
**Thomas a Kempis and the
Brothers of the common life**

Kettlewell S

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THOMAS À KEMPIS

AND

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1885.
H.

P R E F A C E.

IT was from an earnest desire to know something more of the author of 'The Imitation of Christ' that this work was at first written, and is now published in a more concise form, that it may be brought within the reach of a large number who know and value the above most excellent publication, which has exercised so large an influence both before and since the time of the Reformation.

The life of Thomas à Kempis was peculiarly a hidden life, of which it was only possible to catch occasional glimpses from what the old biographers said of him; while there still remained much that could be learnt respecting him, though indirectly, through his own words; (1) of what he said of others in whom he was interested, and with whom he was associated; and (2) in the instructions on the spiritual life which he gave in various ways, from which we gather much information regarding his interior devotion, and his views on religion.

Another object kept in view was to bring out more prominently the nature and results of the religious movement or Society of which he was the most conspicuous ornament and chief exponent, and to give some account of the lives and characters of a few of its early members, men with whom for the most part à Kempis was acquainted, and who were largely instrumental in moulding the devout life of our author. In reproducing these memoirs which à Kempis himself has given, I have kept as much as possible to the simple and pious language which the writer employs. In the later part of this

work, sketches of the lives of many other excellent characters, with whom à Kempis came in contact, are interspersed, with the records of his monastery. The information is various, and has been chiefly drawn from some old chronicles, though mainly from two written by à Kempis; and in the substance of what has been selected I have endeavoured to avoid needless repetition, and still to preserve a continuous history of events.

The period in which à Kempis lived was that preceding the Reformation, when Europe was distracted by various dissensions and wars. In England, the frightful civil wars between the Houses of York and Lancaster were at their height. France was divided and torn in pieces by contending parties; while early in the 15th century the great schism in the Papacy was going on causing much suffering and bloodshed in Italy and Germany. In the East, succour having been refused by the Western powers, through the influence of the Pope, Constantinople fell into the hands of the Saracens, after a lengthened and noble defence. It was 'an age of the Church,' says an able writer, 'in which we seem to expect less tokens of her spiritual life than in any other, . . . and yet precisely in this century it was, that a deep and pure devotion sprang up, surpassing all that had been known before in intensity, superior to all that was to come after it in purity.' How deep, how earnest, how holy, how real this religious devotion was, the following pages will show.

In the Introductory Chapter, the chief sources from which the matter has been drawn are named: but I have endeavoured to avoid all references and notes where not necessarily called for, so as to keep the work within compass.

S. K.