

THE UNION SEMINARY REVIEW

VOL. XXVI.

APRIL, 1915.

No. 3.

WILLIAM THE SILENT.*

BY THE REV. W. W. MOORE, D. D., LL. D.,

President of Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Va.

The sixteenth century was one of the most important epochs in the history of mankind. It was the age of Queen Elizabeth and Lord Bacon and William Shakespeare. It was the age of Martin Luther and John Calvin and John Knox. It broke the shackles of ignorance and superstition and tyranny which for centuries had bound down the human race. It introduced a new era in religious freedom and intellectual freedom and political freedom. The most powerful monarch in the world in the sixteenth century was Charles the Fifth. He had a vast empire. It included Germany, Austria and Lombardy, that is, the northern part of Italy. It included in the south also the kingdom of Naples, the kingdom of Sicily and the kingdom of Sardinia. It included the whole of Spain, at that time the richest and strongest country on the globe. It included Burgundy, that is, the eastern part of France. And it included the Netherlands, or what we now know as Belgium and Holland. It comprised, therefore, a very large part of the continent of Europe. Then, too, in the new world, it included the West Indies and Florida and Mexico, and also Peru in South America. The sun never set on his dominions. He was the autocrat of half the world.

* A Reformation Day Address to Young People, based chiefly on "The Rise of the Dutch Republic," by J. L. Motley.

Charles the Fifth was the bitter enemy of the good men throughout his dominions who wished to put an end to the scandalous corruption of the Romish Church, and to preach the pure gospel to the people. He did his best to prevent the spread of the Protestant Reformation, especially in the Netherlands. I want to tell you first about an edict that he issued in regard to this subject.

THE EDICT OF CHARLES THE FIFTH.

This edict forbade all private assemblies for worship. It forbade all reading of the Scriptures by laymen. It forbade all conversation within one's own doors concerning the Bible or other subjects connected with religion. It forbade all printing, selling, giving or owning of any book or pamphlet or paper written by such men as Martin Luther and John Calvin. It forbade even the holding of any of the opinions of such "heretics."

Be sure that you understand exactly what this edict meant. It meant that a man could not own a hymn book. It meant that a man could not question the miraculous power of a priest to turn bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Christ: It meant that a man could not read the Twenty-third Psalm or the Sermon on the Mount to his children in his own house, unless he had graduated in theology at a Roman Catholic University.

That was the edict. And what was the penalty for doing any one of these forbidden things? Was it a reprimand? Was it a fine? Was it imprisonment? Was it branding on the brow? Was it cropping of the ears? Was it some other form of physical mutilation? No. It was death. And death in a terrible form. Men who violated any one of these points were to be beheaded with the sword. Women who did any one of these things were to be buried alive. That is, if they repented of their errors. Mark the clemency of the Emperor and of the Papal Inquisition. If a man had questioned the miracle of transubstantiation, or had read the Bible to his children in

his own house, and then had expressed his penitence for doing so, they did nothing to him except cut off his head. If a woman had attended a meeting of her neighbors for prayer, and then had repented for doing so, they did nothing to her except to bury her alive. If, however, they persisted in their errors, both men and women were burned alive. The edict provided further that any person who gave shelter or food to one suspected of being a heretic or who failed to denounce one so suspected should be liable to the same punishments. To encourage informers and to put a premium on treachery to one's friends it was further ordained that any one who had been present in any secret assembly for worship and who afterwards came forward and betrayed his fellow-worshippers should receive full pardon, and that in case of the conviction of any one so accused the informer should be entitled to half the property of the condemned man, if valued at not more than one hundred pounds; if more, then ten per cent. of the excess.*

THE EXECUTION OF THE EDICTS.

Sword and scaffold, stake and spade were soon busy with their dreadful work. The Netherlands were turned into shambles. Hugo Grotius, generally known as the father of modern international law, says that in the carrying out of this diabolical edict and of others like it during the reign of Charles V. not less than one hundred thousand people were burned, strangled, beheaded or buried alive. And the worst was yet to come.

The inhabitants of these seventeen provinces in the Lowlands were at that time the most enlightened, prosperous and liberty-loving of all the people in Europe. They had 208 walled cities, "many of them among the most stately in Christendom." Antwerp, Amsterdam and Rotterdam were the commercial centres of Northern Europe. There were, besides, 150 chartered towns, 6,300 villages and numerous lesser hamlets. In these peaceful villages, in these busy towns, in these

* J. L. Motley, "The Rise of the Dutch Republic."

splendid cities, and on the fertile farms which stretched around them on every side, dwelt three millions of the most intelligent and industrious people under the sun, so enterprising and so thrifty in agriculture and manufactures and commerce that of five millions of gold annually which Charles derived from all his realms, two millions came from these small but opulent provinces. Such was the fair land upon which Charles, to his eternal infamy, let loose the fiendish Papal Inquisition, and upon which his son and successor unleashed the brutal soldiery of Spain.

THE DELIVERER APPEARS.

But the appointed deliverer of the Protestant Netherlanders was already born, though the deliverance itself was still far in the future. When Charles V., prematurely old at fifty-five, as a result of his labors, cares and disappointments, but especially of the unexampled gluttony by which he had shattered an originally fine constitution, abdicated the throne at Brussels in 1555 and turned over his vast power and possessions to his bigoted, morose, sickly, repulsive son, Philip II., he entered the great hall where the ceremony took place leaning upon the shoulder of a tall, handsome youth of twenty-two, magnificently dressed, like all the other courtiers in that splendid assembly, wearing a suit of armor inlaid with gold and carrying his steel helmet under his left arm. He was the picture of noble manhood and furnished a sharp contrast to the decrepit Charles and the ill-shapen Philip. With his fine stature, well poised head, symmetrical features, dark brown hair, mustache and pointed beard, spacious forehead, full, brown eyes, and profoundly thoughtful expression, he was an outstanding figure even in that imposing company of princes, soldiers, statesmen and grandees. This was William of Nassau, Prince of Orange. The son of a Protestant mother, the heir of great wealth and high rank, he had been sent as a boy of eleven to the court at Brussels. There he was, of course, educated as a Roman Catholic. The Emperor, who was a good judge of character and talents, had shown a remarkable interest in him.

had made him his favorite page, had put him into military service at nineteen, and at twenty-one had made him commander-in-chief of the army on the French frontier. It was from this command that he was summoned in 1555 to attend the Emperor's abdication. He was equally prominent in military and diplomatic services under Charles' successor, Philip. At twenty-six he negotiated the treaty which brought about peace with France. With three other great nobles, representing Spain and the Netherlands, he visited Paris, and it was then and there that he learned a great State secret, and then and there that he earned his immortal title of William the Silent. He was not so called because he was uncommunicative in general. On the contrary he was a fluent and delightful talker, conversing freely and gracefully in five languages. "His hospitality, like his fortune, was almost regal," and at his palace at Brussels he kept open house not occasionally but constantly, entertaining a multitude of guests, and charming all with his winning address and pleasant conversation. He owes his historic title, "The Silent," to an incident which occurred on his visit to Paris. While hunting one day with Henry II. in the forest of Vincennes, William was amazed and horrified to learn from the French King's own lips that he and Philip II. had formed a plot to massacre all the Protestants in their dominions. It was from the manner in which he listened to this appalling communication that he received his celebrated surname; for, though shocked and horror-stricken, he said not a word, nor did he reveal even by a start or a look the feelings with which he heard that all these thousands of innocent people had been devoted to destruction. Although still nominally a Roman Catholic, his purpose was fixed from that hour; he resolved, if possible, to save his countrymen from that dreadful fate.

THE REVOLT OF THE NETHERLANDS.

Philip II. had married Bloody Mary of England, and, like her, was a gloomy and cruel fanatic. It is said that the only time in his life that he ever laughed outright was when he heard of the massacre of St. Bartholomew, that cold-blooded

butchery of thousands of Protestants in France. It can easily be imagined then with what tigerish ferocity he would enforce the bloody edicts of his father against the Protestants in the Netherlands.

But the spirit of resistance was rising. The condemned Protestants on their way to the scaffold were cheered by the people in the streets. Five hundred of the nobles presented a protest to the regent, Philip's sister. When she showed agitation an insolent counsellor said, "Madam, are you afraid of a pack of beggars?" The petitioners adopted the name thus given them and soon the cry, destined to become so famous, rang through the land—"Long live the Beggars!" The Calvinists gathered in convention at Antwerp. Ministers came forth from their hiding places and preached openly, the people gathered by thousands in the open fields to hear them. Cathedrals and churches were wrecked, and images and pictures destroyed. In their first battle, however, the Beggars were badly beaten, losing 1,500 men.

Moreover Philip now found a perfect instrument for the execution of his nefarious plans in the able, cold-blooded, stony hearted Duke of Alva, who in August, 1567, arrived at Brussels with the most formidable army in Europe. By a formal edict of the Inquisition all the people of the Netherlands except those specifically exempted were sentenced to death, and in a few weeks the bodies of hundreds of fresh victims, dead but unburied, tainted the air. For, in order more effectually to strike terror to the hearts of the heretics, the duke ordered that, in addition to the torturing, beheading and hanging, the corpses should remain on the gibbets and wayside trees. The property of the condemned was seized by Alva and his officers and "the murderers wallowed in the wealth of their victims." The most flourishing country in Europe was stricken to the earth. Manufactures ceased. Business was paralyzed. Grass grew in the streets and weeds choked the wharves of hitherto busy and prosperous cities. Tens of thousands of intelligent and industrious people, merchants, shop-keepers, mechanics and farmers, left their homes, and crossing the Channel on rafts, in small boats,

fishing smacks, or trading vessels, settled permanently in England, where Elizabeth, a Protestant, was now queen.

William, who had withdrawn to his ancestral estates in Germany, and who not long afterwards broke his nominal connection with the persecuting Roman Catholic Church and openly avowed himself a Protestant and Calvinist, and placed himself unreservedly in God's hands for the rescue of his oppressed people—now raised three armies and sent them against Alva's butchers. But the campaign was a failure. Again and again his hastily organized troops were defeated by Alva's veterans. William was cast down, but not in despair. He resolved to win by the sea. He issued commissions to privateers, and soon his terrible "Sea Beggars" were sweeping the ships of Spain from the ocean and capturing towns in Holland heretofore held by the enemy.

But Alva's bloody work went on. He seized and pillaged town after town, torturing and killing the people. After the plunder of Malines and the sack of Zutphen, he fell upon the little town of Naarden, and deliberately butchered nearly the whole population, men, women and children. Next came Haarlem, a hotbed of zealous Calvinism. Unable to take it by assault, after two attempts with heavy losses, the Spaniards determined to reduce it by famine. During the siege neither side gave quarter. The gibbets on the town walls and in the Spanish camp stood face to face, each with its gruesome display of victims. Besieged and besiegers seemed to vie with each other in ferocity. The Spaniards announced the defeats of the armies sent by William to relieve the city by throwing over the walls the heads of captured leaders. The Hollanders replied by rolling into the Spanish lines a barrel containing eleven heads of captured Spaniards. After a seven months' siege, in which 12,000 Spaniards perished, the famished inhabitants, who had subsisted for some time on shoe leather, vermin and weeds, surrendered. Of the 4,000 men who had composed the garrison only 1,600 survived. These were butchered in cold blood (only the Germans being spared), and their gallant

leaders were hanged. About 400 prominent citizens were also put to death.

When William's followers now urged that the cause was hopeless without an alliance with some great potentate, he made an immortal answer: "When I took in hand to defend these oppressed Christians I made an alliance with the mightiest of all Potentates—the God of Hosts, who is able to save us if He choose."

In the following month Alva sent 16,000 troops against Alkmaar, with orders to put every living creature within the walls to death. This force was driven off with heavy loss and after seven weeks abandoned the siege and retreated. A little later the Spanish fleet also was badly defeated and its admiral captured. Following these reverses, Alva asked to be released from his post, and in December, 1573, he left the land which for six years he had drenched with blood and returned to Spain, broken in health and forever infamous.

When his successor, Don Luis Requesens, took command, attempts were made to bring about a settlement by negotiations, but in vain. William utterly refused any settlement except on three conditions: freedom of worship and liberty to preach the gospel according to the Word of God; the restoration and maintenance of all the ancient charters, privileges and liberties of the land; and the withdrawal of all Spaniards and other foreigners from all posts and employments, civil and military.

THE SIEGE OF LEYDEN.

In the campaigns of 1574 the great event was the siege of Leyden. This place, the very heart of Holland, surrounded by orchards and gardens, was invested in the month of May by a powerful Spanish army, which built around it a circle of sixty-six forts and effected a blockade so complete that no relief by land was possible. There were few soldiers in the town, but the citizens themselves took up arms and manned the ramparts. Unfortunately the place was poorly provisioned and in a few weeks it was suffering the horrors of famine. Unable to relieve it by land, William resolved to call in the aid of the sea. He

loaded with supplies two hundred flat bottomed ships at Delft, then cut the dykes and flooded the rich country for twenty miles, preferring to ruin the land rather than lose it, and on the shallow artificial ocean thus created sent his fleet towards Leyden. But adverse winds prevented the water from rising high enough to carry the flotilla to the walls. It stranded five miles away and there for weeks it lay in sight of the starving defenders of the town, with its tantalizing abundance of food. The famishing people momentarily gave way to despair and gathering around the burgomaster, Van der Werf, with reproaches and threats, demanded that the place should be surrendered to the Spaniards. But they did not know their man. That heroic officer, tall, haggard, with tranquil but commanding eye, faced the hungry multitude firmly, waved his broad brimmed hat for silence, and made this answer: "My own fate is indifferent to me, not so that of the city intrusted to my care. I know that we shall starve, unless soon relieved; but starvation is preferable to the dishonored death which is the only alternative. Your menaces move me not; my life is at your disposal; here is my sword, plunge it into my breast and divide my flesh among you. Take my body to appease your hunger, but expect no surrender so long as I remain alive." Such an example could have but one effect. The people rallied from their despair and from that moment there was no more flinching, though many fell dying from hunger, though even infants starved to death on their mothers' breasts, and mothers dropped dead in the streets, with their dead children in their arms. The people, many of whom were subsisting on dogs, cats, rats, and even the green leaves of trees, hurled from the walls this defiance to their foes: "You call us rat-eaters and dog-eaters, and it is true. So long then as you hear a dog bark or a cat mew within the walls, you may know that the city holds out. And when all has perished but ourselves, be sure that we will each devour our left arms, retaining our right arms to defend our women, our liberty and our religion against the foreign tyrant. Should God in His wrath doom us to destruction, and deny us all relief, even then will we maintain ourselves forever

against your entrance. When the last hour has come, with our own hands we will set fire to the city and perish, men, women and children together in the flames, rather than suffer our homes to be polluted, and our liberties to be crushed."

At last, on the first of October, the wind changed, a furious gale sprang up from the west and drove the waters from the sea over the land through the ruined dykes. The stranded provision ships were lifted and borne onward to the Spanish lines. After a succession of desperate combats they captured the outermost forts. One of the strangest spectacles in history was witnessed when in the middle of the night a battle was fought between the Spaniards in their forts and the Dutch in their ships swinging about among the tops of the apple trees and the roofs of submerged farm houses. Panic-stricken by the assault and the rising flood of waters the Spaniards abandoned the rest of their defences and fled. The ships sailed up the channel, throwing bread right and left among the starving crowds of people on the banks. When the admiral stepped ashore he was welcomed by the magistrates, and then straightway a solemn procession was formed and the whole body of magistrates, citizens, sailors, soldiers, women and children marched to the great church to give thanks to God for their deliverance. After prayers the vast congregation attempted to sing a hymn of thanksgiving, but the emotion was too deep, the thousands of voices which began it broke and died away and the multitude wept like children. A letter had been sent at once to William at Delft. He received it at two o'clock as he sat in church. As soon as the sermon was finished he handed the note to the minister, who read the good news from the pulpit. The Prince himself, though still weak from the illness during which he had directed from his sick bed the measures for the relief of the beleaguered city, hurried off to Leyden to congratulate the people on their heroic defence and marvelous rescue. As a reward for its sufferings and a lasting recognition of its heroism by the people of Holland, William, with the consent of the estates, forthwith established there the institution of learning

ever since famous throughout the world as the University of Leyden.

On the very next day after the relief of the city the wind shifted again and a gale from the northeast blew the sea out from the submerged district, the fertile lands were again laid bare, and before the tide could turn the reconstruction of the dykes began and they were soon securely rebuilt.

PERMANENT UNION OF THE SEVEN PROTESTANT PROVINCES.

But the relief of Leyden did not mean the end of the war and the freedom of the Netherlands. After a lull of nine months, hostilities were renewed by the Spaniards, and a little later when the Governor-General, Requesens, died, his mutinous troops, lawless and licentious, fell upon the cities of Ghent, Utrecht, Valenciennes and Maestricht, and pillaged, ravished, tortured, murdered and burned at their will. The greatest sufferer of all at this time was Antwerp, where property of untold value was carried off as booty, a thousand buildings were burned and eight thousand of the people butchered during the three days of what came to be known as the "Spanish Fury."

Meantime William was steadily consolidating his position in Holland. His influence in Flanders and Brabant, that is, the country we now know as Belgium, was scarcely less powerful, and in 1577 he was called back to Brussels, made a triumphal entry, took up once more his abode in the Nassau palace, from which he had been obliged to fly for his life ten years before, and was acclaimed as their leader by the Roman Catholics of the southern provinces as well as the Protestants of the northern provinces. This was the culminating point of his career.

William's hope was to weld the northern and southern provinces, seventeen in all, in a permanent confederacy against Spain, establishing everywhere full religious toleration and securing to Romanists and Protestants alike freedom of conscience and worship. But in these large minded views he was far ahead of his age. The Romanists of the ten southern provinces especially were by no means ripe for such a step as

that. These provinces, therefore, under the adroit management of Alexander of Parma, finally decided for Rome and tyranny, while the seven northern provinces, under William's lead, chose Protestantism and liberty. The Union of Utrecht in 1579 bound these seven provinces in a confederacy, which became the foundation stone of the Dutch Republic. Complete freedom of worship was guaranteed in each province, and no one was to be persecuted for his religious opinions. That was the parting of the ways. From that day to this Belgium has been Roman Catholic while Holland has been Protestant.

REWARDS OFFERED FOR THE ASSASSINATION OF WILLIAM.

The Union of Utrecht (1579) made it more clear than ever that Spain could never again subjugate the Netherlands so long as the Prince of Orange lived. He must be got out of the way.

Philip did not hesitate to adopt the basest and most cowardly means to accomplish his end. At the instigation of Cardinal Granville, a dignitary of the Romish Church, he published an edict placing William under the ban and offering a reward of 25,000 crowns in gold for his assassination. The murderer, moreover, whoever he might be, was to have a full pardon for any and all crimes of which he might have been guilty, "however heinous," and was to be elevated to the ranks of the Spanish nobility. This infamous edict called forth from William one of the most remarkable documents in history, his celebrated *Apology*, in which he gives an account of his whole life, rebuts the charges brought against him, brings home to Philip in blistering words his own black record of adultery, incest, murder of relatives and wholesale cruelty and bloodshed, scoffs at Philip's childish idea that he can be frightened by this menace of cutthroats and poisoners, and says: "I am in the hands of God, my worldly goods and my life have been long since dedicated to His service. He will dispose of them as seems best for His glory and my salvation." The paper concludes with "an impassioned address to the people for whom he had sacrificed his property, the lives of three brothers, the liberty of

his eldest son, and for whose sakes he had for years been holding his life in his hand day and night; and he protests that, if they think he can still serve them, then in God's name let them go forward together in defence of their wives and children and all they hold dear and sacred." To this ringing declaration he signed his dauntless motto: *I will maintain.* It was presented to the States General at Delft, and then published in French, Dutch and Latin, and sent to every Court of Europe.

MANY MURDERERS RISE TO THE BAIT.

Philip's murderous ban soon bore fruit. On a day in the spring of 1582 as William rose from dinner in company with several Dutch and French noblemen, a fanatical dupe of the Jesuits, a youth of the servant class, acting under instructions from his master, a Spanish merchant of Antwerp, appeared from among the servants and offered him a petition. As the Prince took the paper, the assassin drew a pistol and fired. The ball entered the neck under the right ear, passed through the roof of the mouth, and out by the left jaw, carrying with it two teeth. The Prince exclaimed: "Do not kill him. I forgive him my death." But the words were too late; two of the gentlemen present had already run him through with their rapiers. After hovering for many weeks between life and death the Prince recovered, but the shock caused the death of his beloved wife, Charlotte de Bourbon. Later he married Louisa, widow of the Seigneur de Teligny, and daughter of the illustrious Admiral Coligni. She had lost both her husband and her father in the massacre of St. Bartholomew. This first attempt on the Prince's life was made in March, 1582. The second was made in July of the same year, when an Italian and a Spaniard were detected in a scheme to poison him and confessed that they had been hired to do so by the Prince of Parma, the Spanish commander. Other attempts followed, five in all within two years, all with the privity of the Spanish government, but all unsuccessful. The sixth succeeded.

THE ASSASSINATION OF WILLIAM.

Balthazar Gerard, a fanatical Romanist of Burgundy, a villain of mean appearance but desperate and daring character, had long meditated the murder of the Prince. In March, 1584, he came to Treves and confided his scheme to the regent of the Jesuit college. The priest expressed warm approval of the plan, gave the murderer his blessing, and promised him that, if he should lose his life in accomplishing his purpose, he should be enrolled among the martyrs. Other Romanists gave him similar encouragement. Arriving at Delft, Balthazar introduced himself as the exiled son of an executed Calvinist, bought a pair of pistols, and on Tuesday, July 10th, came to William's mansion on pretense of asking for a passport. It was dinner time and the Prince, with his wife on his arm, and followed by the ladies and gentlemen of his family, was just going to the dining room. The Princess, struck with the sinister appearance of the man at the doorway, asked William an anxious question about him, to which he replied carelessly that it was merely a person who came for a passport. The Princess, whose father and whose first husband had both been murdered by the Papists and who, therefore, had good reason for her fears, remarked in an undertone that she had never seen so villainous a countenance. Orange, however, passed unconcerned into the dining room and during the meal conversed with his usual cheerfulness. At 2 o'clock the company rose from the table. As the Prince, who led the way, came from the dining room into the hall, and began to ascend the stairs, the murderer emerged from an obscure archway in the wall, and at a distance of only a foot or two, fired full at William's heart. Three balls pierced the body. He exclaimed: "O my God, have mercy upon my soul! O my God, have mercy upon this poor people!" These were the last words he ever spoke, except to answer "yes," when his sister immediately afterwards asked him if he commended his soul to Jesus Christ. He was laid on a couch in the dining room, and in a few minutes breathed his last in the arms of his wife and sister.

So perished the father of his country at the early age of fifty-one. Four days later the murderer was executed with indescribable torments. The great reward offered by the Spanish King for the murder was paid to the assassin's parents and they took their place at once among the nobility and landed aristocracy.

The body of his illustrious victim was laid to rest in the New Kirk at Delft with impressive public obsequies and amidst the tears of the whole nation. "Never was a more extensive, unaffected and legitimate sorrow felt at the death of any human being." Never has any ruler of any age received truer homage and love from his people, and never has any ruler of any age more richly deserved such devotion. For thirty years he had been their leader in the most unequal conflict ever waged by man against oppression. For them he had sacrificed his vast estates, pouring out his wealth like water, and dying at last almost penniless. For them he had endured toils and trials and sorrows such as few men have ever undergone. His genius had foiled the wildest statesmen and ablest soldiers of Spain.

His courage in danger, his constancy in disaster, his hopefulness in defeat had enabled their small and weak country to baffle the mightiest empire in the world. He had delivered his people from Spanish tyranny and Papal persecution and had driven from the land forever the foreign despotism and the bloody Inquisition. He had secured the political independence of his people and given them the priceless boon of civil and religious liberty. He had laid strong and deep the foundations of that mighty Dutch Republic, which under his successors became the foremost naval power in Europe, with a world-wide commercial and colonial empire.

The statesman, soldier, hero and martyr who did all this for Holland, with absolute trust in God and submission to His will, and who illustrated in his life the loftiest Christian virtues amid circumstances of almost unparalleled difficulty, can never be forgotten. Three hundred and thirty years have passed since he was struck down by the assassin's bullet, but the spirit of William the Silent still holds Holland under its mighty

spell. His blood still flows in the veins of the young **P**resbyterian queen who occupies the throne of **Holland** to-day, ninth in descent from her illustrious ancestor, and for her **and** the house of **Orange** and the memory of "**Father William,**" the Dutch people would die to-day as readily as they died by **thousands** when fighting under his banner for civil liberty **and** pure religion.

Nor can we in the West ever forget him without the **basest** ingratitude, for America is vastly indebted to **Holland,** and so to **William the Silent,** for our free institutions **and** our Protestant faith.