Saint Francis De Sales and His Religious Symbolism

Mary Ancilla Reilly

Loyola University Chicago

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses

Part of the French and Francophone Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation

Reilly, Mary Ancilla, "Saint Francis De Sales and His Religious Symbolism" (1940). Master's Theses. 331. https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/331

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master’s Theses by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License. Copyright © 1940 Mary Ancilla Reilly
Saint Francis de Sales

and

His Religious Symbolism

by

Sister Mary Ancilla, R.S.M.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Loyola University.

1940
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biography</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works of St. Francis de Sales</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolism in the Works of St. Francis</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

The revival of paganism in manners as well as in literature was an outstanding characteristic of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Pious and zealous men, alarmed at the rebirth of pagan science, art, and poetry condemned the whole movement as evil. But this was not the attitude of the Church; on the contrary, she undertook to direct the new movement; she prepared to create a revival that would be Catholic. She tried to open men's minds to beauty in life and art as a reflection of the Eternal Beauty. Consequently, the Christian Renaissance was a time of great conquest and triumph for the Church as well as a time of disaster and loss. Side by side with the falling away of souls, as a result of the Protestant Revolt, was the light of true faith which still shone with undimmed brilliance. Adherents to the Church not only became stronger in love, honor, and loyalty to their God, but they also showed greater fidelity to the marriage state, and respect for the ministers of Religion. To the last half of this century belonged Saint Francis de Sales whose writings aroused
the interest of the intellectuals of his day and exerted no small influence on the period.

The century in which he produced his earlier works is styled by some the most glorious in French literature. The language available to literature was so developed, strengthened, enlarged, and fitted to literary uses that it has ever since remained what the sixteenth century made it.¹ The works of Saint Francis gave evidence of this care and studied form; and the greatest of his works La Vie Dévote reveals a technique in the use of symbolism which is characteristically outstanding. A particular study of the Saint's works was made in order to learn more about the source of this symbolism as found in Pliny.

The age of Francis, in point of science, was on a level with that of Pliny whose one hundred thirty seven books contain the sum and substance of all the knowledge of antiquity with regard to the arts and sciences. In the sixteenth century this "information" which seems far fetched was frequently used in a symbolical way in sermons and literature, and it was generally understood; a passing allusion to the science in a book or an address was assumed as intelligible without any

¹ Edward Baillot, French Literature of Three Centuries (New York, 1907), p. 3.
further comment. In fact, Pliny's *Natural History* was so popular at the time that it was considered a handbook for the educated. Saint Francis employed this accepted knowledge extensively. Indeed, the comparisons are amusing in the light of modern science, but we must remember the enthusiasm of the Renaissance and the charm which the *Natural History* held. Francis draws from this ancient source a wealth of ideas for his unique symbolism and uses it to attain his religious objective, namely, the moral uplift of society.

Not only does he symbolize commonplace animals which have a direct appeal to the populace, but he also employs fabulous animals to enhance his imagery. His ability to express analogies in an eloquent and charming manner, his great originality and creative power in literary symbolism, his capacity for observing human nature, his ability to touch the human heart and arouse a profound sympathy and love for the beautiful have made the works of Saint Francis appeal to all classes of society, and have won for the Saint a lasting place in the literary world.
CHAPTER ONE
LIFE OF SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES

The procession made its way through Annecy with great respect and dignity. Two cardinals, fifty bishops and mitred abbots, and five hundred priests lent color to the scene. More impressive than the numbers, however, was the attitude of the large group who followed the procession under the relentless rays of the sun. Weary and footsore from days and nights of travel, they still pressed onward, cheered and encouraged by the thought of the great mission they were to fulfill. In this vast gathering composed of people of every class and age---villagers, city folk, children, and old men---there was not the least disorder; not a noise nor a complaint. Precautions had not been taken to preserve order; no extra police were assembled. An invisible one, a person who in life was gentleness itself, Francis de Sales, dead for three hundred years, led the Savoyard crowd. ¹

On this day in August, 1911, the body of the saint was being transferred to the new convent on a hill overlooking Annecy, and its people were rendering homage to their bishop

by their calmness and dignity. Such was the twentieth century's tribute to the great Francis, who was born here August 21, 1567.

At an early age Francis was sent to the university of Paris, where for five years he studied theology, Greek and Hebrew. From there he went to Padua to study Roman law under Panciroli, the most famous professor of his time; in 1591 the young man took his degree.

Yet he was troubled about the future. Realizing that the soul was more important, he sought the aid of Père Possevin, S.J., a saintly man who helped him in deciding his vocation. It was not long until the able director prophesied that his humble penitent would one day be a prince of the Church. Many were the trials which he underwent before his great end was reached.1

Dreams of the future success and glory of his son filled the father of Francis with joy, and as the first steps in a brilliant career, he insisted on his son's accepting the important post of Counsellor of the Parliament of Chambery. The heart of Francis was not bent on a worldly career. Vainly his cousin, Canon Louis de Sales, tried to persuade the proud father to allow Francis to embrace the ecclesiastical state. Francis begged in his own behalf, telling his father it was

not a new idea, this thought of consecrating himself to God, but that from childhood he had wished and prayed to become a priest. The father continued to insist that his first born should inherit the land and honors of the nobility. He even took steps to arrange a marriage for Francis.

God was with the earnest young man. The Provost of the Chapter of Geneva died, and the Canon de Sales, after consulting Bishop de Granier, solicited the pope to confer this dignity on Francis. He then hastened to Annecy to interview M. de Boisy, telling him that this was the highest dignity next to bishop, and begging him not to stand in his son's way. The father reluctantly gave his consent.

Francis put away his sword and the gay dress of a noble for the sombre black of the priest. In May 26, 1593, he was installed by the Chapter of Annecy. Only doctors and nobles were admitted to this great dignity; the young Francis was both. He began a retreat under a priest who taught him his new duties; the instructor was surprised at what the young man already knew. The Holy Office he had recited every day; there was no need for further delay. On June 18, 1593, he received minor orders; four days later he was made sub-deacon, and the following September, deacon. On December 15, of the same year he was ordained a priest, and said his first Mass at the Cathedral of Annecy on December 21. Today in that
same cathedral there is an old confessional hacked and cut to pieces, perhaps by the devout pilgrims; here Francis heard confessions, listened to the many tales of sin and sorrow as he strengthened and comforted the sinner. Here also is the pulpit from which he preached to many, among whom were his own father and mother; that mother who listened with joy and that father who did not approve the sermons because he said they were too long, too simple, and contained no Greek, no Latin, no learned quotations; even a child could understand them. He believed that his son preached too often and made himself too cheap. There were other projects undertaken by the Saint which proved sources of annoyance to the father.

In 1595 Duke Charles Emmanuel of Savoy recovered the sovereignty of the Duchy of Chablais and other districts around the Lake of Geneva, of which the Canton of Berne had dispossessed his family sixty years before. Mainly from political motives Charles resolved to undertake the conversion of his people. He felt that as long as his subjects were of the same belief as the Swiss, they would naturally lean toward their co-religionists and snatch at every opportunity to free themselves from his authority. He requested the Bishop of Geneva to send missionaries into the Chablais. For years the Bishops of Geneva had been unable to reside or even visit the city; they were compelled to remove to Annecy. There Bishop
de Granier held a meeting of the priests of his diocese to consult on the best method of carrying out the wishes of the Duke.

Francis de Sales volunteered to go on the dangerous mission of converting the heretics on the southern side of Lake Geneva. The father not only opposed his son, but refused to give him much needed financial aid. The Duke made no provision for the journey, and only through the secret donations of his mother was he able to reach his mission.¹

On September 9, 1594, Francis set out for his mission among rude and lawless people. After a day's march he and his cousin, Canon Louis de Sales, reached the citadel of Allinges in the heart of the Chablais, situated about six miles from Thonon, the principal town and stronghold of Calvinism. Baron d'Hermance, governor of the fortress and a faithful adherent of the Duke of Savoy, gave them a warm welcome. They were ready to set out for Thonon, but the governor asked them to view the surroundings from the citadel. He called their attention to the Lake of Geneva, the snow-capped mountains and the fertile valley. Francis sighed as he viewed the land, the glorious beauty of which was ravaged by signs of persecution, ruined churches, castles burned to the ground, crosses overthrown and gibbets erected. The

missionary could not restrain the tears as he thought of the millions of souls plunged in the darkness of schism and separated from the Church. In the Chablais were seventy-two parishes, thirty thousand persons, and among them only one hundred Catholics.

Every day the Saint said his Mass at d'Allinges and then went to Thonon and the surrounding villages to preach the word of God. There were few Catholics in the towns, and the Calvinists would not listen. Francis was not discouraged, but used every means including his knowledge of law and medicine to win the hearts of the people. The pamphlets which he wrote and distributed expounded the truths of the Religion which he was trying to restore. The heretics who would not listen to his sermons read these documents through curiosity and many found them so convincing that they desired to learn more of that doctrine which appealed not only to their reason, but to their hearts. In small numbers they came to listen to the sermons. The news of their straying flock angered the ministers and they hired ruffians to kill Francis. Many and miraculous were the escapes he had.

Conversions were few, and in 1595 Francis decided to take up his abode in Thonon, believing that he could do more for the heretics if he dwelt close to them. The Calvinists became furious when they learned he was to live in their very town.
They were unsuccessful in all attempts to put an end to him. His gentleness finally won them. He succeeded in having the Church property restored, a Jesuit College established at Thonon, the Church of St. Hippolytus renovated and restored to the Catholics. In this Church on Christmas Day 1596, the Saint said Mass; it was more than sixty years since the last Mass had been offered here.

Many were the conversions that followed. To strengthen the faith and increase the fervor, Francis resolved to hold Forty Hours' adoration at Annemasse. The Calvinists attempted to stop him, but nothing daunted the Saint. He marched in procession from Thonon to Annemasse, a distance of twelve miles. On the way he blessed and erected a cross on the spot where one had been destroyed by heretics. He attached to it the verse:

```
Ce n'est la pierre ni le bois
Que le Catholique adore;
Mais le Roi qui, mort en croix,
De son sang la croix honore.
```

This inscription made many converts. They had been taught that Catholics adored wood and stone, but now they were convinced of some of the errors of Calvinism. The true cross was again triumphant in the Chablais; images were replaced in the land and hearts of the people.

At last the prophecy of Père Possevin was to be fulfilled.
Bishop de Granier wished Francis to be his coadjutor with the right of succession to the See of Geneva. Francis argued that he could not accept this dignity. He persisted in his refusal, but the Bishop had set his heart on the project. He sent often to Francis and also even sought the aid of M. and Mme. de Boisy. Finally he sent Abbé Critain to him with instructions to bring the matter to a conclusion. The good priest advised Francis to beware of the outcome, since he was resisting the will of God. He at length accepted the dignity.

The bishop of Geneva died on September 17, 1602, and Francis returned to the Chateau of Sales to spend a few days with his people before taking up his new duties. During the remaining twenty years of his life Francis upheld in outward appearances the dignity of his office, Bishop of Geneva, but he arranged his own household somewhat like a monastery with fixed laws and regulations. He won the respect and affection of all by his unselfishness, his truthful and loving courtesy as well as by his unaffected simplicity and goodness. Few men have left such a universal impression upon the minds of those among whom they lived. To the courtier, the peasant, the intolerant heretic, to the indifferent and the devout the appeal of Saint Francis was alike irresistible.

Despite his numerous duties, Francis found time to write. His many letters encouraged, admonished, consoled and helped
his followers. The gift for reading and analyzing character with unerring instinct enabled him to give to the world a work which was suitable for all classes of society and which gave him a place in the world of letters. La Vie Dévote, to which considerable space will be given in the next chapter, is three hundred years old, and although everything has changed with the centuries, the fashions, manners, politics, and social customs, Philothée remains unchanged still possessing the freshness and vigor of youth.

His remaining outstanding works are distributed as follows: Les Controverses, Défense de l'Estendart de la Sainte Croix, Traité de l'Amour de Dieu, Sermons and Letters.

Father Reville in the preface to Philothée sums up in a general way the admirable qualities of the Saint:

"His intellectual gifts were of a high order, his mental vision clear, his fancy playful, his imagination creative, his learning extensive. He was tolerant of men's weaknesses, of their peculiarities, their narrow views, their whims, their oddities, their ill founded judgments, their inconsistencies, and their faults, provided only, these did not interfere with their solemn obligations."
The French Renaissance, according to Edith Sichel, began with Charles VIII's return from the wars in Italy at the end of the fifteenth century, a hundred years later than the Italian Renaissance. But the germs of that movement existed in France at an earlier time. Italian humanists had settled in France during the reign of Louis XI. Banishment was a favorite form of punishment for political offenses with the Italian states, especially with Florence, and one may attribute to this cause the presence of so many outstanding Italians in France. This movement of foreigners into France was greatly encouraged by the wise and liberal measures taken by Louis XI to promote an increase of population and the revival of trade. He established a colony of silk-works, first at Lyons and then at Tours, and relieved them from the ordinary restrictions on corporations. He also abolished the law by which the property of all foreigners who had not received the rights of citizenship passed at their death to the crown. As a result of this policy,

not only Italians, but Spaniards, Scots, Savoyards, Germans, and Swiss settled in France. These did much to propagate the ideas of the Renaissance. However, the return of Charles impregnated France with a strong Italian influence. The increased intercourse with Italy, followed by the conquests of Charles in that country, brought new ideas into France. Wars had done a great deal to spread Italian art and literature as well as Italian standards of beauty. Constant friendly relations, at a later time, between the two peoples had widened the field of commerce: Italian merchants settled in French towns. The influence of the churchmen, many of them patrons of learning, the universal correspondence of scholars of all lands—all these had their share in bringing about results.\(^1\) Unfortunately, an extraordinary enthusiasm for antiquity had set in, combined with boundless freedom of opinion, with a laxity of morals which has ever since given scandal to believers and unbelievers alike, and with a festal magnificence recalling the days and nights of Nero's "golden house". The passion for ancient literature simply intoxicated that generation.

France had its own type of humanist in that extraordinary man, Rabelais, the physician, priest, and jester, whose book

is the glory and the shame of his native tongue. Much the same philosophy though put forth in graver tones is brought forth by Montaigne. Rabelais is little read now because of the coarseness and profusion of indecency.

Although the sixteenth century saw the revival of paganism in social customs as well as in literature, it was no less a century outstanding in Catholic sanctity. This century witnessed an adaptation of the classical forms of literature and preaching by Catholics of genius, yielding a highly original blending of religion with eloquent prose and refined verse. It was during this century that prose writing first began to be an instrument of literary expression of equal power and art with verse.

The Renaissance education of our author, Saint Francis de Sales, is important. The scholars of his time were a race—a nation—with their own unwritten laws. They corresponded with each other, although few of them ever met in person. They shared the spirit of each other's labors, imparting every fresh result or research. Such energy involved endless writing. In his correspondence our writer excels, for he imparts his knowledge of God to others. He also shows his artistic taste and the culture of the Renaissance by his appreciation of colors.

---

1"Renaissance," Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. XII.
in the plumage of birds, in the lustre of jerels, and in the
color and beauty of flowers. Only to the fully developed man
does Nature disclose herself in all her fullness of beauty and
meaning; this development is evident in Saint Francis. Deep
character study was not a characteristic of the Renaissance
period; men were too much interested in themselves to take an
interest in others. Most of them enjoyed life too keenly to
look below the surface. In this Francis was not a Renaissance
product, for he knew and understood man thoroughly. Not only
is the Saint a master of the spiritual life, but he is truly
one of the great writers of French literature, of the seven­
teenth century. We might say he came as a happy reaction
against the sixteenth century and put the whole Christian
Renaissance within the reach of the lowliest through his many
works.

His earliest writings for the public are his Controversies,
first printed as leaflets and scattered among the inhabitants
of the Chablais, who could not or would not go to hear him
preach. He sought by means of these pamphlets to refute the
erroneous doctrines of the heretics. After pointing out the
errors of these people concerning the nature of the Church, he
outlines the notes of the true Church and proves that they are
not to be found in the reformed churches, but in the Catholic
Church alone. He also explains the "Rule of Faith" and demonstrates that it is broken by heretics. In conclusion, he discusses several special topics, but only those leaflets which treat of the Sacraments and of Purgatory are now extant. In these pamphlets he exhibits a powerful controversial method through which he met his adversaries and defeated all their lies and fallacies.

One of the well known pamphlets is that written under the title: Défense de L'Estendart de la Saincte Croix. It was an answer to a short treatise written by a minister condemning the Catholics for honoring the wayside crucifix. This Defense was dedicated to Bishop Claude de Granier by Saint Francis as a token of gratitude for the aid and encouragement he had given the mission. Francis was overcome by the fact that the little pamphlet was reprinted under the title of Panthology or Treatise of the Cross, and his exclamation gives expression to his feeling:

"I never dreamed, as in truth, I am not a man of that study and leisure, nor of that memory, to be able to put together so many pieces of worth in one book as to let it deserve the name of Treasure or Panthology, besides I have a horror of such insolent frontpieces:

'A sot, or senseless creature we him call
Who makes his portal greater than his hall.' "

2 St. Francis de Sales, Treatise on the Love of God (London, 1884), Preface.
Although his language appears strong at times, nevertheless, these Controversies always possess a spirit of charity which was ever the controlling motive in every controversy in which he engaged. In these pamphlets we find the same broad-mindedness which permeates the books he wrote with the purpose of promoting piety. The style of these leaflets is so elegant, so polished, so impressive that heretical ministers were accustomed to warn their followers against being deceived and won over by the flatteries of the missionary from Geneva.

More varied and widespread, though no less polished and elegant are his numerous letters. Speaking of these Mr. Strowski says:

"Il est heureux pour nous que Saint François de Sales ait résidé à Annecy. Les personnes qu'il dirigeait étant presque toutes et presque toujours fort loin de son petit Annecy, c'est par lettres qu'il s'entretiendait avec elles; la direction des âmes remplit ainsi sa correspondance."  

He wrote abundantly and on all subjects for:

"Faut-il réconcilier des plaideurs, solliciter des juges, presser le payement d'une dette criarde, obtenir d'un riche créancier qu'il épargne un débiteur pauvre, le voilà qui a pris la plume et qui réconcilie, et qui sollicite, et qui presse, et qui supplie. Un ecclésiastique veut être précepteur, et il écrit pour cet ecclésiastique; un Genevois se convertit, il demande pour le nouveau

---

These letters vary in length and in content; some are very short, while others are long enough to form short discourses. An example of the latter type is found in his letter to the Archbishop of Bourges, which might be styled a Treatise on the Art of Preaching. The substance of this letter is divided under four heads. In the first part he speaks of those qualified to preach, stating that bishops have more than an ordinary mission since they are the fountain-head; whereas other preachers are as streams which flow from them. He insists that both bishop and preacher must prepare for his work by a prayerful and blameless life. Secondly, he emphasizes the aim of preaching and the means by which the preacher should seek that end. Virtue must be made so attractive that the listener will want to practise it. Speaking of the material for the sermon, he mentions the value of nature comparisons, pointing out that Saint Francis of Assisi had no library but nature. Since God made the world, every part of it should speak of His praise and glory. He advises the use of illustrations because they are efficacious and give zest to the sermon; these should be well

1 Ibid., p. 35.
chosen and well applied. Similies, he considers valuable because they clear up the understanding and if applied smoothly, though trivial in themselves, are excellent. Lastly, he speaks of the manner of preaching and insists on poise and dignity. The speaker must be gentle, avoiding sharp words which reach the ear rather than the heart. The language of the preacher should be simple and the composition plain. On the whole, sermons should breathe love rather than indignation, even though the listeners be bitter opponents.

His letters are himself. It is for these that he reserved his most exquisite touches. In them the noblest thoughts are clothed in the noblest words; he speaks in these with an eloquence that comes straight from the heart. The Saint becomes one with those he seeks to comfort; he is cheerful to those whom he kindles to bravery, and he is firm in dealing with those he admonishes.¹

Letters of direction hold an important place in the collection, and his outstanding work is an outcome of his letters written to guide an individual soul. La Vie Dévote began as a course of instructions for Philothée, in real life, Madame de Charmoisy. It is a practical treatise on daily life, charming with its familiar illustrations, its good grace and its

¹ De Margerie, op. cit., p. 159
delightful humor. In his preface St. Francis himself tells us the circumstances which brought about the publication of this book.

"Mais ce n'a toutefois pas été par mon élection ou inclination que cette Introduction sort en public: une âme vraiment pleine d'honneur et de vertu ayant, il y a quelque temps, reçu de Dieu la grâce de vouloir aspirer à la vie dévote, désirant ma particulière assistance pour ce regard; et moi, qui lui avais longtemps auparavant remarqué en elle beaucoup de disposition pour ce dessein, je me rendis fort sçagneux de la bien instruire, et l'ayant conduite par tous les exercices convenables à son désir et sa condition, je lui en laissai des mémoires par écrit, afin qu'elle y eût recours, à son besoin. Elle depuis, les communiqua à un grand, docte et dévot Religieux, lequel estant que plusieurs en pourraient tirer du profit, m'exhorta fort de les faire publier; ce qui lui fut aisé de me persuader, parce que son amitié avait beaucoup de pouvoir sur ma volonté, et son jugement, une grande autorité sur le mien.

In this same preface he also acquaints us with this aim in writing the book, and gives us his explanation of the use of the name Philothée, as well as a little apology for what he calls a lack of ornaments of style.

"Ceux qui ont traité de la dévotion ont presque tous regardé l'instruction des personnes fort retirées du commerce du monde, ou au moins ont enseigné une sorte de dévotion qui conduit à cette entière retraite. Mon intention est d'instruire ceux qui vivent ès villes, es ménages, en la cour, et qui par leur condition sont obligés de faire une vie commune quant à l'extérieur, lesquels bien souvent, sous le prétexte d'une prétendue impossibilité, ne
veulent seulement pas penser à l'entreprise de la vie dévote, leur étant avis que, comme aucun animal n'ose goûter de la graine de l'herbe nommée "Palma Christi", aussi nul homme ne doit prétendre à la palme de la piété chrétienne, tandis qu'il vit emmi la presse des affaires temporelles.

J'adresse mes paroles à Philothée, parce que, voulant réduire à l'utilité commune de plusieurs âmes ce que j'avais premièrement écrit pour une seule, je l'appelle du nom commun à toutes celles qui veulent être dévotes; car Philothée veut dire amatrice ou amoureuse de Dieu."

He disproves in La Vie Dévote the false idea that holiness is so hedged around by annoyances and hardships that it is inadaptable to a life outside cloister walls. The book contains sections written on individual virtues, on modesty, on moral and immoral language, on dangerous amusements, fidelity to God, on duties of husband and wife. It teaches one how to conquer dangers and temptations. Here and there it gives the reader a glimpse of the customs and styles of the time, together with a splendid picture of changeless human nature.

"Les moustaches relevées - la barbe bien peignée, les cheveux crêpés, et les mains douillettes.

"Oyez parlez la plupart des filles, des femmes et des jeunes gens, ils ne se feindront nullement de dire: un tel gentilhomme est fort vertueux, il a beaucoup de perfections, car il danse bien, il joue bien à toutes sortes de jeux, il s'habille bien, il chante bien, il cajole bien, il a bonne mine; et les charlatans tiennent pour les plus vertueux d'entre eux ceux qui sont les plus grands bouffons. Ce
sont ordinairement les amitiés des jeunes gens, qui se tiennent aux moustaches, aux cheveux, aux oeilades, aux habits, à la morgue, à la babillerie.

The book was received with great enthusiasm by the seventeenth century. Even Mary of Medicis sent a copy to James I of England, who was so delighted that he carried it around with him. Moreover, Father Reville goes so far as to say that long before Shakespeare's name had met with general recognition either from his own countrymen or more especially from circles abroad, before any translation of his plays existed, *La Vie Dévote* had been translated into almost every language of cultured Europe. Today, translated into modern French, it is a monument to the great literary and spiritual power of Saint Francis de Sales.

Among the later works of the author was *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu*, addressed to souls already devout that they might be able to advance in perfection. This work published in 1616, gives a history of the love of God, its origin and development among men. When necessary he goes into explanations of the most difficult problems, which by reason of his great mind, he is able to present in beautiful language. He touches on a number of theological questions, proposing simply, as he states himself, not so much what he had learned at an earlier time in
disputations, but what twenty-four years of experience with souls had taught him was most conducive to the glory of the Gospel and of the Church.

The style of the Treatise differs greatly from that of his Defense of the Cross, and in a less degree from his Introduction. In the latter his indebtedness to Pliny is too evident; in his Treatise all similies are directly from nature. He also changes the name of the one addressed from Philothée to Theotimus, or the human spirit desirous of making spiritual progress. This change was made because many men, objecting to the feminine form, did not read the Introduction since they deemed the advice given to a woman unworthy of a man. He accounts for the change in style of his Treatise from that of his Defense of the Cross by telling us that through the years one learns and unlearns many things. In a similar way he accounts for the change in his language; the Treatise, a language of peace, naturally differs from the language of war found in his Defense. Changes also occur in the type of language used in the Treatise and in the Introduction. Speech appropriate for apprentices is employed in the latter, while the former contains the masterly diction of the religious craftsman of his age.

Despite his apologies for his lack of "ornements du language", Francis writes excellent singularly modern French,
enriched by the comparisons drawn from every phase of nature and human life. His feeling for nature was personal; he uses conventional images and gives them a personal touch. While he knew the works of Pliny, his comparisons are not drawn from this author; they are entirely his own. The images occur too frequently, too spontaneously, and possess too much personal color not to be original. His careful choice of words and his well balanced sentences proclaim the artist and scholar. It is of no little interest that long before the founders of the French Academy had formed their plan, Francis de Sales and Antonine Favre had seen in Annecy the need that eventually was recognized and met in Paris, and organized their own Academy. Thus may be claimed for St. Francis a great part in the work of steadying the French language.

Pope Pius XI in his Rerum Omnium states that

"St. Francis de Sales wrote at all times in a dignified but facile style, varied now and then by a marvelous acuteness in thought and grace of expression, and by reason of these qualities his writings have proven themselves quite agreeable reading."

Another tribute was paid to the Saint by the late Pope when he named Francis the Patron of Catholic Writers. He also expressed the wish that the works, the most perfect of their kind in the opinion of the contemporaries of the Saint, might be read now

1 Pius XI, op. cit.
as they formerly were by practically everyone.¹

Calvet, a distinguished writer of our present day, tells us in his L'Homme et le Saint that

"François de Sales est la porte du XVII siècle religieux, dont il a ouvert toutes les avenues, même celles qui semblent échapper le plus à sa lumières. C'est lui qui a réconcilié la Renaissance et l'esprit chrétien en pénétrant la Renaissance d'esprit chrétien; c'est lui qu'a rapproché la vie de la religion en insérant la religion dans la vie quotidienne; c'est lui qui a ramené le christianisme à l'intérieur en l'appliquant à transformer à transfigurer la conscience; c'est lui, et ceci est l'oeuvre essentielle qui explique et anime toutes les autres; c'est lui qui a rappelé l'essence du christianisme est l'amour."

¹ Ibid.
Chapter Three
Symbolism, Its Meaning and Use in La Vie Dévote

Symbolism is as old as the world itself, having been used by the ancient Egyptians in the early ages of their kingly dynasties. Egyptians symbolized their gods with animal forms or with combinations of both human and animal; Horus, the sun-god, took the form of a sparrow-hawk; the disc was the hieroglyph of the sun; the winged disc, derived from the Assyrians, expressed the victory of good over evil. The snake symbolized death; the staff was the Nile King's symbol of authority, and it has retained its significance with most nations ever since.

The literary device was also extensively used by the Jews; the Old Testament is full of symbolism and may be especially seen in the mystery of the Ark. The Jews in turn handed symbolism down from nation to nation. Even the persecutions of the early ages of Christianity made it necessary to veil beliefs and practices under figures and emblems. The early ritual of the Church used symbols, such as the white robe of Baptism to signify the purity of the Christian soul. The poetry of the Catholic Religion, the beauty and significance of its liturgy, the appeal of its belief and history to the imagination, and, in fact,
every detail of the structure of the Church came to have a special significance which contributed considerably in the development of symbolism in literature.

Symbolism is inextricably interwoven in the fabric of social life. Indeed it has been indispensable in binding that fabric together, for expression, communication and the very organization of civilized society are, to some extent, dependent on various forms of symbolism. Language, money, mathematics and the ceremonies of the Church and State are among the many types of symbolism which are apparent on a little reflection. Without symbolism there can be no literature, indeed not even language. Words are but symbols—mere sounds of the voice to which we give certain signification. Might we go so far as to say that symbolism began with the first words uttered by man as he named every living being? It came to be used of every sign, formula, or rite by which those initiated in any mystery made themselves secretly known to one another.¹

The importance of symbolism is due to the fact that without it thought, other than of the most primitive nature, is really impossible; and that in its various forms as it appeals to the sight or hearing, and to a less extent to the other senses, it is a vehicle of thought. In the definition of symbolism as one

thing standing for another, limitation must be imposed.1 Symbolism has been termed indirect representation, and the *Oxford Dictionary* though saying that a symbol "stands for, represents, or denotes something else," adds the proviso "not by exact resemblance, but by vague suggestion, or by some accidental or conventional relation."

The slightest survey of different epochs of civilization discloses great differences in their attitude towards symbolism. During the medieval period in Europe symbolism seemed to dominate men's imagination: Architecture was symbolical, ceremonial was symbolical, heraldry was symbolical.2 The best minds of this period believed in a multitude of fabulous creatures, such as the unicorn and the incombus
tible salamander. The crusaders and travelers brought home tales of marvelous creatures they heard of in some zoological fairyland. On the whole there existed an extraordinary misunderstanding of even the common European animal. The following example from one of the beast books is clear proof of this:

"Monosceros est beste, un corn ad en la teste,
   Pur ceo ad si a nun, de buc ad facun;
Par pucele est prise."3

If we would appreciate that age, we must endeavor to cast

---

3 Philip de Thaun, *The Bestiary* (London, Edited by T. Wright
off for a while our present knowledge of the animal world. We must consider the animals as tokens of the vices and virtues of this world. The dove, the panther, the pelican or the gryphon must remind us of the Savior of mankind; on the other hand what is horrible, degrading, unpardonable must be figured in the viper, the dragon, the toad, in some creature whose nature has inspired man with disgust or fear, revealing to him works of evil like his own. 1

Some aspects of this type of symbolism which was used by Saint Francis de Sales seem queer to the modern reader, but it was precisely this symbolism from the lives of plants and animals which enchanted the seventeenth century. It was not the outcome of direct observation of nature, nor does it show any of Francis's knowledge of nature; but it came in part from the natural histories which were so much loved in the middle ages and from which the sculptors of Gothic Cathedrals took their symbolism of beasts and plants; in part from Pliny's famous Natural History. Francis's use of these symbols should be regarded, then, as quotations from a classical writer of ancient Rome are regarded; and the humanistic and educated world of his time welcomed them as such. He had observed people's partiality for this form of knowledge while in Paris in 1602, and he chose his symbolism in accordance with the literary tastes of the time in order to

1 R.T. Holbrook, Dante and the Animal Kingdom (New York, 1902), p. 10
attain his religious objective.

"I always keep the spiritual formation before my mind, and it is necessary that I should do so for it is important to be perpetually aware of the century in which one is writing."¹

This tendency to portray imaginary creatures is found throughout his comparison. He frequently mentions the phoenix, the unicorn, and the incombustible salamander.

"On dit que la salamander étient le feu dans lequel elle se couche, et le péché ruine l'amitié en laquelle il se loge."²

The phoenix corresponds to the Virgin.

"Le phoenix, comme on dit, estant fort envielli, ramasse sur le haut d'une montaigne une quantité de bois aromatiques, sur lesquelz, comme sur son lit d'honneur, elle va finir ses jours; car lors que le soleil du fort de son midi jette ses rayons plus ardens, cet tout unique oiseau, pour contribuer à l'ardeur du soleil un surcroist d'action, ne cesse point de battre des ayesles sur son bucher jusques à ce qu'il luy ait fait prendre feu, et bruslant avec iceluy il se consume et meurt entre ces flammes odorantes. De mesme, Philothée, la Vierge Mère ayant assemblé en son esprit, par une tres vive et continuelle memoire, tous les plus aymables mistères de la vie et mort de son Filz, et recevant tous jours a droit fil parmi cela les plus ardentes inspirations que son Filz, "Soleil de justice," jettast sur les humains au plus fort du midi de sa Charité, peus d'ailleurs faysant aussi de son costé un perpetuel mouvement de contemplation, en fin le feu sacré de ce divin amour la consuia toute, comme un holocauste de suavité."³

The goat possessed the power of infecting the almond tree, while the basilisk could send forth a deadly poison from its eyes; but more dangerous than these are the wicked who infect and destroy the soul.

¹ M. Muller, Saint Francis de Sales (New York, 1936), p. 23
² St. Francis de Sales, Bk. III, Chap. XXII
³ Ibid., Bk. III, Chap. X
"Ne hantez nullement les personnes impudiques, car, comme les boucs touchant de la langue les amandiers doux les font devenir amers, ainsi ces âmes puantes et coeurs infects ne parlent guère à personne, ni de même sexe ni de divers sexe, qu'elles ne le fassent aucunement déchoir de la pudicité; elles ont le venin aux yeux et en l'haleine, comme les basilics."¹

Animal life interested the Saint only in so far as it furnished imagery to make men comprehend their actions, or in so far as animals furnished lessons for the guidance of men. He neither loved nor portrayed animals for their own sake.

At times when Francis de Sales departs from the ideas of the ancients, goes straight to nature, and observes her with the eyes of a saint, he really understands her, and his comparisons have beauty and freshness. He embodies the physical forms of nature, and the processes of the universe to express spiritual significance.

Nature for him is the vesture of the spiritual world; all nature is a mighty parable of spiritual truth, speaking lessons of wise and solemn import. To his attentive ear all earth is eloquent; to his reflecting mind all nature is symbolical, the animals, the birds, the bees, the streams, and the flowers. He is never weary of ringing changes on them.² The wolf, a savage beast from whom man naturally flees, reminds Saint Francis of temptation; flight is the best remedy.

¹ Ibid., Bk. II, Chap. III
"Si to tout que vous sentez en vous quelques tentations, faites comme les petits enfants, quand ils voient le loup ou l'ours en la campagne; car tout aussitôt, ils courent entre les bras de leur père et de leur mère, ou pour le moins les appellent à leur aide et secours."

In the elephant he finds traits which he considers worthy of note. He emphasizes the response of the elephant to gentle influence. No one takes correction which proceeds from passion; correction should be gentle.

"Rien ne n'a che tant l'éléphant courroucé que la vue d'un agnelet."

Amidst his many labors the Saint found it difficult to guide individual souls, but from this work he derived great pleasure. The motherly instinct of the tigress, which makes her brave all danger and surmount every difficulty in order to save her cub, serves as an example of Francis's own tender love and zeal for souls.

"On dit que la tigress, ayant retrouvé l'un de ses petits, que le chasseur lui laisse sur le chemin pour l'amuser, tandis qu'il importe le reste de la lité, elle s'en charge, pour gros qu'il soit, et pour cela n'en est point plus pesante, ains plus légère à la course qu'elle fait pour le sauver dans sa tanière l'amour naturel l'allégeant par ce fardeau."

A place of retreat for the soul is like the sylvan retreat of the hart.

1 St. Francis de Sales, Bk. IV, Chap. III
2 Ibid., Bk. III, Chap. VIII
3 Ibid., Preface, p. 10
"Comme les oiseaux ont des nids sur les arbres pour faire leur retraite quand ils en ont besoin, et les cerfs ont leurs buissons et leurs forts dans lesquels ils se recè lent et mettent à couvert, prenant la fraîcheur de l'ombre en été."1

One who has consented to sin is like the lioness that has been accosted by the leopard.

"La lionne qui a été accostée du leopard va vitem ent se laver pour oter la puanteur que cette accointance lui a laissée."2

As the kestral protects itself from the birds of prey by her special defense method, so man has his means of warding off the attacks of Satan.

"La crécerelle criant et regardant les oiseaux de prôie, les épouvante par une propriété et vertu secrète; c'est pourquoi les colombes l'aiment sur tous les autres oiseaux et vivent en assurance après d'icelle: ainsi l'humilité repousse Satan, et conserve en nous les grâces et dons du Saint-Esprit."3

Among the lower animals he frequently refers to the work and habits of bees to convey his ideas, drawing many lessons from their diligent ways. The queen of bees never goes abroad without being surrounded by all her subjects; charity never enters the heart without bringing other virtues in the train.

"Le roi des abeilles ne se met point aux champs qu'il ne soit environné de tout son petit peuple, et la charité n'entre jamais dans un coeur qu'elle n'y loge avec soi le train des autres vertus, les exerçant et mettant en besogne ainsi qu'un capitaine fait ses soldats: mais elle ne les met pas en œuvre ni tout à coup, ni également, ni en tous temps, ni en tous lieux."4

---

1 Ibid., Bk. II, Chap. XII
2 Ibid., Bk. II, Chap. XIX
3 Ibid., Bk. III, Chap. IV
4 Ibid., Bk. III, Chap. I
Carefully he observed these small creatures, contemplating with admiration their every act. He finds analogies in every phase of their life. Bees while making honey live upon bitter food; man can never perform acts of greater merit than while he is suffering bitter afflictions.

"Ressouvenez-vous que les abeilles au temps qu'elles font le miel, vivent et mangent d'une munition fort amère, et qu'ainsi nous ne pouvons jamais faire des actes de plus grande douceur et patience, ni mieux composer le miel des excellentes vertus, que tandis que nous mangeons le pain d'amertume et vivons parmi les angoisses. Et comme le miel qui est fait des fleurs de thym, herbe petite et amère, est le meilleur de tous, ainsi la vertu qui s'exerce en l'amertume des plus viles, basses et abjectes tribulations est la plus excellente de toutes."¹

The growth and development of bees remind Francis of the spiritual progress of a soul.

"Courage! Philothée, quand les petits mouchons des abeilles commencent à prendre forme, on les appelle nymphes: et lors ils ne sauraient encore voler sur les fleurs, ni sur, les monts, ni sure les collines voisines, pour ammasser le miel, mais petit à petit, se nourrissant du miel que leurs mères ont préparé, ces petites nymphes prennent des ailes et se fortifient, en sorte que par après ils volent, à la quête par tout le paysage. Il est vrai, nous sommes encore de petits mouchons en la dévotion; nous ne saurions monter selon notre dessein, qui n'est rien moindre que d'atteindre à la cime de la perfection chrétienne."²

In times of darkness, during trials and "amidst the inequality of the vicissitudes of this life" man should cling to God as the bee clings to its support in stormy weather.

¹ Ibid., Bk. III, Chap. III
² Ibid., Bk. IV, Chap. II
"Car comme les avettes, se voyant surprises du vent en la campagne, embrassent des pierres pour se pouvoir balancer en l'air et n'être pas si aisément transportées à la merci de l'orage, ainsi notre âme ayant vivement embrassé par résolution le précieux amour de son Dieu, demeure constante parmi l'inconstance et vicissitude des consolations et afflictions, tant spirituelles que temporelles, tant extérieures qu'intérieures."

Why shouldn't the human heart repose in God as the bee in the flower?

"Voyez votre cœur comme il est généreux, et que, comme rien ne peut arrêter les abeilles de tout ce qui est corrompu, ainsi s'arrêtent seulement sur les fleurs, ains votre cœur ne peut être en repos qu'en Dieu seul, et nulle creature ne le peut assouvir."

Bees also serve as examples of purity.

"Les abeilles non seulement ne veulent pas toucher les charognes, mais fuient et haissent extrêmement toutes sorte de puanteurs qui en proviennent."

This very beautiful passage compares the work of the bee to Holy Communion.

"O Philothée! imaginez-vous que comme l'abeille ayant recueilli sur les fleurs la rosée du ciel et le suc plus exquis de la terre, et l'ayant réduit en miel, le porte dans sa ruche, ainsi le prêtre ayant pris sur l'autel le Sauveur de monde, vrai Fils de Dieu, qui comme une rosée est descendu du ciel, et vrai Fils de la Vierge, qui comme fleur est sorti de la terre de notre humanité, il le met en viande de suavité dedans votre bouche et dedans votre corps."

---

1 Ibid., Bk. IV, Chap. XIII
2 Ibid., Bk. V, Chap. X
3 Ibid., Bk. III, Chap. XIV
4 Ibid., Bk. II, Chap. XXI
Francis de Sales had no sympathy with the noxious insects. Flies, hornets, and spiders which are a constant menace to man are compared with sin, temptation, and all the troubles of the soul. Man must avoid these as the bee shuns a swarm of hornets.

"Et pour celles-là, il s'en faut détourner, comme les abeilles se détourment de l'amas de taons et frelons."\(^1\)

Off-color conversation finds its likeness in the wasp.

"Et ceux qui pensent être galants hommes à dire de telles paroles en conversation, ne savent pas pourquoi les conversations sont faites: car elles doivent être comme essaims d'abeilles assemblées pour faire le miel de quelque doux et vertueux entretien, et non pas comme un tas guêpes que se joignent pour sucer quelque pourriture."\(^2\)

Spiders do not kill bees but they spoil and taint the honey; venial sin does not destroy the soul, but entangles the powers of the soul with evil inclinations.

"Les araignées ne tuent pas les abeilles, mais elles gâtent et corrompent leur miel, et embarrassent leurs rayons des toiles qu'elles y font, en sorte que les abeilles ne peuvent plus faire leur ménage. Ainsi le péché veniel ne tue pas notre ame, mais il gâte pourtant la dévotion, et embarrassse si fort de mauvaises habitudes et inclinations les puissances de l'ame, qu'elle ne peut plus exercer la promptitude de la charité de la charité, en laquelle git la dévotion."\(^3\)

Lesser temptations of vanity, suspicion, impatience, jealousy, and envy are like gnats. As it is almost impossible to be altogether freed from them, the best defense one can make is to ignore them. They can tease but never harm man. Temptation can

\(^1\) Ibid., Bk. III, Chap. XXIV
\(^2\) Ibid., Bk. III, Chap. XXVII
\(^3\) Ibid., Bk. IV, Chap. IX
never harm man, as long as he is determined to serve God.

"Or donc, quant à ces menues tentations de vanité, de soupçon, de chagrin, de jalousie, d'envie, d'amourettes et semblables tricheries qui, comme mouches et mouche-rons, viennent passer devant nos yeux, et tantôt nous piquer sur la joue, tantôt sur le nez, parce qu'il est impossible d'être tout à fait exempt de leur importunité, la meilleure résistance qu'on leur puisse faire, c'est de ne s'en point tourmenter; car tout cela ne peut nuire, quoi qu'il puisse faire de l'ennui, pourvu que l'on soit bien résolu de vouloir servir Dieu."¹

As the butterfly is attracted by the flame, hovers about it, and finally singes its wings, so young people, borne away by their curious and sinful thoughts at length ruin themselves.

"Car, comme le petit papillon voyant la flamme va curieusement volantant autour d'icelle pour essayer si elle est aussi douce que belle, et pressé de cette fantaisie ne cesse point qu'il ne se perde au premier essai, ainsi les jeunes gens bien souvent se laissent tellement saisir de la fausse et sotte estime qu'ils ont du plaisir des flammes voluptueuses, qu'après plusieurs curieuses pensées ils s'y vont en fin finale ruiner et perdre."²

Jealousy destroys the happiness of married life as the worm destroys the apple.

"Comme le yer s'engendre de la pomme la plus délicate et la plus mure, aussi la jalousie naît en l'amour le plus ardent et pressant des mariés, duquel néanmoins il gâte et corrompt la substance, car petit à petit il engendre les noises, dissensions et divorces."³

St. Francis was no less interested in the beauties of plant life; this interest again manifests itself in his symbolism. He

¹ Ibid., Bk. III, Chap. VII
² Ibid., Bk. IV, Chap. IX
³ Ibid., Bk. III, Chap. XXXVIII
observes qualities in plants, but he also draws from the fancied scientific stories of Pliny. As the spongy, porous mushroom imbibes the poison from the toads and serpents near it, so balls, dances, and other nocturnal assemblies attract the vices of the neighborhood.

"Les champignons, selon Pline, étant spongieux et poreux comme ils sont, attirent aisément toute l'infection qui leur est autour, si que étant près des serpents ils en recoivent le venin. Les bals, les danses et telles assemblées ténèbreuses attirent les vices et pechés qui règnent en un lieu: les querelles, les envies, les moqueries, les folles amours; et comme ces exercices ouvrent les pores du corps de ceux qui les font, aussi ouvrent-ils les pores du coeur, au moyen de quoi, si quelque serpent sur cela vient souffler aux oreilles quelque parole lascive, quelque muguetterie, quelque cajolerie."¹

The vine planted among olive trees, bears grapes which are oily, and have the taste of olives; so virtuous people influence those around them.

"La vigne plantée parmi les oliviers porte des raisins onctueux et qui ont le goût des olives: une âme qui se trouve souvent parmi les gens de vertu ne peut qu'elle ne participe à leurs qualités."²

Flowers have always been a favorite theme with poets and song writers. The ancient Greeks and Romans had a flower language which was revived during the Middle Ages. Oak was the patriot's crown, a wreath of bay leaves for the poet, and for the beauty, a crown of myrtle. The instinctive and universal

¹ Ibid., Bk. III, Chap. XXXIII
² Ibid., Bk. III, Chap. XXIV
taste of mankind selects flowers for the expression of its finest sentiment. To Saint Francis de Sales flowers were reminders of the sweetness of God. His words are replete with the imagery of flowers. He opens the preface of *La Vie Dévote* by referring to the work as a nosegay in which no new flowers are used, but in which old flowers are arranged in a new way.

"La bouquetiere Glycera savait si proprement diversifier la disposition et le mélange des fleurs, qu'avec les mêmes fleurs elle faisait une grande variété de bouquets. Je ne puis, ni veux, ni dois écrire en cette Introduction que ce qui a déjà été publié par nos prédécesseurs sur ce sujet: ce sont les mêmes fleurs que je présente, mais le bouquet que j'en ai fait sera différent des leurs, à raison de la diversité de l'agencement dont il est façonné."

The lily, the symbol of purity, was the flower above all others associated with virginity. Although it has been used with reference to both men and women, it is fittingly reserved for maidenhood. Saint Francis makes frequent use of this, his favorite flower. The saint, particularly the virgins, are to him whiter than the lilies of purity.

"Mais surtout, ces belles et florissantes dames, plus blanches que lis en pureté, plus vermeilles que la rose en charité."

Violets grow in sequestered places, beneath hedges, and hidden in the shadows of larger plants. These tiny flowers usually symbolize humility and secrecy. The widow is in the Church a

true violet who sends forth sweetness by the odor of her devotion, and keeps herself concealed under the broad leaves of her lowliness.

"La vraie veuve est en l'Église une petite violette de mars, qui répand une sauvette nonpareille par l'odeur de sa dévotion, et se tient presque toujours cachée sous les larges feuilles de abjection, et par sa couleur moins éclatante témoigne la mortification."1

Flowers are like the good desires of the heart.

"Qui sont les fleurs de nos coeurs, O Philothée, sinon les bons désirs."2

Stars reflected in the brook, the little stream itself, the rushing torrents, the gently flowing waters and quiet lakes, all had a special message for Francis; all spoke to him of God.

"O mon Dieu, ces mêmes étoiles seront dessous mes pieds quand vous n'aurez logée dans vos saints tabernacles."3

Contemplating a pleasant brook, he repeated:

"La grâce de mon Dieu coule ainsi doucement et souvèment comme ce petit ruisseau."4

Seeing the trees in bloom brings forth another sigh:

"Pourquoi suis--je seul défleuri au jardin de l'Église."5

The river flowing swiftly reminds him of the source of his life.

"Mon âme n'aura jamais repos qu'elle ne soit abîmée dedans la mer de la Divinité qui est son origine."6

---

1 Ibid., Bk. III, Chap. XI.
2 Ibid., Bk. III, Chap. VI.
3 Ibid., Bk. III, Chap. XIV.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., Bk. II, Chap. XIV
6 Ibid.
The Saint frequently refers to balm; the mixture of holy chrism and balm represents the two favorite virtues in the person of our Lord. The balm which sinks to the bottom when poured into other liquids symbolizes His humility, and the oil of olives which comes to the top signifies His meekness and kindness.

"Le baume (qui, comme j'ai dit ci-dessus, prend toujours le dessous parmi toutes les liqueurs) représente l'humilité, et l'huile d'olive, qui prend toujours le dessus, représente la douceur et débonnaireté, laquelle surmonte toutes choses et excelle entre les vertus comme étant la fleur de la charité."1

Again he tells us that true goodness is proved like true balm.

"On connait le vrai bien comme le vrai baume: on fait l'essai du baume en le distillant dedans l'eau, car s'il va au fond et qu'il prenne le dessous, il est jugé pour être du plus fin et précieux. Ainsi, pour connaître si un homme est vraiment sage, savant, généreux, noble il faut voir si ses biens tendent à l'humilité, modestie et soumission, car alors ce seront des vrais biens."2

Accepted bits of medieval science continue to furnish the source of his imagery. Seeking beauty and the ideal, he again goes to Pliny for his information concerning precious stones. The fancied origin of the pearl, conceived in the dew from heaven, particularly appealed to him, for he frequently refers to it. The pearl becomes a symbol of purity.

1 Ibid., Bk. II, Chap. XIII
2 Ibid., Bk. III, Chap. VIII
"Le coeur chaste est comme la mère perle qui ne peut recevoir aucune goutte d'eau qui ne vienne du ciel, car il ne peut recevoir aucun plaisir que celui du mariage, qui est ordonné du ciel."  

It is also used to show that a devout life is possible in society.

"Comme les mère perles vivent emmi la mer sans prendre aucun goutte d'eau marien."  

He contemplates the lustre of precious stones; shining enamel becomes the symbol of glory:

"La gloire n'est autre chose, à mon avis, qu'un certain éclat de réputation qui rejaillit de l'assemblage de plusieurs louanges et honneurs: si que les honneurs et louanges sont comme des pierres précieuses, de l'amas desquelles réussit la gloire comme un émail."  

Francis was a careful observer, and he beheld all in direct relationship to God and souls. He stored up in his mind everything that presented itself to his sight, reproducing each at the right moment in order to lift others to higher things.

One might think that the reader would weary of this repetition, these comparisons which have but one source, Nature; but there is such constant freshness of handling the variety of detail in these symbols that one is delighted with each new picture. The comparisons are picturesque, full of charm, beauty and color. All nature reveals itself to the Saint and in the revealing discloses many secrets concerning its Author; secrets which seem to promote the intimacy of Creator and creature.

1 Ibid., Bk. III, Chap. XII
2 Ibid., Bk. I, Chap. III
3 Ibid.
Conclusion

Biographers and critics differ greatly in estimating the value and influence of the works of Saint Francis de Sales. A. De Margerie regrets that the writer has not received sufficient recognition in the literary world, Mrs. Kenny, another biographer, is inclined to call everything he wrote the "greatest" and the "best" of works, while Henri Bordeaux is no less zealous in promoting and praising the ability of the Saint. On the other hand, Abbe Henri Bremond, Sainte-Beu, and Huysmans are less enthusiastic in their praise, branding his writings "insipid" and "rose-tinted". Paul Souday indorses the opinion of these critics, stating that the style of St. Francis is too flowery. This statement is supported by a number of examples. Souday is disappointed with La Vie Devote, and tells us that Francis begins with a comparison of the Holy Ghost to the flower-girl, Glycera; the rest of the book, in his judgment, fulfills the promises of such a beginning. He continues to dwell on the work of saying that the author hands out mere spiritual bouquets and soft and perfumed metaphors.
serving his reader the honey and jam of literature. Francis does not address a religious audience, but men and women of the world whom he desires to lead upward without frightening them. Consequently, he made concessions to them and Souday condemns him for this. The soothing, flattering unctuousness of his words, tinged with a romantic flavor, exasperates the critic, who concludes his article by saying that Francis makes up for austerity with pious effusions. Father Mackey, the Benedictine, who has made a careful study of our writer, would probably disagree with these critics by pointing out that beneath his docile exterior the Saint concealed an austere and unshakable will. He might also add that the discipline which Francis preaches is by no means within the power of "soft" and fearful souls to achieve. Since the saints have come back today to occupy a new position in society, to fill, as it were, the places from which they were exiled and banished for centuries, 'Saint Francis, too, may return in a new light'. This renewed interest in old saints may bring forth a writer who will establish for Saint Francis a greater position in literature.

A final review of his style with the purpose of pointing many noteworthy points disregarded by some of the preceding critics seems appropriate here. The French language, according
to Bordeaux, is best spoken in Savoy with simplicity, clearness, and naturalness. The Saint's careful style gives evidence of this, for it possesses purity, picturesqueness, and clarity together with many rich and colorful expressions which Francis had taken from the dialect spoken by the peasants. The numerous nature comparisons add beauty and color to his works. Before J. J. Rousseau, who is given the credit for making man more conscious of nature and for filling him with a desire to learn more about it, Saint Francis de Sales was expressing his appreciation of God's creation. He, it was, who first heard the voice of the mountains that sounded like a religious chant, and it is he who beautifully describes the waters of the little brook lit up by reflections of the sky and stars. Indeed, so full of music and rhythm are some of his sentences that he has been styled the first French prose poet.

This well-read writer whose writing was received by the well-read of his day did not aim merely at impressing his readers with his beauty of speech; each production had a definite practical goal. The Controversies and the Standard of the Holy Cross were planned for his Protestant missions; the Introduction to the Devout Life was to guide people of the world, the Treatise of the Love of God was drawn up for the Sisters of
the Visitation, and the letters were on every subject for everyone who needed advice or help. These have not only served their purpose in reaching the people of the seventeenth century, but their influence has extended down through the succeeding centuries, and today they still prove a source of help and guidance for those in need. Pope Pius XI expressed the desire that the Introduction be widely read since it has a special message appropriate to the needs of our present day.

His knowledge of Pliny and the great writers of the ancient world together with his powerful originality and use of modern French made his words a powerful contribution of the age. The indefinite literary forms and crude art of medievalism were replaced by an art, a style, a grace, a felicity of workmanship outstanding in the sixteenth century. The Saint portrays a deep, personal feeling for nature manifested in all his works; and his use of conventional images reveals a tremendous power of spontaneity. In fact, in profoundity of natural knowledge, in wealth and exuberance of language, in originality of thought and idea, in knowledge of human nature, in philosophic insight into the laws that govern mind and soul, in poetic imagination, in worldly common sense, and in sage wisdom, Francis remains today what he has been for three centuries, one of the great men of the literary world; his writings being the most complete and vivid reflection of the thought and spirit of his age.
Bibliography


The thesis, "Saint Francis de Sales and His Religious Symbolism", written by Sister Mary Ancilla Reilly, R.S.M., has been accepted by the Graduate School with reference to form, and by the readers whose names appear below, with reference to content. It is, therefore, accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Joseph Le Blanc, Ph.D., Litt.D.  April 1, 1940
Helen Langer May, Ph.D.  March 29, 1940