

to attain to any appreciation of the Trinity, or be moved and enraptured by the thought of the Persons. For the Gifts act on the theological virtues, which decide our degree of glory in eternity. But only the full Vision in the next life will result infallibly in beatific love. Here mere knowledge often leaves us cold, and we must be content with crumbs of *charisma* from the Gifts; for the *charisma* pertains to the effects of the Gifts, in developing and refining of our soul in its progress through Christian maturity—its *aetatis perfectio spiritualis*, especially by wisdom and piety. The *charisma* of the Holy Spirit shows the beauty of the spiritual and moral order, and is that ripeness of grace expressed in outward as well as interior piety; it is something more than just ethical perfection. So, too, all true Christian refinement and nobility is the cult of the Gifts. By these it is that the Spirit with His own hand moulds and educates our souls for eternity:

. . . Nobisque mittat Filius
Charisma Sancti Spiritus.

RUBY FAY, T.O.S.D.

FRANÇOIS

‘UNDER this simple baptismal name have appeared the documents of a short life which might have been that of a Saint or of a man of genius, perhaps both.’

It was no less caustic a critic than André Thérive who made the statement and wrote six columns in *Le Temps* to prove it.

François¹ really needs no such tribute; the facts are self-evident. Even our national temper which views with shrinking, if not with actual dislike, additions to the cate-

¹ *François*. By Auguste Valensin. (Plon, Paris.)

gory of precocious prodigies of sanctity, or even of genius, might be vanquished by this record—in letters and rough notes—of the boy whom Auguste Valensin presents to his contemporaries.

François, to begin with, was *not* a child-saint. He had the ill-health which often helps towards sanctity but so gaily and carelessly borne as scarcely to appear. Obviously he had the seeds in him of a profound spirituality, but André Thérive only uses the word holiness—'a little strong' as he thinks it—in the most tentative way.

Then François is anonymous. We know scarcely anything concrete about him beyond his name, his profile in an admirable portrait-study as a boy of about twelve, and a later one; we know that his people were rich and we may guess that his home town was Lyons. This anonymity adds to the story a quality of elusiveness, and one might almost use the debased word glamour, from the lack of those data on which normal English biography is founded.

What amazes in François as a child is his extraordinary intelligence, what attracts is his joyousness and intensity of life—'a little bounding being let loose in the country and the sun'—his radiant warmth of affection. The book lacks the mawkishness or sentimentality we deplore in certain Latin lives; its note is François' 'capability of God' alongside of a human capability quite all-embracing. 'Of what pagan passions,' says Auguste Valensin, 'of what violent loves would have been capable later on this boy for whom all vision of beauty was a searing (*une brûlure*) . . .' We have, however, to allow for the fact that differences of temperament, and especially of their *expression*, exist. François' childish exuberance invents an expressiveness certainly alien from our strong silent dislike of giving ourselves away—our sentimental objection to sentiment. We must accept a small Latin boy of the rarest type addressing his sister of twelve as his Flower of the Sun, or even his Little Golden Rose. Quite probably, however, judging

from the fun of his letters, these were half-funny expressions—Were all these 'ardent formulas,' asks Père Valensin himself, 'sentimentality, Literature? Not the least in the world. Simple overflow of a heart nothing had as yet complicated and that could only love with tenderness and violence.'

Violence or excess—of endowment—François certainly had—he was 'dazzlingly gifted,' says André Thérive; one can think of none other but the young Leonardo himself who had to *choose* between being a poet, musician, painter, sculptor, prose-writer or, finally, a philosopher; the latter, François' own choice, had to be ruled out by his advisers as too exhausting. The crowning gift of all his nineteen years François had in 'Le Père' (Valensin) the writer and metaphysician, the family friend, whose affection and care are not the least matter of the book. Could even François have been quite what he became without so rare an affection, given and returned, an influence so immense yet so delicate, a formation, in fact, few have the good fortune to undergo?

He was as happy in his home life as in everything else. He had always been allowed to read everything (the favourite poet of this frank and joyous child was Baudelaire . . .); and it was in the 'chambre fleurie' of his mother that he heard the best literature read and commented. This charming and serious-minded young woman was, with his father, the object of François' love and admiration, but often too of his gaily irreverent amusement (in letters to his father, a distinguished doctor kept in town by professional duties: 'Mimi in frou-frous of silk and a white dressing-jacket,' etc., etc.); in a few strong strokes, reproduced in the book, François sketched the grace and, alas! the delicacy of the tall young *élégante* who has died since his death. His memory, powers of assimilation and appreciation, naturally import an echo of his reading into his letters; Madame de Sévigné, for instance, prompts a phrase or so. At fifteen, 'already himself in prose,' he

was in poetry still echoing Péguy and others, but, adds Le Père, the reader would be subtle who could guess the age of the author and that that author was a child. In little note-books he wrote many poems no one came across till he was dead, countless notes and ideas which must have engendered single lines of verse such as

Idées conduisez moi, tant de soleils m'égareront.

A line many poets, says Auguste Valensin, would like to have written.

It was when he was eighteen that François' underlying spirituality definitely emerged, definitely submerging his passionately human interests—every form of art, writing, and speculative thought (the latter constantly kept in check by the Père because of the boy's health). Père Valensin thinks there are in his last months 'indications that permit of entering the secret chamber, where, only a few steps from Eternity, this soul . . . pressed by God, finished in haste the forging of its own greatness.' To us, in almost the first letters to the Père, the signs of this final greatness are evident. In 1931 François had written with the round-about candour which always made him say what he really thought: 'I should like to be . . . a vagabond of glory. In what career? In what vocation? That which God will make in me. It is all I ask Him.' Again: 'How shall I be able to live with so much that is greater than my life? It seems to me my soul is the roof under which there shelter for an instant (may that instant be all my life!) Love, Joy, Beauty, and sometimes, in a flash, the divine *nous* that Plato, on his winged chariot, shows as directing souls in the ways of the spirit.' He wrote like this because he was a poet and thought as a poet, but with his own frankness. 'I want the Universe,' the letter went on, 'the Absolute. In the greatest joys there is a latent suffering, for man carries in him infinity and the universe is finite.' He needed, in a word, the direct dedication to God to which it dawned on him that he would be called

and from which his human self quite passionately recoiled. Before that he had had to undergo the usual testing of temptation—bitter, humiliating hours to the boy so naturally proud and pure, who thought himself vanquished. Brain-storms, wrote the Père, not defeats of the will; with the wisest counsels he guided the boy—as long as François would trust his 'father' (le Père well knew the necessity of such trust in the boy's case), 'You will be saved, saved from yourself . . . from fixed ideas and absurd ones which torture and lessen the soul . . . To sum up, do not watch yourself too closely (*ne te regarde pas trop vivre*').

A month later the definite 'call' made itself felt. 'It is the Risk run (all issues closed but one, succeed or die) which gives its value and its greatness to the Religious Vow . . . O God! God! *Ivresse de Dieu* . . .' The philosopher in him was terribly concerned that feeling should not guide the resolve so painfully forming. 'This has nothing to do with the vague mystical feeling of a "call." But no, this decision is *de froide volonté* . . . One must make the decision at the moment when it is hard to make it . . . O God of the imprudent! I risk infinitely: He can ask me to go further . . . to be no more, empty of everything that is not Him (intelligence, affections, liberty).' These were the stumbling blocks, as they must be for all who enter religion, but he felt everything with such intensity that his sacrifice was unusually great. 'Not to be able to work as much as I like, for instance . . . it is less hard to give one's life . . . than for it to be filled as we would not want it filled . . . So have I suddenly understood obedience? And for me, so violently personal, and so subject to my own caprices, it is deliverance. It is really that renunciation of myself I asked for.'

It was possibly as regards his mother that the sacrifice was greatest. 'Who *knew* François and his extreme sensitiveness, who knew especially what his mother represented to him, and to what degree he was capable of suffering through her suffering, alone can gauge what in the

order of Heroism' was meant by the only letter he ever had to write to his really idolised and still young mother and in which he told her of his decision. A last experience of the 'world' that could have been so seductive to the brilliant and extremely good-looking boy came at a fête at Cannes, or some summer resort. François suddenly remembered, Whom he was forgetting at the moment. 'Alors c'a a été fini.' He went out into the hall and then, with characteristic matter-of-factness, into the cloak-room. Was it among its coats, he asks next day, that he discovered his vocation to be monastic? If he became a Jesuit, for instance, it *might* mean the renouncing of intellectual work, 'the infinite joys of the mind, because of Jesus Christ.'

Till the end François scarcely mentions his ill health, it is only the admonitions of le Père which recall it to us. But in August the letters and note-books cease, le Père had begged they should do so, François was to live without thought and without emotion. And François to the best of his power obeyed. He was very ill, consumed with fever. By October le Père was writing to him daily—'What I say won't matter, what matters is that you know me quite close in thought, in prayer . . . Against illness we have always the resource of guarding our soul and our joy.' With an incomparable tenderness the absent friend watched, and sustained. 'I offer all my days so that the hours do not seem too long to you.' On November 9th: 'My dearest child, if I am heard, in the depths of your fever you must feel that you are in peace and in His Company.' He wrote again next day, but the boy could not read the little note; it was in his hand, however, in the ambulance that brought him home that day to die; it was buried with him.

A short article can but roughly sketch the outline of a life-story as remarkable as it was short; it is in the book itself that the full record must be sought.

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