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THE DAWN OF THE REFORMATION
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM
SEBASTIAN BRANT'S NARRENSCHIFF.

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
GRADUATE SCHOOL of the UNIVERSITY
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By

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1910.

MOM
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REFERENCES.

Sebastian Brant	Das Narrenschiff.
Reinke de Vos	from the Plattdeutsch.
Gottlob Egelhaaf	Deutsche Geschichte.
Woker	Das kirchliche Finanzwesen der Päpste.

- (1) Egelhaaf.
- (2) Woker.

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O U T L I N E .

The Dawn of the Reformation
with illustrations from
Sebastian Brant's Narrenschiff.

The Reformation- the result of a periodically recurring
desire for reform of the church.

Purpose of thesis- Portrayal of conditions making reform
necessary in the XVI Century.

Statement- of the Medieval and Reformation
conceptions of church system.

Conditions- causing that change.

(a) Political: Lack of unity preventing aid to
church.

(b) Ecclesiastical:

Pope: Papal exactions.

Papal immorality.

Accumulating of benefices.

Higher clergy: Increase in number of clergy.

Hunting.

Drinking.

Gambling.

Lower Clergy: Begging.

Monks: General character.

Social- Causes.

Monopoly.

Usury.

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The Dawn of the Reformation
with illustrations from
Sebastian Brant's Narrenschiff.

The cry for reform of the church "in head and members" is one which recurs periodically. It always occurs when there is threatened or actual schism and an ignorant and immoral clergy. This same note is heard at various times thru the earlier centuries of the middle ages and still more frequently in the XV Century at the Councils of Constance (1414) and Basel (1431). The German Reformation is really only a continuation of this same movement. Had the Council at Basel or any later representation of the church met the demands of the people for reform, there would have been no such separation from the church as took place in the following century. But the very fact that the movement did not reach its goal-reform- as a result of the early concordats, made it break

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out again with added force. The papal rights as regarded the German nation and evils of the church had there been definitely named. The Churchmen at Basel recognized that what Christianity needed was a well-organized teaching of the people and the priests in true faith and Christian living, but their ambition for self prevented their taking any action in the matter and as a result, when the people found that their demands were not to be obtained from the official power, they sought to accomplish them here and there by their own initiative. When this decentralization of Christianity set in in parts of the realm, the realm as such ceased to be a member of the Catholic Church because extensive districts maintained their position against the Pope.

It is the purpose of this discussion to linger upon the threshold of the Reformation, as it were, and to look back over the immediately preceding period, noting what conditions, political, ecclesiastical and social,

made such a reform not only desirable but also imperative. Sebastian Brant's "Das Narrenschiff" will be used to furnish illustrations because it is a witness of the impressions made upon that XV Century writer by that with which he came in contact and because it is a truly passive picture of his times. "Hier findt man der welt ganzen louff." The fact that he always remained a true and loyal son of the church gives added force to his portrayals of these evils.

A consideration of the Prereformation and Post-reformation conceptions of the church system will make more interesting a survey of the conditions that led men to desert the one and cling to the other. According to the Catholic conception all believers were divided into two ranks,--the great body of Christians and the priesthood. The priests were the necessary mediators between God and man. One oppressed by wrongdoing and sin could receive alleviation only by freeing his heart to a priest in confession for, without "confessio oris" there could be no absolut-

ion. Without the priests all would be condemned to torment and purgatory but by them all might be freed. At the head of the priesthood was the Pope ruling infallibly as Christ's representative on earth. Anyone offering opposition to his utterances was considered heretical.

The essence of the new conception was the common priesthood of all believers. Where the Catholic priesthood had said, "Die Kirche das sind wir", the new idea said, "Die Kirche das sind wir alle." (1)

Christ died for all in the same degree. Therefore he and not a priesthood was their leader and the only intermediary between God and men. The Bible and not the Pope's decrees should be their guide and everyone had a right to interpret it for himself since in it was everything necessary for man's salvation and superfluous were all the customs that the church had established in the course of the ages. They believed in the infallibility of the Bible and not in the infallibility of the Pope. The mistakes of the

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(1) Egelhaaf.

Pope and the church visibly exposed in these days of corruption and degradation had set men thinking and upturned the very foundations of their past beliefs. Printing had been invented and these new thots were being scattered broadcast among the people.

Is it to be wondered at that Brant sends out a warning note against such heretical tendencies? He speaks of such as those who- (#)

"sich und sonst vil betriegen,

Die heilig gschrift krünnen und biegen.

Die gent dem glouben erst ein büff

Und netzen das bapiren schiff,

Ein jeder ettwas risszt dar ab,

Das es dest minder bort me hab,

Ruder und riemen nimbt dar von,

Das es dest ee mög undergon.

Vil sint in iren sinen so klug,

Die dunckent sich sin witzig gnug,

(#) (99 & 103.)

(6)

Das sie usz eigener vernunft infall
Die heilig gschriffť usz legen all,
Dar an sie fälen doch gar offť,
Und wird ir falsche ler gestrafft,
Dann sie usz andern gschrifften wol
(Der allenthalb die welt is vol)
Möhten sunst under richten sich.

#####

Die selben man wol drunken nennt
Das sie die werheit hant erkent
Und doch das selb umbkeren gantz,
Do mit man sah irn schin und glantz.

#####

Die anders die gschriffť umbkeren,
Dann sie der heilig geist selb dut leren,
Die hand ein falsch wog in der hend
Und legen druff als, das sie wendt,
Machen eins schwär, das ander licht,

Do mit der gloub jetz vast hin zücht.

#####

Ich fürcht, das schiff kum nim zu landt,

Sant Peters schifflein ist im schwangk,

Ich sorg gar vast den undergangk,

Die wällen schlagen all sitt dran,

Es wdrt vil sturm und plagen han.

Gar wenig werheit man jetz hört,

Die heilig gschriff wird vast verkört

Und ander vil jetz usz geleitt,

Dann sie der munt der werheit seit.

#####

Der endkrist sitzt im grossen schiff

Und hat sin bot schafft usz gesandt,

Falschheit verkündt er durch all landt,

Falsch glauben und vil falschen ler

Wachsen von tag zu tag je mer.

Dar zu duont drucken jetz guot stür.

Wann man vil buoche würrf inns für,
Man brannt vil unrecht, falsch dar inn.
Vil trachten allein uff gewinn,
Von allen erd sie buoche suchen,
Der correctur ettlich wenig ruchen;
Uff gross beschisz vil jetz studieren,
Vil drucken, wenig corrigieren,
Die luogen übel zu den sachen,
So sie mennlein umb mennlein machen.
Sie dunt inn selber schad und schand,
Mancher der druckt sich usz dem land.

#####

Die zit die kumt, es kumt die zit,
Ich vörcht der endkrist si nit wit."

#####

Politically Germany was divided into many parts,
tho at the end of the XV and beginning of the XVI Century
it was held firmly bound together by the powerful emperor

Maximilian. He was a man of great gifts and clear perception, in thought and feeling a man of the new times. His guiding principal was the building up of the Habsburg house. Instead of devoting himself to the inner reforms so necessary in the realm, he went outside and sought to regain the old Hohenstauffen inheritance in Italy. Such an exaltation of the dynastic idea would necessarily force the estates to action and in fact they did attempt, though unsuccessfully, to introduce a "Reichsregiment" and actually gained the right of naming the Hauptmann in charge of the Landfrieden in each of the ten provinces into which the realm was divided in 1512. But the actual reforms did not meet their expectations purely because their laws remained on paper and were not carried out. The people could not check imperial authority, ^{because} of Maximilian's great strength of character and strong will and their own insufficient power and passivity.

A beautiful feature of Brant's character is shown

in his patriotism and personal reverence for Emperor Maximilian. His political ideal was that expressed in the term "The Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation." He sees in Maximilian the only one to remedy the evils of the time, and did not think it impossible that the imperial and the papal power be united in one hand--Maximilians. He is serious in his plan for his emperor, strange as it may seem to us.

(#)"Ir haben zwor ein künig milt,

Der uch wol fürt mit ritters schilt,

Der zwingen tüg all land gemein,

Wann ir im helfen wendt allein.

Der edel fürst Maximilian

Wol würdig ist der Römschen kron.

Dem kumbt on zwifel inn sin handte

Die heilig erd und das glocbte landt

Wann er allein uch trüwen mag."

#####

In the last three lines we see the desire back of Brant's hopes for Maximilian. Because of the onward sweep of the Mohammedans many lands had been lost to the Christian faith. They were attacking the German boarder-land on the southeast and were controlling the Danube.

(#)"Der wolff ist werlich inn dem stall

Und roubt der heiligen kirchen schoff.

Di wile der hirtt lit inn dem schloff.

Die Rumsche kirch vier schwestern hat,

Do man hielt Patriarchen stadt,

Constantinopel, Alexandria

Jherusalem, Anthiochia.

Die sind jetz komen gantz dar von,

Es würt bald an das heubt ouch gon.

Das ist als unser sünden schuldt,

Keins mit dem andern hat gedult.

#####

(12)

Jeder der griff jetzt mit der hand,
ob noch kaltt si sin mur und want
und gedenkt nit, das er vor lesch usz
Das für, ee es im kum zu husz,
So kumbt im dann ruw und leit.

#####

Zwitracht und ungehorsamkeit
Den kristen gloub zerstören dut.

#####

Nieman gedenkt, wie nach es im si,
Und wänt doch allweg bliben fri,
Bisz im unglück kumbt für sin thuor.
So stoszt er dann den kopff har für."

#####

There was no union to withstand such an exterior
force unless the people could be aroused to support
Maximilian and so Brant urges the people as the natural
protectors of the land, to take a stand and not be like

mutinying seamen whose ship runs aground.

(#)"Stent uff und wachen von dem troum,

Worlich die art stat an dem boum."

#####

Ein jedes ding ne sterckung hatt,

Wann es binander gsamlet stat,

Dann so es ist zerteilt von ein."

#####

Einhelligkeit in der gemein

Uffwachsen die bald all ding macht,

Aber durch miszhell und zwitracht

Werden ouch grosze ding zerstört."

#####

But all Brant's great expectations of uniting the nation for the assistance of the church were shattered by the death of the beloved Emperor Max. A most violent splitting up of the nation followed and so imperative had become the need of church reform that the important

question to the people was not the choosing of a new king with reference to his ability to unite the state but the question assumed rather a religious character and considered his position as regarded church reform.

The church touched all sides of life everywhere inasmuch as it had for centuries been the acknowledged leader of all the western world. The people everywhere looked to the church for guidance not only in matters religious and moral but also in every phase of life's activities. And just because of this extensive influence when dissatisfactions arose, the complaint called forth was a many-sided one. There was no part of the church which had not become corrupted and Pope, higher and lower clergy and monks were alike censured for their immorality and unspiritual conduct.

It is probable that despite the fact that men were horrified and shocked to find that the supposedly pure-minded and upright popes were indulging in immoral pract-

ices, the greatest cause for discontent with the head of the church was the financial fleecing of Christendom by the Papal Curia. It may suffice as example of such extortions to mention the Annates, Palliumgelder, Türkenzehntengeld, Fructus medii, Dispensationsgelder, Jubeljahre und Ablässe, altho the list might be prolonged indefinitely. In connection with the palliumgelder it is interesting to note how closely the church was bound with the state. The Archbishops of Cologne, Mainz and Treves, who were also Kurfürsten of the realm, were not allowed to take part in the crowning of the Emperor without the pallium and enormous sums had to be paid to the Papal treasury for the right to wear the pallium. The Curia understood well how to fill the treasury in innumerable ways. This would not have been so objectionable had it not often been used for other than the designated purposes. Mention is made among the writings of the time of vast sums of money collected under pretense of warding off the Turks and then used for build-

ing magnificent churches and palaces or giving elaborate banquets and entertainments. There was a great incentive to wrong doing for it was always possible to gain absolution by money payment regardless of the enormity of the offence.

Woker says regarding the official taxbook (1479-1516) "So bleiben nicht viele unbesteuerte menschliche Handlungen übrig; päpstliche Taxen stehen dem Menschen bei jedem Schritte durchs Leben, erlauben ihm das Verbotenste und verbieten ihm das Erlaubenste: sie vergiften und stören die sozialen Verhältnisse und greifen willkürlich ein in die staatlichen Ordnungen." (2)

Where in earlier times the church had fostered learning and cared for the needy and the sick, the Pope's insatiable greed has now led them to demand a payment to the papal treasury for the establishment of schools and hospitals.

The ecclesiastical livings conferred by the Pope upon the church officers were known as benefices.

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(2) Woker.

For example a certain district would be placed under the control and authority of a bishop or archbishop and from the revenues he would both maintain himself in his position and also pay various required sums to the church. In the beginning it was an excellent simplification of the task of collecting the church revenues but it presented a ready means of abuse in that the church officers, whose positions were fast becoming more temporal than spiritual, saw the opportunity for personal aggrandizement and began appropriating vast amounts of the church monies. The corruption spread and where at first only the churchmen oppressed the people in their districts and extorted every possible penny from them, the head of the church began to unite several benefices under one head for the sake of rewarding favorites. This was called the special dispensation for the accumulation of benefices. Brant says: (#)

"Ein zimlich pfrund nert einen wol,

Wer noch ein nimbt, der selb der sol

 (#) (30)

Acht han, das er ein oug bewar,
Das im das selb nit ouch usz far.
Dann wo er noch ein dar zu niunt,
Wurt er an beiden ougen blint,
Dar noch kein tag noch nacht hat ruw,
Wie er on zal uff nem dar zu.

#####

Mancher vil pfrunden bsitzen dut,
Der nit wer zu ein pfrundlein gut,
Dem er allein wol recht möcht tun.
Der bstelt, duscht, keufft so manig pfrun,
Das er verirrt dick an der zal
Und dut im also wo die wal,
Uff welcher er doch sitzen well,
Do er mög sin ein gut gesell."

#####

As was natural, with the Pope allowing and
advancing conditions so far removed from the original

ideas of the church, the bishops and lower clergy were perverted to the new spirit. Most of the bishops led worldly lives, for the bishoprics had come into the hands of the younger sons of noble and princely families who were involved in temporal affairs. Horses, dogs and hunting falcons were not lacking among the higher princes of the church and everywhere there was the most open frivolity.

Brant's words throw great light upon this subject. He holds the bishops especially culpable for the change that has taken place within the clergy and explains the reason for increase in the members of the clergy.

(#) "Jeder buwr will ein pfaffen han,

Der sich mit müßig gan erner,

On arbeit leb und sig ein her.

Nit das er das tüg von andacht,

Oder uff selen heil hab acht,

Sunder, das er mög han ein herren,

Der all sin gschwister mög ernerren,

Und lezt ihn wenig dar zu leren;
 Man spricht, er mag licht dar zu können,
 Er darf nach grösser kunst nit sinnen,
 Echt er ein pfrunden kan gewinnen,
 Und wigt priesterschaft so gering
 Als ob es si ein lichtiges ding.
 Des findt man jetz vil junger pfaffen,
 Die als vil können als die affen.
 Und nement doch selsorg uff sich,
 Do man kum ein vertraut ein vich,
 Wissen als vil von kirchregieren,
 Als müllers esel kan qwintieren.
 Die Bischöf die sind schuldig dran,
 Sie soltens nit zum orden lan
 Und zu selsorgen vor usz nüt,
 Es werent dann gantz dapferlüt,
 Das einer wer ein wiser hirt,
 Der nit sin schoff mit im verfür.

#####

Vil wiht man durch der herren bitt
Oder uff dies und jhenes disch,
Dar ab er doch iszt wenig visch.
Man lehnet brief einander ab,
Do mit das man ein tittel hab,
Und wünen den bischoff betriegen,
So si mit irm verderben liegen.

#####

Do wegen wer, er liesz dar von
Und rurt den alter niemer an,
Dann gott acht unsers opfers nicht,
Das in sünden, mit sünden geschicht."

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What better proof is needed that the priestly
office was regarded as a temporal advantage?

As regards the above-mentioned practice of
supplying oneself with huntingdogs and falcons, Brant
says in part, -- (#)

"Wie wol es sin sel ein kurz wil,
So darf es dannacht kostens vil.
Dank leithund, wind, rüde un bracké
On kosten füllen nit ir backen.
Des glich hund, vogel, vñderspil
Bringt als kein nutz und kostet vil.

#####

Die buren jagen in dem schne,
Der adel hat kein vorteil me,
Wann er dem wilpret lang noch loufft,
So hats det buwr heimlich verkoufft."

#####

In those days excessive drinking and carousing was very common among all classes of people. Brant deploras the prevalent gluttony and debauchery because it brings poverty, destroys reason and mental power, always brings disgrace and evil, causes an infirm old age and shortens life.

"Besser ist haben gut geberd
Dann alle richtum uff der erd.
Usz sitten man gar bald verstat
Was einer in si^m hertzen hat."

#####

In censuring the men and women who play cards
all the night thru, when nobility and burghers often play
against the common people, Brant shows the unfairness of
those practices by a story narrated of Alexander the Great.

(#) "Wann jeder spielt mit sinem glich,
Durfft er des minder schamen sich.
Do Alexanders vater wolt,
Das er umb gaben louffen solt,
Dann er zu louffen vast geng was,
sprach er zu sinem vatter das,
Billich war, das ich alles dät,
Das mich min vatter hiesz und bät.
On zwifel ich gern louffen wolt,

(#) (77)

Wann ich hett jemans minen glich.
Aber es ist jetzt dar zu kumen,
Das pfaffen, adel, burger, frummen
Setzen an köppels knaben sich,
Die inn nit sind an eren glich.
Vor usz die pfaffen mit den leigen."

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Like Luther he wishes it well understood that he
is making no attack on moderate drinking, for a wise man
may drink in moderation, but concludes:

(#)"Der win ist senfft am ingang,
Zu letzt sticht er doch wie ein schlang
Und güsszt sin gifft durch alles blut-"

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He has a happy conception of an ideal situation:
"Vil würden bald vast witzig sin
Wann wizheit stecket inn den win."

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The lower clergy found it difficult to secure means of support since the leaders of the church drew all the riches into their own hands and thus it came about that they were often forced to use very unspiritual means, and were much reproached for begging.

(#)"Aber jetz wänen die jungen laffen,

Wann sie allein euch werent pfaffen,

So hett ir jeder, was er wolt,

Es ist für war nit alles golt,

Das an dem sattel ettwan glisszt,

Mancher dar an die hand beschliesszt.

Und loszt sich jung zu priester wihen,

Der dann sich selb dut maledien,

Das er nit lenger gebeitet hat,

Der selben mancher betteln gat.

Hett er ein rechte pfrun gehan,

Ee er die priesterschaft nam an,

Es wer im da zu kumen nitt.

#####

Kein ärmer vich uff erden ist

Dann priesterschaft, den narung gbrist."

#####

In marked contrast to former conditions stands the strong statement:

"All welt die riecht sich jetz uff gil

Und wil mit betteln neren sich."

By that he means all classes of people—the poor, pilgrims, abbots, monks, priests. Many go about bowing to earth to show their piety and selling sacred pictures and relics, perhaps straw which they claim came from the manger at Bethlehem, or a bone from Baalam's ass. These were readily disposed of, for it was believed that such relics possessed healing power. Young men and children go about pretending to be crippled. Beggars take someone with them who feigns illness or they borrow several children and take them about on a mule. Brant makes some penetrating remarks about these practices.

(#)"Der sitzen vier und zwentzig noch
Zu Straspurg in dem dummen loch,
On die man setzt inn weisen kasten,
Aber bättler dunt selten vasten.

#####

Der lug, wo si der joham grim.

#####

Vil begont sich wol zu wiszbrott mitt,
Die drinken nit den schlächten win,
Es musz Reinfall, Elsasser sin.

#####

Vil neren sich usz dem bättel sich,
Die me gelt hant dann du und ich."

#####

But of all the ecclesiastical classes against
none was the reaction so great as against the monks.
It is impossible to depict here the bad life in the con-
vents and monasteries, but it would be hard to imagine a

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class more lazy, beggarly, shamelessly ignorant or more greatly despised. Most of the evils previously mentioned held true for the monks but perhaps it may be said, that the greatest cause for the reaction against them was the fact, that in a multitude of ways they played upon the superstition of the people and when the people at last began to think for themselves, they realized that the monks thought only of their own material advantage.

(#)"Das gwihte fleisch schmeckt manchen wol,
 Der wermt sich gern bi kloster kol,
 Dem doch zuletzt würd für und glut.
 Verstanden lüten ist predigen gut.
 Man stosszt manch kind jetz in ein orden,
 Ee es ist zu ein menschen worden,
 Und es verstand, ob das im si
 Gut oder schad, stäckt es im bri.
 Wie wol gut gwonheit bringet vil,
 Runt es doch manches under will,

Die dann verfluchen all ir fründt,
Die ursach solches ordens sindt.
Gar wenig jetz inn klöster gant,
In solcher allt, das sie es verstont,
Oder die durch gotes willen dar
Kömen und nit mer durch ir nar
Und hant der geistlichkeit nicht acht,
All ding dunt sie dann on andacht,
Vor usz in allen orden gantz,
Do man nit haltet observantz.

#####

Doch lichter wer, kein orden han,
Dann nicht recht dun, ein ordens man."

#####

And now to turn to the evils in the life of
the people. It may be stated with all fairness and justice
that the first great cause for such laxity in conduct among
the mass of the people, arose from the very conditions

just described. They had no example of right living in the clergy, and tho this is possible in all times, it usually occurs only in isolated cases; but here at the threshold of the Reformation it was a widespread condition. This idea is all important from the viewpoint of the necessity of a Reformation.

In Reinke de Vos, written four years after Das Narrenschiff, these lines are found in reference to this idea:--

"Wenn Blinde so die Blinden leiten,
So müssen beide von Gott sich scheiden."

The people felt no restraining bonds. Morals were lax, blaspheming and swearing were horrifyingly prevalent, conduct in the churches was far from reverential, in fact, frivolous in the extreme, dancing was common at times when the clergy were consecrated and honor was lightly regarded. When Brant says:--(#)

"Manchem ein pfundt gewint ein morgen

(#) (93)

Me, dann es thun ein jar lang sollt"-

he has reference to two evils, one, usury, the other monopoly. Both are harsh to the poor and care not if the poor man hunger with wife and child. The Jewish usurers are to be driven out, for they lend in silver and demand payment in gold, or borrow in gold and pay in silver. The second evil and opportunity for mercenary spirits, lies in the buying up of wine and corn in the land and holding it for high prices during the inevitable famine that ensues.

(#)"Ir vil sich gen den hagel neigen

Die lachend uff den riffen zeigen,

Doch geschicht dar gegen euch gar dick,

Das mancher henckt sich an ein strick.

Wer rich wil sin mit schad der gemein,

Der ist ein narr, doch nit allein."

#####

Had the church retained its earlier widespread influence, when there was no part of the realm untouched

(#) (93)

by its care or undirected by its authority, or had it reformed the abuses which arose later, no element of doubt would ever have arisen in the XVI Century. But when the church not only allowed but led in worldliness, immorality and all manner of evil practices, it was inconceivable, that the people, now awakening intellectually because of the Renaissance spirit that had crept over the Alps, should retain their old ideas regarding the church. They saw the life of the churchmen about them. If such men were the mediators between God and man, they must doubt the efficacy of such mediation. It was only a step from doubting them to doubting the infallible head of the church. And gradually, under the leadership of such a thoroughly German spirit as Luther, they began to see that their old demand of reform was not one that could take place within the church, but that the fundamental idea might be wrong and that a new basis of belief was what was needed. They began to realize, that they held as close relationship to

God individually as did the priests, and that the Bible was nearer to an infallible rule of conduct than any regulations laid down by the Pope could possibly be.

Tho it must be kept in mind, that this change was brought about slowly and only by degrees, it can not be denied that it had its roots in these very conditions here depicted.



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