

**THE LIFE OF ST. JANE
FRANCES FREMYOT
DE CHANTAL**

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The Life of St. Jane Frances Fremyot de Chantal by Emily Bowles

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BY
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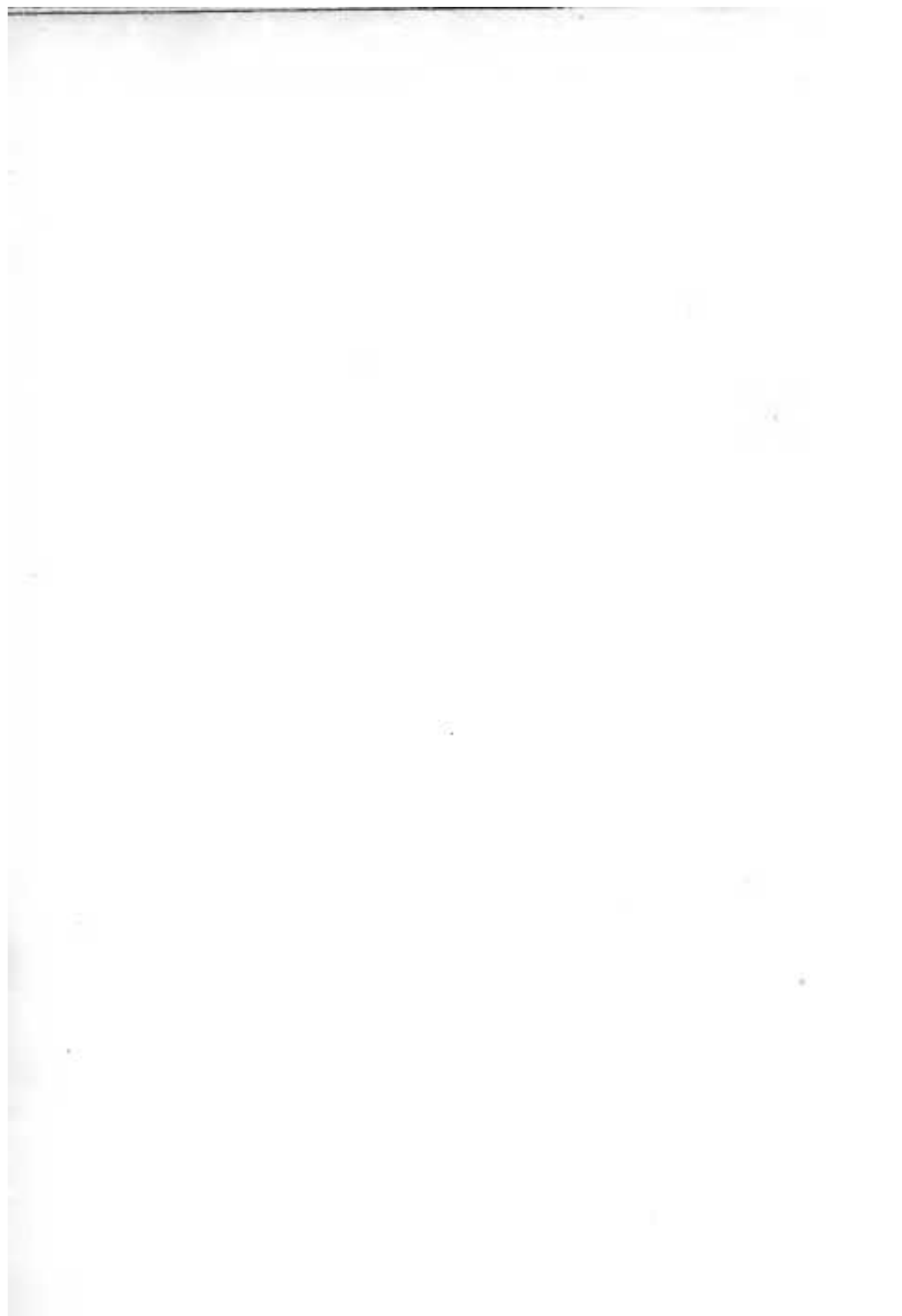
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PREFACE.

(BY THE EDITOR.)

THE following work was originally intended as a sketch of the life and character of the great Saint whose name it bears, chiefly in connection with her own family and children, and less directly in relation to the religious Order, in the foundation of which she was the instrument of Providence. A very interesting French work, *Les Deux Filles de Ste. Chantal*, full of details, and beautifully written, though somewhat too large for translation, has furnished the writer with abundant material for this sketch.

But it was thought a pity not to complete the narrative of the lives of Marie Aymée, the Baroness de Thorens, and Françoise, the Comtesse de Toulonjon, by some account of that of Madame de Chantal herself, not only as a mother in the natural order, but also as the spiritual mother of numerous generations of souls so dear to God, and so precious to the Church, as the nuns of the Visitation are well known to have been. For the life and character of this great servant of God formed a perfect whole, and any true portrait of her must certainly regard them as such. Her characteristic among the Saints seems to be force or strength,—a characteristic remarkable in her from her

earliest years, and one which made St. Francis de Sales, upon his very first acquaintance with her, apply to her the description found in the Proverbs of Solomon which has been prefixed to this volume instead of a dedication. But this force and strength which thus marked her life must be studied equally in all the phases of her career,—as much in her bearing as a religious woman as in her conduct as a wife, a widow, and a mother.

The materials at the command of the writer of her life are abundant and easy of access: the masterly work of the Abbé Bougaud, *Histoire de Ste. Chantal et des Origines de la Visitation*, leaving nothing to be desired in that respect. M. Bougaud's work, indeed, seems likely to take its place as a classic among modern Lives of the Saints, and may well be considered as a model which the writers of such lives should be encouraged to imitate. While it sets the career of St. Jane Frances in its due relation to the historical circumstances of the period in which she played so great a part, and while it abounds in the fruits of the most loving and minute research into the documentary stores and local particulars which are so important in enabling us to understand the narrative of a life such as hers, it also evidences at every page great command of theological and ascetical learning, with a tender and devout piety, and a sagacious spiritual judgment, such as are not always found in union with the highest qualities of the historian as such. With so admirable a guide as M. Bougaud, the author of the work now placed before the English reader has had little difficulty in tracing the chief and most significant events of the life of St. Jane Frances, and in delineating the main outlines of that strong, simple, impetuous, ardent, and somewhat stern character, which the gentle influences of grace, and the prudent hand of St. Francis

de Sales, moulded into the perfection of mature spiritual beauty in the first mother of the Visitation. It was impossible, however, to draw the first named of these two great Saints without giving some kind of picture of the other; and the story has thus expanded into a life of St. Jane Frances, in which considerable space is given to St. Francis de Sales, and to the progress of the Visitation, as well as to those scenes of family history which it was at first intended to make the chief object of study.

Any one acquainted either with the complex history to which reference has now been made, or with the latest literature of the subject, will easily understand why a volume like that now presented to the reader can only pretend to give a cursory account either of the life of St. Jane Frances or of the development of her Order. The work is not half as large as either of those from which it has been chiefly drawn; and even these do not contain all that might be said on the subject. In truth, St. Francis de Sales and his spiritual daughter, notwithstanding the beautiful works which recent French writers have consecrated to their memory, are as yet but imperfectly known, and the materials which exist for a more perfect account than any which have as yet appeared are considerable, and will still require much industry and perseverance to arrange them and set them before the public. The Convents of the Visitation at Annecy and elsewhere contain numberless papers which have hardly yet been fully examined. The case is still stronger with regard to the letters of St. Francis, although in the lately published Lives of that great Saint more use has been made of these precious memorials than hitherto. M. Bougaud (*Hist. de Ste. Chantal*, t. i. p. 231) tells us that he does not know what edition of the Letters to quote, 'car les nombreux autographes de Saint