

**HOLLAND, THE BIRTHPLACE OF  
AMERICAN POLITICAL, CIVIC  
AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY. AN  
HISTORICAL ESSAY PP.1-83**

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pp.1-83 by H. A. van Coenen Torchiana

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# HOLLAND

THE BIRTHPLACE OF AMERICAN  
POLITICAL, CIVIC AND  
RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

*An Historical Essay*

BY

*Handwritten: H. A. van Coenen*  
*Handwritten: H. A. van Coenen*  
**H. A. VAN COENEN TORCHIANA**

OF THE SAN FRANCISCO BAR  
CONSUL-GENERAL OF THE NETHERLANDS ON  
THE PACIFIC COAST



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*Copyright 1915,*  
*H. A. Van Coenen Torchiana*

Mr. John Vanema  
at.  
10-4-1923

*To my wife,  
Catherina van Coenen Torchiana,  
whose never-failing gentleness and kindness  
to all Netherlanders residing in or visiting  
the Western States of America have ever  
commanded my highest esteem, this  
volume is dedicated by  
The Author*





## INTRODUCTION



**T**HIS is the age of fast accumulations. The impulse of the times seems to drive us irresistibly to admire everything of huge proportions. The "Cult of the Immense" finds many worshippers.

The directors of a bank proudly publish their total deposits, assets and liabilities, and the more impressive these figures the safer the interests of the depositors are supposed to be. A city publishes the number of its inhabitants, and when that number has increased far beyond the growth reasonably to be expected there is great local rejoicing; when the census shows simply a healthy growth, a natural evolution, there is disappointment, if not intense gloom. The citizens' pride and happiness seem actually to be threatened. And as it is with banks and cities, so it is also with states and countries.

But is the individual depositor really better off because his bank has assumed mammoth proportions? Is the individual citizen of New York more fortunately situated because the city has four million instead of two million inhabitants? Is the average suburbanite happier because his little village is annexed to a large city, and real estate speculators have reaped a big harvest? And is the citizen of Sleswyck economically, morally or mentally benefited because the country of his nativity belongs to a huge empire instead of to a small kingdom?

Looking at Western Europe, the cradle of our modern civilization, there is one thing which must strike the thoughtful person very forcibly—that through all the ages it has been the small countries and not the large empires whose citizens have stood unflinchingly for the highest

## INTRODUCTION

*human ideals, for religious and civic liberty, for true human culture in the highest sense of the word.*

*Are not the Netherlands and Switzerland shining proofs of the contention that principles of great civic strength and righteousness, and ideals of human happiness find their strongest champions in small countries and that it is not the geographical dimensions, but the strength of the character of its people which fixes a country's place in the family of nations?*

*As the apostles of peace, these so-called "small countries" stand pre-eminent amongst their sisters. It is not prudence dictated by weakness which commands a policy of peace. Strength is a comparative element. But a war between the Netherlands and Belgium, between Denmark and Switzerland would, at the present time, be an absurdity. These small nations in their great comparative strength have developed different and higher ideals, and have learned to scorn the theory that "Might is Right."*

*That the development and growth of these lofty national ideals is a boon to mankind, no thoughtful person will or can deny. That these smaller nations should be undisturbed in working out their national destinies for the benefit of the human race must be self-evident. The destruction of a small nation with high ideals is far greater a blow to human progress than the fall of a great empire in which such ideals do not prevail.*

*The great powers of today were weak powers in their infancy. It was then that they received tremendous stimulation from the precepts and histories of these powerful Davids in the everlasting world struggle for freedom.*

*The People of the United States, the citizens of one of the most powerful nations of the globe, owe a great debt of gratitude to the People of the Netherlands.*

## INTRODUCTION

*Is this always realized? Is it always realized that a great part of American civilization was born in that amphibious little swamp that borders on the North Sea, known variously as the "Low Countries," "The Netherlands," and in later days by the name of its greatest and most powerful province, Holland?*

*Here from the time that the hitherto invincible Cæsar gave up the conquest of the Batavians as impossible, and made them his honorable allies instead of his slaves, through the terrible Eighty Years War with Spain, then the most powerful empire of the world, through all the centuries when the Low Countries were known as the "Battle Ground of Europe," and when the North Sea lurked like a grim gray wolf ready to gnaw and devour the sodden land; through all these vicissitudes, perhaps because of them, the people of Holland upheld and defended the very principles that distinguish America today.*

*No fair-minded person would deny for a moment that the United States owes a great debt to England. The language of America, though compounded of Saxon, Teutonic and Latin roots, first took shape in England. The poets of Britain, her great novelists and essayists have set the pace for American writers and have been their inspiration. In personal bravery and fortitude in the face of awful danger the English yeoman is a model and example. To the sturdy sons of old England Americans owe a not inconsiderable part of their national robustness. There is little danger that this debt will be underestimated.*

*It is to other creditors that justice must be done, and Holland is the greatest of these by far.*

*The writer has not attempted to compose an exhaustive treatise on the subject. A brief statement of the facts in the case, with their obvious deductions is his only object. If even a small part of the dense fog of historical illusion is cleared*