

MARTYRS MIRROR

HANS SMIT, HENDRICK ADAMS, HANS BECK, MATTHIJS SMIT, DILEMAN SNIJDER, AND SEVEN OTHERS, A. D. 1558

In the year 1558, Brother Hans Smit, a minister of the Word of God, was sent forth by the church to seek and gather those that were eager for the truth. Acts 13:3. When he therefore, being divinely called, undertook to travel through the Netherlands, he, together with five brethren and six sisters, was apprehended in the city of Aix-la-Chapelle, on the ninth of January.

While they were assembled there in a house, to speak of the Word of God, and were engaged in prayer, many servants and children of Pilate came there in the night through treachery, with spears, halberds, and bare swords, and well provided with ropes and bonds, and surrounded the house, and bound and apprehended these children of God. They even took with them a mother with her infant that lay in the cradle. But the prisoners were valiant and comforted one another, to be undismayed, since they were imprisoned for the truth of God; and being thus of good cheer, they began to sing for joy. They were very soon separately confined, in which the sisters rejoiced, and sang, so that the people were astonished.

In the morning they were brought before the judge, who talked with each separately, and then remanded them to prison, when he perceived their steadfastness. However, the next day the minister was again summoned before the lords, that he should tell them, how many he had baptized, who they were and where the church held their meetings. But he told them, that they should know that he would rather lose his life (John 15: 13) than by telling this become a traitor, whereupon he was tortured and racked for about a quarter of an hour, to which he willingly submitted, himself taking off his clothes, and going to the rack. When they could accomplish nothing by it, they went away, but soon returned, and said, "You must tell us what we have asked you, or we shall torture you so as to rack your limbs asunder." They also questioned him with regard to infant baptism. He replied that infant baptism was a human institution, and that as such he regarded it, and not as the true Christian baptism.

They also asked him what he thought of the sacrament.(communion) He replied," I think much of it; but that which the priests use is not at all the true supper of Christ, but a piece of idolatry." Thereupon they bound him hand and foot, and tied to his feet a large stone weighing little less than a hundred pounds, and thus drew him up, so that the ring on the stone broke, and the stone remained on the ground. But they took a rope, fastened it to the stone, in place of the broken ring, and hung the stone to his foot, and left him suspended thus for some time; however, they could not accomplish their purpose. Hence they let him down, and put him in prison until Sunday morning, when the lords came from the city with seven priests, who asked him concerning his calling; whereupon he said that he had not put himself into the ministry, but God and His Spirit in His church; for as God sent His Son, and the Son the apostles into all the world, so He still sends His ministers through His Spirit, that they should first preach the Word of God, and then baptize such as hear, understand and believe it, but not young infants.

They also asked him concerning the magistracy, whether he regarded it as Christian or not. He replied that in the first place he regarded them as ministers of God, but that they were deceived and wrongly taught by the priests, and not incorporated into the Christian church. They also inquired of him the origin of the magistracy. He replied that office and power are of God. They then asked him, whether they were Christians. He answered that if they denied and forsook themselves, took up the cross, abandoned their tyranny and pomp, and followed Christ, they could be Christians, not otherwise. They also interrogated him with regard to swearing. He said that Christ had forbidden it. And much more, which it would take too long to write. Finally they asked him concerning the incarnation

of Christ. He said that he believed that Christ was true God and true man, sin alone excepted. At last they told him, that if he would renounce his baptism, and confess that he had erred, they would show him favour. But he replied that he had taught the pure truth, so he would adhere to it. Thereupon they said that he was in their city and that he could not do so there; and that if they did not punish this, the king or the new Emperor should punish them on their bodies; thus they defended themselves like Pilate. But the brother said that it would go hard with them for this; for though God forgave every sin, yet He should judge the innocent blood, and they should not think that they should escape punishment, if they killed him, since the matter should come before Christ, who should judge it, and take care of it, at His day.

After this they put him back into prison, where they left him until Monday evening, when the judge came again, with several others, and also a monk, to dispute with him. But they did not accomplish much, for he put the monk to utter confusion, so that the latter was glad to get away. Many other monks and priests were sent yet, to dispute with him; but they were all put to shame and derision, and were not able to cause this pious man to apostatize. Shortly after they were brought forth again and examined; but God continually gave them bold utterance, and wisdom, so that they could find no fault, or cause of death in him, save only that they did not sufficiently esteem the Emperor. At one time they brought to Brother Henderick alone a subtle serpent and blasphemer, and said, "You don't want any ecclesiastics (monks and priests); hence we have brought to you a learned layman, to instruct you." But Henderick said that he did not want to be instructed by him, unless he were sufficiently instructed by God and His Word, since he did not want to seek life from the dead. This learned man then wanted to prove infant baptism, asserting that the apostles had ordained it. But Henderick replied and spoke to him in such a manner that he had to confess openly, that no infants were baptized in the days of the apostles, and that they had no faith during their infancy. This, Henry wrote upon the table with a piece of chalk, and called upon the obstinate lords to bear witness to it, and also how he had been silenced. He further said, "Thus will all your learned men be confounded before the Word of the Lord." Several of the lords said that if these should be put to death, they should leave home.

Once the brethren and sisters were all twelve left together from four o'clock in the morning until ten in the evening. They were joyful and of good cheer, and conversed with one another from the Word of God, and began to pray and praise God. Brother Hans, as the minister, led them in prayer, as loud as he could, so that the people ran together and listened. But when the lords heard of this, they sent the bailiff thither, who asked them why they had made such a loud noise. They replied that they had been praying; however, they had concluded just before he came. Brother Matthias said, "We will call upon God whether anybody opposes or not." In the evening about ten o'clock they were separated again, and led away. On their way through the city, they joyfully sang, and made known their faith. Some of the councillors were bloodthirsty, and desired to put them to death; but others were opposed to it; for they felt persuaded, and confessed, that they were innocent. The executioner came at least five times, expecting to execute them, but his intention was frustrated each time. They intended to execute the minister and Brother Henderick (who had defended themselves and contradicted the most) first; if perhaps the others might be deterred thereby. When the minister heard that he was to die, he commenced to sing joyfully and thanked God for it, and earnestly besought Him to count him acceptable.

The 23d of August was the day fixed for the execution of the minister, Hans, and brother Henderick. They were brought before the court into the vault near the pillory. Much people flocked together, also some who were their friends, and had sent them food and drink. They went smilingly through the people to the place of execution, and seeing the great concourse of people coming from every direction, the minister said, "O what a beautiful feast day we shall have, since so much people are coming." They were very joyful, and hoped to get into paradise the same day, to their brethren and sisters that had preceded them, and to all the pious, of whom he had known very many. Revelation 6:11. There also came two monks, who sought to mislead them with false doctrine. For awhile the minister contradicted them, showing them how deceitfully they dealt; but finally he refused to speak with them

any longer, and said, "I will adhere to the truth, and the hour of my departure is at hand; I have something else to attend to now, than to talk with you."

When the time had come that sentence was to be passed upon them, the seven judges could not agree in the sentence, and sent word to them, that they would send them another learned man to instruct them, whom if they should hear, they would defer the matter for their best; otherwise they would have to put them to death, though they did not like to do it. But Hans and Henderick boldly said they would remain steadfast, and depart from the truth neither to the right nor to the left, and that on their account they need not spare them or delay any longer, but might pass sentence; but if they thereby sought more accusation against them, they acquiesced in what it pleased the Lord to do. The lords put their heads together, and dismissed the people assembled. When the two men perceived that sentence was not passed, they were sorry, since they had completely resigned themselves to death, and thought that they had contended long enough against the wiles of the serpent. Thus the multitude dispersed, each going to his own, like people that had lost a battle.

When evening came, they had to go back to prison, which caused them sorrow, since they had hoped now to seal the truth with their blood; but they had to wait for another time. Their being taken back to prison caused much thought among the people; some said that God opposed the matter, and had frustrated it. One of the councillors had firmly resolved that their execution should take place at the end of eight days, and not be deferred any longer; however, this also proved futile; for they remained in prison until in autumn, and had to suffer and be tempted much yet; after which they were condemned and executed. Hans Smit, as the minister, was first executed. When being led through the city, he sang joyfully; he did not speak much afterwards, but went briskly to the place of execution, as a patient, dumb lamb. There he was strangled at the stake with a rope, and then bound fast with a chain, and singed with fire. Thus he offered his sacrifice, on the 19th of October, A. D. 1558. Three days after, the others were brought forth, and sentenced to death, namely, Henderick Adams and his brother-in-law, Hans Beck. There was one among the councillors at Aix-la-Chapelle, who was always violently opposed to the brethren, and hence it happened on one occasion, when they were disputing with Henderick, and the latter would not be moved, that this councillor became angry, and said, "Away with them, away with them, to death and the fire; for all is lost on them; no pardon should be offered them any more," etc. But Brother Henderick said to him, "You will not live to see my death;" which was verified, for he died three days before Henderick, on the same day that the minister Hans Smit was executed. When on his deathbed, and near his end, he fell into great despair, plucked out his beard, and cried out most dreadfully, declaring that he had judged many persons, and had certainly sinned therein, and that God would punish him for his bloodthirstiness. He also said many other things of a similar character. Psalm 55:23.

Now when Brother Henderick Adams and the other brother were led to death, the executioner bound his hands so tightly that his fingers turned black; but he lifted up his hands to God, praising Him, that he was counted worthy to suffer this. In the meantime the bonds on his hands became loose. They were tied again, just as hard as before; but it was of no avail; for when he lifted up his hands again, the bonds fell off as before, which occurred several times, so that the judge became angry, and said to the executioner, that he should bind them fast; but the executioner replied, "You can easily see that binding is of no use here." The last time Henderick flung the bond away among the people, so that he was not bound any more, and said, "It is not God's will, that I should be bound." He also said that such violence was contrary to God, and continued to speak boldly unto the end. Thereupon these two brethren, Henderick Adams and his brother-in-law were (like previously the minister) strangled at the stake, with a rope, and then bound to the stake with a chain, and singed with fire; which took place on the 22nd day of the month of October, A. D. 1558. A great number of people were present on this occasion, as was also the case afterwards when the brethren Matthijs Smit and Dileman Snijder were executed, on the fourth of January, 1559. Thus all five valiantly and steadfastly testified with their blood to the divine truth, though some of them had not yet become united with the church.

The sixth brother that had been apprehended with the others, through much disputation with the ungodly, apostatized from his faith; but after he was released he sincerely bewailed his apostasy, earnestly and truly repented, and again joined the church. The six sisters that had been apprehended at the same time, were severely scourged with rods, and then allowed to go their way, and thus returned joyful in the Lord, and constant in faith, to their fellow believers that were known to them: