

**HIDDEN SAINTS: A
STUDY OF THE BROTHERS
OF THE COMMON LIFE**

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Hidden Saints: A Study of the Brothers of the Common Life by S. Harvey Gem

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*A STUDY OF THE
BROTHERS OF THE COMMON LIFE*

BY

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"Learn how many times greater is the virtue that is tested by action, than
that which depends only on thought and imagination."
THOMAS A KEMPIS.

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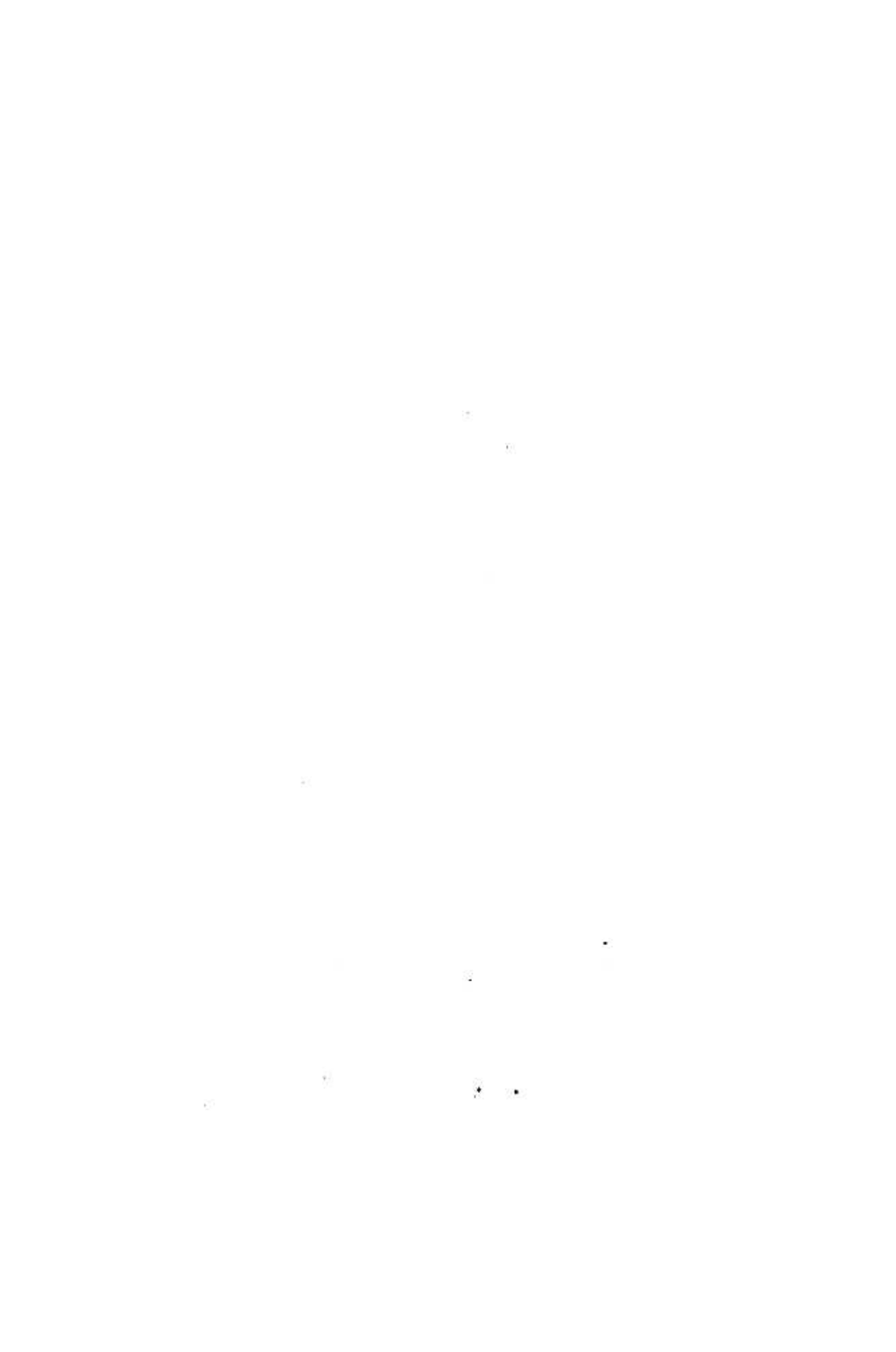
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PREFATORY NOTE

THE object of this little book is to offer to the general reader some particulars about the Brothers of the Common Life under whom Thomas à Kempis received his religious training in boyhood; to describe their aims and work, and their extension through Holland and Germany; to place at the disposal of the student some of the results of the recent investigations made by foreign scholars, and to bring before him many passages from the original authors who were either Brothers themselves or contemporaries with them. Church-people in England have lately paid more attention than formerly to the ecclesiastical history of their own country, and have shown themselves interested in the annals of the Early Christian Church under the Roman Empire; but too little attention has as yet been given to the eventful periods of the Middle Ages, or to the dawn of the Reformation abroad. Hence the Brothers of the Common Life who accomplished so much quiet work in the by-paths of history in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, may well be called "Hidden Saints." Nor did they desire fame; for their motto, drawn from St. Bernard and adopted by à Kempis, was "Love to be unknown" (Ama

nesciri); and until the works of the Rev. S. Kettlewell and Sir F. Cruise appeared they were almost entirely hidden persons to English readers. Little enough are they studied even now, and the writer of these pages has endeavoured by quotation and translation from early records of the Brotherhood to carry the reader back into their lives and their labours. The reason of these quotations and translations has been the belief that only by such means can a history of the distant past be made to live before us again in thought. The writer may here venture to state his reason for this opinion. Many years ago he acquired his first real interest in Church history from meeting with that old-fashioned book *Joseph Milner's History of the Church*. What fascinated him about the work of Milner was the number of well-chosen and numerous quotations from the original authorities. These carried the reader back into the age which they described, giving a vivid picture of scenes which in a summary of history would remain quite colourless.¹ Learning from this experience the writer has thought well to make frequent quotations from the early writings of the Brothers, and he has translated in an abbreviated form the contemporary annals that were published and printed in a later century by Dumbar at Amsterdam. They relate to the original Brotherhood at Deventer, and may be regarded as supplementary to the still more valuable memoirs written

¹ For the same reason the work of Tillemont remains an authority to this day. A similar instance is afforded by *Gieseler's Eccl. History: English translation by Davidson* (Edinburgh, T. T. Clark); which is crowded with passages from the original documents. And see note at the end of this preface.