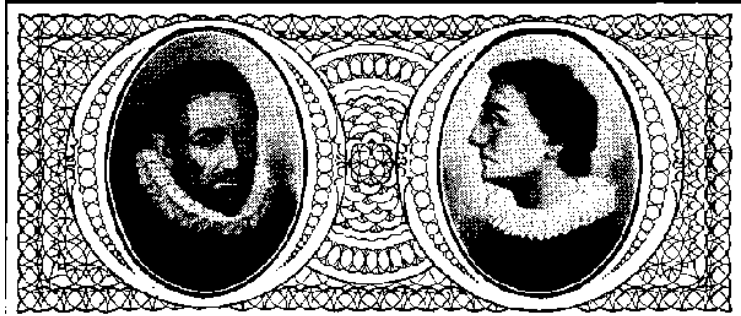


of mighty foes plotting her destruction; it was Holland on her sand-banks by the northern sea, wrestling against the tyranny of Spain, then the greatest and most opulent of kingdoms; it was bleak, sterile Sweden, that gained victories for the Reformation.

For nearly thirty years, Calvin labored at Geneva; first to establish there a church adhering to the morality of the Bible, and then for the advancement of the Reformation throughout Europe. His course as a public leader was not faultless, nor were his doctrines free from error. But he was instrumental in promulgating truths that were of special importance in his time, in maintaining the principles of Protestantism against the fast-returning tide of popery, and in promoting in the reformed churches simplicity and purity of life, in place of the pride and corruption fostered under the Romish teaching.

From Geneva, publications and teachers went out to spread the reformed doctrines. To this point the persecuted of all lands looked for instruction, counsel, and encouragement. The city of Calvin became a refuge for the hunted Reformers of all Western Europe. Fleeing from the awful tempests that continued for centuries, the fugitives came to the gates of Geneva. Starving, wounded, bereft of home and kindred, they were warmly welcomed and tenderly cared for; and finding a home here, they blessed the city of their adoption by their skill, their learning, and their piety. Many who sought here a refuge returned to their own countries to resist the tyranny of Rome. John Knox, the brave Scotch Reformer, not a few of the English Puritans, the Protestants of Holland and of Spain, and the Huguenots of France, carried from Geneva the torch of truth to lighten the darkness of their native lands.

## 13. The Netherlands And Scandinavia.



In the Netherlands the papal tyranny very early called forth resolute protest. Seven hundred years before Luther's time, the Roman pontiff was thus fearlessly impeached by two bishops, who, having been sent on an embassy to Rome, had learned the true character of the "holy see:" God "has made His queen and spouse, the church, a noble and everlasting provision for her family, with a dowry that is neither fading nor corruptible, and given her an eternal crown and scepter; ... all which benefits you like a thief intercept. You set up yourself in the temple as God; instead of pastor, you are become a wolf to the sheep; ... you would make us believe you are a supreme bishop, but you rather behave like a tyrant.... Whereas you ought to be a servant of servants, as you call yourself, you endeavor to become a lord of lords.... You bring the commands of God into contempt.... The Holy Ghost is the builder of all churches as far as the earth extends.... The city of our God, of which we are the citizens, reaches to all the regions of the heavens; and it is greater than

the city, by the holy prophets named Babylon, which pretends to be divine, wins herself to heaven, and brags that her wisdom is immortal; and finally, though without reason, that she never did err, nor ever can.”<sup>351</sup>

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Others arose from century to century to echo this protest. And those early teachers, who, traversing different lands and known by various names, bore the character of the Vaudois missionaries, and spread everywhere the knowledge of the gospel, penetrated to the Netherlands. Their doctrines spread rapidly. The Waldensian Bible they translated in verse into the Dutch language. They declared “that there was great advantage in it; no jests, no fables, no trifles, no deceits, but the words of truth; that indeed there was here and there a hard crust, but that the marrow and sweetness of what was good and holy might be easily discovered in it.”<sup>352</sup> Thus wrote the friends of the ancient faith, in the twelfth century.

Now began the Romish persecutions; but in the midst of fagots and torture the believers continued to multiply, steadfastly declaring that the Bible is the only infallible authority in religion, and that “no man should be coerced to believe, but should be won by preaching.”<sup>353</sup>

The teachings of Luther found a congenial soil in the Netherlands, and earnest and faithful men arose to preach the gospel. From one of the provinces of Holland came Menno Simons. Educated a Roman Catholic, and ordained to the priesthood, he was wholly ignorant of the Bible, and he would not read it, for fear of being beguiled into heresy. When a doubt concerning the doctrine of transubstantiation forced itself upon him, he regarded it as a temptation from Satan, and by prayer and confession sought to free himself from it; but in vain. By mingling in scenes of dissipation he endeavored to silence the accusing voice of

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<sup>351</sup> Brandt, “History of the Reformation in and about the Low Countries,” b. 1, p. 6.

<sup>352</sup> Brandt, b. 1, p. 14.

<sup>353</sup> Martyn, Vol. II, p. 87.

conscience; but without avail. After a time he was led to the study of the New Testament, and this, with Luther's writings, caused him to accept the reformed faith. He soon after witnessed in a neighboring village the beheading of a man who was put to death for having been rebaptized. This led him to study the Bible in regard to infant baptism. He could find no evidence for it in the Scriptures, but saw that repentance and faith are everywhere required as the condition of receiving baptism.

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Menno withdrew from the Roman Church, and devoted his life to teaching the truths which he had received. In both Germany and the Netherlands a class of fanatics had risen, advocating absurd and seditious doctrines, outraging order and decency, and proceeding to violence and insurrection. Menno saw the horrible results to which these movements would inevitably lead, and he strenuously opposed the erroneous teachings and wild schemes of the fanatics. There were many, however, who had been misled by these fanatics, but who had renounced their pernicious doctrines; and there were still remaining many descendants of the ancient Christians, the fruits of the Waldensian teaching. Among these classes Menno labored with great zeal and success.

For twenty-five years he traveled, with his wife and children, enduring great hardships and privations, and frequently in peril of his life. He traversed the Netherlands and northern Germany, laboring chiefly among the humbler classes, but exerting a wide-spread influence. Naturally eloquent, though possessing a limited education, he was a man of unwavering integrity, of humble spirit and gentle manners, and of sincere and earnest piety, exemplifying in his own life the precepts which he taught, and he commanded the confidence of the people. His followers were scattered and oppressed. They suffered greatly from being confounded with the fanatical Munsterites. Yet great numbers were converted under his labors.

Nowhere were the reformed doctrines more generally received than in the Netherlands. In few countries did their adherents en-

dure more terrible persecution. In Germany Charles V. had banned the Reformation, and he would gladly have brought all its adherents to the stake; but the princes stood up as a barrier against his tyranny. In the Netherlands his power was greater, and persecuting edicts followed each other in quick succession. To read the Bible, to hear or preach it, or even to speak concerning it, was to incur the penalty of death by the stake. To pray to God in secret, to refrain from bowing to an image, or to sing a psalm, was also punishable with death. Even those who should abjure their errors, were condemned, if men, to die by the sword; if women, to be buried alive. Thousands perished under the reign of Charles and of Philip II. [240]

At one time a whole family was brought before the inquisitors, charged with remaining away from mass, and worshipping at home. On his examination as to their practices in secret, the youngest son answered, "We fall on our knees, and pray that God may enlighten our minds and pardon our sins; we pray for our sovereign, that his reign may be prosperous and his life happy; we pray for our magistrates, that God may preserve them."<sup>354</sup> Some of the judges were deeply moved, yet the father and one of his sons were condemned to the stake.

The rage of the persecutors was equaled by the faith of the martyrs. Not only men but delicate women and young maidens displayed unflinching courage. "Wives would take their stand by their husband's stake, and while he was enduring the fire they would whisper words of solace, or sing psalms to cheer him." "Young maidens would lie down in their living grave as if they were entering into their chamber of nightly sleep; or go forth to the scaffold and the fire, dressed in their best apparel, as if they were going to their marriage."<sup>355</sup>

As in the days when paganism sought to destroy the gospel,

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<sup>354</sup> Wylie, b. 18, ch. 6.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid.

the blood of the Christians was seed.<sup>356</sup> Persecution served to increase the number of witnesses for the truth. Year after year the monarch, stung to madness by the unconquerable determination of the people, urged on his cruel work; but in vain. Under the noble William of Orange, the Revolution at last brought to Holland freedom to worship God.

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In the mountains of Piedmont, on the plains of France and the shores of Holland, the progress of the gospel was marked with the blood of its disciples. But in the countries of the North it found a peaceful entrance. Students at Wittenberg, returning to their homes, carried the reformed faith to Scandinavia. The publication of Luther's writings also spread the light. The simple, hardy people of the North turned from the corruption, the pomp, and the superstitions of Rome, to welcome the purity, the simplicity, and the life-giving truths of the Bible.

Tausen, "the Reformer of Denmark," was a peasant's son. The boy early gave evidence of vigorous intellect; he thirsted for an education; but this was denied him by the circumstances of his parents, and he entered a cloister. Here the purity of his life, together with his diligence and fidelity, won the favor of his superior. Examination showed him to possess talent that promised at some future day good service to the church. It was determined to give him an education at some one of the universities of Germany or the Netherlands. The young student was granted permission to choose a school for himself, with one proviso, that he must not go to Wittenberg. The scholar of the church was not to be endangered by the poison of heresy. So said the friars.

Tausen went to Cologne, which was then, as now, one of the strongholds of Romanism. Here he soon became disgusted with the mysticisms of the schoolmen. About the same time he obtained Luther's writings. He read them with wonder and

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<sup>356</sup> See Tertullian's "Apology," par. 50.

delight, and greatly desired to enjoy the personal instruction of the Reformer. But to do so he must risk giving offense to his monastic superior, and forfeiting his support. His decision was soon made, and ere long he was enrolled as a student at Wittenberg.

On returning to Denmark, he again repaired to his cloister. No one as yet suspected him of Lutheranism; he did not reveal his secret, but endeavored, without exciting the prejudices of his companions, to lead them to a purer faith and a holier life. He opened the Bible, and explained its true meaning, and at last preached Christ to them as the sinner's righteousness and his only hope of salvation. Great was the wrath of the prior, who had built high hopes upon him as a valiant defender of Rome. He was at once removed from his own monastery to another, and confined to his cell, under strict supervision. [242]

To the terror of his new guardians, several of the monks soon declared themselves converts to Protestantism. Through the bars of his cell, Tausen had communicated to his companions a knowledge of the truth. Had those Danish fathers been skilled in the church's plan of dealing with heresy, Tausen's voice would never again have been heard; but instead of consigning him to a tomb in some underground dungeon, they expelled him from the monastery. Now they were powerless. A royal edict, just issued, offered protection to the teachers of the new doctrine. Tausen began to preach. The churches were opened to him, and the people thronged to listen. Others also were preaching the word of God. The New Testament, translated into the Danish tongue, was widely circulated. The efforts made by the papists to overthrow the work resulted in extending it, and ere long Denmark declared its acceptance of the reformed faith.

In Sweden, also, young men who had drunk from the well of Wittenberg carried the water of life to their countrymen. Two of the leaders in the Swedish Reformation, Olaf and Laurentius Petri, the sons of a blacksmith of Orebro, studied under Luther

and Melanchthon, and the truths which they thus learned they were diligent to teach. Like the great Reformer, Olaf aroused the people by his zeal and eloquence, while Laurentius, like Melanchthon, was learned, thoughtful, and calm. Both were men of ardent piety, of high theological attainments, and of unflinching courage in advancing the truth. Papist opposition was not lacking. The Catholic priests stirred up the ignorant and superstitious people. Olaf Petri was often assailed by the mob, and upon several occasions barely escaped with his life. These reformers were, however, favored and protected by the king.

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Under the rule of the Roman Church, the people were sunken in poverty, and ground down by oppression. They were destitute of the Scriptures; and having a religion of mere signs and ceremonies, which conveyed no light to the mind, they were returning to the superstitious beliefs and pagan practices of their heathen ancestors. The nation was divided into contending factions, whose perpetual strife increased the misery of all. The king determined upon a reformation in the state and the church, and he welcomed these able assistants in the battle against Rome.

In the presence of the monarch and the leading men of Sweden, Olaf Petri with great ability defended the doctrines of the reformed faith against the Romish champions. He declared that the teachings of the Fathers are to be received only when in accordance with the Scriptures; that the essential doctrines of the faith are presented in the Bible in a clear and simple manner, so that all men may understand them. Christ said, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent Me;"<sup>357</sup> and Paul declared that should he preach any other gospel than that which he had received, he would be accursed.<sup>358</sup> "How, then," said the Reformer, "shall others presume to enact dogmas at their pleasure, and impose them as things necessary to salvation?"<sup>359</sup> He showed that the

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<sup>357</sup> John 7:16.

<sup>358</sup> Gal. 1:8.

<sup>359</sup> Wylie, b. 10, ch. 4.



decrees of the church are of no authority when in opposition to the commands of God, and maintained the great Protestant principle, that “the Bible and the Bible only,” is the rule of faith and practice.

This contest, though conducted upon a stage comparatively obscure, serves to show us “the sort of men that formed the rank and file of the army of the Reformers. They were not illiterate, sectarian, noisy controversialists—far from it; they were men who had studied the word of God, and knew well how to wield the weapons with which the armory of the Bible supplied them. In respect of erudition they were ahead of their age. When we confine our attention to such brilliant centers as Wittenberg and Zurich, and to such illustrious names as those of Luther and Melancthon, of Zwingle and Ecolampadius, we are apt to be told, these were the leaders of the movement, and we should naturally expect in them prodigious power and vast acquisitions; but the subordinates were not like these. Well, we turn to the obscure theater of Sweden, and the humble names of Olaf and Laurentius Petri—from the masters to the disciples—what do we find?... Scholars and theologians; men who have thoroughly mastered the whole system of gospel truth, and who win an easy victory over the sophists of the schools and the dignitaries of Rome.”<sup>360</sup> [244]

As the result of this disputation, the king of Sweden accepted the Protestant faith, and not long afterward the national assembly declared in its favor. The New Testament had been translated by Olaf Petri into the Swedish language, and at the desire of the king the two brothers undertook the translation of the whole Bible. Thus for the first time the people of Sweden received the word of God in their native tongue. It was ordered by the Diet that throughout the kingdom, ministers should explain the Scriptures, and that the children in the schools should be taught to read the

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<sup>360</sup> Wylie, b. 10, ch. 4.