

AN ANABAPTIST MARTYR STORY

# The Cost of the Crown

THE NETHERLANDS . 1541-1544

Claudia Esh

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ISBN 10-digit: 1-933753-05-6

ISBN 13-digit: 9-781933-753058

Text and cover design: Teresa Hochstetler

Cover art: Lisa Strubhar

Printed by: Carlisle Printing



**Carlisle Press**

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Sugarcreek, OH 44681

# Dedication

Dedicated to all the heroes of the true Christian faith that kept the truth alive through the years, and to the Christian young people of today who have dedicated themselves to God and to the service of Christ our King.

*The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage. I will bless the LORD. Psalm 16:6–7*

# Our Heritage

Don't forget your heritage,  
Ye Christians of today,  
For many others fought and wept,  
While traveling this Way;  
They feared and loved, they lived and died,  
For the Almighty's love,  
They smoothed the paths we travel now,  
Leading us above.

In the Roman days of old,  
Apostles spread the news,  
Of endless love for everyone,  
Though they be Greek or Jews;  
They rallied 'round the cross of Christ,  
And did not shrink or fear,  
They lit the torch we carry now,  
Burning bright and clear.

Through 'Dark Ages' they marched on,  
A remnant small and weak,  
The 'Church' fought hard against the ones  
Who sat at Jesus' feet;  
They believed the love of Christ above,  
And trusted in His plan;  
The gates of hell did not prevail—  
God kept them in His hand.

When Reformation fires burned,  
And many saw the Light,  
When turmoil raged in Europe's plains,  
The wrong against the right,  
Then hundreds followed Christ their King,  
Through fire and the sword;  
They, even in the face of death,  
Would not deny the Lord.

The cross and banner of the Lamb  
Has triumphed through the years.  
The blessings we enjoy today  
Were sown in blood and tears.  
So don't forget your heritage,  
Oh followers of the Way—  
Many others died for treasures  
That are ours today.

*Claudia Esb, July 9, 2006*

# Introduction

Some of my earliest memories are sitting on the floor beside Daddy's chair as he read or told me stories of my Anabaptist forefathers. When I learned to read, one of the first books he showed me was the *Martyr's Mirror* and I started to read the stories for myself. I'm very thankful that my parents took the time to explain to me what our ancestors have suffered because of their unshakable faith in the Word of God.

Margriete and Grietje, their families, and most of the major characters are fictitious, but many of the related incidents are factual as taken from the *Martyr's Mirror* and other books. All of the Dutch Anabaptist martyrdoms that the girls witnessed or heard about did actually take place.

I pray that this story will help us remember that the treasures of our heritage were bought with the blood of martyrs, and inspire us to press on and keep the holy doctrines that they died for alive in us. May God help us to be a generation of young people that stand for truth in our day as firmly as our Anabaptist forefathers stood for truth in theirs.

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# Name and Place Pronunciation

Aeltgen—AYL-chun

Anneken—AHN-ney-kuhn

Claes—CLAYSS

Doei—DOOIH (Good-bye)

Dokkum—DOLH-cum

Doopsgezinde—DOHWPS-chay-sin-duh (Baptism-Minded)

Enkhiuzen—enk-HWEE-zun

Friesland—FREEZ-lund

Frueder—FROWD-dur

Goedemorgen—CHOO-duh-mow-juhn (Good morning)

Grietje—CHRAY-cha

Jan—YAHN

Levina—La-VEEN-ah

Maeyken—MAY-kun

Margriete—mahr-GRAYT

Soetgen—SOEHT-chuhn

Van Aernem—vahn AYHR-nuhm

Van Rijn—vahn RAYN

Zuiderzee—ZWEE-dur-see



## Chapter 1

# Questions and Conflicts

It was a quiet evening in the small town of Dokkum, Friesland. The sun was departing in all its majestic splendor, painting the sky with waves of soft pinks and brilliant yellows. A few seagulls circled lazily overhead, and small patches of gay wildflowers swayed slightly in response to the gentle breeze.

The silent beauty of the evening gave little evidence to the turmoil that was raging in the Netherlands. The year was 1541, and the Reformation was sweeping like a tidal wave over Europe. Educated men were challenging the Catholic Church, and Rome's hold on the continent was beginning to crumble.

Sparked in Germany, the Reformation fire rapidly spread into Switzerland, Austria, England, the Netherlands, Spain, and France. The diverse churches—Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, Anglican, Anabaptist—vied for the minds and hearts of the common people. Separate state churches held sway over the districts of Europe, forcing the people under their control to comply with their demands.

And then—suddenly—handfuls of men and women began to rise up to challenge the newly established Reformed and the ancient Roman Catholic churches and traditions. Daringly defying law and custom, the Anabaptists brought Europe down upon them in rage.

A young girl, seventeen years old, rounded the corner of a well-kept cottage with a pail of fresh milk in her hand. She stopped, awed by the streaks of color illuminating the western sky. Her golden hair was tucked neatly under a white cap, and her clear blue eyes looked deep in thought.

She gazed into the beauty of the heavens, her thoughts straying into a long-forbidden zone: the Anabaptists. How well she remembered the many conversations about these strange people! Opinions varied wildly in Dokkum; some were hateful, some mocking, but most were sympathetic. And just when she tried her best to forget it all, something or someone would bring it back like a flood. So it was today.

It was an innocent walk, something to fill the rare spare moments of her day, until she passed two women whispering on the street. The girl did not linger, but she was walking slowly. She caught a soft word, “Anabaptists,” then the guarded whisper, “Do you suppose they could be right after all?”

The whispered inquiry perfectly summed up her guilty questions. And now as she watched the sun slide toward the

horizon, the question haunted her. *Do you suppose?... Do you suppose... they could be right after all?*

Just then, a soft childish voice drifted out into the twilight. “Margriete.”

The girl turned. “Yes, Janneken?”

The child looked out of the doorway. “Margriete, where are you? We’re ready to eat supper.”

Pushing serious thoughts resolutely aside, Margriete walked into the house. The room was simply furnished, with a large fireplace to the left of the door. In front of the fire stood a long, narrow table, neatly set. The children drifted to their respective places and bowed their heads for grace.

Around the supper table, the family talked and laughed over the events of the day. “It is being whispered over the town,” Margriete’s father lowered his voice, “that Menno Simons is coming to our area. He won’t stay long—for safety’s sake—probably only for a few days. He’ll hold a meeting or two, maybe baptize a few people, and flee before the magistrates ever hear of it.”

Margriete gathered up courage. “Father, what do you think of the Anabaptists?”

Her father raised his eyebrows slightly. “Well, Daughter, we’ve had so many groups of people that try to break away from the Church. Most of them die away or are put down by the authorities. Are the Anabaptists any different from the rest? I don’t believe that Menno’s right. How could he be? I don’t understand everything, but—”

Margriete’s mother cleared her throat and glanced meaningfully at the wondering eyes of the younger children. Immediately the serious conversation ended and the chatter of the children took its place, but a tense undercurrent remained.

Margriete sat staring thoughtfully at her plate, mulling over Father's words. Suddenly she shook herself. *Father said the Anabaptists are not right*, she told herself forcefully. *Just trust him. Forget about the whole thing.* She managed to keep her mind on happier subjects for the rest of the evening, talking about anything other than the conflicting religions sweeping the continent.

But as soon as she nestled between her down comforter, the troublesome thoughts came flooding back. She recalled everything she had heard about the Anabaptists. *They seem to be at peace*, she thought, *but don't they have heretical beliefs? They don't baptize babies, or pray to the saints...and what would happen to Friesland if everyone refused to fight?... But could it be that they are right and we are wrong? How can I know?*

"Oh, God," she whispered softly from the depths of her heart, "show me what is right."

It was Margriete's first real, heartfelt prayer.