

Fox's Book of Martyrs

A History of the lives, sufferings and triumphant deaths of the early Christian martyrs

Edited by William Byron Forbush

CHAPTER XV

An Account of the Persecutions in Scotland During the Reign of King Henry VIII

Like as there was no place, either of Germany, Italy, or France, wherein there were not some branches sprung out of that most fruitful root of Luther; so likewise was not this isle of Britain without his fruit and branches. Amongst whom was Patrick Hamilton, a Scotchman born of high and noble stock, and of the king's blood, of excellent towardness, twenty-three years of age, called abbot of Ferne. Coming out of his country with three companions to seek godly learning, he went to the University of Marburg in Germany, which university was then newly erected by Philip, Landgrave of Hesse.

During his residence here, he became intimately acquainted with those eminent lights of the Gospel, Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon; from whose writings and doctrines he strongly attached himself to the Protestant religion.

The archbishop of St. Andrews (who was a rigid papist) learning of Mr. Hamilton's proceedings, caused him to be seized, and being brought before him, after a short examination relative to his religious principles, he committed him a prisoner to the castle, at the same time ordering him to be confined in the most loathsome part of the prison.

The next morning Mr. Hamilton was brought before the bishop, and several others, for examination, when the principal articles exhibited against him were, his publicly disapproving of pilgrimages, purgatory, prayers to saints, for the dead, etc.

These articles Mr. Hamilton acknowledged to be true, in consequence of which he was immediately condemned to be burnt; and that his condemnation might have the greater

authority, they caused it to be subscribed by all those of any note who were present, and to make the number as considerable as possible, even admitted the subscription of boys who were sons of the nobility.

So anxious was this bigoted and persecuting prelate for the destruction of Mr. Hamilton, that he ordered his sentence to be put in execution on the afternoon of the very day it was pronounced. He was accordingly led to the place appointed for the horrid tragedy, and was attended by a prodigious number of spectators. The greatest part of the multitude would not believe it was intended he should be put to death, but that it was only done to frighten him, and thereby bring him over to embrace the principles of the Romish religion.

When he arrived at the stake, he kneeled down, and, for some time prayed with great fervency. After this he was fastened to the stake, and the fagots placed round him. A quantity of gunpowder having been placed under his arms was first set on fire which scorched his left hand and one side of his face, but did no material injury, neither did it communicate with the fagots. In consequence of this, more powder and combustible matter were brought, which being set on fire took effect, and the fagots being kindled, he called out, with an audible voice: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit! How long shall darkness overwhelm this realm? And how long wilt Thou suffer the tyranny of these men?"

The fire burning slow put him to great torment; but he bore it with Christian magnanimity. What gave him the greatest pain was, the clamor of some wicked men set on by the friars, who frequently cried, "Turn, thou heretic; call upon our Lady; say, Salve Regina, etc." To whom he replied, "Depart from me, and trouble me not, ye messengers of Satan." One Campbell, a friar, who was the ringleader, still continuing to interrupt him by opprobrious language; he said to him, "Wicked man, God forgive thee." After which, being prevented from further speech by the violence of the smoke, and the rapidity of the flames, he resigned up his soul into the hands of Him who gave it.

This steadfast believer in Christ suffered martyrdom in the year 1527.

One Henry Forest, a young inoffensive Benedictine, being charged with speaking respectfully of the above Patrick Hamilton, was thrown into prison; and, in confessing himself to a friar, owned that he thought Hamilton a good man; and that the articles for which he was sentenced to die, might be defended. This being revealed by the friar, it was received as evidence; and the poor Benedictine was sentenced to be burnt.

Whilst consultation was held, with regard to the manner of his execution, John Lindsay, one of the archbishop's gentlemen, offered his advice, to burn Friar Forest in some cellar; "for," said he, "the smoke of Patrick Hamilton hath infected all those on whom it blew."

This advice was taken, and the poor victim was rather suffocated, than burnt.

The next who fell victims for professing the truth of the Gospel, were David Stratton and Norman Gourlay.

When they arrived at the fatal spot, they both kneeled down, and prayed for some time with great fervency. They then arose, when Stratton, addressing himself to the spectators, exhorted them to lay aside their superstitious and idolatrous notions, and employ their time in seeking the true light of the Gospel. He would have said more, but was prevented by the officers who attended.

Their sentence was then put into execution, and they cheerfully resigned up their souls to that God who gave them, hoping, through the merits of the great Redeemer, for a glorious resurrection to life immortal. They suffered in the year 1534.

The martyrdoms of the two before-mentioned persons, were soon followed by that of Mr. Thomas Forret, who, for a considerable time, had been dean of the Romish Church; Killor and Beverage, two blacksmiths; Duncan Simson, a priest; and Robert Forrester, a gentleman. They were all burnt together, on the Castle-hill at Edinburgh, the last day of February, 1538.

The year following the martyrdoms of the before-mentioned persons, viz. 1539, two others were apprehended on a suspicion of heresy; namely, Jerome Russell and Alexander Kennedy, a youth about eighteen years of age.

These two persons, after being some time confined in prison, were brought before the archbishop for examination. In the course of which Russell, being a very sensible man, reasoned learnedly against his accusers; while they in return made use of very opprobrious language.

The examination being over, and both of them deemed heretics, the archbishop pronounced the dreadful sentence of death, and they were immediately delivered over to the secular power in order for execution.

The next day they were led to the place appointed for them to suffer; in their way to which, Russell, seeing his fellow-sufferer have the appearance of timidity in his countenance, thus addressed him: "Brother, fear not; greater is He that is in us, than He that is in the world. The pain that we are to suffer is short, and shall be light; but our joy and consolation shall never have an end. Let us, therefore, strive to enter into our Master and Savior's joy, by the same straight way which He hath taken before us. Death cannot hurt us, for it is already destroyed by Him, for whose sake we are now going to suffer."

When they arrived at the fatal spot, they both kneeled down and prayed for some time; after which being fastened to the stake, and the fagots lighted, they cheerfully resigned their souls into the hands of Him who gave them, in full hopes of an everlasting reward in the heavenly mansions.

An Account of the Life, Sufferings, and Death of Mr. George

Wishart, Who Was Strangled and Afterward Burned, in Scotland, for

Professing the Truth of the Gospel

About the year of our Lord 1543, there was, in the University of Cambridge, one Master George Wishart, commonly called Master George of Benet's College, a man of tall stature, polled-headed, and on the same a round French cap of the best; judged to be of melancholy complexion by his physiognomy, black-haired, long-bearded, comely of personage, well spoken after his country of Scotland, courteous, lowly, lovely, glad to teach, desirous to learn, and well travelled; having on him for his clothing a frieze gown to the shoes, a black millian fustian doublet, and plain black hosen, coarse new canvas for his shirts, and white falling bands and cuffs at his hands.

He was a man modest, temperate, fearing God, hating covetousness; for his charity had never end, night, noon, nor day; he forbore one meal in three, one day in four for the most part, except something to comfort nature. He lay hard upon a puff of straw and coarse, new canvas sheets, which, when he changed, he gave away. He had commonly by his bedside a tub of water, in the which (his people being in bed, the candle put out and all quiet) he used to bathe himself. He loved me tenderly, and I him. He taught with great modesty and gravity, so that some of his people thought him severe, and would have slain him; but the Lord was his defence. And he, after due correction for their malice, by good exhortation amended them and went his way. Oh, that the Lord had left him to me, his poor boy, that he might have finished what he had begun! for he went into scotland with divers of the nobility, that came for a treaty to King Henry.

In 1543, the archbishop of St. Andrews made a visitation into various parts of his diocese, where several persons were informed against at Perth for heresy. Among those the following were condemned to die, viz. William Anderson, Robert Lamb, James Finlayson, James Hunter, James Reveleson, and Helen Stark.

The accusations laid against these respective persons were as follow: The four first were accused of having hung up the image of St. Francis, nailing ram's horns on his head, and fastening a cow's tail to his rump; but the principal matter on which they were condemned was having regaled themselves with a goose on fast day.

James Reveleson was accused of having ornamented his house with the three crowned diadem of Peter, carved in wood, which the archbishop conceived to be done in mockery to his cardinal's cap.

Helen Stark was accused of not having accustomed herself to pray to the Virgin Mary, more especially during the time she was in childbed.

On these respective accusations they were all found guilty, and immediately received sentence of death; the four men, for eating the goose, to be hanged; James Raveleson to be burnt; and the woman, with her sucking infant, to be put into a sack and drowned.

The four men, with the woman and the child, suffered at the same time, but James Raveleson was not executed until some days after.

The martyrs were carried by a great band of armed men (for they feared rebellion in the town except they had their men of war) to the place of execution, which was common to all thieves, and that to make their cause appear more odious to the people. Every one comforting another, and assuring themselves that they should sup together in the Kingdom of Heaven that night, they commended themselves to God, and died constantly in the Lord.

The woman desired earnestly to die with her husband, but she was not suffered; yet, following him to the place of execution, she gave him comfort, exhorting him to perseverance and patience for Christ's sake, and, parting from him with a kiss, said, "Husband, rejoice, for we have lived together many joyful days; but this day, in which we must die, ought to be most joyful unto us both, because we must have joy forever; therefore I will not bid you good night, for we shall suddenly meet with joy in the Kingdom of Heaven." The woman, after that, was taken to a place to be drowned, and albeit she had a child sucking on her breast, yet this moved nothing in the unmerciful hearts of the enemies. So, after she had commended her children to the neighbors of the town for God's sake, and the sucking bairn was given to the nurse, she sealed up the truth by her death.

Being desirous of propagating the true Gospel in his own country George Wishart left Cambridge in 1544, and on his arrival in Scotland he first preached at Montrose, and afterwards at Dundee. In this last place he made a public exposition of the Epistle to the Romans, which he went through with such grace and freedom, as greatly alarmed the papists.

In consequence of this, (at the instigation of Cardinal Beaton, the archbishop of St. Andrews) one Robert Miln, a principal man at Dundee, went to the church where Wishart preached, and in the middle of his discourse publicly told him not to trouble the town any more, for he was determined not to suffer it.

This sudden rebuff greatly surprised Wishart, who, after a short pause, looking sorrowfully on the speaker and the audience, said: "God is my witness, that I never minded your trouble but your comfort; yea, your trouble is more grievous to me than it is to yourselves: but I am assured to refuse God's Word, and to chase from you His messenger, shall not preserve you from trouble, but shall bring you into it: for God shall send you ministers that shall fear neither burning nor banishment. I have offered you the Word of salvation. With the hazard of my life I have remained among you; now you yourselves refuse me; and I must leave my innocence to be declared by my God. If it be long prosperous with you, I am not lede by the Spirit of truth; but if unlooked-for troubles

come upon you, acknowledge the cause and turn to God, who is gracious and merciful. But if you turn not at the first warning, He will visit you with fire and sword." At the close of this speech he left the pulpit, and retired.

After this he went into the west of Scotland, where he preached God's Word, which was gladly received by many.

A short time after this Mr. Wishart received intelligence that the plague had broken out in Dundee. It began four days after he was prohibited from preaching there, and raged so extremely that it was almost beyond credit how many died in the space of twenty-four hours. This being related to him, he, notwithstanding the importunity of his friends to detain him, determined to go there, saying: "They are now in troubles, and need comfort. Perhaps this hand of God will make them now to magnify and reverence the Word of God, which before they lightly esteemed."

Here he was with joy received by the godly. He chose the east gate for the place of his preaching; so that the healthy were within, and the sick without the gate. He took his text from these words, "He sent His word and healed them," etc. In this sermon he chiefly dwelt upon the advantage and comfort of God's Word, the judgments that ensue upon the contempt or rejection of it, the freedom of God's grace to all His people, and the happiness of those of His elect, whom He takes to Himself out of this miserable world. The hearts of his hearers were so raised by the divine force of this discourse, as not to regard death, but to judge them the more happy who should then be called, not knowing whether he should have such comfort again with them.

After this the plague abated; though, in the midst of it, Wishart constantly visited those that lay in the greatest extremity, and comforted them by his exhortations.

When he took his leave of the people of Dundee, he said that God had almost put an end to that plague, and that he was now called to another place. He went from thence to Montrose; where he sometimes preached, but he spent most of his time in private meditation and prayer.

It is said that before he left Dundee, and while he was engaged in the labors of love to the bodies as well as to the souls of those poor afflicted people, Cardinal Beaton engaged a desperate popish priest, called John Weighton, to kill him; the attempt to execute which was as follows: one day, after Wishart had finished his sermon, and the people departed, a priest stood waiting at the bottom of the stairs, with a naked dagger in his hand under his gown. But Mr. Wishart, having a sharp, piercing eye, and seeing the priest as he came from the pulpit, said to him, "My friend, what would you have?" and immediately clapping his hand upon the dagger, took it from him. The priest being terrified, fell to his knees, confessed his intention, and craved pardon. A noise was hereupon raised, and it coming to the ears of those who were sick, they cried, "Deliver the traitor to us, we will take him by force"; and they burst in at the gate. But Wishart, taking the priest in his arms, said, "Whatsoever hurts him shall hurt me; for he hath done me no mischief, but

much good, by teaching more heedfulness for the time to come." By this conduct he appeased the people and saved the life of the wicked priest.

Soon after his return to Montrose, the cardinal again conspired his death, causing a letter to be sent him as if it had been from his familiar friend, the laird of Kennier, in which it was desired with all possible speed to come to him, as he was taken with a sudden sickness. In the meantime the cardinal had provided sixty men armed to lie in wait within a mile and a half of Montrose, in order to murder him as he passed that way.

The letter came to Wishart's hand by a boy, who also brought him a horse for the journey. Wishart, accompanied by some honest men, his friends, set forward; but something particular striking his mind by the way, he returned, which they wondering at, asked him the cause; to whom he said, "I will not go; I am forbidden of God; I am assured there is treason. Let some of you go to yonder place, and tell me what you find." Which doing, they made the discovery; and hastily returning, they told Mr. Wishart; whereupon he said, "I know I shall end my life by that bloodthirsty man's hands, but it will not be in this manner."

A short time after this he left Montrose, and proceeded to Edinburgh, in order to propagate the Gospel in that city. By the way he lodged with a faithful brother, called James Watson of Inner-Goury. In the middle of the night he got up, and went into the yard, which two men hearing they privately followed him. While in the yard, he fell on his knees, and prayed for some time with the greatest fervency, after which he arose, and returned to his bed. Those who attended him, appearing as though they were ignorant of all, came and asked him where he had been. But he would not answer them. The next day they importuned him to tell them, saying "Be plain with us, for we heard your mourning, and saw your gestures."

On this he with a dejected countenance, said, "I had rather you had been in your beds." But they still pressing upon him to know something, he said, "I will tell you; I am assured that my warfare is near at an end, and therefore pray to God with me, that I shrink not when the battle waxeth most hot."

Soon after, Cardinal Beaton, archbishop of St. Andrews, being informed that Mr. Wishart was at the house of Mr. Cockburn, of Ormistohn, in East Lothian, applied to the regent to cause him to be apprehended; with which, after great persuasion, and much against his will, he complied.

In consequence of this the cardinal immediately proceeded to the trial of Wishart, against whom no less than eighteen articles were exhibited. Mr. Wishart answered the respective articles with great composure of mind, and in so learned and clear a manner as greatly surprised most of those who were present.

After the examination was finished, the archbishop endeavored to prevail on Mr. Wishart to recant; but he was too firmly fixed in his religious principles and too much enlightened with the truth of the Gospel, to be in the least moved.

On the morning of his execution there came to him two friars from the cardinal; one of whom put on him a black linen coat, and the other brought several bags of gunpowder, which they tied about different parts of his body.

As soon as he arrived at the stake, the executioner put a rope round his neck and a chain about his middle, upon which he fell on his knees and thus exclaimed:

"O thou Savior of the world, have mercy upon me! Father of heaven, I commend my spirit into Thy holy hands."

After this he prayed for his accusers, saying, "I beseech thee, Father of heaven, forgive them that have, from ignorance or an evil mind, forged lies of me: I forgive them with all my heart. I beseech Christ to forgive them that have ignorantly condemned me."

He was then fastened to the stake, and the fagots being lighted immediately set fire to the powder that was tied about him, which blew into a flame and smoke.

The governor of the castle, who stood so near that he was singed with the flame, exhorted the martyr, in a few words, to be of good cheer, and to ask the pardon of God for his offences. To which he replied, "This flame occasions trouble to my body, indeed, but it hath in nowise broken my spirit. But he who now so proudly looks down upon me from yonder lofty place (pointing to the cardinal) shall, ere long, be ignominiously thrown down, as now he proudly lolls at his ease." Which prediction was soon after fulfilled.

The hangman, that was his tormentor, sat down upon his knees, and said, "Sir, I pray you to forgive me, for I am not guilty of your death." To whom he answered, "Come hither to me." When that he was come to him, he kissed his cheek, and said: "Lo, here is a token that I forgive thee. My heart, do thine office." And then he was put upon the gibbet and hanged, and burned to powder. When that the people beheld the great tormenting, they might not withhold from piteous mourning and complaining of this innocent lamb's slaughter.

It was not long after the martyrdom of this blessed man of God, Master George Wishart, who was put to death by David Beaton, the bloody archbishop and cardinal of Scotland, A.D. 1546, the first day of March, that the said David Beaton, by the just revenge of God's mighty judgment, was slain within his own castle of St. Andrews, by the hands of one Leslie and other gentlemen, who, by the Lord stirred up, brake in suddenly upon him, and in his bed murdered him the said year, the last day of May, crying out, "Alas! alas! slay me not! I am a priest!" And so, like a butcher he lived, and like a butcher he died, and lay seven months and more unburied, and at last like a carrion was buried in a dunghill.

The last who suffered martyrdom in Scotland, for the cause of Christ, was one Walter Mill, who was burnt at Edinburgh in the year 1558.

This person, in his younger years, had travelled in Germany, and on his return was installed a priest of the Church of Lunan in Angus, but, on an information of heresy, in the time of Cardinal Beaton, he was forced to abandon his charge and abscond. But he was soon apprehended, and committed to prison.

Being interrogated by Sir Andrew Oliphant, whether he would recant his opinions, he answered in the negative, saying that he would 'sooner forfeit ten thousand lives, than relinquish a particle of those heavenly principles he had received from the suffrages of his blessed Redeemer.'

In consequence of this, sentence of condemnation was immediately passed on him, and he was conducted to prison in order for execution the following day.

This steadfast believe in Christ was eighty-two years of age, and exceedingly infirm; whence it was supposed that he could scarcely be heard. However, when he was taken to the place of execution, he expressed his religious sentiments with such courage, and at the same time composure of mind, as astonished even his enemies. As soon as he was fastened to the stake and the fagots lighted, he addressed the spectators as follows: "The cause why I suffer this day is not for any crime, (though I acknowledge myself a miserable sinner) but only for the defence of the truth as it is in Jesus Christ; and I praise God who hath called me, by His mercy, to seal the truth with my life; which, as I received it from Him, so I willingly and joyfully offer it up to His glory. Therefore, as you would escape eternal death, be no longer seduced by the lies of the seat of Antichrist: but depend solely on Jesus Christ, and His mercy, that you may be delivered from condemnation." And then added that he trusted he should be the last who would suffer death in Scotland upon a religious account.

Thus did this pious Christian cheerfully give up his life in defence of the truth of Christ's Gospel, not doubting but he should be made partaker of his heavenly Kingdom.