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THE  
CHURCHMAN

A Monthly Magazine

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OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND*

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beginning of that long succession of Gospel teaching and Gospel preaching which has gone on with more or less of purity, more or less of corruption, ever since. That group of Apostles has long since been dispersed. Some were put to death—the martyrdom of St. James, at a very short interval of time, is recorded first—others travelled into distant places and there died. Among these were perhaps Bartholomew, whom we commemorate in this month. We hear a little more of St. Peter and St. John, and then they disappear; but “their sound is gone out into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world;” and each crowded church, where Christ has been faithfully set forth in His love and His power, and according to the teaching of the Apostles, has become a “Solomon's Porch.”

J. S. HOWSON.



### ART. III.—THE “DE IMITATIONE CHRISTI.”

THE *De Imitatione Christi*, which we have lately heard was one of the few favourite books of General Gordon, was written in the year 1441. Its author, Thomas à Kempis, was born in the year 1380 at Kempen, a small town in the duchy of Cleves and diocese of Cologne. His parents, John and Gertrude Hæmmerlein, were people of humble life, but of this Thomas was never ashamed. Rather, like Luther in after days, he rejoiced in his lowly rank. From his father, who was an honest mechanic, he learnt industry, simplicity, and perseverance; and from his mother he received a heritage of piety, which became richer and more precious as the days went on. Even in tender youth Thomas must have evinced fine talents and shown an inclination for study, or his parents would hardly have thought of making him a scholar. The cost of education and subsistence away from home was altogether beyond their means. To young persons in such circumstances at this period the institutions of “The Brethren of the Common Lot” offered a helping hand; and in this way the Hæmmerleins were enabled to educate their son. At thirteen years of age Thomas was sent to the College of Deventer, then regarded as the Athens of the Low Countries, where his elder brother, John, had been resident for some years previously, under the instruction of the great preacher and scholar, Gerhard Groot. Here he made considerable progress in secular knowledge and in the knowledge of divine things. He read eagerly under the direction of Florentius Radewins,

who had succeeded Groot as superintendent of the college—"a man," to use the words of à Kempis, "adorned with virtues, and filled with divine wisdom in the knowledge of Christ." The young student at once became a favourite with Florentius. He lent him books which he was too poor to purchase, and procured him lodgings in the house of a pious woman, as afterwards happened to Luther at Eisenach. In the course of time à Kempis connected himself with the Brethren of the Common Lot, and soon became one of the most devoted of that Brotherhood. He read and copied much of the Holy Scripture, and gave himself heartily to all the religious exercises of the place. Amongst his companions was a young man of fervent piety, Arnold of Schönenhofen, whose example acted upon the mind of à Kempis, as did that of Augustine upon the mind of Alypius a thousand years before, and that of John Wesley three hundred and fifty years after, in the classic halls of Oxford, upon the susceptible mind of young Whitfield. Arnold used to rise every morning at four o'clock, and after uttering a short prayer upon his knees by his bedside, quickly dressed himself and hastened to the worship. Besides, he frequently withdrew, in imitation of his Divine Master, to some solitary place, in order to devote himself unobserved to prayer and meditation. Thomas à Kempis sometimes accidentally witnessed these outpourings of his friend's heart, and says: "I found myself on such occasions kindled by his zeal to prayer, and wished to experience, were it but sometimes, a grace of devotion like that which he seemed almost daily to possess." But in Florentius, his superior, he had a higher and more finished model. The apostolic simple-mindedness and dignity, the urbanity, gentleness, purity, and self-sacrificing activity for the common welfare which characterized the master, inspired à Kempis with great admiration and reverence. He hung upon his words; he observed his minutest actions with a view to learn some lesson from them; and he sought to express the spirit of the good father's life in his own thoughts and temper and conduct.

In the year 1400 he became an inmate of the Augustinian Monastery of St. Agnes, close to the town of Zwoll, and there he lived to the great age of ninety-two, the flame of his serene and beautiful piety investing the obscure monastery with a brighter glory than shines in the palaces of Christendom. From day to day his life flowed on like a limpid brook reflecting on its calm surface the unclouded heavens. Like Wordsworth's "Wanderer," we may say of him :

In his steady course  
No piteous revolutions had he felt,  
No wild varieties of joy and grief.

Quiet industry, lonely contemplation, and secret prayer filled up the hours of the day and a good part of the night too. “Rise early, watch, pray, labour, read, write, be silent, sigh, and bravely endure all adversity”—these are à Kempis’s rules of life, which he never wearies of repeating again and again. The narrow cell lighted up by the love of God, with unseen angels hovering round, is to him a haven which he would not exchange for the palace of the Emperor or the crowns of the world. Indeed, he regarded the world with abhorrence and contempt, as a chief foe to the spiritual life, and maintained that no compromise was to be made with it, no parley held with it. “It is vanity,” he says, “to mind only the present world, and not to look forward to that which is to come; to suffer our affections to hover over a state in which all things pass away with the swiftness of thought, and not raise them to that where true joy abideth for ever.” Again, he quotes with approval the saying of Seneca: “As often as I mingled in the company of men I came out of it less a man than I went in,” i.e., less humane, with less of the spirit of true manhood in my disposition. His biographer, Franciscus Tolensis, was once shown a picture of him, even then much effaced, but with the characteristic motto at the foot—“I have sought rest everywhere and found it nowhere, save in solitude and books.” Books were his chief companions, and of these he liked best the Psalter and the works of St. Bernard; but he carefully studied the whole Bible, and likewise its patristic and mystical expositors. “Woe,” says he, “to the clergyman without education or knowledge of the Scriptures, for he often becomes the occasion of error, both to himself or others! A clergyman without the Holy Scriptures is a soldier without weapons, a horse without a bridle, a ship without a rudder, a writer without a pen, and a bird without wings.” The renunciation of self, the crucifixion of natural and worldly desires, the absorption of all our interests and passions in the enjoyment of God, the study of the Scriptures, active exertion on behalf of his brethren—these things were his delight. Obedience, prayer, psalm-singing, all exercises of devotion, were to him a delicious feast. We are told by his biographer that during the singing of the psalms he stood in an erect posture, never studying his ease by leaning or supporting his body; his look was often raised heavenward, his countenance in a manner shone, and his whole frame involuntarily followed the direction of his soul. No distracting influences were allowed to draw away the mind of the holy man from the one aim and end of his life—the attainment of greater holiness. Nature with its glories never tempted him away from the contemplation of the beauty of Jesus. Science and philosophy suggested to him no doubts,

and occasioned him no conflicts and pains. Art, charming and beautiful, and so often the handmaid of religion, disturbed not his inward musings on the sweetuess of divine love, or the imperishable joys of heaven. On and on between “the posts of duty” coursed his happy uneventful life towards the goal of eternal bliss. One might suppose that art, especially in so far as it was consecrated to the service of Christianity, would be likely to attract his susceptible mind. Even in that early age it had displayed in the Netherlands great life and riches. Antwerp possessed five painter-and-sculptor establishments within a few years after the birth of a Kempis. Hubert and John van Eyck had executed the miracles of their pencil. Hemmling was his contemporary. The glories of Gothic architecture were everywhere about him, but they had no charms for him. Sacred music, however, he loved; and he seems to have written some poetry, chiefly ecclesiastical hymns, *cantica spiritualia*, which celebrate the Trinity, the Passion of Christ, John the Evangelist, St. Agnes, and others. With the deep rapture of a mystic his thoughts were only centred in the spiritual. The feeling of his heart may be well expressed in the lines of Tersteegen (translated by John Wesley):

Thou hidden love of God, whose height,  
Whose depth unfathomed, no man knows,  
I see from far Thy beauteous light,  
And inly sigh for Thy repose;  
My heart is pained, nor can it be  
At rest till it find rest in Thee.

The beauties of Nature and the glories of Art were subordinated to the one unconquerable desire within him—to become like Christ, to resign himself wholly to the will of Christ. And in his lonely cell, whose bare walls were illumined with the light of angel-faces, apart from the feverish rush of life and the wild tumults of the world, this desire was becoming more and more every day converted into a supreme fact. His life was being transformed, exalted, sublimated into a divine glory, until at length, to use the words of an American poet—

Heaven's rich instincts in him grew  
As effortless as woodland nooks  
Send violets up, and paint them blue.

In this spirit and with this object, he wrote his famous book on *The Imitation of Christ*. The authorship of the work has indeed, as our readers know, been the subject of a long and heated controversy, and hundreds of books, pamphlets, and articles have been written on the subject. Endeavours have been made to claim the honour for Gessen or Gersen, a Benedictine Abbot in Italy; but, as has been remarked, in spite of

all that has been written on the subject, one vital fact yet remains to be proved, and that is neither more nor less than that this Abbot Gessen ever existed ! He is, according to some writers, a myth. The first person who put forth his claims was another Benedictine monk, Dom Constantine Cajitano. He published an edition of the *De Imitatione* in the year 1616, and in the title-page Gersen is declared to be the author. Around him rallied all the Benedictines, who struggled hard to win the honour for a member of their brotherhood. Thomas à Kempis was not, however, without defenders. Like Hector, when struck down prostrate by Ajax, he was in an instant covered by a thick crowd of shields. Facile and able pens wrote in his behalf. A learned Jesuit, Sommalius, who first divided the text of the “Imitation” into separate verses, vindicated the authorship of the Augustine monk, in reliance, as he said, on certain manuscripts of the work in the handwriting of à Kempis himself, then to be seen at Antwerp or Louvain.<sup>1</sup> He was followed on the same side by Rosweid, another Jesuit, whose reasoning is said to have influenced the famous Cardinal Bellarmine to abandon the Gersenian standard. On the death of Rosweid, his baton passed to Fron-teau, a regular Canon, who signalized his accession to the Augustinian cause by a work called “Thomas Vindicatus.” This drew into the field the congregation of St. Maur, who, by their champion Dom Quatremaire, threw down the gauntlet in the form of a pamphlet entitled “Gersen Assertus.” It would be a wearisome and profitless task to pursue the literary controversy. Even in our own day has been heard the noise of the battle. In a series of articles published in the *Civiltà Cattolica* of Rome, a Jesuit priest, P. Mella, advocates with angry zeal the cause of Gersen, and with a bitterness so sadly common in theological and ecclesiastical warfare, he does not hesitate to call the saintly à Kempis *Il Prussiano*. He writes, however, in vain. All efforts to deprive the Monk of Zwoll of the honour of authorship have, it must be admitted, signally failed. His rights are incontestable, and are admitted by the best judges to be so. Amongst these we may mention Monseigneur Malou, Bishop of Bruges, whose literary reputation is European. In his admirable work, “Recherches Historiques et Critiques sur le Véritable Auteur du Livre de l’Imitation de Jésus Christ,” the learned prelate gives a *résumé* of the arguments in favour of à Kempis. The controversy indeed may be considered closed.

The autograph manuscript of à Kempis is preserved in the

<sup>1</sup> Now at Brussels and Louvain. Thomas à Kempis composed numerous works.

Royal Library at Brussels. The writer placed at the beginning of the volume a table of the treatises therein contained. The following inscription ends the manuscript:

Finitus et completus anno domini MCCC  
XLI. per manus fratris thome Kempis  
in monte sancte Agnetis prope Zwollis.

Bishop Malou justly observes that as the four books of the "Imitation" head the list of his works, à Kempis declared himself to be their author.<sup>1</sup>

As to the book itself, Ullman truly remarks it is a book which "charms us by truth which is the genuine reflex of the author's life, and is self-evidenced in every word by the heart that beats in it; by the pure, unmixed tone, the silver accent of inward genuineness, the simple childlike spirit which pervades the whole." It is true the introspective type of piety which it represents is not greatly in favour in these earnest, active, busy times, but the treatise will always have religious value, not only from the saintliness of its purpose, but from the knowledge of human nature which it displays. In this respect it may be said to occupy within the circle of religious literature the position which the plays of Shakespeare hold in the secular world. A distinguished writer of our time says of the book—"It was written down by a hand that waited for the heart's prompting . . . . And so it remains to all time a lasting record of human needs and human consolations: the voice of a brother who ages ago felt and suffered and renounced—in the cloister perhaps with serge gown and tonsured head, with much chanting and long fast, and with a fashion of speech different from ours—but under the same silent far-off heaven, and with the same passionate desires, the same strivings, the same failures, the same weariness."

The treatise is now and then objected to on the ground that it does not recognise sufficiently the doctrine of justification by faith. There is a jealous fear on the part of some lest the honours and importance of Christ's righteousness should be invaded by any undue stress being laid on the personal righteousness of the believer, as if the one could not be maintained as the alone valid plea on which the sinner could lay claim to an inheritance in heaven, and at the same time the other be urged as his indispensable preparation for its exercises and its joys. The "Imitation" does not certainly abound in formal and direct avowals of the righteousness

<sup>1</sup> The whole volume, and especially the books of the "Imitation," has been much used, but it is nevertheless, on the whole, in good condition. A cheap facsimile edition of the "Imitation" was noticed in the July CHURCHMAN.

which is by faith. But we know of no teaching that is more calculated to shut us up into the faith, none more fitted to deepen and strengthen the basis of a sinner's humility and so reconcile him to the great doctrine of salvation by grace, than that which is here set forth. This, however, was not the object of à Kempis in writing the book. His object was to lead men to a more strict and separate devotedness of life than is often to be met with amongst the professed followers of Christ. To Him the inward life, the disposition of mind, is the great matter. He makes war, not with heretics but with the world, not with objective error but with subjective evil. In his eyes sin is the great heresy, the monster error of the universe, and it is the object of his uncompromising hostility. And surely he is right. And well would it be for the world if Christians in our day, in imitation of à Kempis, would turn their weapons which are now used to hack and slay each other, against the sins and vices and corruptions of the age. “It is better to die,” says Plato, “than to sin.” “It is better to avoid sin,” says the good monk, “than to shun death.” In reading this book, then, let us bear in mind the aim of the writer. Like most mystics, he occupies St. John's point of view rather than that of St. Paul. To him Christ is more the image of God and the pattern of a life in and with God, than the author of atonement and redemption, and the cross is more the symbol of self-mortification than the memorial of Christ's sacrificial and mediatory death. And hence not justification by faith but purification by love constitutes the centre of his whole religious system. Love sanctifies everything. It is the confluence of all that is great and glorious in Christianity. With Bishop Jeremy Taylor in after days he holds that “theology is rather a divine life than a divine knowledge.” Piercing through the outer form and varying representations of truth, he struggles increasingly after Him Who is the centre and sum of all truth, and finds his life not in Christianity but in Christ. “It is not profound speculation,” he says, in the first chapter of his “*Imitation*,” “but a holy life that makes a man righteous and good and dear to God. I had rather *feel* compunction than be able to give the most accurate definition of it. If thou knowest the whole Bible by heart, and the sayings of all the philosophers, what would all that profit thee without the love of God and without grace?” He points out again and again the moral grandeur of the Saviour's character and life, and he asks us to imitate it. “Receive Christ,” he says; “let Him be found within thee; follow Him and imitate His example, and with Him thou hast all.” In his mind Christ is the All in All, the Divine Image, the Pattern of the active as well as of the contemplative life.

“ He that intently and devoutly exercises himself in the most holy life and passion of his Lord, will find all that is useful and necessary to his redemption in such great abundance that he need not seek after anything out of or better than Jesus.” Thomas à Kempis shows us the beauty of holiness, the preciousness and power of faith, the excellence of love, and the sure and unfailing reward of a patient and faithful carrying of the cross ; and he asks us for our own good and the good of the world to cultivate this spirit and temper, and to walk in close conformity to the will and commandments of God.

À Kempis, according to the standard of his age, was not, as we have before said, without learning, or incapable of inspiring a taste for it in others. But learning is not his standpoint. He even unduly depreciates it as ministering to presumption, and filling the mind with vanity. Everywhere he underrates the theoretical to the practical. He puts no value on any knowledge that is not of direct moral utility. “ Submit yourself to God,” he says, “ humble your mind to believe, and the light of knowledge will be given you, in as far as it is salutary and needful.” In one place he admits that “ every man has by nature a desire of knowledge;” but he immediately adds the restriction, “ Of what avail is knowledge without the fear of God ? Better the simple peasant who serves God than the proud philosopher who, neglecting himself, contemplates the courses of the stars.” But while he thus disparages mere knowledge as a thing insufficient of itself to satisfy the desires of the soul, he, on the other hand, enjoins *wisdom*, which is at once practical in its nature, and inclusive of perfect humility. Knowledge is of the world, he says, and entangles with the world ; wisdom is heavenly and pure. It comes from God, and leads to God. The distinction has often been pointed out. The poet Cowper, in “ The Task,” draws a graphic contrast between knowledge and wisdom, which comes to our minds as we read some passages of the “ Imitation :”

“ Knowledge and Wisdom, far from being one,  
Have oftentimes no connection. Knowledge dwells  
In heads replete with thoughts of other men,  
Wisdom in minds attentive to their own.  
Knowledge, a rude unprofitable mass,  
The mere materials with which Wisdom builds,  
Till smoothed and squared and fitted to its place,  
Does but encumber whom it seems to enrich.  
Knowledge is proud that he has learned so much,  
Wisdom is humble that he knows no more.”

“ Whatever book thou readest,” says à Kempis, “ suffer not thy mind to be influenced by the character of the writer, whether his literary accomplishments be great or small, but let thy only motive to read be the pure love of truth ; and

instead of inquiring who it is that writes, give all thine attention to the nature of what is written. Men pass away like the shadows of the morning, but 'the Word of the Lord endureth for ever ;' and that Word, without respect of persons, in ways infinitely various, speaketh unto all." "He is truly good," he says in another place, "who hath great charity ; he is truly great who is little in his own estimation, and rates at nothing the summit of worldly honour ; he is truly wise who 'counts all earthly things but as dross that he may win Christ ;' and he is truly learned who hath learned to abandon his own will and to do the will of God."

The great popularity of the "Imitation of Christ" is the best proof of its value. Between the years 1470 and 1500 it is said that eighty editions issued from the press, and since then nearly four thousand editions have gone forth to the world. It has been translated into forty-six different languages, and has penetrated into almost every region of the globe ; and wherever it has gone it has quickened the conscience, and touched the affections, and strengthened and refreshed the spiritual life. Protestants and Roman Catholics have felt it to be a word of God to their souls ; and in times of weariness, sadness, and desolation of heart (and alas ! such times come to us all) they have found a "quiet resting-place" at the feet of the old monk of St. Agnes. The fact that a Kempis was a member of the Roman Church will no doubt in this day, when party spirit runs so high, give many persons a prejudice against the book. Like those of old who asked, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth ?" they will ask, "Can lessons of truth and holiness come from the cell of a monk ?" We can only reply as did Philip to Nathanael, "Come and see." To anyone we may say : *Tolle, et lege* ("Take up the book and read"). Read the specimens here given you and then proceed to the book itself, and we are sure that you will rise from its perusal wiser and better, with a more earnest desire to live a holier and more Christ-like life, and will be ready to acknowledge that the sub-Prior of Mount St. Agnes's Monastery was no less than St. Bernard, St. Francis de Sales, Cardinal Borromeo, Fénelon, Pascal, Lacordaire, and many another shining light of the Church of Rome, a true man of God, "an Israelite indeed in whom was no guile." These men, unsatisfied with mere ceremonial religion, entered, so to speak, within the veil, and there finding the Father of Spirits, they worshipped Him in spirit and in truth. In solitude and retirement and abstraction from the world and its many-sided interests, they sought "Him of Whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write." They sought Him, and He was found of them ; and from their own joyful experience they could bear

testimony to that great and unspeakable privilege which the sincere lover of God has always enjoyed, of an inward communion with their Lord. It is this inestimable experience which makes the “Imitation of Christ” so refreshing, so excellent a tonic to the jaded spiritual life. A Kempis had a profound knowledge of the religious life such as is not to be acquired but by a mind truly devoted and long accustomed to spiritual exercises. He is not satisfied with exhorting men to self-denial, renunciation of the world, watchfulness and prayer, but he leads them on to that absolute resignation, entire faith, and pure love which are the strength and beauty of the renewed nature—the nature that can alone enter into heaven because it comes from heaven, that can alone love, desire, and unite with God because it is born of God. “Some,” says our author, speaking in the person of Christ—“some place their religion in books, some in images, and some in the pomp and splendour of external worship; these honour Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. But there are some who, with illuminated understanding, discern the glory which man has lost, and with pure affections pant for its recovery. These hear and speak with reluctance of the cares and pleasures of the present life, and even lament the necessity of administering to the wants of animal nature; these hear and understand what the Holy Spirit speaketh in their heart, exhorting them to withdraw their affections from things on earth and set them on things above—to abandon this fallen world, and day and night aspire after reunion with God.”

There are others who stigmatize à Kempis as a mystic, and therefore shun him, as if to be a mystic was to be guilty of some deadly heresy, hateful to God and man. So Francis de Sales was denounced by his enemies, and Fénelon by Bossuet, and William Law, the author of the “Serious Call to a Holy Life,” by Alexander Knox. But what is it to be a mystic? Is not Christianity itself a mystery—“the mystery of godliness”? And therefore every true Christian may be regarded as a mystic in that degree, and in no other, in which he becomes a faithful follower of his crucified Lord. The great majority of professing Christians, content with forms and superficial observances, having no experience of the quickening, sanctifying power of the Gospel in the heart, know nothing of mysticism, except as a term of reproach synonymous with heresy and enthusiasm, in the modern acceptation of the terms. Mysticism is a stigma which is too often cast at those who dare to assume as an axiom in theology that vital Christianity, a Christianity that can renew, enlighten, unite to God, make us partakers of the Divine nature, and lift us up into an atmosphere purer and more serene than that which most

of us are in the habit of breathing, is somewhat more sensitive and spiritual in its nature than the world of shallow professors will admit it to be. Mysticism is a necessity involved in the advance and progress of our spiritual being; it loves to commune with God in secret places; it sees God in all things—in the pattering of the rain-drops on the boughs, and the music of the bee among the flowers, and the glinting of the sunshine through the forest trees, and the sobbing and sighing of the sea upon the shore—and it sees all things in God. He is their Source, their Centre, and their Glory. According to the scientific definition of a modern theologian,<sup>1</sup> mysticism is a system which examines religious phenomena simply as facts resulting from the immediate contact of God with the individual soul. And does not the New Testament favour such views? Is not direct communication possible between the human spirit and God the Spirit? Are not the writings of St. Paul and St. John full of expressions which go far to justify the mystic—of Christ being formed in men, and dwelling in men; of God abiding in man, and man in God; of Christ being the life of men; of men living and moving and having their being in God? Does not that profound and beautiful phrase in the “Communion Office,” which points out the “great benefit” of receiving the “Holy Sacrament” “with a true penitent heart and lively faith”—“for then we spiritually eat the flesh of Christ and drink His blood, *then we dwell in Christ, and Christ in us; we are one with Christ, and Christ with us*”—vindicate the highest and noblest teaching of the mystic? Let no one, then, look with suspicion upon the author of the “*De Imitatione*” because he has been accused of mysticism. He is a mystic only in the sense in which the most earnest and pious souls are mystics. Spiritual religion was to him everything; and communion with God—quiet, constant, rapt communion with God—was the chief means of cultivating it in the soul. “Give thyself wholly to God,” he says, in one of his smaller books, “and thou wilt wholly receive Him.” “O God, Who art the Truth,” he cries, “make me one with Thee in everlasting love! I am often weary of reading, and weary of hearing; in Thee alone is the sum of my desires. Let all teachers be silent; let the whole creation be dumb before Thee; and do Thou only speak unto my soul.”

We do not, indeed, think that the type of piety set forth in the “*De Imitatione*” is the highest type. There is a glow of monkish colouring, if we may so say, upon it which is somewhat out of harmony with the picture of Christianity drawn in the New Testament. “True piety is cheerful as the day.”

<sup>1</sup> Reuss, “*Théologie Chrétienne*,” i. 210.

The religion of Christ, taken as a whole, is a stronger and more manly product ; though we readily admit that in those fierce, lawless times in which à Kempis lived, the monastic establishment was often a training school for the strong and vigorous, where the men were formed and disciplined who afterwards ruled the Church or converted the world. The characters which our Lord impressed upon His disciples were : "Ye are the light of the world," "Ye are the salt of the earth." We are not, as His followers, to shun society, to abandon the world, to ignore beauty, art, poetry, innocent amusements, joyous life ; but to carry our religion—high, holy, Christian principle—into all these things, and shed its sweet and sacred influences over them. "In the world, not of the world"—that is to be the rule of the disciple of Jesus. Still, we cannot condemn the course which the holy monk pursued, or the ideal Christian life which he delineated. The world in his day was so impious and brutal and profanely wicked that it seemed as if in the cloister alone men could cherish faith in God and sustain their spiritual life. And, weary with the Babel-voices around him, the pious soul hastened into the lonely retreat to spend his life in communion with God. The nobler and better thing, no doubt, would be to "let his light shine before men that they might see his good works, and glorify his Father in heaven."

What dreadful times were those in which Thomas à Kempis's life was cast ! The iron ages, the leaden ages, the dark ages—these were the terms commonly applied to the period in which he lived, denoting its barrenness of learning, of faith, of reverence, of order. Pure Christianity was hidden away like a rare gem amongst heaps of rubbish. It was only here and there that its clear light gleamed before the wondering eyes of men. "The world was one complicated imposture." Godly souls were "few and far between."

Apparent rari nantes in gurgite vasto.

Physical degradation, intellectual thraldom, spiritual darkness, political corruption, lawlessness, violence, chicanery, mad revelry, lust, ungovernable passion, sacrilege, necromancy, ambitious strivings after power—these were characteristics of the times in which Thomas lived. All sacred things had become venal, crime and debauchery held revel in the Vatican, while the afflicted Church, wedded at once to three husbands (such was the language then used), witnessed the celebration of as many rival masses in the metropolis of Christendom." From the immortal pages of Dante, and the more modest "Vision of Piers Ploughman," we may learn much of the spirit of those times. Kings and princes, barons and prelates, lived a wild turbulent life. Priests and monks were steeped

in corruption. "Viler than a priest" had passed into a proverb. The common people were ignorant, enslaved, degraded. From the "chair of St. Peter" a lying spirit went forth on its diabolic mission through the courts and camps and villages of Europe, seeking whom it might devour. Darkness overspread the land. The Tables of the Decalogue were again broken, the Sermon on the Mount was a dead letter. The impassioned eulogiums on justice, mercy, and truth, of Prophets, and the moral precepts of Apostles, were unknown or discredited by cleric and layman alike. Piety, as Von Ranke remarks, sometimes retired into the rugged mountain or the lonely forest to devote all her harmless days to divine contemplation and prayer. Longing for death, she already denied herself every enjoyment offered by life; or with youthful fervour she laboured, if dwelling amongst men, to body forth in serene, sublime, and profoundly suggestive forms the mysteries she dimly surmised, the ideas in which she had her being. But here and there, amid the general gloom, the bright shining of a star of righteousness might be seen; here and there, yearning for better days for the afflicted Church, or the rest of heaven for their own wearied spirits, there were sweet and saintly souls, witnessing for the beauty of holiness and the glory of God. I need only mention Thomas Bradwardine, called "the profound," who was not more celebrated for his learned work, "Concerning the Cause of God against Pelagius," than for his holy life and blameless manners; and his pupil, John Wycliffe, "The Morning Star of the Reformation," hateful to all who hated goodness and truth; and Jerome Savonarola, whose great words, like arrows tipped with fire, pierced the false Florentine heart till it lay throbbing in penitence at his feet; and in à Kempis's own country, John Ruysbrock, "the ecstatic teacher," as he was called, described by Thomas as "Ætate grandævus, affabilitate servus, morum honestate reverendus;" and Gerhard Groot, the great preacher of righteousness, who "had God always before his eyes;" and Florentius Radewins, of Deventer, who, as we saw, first drew à Kempis to the service of Christ, and whom he calls his "good master;" and Arnold of Schoenhofen, the early friend of Thomas, whose seraphic piety was a household word on the lips of all who knew him; and Henry Suso, "the Minnie-singer of eternal love and wisdom," and "the particular friend of God;" and John Tauler, the Dominican, who received the honourable designation of "Theologus sublimis et illuminatus," and whose writings won the admiration alike of Luther and Melancthon, of Cardinal Bossuet and Du Pin; and John Wessel, called "Lux Mundi" and "Magister Contradictionis," in allusion to his great skill in controversy, to

whom the “*De Imitatione Christi*” had given his first and vigorous incitement to piety; and the clear-eyed, clear-souled à Kempis himself, the saintliest spirit of them all, whom we love to think of sitting in his cell, with

Looks commerçant with the skies,  
And rapt soul sitting in his eyes,

lifting up holy hands in prayer, or studying some passage of the Sacred Word, or patiently transcribing some old manuscript, and surrounded by his devoted scholars, Rudolph Lange, Moritz, Count of Spiegelberg, Louis Dringenberg, Anthony Liber, and, above all, Rudolph Agricola and Alexander Hegius, embodying in his own life the counsel he gives in his “*Vita boni Monachi*” :

Sustine vim patiens.  
Tace, ut sis sapiens.  
Mores rege, aures tege.  
Sæpe ora, sæpe lege.  
Omni die, omni hora,  
Te resigna sine mora.

And thus the years of the old man crept on; the hair became whiter, and the gait feebler, and the frame more bent, but the heart was becoming more weaned from the world which it never loved, and the soul was becoming more refined and spiritualized for the heaven which it had always been yearning after. God was nearer and dearer to him every day. He was his “exceeding joy.”

Beautiful spirit! fallen, alas,  
On times when little beauty was:  
Still seeking peace amid the strife,  
Still working weary of thy life:  
Toiling in holy love,  
Panting for heaven above.

For none so lone on earth as he  
Whose way of thought is high and free,  
Beyond the mist, beyond the cloud,  
Beyond the clamour of the crowd,  
Moving where Jesus trod  
In the lone walk with God.<sup>1</sup>

WILLIAM COWAN.



#### ART. IV.—EGYPT IN FULFILLED AND UNFULFILLED PROPHECY.

EGYPT is deeply interesting to us now, its past hardly less so, and its future cannot fail to concern us greatly, and is bound up with the establishment of God’s kingdom upon earth.

<sup>1</sup> “Orwell” (Dr. Walter Smith).