

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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ROBERT SOUTHWELL, S. J. (1895.)

BY W. 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.]

Under the roof of this inhuman tormentor, (Topcliffe) Southwell was exposed, for several months together, to every indignity and variety of suffering that malicious ingenuity could devise. From his family connections, and from the high esteem in which he was held by his brethren, he was supposed to be the great depository of their secrets. These were attempted to be wrung from him by the force of bodily suffering. In the hope to obtain from him revelations that would have entitled his tormentor to the blood-money accorded by the law, he was day after day, suspended in the air, in the manner already described. On one occasion, while the poor sufferer was undergoing this cruel infliction, Topcliffe was called out upon some urgent business. Southwell was forgotten; in a secluded part of the house, his cries could reach no human ear, and the intensity of suffering was greater than humanity could support. On the return of his keeper, he was found in a fainting fit, vomiting blood copiously, and it was not without difficulty he was restored to his senses. On hearing of the heroic fortitude with which he had borne his torments, the Lord Treasurer, Burghley, is said to have exclaimed "Greece and Rome need boast no longer of their heroes; we can match them here at home. Talk of extorting any thing from this man in regard to his accomplices; why, you cannot draw from him what was the color of a certain horse ridden by him on a certain day."

Ten different times was the good father tormented in this manner, Topcliffe looking coolly on, and urging him to confess the names of his accomplices, as he termed them, and the places of their retreat. On one of these occasions, having exhausted his efforts in the fruitless attempt to draw a single word from this champion of the faith, he gnashed with his teeth, exclaiming: "that I had the whole gang of these Jesuit traitors under my roof; I would grind the catiffs into powder, and scatter it to the four winds of heaven!"

After staying nearly two months in this "kind of domestic prison," as Father Bartoli terms it, Southwell was removed to the Gate-house, a prison in Westminster. Here he was confined, for nearly quarter of a year, in a damp and unwholesome apartment. At the expiration of this term, being brought out to undergo an examination before the judges, his appearance excited the compassion of all. His person, naturally pleasing and handsome, had wasted to a mere skeleton; his clothes were in tatters, and covered with filth and vermin. His father, who had conformed to the more fashionable religion of the court, and who, on account of the situation he filled then, had wished to lose sight of his son, could no longer stifle the feelings of nature at witnessing the state of utter destitution to which his son had been reduced. He threw himself at the feet of Elizabeth, and besought her to commiserate the situation of his child, and to order that, as he was sprung of gentle blood, he should, in some respects at least, be treated as a gentleman. This application was attended to, and

he was removed to a better lodging in the Tower. Here he was supplied with proper necessaries, and some of his family were admitted to visit him, among others, his sister Elizabeth. At his request she procured him his breviary, and a copy of the Latin Vulgate, and of the works of St. Bernard. His choice of this author should not be passed over without a remark. St. Bernard may be characterized as the Fenelon of the Fathers; he is remarkable for the suavity of his style, the pathos of his exhortations, and the unctious and fervent piety of all his writings: qualities so conspicuous in the compositions of Southwell himself, and which may thus be traced to their source.

While in the tower, he gained the heart of his keeper, by the gentleness of his manners, and the winning sweetness of his conversation and deportment. Every indulgence was granted him, compatible with his situation. Some few obtained access to him, and enjoyed the comfort of his spiritual ministrations. Those who were deprived of this consolation, contrived to obtain his advice and the direction of their conscience by means of letters; and many there were, and among them were several Catholic ladies of good family, who, under pretence of visiting the garden of the Tower, came at appointed hours, and received his benediction from the window of the turret in which he was confined. How touching is a ministry thus exercised by stealth, and recalling the best and purest days of primitive Christianity!

What were Southwell's feelings in his dungeon, may be collected from that beautiful "Epistle of Comfort," which he had addressed to those who had preceded him in their sufferings for the faith. "The prison," he says, "is dishonorable; yet when the cause enobleth the name of prisoner, the prisoner abolisheth the dishonor of the place. What thing, of old, more odious than the cross? What place more abhorred than the Mount of Calvary? What cells more reproachful than the gates and dungeons of the saints? Yet now—what thing more honorable than the Holy Cross?—What place more revered than the Blessed Mount?—What sanctuaries more desired than the dungeons of the Saints? A reproachful thing it is to be chained in sin, to be enthralled in the vassalage of lawless appetites, and in the slavish bondage of worldly vanities. But, honorable it is in God's cause, to be abridged of bodily liberty, for maintaining the true independence and freedom of the spirit! And where can you so freely range among the choirs of angels, as when you are sequestered from the distractions of vain company?—When can you take a fuller repast of the sweet fruits of prayer and contemplation, than when the flesh-pots of Egypt are the farthest from sight? Your eyes are not too much troubled with impious and wicked sights; your ears are not annoyed with the heinous outcries of blasphemy; you are quiet from scandals and severed from occasions of divers temptations. Let them complain of the difficulties of a prison, who have fastened their affections upon worldly vanities; but for a Christian Catholic, that hath Christ for his leader, the Apostles for his witnesses, and all former saints for testimonies, it is a shame not to think worthily, and correctly, and reverently thereof. So honorable are the chains of a captive in God's cause, that Solomon in his costliest habits, and Herod in his most gorgeous attire, were not so much honored as John the Baptist, when he had achieved that title, 'John in Chains.' It was a great prerogative to

be an Apostle, a Doctor, an Evangelist; it was a singular favor to be wrapt into the third heaven, and to hear secrets that it is not lawful for man to speak; it was a rare privilege to heal diseases, not only with the touch of the hand, but with that of the very girdles and handkerchiefs: but St. Paul acknowledges a greater title to honor, when, in writing to Philemon, he omitteth his usual style of 'Paul an Apostle,' and beginneth his epistle with 'Paul a prisoner of Jesus Christ.' Herein he followeth the custom of great personages, who, when from inferior dignities they are raised to more honorable titles, always, in their letters, omit the secondary and set down the principal title, proper to their newly achieved preferment." These are the glowing effusions of a mind fully impressed with a conviction of the truth of the sentiments inculcated.

Southwell remained three whole years a prisoner in the Tower, during which time, he was cruelly racked ten several times, with a view to extort from him a disclosure of certain supposed conspiracies against the government. At the end of this period, he wrote an epistle to Cecil, the Lord Treasurer, humbly entreating his lordship, that he might either be brought upon his trial, to answer for himself, or, at least, that his friends might have leave to come and see him. The treasurer answered, "That if he was in so much haste to be hanged, he should quickly have his desire." Shortly after this, orders were given, that he should be removed from the Tower to Newgate; where he was put down into the dungeon called Limbo; and there kept for three days.

On the 22d of February, without any previous warning to prepare for his trial, he was taken out of his dark lodging in Newgate, and hurried to the Court of King's Bench, in Westminster; to hold up his hand there at the bar. The first news of this determination of the council, filled his heart with joy which he was unable to conceal. The moments were approaching for which his heart had long yearned—which had mingled with his first aspirations—in search of which he had journeyed on foot to Rome, and braved the dangers which, during more than ten years, had surrounded the exercise of his ministry in his native land.

The judges before whom he was to appear, were Lord Chief Justice Popham, Justice Owen, Baron Evens, and Serjeant Daniel. When Father Southwell was placed at the bar, the Lord Chief Justice addressed the court. In a long and vehement speech, he attacked the Jesuits and Seminary priests, accusing them as the authors and abettors of all the dark plots and secret treasons which had been hatched during the present reign." The bill of indictment, drawn up by Coke, queen's solicitor, was then read. It ran to this effect: "Middlesex—The jury present on the part of our sovereign lady, the queen. That Robert Southwell, late of London, clerk, born within this kingdom of England, to wit, since the Feast of St. John the Baptist, in the first day of May, in the 32d year of the reign of our lady, the queen, aforesaid, made and ordained priest by authority derived and pretended from the See of Rome; not having the fear of God before his eyes, and slighting the laws and statutes of this realm of England, without any regard to the penalty therein contained, on the 20th day of June, the thirty-fourth year of our lady, the queen, at Uxenden, in the county of Middlesex, traitorously, and as a false traitor to our lady, the queen, was and remained, contrary to the form of the statute in such case set forth and provided, and contrary to the peace of our said lady, the queen, her crown and dignities."