

*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 Saviour, From the Time of Christ to the Year A.D. 1660.* Compiled from Various Authentic Chronicles, Memorials, and Testiomoies by Thieleman J. van Braght (1660) [Translated from the original Dutch or Holland Language from the Edition of 1660 By Joseph F. Sohm], pages 1008-1024.

**TWENTY PERSONS AT LONDON, IN ENGLAND, NAMELY, FOURTEEN WOMEN  
DRIVEN FROM THE CITY: A YOUTH SCOURGED BEHIND A CART; ONE DIED  
IN PRISON; TWO, NAMED HENDRICK TERWOORT AND JAN PIETERSS, BURNT  
ALIVE AND TWO OTHERS, AFTER ENDURING MUCH MISERY, ESCAPED FROM  
PRISON; ALL OF WHICH TOOK PLACE UNDER THE REIGN OF QUEEN  
ELIZABETH, IN THE YEAR 1575**

Final paragraph of the *Martyrs Mirror* account: "It is also deserving of the consideration of every intelligent person, how utterly incompatible with the Christian faith such unchristian and cruel proceedings and sentence as seen here, are, since the Christians are described as sheep and lambs sent out among cruel, ravening wolves. Matt. 10:16; Luke 10:3. Who then can believe with a good conscience, that these English preachers are the true sheep of Christ, seeing they so signally brought forth in this the fruit of wolves, since according to the teaching of Christ, the tree shall be known by its fruit. And these preachers are to be censured so much the more yet, since they regard as a principal article of their faith, that God Almighty before the foundation of the world elected a certain small number of men, which can in no wise be decreased or increased, but who shall infallibly all be saved. And that God Almighty, on the other hand, rejected the great majority of men, who shall likewise infallibly be lost. And that the will or ability which God has given man, can do no more in the way of inducing acceptation of God's gracious conversion, than dead men are able to resurrect from temporal death. If it stands thus with man's conversion, how utterly unfounded is then the course of these English preachers, who by such tyrannical means sought to force the faith and conversion (according to their, idea) upon these poor defenseless prisoners, by threatening them with a terrible death. It appears from this, that they do not believe their principal article themselves."

(Introductory excerpt from the first of) **TWO LETTERS WRITTEN BY THESE IMPRISONED  
FRIENDS, AS WE HAVE FOUND THEM IN A SMALL, OLD, PRINTED BOOK**

We poor and despised strangers, who are in persecution for the testimony of Jesus Christ, wish all men, of whatever race or office, from God, that the Lord would grant them a long peace, so that we may live in peace among one another, in all godliness, to the praise and glory of the Lord, and the salvation of the soul.

Since we are by so many persons, both with word and pen, very unjustly accused and slandered, we are for this important reason constrained briefly, in writing, to present the ground of our faith, and thus make it known as follows

We are not addressed, and interrogated concerning our faith, with a meek spirit, as the holy Scriptures teach; but reproach is heaped upon reproach, and lie upon lie, to increase and augment our afflictions and sorrows; and because they also have no pity for our poor weak women and children. Our country and kindred, and our property, we had to leave (partly, because of the great tyranny), and fled as lambs before wolves, only for the true evangelical truth of Jesus Christ, and not for any sedition or heresy, as the Munsterite errors or abominations were, and as (God forbid!) is reported of us. We fain would that our whole faith and life were written on our forehead, so that everyone might know and see what we believe, and what we seek and desire here upon earth. There should nothing be found but a true faith in full accordance with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and an

unblamable life, seeking to provide bread for our wives and children, even as God has commanded and as the Scriptures teach. I Thess. 2:9; II Thess. 3:8; Eph. 4:28; I Thess. 4:11. Oh, that our persecutors knew that this is the desire of our hearts, they certainly could not but have great pity and compassion upon us poor, despised strangers, if there be any human pity and compassion in them at all, and they would, according to the words of the Lord, have compassion upon us, as the prophet says, "Bring the poor that are afflicted to thy house." Isa. 58:7. Moses says, "If a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him; but the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself." Lev. 19:33, 34.

Mark well that God commands to love the stranger as one's own self. Who is in misery and dwelling in a strange country, that likes to be despised, and driven out of it with his fellow believers, and suffer great loss besides? Hence Christ says, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." Matt. 7:12. Oh, that they would deal so with us, according to natural equity, and the evangelical truth (of which our persecutors so greatly boast), how soon should the persecutors cease, and the lying and slandering mouths be stopped. For Christ and His own persecuted no one, but in His true Gospel taught the contrary, as He says, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good." Matt. 5:44, 45. This is the doctrine left by Christ and His apostles, as they themselves declare, even as Paul says, "Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place; and labor, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day." I Cor. 4:11-13. Paul further says, "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." II Tim. 3:12.

From all this it is demonstrable, that those who have the true evangelical doctrine and faith will persecute no one, but will themselves be persecuted. If it be said to us, that we are persecuted for our heretical faith, according to Paul's teaching, and because God has commanded to kill the false prophets (Deut. 13:9), we reply thus, "Paul says, that we are to reject (avoid) a man that is a heretic, after the first and second admonition." Tit. 3:10. He does not say, "Drive them out of the country and city without hearing or admonishing them." Besides, one must also know who are heretics: namely, those who advance a doctrine that is beside and contrary to the word of the Lord. But no man can convince us of this; that is, that our doctrine and faith are contrary to the doctrine of Jesus Christ and His holy apostles, as the sequel will show.

In regard to their allegation, that God has commanded, in His law, to kill false prophets, we reply that if we, in this time of the New Testament, were to kill all which God had commanded to kill in the Old Testament, we should have to kill not only the false prophets, but also the adulterers, whoremongers, and those who take the name of the Lord in vain and curse, and other like transgressors. Leviticus 20:10; Deut. 22:21; Lev. 24:14. And if they would wink at these, and allege against us only the commandment concerning the false prophets, in order to be rid of us, do at least rightly consider the word of the Lord, by what sign false prophets shall be known. For thus does God speak by Moses, "If a prophet or dreamer say to you: Let us go after strange gods, which you know not, that prophet shall die." Deut. 13. But we do not teach to go after strange gods, neither have we a heretical faith which is contrary to the word of Christ. But we believe in one God, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ His only begotten Son, our Lord, who was conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the pure virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; on the third day He rose from the dead, ascended up to heaven, and is now sitting at the right hand of God the Almighty Father, whence He must come again, to judge the quick and the dead. We believe in the Holy Ghost. We believe that Christ Jesus is true God and man. [continues with 4200 words specifically detailing the biblical basis of their beliefs in light of the particular allegations against them].

*A clear account of the foregoing matters is contained in the following letter, written by one Jaques de Somere (a member of the Calvinistic church, resident at that time in London), and sent to his mother, Tanneken van der parent, residing at Ghent, in Flanders; in which city he subsequently became a pensionary, while the Reformed ruled at Ghent, before the city was delivered up to the [Duke of] Parma, in the year 1584.*

#### **A LETTER FROM JAQUES DE SOMERE, SENT TO HIS MOTHER, AT GHENT**

Venerable and beloved mother, after most humbly commending myself to you, please let me inform you, that we are well, God be praised, even as we, not without great joy, learned from father's letter, that this is also the case with you. I dare say that I never read a letter from my father without anxiety and fear, until the end of the same assures me of your health, since I, aware of the weakness and infirmity of your nature, and in constant dread, lest you might have fallen into some severe sickness, which would cause me greater grief, than if I myself were in the greatest distress and pain.

But God be praised for His goodness, that He does not visit you more grievously, nor lay upon you a greater burden, than you, by His help and the consolation of His Word, and the hope of the life to come, are able to bear; and permits me to enjoy the greatest joy which a good child might wish in this world, namely, to see my father and mother attain to a good old age, and bear me such solicitude, love and favor as I could possibly expect from the most solicitous and benevolent parents, for which I owe you eternal gratitude.

Further, my beloved mother, as regards the particulars of the execution of the Anabaptists, though I doubt not but you have already heard much concerning it from the accounts of others, and I do not like to write of this matter, of which I can never think without great sadness; yet, since you desire it of me, and I perhaps know more about it than the common people, as I was often with them, and took a memorandum of everything, I would not forbear to write you such information as I have with regard to it; and I will also send you some copies of their confession, upon which they died (though some of them are still imprisoned), together with a supplication, which they presented to her majesty, but which was not accepted.

The matter was as follows: On Easter Day, the 3rd of April, A. D. 1575, there were gathered in a house beyond Aldgate (on the way leading to Mirror Court), thirty Anabaptists, men as well as women, for the purpose of exhortation and prayer. But being discovered of the neighbors, nearly all of them were led from there to prison, with so few beaules, that part of them could easily have escaped, had they felt free in their conscience to run. After they had fallen into the hands of the magistrates, they were brought to the house of the bishop of London, in order to be examined by him (through the mouth, however, of the Dutch and French preachers, since the bishop did not understand their language) concerning their faith, which they delivered in writing, and which was of such a character, that it contained nothing but what I myself would have dared subscribe to, excepting only the article touching the oath, in which they openly confessed that they believed that one might not swear in any wise.

Not satisfied with this confession, the bishop laid before them four articles, which they were to sign, or, if they remained obstinate, be burnt alive; declaring that he had received this commission from the court.

The articles were: 1. That they should desist from, renounce and forsake all errors, sects and heresies of the accursed sect of the Anabaptists, and confess that they had been seduced thereto by the devil; and further believe and confess with heart and mouth, that Christ had assumed His flesh and blood from the substance of the flesh and blood of Mary. 2. That infants ought to be baptized. 3. That a Christian might administer the office of magistracy. 4. That a Christian might swear an oath.

Thereupon they replied that they could not believe this in their consciences, and that they would hold to their first confession. Hence they were from these conducted back to prison; but on the way ten or twelve of them (seeing in what danger they were, and that they had a good opportunity to escape,

since only one or two beadles went with them), escaped, all of whom, however, in a day or two, of their own accord, returned to the prison, partly to release their bail who were bound in the sum of a hundred pounds; and partly, because the bishop, as a man of honor, promised them with an oath, that he should release all of them together in four or five days, if they returned; if not, he should keep the others in confinement till Christmas.

Shortly after; five of the men (through the much disputing of our Netherlanders, who belonged to the [Calvinistic] church), before they were condemned as heretics became converted. And yet they were made to stand, in St. Paul's churchyard, in a full assembly of many thousand Englishmen, in front of the pulpit (mark), each with a fagot on his shoulder, as a token that they had merited the fire; and much other loss and ignominy was inflicted upon them, though the bishop had promised them, that he should forthwith acquit them of everything, and release them without any trouble, if they would only sign the four articles; but the contrary was evident.

This occurred on the twenty-fifth day of May, A. D. 1575.

A few days afterwards, when the bishop saw that the rest would not depart their faith, he condemned them all to death, in the ecclesiastical court in St. Paul's church (where the papistic bishop in Queen Mary's time was wont to sentence the Christians), and delivered them over to the secular judge, by whom the women, tied hand to hand, were conducted to Newgate (which is the prison of those confined for capital crimes); together with one of the men, whom they considered to be the youngest and most innocent. But the rest of the men were taken back to their old place of confinement of the bishop's prison, so that it was thought that the women were to be executed first, even as they also daily came and threatened them, holding up death before their eyes, if they should not renounce; so that for five or six days they suffered great distress and temptation, expecting from day to day to be burnt, and this was done even on the very day when their sentence of banishment had arrived from the court; for at ten o'clock in the evening the bailiff and his beadles came into prison, to make an inventory of all their property, and to apprise them, that they should prepare themselves to die the next day, which he did, in order to see whether none of them would renounce through fear. But when he saw that they all remained steadfast, he announced to them, that the queen would show them mercy, and only banish them from the country, and cause the youth to be scourged behind a cart.

Thus, within five or six days afterwards, fourteen women or thereabouts, were conducted, by the officers of justice, from the prison which stands near St. Martin's Church, to St. Catharine's on shipboard, and the youth was scourged behind a cart which went immediately in front; and thus all were banished from the country, on pain of death, and they are now residing in Holland and Zealand.

A few days afterwards, the five men who were still confined in the bishop's prison were likewise sentenced by the bishop, and brought to Newgate, where one of them, through the poverty and hardship of the severe confinement, died in prison. The others, fearing that the extreme penalty should be inflicted upon them, since they had so rigorously dealt even with the women; and hearing that the queen and the entire council were so incensed against them, that hardly any one dared intercede for them, because of an evil report that they denied God and Christ, and rejected all government and authority of magistrates and higher powers as ungodly and unchristian; ventured to present a supplication, together with their confession concerning the four articles that had been laid before them (copies of which I send here), to her majesty, who was so incensed against them that she would not even receive it, but severely reprimanded the maids of honor who presented it to her, as they themselves reported to those that had delivered it to them.

When they saw this they changed said articles and supplication to some extent and delivered it to My Lord of Bodley, who, having conferred with the bishop about the matter, returned them the following day with the answer that he was sorry for their sakes, but that there was no hope at all of mercy, except they were willing to sign the articles, and renounce their heresy. In the meantime, the bishop, in behalf of her majesty, issued several articles, one of which was that a Christian magistrate might punish obstinate heretics with the sword; commanding all strangers to subscribe to the same, or if

not, to give sufficient bail that whenever it shall please the bishop they will appear before him and the queen's commissioners, to be more fully examined and punished according to the finding. Hence, nearly all the strangers, more through fear than otherwise, signed the same, except some who would rather be in danger, than, against their conscience, sanction, by their handwriting, the killing of the poor people; how it will end with them, is not yet known.

Shortly after, an order from the court came to the sheriff or bailiff of London, that he should execute the oldest two, according to their sentence. One of them named Jan Pieterss, was a poor man, more than fifty years of age, with nine children. His first wife had previously likewise been burnt for her religion, here in Ghent in Flanders. And he was now married to a woman whose husband had also previously been burnt at Ghent for his religion. Hence both, on account of persecution, had fled to England, thinking that they should be able to live there without peril in the liberty of their conscience. All this he stated to the bishop, and asked for mercy to leave the country with his wife and children; but it was not granted him.

The other, named Hendrick Terwoort, was a handsome, wealthy man of thirty-five or six years, a goldsmith by trade, and had only been married eight or ten weeks previous to his apprehension.

These two, as no disputing of the Dutch and French preachers could move them to subscribe the articles, but were much rather confirmed in their views through the cruelty and unchristian proceeding of those who boast themselves of the Gospel and the true faith, notwithstanding that many Englishmen as well as Dutchmen solicited pardon for them, were, nevertheless, the 22d of July, at six o'clock in the morning; in Smithfield (where they formerly used to burn persons belonging to our religion) most miserably burnt alive at a stake, till consumed to ashes, without any strangling or gun powder, according to the custom of the country, on the Friday after that on the preceding Tuesday the stake had been erected. I doubt not but that the queen consented to it with reluctance, but was persuaded thereto by some papists or other perverse persons and enemies of the truth, of whom there are many here; who made her believe that the Anabaptists (which religion is unknown to this nation), not only deny God and Christ; and thus overthrow the salvation of souls, but that they also reject all secular politics, laws and authorities, and instigate the people to sedition and rebellion, teaching that the office of the magistracy is ungodly and unchristian, whereby mostly, I doubt not, she became incensed against them, so that she would not even receive their supplication.

May the Lord forgive those who were the cause and authors of this, and so greatly slandered these poor people before her majesty, as you may judge from this their confession, which they subscribed in my presence, with their own hands: which though it does not satisfy me in every respect, and I greatly fear that they labor under a misapprehension as regards the point of Christ's first conception and the origin of His flesh; yet, since they with expressed words confess in a Christian manner, and have often orally confessed in my presence, that Christ is true God and true man, like unto us in flesh and blood and all other things, except sin alone; I am so far from deeming them worthy of any capital punishment, that I would not hesitate to recognize them as brethren and do not doubt their salvation, provided they have feared the Lord, and walked before Him in a good conscience; for our God is a merciful and gracious God, who does not condemn men for this or that misapprehension and error, but much rather graciously forgives their weakness and infirmity, for His Son Christ Jesus' sake, if it does not arise from stubbornness, but from pure ignorance, even as Paul says of himself, that he obtained mercy with God, because he had sinned ignorantly (I Timothy 1:13); and the error does not concern the fundamental doctrines of the faith, but the accessories of it, as is the case with these Anabaptists.

As regards the two young men that are still left, they continue as firm and steadfast as ever, and daily expect to have the same punishment inflicted upon them.

Lucas and I sought, if it were possible, to help them out of prison (four days after the others had been executed), and had with much talking brought the matter so far that they subscribed the confession (a copy of which I herewith send you), hoping that the bishop should be satisfied with it; who, when he

had read it, found it good enough, but would nevertheless not accept it graciously, except they would subscribe the first four articles without any contradiction, and unite with the Dutch church, which they had resolved not to do, even though they were entirely and in every respect of our belief because they would thereby have to condemn the two executed, and all others of their fellow believers (who died or still live in the same faith), and confess that they had been led into damnable heresy by the devil, the spirit of lies and error, in which they say that they, in their consciences, in no wise believe, but that they are much more assured of their salvation in Christ, who is true God and true man, and because they would greatly offend God, as they say by saying all these things against their conscience.

Hence there is nothing known but that they will have to suffer the same punishment which their associates suffered; and this the more, because they attempted to break out of prison, by filing off an iron bar from a window, for which reason they are now also fettered much more heavily than ever before, and should consider themselves fortunate, if they, the sooner the better, could be released through death from the great poverty and misery of the imprisonment, since they are both confined apart, so that they cannot comfort each other, and no one may come there and speak to them, on pain of being held himself.

Here you have, beloved mother, from beginning to end, a written account of the sad history of the imprisoned, converted, banished and executed Anabaptists, which as I well know, has seemed very incredible and strange to you, and that you have been greatly grieved: *because they who formerly suffered persecution themselves here now persecute' others* for their religion; and force the conscience of others with fire and sword, whereas they formerly taught (which is the truth); that no man has a right to *rule over the conscience of another*; and that faith is a special gift of God and cannot be implanted in man by any physical force, but through the Word of God and the illumination of the Holy Ghost; also, that heresy is not a carnal, but a spiritual crime, which God alone must punish; that lies must be overcome not by force, but with the truth; *that the disposition of the children of God is, not to put others to death for their faith, but to be put to death themselves for the testimony of the truth*; finally, that the shedding of blood for the sake of religion is a sure sign of antichrist, who thereby sets himself in the place and judgment seat of God, and ascribes to himself dominion over the conscience (which belongs to God alone). I am well aware, I say, that this matter has greatly grieved you and every sympathizing heart; yet I hope that you will hereby not become offended or take occasion to doubt the true faith; but will think (as is also the truth) that it has not been sanctioned or approved of by some of the God-fearing and learned, of the English, as well as of the foreigners that are here.

Moreover, though this church should approve of it, you nevertheless well know that the truth does not depend on men, who are but frail, weak, sinful, and changeable, so that those who are good and godly today, may tomorrow fall into great sins, especially if their affairs prosper in this world; but that our comfort and hope, religion, faith and salvation consist in God, who is unchangeable, and whose truth ever remains uniform. By Him we have also been taught and warned beforehand, that we should not be offended at the scandals of this world, which are many and of various kinds, and are also often caused by those who shelter in the church of Christ. Even as Paul declares concerning what befell him, the persecution which he suffered from false brethren was not the least.

I would write you more about this matter, if time did permit me. Hence I will conclude here, and pray the Lord, that He will strengthen you and all the God-fearing and lovers of the truth, in virtue and godliness, to the salvation of the soul. Amen.

Your obedient son,  
JAQUES DE SOMERE.

Wherefore, let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator. I Peter 4:19.