

# ANNALS OF IOWA.

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## PELLA—A BIT OF HOLLAND IN AMERICA.

BY CYRENUS COLE.

### I.

In the summer of 1847 seven hundred colonists from Holland came to Iowa and settled in Marion county on the divide between the Des Moines and Skunk rivers. In their own country they had been persecuted on account of their religion, being Dissenters from the established Reformed church, and therefore they called their new home Pella, meaning a place of refuge. Many of the colonists were animated by a desire to better their worldly condition, but the founding of the community was primarily a religious ceremony. Upon the seal of the new town they inscribed the words: *In Deo Spes Nostra et Refugium*, or, *In God Our Hope and Refuge*.

The religious movement which resulted in the founding of Pella was not one of the world's great movements. History has made but little record of it.\* The theological pamphleteers are dead, and their pamphlets are covered with dust. We shall walk for a few minutes in one of the byways of history; we shall, I hope, find the walking pleasant and the meditations profitable. The story of the people of Pella is one of the romances of the history of Iowa. It is a strange

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\*The history of Pella and surrounding country is being written by K. Van Stigt, under the auspices of the *Hollandsche Oud-Nederzetter's Vereeniging*,—Hollandish Old-Settlers' Association,—of that place. Two parts of the work have been published and a third part is to follow. I have drawn freely from that authentic source in the preparation of this paper. Mr. Van Stigt's lucid and elaborate history is written in the Dutch language.

thread woven into the cloth, giving it added color and strength. Those seven hundred immigrants, with later additions, are enrolled among the makers of Iowa. They endured the hardships of pioneer life and fulfilled all their duties to State and society in the deep consciousness that they were part of God's own plan.

## II.

To speak of religious persecutions in Holland is almost to contradict history. Holland is one of the cradles of both civil and religious liberty in Europe. Beginning with the Union of Utrecht, 1579, or, more properly with the Act of Abjuration, 1581, the Dutch Republic was "the common harbor of all sects and heresies." The persecuted of those days fled to the Netherlands and all found an asylum there. Holland was an earlier America. From France came Huguenots; from England, Pilgrims and Puritans; from Germany, Anabaptists and witches, and Jews from all countries. Holland, triumphant over the combined strength of the kings of Spain and the popes of Rome in the most tremendous struggle of Protestantism, decreed, under William the Silent, that no Catholic should be molested on account of religion. They refused to persecute those who had persecuted them. In the New World the Dutch both preached and practiced the same tolerance. No witches were burned in New York, which was settled by the Dutch. When the Quakers were driven out of Massachusetts, they were admitted to New Amsterdam (now New York) for there it was held that "at least the consciences of men ought to be free."

But the Holland of 1840 was not the Holland of 1640. There public had been turned into a monarchy, and the stadtholders had become kings. A clergy supported by the state had learned to use the civil power for its own ends, which were not always the ends of religion. Tolerance had become intolerance. Sturdy Calvinism had become fawning formalism. But all the old fires had not been put out. The men and women who came to Pella, while in Holland stood



true to the past of the Republic and the Reformation. They were of those who will not take their religion from the state, nor their politics from the church. They were men and women well adapted to play their part, or rather to do their duty, in the New World. They came from a royal race of freemen. All through European history the blood of these adherents of liberty runs as a stream of scarlet. Froude says that when Erasmus was born in Amsterdam, 1467, the Dutch were a free people "in the modern sense," and Hallam says that in Holland "self-government goes beyond any assignable date." Cæsar on his tour of European conquest found the Nervii, ancestors of the Dutch, the most stubborn defenders of their lands and their liberties, and, in recognition of their prowess he exacted from them no tribute except the tribute of blood. Charlemagne in his turn consented that it should be written in their statute books that "the Frisians shall be free as long as the wind blows out of the clouds and the world stands." The religious faith and the moral heroism of the war with Spain, lasting eighty years, is one of the world's best inheritances. "The spirit of the Dutch," said Sir Philip Sidney to Queen Elizabeth, "is the spirit of God and is invincible." This same spirit, I like to think, reappeared in the men and women who in 1834 revolted against the established church in Holland, and seven hundred of whom came to Pella in 1847.

### III.

The Pella Pilgrims in Holland believed in the complete separation of church and state. They opposed the established church because to them it had become an institution of form, instead of being an expression of faith. They insisted on a realignment with the Bible. When they saw they could not accomplish these reforms within the church, they became Separatists, as the English Pilgrim Fathers had been under Robinson and Brewster. Throughout we shall note a striking resemblance between the Pilgrims of Pella and the Pilgrims of Plymouth. The difference is mainly that between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries.

A few words in regard to the connection between church and state in Holland are necessary to a clear understanding of this history. In no country did the Reformation make more rapid progress than in Holland where "the free spirit of the great mercantile communities was in singular harmony with the movement." Racially the people of Holland were closer to the Germans, but ecclesiastically they took their tone from France. They followed Calvin; not Luther. In the synod of Dort, Arminius opposed a free church, styling it a new popedom, while Gomarus, the champion of Calvinism, stood for a church independent of the state. From 1618 to 1795 the church in Holland was free, but not without periodic state intervention. Out of the Napoleonic reconstruction of Europe, Holland emerged a monarchy with a close ecclesiastical establishment. The church was governed by a commission of seven members appointed by the king from twice as many men nominated by the synod. The state used the church and the church used the state, each for its own ends. The church became worldly and the government tyrannical. It was against this that the people who cherished the old ideas revolted. The struggle was most marked in South Holland—Zuidholland—with its Rotterdam, the Hague, Leyden, Dort, Delft, Delfshaven and Gornichem, all famous in the struggles for civil and religious liberty in Europe.

The new reformation was led by a number of young men, many fresh from the universities and theological schools. Prominent among them were: H. P. Scholte, A. Brummelkamp, S. Van Velzen, G. F. Gezelle Meerburg, A. C. Van Raalte and H. de Cock. Of these men, Henry Peter Scholte, or Dominie\* Scholte, leader of the Dissenters who came to Iowa, was born in Amsterdam, September 25, 1805, and died in Pella, August 15, 1868. He was the son of a cabinet-maker and himself learned the carpenter's trade. But he had other aspirations. At the age of 17 he entered the

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\*The word, "dominie," Dutch spelling "dominee," is derived from the Latin "dominus," meaning master, and is applied, rather familiarly, in the Dutch churches to pastors.



University of Leyden. He served in the Belgian revolution and won a medal for bravery. On that occasion the national poet, Da Costa, dedicated to him a patriotic and religious poem. Entering the active ministry, Dominie Scholte soon gained the disfavor of the authorities, especially those in the department of instruction. He held church organizations to be of little importance to religion. He said he was by conscience "prevented from clothing his faith in the straight-jacket of ecclesiastical formalism." For these and other breaches he was expelled. The three congregations over which he had presided, thereupon seceded from the established church. On November 29, 1834, Dominie Scholte was tried, for teaching dissension, at Appingadam and at the conclusion was imprisoned. In his diary he recorded that in the adjoining cell was a common thief. "This may have a very gloomly outlook to you," he said to those of his friends and followers who sent word to him in prison, "but to me the outlook is glorious indeed." At the end of five days the good dominie was released. Another trial was had at Appingadam, February 20, 1835, which lasted eight days and as a result of which he was liberated. It cost him eight thousand guilders, about \$3,000, to defend himself against these prosecutions. On March 26, 1835, he was told to vacate, within three days, his residence as a pastor of the church. He went to Genderen, accompanied by his wife, who was ill with a fever.

In order to prevent the growth of the movement, the government sent a detachment of "kurassiers," soldiers, to the infected districts. From time to time, many were fined and some imprisoned. Under a section of the Code Napoleon the government denied the Dissenters the right to meet in assemblies of more than nineteen persons, larger assemblies being dispersed as mobs. But in spite of all the efforts of the government the new reformation spread rapidly. It became a religious enthusiasm. The meetings were held in barns, in pastures, and by the waysides. Haysheds and kitchens became temples. The local authorities and the soldiers were equally exasperating and oppressive. At one

time Dominie Scholte was preaching from a farmer's cart, when the soldiers came and ordered the people to disperse. The preacher continued with his sermon. The soldiers cut the cart into fragments, the dominie and his wife going down with the pieces. The audience sang psalms to drown the uproar. The psalm was their only weapon against the authorities. It is said that oftentimes they sang so fervently of the love of God that their persecutors were conscience smitten and departed.

#### IV.

I shall not further follow the history of these people in Holland. This paper has to do with how they came to America and what they did at Pella. From the "Tijdschrift de Reformatie," properly a series of pamphlets on the new religious movement, it appears that while the government relented in its persecutions, the Dissenters were in various ways harrassed and ostracised, especially by the regular church authorities. They came to feel the longing for a new fatherland. Some had already forsaken their native country. In 1841 America was referred to as a land to be desired, "where there are no Ministers of Religion, where separation between church and state is a verity, where no one is compelled to help support a clergy whose teachings he cannot accept, and where education is free indeed."

In August, 1846, a meeting for the purpose of promoting emigration was held at Utrecht. A commission was there appointed to consider applications for membership. The instructions were to receive only such persons as were sober, industrious, moral and religious. Applicants who were not personally known to the members of the commission were required to bring certificates as to their Christian conduct and character, and also as to their worldly condition. Roman Catholics were excluded from membership, not because of any hostility toward them, but because the desire was to form a colony of one mind on religious matters. They found afterwards that they had as many minds as persons in the colony. Those "picked Christians" were all active



theologians and trained in scriptural controversy. That they were "all preachers" passed into a proverb among them.

On December 25, Christmas day, the shareholders of the colony met at Utrecht to form a permanent organization. The following officers were elected: President, H. P. Scholte; Vice-President, A. J. Betten; Directors, J. F. Le Cocq, G. H. Overkamp, A. Wigny, and J. Rietveld. Isaac Overkamp was elected secretary.

From that time preparations were rapidly made for the emigration in the spring of 1847. Four ships, small sailing vessels, were chartered. The *Catherina Jackson*, the *Maastrom*, and the *Nagasaki* sailed from Rotterdam and the *Pieter Floris*, from Amsterdam. The ships departed for America between the 4th and 11th of April, 1847. They carried in all, one hundred and sixty constituted "households," or families, together with a large number of both men and women who were compelled to leave their families and relatives as well as their native land. The historian of the colony says that there was much "struggling in prayer" and "heart-bleeding;" there was so much to hold them back, and so much to urge them forward. Many family bonds were irretrievably broken.

Religion is relentless in what it exacts from its devotees. The writer of this sketch may be permitted to cite the case of his own father, who was a member of the colony. Of all his people he alone had joined the Dissenters. His course was regarded by his family as scandalous and foolhardy. But he asked for his portion, his father being dead, and did not wait for a blessing. An uncle in vain tempted him with the prospect of a substantial inheritance. He gave up all, including his mother. He had read, and he believed, that those who forsake all, for Christ's sake, shall inherit in this world a hundred fold and in the world to come, everlasting life. His mother followed him to where the boat was waiting and would hardly be shaken off. That was the last meeting and the last parting between mother and son. One heart was forever broken there, and in America, in after years, one head must often have been bowed in remembrance

of her. But he never uttered a regret, though all family ties remained broken, for in his heart was the determination of a man who believed in the pride of right, strangely linked with the humility of one who sought to do the works of righteousness, as if in the sight of God daily. This incident is no part of the history I am writing. It is recorded, as an incident throwing light on the character and the coming of the first settlers of Pella, and, also, as a son's acknowledgement of an indebtedness which can never be paid in the coin or service of this world.

## V.

Crossing the Atlantic is now a trip of a few days. In 1847 it was still a journey of many weeks. Of the four ships, the *Catherina Jackson* was only twenty-six days at sea; the others, from thirty-six to fifty days. For some of the passengers the voyage was fraught with danger. The ships were not new, nor first-class. At least one of them, the *Catherina Jackson*, was no longer seaworthy. On the first or second succeeding trip, loaded with a cargo of freight, she went down to the bottom of the Atlantic. The sailors were some of them English and some Dutch. Many of the crews were blacks. Order and cleanliness were strictly enforced. A temporary government, civil and ecclesiastical, was instituted on each ship. Each was a kind of miniature, psalm-singing republic. Religious services were held daily. The rude sailors came to respect greatly their strange passengers. It is told how the roustabout blacks were especially moved by the religious services; the long meter psalms held them spell bound. The captains all testified that never before had they carried across the Atlantic such exemplary people. They could not understand why they had been compelled to leave their native land. When the ships reached Baltimore, the health officers of the port came on board. They were so pleased with the cleanliness of the ships—the proverbial Dutch scrubbing brushes had been plied until their sea quarters were as clean as their kitchens in Holland had been—that they omitted the usual inspections. “Oh,



these immigrants are all right," they said. One of them added to some of the rosy-cheeked girls: "Welcome to America." At least one of those who heard that welcome never forgot the words. How a word of welcome, spoken under such circumstances, lives on and on in a human heart!

How glad they were at the sight of land, though a strange land! Maryland was beautiful in the verdure of May. But Baltimore bewildered these men and women of strong faith and austere lives. The American city seemed to them both dirty and wicked. Baltimore was even then a large seaport, but in 1847 it had few pavements; in most of the streets people waded through the mud, and, according to the accounts of the colonists who landed there in that year, chickens, hogs and cows roamed at will in many parts of the city. Before they had taken their effects from the ships they realized that they had made many mistakes. Supposing they were going to a wilderness, they had brought all manner of household goods and work tools with them: chests, cabinets, plows, farm wagons—all useless in America. They had many more things to unlearn, and many more to learn. From Baltimore inland they traveled by the primitive American railroad. In this emergency there was developed a veritable Æneas—it was Æneas who carried his father from burning Troy. One of the immigrants found, just before the train was ready to start, that his mother, an invalid, had been left behind. He ran frantically through the streets trying, in Dutch, to make some one understand that he wanted a conveyance. But they could not understand him. He was too Dutch and too excited. In despair he picked up his mother and in his arms carried her through the streets filled with gaping people to where the train was waiting. This Æneas was Dirk Synhorst; he stood six feet high and as sturdy as a giant.

From Baltimore to Columbus, Pennsylvania, the journey was by railway; from Columbus to Harrisburg, by canal-boat; from Harrisburg to Johnstown, by railway; from Johnstown to Pittsburg, by canal-boat; from Pittsburg to

Cincinnati, by steamboat on the Ohio river, and from Cincinnati to St. Louis by steamboat on the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. The journey was tedious and tiresome. The American railway was still in its beginnings. The cars were small, hardly accommodating eight persons comfortably. They were jerked and jolted over rough roadbeds. The little cars were drawn up the steeper grades by stationary engines. Whenever they came to one of these ascents there were fears and screamings. What if the cables should break! These people were unused to mountains. They had lived in a country perfectly flat and level. They were like the Frieslander who innocently told De Amicis, the Italian traveler, that some day he intended to go and see the Wiesselschebosch. The Italian asked what that was. The Frieslander said it was a *mountain* in Gelderland, near the village of Apeldoorn, "one of the highest in the country."

"How high is it?" asked the Italian.

"One hundred and four metres"—three hundred and odd feet!

In the canal-boats they were packed like herrings in boxes. They were used to canal-boats in Holland—picturesque craft drawn on strips of water through green fields where grazed the Dutch national animal—the Holstein cow; but the American canal boats climbed mountains by means of locks, crossed rivers on viaducts and passed under mountains through tunnels. In all they were three weeks in making the journey from Baltimore to St. Louis. But in spite of the many inconveniences, those who made that journey in 1847 never tired of praising the beauties of nature. They had never seen anything so romantic. What writings are left of that time all show the ecstasies which were mingled with the uncertainties of the journey. The clear skies, the bright suns, the vast hills, the great valleys and the green woods of early spring in America! The "Godly observer," wrote one, could only exclaim, in the words of the poet:

"Hoe groot zijn, Heer Uw werken."\*

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\*"How great are, Lord, Thy works."



St. Louis was reached in the first days of July. They had been three months on the journey from Rotterdam, or Amsterdam to the Mississippi river.

The colonists tarried in St. Louis during all of July and part of August. Their lodgings were poor, their food no better, and they were entirely unaccustomed to the insufferably hot weather. In consequence there were a large number of deaths. On the journey from Baltimore to St. Louis four had died and on the sea voyage, twenty, eighteen of whom were children. Probably thirty in all, or one in twenty-five, laid down their lives. Such a death list throws light on the vicissitudes of traveling in 1847. "They died like Christians," it is recorded, "witnessing that death was their gain." The American welcome everywhere was so cordial that the colonists could not sufficiently express their gratitude. In St. Louis, one of the Presbyterian churches\* was thrown open to them. They used it for both church and Sunday-school services.

The report had everywhere preceded them that the Hollanders were the possessors of almost fabulous wealth. These rumors had been widely published in the newspapers of the cities through which they passed. As a matter of fact there was plenty of money among them, all gold and all carefully guarded. Money in America was scarce in those days, especially west of the Mississippi river. The rumors of their wealth caused them many inconveniences, and whatever they bought they were made to pay higher prices for than were charged German and Irish immigrants, who at that time abounded and who had the reputation of being, generally, very poor.

At St. Louis, Dominie Scholte who had made a tour of the eastern cities, Boston, New York, Albany, Washington and other places in the interest of the future settlement, rejoined the colony. In his writings he speaks particularly about

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\*There is a close correspondence between the Presbyterian and Dutch Reformed churches. Both have their foundations in Calvinistic confessions—Westminster and Dort, respectively. In faith and form the Dutch church corresponds more exactly, in fact, almost exactly with the United Presbyterian.

the cordiality of the authorities in Washington. Of Boston he did not form a high opinion, speaking religiously. The Emerson school was in vogue, with its Unitarian and Universalist tendencies. The good dominie referred to the city as the capital of "Amerikaansche rationalismus." But he was most at home in New York and Albany, where he found so many of the descendants of Hollanders. He was welcomed by some whose ancestors had come from Holland when New York State was still "Nieuw Nederlandt," and New York City, still "Nieuw Amsterdam," two hundred years before. In both New York City and Albany, Dominie Scholte preached in his native language. "Everywhere," he wrote of his reception in New York State, "the name of Hollander is a title of honor." Some of the ministers referred to the Pella colonists, not as immigrants, but as missionaries who were journeying westward to Christianize the heathen regions of America.

From St. Louis they sent out "spies after the manner of the children of Israel" of old, to find a suitable location for a settlement. The spies, or commissioners, were five in number, H. P. Scholte, Isaac Overkamp, Jan Rietveld, Teunis Keppel and G. Van der Pol. Immigrants were in great demand in 1847; Dutch immigrants were at a high premium. Many locations were offered them and many flattering inducements held out. Illinois was somewhat of a temptation. I have been told that the town of Nauvoo, which had just been vacated by the Mormons, was offered them "at a bargain." Missouri was objectionable because of the existence of the slavery question. Texas held out so many inducements that the cautious Dutch came to the conclusion there was something the matter with Texas. From the first, Iowa was the most favored place. The State was not yet one year old, having been admitted into the Union in the preceding December. The commissioners at once went to Iowa. They avoided the "half-breed" tract, in the southeastern part of the State, because of the defective land titles. They went to Fairfield where Gen. Van Antwerp was in charge of the government land office. The name,



Van Antwerp, was attractive to them, being Dutch. At Fairfield the burial of a child of the registrar had an important bearing on the location of the colony. At the funeral, Dominie Scholte met the Rev. M. J. Post, in whom, he says, he "noted the hand of God." Mr. Post was a Baptist missionary preacher, or circuit rider. He had seen all the lands of the "New Purchase." After some urging he conducted the commissioners to the divide in Marion county and said: "This is the garden spot of Iowa." There, accordingly, they bought two civil townships of land, paying to the government \$1.25 per acre. Some of the land had previously been entered by a band of American settlers who had invaded the tract as early as 1843, and these "claims" they purchased outright. This done, they returned to St. Louis with the glad tidings that they had found their future abode, but it remained for them to carve their homes out of the wilderness.

The journey was at once resumed, a steamboat being chartered from St. Louis to Keokuk. They departed Saturday afternoon and reached Keokuk on Monday morning. On the intervening Sunday a triumphal religious service was held on board. The preachers likened the colonists to the Israelites about to enter the Promised Land. At Keokuk, a heavy rain was falling when they arrived, and their first impressions of Iowa were therefore not agreeable. As best and quickest they could, they gathered their goods in wagons, which they purchased, together with horses and oxen to draw them, from those who had come to offer such for sale. They paid for everything in gold, which surprised and delighted the Americans who were unused to such money in the West. There were many amusing, and some pathetic incidents at Keokuk. The writer's grandfather, Mathias de Booy, bought a wagon and span of horses for \$250, placed in the wagon all the Lares and Penates, and on top of the household goods and gods, the children, three sturdy young men and two budding young women. But when the word was given to the horses, they refused to go a step, however much their new owner talked to them about the urgent necessity of doing so. He was fast arriving at

the conclusion he had bought a span of balky horses, when, fortunately, a bystander, who had been a much amused spectator, stepped forward and assured him that the horses were all right in every respect, except that they did not understand Dutch fluently. The stranger thereupon addressed the horses in the vernacular of Keokuk and immediately they started so briskly that the driver began to wonder whether they would understand enough Dutch ever to stop again.

This same good man had an experience in St. Louis which will throw some light on the dress worn by the colonists. He brought over the ocean with him three suits of knickerbockers, shoes with buckles, stockings, cutaway coats, soft flowing ties and all. One fine Sunday morning he decided to put on his very best and go to church. His daughter who helped him "fix up" was very proud of him as he sauntered out. In the course of a little time he came running back, all out of breath, pursued by a lot of little street gamins who had been throwing sticks and even brickbats at his trouserless legs. His first exclamation was "what bad boys they have in America!" When he learned it was due to the peculiarity of his dress he laughed heartily over the incident and remarked: "We will have to sew pieces to the trousers." Fifty years later the knickerbockers had again come into style in St. Louis, through the instrumentality of the bicycle. Fashions, like everything else, move in a cycle.

It was a curious procession that made its way up the valley of the Des Moines. Quite a spectacle it must have been for the "natives." There were men and women in strange garb, and speaking a strange language. Some rode in wagons drawn by horses and some in carts drawn by oxen. Some rode on horses and many went afoot. The men were broad-shouldered and the women fair-faced. The men were in velvet jackets and the women in caps and bonnets the like of which had never before been seen in Iowa.

After a journey of several days, during which the houses gradually disappeared, they came, on August 26th, 1847, to a level place, where stood a hickory pole with a shingle nailed to the top and on the shingle the single word, "Pella."



"But, Dominie, where is Pella?" "We are in the midst of it," he replied. But the dominie's little daughter, Johanna, like the little girl in the fairy story of Hans Christian Andersen, could not see anything at all. She thought to herself, "This Pella is all a make-believe."

## VI.

I shall not go into the details of the building of Pella. It was almost September. Winter was before them. They were on an open prairie. There was no shelter, except a few log houses left by the "squatters" of 1843. The Des Moines river flowed a few miles to the south of them, and the Skunk river, a few miles to the north. There was an abundance of timber on the banks of either stream. From a distant saw mill they procured lumber to build the first house. It was a long structure, of boards upright. The space within was divided into compartments, each allotted to a family. The rest went to work and made "dug outs." That is, they dug cellars, generally on the southern slope of a hill, placed green rafters across the top and then piled on straw, or slough grass, of which there was an abundance. For flooring some used planks; many more used the bare earth. A board or two, or some old coat, served for a door. The settlement became known as the "Strooijen stad" or "Straw City." The winter spent in such primitive abodes has ever been a distinct era in the minds of the colonists. Many of the incidents, some amusing and more pathetic, have remained in circulation among them even to this day. One is the story of a cow, which, finding better grazing on the straw-covered roof of one of the "dug outs", gradually climbed upon the roof, and finally fell through it to the great alarm of the peaceful burgher and his wife who were sleeping below. But in spite of these discomforts, one who lived through them all says: "Many times I have looked back to that winter as one of the happiest of my life. There was love, unity and mutual helpfulness. We were happy. We spent our evenings in psalm-singing and in edifying, Christian conversation."

I can not refrain from quoting briefly from an article

written by Professor Newhall, a pioneer correspondent, who has left a picture of Pella as it was in the year one. He passed through the new town just three weeks after the Hollanders reached the place. He wrote to *The Burlington Hawkeye*: "Methinks I hear you exclaim, 'Where is Pella?'. Not the ancient city of Macedonia, but the foreshadowing of the famous Holland settlement which has recently been located upon our beautiful prairies of the New Purchase. To tell you this would be like telling you fiction. . . . Just about two months ago I halted about sunset at a lone cabin on the ridge road midway between Oskaloosa and the Raccoon Forks. . . . Again today (the 17th of September) about noon, I find myself dashing along this beautiful road. I did not dream, neither was I in a trance, for my eyes beheld the same beautiful earth clothed in its rich garniture of green—yet I discovered a new race of beings. The men in blanket coats and jeans were gone. And a broad-shouldered race in velvet jackets and wooden shoes were there. . . . Most of the inhabitants live in camps, the tops covered with tent cloth, some with grass and bushes. The sides barricaded with countless numbers of trunks, boxes and chests of the oddest and most grotesque description. . . . They are all Protestants who have left their native land, much like the Puritans of old, on account of political and religious intolerance and persecution. . . . They appear to be intelligent and respectable, quite above the average class of European immigrants that have ever landed on our shores."

Three things they did in Pella before all else. They made provision for the worship of God, for the instruction of the youth, and for citizenship. They observed the first Sunday in Pella and they have observed every Sunday since. The first religious services were held in the open air; the next in a private cabin, and by March, 1848, they had completed a substantial structure, 25 by 50 feet, which served them as church building, school house and assembly hall. The only planed lumber in the structure was in the pulpit. The first instruction was in both the Dutch and English languages. As soon as it was possible all public instruction was in the



English, and all public instruction has been continued in that language since. Three weeks after their arrival, an officer of the courts was sent for and all the male adults declared their intention to become citizens of the United States. They put off the old and put on the new citizenship as soon as possible. Professor Newhall, from whom I have already quoted, has left a good description of this interesting ceremony, which took place while he was in Pella, probably on September 17, 1847. In his letter to *The Burlington Hawk-eye* he wrote: "It was altogether an impressive scene, to behold some two hundred men with brawny arms upraised to heaven eschewing all allegiance to foreign powers, potentates, etc. And as they all responded in their native tongue to the last word of the oath, 'so help me God', no one could resist the heartfelt response. . . All seemed to feel the weight of the responsibility they were about to assume. . . A fact worth recording during the ceremony before the clerk of the court was that of the whole number who took the oath of intended citizenship but two made their marks."\*

At the regular session of the Iowa legislature, 1848, a bill was passed, and approved by the governor, empowering the people of Pella to hold forthwith a township election. They voted for President of the United States for the first time in 1852, most of them voting for Franklin Pierce, the Democratic nominee. They took their first politics largely from their American neighbors. They were also suspicious of the Whig party because of the encroachments of Know Nothingism. When the Republican party was organized, many cast their political lot with it, and many more became Republicans during the war for the Union to which the colony made a liberal offering of its best young men. Dominic Scholte was among those who became Republicans. He was sent as a delegate and was elected one of the vice-presidents

\*Education is general in Holland and has been for many centuries. In 1583 it was laid down in one of the laws that education "is the foundation of the commonwealth." Douglass Campbell says that "the first free schools in America, open to all and supported by the government, were established by the Dutch settlers of early New York." Those of New England were not free to the same extent. This is also stated by Andrew S. Draper, *Educational Review*, April, 1892.

of the convention which nominated Lincoln in 1860. The majority of the people of Pella, however, have remained true to the Democratic party.\*

A survey of the town was made on the 2d of September, 1847, by Claiborne Hall, the county surveyor. He laid out eight blocks into sixty-four lots, surrounding the Garden Square. The nomenclature of the streets and avenues was unique. The streets, running east and west, were named: Columbus, Washington, Franklin, Liberty, Union, Independence, and Peace. The avenues, running north and south, were named: Entrance, Inquiry, Perseverance, Reformation, Confidence, Expectation and Fulfilling. Here is a combination of politics and religion which showed the ends the colonists aimed at in their life in America. At the same time they began to till the soil. The farmers went to work with a willingness that had never been excelled even in America. Nature encouraged them much for they had come to a region where they had but to tickle the soil with a hoe, as Douglas Jerrold says, to make it smile with a harvest. But they had much to learn about plowing and sowing, about sunshine and rain, and about soils and crops in their new land.

I may add here some first things in Pella. The first schoolmaster was Isaac Overkamp, assisted by Henry Hospers, now of Orange City, and James Muntingh. The first justices of the peace were H. P. Scholte and Green T. Clark, a pioneer among pioneers. Mrs. Post, the wife of the guide and missionary, opened the first hostelry. Wouters & Smeenk opened the first "store." H. P. Scholte and E. H. Grant established the first newspaper, in 1855, *The Pella Gazette*, printed in English. It was at that time the farthest west newspaper in Iowa, except on the Missouri slope, *The Des Moines Star* having suspended publication. In 1860 the first paper in the Dutch language, *The Weekblad*, was founded by Henry Hospers. The first winter was a mild one. In May, 1848, they were visited by the first American tornado, which struck down many of their temporary residences. Their

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\*In this respect Pella is said to be unique among the Dutch settlements in America, in all others the predominating political faith being Republican.





*Your sincere friend,  
Henry Hospers.*

HON. HENRY HOSPERS.

Founder of Orange City, Iowa; Representative in the 23d, and State Senator  
in the 26th and 27th General Assemblies.

first sight of an American snow storm, or series of storms, was during the winter of 1848-9 when the snow was piled from three to ten feet deep. By that time some of the weaker-hearted ones began to long, at times, for peaceful old Holland, with religious and civil persecutions thrown in. But they kept the American faith, and continued the good fight.

## VII.

From 1848 to 1855 there were large annual additions to the colony. In 1856 there were probably two thousand people in the settlement. The immigration after that year was less distinctly religious, and less heroic. They have prospered as a community, almost beyond all expectations. The two original townships have long since been too small for them and their descendants. The settlement is now nearly forty miles long and ten to fifteen miles wide. They buy land continually, but seldom sell. They have absorbed several neighboring villages. There has always been a conservative, "old-fashioned" element in the center, but the outlying "provinces" of Pella are liberal and thoroughly Americanized. Theology is blue at the center, but it grows paler toward the circumference. The home language is still the Dutch in most places, but the public language is always the English, which alone is taught in the schools.

Holland, after England, has been the mother of colonies. Her colonial possessions even today are, in population, next to those of England, France being third. The Dutch, like the English, have been preeminently home makers and nation builders. This national instinct has shown itself in the people of Pella. In 1870 they sent a colony to Sioux county, where they founded Orange City, under the leadership of Henry Hospers, now a State senator. This "first born of Pella" has repeated the success of the "mother colony." In 1878 a Kansas colony was organized, but the drouths in that state put a timely end to the undertaking. There are small Pella settlements in Nebraska and also in South Dakota.



In 1851 the government of Holland modified the relations between state and church, thus allaying, in a measure, the movement which resulted in the emigration of so many of the best people from the Netherlands. Some years later the King of Holland, William III., sent Rev. Cohen Stuart, one of the learned men of Holland, to carry his greetings to his former subjects, the people of Pella, coupled with an acknowledgment and regret that they had been ill-treated in their own land. They were glad to hear the King was sorry. But they were more glad in the consciousness of an American citizenship which had become dear to them all. In a religious sense the people of Pella have not always been able to agree. By 1856 they had at least four church organizations, each slightly at variance with the other. Men of such vigorous beliefs and independent minds, men with whom theology was the most serious matter of life, would naturally be unable to agree. In due time the main body of Christians accepted membership in the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, now called the Reformed Church of America, which has its parent organization in New York City, dating back to the first settlements by the Dutch.\*

The navigation of the Des Moines river was one of the delusions of the times. In Pella this delusion took the form of a great venture. A company was formed to build and operate steamboats. At its head was A. E. Dudok Bousquet, one of the prominent men of the community. It is needless to say they wrecked the fortunes they invested. In anticipation of this steamboat traffic they laid out a city on the Des Moines river, about three miles from Pella, and called this "port of Pella," New Amsterdam, a name everywhere dear to Hollanders because associated with their naval and commercial greatness. Front street of New Amsterdam was on the Des Moines river and Back street, on the beautiful Lake Prairie, which has since been a "mud hole." There

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\*This church is often confounded with the German Reformed church, now called the Reformed Church in the United States. The two organizations are entirely distinct, the one having its origin in Germany and the other in Holland. Both belong to the great family of Calvinistic Presbyterian churches.

was, especially on paper, an elaborate system of streets and avenues, of parks and market places. Plans were drawn for a system of canals, penetrating all parts of the city to be, for, with Dutch fervor they said, "what is a city without canals?" Lots in Pella were worth \$50; in Amsterdam, \$100. The site of the latter is now a tangle of jimpson weeds and brushwood.

In 1853, the Baptists of Iowa, having received substantial encouragement from the people of Pella, located there Central University, which was designed to be the denominational college. Prof. E. H. Scarff was elected the first president. The school was opened immediately, although the main building was not erected until 1856. The school has exerted a large influence on the community, especially in the Americanization of the people. Central University soon became one of the leading colleges of the State. It was one of the pioneers of education in the trans-Mississippi West and was from the first, co-educational. When the war broke out one hundred and twenty-seven professors and students, including every one able to bear arms, enlisted. Not one remained behind. Many of the young women went as army nurses. In the college library there stands a simple slab of marble on which are chiseled the names of the five and twenty who never came back from the war, or who came back to die. It is one of the tender and proud spots in the history of the colony and the university which was founded there by the Baptists.

In 1850 the gold fever spread all over the country. Pella was on one of the State highways and the stream of gold-seekers passed through its streets. The movement of those wild pioneers toward the far Pacific is still remembered in Pella. Thousands passed through the colony. Some walked, some rolled wheelbarrows and hand-carts before them, some went in wagons drawn by horses or mules and some in veritable cabins on wheels drawn by six, or even ten yoke of oxen. They carried all manner of kitchen utensils, food and clothing. Some of the "caravans" were miles in length, all moving toward the setting sun. A



few of the people of Pella were seized by the desire and went to California. They were stirring days and full of interest to the new comers. Ten years later came the passing of soldiers to the "front" along the same highway. In that patriotic movement scores of the young men of the colony joined and many gave their lives for their adopted country.

Such are the principal events that helped to shape the destiny of the colony. During all those years they labored without ceasing, making the wilderness a garden of agricultural Iowa. In no part of the West has farming been made more profitable. Among them industry and thrift have been predominant qualities. Of the customs and manners peculiar to them many still survive. They are a people without pretenses, sincere in all things. In their dealings with men they are strictly upright. Their word is as good as their bond. In religion they have been among the strictest. In olden times (the custom has lapsed much) the Bible was read daily in every home. There was a prayer before each meal, and after each, a chapter of the Bible and another prayer—three times a day, summer and winter. It was a restful, strong, tenacious life and strangely at variance with the hasty, reckless life of the early prairies. The homes are always clean and wholesome—there the women are supreme. In every respect the family is an exact and co-equal partnership. In every home from nine to ten in the morning is "coffee time," and from four to five is "tea time." What saintly gossip has been talked in Pella around those hospitable mid-meal boards! Wine, generally home made, was frequently served. From the Americans they learned to use a "little whisky" in harvest time, and German brewers introduced beer. The colony was founded in sobriety, almost in abstemiousness. On arriving at Keokuk one among the seven hundred partook of too much liquor and it was recorded in one of the pamphlets of the time that "the Christian organization no more recognizes him as a member of it."

#### VIII.

I have spoken of the Hollanders who settled at Pella as strangers in a strange land. But they were not strangers to

American institutions. They had two centuries of republican government back of them. William Dean Howells, upon his return from Europe recently, finely expressed this thought. "Holland," said he, "was very interesting to me, because Motley made it so. His portrait is in the queen's palace. . . I think in Holland you feel the atmosphere of a former republic. The Dutch seem a very free people, and, England excepted, I think one feels more at home there than in any other country in Europe." Fifty years ago, when the pioneers of Pella left Holland, this "atmosphere of a former republic" was much more potent.

The Dutch have always governed themselves. I have already quoted the testimony of Hallam that "in Holland self-government goes beyond any assignable date." I may add that of Froude. Erasmus was born in Amsterdam, 1467, a quarter of a century before the discovery of America. Even then, says Froude: "The country in which Erasmus came into the world was the rival of Italy in commerce and art and learning." The Netherlanders,\* he adds, were "tenacious of their liberties, and fierce in asserting them; governed by their own laws and their own representatives—a free people in the modern sense. . . If the mind of a man inherits its qualities from the stock to which he belongs, there was no likelier spot in Europe to be the birthplace of a vigorous and independent thinker."† Such is Froude's testi-

\*"Netherlands" and "Holland" are used generally without distinction. The former is the official designation of the country we call Holland. Historically "the Netherlands" included Belgium, especially the lower provinces: Antwerp, Brabant, Flanders, East and West, and Limbourg, where the language is Flemish, or Dutch. These provinces include the great towns of Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent, Burges, Malines, etc. "Flemish" and "Dutch" are used almost without distinction. The Encyclopedia Britannica uses "South Dutch" for Flemish and "North Dutch" for Hollandish. In a Flemish book of 200 pages the writer in the Encyclopedia found only 200 expressions which differed in any respect from the Dutch. The modern Belgians speak Walloon (French) or Flemish (Dutch). The former is the official language, but the latter is spoken by the majority. In the revolt against Spain, the Flemish provinces at first joined, but afterwards deserted, and remained with Spain. The provinces which stood loyal to Spain were ruined; those which stood loyal to convictions became the rulers of the world.

†Froude's "Life and Letters of Erasmus," Lecture I. Froude asks seriously whether civilization would not have been advanced had the Reformation followed the lines laid down by Erasmus instead of those by Luther. John Fiske says that, "it has been well said that while Luther has been the prophet of the Reformation that has been, Erasmus was the prophet of the Reformation that is to come." Erasmus had a superabundance of learning; Luther, of combativeness.



mony. One hundred and fifty years after the birth of Erasmus, when Shakespeare was writing, says Taine, "In culture and instruction, as well as in the arts of organization and government, the Dutch are two centuries ahead of the rest of Europe."

In seeking an explanation for this early self-government and civilization in the Netherlands, we come first of all to the fact that Holland is a man-made country, reclaimed from the sea. The genesis of their freedom is in the fact that the Dutch are self-made people. Their country was small; in its heroic age hardly larger than some congressional districts in Iowa.\* This forced them to take to the sea—fisheries, commerce and colonies followed. In Elizabeth's time, Sir Walter Raleigh said that the ships of Holland "outnumber those of England and ten other kingdoms." Their ships brought them not only wealth, but they brought them in contact with other civilizations, especially the learning of Italy—literature, music, painting and statesmanship all flourished under the republic which was established on the ruins of the Spanish government in the Netherlands. The Dutch became great against resistance. They thrived on opposition. It took that to bring out their strength. "The stubborn courage of the Dutch" became a proverb. Through all they were democratic. The Spanish ambassadors who came to arrange the truce of 1609, saw a few men in simple garb sit down on the grass by a canal, and, after a prayer had been said, eat a meal of bread and cheese.

"Who are those peasants?" asked one Spaniard resplendent in gold.

"They are the ambassadors from the States General."

"Then I shall advise the king of Spain to make his peace with them—for such a people can never be conquered."

I think that religion also had much to do with the perfection of freedom in Holland. The Dutch, as I have already stated, took their religion from France; from John Calvin. Calvinism in Dutch blood meant the determination

\*In 1833 Holland had 8,768 square miles of surface. By 1877 it had been increased by drainage to 12,731 square miles.

of man united with the pre-determination of God—an invincible union. The Reformation of Europe divided itself, broadly, into three branches. Lutheranism, which occupied Germany and the Scandinavian countries; Episcopacy, which occupied England, and Calvinism, which occupied Holland and Scotland\*, and portions of France and England and Switzerland. In the broader sense, it may be said that the Calvinists are the Puritans of history. The term is properly no longer limited to the Englishmen of that faith. In France these Puritans, or Huguenots, were outnumbered by the Catholics and in England by the Episcopacy. In the Netherlands they constituted both the state and the church. They made Holland the Republic of the Reformation.

The political bearings of these religions may be noted briefly. In Germany, Luther closed his great work by teaching that "it is a heathenish doctrine that a wicked ruler may be deposed." Cranmer in England taught that "God's people are called to render obedience to governors, although they may be wicked and wrong-doers, and in no case to resist."† Luther and Cranmer were hardly cold in death, before a very different doctrine was proclaimed at the Hague in the Dutch Declaration of Independence, against the king of Spain: "All mankind know," reads the preamble of that great paper, "that a prince is appointed by God to cherish his subjects, even as a shepherd to guard his sheep. When therefore, the prince does not fulfill his duty as a protector; when he oppresses his subjects, destroys their ancient liberties, and treats them as slaves, he is to be considered not a

\*There is a striking similarity between the Scotch "Kirk" and the Dutch "Kerk," which are the words for church. In origin and faith the two organizations are the same, practically. This causes Amelia E. Barr in her "Bow of Orange Ribbon," a story of the Dutch of New York, to make one of her characters, a Scotchman, say: "There are wise folk that say the Dutch and the Lowland Scotch are of the same stock, and verra gude stock it is,—the women of baith being fair as lilies and thrifty as bees, and the men just a wonder o' everything wise and well spoken o'. For-bye, baith o' us—Scotch and Dutch—are strict Protestors. The Lady o' Rome never threw dust in our een, and neither o' us would put our noses to the ground for either powers spiritual or powers temporal." Historically this is correct, the Lowland Scotch having a Saxon, or Teutonic basis.

†Quoted by Bancroft, "History of United States," Vol. I., Chap. XIX.



prince, but a tyrant. As such, the estates of the land may lawfully and reasonably depose him, and elect another in his room."

This Act of Abjuration was issued at the Hague July 26, 1581. The document is to the Dutch republic what the Declaration of July 4th, 1776, is to the American republic. Douglass Campbell says: "This is one of the most important documents in history. A translation of it was found among the papers of Lord Somers and is published in his 'Tracts.' That great statesman used it as a model for the famous Declaration of Rights by which England, a century later, proclaimed the abdication of James II., and the selection of the Prince and Princess of Orange to fill the vacant throne. Again, after another century, it furnished the model for the still more celebrated Declaration by which the thirteen American colonies announced their independence of Great Britain." Thorold Rogers, an English professor and parliamentarian, says: "The action of the Dutch republic was the first appeal which the world had read on the duties of rulers to their people. . . . The sturdy Hollanders, at a time when public liberty seemed entirely lost, and despotism had become a religious creed, began the political reformation. The teachers of Europe in everything, they are the first to argue that governments exist for nations, not nations for governments. And as precedents, especially successful ones, govern the world, the Dutch gave the cue for the English parliamentary war and the English Revolution, to the American Declaration of Independence, to the better side of the French Revolution, and to the public spirit which has slowly and imperfectly recovered liberty from despotism." Motley says that the doctrines laid down in this Dutch act "at that time seemed startling blasphemies in the ears of Christendom."\*

\*These quotations are from "The Puritan in Holland, England and America," by Douglass Campbell; "The Story of Holland," by Thorold Rogers, and "The Dutch Republic" by Motley. Thorold Rogers says in his preface: "The revolt of the Netherlands and the success of Holland is the beginning of modern political science and of modern civilization."

I will close this hasty glimpse of the fatherland of the first settlers of Pella with one more quotation, one from John Fiske: "To be a citizen of a great and growing state, or to belong to one of the dominant races of the world, is no doubt a legitimate source of patriotic pride, though there is perhaps an equal justification for such a feeling in being a citizen of a tiny state like Holland, which in spite of its small dimensions, has nevertheless achieved so much,—fighting at one time the battle of freedom for the world, producing statesmen like William and Barneveldt, generals like Maurice, scholars like Erasmus and Grotius, and thinkers like Spinoza, and taking the lead even today in the study of Christianity and in the interpretation of the Bible."\*

This statement has the weight of historical authority. It is well said, and something had to be said, in passing, about the ancestry of the people of Pella, for ancestry, whether with individuals or nations, is nine-tenths of them. I think one-tenth is a liberal allowance for environment and volition. If events are not determined from the first, they are at least determined by their beginnings. All things are of the Purposes of History, if not of the Providence of God. In this faith Pella was founded.

### IX.

On the first and second days of September, 1897, the people of Pella celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of their settlement. Ten thousand gathered where the seven hundred had met in 1847. Of the first settlers only a few remained. Shattered and broken and bent were they; the remnants of a once sturdy band. The pathos of a great struggle was written on their faces; there was also the consciousness of victory. For the community it was an auspicious and memorable occasion. In the long procession, three score girls in white preceded the survivors of 1847. It was the contrast between the past and the present. The city was filled with flags, but all the flags were American. There was not a flag of Holland displayed in all the streets. "We are Americans, though we

\*"American Political Ideas," chapter on "Manifest Destiny."



are proud of our Dutch blood," is what the people meant to say. And their children and grandchildren, or as many of them as had studied the history of Europe and America, were even prouder of that blood than were their parents and grandparents. The joint heritage of Dutch blood and American citizenship—what more could they desire?

And here we must say farewell to the bit of Holland in America which I have tried to describe. It is worth while, in many ways, to gather up these fragments of history. Our love for those who have gone before us and prepared the way for us, prompts us to write of these subjects. Even selfishness, which enters into all our words and actions, prompts us to do this, for, if we are wise, we know that there is no great future without a conscious past. Pella has for the Iowa writer not only historical, but pictorial values and capabilities. It is a community with a heroic background and a vast perspective. That it has lost much of its individuality is true. Fifty years are a long time in Iowa. Surroundings and conditions change men and women even more than men and women change their surroundings and conditions. America, which is eager and greedy and great and grand, in time will mark all her own. Evolution here is working out a new type of man. In Pella many of the good old customs have survived the first half century—may they survive forever. Religion still lives in that sacred soil, but theology is less flourishing; its intricacies no longer perplex men and its controversies are becoming memories.

I wish that I could have preserved in this brief sketch something more of the Iowa of 1847—of those free prairies and that free spirit. I have often heard told how beautiful Iowa was when the settlers who had come from Holland first saw this land. It was billowy like the sea which they had crossed. There was wave after wave on the tall grass. Climbing up the hills and dipping down into the hollows the winds rippled or rolled over the vast meadows of God. How the prairies bewildered men! The women loved and dreaded them, they were so vast, so lonesome and at times so silent. Over all such floods of sunshine out of deep blue skies, such

sunsets across purple fields and such weird starlight over primeval stillnesses, stillnesses broken only by the hooting of the owl or the barking of the distant wolf.

It cost something to live in a new country, but it was also worth something. I believe that a part of it all has passed into the men and women who toiled among such scenes; something of the strength and the freedom, something of the highness and the wideness, something of the beauty and the sacredness. Men and women have been living in Iowa, but Iowa is just beginning to live in men and women. It takes more than one generation to do this. Her blood flows in their veins and her breath is in their nostrils—the breath and the blood of this new Empire State which lies sun-kissed in the two arms of the Great Father of Waters.

But the making of Iowa was not a dream; it was a stern reality. It was not in a handful of wild flowers which women gathered, nor in a bit of blue sky which they admired, nor in the song of a bird which charmed them. It was a battle between civilization and barbarism. The men and the women marched side by side and fought together. The army was "that westward penetrating wedge of iron-browed, iron-muscled, iron-hearted men." It was a war which lasted not eight years, nor eighty, but two hundred and fifty years, from the time the first settlements were made along the Atlantic until the army of occupation reached the Pacific. Ever marching, ever fighting; sometimes repulsed, or annihilated, but always victorious in the end. With the axe and the plow, with the books of the law and the Book of God, with the sword and the cross, with the sweat of the brow and the anguish of the heart, a continent has been conquered. Fortunate are they whose fathers and mothers, or great grandfathers and great grandmothers, served in this Grand Army of the Pioneers—the State builders of the New World.

In this vast country of ours each one has some spot which is more dear to him than all the rest. Pella is such to me. How often has the story of the dikes and the prairies, of the gray skies and the blue, of the sea of waters and the sea of grasses, of the joys and the sorrows, of the burdens borne so



far and the sufferings endured so long, been told to me by one who, as a girl gave her heart first to the New Reformation in Holland and then, to the New Country in America. I have gathered the facts from all sources, but from her I have the spirit of this sketch. I have learned to believe that the truest history of any era or any event, must be written out of the hearts of women, rather than out of the minds of men; and to believe that what women have felt and women have endured is the record and the race to be, rather than what men have dared and men have achieved.



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