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ARTICLE I

REFORMERS BEFORE THE REFORMATION.

Reformatoren vor der Reformation, vornehmlich in Deutschland und den Niederlanden, geschildert von Dr. C. Ullmann. Erster Band, Hamburg, 1841. Zweiter Band, 1842. [Reformers before the Reformation, particularly in Germany and the Netherlands.]

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THE author of these volumes ranks among the best German writers of special church history. Nineteen years ago, at the early age of twenty-nine, after having gained some reputation as professor of theology at Heidelberg, he gave no doubtful indication of what he was to be, by that work with which his name is most associated in England and in this country, his life of Gregory of Nazianzum. Naturally endowed with a sound and vigorous understanding, educated both as a general scholar and as a theologian after the best manner of his country, he early applied himself to original investigations in historical theology, and by a life of unremitted effort, has risen to a high eminence, making him an authority, in matters connected with his department of study, second to no other. No writer exhausts a subject of inquiry more than he; no one digests more perfectly the materials which his industry collects, and few present them to the reader in a more complete form or a more lucid order. His style of composition is pure and elegant, his language rich and flowing. Though a man of great liberality of feeling he is strongly attached to the lead-

ing doctrines of the reformation, and always expresses his sentiments with a dignified freedom and christian independence. There is not only an unusual elevation both in his moral and intellectual character, a largeness and breadth of views alike honorable to the philosopher and the Christian, but a beautiful symmetry in his mind, sterling good sense and correct taste, not always associated with learning and talent in the men of his country.

Ten years ago, Ullmann published his life of Johan Wessel, a work which threw a new and unexpected light upon the dark period of the history of the church in Germany immediately preceding the reformation. The volumes named at the head of this article, grew out of a revision of that work and an enlargement of the plan, so that by grouping together the history of those men whose influence was greatest in preparing the soil for Luther to cultivate, but whose services had been almost overlooked, he might exhibit a more perfect and rational view of the causes of the reformation than had yet been given to the public. We well recollect the sensation which his lectures on this subject produced in Halle, by drawing from the wells of history deeper and fresher waters than others had done before him. The most learned and able men of the theological faculty shook their heads, doubting and yet not daring to contradict the position taken. But since the historical evidence has been brought to light and published to the world, all such skepticism has given way to admiration and praise. If it be asked how it is possible that such things should so far have escaped the observation of historians for more than three centuries, we reply by asking, how it was possible for Leopold Ranke to make such a collection of new documentary evidence upon the whole period of the reign of Charles V. as is found in his recent history? The fact is undeniable, whether it can be accounted for or not. But all this goes to prove that the old writers did not examine original and official documents, as historians are now accustomed to do, and that they trusted more to the tradition handed down from spectators whose impressions were sometimes right, sometimes wrong, and whose accounts were frequently desultory, if not superficial.

It is not merely the memory of the men whose full history we now read for the first time, that interests us; it is the important link which they supply in history that lends to this valuable contribution of Ullmann its highest charm. Reasoning from general principles men have long since come to entertain the belief that such a spiritual movement as that in which Luther was the most

conspicuous actor, could not have been produced by him, nor by any other human being; but that there must have been some great process of preparation working deeply in the minds of the people. It has been said, and with truth, that spiritual oppression and corruption had become insufferable, that external opposition from such men as Arnold of Brescia, Wickliffe, Huss, Jerome of Prague and Savonarola, aroused the minds and fixed the attention of the people upon the subject, and that the revival of classical learning which spread from Italy to Germany; enlightened the public mind and exposed the abuses of ecclesiastical power. But still there was wanting a clear historical proof of a positive influence, acting directly upon the moral elements of society with sufficient power to account not only for outward resistance and political action, but for a moral revolution so deeply religious as the reformation unquestionably was.

There are, as Ullmann remarks, in every great and permanent reformation two essential elements, the one internal, or the calm and religious contemplation of principles lying at the very foundations of popular belief, the other external, or actual resistance to the established order of things, to the ecclesiastical and political relations of society. The former, if it exist separately, may be limited to the closet, or at most, through books, exert some influence upon a particular class of readers; the latter by itself, may indeed produce events of dramatic interest, such as the imprisonment or execution of the chief actor, or an insurrectionary movement in some province; but such events generally pass away without leaving any permanent effects upon society. It is the union of these two elements that constitutes a reformation. Both of them were at work at the close of the fifteenth century. But resistance to authority, being external, very naturally attracted most attention, and the actors in those scenes which were under the public eye, are well known in history, while the silent meditations of men, who, in their retirement, penetrated the true character of the Papal hierarchy, traced it to its origin both philosophically and historically, and were led back to the Bible and to primitive Christianity, as their hope and the hope of the world, have been allowed to pass even to the present time, for the most part, unnoticed and unknown. It was not a Huss, nor a Savonarola, nor men of that class, who revolutionized the church in Germany and Switzerland. Luther and Zuingle were not made what they were by the influence of these men. Their characters were not formed, nor did their minds receive direction from the

influence of external events. It was not till the internal process had been nearly completed, that the tragical end of the men who had gone before them came to act upon their minds. It was in retirement, in meditation upon things purely spiritual, in intercourse with pious men, that the reformers received their impressions and their true calling. It is, in the biblical and practical theology of a certain class of men in Germany and the Netherlands, a theology transmitted to Luther by Staupitz, and to Zuingle by Wyttenbach, that we are to seek for the religious element of the reformation.

The general view entertained by Ullmann on this subject is the following. Germany, including Switzerland and the Netherlands, was the original and independent seat of the reformation. It is a remarkable fact that men have been misled for centuries, and been accustomed to speak of English, Bohemian, French and even Italian precursors of the reformation with scarcely a thought that there could have been such in the very country which was the theatre of action, whereas it was the men who lived along the Rhine in its whole extent, that sowed the seeds of the reformation. Did Luther, Zuingle and their associates drop down from the sky in full panoply as reformers? Did they come into existence and receive their stamp of character through the agency of foreigners who could effect at a distance and upon strangers what they could not at home and upon their intimate friends? It is impossible. The laws of historical connection require us to assume that there were intermediate links in the chain of causes, or rather that there was a direct agency of men on the very spot rendering it necessary that precisely there the scene should open. And now we are able to prove that there were, in fact, men in Germany and in the Netherlands who had an influence upon the reformers, in producing their character, which no foreigners ever had. Where, in all the writings of Luther—to give but one example—do we find any reference to an influence from abroad upon his mind to be compared with that which he attributes to the men who preceded him in his own country and in the Netherlands? He says that his literary character was formed under the influence of the writings of Johan von Wesel; that the Brethren of the Life in Common *made the beginning* in the gospel; that one might be led, by a comparison of his writings with those of Johan Wessel (not to be confounded with Johan von Wesel), that he had drawn all his doctrines from that writer; that neither in the Latin, nor in the German language could be found a more evangelical theo-

logy than Tauler's; that no one had better taught him what God, Christ, man, and all things are than the author of the *Deutsche Theologie*; and, finally, that Staupitz first kindled up the light of the gospel in his heart. Of none of his predecessors in other countries does he speak in a similar way. Such men as those above named can by no means be left unnoticed in a just account of the causes which led to the reformation. On the contrary, their lives and character must be clearly set forth, if we would explain why it was in Germany and the adjoining countries rather than anywhere else, that the tree of spiritual liberty first struck its roots.

The reformation, according to Ullmann, was the reaction of Christianity as gospel against Christianity as law. During the middle ages, Christianity gradually lost its voluntary, spiritual character, and degenerated into a rigid, inflexible, imperative system of law. Against this corruption an antinomian and pantheistic opposition sprung up, going to the opposite extreme of licentiousness. Between these two systems, that of the false letter and that of the false spirit of the gospel, was the true position of the reformation. Nowhere does this characteristic feature of the reformation appear more conspicuously than in Luther's predecessors. Goch, in particular, penetrated deeply into the doctrine of divine grace, and, in this respect, surpassed, perhaps, Luther himself. This doctrine was the centre of his theological contemplations, and it was as fully cleared up by him within a limited range as it was afterwards on a broader scale.

Religion with these men, not less than with the reformers, was made to consist in the inward moral principle rather than in the outward act. They estimated piety not by the quantity, but by the quality of its manifestations. Another peculiarity which distinguished them from the age in which they lived, was the spiritual freedom which they regarded as essential to true religion. It was not religious freedom in a civil point of view that chiefly occupied their attention, but a religious life which was spontaneous and free in a moral point of view. The grace of God, according to their belief, produced in the heart a principle of spiritual life which led men voluntarily to do what the law of God required, and to this spontaneous obedience, not forced by legal constraint, but flowing freely from a living faith and a holy love, they attached great importance.

But we will pass to a consideration of the individual character of the men whose history is portrayed in the volumes before us.

It was not so much the design of the author to write a religious biography of these men as to fill up a chasm in history, and to exhibit certain religious tendencies which existed in many minds, but which could be brought distinctly to view in the lives and sentiments of a few individuals who were respectively the most perfect representatives of these several tendencies. Particular parts of history are therefore clustered around the lives of those men who were chiefly concerned in those transactions, thus giving to the work the double charm of special detail and of historical unity. The undertaking is a very difficult one, and sometimes congenial characters and similar tendencies can be placed in juxtaposition only by sacrificing the chronological order. We will not say but that the arrangement adopted by Ullmann is the best that the case would admit; still, when, upon opening the second volume, we find ourselves carried back to an earlier period in the introductory chapters, than that of which the first volume treated, we feel that one important advantage has been surrendered in order to secure another. All writers of history in a series of biographical sketches, have this difficulty to contend with. Böttiger in his recent *History of the World in Biographies*, and Ullmann in the work before us, by resorting frequently to introductory or intervening chapters, seem to have accomplished all that the method will admit.

The first volume treats of Johan von Goch, Johan von Wesel and the men of their acquaintance. Johan Pupper (a family name but little used by him) was born near the beginning of the fifteenth century in the small village of Goch in Cleves, and was hence, according to the custom of the times, called *von Goch*. Little is known of his early history. It would appear from his writings that he received a theological education above what was common at that time. With the Scriptures, and with the Latin fathers, particularly with Jerome and Augustine he was familiar, as well as with the scholastic theology more especially that of Thomas Aquinas and of his school. He was an acute and clear-headed dialectician, and a very exact and perspicuous writer, though in elegance of style he was not above the other Latin writers of his day. He was probably educated at one of the schools of the Brethren of the Life in Common—of which a full account is given at the beginning of the second volume—and at the university of Paris. The first act by which Goch comes distinctly before us in history is that by which, when about fifty years of age, he founded a priory for nuns at Mechlin in Brabant in 1451.

Christianity was introduced into this city by St. Lambert, near the close of the seventh century, and was more firmly established there by Rumold, the patron saint, to whom the cathedral, commenced in the twelfth century and completed in the fifteenth, was dedicated. The city was under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Cambrai until 1559, when it became an independent archbishopric, and the celebrated cardinal Granvelle was its first archbishop. Mechlin became very naturally the residence of many priests and monks. Beside a commandary of the Teutonic Knights, one convent of Minorites, another of Carmelites, one of Augustinian Eremites, and a house of the Brethren of the Life in Common, there were the nunneries of the Valley of Lilies, of Mount Sion, of Bethany, of Muysen, not to mention the female charitable societies, such as that of the Beguins, that of the Leprous Virgins, the hospital of St. Mary, and the Black Sisters, so called from their dress. Mechlin, therefore, was preëminently a monastic city, in which von Goch had ample opportunity to watch the operations and to study the nature of this important branch of the mediæval church. His agency in respect to monasticism was two-fold, fostering it on the one hand by his external connections, and yet withering it on the other by the severity with which he probed its vital parts. By founding the Priory of Tabor and acting twenty-four years as its rector, he showed that he maintained a quiet existence nominally within the pale of the church; but by profound meditation upon the true nature of Christianity and upon the character of the church as it appeared in his age, he brought out a system all the tendencies of which were so many internal elements of a genuine reformation.

In his writings, Goch appears as a biblical theologian, striking at the root of the evils of the scholastic theology, and of the superstitions and unscriptural practices of the age. He represents the church as having fallen into the following among other fundamental errors, that of giving to Christianity the legal character of Judaism; that of a Pelagian theology and a consequent reliance upon good works; and that of tyrannically exacting countless forms of religion of which the apostolic church knew nothing. The favorite doctrine of the church during the middle ages, namely, that the precepts of Christ acting upon the spontaneous feelings of the pious heart were insufficient for the highest attainments in religion, and that the obligation of a monastic vow needed to be superadded, was elaborately refuted by this able theologian. "This," said he, "is the error of our times, an error

which shows itself to be kindred in various respects with that of Pelagianism. The latter asserts that the grace of God is not indispensably necessary to spiritual acts, that the human will is of itself sufficient to produce them; the former, though it acknowledges the necessity of grace to such spiritual acts, denies that grace is of itself sufficient. The assertion that the precepts of the gospel cannot be perfectly observed without the obligation of a vow, amounts to nothing less than saying that the grace of the gospel is insufficient for that end." In another place, he says, "It is manifest that those who need compulsion have no love for that to which they are compelled by the obligation of a vow." Such a method, he contends, does not produce conformity to the divine character. "For as God does nothing by constraint, but always acts freely according to his nature, and as intelligent creatures are distinguished from irrational brutes by their intellectual and moral freedom, it is evident that human actions are most like the divine, and most worthy of our nature, when they are spontaneous and free." It is interesting to see what language this adult and full-grown son of the church holds in regard to his spiritual mother. "The church," he observes, "is the mother of the faithful. But it often happens that the mother has more affection than judgment. Hence in many of the things done by the church we perceive more zeal than discretion.—So it is in regard to monastic vows; for though they are not adapted to strengthen the will for any spiritual act, they were established by the church under the view that they might be the occasion of good to the weak and negligent." It will be perceived that this is not a very flattering representation of the superiority of the monastic state. Goch was far from shrinking from the conclusion which must be drawn from such premises. He brings it out not only with logical clearness but with strong indignation. "Nothing can be farther from the truth than the shameless boasting of the monks, when, to exalt their order, they, to their own disgrace, call it an order of perfection. They constitute the weak and faltering part of the church, who, being unable to control their inordinate desires, need outward restraints to preserve them from sin." In such declarations he conveyed to his readers undeniable, but at the same time most unwelcome truth.

Nor did he confine his attention to this particular corruption of Christianity. His clear vision surveyed the whole field of observation presented in the existing state of the church. Especially did his eye rest upon the main pillar of the Papal hierarchy, the

distinctions introduced in the clergy. He strenuously maintained there was no office in the church higher than that of elder or presbyter. His strong and decisive language is, "Many things have, by custom and by the regulations of the church, been wrested from the presbyters, which were given to them by divine authority." When it was asserted that the bishops alone were the successors of the apostles, he replied, "True, indeed, according to the usages and rules of the church, but not according to the original institution established by Christ and his apostles."

Thus a pious monk, deeply imbued with the spirit of primitive Christianity, not only lamented the corruptions which everywhere met his eye, but in his quiet retreat, without the least outward collision, without any attempt to summon the people to external resistance, applied his powerful mind to the work of searching the subject to the bottom, and of presenting the results with an irresistible array of argument; and by that means, whether consciously or unconsciously, he prepared the way most admirably for an ultimate reformation which should extend to all the branches of ecclesiastical organization, doctrine and worship. To the legal and formal piety of the times he opposed freedom and spirituality; to a false reliance upon good works, a reliance upon the grace of God; to the imagined sanctity of a useless monastic life, the true holiness of a life of active piety; to the unscriptural assumptions of the dignitaries of the church, the labor, self-denial, simplicity, zeal and official equality of the primitive ministry. He died in 1475, eight years before the birth of Luther.

In the mean time, there were other men, who, from a somewhat different point of view, saw the alarming degeneracy of the church, and who raised a voice sometimes of lamentation, and sometimes of indignant rebuke. Of this class was Gregory of Heimburg, a distinguished scholar and statesman, who was active at the council of Baale, and was an influential member of almost every German diet. He well knew, as he said, "that it was more perilous to dispute the power of the pope than to dispute the power of God." Still he fearlessly spoke out in loud tones of remonstrance. While the pontiff professes to be invested with the plenitude of the power of Christ, he knows from Christ's own words that this pretension is false. Christ did not give his disciples secular power, but taught them expressly that his kingdom was not of this world. He himself would not be an earthly king, but was subject to rulers, as were also his apostles both in principle and in practice. For three hundred years, noth-

ing was known of the papal supremacy. The Roman bishops were called, not to dominion, but to martyrdom. They gloried, not in the purple, in milk-colored horses, in riches, splendor and power, but in being able to say, "So we have forsaken all and followed thee." Such was the tenor of his language which could be only hinted at in this connection. While Heimburg was thus exposing the arrogant pretensions of the Roman bishop, and calling upon the German nation "to arise and shake themselves from the dust, and break the yoke that had been laid upon their necks," Jacob of Jüterbock, a native of the very place where Tetzel one hundred and thirty-two years afterwards preached indulgences, was publishing his views of the church, and his doubts whether it was not already corrupt beyond the power of recovery. "If a reformation be possible," said he, "it must be effected either by the direct power of God, or through the agency of man. The former is possible, indeed, but it is not the ordinary method of Providence.—It will not be accomplished by any one man, for many have attempted it and failed of success. The papal court itself stands in greatest need of reformation, as all the recent councils have declared. If the pope cannot purify his own court, how can he reform the church?"

A far more important character is next presented to us in Johan von Wesel, so called from his native place, the small town of Wesel on the Rhine between Maintz and Coblenze. He was professor of theology in Erfurt and afterwards a distinguished preacher at Worms. About the year 1450, while at Erfurt, he wrote a treatise against indulgences, which begins thus. "We read, in the four gospels, the discourses of our Lord; in these are contained the mysteries of salvation; but we find there nothing about indulgences. Next, the apostles preached and wrote epistles to the churches; neither in these is any mention made of indulgences. Then we have the works of Gregory Nazianzen, Basil, Athanasius, Chrysostom, Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine, and yet they say nothing of indulgences." We cannot follow him through his elaborate discussions in which he completely overthrows the systems proposed and defended by Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas and other scholastic writers. We will only give the conclusion to which Ullmann has been brought by an examination of the treatise. "Wesel had proceeded further in his principles when he wrote against indulgences than Luther had done when he wrote on the same subject. His refutation of the doctrine was clearer, more comprehensive and founded on a better

understanding of the whole subject. It aimed more at the foundation of the entire system than did the bold and powerful, but occasional and partial assault of Luther."

As preacher at Worms, Wesel found himself surrounded by worldly and corrupt priests, and placed under a bishop who was a better warrior than preacher. Still he was not diverted from his course. In a work which he published on the Office and Authority of Pastors, he openly declared that the church had "fallen from a state of true piety into a kind of superstitious Judaism." Wherever he looked, he beheld nothing but "an ostentatious display of works, a dead faith and pharisaical pride;" "cold ceremonies, and superstitions, not to say idolatry." "The word of the Lord," he continues, "is bound by human inventions, and cannot be freely proclaimed. A tyrannical power rises up against it on all sides; it is opposed by the teachings of the bishops, to say nothing of the legends of the saints, the fraud of indulgences and the fury of the monks, whom one must exalt to heaven, if he would live comfortably." "But," he says to his brethren, "if called to preach the truth, do not stand in fear of the anathemas and curses thundered in papal bulls—which are but paper and lead—for they throw a cold and harmless bolt. For he who would excommunicate you was long ago himself excommunicated by the supreme Judge." With a prophetic spirit he says: "I see that our souls must waste away with spiritual famine, unless a star of hope shall arise.—Deliver us, O God of Israel from all these distresses."

Wesel regarded the Scriptures as the only guide of the Christian. He refused to accept even the interpretation of them at the hands of the church. The Bible must be its own interpreter. The fundamental doctrine taught in the Scriptures, he conceived to be that of salvation by grace. *Sola Dei gratia salvantur electi.* He objected to the word "catholic," in the Apostolic creed where it is said, "I believe in the holy catholic church." "For," said he, "the catholic church, that is, the whole body of the baptized, is not holy; a majority of its members are reprobates." In regard to the endless round of ceremonies with which the consciences of men were needlessly burdened, he said, "Christ ordained no fasts. As little did he require his disciples to observe festivals. He never enjoined the severe canonical hours upon priests. But now the service at mass has become so accumulated as to be an intolerable burden." Upon the system of penances he remarks, "When a man makes confession, severe penance is imposed up-

on him. He must perform a pilgrimage to Rome, or even further, must fast and repeat many prayers. Not so did Christ teach; he simply said, Go and sin no more." He rejected entirely the authority of tradition. In his preaching at Worms, he used such language as the following: "I will regard that and that only as sin which the Scriptures declare to be so." "I condemn the pope, the church and the councils, and exalt Christ." "To me their double-pointed mitres, their splendid infulas, the pearls and gold that adorn their feet are nothing. I can only smile at their high-sounding, heroical names, their miserable titles and their lofty triumphs, all of which are signs of anything rather than of a bishop." When such things were justified on the ground of their antiquity, he tersely replied, "The Babylonian empire is not therefore good, because it has stood some few centuries." "We have, then," said he to his brethren, "to demand of the pope, and the priests, as successors of Christ and the apostles, that they give us the word of God. If they will feed us with that, we will listen to them as we would to Christ himself; but if they will not, we will disregard them." He complains loudly of the spiritual adulation of the times, of the "blasphemous titles, such as 'the vicar of Christ,' 'demigod,' 'the most divine,' with which shameless flatterers wag their tails (*cauda adblandiuntur*) before the pope, so that the ass in purple is pleased with himself, and thinks himself some great one." Of the mummeries of public worship he speaks with equal contempt. "How changed is the appearance of the church! At present, it is esteemed clerical to mutter prayers coldly with the lips without understanding them. It is regarded as something grand when the deacons bray, 'Gospel!' 'Epistle!' Mutterings and stentorian voices are employed in worship without regard to its spirituality." After such declarations, nothing need be said of the resemblance between the "reformer before," and the reformer of, "the reformation." It will occur of itself to every reader's mind. We regret to add, that Wesel closed his life, under a limited recantation, in prison. In the hour of trial, which came upon him in his old age, he did not prove as firm and heroic as the monk of Wittenberg did at the diet of Worms.

In coming to the second volume, we find ourselves, as already intimated, carried back to an earlier period than that to which Goch and Wesel belonged. We might infer from the reputation of the author, as a skilful historian, that such an arrangement could not be arbitrary. The reason of this recurrence to an earlier date is obvious. The characters which are next to be repre-

sented were formed under peculiar influences. Those influences, and the institutions to which they gave rise, need to be brought distinctly to view, in order that we may fully understand the history of the individuals formed by them. Johan Wessel, of Heidelberg, was the distinguished harbinger of the reformation in whose capacious mind all the streams of religious knowledge and truth, enjoyed in that age, were united. To prepare the way for a full comprehension of his position and influence, the author occupies more than one third of the second volume in giving an elaborate and brilliant account of the Brethren of the Life in Common, and of the German mystics. Of the men connected with the former, Gerard Groot, Florentius, Zerbolt and Thomas à Kempis are particularly noticed; of those who belong to the latter, Ruysbroek, Suso, Tauler the author of the *Deutsche Theologie*, and Staupitz.

The view which Ullmann takes of the remoter causes of the reformation may be briefly given thus. There is in human nature itself a tendency to correct obvious abuses. In Christianity there is both a light which exposes ecclesiastical abuses, and a moral energy which impels men to seek and apply the proper spiritual remedy. The corruptions of the church originated in a want of practical piety, and of sound views of revealed truth. The causes which should lead to a reformation, then, must be a revival of religious feeling, and a return to an intelligent view of the spiritual nature of Christianity. The former would manifest itself in the people at large, the latter, more in men of retirement and learning. So it was in point of fact. These two causes exerted a reciprocal influence upon each other. While piety led to intelligence, intelligence strengthened piety. Connected with the revival of ancient learning was the elevation, or rather transformation of the mysticism of the middle ages.

The transition from a wild and extravagant mysticism to the sobriety, solidity and purity of the later mystics was effected by the influence of Ruysbroek. Before him, the Beghards, Beguins and Lollards, in their vague spiritualism, fell frequently into pantheistic speculations which threatened to destroy all reality in moral distinctions. This tendency predominated most in that particular class, called the Brethren of the Free Spirit; and those speculations were carried to the highest point of abstraction, in the beginning of the fourteenth century, by Master Eckart, the Hegel of the middle ages. Ruysbroek, who, after preaching till about the age of sixty, retired to a convent adjoining the battle-field of

Waterloo, while he adopted the more spiritual elements of the pantheistic mysticism, pruned off its excrescences, denied the identity of God and the universe, maintained, not a substantial, but spiritual and mystical union of the pious with God, and held firmly to the essential difference of good and evil both in the motive and in the act. He became the patriarch of the religious mystics of the Netherlands and of Germany. His peculiarities consisted chiefly in the contemplative and speculative character of his piety, a spirituality which may be represented as about midway between transcendentalism and pietism. In this *inwardness*, as it was termed, lay the ground of a radical difference which manifested itself in opposition to the ceremonial and external religion of the church. Passing over all the characteristic features of his system, we will here simply indicate his position with reference to a reform in the church.

He was severe in his castigation of the lovers of pleasure. Though in the church, they were "the world for whom Jesus would not pray." He complained that riches and splendor were the only objects of desire. "Even the popes, princes and prelates bow before mammon. The church seeks wealth, all her spiritual gifts and her public servants are for sale. The rich can procure whatever the church has to bestow—indulgences for all sins, release from purgatory, funeral chants and the tolling of the bells, burial before the altar, and the benediction of the priest." After describing the profligate lives of various classes of persons who profess peculiar sanctity—of the monks "who are nominally mendicants, but who live in revelry," and "suck the blood of all the country within fifty miles of the convent," of the nuns "to whom the convent is a prison and the world a paradise," and who, "with their silver-plated zones, leave their cells as if to serve the world and the devil;" of the priests, who "if they had the power, would sell Christ and his grace and eternal life to the wicked for cash;" who "if anything is to be gained, will run to the church as soon as the bell strikes, whereas if nothing is to be received, the bells may ring till they break before a priest will stir," he proceeds to a description of the higher clergy, whom he represents as "accessible only when their officials receive bribes and as having little to do with religious services except reading mass on high festivals." "In their visitations," he continues, "they are attended with not less than fifty horsemen and an immense troop of servants, the expense being borne not by themselves but by others. Festivals are held with great ceremony and a splendid array of

tables; but nothing is done to improve the morals either of the clergy or of the people. Only open scandal is noticed at all, and for this large sums of money must be paid, and then the sinner can go on as before. Thus all the parties concerned have what they desire,—the devil the soul; the bishops the money; and the poor dunces their pleasures.”

The two-fold influence of Ruysbroek, the mystical and the practical was divided, in part, and separately transmitted through Tauler, who propagated this pious mysticism in Germany, and Gerard Groot, the founder of the religious and literary establishment of the Brethren of the Life in Common with whom a more practical mysticism prevailed. It would be interesting to trace the history of those semi-monastic and literary fraternities, which were established by the Brethren under the name of *houses*. The celebrated schools of Deventer, Zwolle and many others, were connected with them. These fraternities were partly missionary and partly literary in their character. They held public and private meetings for religious edification, in which preaching, exhortation and prayer were held in the native language, instead of the Latin. They multiplied, by their own industry, manuscript copies of the Scriptures and other useful books. In the education of the young, where their services were unequalled, they united literature and religion. With them originated the biblical theology, and the classical learning of Germany. From their schools went out those men who, as theologians and scholars, prepared a whole generation for the influence of Luther. The university of Erfurt, then the chief seat of learning in central Germany, had among its ablest teachers, men who were educated by the Brethren, and it was in Erfurt that Staupitz and Luther studied.

Johan Wessel, of whom the second volume chiefly treats, received his early education in the school of the Brethren at Zwolle under Thomas à Kempis, and afterwards studied at Cologne, Paris and Florence. Like all the scholars of that day, he travelled from country to country, and was teacher in several places, particularly in Paris and Heidelberg. After the trial of his friend, Johan von Wesel at Worms, he left Germany and passed his old age in his native country near Gröningen, where Agricola, Hegius, Lange and others enjoyed his instructions. Agricola had before studied under him at Paris. Hegius acquired great distinction as rector of the school of the Brethren at Deventer. He was the teacher of Erasmus, Hermann von Busch and many other distinguished scholars. Lange, after studying at Deventer, visited

Italy, as did all these great classical scholars, and was long at the head of the school at Munster. Dringenberg, educated also at Deventer, and afterwards in Italy, founded the celebrated school of Schlettstadt in the south of Germany. Under him were educated Simler, the teacher of Melancthon, Sturm, Wimphiling, and many other persons of eminence.

Men of this description formed the connecting link between the Brethren of the Life in Common, and the literary friends and associates of Luther. Their spirit is well represented by the words of Lange, one of their number, who lived to see, in his old age, the theses of Luther. On that occasion he said, "The time is at hand when the darkness shall be dispelled both from the church and from the schools, when pure religion shall be restored to the church and pure Latinity to the schools." Ullmann has not entered into the literary history of these men; but a better account of them than was ever before given, has just been published by Professor Karl von Raumer, of Erlangen, in his *Geschichte der Pädagogik*. Our limits will not allow us to give even an outline of the history of the Brethren of the Life in Common, and we have only hinted at their extensive influence at the dawn of the reformation. It has been said that Ruysbroek's doctrines were transmitted partly through Groot and the men trained under him, and partly through Tauler. We must now go back and take up the thread of the history of the German mystics.

The general effect of their teaching was to transfer religion from the schools to common life, from the Latin to the German language, and from the intellect to the heart. Heinrich Suso, of Suabia, "the Minnesinger of eternal love," was the most poetical of the mystics. As a travelling preacher, he produced a great sensation among the people. He was the Bunyan of his age. With a heart that was all on fire, and an imagination that was full of the finest poetry, he united the earnestness of a martyr, and the lofty bearing of a knight. Without entering into a delineation of his character, suffice it to say, that all his influence tended to produce a silent spiritual reformation. He did not take special pains to speak according to the doctrines and practices of the church. "The popes," he said, "think more of themselves and of their personal friends than they do of the honor of God, and Christianity. The cardinals are chiefly intent upon raising themselves, by every possible means, to the pontifical chair. The bishops are forgetful of God and of their flocks. Of the priests

few would lay down their lives for the truth, and perhaps it is well that men do not know how few."

Johan Tauler, who passed his life in Cologne and Strassburg, the two principal seats of mysticism, was a man of the most ardent, but at the same time childlike piety. His was the mysticism of an all-subduing moral sentiment. He formed a connection with Ruysbroek, and came under the spiritual influence of that venerable man, though he maintained his originality and independence of character, and was, in fact, intellectually superior to his aged friend. His sermons and religious treatises are not as gorgeous as those of Suso, but "are like a sweet meadow with its fresh flowers of natural growth." His rich, flexible language was the store-house whence later mystics drew their philosophical and religious terms, and is scarcely excelled by the German of the present day, in its most cultivated form. His conceptions of our union with God were not pantheistic, or those of the mere relation of a finite to an infinite being; but his mind was filled with this one great idea, that of a union with God by a life in Christ. He viewed religion as consisting principally in "following the indigent life of Christ," which is the title of one of his most important works. By indigence, however, he did not understand poverty as an external condition, but an inward sense of spiritual things, which induces men to renounce the sensible world as a source of enjoyment, and to live, after the example of Christ, with their souls absorbed in thoughts of God and of heavenly things. "We should be like God and Christ, and seek our happiness where they find theirs, not in created things, but in their own infinite excellences." In consequence of his christian sympathy with the innocent peasants who were put under the ban, he was condemned by the pope, and his writings prohibited. He, however, maintained his ground against the pope, in a work which he published at the time, and continued his pious labors among the outlawed peasants. Luther could not fail to esteem such a character. It was not, however, so much the collision with the pope just mentioned, as the entire religious character and the pure theology of Tauler, that drew forth his encomium. In a letter to Spalatin, he says, "If it would afford you gratification to see a sound theology, in the German language, perfectly like that of ancient times, procure Johan Tauler's sermons; for I have never seen either in Latin or in German a purer theology, or one more entirely conformed to the gospel."

Of the *Deutsche Theologie*, the production of some pious, but

unknown writer of that age, a detailed account cannot here be given. It was more speculative than most of the writings of the later German mystics. It is enough for our present purpose to say that Luther himself edited it, believing it to be well adapted to promote the cause of the reformation. He remarks in the preface, "If I except the Bible and St. Augustine, no book has come to my knowledge from which I have learned more as to what God, Christ, man, and all things are than from this; and I now find there is truth in the sarcasm used by certain learned men, that we, Wittenberg theologians, pretend to have made new discoveries, as if nobody had lived before us."

Here we must pause, before reaching the middle of the second volume. The chief of "the reformers before the reformation," Johan Wessel, has not yet come before us, except incidentally. There are two reasons for the omission. The one is, that his doctrines form an extensive and complete system, to the delineation of which Ullmann has devoted no less than two hundred pages, so that an abridgement of them would be impracticable; the other is, that no mere outline would give so correct an idea of the system as the general statement that it is substantially the same that Luther taught. Not only is this apparent to every one who has taken the pains to make the comparison, but it is acknowledged by Luther himself. "Had I read Wessel's works before," he observes, "my opponents would have said, 'Luther has borrowed his ideas from Wessel,' so great is the resemblance. This greatly encourages and comforts me. I am no longer in doubt that my teaching is true, he agrees with me so perfectly in his feelings, in his views and even in his expressions." We close with one remark, suggested by these words. The main point established by Ullmann's researches is, not that Luther derived all his views directly from the writings or oral teachings of his predecessors—though they taught nearly every doctrine which he taught,—but that they had produced a powerful effect upon the people at large, that they had scattered far and wide seeds of truth which had already begun to germinate, that they opened many a secret spring which, under the magical wand of the great Reformer, burst forth and mingled in one mighty torrent. We have therefore not been careful to trace the religious influence which went forth from the Netherlands to the university of Erfurt, and which there acted upon Staupitz and Luther. The same influence was felt at Heidelberg, and elsewhere. It was not a tradition transmitted in the line of single individuals that in the hands

of one man produced the reformation ; but it was a wide-spread general influence, religious, theological and literary, acting upon many minds, and breaking out at different points, but with the most collected energy at Wittenberg—it was this that gave to the greatest man of the age a power which could not otherwise be accounted for but by a miracle.

ARTICLE II.

A VINDICATION OF LUKE CHAP. 2: 1, 2. WHEN DID THE TAXING SPOKEN OF IN THESE VERSES TAKE PLACE?

From the German, by R. D. C. Robbins, Resident Licentiate, Theol. Sem., Andover.

[The following discussion is translated from Tholuck, on the *Credibility of the Evangelical History*.¹ This work was called forth by Strauss's *Life of Jesus*, and very frequent allusions are made to him and his works as well as to other skeptical writers, in the volume. A part of the section upon "the proof of the credibility of the evangelical history from Luke's Gospel," was thought of sufficient interest to warrant its publication apart from the remainder of the volume. Some of the allusions of a local nature, which although important for the readers for whom the work was originally designed, are not so for an English reader, and also some things which connect this with other parts of the volume have been omitted or modified in the translation. Quotations from Latin and Greek authors, and in some cases references which in the volume are in the text, have been thrown into notes. In other respects the form of the discussion in the original has been substantially retained. Some leading points of the argument for the trust-worthiness of Luke, which immediately precedes and is closely connected with this particular discussion, are here given.

Two questions arise when we examine the credibility of an historian ; first, whether he intends to write history or fiction, and secondly, whether he is fitted by his objective relations and subjective qualities to present the truth which he professes to give.

¹ Die Glaubwürdigkeit der Evangelischen Geschichte, u. s. m., von Dr. A. Tholuck. Zweite Aufl. Hamburg, 1838.