WYLLIAM POSTELL AND THE NETHERLANDS

BY

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Professor Kvačala in his admirable article on Postell,1) was compelled for lack of evidence to leave unanswered a number of questions having to do chiefly with Postell's relations to the Netherlands. In his later years Postell was in correspondence with Plantin at Antwerp, and like him was an adherent of Hendrik Niclaes, the founder of the Family of Love. When did this connection with the Netherlands commence? The suggestion is made that Postell's works were widely disseminated by Anabaptists whom he came to know at Venice.2) A more specific suggestion is that the letter to Schwenkfeld may have created sympathy in separatist circles even as far as Holland.3) But this letter itself raises questions. How was it sent and how received?4) Kvačala believes also to have identified a second letter to Schwenkfeld, but is at a loss to explain when, where and by whom it was sent.5)

A partial answer, at least, to these questions is afforded by a study of Postell's relations to the sect of David Joris of Delft, the Anabaptist leader, who, from 1544 to his death in 1556, lived under the assumed name of Johann von Brügge in Basel. Plantin asked Postell about his relation to this sect, „car je n'entends pas bien vostre intention quand vous y melés je ne sçay quoy des Davidistes”6). Postell in his answer implied that he had once highly es-

2) ARG., XI, 1914, p. 204.
3) ARG., XV, 1918, p. 184.
5) ARG., XV, 1918, p. 162.

Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis XXIV.
teemed Joris for his religious illumination, but now blamed him for having lived at ease. Here is the passage:1)

"L'autre question est, que j'entends in consortii charitatis usum, parlant des Davidistes. Je vous assure, et ce en la charité qui dure éternelement, voire et depuys que la foy et espérance cesseront, que je n'entends de Georges David, ou David Jorgis, come lhom le disoit, aultre, sauf que ce aye esté un meschant, et quant à ses actes, du tout tyran, et plain d'amour propre, qui ha eu cognosiance du tout très grande des secretz de Dieu, desquels il ha abuse, parcequil ha abusé tant de l'église come de la charité qui en est la finale marke, en tournant à son profict particulier et filiautie ce que ayant receu du povre et moins intelligent peuple qui le conduysoit par son povoir et richesse, estoit obligé, comme un bon chef à ses membres, à l'employer pour eux et davantage à mettre pour eux, si il en eust eu de propres, mettre les biens, la vie et l'honneur, et pour les siens, s'il est besoing, mourir en povreté, mespris et douleur".

The charge that Postell was a Davidist struck close enough home to elicit a reply the title of which alone has been preserved. It read:

"Retractationum liber, in sua de restitutione omnium scripta institutus. Ms. A. r56o, ubi de Davidis Georgii Batavi Haeresiararchae erroribus et exustione post mortem agitur .... "2)

But in spite of this repudiation Postell's relations with the Davidists had been more intimate than he cared later to admit. In working through the Jorist papers, confiscated at the time of the trial in 1559,3) I was surprised at the frequent occurrence of the name of Postell or of his pseudonym, Elias Pandocheus.

These papers reveal the intimacy of Postell with the French doctor, Jean Bauhin, and also demonstrate that the medicus gallus was himself a Davidist.4) He had come to Basel in 1541 three years before Joris' arrival. When Bauhin became an adherent of the sect we do not know, but he must have been quite outspoken as to his discipleship, while concealing the presence of his master in Basel. Our