

THE REFORMED CHURCHES IN THE NETHERLANDS.

The Reformation of the 16th century passed in the Netherlands through three periods.

The first is at present designated by historians as that of the Sacramentarians or Evangelicals and extends from 1518 to 1531. As early as the first months of the year 1518 the fame of Luther spread to this country; his ninety-five theses were read everywhere; the new of his heroic deed was received with enthusiasm. The number of his admirers increased daily. Naturally these were called Lutherans, though of course they were not at all Lutherans in the later and specific sense of the term and inclined rather to Zwingli in their views on the Lord's Supper. In fact Zwingli himself had been strongly confirmed in his views by a letter from Cornelius Honius, a jurist of the Hague, and had been led by him to his exposition of *est pro significat*. This period of the Dutch Reformation was characterized by deep piety, holy zeal, fiery courage, and particularly by the entire absence of the political element. According to the testimony of Erasmus, in 1525, a large part of the population joined the movement. Soon, however, Church and State conspired to suppress the heresy. Edicts were issued and people were burned at the stake. The evangelical preachers having fled from the country, their followers were left to their fate and, deprived of leaders, they decreased in number and their enthusiasm cooled.

At this juncture, however, another party appears on the scene to take up the cause of reformation. The Anabaptists opened the second period, covering the years from 1531 to 1560. Probably their influence had already begun in 1525, when the persecution was most fierce, but not until 1530 did they begin to be known as a separate, distinct party. In this year Jan Trijpmaker returned to Amsterdam from Embden,

where he had met the well known Melchior Hofmann. The Anabaptists soon gathered a large following. Their heroic faith compelled admiration; they did not flee from danger but braved it. They were men drawn from the people, and were simple and unostentatious. They supplied the guidance and direction that were wanting in the Reformation movement and infused faith and new courage into those who had become fearful. Their doctrines, especially in regard to the sacraments, met with sympathy and assent. The overstrained feelings, to which many had been wrought by the persecution, could not but favor the fanatical elements of the Anabaptist movement. It was but natural that the former Evangelicals in great number, nay, even as a rule, joined the Anabaptists. The original Reformation thus gradually disappeared. But against the Anabaptists also persecution began to rage. They were scattered, were expelled and were put to death; moreover they were divided and consumed by internal dissensions. It was Menno Simons, who at this stage gathered the defenseless Anabaptists round himself, bridled their fanaticism and made them find their strength in quietness.

If it had not been for another movement, which at that time spread to our country, the Reformation amongst us would probably have perished at its birth and have gradually dwindled away. Slowly, however, Calvinism was making its way into the Netherlands. It entered partly from the southern provinces; it was introduced partly also by the numerous fugitives, who had sought a refuge in London, East-Friesland, Cleves and the Palatinate. This Calvinism imparted to our people the power not only to endure persecution but also to save and confirm the Reformation in this country. It was distinguished from both the preceeding movements in two respects. First, it exhibited a strong organizing power. The Evangelicals and the Anabaptists had become scattered and divided, being destitute of good and firm leadership. Owing to their lack of unity they suffered from a lack of power. The Reformed on the

other hand were organized immediately. As early as 1561 they received a Confession from Guido de Brès, and from the year 1563 onward assemblies of the Churches or Synods were held in the southern part of the Netherlands. In the second place, Calvinism gave rise to a political movement. The Evangelicals and the Anabaptists had refrained from all action in the sphere of politics, allowing themselves to be slaughtered like defenseless sheep. The Reformed, however, were animated by a political as well as a religious conviction. They sought to attach to their cause the nobles and merchants, and as early as 1566 they resolved upon armed resistance. Prince William of Orange was placed in command, and in 1568 opened the war, which after eighty years ended with the peace of Westphalia. Thenceforward religious and political interests were inseparably united. To declare one's self in favor of the Reformed religion and of the Prince of Orange amounted to the same thing. Nevertheless the party of the Reformed, which had thus boldly taken up the contest with Spain, was small in number. According to a rough estimate no more than one-tenth of the population was Reformed in 1587, and even this tenth part belonged chiefly to the lower classes. Nay, for four years, from April, 1572 till November, 1576, the contest with Spain was carried on by the tenth part of the population of Holland and Zealand alone. But this small Calvinistic group was strong through its faith and powerful through its principles; it knew what it wanted and was unfaltering and unconquerable in its efforts to obtain it. It increased under persecution in political as well as in religious influence and power.

By the logic of events, the Reformed religion naturally became the supreme religion, the religion of the State. *De facto* it was this already in 1583, but it became so formally and legally at the Great Assembly of 1651. This indeed is the unique and truly remarkable feature of Dutch history, that Church and State were born simultaneously, on one and the same day, and were united from the outset. The

Reformed Church was the centre of the Commonwealth; the Church and the Republic did not at first exist separately, to be united afterwards; the Republic rather was born from the Confession of the Church. What Holland has become as a nation it owes to the Reformation, and more particularly to Calvinism. Here Calvinism has shaped a people, formed a nationality, founded a republic. As a nation, Holland is a son, a foster-child of the Reformation, and for this reason Calvinism, here more than anywhere else, has entered into the innermost fibres of the trunk of our nationality; it has been the principle of our life, the sinew of our strength, the foundation of our prosperity.

The period during which the Church was at its prime was, owing to this close alliance, likewise the time of greatest prosperity for the Republic, and with the decline of faith came also the downfall of the State. At about the middle of the 17th century the Church and the Commonwealth had reached the height of their power. Theology was cultivated by the foremost scholars. The universities, which drew to themselves the most eminent talent at home and abroad, became famous and great centres of attraction. The arts and sciences flourished. It was the golden age of literature. Trade and industry developed, and in consequence wealth and luxury increased. But all this prosperity was due either directly or indirectly to the contest which Calvinism had so valiantly and perseveringly kept up for eighty years.

In like manner also the Church and the Commonwealth went down together. The union of the Church and the State was not profitable to the Church. The Reformed Church was not a State Church in the strict sense of the word; but nevertheless it was a public, a dominant Church. Especially after the time of the Synod of Dort, which with the assistance of the State had expelled the Arminians, the custom came into vogue of excluding from public offices all who were not members of the Reformed Church. The consequence was that Church-membership became a question of fashion, and many joined the public Church who

did not adhere sincerely to the Reformed religion. Outside of the Church the influence and power of Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Mennonites and Arminians increased. In philosophy and theology Cartesianism and Cocceianism prepared the way for the subsequent Rationalism. Indolence and luxury began to undermine the old Dutch self-respect and energy. In the 18th century foreign influences likewise made themselves felt, in particular English Deism and French neology.

In consequence of all this the love for the House of Orange began to wane, the national character degenerated, and Calvinism withdrew into the quiet circles of the common people. Among them, however, it remained alive, and was preserved in its original purity, in close alliance with attachment to the Princes of Orange and with a deep national sentiment. The lower classes of the people retained their characteristics; with them foreign customs did not replace the old national habits, and French ideas found no acceptance. This part of the people remained, as it had always been, attached to its faith, faithful to its traditions, proud of its history. It was, however, unavoidable that under these circumstances Calvinism should suffer from onesidedness and degeneration, being almost entirely deprived of firm direction and guidance. The Church and the schools, pious people and theology became more and more alienated from each other. Those who loved the faith of the fathers could no longer find satisfaction in the preaching that prevailed, and gathered in conventicles to seek edification for themselves. In proportion as they felt less at home in their own time, they lived in the past, in the world of the older religious literature, in the language and ideas of the fathers. The Reformed who had once stood at the head of every movement and had been the liberals and radicals of their time, now became conservative, reactionary, panegyrists of the old, and despisers of the newer times. They acquired the reputation of bigots, fanatics, who sought the darkness and eschewed the light. This had the effect of making them

still more obstinate and inflexible, and of rendering their isolation almost complete. Being thus shut off from all healthy activity and movement, they did not escape the danger of adopting various foreign and erroneous ideas of Antinomian, Labadistic and Pietistic origin. It was no longer the old, high-minded, radical Calvinism, but a Calvinism that had become rough, harsh, unpolished, without splendor and fire, cold and dry and dead. Yet, notwithstanding all this, to the people is due the honor of having safely preserved the treasure of Calvinism, even in this less noble form, and of having transmitted it to our age and to the children of our generation. God himself protected it and, by so doing, He indicated that it still had a task to perform in this century¹.

Midway between the national Reformed faith and the neology which had intruded from without there appeared towards the close of the eighteenth century a moderate tendency, known by the name of Supranaturalism, which lived far into the 19th century. Its nature is not difficult to describe, superficiality being its main feature. It did not wish to pass for disbelief; far from it, it honored religion, professed to be pious, put a high estimate on the Bible and Christianity. It had strong aversion to neology. Neither did it wish to be rationalistic in the sense of Wegscheider and Paulus. But it prided itself on being *rational*. Reason was highly esteemed in the sphere of religion, though it could not do without revelation and even argued the necessity of the latter. From this it will be seen that Supranaturalism did not take its point of departure in revelation and faith, but from the outset occupied a higher standpoint, from which it looked down upon both, and whence, by a process of reasoning, it tried to reach revelation and to demonstrate the reasonableness of faith. Of course the *Testimonium Spiritus Sancti* could no longer render service on this standpoint. The argument from miracles and prophecy had lost its force with such as denied the credibility of the Holy

¹ Cf. my article on "The Future of Calvinism", in *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, January, 1894.

Scriptures. Hence Supranaturalism chose the historical way. By the help of various external and internal witnesses, first of all the authenticity, integrity and the trustworthiness of the New Testament Scriptures were established. From this *fides humana* one could ascend to the *fides divina*, inasmuch as the New Testament, having thus been demonstrated to be trustworthy, revealed the divine authority of Jesus and the Apostles which was confirmed by miracles and prophecies. The inspiration and authority of the Old Testament were established on the basis of the New Testament. After the *pars formalis* of Dogmatics had been struggled through with in this manner, the *pars materialis* was taken in hand. But what kind of Dogmatics! By the aid of the much-lauded grammatical exegesis of Ernesti, a so-called Biblical Theology was drawn from the Scriptures which did not deserve the name of Dogmatics. It was a conglomeration of certain commonplace, superficial Christian truths, not born from the depth of Scripture and utterly foreign to the spirit and vigor of the Reformed Confession, a doctrine of religion which changed God into the Supreme Being, Christ into a teacher, man into a merely intellectual creature, sin into weakness, conversion into correction, sanctification into a process of making virtuous. In a word, it was Deistic in its theology, Pelagian in its anthropology, Arian in its christology, moralizing in its soteriology, collegialistic in its ecclesiology and eudaemonistic in its eschatology².

The old system of Presbyterianism did not harmonize with these principles. Not only the spirit of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands, but also its organization was soon to undergo a great change. The Revolution in France made its appearance here towards the close of the 18th century and was greeted enthusiastically by the infatuated people. After the departure of the Prince of Orange for England on January 18th, 1795, the "Provisional Repre-

² Cf. my article on "Recent Dogmatic Thought in the Netherlands", in *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, April, 1892.

sentatives" issued a proclamation, wherein it was maintained that every man had the right to serve God in his own way, that every citizen of whatsoever religion should be able to vote in the constitutional bodies, and that all citizens should be elected to public offices on no other ground than their virtues and abilities. The National Assembly, which met on June 1st, 1796, repealed the old system of a dominant or privileged Church, separated Church and State, and abolished all the proclamations and resolutions of former States, August 18th, 1796, in general all that had arisen from the union of Church and State at that time. In this spirit a constitution was framed, which was adopted in the National Assembly with a small majority, but rejected by the people August 18th, 1797. The next constitution had, however, the same tendency; but it was enacted that the stipends of the ministers should be paid for three years. The Revolution, however, did not fulfill what had been expected of it. Very soon many persons, who had given it encouragement, were totally altered in mind. The separation of Church and State was not revoked; but much of the old system returned in the constitution of 1801, and much more again in 1803, for example the payment of ministerial stipends, the celebration of Sunday, the thanksgiving day, the faculties of divinity, etc. These conditions were confirmed by the following constitutions: the separation of Church and State was preserved; the privileged Church was abolished; all religious opinions were protected within the pale of the law; but the State continued to support the Church. In 1805 a Secretary of State was charged with Church policy; in 1808 a Ministry of Public Worship was established that existed till 1862; by a decree of August 2nd, 1808, Church property was handed over to the exchequer, and the stipends of ministers of other denominations were paid as well as those of the Reformed Church. After the annexation by France, in July 1810, great complications arose in the concerns of the Reformed Church. An imperial decree (October 10th, 1810) proposed

to subordinate the Church entirely to the State. After November 1810, the stipends were no longer paid. Distress increased more and more during the years 1810-1812. In November 1813, however, there came a sudden change. The Prince returned and was proclaimed King. He soon took the affairs of the Church in hand, but he did this in a way peculiar to himself. He not only reformed the finances, but he intended also to reorganize the Reformed Church after the episcopal and territorial system with which he had become acquainted in England. There was no necessity for doing this. The Churches were organized. There was a standard of discipline in the Church. Some Presbyteries and Synods were still existing, and could at any moment be convoked. There was no disorganization, but the old organization was ineffectual owing to the confusion of the times. The King undertook to introduce into this country also the caesaropapistic ideas which prevailed elsewhere, making the Church the instrument of his will, the tool in his hand. On May 28th, 1815, he appointed by private decree, without the Churches' knowledge, a committee of eleven ministers, who had to consider a project, which had been previously prepared, for the management of the Church. This project, in a somewhat modified form, was sanctioned by the King, January 7th, 1816, and became law as "General Rules for the Board of the Reformed Church in the Kingdom of the Netherlands".

In this manner, the old Presbyterian form of Church discipline was in one moment, through an arbitrary act of the King, abolished and replaced by a new royal organization. There is at the present time in this land no one who does not acknowledge that this regulation was illegal in its origin, and anti-Reformed, anti-Presbyterian, hierarchical in its character, contradictory to the Kingship of Christ. Indeed, in the 15th Article it is positively said that the legislative power rests in the King. Permanent Boards took the place of the classical and provincial assemblies. The General Synod became a college, which assembled

once a year and whose members for the first time were appointed by the King. The rules formulated by this Synod were to be sanctioned by the King. In Article 9, it is true, the Boards were held responsible for the maintenance of doctrine, but by this doctrine was understood a universal Christianity, with a tendency to Supranaturalism as sketched above. This appeared in all its force, when the Synod, presented to the Church by the King, framed a formula of subscription for the ministers of the Reformed Church. In it the ministers undertake to accept faithfully and believe truly the doctrine which is conformable to the Holy Word of God in the accepted Forms of Unity of the Dutch Reformed Church. It is supposed that this formula was intentionally worded in such an ambiguous way. Be this as it may, it clearly states that the ministers need not accept the Forms of Unity because they are founded on the Word of God, but only the doctrine which is contained in the Forms of Unity, in so far as they are conformable with the Word of God. The determination of this doctrine was freely left to the individual.

History speaks in a still more decided way. It must be allowed that there was gradual improvement in the organization of the Church in some respects. William II and William III gave it more independence. In 1842, the King declared himself incompetent to rule the affairs of the Church, according to the constitution. In 1843 he gave the highest legislative power in the Church to the Synod. A new regulation was made in 1852 by the Synod, which was in some respects a change for the better as it gave more authority to the members of the congregation, more privileges to the elders, and endeavored to build up the organization from below, from the people themselves. Notwithstanding this, it was in substance the same as the organization of 1816. The Synod, established by the government, was independent, but the Church was not relieved from the tyranny of its rule. The power was merely transferred, not abolished. And this power, regal in its origin, inspired with

a hierarchial spirit, has, although altered in some ways, been maintained to this day in a system of Boards antagonistic to the Church and its members.

The history of the Dutch Reformed Church in this century furnishes a clear proof of this. It is one continual struggle between the Confession and the ordinances. The Supra-naturalistic party, which was supreme at the commencement of the century, was replaced by the Groningen School about the year 1835, and this in its turn by the "Modern" Theology about 1850, always in a retrograde movement. Supra-naturalism went back from Confession to Scripture, the Groningen School from Scripture to the Person of Christ as the revelation of God, and "Modern" Theology from the Person of Christ to the religious individuality of Jesus. All these parties were hand and glove with the Synod, formed the Synodical faction, and were always upheld by the Synod appealing to the prescribed ordinances rather than to the Confession. The main consideration for the Boards was, and continued to be, to maintain order and peace, and to compact together those who in principle were opponents and therefore could not unite. By the authority of the ordinances the true sons of the Reformed Churches were set aside, wronged, persecuted and cast out.

Great numbers of these true sons still remained, even when the Church went from bad to worse, and was ruled by unbelief. In the retired circles of the people, as remarked above, the old Calvinistic faith was preserved. Out of these recesses it gradually made its reappearance. The "Revival", which was introduced into Switzerland by Wilcox and Robert Haldane, began also to have influence here under the leadership of Bost, César Malan, Merle d'Aubigné, Monod, Gaussen, etc., especially in certain aristocratic circles at the Hague and in Amsterdam. This Revival was neither national, nor positively in accordance with the Reformed doctrine; it was of a Methodistical, individualistic, generally Christian character. Nevertheless it has been highly blessed. It went enthusiastically to work for the evangelization of

all, even the lowest classes of the people, and encouraged philanthropy. It led in this country to the revival of Calvinism, and to activity within the Church. The famous poet, Bilderdijk, who published strong poems against unbelief and the Revolution, had already written in 1810, that the condition of the Reformed Church was such as to necessitate separation from it, and he again repeated this conviction in a letter to Da Costa in 1825. The idea of separation became more familiar here by the force of the example of the free Church at Geneva. Here and there small separations occurred, e.g. at Axel. The thought and necessity of separation was felt in all circles.

The most important and most highly blessed of these separations was that which commenced in 1834, and which gradually spread over the whole land. The minister of the congregation at Ubrum in Groningen, Hendrik De Cock, through discourse with pious people and through reading the *Institutes* of Calvin, arrived at the knowledge of the truth. In 1833 he came forward against two ministers who were denominated by him "wolves in the sheepfold of Christ". This caused his suspension, though at first he retained his stipend; but later, December, 1833, he had to forego it for two years. A publication, which he issued at this time against the Evangelical Hymns, brought about his dismissal, May 29th, 1834. After due consideration, De Cock decided to separate with his Presbytery and the larger part of his congregation. And he judged now that this was not only his duty, but, according to Article 27 and 28 of the Dutch Confession of Faith, the duty equally of all believers. In an "Address and Appeal to the Faithful in the Netherlands", he exhorted them to awake to their responsibilities as believers, to separate from the false Church, and to join the true one. Soon there were withdrawals and separations elsewhere, e.g. at Genderen, under H. P. Scholte; at Hattem, under A. Brummelkamp; at Drogeham, under S. van Velzen, etc. The call, "Come out of Babel", resounded throughout the land.

But in the beginning, the congregations which had separated lacked good organization, intelligent leadership, internal harmony. Very soon dissensions of all sorts arose concerning baptism, Church discipline, official dress, the necessity for the universal preaching of grace, but above all, the liberty extended to them by the government, and the advisability of accepting it. Separation was not regarded as right by the government. Before 1834 the Dutch government had several times shown opposition to the establishment of separated religious meetings. Conductors of such meetings were at that time either condemned to pay a fine or committed to prison, and the meetings were dispersed. But when the minister of the King signified his disapproval of separation and admonished the congregations to return to the discipline of the Synod, persecution became rampant. The police and the courts of justice obtained authority to act against those who had separated. Even the Synod of the Reformed Church preferred a request to the government to the effect that it should not allow the separated to hold religious meetings and should hinder the establishment of separated congregations. All men of standing approved of the persecution. Journals and periodicals expressed satisfaction with the measures taken against the separated. In some places even the rabble was urged to commit against them all sorts of insults and annoyances. Fines, imprisonment, and billeting of troops in private houses were the order of the day. Only a few dared to protest against this religious intolerance, notably, the noble Groen van Prinsterer. Foreign countries gave utterance to more expressive language.

On December 11th, 1835, a ministerial note was issued, which signified that His Majesty the King had heard with the greatest sorrow that it was the intention of some congregations to separate from the established Reformed Church and to form private societies; that the King could not give his sanction or constitutional protection until it was apparent that the public peace and safety would in no wise

be disturbed; and that therefore the new congregations should send in their regulations, in which nothing could be allowed which would encroach on the prosperity, rights or privileges of the established Reformed Church.

The first Synod of the separated congregations, which sat from March 2nd to March 12th, 1836, at Amsterdam, asserted that they represented the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, that they had only cast off the anti-Reformed form of Church government, but that they had not left the Church itself; that they were therefore the old Reformed Dutch Church and had a right to the goods, possessions and revenues of the Church, but would nevertheless renounce these rights, desiring only liberty to hold public religious meetings.

The government, however, showed no increased friendliness towards this attitude of the separated congregations, but answered by issuing a royal decree, July 5th, 1836, to the effect that it looked upon the claim of the separated to the title of Reformed Churches as usurpation, and that it prohibited their meetings; that if there were still some who would form separated congregations, they must ask permission from the government in an address signed by each individual, undertaking to provide for themselves, to expect no help from the government, and not to encroach on any possession of the Reformed Church. This decree of the government caused great dissension among the separated. Some, for example the congregation of Utrecht, were of opinion that it was advisable to obtain liberty of worship on those conditions. But many felt scruples at surrendering the name "Reformed Church", at receiving recognition only as a group or society of persons, and at losing claim to the titles or possessions of the Reformed Church. In this way schism arose between the so-called "Separated Congregations", and the "Congregations under the Cross."

After the abdication of William I in the year 1840, the persecution gradually ceased, and the cause of the discord was also practically eliminated. By degrees there arose more

unity, order, organization. Among the Separated Congregations this was very much promoted by the foundation of the theological school at Kampen in 1854. Previous to this, students in theology had received instruction from ministers severally, so that there existed great differences in opinion and divisions into schools. But in 1854 an end was put to this. All the ministers of the Church were from henceforth educated in the same school and the unity of the Church increased. The period 1834-1854 was in many respects a period of persecution, discord, and dissension. But after 1854 a time of growth began for the Separated Churches. In 1869 the reunion of the Separated Congregations and the Congregations under the Cross was brought about, under the new name of Christian Reformed Church; and as such the Church was at length recognized by the government, on the basis of a general code of rules, which was sent in. Its honor and glory consisted more and more in being a free Church, free from the State. At first some still maintained that they were the old Reformed Church, and that they had a right to the possessions of the Dutch Reformed Church and to assistance from the government. But other influences brought about a different opinion. Even at the commencement of the separation some came under the influences of the Swiss Revival, especially that of Vinet, which advocated the separation of Church from State. The Synod of Utrecht, September 21st-October 11th, 1837 had already proclaimed this principle. Later on, it was especially promoted by the deputies of the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland, who for the first time were present at the Synod of Hoogeveen, 1860 (Dr. James Harper, Dr. William Peddy, and Mr. John Derk Peddie). Since then the conviction has grown more and more among the Separated Churches that they must be free from the State.

But many Christians, even of Reformed convictions, remained in the Reformed Church, and had earnest scruples against separation. These friends, however, brought together by the Revival, and held together by the fear of

separation, were not unanimous among themselves. They were at variance with each other on several points: on Reformed doctrines, especially predestination and particular grace, on the Dutch Reformed Church and its condition, on the truth and worth of the Articles of Confession, on the State, education, politics, etc. In particular, there were two parties. The first was the "Ethical", which sought to promote the Pietist element in the Revival, represented in the German "Vermittelungstheologie", especially under the leadership of Chantepie de la Saussaye³. It took its starting point from the regenerated subject, placed purity of life before doctrine, and tried to deduce from that life all the objective truths in Scripture and in the Confession of Faith. The chief object of the Church is not doctrine and its maintenance, but the living, believing congregation. This congregation is the backbone and inspiration of the Church, finding expression in the articles of Confession, which are merely an imperfect and variable code of life. Therefore it is of no use to maintain doctrine, confession, and discipline, absolutely and judicially; ethical preaching, moral discipline, and renewing by the Holy Ghost are the only things of value. If men are converted and life is renewed, all that is necessary is gained. Until this can be accomplished, the confused state of the Church must be meekly endured as being the will of God. By degrees this "Ethical" party deviated more and more from the other in opinion on matters concerning the schools, Churches, politics, the theological faculty, etc.

The opposite party was led by the renowned Groen van Prinsterer, born 1801, died 1876. He was a son of the Revival, but also a disciple of Bilderdijk, who, with his poetical genius, combatted in principle all Deism, Rationalism, Pelagianism, and Revolutionary ideas; was always zealous for the sovereignty of God; and by his teaching of our national history at Leiden aroused in many students a taste for historical research. On this account, Groen, who was a lawyer and

³ See "Recent Dogmatic Thought in the Netherlands", *Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, April, 1892, p. 221.

well versed in the history of his own land, retraced his steps back to the great truths of the Reformation, thoroughly entered into the significance of Calvinism, endeavored to live as a Christian, with knowledge of history and statecraft, and maintained the Reformed character of the nation, of the State, of the school, and also of the Church. As to the last, many had before this time overtured the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church to maintain the Reformed doctrine. In 1835 many petitions had been presented to the Synod to this effect, but this important matter was always lightly dismissed. The Synod would not involve itself, thought itself incompetent to judge, declared the time was not ripe. The movement was, however, pressed forward. In 1841 the Rev. B. Moorrees presented a petition to the Synod with 8790 signatures for the enforcement of the old form of subscription for the ministers and the maintenance of doctrine. But this important question was again lightly dispatched by the Synod, which declared the tone of the petition unbecoming and satisfied itself with the declaration that the Dutch Reformed Church was not "liberal", that it had a form of Confession, of which the "substance and main point" were still effectual. But it was careful not to say wherein this "substance and main point" consisted.

In the following year (1842) many petitions were again presented to the Synod, in particular, the one by the seven "Gentlemen of the Hague". Groen van Prinsterer was the leader among these. They sent in a petition concerning the authority of the Form of Unity, the academic education of the ministers, the mutual connection between elementary instruction and the Church, and the modification of the Consistory. They declared that the Synod itself did not maintain the substance and main point of doctrine, that it permitted all kinds of false doctrine, that it was very ambiguous, and they therefore asked from the Synod a clear and positive declaration that the main points of doctrine should be the guide for preaching and education. They wished above everything for straightforwardness and clear-

ness. But this was what the Synod could not, and would not give. Unbelief had gradually increased in the Church, and denial of the truths of Christianity had become more general. On this account a storm broke out against the petitioners. The Synod of 1843 was besieged with petitions sent in by the opposite side, and only declared therefore that it adhered to its answer given in 1841.

Between the years 1841-1843 it became clear that concerning the system of Church government there were two parties; the "ethical" and the "judicial confessional".

The "judicial confessional" party continued to cherish the hope that it would be righted at last by the Synod. But gradually the hope abated. The downgrade movement was going on. The Supranaturalistic party was succeeded by the Groningen, and this in its time by the "Modern" one. The nomination of anti-Reformed ministers, such as Rutgers van der Loeff at Leiden, 1846; Meyboom at Amsterdam, 1854; Zaalberg at the Hague, 1864, was approved of by the Board. In fact, liberty in doctrine was conceded. It was more and more evident that the clause in Article II of the general code, "maintenance of doctrine", was misleading. The hope of the orthodox party that they would receive satisfaction from the Board was more and more abandoned.

The adherents of the Confession on this account retired more and more within their own circle, especially after the year 1854. Several societies were established to bind them together, and to strengthen them to act in concurrence for the maintenance and vindication of the doctrine and claims of the Dutch Reformed Church. Among these adherents, however, discord was soon again evident. Some withdrew into their own circles, seeking gradually to acquire a majority by influencing the congregations regarding the Confession, to alter the tone of the Boards, and in this manner to renovate the Church. They therefore wished to have no hostility against the Boards; indeed, though they felt that the formed and Presbyterian in all particulars, they rejoiced that modification of the code of the Church in 1852, was not Re-

it was much better than the code of 1816; so they entered into no conflict with the Boards and articles of the code, but only with unbelief. They wished to maintain the Dutch Reformed Church as the Church of the land, to avoid strife, and above all not to separate from it. This party was specially strong in Friesland, and was well defended by Dr. Vos, then minister of the congregation in that province, and later in Amsterdam.

Other members, however, influenced by G. Groen van Prinsterer, developed the idea after 1854 that the Boards were not worth considering, that they were *per se* unlawful, anti-Reformed, opposed to the Confession and Church discipline, and that they ought therefore to be withstood. With this party, the struggle became more and more acute between the Church and the Boards, between the code of ordinances and doctrinal Confession. If it were necessary, in order to be faithful to the Confession, they thought that the members ought to attack the ordinances. These ordinances were the principal cause of the distress in the Church. The organization had been forced on the Church as a yoke, had been spread over her like a net. Reformation of the Church ought to consist in throwing off this organization, and in replacing it by another more suitable to Reformed life.

The mouthpiece and leader of this party was Dr. A. Kuyper, born 1837, minister at Beesd 1863, at Utrecht 1867, and at Amsterdam 1870. In 1874 he tendered his resignation from the ministry, choosing a political career. In 1880 he returned to Amsterdam, was made an elder in the Church, and exercised a mighty influence over a numerous party. It may be said that after his appearance in Utrecht the ideal of his life was the reformation of the Church by means of liberation from the organization which had been forced upon it. Deeply convinced of the contradictions in the condition of the Dutch Reformed Church, he strove to make the local churches independent, by binding them together confederately, and then casting off altogether as a yoke and snare, the enforced organization.

The beginning of this movement was in Amsterdam. In that city there was a strong Reformed party of adherents to the Confession. Several times small conflicts arose between orthodox members of the Consistory and "Modern" ministers. If it was possible that the reformation should succeed anywhere, it would be from this centre, and so spread over the whole land. From 1867, when Dr. Kuyper began to speak concerning the Church, up to 1885, such matters as the unlawfulness of the Boards, the anti-Reformed character of the organization, the independence of the local churches, and the necessity of casting off the organization, were fully investigated and explained. Among the many things which aided in promoting the sense of freedom and self-reliance in the local churches, were the conflict in the political world against State-absolutism; the struggle for the free school, which originated from the parents; the preparation and foundation of the Free University by a special society; the restitution by the Synod in 1866 of the nomination of ministers, elders, and deacons, to Church members; the restitution in the same year of the administration of the revenues to the local churches, etc.

In 1885 matters came to a crisis in Amsterdam. The Consistory refused to give testimonials as to moral character to disciples of certain "Modern" ministers, who needed them according to the regulations, in order to be confirmed in a neighboring "Modern" Church, and afterwards to be enrolled as members of their own local church. The classical Board did not condemn this refusal, but declared that it ought to be based on personal examination of the said disciples. The provincial Board, however, ordered the Consistory (October 26th, 1885) to issue the testimonials in six weeks time, and shortly afterwards, when an appeal to the deputy of the Synod was not admitted, before January 8th, 1886.

So the Consistory of Amsterdam had to decide, either to submit, or to proceed with suspension and dismissal in view. It adopted the latter course, but in the meantime took measures to ensure that the revenues of the Church were retained

in a legal manner, in case of suspension and dismissal. Amsterdam possessed free administration.

Previously to this, in April, 1875, the Consistory had enforced a rule on the Church wardens intended to safeguard the revenues against possible violation by the classical, provincial, or synodical Boards, and to insure all claim to them to the Church wardens, the Consistory and the congregations. During the struggle in the last months of 1885, a change in this rule was proposed by the Consistory to the effect that the deputies of administration should be obliged to adhere to any Consistory which had been suspended, dismissed, or replaced by another for determining to maintain the Word of God in a controversy. This change in Article 14 was carried by 80 votes, and adopted by the Consistory December 14th, 1885. The classical Board meanwhile, was on its guard, being kept informed of all that was going on by Dr. Vos, minister at Amsterdam, and therefore a member of the Consistory and Secretary of the Board. The following day, the Board asked for information; suspended the 80 voters, January 4th, 1886; undertook on its own responsibility "what is of the Consistory"; and issued the testimonials the same day. At the same time the Board wrote to all Dutch Reformed Consistories to inform them of the suspension, and to warn them against violating the rules. The Board also ordered the sexton to take care that no meeting of the suspended Consistory should assemble in the chapter-house.

The original cause of contention had been the testimonials. This was now totally superseded by the question of administration,—as to which were the lawful Consistories and Church wardens, and who had the right of possession to the chapter-house of the new Church. This was the cause of several disagreeable and even violent conflicts. Kuyper and Vos were on opposite sides with their parties, and each claimed to be in the right. But Kuyper's party was defeated. After long deliberation the Synod confirmed the dismissal of the suspended members, December 1st, 1886, which had been already done by the provincial Board, July 1st, 1886,

and by the *synodus contracta* September 24th, 1886, and they were excluded for an indefinite period from the benefits of Church privileges, and from accepting ecclesiastical offices. All claim to the possession and administration of the emoluments of the Church was denied to them.

The suspended and dismissed Consistory now resolved to cast off the yoke of the synodal organization, December 16th, 1886, to bring into force again the system of Church discipline of Dort (1618), to adopt the name of the Dutch Reformed Churches, not to press the claim to the buildings and revenues of the Reformed Church for the present, and for this cause to appear as the "doleerende" Churches. The Consistory resolved further to resume public services on Sunday and to communicate all that had occurred to the members of the Church. About 20,000 members accompanied the dismissed Consistory.

Throughout the country the conflict in Amsterdam produced a great sensation. Declarations of sympathy came simultaneously from all directions. In many congregations, if not all the members, yet a portion of them, drew around the suspended. A Reformed Ecclesiastical Congress met at Amsterdam, from January 11th-14th, 1887, to deliberate about casting off the synodal hierarchy. Many congregations followed the example of Amsterdam that year. At the "Synodal Convention" of the liberated Churches held at Rotterdam, June 28th, 1887, seventy-one Churches were represented, and this number grew to about 200. At this convention the question of entering into relations or even union with the Christian Reformed Church was thus early brought into discussion.

The members of this Church criticized the action of the Dutch Reformed Churches in very different ways. Some were enthusiastic, and greeted the "doleantie" with undiminished friendliness, others did not conceal that they disapproved of much in the "doleantie". A third group believed that notwithstanding all differences, union was necessary, because ordered by the Word of God. Negotiations were

entered into semi-officially between persons of influence in both Churches, at the close of 1887, and the beginning of 1888; also in June, 1888 at the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Churches at Utrecht, and in August 1888 at that of the Christian Reformed Church at Assen, but it soon became obvious that serious differences existed. The chief of these were three in number.

The first concerned the code of rules which the Christian Reformed Church in 1869 had sent to the government, and on the ground of which it was recognized by the government. The "doleerende" Churches had had so many experiences of rules and synodal hierarchy, that they had strong objections to this code, considered it a collegialistic abuse, and made the abolition of it a *conditio sine qua non* of union. Many in the Christian Reformed Church, notwithstanding, were not inclined to acknowledge these scruples as sound objections, yet nobody defended the code as necessary for the existence and growth of the Church. It began to be owned more and more that this code could be abolished without any detriment, that doctrine and Church discipline were all that were necessary for a foundation, and that the government, quite contrary to former times, need have no scruple in recognizing, on the ground of these two things alone, the Christian Reformed Church, and also in warranting their possessions. The Synod of Leeuwarden, 1891, resolved almost unanimously to repeal this code, and so to remove the obstacle to union.

The second point of difference concerned the matter of reformation, and was of a more serious nature. Certain Consistories and congregations had also at an early date retired from the Reformed Church. But after the general movement of separation in 1834, these had become ever more isolated. The Christian Reformed Church had grown by degrees to be an independent Church, set over against the Dutch Reformed Church, and shut off by a fixed organization. But the "doleerende" Churches could not at first acquire such a position, nor feel themselves independent. All things

were still in movement and development. There were still occasional separations from the Reformed Church of larger or smaller communities, under the lead of the Consistory. They still hoped for the liberation of all, or at least, the greater number of local Churches. Therefore they would not shut themselves off entirely from the Dutch Reformed Church, and organize themselves, but considered that they were standing, not in opposition to the Church itself, but only to the reorganization which had been forced on it. They also hoped here and there to gain possession again of the ecclesiastical revenues by sentence of the court. They would not say they were separated, but only "doleantie", that is, congregations that were precisely the same as formerly, but which had cast off the yoke of the Synod, had returned to the old system of Church discipline, but were for a time disregarded in their true position, and were therefore "dolent". This feeling was in some instances so strong, that they only built wooden churches, persisted in calling all members of the local Dutch Reformed communities members of the Church, and assisted the poor.

But here time brought experience. Gradually all these ideals vanished. The action of the "doleantie" had its day. Those who remained under the synodal organization everywhere had the ecclesiastical revenues assigned to them. The hope of the liberation of all the churches was baffled. Separation became more and more obvious between those who remained in the Dutch Reformed Church, and those who sided with the movement of the "doleantie". This difference was evidently more a theoretical than a practical one. Every day it decreased in importance. So, as early as 1892 the two Churches united on the basis of doctrine and of the system of Church discipline; the matter of reformation remained an open question. The differences between them were really of the past. The Christian Reformed congregations gave up their collegiate rule; the "doleerende" Churches recognized themselves as really

separated. Together they have since 1892 borne the name of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, about 700 in number, with 350,000 members, and 550 ministers.

The third difference was respecting the theological education of the students for the ministry. The Christian Reformed Church had founded her theological school at Kampen in 1854, and it had been most highly blessed. There was a gymnasium connected with it having a five years' course, independently organized, with five masters and sixty pupils. The theological school had a four years' course (one preparatory year and three years of theology) with five professors, two lecturers, and sixty-eight students. Both schools, were founded and supported by the Church, and were under the superintendence of curators, who were also appointed by the Church.

The "doleerende" Churches, however, had been in connection with the Free University since 1887. This institution was founded by private persons, all of whom belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church, in 1880, and had absolutely no ecclesiastical character. This university stands on the basis of "Reformed principles". There was no reason *per se* why it should be connected with the "doleantie", but its professors were the leaders of the "doleantie". The theological students examined by the Free University could not obtain calls; the "doleerende" Churches were in need of ministers. In this manner there arose a connection between them. In 1891 a loose connection was made, and deputies were also appointed in the name of the Churches, who were to have superintendence over the Reformed character of the instruction.

When the union took place in 1892, these connections were maintained, and the theological school at Kampen was acknowledged by all the Churches as their own institution. The solution of the question whether it should be united to the other institution was put off till later. At the Synods at Dordt in 1893, and at Middleburgh in 1896, attempts were made to unite the two institutions, but without result.

Later the question again came up, but the Synod at Groningen, August, 1899, maintained the *status quo*. The union of the two schools seemed to be impossible. But the separation is certainly a drawback. Each institution represents a different party, makes the difference between them permanent, continues the different historical traditions of separation and 'doleantie'. They are therefore disadvantageous to the union and growth of the Churches.

At the several Synods, which are held every third year, attempts have continually been made to unite these institutions, but without result. Each still represents a different party and keeps alive the historical traditions of "separation" and "doleantie", though the antagonism between them is diminishing more and more, especially since the nomination of two professors from the theological school at Kampen to the Free University in Amsterdam, as well as that of a disciple of the latter institution to the professorship of dogmatic theology at the theological school at Kampen. So it may be hoped that the union of these two institutions will be accomplished in later years, especially as the cost of both is too great for the Churches to support.

Although these Reformed Churches have a large number of adherents, and exercise undeniable influence, they must beware of over-estimating themselves. The population of the Netherlands amounts at the present day to more than five and a half millions. To the old Dutch Reformed Church belong about 2,200,000 members. This Church is still upheld very warmly by many. It suffered very little from the movement of the "doleantie", which rather spurred it on to greater activity than before. It is, however, very much divided within itself and therefore does not exercise such an influence over the people, as it ought to do in view of its numerous adherents. No less than four parties are fighting for supremacy in the local congregations and in the different Boards. They differ from each other not only in unimportant questions concerning government and discipline, but also in the chief points of doctrine and belief.

On the authority of the Scriptures, the person and work of Christ, the personality and influence of the Holy Ghost, on sin and grace, and the whole conception of Christianity, there reigns the widest possible difference of opinion. The Dutch Reformed Church is a kingdom which is divided against itself, and it maintains its existence as a large body only by financial and legal bonds.

After the Dutch Reformed Church comes in order the Roman Catholic, which numbers not less than 1,600,000 members. Notwithstanding all the progress of this Church in inner growth, in influence and activity, it does not increase in membership to the same extent as Protestantism. According to the latest statistics, Roman Catholics form no longer two-fifths of the population, as formerly, but about one-third. Further there are in this country about 100,000 Jews, 65,000 Lutherans, 20,000 members of the separated Lutheran Church, 15,000 Arminians, 53,000 Mennonites, etc. All these societies, even the Jewish, are financially assisted by the government, though in very unequal degrees; the whole assistance to all the Churches amounts every year to more than two millions of guilders. Only the Reformed Churches and some very small societies, such as the Irvingites, Moravians, etc., receive no pecuniary support.

Voices are continually heard in loud demand that this financial bond between the Churches and the State should be severed in a legal manner, and with due regard to any right to this assistance which has come down to the Churches from former times. But these voices do not meet with much sympathy. The chances are not large that such a financial separation will be brought about in the ensuing years. And sometimes fear takes possession of the heart, lest the radical parties, growing in power, should sever the connection in a violent and unjust way, as they have now done in France.

As everywhere else, apostacy from the old Christian faith grows rapidly in the Netherlands. Sometimes there seems to be a reaction, a fear of advancing further on the path of negation, but in general the current of the times is away

from Christ and His cross. Worshipping of men, adoration of genius and of matter, boasting of absolute prosperity, adherence to the theory of evolution in the past and in the future are the characteristics of our day. It is of small consolation over against this apostacy in the civilized world, that in the heathen world missionary work is advancing. Where thousands and millions in the former turn their backs upon Christianity, and even adhere to Buddhism and Mohammedanism, to spiritualism and theosophy, there are in the mission-field but tens and hundreds, who in truth are converted to Christianity. Yet we are of good heart. It is no man, but Christ, who upholds His Church, notwithstanding the raging of hell. He is King also in this century, and He will reign a King, till He has put all His enemies under His feet.

Amsterdam.

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