

**WHO WAS THE AUTHOR  
OF "THE IMITATION OF  
CHRIST"?**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649419005

Who was the Author of "The Imitation of Christ"? by Sir Francis Richard Cruise

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**SIR FRANCIS RICHARD CRUISE**

**WHO WAS THE AUTHOR  
OF "THE IMITATION OF  
CHRIST"?**



*to the Proprietor King & Co  
with kind regards from F. R. Cruise,*

WHO WAS THE AUTHOR

OF

“THE IMITATION OF CHRIST”?

BY

SIR FRANCIS RICHARD CRUISE, D.L.,

M.D. (UNIV., DUBLIN)

“Tot ou tard, tout se scait”

LONDON

CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY

69 SOUTHWARK BRIDGE ROAD, S.E.

1898

C 805.25.10

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY  
GIFT OF  
JAMES BYRNE  
OF NEW YORK W  
NOV. 22, 1921

(REPRINTED FROM THE IRISH ECCLESIASTICAL RECORD, 1897.)

## PREFACE

---

JUST ten years ago I published an essay on Thomas à Kempis and *The Imitation of Christ*.<sup>1</sup> The notices which followed its appearance have led me to think that my humble work filled a want, and was likely to prove useful to dispel errors, and manifest the truth regarding the wondrous book itself and its gifted author. I venture in illustration to quote here the words of the *Saturday Review*, January 7, 1888: "The volume contains a summary of all that is, and probably all that ever will be known of the subject, excellently arranged, and in a convenient form."

The motive which originally led me to write was the desire to rescue à Kempis, one of the most remarkable ascetics of the Middle Ages, from the obscurity in which he rests, at all events for most people; to give some account of his life, and the surroundings amidst which it was spent; and to show the solid grounds upon which I rest my belief that (despite all vexatious controversy) he was in truth the author of *The Imitation*. Finally, I strove to bring my readers through the locali-

<sup>1</sup> *Thomas à Kempis*. By F. R. Cruise, M.D. Kegan Paul, Trench, & Co. London, 1887.

ties in which a Kempis spent his long holy life, and to give some account of his relics. This portion of the book is illustrated from photographs, nearly all of which were taken by myself on the various spots.

Two successive editors of the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* have paid me the high compliment of asking me to reproduce, in a condensed form, the main portions of my original essay, in fashion suited for priests and others whose scant leisure disables them from mastering the more elaborate treatise, and this I have done in the numbers of that periodical dating from January to June, 1897. With full permission I now reproduce this epitome, and hope for its wide circulation under the auspices of the Catholic Truth Society.

I should observe that in certain points, especially regarding the manuscripts, I have brought the present essay up to date, a necessary step considering the additional knowledge which has come to light since 1887.

It is no small gratification to me to find that a wish and hope which I expressed in my earlier work have been accomplished, namely, the erection of a suitable monument to the great Monk of Agnetenberg, and the transfer of his relics to a fitting resting-place. This auspicious event took place at Zwolle, Holland, near to Mount St. Agnes, on the 10th of November, 1897.

Knowing, as I do well, the profound and widespread ignorance which obtains regarding the authorship of *The Imitation*, it is my intention, very shortly, to reproduce this essay in several European languages, so that those who seek the truth may easily find it.

DUBLIN,

F. R. CRUISE

May, 1898.



## Who was the Author of "The Imitation of Christ?"

As we know that the Holy Scripture came from God, Fontenelle did not outstep the truth when he designated *The Imitation of Christ* as the most beautiful book that ever came from the hand of man. Beyond doubt it most perfectly reflects the light which Jesus Christ brought down from heaven to earth, and truthfully portrays the highest Christian philosophy. When our Divine Saviour preached the Sermon on the Mount He held up as the characteristics of His followers—perfect humility, poverty of spirit, purity of heart, meekness, sorrow for sin, forgiveness of injuries, and peace and joy in the midst of tribulation and persecution. Where else do we find these doctrines so incisively and persuasively taught as in *The Imitation*? In this one book, as Dean Milman says, "was gathered and concentrated all that was elevating, passionate, profoundly pious, in all the older mystics," and no one ever could resist its power, "its short quivering sentences, which went at once to the heart."

How, and why, it may be asked, was the author able to compass within the covers of this slender volume so much wisdom, such vast spiritual experience, poetry, and profound philosophy? Such is the question put by the late Brother Azarias, in his essay on "Culture of the

Spiritual Sense," wherein he gives us the most perfect and beautiful analysis of *The Imitation* ever written. Let me quote his reply :—

Here is the secret of the magic influence wielded by the *Imitation*. Pick it up when or where we may, open it at any page we will, we always find something to suit our frame of mind. The author's genius has such complete control of the subject, and handles it with so firm a grasp, that in every sentence we find condensed the experience of ages. It is humanity, finding in this simple man an adequate mouth-piece for the utterance of its spiritual wants and soul-yearnings. And his expression is so full and adequate, because he regarded things in the white light of God's truth, and saw their nature and their worth clearly and distinctly, as divested of the hues and tints flung around them by passion and illusion.

Amongst the countless effects which the study of this wondrous volume is certain to produce, none is more natural than a longing to know something of its author. Just half a century ago I began to ask myself the question :—Who wrote this book, and what manner of man was he? Thenceforth I commenced to study the subject, and in 1887 I published the result of my researches. I can well understand that many feel as I did, especially those who, having spiritual charge of others, advise them to read *The Imitation*. In the hope of giving to such, in very brief and simple fashion, the information which cost me years of laborious research, I shall now endeavour to condense all essentials into the smallest possible space.

Those who wish to study the subject deeply, will, I think, find in my essay quoted all they need. I believe it is impossible for any unprejudiced reader to master

the evidence I have there produced without arriving at the conclusion that the authorship of *The Imitation of Christ* must be assigned to Thomas à Kempis, Canon Regular of St. Augustine, who lived and died in the monastery of Mount St. Agnes, near Zwolle, in Holland. When I use the term authorship I should explain the exact limits within which I believe it applies to à Kempis. It seems evident that he was not the sole or original author in the ordinary sense of the word. On the other hand, it is equally manifest that he was the skilled collector, compiler, and arranger of the book, which, when studied to the bottom, proves to be an epitome or hand-book, embodying especially the teaching of the Holy Scripture, St. Bernard, and the writers and inspirers of the school of Windesheim, to which latter we shall allude presently.

Before proceeding to consider and analyze the strange controversy which formerly existed as to the authorship of *The Imitation*, it will be desirable to give a brief outline of the life and surroundings of Thomas à Kempis, the man towards whom all existing evidence points. In fact this course is necessary, because it opens up the history of the school of Windesheim, the cradle of the book in question, and of which à Kempis was pre-eminently the literary exponent. I may observe that I think it better to omit, as far as possible, in this essay, references to the various authorities from whom I quote. They may be found *in extenso* in my former work, and all interested in the subject can satisfy themselves, as I have done, of their accuracy and fulness. So far as I am aware, not a single one has been challenged or found erroneous.