Stories of the *Martyrs Mirror*

**BACKGROUND**

In the late 1740s, several Mennonite leaders from Pennsylvania called for a new piece of literature. They wanted to translate the Martyrs Mirror from Dutch into German, for distribution in Pennsylvania. They feared that war was imminent, and wanted to prepare their people for the cross of testing and suffering that war would bring. This book was invaluable for all Anabaptist groups, for it provided a history of the martyrs during the Reformation. Church leaders wanted the young people to understand the faith of their mothers and fathers. They wanted them to know that their faith was important enough to live for and to die for! In 1748, the largest book ever printed in America made its way through the press at the Ephrata Cloisters. The first copy of Martyr’s Mirror was finally available in America! The first English edition, translated from the German, was published at Lampeter Square, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, in 1837.

The *Martyr’s Mirror* was first printed in Dutch in 1660, and was written in the confidence that those who would read it would focus on the martyrs themselves, note the steadfastness of their faith, and follow their example. The preface notes that this new book of persecution was written as a constant reminder of the devoted revered martyrs who suffered on account of adult baptism, or in general, for their testimony of Jesus Christ. The *Martyrs Mirror* honors these martyrs for their fervent prayers for those who harmed them, for their prayers for the welfare of all people, for their good teaching and good example, for leading others to salvation, and for their unwavering and unswerving faith to the end of their lives.

Much blood was shed during the first century A.D. The *Martyrs Mirror* gives Jesus Christ himself first place in the martyrs of the new covenant. After his death, persecution raged and eventually consumed nearly all of the beloved apostles and friends of Christ. The *Martyrs Mirror* continues on through each century, giving an account of those who suffered. The last century included in the book is the 17th century, from 1600 to 1660. The persecution that occurred during this century was not quite so severe.

The *Martyrs Mirror* actually contains two books. The first, covering the first fifteen centuries after Christ, was written by Thielman J. van Braght. The second, which covers the 1500s and 1600s, was originally compiled from a variety of authors. Later, Thielman van Braght incorporated this work as a second part to his book.
LESSON 7: THE EXECUTIONERS

Objective
To examine the execution of Anabaptist martyrs from the perspective of the executioners. Luke 23:34—Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”

Key Concepts
• Students will learn about the breadth, purpose, and extent of the Martyrs Mirror
• Students will imagine creatively the effect of taking part in executions.
• Students will evaluate one or more stories from the Martyrs Mirror, from the perspective of an executioner.
• Students will compare contemporary reasons for giving the death penalty to those of the 16th century.

Estimated Lesson Time: 50 minutes

Materials
• One copy of the Martyrs Mirror
• Prepared MM Cards (p. 130)
• “Executioner Stories” handouts (pp. 131-138)
• Chalkboard, flip chart, or marker board
• (Optional) Multiple copies of the Martyrs Mirror or Mirror of the Martyrs: Stories of Courage, inspiringly retold, of 16th Century Anabaptists Who Gave Their Lives for Their Faith by John S. Oyer and Robert S. Kreider, for the Extend the Lesson activity, “Actual execution facts”

Teacher Preparation
1. Obtain a copy of the Martyrs Mirror that you can keep in your classroom for this lesson and the following two lessons.
2. Copy and cut MM Cards into twenty slips of paper. Shuffle and place in a stack for later distribution.
3. Make enough copies of the “Executioner Stories” handouts for each student to have one. Be sure to use at least one copy of each of the seven stories.
4. If using the “Actual execution facts” exercise from Extend the Lesson, obtain enough copies of the Martyrs Mirror for every group of four or five students to have one to use. If copies of the Martyrs Mirror are hard to find, you may use multiple copies of Mirror of the Martyrs by John S. Oyer and Robert S. Kreider.

INTRODUCING THE LESSON
Horrible acts. Without preamble or introduction read the following list:
—Killed with seven cruel blows
—Secretly murdered in a tower
—burned to death in a small hut
—tortured on the rack and then burnt to death in a small hut
—mouth stuffed with gunpowder and then body thrust into a burning fire
—beheaded
—burned in a hut of straw and wood

Ask, “What do these horrible acts have in common?” Allow for a variety of answers.

After several students have ventured guesses, say, “These are all ways that executioners killed Anabaptists for their beliefs. People who are killed for their religious beliefs are called martyrs. The list I read came from a book called the Martyrs Mirror, which tells the stories of Anabaptists who were tortured and killed for their beliefs.”

Get out a copy of the Martyrs Mirror and place it in a prominent location at the front of the room.

**LESSON STEPS**

1. **Class quiz.** Tell the students that they’re going to take a surprise quiz about the Martyrs Mirror. “Don’t worry, though, Big Idea has taken pity on you and done the research ahead of time. She’s supplied us with both the questions and the answers, plus we’ll do the quiz as a class.”

   Distribute twenty MM Cards. Have the first student with a question card (marked by a large Q) read the question. Those holding answer cards should venture answers until the correct one is found. Repeat until all of the questions and their correct answers have been found.

   Ask the question, “What have we learned about the Martyrs Mirror by taking that quiz?” Have students repeat back the information in sentence form. Write the statements on a chalkboard, flip chart, or marker board.

   Possible statements include:
   - The first English edition of the Martyrs Mirror was published in 1837.
   - Thieleman J. van Braght compiled the stories of the martyrs that appear in the Martyrs Mirror.
   - Stories of approximately 3,950 Anabaptist martyrs are included in the Martyrs Mirror.
   - The Martyrs Mirror covers the time period from 1 CE to 1660 CE.
   - The Martyrs Mirror has 1,157 pages.
   - The first English edition of the Martyrs Mirror was published in Lampeter Square, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.
   - The 1950 edition of the Martyrs Mirror is 6.5 centimeters thick.
   - Jesus Christ is the first martyr recorded in the pages of the Martyrs Mirror.
   - Ully Wagman, who was martyred in 1654, is the last martyr recorded in the pages of the Martyrs Mirror.
   - The full title of the Martyrs Mirror is The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians Who Baptized Only Upon Confession of Faith, and Who Suffered and Died for the Testimony of Jesus, Their Savior, from the Time of Christ to the Year A.D. 1660.

2. **Executioner identification.** Invite the students to look at some of the stories from the Martyrs Mirror, saying, “Folks has supplied us with seven stories from the Martyrs Mirror. I will distribute them in a minute. When I do, I want you to
read the story, and do four things.” Write the following instructions on a chalkboard, marker board, or flip chart as you read them:

a. If possible, identify the person who did the executing.

b. If possible, identify the person who ordered the executing.

c. On the back of the handout, write down the reason given in the story for the execution.

d. On the back of the handout, write three sentences about how you think the executioner felt after executing the Anabaptist martyr.

Distribute copies of Executioner Stories handouts. All seven stories should be included in the distribution.

3. **Contemporary comparison.** Ask students to share the reasons they found in their Executioner Stories for the execution of the martyr in their story. List in a column on the chalkboard, flip chart, or marker board.

Then ask students to identify the reasons governments give today for executing people. Possible answers include: because the person had killed someone else, because the person is a soldier of a country that government has declared an enemy, because a person is living too close to our enemies, because someone has been proved a traitor, etc. List the contemporary reasons in a column next to the reasons for killing the Anabaptists.

4. **Discussion.** Ask students:

- How do the reasons compare? What makes the most or least sense? Why?
- Would the Anabaptists be killed today? If so, why? If not, what might they do that is consistent with their beliefs that would get them killed or imprisoned (perhaps not go to war)?
- How do you think the people felt after they executed the martyrs? What did taking part in such killing do to them?
- Do you think the people who killed the martyrs were bad people? Why or why not?
- How does our country treat those who kill other people—in war, in an execution chamber, or in the midst of a shootout? What does this say about what our leaders consider to be important?

5. **Imagining the result.** Choose one of the Executioner Stories to dramatize. Select two students who are able to extemporize and don’t mind acting in front of the class to take the part of the executioner and the executioner’s child.

The rest of the class may act as the director. Explain, “You are the director, and this is the scene. The executioner has come home from work after executing __________ (fill in the name of the martyr you have selected). In a moment, the executioner’s child will ask, ‘What did you do today?’ Together, we will tell the executioner how to respond, based on our imaginations and the information in the story. What is the executioner’s first response going to be?”

Have students call out first responses. Examples: “I don’t want to talk about it,” “I’ll tell you when you’re older,” “I killed a woman/man.” Choose a line from the ones suggested and direct the student playing the part of the executioner to use that as his or her first response. The student playing the part of the executioner’s child should then ad lib a response. Repeat with one or two more responses.

When you have run through the skit once or twice, read Luke 23:34: Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”
Repeat the exercise, asking the students to take this verse into consideration when suggesting a first response from the executioner to his/her child. Do one or two more extemporized scenes.

Close out the scene with applause for the actors. Say, “You now have permission to step outside of your roles. You are no longer the executioner or the executioner’s child.”

6. Marking the time. Ask two students to write on the timeline the names of the first (Jesus Christ—30 CE) and last (Ully Wagman—1654) martyrs killed, according to the Martyrs Mirror.

Lead in prayer for the executioners who killed the Anabaptist martyrs, their descendents, and all who take the part of executioner or who order executions in our world today. Pray that they will accept Jesus’ forgiveness and stop participating in the killing.

EXTEND THE LESSON
(These activities will extend the lesson to longer than 50 minutes.)

• Timeline pictures. Encourage artistically talented students to draw a picture of a cross and a jail cell by the names of Jesus and Ully Wagman, respectively, to indicate the manner of their deaths.

• Skitload. In lieu of the “Imagining the Result” exercise, break students into small groups according to the Executioners Stories handout they received. Assign them to write or extemporize a skit of what it was like for one of the executioners after the execution. The students may choose the setting and circumstances, but their skit should show how they think the executioner may have felt after killing the Anabaptist. The skit should include reference to at least three key details from their story, in addition to identifying the name of the Anabaptist who was killed.

• Haiku. Invite students to write haiku poetry (5-syllable line, 7-syllable line, 5-syllable line) about what it must have felt like to be a person who killed a martyr. The poem should focus on the emotions of the executioners. Did they feel sadness, rage, confusion, guilt, numbness? After students have written and read their haiku aloud, talk together about what might have happened to the executioners as a result of feeling these emotions.

• Actual execution facts. Obtain multiple copies of the Martyrs Mirror, enough for one for every group of four to five students (or use multiple copies of Mirror of the Martyrs by John S. Oyer and Robert S. Kreider). Assign students to identify all the different ways the martyrs were killed and/or tortured: drowning, burning, hung by thumbs, cut to pieces, etc. Then compare these to contemporary practices of execution: electrocution, lethal injection, firing squad. Ask, “Even though the methods have changed, has the underlying idea—that taking a life is okay as a form of punishment—changed?”

• Research. Assign students to research some current-day Christians who were/are persecuted for their beliefs. Help students find appropriate web-site links that will help them make a thorough connection to suffering today. Perhaps they could take action with letters of prayer support, or make a wall map showing current-day persecution hot spots.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q</th>
<th>When was the first English edition of the <em>Martyrs Mirror</em> published?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
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<td>A</td>
<td>Thieleman J. van Braght</td>
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<tr>
<th>Q</th>
<th>How thick is the 1950 edition of the <em>Martyrs Mirror</em>?</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>6.5 centimeters</td>
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<tr>
<th>Q</th>
<th>How many Anabaptist martyrs are included in the <em>Martyrs Mirror</em>?</th>
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<td>A</td>
<td>Approximately 3,950</td>
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<td>A</td>
<td>Jesus Christ</td>
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<td>From 1 CE to 1660 CE</td>
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OF A PIOUS BROTHER WHO WAS PUT TO DEATH FOR THE WORD OF GOD, IN THE CITY OF VUREN IN FLANDERS, A. D. 1553

About the year 1553, there was put to death with the sword, in the city of Vuren, in Flanders, for the testimony of Jesus, a God-fearing, pious brother, who had to endure many severe conflicts from the papists, the adversaries of the truth; but as a valiant hero of Christ he would not fear them that kill the body, but sought much rather to please Him who after this temporal death has power also to cast into hell, into everlasting fire, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. He therefore comforted his sorrowful wife, who was pregnant, and whom he loved dearly, with the Word of God, fearing that adversity was in store for her; that she should not regard the torments inflicted upon him for the Word of God. They sentenced him to be executed with the sword; hence he took affectionate leave from all his brethren, and, as a humble lamb, following the footsteps of his Leader Jesus, ascended the scaffold; but the evening wolves, which let nothing remain until the morning; by which and other fruits they may be known, retained their wolfish nature, so that they killed this friend of God with seven cruel blows, and finally sawed off his head, so that through great sorrow many a tear was shed by the people who were present and witnessed this martyrdom. His poor, pregnant wife lamented greatly, so that she died with her fruit from excess of grief. Many witnessed this heinous murder, perpetrated by the bloodthirsty; but the great and faithful God, who regards the sufferings of His own, as though the apple of His eye had been touched, will avenge this in due time. O how will these bloodthirsty men excuse themselves, when the chief Shepherd shall appear in the clouds, and require an account of this matter! But those faithful heroes and adventurers of God, who did not dare deprive their Creator of His divine honor, but would serve Him rightly according to His Word, and gave their lives therefor, they have the promise from the mouth of Jesus, that He will confess them before His Father in heaven, that it is the Father's good pleasure to give this little flock His glorious kingdom, and that all who here suffer with Christ for righteousness' sake, shall rejoice forever with God. Matt. 10:32; Luke 12:8, 32; Matt. 5:10.

Concerning this, read hymn in the old hymn-book.

Reprinted from Martyrs Mirror (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1985), 547-548. Used with permission. All rights reserved.
DIGNA PIETERS, AFTER ENDURING MUCH AFFLICTION, PUT INTO A BAG AND DROWNED, IN PUTTOX TOWER, AT DORDRECHT, FOR THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS CHRIST, ON THE 23RD OF NOVEMBER, 1555

A. D. 1555, unholy hands were laid, at Dordrecht, in Holland, upon several of the saints of God, of whom, among others, there is mentioned by name, a God-fearing woman, named Digna Pieters, who being a citizeness of said city, had at the same time a citizenship also in the spiritual city of God, that is, in the church of Jesus Christ on earth, yea, also, because of her integrity, in the new and heavenly Jerusalem, which is above, in which, and of which, she was regenerated by the Word of truth.

On account of the faith which she had in common with the dear friends and children of God, she was imprisoned, and severely proceeded against in various ways, for the purpose of causing her to apostatize from the faith. But as they could make no progress in the matter, since she was founded upon the immovable cornerstone, that is, Christ Jesus, they resolved to put an end to her citizenship and at the same time also to her life. Thereupon it followed that the chamber of justice, through the instrumentality of the bench of judges and the council of said city, with public striking of the bell, disfranchised her, before the steps leading up to the city hall, on the 17th of November of said year, to be further dealt with as the lords of said chamber should find or judge proper.

Concerning this, there remains, though almost obliterated by age, the following act in the book records of said city, in the keeping of the secretary there:

\textit{Actum per Campanam, the 17th of Nov., 1555.}

Whereas Digna Pieters, citizeness of this city, at present a prisoner, has without pain of iron bonds, openly confessed before the bench of judges, and the council of this city, to have been rebaptized, etc., also to have held conventicles, contrary to the faith, holy sacraments, and other services and ceremonies of the holy church; therefore, the council of the aforesaid city has disfranchised said Digna Pieters, and disfranchises her by these presents, further to be proceeded against, as the aforesaid council, according to the exigency and circumstances of the case, shall deem proper.

Thereupon follows in said book, how the chamber of justice proceeded against her, six days after-wards, in regard to which the following words are found.

\textit{Digna Pieters drowned}

Today, the 23rd of November, A. D. 1555, Digna Pieters, by virtue of a certain sentence given and pronounced by the bench of judges, and the council of this city, (by the mouth of Wouter Barthouts, judge in the law) was put into a bag, and drowned, in Puttox Tower.

Extracted from the book of records of the city of Dordrecht, commenced the last day of October, 1554, and concluded the 16th of June, 1573.

This was the end of this valiant heroine of Jesus, who, though she was secretly murdered in a tower, like Joris Wippe and others, will hereafter, in the great day of the Lord, be brought openly to light; then it shall be seen what difference there will be between those who did this, and her who suffered it, since everyone shall receive in his body according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. II Cor. 5:10.

This Puttox Tower, where this martyrdom took place, stood close by the gate of the Grootehooft of the city of Dordrecht; but it afterwards fell by reason of great age, or as a signal warning of God on account of this murder. In its place stands now a house, in the gable of which these words are carved in hard stone:

"Through the falling of Puttox Tower I was built, and stand to this hour."

As to the persons who in said year administered criminal (or capital) justice, and, consequently, executed this work, they were, according to John Beverwijk's history of the government of the city of Dordrecht, the following: Adrian van Blyenbergh Adrienss, bailiff; and nine judges as follows: Jacob Adriaenss; Philips van Beverwijk Oegerss; Maerten Schrevel Dircks; Jacob Oem Sir Jacobs; Pieter Muys Jacobss; Schrevel Sir Ockerss; Wouter Barthouts; Cornelis van Beveren Sir Claess; Wauter van Drenkwaert Sir Wilmss.

But whether all these judges, together with the bailiff, concurred in the aforesaid sentence; or whether Wouter Barthouts, who was present at her death, was the chief instigator of this work, is not expressed; however, it seems that the majority did not have much pleasure in it, since Wouter Barthouts alone, as it seems, with the executioner and the servants of justice, was present at the death of this woman.
JOOST JOOSTEN, BURNT AT VEER, IN ZEALAND,
A. D. 1560

It occurred in the year 1560, that at Veer, in Zealand, there was apprehended a young brother named Joost Joosten; a native of Goes, a small town in Zealand, who was considerably versed in the Latin language. When he was a student of about fourteen years, it happened that King Philip was in Zealand, and that this Joost Joosten was singing choral in church, in the organ loft, as is customary in papistic churches. The king was so delighted with the lad's singing, that he wanted to take him with him to Spain; on which account Joost kept himself concealed for six weeks, as he did not want to go away. Thus, he afterwards became converted to the true faith, and consequently, was baptized upon his faith, and thus led a Christian life. This the enemies of the truth could not endure; hence they apprehended him when he was eighteen years old. He had to suffer many assaults, and divers times attempts were made to draw him from the faith. He disputed with four inquisitors concerning many articles of faith; they made strenuous efforts to draw him over to their religion. When they could not move him with such means, they tortured him dreadfully, especially with instruments called iron teerlingen, which they thrust into his knees so that they came out again at the ankles. But all this he steadfastly endured with great patience, and faithfully kept the treasure which he had in an earthen vessel: Hence the children of Herod sentenced him to death by burning; which they executed on him on a Monday before Christmas. On his way to death he rejoiced greatly in the Lord, and sang yet as he was going into the hut of straw in which he was burnt, the last verse of the hymn composed by himself, which begins thus: "O Lord, thou art forever in my thoughts." He also wrote a confession of faith, of five sheets of paper, which, however, through course of time has been lost.
During the time of freedom following the de-
struction of the images, the church at Maestricht
grew and flourished, increasing in number. But
when the Duke of Alva came into the country,
many fled out of the city whithersoever they best
could; some, however, remained, among whom
there was also a brother who was an elder and a
school teacher. His name was Arent van Essen,
and he had a wife whose name was Ursel. In the
same house with them there lived another couple,
of whom the wife's name was Trijntgen, and the
name of her mother, an old woman of about sev-
enty-five years, was Neeltgen. These persons hav-
ing been betrayed and reported to the authorities,
one of the burgomasters of the city, a man of furi-
ous disposition, came violently, about twelve
o'clock in the night, with his servants, called bead-
dles, to the house of the schoolmaster, and with
great noise apprehended this man Arent, and the
latter was led in the night to the council house,
called the Landskroon. About an hour after, the
burgomaster with his beadles again went to the
house of the aforesaid schoolmaster, to apprehend
two women yet, whom he had not seized before.
Arriving there he also found Neeltgen the old
woman, who had come to see how it was with her
daughters Trijntgen and the others; for she had
heard that Arent had been taken away and im-
prisoned. He also apprehended these three, and
took them likewise to the Landskroon, to the man,
so that in the morning all four were together, re-
joicing together in God, and comforting one an-
other.

When they were brought before the lords, they
each separately confessed their faith (1 Pet.
3:15), and that they had received baptism upon
their faith, and what else belongs to godly doc-
trines; in which, it seems, Ursel, though weak, ac-
cording to the flesh, was not the most timid; for
they separated her from the rest and delivered her
to the lords (that is, to the bailiff and the judges),
who judge in cases of capital punishment. And
thus she was taken to the Dinghuys, a place thus
called; where she was greatly harassed with many
threats, all of which she meekly bore and suffered.
Thus it went also with her husband, Arent, whom
they likewise delivered to the lords, and brought
him to the prisoners' gate, which is the highest
prison, where also manifold wiles were employed
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and he had a wife whose name was Trijntgen. In the
same house with them there lived another couple,
of whom the wife's name was Trijntgen; and the
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When they were brought before the lords, they
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Thus it went also with her husband, Arent, whom
they likewise delivered to the lords, and brought
him to the prisoners' gate, which is the highest
prison, where also manifold wiles were employed
to cause him to apostatize.

When this old woman Neeltgen and her daugh-
ter Trijntgen, were also delivered to the lords, and
conducted to the Dinghuys, and came into the
street on their way thither, both of them being
joyful and of good courage, Trijntgen for joy be-
gan to sing, thus she was kindled in the Lord.

During their imprisonment in the Dinghuys they
were frequently assailed by the lords, and also by
monks and priests, who sought to move them to re-
nounce their faith; but God preserved His sheep
from the terrible rage of the wolves. After this
they began to torture Arent. Yea, it was said,
that he was seven times severely tortured, so that
he fell into despondency in consequence of all these
torments: but the Lord extended to him His hand,
strengthened him, and gave him new courage, so
that in the morning all four were together, re-
took them likewise to the Landskroon, to the man,
so that in the morning all four were together, re-
joyicing together in God, and comforting one an-
other.

When these persons were delivered to the prison,
where also manifold wiles were employed to
cause him to apostatize.

When this old woman Neeltgen and her daugh-
ter Trijntgen, were also delivered to the lords, and
conducted to the Dinghuys, and came into the
street on their way thither, both of them being

On the 9th of January, in the year 1570, Arent
and Ursel his wife were notified in the name of the
lords, that each was to be put to a stake and burned,
in which message they greatly rejoiced, because
they were to be counted worthy to die for the name
of Christ; and were full of joy that day and night,
thanking and praising God, and thus waited for the
day of their redemption.

In the morning a town beadle came to Ursel, and
enjoined her in the name of his lords, that she
should not speak in the street on her way to exe-
cution; this the beadle said in the presence of the
lords. Ursel said to the lords: "And may I not sing
a little, and say something now and then?" But this
they would not permit her, and said among them-
se: "We hear now what her intentions are."
They further said to the executioner: "Do as you
are commanded, and stop her mouth." The execu-
tioner had a piece of wood, which he put in Ursel's
mouth, and tied up her mouth with a cloth. And
so as they had been taken back from the prisoners'
gate, where they were tortured, to the Dinghuys,
whence they were to go to execution, and where
also Neeltgen and Trijntgen were still imprisoned,
Trijntgen, when Ursel was led away from the
Dinghuys, had come to a window above, and when
she saw Ursel being led forth to death, she cried
aloud among all the people, saying to Ursel: "Dear
sister, content manfully, for the crown of life is
prepared for you." Thus Ursel, with her mouth
wagg'd, went to the Vrijthof (the place where she
was to be offered up), the people complaining
greatly, because her mouth had been gagged so
that she could not speak one word.

When Ursel arrived at the scaffold which had
been erected, she ascended it quietly as a lamb, and
went directly into the hut, and the executioner
immediately set fire to the same; and thus she was
burned to ashes, and became a burnt offering unto
the Lord.

Very shortly after, Arent, Ursel's husband, was
also notified to prepare himself for death, which
he willingly received, and prepared himself ac-
cordingly. Before he was led forth to death, they
also stopped and tied up his mouth, which pre-
vented a pitiful sight. They had erected a scaffold
in another place than where Ursel had been put to
death, namely, in the Friday or cattle market, near
the Poel. What the lords sought by putting them
to death separately was not really known; but com-
mon report had it, that the lords did it in order that
Arent and Ursel might not derive any comfort
from each other. When Arent was thus led, with
his mouth gagged, to this place, a joyful and undis-
mayed mind could be perceived. Having ascended
the scaffold, he fell upon his knees, and fervently
offered up his prayer.

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ANNEKEN HEYNDRICKS, A. D. 1571

In the year 1571, there was burnt alive, at Amsterdam in Holland, for the testimony of Jesus, a woman named Anneken Heyndricks, aged about fifty-three years. Having come from Friesland to Amsterdam, she was betrayed by her neighbor, the underbailiff, who entered her house, in order to apprehend her. She said to him with a meek spirit: "Neighbor Evert, what is your wish? if you seek me, you can easily find me; here I am at your service." This Judas the traitor said: "Surrender, in the name of the king." And he bound Anneken with a rope, and led her along with him, as Judas and the scribes had done with our predecessor, Jesus. When they had arrived on the Dam, Anneken said, that they should not hesitate to look at her, since she was neither a harlot nor a thief, but a prisoner for the name of Jesus. After arriving in prison, she thanked and praised her Lord and Creator with an humble heart, for counting her worthy to suffer for His name's sake. And she boldly confessed her faith before Pieter the bailiff and the other lords. They greatly tormented her with Baal's priests, in order to cause her to apostatize; but through the grace of God she valiantly resisted it. This greatly astonished the bailiff, that she did not pay more regard to his spiritual lords, and he said to Anneken: "Sir Albert, our chaplain, is such a holy fellow, that he ought to be mounted in fine gold; and you will not hear him, but make sport of him, hence you must die in your sins, so far are you strayed from God."

Thus they suspended this God-fearing aged woman (who could neither read nor write) by her hands, even as Christ had been, and by severe torturing sought to extort from her the names of her fellow believers, for they thirsted for more innocent blood. But they obtained nothing from Anneken, so faithfully did God keep her lips. Hence the bailiff preferred against her the charge of being infected with heresy, having forsaken the mother, the holy church, now about six years ago and having adopted the cursed doctrine of the Mennonists, by whom she had been baptized on her faith, and married a husband among them. Thereupon she was sentenced to be burnt alive. She thanked the lords, and said with humility, that if she had done amiss to any one, she asked them to forgive her. But the lords arose and made no reply. She was then tied on a ladder. Then she said to Evert the underbailiff, her neighbor: "Thou Judas, I have not deserved it, that I should be thus murdered." And she asked him not to do this any more, or God should avenge it on him. Thereupon Evert angrily said, that he would bring all those that were of her mind into the same trouble. Then the other bailiff came once more with a priest, tormenting her, and saying that if she did not renounce, she should go from this fire into the eternal. Thereupon Anneken steadfastly said: "Though I am sentenced and condemned by you, yet what you say does not come from God; for I firmly trust in God, who shall help me out of my distress, and deliver me out of all my trouble." They did not let her speak any more but filled her mouth with gunpowder, and carried her thus from the city hall to the fire into which they cast her alive: This done, the traitor Evert, the underbailiff, was seen to laugh, as though he thought he had done God an acceptable service. But the merciful God, who is the comfort of the pious, shall give this faithful witness, for this brief and temporal tribulation, an everlasting reward, when her stopped mouth shall be opened in fullness of joy, and these sad tears (for the truth's sake) shall be wiped away, and she be crowned with eternal joy with God in heaven.

Concerning this, see a hymn in same old hymn books.

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HANS PELTNER, A. D. 1574

In the year 1574, Hans Peltner, a tailor, at Rottenhosen in Imtal, was apprehended for his faith, and the divine truth, who had to endure many disputations and temptations, from the priests as well as others, all of which he very valiantly resisted, and with the Word of God testified to the truth, to which he by the help of God would adhere unto death. On this account he was finally sentenced to death, and conducted forth to the place of execution, where he exhorted the people to desist from sin and repent. He then knelt down, turning his face to the East, or the rising of the sun, lifted up his hands to heaven, and poured out an earnest prayer to God his heavenly Father, thanking and praising Him for all the grace and benefits shown him and that He had made him worthy to suffer for His name. He also prayed for all men who were worthy, that God would put repentance and amendment into their hearts. Finally he commended his spirit into the hands of God, for whose name he was willing to offer up again his life and body (which he had received from Him), and to testify to His truth even to his last drop of blood, as he had promised Him in baptism, and would thus expect to he received of Him into His gracious arms.

This prayer was too long for the executioner's patience, for he wanted him to shorten it; but the judges said that he should let him pray to his heart's content, since it was his last time.

When he had finished praying, he rose and went boldly toward the executioner, so that neither his face nor his color changed, but he knelt down again so intrepidly, that the executioner was consternated by his valiant praying and undaunted mind, and became afraid to execute him.

When the executioner removed the collar from his neck, previous to seizing his sword, he asked him once more, whether he would renounce; but he would not. Thereupon the executioner proceeded, beheaded him, and then burned his dead body. Thus this Christian hero freely testified to the truth with his blood, and in no wise suffered himself to be separated from the way of eternal life in Christ. Hence the Lord, the judge of the living and the dead; who holds in His hand the judgment and the souls of them that have died for the faith, shall raise him up at the last day, and cause him to appear before Him, where he shall inherit a martyr's crown and all that God has promised His own.


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HANS BRET, A. D. 1576

Hans Bret, who was about twenty-one years old, and the son of one Thomas Bret, an Englishman, was (besides his daily labor which he performed in the service of his master) very diligently concerned and engaged with the study of the word of the Lord, in which he constantly exercised himself in the morning and evening also, generally, exhorting with edifying, profitable and instructive passages from the holy Scriptures, those with whom he had intercourse, to a virtuous and godly life. He would also not spend Sunday idly, but truly sanctifying and observing it, generally sought together a number of new converts, to whom he diligently went in all kindness, giving out to them in the fear of God some edifying questions from the Scriptures, whereby he exhorted them to repent and desist from their sinful life, showing them the indignation which God shall pour out upon the children of unbelief and unrighteousness, and the gracious promises of salvation which are promised in eternal life to the penitent children of faith. This his exhorting he did with such becoming earnestness and edifying doctrine, that many sought to be with him, perceiving in him the powerful work of God and his advancement in the knowledge of Christ, with which he, though so young in years, was very richly filled, and which he also did not keep to himself alone, but allowed it to break forth and flow from him without fear to the profit and advantage of his neighbor: II Cor. 3:5; Phil. 3:8; I Tim. 4:12; I Cor. 14:33.

But the devil, the enemy of righteousness, and enier of the increase of virtue and of the church of Christ, could not long tolerate or endure this; for, perceiving in this servant the godly zeal in the truth, and assiduity to convert the erring, he, by his instruments (bloodthirsty men, who always have dishonored the temple of God, murdered His sheep, slain His saints, shed their blood, and given their flesh as meat to the beasts of the field), sought to trouble this servant of God with affliction, and to hinder the brightness of his light, which he also partly effected and accomplished; for about two months after he had been baptized upon the confession of his faith, according to the command of Christ, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, there came, an the sixth day of May, in the year 1576, about nine o’clock in the evening, the bailiff of Antwerp, with many servants, to the house of Hans Bret’s master, who had been betrayed with all his household. They closely guarded this house from behind, where it had two exits, as well as in front, with armed men and beatles, and then knocked at the front door, which Hans Bret came to open (not knowing that those who thirsted for the blood of his mister and his household, and for his own, stood before it), and asked who was there. They said: “Open,” and pretended that they wanted to buy something. In the meantime, hearing that they had inserted an instrument in the door, to open it from the outside, he began to think that they were the wolves and tyrants, who came to devour the innocent and harmless sheep of Christ, and did not open the door to them; but they managed to open it from without, which perceiving, Hans Bret ran into the house, where his master with his wife and several other women sat eating; and warned them of it, who all quickly rose up and ran to the rear, thinking (as also Hans Bret) to escape by the back door; but when they opened this, the bailiff’s beatles showed themselves with great cruelty; speedily apprehending and capturing all whom God permitted them, among whom there was also this servant of God; but his master and several others with him were wonderfully and remarkably delivered and preserved through the hand and assistance of God. Jer. 1:8; Acts 26:17. Behold, thus did this innocent sheep of Christ fall into the hands of the wolves, and was confined in prison, only for the faith in the doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ; and the practice of the same.

Now, how he conducted himself in his bonds; how they, through wiles and snares, fair promises and severe threats, sought to move him from, and despoil him of, the salvation of his soul; and how they, because he had written some letters to his brethren and friends, cast him into a loathsome dungeon; together with the various disputations which he had with the priests and soul-seducers, and also how he answered them, and what boldness he manifested through the help of God; all this you will find fully treated and revealed in the following letters written by him.

When he had been confined about eight months, the tyrants finally went to the utmost of their power in the case of this servant of God and faithful follower of Christ, and, on Friday before Derthen-Avondt, in the year 1577, had him brought into court, whither he went very boldly, since his bonds were not for any crime, evil, or unrighteousness, but for the doctrine of his Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, for righteousness and truth, for which the children of God have always had abundantly to suffer, who have helped Christ to bear His cross, as a true ensign that they are Christ’s servants, disciples and followers.

Being brought before the lords and judges, he was asked, whether he had been baptized upon his (Continued)
faith, which he finally confessed and acknowledged, not ashamed of what he had done by the command of his Lord and Master Christ Jesus, though he certainly knew that they did not ask him to be taught of him, but only to get a word from his mouth by which they might sentence him to death. When the lords and criminal judges had heard this Christian confession, they rose up and went to sentence him to death; and having returned from their evil consultation, they pronounced and declared their sentence over this servant of God: that he should publicly be burnt alive at the stake till death should ensue.

When he had received his sentence, he was conducted back to prison, undismayed and of good courage, where he doubtless addressed some Scriptural remarks to the common people, as setting forth the cause of his imprisonment and suffering not to be any evil or crime, but the faith of the pure and saving truth, which the world cannot endure. Romans 10:9.

Thus he (Hans Bret) was brought back from the court into prison, and confined and held there till the following day, which was Saturday; then, in the morning, the executioner came to him into prison, in order to screw fast his tongue, close his mouth, and prevent his speaking. O miserable work!

Murderers, and the very worst criminals have the privilege and permission of freely using their tongue; but, behold here a follower of Christ, a child of God, a servant of faith, one separated from the world, in whom dwells righteousness and no cause of death is found—behold, how he is prepared for death by closing his mouth and screwing fast his tongue, that the truth may not be proclaimed, righteousness not heard, nor any testimony be given of the name of Christ. O Christ, look down, and succor Thy saints.

When the executioner had come to him, he commanded him to put out his tongue, which he (faithful and pious servant of God), willingly did, since he had not a member on his body, which he was not willing to deliver up to suffering for the name of Christ, being well assured that all the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the joy and glory which God has promised them that overcome. Matt. 10:22; Romans 8:18; Rev. 27.

And when he put out his tongue, the executioner fastened it with a piece of iron, and screwed it very tight with a vise or screw, and then touched the end of the tongue with a hot iron, that swelling, the screw might not slip off or become loose. O bitter cruelty and great tyranny.

When they had thus closed his mouth, and screwed fast his tongue, the fire with which he was to be offered up being already prepared in the marketplace, they led him forth, with his hands tied together, from prison, and placed him into a wagon, to convey him to the marketplace, to the spot where his sacrifice for the Word of truth was to take place.

It is said that they took this wagon for the reason that the way that leads from the prison to the marketplace, could not well be walked, because of the burnt houses which had been set on fire by the Spaniards, at the taking of Antwerp.

When he stepped into the wagon, he saw several persons of his acquaintance, whom he boldly and joyfully beheld, showing by his actions the desire which he had to come to the place where his sacrifice was to take place. He affectionately bowed his head, and greeted divers persons with the head, expressing and manifesting his steadfastness by his countenance and actions, all to the praise of God, who bestows such strength and power upon His saints, as being their protector, refuge, help, power, strength, and strong bulwark in all distress, tribulation, sorrow, and suffering inflicted upon them by the world for the true saving faith in Jesus Christ. Matt. 28:20; Ps. 18:2; Matt. 16:16.

When he had been brought into the marketplace, near the stake and the fire, he lifted himself up, and being clothed with Christian glory, descended from the wagon, being of good courage in God, strong in faith, and persevering in the conflict. With folded hands, he bowed his knees to the earth, humbly casting his eyes up to heaven, thus preparing himself to worship his Lord and God, and to commend himself to Him, even as behooves every Christian believer. Luke 23:46. But when those bloodthirsty men saw this, they could not tolerate or endure it (which they nevertheless permit criminals to do, who are put to death for their evil deeds); but very hurriedly and quickly pulling him up from the ground, they prevented him from calling to God upon his knees, and with great cruelty conducted him to the stake. To suffer all this, he went into the hut (constructed of straw and wood), humbly and meekly stepping to where they placed him at the stake, and made him fast by putting chains around his body, all of which he endured with great steadfastness for the Word and truth of Christ. And as he thus stood in the hut, at the stake, they finally kindled the fire, thus burning alive and devouring this lamb, whose body, indeed, was burnt, but whose soul was received into paradise, into joy and blessed rest, because he confessed Christ, who has promised salvation to them that endure.

Thus did this young and pious Christian, aged about twenty-one years, end his life, and offer and deliver up his body for the Word of God, in the year 1577, on Derthien-Avondt, and thus he became a witness among the witnesses of Jesus, a confessor among the confessors of Christ, a Christian conqueror among the soldiers of the Lord, a soul among the souls of Christ at rest under the altar, a faithful servant among the servants of Christ, whose reward is the crown of eternal, imperishable life.

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