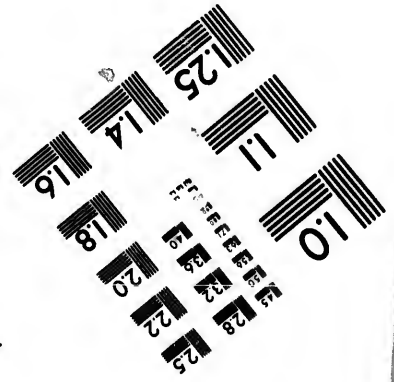
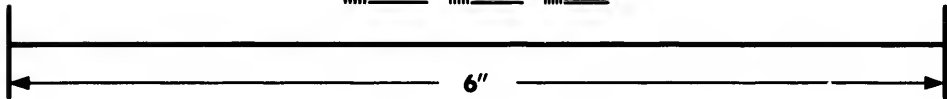
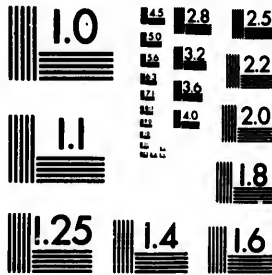


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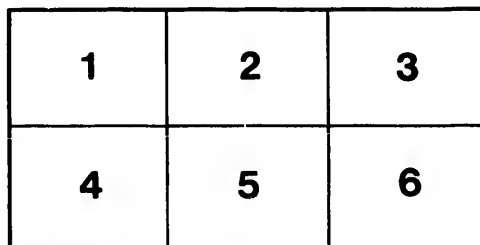
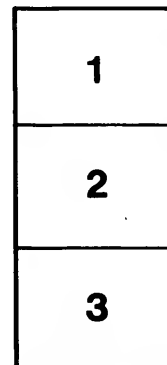
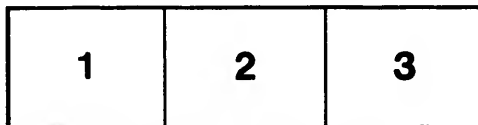
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MEMOIR

OF

FATHER LOUIS DELLA VAGNA,

LATE PARISH PRIEST OF ST. MARY'S;

A CAPUCHIN FRIAR OF THE THIRD ORDER OF
ST. FRANCIS.

HIS VIRTUES—HIS EARLY LIFE—HIS MISSIONARY LABOURS IN
FRANCE, ITALY, GREAT BRITAIN, IRELAND, AND THE
PROVINCES OF CANADA;

BY A MEMBER OF THE CATHOLIC PRESS.

TORONTO:

PRINTED BY CHARLES DONLEVY, MIRROR OFFICE,

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PREFACE.

In submitting the following memoir of the Rev. Father Louis della Vagna to public patronage, I owe an apology for many errors and omissions which are clearly discernible throughout the work. That apology must be First—The humility of the good Friar, who concealed his own merits as much as possible. Second.—The extreme paucity of the materials at my command. Third.—Above all, the hurry in which the Pamphlet has been got up, having been conceived and printed in one week, that it might accompany the portraits of Father Louis. Nevertheless I am persuaded that the pious reader will find in this little volume much food for meditation. While the admirer of the heroic labourers of the missions, will see therein a feeble tribute of gratitude from a Celtic pen, to a monk who left the sunny clime of Italy to minister to the wants of our exiled countrymen.

P. A. O'NEILL.

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MEMOIR

OF THE LATE

FATHER LOUIS DELLA VAGNA.

Holy be the Pilgrim's Sleep,
From the dreams of terror free,
And may all who wake to weep,
Rest to-night as sweet as he.

TOM MOORE.

On the Festival of St. Patrick---at the hour of eight o'clock---when the Vesper Bell had ceased its chiming, the Sanctuary Lamp that for the last year had shed its bright beautiful light over St. Mary's Congregation, was suddenly extinguished. Whilst his flock "shouted for joy" in the midst of a national *fete*, the Rev. Father Louis della Vagna passed away, at the close of a short, but severe and trying illness, during which he ardently aspired after the moment of union with our Lord, so fervently loved by him and so intensely throughout his penitential life. Of the good pastors who rest within the crypts of our churches, none has left a memory more fragrant with flowers of holiness. Speaking a strange language---coming from a foreign land---knowing little of the peculiar people to whose wants he was called upon to administer---his was nevertheless a nature so estimable, that he was regarded by his flock of St. Mary's with a degree of veneration and respect bordering upon worship. His loss was the more poignant, as it was wholly and entirely unexpected---arriving at the very period when the people of St. Mary's were becoming alive to the possession of the jewel, set in its rich casing of ascetic brilliants, which Providence had placed in their midst.

Father LOUIS DELLA VAGNA was born in the far-famed City of Genoa, now included in the Kingdom of Sardinia, in the year of our Lord 1801. On its sea-side he walked when yet a child, viewing in the clear blue skies of Italy, and her

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calm waters, as in a mirror, the beautiful serenity of a life guided by the commandments of God. As he traversed the semi-circular rock which surrounds its magnificent harbour, we marvel not that in his wanderings, he felt a deep sensation of the power of the Creator, the extreme nothingness of humanity beneath the shadow of its mighty cliffs. Genoa, the birth-place and the cradle of Christopher Columbus; in the Monasteries of which he planned those grand enterprises that added a continent to civilization, was, during Father Louis's childhood, a place of but minor importance. Situated on the Mediterranean Sea, with a fine harbour and an industrious and indefatigable population, it still, indeed, maintained a certain rank in commerce. But, as to political standing or national aspirations, its *prestige* had long since departed. The sun of its glory had set centuries ere this, over the silver-crested waves of the adjacent seas. There was left only to the ancient maritime commonwealth, amid the wrecks of former magnificence, the missionary zeal of her ecclesiastical sons, who, whether as secular Clergy, or members of the Religious Orders, still continued to spread to the East and to the West, "preaching the Gospel to all nations." In these modern times, the Genoese could not glory in their martial prowess; but the apostolic zeal and piety of their monks, and, above all, their solicitude in the education of youth, still emitted a shining light, which shone far beyond the environs of their Gulf of Genoa.

The young Louis, in the midst of this truly religious city, from his earliest infancy exhibited traits of the most ardent of temperaments. His boyish aspirations were vehement; and despite of his semi-conventual education, his ambitions leaned rather to the distinctions of the world than the humility of the cloister. It was the lofty spirit he inherited from his fathers that thus stirred him. His family, for generations, was a noble one. Even were he not of the proud, passionate sons of Italy, there was that within him which could not brook control—which prompted resistance. His was that strong spirit, based upon a foundation of deep thought, which, when hopelessly entangled in the meshes of the world, turns from it with disgust, and fixes its eagle glance on the haven that is alone the true destination of man. It may readily be imagined that a youth of this character should meet with difficulties in early life, which, as in the case of

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almost all those men who, having betaken themselves to the cloister, have afterwards become distinguished in their Order, gradually inclined him to give up the allurements of the world.

As soon as his tender age would permit, he was sent to the primary schools of Genoa, kept by holy men like the Brothers of the Christian Schools, in order to learn the rudiments of a sound education. Here the instruction was not limited, as in the Common Schools of our own country, to the mere recitation of words or figures. The object with the teacher was rather to instil sound principles for future guidance into the minds of the infantile pupils, thus securing the practice of religion and morality as youth advanced; and so ordering it that the higher schools would serve in some manner as a moral portal, out of which the student went fully prepared to withstand the trials and temptations of after life. It was the fortune of his parents to be enabled to avail themselves of these good schools; and thus, under the tutelage of the holy men who taught them, the young Louis grew in the principles of the One true Faith, and became of an age to attend to the more immediate business of every day life. At this early period he was rather remarkable for the industry with which he applied himself to his studies, and it soon became evident that he was gifted with the power of language in an unusual degree, for we find him using the English tongue, for commercial purposes, at a subsequent period, with the skill and capacity of a master. In this acquirement he was, amongst his brethren, somewhat singular; as of all the Continental tongues, English is the most unmusical to Italian ears.

It was to his early associations in the city of Genoa also that the youth was indebted for that spirit of charity which he exhibited in after life in a most heroic degree. Genoa "the Proud," in the midst of her splendid palaces of black and white marble, did not, like Dives in the parable, neglect the poorer members of the Church. The whole place teems with hospitals, asylums, and other benevolent institutions. And one of these which merited the favorite attention and much of the leisure hours of Father Louis, was served by Ladies of the Third Order of St. Francis, of which religious confraternity the Grey Sisters and the Clares of the British Isles are branches. The number of indigent persons daily relieved by them at this one Convent alone,

does not fall far short of 2,000. It was no wonder that a scion of such a city should be ever ready to relieve the distressed; for in so doing, he was engaged in the practice of that virtue which had been engraven upon his heart in the walks of his youth—a virtue, however, which was increased as he advanced in years and as he travelled in Ireland and the West of England amongst the poor peasants of that country.

The religious education of his early years—the sound principles which he had imbibed in season—and the sacred influence of the external evidences of Catholicity by which he was surrounded from his cradle—all these tended to keep the youth free from the deeper vices of the world, and as age advanced, to turn his thoughts into the channels of a religious life.

At length the time having arrived when, according to the designs of his family, *LOUIS DELLA VAGNA* should begin his share of the toils and troubles of life, he evinced by his intelligence and ability, the superiority of a judicious moral education over any merely secular system that could be devised. During the five years that he performed his duties in the Counting Room on the Exchange, he set about his business with an energy and an earnest integrity which won the approbation of all. His existence during part of this period was a monotonous one; until at length in conducting the business with which he was charged, he was entrusted with the foreign correspondence. It was here that he found the utility of his early acquirements, more especially his knowledge of English, which was then (as indeed it is now) a language little known or studied in Italy or the adjoining countries. Owing to this fortunate change also, he was enabled to acquire a power of expression in that language, without which he might never have extended the influence of his character beyond the precincts of his native city.

Having attained his majority, with an excellent reputation—a most important auxiliary to future success—he became principal of an extensive Banking Institution. While immersed in the trying cares and responsibilities of this position, he fell off much from the religious fervor of his youth. Business—the science of acquiring money and possessions, took complete possession of his soul. The contemplation of the fleeting goods of this earth usurped the

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place once filled by desire for the acquisition of treasures where "thieves do not break in and steal." Often and bitterly did the good man subsequently lament his blindness during these four years. Many a time did he kneel before that beautiful picture, "*The Magdalene and the Savior*," in the sombre aisles of St. Mark's Cathedral, and bitterly repent, as if it were a most flagrant crime, his former indifference. It gave a tinge of melancholy to all his meditations: he never ceased to deplore this temptation, into which in the hour of success he had fallen.

Being at length aroused by the operation of Divine grace, and being tired of the ceaseless race for riches, he left the banking concerns in the hands of his brother, and announced his intention of quitting the world. Despite the solicitations of his friends he adhered to his resolution, and having divested himself of all his wealth, entered the Convent of St. Francis of Assissium, and subjected himself to the severe rules and the austerities of the Third Order of St. Francis, at that period of life when the pleasures of this world hold undisputed sway—in the 24th year of his age; in the year of the Grand Jubilee, 1825.

In entering this Order, Father LOUIS was in reality crucifying himself with his Divine Master. He was committing himself to the practice of austerities, inferior only to those of La Trappe. The Friar Minors of Genoa maintained the ancient rule with much of its pristine vigor; for though the rule of the Third Order of St. Francis was originally intended for persons dwelling in the world, it soon became, as in this case, the distinctive mark of communities, rendered more useful by the absence of the absolute vows of the cloister. Year after year, while the good father resided in Italy, he associated the spirit of prayer with the highest degree of activity. In imitation of the Holy Monk of Umbria, the Founder of his Order, he spent all the time at his command in according spiritual consolation to the sick—in exhorting sinners to conversion and repentance—in setting the poor and lowly an example of poverty for the sake of Christ. Though blessed with a benign gift of heavenly contemplation in return for the victory which he had gained over the hot impulses of his youth, he was, nevertheless, amongst the people to whose wants he administered, a man of simplicity and sweetness—a monk who

was truly "meek and humble of heart." His struggles during the first years that he dedicated himself to the service of God, were great. Many times the recollection of worldly splendors made him sorrowful; but having persevered in every good work, he was at length rewarded with that calm contentment and blissful anticipation which characterizes the true disciple of St. Francis.

The Order to which Father Louis had attached himself was established by St. Francis of Assisium, in 1221, simultaneously in Poggi Bonzi, a town in the Grand Dukedom of Tuscany, and a place called Cannerio, in the valley of Spolletto. After a succession of years, a number of relaxations in the original rule was introduced, and many of the brethren being dissatisfied with these relaxations, in 1525 reformation was carried out by Matthew Baschi. The new branch thus established was called the Capuchin Friars, amongst whom the late Pastor of St. Mary's was not the least. For upwards of twenty-five years he continued to fast and pray and fulfil the ordinary requirements of his state, under the reformed rule, until the choice of his superior fell upon him to perform another function in which the Franciscan Friars are eminently successful. He was nominated, after having preached with much profit in the various Departments of Southern France, to the mission of the North-Western coasts of Europe.

In the year 1850 our zealous Missionary sailed across the Gulf of Genoa, and taking Lyons on his way, proceeded in the direction of Paris. He was then 49 years of age, in the prime and vigor of his manhood. The rigorous vigils and abstemiousness, however, which he continued to practice were gradually undermining a constitution not naturally robust. He reached Paris in the year 1851, and remained for some time in company with other Friars, making preparations for the further prosecution of his journey. Whilst in Paris he met by accident the illustrious Prelate who has since filled the See of Toronto with so great honor to the Church of Canada, and who was then on his way to Rome on the business of his consecration. To this chance meeting are we indebted for his coming amongst us. At this interview the Bishop eloquently expatiated upon the vast field open for the exercise of the ministry in his new diocese. He besought Father Louis to join him in its evangelization.

And he was the more pressing in his solicitations as he knew and appreciated his former study of the English language. But the Holy Man in his humility could not be persuaded that he possessed any gift which would render him a valuable acquisition to His Lordship; nor could he think of moving a step to the right or to the left unless in perfect obedience to his superiors. Bishop de Charbonnel was therefore necessitated to accept the good monk's promise to come to Canada whenever he should be permitted, at the same time however that he made no secret of his desire to undertake such a journey as soon as a fitting opportunity should present itself.

He then crossed the Channel in 1851, and landing in Liverpool, proceeded on his mission to the people of Wales. In company with several brothers of the same Order, he founded the Monastery of *Pantassac*, which continued to increase and flourish exceedingly under their fostering care. For two years subsequent to this he performed a series of the most severely fatiguing missions. In Liverpool he preached in one of the Churches permanently for several months, and the vast number of General Confessions, together with the crowds of strangers who were attracted to his sermons, evinced his power over all hearts. From Liverpool he extended his missionary zeal to other parts, (amongst which Liscop is the principal), and ere he retired from the pulpits of England had even delivered his earnest exhortations in the great metropolis of the nation, in that modern Babylon of drunkenness, vice, and misery—the City of London. In 1854 he came to Ireland, and in his missions in Dublin, Cork, and elsewhere, accomplished an incalculable amount of good. Returning to his Monastery at Pantassac, he received a command from his superior to hold himself in readiness for the Bombay missions; the scorching sun of Hindostan and China having thinned the ranks of the Franciscan missionaries around the military posts of the Company. Providence, however, had ordained it otherwise. He was to fall by another destroyer than the endemics of the Indies.

Having returned to Pantassac at the instance of his superiors, he commenced preparations for his voyage to the East. In the midst of this work however, he was stricken down by the hand of disease, brought on by his excessive labors in the United Kingdom; and his sickness continuing,

he was obliged to defer his contemplated journey entirely. In the meantime the packet sailed without him, and another of the brethren filled his place, much to the good Friar's chagrin. The affection which he had conceived for Bishop de Charbonnel was a warm one, and the desire to join him in the Far West strong. But to a missionary of Father Louis's zeal, it was peculiarly distasteful to be separated, even though by the stern decree of necessity, from that glorious cordon of saints who are at this moment planting the standard of the Cross, like the Apostles of old, in the deserts of India, or sealing the Faith of Jesus Christ with their blood in the vast Provinces of the Chinese Empire. It was the will of God however, and the good man submitted without a murmur. And there was not wanting one who rejoiced that he "went not out to the wilderness" on this occasion.

In the Fall of 1855 he again went on the missions into the surrounding country, and in his journeyings crossed over into Ireland; reaching All Hallows College, that Alma Mater of the Irish missions, on the Sunday previous to the 17th of March, 1856. While here it is needless to say that he was received as would be St. Francis or St. Anthony himself, and by his appearance and the influence of his zeal stirred up in the incipient missionaries of that institution an ardent love for the life which is before them. During his visit to All Hallows, he had an interview with Rev. Mr. Mulligan, now in St Michael's Palace. He appeared then, notwithstanding his great fatigue, and the severe illness out of which he had but recently become convalescent, to be in a good state of health and likely for some time longer to continue his zealous labors.

In the meantime His Lordship Bishop de Charbonnel was renewing the exertions he had been making for several years in order to secure him for the missions in the diocese of Toronto. Finding many difficulties in the way of such a consummation, he applied at last to the Propaganda. In a short time his efforts were crowned with success; and through the influence of the Sacred College, Father Louis was sent to Western Canada. This disposition of his services in the cause of religion was made known to him by his superior in the beginning of April of last year; and with his characteristic promptness and obedience, he immediately set about pre-

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paring for a departure from Pantassac, on this journey, which in relation to Italy, his own native land, was to the other extremity of the universe. In the month of April, such was his diligence, he arrived in Toronto, and on the Festival of the Ascension he accompanied the Bishop to St. Paul's, and sat at his right hand during the celebration of High Mass. Those who were present in the old church on that day will not soon forget the effect produced upon the congregation by his devout and sanctified demeanor. In his Pastoral Address at the conclusion of the Holy Sacrifice, the Bishop, observing the interest which the presence of Father Louis created, was pleased to refer to him in the following terms: "I have the happiness," said His Lordship, "to announce to you also the arrival amongst us of a holy monk, the Rev. Father Louis, who comes all the way from Italy burning with zeal for the salvation of souls. I have known him for nearly eight years; I have sought him for you for the last six; but obstacles continually presented themselves. At length, through the kindness of the Pope and the Propaganda, he is here."—*Toronto Mirror*. On the Sunday following he was inducted in the Parish Church of St. Mary's, and from that day till the day of his death, he administered the sacraments and the spiritual consolations of religion, with unremitting care and attention. He was literally day and night with his flock. All day long he sought after and promoted their welfare. He visited the sick, comforted the afflicted, and performed deeds of which, till a further manifestation of Divine Providence, if such be his will, we forbear to speak. Youth, laboring under the ills incident to a residence in miasmatic places, almost deprived of the light of heaven, being moved to repentance, knelt at the feet of the Holy Friar, and went away with the sweet consolations of religion. It was remarkable too, that they thought no more of death or material darkness. But *seeing* believed. The poor man, lying on his sick bed, clasped the hand of the good missionary, was enveloped in his warm embrace, and receiving from him the consolations of the holy eucharist, was rejoiced, as the good man who knew nothing about medicine, told him that his illness was but temporary, and that he would in a few days be numbered amongst the workmen of the world—a fact which was verified in less time than that mentioned. To recount his prayers,

his exhortations, his multiform duties, while Pastor of St. Mary's, is impossible. Suffice it to say, that while all the day long, he worked and preached, it may be said that all the night long he prayed and wept for the faults of his people—and with the deepest humility, while living the life of a saint, he accounted himself the lowliest christian amongst them.

Father LOUIS, notwithstanding the rigour of our Canadian winters, continued to adhere to the strict rules and austerities of his Order. He fulfilled, after the example of his Holy Founder, the canonical hours. He rarely slept more than barely sufficed to sustain nature. Several times during the silent hours, he raised his soul to God in thanksgiving and supplication. He rose generally about midnight, and continued in deepest pre-occupation and sacred communings within himself for a long time. It was often far into the morning ere he finished his prayers and ejaculations. Often might he, in the depth of his love, have repeated the fervent canted prayer of St. Francis of Assissium, "*In foco l'amor mi mise.*" After the manner of the ancient Anchorites, he mingled ashes with his food; and not the least among the disciplinings with which he chastised the rebellions of the flesh, were the painful and coarse garments which he wore. In utter disregard of the rigours of the climate, he would wear but one extremely coarse and rugged robe, refusing himself even the convenience of hose. He suffered his beard to grow after the manner of the Capuchins; and instead of shoes, he had upon his feet a species of sandal, which was a very inadequate protection against the severity of the weather. His room was uncomfortable and inconvenient to excess; and the bed on which he rested, even in his illness, was a narrow board, on which was spread a scanty covering of straw. He rarely eat more than one fair meal in the day; and during penitential times, it seemed as if he refused entirely to nourish his body.

From his vow of holy poverty nothing could induce him to swerve. So firmly did he adhere to it, that he would only receive contributions in money from his people when commanded. He would rather have imitated the Friars mendicant, and subsisted upon the alms of his flock. And when speaking to the congregation concerning the customary dues, he pointed frequently to the unadorned walls of St. Mary's Church, telling them that his vows of poverty pre-

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vented him from possessing more than sufficient for the merest necessities of existence; "but," said he, "all that you can spare is required for beautifying the House of the Lord!"

The virtue of humility he practised in the highest degree of perfection. His whole career, in fact, was one of continued self-denial. In conversation he never presumed to press his opinions with pertinacity upon others; and he always preferred to defer to the will of another rather than to have his own way. His garments, his plain and simple demeanour, the subdued tone of his actions, the love which he entertained for the company of the poor and simple, were all so many evidences of a humility which was deeply seated within his breast. Nor was the virtue of obedience less firmly engrafted in his soul. In all his actions he bowed to the slightest will of his superiors. He was gifted also with a spirit of deep contemplation. At all times and all places he wore an abstracted countenance, seeming to be continually wrapt in meditation. He cherished a particular devotion to St. Francis, and on the occasion of his festival, which falls in October, he had always a grand celebration. He was also a great admirer of blessed St. Anthony, of Padua.

On Friday, March 13, 1857, he celebrated Mass, but feeling unwell from the effects of the dampness of a newly plastered wall in the room in which he rested, he was forced to retire for the day. On Saturday he grew worse, and towards evening it became evident that he was fast sinking under an attack of Inflammation of the Lungs. He was immediately removed to St. Michael's Palace, where every possible care was bestowed upon him by the good Sisters. Notwithstanding their attention however, he became gradually worse, and expired on the evening of St. Patrick's Day, in the 56th year of his age. He seemed to have had a presentiment of his death. For when Rev. Mr. Lawrence was about to go up into the pulpit to preach the panegyric for the late Dr. King, Father Louis accosted him; and upon

the Rev. Mr. Lawrence telling him that he intended to preach from notes, he replied, "That is the way in which the Pope's panygeric is preached at Rome. You are going to preach this man's panygeric now. *You will preach my funeral sermon shortly; and it will be the NEXT ONE that you will preach.*"

On Wednesday his body was laid out and exposed in the Cathedral, where his parishioners and the people at large were permitted to cast a last look upon him, and to pay that tribute of respect which Catholics, and especially Irish Catholics, never fail to render to the remains of their clergy. Throughout Wednesday and Thursday the Cathedral was crowded with persons of all ages and every sex, who pressed forward with the greatest eagerness, happy even to touch the hem of the good Friar's garment. And I am assured by an eye-witness that the coarse robe in which he was clothed was literally torn from him, through the desire of the people to obtain some memento of one whom they so dearly loved. On Friday he was placed in one of the crypts of the Cathedral, and during the subsequent week a meeting was held in St. Mary's, at which Rev. Mr. Walsh presided, the object being to concert measures for raising a monument to his memory. At this meeting, which was principally composed of artizans and laborers, upwards of \$30 was raised for the purpose.

Thus died Father LOUIS DELLA VAGNA, and thus he lived. A model of chastity and humility—a martyr to obedience. If the virgin soil of Upper Canada be destined to contain a Man of God, then the Holy Friar of St. Mary's will have strong claims to the title.

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