

AN ACCOUNT

OF THE

SEVERE PERSECUTIONS OF MENNO SIMON, AND A DESCRIPTION OF THE PLACE WHERE HE LAST PREACHED THE GOSPEL, DIED AND WAS BURIED.

"All that will live godly in Christ Jesus," says Paul, "shall suffer persecution." 2 Tim. 3:12. These words, although often confirmed, through the inconsiderate wickedness of this world, we find particularly confirmed in the example of our author Menno Simon. For, after he had been persecuted in many ways and sought for by his opponents, they, in order that their design might be accomplished with certainty, issued a decree in which it was stated that whosoever should shelter, or in any manner conceal Menno Simon or any of his followers, should suffer death; which decree was enforced in the year A. D. 1539 in the case of Tjaert Reyndertz,* a peasant living near Harlingen (prov. Friesland, Neth.), who, because he secretly harbored Menno Simon in his house, in his great danger and distress, was a few days after, taken to Leenwarden (in the same province), and as an ungodly criminal put on the wheel, though even his enemies acknowledged that he was a pious man.

Besides this, another decree was issued in the year A. D. 1543, throughout West Friesland, by which a general pardon, the favor of the Emperor, freedom of the country, and besides, one hundred Carl guilders** was promised to any criminal, even murderer, who would deliver Menno into the hands of the executioner; and, in order that their purpose might be more readily accom-

plished, his name, person, clothing and stature were described, and this description posted upon the church-doors; so that he could not even find a hut of straw where he could quietly rest with his wife and little children, for any length of time. Menno himself relates that in 1546, at a certain place, where they yet boasted of being evangelical christians, four dwellings were, at once, confiscated, because the owner had rented one of them for a short time to his sick wife and little children, though the neighbors were not aware of it. This severe persecution compelled Menno to remove to a place situated between Hamburg and Lubeck, six and a half or seven miles from Hamburg, three miles from Lubeck, and nearly a mile from Oldeslo, which formerly was a large forest of oaks, but which is now an open field, generally called Woeste Veldt, belonging to the nobleman and estate of Van Vriesenburg; which nobleman was at that time a very cruel person, on which account he was generally shunned and feared. But having spent much of his youth in the Netherlands, and having often witnessed the death of martyrs, he was very compassionate towards them, being conversant with their doctrines. He clandestinely gave them liberty to dwell there, and assiduously and faithfully assisted them; although he was requested by the king's order not to permit them to live there; therefore he announced to them, through one of his servants, that they should leave

* See Martyr's Mirror, English edition, published by D. Miller, Lampeter Square, Pa., 1837. Page 382.

** Forty Dollars.

before sun-down, at the risk of punishment, yet, he sent a faithful servant after the first, to tell them the cause of this announcement, and to inform them that the men should either absent or conceal themselves for a week or two. In the mean while he succeeded in quieting this excitement, through one of the courtiers. After this the exiles came hither from every side, until there was quite a little community there, who lived in comparative quiet. Each family had to pay one dollar a year for this protection, and were taxed no further. This may well be considered a special dispensation of God's providence, that the exiles were fostered and protected by a very cruel person, who was feared by all around him. For which reason Menno considered it expedient, as it was said, to remove to that place.

Menno Simon died about thirty years after he left the church of Rome. During this time he taught and proclaimed the gospel, purified of Roman idolatry and superstition. His last exhortation was given on his death-bed, while the hand of death seemed already to rest upon him, showing his unquenchable zeal. He, however, partially recovered and was better for several days, but on the day of the anniversary of his remun-

ciation of popery, he suddenly became worse, though well taken care of, and the next day, being Friday the 13th of January, 1561, he calmly fell asleep in Jesus, in the sixty sixth year of his age, and was buried in his own garden, which according to Hoornebeck, was also customary with the primitive Christians under the persecutions of the pagans.

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NOTE 1.—Although the "Martyrs' Mirror," page 59, and T. J. van Braght in his "Bloody Theatre" and others, write that Menno Simon died on the 13th of January 1559, yet we are led to think that he died in 1561, for the following reasons:

The old biography of Menno Simon mentions 1561 as the year of his death, which statement we deem correct; also on the 23rd of January 1559, he wrote a tract (see his Reply to Zylis and Lemmekes in this book), and sent it to the German teachers, Zylis and Lemmekes. Now, if he died on the 13th of January 1559, he must have written this ten days after his death.

NOTE 2.—The reader should know that although some old biographies mention 1505 as the year of his birth, yet we will take 1496; for, the "Martyrs' Mirror," "The Bloody Theatre," "The Decline of Tyrants" and "Annals," all mention that he died in his sixty sixth year. If Menno, then, died in 1561, he necessarily was born in 1496, or else he died in the fifty sixth year of his age.

