

# The Fourth Man

## A Story from the Time of the Afscheiding

**Editor's note:** *The following story was previously published in November, 2000 and the following chapters can be found online under the Beacon Lights link at the PRCA website <http://www.prca.org/>. This story gives the background to the story of the book reviewed in this issue.*

### PREFACE

The articles which will appear in subsequent issues of *Beacon Lights* are translations of a book with the title, *The Fourth Man*. The book was written in the Dutch by P. S. Kuiper and published by *The Banner* in Utrecht, the Netherlands.

The author informs the readers that the title of the book is taken from [Daniel 3:25](#): “Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.”

As the sub-title indicates, the story is about the Secession of 1834, and what effect that Secession had on the inhabitants of the small village of Hilversum in the year 1835, one year after the Secession began. The author explains the book in these words. “In this story free use is made of the scarce data and traditions that have been saved from this anxious time.” That implies that most of what is described in the book did not actually happen. The main persons are the product of the imagination.

“The tragic attack on the farm of Gijsbert Haan on June 12, 1836 is, sadly enough, a historical fact. However, similar acts of violence did occur in the Netherlands in those years.

“It may be added for the interest of the reader that Gijsbert Haan was among the 800 immigrants who came to America under the leadership of Rev. Scholte. He first settled in Pella, Iowa, later came to Grand Rapids, and was one of the organizers of the Christian Reformed Church in 1857.”

The original translation of the book was done by Rev. Cornelius Hanko, my father, and the editing and preparation for publication was done by the undersigned. My father thought the book worth publishing in *Beacon Lights* for various reasons.

The story itself is a simple story, in fact, almost too simple for the young people who read *Beacon Lights*. But that may have its own advantage. Its very simplicity makes it a story that can be read by children and young people from 7 or 8 years old and up. It will introduce them to *Beacon Lights* at an early age and get them accustomed to reading what will be, in a few years, their paper.

But the value of the story makes its simplicity something to overlook in the interests of other advantages. My father saw in the book an accurate and interesting description of life in our Fatherland 180 years ago. (The interested reader might want to know that the same thing has been done in picture form by the Dutch artist Poortvliet, whose books are available in this country.) More importantly, the book gives an accurate description of the effect of the Secession of 1834 on the people in the Netherlands, who suffered persecution for their commitment to the cause of the Lord Christ and the truth of Holy Scripture. This Secession, which took place in 1834, was a true reformation of the church of Christ. Many of these Seceders came to this country, and our own Protestant Reformed Churches have many sons and daughters from immigrants who were a part of this Secession. My own paternal grandmother was herself a daughter of the Secession. It is a book about our roots.

For those of our readers who do not know a great deal about the Secession of 1834, the following brief summary will help them place this momentous event in its proper light. The Secession really began in the Reformed Church of Ulrum, a village in the northern part of the Netherlands when Rev. De Cock and his consistory and deacons signed a Declaration of Secession, which announced their separation from the State Church which had become thoroughly apostate. Joining De Cock in the Secession were other ministers, among whom was Scholte, who later led a group of immigrants to Pella, Iowa, and Van Raalte, who led another group of immigrants to what is now Holland, Michigan on the shores of Lake Macatawa. In this latter group the Christian Reformed Church had its origin. If anyone desires more information on this, such information is available in my book *Portraits of Faithful Saints*, and in a syllabus prepared originally for *The Beacon Lights* entitled *From Dordt to Today*.

The editor and publication committee of *Beacon Lights* have graciously consented to publish this translation. For this my father is grateful.

One or two remarks by way of explaining some of the translation and formatting. My father (I concur) thought it best to leave the names of people, towns, and streets in their Dutch form. Many can be translated into English, but not all. The names, therefore, may strike our readers as strange.

The author has included a few endnotes will be included in endnotes at the end of the pertinent chapter. I have also included a few additional endnotes when I thought the

text needed some explanation. What endnotes belong to the author will be indicated in the endnote itself.

Prof. Herman Hanko  
Grand Rapids, Michigan  
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## CHAPTER 1

### The School by the Creek

According to an old saying, “April sometimes wears a white hat.” But that certainly did not apply to the first of April in the year 1836. Spring came all at once, and the sun, which freely poured out its golden rays over the weaver’s village of Hilversum,<sup>1</sup> was far from lacking in strength.

The farmers plodding behind their plows knew it, and so did the weavers and spinners in their stuffy work areas.

But the greatest sigh came from the old town school at the Kerkbrink, where instructor Dirk De Liefde and the assistant, J. J. Van Oostveen, gave lessons to about 190 children.

“Children, we have now finished our arithmetic lesson!”

The solemn voice of instructor De Liefde rang through the schoolroom. His words did not fall on deaf ears!

Immediately all the pencils were laid aside.

“One: Take up your slates!”

A hundred hands took up the slates.

“Two: Slates in your desks!”

A hundred slates disappeared in the desks.

“Three: Arms crossed!”

Two hundred arms were crossed.

Like frozen snowmen the children sat in their black-painted seats each of which held six persons. It was most advisable to sit still because the rod and the ruler did not hang on the straight-backed chair of the instructor in vain.

All eyes were focused on the blackboard where the instructor De Liefde had written a poem in very neat letters.

His piercing eyes wandered for a moment over the class until they settled on a blond, sturdy lad. "Martin Boelhouwer, come and stand here by the blackboard!"

The boy's face went white. Had he unawares done something wrong for which he would now be punished?

Instructor De Liefde noticed his fear and smiled slightly.

"Do not be afraid, boy," he said encouragingly. Martin shuffled to the front, still not quite at ease. "Children, this morning I have written a very fine poem on the blackboard. Martin Boelhouwer, you try to read this for us in a proper and clear tone of voice!"

The lad blushed from both shyness and pride. He put his feet together and his hands behind his back.

At that moment the side door creaked softly open and Mr. Van Oostveen entered the room.

When he saw Martin standing at the blackboard he immediately saw what was happening. He nodded as if to say: "I will wait a moment."

Martin looked at the blackboard, cleared his throat and read with a clear voice:

*He who strives after virtue,  
And values her worth,  
Finds peace and contentment,  
A paradise here on earth.*

"Every one of us enjoyed that," Instructor De Liefde said in praise, "don't you think so, Mr. Van Oostveen?" The assistant nodded, after which he hastily took something out of the cabinet and disappeared.

A rising tumult in his room proved that his hasty departure was necessary.

The teacher signaled Martin to be seated. Martin walked to his seat with his head in the clouds.

It was a great honor to be chosen to read a poem.

Usually his friend Cornelis Van Ravenswaay was asked to do this.

Slyly Martin looked at him. Would his friend be jealous?

But Cornelis only looking longingly outside while Instructor De Liefde admonished the children: "Let us all live according to the spirit of the wisdom in this poem." The children all nodded in full agreement, although they understood very little of it.

They understood still less that this "very nice" poem was exactly the opposite of what the Bible taught. They never heard anything else but "virtue."<sup>2</sup>

Twelve strokes, announcing deliverance to the children, rang from the church tower high above the school. A hundred sighs arose.

When Bollebakker, who had been rubbing his always-hungry stomach for some time, arose part way from his seat, one look from the eyes of the instructor brought him back to the required position.

"In order to enjoy our noonday meal we turn homeward decently and orderly."

Row after row the children now left the room. First the children of the dime-seats. Those were the children whose parents paid a dime tuition and who therefore might sit in front. Toon Bollebakker was also among them, for his father was in a double sense a big farmer: his stomach was as fat as his wallet.

After that the children of the "nickel seats" might go out, among which were Martin and Cornelis.

The children of the back seats, the "flea" and "louse" seats, were the last to stand up. Their parents paid 2½ cents or less. But the fleas and the lice, which infected the back seats, were, for that matter, less considerate of these differences, for they regularly paid a visit also to the middle and front seats.

In the hall the children hastily slid into their wooden shoes, while the boys also put on their caps. Because of the nice weather, most of them left their jackets hang until later. The class of Mr. Van Oostveen was also excused. All at once the entire village rang

with the pleasant voices of the children. The geese, chickens and cats, which wandered about in the village, hastily sought refuge.

While Martin pulled on his wooden shoes and reached for his cap among his jostling and cheerful classmates, his eyes attentively watched the door. He was preoccupied with his daily problem: How do I escape Toon? Part of the way Toon Bollebakker and he had to walk the same way. However, Martin hated it when Toon walked with him, for he always boasted of his father's fortune and impressed upon Martin that Martin's father was only a small farmer.

However, since Toon sat in the front seat he was always the first one out, so that it was difficult to escape him.

This time things were in Martin's favor. He heard the husky voice of Toon asking where his wooden shoe could be.

Martin realized that now he had the opportunity to get ahead of his unpleasant companion.

He hurried out of the door and turned to his right into Moleneind St. His wooden shoes clattered loudly on the road. Past Doodweg Ave. he took off his wooden shoes and ran the rest of the way on his socks.

This was certainly not good for his socks, but his mother was far away, and his danger was near!

Martin raced like a greyhound through Moleneind St. with the pleasant thought that that fat boaster could never catch up with him. This occupied his attention so completely that he hardly noticed that he had arrived at a corner. That was his mistake. At that very moment out of the Dieperweg Ave., a peddler was trudging along. His name was Aalt Boor and he was pushing a handcart. He was one of the fish peddlers from Huizen who traveled through the surrounding villages to sell his wares.

Botje—that is what he was commonly called—was in an especially bad humor that day. Yet, up to that moment he had done a good business, for Friday was always his best day, because on that day the Roman Catholics might eat no meat. Besides, today was Good Friday, when his business was at its best. But it was also April 1 and many villagers could not resist the temptation of playing tricks on the not-so-sharp Botje.

He crossed Moleneind St. with an angry jerk of his cart and a face that looked like ten rainy days.

When Martin saw him suddenly appear at the corner of Dieperweg Avenue, he could not slow down quickly enough to avoid colliding with the peddler. With a crash both tumbled to the ground.

Martin fell on unpaved Dieperweg Avenue—it was fortunate for him that it was still unpaved—and his wooden shoes and cap flew through the air.

Aalt Boor was less fortunate. He tried to keep his balance by holding on to his rickety handcart. When that failed he tipped the cart over with him as he fell, and the whole slippery load spilled on top of him. The fish peddler was so shocked that he sat for a while staring with open eyes and a gaping mouth. He had a striking and noticeable likeness to his wares.

Martin was the first to come to his senses. He stood up pale and shaking. A few drops of blood flowed from his nose as a result of the collision. Hastily he went to Botje, who was wrapped in a dangerous silence.

“Excuse me, Botje...er...Boor,” he stuttered. “I’ll help you clean up a moment.” And while his classmates came shouting to the spot, he tried to set the handcart upright.

At that point it seemed as if something snapped in the peddler. Snorting with rage, he got up and gave the boy a ringing slap around his ears so that the poor boy saw the stars and the constellations.

“Look out of your eyes, you clumsy clown!” he shouted, hoarse with rage, “and keep your claws off from my cart!”

Martin decided that he’d better take his departure as soon as he could; his enemy had given in to his anger. Crying in his misery and hurt, he picked up his wooden shoes and cap and trudged away, giving no further thought to the fish peddler.

In the meantime the peddler was surrounded by a troop of noisy schoolboys. First they laughed heartily about the man, but before long many of them felt sorry for him. Finally together they set up the handcart and with a grin of pleasure they took to their legs.

Aalt Boor stood watching all this with suspicion, but let the boys go their way. Zadok Pakkendrager, a Jewish boy, whose nickname was Dokkie, saw the fish peddler secretly brush the fish scales from the seat of his pants.

“Shall I do that for you?” he asked with a straight face. The peddler gave the boy a look of an angry spider, but was wise enough to say nothing.

“You all are thanked,” he grumbled briefly and set his cart in motion. “No thanks,” answered Dokkie hypocritically, and took off his cap. “Give the greetings to the people in Huizen and be careful at the corners.” With a red face the fish peddler crossed over the creek of Rijk Das and disappeared like a beaten dog down Zonen Maanstraat Avenue.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> In the present town of Hilversum one can find only a little of the old weaver’s village. Most houses and farms of that time have disappeared and many of the streets have been renamed. On the edge of the square where is the church one can still find: a. The old church tower. The church itself has been replaced by a larger building in 1891. b. The courthouse which has become a municipal information center. c. The large inn, which is now The Court of Holland. Also the old toll house still exists, which stood at the place where the road divided into two roads, one to Baarn and the other to Utrecht. It is now a café. “The Young Count of Buuren (evidently also a hotel, HH) is still in use. The wooden bridge has been replaced by a stone bridge, which still has the old name, “Dogs’ Bridge.” The cemetery, named, “Ponder Your Death,” in which many people from this story lie buried, was closed in 1943 and will soon disappear. (author’s endnote.)

<sup>2</sup> The author introduces here a main reason why the Secession took place, and, along with that, one of the themes of the book. The apostate State Church had virtually denied the importance of and need for the knowledge of the truth as revealed in the Scriptures. Religion had been reduced to doing good, to “virtue.” Nothing else counted but a virtuous life. Note too that the doctrine of heaven in fact is denied in the verse when it speaks of the reward of a virtuous man as being Paradise on earth. This was being consistently taught in the schools.