

## MEMORIALS OF BAPTIST MARTYRS

### ANNE ASKEW.

THIS distinguished lady is very truly said, by Mr. C. B. Tayler, to have been the most interesting victim of the fires of Smithfield. We have indeed a sad story to tell of this gentle and delicate woman. She was the intimate friend and companion of the lovely queen Catherine Parr, and was singled out by the crafty bishop Gardiner and others, as well as by the popish ladies of the court, hoping that through her they might find an accusation against the queen, for holding the faith and principles of the Reformation.

Anne Askew, as we learn from the second volume of "The Pictorial History of England," by Messrs. Craik and Macfarlane, was associated with Joan Boucher, of whom we shall speak in our next article, in the good work of circulating books and tracts in the court of Henry VIII. Joan escaped burning till the following reign, but, like her friend Anne Askew, she was persecuted and imprisoned by the tyrannical and hypocritical monarch. The probability that these two friends entertained the same views on the subject of baptism, seems confirmed by uncontradicted tradition, and the fact that no other body of Christians ever seems to have claimed either the one or the other. We feel no difficulty, therefore, in placing Anne Askew among the so-called "fanatical Anabaptists," of whose religious views the lower house of convocation complained to the sovereign, "as prevalent errors that demanded correction."

Anne was the youngest daughter of Sir William Askew, of Kelsey, in Lincolnshire; her eldest sister had been engaged to marry a gentleman of the name of Kyme, a harsh and bigoted Catholic; but the sister died, and she was compelled by her father to take her sister's place, and become the wife of that gentleman. It was indeed a most unhappy marriage for Anne. Her education had been superior to that usually given even to the nobility in those days, and she possessed a strong and enlightened mind; indeed she presented a striking contrast to her morose and narrow-minded husband.

She seems to have been distinguished for piety from her earliest years, and to have searched and prized the holy Scriptures, which had made her wise unto salvation. Her love of the truth, as it is found in its purity and freshness in the word of inspiration, gave great displeasure to her husband, by whom she was cruelly driven from her home. One of the accusations against her was, "that she was the devoutest woman he had ever known, for she began to pray always at midnight, and continued for some hours in that exercise."

Travelling to London to sue for a divorce from her tyrannical husband, his persecution and that of the popish priests followed her, and she soon fell into the snares they had laid for her. Full of piety and of Christian simplicity, she dreamt of no evil in the circles in which she moved. Anne Askew--for she had resumed her maiden name--was filled with the piety induced by the Holy Spirit. Her thorough knowledge of Holy Scripture, the hold which it had obtained of her heart, the influence which it exercised upon her conduct, the sweetness which it breathed over her manners, all combined to win for her the affection of those noble and pious ladies who formed the circle of the queen's society, who was herself said to be her friend, to have received books from her, and to have returned many a kind message. It has been said that probably a more unguarded and fearless spirit existed in this meek and gentle lady than in any other follower of Christ of her sex, rank, and the age in which she lived.

Soon, however, did she find that all the holy familiar intercourse she held on various occasions with the godly ladies of the court must cease; and that her attachment to the writings and memory of holy men must be locked up as inviolate secrets in her own bosom; for she was apprehended on the charge of holding heretical opinions against the six articles, with especial reference to the sacrament of the Lord's supper, and was committed to prison. Her conduct from that time presented a remarkable combination of lofty self-possession, and touching simplicity and sweetness--of firmness, constancy, and a ready wit, according to the true acceptation of that word; and all these qualities were in perfect keeping in her whole character and conduct, and made her at the same time one of the most feminine and courageous of her sex.

On the part of her enemies two objects were plainly manifest in all the examinations to which they subjected her--the first was to make her criminate herself, the second to lead her to criminate the queen, and those of her ladies who were suspected of holding "the new learning," as the eternal truths of the gospel were called by the Catholics.

Few women have so dearly and so truly won the title of heroine, in the highest sense of the word, as the poor persecuted martyr, Anne Askew. Few have possessed a presence of mind so unsupported by human strength, or even so little encouraged by human friends as this young lady. The wisdom and discretion which she exhibited in answering the insidious questions, and baffling the crafty designs of her enemies, were no less remarkable than her clear and accurate knowledge of the word of God, and her resolute spirit in cleaving to it. And thus she met and surmounted all the difficulties to which she was exposed, in one conference after another, with the most skilful and subtle of the Popish party; and every one who entered into an encounter with her, was

completely foiled by her truth, her simplicity of wisdom, her patience, and her calm trust in God. Her piteous story is enough to melt the sternest man to tears, were it not that the heart must throb, and the cheek burn at the disgraceful consciousness that Englishmen and English prelates, could be found base and bad enough to make that gentle lady the victim of their diabolical malice.

She was examined concerning her opinions by Christopher Dare, and Sir Martin Bowes, the then Lord Mayor of London, and their brother commissioners. With what inimitable simplicity did she reply in the conversation, which is said to have taken place between the Lord Mayor and herself: "What if a mouse were to eat the sacred bread after it was consecrated?" was the absurd question; "what shall become of the mouse, what sayest thou, thou foolish woman?" "Nay, what say you, my lord, will become of it?" "I say' that mouse is damned!" "Alas, poor mouse," was her quiet reply; and so at once all his divinity was discomfited. In one of her examinations she was asked if she had said that priests could not make the body of Christ; "I have read" she replied, "that God made man but that man can make God, I never yet read, nor, I suppose ever shall."

She herself, in the most artless language, gives an account of her various examinations. First, she was summoned before the inquisition at Sadler's Hall, where Christopher Dare asked her if she did not believe that the sacrament hanging over the altar was the very blood of Christ. She replied by asking him, "Why Stephen was stoned to death?" He said he could not tell. "No more," said she, "will I answer your vain question." Being charged with reading from a book that God dwelleth not in temples made with hands, she showed them the seventh and seventeenth chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. She was asked why she had said she would rather read five lines in the Bible than hear five masses? She confessed having said it, because the one did greatly edify her, and the other did not at all; quoting the text in the fourteenth of the first epistle to the Corinthians:--"If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for the battle?"

On her next examination before the lord mayor, she relates:--"Then the bishop's chancellor rebuked me, and said I was much to blame for uttering the Scriptures; for St. Paul, he said, forbade women to speak, or to talk of the word of God. I answered him that I knew Paul's meaning as well as he, which is that a woman ought not to speak in the congregation, by the way of teaching. And then I asked him how many women he had seen go into the pulpit and preach? He said he never saw any. Then I said he ought to find no fault in poor women, except they offend against the law." In an interview with a priest she requested him to answer some of his own questions, when he told her "that it was against

the order of the schools, that he who asked the question, should be required to answer it;" she at once told him that she was but a woman. and knew not the course of schools.

But we pass over these, and many other examinations, in which the patience of her adversaries, who could not overcome her, was exhausted. These bold and crafty men were determined to spare neither threat nor violence by which they might extort from her some word or other, as a ground of accusation against the Lady Herbert, who was the queen's sister, or the Duchess of Suffolk, and so at last Queen Catharine herself. As yet they had discovered nothing. Rich, and another of the council, came to her in the tower, where she was then confined, and demanded that she should make the disclosures which they required concerning her party, and her friends. She told them nothing. "Then," she says, "they did put me on the rack, because I confessed no ladies or gentlemen to be of my opinion; and thereon they kept me a long time, and because I lay still and did not cry, my lord chancellor and Mr. Rich took pains to rack me with their own hands till I was nigh dead." These inhuman creatures, it is recorded, provoked by her saint-like endurance, ordered the lieutenant of the tower to rack her again. He, Sir Anthony Knevett, "tendering the weakness of the woman," positively refused to do so. Then Wriothsley and Rich threw off their gowns, and threatening the lieutenant that they would complain of his disobedience to the king, "they worked the rack themselves, till her bones and joints were almost plucked asunder." When the lieutenant caused her to be loosed down from the rack, she immediately swooned. "Then," she writes, "they recovered me again. After that I sat two long hours reasoning with my lord chancellor on the bare floor, where he, with many flattering words, persuaded me to leave my opinion; but my Lord God, I thank his everlasting goodness, gave me grace to persevere, and will do, I hope, to the very end." And she concludes this account to her friend, by saying, "Farewell, dear friend, and pray, pray, pray."

The lieutenant of the tower, fearing Wriothsley's threats, secretly took a boat, and hastened to the king, to tell him the things he had witnessed. Henry seemed displeased at the excess of barbarity perpetrated, and dismissed the humane officer with assurances of his pardon; telling him to return, and see to his charge in the tower. There all the wardens and officials anxiously waited the result and gave God thanks for the success of his embassy.

Lascelles, one of Anne's fellow martyrs, inquiring if it were true that she had recanted, received from her this replv:--"O friend, most dearly beloved in God. I marvel not a little what should move you to judge in me so slender a faith as to fear death, which is the end of all miseries. In the Lord I desire you not to

believe of me such weakness. For I doubt it not but God will perform his works in me, like as he hath begun. I understand the council is not a little displeased, that it should be reported abroad that I was racked in the tower. They say now, that what they did there was but to fear me; [make me afraid,] whereby I perceive they are ashamed of their uncomely doings, and fear much lest the king's majesty should have information thereof; wherefore they would have no man to noise it. Well, for their cruelty God forgive them!"

Her last hours were employed in writing a strong denial of a report which had been circulated, that she had recanted, and swerved from the truth, and she concludes her account with this beautiful prayer:--"O Lord, I have more enemies now, than there be hairs on my head! Yet, Lord, let them never overcome me with vain words, but fight thou, Lord, in my stead: for on Thee cast I my care! With all the spite they can imagine, they fall upon me, who am Thy poor creature. Yet, sweet Lord, let me not set by them that are against me; for in Thee is my whole delight. And, Lord, I heartily desire of Thee, that, Thou wilt, of Thy most merciful goodness, forgive them that violence which they do, and have done unto me; open also Thou their blind hearts, that they may hereafter do that thing in Thy sight, which is only acceptable before Thee, and to set forth Thy verity aright, without all vain fantasies of sinful man. So be it, O Lord, so be it."

Unable to walk or stand from the tortures she had endured, Anne Askew was carried in a chair to Smithfield, and when brought to the stake was fastened to it by a chain which held up her body, and one who saw her there describes her as "having an angel's countenance, and a smiling face." She had three companions in her last agonies, fellow-martyrs with herself, John Lascelles, a gentleman of the court and household of king Henry, John Adams, a tailor, and Nicholas Belenian, a minister of Shropshire. The apostate priest Shaxton preached the sermon, to which Anne Askew gave diligent attention, assenting when he spoke truth, and when he erred, detecting and exposing it. The concourse of spectators was so great, that a space was obliged to be railed in to keep off the pressure. The three Throckmortons, near kinsmen of the queen, and members of her household, drew near to comfort Anne and her three companions, but were warned that they were marked men, and were entreated to withdraw.

While these things were going on, at a short distance, elevated on a high judicial seat, immediately under St. Bartholomew's church, sat Wriothesley, the tormenting Lord Chancellor of England, the old duke of Norfolk, the old earl of Bedford, the Lord Mayor, and several others. Guilt always makes men fearful, and when these men heard that some gunpowder was thrown upon the bodies of the martyrs, they showed no small alarm, lest the faggots might thereby be

driven towards them. At length, however, the facts being fully ascertained by the earl of Bedford, their alarm ceased.

At the very last, a written pardon from the king was offered to Anne Askew, upon condition that she would recant. The fearless lady turned away her eyes and would not look upon it. She told them that she came not there to deny her Lord and Master. The fire was ordered to be put under her, and her companions, who, in like manner had each refused a pardon, by the Lord Mayor; "and thus," to use the words of John Foxe, "the good Anne Askew, with these blessed martyrs, having passed through so many torments, having now ended the long course of her agonies, being encompassed with flames of fire as a blessed sacrifice unto God, she slept in the Lord, A. D. 1546, leaving behind her a singular example of Christian constancy for all men to follow." Her crime was the denial of the Mass. "So this," she wrote, "is the heresy that I hold, and for it must suffer death." She kept the faith to her God, she kept the faith to her friends, for she betrayed no one, enduring shame and agony with meek unshaken constancy. O none but Christ, none but Christ could have made the weakness of a delicate woman so strong,--the feebleness of a mortal creature so triumphant!

And thus the square of Smithfield, which was made in the reign of Henry I, "a lay stall of all ordure or filth," and the place of execution for felons and other transgressors, has become not only drenched with the blood of martyrs, but hallowed by the faith and patience of the saints, by the witness of their good confessions, and by the breath of their dying prayers and praises.

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