

George Tankerfield.

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THE tablet erected by our Society on one of the piers of the gateway to the old graveyard in Romeland commemorates a phase of our history which ought on no account to be forgotten, though perhaps it may also be added that it ought not to be commemorated overmuch. The lapse of nearly four centuries has not, indeed, sufficed to pacify all the great controversies of the Reformation, but it has enabled us to view them with a more tolerant eye, and often to perceive "some seed of goodness," even in things which were unquestionably evil in themselves. Political and religious controversies now, happily, tend to keep separate, and both seem to have lost some bitterness in the process of dissociation.

George Tankerfield, the Protestant martyr burned by Marian persecutors at St. Alban's, was a native of York, living in London, and no more than twenty-eight years of age. Like most North-country men, he had been a tardy convert to "the New Doctrines," and in King Edward's days he "had been a very Papist." But he had been first revolted by the cruelties of the Marian persecutors, and then attracted by the teachings which he saw them attempting to repress. He was evidently of an argumentative disposition, and fond of holding forth in company; and one gathers that but for these qualities, he might well have remained unmolested—as those who could keep their mouths shut for the most part actually did.

He was a cook by trade; and when Beard, the Yeoman of the Guard, arrived at his house to apprehend him, that officer pretended that he was wanted "to dress a banquet for my Lord Paget." His wife hurried out to fetch him, for he had gone to watch the archery in Temple Gardens; and she was particularly anxious that he should not miss so good a job, because he had been ill and unfit for work for some days. When the poor woman realised what she had done, she attempted to stab Beard with a skewer; and one gathers that old John Foxe, the chronicler, would not have been sorry if she

had succeeded! He records as a crumb of consolation that she did land a brick between Beard's shoulders as he was leading his prisoner away!

Tankerfield was arraigned before Bonner as one of a batch of ten prisoners—eight men and two women—who had all been arrested about the same time; and it seems that he, and Robert Smith of Windsor, were the two chief spokesmen of the party in the lengthy series of examinations which ensued. "This (Tankerfield) is master speaker, and this (Smith) master comptroller," was one of Bonner's comments in the course of the trial, and later on he broke out, with the customary brutality of the period, "By my troth, master speaker, ye shall preach at a stake."

The crucial questions, as usual, were (1) the necessity of Auricular Confession, (2) the Real Presence, and (3) the sufficiency of the Mass; and on these points, particularly on the second, no qualified acceptance was permissible. The prisoners were required to accept meticulously and categorically the full and literal interpretation which was given to that doctrine by their judges.

Indeed, it is clear that neither party was at all desirous of finding any terms of agreement. Each was intent on securing a dialectic triumph for its own shibboleth. As has been well pointed out, both sides regarded themselves as soldiers, and looked on death and torture as inevitable incidents of the war.

Of course, all the prisoners were condemned; but three died in prison in the Lollards' Tower at Lambeth before the date fixed for their execution. The rest were distributed about the country so as to inspire public terror—a policy which, as it proved, only aroused public resentment. Robert Smith was burned at Uxbridge, Stephen Harwood at Stratford, Thomas Fust at Ware, and William Hale at Barnet. Elizabeth Warne, whose husband had already suffered a similar fate, was burned at Stratford-le-Bow; and her daughter Joan, a girl of twenty, at Smithfield, some five months later.

Tankerfield was brought to St. Alban's on August 26th, just six months after his arrest, by Edward Brocket, the Sheriff of Hertfordshire, and Pulter, of Hitchin, the

Under-Sheriff. They left their prisoner at the Cross Keys, and went off to dine with "a certain gentleman" whose son had been married that morning. One fancies that the poor bride must have had but a gruesome recollection of her wedding breakfast.

Tankerfield was kindly received by the inn-keeper, and seems to have held a sort of reception in his chamber, remarking to his visitors, with almost incredible cheerfulness, that "Though the day be never so long, at length it ringeth to evensong." Some who came in reviled him; but the more part pitied and condoled with him; and he enjoyed the pleasure of a last long argument with "a certain schoolmaster, a retainer to Sir Thomas Pope," who eventually quitted him unconvinced, but with the assurance that he "wished him well."

Then he called for bread and wine, and made his confession aloud in the hearing of all who filled the chamber; and, after reading from his Bible the four accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper, he solemnly partook, with thanksgiving, of the sacramental elements—protesting that "he did not thus to derogate authority from any man, nor in contempt of those who were God's ministers; but because he could not have the Sacrament ministered to him according to God's Word."

Finally, he called for a fire; and, when it was well kindled, bared his foot and placed it in the flame, as though to test his own endurance and resolution. And, as he flinched from it, pointed out to the bystanders that the flesh was weak, but that he trusted that the Spirit would sustain him—surely an amazing instance of steadfast courage and serenity!

By now it was two o'clock in the afternoon, and the sheriffs were returned from their banquet to conduct their prisoner to the stake. "I shall have a sharp dinner," he remarked with unwavering cheerfulness, as he passed down the hill into Romeland, "but I hope a joyful supper in Heaven."

As they were binding him to the stake, a priest made a last effort to secure a recantation, but was repulsed with a fierce defiance. Perhaps it was this which caused the Mayor (Henry Gape), when ordering the pile to be fired, to add that "if he had but one load of faggots in the world, he would give them for the burning of so obstinate

a heretic." But the last incident recorded is pitched in a worthier key: A "certain knight" approached him and grasped his hand, saying "good brother, be strong in Christ," and received the reply from the martyr, "Oh, Sir, I thank you. I am so, I thank God."

He does not seem, after this, to have suffered long or much; and there were whispers among some of the bystanders that for this he was indebted to enchantment. Anyway, the fire was lit, and he was burned to ashes—"and thus came Faithful to his end."

Surely, even if nothing in his life became him better than the leaving of it, we may confess that here was a man whose memory deserves our esteem.

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