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THE GROUP OF MEAUX

A Study in the Rise of the Reformation in France

by

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Introduction

Those epochs that have changed the course of human history are the most intriguing to the student, for in them we find personalities great enough to tower above the mass of their fellow men. One such period in which we find outstanding men is the Reformation. But this paper is not given to a consideration of those of the first rank, as Luther, Calvin, or Zwingli, but to a group of less known men, who worked along the same lines. It is popularly supposed that Luther was the sole cause, humanly speaking, of the Reformation, and that before he nailed his theses to the door of the cathedral of Wittenberg in 1517, he alone had conceived the reformed ideals for the church. But this is not the case. Five years before in 1512, Jacques Lefèvre, a professor in the University of Paris, had published his *Commentaire sur les Epistres de St. Paul*, the cardinal doctrine of the Reformation, and, later, was identified with a group of men who were actuated by the desire to reform the Church. This group carried on their work in the very heart of France, within twenty-five miles of Paris.

It is the purpose of this paper to study the "Group of Meaux", its personnel, its aims, work and accomplishments, and to give an estimate of the contribution they made to the Rise of the Reformation in France. The treatment is largely topical, revolving about the different members of the group and their life previous to the time of their coming together at Meaux.

The subject has been covered by many authors, though never with the purpose of considering the Meaux group alone, but only as they chanced to fall within the scope of the history of the movement as a whole. The subject has been treated thoroughly by French authors who have written of the individual members and of the group as a unit. The English authorities worthy of mention are d'Aubigne, History of the Reformation; Baird, The Rise of the Huguenots; and Farmer, Essays on French History. Of the three, Baird's work is the most complete and authoritative.

The French sources are most interesting. It is here that we find the primary sources. The most complete and most interesting of these sources is the collection of the letters of the reformers by M. Herminjard. In reading through these letters we live again the lives of these men who wrote them. The Memoires of Mezeray and the "Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris" are most interesting and illuminating. The other sources are the letters of Marguerite of Angoulême, the writings of Lefèvre, Farel's Du Vrai Usage de la Croix, and the Journal of Louise of Savoie; Brantome's Oeuvres and Marguerite's Heptameron furnish lighter reading. One of the finest results that has come to the author from this study has been this first hand contact with these original sources. The secondary sources in French are many. Of the best, from the standpoint of the Protestant is Béza's Histoire Ecclesiastique, and the Haag brothers work, La France Protestante. Maimbourg's Histoire du

Calvinisme and Rémond's Histoire de l'Heresie give the Roman Catholic point of view. The Dictionnaire Historique et Critique of Bayle also deserves mention.

Aside from the academic interest that lies in a study of this type, there is another and a higher one. It is impossible to live in the atmosphere of the letters of the reformers, or to read the comments of Lefevre upon the Scriptures and not be touched by the earnestness and zeal of the purpose of these men in the work that they had chosen to do. And however much their failure to stand the test of persecution is deplored by the reader, yet to live with, even for a short time, men who so evidently had a message to give the world leaves one with a feeling that it was "good to have been here."

Chapter I

The Personnel of the Group

Chapter I

William Briconnet--Bishop of Meaux

On the 19th of March of the year 1516 William Briçonnet became Bishop of Meaux.(1) He received this appointment at the hands of Francis I, king of France. Francis, however, had need of the bishop and did not leave him long in his see, but sent him to Rome as a special envoy for France at the court of Leo X.(2) The appointment was the culmination of a series of advancements that had come to him since he had taken orders, were an expression of the royal favor which descended from father to son. The father, Count de Montbrun who had been superintendent of finances and prime minister under Charles VIII, had entered the church after the death of his wife.(3) He was made successively Bishop of St. Malo, archbishop of Rheims, and cardinal.(4) It was he who convoked the council of Pisa (1511).(5) Because of his office of archbishop of Rheims he officiated at the coronation of Louis XII. This favor was shown also to his sons, William and Denis, both of whom entered orders. (5) William Briçonnet early evidenced a love of study, which went with him all his life. When first he entered orders he was appointed archdeacon of Rheims and Avignon, then bishop of Lodeve (1504).(6) Louis XII sent him to Rome on a temporary mission in 1507, the same year in which his father, who had been raised to the bishopric of Narbonne, resigned in his favor the rich abbey of St. Germain-des-Pres at Paris.(7)

(1) Herminjard, Correspondance des Reformateurs, vol. i, p.43
(2) Ibid. (3) Ibid, p.3 (4) Ibid, p.3. (5) Denis became Bishop of Lodeve and of St. Malo. Ibid, p.78. (6) Ibid, p.3. (7) Ibid, p.3.

Brignonet was in Rome for two years on Francis' mission to Leo X. (1) There he came into close contact with the papal church and saw the abuses that were rampant in the court of Leo. No doubt he was here strengthened in his resolve to correct abuses, for when he returned to France he zealously turned his attention to the reformation of the customs in his diocese. This was not the first attempt that he had made to correct abuses about him. In the abbey of St. Germain-des-Prés he had insisted that the monks under him keep their oaths. It was probably during this time as the abbot of St. Germain-des-Prés that Brignonet became acquainted with Jacques Lefèvre, who had so great an influence in his life. (2)

Had Brignonet been so inclined, he might have gone far in diplomatic circles. An eloquent man, high in royal favor, of noble blood, rich and talented, with everything in his favor, who knows how high he might have been advanced. But he had no ambitions along such lines. Rather he desired to see the reform of the many evils in the church about him, and in his own diocese he turned to this task with a will. He convoked several synods in his bishopric, where he published some "excellent regulations." (3) In the ordinance of the 13th of October 1518 he divided his diocese into thirty-two stations, and in each of these he had a preacher for the instruction of the people during the periods of Advent and Lent. The priests

(1) Herminjard, op. cit. p. 43. (2) Lefèvre dedicated his Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to Brignonet. Herminjard, op. cit., pp. 3-9. (3) Ibid, p. 43.

were required to reside in their parishes. (1) But Briçonnet felt the need of assistance in this program of reform and he turned to Jacques Lefèvre the man, who as early as 1512(2) had pointed out to him the Scriptures as the rule of life. In the summer of 1521 he invited him to come to Meaux, with those of his friends whom he cared to bring along and to aid in this work.

Jacques Lefèvre--Professor of University of Paris

This invitation from Briçonnet reached Lefèvre at a very opportune time, for he was in the midst of a losing battle with the faculty of the Sorbonne. Jacques Lefèvre had been a professor in the University of Paris since about 1493.(3). He was born in Étapes, a town of Picardy in 1455.

"It is impossible to determine what were his first studies, or in what year he first arrived in Paris. He appears to have possessed ecclesiastical dignities and benefices, but he renounced them later, and giving his family the property that he had at Étapes, he devoted himself entirely to the study of letters and of philosophy."(4)

He came of an obscure family but one in easy circumstances.(5) He was educated at the University of Paris. Many obstacles stood in the path to distinction. As well as being of mean birth, he was unattractive in appearance and diminutive in stature.(6) More serious than these, however, was the "barbarous" (7) education that he received, not only in the inferior schools but also in the University. After graduating from the University

(1)Ibid. (2)Lefevre dedicated his Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to Briconnet. Herminjard, op.cit., pp.3-9. (3)Graf, Essai sur la Vie et les Ecrits de Jacques Lefevre, p.4. (4)Ibid. p.5. (5)Ibid.p.5. (6)D'Aubigne, Hist. of the Reform. vol.III, p. 382, Graf p.6. (7)Beza, Histoire Ecclesiastique des Eglises Reformees. vol.1

with the degree of Master of Arts, he became a priest.(1) During a sojourn in Italy he completed his studies and received there his initiation into the true philosophy of Aristotle, brought into Italy by fugitive Greeks.(2) Besides this trip to Italy, he appears to have travelled much both in Europe and in Asia.(3) Adding to his University preparation the liberal and widening education of travel, Lefèvre's brilliantly active mind overcame all obstacles to great learning. When he returned to Paris, he was given the professorship of mathematics and of philosophy. (4) He published an excellent edition of the works which formerly had been in use and in place of the mutilated and corrupted text of Aristotle, he published an excellent edition of his work.(5) He acquired a proficiency in mathematics, in biblical literature and in astronomy as well as in philosophy.(6)

"Though there was nothing pleasing in his small meagre person yet those who came in contact with him forgot the unattractiveness of the outward man in the contemplation of the brilliantly active mind."(7)

Because of this, Lefèvre collected about himself a number of the more studious men of the University of Paris who were his devoted followers. Soon he acquired a great reputation for learning. Erasmus ranks him first for his profound learning.

"He lived ordinarily at Paris (probably at St. Germain-des-Prés) and acquired a great reputation for his lectures in mathematics and especially those in astronomy. The most distinguished men of the period were his pupils, and the friends of letters honored him, regarding him as the restorer of the true philosophy of Aristotle. Louis XII esteemed him, and the great nobles also, who in imitation of the Italian princes, had begun to favor letters and protect scholars." (8)

(1)Graf, *ibid.*(2)Bayle, *Dictionnaire Historique* art. Lefevre. See also Herminjard *op.cit.*p.4. (3)Herminjard, *op.cit.*p.4 (4)Graf.p.5 (5)Herminjard *op. cit.*p.4. (6)Herminjard, *op.cit.*p.4. (7)Farmer, *Essays on French History*,p.6. (8)Graf,*op,cit.*p.9ff.

As a teacher Lefevre had built up for himself an enviable reputation. His gentleness and affection, (1) coupled with his great learning, soon collected about him a group of the more studiously inclined members of the University. In this group, was one who was noted for his brilliance and his fiery zeal-- William Farel.

William Farel--Student of Lefèvre

Farel was born near the little town of Gap in Dauphiné in the year 1489. His parents were of noble blood, (2) and, as Farel says of them, they were among the most devoted servants of the Papacy.

"My father and mother believed everything, and accordingly they brought up their children in all the observances of Romish devotion." (3)

The father planned for his son the career of a soldier and knight. But William was of a different type, preferring to know more than "his rosary and sword." He was not anxious to follow in the path of Du Terrail, (Bayard, le chevalier sans peur et sans reproche) who at that time was famous for his conduct in the battle of Tar. William continued in his desire to study and persistently asked his father for permission. At first he objected, but finally he gave permission and in 1510 we find William joyfully setting out for Paris to become a student at the University. (4)

Once at the University he had but two occupations, his studies and the observance of his religious duties.

(1) See letter of Jean Caesarius to Erasmus describing Lefevre's attitude toward his students. Herminjard p.32. (2) d'Aubigne op. cit. vol.iii, p.375. (3) Du Vrai Usage de la Croix de Jesus Christ. (Farel) (4) Herminjard, op.cit., p.178ff.

"He applied himself diligently to his studies and was constantly to be seen in churches praying to some saint, chanting the mass, or devoutly repeating his hours." (1)

As he went about to these churches, Farel noticed another man, older than himself who was also very regular in his performance of religious duties. "Never says Farel of him, "had I seen a chanter of the mass sing it with greater reverence." (2) This man was Lefèvre. Farel desired greatly to meet him and was overjoyed when Lefèvre received him cordially into the group of students about him. In this way began the friendship of the two men who were to be the founders of the Reformation in France. Little did it seem at that time that they would ever break away from the Church of Rome. Lefèvre was scrupulous in the performance of all his religious duties. He was especially devout in his attendance at mass, and he worshipped the Virgin Mary with great devotion, and so zealous in his worship of the saints that he took up the task of compiling a history of the lives of the saints of the Roman calendar. Farel too was impregnated with the doctrines of the Church of Rome.

"In truth" he says of himself, " the papacy was not and is not so papal as my heart has been, for so effectually had it blinded my eyes and perverted my being that if any person had been approved by the Pope he appeared to me like a god, and if any one said or did anything against the Pope, or his authority, I would have wished such a one to be ruined and destroyed." (3)

Lefevre and Farel-~~R~~Religious Development

Something had to come into their lives and change this attitude before they could be the leaders of the Reformation.

(1)Farmer, op.cit.p.7. (2)Farel, Du Vrai Usage, etc. (3)Farel, Du Vrai Usage, etc.

That was the study of the Scriptures. Before Farel and Lefèvre met, Lefèvre had started this study. He published in 1508 at St. Germain-des-Près (1) a comparison of the different Latin versions of the Psalms with a commentary. (2) (It must have been during Lefèvre's stay at St. Germain that he met Brignonnet, who was abbot there from 1507 on.) When Farel joined him, Lefèvre must have been working at his Commentary on St. Paul's epistles. Probably he introduced Farel to the study of them, tho that was very uncommon in those days. This study bothered Farel a great deal when he read in them doctrines so different from those in the church about him.

"I do not well understand these things. I must give a very different meaning to the Scriptures from that which they seem to have. I must keep to the interpretation of the Church and indeed of the Pope." (3)

Truly the "Pope and papal Church were not so papal as he." (4) Consequently when a doctor warned him against studying the Scriptures, Farel stopped his study "shutting his eyes lest he should see." (5)

In the meantime Lefèvre had discovered that "human doctrines seemed as darkness in comparison with divine study" (6) and spent much of his time on the study of Paul's epistles and his commentary on them. As never before he felt "the unique obligation to hold to the Holy Scriptures, the source and rule of true divinity", and "the insufficiency of works as a means of salvation." (7) Both Lefèvre and Farel however continued in

(1) Herminjard, op.cit., p.4, Graf, op.cit. p.22. (2) Ibid. (3) Farellus Natali Galeoto, Herminjard vol.iii. (4) Baird, Rise of the Huguenots, vol.i. p.69. (5) Intro. to Commentary on Paul's Epistles. Herminjard, op.cit. pp.3-9. (6) Farellus Natali Galeoto. (7) Intro. to Commentary on the Psalms. after Graf, p.23.

their observance of all the rites of the Catholic Church.

In 1512 Lefèvre published his "Commentarie sur les Epistres de St. Paul". Graf in discussing the "opinions de Lefèvre sur les Dogmes et les Practiques d'l' Église" in his work says:

"It is interesting to examine what his opinions were upon some of the principal points which were shortly to cause such profound schism between the Catholic and Protestant churches, before the time when Luther put his hand to that reformatory movement of which men had for so long felt the need. We find these opinions in his "Commentary upon the Epistles of St. Paul", where, without ever passing the bounds of mildness and moderation, he does not fear to openly express the sentiments which the study of the Apostolic writings suggests to him. He is far from having a doctrine developed after a rigorous manner upon the reports of free will and of grace, of faith and of works, but in following the precepts of Paul he does not at all lose sight of those of John and of the Evangelists. 'As Adam, by the sin which he committed, brought death upon himself and thus gave death entrance into the world, thus all those who have sinned--in eo in quo peccaverunt,--that is to say by their own sin or by the cause of their own sin, have brought death upon themselves. And thus the Apostle does not appear to wish to say that all have sinned, since he adds that death has reigned from the time of Adam to Moses upon those who have not sinned. Thus they who have not sinned at all are dead also, not on account of sin but from likeness to the disobedience of Adam. Christ is the source of all justification, Adam the covering of all disobedience. The likeness of Christ is life, the likeness of Adam, death. The works of faith are the signs of faith, of a living faith which gives justification. There are here two parts; one confines itself to works, the other to faith regardless of works. John refutes one, Paul the other. And you, if you have honesty of heart, will have confidence neither in faith nor works, but in God. Seek first to obtain the salvation of God by faith after Paul and then add works to faith after John, since they are the signs of a living faith.'" (1)

It is an interesting fact that Lefèvre dedicated his work to the abbot of St. Germain-des-Prés, William Briçonnet. (2)

(1) Graf, op. cit. p.61ff. (2) See dedication of his Commentary to Briçonnet.

As a commentator, Jacques Lefèvre ranks high. Merle d' Aubigne quotes Simon that "Jacques Lefèvre deserves to be ranked among the most skillful commentators of the age", (1) and adds that he deserves greater honor, going so far as to compare him with Augustine both in his doctrines and his writings. As an expositor of scripture he holds high place because of the clarity of his thought. Out of his study he came to a conception of the great doctrines of the New Testament and five years before Luther posted his ninety-five theses on the door of the cathedral of Wittenberg, Lefèvre at Paris clearly announced the doctrine of justification by faith--the cardinal doctrine of Luther and the Reformation. But it cannot be said that the publication by Lefèvre of this doctrine had the effect that Luther's theses had, for it was not addressed to the same class of people. Luther wrote for the common people. Lefèvre wrote to the scholars. Another reason lies in the different character of the men. Luther was impetuous, radical. Lefèvre was cautious and conservative. Luther was ready to follow his faith to the end. Lefèvre would never have thought of a separation from Rome. He was not the one to lead in any revolt against the church. "His work was to prepare the ground and sow the seed." (2)

Even after the publication of this commentary we find Lefèvre and Farel both assiduous in their devotion to their

(1)d'Aubigne, op.cit.p.339. (2)Farmer, op.cit.p.13.

old customs and altogether "plonge en idolatrie et en grosse ignorance". (1) In spite of this however, Lefèvre must have recognized the fact that a change was due, for one day he turned with great earnestness to his companion, Farel, and said "My son, God is going to renew the world and you will be a witness of it." (2)

(1)Farel, Du Vrai Usage. This work is a religious autobiography of Farel. (2)Herminjard, op. cit. p.5. This must have impressed Farel deeply for we find two references to it in his writings.

Chapter II

Conditions

Unfavorable Conditions

a-The Status of France

And "the world" was in need of a "renewing". In Rome Giovanni de Medici as Leo X was "enjoying" the Papacy. In France, Louis XII was drawing to the close of his reign, when he should die and leave the throne to his son-in-law, Francis of Valois, Count of Angouleme. When he ascended the throne in 1515 he took the title, Francis I. In Germany Maximillian ruled. Ferdinand had consolidated the kingdom of Spain. Henry VIII had succeeded to the throne of the Tudors. The moral life in all these countries was far from ideal. The courts of Francis, Henry VIII and Leo X while not the worst that history shows in their respective countries, were yet degenerate enough to call down upon them the sharp censures of even that age, to say nothing of the judgment of the present day. Especially is this true of the Courts of Francis and Leo X.(1)

The condition of the people in France at this time was one of intellectual ignorance and religious superstition. The Renaissance had not reached France and as yet they were in the Medieval period. Belief in astrology was practically universal from the highest noble to the lowest peasant. We read that Louise of Savoie went to an astrologer-monk to inquire concerning the possibilities of a son.(2) Sorcery also was believed in by all. In the Heptameron we have an instance of a proctor

(1)See Baird, op. cit. chap.1. (2)Freer, Life of Marguerite of Angouleme. vol.i.

visiting a necromancer and paying him to bring spells on five people. This he did by the use of five waxen figures,-- those who were to be benefited had their arms raised, and those who were to die had them lowered.(1) The prophecy of Nostradamus that Catherine de Medici would see all her sons kings was given such general recognition that it was discussed in diplomatic papers. (2) As late as Henry II it was popularly supposed that Diana of Poitiers had captured Henry's affection with a love philter since he remained true to her all his life.(3) An interesting story that is illustrative of the popular estimate of the value of relics is told by Caesar Heisterback. A certain monk named Bernard carried with him in a box relics of St. Peter and St. Paul. When Bernard happened to give way to sensual thoughts, the two saints punched him in the side. When he righted his thoughts, the punching ceased, but whenever he renewed them, the punching recommenced and so Bernard was restrained from evil thoughts.(4)

The church was in no better condition. The priests were notorious for high living and loose morals. The ranks of the clergy were filled with men who, by their avarice and dissoluteness of life, confused the innocent people and weakened their previous great devotion.

"This was the door, this was the spacious gateway, by which heresies entered France. For the ministers sent from Geneva were easily able to create in the people a hatred of the priests and friars, by simply weighing the life led by the latter." (5)

(1) Heptameron, Novel 1. (2) See Baird, op. cit. p.47. (3) Ibid.
(4) Schaff, Hist. of the Christian Church, Vol. V, part 1.
(5) G. Carrero, Tommaseo, vol. ii, p. 150.(after Baird)

Brantome says of these churchmen that they were "in their bishoprics and abbeys, as debauched as gens-d'armes." (1)

In the Heptameron, the tales told of friars and monks were so many, especially of those of the Franciscan order, that finally Oissille says in disgust "Shall we never have done with them?" (2)

Also in the Heptameron instances were given of the abuse of the Confessional. (3) So general was the decline among churchmen that the proverbs were coined, "He is as idle as a priest or monk", and, "Avaricious and lewd as a priest or monk." (4)

With the morals of the clergy worship had also degenerated. Reverence and devotion were paid not to Christ, but to saints, relics and images. Nearly every church had some relic which was the object of worship. In one place the hair of the blessed Virgin was carefully preserved, (5) in another the wondering people reverently gazed on the sword that the Archangel Michael was so kind as to leave with them. (5) The churches of St. Denis and of Ratisbon claimed the entire body of St. Dionysius and it made no difference to St. Denis that the Pope had declared that the one at Ratisbon was authentic. (5) Geneva worshipped a bone of a deer as the reputed arm of St. Anthony. Lyons possessed a great rarity in the twelve combs of the Apostles. (5) Nails and pieces of the true cross were aplenty, in fact so many pieces of the cross and so many whole crosses were in existence that they had to be explained by the theory that the cross was self-propagating. (6) But this was not all. The worship (1) Brantome, Oeuvres, tome vii, p. 312. (2) Heptameron, Novel 48. (3) Ibid, Novel 41. (4) Brantome, Ibid. (5) This list comes from Calvin's work on the "Inventory of the Relics" after Baird. (6) Schaff, His. of the Christian Church, Vol. v, pt. 1.

of heathen idols was not disturbed. At Meaux there was brought to light the worship of Isis.(1) At Polignac with priests assisting in the ritual, a statue of Apollo was the object of worship. The Bible was a book almost unknown to the people and even to the clergy. The worship of the Virgin Mary and of saints had practically eliminated the worship of Christ. Demonology had a tremendous hold on the imagination of that time.

Such was the condition of France and the church in France when Lefèvre turned to Farel with his solemn prophecy of the coming renewal. It was needed and that badly.

"It is sufficient to say" says M. Herminjard in discussing the date of the beginning of the reformation in France, "that with the exception of the first symptoms, we can hardly place at least the decisive beginnings of the French Reformation prior to the year 1520. Until that time Lefevre was still only the forerunner.-----The Commentary of 1512 was but the imperfect prelude to the 'Manifestation of the Gospel'. It was necessary for him to advance little by little and slowly, under the influence of the movement inaugurated by Luther, which penetrating into France caused to hatch and fructify the germs of religious emancipation-----in the being of Lefèvre."(2)

b-The Attitude of the Sorbonne

This process of hatching and developing the ideas of emancipation in Lefèvre took some time. When Lefèvre made his second (3) excursion into Germany and met Luther, Luther writes of him:

"Nam et Stepulensi, viro alioqui (bone Deus) quam spirituali et sincerissimo, haec intelligentia deest in interpretando divinas literas." (4)

(1)Farel, Du Vrai Usage. (2)Herminjard, op. cit. p.239, note.
(3)Ibid, p.26, note. Also p. 4, note. (4)Ibid, Luther to Spalatin, p. 26.

But still he remained steadfast in his devotion to images and pictures and as late as 1519 Glareanus wrote to Zwingli at Zurich asking on the behalf of Lefèvre for the history of the martyrs of Zurich as Lefèvre was compiling a "Legende des Saints." (1) Farel on the other hand had begun again to study the Bible, earnestly applying himself to the study of the original Hebrew and Greek. Little by little he was breaking away from the Pope. In 1512 besides the earnest prophecy made to him by Lefèvre, Farel was impressed by a brilliant speech made by Allmani, a young doctor of the University, in which the assertion of Cardinal de Vis that the Pope was absolute monarch of the Church was refuted. (2)

"It was necessary that popery should have fallen little by little from my heart, for it did not tumble down at the first shock." (3)

After Lefèvre had completed the lives of the saints who were on the days of the months of January and February, he intended to have them printed,

"But becoming aware of the great idolatry it is to pray to saints, and that these legends serve as sulphur to feed the fire, he left all and betook himself entirely to the Holy Scriptures." (4)

Thus slowly did they two break away from their allegiance to the Pope, and gave all their time to the study of the Scriptures. In 1518 (5) he published a short treatise on the "Three Marys" proving that Mary the sister of Lazarus, Mary Magdalene and "the woman that was a sinner" were not one and the same person,

(1) Herminjard, op. cit. p.41. (2) Farmer, op. cit. p.20. (3) Farel, Du Vrai Usage. (4) Ibid. (5) Graf, Essai p. 19.

as was the accepted belief. The time, however, was not propitious. The Sorbonne had been aroused by the activity and fame of Luther to oppose any and all heretical innovations. They seized upon this work of Lefèvre and, led on by Natalis Beda (or Noel Bedjer), decided it was heretical.(1) Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, was designated to combat this heresy. The real heresy of which Lefèvre was guilty is explained by H.C. Agrippa in writing to P. Claude Dieudonne:

"that Lefèvre, a simple Master of Arts (artium Magister) presumptuously set himself up to explain Scripture, the sacred precincts of the doctors of Theology." (2)

The matter went even further, moreover, for the Sorbonne, not satisfied with the refutation of his statements, pronounced him a heretic, with all those who would maintain the truth of his position, and turned his case over to Parliament.(3) There seems to be some conflict in claims as to who saved him from punishment, whether Marguerite or Guillaume Petit, the king's confessor, but one or both persuaded the king to interfere and to save Lefèvre, which he did.(4)

(1)Ibid. (2)Herminjard, op. cit. p.51. (3)Baird, op. cit. p.72
(4)Baird, Ibid. See here Freer, Life of Marguerite of Angouleme, vol. i.

Favorable Conditions

a-The Assistance of Other Men

It was into this situation that Briçonnet's invitation came to Lefèvre. Weary of the danger and trouble that lay in his present situation, Lefèvre gladly accepted and in the summer of 1521 went ahead to Meaux, there with Briçonnet to form the nucleus around which was to be gathered the other members of that well known circle: "group of Meaux".

When Lefèvre arrived at Meaux he was warmly welcomed by Briçonnet who turned over to him the administration of the Leprosery.(1) He found there with Briçonnet, his brilliant young chaplain, Michel d'Arande, of whom Lefèvre shortly became an intimate friend. This young man was a close companion of Briçonnet, and it is probable that when he accompanied his superior to Paris that he attracted the attention of Marguerite.(2) In a short time Lefèvre was joined by several of his friends and those of Briçonnet. Farel arrived shortly after Lefèvre. (3) He in turn was followed by Gerard Roussel and Martial Mazurier, Principal of the College of St. Michel in Paris. Mazurier had come to Meaux from Paris and was filling the charge of curate of St. Martin.(4) Of Mazurier we will hear more later.

Gerard Roussel (in Latin Ruffus) was born at Vaquerie, near to Amiens, in the year 1480. He studied under Lefèvre

(1)Herminjard, Ibid.p. 71, note. (2)Briçonnet was no stranger at court. (3)Baird, op. cit. p.74. (4)Ibid, p. 76.

and charmed with the personality of the man, became one of his intimate friends.(1) At the age of twenty-two, Roussel published his early works on mathematics, on philosophy and on mystic theology.(1) After he received from the University the degree of doctor of theology he taught at the college of the Cardinal de Moire.(1) Later he was appointed curate of Busancy, of the diocese of Rheims.(1) It was from here that he came to be with Lefèvre, at the invitation of Briçonnet, who appointed him curate of St. Saintin.(1)

Others came after them and were received into their midst. Vatable, a native of Gauaches in Picardy (2) a fellow countryman of Lefèvre, came to Meaux from St. Germain-des-Pres.(3) Capito also, a native of Alsace, a doctor in the schools of medicine, of theology and of law,(4)--truly a rare distinction. He, however, did not stay long at Meaux but returned to Basle.(5)

Such was the group which Briçonnet had gathered about him. Learned men, earnest men, men who were in every way sympathetic with the program which the Bishop was engaged in carrying out--they were able to afford him noteworthy assistance. But the "group of Meaux" is not yet complete. It needs yet one illustrious person to make out the number.

b-The Support of Marguerite d'Alencon

When the troops of Francis I relieved the city of Mezieres which had been besieged by the forces of Charles V, Marguerite and her mother travelled to meet Francis at that city. On

(1)C. Schmidt, Vie de Gerard Roussel, also Du Plessis, Hist. de l'Eglise de Meaux, pt. 1, p. 327, after Herminjard, p. 79. (2)Herminjard, p. 23. (3)Ibid, p. 45. (4)Ibid, p. 29. (5)He had a charge there to which he had been called in 1515.

their way from Paris, they stopped for a period of eight days in October, 1521 (1) at Meaux and were for this short time at least identified with the "group of Meaux". Tho' it is possible that the objection might be raised that Marguerite, duchess of Alencon and sister of Francis I, king of France, was not with the group enough to be counted one of them, yet even when absent in body she was with them in spirit all the time. Louise of Savoie was with her and she too was included in their gathering but in no sense can it be claimed that she was ever a member of this group. Her spirit was alien to it, while Marguerite was ever a member of the group as long as it lasted and as long as she lived was one with the spirit of reform.(2)

Marguerite of Angouleme was the first born child of Louise of Savoie and Charles, duke of Angouleme. By the failure of both Charles VIII and Louis XII to have a son, heir to the throne, Francis D'Angouleme, the brother of Marguerite was heir apparent to the throne of France. On account of her position as princess of the blood, royal interest was shown in her education and she was provided with excellent teachers. She was very receptive and early showed an aptitude for her studies. The tutor of her brother describes her at the time of her marriage to the duke of Alençon as "tres belle et bien sage de son age".(3)

(1)Freer, op. cit. vol. 1. (2)See Freer, Baird, Duclaux, St. Marthe, et al. (3)Brantome, Dames Illustres. It was the Mar-echal de Gie.

She had always shown a great interest in things intellectual and religious, and it was quickly recognized by men of learning and by the men of the church that in the king's sister they had a sympathetic and valuable friend. The value of this friendship lay in the great influence which Marguerite had with her brother, Francis.(1) There was between them a great love that lasted all their days. Because of this interest in religion there sprang up between Briçonnet and Marguerite an acquaintance which grew into friendship. Marguerite thought very highly of Briçonnet's qualities and accepted him as her religious instructor. Beginning in the year 1521, these two carried on a correspondence which reveals the character of their religious life.

In a letter from Marguerite to Briçonnet written some time after June 19, 1521, Marguerite asks him to send her Michel d'Arande to be with her to show her "the way of salvation".(2) This request was granted and d'Arande was sent to her and probably assisted in enlisting her interest in the ideals which inspired the work of the group.(3) Marguerite had fallen under the same teaching which had influenced Farel and Lefèvre, namely, the study of the Scriptures. Perhaps the greatest interest that she had in the reform was for the distribution of the knowledge of the Bible among the people as well as the clergy. This was one of her chief interests, and

(1)Ibid. (2)Herminjard, op. cit. p.65. (3)Freer, op. cit. vol.i.

her attitude toward the place it had in her life she has put in the words of one of her characters in the Heptameron, the dame Ossille:

"I have long been in search of such a remedy (for ennui) all my life long, and I have never found but one, which is the reading of the Holy Writ. It is in such reading that the mind finds its true and perfect joy, and whence proceed the repose and the health of the body.-----I sing with my heart and pronounce with my lips, as humbly as I can, the beautiful canticles with which the Holy Scriptures inspired David. The pleasure I derive from them is ravishing." (1)

Great must have been her interest, for at the time of her visit in Meaux she sat at the feet of Jacques Lefevre and listened to the wisdom and eloquence that had electrified the University. Lefevre's exposition of the Scriptures seems to have interested even Louise, for Marguerite writes concerning her that "Madame has begun to read in the Holy Scriptures." (2)

While there, Marguerite was completely won over to the project of this group and set about the task of winning the royal family to her point of view. (3) In her letters to Briconnet we read requests for guidance and direction, and we find in his answers an occasional word of encouragement. But tho there were some periods when the winning of Francis and Louise seemed possible, it was a losing fight. Both of them were too innately selfish and ambitious to break away from the Church of Rome and so throw into the field against them

(1) Heptameron, Introduction. (2) Herminjard, p. 78.

(3) Duclaux, Life of Margaret of Navarre, p 55ff.

the Pope and the entire church, and perchance lose the kingdom.(1) This plan was obnoxious to them both not only for that reason but further because the high moral standard which the reformers held up did not agree with their desires, neither Louise nor Francis seriously considered the break.(2)

Another trend which this contact helped to strengthen was the weaning of Marguerite away from the necessity of prayers to saints and started her upon her true religious life, which might be termed mystical. For her religion must have been of a mystical nature for her to have remained within the Catholic Church, and yet to have held religious opinions which were undoubtedly Protestant.

Marguerite has left behind her much poetry and many letters in addition to the better known collection of stories, the Heptameron, and in all of them we find the signs of a religious life which was essentially Protestant. In many instances she shows a strong mystical tendency as illustrated in her desire for "the Nuptial day" as set forth in this poem

"Lord, when will come the day
So much desired
When I by love will be
Drawn to you?
That nuptial day, O Lord,
Is so late for me
That no wealth or honor
Can satisfy me.
Dry from these sorrowing eyes
The flowing tears
And give to me Thy best gift
A sweet repose." (3)

(1) Duclaux, Life of Margaret of Angouleme, p.55. (2) See Farmer, p. 27. (3) Les Marguerites de la Marguerite.

Chapter III

The Reform at Meaux

The Work of Reform

When Marguerite arrived at Meaux she found the work of reform well under way. What was this work of reform? What were the plans of Briçonnet and his group? Their object might be described as the restoration of the purity of the primitive, apostolic church. The means employed were three. First, to cleanse the church of all the abuses and superstitions that filled it. To do away with worship of saints and relics and to turn their prayers from the dead to the living. Second, to have the ministry perform its office of preaching and of ministering to the needs of the people. Finally to put in the hands of the common people, the New Testament so that they might learn for themselves the good news of redemption thru the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

To this end the group worked as one under the leadership of Briçonnet. As was the case in Germany, so when this movement began there was never a thought of breaking with the Romish Church. But it was a sincere attempt to purge it of existing abuses. In the earlier measures enforced by Briçonnet in his diocese he tried to eliminate the more flagrant abuses and, in part, succeeded;⁽¹⁾ but the preaching of these untrained priests could not have satisfied him, for he called others to assist.⁽²⁾ Furthermore he forbade the Franciscan monks to preach in the pulpits of his see,⁽³⁾ and in their stead he placed men who preached the Gospel, and exhorted to holy living by life

⁽¹⁾Herminjard, op. cit. p.221, note. ⁽²⁾See Baird. ⁽³⁾Herminjard, Ibid, p.67.

as well as by word of mouth. Briçonnet pushed this preaching reform with vigor, so that the change was noticeable even to a passing traveller who wrote of this bishop that

"when any of his preachers were absent, he enjoined them (i.e. the ignorant vicars) to write to their parishioners for the day--hoping by this means, in so much as God has given them Grace, to break the bread of the Gospel and to feed the people committed to their care".(1)

While Mazurier, Roussel, Farel and others were preaching, Briçonnet and d'Arande started to translate the Scriptures into French. This they did with a will. It seems to have been one of the chief interests of Lefèvre's life to put the Gospel into the hands of the people. When Marguerite was at Meaux, Lefèvre and d'Arande were hard at work. The translation was not quickly forth-coming but finally in June of 1523, he published the translation of the four gospels. In the introduction to this work, Lefèvre admonished those who read that

"Lequel est le livre de vie et le seule reigle des Chrestiens", (2) and in it shines the true sun, the light of our faith, "Jesus Christ, l'unique auteur de notre salut".(3)

October 17, 1523 saw the publication of the first half of the second part of the New Testament. In this were the Epistles of Paul and the Catholic epistles. The Acts of the Apostles was published October 31, the Revelation of St. John, November 5. The Second half, which completed the work is dated November 6, 1523. (4)

(1)Herminjard, Ibid. p. 221 Bretonneau op. cit. p. 168

(2)Herminjard, op. cit. p.34. Also Intro. to the Four Gospels by Lefevre. (3)Ibid, p. 134. (4)Ibid, p. 159, note.

In the introduction to this publication, we find much of interest. Lefèvre defends his translation of the Scriptures by saying that Charles VIII wanted it. Now "les plus haulte et puissantes princesses du royaume" desire the printing of the New Testament for their edification. He remarks that this translation was wrought by "the intelligence obtained by humbling himself before God in prayer." He claims royal approval still further when he says

"it is the intention of the debonnaire king, who deserves the name, very Christian, that the word of God be preached in all its purity through all his realm".

Lefèvre also urges as the will of the king, that the clergy should, after the example of St. John Chrysostom, exhort the people to read and meditate on the Gospel.(1) This attitude of Francis, which was so favorable to the reformers, was referred to twice more by Lefèvre in his writings.(2) Also Jean Lermite records that this printing went forward "par commandante du roy".(3)

The expense of this printing was borne by Briçonnet, and those who could not afford to purchase copies of the New Testament had copies given to them.(4) The people read this work gladly and their eager reception cheered the heart of Lefèvre. Lefèvre wrote to Farel (5) that "the New Testament translated into French has been received with an extraordinary eagerness by the simple people".

(1)Ibid, pp. 159-168. (2)Once in a letter to Farel (Hermin. p.221) and again in the introduction to the second half of the New Testament (Herminjard, p. 211, note). (3)Ibid, p.221, notell.(4)Lefevre to Farel, Herminjard, op. cit. p. 221 ff. (5)Herminjard, op. cit. p. 219-227.

The Results of the Reform

Nor was this all. Following some suggestion made by Oecolampade to either Briconnet or Lefevre, Roussel and four others were directed to instruct the people every morning in the Epistles of St. Paul. Preaching was carried on in the tongue of the people. The sermons were no longer mere recitations from the "Golden Legend", as they had been when the monks occupied the pulpits, but they were faithful expositions of Scripture. The Scriptures were available to the people in their own language and were eagerly accepted by them. Stress was taken away from the worship of relics and saints, and from prayers for the dead, and was placed on the gospel of salvation thru Jesus Christ alone. The king and the king's sister were openly in sympathy with them. These things would suggest that the work of the Group of Meaux would be crowned with success, not only Meaux but throughout the entire country.

But these were not the only results that came from the activity of this group. The Sorbonne was out in the field yet, and like Nestorius of old, they were "heresy-hunting". As a means of understanding the attitude of the Sorbonne we might take Natalis Beda as a representative member of that body and study him. He came to the University from the city of Mont-St. Michel,⁽¹⁾ and he was appointed syndic

⁽¹⁾Ibid., p. 70, note 5.

of the faculty of the Sorbonne and was the instigator of many of its policies and actions. (1) Judging from the way in which he went about to seek out heresy, we might say that he was actuated by the thought that he alone was appointed to keep the church free from doctrinal error. So manifest was his zeal in his self-appointed task, that Erasmus said of him "There are a thousand monks in Beda". (2)

When Luther appealed to the judgment of the universities of Paris and Erfurth, (3) his case fell into the hands of Beda. Beda himself made reply to the letter of the elector of Saxony, the 2nd of March, 1521, and on the 15th of April of the same year the faculty of the Sorbonne responded by a most bitter condemnation. (4) In it Luther was identified with Mohammed and extermination by sword and by fire was invoked against him and his works as the only argument to be employed. (5) In August of that year, Glareanus wrote that there were none of Luther's books to be had in Paris. (6)

The condemnation of Lefèvre followed on November 9, 1521. (7) This shows that the Sorbonne was in no mood to brook any heresy. As may be supposed the movement for reform at Meaux was watched with suspicion by "ces barbarous docteurs". (8) The character of their suspicions is seen in the classification of Lefèvre with Luther, Erasmus and Reuchlin by the masters of the Dominican orders as anti-Christ. (9)

(1) Beza, Hist. Eccl. tome I, p. 2. (2) Freer, op. cit. vol. II, p. (3) d'Aubigne, op. cit. vol. iii. p. 415. (4) Herminjard, op. cit. p. 70. (5) Ibid. (6) Ibid, p. 70, note 8. (7) Farmer, Essay etc. p. 21, and Herminjard, op. cit. pp. 51 & 78. (8) Beza, op. cit. vol. i., p. 2. (9) Herminjard, p. 72.

When Briçonnet barred from the pulpits of his diocese the Franciscan monks (Cordeliers) he made for himself and his cause powerful enemies. They appealed from his decision on the ground of the decretal of Boniface VIII, promulgated in 1300 and giving the right to both the Franciscan and Dominican orders to preach in the churches, in public places and in the pulpits of parishes.(1) Parlemeute upheld the bishop in his right to prohibit their preaching in his own diocese.(2) Unable to force him to reinstate them, the Franciscans were anxious to repay the insult and they brought to the attention of the willing Sorbonne, the "Lutheran" character of the work of the "group of Meaux".(3)

The Sorbonne had already been watching the work at Meaux with disapproval. When Lefèvre completed his translation of the portions of the New Testament and distributed them among the people, they voiced their disapproval. They attacked the proposition put forward by Lefèvre that "all the people and particularly the clergy ought to be led to the study of the sacred Scriptures, because the other sciences are human and of little use,"(4) saying

"haec propositio secundum primam partem Laicos quoscunque ad studium sacrae Scripturae et difficultatum ejusdem esse inducendos, sicut et Clericos, ex errore Pauperum Lugdunensium deducitur."(5) (June 8, 1523)

Two months later, August 26,

"they declared that it was very pernicious, in view of existing circumstances, to permit to be scattered among

(1)Ibid, p. 72, note 4. (2)Ibid, p. 67, note 4. (3)See Baird, op. cit. p.80. (4)Herminjard, p. 220, note.
(5)Ibid.

the people, any versions of the Bible, whether complete or in part, and that those who had already done so ought to be suppressed rather than tolerated."(1)

It was only the intervention of the king on behalf of this translation that saved Lefèvre from Parlemeute, which would have gladly followed the Sorbonne suggestion.

(1) Ibid.

Chapter IV

Failure

Chapter IV

Defection of Briçonnet

Now we approach in our study that time in the history of this movement that from the standpoint of a Protestant we could wish had not happened. If only there had been in the characters of Briçonnet and Lefèvre the dogged courage that characterized Luther, how different a story might be told. But such was not the case. When the Sorbonne brought pressure to bear on Briçonnet we see a gradual weakening. At first, Gaillard records, Briçonnet had the courage to stand against the Sorbonne calling them Pharisees and false prophets,(1) but this did not last long. Soon we see signs of weakening in the bishop. Perhaps the first indication of it is found in his correspondence with Marguerite. The bishop counsels her to "cover the fire for some time"(2) since "the wood that you wish to blaze is so green that it will quench the fire, and we counsel you for several reasons,(which some day I hope to tell you) not to quench the brand".(3) Gradually the Sorbonne acquired control over the bishop. Before their conquest over the head of the movement was completed, however, they had intimidated another of the group and had either persuaded him to renounce his former stand or had forced him to do so. This one was Martial Mazurier. He had been one

(1) Gaillard, Histoire de Francois Ier, Vol. vi, p. 409.

(2) The last of Sept. or first of Oct. of 1522. (3) Herminjard, Correspondance etc., vol. i, p. 105.

of the most eloquent of the group, rivaling in this respect Gerard Roussel.(1) But when he was arrested and was accused of teaching erroneous opinions and of acts of violence(2) and put in the dungeon of the Conciergerie (3) he weakened. Whether it is true as d'Aubigne says that he was attracted by the morality of the reformers and not by their doctrines(4) we cannot say. The immediate prospect before him was the stake unless either he withdrew from his former position or proved the charges false. The charges were not false and the only course was to renounce his former stand, which he did.

"From the days of the emperor Julian, apostates, after their infidelity, have always become the most merciless persecutors of the doctrines they had once professed", (5)

and this was the case with Mazurier, as we shall soon see.

The first demand that the Sorbonne made upon Brignonnet was that he denounce the writings of Luther. This he did in a synodal decree of October 15, 1523.(6) In this decree, Brignonnet warns the "faithful of his diocese" against "Martin Luther who in opposition to the entire order of the hierarchy" would overthrow and destroy the estate which keeps all the rest in the path of duty".(7) Further, Luther is compared with Nicolaos, the father of the Nicolaitans, and to Chrysippe, for his "fantastic interpretation of the sacred Scriptures".(8) This sounds very strange coming from Brignonnet, particularly

(1) Baird, Rise of the Huguenots, vol. i, p. 74ff. (2) Crevier, Hist. de L'Universite, vol. v, p.234. (3) Gaillard, op. cit. vol. v, p. 203. (4) d'Aubigne, His. of the Reformation, vol.iii, p. 448. (5) d'Aubigne, Ibid. (6) Herminjard, op.cit. p.153. (7) Ibid, p. 154. (8) Ibid.

the praise of the clergy as "that estate which keeps all the rest in the path of duty", especially when we refer to some other statements that he makes of the clergy in his correspondence with Marguerite as, "the estate by the coldness of which all the others are frozen"(1) and "that which is the ruin of all the rest".(2). The decree closes with the warning that any one who "buys, possesses, reads, sells, or approves justifies, and communicates in public meetings or in private conversation, the books of the said Martin" will be in danger of excommunication.(3)

15471 One wonders what must have been the workings of the mind of the bishop that he could sign that decree and yet so enthusiastically assist Lefevre in the work of translating the Scriptures and in the distribution of the same to the people at his own cost.(4) But this did not satisfy the Sorbonne. To give them credit, they made every effort to be thorough in their attempt to rid the kingdom of heresy.

On the same day in which Briconnet issued his decree to the people of his diocese, he issued one to the clergy,(5) in which he warns "all and each of the cures, vicaires, under-vicaires and other priests of our dependance"(6) against "some persons, abusing the Gospel and turning it from its proper sense"-----"that Purgatory does not exist, and by consequence it is not necessary to pray for the dead, nor invoke the very

(1)Ibid, p.86. (2)Ibid, p. 154. (3)Ibid, p. 155. (4)See here the reasoning given by d'Aubigne, His. of the Reform. vol. iii, p. 435. (5)Herminjard, op. cit. p. 156. (6)Ibid.

blessed Virgin Mary and the saints".(1) Moreover if any one dares "to preach, to affirm these afore-mentioned heresies, or other errors, you are to cite them immediately before us and we will interdict them from continuing to evangelise your flock".(2) And within twenty-two days of the date of this decree, Lefèvre was to write within this same diocese the introduction to his translation of the New Testament.(3)

Still unsatisfied, the Sorbonne summoned Briçonnet to Paris to a trial for heresy. Here he was to be tried by a commission appointed by the Parlemeute. (4) He objected to this, asking to be judged in open court, and not by this commission.(5) This was not granted, and his trial went on before the commission. There is no record of the proceedings of the trial, but Briçonnet must have acceded to every demand made by the commission, for they cleared him of heresy. Baird (6) gives to Mazurier the doubtful credit of persuading Briçonnet to come over to his side, and of removing any scruples that the bishop might have had. One cannot help wondering what the result would have been if Briçonnet, like Luther, had taken his stand on his position and remained there. Would not many others in France, emboldened by his example have followed him? Would Marguerite have permitted the Sorbonne to have taken him to the stake? But the result was otherwise and with the payment of 200 livres parisis, on the 29th of November, 1525, a month and twenty-one days after his summons to appear at Paris before the commission(7) Briçonnet was given his liberty.

(1)Ibid, p. 157. (2)Herminjard, op. cit. p. 158. (3)See date of publication of the second part of his translation of the New Testament. Herminjard, p. 159. (4)Registres du Parlemeute, Oct. 3, 1525. (after Baird, p.82. (5)Ibid. (6)Baird, Rise of the Huguenots, vol.i, p. 82. (7)He was called on the 3rd of Oct.

This is the end of any contribution that Briçonnet made to the cause of the Reformation in France. Before going any further it is of interest to consider two questions. First whether Briçonnet was ever in sympathy with the movement or not. Second the date of his synodal decrees.

Of the first, contrary to the opinion of some Catholic historians, (1) there seems to be no reason to doubt that, up to the time of the action of the Sorbonne, Briçonnet was in full accord with the work of those pastors who were "brought in by himself" (2) and who worked under his direction. His letters to Marguerite go to show that he was in sympathy with them. (3) The fact that he instructed Roussel to give daily lectures on the Epistles (4) and the report that Lefèvre gives Farel of the pleasure that the bishop has in the distribution of the New Testament to the people, (5) all go together to substantiate the position that at the first Briçonnet was one with the others in this Movement.

The fact that he was so manifestly in sympathy with them up to the close of the year 1524 brings up the question whether the date on the first three of his synodal decrees was the real date of publication. In view of the circumstances it is doubtful. In the decree to the clergy, (Oct. 15, 1523) we find Briçonnet inveighing against Lefèvre, Farel, Roussel, and all the others of this group. In the natural order, after a statement like that on the part of the bishop, we would expect

(1) Maimbourg, Hist. du Calvinisme, Daniel, Histoire de France.
(2) Herminjard, op. cit. p. 157. (3) See letters of Briçonnet to Marguerite in Herminjard, op. cit. pp. 84, 109, and in the Appendix. (4) Ibid, p. 222. (5) Ibid.

that those "pastors brought in by himself", would take the hint and get out. Yet such is not the case. Lefèvre stays on in Meaux for some time, rejoicing in the eager reception of his translation of the New Testament.(1) Roussel also remains in Meaux and we find him writing to Farel from Meaux as late as the 6th of July, 1524.(2) In this letter Roussel remarks that his time is entirely taken up by his work of preaching and teaching the people of Meaux.(3) Also he notes the fact of the retraction of Mazurier and Caroli, which goes to show the difficulty of braving the censures of the Sorbonne and the arrests of Parlement.(4) But there is nothing in the letter, or in Lefèvre's letter that would suggest an antagonistic attitude on the part of the bishop. And Pierre de Seville wrote to the Chevalier Coct as late as December 28, 1524, "I notify you that the bishop of Meaux, in Brie, near Paris, and Jacobus Faber Stapulensis (Jacques Lefevre)---- have broken all the images" in the bishopric.(5) That hardly sounds consistent with the decree to the clergy. In this question the case stands with Baird that "Everywhere there is evidence that until his courage broke down, Briçonnet was in full accord with the reformers."(6)

(1)Ibid. (2)Ibid, p. 231. (3)Ibid, p. 233. (4)Ibid, p. 234.
(5)Ibid, p. 315. (6)Baird, op. cit. p. 81.

Persecution in Meaux

When the bishop returned from Paris, he set about undoing the work that he had spent four years building up. It was a comparatively simple matter to drive out the other members of the group. But the people who had for four years listened to them preach did not receive this change of heart on the part of the bishop kindly, but rather resented it. Du Plessis (1) records that when the Bishop published the indulgences of Pope Clement VII, and an order for a three days' fast in order to procure peace between Christian princes, they were torn from their place on the doors of the cathedral and a placard was substituted on which "they did not blush to put forward that the Pope was the true Antichrist". (2) Briconnet attempted to discover who did it, but could not find out for a time. Finally Jean Leclerc was found to be the "enfant de Sathan" and he was arrested and taken away to Paris for trial. There the sentence of Parlemeute was

"that he should be lashed publicly in Paris for three days following by the hand of the executioner. From there, they were to return to Meaux, where he was to receive a new scourging, then be branded by a hot iron, and banished with indignation from the frontiers of the kingdom."(3)

This barbarous sentence was duly carried out, under the eyes of Briconnet and with his sanction.

Nor was this the last of the persecution carried on under his hand. Jacques Pauvan was the next to be arrested

(1) Du Plessis, His. de L'Eglise de Meaux, vol. i, p. 329.

(2) Ibid. (3) Ibid.

by the persecuting Franciscans. He had been a student in the university and falling under the spell of Lefèvre, he had left his studies and gone to Meaux to help him. Even after the others had fled, he remained behind and was in no whit afraid to state his opinions. Among others he asserted the non-existence of purgatory, that God had no vicar and the impropriety of saint worship. These and many others (1) brought him to the attention of the Franciscans and he was arrested. The Sorbonne reviewed his theses (2) and quickly passed condemnation upon the young man, and his defender, Matthieu Saunier.(3) Again we come face to face with Mazurier, for he it was that set about the work of persuading the young man of his errors. And the tongue that is reported to have talked Brigonet out of his position, now had like success with Pauvan.(4) On Christmas day, 1525, he publicly retracted his errors, "all nude, in his shirt, crying for mercy to God and to the Virgin Mary."(5) Besides this he was sentenced to seven years imprisonment in the priory of St. Martin des Champs. But he was not long to remain there, for the Parlemeute called him out and reinterrogated him. This time there was no weakness and he boldly professed his convictions. Consequently he was sentenced to the stake, and on "le mardi 28e of aoust, 1526" (6) he met his death at the Place de Greve. For some reason he was permitted to speak to the people as

(1)Crespin, *Actiones et Moniments*, fol. 52. (2)Gerdesius, *Hist. Evang. Renov.*, iv, 36, (after Baird) (3)Ibid. Saunier had written a defense of Pauvan shortly after his theses were known. (4)Crespin, *op. cit.* 52 fol. (5)Journal d'un Bourgeois etc. p. 291. (6)Ibid.

he was going to his death, and so powerful was his address that Farel reports Pierre Cornu, a doctor of Paris, to have said that "it had been better to have cost the Church a million in gold, than that Pauvan had been suffered to speak to the people."(1) With the martyrdom of Pauvan ends the story of the Group of Meaux. He was the only one who suffered to the death in the entire group.

The Dispersion of the Group

Before we come to a consideration of the contribution that this group may have made to the Reformation in France, let us follow them as they are dispersed from Meaux by the defection of the bishop. When Parlemeute, at the instigation of the faculty of the Sorbonne, condemned nine propositions extracted from Lefèvre's Commentary on the Gospels, Lefèvre decided that it was time to flee.(2) Not long after this he was found in Strasbourg, hiding under the pseudonym of Antonius Peregrinus.(3) Though Francis I, at the petition of his sister, wrote to the Parlement not to disturb these men whom they were persecuting, among whom were Lefèvre and Berquin, Lefèvre did not dare to return until Francis came back to France from his imprisonment in Sapin.(4) When Francis returned he recalled Lefèvre to Paris and appointed him tutor of his son, Charles, Duke d'Orleans, and his two daughters.(5) Later when persecution of the "heretics" was proceeding with his

(1) Baird, op. cit. p. 92. (2) See here Bayle's article Lefevre op. cit. (3) Herminjard, op. cit. p. 404. (4) Bayle, op. cit. (5) Bayle, Dictionnaire Historique, Art. Lefevre.

approval, Marguerite of Navarre, secured refuge for Lefèvre at Nerac where he spent the last days of his life in peace and safety.(1) But he was never satisfied with his share in the Reformation and to his dying day bemoaned that he should have failed to follow in the path of those who had suffered for the Gospel, in which they had been instructed by him.(2)

Farel was the first to leave Meaux, going before there was any opposition. Baird says of him, that

"neither the reason nor the precise time of his departure is known".(3)

But it is known that he went from there to Dauphiné and then into Switzerland where he became so much a part of the Movement in that country that he is regularly regarded as a Swiss reformer.

Of the fate of d'Arande little is known. M. Herminjard says that "little is known of him", (4) except that leaving Meaux to travel with the regent and Marguerite, it is not apparent whether or no he returned. He is next heard of in Marguerite's college of Bourges where the archbishop of Bourges threatened him with imprisonment for his preaching.(5) About the time of the Bishop of Meaux's defection, d'Arande was elected bishop of Saint-Paul-Trois-Chateau.(6) After that there is silence. One thing is certain that he is no longer heard of as a reformer.

(1)Freer, Life of Marguerite, vol. ii. (2)Baird, op. cit. p. 95. See his discussion of this subject. (3)Ibid. p. 83. (4)Herminjard, op. cit. p. 191. (5)Ibid. p. 205. (6)Ibid. p. 339.

Capito and Vatable remain in the light which they had found at Meaux, but took no great part in the French Reformation. (1)

Gerard Roussel was the last of the group to leave Meaux. He left shortly after Lefevre and followed him to Strasbourg. He was forced to leave because of "irregularities" in the conduct of worship. (2) When in Strasbourg both he and Lefevre were identified with a group of reformers among whom were Farel and Count Sigismond of Hohenlohe. (3) When Francis recalled Lefevre, he included in this call, Roussel. (4) After a time in Fontainebleau with Marguerite, Roussel had to leave the country to escape persecution. (5) At Marguerite's insistence he repaired to Navarre and there under the protection of the queen continued to preach the doctrines that he held at Meaux. (6) But like Lefevre, Marguerite and others he never openly severed his connection with the church at Rome, finally becoming, under the continued patronage of Marguerite, Bishop of Orlande. In this position Roussel filled out the remaining years of his life.

There remains of this group yet Marguerite of Navarre, and Briçonnet. Briçonnet remained in his position as bishop and we have the records of Protestant historians that he spent his days in remorse for his defection from the truth. (7)

(1) Vatable is found with Marguerite of Navarre at Nerac. (See Duclaux, Life of Marguerite.) (2) Baird, op. cit. p. 84. (3) Graf, Essais etc. chap. 6 (4) Freer, op. cit. vol. ii, chapter 3. (5) He preached without cassock. (Freer). (6) Freer, Ibid. (7) d'Aubigne, His. of the Reform. vol. iii.

The Catholic historians would have us believe that he spent his days in relief at deliverance from his false friends who would pervert his people.(1) From his subsequent life, which was not free from trouble from his friends of the Sorbonne, it is rather to be surmised that he spent some part of his time at least in remorse, like Lefèvre.(2) One wonders what were his feelings when there were committed to his keeping those "heretics" from his own diocese whom he had helped to teach.(3)

Marguerite carried on as best she could the work that was started in Meaux. What could be done by the use of her influence in the behalf of the reformers, she did and did well.

She protected not only Lefèvre and Roussel, but also others who were unfortunate enough to fall afoul of the Sorbonne. Twice she saved Berquin and tried the third time, but failed.(4) She used her great influence with her brother to favor the reform as long as she was with him in Paris.(5) And when she went to Navarre to be the queen of Henry d'Albret, she made her courts of Nérac and Pau houses of refuge for the reformers. (6) All thru her life she kept in close touch with the reformatory movement, aiding with her influence, her money and by writing this cause. (7)

(1)Maimbourg, Hist. du Calvinisme. Daniel, Hist. de France.

(2)See his continued correspondence with Marguerite. See also the account of his second trial before the Sorbonne. Freer, op. cit. vol. ii. (3)Journal d'un Bourgeois etc. p. 284.

(4)See letter to Francis by Marguerite. See Genin, Lettres de Marguerite de Navarre a son Frere. (5)See list of men at Nerac given by Duclaux, Life of Marguerite. (6)Melancthon writes to her to ask aid for a young student. Erasmus writes to her to commend her attitude. (7)See Baird, op. cit. p. 94.

Chapter V

CONCLUSION

Chapter V

The Contribution of the "Group" to the Movement

The influence of a group of men when limited to a small period in their lives of four or five years is very hard to estimate. But in this case it is especially hard for their influence was not limited to any one place. Perhaps this difficulty can be solved by taking up first their influence as a group at Meaux, and then their influence on the movement at large after the group broke up.

Naturally the presence of a group of able men such as were gathered at Meaux would not pass without results. And we find these results in the people with whom they worked. When the work had to be abandoned and the men had dispersed because of the defection of the bishop, there yet remained among the people the seed sown by them which was soon to spring up and bear fruit. Some of this steadfastness to the teaching that they had received was manifest when the people would attend Roussel's services bringing with them the banned portions of the New Testament.(1) A later one was given when prisoners were brought before Briconnet to be tried for their "heresy" which they would not give up.(2) A third was given when the "Fourteen of Meaux" went to the stake for the faith which this group had instilled in them.(3) And perhaps the final manifestation of the influence of this group was given on that dreadful night when Meaux was the next city after Paris

(1) Baird, p. 84. (2) Journal d'un Bourgeois etc. p. 284.

(3) H. M. Bower, The Fourteen of Meaux.

to receive the commission from the queen-mother to massacre all the Huguenots within the city.(1) These were living testimonials to the work that this group had accomplished in their four years of undisturbed work.

But thru its individual members, the influence of this group will be immortalized. Was it not to Lefevre that Olivetanus owed the inspiration and more for his translation of the New Testament? Was it not thru the work of Farel that Dauphiné and Basle received the gospel? And did not Farel persuade Calvin that it was his duty to go to Geneva? Pusillanimous as he was, Brignonnet deserves the credit for bringing Marguerite to a persuasion of the importance of the New Testament and thru it to an understanding of its doctrines. And to her, more than to any of the others, lasting credit belongs, for she gave to the Reformation two of its greatest, supports, humanly speaking. In the protection that she gave to the preachers of the Evangelical doctrines in the kingdom of Navarre she laid the foundation for the almost nation-wide acceptance of the Gospel by the Navarrese. Further in the person of her daughter, Jeanne d'Albret trained in sympathy with the reformed position, Marguerite gave to the cause of the Reformation one of its greatest leaders who was the mother of the king-to-be, Henry IV. In other words, the work of the group was entirely that of seed-sowing. There was none among them who could take the place of Luther. But without them, Luther's message would never have been received. "The trumpet blast which Luther, in the year 1517, sounded in Germany, awakened all the spirits in France."(2)

(1)Laurry, "Fourteen of Meaux"

(2)Farmer, op. cit. p. 53

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