

William the Silent

(1533 - 1584)



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Retold by Christina Eastwood

William the Silent

William was the eldest son of Count Nassau in Germany and he was born in April, 1533. His parents were Christians and taught him the teachings of Martin Luther, who taught that the Catholics were wrong to teach that people needed to give the priests money to get into heaven.

When he grew up, his cousin said that he could become the Prince of Orange, if he became a Catholic. So he did. But he could never forget what his parents had taught him. As the Prince of Orange he owned a lot of land in the Netherlands which was ruled by Charles V. Charles V was a Catholic and did not want anyone in the lands he ruled to be taught about Luther. He wanted them all to be Catholics like himself.

Charles took a liking to William and shared his secret plans with him. He taught William to speak in different languages and gave him a good education.

Suddenly, Charles decided to stop being king and his son Philip II became king instead. Philip also hated the teachings of Luther, and worse still, he did not trust William. William saw that Philip II was a cruel king.

In 1559, William was sent to France and he was out hunting one day with the King of Paris, Henry II. Henry began talking to William about a plot that he and Philip II had to kill all of the Christians who followed Luther's teaching. Henry thought that William knew all about the plot and William decided not to tell him that he didn't. This is why he got the name 'William the silent'.

Henry went on talking and William learnt all about the plot. William decided that he

would stop these wicked kings' plans. He loved the people of the Netherlands.

As soon as he could, William told the leaders of the lands ruled by Philip II about the plot. Philip never found out who had spoiled his plans.

Although William had become a Catholic, he didn't think it was fair to cruelly treat people if they didn't want to be Catholics. He wanted to help the Dutch to fight this evil plot. He tried his best to stop the plan from taking place, but he could not. So he went back to his home town to think. While he was there, he decided that he would be on God's side and fight for the Christians who were being persecuted.

It was a long battle and to begin with it looked like he was losing. But then, the Sea Beggars, a group of Dutch sailors who spent their time raiding Spanish treasure ships, helped him. They knew all about the

canals, marshes and dykes and were very brave. They helped the Dutch to become rulers of the sea.

Very slowly, the Spanish were overcome and the fighting stopped. William was never cruel to those he was against. He wanted freedom for everyone to believe what they thought was right, without being cruel to those who thought differently. He allowed them to continue being Catholics while the Christians were allowed to follow Luther's teachings.

You can imagine that Philip II was not pleased. He said not very nice things about William and offered a reward to anyone who could kill him. Eventually a wicked man thought of a plan and managed to kill him. As William died, he was heard praying:

'My God, have mercy on my soul and on my poor people.'