt that neither the environment nor the nature of factory work was appropriate for young women. To remedy this problem, he soon conceived the idea of creating a two-year commercial school.

His plan was simple. The Saint Xavier grade school would remain an eight-year program. This program would be supplemented, however, by a two-year business department that would train and prepare grade school graduates, both girls and boys, for jobs and careers in the business world. The curriculum would include such subjects as stenography, bookkeeping, typesetting, business correspondence, Dictaphone, and the use of other office machines. He approached his superiors and the sisters teaching in the grade school and proposed his idea to them. Eventually, his Jesuit superiors approved, but the sisters resisted. The mother-superior of the convent was opposed to the idea of girls training to work in offices. "It is such a dangerous life," she warned (1). In response, Fr. Finn pointed out that factory work was at least as dangerous and unsuitable for young women as offices, and, keeping them in school for an additional two years was in their best interests. After further discussion, mother-superior finally consented to the plan. In the fall of 1904, Saint Xavier Commercial School opened its doors. As in the grade school, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur taught the girls and the brothers of the Society of Mary the boys. Tuition was kept to a minimum.

The school's beginning was modest. Only three pupils enrolled that first year. But enrollment grew rapidly, and

the school soon became popular because it met a real need in the neighborhood. The curriculum offered practical job training to the children of the struggling families that made up Saint Xavier parish. In time, students began to enroll from all over greater Cincinnati.

In 1935, the Society of Mary withdrew its brothers from the faculty and the boys' division of the Commercial School closed. More than likely, declining enrollment was the reason. However, the girls' division continued to grow and prosper. In 1954, long after Fr. Finn had gone to his eternal reward, the School celebrated its golden jubilee. Enrollment was at capacity, about 130 in each year. By 1960, however, the Commercial School was becoming replaced by the growing number of parochial high schools in the city and it closed its doors. The fifty-sixth and final commencement exercises of Saint Xavier Commercial School took place in the Schmidt Fieldhouse of Xavier University on June 5, 1960.

Somewhere around 1907, Fr. Finn took on another task and became the editor of *The Saint Xavier Calendar*. Most churches published a weekly bulletin or monthly calendar that featured the parish's schedule of events, announcements, death notices, and the like. But Fr. Finn's *Calendar* was different. It became an outlet for his pent-up urge to write. Its pages were filled with interesting reviews

of new books and the latest movies. It featured brief editorials or commentaries on timely topics of the day and, from time to time, a short story or poem from the pen of the editor. Its appearance was eagerly awaited each month by a large readership both in the parish and beyond. At one point, 4,000 copies of the *Calendar* were distributed free of charge every month and they disappeared as soon as they appeared. It was estimated that at one time as many as 20,000 people read *The Saint Xavier Calendar* regularly. Merchants soon learned that advertising in *The Calendar* paid off.

According to Fr. Daniel Lord, on several occasions the national Jesuit magazine *America* tried to steal Fr. Finn away from Saint Xavier and secure his services for its editorial staff in New York City. The magazine's editors were not so much interested in Finn's juvenile novels as in his literary criticism and comments on current events, which "had lifted a church calendar out of the dull slough of parish bulletins and made it sparkingly interesting" (2). Their efforts were thwarted, Lord says, "by the united protests of the people" of Saint Xavier (3). Lord does not share how they protested.

Meanwhile the Young Ladies' Sodality continued to thrive under his leadership. Membership soared to almost 1,000 at one point, and the Lenten Self-Denial Fund,

which he had inaugurated some years earlier, continued to raise impressive sums of money for various charitable causes. For instance, at the price of \$5,000.00 the Sodality reserved a room at the Good Samaritan Hospital for sick sodalists in need of hospital care, along with free board and medicine. In 1919, the ladies of the Sodality also established a free ward of ten beds for the sick children of the parish at Saint Mary's Hospital at the price of \$1,000.00, with plans to add a second ward in the near future. In addition, it created a perpetual scholarship of \$1,500.00 at Saint Xavier College for a deserving member of the parish, and regularly donated money to the Free Day Nursery that Saint Xavier Church operated for many years. At the time of Fr. Finn's death in 1928, the Sodality was raising \$8,000.00 for the foundation of a burse for the education and training of one Jesuit novice at the newly established Novitiate of the Sacred Heart in Milford, Ohio. When one recalls that the Sodality were women of modest means, these contributions are all the more impressive.

Given Fr. Finn's passion for literature, it is not surprising that the Young Ladies' Sodality decided to establish a lending library for the general public. The Ladies called it "The Penny-A-Day Library," and it opened its doors for business in 1914 in a building at 616 Sycamore Street just across from Saint Xavier Church. The

library was devoted to works of fiction exclusively, and its motto was, “All the fiction that is fit to read.” It differed from other libraries in two ways. First, it charged only one penny a day instead of the usual price of two cents in other libraries. Secondly, it possessed no books of objectionable content. The collection featured “decent reading for decent people.” The “Penny-A-Day Library” started out with over three hundred titles and the number grew steadily. Within a few months it had over two hundred registered subscribers.

The library’s collection included books by non-Catholic as well as Catholic novelists, though one of its goals was to familiarize its patrons with the works of a growing number of notable Catholic writers such as Robert Hugh Benson, Francis Bickerstaffe-Drew, whose pen name was John Ayscough, and Olive Katharine Parr. Needless to say, Fr. Finn’s own works proved very popular with the library’s members.

xiv.
Back to Writing

In the midst of all his works and responsibilities at the parochial school and parish, Fr. Finn found no time or leisure to do what he loved most, to write. From all sides, friends, fellow Jesuits, children, and his publisher were urging him to take up his pen again and let his imagination flow. But there simply was no time. Originally, he had planned to escape the school and the city for a few weeks each summer to devote himself to composition in some secluded spot, but he soon found that his summers were as occupied as the school year. Every early July, he and the Young Ladies' Sodality were busily planning the annual picnic for the Saint Joseph Orphan Asylum, one of their major works. After that event, he was regularly assigned to preach an eight-day retreat at some convent, and then make his own annual eight-day retreat. By that time,

September and the new academic year had arrived, and he was back at his desk in the director's office at the school.

By 1913, twelve years had passed since he last published a book and the urge to take up his pen became too strong to resist. He approached his Provincial Superior with a plan. He requested permission to put all his responsibilities aside for a month or two the following summer and hide away at Campion College in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. Campion College was a Jesuit boarding school where his friend Fr. George R. Kister, S. J., was superior and where Fr. James J. Daly, a fellow writer, spent his summers. He felt confident that a few weeks of fishing, boating, and swimming in the Mississippi River and relaxing with Jesuit brothers would awaken his imagination and the creative juices would flow again. As it turned out, he was right. With the Provincial's permission he spent the summer of 1913 at Campion, and within a period of three weeks he had written his first novel in twelve years "with ease and pleasure" (1). He entitled it *The Fairy of the Snows*. Furthermore, he discovered that he had the plot and characters for another novel, *That Office Boy*, which he wrote the following summer at Campion College. His publisher and his many young readers were delighted. The third period of his writing career had begun.

The Fairy of the Snows takes place in Cincinnati and is the story of a young girl who lives with her poor family in the city's Bottoms. The novel's leading character, the fairy of the snows, was patterned on the life of a real person. Her name was Margaret Mary Luddon. In later life she entered the Sisters of Divine Providence and became Sister Mary Eucharist.

Fr. James Daly wrote a review for *The Fairy of the Snows* with this interesting observation:

“Is it merely one form of a common illusion that we think Fr. Finn's latest book is his best? It seems to us *The Fairy of the Snows* has greater depth emotionally and intellectually than Fr. Finn's other novels, with a surface humor richer, happier and more tender. School life, which was the favorite field of Finn's fiction, is not nearly so engrossing or dramatic as life in the poor quarter of a large city... But in the purlieus of the tenements of a modern city the action is much more breathless, the issues are sterner, and involve life and death, hunger and thirst, the body and the soul, all the pitiless hopes and hazards of elemental life” (2).

The following summer, 1914, Fr. Finn returned to Prairie du Chien to write *That Office Boy*, a novel he had

conceived and planned the previous year. *That Office Boy* tells the story of Peter Duffy – a dear friend at whose wedding Fr. Finn had presided the previous May – who had at one time served as Fr. Finn’s office boy. When Fr. Finn finished the first draft of the book, however, he was dissatisfied. Something was wrong, but he did not know exactly what. So, he submitted it to his friend Fr. James Daly, who had so admired and praised *The Fairy of the Snows*. Several days later, Fr. Daly visited Fr. Finn’s room with the manuscript. Fr. Daly told him, frankly, that the story was all wrong, that it failed to hang together.

In light of the criticisms, Fr. Finn reread the text. As he did so, it dawned on him that the problem was simple: he had stuck too closely to the details of what had actually happened. As paradoxical as it may seem, too literal a description of the facts does not always make an intriguing story. So, Fr. Finn took the manuscript in hand, rewrote several chapters and soon had a novel with which he and Fr. Daly were pleased. *That Office Boy* was published the following year.

Prairie du Chien proved such an agreeable and fruitful place for writing that Fr. Finn decided to return there again in the summer of 1915. This visit, however, was not as pleasant. For one thing, the weather failed to cooperate. It was cloudy, chilly, and rainy most of the time. In addition,

he was very sick with what symptoms or illness he does not tell us. In fact, he had been so sick through the spring that his doctor had ordered him to bed. Despite these handicaps he managed to write another novel and completed it in just seventeen days. He titled it *Cupid of Champion* and Benziger published it in 1916.

Fr. Finn seemed to write his best when he was in very bad health and scarcely able to leave his bed. How does one account for this? Some years later in an article he wrote for *The Jubilean*, a newspaper published in St. Mary's, Kansas, he attempted to explain. "Looking back, there is one thing that strikes me as being rather strange. *Tom Playfair* is my liveliest book. It is full of animal spirits. Yet I wrote it an invalid. During its composition, I was sinking in health, suffering from mental depression, from physical pain, from want of sleep and, although not especially perturbed, looking forward to an early death" (3). Similarly, in the summer of 1915, he managed to write *Cupid of Champion*, although he felt just as miserable as he had when he wrote *Tom Playfair*. "I discovered what I should have learned from the writing of *Tom Playfair*, that to write a book one need not feel well or cheerful. A writer, if he only knows it, can give what he has not got" (4).

This explanation is interesting, but not totally satisfactory. We will probably never know how Fr. Finn

managed to be so creative despite serious illness since he himself could not explain it. Yet one has to wonder whether writing was, for him, a form of what we would call today therapy. At a time when diseases and chronic illness were common, when sickness often went undiagnosed and when vaccines, treatments, and medications were either unknown or unavailable, perhaps the only remedy for bad health was the distraction of a consuming occupation. Whatever the explanation, he was an extraordinarily productive person for a virtual invalid.

Which leads to another intriguing question. Just what was the nature of the illness or illnesses that afflicted him? Once again, his own observations are not especially helpful. He mentions insomnia frequently in his memoirs, and sleeplessness certainly haunted him during all the years of his Jesuit formation. He mentions suffering from dyspepsia and headaches while a novice and junior; and he talks about suffering back pain as a result of a fall during a baseball game at Woodstock. That same year migraines assaulted him with great force. While he was back at Saint Mary's in 1884, he shares, "My health continued to grow worse.... I felt that my life was nearing its close.... I departed for St. Louis a broken-down man" (5). During his first year of theology he suffered from bronchitis for most of the winter, and even attended class while lying flat on

his back. While in St. Louis in 1893, he says that “he was really making a swift recovery from tuberculosis” (6). Finally, the cause of his death was “chronic nephritis,” likely some type of renal failure from which he probably suffered for some time. In light of all this sickness his lifetime of achievements is nothing less than remarkable.

And that leads us to yet another question. As Fr. Daniel Lord once pointed out, “There is something amazing, in view of his later attainments, in the extremely sketchy intellectual training he managed between illnesses” (7). Fr. Finn’s education was certainly sketchy and haphazard. In spite of that, however, he was a truly learned man with a lively, curious mind with a world of cultural and intellectual interests. Fr. Lord explains, “Only his quick mind, his avid love of books, and his already developing interest in writing made up for the casualness of his studies” (8).

xv.

*The Children
Always Came First*

As much as Fr. Finn enjoyed writing and relished those precious moments he could devote to it, the great love of Fr. Finn's life was Saint Xavier Parochial School and its children. For twenty-seven years he devoted most of his time and attention to them. As the years passed, the school's enrollment declined. This decline was due, in large part, to the flight of families from the city's basin to the suburbs on the hills as their financial situations improved. When he took over as the director of the school in 1901, the enrollment was about 1,100 pupils. In the years that followed the number grew steadily until it peaked at some point at around 1,400. By 1913-14, however, enrollment was falling again. During the last years of Fr. Finn's tenure as director, the number of children in attendance was between 800 and 850 annually.

He was constantly looking for ways to improve the school so that it met the needs of the children. For instance, in February 1907, he established a school library. The teachers had pointed out to him that many of the children were deficient in their writing skills. In Finn's mind this deficiency meant that they did not read enough, and there was only one way to remedy that problem - make good, wholesome, interesting books available to them through a school library. So again, he turned to the parishioners for help, and they did not fail him. Within a month a school library was created in St. Nicholas Hall. Bookshelves were acquired and over 400 books were donated. Just two months later the collection had grown to 1,000 books and membership had grown to 400. As he often said, "Get the right book into the hands of the right boy or girl" (1).

In 1914, Fr. Finn introduced another innovation, the Vacation School for children who were deficient in one subject or another. The idea was to give them an opportunity to catch up by studying during the summer and to remedy the children's shortcomings before the new school year began. Fr. Michael Ryan, S.J. was placed in charge of the summer program and the Ladies' Aid Society funded it.

Raising money to finance the school was, of course, a constant concern for its director, and Fr. Finn was always looking for new ways to secure much needed funds. The entrance of the United States into the First World War in April 1917 presented such an opportunity. In order to pay the cost of the nation's wartime military operations, the Treasury Department began to sell Liberty Bonds and War Savings Thrift Stamps to the general public. By purchasing Liberty Bonds, which sold for various prices as low as \$50.00, everyone from the wealthiest Americans to citizens of more modest means could contribute to the war effort in a practical way, and thereby demonstrate their patriotism. Citizens who bought Liberty Bonds basically loaned money to the government. After a certain number of years, those who invested in Bonds received their money back with interest.

The government's introduction of Liberty Bonds gave Fr. Finn an idea. Encouraging parishioners and other friends of the school to buy bonds was certainly a patriotic thing to do. Why not take this act of patriotism one further step and urge them to donate the bonds to Saint Xavier School? In this way they aided both their country and the school. So, on October 8, 1918, he established what he called The Buy-More-Bonds Club. In the October issue of the *Saint Xavier Calendar*, he introduced the Club in this

fashion: “Many of our Calendar readers intend buying Liberty Bonds.... Why not get an extra Bond and give it to the school? Do it now. You’ll help your country; you’ll also help the school” (2). The Club’s membership was extended to all who donated a fifty-dollar Liberty Bond to the school, or who paid the school fifty dollars, in full or in installments, for the purchasing of such a bond. All members automatically became members of the School Association for thirty years. The first member of the Club was State Senator Robert J. O’Brien, and sixty-nine others followed his example.

While the adults were supporting their country and Saint Xavier School through The Buy-More-Bonds Club, the pupils were contributing to the nation’s war effort by selling Thrift Stamps. Thrift Stamps were also issued by the Treasury Department. They cost 25 cents each, which meant that even the poorest could afford them. When sixteen Thrift Stamps were collected, the stamps could be exchanged for War Savings Certificates, which bore interest compounded quarterly at four percent and were tax free. When the War Savings Stamps matured on January 1, 1923, the Department promised to pay the sum of \$5.00 for each certificate.

Many schools across the country took part in the program by encouraging their students to sell Thrift

Stamps. The children of Saint Xavier School participated, of course, and their efforts paid off handsomely. On October 8, 1918, Fr. Finn received a letter of thanks from Alfred G. Allen, the Chairman of the Hamilton County War Savings Committee. His letter read as follows:

“Dear Father: The Committee takes this opportunity to express its earnest appreciation for the wonderful success that has been achieved at Saint Xavier’s School in the War Savings work. We understand that your sales to date exceed...all the schools in the state of Ohio. For this, credit is due you and your assistants for your enthusiasm, initiative and ability in bringing about the demonstration of these results. Yours very truly, Alfred G. Allen, Chairman” (3).

The children of the school regularly staged plays and pageants for the entertainment of the community. Many of these productions were written by the director of the school himself. In the spring of 1923, for instance, *The Saint Xavier Calendar* carried the following invitation:

“Hundreds of thousands have read the delightful stories written by the Reverend Francis Finn and now a number, limited only by the capacity of Saint Xavier

Memorial Hall, will have an opportunity of becoming acquainted with him as a playwright. On Thursday night, May 31, his three-act comedy, 'The Merry Month of May,' will be presented by the Xavier Thespian Club under the direction of Miss Florence Moran, and it goes without saying that this production will be attended by an enthusiastic audience" (4).

There was also the school chorus and orchestra, which were very much in demand. They performed for the Chamber of Commerce, for municipal and civic events, and at hospitals and homes for the elderly.

To make sure that the children were wholesomely entertained during the "dangerous" summer months, and as an incentive to get them to Sunday Mass, Fr. Finn introduced what he called The Air-Dome Picture Show in July 1913. Every Tuesday evening at 7:30, weather permitting, a three-reel moving picture was shown in the spacious yard of Saint Xavier School. Admission was three cents for children; however, boys and girls who had attended Mass at Saint Xavier Church the previous Sunday were admitted for just one cent. The same film was repeated for the grown-ups at 8:45 pm. They were charged five cents. Whatever profits The Air-Dome Picture Show realized were donated to charity.

Nor did the children of the Saint Xavier School forget that helping one's neighbor was the mark of a true Catholic. In 1927, for the fifth consecutive year, all 900 of the school's pupils contributed to the Community Chest, the forerunner of the United Way, which raised money annually through a fund drive for the needy and unfortunate of Cincinnati. Prior to the drive in 1927, Fr. Finn wrote a letter to the parents of every child in the school explaining the purpose of the Community Chest and why its collection was so valuable. He also informed them that Saint Xavier School would be donating to the drive, and he expressed his personal hope that every child would contribute something, if only one penny, towards Saint Xavier School's donation. Fr. Finn wrote, "That this may be done, we call upon the parents and guardians of our dear children to help the little ones in making this offering; to encourage them; to explain to them that they must all bear one another's burdens; to teach them the beauty of self-sacrifice" (5).

The pupils of Saint Xavier School raised \$200.00, which was delivered to Mr. L. H. Wiggins, the captain of the local district of the Community Chest. In an article that appeared in *The Cincinnati Times Star* on May 2, 1927, Mr. Wiggins thanked the children for their kind contribution, remarking, "No gift received by the Chamber of

Commerce carries more feeling and spirit than the one that has come regularly from the pupils of Saint Xavier Parochial School” (6). The irony of the contribution was surely not lost on Mr. Wiggins or the other officials of the Chamber. The children from one of the city’s poorest neighborhoods were donating their pennies to aid the needy and less fortunate of Cincinnati.

The children of Saint Xavier School were Fr. Finn’s pride and joy and they always came first. They returned that affection and love as only children can do. “Wherever he went, he was surrounded by them. His daily walk to and from the school and rectory was a continued triumphal procession. Children fought for the privilege of holding his hands and carrying his bundles.... During those last years, whenever he rode in a borrowed automobile to get the afternoon fresh air, he filled the car with the little boys and girls of his beloved school” We have Father Lord’s word for this (7).

But spending so much time with his young charges, he also witnessed the bleaker side of their lives in the overcrowded tenements that surrounded the school. He knew firsthand the pain, the sorrow and the tragedy that poverty, drunkenness, and neglect inevitably inflicted on the little ones. In his novel, *The Fairy of the Snows*, he describes this world for his readers in vivid detail. What he

fails to share in any of his writings, however, is the amount of time he personally spent among those families alleviating sorrow where he could.

One of the most telling tributes paid to Fr. Finn at the time of his death came from Rev. David McKinney, retired rector of the First Presbyterian Church, who wrote, “No man was better known in the basin of the city than Fr. Finn. I came into contact with him numerous times while doing charity work in the lower sections of the city. He was especially kind to the little ones and his death will be felt keenly by many youngsters” (8). The following story is but one example of his work for the poor.

In 2006, a woman named Mary Boland contacted the Development Office of Xavier University in Cincinnati to inform the staff that she had in her possession two letters that Fr. Finn had written to her mother, Blanche Barrett Boland, in 1905. Mary explained that she was 90 years old and was living in Maple Knoll Village, a retirement home in Cincinnati. She was calling to ask if Xavier was interested in possessing the letters and, if so, she was willing to donate them. The answer was, of course, yes and the two letters are now in the Finn collection in the Xavier University archives where they share to the public a glimpse of Fr. Finn’s character.

As a teenager, Blanche Barrett Boland lived with several younger siblings in the Bottoms of Cincinnati within the confines of Saint Xavier Parish. They had been recently orphaned and were residing in a tenement flat under the supervision of two Irish maiden aunts who lived nearby. Blanche was apparently a strong-willed young lady and had decided that living in the same flat with the aunts would not work because they were too “bossy.” Fr. Finn knew of this arrangement and was concerned about Blanche and her siblings. So, every Saturday afternoon he visited them to make sure that all was well, doubtlessly bringing groceries and other supplies along with him. Some years later, one of her brothers contracted tuberculosis and Blanche decided to take him to Tucson, Arizona, hoping that a drier climate might affect a cure. It was while she and her brother were residing in Arizona that Fr. Finn had occasion to write her a letter. Interestingly enough, the envelope of the letter bore the simple address of “Ms. Blanche Barrett, Tucson, Arizona” with a two-cent stamp. Either Tucson was a very small town, or its postmaster was a very resourceful man. In either case, Blanche received the letter.

xvi.

*“He is Writing
Another Book”*

Every now and then, usually during the summer, Fr. Finn would disappear from the school for a period of time, and everybody knew the reason. He was writing another book. Indeed, he almost certainly was. It is remarkable that despite his other responsibilities, not to mention his uncertain health, he managed to average almost one novel a year. In 1917, *Lucky Bob* made its appearance, and in 1918, *His Luckiest Year* came off the printing presses. Following a trip to British Honduras in 1919, he wrote *Facing Danger*. In his memoirs, however, he confesses that at the age of sixty-one he could no longer craft a story as quickly as he once did. *Facing Danger* was a case in point. His pen no longer functioned as nimbly as in the past and *Facing Danger* took twice as long to write as his earlier works. Age was taking its toll.

Time wasn't the only thing tough on Fr. Finn. He wasn't always pleased with the treatment he was getting from Benziger Brothers. In a letter to the publishing house in 1920, he expressed two complaints: the price of his books and the royalty he was receiving. For years his books had sold for 85¢ to \$1.00. He thought that these were reasonable prices, given the modest budgets of his youthful readers. However, Benziger had raised the price for *Facing Danger* to \$1.25 and this price, he felt, made it too expensive. Furthermore, there was the question of his royalty, which he wanted increased from the twelve percent he was receiving to fifteen percent. We do not have Benziger's response to these complaints, but we do know that the price of subsequent books was at least \$1.25 and his royalty payments increased significantly.

Although he does not mention the trip in his memoirs, Fr. Finn traveled to Hollywood, California, sometime in 1920 or early 1921. Motion pictures had always fascinated him, and he was eager to visit the home of the American film industry. While there he had the good fortune to make the acquaintance of John Leslie Coogan, better known to movie fans by his film name, Jackie Coogan. Coogan began his career as a child actor in silent movies. In 1921 he was featured in the film *The Kid*, which Charlie Chaplin produced. The following year he played the title

role in *Oliver Twist*, a film directed by Frank Lloyd. Fr. Finn seems to have met other child movie stars as well, and when he returned home decided to write a story based on his experiences in Hollywood. The result was *Bobby in Movieland*, which Benziger published in late 1921.

xvii.

A Visit to Ireland

The summer of 1921 found Fr. Finn traveling again. This time his destination was Ireland, the land of saints and scholars and the birthplace of his parents, John and Mary Whyte Finn. Of course, he was eager to visit the country from which his parents had unwillingly departed years before, and about which they had told him so much. But he had another motive as well. He had plans to write a novel about the war for independence that the Irish were then waging against the British. It is somewhat surprising that he chose to visit Ireland at a time of civil unrest, but the troubles in that country do not seem to have disturbed him in the least.

The Irish War of Independence, lasting from 1919 to 1921, was essentially a guerrilla campaign that the Irish Republican Army and Sinn Fein waged against the British military. Many Irish regarded the British soldiers in Ireland

and their ally, the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC), as an army of occupation, and were sympathetic to the Irish Republican Army, the IRA. As the violence became more intense, the British government decided to organize a temporary militia of auxiliaries, mostly veterans of the First World War, and sent them to Ireland to help the British army and the RIC quell the rebellion. These auxiliaries came to be known as the “Black and Tans” because of the colors of their improvised khaki uniforms. Unfortunately, the Black and Tans proved to be an undisciplined, unruly fighting force notorious for harsh reprisals and for brutalizing civilians. They soon came to be feared and hated by many Irish. This political landscape was the Ireland that Fr. Finn planned to visit in the summer of 1921. Fortunately, he left us a diary of his trip.

On June 21, he set sail for Europe from Quebec, Canada on the steamer *The Empress of France*. The trip down the St. Lawrence River and across the Atlantic Ocean was uneventful and pleasant except for a few days of rainy, chilly weather. In the morning of June 28, the northern shore of Ireland came into sight; in the afternoon Scotland could be seen and by sunset the Isle of Mann was visible. Shortly thereafter, the boat docked at Liverpool, England where he disembarked. After passing through customs, Fr. Finn took a cab to the Jesuit residence and

college where he was cordially welcomed. He was not impressed with the city of Liverpool. He found it a “slummy city,” though the people, many of whom were Irish, were friendly and helpful (1).

Several days later he left Liverpool for Ireland, traveling by train to Chester and then across the northern coast of Wales to Holyhead where he boarded a boat that carried him across the Irish Sea to Dublin. Arriving in Dublin he went directly to the Jesuit Residence on Gardiner Street where he was warmly greeted by the brother porter who took him to his room.

Not surprisingly, given his Irish roots, he found Ireland charming, and he felt at home. He was particularly impressed by the warmth, friendliness, and piety of the Irish people. Wherever Fr. Finn went, the churches were filled with worshippers and their fervor was both evident and edifying.

However, he was not in Dublin long before he encountered evidence of the war. “I have seen on several occasions the Black and Tans going about in caged lorries, their guns sticking out and turned on the people. They are caged so that bombs may not reach them. It strikes me that their guns pointed at the crowds are enough to incite people to trouble” (2).

Throughout the month that he spent in Ireland he used the Jesuit house in Dublin as his base of operation, but he also made several trips to the west of the island. The first, naturally enough, was to Ballinasloe, the town in Galway from which his parents had emigrated during the time of the great hunger. He shares that on the train to Ballinasloe he “could not help sensing the loneliness of Ireland. There were few houses along the country-side and fewer people” (3). He attributed the sense of loneliness to the heavy loss of population in the country because of the famine and the great exodus that followed it. Whereas the population of Ireland prior to the hunger had been about 8,000,000, it was now only half that number, and the countryside looked deserted.

In Ballinasloe he found the house in which his mother’s family, the Whytes, had lived. It was located, he shares, “On Society Street at the foot of High Street,” though it now belonged to a family by the name of Ward (4). He was unable to locate any of his relatives on either side of his family; but, he was introduced to an elderly lady by the name of Mary Quigley who remembered the Whytes well. She assured him that his mother’s people “were highly connected and of the best blood” (5). He was apparently unable to learn anything about the Finns.

From Ballinasloe he traveled to the city of Galway, which he described as a “quaint old town with all its streets running around in circles” (6). He also paid a visit to Cork city where he stayed for several days, and from there he traveled to Killarney. On the train from Cork to Killarney he struck up a conversation with a Sinn Fein officer whom he met by chance. The young Sinn Feiner told him that he had been on two hunger strikes, one for five days and the other for ten. “Although he drank all the water he pleased, he was carried unconscious after ten days to the hospital... These Sinn Feiners,” Finn remarked, “are brave and of the stuff that makes martyrs” (7). His sympathies were clearly with them.

The town of Killarney was in sad shape. Though it was a tourist center, the tourists were notably absent because of the war. While there, he enjoyed a pleasant boat ride on Killarney’s famous lakes and a horseback ride through the Gap of Dunloe, though it left him a bit sore the following morning.

The last eight days of his European trip were spent in London. This stay included a visit to that “queen of spires and steeples and age-old buildings, Oxford” (8). Fr. Finn was struck by the urbanity of the Londoners and the respect and deference they showed to one another and to visitors. It was also during his stay in England that he first

learned about the Bexhill-on-the-Sea Library, which had been established a few years earlier by an American residing in Britain. It was a circulating library designed to make books available to readers all over Europe and which charged no fees or dues except the cost of postage. He was much taken by the Library and the success it was enjoying. It was at the Bexhill-on-the-Sea Library that he conceived the idea of creating his own Little Flower Library.

Curiously enough, while he was in London, he heard little discussion of the war in Ireland. "I was in London for eight days. Everybody knew I was Irish in blood and in sympathy. But no one ever uttered a word in my presence, which breathed the least suspicion of hostility to Irishmen or to Irish affairs" (9). On August 11, 1921, he left England for the return trip home.

If his visit to Ireland was enjoyable, it was also productive because he came back to Cincinnati with the plot, the setting, and the characters of his next novel well delineated. *On the Run*, as he called it, is the story of Joe Ranly, a wild, seventeen-year-old Irishman residing in Cincinnati who decides to go to Ireland to fight on behalf of the Irish people against the Black and Tans. In the process, he finds himself in a world of trouble and only the end of the war saves him. By the following summer, *On the*

Run had been written and was ready for the publisher. It was released in 1922.

Among Fr. Finn's books, *On the Run* is unique in that it is the one he himself did not like and was not ashamed to say so, even though it sold relatively well. In his memoirs he describes *On the Run* as "the tragedy of my years of writing. It came about because I deliberately violated my own principle, which was never to undertake the writing of a story unless I felt that I was fresh and at leisure" (10). Unfortunately, he never finished this section of his memoirs and, therefore, never elaborated further on why he was so displeased with *On the Run*.

xviii.

*A Nostalgic Return
to Saint Mary's College*

In June of 1923, Saint Mary's College, Kansas, celebrated its diamond jubilee, the seventy-fifth anniversary of its founding in 1848. At its annual commencement ceremony that year, the College bestowed an honorary Doctor of Laws degree on Fr. Finn, the most famous and distinguished of its sons. He gratefully accepted the degree, of course, because there was no place on earth dearer to him than Saint Mary's. Forty-two years had passed since that wintry day in 1881 when he first arrived at Saint Mary's, a young sickly novice, and many of the Jesuits he had known there had now gone home to God, including dear Fr. Charles Coppens who had been such an inspiration and encouragement to him. While he was reminiscing about the old days, however, everybody else at Saint Mary's was bursting with pride as they welcomed home the internationally famous author, their

own Fr. Francis Finn. Thousands of boys and girls around the world now knew Saint Mary's College well, although they called it Saint Maure's since that is what Fr. Finn had called the College in his novels, *Tom Playfair*, *Percy Wynn*, and *Harry Dee*.

Unfortunately, Saint Mary's College would survive Fr. Finn's nostalgic visit by only eight years. Boarding schools out in the country ceased to be popular as students more and more preferred to attend colleges in the big cities. Declining enrollment meant serious financial problems for Saint Mary's, and the Great Depression of 1929 proved to be a devastating blow. After its commencement ceremony in June 1931, the school formally closed its doors. The following August its buildings became the new home of the Jesuit Theological College of the Missouri Province, which had been previously located on the campus of Saint Louis University.

After a memorable week at Saint Mary's, Fr. Finn moved to Champion College in Prairie du Chien for some time of rest and relaxation. If Saint Mary's evoked happy memories, Champion College had become his favorite place to vacation. There he could fish and boat and swim, and spend time relaxing with a group of his Jesuit brothers. But Prairie du Chien did more than refresh him. It usually awakened his imagination and inspired him to write. The

summer of 1923 was no exception. At one point that summer he was writing about 3,000 words a day. As a result, *Lord Bountiful*, another novel, was all but finished by August 1. Like his earlier books, *Lord Bountiful* proved to be a big hit with his young readers and sales were brisk. By December 1923, Benziger had sold 7,000 copies.

xix.

The Little Flower Library

Fr. Finn often remarked that about every twenty years he had a “big idea.” At the age of twenty-one he conceived his first big idea, creating “The American Catholic Boy,” *Tom Playfair*. Twenty-one years later when he was in his early forties, his second big idea came to him, establishing a free parochial school at Saint Xavier Church. Twenty-one years after the free parochial school, his third big idea was born, creating the Little Flower Library.

The idea of the library first occurred to him while he was traveling in England in 1921. Fr. Joseph J. Keating, S. J., editor of *The Month*, a literary publication of the English Jesuits, had introduced him to the Bexhill-on-the-Sea Library, a free, private, circulating library that loaned books to people all around the world through the postal system. The only charge was the cost of postage. The idea intrigued Fr. Finn. His own experience had persuaded him

that fiction explicitly designed for Catholic children was an invaluable way to teach them their religion and to inspire them to live it. Happily, more and more Catholic juvenile literature of good quality was appearing, as more and more talented writers became interested in the field. But a serious problem remained, namely, how to put these valuable books into the hands of the young. "I was thinking of thousands and thousands of towns and villages throughout the United States. Our country abounds in Catholic men and women, boys and girls, who have never seen a Catholic book, and who never will unless we other Catholics take steps to change conditions. No wonder we suffer from bigotry!" (1).

His solution was simple. Why not imitate the Bexhill-on-the-Sea Library and create a free, private, circulating library of religious literature for children available through the postal system? He tried to sell his idea to the Knights of Columbus, an organization to which he belonged and had served for some years. When they hesitated, he approached the Catholic Church Extension of Chicago to see if they would be interested. They liked the concept, but felt it was too risky. So, in desperation he decided to undertake the task himself, and thus was born his Little Flower Library.

Fr. Finn began by purchasing, at a cost of \$1,800.00, “one hundred titles, twenty copies to a title, of the best Catholic books for children” (2). Slowly but surely the Little Flower Library became popular. In 1928 he wrote: “Its books have reached, I dare say, over a hundred thousand Catholic children. Only within the last few days, as I write this, the library has sent packages of fifty books to a dozen little parish schools in out-of-the-way places where there is no such thing as a Catholic publisher or a Catholic library” (3).

Unfortunately, his third big idea was the offspring of his old age, and it came at a time when his health was failing him. Still the Library enjoyed considerable success and carried on even after his death.

Into each book that the Little Flower Library mailed out, Fr. Finn inserted this message. “Little Friend: I am a book. I can neither hear, nor see. But, oh, I can tell you many, many things and help you pass many happy hours. Treat me kindly....I am only loaned to you, so be sure I am read and returned. It is my mission to bring happiness to children. Between my covers I bring a story, a gift from the Little Flower of Jesus to you” (4).

xx.

*On the Board of Trustees
of Saint Xavier College*

In 1920, Fr. Finn added one more responsibility to his already long list of duties when he became a member of the Board of Trustees of Saint Xavier College, a position he held until his death. With his many friends and contacts in the Cincinnati community and beyond, he was a valuable addition to the board as the College's administrators were surely aware. Then as now, Saint Xavier College, as a private institution, relied heavily on the generosity of friends and supporters, and fund-raising was a never-ending endeavor. Fr. Finn's contribution to the College with money raising efforts was significant as the following example demonstrates.

In 1919, Saint Xavier College formally separated from Saint Xavier High School and moved to its new campus in the suburb of Avondale, while the newly created High School remained at Seventh and Sycamore Streets

downtown. The College embarked on an ambitious building program, which clearly required significant sums of money. Hinkle Hall, the Jesuit residence, and the Science Alumni Hall, now Edgecliff Hall, were the first structures on the new campus. In 1924, plans were drawn up to build a dormitory on the west side of the campus near the old Avondale Athletic Club, which served as the Student Center. While the residence hall was under construction, there was considerable discussion as to what the building should be named.

One suggestion came from Fr. James McCabe, S.J., a recent past president of the Saint Xavier College. In a letter to Fr. Hubert Brockman, S.J, the current president, McCabe recommended calling it the “Francis J. Finn, S.J. Dormitory.” His reason was simple. “Unless he [Finn] demurs, I think that should be the best name, as he has done so much to raise the funds” (1). Whether Fr. Brockman ever spoke to Fr. Finn about naming the building after him is unknown, but if he did, it is a good bet that Fr. Finn demurred. In any case, the new residence hall was eventually named Elet Hall after the first Jesuit president of Saint Xavier College, Fr. John A. Elet, S.J.

Fr. Finn’s other contribution to Saint Xavier College is better known. He is the person who gave the school’s

athletic teams the nickname “Musketeer.” How this came about is a rather long but interesting story.

In April 1925, *The Xaverian News*, the student newspaper of Saint Xavier College, announced that it was sponsoring a contest to find a permanent, official nickname for the school’s athletic teams. The paper explained that, heretofore, the teams had gone by various unofficial names such as “The Saints” or “The Avondalers” or the “The Catholics” or “The Xaverians.” But the editors of the paper dismissed these because they lacked “the force and virility” that typified Saint Xavier College’s athletic teams (2). So, the paper invited all students, alumni and friends to submit possible names. They were looking for something that was “original, short, and snappy” (3). Competent judges would select the best name, and the handsome prize of \$5.00 would be awarded to the winner. The deadline was May 12, 1925. However, on May 13, *The Xaverian News* announced that the deadline had been extended indefinitely because of the small number of entries.

Finally, a winner was selected, and the newspaper announced the decision on October 7, 1925, in the following manner: “Saint Xavier College athletic teams will hereafter be known as the Musketeers. This name was decided upon by the Athletic Council and approved by the

College administration. The Reverend Francis J. Finn, member of the Board of Trustees and widely known writer of books for juveniles, selected Musketeers as the best name befitting Saint Xavier athletics” (4). Fr. Finn pointed out that the motto of the Musketeers, “All for one and one for all,” characterizes the spirit of Xavier athletics.

xxi.

His Last Years

During the last five years of his life, Fr. Finn spent a good part of every winter resting and relaxing in Florida. This change was at the urging of his doctors who had run out of other remedies. Florida had two obvious advantages. It freed him from the rigors of a Cincinnati winter and blessed him with the warm, sunny weather of the south. In late February 1924, he traveled to Tampa, Florida for the first time. There he stayed with the Jesuits at Sacred Heart College, the school that the Jesuits had established in Tampa in 1899, and which is now called Jesuit High School. After a week or two, he moved onto Fort Myers where he stayed with the family of Richmond Dean, his brother-in-law, the widower of his sister Kate. In late March he stopped in Jacksonville on his way to Chicago and then returned to Cincinnati, much improved in health.

Whatever the state of his health, however, he continued to write books on a regular basis. For instance, *The Story of Jesus* appeared in the fall of 1924, published by The Extension Press. Fr. Francis X. Talbot, S.J. made favorable note of it in *America* with the comment: “The *Story of Jesus* is told for boys and girls by our dean of Catholic juvenile literature, Fr. Francis Finn” (1).

By January 1925, he was again in Florida, this time for a longer visit. While he was traveling, he corresponded regularly with Florence Moran, the longtime secretary at Saint Xavier School, who had the wisdom and foresight to save his letters. These represent a real treasure because they give us a good understanding of where he traveled, what he did and what caught his attention.

He first visited Miami, Florida where he stayed at Gesu Church. He spent much of his time there swimming, boating, and fishing at Miami Beach. Toward the end of February, he traveled to Key West and from there took a boat to the island of Cuba where he visited for several weeks. Fr. William Kane, a brother Jesuit, was his traveling companion, and they were warmly greeted by the Jesuits at the Colegio de Belen, the Jesuit school in Havana, where they stayed. They arrived in Havana in time for the Carnival which was just beginning. Carnival is a festive season celebrated for several weeks in February or

March just before Ash Wednesday and Lent. There were public celebrations such as parades, street parties, and other entertainments, at which elaborate costumes and masks were worn. Fathers Finn and Kane thoroughly enjoyed themselves, although they found the huge party somewhat “noisy.” By April 1, they were back in Miami and making plans to return to Cincinnati.

In the summer of 1925, Fr. Finn returned to Campion College in Prairie du Chien to vacation with his Jesuit brothers and, of course, to write. Once again, the fresh, clear, air of northern Wisconsin inspired his imagination, and his wizard pen was soon at work. Before the summer ended, he finished *Sunshine and Freckles*, and had it ready for the publishers. A review of *Sunshine and Freckles* that appeared in the *Cincinnati Commercial* had this to say about the novel: “It is perhaps one of the author’s best efforts, a real boys’ story for boys of all ages up to 90” (2).

By late January of 1926, Fr. Finn was back in Miami, Florida for what had become his annual winter visit. Shortly after his arrival, however, he received some disquieting news from Benziger Brothers. The sales of virtually all his books had been falling. He mentions this fact in a letter to Florence Moran, though he does not go into the reasons. In early March, he wrote to Florence Moran again, this time to say that he was preparing *The*

Boys' and Girls' Prayer Book for publication. Though he did not realize it, *The Boys' and Girls' Prayer Book* would be the last of his published works. Finally, on March 31, he boarded a boat in Miami bound for New York City where he planned to confer with his publishers, and then return to Cincinnati on the night train.

In August of 1926, he signed a contract with Benziger Brothers for the publication of *The Candles' Beams*, a collection of six short stories. One of these stories was "Ada Merton," which he had written many years before when he was a young philosophy student at Woodstock. It was among his very first works and was originally published in *The Messenger of the Sacred Heart*.

It was often said that no priest in Cincinnati was better known than Fr. Finn. When he walked along the streets of the city, he was frequently stopped by friends or parishioners or former students or even casual passers-by. People would occasionally use these chance meetings to give him money for the children of the school or the parish, a little girl who needed shoes or a little boy who needed a winter coat.

Fr. Finn was universally respected and admired as the following anecdote narrated by Fr. Daniel Lord illustrates.

“I shall never forget the first time I walked with him down the streets of Cincinnati... Here was one man in the world for whom money seemed unnecessary. I had just got off a late train, so we dropped in for lunch at the city’s best-known restaurant. We ordered, ate; the proprietor came up, spoke to Fr. Finn, and wrote his own initials on our check. We took a taxi, and the driver did not pull his meter flag. We approached a motion-picture theater; the manager ran up, greeted Fr. Finn effusively... and begged him to come in and pass on the new film that was being presented. We taxied, at the expense of the taxi company, to the ballpark, sat immediately back of the catcher, and were welcomed with a smile... All told, it was something new in my life, a day that proved to be a long tribute to Fr. Finn of everybody’s friendship” (3).

Equally impressive was his ability to forgive wrongs, to overlook slights, and to turn the other cheek. Fr. Lord is once again our witness. “I myself have heard him make excuses for quite atrocious wrongs and seen him treat with forgiving courtesy men who had deeply hurt him” (4).

Physically, Fr. Finn was a heavy-set man and not particularly handsome or distinguished in appearance. He was not a scholar, or a man given to scholarly pursuits.

The haphazard, disrupted nature of his education and intellectual formation precluded that possibility. Nor was he an outstanding pulpit orator, although his sermons always made a point and contained a pertinent message which was expressed in a pleasing, sometimes humorous, style. But, it can be truly said of him, that although he aged, he never grew old.

Fr. Finn spent almost two and a half months in Florida during the winter of 1927, and had a very pleasant, restful time. After a two week visit with relatives in Fort Myers, he moved on to Miami where he stayed with the Jesuits at Gesu Church. Although he limited himself to about an hour and a half of work each day, he did manage to write several chapters of what would become his memoirs, using a typewriter that he had borrowed. His love of baseball lured him to West Palm Beach where he saw his beloved Cincinnati Reds play Babe Ruth and the New York Yankees. He also attended an exhibition baseball game between the Reds and the St. Louis Browns. On this occasion he shook hands with several of the Reds players including Bubbles Hargrave, the catcher, and Charlie Dressen, the third baseman. He also visited with Dick Bray, a former student at Saint Xavier College, who was just beginning his long career as a radio announcer for the Reds. All in all, it was a delightful vacation, and by the

time he left Florida to return home in early April he was feeling better.

When he arrived back in Cincinnati, he took up his usual responsibilities at the school and church, but his health was clearly failing, and his workdays became shorter and shorter.

On July 18, 1927, his dear mother, Mary Josephine, died at her home in St Louis. She was 91 years old. At least once a year Fr. Finn had paid her a visit, usually on his way to vacation in Wisconsin. Over the years she kept apprised of his activities and supported every one of his undertakings. He outlived his mother by only one year and a few months.

As usual, it was the children of the school and his writing that buoyed him up and kept him going. On October 27, 1927, he signed what would be his last contract with Benziger Brothers for the publication of his final book, *The Boys' and Girls' Prayerbook*. How appropriate that his final work embraced the two great loves of his life, his God and the children of the world.

In January 1928, Fr. Finn left for his final winter trip to Florida. This time Fr. George Kister, another good friend, accompanied him. At each stop along his journey, a delegation of the Knights of Columbus met him at the train station. He had been a member of the Knights for

many years and regularly attended their conventions. After a brief stop in Jacksonville, he and Fr. Kister traveled to Fort Myers where they spent several weeks with his relatives, the Deans. From there they moved on to Tampa where they stayed with the Jesuits at Sacred Heart College. While in Tampa, they attended several exhibition baseball games. They saw the Reds play once and Babe Ruth's New York Yankees once. By early April, Fr. Finn was ready to return home, although in one of his letters to Florence Moran he boasted that he had not taken one of the nitroglycerine pills that he had brought from Cincinnati.

xxii.

Fr. Finn: The Writer

There has been some confusion as to just how many books Fr. Finn published in his lifetime. The definitive answer to that question can be found, I think, in the bibliography of his works, which he appended to his memoirs. That list contains twenty-seven titles in chronological order according to the date of publication. Of these twenty-seven books, four were collections of short stories, *Mostly Boys*, *New Faces and Old: Short Stories*, *The Best Foot Forward and Other Stories*, and *Candles' Beams*. The rest were full-length novels of which *Harry Dee: Or Working It Out* was the longest (1).

Many of his works were translated into foreign languages and earned him an international audience and reputation. Fifteen of them appeared in French translation, six in German, four in Italian, four in Polish, three in Bohemian, and eighteen in Flemish. Some also appeared in

Hungarian, Spanish, Catalanian, and Portuguese, and several were produced in braille for the blind. Fr. Finn also adapted a number of his stories for dramatic presentation as plays, although only one of these, *The Wager of Gerald O'Rourke* based on *Tom Playfair*, was ever published (2).

Benziger Brothers of New York published all but four of his books. Herder Publisher of St. Louis published three: *Ada Merton* and *New Faces and Old: Short Stories*, both of which appeared in 1896, and *Echoes From Bethlehem: A Christmas Miracle* in 1896. Extension Press published *The Story of Jesus* in 1924 (3).

From 1891 when *Pery Wynn* first appeared until the publication of *The Best Foot Forward* in 1899, Benziger charged 85¢ for each copy of his books. For the next two novels the price went up to \$1.00; but returned to 85¢ for *The Fairy of the Snows* in 1913. After that, the cost of the books fluctuated between \$1.00 and \$1.50. Fr. Finn was always solicitous about the price of his books and urged Benziger to keep them as low as possible so that his works remained affordable to his young readers. His books continued to sell well throughout his lifetime and even after his death. In an article he wrote for the *Saint Mary's Star* in 1943, Fr. William B. Faherty, S.J. reported that even fifty years after Fr. Finn's first publication, his annual sales

averaged five thousand copies, testifying to his enduring popularity (4).

For his first four novels from *Percy Wynn* to *Claude Lightfoot*, Benziger paid Fr. Finn a royalty of eight cents per copy for the first 4,000 copies sold, and ten cents for each after that. However, for *Ethelred Preston*, which appeared in 1896, Fr. Finn's royalty rose to thirteen cents for all copies. This significant increase is interesting. First of all, it just so happened that 1896 was the year in which Herder first published novels for Fr. Finn, both of which sold quite well. So, it is probably no coincidence that Benziger awarded him a more generous royalty that year, acknowledging not only that his books were popular and profitable, but also that there was now a formidable competitor vying for his works.

His royalty payments remained thirteen cents per copy for the next seven novels that Benziger published. Subsequently, his cut rose to fifteen cents, then eighteen cents, and finally twenty-two cents for *Bobby in Movieland* and *On the Run*. Twenty-two cents was Frank's peak and then his royalties dropped. He received ten cents per copy for his last three books. On December 24, 1926, he signed what was one of his last contracts with Benziger. In it he granted Benziger permission to republish and remarket

twenty-one of his most popular books at a sale price of \$1.25 per copy. His royalty was two cents per book sold.

It should be noted that Fr. Finn derived no personal profit from any of his writings. As a Jesuit with a vow of poverty, he turned over all the proceeds from his books to the Society of Jesus. This practice was true during his lifetime and after his death. In fact, the contract he signed with Benziger Brothers in 1926 contains the following statement: “In case of the death of Rev. Francis J. Finn, S.J., his royalties are to be paid to the Provincial of the Missouri Province residing at Saint Louis University, St. Louis, Missouri” (5).

His Jesuit superiors used this money to meet the ordinary expenses of the Province, but much of it went to the cost of educating and training young Jesuits, as Fr. Finn mentions in his memoirs.

He often remarked that what literary productivity required most of all was freedom from all other activities. “To give my pen wings, all I needed was a vast leisure with nothing to do and nothing to worry about” (6). When granted this limited freedom he wrote with amazing speed. Many of his novels were produced during a summer vacation of a month or so, during which time his pen flew across the page.

He was frequently asked if his stories were true and if his characters were real people. One such request came from a boy in Bavaria, Germany who wrote to Saint Mary's College in 1910. This young German wanted to know if Tom Playfair really existed. Writing in his native language, he addressed his letter to "The Very Distinguished Father President of the Jesuit College Near Pawnee River, U.S.A." The state of Kansas was not mentioned on the envelope and "Pawnee" was the fictitious name that Finn had given to a creek near Saint Mary's College. Nonetheless, the letter arrived at Saint Mary's in due time (7).

When asked if his stories were true, Fr. Finn made a distinction. His books, he said, were often based on an incident or a series of incidents that had indeed occurred, but he reworked them to fit the circumstances of his story. Strange as it seems, he insisted, sticking too closely to the facts does not make for an engaging tale, though he conceded that most of his stories had a foundation in the actual. As for his characters, he explained that they were frequently a composite of two or three girls or boys whom he had met and known. For instance, it was commonly believed that Tom Playfair was actually George R. Kister, a student whom Finn taught at Saint Mary's College in 1884. George Kister later became a Jesuit and had a

distinguished career as an educator. He served as prefect of studies at Saint Mary's, president of Campion College in Wisconsin, principal of Saint Xavier High School in Cincinnati, and ended his active years as president of Saint Mary's, his alma mater.

What did Fr. Finn hope to achieve through his many books and stories? He certainly wanted to entertain his readers, to be sure, but his primary purpose was to teach some spiritual or moral lesson. In other words, his goal was unapologetically didactic. He was, first and foremost, a preacher of the Catholic faith to which he was so personally committed. Behind the adventures, the misadventures, and the antics of his lovable characters, he was preaching the gospel of Jesus, though his youthful readers were only vaguely aware of it because the story was so engrossing. His special gift as a writer lay in his ability to make that gospel convincing and attractive to adolescents. And his message was simple enough, though it was disguised in an entertaining package. He wanted his young readers to understand that the purpose of their lives was to love and serve the God who had created them and loved them. He had a talent for making virtue attractive, and a gift for presenting selfless love as the noblest characteristic any girl or boy could ever aspire to and display.

xxiii.

Death, Funeral, & Tributes

When Fr. Finn returned to Cincinnati from Florida in April 1928, he seemed to be in better health, and he returned immediately to his usual routine. After a few weeks, however, it was clear that he was seriously ill. Weak and in considerable pain, he was taken to the Good Samaritan Hospital where he lingered between life and death for some time. He managed to leave the hospital for a few hours one day in June to attend a play that the children staged in his honor. It was a production of *The Haunt of the Fairies*, a play he had written years earlier. As his car approached the school, the children flocked to greet him, and the driver had to stop for fear of injuring one of them. Finally, the boys pushed the car up to the main entrance of the school and Fr. Finn got out to a warm, enthusiastic welcome. A week or so later, he was discharged from the hospital, only marginally better.

At the beginning of the new school year in the fall of 1928, he returned to his office, but only for a few hours each day. By the end of October, however, he was no longer able to go on with his work. He returned to the Good Samaritan Hospital once more, but there was nothing further the doctors could do for him. He died peacefully on Friday, November 2, All Souls Day. The cause of death was listed as “chronic nephritis,” likely some type of chronic renal failure, which had been progressing for some years.

News of his death spread quickly and elicited an outpouring of tributes and expressions of sorrow. From Murray Seasongood, the Mayor of Cincinnati, came these words: “I feel the city has sustained a very great loss in the passing of Fr. Finn. I was a personal friend and a great admirer of him. He was a man of a lovely nature, kindly and well disposed in his sympathies. Personally, I feel his death keenly” (1).

Fr. Hubert Brockman, the president of Saint Xavier College, expressed his sorrows this way: “It was my blessed privilege to have lived close to Fr. Finn these many years. It is my unmerited honor to have been his companion and brother in life. My abiding memory of him will be... his unconquerable optimism which left a smile on his face at his very last breath” (2).

The Rev. Frank H. Nelson, rector of Christ Episcopal Church, wrote: “Words cannot express my feeling at the death of Father Finn. To know him was to love him...I became acquainted with Father Finn some twenty-five years ago, when we both were interested in the organization of the Antituberculosis Society. I have admired him ever since.....All who love God and man loved him” (3).

Richard Crane, Civil Service Commissioner and a Saint Xavier College graduate, spoke of Fr. Finn’s devotion to God. “Fr. Finn was one of the greatest Jesuits of his time...Never have I known a religious in whom the active and contemplative lives were so beautifully blended” (4).

Fr. James J. Daly, his dear friend, spoke of his whole-hearted consecration to the service of God:

“It always seemed to me that the world lost a poet in Father Finn. For him the stark realities of life could never dim the wonder and mystery of the world. Every day ushered in possibilities of splendor. The dawn was fraught with promise. He faced the day’s work expecting miracles...The miracles must have come, because he never betrayed the least sign of disappointment or discouragement...Whatever gifts and accomplishments he had, his keen business sense,

his talents in literature, music and drama, his ease in a crowd, his power of leadership, his popularity and friendships all were regarded and employed solely as agencies in his work for religion. And he made this plain to all men. There was for him only one mill in the world, and that was God's, and all things were grist for it. It was a noble philosophy, and it gave a boyish simplicity to his life" (5).

One of the most interesting tributes came from Fr. Michael J. O'Connor, S.J., who wrote: "It was I, then Father Finn's rector in old Saint Xavier's, who was privileged to take him out of the limited sphere of college life and college activities and to appoint him to the place Father Finn filled so splendidly in the Saint Xavier parish through more than thirty years" (6). At the time, O'Connor's decision to entrust the Saint Xavier grade school to Finn was greeted with widespread skepticism, but in retrospect it was universally praised as a brilliant move for which Fr. O'Connor had every right to be proud.

On Sunday, November 4, Fr. Francis J. Finn, S.J. lay in state in the parlor of the Saint Xavier Church rectory. The following morning his body was moved to the church where Fr. Hubert Brockman celebrated a Requiem High Mass for the repose of his soul. This celebration was a

special Mass, fittingly enough, just for the children of Saint Xavier Grade School, the students of Saint Xavier College, Saint Xavier High School, and Saint Xavier Commercial School, along with the young ladies of Notre Dame High School. They filled the church to overflowing. Through the rest of the day, thousands of people from all over the city passed through Saint Xavier Church paying silent tribute to a man they had come to admire and love.

On Tuesday morning, November 6, at 10:00 promptly, the Solemn Pontifical Mass began. John T. McNicholas, the Archbishop of Cincinnati, presided, assisted at the altar by Bishop Francis J. Howard of Covington and five or six monsignors. His brother Jesuits, priests, brothers, and scholastics were seated in the sanctuary along the communion rail, while members of the secular clergy and other religious orders, about one hundred of them, sat on chairs in front of the first pew. The honorary pallbearers, representing every department of the College and the Parochial School, the alumni, the Knights of Columbus, and the City of Cincinnati, occupied the pews in the middle aisle on the left side; relatives, the Parochial School staff, and the Young Ladies Society were on the right side. Protestant ministers, judges, attorneys, business and professional men were among the congregation that packed the church and its gallery.

At the end of the Mass, Archbishop McNicholas paid a short, but touching, tribute to Fr. Finn.

“The eulogy has no place in the rule of a religious order, for the austere rule of life follows in death. Furthermore, Father Finn needs no eulogy, for his life and works speak for his great unselfish service. Not only will Saint Xavier Church mourn him, but there is sorrow among the entire clergy of the diocese, the citizens of Cincinnati and the youth of the land. Fr. Finn knew that nature fashioned the human heart to love, and his great manifestations of love have made him the great man, the great priest who has merited the love of all... He regarded his priesthood as his opportunity to serve mankind” (7).

Following the Mass Fr. Francis J. Finn was laid to rest among his Jesuit brothers in the New Saint Joseph Cemetery in Price Hill.



Framed on the wall of Father Finn's office at the time of his death were these words:

America First

Not merely in matters material, but in things of the spirit.
Not merely in science, inventions, motors and skyscrapers,
but also in ideals, principles, character.
Not merely in the calm assertion of rights, but in the glad
assumption of duties.
Not flaunting her strength as a giant, but bending in
helpfulness over a sick and wounded world like a
good Samaritan.
Not in splendid isolation, but in courageous co-operation.
Not in pride, arrogance and disdain of other races and
peoples, but in sympathy, love and understanding.
And so, in that spirit and with these hopes, I say with all
my heart and soul, "America First" (8).

Notes

Chapter One The Early Years

1. Editorial, *The Cincinnati Post*, 2 November 1928, 14, as quoted in “Affectionate Tributes to the Memory of Rev. Francis J. Finn, S.J.,” *Saint Xavier Calendar*, December 1928, 469-471.
2. Francis J. Finn, S.J., *Father Finn, S.J.: The Story of His Life Told by Himself For His Friends Young and Old*, edited and with a preface by Daniel A. Lord, S.J. (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1929), xii. *The Story of His Life* is Fr. Finn’s memoirs which were edited by his friend, the well-known Jesuit writer Daniel A. Lord, and published in 1929, a year after his death. Fr. Lord also added a very enlightening preface to the memoirs in which he gives us a vivid picture of how Fr. Finn’s contemporaries assessed his life and achievements. Unfortunately, Finn did not live to complete his memoirs and, as a result, several tantalizing questions remain unanswered. However, what we have in the memoirs he either wrote himself or dictated to his faithful secretary Florence Moran in the last few years of his life. In editing the text, Lord remained faithful to Finn’s own words, so the memoirs are essentially just as Finn wrote or dictated them, though there are some incomplete chapters and other chapters that he planned to write, but never got to. A few minor errors found their way into the memoirs for whatever reason. For instance, we know that Fr. Finn was the first child of John and Mary Finn, not the second as the memoirs state. Similarly, we know he had five

siblings, not just the two sisters and one brother mentioned in the text.

3. Finn, *Story*, 3.
4. Finn, *Story*, 3.
5. Finn, *Story*, 7.
6. Finn, *Story*, 7.
7. Finn, *Story*, 9.
8. Finn, *Story*, 11.
9. Finn, *Story*, 21.
10. Finn, *Story*, 33.
11. Finn, *Story*, 37-38.
12. Finn, *Story*, 25.
13. Finn, *Story*, 29.
14. Finn, *Story*, 30.
15. Finn, *Story*, 31.
16. Finn, *Story*, 31.
17. Finn, *Story*, 31.

Chapter Two Jesuit Formation

1. Finn, *Story*, 35.
2. Finn, *Story*, 42.
3. Quoted from “Obituary: Father Francis J. Finn,” *Woodstock Letters*, February 1929, 119.
4. Finn, *Story*, 53.
5. Finn, *Story*, 55.
6. Finn, *Story*, 55.

Chapter Three Saint Mary’s College

1. Gilbert J. Garraghan, S.J., *The Jesuits of the Middle United States*, 3 vols, (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1984), vol. 2, 604-612, 619-622, 658-674; vol 3, 25-52.

Chapter Four
Philosophy Studies at Woodstock College

1. Gerald McKevitt, S.J., *Brokers of Culture: Italian Jesuits in the American West* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), 80.
2. McKevitt, *Brokers*, 79-83.
3. Finn, *Story*, 103.
4. Finn, *Story*, 103.
5. Finn, *Story*, 106.
6. Finn, *Story*, 109.
7. Finn, *Story*, 112.
8. Finn, *Story*, 112.

Chapter Five
Back to Saint Mary's College

1. Finn, *Story*, 120.
2. Finn, *Story*, 121.
3. Finn, *Story*, 122.
4. Finn, *Story*, 124.
5. Finn, *Story*, 124.

Chapter Six
Back to Philosophy at Woodstock College

1. Finn, *Story*, 127.
2. Letter, Rev. Rudolph J. Meyer, S.J., to Fr. Finn, 7 October, 1887, Xavier University Archives, Finn Collection, folder 406.
3. Finn, *Story*, 134.
4. Finn, *Story*, 129.

Chapter Seven
Teaching at Marquette College in Milwaukee

1. Finn, *Story*, 141-142.

2. Finn, *Story*, 146.
3. Finn, *Story*, 143.

Chapter Eight

Theology Studies at Woodstock College

1. Letters, Augustine Schmil to Francis Finn, 2 February, 1891, and 14 February, 1891. Xavier University Archives, Finn Collection, folders 498 and 499.
2. Finn, *Story*, 151.
3. Finn, *Story*, 155.
4. Finn, *Story*, 158.
5. Finn, *Story*, 158.
6. Finn, *Story*, 161.
7. Finn, *Story*, 164.

Chapter Nine

Back in St. Louis, Missouri

1. Finn, *Story*, 166.
2. Review of *Percy Wynn: Making a Boy of Him*, publication and author unknown, Xavier University Archives, Finn Collection, folder 104.
3. Review of *Claude Lightfoot: Or How the Problem Was Solved*, publication and author unknown, Xavier University Archives, Finn Collection, folder 27.
4. Review of *Candles' Beams*, publication and author unknown, Xavier University Archives, Finn Collection, folder 22.
5. Finn, *Story*, xviii. Father Lord's observations become all the more meaningful when we recall that he himself was an eminently successful writer. A Jesuit priest like Finn, Lord served as the national director of the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary and edited its publication, *The Queen's Work*, for many years. He authored ninety books

and over three hundred pamphlets, countless articles, plays, musical pageants and songs. Few individuals influenced and energized the Catholic youth of America during the first half of the twentieth century more than the Fr. Lord. See David J. Endres, “Dan Lord, Hollywood Priest,” *America*, 12 December 2005.

6. Report from Benziger Brothers to Fr. Finn dated 5 July 1893, Jesuit Archives and Research Center, St. Louis, Missouri.

Chapter Ten

Early Years as a Priest

1. William B. Faherty, S.J., “Tom Playfair’s Creator at Tom Playfair’s School,” *Saint Mary’s Star*, Kansas, 22 July 1943, 2. (Reprinted from the Kansas Historical Quarterly, May 1943.)
2. Faherty, “Tom Playfair,” 2.
3. Finn, *Story*, 207.

Chapter Eleven

Assignment: Cincinnati, Ohio

1. “John Finn at Rest,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 30 January 1900, 6.
2. “John Finn at Rest,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 30 January 1900, 6.

Chapter Twelve

Director of Saint Xavier Parochial School

1. Finn, *Story*, 216.
2. Finn, *Story*, 211.
3. James J. Daly, S.J., “Affectionate Tributes to the Memory of Rev. Francis J. Finn, S.J.,” *Saint Xavier Calendar*, December 1928, 449.

4. Joseph P. DeSmedt, S.J., “Affectionate Tributes to the Memory of Rev. Francis J. Finn, S.J.,” *Saint Xavier Calendar*, December 1928, 457.

Chapter Thirteen

The Saint Xavier Commercial School is Born

1. Finn, *Story*, 225.
2. Finn, *Story*, xxi.
3. Finn, *Story*, xxi.

Chapter Fourteen

Back to Writing

1. Finn, *Story*, 184.
2. James J. Daly, S.J., Review of *The Fairy of the Snows, The Champion*, Sacred Heart College, date unknown, Xavier University Archives, Finn Collection, folder 40.
3. Francis J. Finn, S.J., “The Story of a Story,” *Jubilean*, Saint Mary’s College, Kansas, 24 October 1922.
4. Finn, “Story of a Story.”
5. Finn, *Story*, 124.
6. Finn, *Story*, 165.
7. Daniel A. Lord, S.J., “Obituary of Francis J. Finn, S.J.,” source unknown, Jesuit Archives and Research Center, Saint Louis, Missouri.
8. Lord, “Obituary of Finn.”

Chapter Fifteen

The Children Always Came First

1. Finn, *Story*, 11.
2. *Saint Xavier Calendar*, October 1918, 365.
3. *Saint Xavier Calendar*, November 1918, 419.
4. *Saint Xavier Calendar*, August 1923, 233.

5. Letter, from Fr. Finn to the parents and guardians of the pupils of Saint Xavier School, undated, Xavier University Archives, Finn Collection, folder 359.
6. *The Cincinnati Times Star*. 4 May 1927, Xavier University Archives, Finn Collection, folder 212.
7. Finn, *Story*, xviii.
8. "City Mourns Death of Rev. Francis J. Finn," *The Cincinnati Post*, 2 November 1928, 14.

Chapter Sixteen
He Is Writing Another Book

No Notes

Chapter Seventeen
A Visit to Ireland

1. Francis J. Finn, S.J., "Father Finn in England," *Saint Xavier Calendar*, October 1921, 377.
2. Finn, "Father Finn in Dublin," *Saint Xavier Calendar*, November 1921, 421.
3. Finn, "Father Finn in Galway," *Saint Xavier Calendar*, December 1921, 453.
4. Finn, "Father Finn in Galway," 453.
5. Finn, "Father Finn in Galway," 453.
6. Finn, "Father Finn in Galway," 459.
7. Finn, "Father Finn's Diary, Killarney," *Saint Xavier Calendar*, January 1922, 19.
8. Finn, "Impressions of London," *Saint Xavier Calendar*, February 1922, 55.
9. Finn, "Impressions of London," 55.
10. Finn, *Story*, 186.

Chapter Eighteen
A Nostalgic Return to Saint Mary's College

No Notes

Chapter Nineteen
The Little Flower Library

1. Finn, *Story*, 201.
2. Finn, *Story*, 205.
3. Finn, *Story*, 205-206.
4. "Books! Clergyman Had Them in Number," *Saint Xavier Calendar*, December 1928, 467.

Chapter Twenty
On the Board of Trustees of Saint Xavier College

1. Letter, James McCabe, S.J., to Hubert Brockman, S.J., 5 May, 1923. Xavier University Archives, Finn Collection, folder 560.
2. *The Xaverian News*, 8 April, 1925, 1.
3. *The Xaverian News*, 8 April, 1925, 1.
4. *The Xaverian News*, 7 October, 1925, 1.

Chapter Twenty-One
His Last Years

1. Francis X. Talbot, S.J., *America*, 22 November, 1924, Xavier University Archives, Finn Collection, folder 130.
2. Review of *Sunshine and Freckles, Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, author unknown, 22 November, 1925, Xavier University Archives, Finn Collection, folder 137.
3. Finn, *Story*, xiv-xv.
4. Finn, *Story*, xvi.

Chapter Twenty-Two Father Finn: The Writer

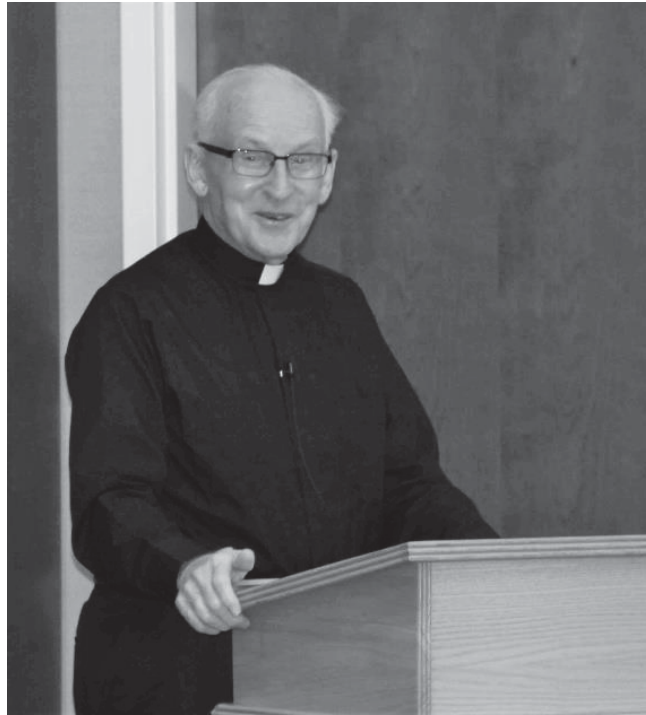
1. Finn, *Story*, “A Bibliography of Father Finn’s Books,” 229.
2. Finn, *Story*, “List of Father Finn’s Books Which Were Translated Into Foreign Languages,” 229-232.
3. The information in these paragraphs concerning the price of Finn’s books and the royalties he earned from them come from the records of the Jesuit Archives and Research Center, St. Louis, Missouri.
4. William B. Faherty, S.J., “Tom Playfair’s Creator at Tom Playfair’s School,” *Saint Mary’s Star*, Saint Mary’s, Kansas, 22 July, 1943. (Reprinted from the *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, May 1943.)
5. “Agreement Between Francis J. Finn, S.J. of Saint Xavier’s College, Cincinnati, Ohio, and Benziger Brothers of New York, N.Y.,” 4 December, 1926, Jesuit Archives and Research Center, Finn Collection, St. Louis, Missouri.
6. Finn, *Story*, 176.
7. Faherty, “Tom Playfair’s Creator,” 2.

Chapter Twenty-Three Death, Funeral, and Tributes

1. “City Mourns Death of Rev. Francis J. Finn,” *The Cincinnati Post*, 2 November, 1928, 14.
2. “Affectionate Tributes to the Memory of Rev. Francis J. Finn, S.J.,” *Saint Xavier Calendar*, December 1928, 453.
3. “City Mourns Finn,” 14.
4. “City Mourns Finn,” 14.
5. “Affectionate Tributes,” 449-451
6. “Affectionate Tributes,” 449.

7. "Affectionate Tributes," 448.
8. "Noted Clergyman's Creed on America," *Saint Xavier Calendar*, December 1928, 459. The author of this Creed is not known, though it may very well be that Fr. Finn wrote it himself. It is certainly in his style.

About the Author



Thomas Kennealy is a Jesuit priest living in retirement in the Cincinnati Jesuit Residence. Born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio, Fr. Kennealy entered the Society of Jesus in 1949, and was ordained a priest in June 1962. In the fall of 1969, he joined the faculty of Xavier University in Cincinnati as a teacher of French in the Department of Modern Languages. In 1974, he was appointed Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, a position he held for thirty-two years until 2006. He served as Xavier's archivist and historian until 2019 when he retired.

Unless You Become Like Little Children lovingly tells the story of Francis Finn, a Jesuit priest who died about a century ago in Cincinnati. He was a man of multiple talents and interests. He was an educator who founded a commercial school to help young women fit in the workplace of offices in downtown Cincinnati. He was a pastor who tended to the spiritual needs of men and women of all ages. He was a writer, author of immensely popular books to guide and inspire young readers. His story itself is inspiring, and this book tells it beautifully.

- **Fr. Ed Schmidt, S.J.**, former Editor of *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*, and editor with *America*, and business manager at *Company Jesuit Magazine*

Fr. Kennealy is a skilled storyteller as he weaves together this detailed account of the life of Fr. Francis Finn, S.J. Chronicling Fr. Finn's life with historical context, Fr. Kennealy captures our imagination using personal journals and writings from the period to illuminate this poignant and often moving biography. In addition to providing details of Fr. Finn's life, Fr. Kennealy offers a rich account of Jesuit formation and Jesuit education at the beginning of the 20th century. A great read!

- **Joseph P. Shadle**, Director of the Center for Mission and Identity, Xavier University

In *Unless You Become Like Little Children*, **Fr. Kennealy** beautifully shares a story of the tortured artist. Fr. Finn's struggle is the struggle of many – our time on earth – professional duties versus personal passions. Fr. Finn left a legacy of both. His story is inspirational. And by its end, I felt the love and affection that Cincinnati felt for Fr. Finn and was heartbroken to close the book.

- **J.M. Green**, author of *The Novice Angler*

For those who have their finger on the pulse of Cincinnati's rich literary history, they probably know the names of Samuel Clemens, Nikki Giovanni, and other influential writers who have, at one time, called Cincinnati home. But Fr. Francis Finn? Thank you **Thomas Kennealy** for introducing, or reintroducing, another important Cincinnati author. Fr. Finn is an early and fantastic contributor to our country's youth literature culture. His contributions must be studied.

- **Lesleigh Chumbley**, owner of Bike Trail Books bookshop, Loveland, Ohio



Thomas Kennealy is a Jesuit priest living in retirement in the Cincinnati Jesuit Residence. For fifty years he was associated with Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio: first as a teacher of French, then as Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences for thirty-two years and, finally, as Xavier's archivist and historian. He retired in December 2019.



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