

PART ONE

Prologue

THERE was once a Preacher¹ in Germany, and he was a Swabian by birth. May his name be written in the book of life! He had the desire to be the Servant of Eternal Wisdom and to be known as such. He became acquainted with an enlightened woman who endured in this world much trouble and suffering.² She asked him to tell her something about suffering from his own experience, whereby her suffering heart might take strength, and she continued to ask this for some time.

When he came to see her, she persuaded him to impart to her the nature of his beginning and progress in religion, and the various kinds of trials and sufferings he had had. He related all this to her in spiritual confidence. As she derived consolation and instruction from all this, she wrote everything down for her own benefit and for that of others. But she did so secretly, so that he did not know anything about it.

Later, when he had become aware of this spiritual theft, he scolded her for it, and made her hand over everything to him. He took it and burnt all that she gave him at that time. But when he had also obtained the rest, and was about to proceed in the same manner, he was prevented from doing so by a heavenly message from

¹ That is, a Dominican friar, a member of the Order of Friars Preachers.

² Elsbeth Stagel. See below, Chapter xxxiii.

God. And thus the chapters that follow remained unburnt, just as she had written them in her own hand, for the most part. In addition, some wholesome instruction was added thereto in her name, after her death.

Of the Divine Impression

THE Servant's first beginning in religion¹ took place in his eighteenth year. And although he had already worn the religious habit for five of these years, his mind was not at peace. If God could but keep him from the greatest sins which might blacken his reputation, it seemed to him that the number of ordinary sins did not matter at all. Nevertheless he was at this time in some manner protected by God, so that he felt dissatisfied with himself, however much attention he paid to the things that seemed to him desirable. He often felt that there must be something else that would bring peace to his wandering heart, and in his restlessness he felt pain. He always chafed against this manner of life, yet he could not help himself, till God of His mercy liberated him by a sudden change. Men wondered at the sudden alteration that had come over him. One said this and another said that, but what had really happened to him no one imagined. For God had secretly drawn him to Him in divine light, and this brought about a sudden conversion.

¹ The first of the three stages of the mystic way, which leads to spiritual perfection.