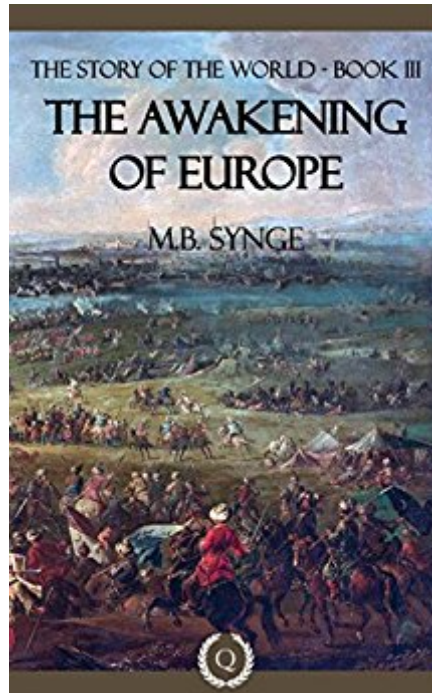




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The Awakening Of Europe [Quintessential Classics] [Illustrated]



Synopsis

Far away, in the north-west corner of Europe, lie the Netherlands, the lands which are now to play a large part in the world's history. The Low Countries they were called by the men of old time; and with good reason too, for many parts were actually below the level of the sea. Spongy and marshy, bleak and cold, was this corner of the European continent in the olden days. Winds and waves had wrought sad havoc with the coast. The rough North Sea was ever encroaching on the low-lying land, breaking over the shores with its never-ceasing roar and tumble, and flooding the country below its level whenever the wild west wind blew it home. Not only had the people of this country to contend with wind and wave, but from the other side many great rivers rolled through the land, to empty their waters into the North Sea, overflowing their low banks and flooding the surrounding neighbourhood. The largest of these was the Rhine. Rising amid the snowy Alps, leaping joyously over the famous falls of Schaffhausen, flowing in majesty right through Germany, the Rhine at last reached the Netherlands. The mouth of this famous river gave some trouble to the Hollanders. They made colossal pumps and locks, by which they lifted the water and lowered it into the sea. There was no rest for a lazy river in these parts. The stream must be kept moving, it must do its share of work in the country. "As long as grass grows and water runs." This was their idea of For ever. "I struggle but I emerge." This was the motto of Zeeland, with the crest of a lion riding out of the waves, and it sums up the story of the people of the Netherlands. For hundreds of years they fought the angry waters with a stubborn determination, a patient energy, a dauntless genius, — an example to other countries. They erected great mounds or dykes to keep out the North Sea; they dug canals to direct course of their sluggish rivers and to keep them within bounds. And when the ocean tides were high or the winds blew long from the west; when the heavy snows from the mountains melted, or the rainfall was unusually great, so that the dykes were broken down and the waters rushed in boundless masses over their land, yet the Hollander would not give up. With dogged perseverance he began again, so that to-day such an inundation is impossible. "God made the sea, but we made the land," they can say to-day with pride. But even to-day these great dykes which keep out the sea have to be watched. Every little hole has to be carefully stopped up or the sea would rush in and devour the land once more. Every man, woman, and child in the country knows the importance of this. A little Dutch boy was returning from school in the late afternoon, with his bag of books hanging over his shoulder, when he thought he heard the sound of running water. He stood still and listened. Like all other little boys in the Netherlands, he knew that the least crack in a dyke would soon let in the water, that it would cover the land and bring ruin to the people. He ran to the mound and looked about. There he saw a small hole, through which the water had

already begun to trickle. He was some way from his home yet. Suppose he were to run on fast and tell some one to come. It might already be too late – the water might even then be rushing over the land. He stooped down on the cold damp ground and put his fat little hand into the hole where the water was running out. It was just big enough to stop up the hole and prevent the water from escaping any more...

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