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Obituary Notice of the Rev. Francis  
Anthony Matignon.

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IN FAITH.

# OBITUARY NOTICE

OF THE

*Rev. Francis Anthony Matignon, D. D.*

LATE PASTOR OF THE

*CHURCH OF THE HOLY CROSS,  
BOSTON.*

First published in the *New-England Galaxy*,  
Sept. 25, 1818.

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*"The just shall be had in everlasting remembrance."*

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1818.

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## OBITUARY NOTICE.

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THE REV. FRANCIS A. MATIGNON, D. D. who died on the 19th of Sept. 1818, was born in Paris. Nov. 10, 1753. Devoted to letters and religion from his earliest youth, his progress was rapid and his piety conspicuous. He attracted the notice of the learned faculty as he passed through the several grades of classical and theological studies; and having taken the degree of bachelor of divinity, he was ordained a Priest, on Saturday, the 19th of September, 1778, the very day of the month and week, which, forty years after, was to be his last. In the year 1782, he was admitted a licentiate, and received the degree of doctor of divinity from the college of the

Sorbonne in 1785. At this time he was appointed regius professor of divinity in the college of Navarre, in which seminary he performed his duties for several years, although his state of health was not good.

His talents and piety had recommended him to the notice of a Prelate in great credit, (the cardinal De Brienne) who obtained for him the grant of an annuity from the king, Louis XVI. which was sufficient for all his wants, established him in independence, and took away all anxiety for the future. But the ways of Providence are inscrutable to the wisest and best of the children of men. The revolution, which dethroned his beloved monarch, and stained the altar of his God with the blood of holy men, drove Dr. Matignon an exile from his native shores. He fled to England, where he remained several months, and then returned to France to prepare for a voyage to the United States. He land-

ed in Baltimore, and was appointed by Bishop Carroll, pastor of the Catholic Church in Boston, at which place he arrived, August 20, 1792.

The talents of Doctor Matignon were of the highest order. In him were united a sound understanding, a rich and vigorous imagination, and a logical precision of thought. His learning was extensive, critical and profound, and all his productions were deeply cast, symmetrically formed, and beautifully coloured. The fathers of the church and the great divines of every age were his familiar friends. His divinity was not merely speculative, nor merely practical; it was the blended influence of thought, feeling, and action. He had learned divinity as a scholar, taught it as a professor, felt it as a worshipper, and diffused it as a faithful pastor. His genius and his virtues were understood; for the wise bowed to his superior knowledge and the humble caught the spirit

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of his devotions. With the unbelieving and doubtful he reasoned with the mental strength of the apostle Paul ; and he charmed back the penitential wanderer with the kindness and affection of John the Evangelist. His love for mankind flowed in the purest current, and his piety caught a glow from the intensity of his feeling. Rigid and scrupulous to himself, he was charitable and indulgent to others. To youth, in a particular manner, he was forgiving and fatherly. With him the tear of penitence washed away the stains of error ; for he had gone up to the fountains of human nature, and knew all its weaknesses. Many, retrieved from folly and vice, can bear witness how deeply he was skilled in the science of parental government ; that science so little understood, and, for want of which, so many evils arise. It is a proof of a great mind not to be soured by misfortunes nor narrowed by my particular pursuit. Doctor Matig-

non, if possible, grew milder and more indulgent as he advanced in years. The storms of life had broken the heart of the man, but out of its wounds gushed the tide of sympathy and universal christian charity. The woes of life crush the feeble, make more stupid the dull, and more vindictive the proud; but the great mind and contrite soul are expanded with purer benevolence, and warmed with brighter hopes, by suffering—knowing that through tribulation and anguish the diadem of the saint is won.

To him whose heart has sickened at the selfishness of mankind, and who has seen the low and trifling pursuits of the greater proportion of human beings it is sweet and refreshing to contemplate the philosopher delighted with visions of other worlds and ravished with the harmonies of nature, pursuing his course abstracted from the bustle around him, but how much nobler is the course of the moral and christian philosopher who



teaches the ways of God to man. He holds a holy communion with heaven, walks with the Creator in the garden at every hour in the day, without wishing to hide himself. While he muses the spirit burns within him, and the high influences of the inspiration force him to proclaim to the children of men the deep wonders of divine love.

But this contemplation must give angels pleasure when they behold this purified and elevated being dedicating his services, not to the mighty, not to the wise, but to the humblest creatures of sorrow and suffering. Have we not seen our friend leaving these sublime contemplations and entering the habitations of want and wo? relieving their temporal necessities, administering the consolations of religion to the despairing soul in the agonies of dissolution? yes, the sons of the forest in the most chilling climates, the tenants of the hovel, the erring and profligate can bear wit-

ness with what patience, earnestness, constancy and mildness he laboured to make them better.

In manners Doctor Matignon was an accomplished gentleman, possessing that kindness of heart and delicacy of feeling which made him study the wants and anticipate the wishes of all he knew. He was well acquainted with the politest courtesies of society, for it must not, in accounting for his accomplishments, be forgotten, that he was born and educated in the bosom of refinement; that he was associated with chevaliers, and nobles, and was patronized by cardinals and premiers. In his earlier life, it was not uncommon to see ecclesiastics mingling in society with philosophers and courtiers, and still preserving the most perfect apostolic purity in their lives and conversation. The scrutinizing eye of infidel philosophy was upon them, and these unbelievers would have hailed it as a triumph to have caught

them in the slightest deviation from their professions. But no greater proof of the soundness of their faith or the ardour of their piety could be asked, than the fact, that, from all the bishops in France at the commencement of the revolution, amounting to one hundred and thirty eight, but three only were found wanting in integrity and good faith, when they were put to the test; and it was such a test, too, that it could have been supported by religion only. In passing such an ordeal, pride, fortitude, philosophy, and even insensibility would have failed. The whole strength of human nature was shrunken and blasted when opposed to the besom of the revolution. Then the bravest bowed in terror, or fled in affright; but then these disciples of the lowly Jesus taught mankind how they could suffer for his sake.

Doctor Matignon loved his native country, and always expressed the deepest interests in her fortunes and fate;

yet his patriotism never infringed on his philanthropy. He spoke of England as a great nation which contained much to admire and imitate, and his gratitude kindled at the remembrance of British munificence, and generosity to the exiled priests of a hostile nation of different religious creeds.

When Doctor Matignon came to Boston, new trials awaited him. His predecessors in this place wanted either talents, character or perseverance; and nothing of consequence had been done towards gathering and directing a flock. The good people of New-England were something more than suspicious on the subject of his success; they were suspicious of the Catholic Doctrines.— Their ancestors, from the settlement of the country, had been preaching against the Church of Rome, and their descendants, even the most enlightened, felt a strong impression of undefined and undefinable dislike, if not hatred, towards

every papal relation. Absurd and foolish legends of the Pope and his religion were in common circulation, and the prejudice was too deeply rooted to be suddenly eradicated or even opposed.— It required a thorough acquaintance with the world to know precisely how to meet these sentiments of a whole people. Violence and indiscretion would have destroyed all hopes of success. Ignorance would have exposed the cause to sarcasm and contempt, and enthusiasm, too manifest, would have produced a reaction that would have plunged the infant establishment in absolute ruin.— Doctor Matignon was exactly fitted to encounter all these difficulties. And he saw them, and knew his task, with ~~the~~ discernment of a shrewd politician.— With meekness and humility he disarmed the proud ; with prudence, learning, and wisdom, he met the captious and slanderous, and so gentle and so just was his course, that even the censorious

forgot to watch him and the malicious were too cunning to attack one armed so strong in honesty. For four years he sustained the weight of this charge alone, until Providence sent him a coadjutor in the person of the present excellent Bishop Cheverus, who seemed made by nature and fitted by education and grace to soothe his griefs by sympathy, (for he too had suffered,) to cheer him by the blandishments of taste and letters and all congenial pursuits and habits; and in fact, they were as far identified as two embodied minds could be. These holy seers pursued their religious pilgrimage together, blessing and being blessed, for more than twenty years; and the young Elisha had received a double portion of the spirit, and worn the mantle of his friend and guide, long before the sons of the prophets heard the cry of *my father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof.*— May the survivor find consolation in the



religion he teaches, and long be kept on his journey to bless the cruise of oil in the dwellings of poverty and widowhood, and to cleanse by the power of God the leprosy of the sinful soul.

Far from the sepulchre of his fathers repose the ashes of the good and great Doctor Matignon; but his grave is not as among strangers, for it was watered by the tears of an affectionate flock, and his memory is cherished by all who value learning, honour genius, or love devotion.

The writer of this brief notice offers it as a faint and rude memorial only of the virtues of the man whose character he venerated. Time must assuage the wounds of grief before he, who loved him most, and knew him best, can attempt his epitaph.

