

EDITORIAL

## THOMAS À KEMPIS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**W**HATEVER can have prompted ex-President Eliot to place on the list of his 5-foot library of twenty-five volumes encouraging reading Thomas à Kempis' *Imitations*?<sup>1</sup>

Thomas à Kempis is worth reading, true enough, as an illustration of the morbid misanthropy that a hopelessness of terrestrial wellbeing can afflict a man with. At this stage of civilization, however, a work that can only promote suicide with such maxims as "There are no such things as friendship or ties of kindred," "Think not, reason not, live not, but commit thy fate to the hands of a superior, who will think and reason for thee"—such a work is strangely out of place in a library that is meant to uplift.

Thomas à Kempis is worth reading as an illustration of how things were and had to be, and as a contrast with how things can be to-day. In a library that is meant to stimulate manhood and intellectual activity such a work is like a buzzard among eagles.

Thomas à Kempis is worth reading as proof of how the springs of even a bright intellect can be broken by economic conditions that turn father against son, daughter against mother, friend against friend, just as on a shipwreck where the most brutish of man's latent passions, born of the instinct of self-preservation, are stimulated. But in a library, headed by Franklin's *Autobiography* whose audible motto is, In the bivouac of life be not like dumb driven cattle be a hero in the strife, such a work as Thomas à Kempis' "Imitations" looks like a grinning skeleton in a collection of Apollos of Belvidere and Venuses of Milo.

Thomas à Kempis is worth a place in a collection of mental disease superinduced by the class struggle, at a season in man's history when the class

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<sup>1</sup> [Presumably *The Imitation of Christ*.]

struggle was a pestilential necessity. But Thomas à Kempis flanked by Goethe's *Faust*, on one side, and Darwin's *Origin of Species* on the other, in a modern library, when society is ripe for the Socialist Republic of universal brotherhood, is like thrusting a driveling idiot in the company of intellectual giants.

In fine, Thomas à Kempis, who uttered at least twice a day the invocation: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," and whose counsel amounted to: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in hell"—such a work does merit a place in a library but only as a lighthouse on a rock to warn the mariner away, not among works that are as buoys to show the mariner the channel.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.  
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