

ANNE ASKEW, "THE FAIR GOSPELLER."

BY JOHN KNIPE.

PART II.

THE ORDEAL OF FAITH. BEFORE THE QUEST. THE SADDLERS' HALL, CHEAPSIDE. MARCH 11, 1545.

The Saddlers' Hall sounds a strange place for a Heresy Tribunal. But it was so used by the Quest. We know little of Christopher Dare except that he was hated by the Londoners. Probably he was a harsh man in his odious office.

"Anne Askew, alias Kyme," was brought before him in the forenoon. We hear nothing of any "indictment or presentment by the oaths of twelve men," and I suspect the proceedings were illegal, although the actual arrest may have been lawful if, as seems likely, the Lord Mayor signed the Warrant.

"Anne's Journal" gives a graphic account. Dare questioned her first on the 1st Article: Transubstantiation.

"He asked if I did not believe that the Sacrament hanging over the altar was the very body of Christ really."

It was a terrible question, subtle and manifestly unjust, since if she denied it before him Anne condemned herself to the stake. She showed the quick wit for which she was famous. "Then I demanded this question of him, Wherefore Saint Stephen was stoned to death?" Dare must have understood the bold allusion. He replied curtly that he could not tell. And Anne answered that no more would she reply to his vain question.

The Inquisitor marked her answer dubious, and passed on. He examined her briefly on the other five articles (Communion in one Kind, Vows of Chastity, Private Masses, Celibacy of Priests, Auricular Confession).

Anne replied by citing Scripture to the vexation of a Heresy Commissioner who apparently was orthodox in his ignorance. His seventh question was a taunt; was she inspired? In the eighth Dare tried to catch her in her words. He asked if she did not think that Private Masses did help souls departed. Anne replied boldly that "it was great idolatry to believe more in them than in the death which Christ died for us."

Whereupon Dare sent her straight to the Guildhall.

BEFORE THE LORD MAYOR.

The proceedings were illegal, for she was not "so accused and presented" as required by the Act, which further provided that the person accused "shall examine the accusers."

Sir Martin Bowes, the Lord Mayor, was a bluff Yorkshireman, member of the Goldsmiths, and proud of his knowledge of theology. He had an eye for a pretty woman and he addressed Anne paternally, calling her a "foolish woman." He asked her if she denied what

common parlance named "God's Body-making." Anne replied: "I have read that God made man; but that man can make God I never yet read." "Foolish woman!" ejaculated Bowes. And he put to her the popular query of that day; which even Bishop Gardiner had not denied. My Lord Mayor solemnly demanded: "What if a mouse eat it after consecration, what shall become of the mouse?" When she was silent, Bowes repeated: "What say'st thou? Thou foolish woman!"

Anne asked what he said. The Lord Mayor thundered: "I say, that mouse is damned!"

Then from the bar of the Guildhall the clear feminine voice observed sweetly: "Alas, poor mouse!"

And the laughter of those present confounded my Lord Mayor. Now uprose the scandalized face of the Reverend Thomas Bage Williams, Bishop Bonner's Chancellor, as he rounded Bowes in the ear and urged him to leave such discussion to the Church.

Before long he rebuked Anne as blameworthy for uttering the Scriptures contrary to Saint Paul's prohibition. Anne replied by quoting and commenting upon 1 Corinthians xiv. It is only fair to remember that in those days when the clergy quoted texts they did not expect them to be known, still less the context.

The examination at the Guildhall ended quickly in Anne's committal.

FIRST IMPRISONMENT. THE COMPTER. BREAD ST. BOW.

In a narrow lane off Newgate Street there was a gloomy stone building, the Compter or Common Jail for persons awaiting trial. Anne was closely imprisoned in a cell. She seems to have been allowed one to herself and probably the jailer thought she could pay for "Garnish." Her woman was admitted, but none other except a priest sent by the Bishop to "give her good counsel"; "which," Anne records tersely, "he did not." She was in sore straits for money, and as the prisoners were accustomed to rattle a box at the window-bars, her faithful woman "went abroad in the streets and told her case" to those who were ever inclined to help any in trouble with the Law—the bold 'Prentices of the City.

They sent Anne money. At first the kindhearted lads gave it themselves, but after they told the maid "divers ladies had sent money." The rumour of her arrest had reached the Court, and later serving men in the blue coat of Hertford and the violet coat of Denny met the woman and gave her ten shillings and eight shillings in the name of those noble ladies.

Then the tale came to Cousin Britain in his quiet chambers at Gray's Inn. For twelve days he could not see his kinswoman, but he took active steps badgering Bowes, complaining at the Consistory, demanding that Anne should have legal advice when accused of a capital crime. March 23rd he visited Anne in her cell. He was alarmed when he heard that Bonner had sent a priest, and doubtless the barrister warned his cousin that she must be prudent in her answers, especially concerning the Sacrament of the altar,

while he would tell her that "offenders standing mute were convicted."

After a long talk, Britain went off to worry the Lord Mayor, and he applied for bail. Bowes said civilly that he was ready to befriend the lady, but that "a spiritual officer's sanction had been necessary to her committal and he desired him to call on the Bishop's Chancellor." Bage would only promise to speak to Bonner, and he desired Mr. Britain to return on the morrow. The indefatigable Britain agreed and met the Bishop.

Edmund Bonner was not yet the savage persecutor of Mary's reign. He was the natural son of John Savage, "a richly beneficed Cheshire priest" of good family. Bonner had a great respect for persons of family. "He showed a rough good nature" to heretics at times, and he was not so hostile to Bible-reading as Gardiner, for he had "set up six Great Bibles in convenient places at Paul's," partly, as he said, because it caused less of a crowd than when there was one. He had allowed if not licensed a "Bible-reader," named Porter. He listened affably to Britain and appointed the day following at 3 p.m. for Anne's appearance. "He desired that Dr. Crome, Sir William Whitehead, and Mr. Huntingdon, for whom she had a particular respect, might be present and report she was humanely treated." And he told Britain "to urge her to speak freely" and swore—Bonner was free of tongue—"that it would not turn to her prejudice. If she did say anything amiss all he would do would be to put her right by godly counsel and instruction."

ANNE BEFORE BONNER. THE PALACE. OLD ST. PAUL'S.
MARCH 25, 1545.

Bonner observed Anne with keen interest, and in a paternal manner he inquired of her opinion about the Sacrament. Britain was present, and his friend a Mr. Spilman, also a lawyer of Gray's Inn. With Bonner there were Dr. Standish, Dr. Weston and his chaplains. The three sympathizers named by the Bishop are not mentioned. The gist of Bonner's opening question was how would Anne believe if the Scripture affirmed Transubstantiation, and how would she believe supposing the Scripture to deny it. Anne replied steadily that she believed "as the Scripture taught." Her answer was not heretical but Bonner "upon this argument tarried a great while." He "would have driven her to make him an answer to his mind." She would not and she refused to let others intervene, saying, "what she had said to the Bishop of London she had said."

After a few moments Bonner rose and withdrew into his private room. But it is evident from what followed that Dr. Weston had been favourably impressed.

THE DISPUTED CONFESSION.

In almost all the records of the Reformers we find some disputed Confession, and the notice in the *Dictionary of National Biography*

on "Anne Askew" by Dr. Gairdner is here amazingly inaccurate. The only real account is that in her Journal and she is emphatic as to what took place. Bonner came back with a fresh-written document, which he read aloud, and asked her if she agreed to it. The statement, of course, was a profession of faith in Transubstantiation, and a general submission to the authority of the Church. Anne answered that "she believed so much as the Holy Scripture did agree unto." And she asked him to add her words to his writing. Bonner retorted that she "should not teach him what he should write." He told her that she might thank others and not herself for the favour that he had shown her as she was so well connected."

He sat down, handed her the writing, and bade her sign it. If Anne obeyed Bonner was willing to order her to be set free.

By recent Statute the Ordinary had the power within his discretion. Britain, Spilman, and the rest seem to have urged her for she says: "With much ado, at the last I wrote thus: 'I, Anne Askew, do believe this if God's Word do agree to the same and the true Catholic Church.'"

Strange to say it was the reference to the Catholic Church which enraged Bonner. "He flung into his chamber in a great fury." Britain rushed after him. "For God's sake, treat her kindly!" he implored. "She is a woman!" roared Bonner: "and I am nothing deceived in her." Britain was a tactful man. "Take her as a woman then, and do not set her weak woman's wit to your lordship's great wisdom."

Dr. Weston had examined what Anne had written and he followed the barrister; the ecclesiastic represented to the Bishop that the lady acted from ignorance, meaning to express her faith in the Catholic Church!

Bonner consented to come out. He took the names of Britain and Spilman as "sureties-in-bond" but remanded Anne until the next day to appear at the Guildhall where Bail might be granted by the Lord Mayor.

SECOND APPEARANCE AT THE GUILDHALL. MARCH 26.

Sir Martin Bowes refused to grant Bail and remanded Anne again. The patient Britain persisted, and finally both Bonner and the Lord Mayor accepted the Bail Bond. Bowes, however, summoned her before him on July 12. She and two others were arraigned for heresy but Chancellor Bage Williams had withdrawn his charge against her. No witnesses appeared and the Lord Mayor ordered her formal release.

THE FAIR GOSPELLER AT COURT. JULY, 1545—MAY, 1546.

Cousin Britain's name is not mentioned again. Anne was heartily welcomed at Court by the Queen and her ladies. The King's favourite, Sir George Blage, gentleman of the bedchamber, was a Gospeller, so were the ushers, Mr. Lascelles and Mr. Morice, father of Cranmer's secretary. Anne got her nickname from

distributing copies of Tyndale's New Testament. She obtained these from the London agent of the "Christian Brethren," Joan Bocher, and the First Meeting-House of the Reformers was a room over a warehouse in Bow Lane. There is no evidence whatever, and the writer has searched every available contemporary source, for the other "loud lie" of Parsons the Jesuit that Joan Bocher was Anne Askew's friend. Madame Askew was probably one of the Queen's gentlewomen, or else she filled some salaried post, for she was an acknowledged Court beauty, wearing unblemished "the white flower of a blameless life." Henry was abroad part of the year, and so was Gardiner, while in the King's absence, Cranmer and the Queen headed the Council. There was a lull in the bitter storm of persecution.

But in 1546 Bishop Gardiner regained the royal favour which he had lost by attacking Cranmer, and he found that the gentle influence of Catherine Parr was defeating his Bloody Statute.

BISHOP GARDINER "BENDS HIS BOW."

"He bent his bow to strike at some of the head deer." (Foxe.) Gardiner at once marked Anne and he accused her to Henry as "tainting the Queen and her ladies with heresy." Henry was enraged at the suggestion that his nieces, the Marchioness of Dorset and her sister, were Anne's dupes. A search discovered prohibited books in the Queen's rooms.

MAY 24, 1546. THE SUMMONS BEFORE THE COUNCIL.

Gardiner's name is on the list of signatures to the following: "Two of the Yeomen of the Chamber were sent and had with them letters to one Kyme and his wife for their appearance within ten days of receipt." (P.C.Bk.) Gardiner meant to part Anne from the Queen her friend. He had a further design, as will appear.

BEFORE THE COUNCIL. GREENWICH PALACE. JUNE 17.

The Council Book shows that Cranmer was not present, then or on the days succeeding. The Lord Chancellor Wriothesley, the Grand Master Lord St. John, Essex, Lisle, Secretary Paget, Gage (Constable of the Tower), the turncoat Rich (bitter enemy of More), and Bishops Tunstal and Gardiner, besides Court officials: these were present. What we know of the close of Anne's short life stands out in a rapid series of vivid events. In the Interrogation the terrible Gardiner was the chief figure. He examined her, cross-examined her, and re-examined her on the First Article, seeking to shake her confident faith. When she answered prudently he admonished her "to speak plainly," and when she quoted texts he called her "a parrot." Tunstal sat silent. We know that he boasted years after that "he had never burnt any man."

The Council had first called Kyme before them and attempted a reconciliation. But if he was willing, the lady flatly refused to live with him again. She would only give her reasons before the King. So he was told to withdraw and was not present during her

examination. And that was the last time Anne Askew met her husband.

Gardiner questioned her on Reservation. Her answer is remarkable. She challenged him to prove it! Let them mark a consecrated wafer, "let it lie in the box and in three months it would turn mouldy." She added boldly; "Therefore I am persuaded it cannot be God." Gardiner told her she would be burnt.

Anne had been five hours before them. They listened and watched to see how she would take Winchester's savage threat. She said quietly that "she had never read Christ and his Apostles put any man to death." There was an amazed silence. Then they commanded her to stand aside. In the recess, Essex, Lisle and Paget spoke to her privately, urging her to recant. Paget whispered; "You could deny it again if need were." When recalled she asked Wriothesley, "How long he would halt on both sides?" An imprudent question, which he never forgave. The horrible business of persecution made every man suspect his neighbour of suspecting him. Anne was asked "if any of the Council (the absent Cranmer was aimed at) had befriended her?" She denied it. She was then remanded in ward. "To my Lady Garnish" she writes playfully. Her warder was not a titled lady, as she learned Gardiner glossed their gentleness! (*Vide* the Compter jailer.)

JUNE 18. The Council Book shows she was before them at Greenwich and not at the Guildhall. Almost every historian has gone wrong on these dates. She gave in a written statement of her faith in "The Sacrament of Remembrance." Again she exasperated Gardiner by her faultless memory of the New Testament. Of the Council "Some liked the wit and freedom of her discourse but others thought she was too forward."

JUNE 19. The Proceedings were formal. Probably it was Gardiner who put to her the fatal question: "Will you plainly deny Christ to be in the Sacrament?" She answered affirmatively, quoting St. Matthew xxiv, and Acts vii and xvii. They committed her and she praised God saying she "neither wished for death nor feared his might."

The record runs: "Thomas Kyme—who had married one Anne Ascue—who refused him to be her husband without any honest allegation was appointed to return to his country—and for that she was very obstinate and heady in reasoning of matters of religion, wherein she showed herself of a naughty opinion, seeing no persuasions of good reasons could take place she was sent to Newgate to remain there to answer to the law." (P.C.Bk.)

But the eager little woman who argued with Gardiner was to suffer a deep spiritual change before she drank of her Lord's cup. On the Sunday (20th) she was seized with fever (probably gaol-fever) and in anguish of body and mind she sent a piteous request to the Council that "Dr. Latimer might come to her." He was their prisoner at Greenwich, but "Stout Hugh Latimer" was the last man whom they would allow to comfort Anne Askew.

Instead they ordered her to be conveyed straight to Newgate and in such pain as she had never felt before, the doors of Newgate closed upon her. Anne, as her request and the Journal show, longed for Latimer to assure her that she was not forsaken by her God. She bore her dark hour alone, and the meekness of the martyr tempered her ardent spirit. After they offered her Dr. Crome, but he had recanted and she would not see him. About this time she wrote the Prayer in her Journal, which begins "Lord, I have more enemies than the hairs of my head." It breathes a touching submission and utter dependence, with the confiding love of a child. It is hard for us to understand her marvellous faith.

JUDGMENT AT THE GUILDHALL. MONDAY, JUNE 28.

"Machyn's Diary" gives a brief account, but there is an obvious slip in the date, which the Council Book and her Journal correct. On the Bench sat the Lord Mayor (Bowes again), Norfolk, St. John, Bishops Bonner and Heath, Chief Justices of King's Bench and Common Pleas, Lord Chief Baron of Exchequer, Master of Rolls, Recorder, the Bishop's Archdeacon, Chancellor and Commissary.

And with all this array the Trial was illegal for it was "without a jury." The judges broke the very Statute by which they condemned the prisoners at the Bar; with Anne being Dr. Shaxton—former Bishop of Salisbury, a gentleman named White, and a poor Essex tailor named Adams." All "confessed the indictment" and "so had judgment to be burnt."

JUNE 29. But on the morrow (Tuesday in the Journal) Anne was suddenly brought from Newgate to The Sign of the Crown. She was taken before Bonner and Sir Richard Rich, who "with flattering words went about to persuade me from God." Two of those condemned with her had given way. "Then came to me Nicholas Shaxton and counselled me to recant as he had done." Poor Bishop Shaxton! He had borne bravely poverty and rigorous imprisonment but he could not face the stake. Anne told him "it had been good for him never to have been born." The apostate was dumb and Rich, enraged at his failure, produced a fresh Council Warrant.

IN THE TOWER OF LONDON. JUNE 29—JULY 12.

At three in the afternoon Anne was led to the White Tower and interrogated by Wriothesley and Rich before Sir Anthony Knevet the Lieutenant. They demanded testimony against the Queen and her ladies, with the names of those who succoured her in the Compter. Anne spoke of the unknown servingmen in the blue and violet coats but she knew of none who sent money. They had her on the rack and under sharp torture, demanded the names of the Gospellers at Court. They asked repeatedly if the Queen were not one of them. Strong men succumbed on the rack but Anne "lay still and did not cry." Wriothesley and Rich flung off their gowns and turned the levers themselves until she was nigh dead. She never accused the Queen or any others. Knevet interposed,

and stopped the Question. She fainted as they loosed her. When she came to she was lying on the stone in that dreadful vault and propped against the rack she "reasoned two full hours with Wriothesley." He ordered her to be racked again. Knevet declared peremptorily that "the woman had borne enough" and he bade them carry her to a house and lay her in a bed. The Lieutenant's word was Law in the Tower. The house was almost certainly that of Partridge the Gentleman Gaoler, which was next door to the Lieutenant's lodging. They carried the helpless form in a chair across Tower Green as the Lord Chancellor swearing "the woman could and should have borne more!" cursed Knevet, threatened to tell the King, and called for his horse. Sir Anthony quietly commanded his wherry, and, favoured by the tide, he beat Wriothesley in the race to Whitehall. He saw the King, told him all and pleaded his knighthood. Henry was silent and embarrassed, but finally he gave Knevet his hand to kiss, and muttered "We had not meant the woman should be handled so extremely." Knevet left the Palace as Wriothesley on his blown horse reached it. He had stuck in the mud of Great Tower Street. Henry vented his rage on his Lord Chancellor. Knevet found the Tower warders anxiously looking out for him, and, what was rare in its annals, the Lieutenant told them what had passed, and they thanked God. In the care of the humane and kindly Knevet, the suffering Anne had a brief respite. It is clear the racking severely injured her spine.

JULY 12. "Machyn's Diary" makes the date plain. "This night Anne Askew was brought by water from the Tower to Blackfriars and from thence carried in a chair to Newgate by the sheriff's officers."

LAST DAYS IN NEWGATE.

There was a little company of martyrs in the prison and they shared a common parlour. Lascelles, the Court Usher, had been condemned, and Blagge whom the King interposed to pardon freely—and Belenian a priest. Anne's friend, sturdy old John Loud of Lincoln's Inn, visited them, and so did the brothers Throgmorton in spite of the warning from an unknown man. "Ye are all marked that come to them. Take heed to your lives." Anne either finished or dictated her Journal which she seems to have given to Loud to be printed in Germany. He gave it "to certain Dutch merchants of the City" and they to the Reformer Bale abroad. Loud wrote of Anne: "The day before her execution and the same day also she had a smiling countenance and an angel's face."

JULY 16, 1546. SMITHFIELD. "RATHER DEATH THAN FALSE TO FAITH."

In these words Anne had rejected Wriothesley's offer of a pardon and pension from the Crown. The Martyrdom has been described in vivid details. How the Lord Mayor and Council sat "looking

on, leaning in a window by the Hospital" (Bartholomew's) the three stakes and piles of faggots, the sultry sky, the four martyrs, the courtier Lascelles, the priest Belenian and the Essex tailor, with Anne "holden up between two serjeants," an eye-witness related, "so racked that she could not stand, sitting there in a chair" (Loud). The really tragic figure was the miserable Shaxton in his pulpit preaching at those who were faithful to death. A vast crowd watched in pity and horror. Anne listened attentively to Shaxton, sometimes audibly approving and once she cried out: "There he misses and speaks without the Book!" He ended and the Martyrs began to pray. They chained Anne alone to the centre stake and Wriothesley sent her the King's Pardon if she would recant. She turned away her eyes from the parchment. "I came not hither to deny my Lord and Master." Such were the last words of Anne Askew. The others refused also. The sight of the sacks of powder caused an undignified panic among the Council. Bedford said it was about the bodies of the Martyrs and too far off to harm others. Rain was threatening and the Lord Mayor rose and cried: "Fiat Justitia!" The radiant face of Anne was uplifted, the smile still on her lips, her eyes fixed on the sky. "They put fire to the reeds." There was a sudden clap of thunder quickly followed by the powder exploding, and a cloud of smoke.

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Amid the rain the Londoners hurried home, asking each other if they had heard thunder or a Voice from Heaven for they thought the Council had burned the bodies of those whose souls the angels rejoiced to receive into Life Everlasting.

NOTE.—I accept the authenticity of the Journal, but not all of Bishop Bale's comments.—J. K.

CONTEMPORARY AUTHORITIES.

Acts of the Privy Council.

State Papers Henry VIII (Domestic).

Machyn's Diary.

Wriothesley's Chronicle.

"The Journal" printed in *Bale's Tracts—The First Examination of Anne Askew*, printed at Marburg (Hesse), November, 1546; *The Latter Examination of Anne Askew*, printed January, 1547, also at Marburg (Hesse).

Foxe's Acts and Monuments.

Robert Parsons, S.J., *Three Notable Conversions.*

Strype's *Annals and Memorials* (contains Loud's narrative).

Bishop Burnet quotes from *A Journal of Anthony Anthony*, Ordnance Surveyor at the Tower. This document is lost, but the name appears frequently in the Priory Council Book.