

THE CATHOLIC.

QUOD SEMPER, QUOD UBIQUE, QUOD AB OMNIBUS CREDITUM EST.—WHAT ALWAYS, AND EVERY WHERE, AND BY ALL IS BELIEVED.

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OFFICE—CORNER OF KING & HUGHSON STREETS.

J. Robertson, Printer and Publisher.

VOLUME IV.

HAMILTON, [GORE DISTRICT] NOVEMBER 1, 1843.

NUMBER 7.

From the U. S. Catholic Magazine,

ROBERT SOUTHWELL, S. J. (1595.)

REV. JOE. WALTER, AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE AND TIMES OF SIR THOS. MORE," ETC

"And smit with feelings of the olden days,
Revive the music of neglected lays."

Daniel, (1595.)

[CONTINUED.]

The grand jury having found a true bill, Father Southwell was ordered to come up to the bar. He readily obeyed, and advancing with a calm and meek air, made a low reverence to the judges. His arms being then unpinioned, he modestly held up his hand according to usage, and on being asked whether he was "guilty or not guilty?" he answered; "I confess that I was born in England a subject of the queen's majesty; and that, by authority derived from God, I have been promoted to the sacred order of priesthood, in the Catholic Church, for which I return most humble and hearty thanks to the Divine Majesty. I also confess that I was at Uxendon, at the time stated, when by trick and stratagem I fell into your hands, as is well known; but that I never entertained any designs or plots against the queen or kingdom, I call God to witness, who is the avenger of perjury; neither had I any other design in returning home to my native country, than to administer the sacraments, according to the rites of the Catholic Church, to such as desired them." Here the judge interrupted him, telling him that he was to leave all that alone, and plead directly guilty or not guilty. Upon which he said, that he was not guilty of any treason whatever. Being then asked, "by whom he would be tried?" he said, "by God and by you." The judge told him he was to answer, "by God and his country." This he at first refused, alleging that the laws of his country were not agreeable to the laws of God; and he was unwilling those poor harmless men of the jury, whom they obliged to represent their country, should have any share in their guilt, or any hand in his death. "But," he added, "if through your fault it must be so, I cannot help it. Be it as you will; I am ready to be judged by God, and my country." When the twelve jurors were sworn, he challenged none of them, observing, that as they were equally strangers to him, charity did not allow him to except against any one of them more than another. Coke, the solicitor, then began to prove the heads of the indictments,—that Mr. Southwell was an Englishman, and a priest, by his own confession; and that his being so young was a demonstration that he had been made a priest since the time mentioned in the statute." Here the judge interrupting the speaker, and demanding of Southwell somewhat abruptly, what was his age? "The same," replied the father as abruptly, "as that of our Saviour when He was brought before Pilate." This expression, hastily thrown out, shocked the pious ears of Topcliffe, who was sitting among the lawyers, and he exclaimed with holy horror, that this impious priest was guilty of unpardonable presumption in comparing himself with our Saviour. Southwell meekly replied; "You misunderstand me, sir; so far from comparing myself to our blessed Lord and Master, I confess myself to be the creature of his infinite bounty, and the meanest worm of the earth in his sight."

When Ann Bellamy was brought to give her evidence, Southwell's firmness seemed for a moment to desert him.

To behold the apostate daughter of his worthy friend and protector, leagued with the enemies as well of her spiritual father, as of him who was her parent in the flesh, was a sight too painful for the sensibilities of his nature. For a moment he covered his face with his hand, while tears were seen to steal down his cheek.

When the evidence had closed, Coke rose and addressed the prisoner in a long and rambling discourse, in which passion claimed a far greater share than either reason or charity. When he had declaimed as long as he thought fit against the servant of Christ, and the other lawyers with the lord chief justice at their head, had loaded him with reproaches, jeering him upon his sacred profession, to which he offered no other answer than meekness and that silence which is sometimes more eloquent than speech, the jury retired to consult about their verdict. They were not long in deliberating, and their verdict was "guilty." He was asked if he had aught to say why sentence should not be pronounced against him. His answer was—"nothing—but from my heart I beg of Almighty God to forgive all who have been any ways accessory to my death." The lord chief justice exhorted him to prepare for the welfare of his soul, during the short time that was left him. He thanked him for his counsel, saying, "that by the grace of God, he had long since provided for that, and was conscious to himself of his innocence. The judge then rose, and pronounced sentence in the usual form. At the conclusion, Southwell made him a lowly reverence, returning him thanks, as for the most acceptable favor he could have done him. The judge offered him the aid of a minister to prepare him for death. Father Southwell begged him not to trouble himself on that head, as the grace of God would be more than sufficient for him. He was then remanded to Newgate; his arms were again pinioned, and he was led out of the court. A multitude of people thronged the streets of Wosminster, curious to behold a man known as well for his distinguished talents, of which he had given proof in several publications, as from the circumstance of his being a member of an ancient and distinguished family, his father and sister* being known to fill situations in the queen's household; and doubtless it was matter of surprise to many, that, considering the relations in which Father Southwell stood to these influential personages, efforts had not been made to prevent the scene which had just been witnessed. Aware of the interest thus excited among the populace, and fearful of the sympathy always felt for virtue and talent in distress, it was determined to convey the prisoner by water to Blackfriars. To use the words of Father Bartoli, "scarcely was Southwell well lodged a second time in Limbo, when some half-dozen preachers came to prove to him that hell would be his next remove, if he did not quit his damnable errors of his Romish superstition." But they went away with less humor than they came, for the keeper of the prison, touched as he had already been by the piety and gentle manners of his prisoner, was

* The Lady Mary Southwell was one of the maids of honor to Queen Elizabeth. In the Stoneyhurst MSS. is a curious paper entitled, "A true relation of what succeeded in the sickness and death of Queen Elizabeth," and which is thus endorsed in the writing of Father Persons;—"The relation of the Lady Southwell, of the late queen's death, 20 April, 1607. It is printed in the Rev. M. A. Tierney's new and valuable edition of Dodd's Church History of England, vol. iii. p. 70.

now entirely won over to the faith by the triumphant manner in which he heard the good father refute the arguments of the said preachers, and put them, if not to silence, at least to confusion;

For e'en though vanquish'd they could not argue still.

On the morning of the 21st of February, 1595, the keeper of the prison came to his cell to announce that the day had arrived in which he was to suffer for the priesthood. He embraced him in a transport of joy, grateful for the happy tidings he had brought him.—The keeper asked for some token of remembrance.—"Here," said Southwell, with a placid smile, "it is a sorry gift, but the only one my poverty affords," and he took from his head a silk cap which had been given him by a friend. The man is said to have treasured this memorial with religious care, nor could afterwards be induced by any consideration to part with it. At the door of Newgate a hurdle was awaiting him, on which he was to be drawn to Tyburn, a distance of between two or three miles. Upon this rude vehicle he stretched himself on his back, with his eyes turned towards heaven, and his hands joined upon his breast in the form of a cross. His lips were seen to move in prayer, and in a tone of deep emotion he was heard to exclaim: "And is it so, O Lord! and can a wretch so vile as I be thought worthy of so high an honor? But all is for thy greater glory." Such was the fervor of his manner, and the heavenly expression of his countenance, that several among the crowd could not withhold expressions of admiration: "God bless you!"—"Heaven support you!"—"Take courage!" were heard on every side; nor could the efforts of the officers who surrounded the hurdle, repress these outpourings of popular sympathy. When the procession was on the point of moving, a lady, who was veiled, approached and bent over the hurdle. It was a Mrs. Bannister, one of Southwell's sisters. He gave her his blessing as well as he could do so, his arms being pinioned, and was heard to whisper to her: "I will remember you in my prayers; but retire; you are in danger; there go in peace; God bless you!" After this, he spoke no more the whole way, keeping his eyes raised to heaven, and his heart in communion with his Maker, the only words that from time to time escaped his lips, was his favorite and customary ejaculation, *Deus meus et omnia*—"my God and my all!"

Below the gibbet stood a cart, in which the blessed martyr was placed. Making the sign of the cross in the best manner he could, he began to address the people in those words of the Apostle: "Whether we live, we live to the Lord, or whether we die, we die to the Lord: therefore, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord." Here the sheriff would have interrupted him, but he begged leave to add a few words more, assuring him that he would say nothing that could give offence. He then spoke as follow: "I am come to this place to finish my course, and to pass out of this miserable life, and I beg of my Lord Jesus Christ, in whose most precious passion and blood I place my hope of salvation, that he would have mercy on my soul.—I confess that I am a Catholic priest of the Holy Roman Catholic Church, and a religious man of the society of Jesus; on which account I owe eternal thanks and praises to my God and Saviour."