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WILLIAM THE SILENT.

BY THE REV. JAMES I. VANCE, D. D., LL. D.,
*Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church,
Nashville, Tennessee.*

"The greatest man in all human history was William the Silent." This was the rather startling statement made by a young lawyer, the president of our board of deacons, during an informal conference of the church officers, when the conversation turned on present day conditions in America and Europe and on national leaders. He was of Scotch extraction, one of seven sons, whose father and grandfather had been ruling elders in the First Presbyterian Church of Nashville and all of whom have been staunch and loyal supporters of the faith.

I.

His remark about William the Silent led me to a fresh study of his hero, and I found the facts were with him. I found Dr. Joseph Rankin Duryee, for half a century the devoted pastor of a Dutch Reformed Church in New York City and one of the saintliest men I have ever known, saying: "From early boyhood I have held Washington and William the Silent as the noblest examples of manhood who have blessed the world since apostolic times."

I found Edmondo de Amicis in *Holland and Its People* saying: "This man without a kingdom and without an army is more powerful than Philip. . . . Like Philip, he is astute and impenetrable, but he sees more clearly with the eyes of his intellect into the future. He possesses, as does his enemy, the faculty of reading the souls of men; but he has also what his enemy has not,—the power of gaining their hearts. He has

a good cause to sustain; but he knows how to make use of all the arts by which bad ones are supported. . . . William in Holland reads the thoughts of Philip in the Escorial, foresees, unravels, overturns all his plots, mines the earth under his feet, provokes and flies before him, but returns again perpetually, like a phantom that he sees but cannot clutch, or clutching, cannot destroy. And when at last he does, victory remains with the dead and defeat with his living enemy. Holland is without her head, but the Spanish monarchy is shaken to its fall, and never will recover."

I found Ruth Putman reminding us: "The common people greeted him with cries of 'Father William has come!'"

I found the consistory of the renowned Collegiate Church in New York City, the most illustrious daughter of the mother church of the Netherlands, in their greeting to her gracious Majesty the Queen of Holland, commemorating the four hundredth anniversary of the birth of William the First, Prince of Orange, and recalling "with deep gratitude his unremitting labors for church and state amongst his beloved Batavian people, by which the precious heirlooms of civil and religious liberty have become shining exemplars of the whole world;" cherishing his memory as "the founder of religious toleration, which largely through the influence of the Dutch Republic has developed into religious liberty, the peculiar glory of our United States;" and paying tribute to "his magnanimity in adversity and to his fertility of resources, of his endurance through a long series of calamities with imperturbable cheerfulness and patience, and to his humble and complete submission to the will of his Heavenly Father."

I read with a hot heart and quickened pulse the eloquent sermon delivered at the stately quadrennial service by Dr. Parkes Cadman in which he said of William: "He needs no tomb nor epitaph to guard his name, for none braver and wiser glows in the golden roll of modern history. And perhaps the best witness to this unforgettable Prince is that when he died the little children wept for him in the streets of Holland's towns and cities."

Then to crown and complete my study of this tallest-

statured man in the annals of mankind, I read the four volumes of Motley's *History of the Rise of the Dutch Republic*, which on almost every page is a glowing tribute to the glory of William the Silent, who failed in all his campaigns, who died by the hand of an assassin whose physical needs he had just relieved from his well-nigh empty purse and whose last words were: "My God, have pity on my soul! My God, have pity on these poor people!"

Yes, my young deacon was not exaggerating when he said: "The greatest man in all human history was William the Silent."

It is the story of this man's service to Protestantism and to the cause of human liberty that is to ring from Southern Presbyterian pulpits on Reformation Sunday, the last Sunday in October, 1934. It is enough to start a revival. It should call the nation back to the altars on which men died for freedom. It is enough to give us a new day in a changing world. If the people and their leaders can catch the spirit of William the Silent and the patriots who created the Dutch Republic, the glory of our country will come back to us and fears for the future of America will be no more. In this calling our people to a remembrance of this great saint and statesman, Southern Presbyterians are following close upon the steps of the Reformed Church in America, which on April 24, 1933, in the cathedral Church of St. Nicholas in New York City commemorated the four hundredth anniversary of the birth of William the Silent, Count of Nassau and Prince of Orange.

These two churches, the Dutch Reformed and the Southern Presbyterian as they are affectionately called, have much in common, and entertain for each other an affectionate regard which but for the barriers of space might long since have found in closer bonds an expression of the fellowship they cherish. Our mutual admiration and esteem will find in the memory of William the Silent a shrine at which we can kneel together and worship the God who has made us free.

II.

William, Prince of Orange and Count of Nassau, was born in Dillenburg on the Lahn in Nassau on April 25, 1533. His father was William, Count of Nassau, and his mother, Julianna of Stolberg, a devoted Lutheran of pure German blood. To them were born five sons and seven daughters. Of these William was the eldest. He received from the pious example and devout teaching of his mother many of the noble virtues which bore such splendid fruitage in his life. On the death of an uncle, he inherited by will the fiefs of Nassau and Orange, and by the order of the Emperor went to Brussels to be educated as a Catholic and courtier. He won the esteem of Charles the Fifth and was prominent in the councils of state. When he was eighteen years old, he married Anne of Egmont, the only daughter of the wealthy Count of Buren. A few weeks after the accession of Philip the Second, William, who had been made a councilor of state, was made a knight of the Order of the Fleece. All that was needed for him to secure a brilliant and powerful position in the empire was to approve the policies of the infamous Philip the Second for the church and state.

In 1559 while a hostage at the court of Henry the Second of France as a guarantee of the execution of the Treaty of Cateau-Cambresis, while hunting with the King of France in the Bois de Vincennes, Henry, supposing William already in favor of the diabolical scheme, unfolded to him the details of the plan by which he and Philip the Second were to send the Duke of Alva with a powerful army to the Netherlands and exterminate the Protestants. William retained his composure and acted as if he were already in full possession of the plot. . . . It was this strategic silence that led to the name "Le Taciturne." As his whole career shows, he was not a silent man, for when the time came to speak, no one had bolder or wiser words than he.

Speaking of the hour when he learned of the plan to massacre the Protestants, William, although then a Catholic himself, says: "I confess that from that hour I resolved with my whole

soul to do my best to drive this Spanish vermin from the land, and of this resolve I have never repented."

In 1567, William withdrew to his estates and soon associated himself with three hundred other nobles to resist the bloody and brutal efforts of the Spanish king to destroy all who held to the Protestant faith. The same month the Duke of Alva, one of the greatest military commanders in Europe and one of the most cruel, left Spain with an army of ten thousand men on his punitive expedition for the Pope and the Emperor.

The iniquitous Inquisition was unleashed on the land and a reign of terror as ruthless as ever broke on the innocent heads of a devoted people swept over the cities of Holland. In 1568, by royal rescript, William was formally declared a traitor. The Crown offered a reward of thirty thousand dollars to anyone who would kill him. William's answer was a summons to the people to resist. It was circulated in German, Latin, Dutch, English, Spanish and French. Three expeditions were organized in the Low Country, but these forces were annihilated by Alva, and the destruction of the people was accompanied by atrocities which beggar description.

William poured out his private fortune without stint and placed his life in jeopardy every hour. "The tyrant," he said, "would rather stain every river and brook with our blood, and hang our bodies upon every tree in the country, than not to feed to the full his vengeance and steep himself to the lips in our misery. Therefore we have taken up arms against the Duke of Alva and his adherents to free ourselves, our wives and our children from his bloodthirsty hands. If he prove too strong for us, we will rather die an honorable death and leave a praiseworthy fame than bend our necks and reduce our dear fatherland to such slavery. Herein are all our cities pledged to each other to stand every siege, to dare the utmost, to endure every possible misery, yea, rather to set fire to all our homes and be consumed with them into ashes together, than ever submit to the decrees of this cruel tyrant."

These brave words were as courageously fulfilled, and the mainspring of the confidence which sustained William and his devoted followers in the unequal conflict was their trust in God.

He was the champion of their political rights, but he was first and foremost the defender of their religion. Liberty of conscience was his big objective. He fought not only for the Dutch Republic, of which he was to become the founder, but for all the peoples of the world, the battle for civil and religious liberty, and the price those stout burghers paid that men might be free must never be forgotten.

Soon William became a member of the Calvinist or Reformed Church, but be it said to his lasting fame that his spirit of tolerance recognized no narrow bounds and his championship of civil and religious liberty was as pronounced for foe as for friend, for Catholic as for Protestant. The sufferings endured by the people in their resistance of the Spanish invaders beggars description. Motley has set them down in his history of the Rise of the Dutch Republic in lines that flame. When we grow lukewarm in the cause of freedom, and time-serving politicians play fast and loose with the constitutional safeguards of our Government, and when the church and the faith that makes men free and the Word of God are lightly esteemed, it is well to go back and read again the story of "the tens of thousands in those miserable provinces who fell victims to the gallows, the sword, the stake, the living grave, or to living banishment. . . . No mode in which human beings have ever caused their fellow-creatures to suffer was omitted from daily practice. Men, women and children, old and young, nobles and paupers, opulent burghers, hospital patients, lunatics, dead bodies, all were indiscriminately made to furnish food for the scaffold and the stake. Men were tortured, beheaded, hanged by the neck and by the legs, burned before slow fires, pinched to death with red hot tongs, broken upon the wheel, starved and flayed alive. Their skins stripped from the living body were stretched upon drums, to be beaten in the march of their brethren to the gallows. The bodies of many who had died a natural death were exhumed and their festering remains hanged upon the gibbet, on pretext that they had died without receiving the sacrament but in reality that their property might become the legitimate prey of the treasury. Marriages of long standing were dissolved by order of government, that rich

heiresses might be married against their will to foreigners whom they abhorred. . . . Unborn infants were torn from the living bodies of their mothers, women and children were violated by thousands, and whole populations burned and hacked to pieces by soldiers in every mode which cruelty in its wanton ingenuity could devise."

All this and more than all this was endured not for a day but for months and weary years by the people of the Netherlands in their struggle for freedom, and the great soul who led them in their heroic sufferings, whose dauntless spirit inspired them with the desperate courage of long-drawn-out resistance, and who in his own person led the line of those who suffered the loss of all things, was William himself. But his trust in God never wavered, and no disaster could tempt him to surrender his principles. His faith in God was like a pillar of fire in the sky of night to his oppressed and down-trodden people.

There is not space to rehearse the full story. A single incident must suffice to suggest the kind of conflict that was waged, and the price the Protestants of the Dutch cities paid rather than surrender their freedom and their faith. In the long-drawn-out siege of the city of Leyden the inhabitants were brought so close to starvation that the only food left consisted of rats and dogs. The enemy derided them as "rat and dog eaters." The burgomaster shouted his defiance in words which should live forever and inspire courage in the hearts of those who suffer for fidelity to a great cause. "Ye call us rat eaters and dog eaters," he cried. "So long, then, as ye hear dogs bark or cats mew within the walls, ye may know that the city holds out. And when all has perished but ourselves, be sure that we will each devour our left arms, retaining our right to defend our women, our liberty and our religion against the foreign tyrant. Should God in His wrath doom us to destruction and deny us all relief, even then will we maintain ourselves forever against your entrance. When the last hour has come, with our hands we will set fire to the city and perish, men women and children together, rather than suffer our homes to be polluted and our liberties to be crushed."

These are words to release a new era on the world, and

they did, but victory was still far off. In a last desperate effort, the dykes were cut and the sea allowed to roll in upon their farms and destroy their crops. "Better drown the land than lose it," they said, but even this did not suffice.

During all this trying time, William himself, desperately ill of a dangerous fever, was lying at a fortified point between Delft and Rotterdam. A little group of the faint-hearted, discouraged beyond further resistance, counseled surrender, but their indomitable leader replied: "I can die but once, whether by your hands, the enemy's, or by the hand of God. My own fate is indifferent to me; not so that of the city entrusted to my care. I know that we shall starve if not soon relieved. . . . My life is at your disposal. Here is my sword. Plunge it into my breast and divide my flesh among you. Take my body to appease your hunger. But expect no surrender so long as I remain alive."

This was the spirit with which William fired the souls of his followers, and this was the spirit which created the Dutch Republic and which has made democracy possible in the world. But their great leader was not to live to see the fruition of his hopes. Again and again was the cup of victory dashed when almost to his lip. Once when the King of France pledged an army to aid in the struggle against Spain, the massacre of the Huguenots on St. Bartholomew's Eve turned hope to despair.

During all this period William was tirelessly at work seeking aid from every quarter for his sorely beleaguered country. He sent appeals to England as well as to France, to the Protestant princes of Germany. Indeed, he was willing to remain in the kingdom of Spain, but only provided religious liberty was guaranteed. At forty-eight, the burdens he had carried had made him an old man, but his spirit was unbroken and his trust in God never wavered. There was nothing of bitterness or harshness in his nature. All who met him loved him. It was said that "every time he put off his hat he won a subject from the King of Spain."

On December 18, 1573, Alva left the provinces forever. He left heavily in debt and universally detested. He boasted of having caused the death of 18,600 inhabitants of the prov-

inces whom he had caused to be executed during his administration. How many had perished by "battle, siege, starvation and massacre defied computation." He died of a lingering fever, at the close of which his vitality was so reduced that he could only be kept alive by the milk from a woman's breast. Such was the inglorious end of the butcher of the Netherlands.

He was succeeded by Requesens, the general commander whose administration soon began to vie with the brutalities of Alva, and later John of Austria followed Requesens in vain efforts to subdue the indomitable spirit of the Dutch and defeat the leadership of the Prince.

William was often defeated, but never conquered. Finally, on July 10, 1584, he was assassinated. Philip had put a price on his head, and Balthazar Gerard, a young Burgandian, posing as a refugee Protestant and protected under William's roof at Delft, stepped from concealment in a circular staircase and fired three shots from a pistol into the Prince's heart. He died with God's name on his lips. He did not live to see the consummation of his hopes, but it was on his work the Dutch Republic later was founded. As Barnouw says in his life of the great statesman: "William the Silent . . . vindicated not for his people alone but for all nations in the western world the right to live their own lives free from dictation by political tyranny and religious intolerance."

III.

1—*It is to keep this spirit alive in Europe* and in the world that the cause of Protestant Relief in Europe labors and pleads. The spirit of "the greatest man in all human history" still speaks against despotism and religious intolerance, and woe to the nations of Europe and to us of the western world if we should ever lightly esteem the principles for which the people of the Netherlands suffered and contended. There are two million of their descendants among the citizens of the United States of America, and none rank higher in intelligence, character, industry and religious convictions. They are an invaluable constituency in the maintenance of free and representative gov-

ernment and can be counted on to stand loyally for their ancestral inheritance in church and state.

2—*It is interesting to notice the close kinship between Holland and Scotland* in the struggle for freedom of conscience and religious liberty. Both are small countries with a world reach. The people of both countries have built their citizenship on their trust in God, and many of them have suffered martyrdom for their religious convictions. To each must be accredited a noble place in winning not only for their own nations but for mankind the boon of freedom. The human race would lose some of its richest strains if there were drained from its veins the blood of the Scotch and the blood of the Dutch.

There is much that is strikingly similar in the personal characteristics of the people of the two countries. Many of the words in their languages seem to have a common origin. When Scotland's people were bitterly persecuted for their faith, many of them found refuge across the channel in the homes and churches of Holland. From both of these little lands have come to our America that passion for freedom and that spirit of religious tolerance which are among our dearest possessions.

3—*It is easy to forget the price that has been paid for human freedom.* The world to-day seems to be drifting toward dictator governments. The spirit of liberty is in jeopardy. It is a long call from such men as Stalin and Mussolini and Hitler to William the Silent. People are willing to sacrifice much to climb out of depression. Regimentation and collectivism are the new gods to whom prosperity is being asked to say its prayers. Constitutional government is in the discard. It is not a bad time to let the sane and stately figure of William the Silent cast its shadow on our public leaders. Let the people of the western world recall the siege of Leyden and recall the long years of struggle against the Spanish tyranny, and resolve that those who laid down their lives in that great contention shall not have died in vain. **LEST WE FORGET!**

4—*There were three cardinal principles* for which William uncompromisingly contended in all the terms laid down for peace with Spain.

(1) "The withdrawal from the country of all Spaniards and foreigners in civil or military employment."

(2) "The free exercise of the Word of God according to the Gospel."

(3) "The restoration of the ancient rights, privileges and liberties of the land."

The religious issue was at the heart of all these. It was the abuses of the Inquisition against which the Prince thundered. He would have none of it. And at last Spain itself has opened its eyes and is speaking with William's voice.

5—*William the Silent built his life around three mottoes.*

(1) The first was: "I will maintain." This legend was on his shield. His admirers have interpreted it to mean: "I will stand my ground." "I will fight to the last ditch for my cause." "I will be true to my trust and to the people into whose affairs I have come as a leader." This is the unconquerable spirit of the Calvinistic faith. William was not a proselyte to Calvinism. He was born that way. He incarnated the final perseverance of the saints because he believed in the final preservation of God's grace.

(2) His second motto was: "The distinction is too small for us on that account to remain divided." Here was the explanation of his tolerance. William was not a politician, he was a statesman. It would be well for the Protestantism of our day to lay to heart this second motto of the Prince. It will be a great day when the eleven branches of the Presbyterian church in America shall say to each other: "The distinction is too small for us on that account to remain divided."

(3) The third of William's mottoes was: "It is not necessary to hope in order to undertake nor to succeed in order to persevere." It is here that William reaches his sublimest height and leaves all common men behind him. This is the spirit of the leader the world still waits to follow. God send us a man who does not worship success! Who is not afraid to fail! Who dares to attempt the impossible!

6—*William the Silent calls us back to the strategy of individualism.* "God cannot make best man's best without best men to help Him." It is not the mob but the man that counts.

Even in a communistic state like Russia, it is not the crowd, it is the leader. Even in a fascist state like Italy, it is the dictator. But the trouble with such dictator individualism is that it reduces little lives to mere pawns on the chessboard of nationalism. William's individualism was not the kind that takes from little men their chance. It gave them their chance. It dowered the common life with the dignity of the noble and the earl. This is where modern nationalism dismally fails.

Emil Ludwig in the foreword of his recent book, *"Nine Etched From Life,"* says: "Where the state is endowed with the divine attributes of omnipotence and omniscience, there is no other aim in life for the individual except to serve blindly. The service of this idol which is expressed to-day in racial and national rivalries . . . shows the lack of a creative vision and a degeneration of religion, which in its pristine stage lays emphasis on the individual soul. . . . Fate is preparing the final doom of nationalism. When the great struggle for the mastery of the races and the nations is finished, nobody will ask whose flag is that which flies from the towers of the conquered city. . . . But the ideal of a world citizenship will tower above the waters of this final deluge and toward it our impoverished successors will reach out for succor in their common distress."

It was such a citizenship that throbbed in the pulses of William the Silent, and it was such a government for which he contended four long centuries ago.