

## THOMAS A KEMPIS AS HYMNOGRAPHER.

BY BERNHARD PICK.

THOMAS à Kempis, or Thomas of Kempen, the reputed author of the *Imitatio Christi*, a work which has immortalized his name, was born in 1379 or 1380 as the son of an artisan named Johann Hemerken, at Kempen, a small town in Rhenish Prussia near the Dutch border. Thomas received holy orders July 26, 1413, and died July 25, 1471. He had the ill fortune that, whereas his hymns were published and translated, his name as author remained unknown. As a rule the original usually appears as if taken from a fourteenth century manuscript, and this error was repeated by translators. This state of affairs continued until the year 1905, when the forty-eighth volume of the *Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi* edited by Clemens Blume and Guido M. Dreves was published, in which the hymns of Thomas à Kempis are now given (pp. 475-514). Reading these hymns I was struck with their contents, which sounded so familiar that I felt I must have read something like them in the English language. I examined my collection of English hymns made from the Latin, and with the help of the text published in the *Analecta* I have been enabled to trace many translations which were credited to a fourteenth century manuscript to their original source, and to restore Brother Thomas to his place among hymnographers. In the *Analecta* there are thirty-five poems of Thomas, seventeen of which the reader may now find in an English dress, some even in more than one translation. It is worthy of observation that none of the medieval Latin hymnographers sing so much about the glories of the heavenly Jerusalem as our Thomas. Of the 503 hymns published in the forty-eighth volume, seven hymns only are given which sing of the glory of Paradise; one by Peter Damiani, author of the famous *Ad perennis vitae fontem*, and the other six by Thomas à Kempis, four of which fill the pages of the little volume entitled *Hymns on the Joys and*

*Glories of Paradise* by the late John Mason Neale, who was likewise mistaken with regard to the author of these hymns.

Thomas is the author of the following poems:

1. *O vera summa trinitas* (on the Trinity), translated by S. J. Stone in Kettlewell, *Thomas à Kempis and the Brothers of the Common Life*, Vol. II, p. 291.
2. *En dies est dominica* (for Sunday), translated by Trend in *Lyra Mystica*, p. 371; a cento comprising six out of the twenty-nine stanzas is found in the *Hymnal Noted*, No. 51.
3. *In diebus celebris* (for festive days) englished by H. Trend in *Lyra Mystica*, p. 184. 24 stanzas.
4. *Veni, veni, rex gloriae* (for the Advent) translated by T. G. Crippen in *Ancient Hymns and Poems*, London, 1868, from the Karlsruhe MS.
5. *Apparuit benignitas* (Christmas hymn). Of this beautiful poem on the Incarnation we have no complete translation, only a cento beginning with the second stanza "O amor quam exstaticus," rendered by Webb in the *Hymnal Noted*, 1854, comprising stanzas 2, 4, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12 and a doxology added.
6. *O quam glorificum solum sedere* (in tribulation). Neither Duffield, nor Neale, nor J. Gregory Smith in *Lyra Mystica* (p. 191) gives the name of the author. Duffield (*Latin Hymn Writers*) mentions this hymn as belonging to a fifteenth century manuscript. Neale (*Mediaeval Hymns*, 1867, p. 190) calls it a German hymn, probably of the early part of the fifteenth century. Smith mentions it as an ancient Latin poem.
7. *Quisquis valet numerare* (on the glory of the heavenly Jerusalem), translated by Neale in *Hymns Chiefly Mediaeval, on the Joys and Glories of Paradise*, London, 1866, p. 46ff., omitting however stanzas 6, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16.
8. *In domo Patris summae majestatis* (on the heavenly Jerusalem). The text is also given by Mone (*Lateinische Lieder des Mittelalters*, No. 302) from a fifteenth century manuscript at Karlsruhe, and with the title "A Hymn of the Various Mansions and Rewards of the Elect in the Heavenly Jerusalem." A translation, less complete, by Neale, is found in the *People's Hymnal*; another in *Lyra Mystica*, (signed H. R. B.) p. 254, with the same heading as given by Mone, has all the twenty-seven stanzas.

9. *Angelorum si haberem. . . .* }  
 10. *Creaturarum omnium merita.* } on the benefits of God.  
 11. *O quid laudis, quid honoris.* }

The first translated by C. B. Cayley in *Lyra Mystica*, p. 456; the second and third by J. M. H., *ibid.*, p. 109 and p. 106.

12. *Jerusalem luminoso*a (on the glory of the heavenly Jerusalem), was first published by Mone, No. 304, from a fifteenth century MS. at Karlsruhe, where it is entitled "On the glory of the heavenly Jerusalem, as concerning the endowments of the glorified body." Of this and cognate hymns of this manuscript Neale says: "The language and general ideas prove the writer (unknown, but apparently of the fifteenth century) to have been subject to the influence of the school of Geert Groet and Thomas à Kempis." Neale's translation is found in *Hymns on the Joys and Glories of Paradise*, p. 54.
13. *Nec quisquam oculis vidit* (also on the heavenly Jerusalem), also translated by Neale, *loc. cit.*, p. 62, but only seven out of fourteen stanzas.
14. *Vitam Jesu Christi stude* (in praise of Christ), translated by S. J. Stone.
15. *O dulcissime Jesu* (also in praise of Jesus), translated by S. J. Stone.
16. *Adversa mundi tolera* (in tribulation). The text is also given by Daniel, II, p. 379, where it is headed "A Hymn by Thomas à Kempis concerning Christian Patience." In the *Analecta* it is headed "Consolatio ad sufferendum tribulationes." Of this beautiful hymn which goes under the author's name, we have a translation by Stone in Kettlewell's work, II, p. 292; by E. Caswall in *Hymns and Poems*, 2d ed., London, 1873, p. 222, and by D. J. Donahoe in *Early Christian Hymns*, New York, 1908, p. 203.
17. *O qualis quantaque laetitia* (on the celestial glory), better known because of the general omission of the first verse as the "Adstant angelorum chori," the only poem of à Kempis given by Trench (*Sacred Latin Poetry*, p. 327) and of which he says that the whole of our author's poetry will not yield a second passage at all to be compared in beauty with this. The text of Trench is also found in *Songs of the Christian*

*Creed and Life* (London, 1879), by MacGill; also in *The Hymns of Hildebert and Other Mediaeval Hymns* with translations by Erastus C. Benedict, New York, 1867. An excellent translation is that of Mrs. Elizabeth Charles in her *The Voice of the Christian Life in Song* (New York, 1859); a second was made by Benedict (*op. cit.*); a third by MacGill. All these translators, because following the text of Trench, omit not only the first stanza but also stanzas 5, 6, 9. The only complete version is that of Stone in Kettlewell's *Thomas à Kempis*, p. 293.