

THE  
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I.

THE BELGIC CONFESSION AND ITS AUTHOR.\*

THE usefulness and even the propriety of creeds and confessions have often been attacked in modern times. It has been said that they stand in the way of free inquiry and the progress of theological science; that they hamper the study of the divine word; that they interfere with liberty of conscience and the right of private judgment; that they lead to intolerance on one side and hypocrisy on the other; that they tend to perpetuate the divisions by which the Christian Church is distracted and weakened; that they embitter and intensify differences of opinion among brethren, and that not unfrequently they counteract their own aim and bring about an indifference to all dogma, and even a thorough-going scepticism. It is a sufficient answer to these plausible objections to say that the abuse of a thing is no argument against its use; that no man or set of men can possess true faith without confessing it; that a Christian society cannot exist without an organization, and this implies agreement in religious opinions; that according to the Scripture, error in doctrine

\* AUTHORITIES:—1. *Kort Historisch Bericht van de Publike Schriften rakende de Leer en Dienst der Nederduytze Kerken van de Vereen. Nederland.* Opgesteld door Johannes Ens Utrecht: 1733.

2. *Kort Historisch Verhaal van den Eersten Oorspring der Nederl. Gereform. Kerken onder 't Kruys. Beneffens alle derselven Leer—en Dienst—Boeken.* Door Isaac Le Long. Amsterdam: 1751.

3. *Golden Remains of Mr. John Hales,* London: 1659.

4. *La Confession de Foy des Eglises Reform. des Pais-Eas.* In two columns, one containing the ancient Confession, the other the Revision made at the Synod of Dordrecht. Published by order of the Synod of the Walloon Churches, held at Leyden, 1667. Leyde: E. Luzac, 1769.

5. *Guido de Brès. In Syn Leven en Sterven.* Benevens Eenige Brieven aan zyn Huisvrouw en Moeder. Naar het Fransch. Amsterdam: H. Höveker, 1835.

6. *Eene Bladzayde uit de Geschiedenis der Nederl. Geloofsbydenis.* Door J. J. Van Toorenbergen. S. Gravenhage: M. Nyzhoff, 1861.

7. *Various articles by the Rev. A. P. Van Gieson, D.D.,* in the N. Y. Christian *Intelligencer*, during the year 1863. Also, his sermon in Centennial Discourses of the R. D. C., issued in 1876.

needs to be disowned just as much as error in life; and, finally, that all the past history of the Church shows that the formation of doctrinal symbols was an imperative necessity. It may be added that one of the greatest treasures of Christendom to-day is the long line of creeds and confessions which it inherits from the past. They are not the Scripture, nor do they stand on a level with it, but they show how, during the course of the ages, the sense of the Scripture was perceived, understood, and appropriated by successive generations of believers. They are, therefore, the milestones of ecclesiastical history. In no case are they the result of abstract, private, and personal speculations, but on the contrary, give in precise and measured terms the very truths which, although bitterly attacked, were defended and cherished as essential to the integrity of the Christian faith. Many of them bear the unmistakable flavor of martyrdom. They set forth principles for which men not only were ready to die, but actually did die, often in great numbers and in horrible torments. It pleases some to speak of these standards as dry and musty and spiritless, but to the thoughtful reader or student they are ever fresh and juicy. They embody the faith of whole generations, and embalm the results of the most earnest and prolonged discussions. They show how the indwelling Spirit of Truth manifested himself from age to age, and what form theological thought took under his guidance in opposition to error, as it shifted its ground in successive periods. What a series of mighty intellectual and spiritual conflicts is suggested by the name of the Creed of Nicæa! What thrilling memories spring up at the mention of the Confession of Augsburg! Whatever may be true of modern compends of opinion, these ancient creeds were not manufactured; they grew. The form they took was the result of a protracted antecedent struggle in which men's faculties were strained to the utmost. When, at last, after scores of years had elapsed, conclusions were formulated, they were put in shape not as new results of philosophical investigation, but as the simple statement of that which had already been wrought out in the sphere of Christian life and Christian experience.

Eminently does this apply to what has been justly called the period when confessional literature bloomed most highly, the Reformation. The revival of Scriptural truth and Apostolic life took place in so many different countries, and under such varying circumstances that, with all the underlying agreement among Protestants as to essentials, it was impossible to make a single standard of faith answer the purposes of all. The Augsburg Confession, with its appendices, seems indeed to have contented the Lutherans everywhere, and it still

remains the ecumenical symbol of that large and influential body of Protestants, but it was otherwise with the Reformed. Their confessions were very numerous, arising as they did in various regions and intended to meet varying emergencies; and although all approved the Heidelberg Catechism and accepted the Canons of Dort, yet no formal consensus ever gave these symbols universal authority. The number of particular or national creeds, although unfortunate in one sense, was felicitous in another. It gave occasion to the preparation and issue of Harmonies, which showed by actual collation that however these instruments differed in form or arrangement or phraseology, yet in substance they were the same. The circumstantial variations only brought more distinctly to view the interior unity of them all—a fact which gave no small aid to the claim that the Augustinian theology is in truth the theology of the Word.

Each of these creeds has a history which needs to be borne in mind by all who would rightly estimate their character and influence. That of the Belgic Confession is especially interesting and important, both in itself and as a contribution to Symbolics.

The Reformation began early in the Netherlands, the fatherland of Erasmus, whose writings did so much in paving the way for the Gospel. In the first quarter of the 16th century the New Testament, in whole or in part, was several times translated and was widely circulated. Many were brought to the knowledge of the truth, and persecution seemed only to multiply their numbers. The bitterest opposers of the new views were the monks. Even before Luther, the attacks of Erasmus had aroused them, and put them on their guard. And now they sought and obtained efficient aid from other lands. Especially at Bergen, in the frontier province of Hainault, an Italian monk filled the city with his preaching. He held conferences on the streets; he pressed urgently the necessity of submission to the Pope; and he charmed all hearers by his eloquence. Men crowded around him and listened with delight. Among his greatest admirers was a pious, conscientious woman, the wife of a citizen named de Brès.

The same year (1523) her son Guido was born. He early became distinguished for his strictness of life, and his devotion to all the superstitions of the Romish Church. A copy of the Scriptures having fallen in his way, he eagerly read it, and devoted himself to the study of its pages. Before long he learned to know the truth of the Gospel. As soon as he perceived that man is saved by grace, he consecrated himself to Jesus Christ, his Redeemer. He had learned and was pursuing the art of a painter on glass; still he seized every occasion to declare to his parents, to his companions, and to all whom he met,

the truths which had become so dear to him. Most of them would not listen to him; his mother, however, was converted, although the exact time of this event is not known. Persecution broke out, and as the young artist ran the risk of being denounced to the authorities, he felt it to be his duty to leave the country. At that time (1547) Edward VI. was on the throne of England, and through his pious zeal and that of Cranmer the land became a shelter for all followers of the truth. Hither then Guido fled for refuge. He took up his abode in London, and obtained a support by his art as a painter. He associated himself with the Walloon congregation, which worshipped in Thread and Needle Street, on a spot where there still stands a church in which worship in the Dutch language is maintained. At that time the congregation was under the care of John à Lasco, the distinguished friend and companion of the Reformers. Here he became stronger in the faith, and increased his knowledge of the truth so that he resolved to give himself entirely to the work of the Gospel. After some time, having learned that the faithful in the Netherlands had a respite, and that there was opportunity to proclaim the truth, he crossed the sea in order to labor among his countrymen. He travelled through the land, and spoke in a simple and earnest way wherever he could find hearers, whether many or few. After having labored thus in town and in country, he settled at Ryssel (now Lille in France), where there was a large number of believers. For some years the word had been secretly proclaimed here in the house, or the woods, or the open field, or in caves of the earth; and the danger to which the hearers were exposed had not yet chilled their eager desire to be fed with the bread of life. It was the care of this flock that Guido de Brès took upon himself.

He had not only to strengthen the faith of believers and win new souls to Christ, but also to counteract wretched errorists. The fanatical Anabaptists mingled their weeds with the good seed of the word. Their false teachings were opposed by him with great power, and his unwearied efforts were followed by the divine blessing. The church abounded in good works, and very many of the ignorant were brought to the knowledge of God. This was probably the occasion of his writing and publishing three small treatises entitled separately, "The Root, the Origin, and the Foundation of the Anabaptists of our Day, with an ample refutation of their chief arguments."\* It was then

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\* Two editions of the Dutch version of these works were published after his death, one in 1589, the other in 1603. The British Museum contains a copy of the French original, a small thick volume, containing 903 closely printed pages. The title runs thus: *La Racine, Source et Fondement des Anabaptistes ou rebaptizes de notre temps. Avec très ample Refutation des arguments principaux, par lesquels ils ont accoutume de troubler l'Eglise de notre Seigneur*

a time of peace for the Reformed. The Emperor, who had issued stringent decrees on the subject, was at last moved by the disasters of his people and by the representations made by his sister, the Regent. He saw that his severity would draw after it dangerous results, and depopulate the province which had been so serviceable to him. In consequence much more freedom of worship was allowed to the dwellers in West Flanders.

In 1555 this came to an end. The government was committed to the Emperor's son, Philip. He renewed his father's decrees and insisted upon executing them to the letter. These decrees required that every one who favored the new opinions should be removed from official positions, that all the men who were proved to have accepted the heretics' teaching or attended their meetings should be beheaded, and the women buried alive. Nor was this doom spared even in the case of those who abjured the faith, while such as persisted were sent to the stake. The inhabitants who sheltered the heretics, or who did not become informers against them, were declared liable to the same penalty. Philip, not satisfied with carrying out these decrees in the usual way, instituted a special tribunal for the extirpation of heresy, and this, though it did not bear the name of the Inquisition, was constructed on its exact pattern, both as to its aim and its measures. Very many persons were imprisoned on mere suspicion and punished on contemptible testimony. The accused were not heard in the presence of their accusers, nor made acquainted with the charges made against them. All remonstrances to Philip were fruitless; his answer was, "I would rather not be a king than reign over heretics."

The church at Ryssel was one of the first to suffer under Philip's edicts. In 1556 the prisons were filled and the scaffold streamed with blood. Guido seeing his flock scattered betook himself to Ghent, and while there published a work consisting of extracts from the old divines in confirmation of the doctrines of the Reformers, and entitled "The Staff of Faith." This little book was extensively circulated in

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*Jesus Christ, et séduire les simples. Le tout réduit en trois livres, par Guy De Brès. Chez Abel Clemence, MDLXV.* The first twelve pages are occupied by a Letter to the Church of the Low Countries, zeal for whom, lest any of them should be led astray by these errors, induced the author to write.

Book I. treats of the origin of the errors complained of, and traces it to the appearance, in 1521, of Thomas Münzer, Balthazar Hübmör, and others who claimed to have special visions and revelations, and denounced all ministers and magistrates. The author sets forth at length the monstrous extravagances of these men, both in doctrine and morals.

Book II. discusses the Incarnation, or the true human nature of Christ's flesh.

Book III. treats of the nature of baptism, of the right of the young to receive the ordinance, and the wrong done by withholding it from them. This book closes with two essays, one on the Lawfulness of Oaths, the other on the continuous Immortality of the Soul after death.

The spirit of the whole volume is good, the argument is fairly conducted, and the language is wonderfully free from the railing, unfortunately so common in those days.

those trying times, when faith so often needed a staff to lean upon ; but it seems to have entirely perished, as there is no mention of it anywhere save in the account of his martyrdom, published in 1585. But desiring to put to still further use this time of forced inactivity, he repaired to Lausanne and afterward to Geneva, for the purpose of pursuing his studies. For he felt the need of a more extensive acquaintance with theological learning, and with the Latin language, in which its chief treasures at that time were stored. During his absence God blessed the churches in Belgium, for while the voice of the living preacher was silent, the blood of the martyrs spoke with power. The stake and the axe rather awakened than suppressed the zeal of the believers, and the flames which consumed the martyrs shot forth sparks in every direction, that spread the Gospel more and more. Guido could not prevail upon himself to remain any longer away from his brethren. In June, 1561, he returned to the Netherlands, and strengthened the churches at Doornik, Ryssel, and Valenciennes. God preserved him even in the midst of the fire, so that he escaped the hands of the enemy. All the Evangelical churches in Flanders enjoyed the benefit of his activity and zeal. When the persecution became so hot that he could not any longer preach or exhort, he went to France, and labored among the churches there, especially in Amiens and Montdidier.

It was in the midst of these varied and unwearied toils that the conviction was forced upon his mind that the believers of the Low Countries should have a common confession of faith. Such a confession was needful in order to render due glory to the Lord Jesus Christ, their ever-blessed Saviour and their only hope ; to give the lie directly and efficiently to the shameless calumnies uttered against their doctrine and worship ; and to show how fully they agreed with their fellow-Protestants in Germany, France, Switzerland, and Britain. It would, moreover, be of excellent service in enlightening the ignorant, and in building up and confirming the pious in their most holy faith. To this, therefore, he addressed himself, with the result which will presently be stated.

De Brès' ministrations in France were very acceptable. The Duke of Bouillon invited him to his own city, and heard him with pleasure and edification. But finally the terrors of the sword drove him out of the country. In the beginning of August, 1566, when he was invited to Antwerp, he was settled at Esdam, and the people there gave him up only because of his strong desire to labor among his countrymen, the Walloons, who composed the large church at Antwerp. He continued here for some time, and then returned to his

former charge at Valenciennes—the church which he had been the means of gathering and establishing. Here he had as colleague Peregrin de la Grange, a native of the South of France, who had been sent from Geneva. For a time they prosecuted their labors in freedom and peace, but ere long there came a fatal interruption. In 1565 the Duchess of Parma, the Regent of the provinces, issued orders to enforce with severity the edicts of the king concerning religion. A confederacy of the nobles for a time hindered the accomplishment of this purpose, and there was a period of several weeks in which the people supposed that freedom of worship would be allowed, and there was an almost universal attendance upon the Protestant preachings. But as soon as the Regent was supplied with troops there was a great change. Valenciennes being particularly obnoxious because of the great number of Protestants it contained, an army under the command of Noircarmes, the Governor of Hainault, was set in motion for its subjugation. The inhabitants at first showed considerable spirit in defending themselves, but when the investment was completed and the cannonade began, they surrendered ignominiously, stipulating only that their lives should be spared and the city not given up to pillage—stipulations which were granted, but, as the result showed, only to be broken. The ministers, however, escaped; but after wandering around were arrested at St. Arnaud. They were loaded with chains and sent to Valenciennes, where they were thrown into a dark and filthy prison. Here they were continually visited by Roman priests, who came either to dispute with them, or to jeer at their misery. One of these was the Bishop of Arras, who at one time had accepted the Gospel, but afterward renounced it. In a discussion with him on the Eucharist, Guido asked: “Do you believe that the Apostles ever sang the mass?” Another visitor was the Countess of Rouelx, who was curious to see how the Calvinists sustained themselves in their martyrdom. She asked them how they could sleep, eat, or drink, when covered with such heavy fetters. “The cause, and my good conscience,” answered de Brès, “make me eat, drink, and sleep better than those who are doing me wrong. These shackles are more honorable than golden rings and chains. They are more useful to me; and as I hear their clank, methinks I hear the music of sweet voices and the tinkling of lutes.” This exultation never deserted these courageous confessors, except once, when de Brès learned that many of the so-called Reformed had returned to the errors of Popery. Amid flowing tears he exclaimed: “Alas, a thousand times alas, such news is like a stab through my heart.” At the same time he sent earnest entreaties to his brethren,

his joy and his crown, to stand fast in the Lord, asking them to pray for themselves, for weak believers, and also for himself while in this conflict, adding: "For it is for you and for your faith that I contend, and that I will gladly mount the scaffold if such be the Lord's will." To the people of his charge he wrote, recommending to them his mother and wife and children, saying: "You are no longer able to give me proofs of your regard; I pray you show them to these. For the Son of God, and in your service, my wife is robbed of her husband and her children of their father. Stand by them in their need."

On Saturday, the 31st of May, ten weeks after their arrest, the ministers were aroused at three o'clock in the morning, and told to prepare for their execution three hours later. They received the news with thanks and praise. De Brès at once informed the other prisoners. "My brethren, to-day I am to die for the truth of the Son of God. Praised be his Name! I am very glad. Never did I think God would bestow upon me such an honor." He exhorted them to be of good cheer, for "death is nothing." Presently they were taken to the town hall to hear the sentence which doomed them to the halter. When de Brès mounted the ladder, he admonished the people to obey the magistrates and all others in authority, except in matters of conscience; and he exhorted his friends to persevere in the doctrine he had preached to them, testifying that it was the pure truth of the Gospel for which he was now to die. While he was speaking the executioner threw him off the ladder, and he was strangled to death. An extract from one of the letters he wrote to his wife well conveys the spirit, the fortitude, and the tenderness of this confessor of Christ:

MY DEAR AND WELL-BELOVED WIFE IN OUR LORD JESUS:

Your grief and anguish, troubling me in the midst of my joy and gladness, are the cause of my writing you the present letter. I most earnestly pray you not to be grieved beyond measure, from fear of offending God. . . . If the Lord had wished us to live together longer, he could easily have caused it so to be. But such was not his pleasure. Let his good will be done, and let that be a sufficient reason. Moreover, consider that I have not fallen into the hands of my enemies by chance, but by the providence of my God, which guides and governs all things, small as well as great, as we learn from the saying of Jesus Christ, "Fear not, the hairs of your head are all numbered." . . . How then could I be overtaken by misfortune or adversity without the permission and the providence of God? That could not possibly be, unless we say that God is no longer God. . . .

When I was arrested, I said within myself, "We have made a mistake in that we travelled in such a large company—we have been betrayed by such or such a one—we should have made no halt any-



where"; and in the midst of these perplexing thoughts I was all cast down in spirit, until I lifted up my soul on high and meditated on the providence of God. Then there came to me a wonderful peace. Then I began to say, "O my God, thou hast caused me to be born at such day and hour as was ordained by thyself. All my life long thou hast shielded and preserved me in the midst of wonderful perils. . . . If then the hour has at last come for me to depart this life that I may be with thee, thy holy will be done. I cannot escape from thy hands, and I would not, even if I could, since to be conformed to thy will is my highest joy." All these considerations have made, and still make my heart very glad and peaceful, and I pray you, my dear and faithful companion, to be glad with me, and to thank the good God for what he is doing, for he does nothing but what is altogether right and good. . . . I am shut up in the strongest and most insufferable of dungeons, so dark and gloomy that it goes by the name of the Black Hole. I can get but little air, and that of the foulest. I have on my hands and feet heavy irons which are a constant torture, wearing the flesh even to the bone. But notwithstanding all, my God fails not to make good his promise and to comfort my heart, bestowing upon me a most blessed peace. . . . I pray you then to be comforted in the Lord, to commit yourself and your affairs to him, for he is the husband of the widow and the father of the fatherless, and he will never leave nor forsake you. . . .

Good bye, Katharine, my well-beloved! I pray my God to comfort you, and give you resignation to his holy will.

Your faithful husband,

GUIDO DE BRÈS.

*Minister of God's word at Valenciennes, and now a prisoner for the Son of God.*

Having thus seen the origin, training, services, and sufferings of this faithful martyr for the truth, his patience, meekness, constancy, and fortitude, his Paul-like combination of tenderness and courage, it is time to turn to that monument of his faith and zeal by which he is now best remembered and by which he is distinguished above the thousands of his fellow-confessors and martyrs in the dark days of the Spanish persecution.

For a long time there existed considerable uncertainty respecting the exact date and authorship of the Confession, but of late the chief points of interest have been determined with certainty, although many interesting details, which we would like to possess, seem to be irrecoverably lost. Martin Schook, a professor at Groningen in the 17th century, who wrote a history of the Confession, in which he claims to have had access to many documents unquestionably authentic, says that in the year 1559 Guido de Brès, moved by the fact that the inquisitors looked upon the orthodox believers as no better than the furious Anabaptists, applied himself to the task of arranging certain articles which would show the faith really held by the Church

under the Cross. But before publishing it, he submitted it to other ministers of the word, as he had opportunity, so that it might be amended in any point which failed to meet their approbation. Among those thus consulted was HERMAN STRYCHEL, also called Model, "a monk who had renounced his vows to become one of the most popular preachers in the Reformed Church, and on one occasion addressed a congregation of seven or eight thousand persons in the neighborhood of Ghent,"\* and ADRIAN SARAVIA, (born at Artois, France, in 1531,) who afterward was made Professor of Divinity in the University of Leyden, but becoming involved in some complications with the Earl of Leicester (1587), withdrew to England, where he was made a prebendary in several important churches, and was held in great esteem for his learning and virtues. At this time Saravia, being about to start on a journey to Geneva, took the articles with him and exhibited them to Calvin and other Swiss theologians toward the end of the same year. On his return to the Netherlands he brought back the opinion of Calvin and his colleagues, who, so far as appears, made no objection to the contents of the articles, but suggested that as the same language was used in both, it would be better for the Walloons to unite with their French brethren in the confession which had been adopted by the first Synod at Paris a little while before, viz., on the 19th of May, 1559. De Brès did not accept the suggestion, but still withheld his articles from publication until 1561. Meanwhile he sent them to the Church of Embden, where they were examined and approved by Cornelius Cooltuyn and a few of his colleagues. Afterward they were sent not only to various ministers in the Netherlands, but to those of Metz, to Dathenus and Heidanus at Frankenthal, to Pollanus at Frankfort, and to the ministers of the Dutch and French churches established in London. The notion widely spread, and admitted even in so accurate and trustworthy a work as the Schaff-Hertzog Encyclopædia (p. 334), that Francis Junius "revised the confession," and so was one of its authors, is certainly groundless. He was born in 1645, and surely could not while yet in his minority have been entrusted with so responsible a task. He indeed was employed about the document, but only as a messenger to convey it from Holland to some of the divines of other countries.

After having been seen and at least tacitly approved by most of the ministers throughout the Netherlands as well as by various foreign divines, the Confession was published in the Walloon speech in which it was composed. So late as 1846, Vinke, in his *Libri Symbolici*

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\* Motley, "Dutch Republic," i., 533.

*Eccl. Refor. Nederland*, stated that he was unable to find any copy extant of the original edition, and there was a difference of opinion as to its date. But in 1861 one was found in the Royal Library at the Hague, the title running thus: CONFESSIO DE FOY, *Faite d'un commun accord par les fideles qui conversent es pays bas, lesquels desirent vivre selon la purete de l'Evangile de nostre Seigneur Jesus Christ.* I. Pier. iii. Soyez tousiours appareillez à respondre à chacun qui vous demande raison de l'esperance qui est en vous. M. D. LXI. It is preceded by a touching letter to Philip II., in which they declare their loyalty and obedience, and remonstrate against the calumnies by which they are assailed, calling attention to the confession which they submit, and which if need be they would sign with their blood, and entreating liberty of conscience for the more than a hundred thousand of his subjects who seek only to live according to the pure word of God. This is followed by a page containing several texts of Scripture, such as, "Whosoever confesseth me before men, him will I confess before my Father who is in heaven," designed to encourage the faithful in maintaining the truth in the presence of persecution, an affecting testimony that this Confession was not a mere speculation of the closet, but the outcry of men who suffered the loss of all things for their faith, and yet by their foes were branded with the odious names of rebels, schismatics, and heretics. Its author had no intention of prescribing a rule of faith for others; his only purpose was to refute the calumnies of persecutors, to show what he and his oppressed brethren believed, and establish its authority by an appeal to the written word, which accordingly is copiously cited on the margin of each article. In the year 1563 it was translated into Low-Dutch and German. But it did not receive ecclesiastical authority until the year 1566, the *wonderful* year, as some of the Hollanders call it, when began the eighty years' war, in which the Dutch Republic single-handed contended against the gigantic power of Spain. In May of that year a synod, composed of the most distinguished ministers and others holding the pure Gospel, was convened at Antwerp. One of those who was present says that it was gathered secretly and amid a thousand difficulties and dangers. The inquisition was in full vigor and an open meeting would have been simply a courting of persecution and death.

At this meeting there were present Saravia and also the accomplished Philip Marnix de St. Aldegonde. Here the Confession was read and approved with some slight alterations. Hermann Venema says\* that it was abridged from a somewhat longer one (paulo pro-

\* "Institutiones Histor. Eccles. Vet. et Nov. Test.," vol. vii.

lixior) drawn up in 1563. But this is an error, as will appear whenever the *editio princeps* is compared with any of later date. There were indeed numerous changes, but these affected only details. Diffuse sentences were compressed; others that were slightly obscure were made more perspicuous; and for many terms and phrases, others that were deemed more elegant or forcible or exact were substituted. Emendations of this kind were made in every article, but in points of doctrine or other essential features there was no change whatever. The Confession bears the stamp of de Brès throughout. Specimens of the minor alterations are seen in the 1st article where the last clause, "and the overflowing fountain of all good," is an addition, and in the 6th article where the last clause, "much less detract from the authority of the others," is also an addition. In other cases there was retrenchment, as for example in the 7th article, where the sentence, "Every one should guard against adding to or diminishing the Word, mixing human wisdom with Divine," is dropped. By far the most important change that was made is seen in the 20th article. By the revision this was made to terminate with the words, "Just in leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves." But in the original draft it stood thus: "And since he leaves the rest in the ruin and perdition whereinto they are fallen, he hereby manifests himself just." It is clear, therefore, since the number of articles remains the same, and the doctrinal content of the earlier is found pure and entire in the latter, that there was no change of any importance. But the Synod, after approving the final draft, thought it would be well to take the advice of the Genevan divines on the matter, and accordingly despatched Francis Junius to ascertain their views. In November following an answer was received. It was to the effect that they had admitted from the beginning that the articles were orthodox, but that they had thought that the Netherlandish Churches had no need of the Confession; still, since it had been published, it could not now be recalled, and they approved of it as agreeable to the Word of God.\*

\* From this account which is every way trustworthy it is apparent how incorrect is the statement contained in G. B. Winer's *Comparative View of the Doctrines and Confessions of Christendom*. See note at foot of page 24 of the English Translation (T. & T. Clark: Edinburgh, 1873). "They who attentively read it [the Confession] will find strong reason for thinking it was written by some individual hastily, without much judgment, or the serious scrutiny of others, and therefore for doubting whether such a document ought to be regarded as expressing the mind of a whole community. Adr. Saravia says that it was first written by Guido de Brès, communicated to a few here and there, and, without any very solemn examination or approbation of any Synod, gradually passed into use as a formula of the churches." This is simply a tissue of misrepresentations. The Confession was indeed the work of de Brès, but it was not written hastily, nor without examination and revision. Nor was it submitted only to a few, nor did a Synod fail to pass upon it, nor is there the least reason for supposing that it does not express the mind of all the Belgic believers of that period.

Here it may be well to answer the question, Why, since there were already in existence other confessions of acknowledged excellence, the Netherlanders did not accept one of these, instead of preparing one of their own? In regard to the Augsburg Confession, it may be said that they did not approve of everything which it contains, while they desired some things which it does not contain. It was especially unsatisfactory to them because it had no article concerning the Sacred Scriptures, from which they thought that the whole doctrine of faith should be derived. The omission is the more singular since it is recognized alike by friends and foes that the formal principle of Lutheranism is the sole authority of the Divine Word, as distinguished alike from tradition and from visionary enthusiasm. A stronger claim was presented by what is sometimes called the London Confession, a short compend of doctrine and duty drawn up by John à Lasco, in 1550, for the use of the congregations of foreigners established in England under Edward VI. This was translated into Dutch by Uitenhove, and very widely circulated, although without ecclesiastical authority. Alva and the Inquisition put it in the index of prohibited books, and pursued it with so much zeal that it disappeared and was almost forgotten, until about forty years ago a copy of a later edition was discovered at Utrecht. But this formulary also was felt to be not what was wanted. It did not make as clear and explicit assertion of the sole and sovereign authority of the Word of God as these earnest believers deemed to be necessary. It resembled the Zwinglian Articles, which, although evangelical and Scriptural, yet lacked the *lucidus ordo* that seems requisite in a formal statement of doctrinal truth. A more formidable difficulty was the polemic character of à Lasco's compend. It assailed the Romanists and their doctrines with the utmost vehemence, and it would be unwise and unseemly for the Netherlanders, who prepared their confession with the view of showing to the king what they held, and of disabusing his mind of the erroneous views he entertained, to state at needless length what would only increase his ill-feeling toward them.

At first view it seems difficult to understand why the Gallican Confession was not adopted, especially since this course was repeatedly recommended by Calvin and the other Genevan theologians. There is certainly a striking agreement between the two formularies. Both present the same doctrine in a corresponding order and sometimes in the same words, so that one can hardly doubt that the later was modelled after the earlier. And yet there appear to be intelligent reasons for the action of the Netherlanders in declining to fol-

low Calvin's advice. It was natural for them to desire a statement sprung from themselves and identified with their own land and people. Then, besides, they desired a confession which should be more complete than that of the French Churches in the exposition and proof of doctrine. Accordingly it will be seen on examination that almost all the points of faith are set forth more fully and accurately in the Belgic Confession; that they are accompanied by references to the Scriptures that prove them; and that in one article, the xxxvith, which treats of the second advent of Christ and the last judgment, there is set forth a doctrine which is entirely wanting in the Gallican symbol, strange as it seems that such an omission should occur in a creed penned by the great Reformer. Further, there were peculiarities in their circumstances which they needed to meet. One of these was the presence of Anabaptist errors which prevailed very widely in the Netherlands and but slightly in France. Hence there is no mention of them in Calvin's formula, although there is distinct reference to "the diabolical imaginations of Servetus" (art. xiv.), whereas the work of de Brès more than once states "its detestation of the error of the Anabaptists" (arts. xviii., xxxiv., xxxv.), with whom for obvious reasons it was very important that the faithful should not be confounded. It may be added that there are some expressions in the French Confession (*e. g.*, art. xxiv.), which, though true enough as a rejection of Popish errors, yet were calculated to give offence to Philip and his partisans, and might therefore well be avoided. On these grounds therefore "the Church under the Cross" judged that, notwithstanding their full consensus with the brethren in France, it was better for them to adhere to their own Confession. The special object of its preparation was twofold: first, to proclaim to the king, the nobles, and the entire nation that they did not reject the ancient and Scriptural doctrine of the Christian Church, but, on the contrary, adhered to it strenuously; secondly, to show that they had nothing in common with the Anabaptists and other seditious bodies whose tenets and practices were at war with social order and morality. This appears not only from the Confession itself, but also from the Letter to King Philip II. prefixed to it, as well as from the Remonstrance to Magistrates added at the end. The Letter referred to bears the address, "The faithful in the Low Countries, who desire to live according to the true reformation of the Gospel, to King Philip, their Sovereign Lord." It breathes throughout the genuine spirit of martyrdom. It indicates so clearly and fully the purpose and motives of the authors of the Confession that a translation is

here inserted. It does not appear by whose pen this weighty and touching epistle was written, but it sounds in every part of it like the utterances of de Brès, and we doubtless shall not go far astray in attributing it to his hand. It certainly is remarkably free from the bitterness which ferocious and long-continued persecution is apt to engender, and is every way becoming loyal subjects addressing one whom they regarded as a gracious prince, but as grievously misled by those who had access to his presence.

This is the text of the letter literally translated :

If we were permitted, Sire, to appear before your Majesty, to clear ourselves of the crimes with which we are charged, and to show the equity of our cause, we would not resort to this secret method of making known to you the groanings of our people by a mute request or a written confession. But since our enemies have filled your ears with so many false reports that we are not only prevented from appearing in your presence, but hunted from your territories, and massacred and burnt wherever we may be found, at least, Sire, allow us in the name of God that which cannot be denied even to the brute beasts, namely, that our lamentations may be heard as from afar. So that if having heard us your Majesty judge us to be guilty, the fires may be increased and the racks and torments multiplied throughout your kingdom ; but if on the contrary our innocence be made clear to you, that it may be a stay and a defence against the fury of our enemies. For alas, Sire, if only accusation be needed and every means of defence is taken away from the accused, who will be found upright? Whose innocence will be established?

It is charged that we are rebels and seditious, aiming only to subvert all government and throw the world into confusion ; not only to liberate ourselves from your power and jurisdiction, but even to wrest the sceptre from your hands. Such crimes are unworthy of our profession, unworthy of a Christian, unworthy of the name of a man, worthy only of the ancient sentence of tyrants, *Christianos ad leones!* But it is not enough to accuse ; every thing depends upon the proof. The prophets, the apostles, the members of the primitive church were charged, and indeed according to outward appearance and the carnal judgment of men, loaded down with like calumnies. But as they in their age protested, so we now protest before God and his angels that we desire nothing else than to live with a pure conscience in obedience to the magistrates, to serve God and to reform ourselves according to his word and his holy commandments. And besides this secret testimony of our consciences, they who have taken part in the proceedings for our condemnation will testify that they have never perceived in us anything tending to excite rebellion against your Majesty or trouble the public peace, but rather have found that in our public assemblies we pray for kings and princes and especially for you, Sire, and those to whom you commit the government of your lands and territories. For we are taught as well by the word of God as by the assiduous inculcations of our ministers,

that kings, princes and magistrates are divinely appointed, and that whoever resists the magistrate resists the ordinance of God and shall receive condemnation. We confess and avow that by the eternal wisdom of God kings reign and princes decree justice, provided that they exist not by usurpation or tyranny, but by God's own appointment. And to show that this is not only in our mouths, but engraved on the bottom of our hearts, who among us has ever been found to refuse the tax or tribute imposed on him? On the contrary each man has paid as soon as the command was given. What taking up of arms, what plot has ever been discovered, even when by those who use your name and authority to go to all lengths in cruelty, we have been so terribly tormented as to provoke the patience of the most gracious and turn it into anger and despair?

But we render thanks to God that the blood of our brethren poured out in our cause or rather in the cause of Jesus Christ, and for a testimony to the truth, crieth out, and that the banishments, prisons, racks, proscriptions, tortures, and innumerable other afflictions do show that our desire is not carnal, seeing that we could live much more at our ease in the flesh if we did not maintain this doctrine. But having the fear of God before our eyes and terrified by the menace of Jesus Christ, who has said that he will deny us before God his Father if we deny him before men, we offer our backs to stripes, our tongues to knives, our mouths to gags, and our whole body to the flames. For we know that whoever will follow Christ must take up his cross and deny himself. No well-regulated mind, no one who is not blinded and devoid of sense, could ever imagine that they seek to stir up trouble who forsake their country, their kindred, and their friends in order to live in peace and tranquillity, or that they strive to rob the king of his crown or conspire against him, who die for that Gospel in which they see it written, "Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's." Wherefore offering their persons and their property to the king they supplicate his Majesty for permission to offer unto God what He requires and what we cannot refuse Him since He has made us his, having bought us at a great and costly price.

Nor should our enemies be allowed to abuse your goodness and patience by telling you that it is only because of our small numbers that we do not revolt, as if each of us was a rebel at heart, only awaiting opportunity to take the field and assail you with fury. For let them disguise the fact as they will, we assure you that in your Pays Bas there are more than a hundred thousand men holding the religion of which we now offer you the Confession, and yet not one of them has any inclination to mutiny, nor has any one heard a word tending in that direction. When we speak thus of our numbers, it is not, Sire, to intimidate the least of your officers and servants, but to refute the calumnies of those who only by falsehood can render us odious, and also to move you to pity. For alas, if you stretch forth your arm to plunge it into the blood of so many, O God, what a waste will you make of your subjects, what a plague among your people, what mourning, what groaning, what sighing of women and children, of relatives and friends! Who is there that could see with a dry eye so many honest citizens, loved of all and hated by none,



dragged to a dark and frightful prison, and after racks and tortures, subjected to punishments the most cruel and barbarous, such as even profane heathen tyrants never invented, while if their wives escape they must wander in foreign lands, carrying their infants on their backs and begging their bread from door to door? O Sire, let not posterity stamp your reign as bloody and cruel! Let them not say that the honor of your ancestors, the greatness of your father and your own excellencies have been obscured by cruelty, a cruelty, I say, such as belongs to wild beasts, and is unbecoming a man, especially a Prince whose chief virtues consist of mildness and clemency, the characteristic marks by which a true king is distinguished from a tyrant.

In regard to the persecutions urged against us as if we were enemies not only of your crown and the public weal, but also of God and His church, we beseech you to judge of these by the Confession of Faith which we here present, and which we are ready and resolved, if need be, to seal with our blood. By this, as we hope, you will perceive that we are unjustly charged with being schismatics, rebels, and heretics, since we avow and confess, not only the principal points of the Christian religion as comprised in the symbol and the common faith, but all the doctrine revealed by Jesus Christ as our life, righteousness, and salvation, published by the Evangelists and Apostles, sealed with the blood of so many martyrs, and kept in its purity and integrity by the primitive church, until by the ignorance, avarice, and ambition of the ministers, it has been corrupted by inventions and human traditions contrary to the spirit of the Gospel. This our adversaries impudently deny to be the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, since they condemn and massacre us for not holding that which is not in it. Nor can they excuse themselves from blasphemy against the Holy Ghost when they say that all the treasures of the divine wisdom and the means abundantly sufficient for our salvation are not contained in the Old Testament and the New, but that their inventions are necessary, and that whoever does not esteem them as highly as the Gospel or more so, is accursed, unworthy of human society, fit only to have his body exterminated and his soul plunged into the lowest depth of hell. The weakness of our flesh trembles at these words, being frightened by the menaces of those who are able to reduce us to ashes; but on the other hand we hear the Apostle saying, "Though an angel from heaven should preach any other gospel, let him be accursed;" we hear St. John closing his prophecy with the words, "I testify unto every one that heareth the prophecy of this book, If any man add unto these things, God will add unto him the plagues written in this book." In short, we see that we are commanded to follow only the word of the Lord, and not that which seems to us right, and are forbidden to add to or take from the holy utterances of the great God.

Jesus Christ has said that he made known all that he heard of the Father; and if because of the Apostles' weakness he concealed something which he promised that he would reveal to them by the Spirit whom he was to send, we feel assured that he has kept his promise, he being Truth itself, so that these secret things are contained in the Gospel and in the Apostolic writings made after the aforesaid promise

and the reception of the Holy Spirit. Whence it appears that they abuse the passage of the Evangelist, who understand the reserve matter which the Apostles were not able to bear to be their ceremonies and unscriptural superstitions, as we would be very glad to show by the testimony of the Word, were it not that we fear in view of the brevity due to a letter to become tedious to your Majesty. We humbly entreat, in the name of Him who has established you and maintains you in your kingdom, that you will not permit those who are carried away by avarice and ambition and other bad passions, to make use of your arm, authority, and power, in order to satisfy their appetites and gorge themselves with the blood of your subjects, calling all true zeal for piety sedition, revolt, scandalous, and the like terms by which they seek to inflame you against us. But alas, Sire, consider that the world has always hated the light and opposed itself to the truth. Meanwhile, is the man who has in his mouth this word of truth seditious, because men band themselves against him? On the contrary, we are to attribute sedition and scandals to the irreconcilable enemy of God and man, the Devil, who in order to save his kingdom which consists in idolatry, false worship, profligacy, and other boundless vices, that are cut off by the Gospel, raises storm and mutiny in order to impede its course. To this must be added the ingratitude of the world, which, instead of receiving with thanks the word of its Master, its Shepherd and its God, arrays itself against it, giving as its reason the length of time in which it has persevered in its error, thus setting the prescription of time against Him who made the ages and to whom all things are present.

To you, Sire, to you it belongs to take cognizance of these things, to you it belongs to oppose errors however deep-rooted by length of time, and to maintain the innocence of those who hitherto have rather been oppressed than heard in your courts of justice. So may the Lord bless you and keep you, may the Lord make his face to shine upon you and uphold you in all prosperity. Amen.

Of course all this cogent remonstrance and earnest entreaty fell without effect upon the ears of the ferocious and bloodthirsty bigot who then occupied the Spanish throne. One may well doubt whether he even condescended to read its stirring words. Perhaps it was not allowed to come before him at all. But even had it been otherwise, no different result was to be looked for. Philip, like Louis XIV. of France in a subsequent century, seems to have deliberately sought to compensate for personal peccadilloes and shortcomings in religious matters, by harrying all presumed heretics with fire and sword, and thus manifesting a zeal for the Lord like that of Jehu of old. The only answer made to the Confession by the Papal authorities, was to put it in the *Catalogus librorum prohibitorum*, which was done in the year 1569.

The "Remonstrance to the magistrates of the Low Countries," which follows the Confession, was in much the same strain as the

Letter to the King, but somewhat bolder in tone. The authors of it declare that they recognize the authority of civil rulers as God's ministers of justice, and for this reason offer their remonstrance as poor innocents who have been condemned rather than interrogated as to their faith, burned rather than heard in their own defence. They say that their enemies are of two kinds. One class is transported by a furious zeal for what they call religion, and think that they are doing God service in hunting the faithful to death. The other persecute us, not because we trouble their devotion, for they have none, but because the Gospel to which we seek to conform our lives is a constant rebuke to their impiety, avarice, ambition, and other vices. Both combine to urge the authorities to a relentless persecution. But to do this is to persecute Christ in his members, for men bathe both their hearts and their hands in the blood of such as seek by a living faith to renew the divine image in their souls. How long is this to go on? How long will the magistrates condemn without hearing, and listen only to those whose interest lies in maintaining the abuses that are in question?

The remonstrants, like most men in their day, did not understand the principles of religious liberty, for they expressly declare that the civil power should take cognizance of heretics, in this dissenting, as they admit, from the ancient doctors who held that the magistrate could not constrain the conscience, but was set only to preserve civil and social order. They insist, however, that the question what is heresy should be settled by the Word of God alone, and not by the opinion of monks and priests, the lineal successors of the Scribes and Pharisees, who, under the pretence of great sanctity, corrupted the true service of God. These men appeal to custom and long usage in support of their views, not perceiving that Jews, Turks, and Pagans could defend their course by precisely the same argument. As for those enemies who care not for religion, their attendance at confession and mass is in deference to the opinion of others, and they rail at the Gospel and denounce its followers simply to turn away attention from their own gross misdeeds. The magistrates, therefore, are summoned to use their power against these openly wicked persons, and not against the confessors of Christ. "Compare our lives with those of our foes, for the tree is known by its fruits. We thank God that even our enemies are constrained to bear witness to our modesty, virtue, and patience; as when they say of one, 'He does not take God's name in vain, he is a Lutheran,' or of another, 'He is not licentious nor a drunkard, he belongs to the new sect.' And yet they lose no opportunity to torment us. Begin then, Sirs, begin to take the

matter in hand. Inquire into our innocence, so loaded down with bitter accusations and charges, lest the Lord who holds the life of his servants dear should be angry with you. Despise not our tears and groans, in order that the Lord may hear your prayers, bless you in your office and work, and make you prosper in all that you do. So may it be."

It does not appear that this manly and touching appeal had any more effect upon the magistrates than the letter to the king had upon his Majesty. The persecution became more and more bitter and unrelenting, and the believers in the Low Countries earned their title to the name which they assumed as a badge of honor and an assurance of fidelity—the Church under the Cross. In proportion to their numbers they furnished far more martyrs than any other branch of the Reformed.

In the original Synod in 1566 which approved the Confession, it does not appear to have been subscribed even by the members present; much less did they ordain that it should be subscribed by others. But in a Synod held at Wesel two years later it was decreed that all candidates for the ministry should be asked whether they agreed in all things with the doctrine which it contained. In the year 1571 a national Synod was held at Embden, at which the ministers subscribed the Confession and recommended such subscription to others. They also instituted a correspondence with the French churches with a view to obtain a subscription of each nation to the symbol of the other, in order that the agreement of the two bodies might be clearly manifest—a purpose, however, which was not carried into effect until twelve years later. In the year 1574 a provincial Synod held at Dordrecht, made subscription obligatory not only upon ministers, but upon elders and deacons, and also the schoolmasters. In the year 1578 a national Synod held at the same place added the professors of theology, but omitted the deacons, and only recommended subscription to the elders; but the next national Synod, which was held at Middleberg in 1581, reimposed the obligation upon all in the following terms: "The ministers of the word, elders and deacons, likewise the professors of theology (and it well becomes the other professors also), and the schoolmasters shall subscribe the Confession of the Netherlandish Churches." This rule was re-enacted by the national Synod which met at the Hague in 1586, and which also imposed the penalty of deposition in case any professors or ministers should persist in a refusal to subscribe. This continued to be the law of the church up to the time when the great epoch-making Synod met at Dort in 1618.

The chief action of this famous body in respect to the Confession consisted in two points. One was an inquiry into the doctrinal correctness of the symbol itself in the presence of the foreign divines there assembled to see if any objection was entertained to any part of it save the 31st and 32d articles, as to which, since they treated of church government and order, there were well-known differences of opinion. The result of this inquiry made with due form and deliberation was eminently satisfactory. The distinguished divines of Great Britain certified that after having made due examination, they found nothing in the Confession, so far as points of faith were concerned, which did not agree with the word of God. The divines from other countries that were present, each and all, made the same declaration, saying that in their judgment the Confession entirely agreed with the word of God and with the confessions of the other Reformed Churches. And they exhorted the Netherlandish believers to persevere in this orthodox, pious and simple Confession, to hand it down to posterity inviolate, and to maintain it until the coming again of our Lord and Saviour. The two divines\* appointed by the French Churches to attend this Synod, having been forbidden by the King of France to be present, no reply could be obtained from them, but it was announced by the Walloon delegates that the Confession had been formally approved by a French National Synod held at Vitry in 1583. It thus appears that the Belgic Confession has a valid claim to an ecumenical character. No other symbol of the Reformed has been solemnly ratified by the official representatives of so many national churches as this one. England, Scotland, France, Switzerland, and Germany concurred with the Netherlands in setting to their seal that the articles of Guido de Brès, martyr for the Gospel, do express the pure truth of the divine Word.

The other action of the Synod had respect to the text of the Confession. When the foreign divines were asked to express their opinion of it, the question naturally arose, as we learn from the account of Mr. Walter Balcanqual, contained in Hale's "Golden Remains," what edition of the Confession should be regarded as authentic. It was resolved by the Synod that the one found in the *Corpus et Syn-tagma Confessionum Fidei*, Geneva, 1612,† should be thus regarded, a Latin edition being selected, doubtless out of deference to the foreign divines, many of whom had little or no acquaintance with the Dutch. But after the departure of these divines the Synod took up

\* The celebrated André Rivet and his brother-in-law, Pierre Du Moulin, the most brilliant controversialist of his day.

† See a good account of this book in Schaff's "Creeds of Christendom," i., 354.

the matter of the text and resolved, in view of the fact that there were some verbal variations in the different copies, that a final revision should be made. They ordered a collation of the different editions in each of the three languages, Latin, French, and Dutch, to be made, special regard being given to the copy which had been hitherto held as authentic in the Walloon churches. The deputies appointed to do this work were Antony Thysius, Daniel Colonius, Godfrey Udemannus, Herman Faukelius, and Festus Hommius, the last two of whom were afterward employed in making the translation of the Scriptures now known as the *Staatcn Bijbel*. This committee subsequently reported, and the matter was carefully considered in open sessions of the body, and finally by unanimous consent a copy in each language was approved and ordered to be held as authentic. The changes made were few and slight, and almost exclusively verbal. Thus in Art. I. the word *Almighty* was added in the statement of the divine perfections; in Art. II. the word *fully* was substituted for the word *evidently*; in Art. III. the quotation from 1 Peter (i. 21) was made to conform to the exact text of Scripture; and in Art. IV. the canonical books were all mentioned individually, instead of being given by classes, as the Five Books of Moses, the Twelve Minor Prophets, etc. In Art. XXII., where our righteousness is said to consist in "Christ imputing to us all his merits and so many holy works which he hath done for us," there was added the four words, "and in our stead," thus bringing out more clearly the vicarious character of our Lord's obedience.

Since that time the form of the Confession has remained unchanged, although innumerable editions have appeared, especially in Dutch, in which language the excellent custom obtained of inserting the Confession at the end of the Bibles and Psalm-books printed for common use in churches and families. The symbol was translated into other tongues, among which were Hungarian, Romaic, Greek, and Arabic. The Greek was prepared by James Reims, and first issued in quarto form in 1623. Again it appeared in 1638, in a small volume containing the Greek and Latin versions in parallel columns. This was reproduced in 1653.\*

The character of the Confession can be better understood by setting forth in order the titles of the thirty-six articles of which it consists.

I. There is one God. II. By what means God is made known to us. III. Of the written Word of God. IV. Canonical Books of the

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\* Copies of both of these are in the Gardner A. Sage Library, at New Brunswick, N. J.

Holy Scriptures. V. Whence do the Holy Scriptures derive their dignity and authority. VI. The difference between the Canonical books and the Apocryphal. VII. The sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures to be the only rule of faith. VIII. God is one in essence, yet distinguished in three persons. IX. The proof of the foregoing article of the Trinity. X. Jesus Christ is true and eternal God. XI. The Holy Ghost is true and eternal God. XII. Of the Creation. XIII. Of Divine Providence. XIV. Of the creation and fall of man, and his inability to perform what is truly good. XV. Of original sin. XVI. Of eternal election. XVII. Of the recovery of fallen man. XVIII. Of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. XIX. Of the union and distinction of the two natures in the person of Christ. XX. God hath manifested his justice and mercy in Christ. XXI. Of the Satisfaction of Christ for our sins. XXII. Of our justification through faith in Jesus Christ. XXIII. Our justification consists in the forgiveness of sin and the imputation of Christ's righteousness. XXIV. Of man's sanctification and good works. XXV. Of the abolishing of the ceremonial law. XXVI. Of Christ's intercession. XXVII. Of the Catholic Christian Church. XXVIII. Every one is bound to join himself to the true Church. XXIX. Of the marks of the true Church. XXX. Of the government of the Church and the offices in the same. XXXI. Of the ministers, elders, and deacons. XXXII. Of the order and discipline of the Church. XXXIII. Of the sacraments. XXXIV. Of holy baptism. XXXV. Of the holy supper of our Lord Jesus Christ. XXXVI. Of magistrates. XXXVII. Of the last judgment.

The reader who carefully examines what is contained under these heads will find not only a neat summary of divinity, but a very clear statement of what have been called the doctrines of grace, viz.: the sovereignty of God in bestowing salvation, the strictly vicarious nature of Christ's sacrifice, the utter moral ruin of man by the fall, his absolute dependence upon the Holy Ghost for spiritual life, and the certain preservation of God's people unto eternal life. These truths are inwrought into the very texture of the Word, and no progress in theology will ever outstrip them or throw them into the shade. They are not merely theoretical, they are not simply possible modes of stating what is taught in Scripture, but they are its substantial and characteristic features and therefore are reproduced in the experience of all devout believers, even of many who professedly deny them. But this masculine theology, just because it is so vigorous and well-marked, is the more liable to misrepresentation. A public man whose lineaments are sharply defined always presents

the best subject for the caricaturist. A slight stroke of the pencil will distort the whole appearance into something ludicrous or offensive, and yet leave the likeness one that cannot for a moment be mistaken. So is it with the goodly system which takes the name, sometimes of Paul, at others of Augustine, and again of Calvin. It is bold, orderly, self-consistent, and clear. Hence the ease with which it can be so represented as to resemble the poet's *monstrum horrendum*. A small addition here, a small omission there, a slight reversal of order or of words in another place, changes the whole aspect of things, and turns the admirable into the horrible. For example, the system represents God as so holy that he cannot look upon sin, and so just that he must punish it, but yet so gracious that he gives up the Son of his love in order that through his sacrificial death there may be saved a multitude that no man can number. Now simply omit from this statement the fact that God devises and executes the redemptive economy, and there follows the wearisome caricature, which we so often see in the pages of the ignorant or the malicious, holding forth God as an almighty and bloodthirsty tyrant, whose dread vengeance on sin as a personal wrong to himself is appeased only by the interposition of a third party who comes in only of his own motion. Now the only possible occasion for this monstrous perversion lies in the wilful omission of the fact that *God gave his own Son*, and yet this is a constituent part of the belief of the Reformed upon the point in question. So habitually foreordination is made out to be fatalism. Grace is misrepresented as in deadly antagonism with free agency. The preservation of saints is made out to be the perseverance of sinners in the road to hell.

Such being the case, it is matter of thankfulness when doctrinal standards, forsaking the language of the schools and seeking to draw from the experience of the pious in all ages, express fundamental truths in a simple, perspicuous, and Scriptural way, so that the way-faring man, though a fool, need not err therein. And this is what is done in the Belgic Confession. It is not vague or uncertain or timid. It declares the whole counsel of God so far as he has revealed it, and yet does this in a kind, gracious spirit, without passion, without heat, and without prejudice. Nothing is said to provoke controversy or to stir up wrath, and yet nothing is held back. No man *need* err in understanding it, but if he wish to travesty its salient features, so as to make it ridiculous or repulsive, the way is open and the work is easy.

Dr. Schaff says of this Confession : \* " It is, upon the whole, the

\* " Creeds of Christendom," i., 506.



best symbolical statement of the Calvinistic system of doctrine, with the exception of the Westminster Confession." It is doubtful whether it is requisite to make this exception. The Westminster is fuller, more didactic and impersonal, and more symmetrically arranged, but for that very reason less desirable as a representative document. The freer a symbol is from dogmatic or philosophical niceties, the simpler in its statements, the more devout and spiritual in its tone, and the more rigidly confined to fundamental truths, or to those essential to the religious life, the better it is. The Belgic Confession had the Gallican for its basis, and, as Ebrard says, use was made of the Frisian Confession of Uitenhoven, and of the Catechism of John à Lasco, but the whole was thoroughly fused in the pious mind of its martyred author, and bears the stamp of the perilous period in which it was made. Hence it is notable for its apologetic character. It was designed not so much to suppress or deny error as to announce and emphasize truth. Its author had no wish to bring railing accusations against any, but rather to set forth plainly and firmly the faith held by the Church under the Cross. Hence, while the errors of Rome are rejected, this is done in as mild and courteous terms as the manners of the time permitted; and his Holiness is not called Antichrist, thus committing the church to a dubious interpretation of an obscure and difficult prophecy. And when any particular tenets are disapproved, no anathema is pronounced upon the holders of those views. The dissent from Rome appears conspicuously in what is said of the rule of faith (Art. vii.), of justification by faith (Art. xxii.), of the sole mediation of Christ (Art. xxvi.), of the doctrine of the true church (Art. xxix.), and of the sacraments (Art. xxxv.); and for all that appears, this emphatic dissent is just as much needed now as it was three centuries ago. For more and more are controversies within the pale of the visible church ranging themselves under one or other of the two great parties—the outward, formal, and traditional, and the inward, scriptural, and evangelical.

As one of the most common charges against the Belgic believers was that they were heretical, they are careful to repudiate by name known and acknowledged errors, such as the Arian and others of the same class (Art. ix.), the Manichæan (xii.), and the Pelagian (xv.). They specify, as points in which they disown the Anabaptists, their denial that Christ assumed human flesh of his mother (xviii.), their repetition of the ordinance of baptism to adults and their denial of it to infants of believers (xxxiv.), and their seditious spirit toward a lawful magistracy (xxxvi.). For the same purpose of self-vindication they affirm their adhesion to all the cardinal features of the historic

faith of the church. Their article on the proof of the Trinity (ix.) is a fair summary and well managed, excepting the adduction of the notorious text of the Three Witnesses (1 John v. 7, 8), which it is now well known formed no part of the original text of the epistle. They are careful, too, to affirm that they willingly receive the three creeds, the Apostles', the Nicene, and the [so-called] Athanasian. In the case of the last mentioned the language by no means implies that the damnatory clauses are adopted, but only that the *Quicumque Vult* is accepted as a just and accurate explication of the doctrine of Scripture on the points of which it treats. On the vicarious and expiatory nature of our Lord's sacrifice, the article (xxi.) is distinct and clear, being as outspoken as Anselm. So in the final article, which treats of the last judgment, it is expressly said that men shall be "judged according to what they shall have done in this world, whether it be good or evil," thus cutting off all room for the unscriptural, weak, and enervating suggestion of another probation for any class between death and judgment.

On the subject of civil government they fall into the error, well-nigh universal in their day, of denying religious liberty. Not content with repudiating the anarchical and destructive tenets avowed by some, and insisting upon the just authority of magistrates "in all things not repugnant to the Word of God," they go on to affirm that the civil authority ought to "protect the sacred ministry and prevent all idolatry and false worship," expressions which might easily be understood and applied so as to bring the church under the control of the State and crush out all freedom of conscience. And in fact the mixture of civil and ecclesiastical powers in the Netherlands had much to do with the subsequent lamentable decline in doctrinal purity and religious energy; and the only hope of recovery under God lies in the substantial freedom which has been achieved of late years, but still lacks something to render it complete. These clauses are retained in the Confession as adopted by the Reformed Dutch Church in America, but their force is broken by qualifying statements contained in the preface to the first edition of the Constitution of the church, issued in 1793. But in the year 1831 the matter was brought before the General Synod as needing some further explanation, whereupon, after referring to the Preface to the Constitution, the Synod resolved:

1. That the Reformed Dutch Church deprecates any union between Church and State as alike detrimental to the interests of vital piety, and dangerous to the liberty of conscience which is now enjoyed by the citizens of our happy Republic.

2. That the results of experience in this country abundantly prove that the church needs no other support than the piety of its members and the grace of Christ.\*

Upon the whole it may be claimed that this Confession represents more exactly than any other of symbolical authority the general mind of the Reformed. It is not too long, nor does it enter into details upon points about which orthodox believers may be expected to differ, while on all essential points, it is clear and full and strong. Its polemic features are only those that were indispensable. Dissent from Rome must of course indicate the grounds upon which it rests, and the rejection of Anabaptist errors was required in order to distinguish humble believers from the violent and unclean crowd of half-crazy fanatics with whom their crafty foes sought to confound them. And this clean-cut and decisive rejection of agrarian and communistic errors is nearly as much demanded in our day, as it was in the middle of the sixteenth century. It is educated men who tell us that property is robbery, and it is in the highest-toned literary periodicals that views are advanced, the adoption of which would run a plowshare through the whole fabric of modern civilization. The Confession is further recommended by its Scriptural character, *i. e.*, not merely its conformity to Scripture, but its custom of interweaving the very words of Divine Revelation in the issue of its articles. The philosophical theologian may object to this, but surely the confession of the people is better, the closer it clings to the *ipsissima verba* of Inspiration. Somehow God's word, even in a translation, has more incisive force than the word of his servants. On the Sacraments we hear the clear voice of the general body of the Reformed, shunning equally the high Sacramentarianism of Luther, and the bald, prosaic, commemoration-theory of Zwingle. It confesses the mystery, but holds it fast, and with it the blessed comfort which the Holy Supper brings to the believing communicant and to him alone.

One of the crying evils of the times is the neglect of Symbolics, both among clergy and laity. There are few of our best appointed seminaries in which this is made a distinct department, or in which ample provision is made for instruction in its nature, grounds, and history.† And to how small an extent are ministerial cadets trained to the knowledge of the origin, character, and differentiating features of the standards of the church to which they belong. And as to the people the case is still worse. They are sadly ignorant of confessional

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\* Minutes G. S., IV. 439.

† Only last year a middle-aged minister, of good standing among his Presbyterian brethren, asked the writer whether the Heidelberg Catechism were not a Lutheran symbol!

writings, are accustomed to hear them denounced as dry and dull and unedifying, never of their own accord turn to them, and if they do, have no preparation for an intelligent and profitable use of their contents. Their piety accordingly is weak and flabby. It lacks the symmetry, stability, and vigor which come only from a comprehensive view of revealed truth in its leading outlines. It is said of an eminent lawyer that he was in the habit of reading Blackstone's Commentaries or its equivalent once a year, in order to refresh his mind by contact with first principles and keep solid the basis upon which all further acquisitions must rest. A similar discipline would be of signal service to every adult believer. Drop the periodical and the religious novel and go back to a creed which has been distilled from the life-blood of a generation, which is a product, not of the closet, but of the battle-field, which has been tested by the rack and the stake and the gibbet, which has been drawn by prayer and meditation from the sacred fountains, which has kindled faith, hope, and love to their highest flights, and which gives in a clean, clear, and comprehensive outline the great volume of the truths by which the soul is nurtured for life everlasting. There is no danger of the Creed supplanting the Scripture. On the contrary it makes the sacred volume clearer and dearer, and causes it to be read more intelligently. It puts a barrier in the way of the dangerous habit of running off with a half truth as if it were the whole—the fruitful source of most modern heresies and vagaries—and compels the believer to look at the entire scheme in its mutual relations and its legitimate results.

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