

**SAINT FRANCIS  
OF SALES**

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Saint Francis of Sales by A. de Margerie

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**A. DE MARGERIE**

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*The Saints*

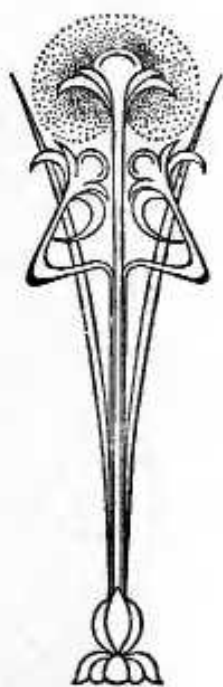
SAINT FRANCIS OF SALES

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# *Saint Francis of Sales*

*By A. de Margerie*



*Translated by  
Margaret Maitland*

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## EDITOR'S PREFACE

**I**T is generally recognised that St Francis of Sales belongs to the school of modern Saints; that is, of those Saints who not only lived at or after the Renaissance, but who also took account of what was good and evil in it, and shaped their Christianity under its influence.

Owing to the difficulty, nay, the impossibility, of separating the healthy from the morbid and predominant elements of the pagan culture with which Christianity was first confronted, an attitude of unqualified hostility was the only thing then practically possible. As Matthew Arnold would say, it was the Hebraistic and not the Hellenistic side of human perfection that most needed emphasis and protection in those days; it was the sense of the sovereign rights of God and conscience; the duty of struggling and fighting for truth and right that had to be secured, rather than any kind of ethical nicety or delicate finish of character. Strength was the first consideration, sweetness might come after as its efflorescence. And in the course of time even Gothic Christianity refined itself and spread its influence from the central fortresses of the soul over its whole area; passing from the conscience to the affections, tastes, and emotions; from isolated individuals to states, nations, and empires; and

giving birth to a culture of its own, or at least presiding over and directing its formation.

Naturally, then, when pagan culture was unearthed and brought to light before the eyes of Christendom, many were found in whose breasts its ideals—artistic, literary, and philosophical, struck a chord of sympathy; and as when we find redeeming points in some previously blasted and blackened character we are often prone to deify what we had formerly anathematised, so the unqualified odium in which Greco-Roman civilisation had been held for centuries, led to an excessive exaltation of its merits and a condonation of its faults at the expense of its calumniators' credit and authority. Hence the Renaissance period witnessed a very fierce and indiscriminating tug-of-war between the zealots of either cause—between puritanism and humanism: between the champions of conscience and morality, and the champions of intellect and refinement; each side ignoring the just claims of the other, and desiring to establish its own maimed ideal of human perfection. Roughly, it may be said that the sympathies of good men were mainly on the side of morality, while the champions of taste and cultivation were not as a class conspicuous for religion or purity; and this identification of the two parties with the sheep and the goats respectively, made reconciliation all the more difficult. When at last it did come about in some degree, it was bound to come from the side of the sheep, not from that of the goats. For though religion must first seek the Kingdom of God as the "one thing needful,"

though it regards consciousness and sincerity and good-will as the essential foundation of all right living; yet it is but the foundation, and the sincere will to do right must give birth to the endeavours to *know* what is right and to bring the best out of each faculty of the human soul. The root, after all, is for the sake of the flower. But cultivation that is not governed by an ethical motive is like a rootless flower, beautiful while it lasts; nor does it—whatever moralists say—stand in need of religion; for men can easily, and do mostly, live in the middle of things, shutting off all thought of the extremities—of the end and the origin—as tiresome or futile. Hence, speaking subjectively and apart from the abstract reasonableness of things, religion demands and gives birth to cultivation more readily than cultivation to religion.

St Francis of Sales stands out as one in whom this synthesis of these seeming contraries was peacefully accomplished; and if, perhaps, he seems to lack the intensity of his namesake of Assisi or of earlier types, it is precisely because of the even and harmonious development of every faculty of his soul, which destroys the effect produced by narrowing the spiritual energies into some deep-rushing channel, and gives us instead the noiseless tranquillity of the wide-spreading river. Take us as we are, with our limited energy and limited light, a certain narrowness is the usual condition of heroism and strength; not only lest, Hamlet-wise, our practical judgment be dazed with a boundless infinitude of considerations, but no less because our emotional