

The Revolution Of 1688 On Its Religious Side



**By
Richard Heath**

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On Its Religious Side - By Richard Heath

'To condemn those who in the flames invoke the name of Jesus Christ is no light matter' — Anne Dubourg[1]

IT IS A THOUSAND PITIES that English history is treated alone and without reference to that of Europe. The great man of the later Stuart period was Louis XIV, and he set the fashion to Society in his age. Charles II and James II followed his example, and worked for the same ends.

Nothing more natural: they were bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, and largely educated under the same influences. Bourbon – Medici – Guise, brought up in France under a bigoted Catholic mother, and dazzled by the blaze and blare of their illustrious relative at Versailles, how could they do other than try to effect in England what he had done in France?

And they found a great part of the people and most of the leaders in church and state blindly ready to assist their purpose. What king was ever welcomed to the throne with more intense enthusiasm than Charles II, or was maintained upon it by more devoted loyalty? Macaulay tells us that every servant-girl in London went into mourning at his death; and before he expired all in the room, including Bishop Ken, fell on their knees and invoked his blessing as their common father[2].

He had a parliament as entirely devoted to his person as if he had himself nominated the members, and he kept that parliament in existence for eighteen years. Charles II alone knew what he was aiming at, but neither ministers nor parliament seemed to have known where they were drifting.

One minister after another found him out, and then they fell, and at last the Cavalier Parliament itself got into a panic and ended by aiding and abetting the infamous concocters of the Popish Plot. But there was and had been a real plot to turn England into a Romanist despotism, and the dominant party had been so bent in destroying the work of the Puritans,

that they made themselves its docile instruments. Darker days never befell the truly godly in this country than those between the Restoration and the Revolution. The days of "Mary I" look more lurid, but they were not nearly so hopeless and depressing. In the days of Charles II England was well typified by Mansoul in the hands of the Diablonians.

No better place at that time to hear the news, especially "the police news", than a county gaol, for the prisoners were crowded together in large rooms where they were allowed to see their friends. Certainly John Bunyan was thinking of all he daily learnt about the condition of the country during his twelve long years in Bedford gaol when he wrote his Pilgrims Progress and Holy War.

And I cannot help thinking that in painting the character of Diabolus he had Charles II in his eye[3]. Otherwise, he surely would not have represented the great enemy of the kingdom of Jesus Christ as an easy-going, good-natured gentleman, careless of his own honour and dignity; provided that he could attain the end of his policy to make his power secure and absolute. Notwithstanding Charles the Second's bonhomie, he was a true disciple of Machiavelli, and knew the importance of beginning his reign by striking hard and deadly blows against his enemies. Hence his revengeful pursuit of those who had sat in judgment on the late King.

The Convention – at least the Lower House – at first resisted the cry for blood, but giving way at the end, thirteen persons were executed with all the horrors attending death for high treason: and as the principal offenders had passed beyond the reach of human law, their bodies were dragged from their graves to the gallows at Tyburn, where the putrefying remains were hanged as a terror and a warning to all their adherents.

The Parliament of 1661, made up for the most part of young men, were passionately determined to reverse everything done under the Commonwealth, and all who in spirit sympathised with the late order of things were made to feel acutely the change. How numerous these were is shown by the fact that, when after the execution of Colonel Okey the king consented to give the body to be buried by his wife, about twenty

thousand persons assembled to attend the corpse to its last resting-place, so that the Government, affrighted, withdrew the permission, and Colonel Okey's remains were interred in the Tower. Instead of trying to conciliate this formidable opposition, which included nearly all who were most worthy and most earnest in the nation, the authorities sought to terrorise them.

In the State Trials of this time I have met with the following illustration of the way in which the wicked watched the righteous, seeking to slay him. It gives a most graphic picture of the spirit of the time, and seems likely to have been one of the histories John Bunyan had on his mind when he described the trial of Faithful in *Vanity Fair*.

On October 19th, 1661, Whitechapel was in a hubbub. A preacher among the Seventh Day Baptists, named John James, had just been seized; being pulled by force out of the pulpit. In the midst of a rough crowd, crying "Treason! treason!" he was dragged to a tavern close by, until the Lieutenant of the Tower appeared on the scene, who committed him to Newgate, where he lay until November 14th; when he was taken to Westminster to be tried before the judges of the King's Bench.

He was indicted for high treason. The sole ground of this serious charge being certain words which one Tipler, a journeyman piper, professed to have overheard as he stood listening[4] at a window in Bulstake Alley, which words the congregation, being questioned by the Lieutenant of the Tower, on the day of the arrest, utterly denied had been spoken.

John James asked for a copy of the indictment, but was refused. Having pleaded "not guilty", he was committed to the King's Bench prison in Southwark, where he received a letter from a per-son of note, warning him that such a jury had been empanelled, being all picked men, and most of them knights and gentlemen, that if he did not except against them he was a dead man.

On the 19th he was brought forth to his trial, in order to his condemnation. The Lord Chief Justice[5] and three other judges sat on the bench, and five of the king's counsel, besides the attorney-general and the solicitor-

general, were there to plead against him. Sergeant Keeling opened the case, and Sir Geoffrey Palmer followed, the latter suggesting that a man came under the law who harboured treason in his heart. The witnesses now gave in their evidence.

Tipler had stood in a window in the yard next adjoining the meeting, and had heard the prisoner at the bar say that the king was a bloody tyrant, a blood-sucker, and a blood-thirsty man; and that, further, the said prisoner did wonderfully adore Oliver Cromwell, saying that every finger of his was a champion, and that when they had power again they would do it more thoroughly.

Another witness then deposed to being at the time in Tipler's house, to hearing loud speaking, to coming out and hearing dangerous words, but what the dangerous words were he could not remember. Finally, Bernard Osburn, a sailor, swore to all Tipler had said. To rebut these charges James produced four witnesses who came into court and stated that Bernard Osburn had confessed to them that he had sworn against John James, he knew not what; and a woman, a near relation of Osburn, came forward and affirmed that he had told her that he had been affrighted into what he swore, in fact that it had been brought to him in writing. But Osburn declared that he had never said such things.

James then began his defence, in which he categorically denied every statement made by the witnesses for the prosecution, affirming that he had not said one of the things attributed to him; then he warned the jury not to shed innocent blood, and was proceeding to speak of the Kingship of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the eternal character of His reign.

At this, the Lord Chief Justice cried: "Hold, sirrah; sirrah, you think you are in the conventicle in Whitechapel, preaching." Then Serjeant Lynne proceeded to try and lessen the effect of the objections to the evidence; after which, Sergeant Maynard spoke. "The prisoner," he said, "had referred much to his innocence and integrity, but he believed that there never was any offender or the vilest miscreant in the world that would ever have received the reward of his doings if his own excuses and protestations could have saved him." Then up-stood Sir Heneage Finch,

who disclaimed against the treason and rebellion of the prisoner at the bar – "horrid treason and rebellion for spurning against the meekest king on the earth". "He tried," Finch said, "to affright your consciences with his innocency, but the punishment of this malefactor will affright like malefactors in future, and further, that while some were allowed liberty of conscience for a time, till they were better informed, this man, and those of his kind, are none of these men."

And further, he told them they were not to be affrighted by what the prisoner had said on account of innocent blood, for they would find that if his blood be rightly and swiftly pursued, it would be the means of preventing the shedding of the blood of thousands. Finally, Judge Foster tried further to incense the jury against the prisoner by telling them that he was one of the same spirit as those who heretofore had put all the nation in a flame, and that no treason was comparable to that treason that was covered with a pretence of religion.

John James now desired to address one word to the jury, but was told that he could speak no more; whereupon he cried out that then they had as good have hanged him at Bulstake Alley without bringing him there to cover over the matter with the pretence of law; for which explosion of righteous indignation he was solemnly rebuked. A verdict of "guilty" was soon returned, and the prisoner was ordered to come up for judgment on the Friday following.

In the interval, his wife was persuaded to petition the king, and she presented a memorial to Charles II as he came out of the park, stating at the same who she was. "Oh!" said the king, "Mr. James, he is a sweet fellow!" and the door was shut in her face. Next morning she followed the king downstairs from the gallery into the park imploring an answer, but all she got was, "He is a rogue and shall be hanged".

On November 22nd, James was brought up again before the judges, and asked why sentence of death should not be passed on him. Not much, he replied, only two or three Scriptures: "Know ye for certain that if ye put me to death, ye shall certainly bring innocent blood upon yourselves and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof, and 'precious in the sight

of the Lord is the death of His saints'. I have no more to say for myself, but I will say one word for the Lord Jesus Christ. The Son of God is King of England, Scotland, Ireland, and of all the kingdoms of this world." He was then silenced, and sentence of death pronounced with all the horrid tortures inflicted in those times on traitors. James exclaimed, "Blessed be God! Whom man hath condemned God hath justified".

Taken back to prison, he was, notwithstanding his extreme poverty, subjected to all kinds of extortions, from the governor of the King's Bench prison to the executioner, who came to demand money that he might be favourable to him at his death. Twenty pounds would satisfy him, but James pleading poverty, he fell to ten, and, in conclusion, told him that unless he could pay him five pounds he would torture him exceedingly[6].

There had been a time in his imprisonment when John James had been greatly troubled, and had said, "Why should I live any longer? Lord, take away my life". But this, he said, the Lord rebuked, and he had much calmness of spirit, and very suddenly by grace arrived to rejoicing in God. At times in imagination he put the halter round his neck and the sled before his eyes, but found they were not at all terrible (as yet).

The friends who visited him found him exceedingly cheerful, and much filled with the sense of the goodness of the Lord, declaring that he could truly say, "Whatever the Lord had spoken of in His blessed word in relation to any trials he had hitherto met with, He had been in them all every way as good as His word".

When he had thoughts of living, he said to another friend, he had nothing but trouble and distraction; "for, alas," said he, "what will my life signify? It will signify but little; but my blood will cry aloud; it will speak louder than my life". Some could not forbear weeping when they visited him in the dungeon at Newgate, after his sentence; but he smiling said, "I beseech you, let me not see any of this, for all is well, and therefore forbear, I beseech you, such carriage, which will too much encourage the enemies of the Lord".

To others he said, "I am going to a place where the 'wicked cease from troubling, and where the prisoners be at rest'. God has been eminently with me; and though it be hard to look the king of terrors in the face, my dear Lord hath helped me over two of my steps, and now I have but one more before I shall be free from all that care and fear of dishonouring God or grieving His people in the work to which I am called." And to another he said, "I bless God I do no more fear this death than to lie down upon this bed. Oh, how good is God! There is a ground for encouragement in the Lord's dealings with such a poor worm as I, for all the saints to trust Him in every condition."

Upon the seventh day, in the morning, he was allowed to be alone with his wife, and when the friends waiting to see him inquired how he was, he replied, "Never better in all my life; my wife and I have had the best morning that ever we had. We have been giving up one another in the Lord, and I bless the Lord that He hath made us willing to part one from another."

While in prison he preached more than one sermon, especially on his favourite topic, "Jesus Christ, King of all the nations of the earth". Pass what judgment men might on such phrases, they were not used in this instance as political weapons.

Finally, several persons of quality came to visit him, men and women, courtiers and others, to persuade him to petition the king and to lay forth his innocency; especially one of eminence in the city laboured much with him to that end, but he replied that he had discharged his duty and conscience already in clearing himself and that to the king he had done no wrong; therefore would submit himself to the Lord and rest satisfied in His good pleasure.

He seemed indeed to feel a sort of glory in his death, dwelling on all the details of his trial – the cause for which he suffered, the kingdom of Christ and the righteousness thereof; the false witnesses, who laid to his charge things he knew not; the importance given to his trial by its taking place in so high a court and before several judges, by the Government employing four of the king's counsellors besides the attorney-general and the

solicitor-general to plead against him, and empanelling a jury of knights and gentlemen, all of the same spirit; thirsting after his blood; the being robbed of his garments; and finally the mode of death with its details, even the fact of his body not being put into the grave, but on poles, so bringing it to resemble that of the witnesses in Revelation 11.

The night before he suffered he sat at supper with some friends, and said unto them, "I sup with you tonight, but you would be glad to sup with me tomorrow night". About three in the morning he had a sharp conflict with the king of terrors for about an hour and a half's time, but spoke no word, only had an inward wrestling that put him into a sweat.

A friend who watched with him read the eleventh of Hebrews, and therein the Lord discovered, to the refreshing of his soul, how that the way he was to travel that day had been travelled through by the Lord's worthies of old, and by faith they endured and accepted not of deliverance on man's terms because they looked for a better resurrection; and afterwards that friend sought the Lord.

Then John James declared that the Comforter was come to him again, and had refreshed his soul, and then he made himself ready, and in a joyful frame took his Bible and read James 1:12: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him."

Then he discoursed from this Scripture for half an hour, and when he had ended his discourse he kneeled down and prayed and praised the Lord. After that he discoursed with much joy and sweetness, and said that the Lord had granted him the desire of his heart; for he had desired and sought the Lord that he might be far from being afraid of any amazement, that he might endure the shame with joy when it came.

Just before his going forth, the friends arrived who had particularly desired to accompany him to the place of execution. "Here come my bride-men," he said, embracing them with joy. Then the keeper of the prison delivered him to the sheriff, who brought him into the press-yard, where, hearing the noise of the multitude without, he said there would by and by be as

many Hallelujahs. They then bound him about the back with a new cord, and so he was led into the street, and being placed on the sled, and attended by the sheriff's men and a company of foot-soldiers, he was dragged to Tyburn; and the way out of the town being very foul, he was drawn through much dirt and water, besides much splashing of the horses that went beside him.

It was one of the last days in November 1661 when this poor saint was dragged through the mire to endure his horrible sentence. But he was full of joy and cheerfulness, and not at all dismayed or terrified, when at last he stood beneath the gallows. Leave being given him to - speak, he discoursed at large on the charges made against him, in the course of which he described himself as coming from a mean family, but of God-fearing people; mentioned that his aged mother was still living; referred to his principles as a Baptist, as a Seventh-Day Baptist, and as a believer in the visible kingdom of Jesus Christ here on earth.

"I do desire to declare it humbly and in the fear of the Lord, that Jesus Christ the Son of God is King of all the nations of the world." Then having declared that he had not the least rising of the spirit against either judge, jury, or witnesses, having asked God to pardon them, he spoke earnestly to the people of God not to forsake the assembling of themselves together, or to neglect the ordinances of the Lord, but to stick to them whatever should happen, not to content them-selves with what they already knew, but to endeavour in the fear of the Lord to be seeking after more, and to have a care not to defile themselves with any superstition by treading into paths that might not suit the mind of God, however much they might be accepted in the land.

Finally, he spoke to those that had not yet an interest in Jesus Christ, that could not call God Father. First he addressed himself to the young, then to the ancient, saying, "There is yet a day of grace. Jesus Christ is held forth in the Gospel freely, He holds forth His blood freely; for the worst of sinners are not too old, nor too wicked, nor too great, they are not too unclean for Jesus Christ to pity."

Then he addressed himself to the Lord in prayer. And this prayer, now lying imbedded among legal reports, is one of the most touching man ever offered. "Sweet Father! blessed be Thy holy and dear name, that such a poor worm as is before Thee can call Thee Father, that such a poor worm as is before Thee can come and take hold of Thee through Thy dear Son." Then praying very earnestly for the poor witnesses in his late trial, he came to plead for "the poor executioner who is to destroy Thy servant and take him out of this world: that God would be pleased, if it may stand with Thy glory, and if he be within the line of the covenant of grace, that Thou wouldest wash his soul in the blood of Jesus Christ".

Then he prayed for all the people in England, Scotland, and Ireland, and all the people up and down the countries, praying specially for the people of God everywhere, and for their unity.

"And, sweet Lord, remember our dear King, our righteous Redeemer, and that Thou wouldest be pleased to give Him the heathen for His inheritance, and the utmost part of the earth for His possession". Then praying finally for courage in the presence of the instruments of death, he ceased, being very tired, and his body brought very low.

The hangman said, "The Lord receive your soul". He replied, "I thank you". Then another said, "This is a happy day". He said, "I bless the Lord it is so" The other said, "The Lord make your passage easy." He will do." Then the hangman, having prepared him for his death, drew away the cart, John James saying aloud, lifting up his hands, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit", and so he finished his course.

The sheriff and executioner appear to have been so far affected as to suffer him, contrary to the sentence, to be dead before cutting him down; then the hangman took out his heart, burnt the interior of the body, and returned his head and quarters back to Newgate to be disposed of by the king, his quarters being put up on the gates of the city, and his head first on the bridge, but afterwards it was taken down, and put on a pole in Whitechapel, over against the passage to the meeting-place where he was apprehended.

Though wrong in just place be set,

Committing great iniquitie;
Though hypocrites be counted great,
And still maintain idolatrie;
Though some set more by things of nought
Than by the Lord that all have brought;
Blame not my lute.

Blame not my lute, I you desire,
But blame the cause that we thus play;
For burning heat blame not the fire,
But him that bloweth the coale away;
Blame ye the cause, blame ye not us,
That we men's faults have touched thus;
Blame not my lute. [7]

NOTES:

- 1) Anne Dubourg was a counsellor in the Parliament of Paris, who, like Nicodemus in the Sanhedrin (John 7:50), tried in vain to move the consciences of his fellow-rulers. He spoke these words in a Bed of Justice, held in 1559, in the presence of Henri II of France, and they cost him his life.
- 2) Bishop Burnet's History of his own Times.
- 3) Andrew Marvell, describing Charles II, says: "Of a tall stature and a sable hue, much like the son of Kish, that lofty Jew."
- 4) "I command, moreover," said Diabolus, "that there be spies continually walking up and down the town of Mansoul." — Holy War.
- 5) Sir Robert Foster. "After the Restoration it was considered necessary to sweep away the whole of the judges from Westminster Hall, although they were learned and respectable men. Immense difficulty was found in replacing them.... At last a chief-justice was announced, and his obscurity testified the perplexity into which the Government had been thrown in making a decent choice. He was one of the few survivors of the old school

of lawyers which had flourished before the troubles began." — Lord Campbell: "Lives of the Chief Justices", Vol. 1, page 491.

6) This hangman went by the sobriquet of "Squire Dun". In a curious little tract of the time, entitled "Groanes from Newgate, or an Elegy upon Edward Dun, Esq., the Citie's Common Hangman, who dyed Naturally in his bed the 11th of September, 1663. Written by a person of Quality, 1663," the epitaph concludes by calling him "the miracle of crueltie", and then proceeds to give details too horrible for reproduction, but which ought to be recalled sometimes if we would realise the world in which our suffering forefathers lived.

7) John Hall's ditty, "On the Wicked State and Enormities of Most People in the Present Miserable Daies".



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