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XXII

VENERABLE GEORGE NICHOLS,

secular priest,

VENERABLE RICHARD YAXLEY,

secular priest,

VENERABLE THOMAS BELSON,

layman,

and

VENERABLE HUMPHREY PRITCHARD,

layman,

martyred at Oxford,

5 July 1589.

Canonization Process

VENS. GEORGE NICHOLS and RICHARD YAXLEY, secular priests, and THOMAS BELSON and HUMPHREY PRITCHARD, laymen, martyred at Oxford, 5 July 1589.¹

VEN. GEORGE NICHOLS

George Nichols was born at Oxford (doc. 13 (e)), probably about 1550: he was a student at Brasenose College, Oxford, about 1565,² and was then probably about fifteen years of age.³ He graduated B.A. at Oxford in 1571,⁴ and subsequently became an usher (assistant master) at St. Paul's School in London (doc. 13 (c)). Presumably he conformed to the State Church at this time, but we know nothing of how his conversion to Catholicism came about. He arrived at the English College at Rheims in November 1581,⁵ but went on to Rome, apparently on a journey of devotion, for we find that in July 1582 he returned from Rome to Rheims.⁶ He received the subdiaconate and diaconate at Laon in April 1583 and was ordained priest in Rheims Cathedral by Cardinal Louis de Guise, Archbishop of Rheims, on 24 September following.⁷ He left Rheims for England some time in 1584.⁸

The field of Nichols' ministry in England was in and around Oxford, where he is said to have laboured with much fruit and to have been 'the refuge of all the Catholics' (docs. 5, 6). In 1587 he was sent for by Catholic prisoners in Oxford Castle to reconcile to the Church a notorious young highwayman named Harcourt Taverner, who was under sentence of death there. On the morning of the execution Nichols came to the gaol in disguise and, gaining admission by posing as a relative of the condemned man, was able to hear his confession and prepare him for death. On the scaffold Taverner openly professed himself a Catholic and resisted all persuasion to return to the Protestant religion (docs. 5, 6, 10, 11, 12). Unfortunately this is about the only incident recorded in Nichols' five years of ministry in and around Oxford.

VEN. RICHARD YAXLEY

Richard Yaxley, alias Tankard (doc. 1 (b)), was born at Boston in Lincolnshire (doc. 13 (e)) some time around 1560. He was the son of William and Rose Yaxley (née Langton), and was one of a family of eight sons and four daughters.⁹ He entered the English College at Rheims in August 1582, received tonsure and minor orders there in September 1583, the subdiaconate and diaconate in April 1585,¹⁰ and was ordained priest in Rheims Cathedral by the Bishop of Meaux on 21 September 1585.¹¹ Four months later, on 28 January 1586, he set out from Rheims for England.¹²

On his arrival in England Yaxley seems to have sought out his former fellow-student, Ven. Robert Dibdale (ordained at Rheims in March 1584

who was then staying with Mr. Edmund Peckham at Denham in Buckinghamshire, and during the next few months he was involved in the exorcisms which were taking place at Denham at this time.¹³ About the end of 1586 or the beginning of 1587 we hear of him in the area of Oxford, where he endeavoured to have a girl named Sarah Williams, one of those exorcised at Denham, set free from prison.¹⁴ Around March 1588 he appears in a list of 'papists and recusants' as being in Cornwall.¹⁵ Otherwise we have no details of his work in England, but it is almost certain that, like Nichols, he laboured mostly in and around Oxford.

VEN. THOMAS BELSON

Thomas Belson, sone of Augustine Belson of Ixhill Lodge, Brill, Buckinghamshire (doc. 13 (e)), was born probably around 1565 and came of a staunchly Catholic family.¹⁶ One William Forrest stated later that about 1581, when he was in the service of Augustine Belson at Brill, he was led to absent himself from the Protestant church services 'by the example and demeanour' of his master and 'by the special persuasion' of the latter's sons, Thomas and William; Thomas and William, he added, 'never used to come to [the Protestant] church' and they said that it was 'rather a hell than heaven' to do so.¹⁷ After Thomas Belson's martyrdom his home at Ixhill Lodge was reported to Lord Burghley to be 'a receptacle house for Jesuits' and it was urged that those dwelling therein, namely the father and brother of the martyr, 'ought to be removed' (doc. 3).

The Thomas Belson who matriculated in the University of Oxford in 1581 and graduated B.A. in 1583 was probably the future martyr.¹⁸ In 1584 we find him in the English College at Rheims. How long he spent there or whether he went with the intention of studying for the priesthood, we do not know; the College Diary records merely that on 5 April in that year he set out from Rheims for England in company with a priest, Ven. Francis Ingleby (martyred at York in 1586, supra pp. 270 seq.) and another young layman named Metcalf.¹⁹

After his return to England Belson was soon in trouble on account of his religion. On 24 June 1585 he was a prisoner in the Tower of London (doc. 14), committed 'for conveying intelligence between Bridges the priest and others beyond the seas and some in this realm' (doc. 15 (b)). He remained in the Tower until the end of November 1586, when the Privy Council decided to release him 'upon bond to depart the realm' (doc. 15 (a)). Probably he went abroad for a time, but by the spring of 1589 he was back again in England.

VEN. HUMPHREY PRITCHARD

Of Humphrey Pritchard's early life nothing at all is known; we meet him for the first time when the four martyrs were arrested in Oxford in 1589. His name (given variously as Richard, ap Richard, Prichard, Pritchard) indicates his Welsh origin;²⁰ like many other Welshmen of his day, he had probably come to England to seek a livelihood. He worked as a serving-man at the inn in Oxford, called 'The Catherine Wheel', where the arrest took place, and he is said to have served the Catholics who came there in every way he possibly could during the previous twelve or fourteen years (doc. 5). He is also described as a tailor (doc. 9).

ARREST, IMPRISONMENT AND EXAMINATION OF THE FOUR MARTYRS²¹

About April or May 1589 a spy reported to the Privy Council in London that some Catholic priests were ministering in and around Oxford and that they had their headquarters in Oxford city. Immediately a special messenger was sent by the Council to Oxford to hunt them out and arrest them. At Oxford he was joined by the Constable of Oxford and a band of pursuivants and, with the spy as guide, they set out on their search. About midnight they arrived at the suspected inn, 'The Catherine Wheel', owned by a pious Catholic widow. They were admitted by the inn-servant, Humphrey Pritchard, who was immediately arrested. They then proceeded to search the house and finding Frs. Nichols and Yaxley and the layman Thomas Belson, they questioned them. Their answers at first seemed so satisfactory that no grounds could be found for a charge against them. The spy, however, urged that the search be continued, with the result that some vestments for Mass were discovered and from this it was concluded that at least one of the party was a priest. The three were consequently arrested and taken to prison, along with the inn-servant, Pritchard.

The next day the four prisoners were brought before the Court of the Chancellor of the University of Oxford, presided over by the Vice-Chancellor. They admitted freely that they were Catholics but hesitated at first when asked if there were any priests among them. On being pressed further, however, George Nichols declared boldly that he was a Catholic priest. After being examined Nichols and Yaxley were taken to the old prison in Oxford called Bocardo and Belson and Pritchard to Oxford Castle; all four were put in irons. The fact that Yaxley was put with Nichols seems to indicate that he too was at least suspected of being a priest.

The following day all four prisoners were again brought before the Chancellor's Court. The priests in particular were questioned as to why they had come to England, how they had

employed their time, with whom they associated, and so forth. They answered that they had worked only to save souls, denied any motives besides spiritual ones, and resolutely refused to reveal the names of any Catholics.

TAKEN TO LONDON FOR FURTHER EXAMINATION

After this the four men were sent to London to be examined by the Privy Council. They travelled on horseback, with their arms tied behind them as they rode, and the priests in addition had their feet tied beneath the horses' bellies. They suffered much on the journey and Pritchard was injured not a little when he was thrown to the ground from his horse.

On reaching London they were brought first before Sir Francis Walsingham, Secretary of State, and then before the Privy Council. Nichols again admitted that he was a priest; Yaxley said he was a Catholic gentleman, and Belson gave the same reply. They again refused to betray their friends or to give any information about other Catholics. After being examined they were taken back to prison, but the two priests were again separated from the laymen and put in the Bridewell prison. Here they were tortured by being hung up by the hands for some fifteen hours, and while they were suffering spies were brought in to see them and thus it was ascertained that Yaxley as well as Nichols was a priest. Afterwards a man was sent to them who pretended that he wished to become a Catholic and in this way tried to make them speak of things which the authorities wished to know, e.g. with what Catholics he could take refuge in order to escape persecution after conversion, and so forth. Nichols instructed him in the Catholic faith but revealed nothing else whatsoever to him. After the man had made his report Nichols was confined in some kind of cellar or dungeon for a time and then questioned again, but he remained just as steadfast as before. Yaxley meanwhile was removed to the Tower of London and the Privy Council ordered that nobody was to have access to him except Richard Topcliffe (doc. 1 (a), 14), who was well-known for his cruelty to Catholic prisoners (supra p. 14).

RETURN TO OXFORD, TRIAL, AND EXECUTION

At the end of June 1589 the Privy Council decided that the four prisoners were to go back to Oxford to stand trial, and writs were issued

mutilated by Protestants, who came and slashed them with knives. Two days later, the heads and quarters were removed by the authorities and placed on high poles over the city gates.

The execution of the four martyrs made a profound impression on the people at Oxford, and one contemporary writer compares the scene to that on Calvary, when, in the words of St. Luke, 'the multitude of them that were come together and saw the things that were done returned, striking their breasts' (doc. 6). Indeed, the martyrdoms, intended as a deterrent to Catholics at Oxford and to those thinking of being reconciled to the Catholic Church, had, according to another document, the opposite effect, for they caused such a stir in and around the city that it was hoped that 'for every one person who was formerly converted, ten would now be converted,' and the writer prays that God in his infinite mercy would bring this about (doc. 5).

FAMA MARTYRII

George Nichols, Richard Yaxley, Thomas Belson, and Humphrey Pritchard are included in all the principal catalogues of martyrs from the time of their death onwards (doc. 13). They are treated as martyrs for their faith in contemporary Catholic sources and in subsequent Catholic accounts of their life and execution (docs. 4-12).

It was claimed that, shortly after the martyrs' quarters had been placed over the city gates at Oxford, the right arm of George Nichols was seen raised and pointing towards the city, like that of a preacher exhorting or threatening (docs. 5, 6, 10, 11, 12).

No portraits or other likenesses of any of the four martyrs have come down to us, nor are any relics preserved.

The four martyrs were dealt with in the Ordinary Process on the English and Welsh martyrs at Westminster, London, in 1874, and they were amongst the 241 martyrs whose cause was introduced by the decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, In immani illa, 9 December 1886.

The cause of the four martyrs was again considered in the Apostolic Process at Westminster in 1923-26. The Promoter General of the Faith declared that the historical sources were abundant and that it was quite clear that the two priests suffered 'religionis et sacerdotii causa', and that the two laymen likewise suffered 'nonnisi ob auxilia et devotionis obsequia iisdem [sacerdotibus] praestita'. He therefore raised no objections:

'Nihil igitur objiciendum invenio contra nobilissimam hanc causam, in qua crudelitati atque impietati persecutorum pietas atque sanctitas quatuor Dei servorum plane respondet.'²³ All four martyrs were included in the first list of those declared worthy of beatification.²⁴

NOTE ON SOURCES

The chief sources for the martyrdom of Ven. George Nichols and companions are a few contemporary documents which seem to depend on a single source, now unfortunately lost.

This lost original would seem to be an English account of the martyrdom sent by Richard Verstegan, book publisher and Catholic agent at Antwerp, to Cardinal William Allen in Rome between July and October 1589, based on the report of four Catholics who had arrived in Antwerp from England shortly before (*infra* p. 773).

A brief English version of this report exists in a letter, probably from Verstegan, to Sir Francis Englefield in Spain, dated 19 October 1589 (doc. 4).

The Breve relatione, Rome 1590 (doc. 5) is probably either a translation of the account sent to Cardinal Allen, or is at least derived from it.

Fr. Robert Persons' account in his Relacion de algunos martyrios, Madrid 1590 (doc. 6) is in turn based either on the Breve relatione, with some additional material, or on Verstegan's original account. This account by Persons was reprinted in Diego de Yepes's Historia particular de la persecucion de Inglaterra, Madrid 1599.

Fr. Pedro de Ribadeneira's account in his 'Appendix' to Dr. Nicholas Sanders and Fr. Edward Rishton's De origine ac progressu schismatis Anglicani, Alcalá 1593 (doc. 10) is again based on the same sources.

The accounts in Dr. Anthony Champney's Annals, c. 1618 (doc. 11), and in Bishop Richard Challoner's Memoirs of Missionary Priests, London 1741 (doc. 11), are also based chiefly on these same sources.

Thus, three fundamental early sources are extant, viz. the letter to Sir Francis Englefield, the Breve relatione, and Persons' account in his Relacion de algunos martyrios, and these three are cited in full below. The other sources, derived from these, are also cited, somewhat abbreviated.

Notes

1. Cf. The Martyrs of Oxfordshire, by Students of Heythrop College, Oxon., London (C.T.S. pamphlet, B 339) 1933, pp. 12-19, 'The Oxford Martyrs of 1589'; T.P. Ellis, The Catholic Martyrs of Wales, London 1933, pp. 44-46, 'The Venerable Humphrey Pritchard'.
2. Boase and Clark, II, ii, p. 27.
3. There were several parishes in Oxford at the time, but none of the parish registers go back to 1550. Cf. NIPR, V, p. 129. We do not know in which parish Nichols was born.
4. Boase and Clark, I, p. 282.
5. DD2, p. 183.
6. Ibid., p. 189.
7. DD1, p. 11; DD2, pp. 194, 199.
8. DD1, p. 29.
9. A.R. Maddison, Lincolnshire Pedigrees, III (Harleian Society, LII), London 1904, p. 1124, 'Yaxley of Boston'. The parish registers of Boston go back to 1557, but Richard Yaxley does not appear in them, though other members of the family do. Cf. The Parish Registers of Boston in the County of Lincoln, I, 1557-1599, ed. C.W. Foster, Lincoln 1914. Yaxley's date of birth is a conjecture from the dates of baptism of others of the family and from that of his own ordination to the priesthood.
10. DD1, pp. 190, 198, 205-206.
11. DD1, p. 12; DD2, p. 207.
12. DD1, p. 30; DD2, p. 208.
13. On the Denham exorcisms and our chief sources concerning them, viz. Samuel Harsnet's A declaration of popish impostures, London 1603, cf. supra p. 247, note 12. Harsnet mentions Yaxley a few times (pp. 191-192, 203-205, 208).

14. Harsnet, op. cit., p. 205.
15. B.L., Lansdowne MSS, 55, f. 163, 'A note of the papistes and recusantes in the severall shires of England'; CRS, XXII, p. 127.
16. W. H. Rylands, The Visitation of the County of Buckingham (Harleian Society, LVIII), London 1909, pp. 146-147, 'Bellson, of Brill'. Ixhill Lodge was still standing in the early 18th century in the parish of Brill in Buckinghamshire, about a mile from the Oxfordshire border (VCH, Buckinghamshire, IV, p. 106). Cf. also F.W. Bateson, Brill: A Short History, The Brill Society, 1966, p. 9. The parish registers of Brill go back only to 1586 (ibid.). Belson is described as 'juvenis nobilis' at the time of his death (doc. 8).
17. P.R.O., SP 12/173, no. 29. I, examination of William Forrest, 23 September 1584; A. Davidson, William Forrest and the Devil, in Essex Recusant, X (1968), p. 121.
18. There were two Thomas Belsons at Oxford around this time. The first matriculated in Exeter College on 3 December 1575, aged seventeen (Boase and Clark, II, ii, p. 63). The second, probably the martyr, matriculated in St. Mary Hall about 1581 and graduated B.A. in 1583 (ibid., II, ii, p. 100; II, iii, p. 116).
19. DD2, p. 201. Nichols and Yaxley were together in the English College at Rheims: Nichols was there 1581-84 and Yaxley 1582-86. Belson was certainly there with Yaxley, and almost certainly with Nichols also.
20. Surnames did not become widely used in Wales until towards the end of the 15th century; previously a person was identified by being described as 'son of', in Welsh 'ab' or 'ap'. The later surnames were often formed by fusing the 'ab' or 'ap' with the father's name. Thus 'ap Richard' would become 'Prichard'. Cf. DWB, p. xix. The martyr is also called 'Griffin' (doc. 5) and 'Griffith' (doc. 8). English forms of the common Welsh name 'Gruffydd'. Probably his full name was 'ap Richard ap Gruffydd', i.e. son of Richard, son of Gruffydd, and he could be called by either name indifferently.
21. The account that follows here of the arrest, examination, trial, and execution of the four martyrs is drawn mainly from three basic extant documents (docs. 4, 5, 6), which in turn seem to derive from a single earlier source, no longer extant. See 'Note on Sources' below.

22. The extant Assize records for the Oxford Circuit go back only to 1627 (supra p. 324, note 7).
23. Animads., p. 178.
24. Ibid., p. 208.

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LETTERS AND WARRANTS OF THE PRIVY COUNCIL, May and June 1589.

- (a) Warrant to the Lieutenant of the Tower of London, 25 May 1589.
- APC, XVII, London 1898, p. 205.

The warrant ordered the Lieutenant to receive into his custody in the Tower of London Richard Tankard, vere Yaxley, who was being transferred there from the Bridewell prison in London.

At White Hall,¹ the xxvth of May, 1589.

Presente:

Lord Archbishop of Canterbury	Lord Cobham
Lord Chancellor	Lord Buckhurst
Lord Treasurer	Mr. Treasurer
Erle of Warwycke	Mr. Comptroller
Lord Admyrall	Mr. Vicechamberlaine
Lord Chamberlaine	Sir John Perrott
Mr. Fortescue	Mr. Wolley

A warrant to Sir Owen Hopton, Lieutenant of the Towre, to receive into his custody one Richard Tankard, a seminary preist, at the handes of the Bedle of the prison of Bridewell, and to comitt him close prisoner to the Towre under sure and salfe custody, permitting onelie Mr. Topcliffe² at usuall times to have accesse unto him.

- (b) Letters to the Lieutenant of the Tower of London, the Master of the Bridewell prison, the Keeper of the Gatehouse prison, and the Sheriff of Oxfordshire, with various warrants, 30 June 1589. - APC, XVII, p. 329.

Four letters dealt with the conveying of the martyrs from the prisons in London, where they were confined, to Oxford for their trial. Warrants directed the Justices of the Peace and others to assist the 'messengers' who conveyed them to Oxford, and a warrant directed the Vice-Chamberlain to pay the 'messengers'.

The last of Juine, 1589, in the after noone
at Nonesuch.³

The Lord Chancellour	Mr. Vicechamberlain
Lord Treasurer	Mr. Secretary
Mr. Comptroller	Sir John Perrot

A letter sent unto the Liutenant of the Towre to delyver Rychard Yaxeley alias Tanckard unto Thomas Wright and Henry Goodwin, messengers

of her Msjestie's Chamber, to be conveighed unto the Justice of Assize at Oxforth, ther to receave tryall.

The lyke letter written to the Master of Brydwell to delyver George Nichols, priest, and Humfry ap Rychard unto Thomas Wright and Henry Goodwin, messengers of her Majestie's Chamber, to be conveighed unto Oxforth, ther to receave ther tryall at the Assises.

An other written to the Keeper of the Gatehouse to delyver Thomas Bolster⁴ unto the above mentioned messengers to be conveighed as the rest unto the Judges of the Assise at Oxon. to receave ther triall.

A letter to the Shrife of Oxon.⁵ to recwave the sayd 4 prisonners.

Item, a letter to, or rather an open warrant to all Justices of Peace, Constables, etc., to be assistaunt unto the sayd messengers for the conveighinge of them safely unto Oxon.

Item, a warrant directed unto Mr. Vicechamberlayne to delyver unto the above mentioned messengers a some of monney for the conveighinge of thes prisonners unto Oxon.

Notes

1. The royal palace of Whitehall, in London.
2. On Richard Topcliffe, notorious persecutor of Catholics, cf. supra p. 14.
3. The royal palace of Nonsuch, in Surrey.
4. Thomas Belson.
5. Sheriff of Oxfordshire.

EXCERPTS FROM ACCOUNTS OF THE TREASURER OF THE CHAMBER, 1588-90.

- P.R.O., E 351/542, mems. 128v, 141r, 145r. (Mod. ver. in ASP, I, pp. 250-251.)

The accounts of the Treasurer of the Queen's Chamber give details of payments made for various purposes by order of the Queen or the Privy Council. Three entries in these accounts during the years 1588-90 refer to payments made in connection with the arrest and trial of the four martyrs:

- (a) payment of £5 to Richard Elsworth and John Bradford, on a warrant dated 26 May 1589, for 'pursuing and apprehending' the martyrs and conveying them from Oxford to London (mem. 128v);
- (b) payment of £4 to Richard Elsworth, on a warrant dated 14 December 1589, for going to Oxford to give evidence against the martyrs at their trial (mem. 141r);
- (c) payment of £4 to Thomas Wright and Henry Goodwin, on a warrant dated 26 September 1590, for conveying the martyrs back from London to Oxford for their trial (mem. 145r).

The excerpts are from 'The Accompte of Sir Thomas Heneage, Knighte, Threasurer ...' (mems. 118r, 134r), and the sums mentioned are described as 'allowed to the said accomptaunte for moneye by him paide to divers and sondrye persons hereafter mentioned by vertue of the Quenes Majesties and her honorable Counsellies warrauntes and letters' (mems. 124r, 140r).

Sir Thomas Heneage (d. 1595) was Treasurer of the Queen's Chamber from 1570. The accounts run from Michaelmas to Michaelmas.

(a) Excerpt from account for 1588-89 (mem. 128v).

To Richarde Elesworthe and John Bradforde uppon the Counsellies warrant dated at the Courte xxvi^{to} Maii 1589 for there chardges and expenses in pursuinge and apprehendinge of Tanckerd and Nicholles, twoe semynarye preestes, and Belson, a conveyer of letters from beyonde the seas, and twoe other of there fellowes,¹ travellinge by the space of xvi dayes aboute the same service and bringeinge them up to the Courte, v^{li}.

(b) Excerpt from account for 1589-90 (mem. 141r).

To Richarde Elseworth upon the Counselles warrant dated xiiii December 1589 for his charges and paines goinge to Oxforde to give in evidence againste twoe preestes and twoe others their confederates at the Sises² holden there by the space of vii daies, for himself and his horse and for his returne, iiii^{li}.

(c) Excerpt from same account (mem. 145r).

To Thomas Wrighte and Henrie Godwin, messengers of her Majesties Chamber, upon the Counselles warrant dated at Otelandes³ xxvi^{to} Sept. 1590, for the coste, travell, and charge of themselves and their horses, with a waggen, beinge sente from the Courte at Nonesuch to London to carrie and convey from thence to the citie of Oxforde foure prisoners, viz. Richarde Yaxley al/īa/s Tankerde, George Nicholles, preestes, Humfrey ap Richarde, and Belster [sic], and for iiii other horsemen for their better aide in the saide jorney, with twoo daies attendaunce in the same shire, and for their returne to the Courte againe, the summe of iiii^{li}.

Notes

1. The fifth person may have been the graduate named Ellis who followed the four martyrs from Oxford to London (ASP, I, p. 251). On Ellis cf. doc. 5, infra p. 781.
2. Assizes.
3. The royal palace of Oatlands, in Surrey.

LETTER OF SIR FRANCIS KNOLLYS TO LORD BURGHLEY, 5 July 1589. - B.L.,
Lansdowne MSS, 61, no. 47 (autograph, with holograph postscript).
 (Much of the letter is cited in John Strype, The Life and Acts of
 John Whitgift, D.D., I, Oxford 1822, pp. 603-605.)¹

Sir Francis Knollys (c. 1514-96) was a member of the Privy Council, represented Oxfordshire in Parliament from 1572 until his death, and held many other important government offices. Strongly anti-Catholic, he assisted at the trials of several Catholics. On this occasion he had been sent with the four martyrs on their return from London to Oxford, 'per fare che fossero condemnati e giusticiati' (doc. 5).

Lord Burghley (1520-98) was the great statesman of Elizabeth I's reign. As William Cecil he was Secretary of State under Edward VI, from 1550 to 1553, and was knighted in 1551. During Mary Tudor's reign he conformed outwardly to Catholicism, but he also established a close understanding with the Princess Elizabeth and gained her confidence, and on her accession in 1558 he again became Secretary of State. In 1571 he was created Baron Burghley, and in 1572 he was appointed Lord Treasurer, which office he held until his death. For the greater part of Elizabeth's reign Burghley was her principal minister and most trusted counsellor. He was a very able administrator and exercised a decisive influence on English policy at home and abroad. A sincere and convinced Protestant, he was determined to establish the new religion as the one religion of England, and consequently he was regarded by English Catholics as their arch-enemy.

In his letter (2 pp.), written on the day of the martyrs' execution, Knollys reports to Burghley on various matters at Oxford. Unfortunately he tells little about the trial of the martyrs, for he leaves this to the bearer of the letter, Mr. Tyrwhitt (who had accompanied the martyrs down from London and is now returning there), who, he says, will be able to inform Burghley about the proceedings. However, three points which he makes are worth noting. (i) The martyrs were sent back to Oxford for trial 'by the order of Mr. Topliff and of Mr. Attorney', i.e. of Richard Topcliffe, the notorious persecutor, and of the Attorney General. (ii) They were proceeded against 'to the daunting of all the papists', i.e. their condemnation inspired fear into the Catholics of the area, whom Knollys has already described as 'very proud boasters' and having conceived 'very great hope'. (iii) Belson's home, Ixhill Lodge at Brill, was a refuge for priests, and Belson's father and brother who lived there 'ought to be removed' (this in the postscript, in Knollys' own hand).

My verye good Lorde,

Since my comynge hether to Oxforde to the Assises I have founde the papistes that be traytors, and also the papistes that be conynge² shifters to avoyde the penaltye and danger of the lawe, to be verie proude boasters and suche as have conceived verie greate hope, the one sorte to dye gloriouslye for the popishe religion, and the other sorte to escape deathe by obstinate refusall to answer directlye to the charge of ther offences, althoughe they woulde playnlye shew them selves to be popishe Catholiques and trayterouslye affected ...

This bearer M^r Turrwitt, who hath verie duetifullye brought certaine Jesuites,³ obstinate traitors, to this Assises, to be worthilye condemned by the order of M^r Topliff and of M^r Attorney: this bearer, I saye, can well informe your Lordship how well the sayd Jesuytes have been proceeded withall here at this Assises, to the dawntinge of all the papistes, that before this proceedinge here did proude aduance them selves, as though they ought to be taken for good subjectes⁴ ...

And thus craving pardon for my tedious letter, I do moste humblye comyt your Lordship to God. From Oxforde the vth of Julye, 1589.

Your Lordships to command,

/signed/ F. Knollys.

Postscript /in Knollys' own hand/.

The purseuant that brought downe theese Jesuyts to be proceded agaynst at this Assises can informe your Lordships of a receptkle howse at Yxell Lodge in the forrddt of Barnwodd⁵ for traytorous Jesuytts: the dweller therein nowe is a father and a brother of one Belson that is exequed presently. Whyche dwellers ought to be removed and this purseuant is to be rewarded for his dyligent travayle hether.

Addressed:

To the right honorable and his verie good Lo/rdship/, the Lo/rd/ Highe Tresorer of Englande geve these.

Endorsed:

vth July 1589. Sir Fr. Knollis, Treasurer of hir Majesties household, from Oxford. Some account of the Assizes at Oxford, of the confidence of papists, two sortes of subjects observed by him.

Notes

1. Cf. also A. Davidson, in Essex Recusant, X (1968), p. 122.
2. Cunning.
3. 'Jesuit' was often used loosely and in a pejorative sense of Catholic priests in general. That it refers here to Nicholls and his companions is confirmed by the postscript.
4. The executions were certainly intended as a deterrent to Catholics at Oxford, but a contemporary Catholic writer believed they would have the opposite effect (doc. 5, infra p. 790).
5. Bernwood Forest, in Buckinghamshire, around Brill. Cf. F.W. Bateson, Brill: A Short History, pp. 4-7.

EXCERPT FROM LETTER TO SIR FRANCIS ENGLEFIELD, from Antwerp,
 19 October 1589. - MS at Valladolid (probably copy - see below).
 CRS, V, London 1908, pp. 168-169.

Sir Francis Englefield, of Englefield in Berkshire, succeeded to the family estates in 1537 and was Sheriff of Berkshire and Oxfordshire at the time of the death of Henry VIII in 1547. Imprisoned for some months during the reign of Edward VI, on the accession of Mary Tudor he became a member of the Privy Council and Master of the Court of Wards. Soon after Elizabeth I succeeded Mary he left England and lived at first in Flanders and later in Spain, where he had much influence at Court in matters concerning English Catholics. In 1586 he was attainted for high treason by the English Parliament and all his possessions were declared forfeit to the Queen. He died in the English College at Valladolid in 1596.¹

The writer of the letter to Englefield was probably Richard Verstegan, who was resident at Antwerp at this time. Born in London 1550, he had to leave England in 1582 and spent the rest of his life abroad: in Paris (1582-86) and Antwerp (1586-1640). During these years he supervised the publication of many Catholic books for distribution in England and also acted as agent in the transmission of letters and news between Catholics in England and their fellow-countrymen abroad.² Sir Francis Englefield, in Spain, was one of those to whom Verstegan wrote.³

The present location of the manuscript of the letter of Englefield is not known. The excerpt cited was published in CRS, as indicated, by Fr. J.H. Pollen, S.J., 'from an extract sent to the late Fr. J. Morris, S.J.' from Valladolid;⁴ no more precise reference is given, and a recent attempt to trace the manuscript at Valladolid was unsuccessful.

The letter gives a brief account of the arrest, imprisonment, examination, trial and execution of the four martyrs, based on information received from four English Catholics who had arrived at Antwerp shortly before.

At the end of the letter the writer says that he has 'written to his Grace more at large' about the four martyrs. 'His Grace' is almost certainly Cardinal William Allen, founder and first President of the English College of Douai, then living in Rome (supra p. 24). Verstegan sent frequent news-letters to Allen in Rome, either directly or through Allen's secretary, Roger Baynes,⁵ and he addresses Allen as 'Your Grace'.⁶ This longer account of the martyrs, sent, as we suggest, to Allen and based, like the present letter, on the information of the four English Catholics, is now unfortunately lost. But it seems most probable that the Italian Breve relatione, published in Rome in the first half of 1590 (doc. 5), is either a
 translation of it or at least is based on it.

Handwritten notes on the right margin: "in the book" and "in the book" written vertically.

There came of late four English Catholics to this city⁷ from England, who report their cruelty to increase daily, as appeared by an execution done about two months or more ago upon two seminary priests and two laymen, who, apprehended in Oxford at the Catherine Wheel, being an inn, were first convented before the Vice-Chancellor,⁸ Commissaries, and other Justices, did confess themselves to be Catholics all, and after some few days were sent up to the Privy Council, where Walsingham⁹ demanding if they were priests, one of them called M^r George Nicols, priest of the seminary, did confess that he was. 'Ergo;' saith Walsingham, 'a traitor.' Cui Nichols, 'I never heard or read that to be a priest, especially among Christian people, was to be termed a traitor; neither were they so taken with our forefathers, but had in all reverence, especially at St. Augustine first preaching the faith.' Whereto Walsingham replied like himself, as your Honour may imagine. M^r Yaxley the other was called, who said, being demanded, that he was a Catholic gentleman. The third was one M^r Belson, a known Catholic gentleman. The fourth was Humphrey Richard, a Welshman, servant of the house where they were taken, a sound Catholic. The priests were sent to Bridewell,¹⁰ where seorsim they were for the space of fifteen hours hanged up by the wrists of the hands, and after let down. Tyrell and Tyllertt, apostate priests,¹¹ were brought in to confront them, especially M^r Yaxley, who they testified to be a seminary priest and D. Webbe's¹² camerado. He was hereupon sent to the Tower and threatened the rack, and M^r Nicols let down into a deep dungeon full of venomous vermin, where he remained for a season. And after one month they, with the two others, were sent down to Oxford, where at an open Assize they were condemned by the verdict of a Puritan quest,¹³ picked out of purpose, and after executed, they all taking their death in most constant and courageous sort. Not so much but the poor servant said, 'Testify with me, I pray you, that I died a Catholic.' To whom a Protestant minister replied, 'What! thou knowest not what it is to be a Catholic.' Saith he, 'What I cannot say in word, I will seal with my blood.' It were too long to recite all their disputes with the Puritans and other their goodly sayings and examples, which all I have written to his

Grace more at large. Since this execution they begin to execute their wicked statute more strictly and severely. Antwerp, October 19, 1589.

Endorsed:

De martyribus and troubles of Syon, and namely Sister Elizabeth Sanders.¹⁴

Notes

1. BDEC, II, p. 169; A. J. Loomie, S.J., The Spanish Elizabethans, pp. 14-51.
2. CRS, LII (The Letters and Despatches of Richard Verstegan, ed. A.G. Petti), pp. xxvi-xlvi; NCE, XIV, p. 627, art. 'Verstegan, Richard'.
3. CRS, LI, p. xviii.
4. CRS, V, p. 168. Fr. J. Morris, S.J., was Vice-Postulator of the Cause of the English and Welsh Martyrs from 1874 to 1893, when he was succeeded by Fr. J.H. Pollen, S.J.
5. CRS, LII, pp. xix.
6. Ibid., p. 182.
7. Antwerp: see end of letter.
8. Martin Heton, M.A., D.D. (1552-1609), Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford from 10 July 1588 to 16 July 1589. He afterwards became Protestant Bishop of Ely.
9. Sir Francis Walsingham, Secretary of State (supra p. 21).
10. The Bridewell Prison, in London.
11. Anthony Tyrrell, ordained in Rome c. 1580 (supra p. 382), and probably Francis Tyllotson, ordained in Rheims in 1585.
12. Lawrence Webb, Doctor in Canon and Civil Law, of the diocese of Ely, a priest on the staff of the English College of Douai.
13. Jury.
14. Elizabeth Sanders, sister of Dr. Nicholas Sanders (supra p. 46), was a member of the English Bridgettine community of Syon Abbey, now in exile at Rouen.

'BREVE RELATIONE'. - Breve relatione del martirio di doi reverendi sacerdoti et doi laici, seguito l'anno M.D.LXXXIX in Oxonio, città di studio in Inghilterra, Rome 1590.

The Breve relatione is a small pamphlet of 14 pages (unnumbered), published in Rome at the beginning of 1590. St. Robert Bellarmine had received a copy of it by mid-February in that year and was arranging to have a French translation published.¹ Only five copies are now known: three in the Vatican Library, one in the Venerable English College in Rome, and one in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. The selection of details in it is curiously similar to that in the much shorter letter to Sir Francis Englefield (doc. 4). It will be recalled that at the end of the latter there is mention of a longer account of the martyrdom sent by the writer to 'his Grace' shortly before. We have already suggested that the writer of both the letter and this longer account was Richard Verstegan and that 'his Grace' was Cardinal William Allen at Rome (supra p. 773). If this is so, it seems most likely that the present document is either a translation of the account sent to Allen or is at least derived entirely from it. And since Verstegan got his information from four English Catholics who had arrived at Antwerp shortly before, we appear to have here an account of the martyrdom based on very reliable sources.

The French translation of the Breve relatione promised by Bellarmine was published the same year as the Italian original: Discours veritable du martyre de deux prebstres et deus laycz, advenu l'an mil cinq cens quatre vingts neuf, à Oxfort Université d'Angleterre, Paris 1590.

The Breve relatione, after a short introductory address to the reader, describes: (i) the arrest of the four martyrs at Oxford; (ii) their imprisonment there and the two examinations they underwent before the Court of the Chancellor of the University; (iii) their journey to London, their examination there before Sir Francis Walsingham and before the Privy Council, their imprisonment in different prisons, and the torture of the two priests; (iv) their return to Oxford and their trial at the Assizes there; (v) their execution. There is added: (vi) a fairly lengthy description of the reconciliation by George Nichols, at Oxford about two years before his martyrdom, of a well-known highwayman, Harcourt Taverner, and (vii) a short note on a change of policy by the authorities regarding martyrdoms at Oxford.

We have broken up the document into seven sections, as above, and inserted headings accordingly.

BREVE RELATIONE DEL MARTIRIO DI DOI REVERENDI SACERDOTI ET DOI LAICI, SEGUITO L'ANNO M.D.LXXXIX IN OXONIO, CITTA' DI STUDIO IN INGHILTERRA. In Roma, appresso Paolo Diani, M.D. LXXXX. Con licentia de' Superiori.

Il Stampatore al Lettore

Essendomi capitata alle mani questa historia d'alcuni martirizzati in Inghilterra per difesa della fede Catholica, ho giudicato oportuna occasione, dopo la publicatione del Giubileo, concesso da sua Santità per la necessità di Francia, darla fuori in stampa, acciò i fedeli, con haver per mezo de' santi sacramenti purgate le loro conscienze dalli peccati, mossi a compassione delli stratii che si fanno contra loro fratelli, possino più sicuramente e ferventamente pregare la Divina Maestà, non solamente per l'aiuto e riduzione de quel regno, ma ancora per la preservatione della Francia. Et anco svegliati, et fatti avvii con l'esempio altrui, e da tanti mali e danni, i quali nell'uno e l'altro regno vediamo ogni giorno esser causati dal contagioso male della perfida heresia, ci sforziamo ad osservare diligentemente la santa legge e volontà di Dio Nostro Signore, guardandoci da ogni peccato, come fonte e origine così delle heresie, come di ogni altro danno corporale e spirituale. Anzi con la vita santa, e conversatione degna del nome di Christiani, invitiamo gli heretici a ritornare alla unione della santa Chiesa. Il che faccia Dio per la sua infinita bontà. Vale.

Breve Relatione de un Notabile Martirio di doi Sacerdoti,
e doi altri Laici, seguito l'anno 1589, in Oxonio,
Università d'Inghilterra.

/i. Arrest of the Four Martyrs at Oxford/

Alli dicidotto del mese di Maggio passato, fu pigliato il reverendo sacerdote Signor Georgio Nicolo, il quale dopo d'esser tornato in Inghilterra dal Seminario di Rems, si era trattenuto nella città d'Oxonio e suoi contorni sei anni nell'aiuto dell'anime. Insieme con lui fu pigliato un'altro sacerdote detto Signor Taxleo, pure alumno dell'istesso Collegio, e doi laici, in una hosteria di Oxonia, che ha per insegna la Ruota di Santa Catherina, in questo modo.

Havendosi in Londres inditio, come alcuni sacerdoti Catholici solevano praticare in quella Università, e anco dove erano soliti di far capo, fu mandato un barigello e posta di Londres,² il quale con altri sbirri, pigliando seco il Contestabile d'Oxonio, e lo spione, che li guidava, se n'andò prima alla casa di un cittadino, chiamato il Signor Roncheo, dove non erano detti Catholici, e perciò fatta ivi la cerca, e non trovando niente, se ne partirno.

Di poi circa la meza notte sene andorno alla detta hosteria della Ruota, ove sapevano esser il refugio di quanti Catholici capitavano in Oxonio, e bussando, dissero che dovessero aprire alla corte. Al che non potendo loro far resistenza, venne ad aprirli un servitore di detta hosteria, chiamato Onfredo Griffino, il quale già dodici o quartordici anni si era adoperato in servire li Catholici, che vi capitavano, in tutto quello che lui poteva e sapeva. Aperto che hebbe la porta, egli primo di tutti fu subito preso, e condotto dritto alla stanza propria, perchè, secondo l'informazione e inditio che havevano, pensavano dover trovarvi alcun Catholico, ma vi trovorno solo un giovine scolare d'Oxonio, il quale essendo stato da loro esaminato, e lasciato libero, andorno alla camera della patrona dell'hosteria, la quale era una vedova vecchia di più di sessanta anni, devota, virtuosa, honesta, e amica di tutti i Catholici, e intrando con impeto dentro di detta camera, lei a quel rumore si svegliò, e credendo da principio che fussero ladri, li pregò, che si ritirassero un poco, sin che lei si potesse vestire, e poi facessero quello che li pareva. Ritirati che furono, quelli della casa per altra via avisorno i detti sacerdoti (li quali con un gentilhuomo laico, Catholico, chiamato il Signor Belsono, si trovavano in altre stanze) che la corte stava in casa, e però che provedessero alli

casi loro. Inteso questo, non parendoli di far altro, fecero animo, et aspettarono che il barigello e compagni venissero. Entrati che furono, cominciò il barigello ad essaminarli, loro risposero intrepidamente al tutto, di modo che il barigello delle lor risposte satisfatto, non trovando inditio che fossero quelli che lui cercava, si sarebbe partito, con credere che fossero gentil'huomini del paese, quivi alloggiati, se non gli fusse stato fatto cenno, e avisato dallo spione, che a questo fatto l'havea guidato, che facesse più diligente inquisitione nelle robbe loro, che troverebbe qualche inditio. Cominciando dunque a cercare fra quelle, trovò certi paramenti di Messa, li quali veduti, subito pigliò tutti tre li detti Catholici, e li menò insieme col servitore prigionero.

/ii. Imprisonment and Examinations at Oxford/

La mattina furono presentati avanti il Commissario,³ e altri magistrati e dottori della città, cioè, Dottor Lileo,⁴ e Dottor Vilesio, capo del Collegio di san Giovanni, huomo assai grosso e materiale,⁵ e altri ministri, ove interrogati delle loro conditione, il Signor Giorgio Nicolo confessò subito in queste parole, Io sono sacerdote della vera, anticha, Catholica, e apostolica Chiesa. L'altro sacerdote disse di essere gentilhuomo (come veramente era) e Catholico. Così anco rispose il Signor Pelsono, laico. All'hora li magistrati cominciorno ad interrogarli circa le cose che, come Catholici, potevano haver esercitate nel regno, contra li statuti della Regina. Nel che confessorno arditamente d'essersi impiegati nell'aiuto delle anime, per convertirle alla santa Chiesa (il che appresso di loro e delitto capitale) e non altro.

Dopo furono rimenati in prigione li doi sacerdoti (poichè anco dell'altro havevano qualche inditio che fosse sacerdote) ad una prigione assai cattiva, detta Boccardo, li doi laici, cioè il gentilhuomo e Onfredo, servitore della vedova, al Castello.

Dopoi mentre stavano i doi sacerdoti in prigione, con ferri a piedi, venne a loro un ministro delli heretici, per disputare co'l Signor Nicolo, ma fu rebuttato così lui, come li vani suoi argomenti.

Il giorno dipoi furono menati tutti quattro, con grossi ferri alli piedi, dinanzi al Vicecancelliere, nel Colegio chiamato Chiesa di Christo, dal quale interrogati delle istesse cose delle quali la prima volta erano stati esaminati, li risposero al medesimo modo che prima.

/Iii. Journey to London, Examinations there, and Torture of the two Priests/

Dopo questo furono mandati a Londres, per essere essaminati da quelli del Consiglio di Stato, che loro chiamano il Consiglio Secreto:⁶ li sacerdoti con le gambe legate sotto la pancia del cavallo e le braccia adietro, il gentilhuomo solo con le braccia legate. Nel montar a cavallo, occorse che il cavallo, sopra il quale fu posto il servitore con le braccia adietro, essendo tutto pieno di guidaleschi, sentendosi premer dalla sella, cominciò a correre e infuriarsi, di modo che buttò il povero servitore a terra, il quale, ceduto sopra le faccia, si fece non poco male. Li heretici, che vi si trovavano, si burlavano di lui, e ridendosi del fatto gridavano: Tenetelo, tenetelo, che non fugga. Di poi rimessolo a cavallo, seguirono il viaggio, accompagnandoli molti sbirri a cavallo con archi, alabarde, e archibusi. Nel viaggio uscivano molte persone dalle case e villaggi circonvicini, per vedere quei sacerdoti, se erano mostri, come gli sono descritti continuamente dalli loro ministri, e come li sbirri allhora li denominavano. Ma vedendo la loro modestia, pazienza e costanza molti dicevano: Questi non sono già mostri, ma huomini belli, pazienti, e come appare, virtuosi, li quali non doverebbono essere così fieramente trattati da voi.

Nel partirsi loro da Oxonio, un certo scolare chiamato Ellesio, graduato già nel arti del grado di Bacalaureo, del

Collegio della Madalena, mosso dal esempio della costanza e fermezza, che li Catholici mostravano nei mali trattamenti fattigli da gli heretici, si mise a seguirli, caminando e correndo al passo delli cavalli, per farli compagnia per tutto quel viaggio sin a Londres, ch'è almeno una giornata e meza, tanto era l'amore e compiacimento, che haveva de trovarsi con loro.⁷ Arrivati che furono a Londres, dubitando li sbirri e quelli altri maligni, che questo giovane non divulgasse fra il populo la crudeltà che loro havevano usata contro li Catholici per strada, donde per le sue parole e esempio altri potessero pigliar compassione de quei servi di Dio, diedero nome che lui fosse pazzo, e come tale lo fecero porre in una casa, dove si custodiscono i pazzarelli, ove facendogli fare astinenza, e dandogli buone battiture, lo trattorno da pazzo, essendo lui molto più savio di loro, come alcuni fanno testimonio, che l'hanno visto e parlato, dopo l'essere posto in quel luogo, dove sin hora si trova.

Ma per tornare alli prigionieri: giunti in Londres furon menati dinanzi il Secretario del Consiglio Secreto chiamato Valsingamo, huomo per la sua malignità e barbara crudeltà famoso. Costui interrogando il Signor Nicolo, chi fosse, rispose egli: Io sono sacerdote di Dio. Soggiunse il Secretario: Dunque sei traditore? A questo il sacerdote: Non ho mai inteso ne letto che l'esser sacerdote, massimamente apresso Christiani, fusse essere traditore: ma so bene, che quando il nostro glorioso apostolo, Sant' Agostino, piantò la fede nel nostro regno, li sacerdoti di Dio non erano così tenuti o chiamati. Disse il Secretario: Tu sei traditore, non solo perchè sei sacerdote, ma perchè sollevi il populo, e li insegni leggi contrarie alli ordini di sua Maestà. Rispose, l'insegnare la legge di Dio non è sollevare populi, o far contro la Regina, etc. Et dopoi, condotto dinanzi il Consiglio Secreto, al medesimo modo satisfecce pienamente a tutte le loro interrogationi. L'altro sacerdote, Signor Iaxleo, domandato chi fusse, rispose: che lui era gentilhuomo Catholico. Così

rispose anco l'altro gentilhuomo laico, e altro non li potettero cavar di bocca.

Dopo questo, il gentilhuomo insieme col servitore furon condotti alla prigione, li sacerdoti furono menati ad un luogo, dove solevano darsi tormenti a malfattori, chiamato Brideuel, e quivi furono appiccati per le mani, in modo che da quelle tutto il corpo stete pendente per spatio di quindici hore, e mentre stavano in questo tormento li ministri della giustitia menarono altri spioni, perchè li riconoscessero di vista. Et così furono più certificati che tutti doi erano sacerdoti.

Deposti del tormento, fu mandato loro un pessimo huomo, il quale, con fingersi di voler essere instrutto della fede e farsi Catholico, vedesse di cavarli di bocca altre cose, che gli giudici desideravano sapere, come chi fossero li Catholici, alli quali egli potesse far ricorso per guardarsi dalla persecutione, e cose simili. Il buon sacerdonte Signor Nicolo lo instrusse della fede, senza dirli altro. Egli ritornato a far la relatione, fece tal effetto con questa sua fintione e relatione, che il Signor Nicolo fu cacciato in un fondo di torre, luogo oscuro, pieno di animali velenosi. Dopo questo esaminati di nuovo, non li puoteron cavar di bocca altro che quello che è detto di sopra, mostrando tal perseveranza e pazienza, che fecero stupire li istessi adversarli.

¶iv. Return to Oxford and Trial at the Assizes

Finalmente dopo esser stati un pezzo prigionieri in Londres, risolsero de rimandarli ad Oxonio, per dover essere ivi sententiati a morte come traditori, cioè come sacerdoti e Catholici. Con loro fu mandato un Cavaliero molto principale del Consiglio Secreto, chiamato Francesco Knols,⁸ per fare che fossero condannati e giusticiati. Il quale arrivato in Oxonio, la prima cosa, fece mettere in prigione le buona vedova, padrona dell'hosteria della Ruota, alle quale poco dopo furon confiscati li beni, e lei confinata in prigion perpetua.

Dopo presentati li Catholici avanti li giudici insieme, con altri malfattori, per udir la loro condannatione, il giudice principale li disse, se volevano esser giudicati secondo le leggi del paese. Il Signor Nicolo rispose che volean esser giudicati secondo Dio e secondo la loro conscientia. All'hora sogionse il giudice, se non vorrete esser giudicati secondo le leggi, bisognera che faciate la morte che si da a quelli che ricusano tal giuditio, che si fanno morire tra due tavole, con un sasso acuto alle reni e un altro al cuore, comprimendo il corpo come in un torchio. Così vedendo il buon sacerdote che quelli lupi rapaci non desideravano altro che il sangue loro, con più gravi tormenti, li rispose che in questo mondo procedessero loro secondo le loro leggi, che il dì del giuditio il Giudice eterno trattarebbe tutti secondi li loro meriti or demeriti. E così scielti dodeci huomini secondo l'ordine del paese, ma che erano pessimi heretici Puritani, quelli senza dimora li giudicorno degni di morte. Havuto il giudice principale il parere delli dodeci, condannò prima li doi sacerdoti, come rei di lesa maestà, a dover essere trascinati a coda di cavallo, impiccati, e squartati; poi gli altri doi, come gente a quelli favorevole, per essere in loro compagnia etc. a dover essere appicati.

Udita la sententia, questi gloriosi martiri mostrorono singolare allegrezza, mirandosi con volto allegro l'un l'altro, e dicendo che ringratiavano Iddio, che gli havea fatti degni, non solo di patire opprobrii e vilanie, ma anco di dovere spargere il sangue loro, per essere più simili al suo Redemtor Christo Giesù.

/v. Execution at Oxford/

Rimenati alle prigione, dopo pochi giorni, furon condotti al luogo del martirio, li doi sacerdoti trascinati a coda di cavallo, e gli altri a piedi, dove gionti che furono, si monstravano tanto arditi e allegri, che nella faccia loro appariva la virtù

di Dio, e che lo Spirito Santo gli havea fatti degni di tanto dono.

Il primo che offerse il suo corpo in sacrificio al suo maestro Christo fu il Signor Nicolo, il quale fatta humilissimamente oratione al'omnipotente Iddio, e volendo far un ragionamento al populo, non li fu permesso, ma solo hebbe tanto di tempo, che puote fare la sua protestatione della fede, nella quale disse a tutto il populo che non era sententiato a morte per altra causa, che per il suo sacerdotio, et per la professione che faceva di essere figlio della santa Chiesa Catholica, e così fattosi il segno della croce, facendo l'istesso segno di croce nel primo scalino della scala, e basciandolo, cominciò a montare, e in tutti li scalini fece il medesimo, e buttato giù da la scala, rese lo spirito al suo creatore.

Il secondo fu l'altro sacerdote, il Signor Iaxleo, il quale per la nobiltà, gioventù, e bello aspetto suo, moveva molti a compassione. Questo seguotò con volto allegro e intrepido l'esempio del suo compagno e maestro, che gl'era preceduto avanti, in ogni cosa. Arrivato al scalino di donde dovea esser precipitato, abbracciò con grande affetto il compagno morto, e lo pregò ad aiutarlo nella sua agonia con le sue orationi. Mentre faceva la protestatione della fede, interrotto fu gittato del la scala.

Il terzo fu il Signor Belsono, il quale ancora seguì in tutto e per tutto l'esempio delli doi precedenti gloriosi martiri, e abbracciando tutti doi, si raccomandò alle loro orationi, e mentre faceva la protestatione della fede, anche egli fu gittato abasso.

Quarto e ultimo seguì quel costante e fedele servitore della vedova, il povero Onfredo, che d'hoste delli martiri fu dal Signore fatto degno del martirio, il quale etiandio nel volto mostrava tal allegrezza e vigore di spirito interno, che pareva più presto huomo che andasse a nozze, o a qualche banchetto, ch'alla

morte. Questo glorioso martire, imitando in ogni cosa li suoi compagni, ascenso al'ultimo scalino, disse queste parole. Populo qui presente, vi prego tutti, che mi date testimonianza in questo mondo e nel dì del giudicio, ch'io moro per esser Catholico, cioè fidel Christiano della santa Chiesa. Il che sentendo un goffo ministro eretico, disse al povero Onfredo: Poveraccio, come dici che muori Catholico, poichè per la tua ignoranza non sai che si vogli dire Catholico. Al che rispose Onfredo: Quantunque io non ti so dire con parole quel che vuol dire Catholico, pure Iddio sa l'animo mio, e sa che credo tutto quello che crede la santa Chiesa Romana, e quello ch'io non ti so esplicare con parole, son qua per esplicarlo e testificarlo col mio sangue. Et così il buon Onfredo, gettato dalla scala, se ne sali al cielo.

Dopo questo tagliate le corde, donde pendevano li doi sacerdoti, li squartorno, e messi prima li quarti e teste in un caldaro d'acqua bogliente, preparata a questo effetto, li posero poi sopra le mura del castello vecchio, per dove passando li ministri Puritani, guastavano con cortelli quelli gloriose faccie delli martiri. Dopo doi giorni furono li detti quarti e teste levati di là, e portati alle porte della città, e in quelle attaccati, nel che occorse una cosa stupenda, notata tanto da Catholici, come ancho dall' istessi heretici. Il che fu, che essendo tutti i quarti attaccati in modo che la mani pendevano verso terra, il quarto del braccio destro del Signor Nicolo, poco dopo di esser stato attaccato, o per miracolo, o per cagion naturale che si fosse di ritiramento di nervi, o altro, si levò da se stesso in aera steso contro la città, nella guisa che suol stender il braccio un predicatore nel pulpito, quando predicando essorta, o minaccia la vendetta di Dio, il qual segno faccia Dio che sia a gloria di sua Divina Maestà e salute di quel populo.

Delle molte opere, che Dio si degnò di operare in salute delle anime per mezo di questo sacerdote, raconterò solo questa. Era nel distretto di Oxonio, doi anni fa, un famoso ladrone per nome Harcot, il quale dopo molti latrocinii nel fiore della sua gioventù, quando meno se lo pensava essendo preso, fu condotto in prigione ad Oxonio.⁹ Quivi convinto, confessando i suoi delitti, fu condannato a morte. Hor dopo la condannatione, posto in una prigione più larga, dove erano molti altri, fino al tempo che si doveva esequire la sententia, piacque alla maestà di Dio che tra la prigioni vi fossero alcuni Catholici, li quali sapendo che questo povero giovane per li suoi delitti fra poco tempo dovea morire, desiderando, poichè perdeva il corpo, che si acquistasse l'anima, cominciarono a trattare con lui della salute sua. Non si mostrò molto difficile il giovane in acconsentire alla fede Catholica, ma voltando gli occhi sopra la quantità ed enormità de suoi peccati, si disperava di ottener perdono da Dio di quelli. Nel che confortato dalle parole de buoni Catholici, che non dubitasse della misericordia di Dio, ma che dalla parte sua non manchasse a se stesso, con dolersi quanto potea, e col far penitenza quel poco di vita che gli restava, e prepararsi per una buona confessione: egli di tutto cuore abbracciando questi consigli, si diede con intenso dolore de suoi peccati alla maggior penitenza che poteva, vegliando le notti, in domandar perdono, e con questo preparandosi alla confessione, cominciò con grande instantia a dimandare alli Catholici, che gli procurasero un sacerdote, per mezo del quale e con la maestà di Dio e con la santa Chiesa finalmente potesse riconciliarsi. Li Catholici subito fecere intendere il tutto al nostro Signor Nicolo, che era come refugio di tutti li Catholici di quel paese, il quale, inteso il fatto, rispose che, per meglio del penitente e per più sua dispositione, egli voleva differire un poco il confessarlo, tra tanto che gli dessero buona speranza, e attendessero ad instruirlo, e conservarlo in contritione, che lui non mancherebbe al tempo suo di confessarlo. Questo si vidde che fu cosa dettata dallo Spirito

Santo, perchè il giovane col desiderio della confessione, col considerare la gravezza e peso de peccati che haveva sopra di se, crebbe tanto in virtù, che non solo non temeva la morte che le dovevano dare, ma intendendo di meritar molto peggio, la desiderava, per offerirla a Dio in qualche ricompensa delli suoi peccati. Con questo non cessava mai appresso i suoi maestri di fare istanza per potersi confessare; loro dandogli buone parole, attendevano ad instruirlo. Finalmente la sera avanti il giorno nel quale doveva essere giustitiato, essendogli annunciata la morte, con prieghi e lagrime caldissime, gettatosi a piedi de suoi maestri, disse, Ecco ch'io moro, e non mi son confessato; che per la passione di Christo non abbandonate questa pover anima. Loro assicurandolo che non morirebbe senza la confessione, perchè sapevano che il buon sacerdote non gli mancherebbe, lo confortarono a raccomandarsi a Christo all'hora più che mai, e così passò tutta quella notte in gran contritione e lagrime. La mattina sapendosi per la città che si doveva far giustitia, si congregò gran populo, scolari della Universita e altri, intorno alle prigioni.

Alcune hore prima che si doveva far morire questo famoso ladrone il buon sacerdote, parendogli già tempo di unir perfectamente quell'anima a Christo, se ne va fra mezo quella moltitudine di gente, non stimando alcuno suo pericolo, fino alle prigioni. Piacque a Dio che da nessuno fu conosciuto, ma adnesso dentro le stanze della prigione, come si solevano admettere molti altri, per trattare con suoi amici, o vedere quello che haveva da essere giustitiato. Gionto vicino alla stanza dove era il giovane, un Catholico che a posto stava su la porta per veder se veniva il sacerdote, vedutolo, accennò al giovane che andasse, e così il sacerdote, pigliato seco il giovane, lo ritirò da parte in un orto segreto, ch'era tra le stanze delle prigioni, e sotto un arboreto confessandolo, diligentemente l'instrusse di quanto doveva fare, e ci fu tempo abbondante per ogni cosa, poichè, no so per qual mezo, la providenza divina ordinò che la giustitia si differisse sin dopo pranso

Questo glorioso sacerdote, fatto il debito suo, se ne ritornò intrepido tra tutta quella moltitudine, senza essere meno da nessuno conosciuto.

Venuta l'ora che si dovea giustitiare, alcuni ministri heretici così nella prigione, come anco per strada mentre andava al lungo della giustizia, volsero esortare il giovane, a disporsi alla morte secondo che insegna Lutero e Calvino, ma lui li ributtò sempre da se, dicendo che non lo molestassero, che erano stati prevenuti da altri, e che lui già sapea quanto dovea fare.

Condotto il giovane al luogo della morte, sul principio, vedendo la forca, si atterri, e turbò molto, ma ricordandosi poi de i suoi buoni propositi, si inanimò tanto che cominciò a mostrare a tutti allegrezza singolare. Gionto alla forca, e posto ingenocchioni, si fece il segno della croce, come poteva con le braccia legate, e in voce alta recitò il Miserere in Latino, che nella prigione haveva imparato, cosa che fece restare fuori di se gli heretici: poichè il farsi il segno della croce a loro è odioso, come al demonio, e recitare li salmi in Latino è cosa a loro tutta insolita. Per il che accostandosigli un ministro, cominciò ad avvisarlo, che dovesse lasciare questo, e pensare a salvar l'anima, dandogli documenti a modo suo. Il buon giovane scacciandolo da se, e pregandolo non gli fosse molesto in questo suo ultimo passo, al fine vinse la sua importunità, e segui le sue devotioni.

Levato in piedi, avanti di cominciar a salir la scala, fattosi di nuovo il segno della croce, e segnato il primo scalino lo baciò e così fece a scalino per scalino (come è versisimile che fosse instrutto dal buon sacerdote, il quale nel suo martirio fece il simile, come è detto). Come fu nel ultimo scalino, voltato al popolo disse: Io conosco e confesso che merito questa e peggior morte

per li miei delitti, ma ringratio bene la maestà di Dio, che avanti di morire si è degnato di farmi conoscere la vera luce della sua santa fede. Per tanto in presenza di tutti protestò di morire nella antiqua fede della vera e santa Chiesa Catholica Romana. Maravigliati tutti di tal confessione, un importuno ministro cominciò a voler disputar, e mostrarli come non era buona la sua fede, e lui rispondendo che non si pigliasse fastidio, perchè era chiaro e certo di quanto dovea credere, e preparato anco per quella fede a mettere altre vite, se altre gli ne restassero. Precipitato della scala morendo, come il buon ladrone, rubbò il Paradiso. Si divulgò fra il popolo per le cose dette che costui fusse giustitiato non per li suoi latrocinii, ma per le fede, volendo Dio honestare e honorare in questo modo la penitenza di questo buon ladrone, e molto anco pigliavano delle stringhe e parte delli vestimenti per devotione di quel buon penitente.

[/vii. Change of Policy on Martyrdoms at Oxford]

Qui è da notare, che per il passato dubitando gli heretici, che per essere Oxonio la principale academia di tutta Inghilterra, ove concorre infinita gioventù, non fossero per commoversi molti alla fede Catholica, se ivi fossero stati esaminati e sententiati li Catholici, hanno fin hora diligentemente osservato di non vene martirizar nissuno. Hora con tutto questo rimedio avertendo che si facevano molti Catholici, si risolsero per dar terrore (acciò per quello non si facessero) farci giustitiare questi quatro: ma la morte loro ha fatto tal commotione in tutta la città e paese intorno, che si spera che per uno, che prima si convertiva, hora se ne convertiranno dieci, il che piaccia all'infinita misericordia di Dio di concedere.

1. The copy had been sent to Bellarmine by Fr. Joseph Creswell, S.J., Rector of the Venerable English College, Rome. On 19 February 1590 Bellarmine wrote to Creswell, from Paris, to thank him: 'Ringratio la R.V. dell' amorevolezza sua in salutarmi con lettere et mandarmi il martyrio di quei quattro compatrioti suoi. Ci ha consolati tutti la constanza loro, et per animare i nostri Francezi presto si stamparà quà l'istessa relatione voltata in Franzese: perchè se Dio presto non ci aiuta, dubito grandemente che Francia non vienghi al termine à che hora si trova l'Inghilterra.' A.E.C.R., Scritture, III, 18; X.M.
Le Bachelet, S.J., Bellarmin avant son Cardinalat, 1542-1598, Paris 1911, p. 258.
2. 'Barigello': a messenger or agent, sent no doubt by the Privy Council, probably the Richard Elsworth mentioned in doc. 2 (a), (b). The French translation calls him 'le provost des mareschaulx'. The Spanish term used is 'alcalde' (doc. 6).
3. The Vice-Chancellor of the University, Martin Heton (supra p. 776, note 8).
4. Edmund Lillie, M.A., D.D., Master of Balliol College 1580-1610 (Foster, Alum. Oxon., III, p. 914).
5. Francis Willis, M.A., D.D., President of St. John's College 1577-90 (ibid., IV, p. 1649).
6. The Privy Council.
7. Probably Richard Ellis, of London, who matriculated in Magdalen Hall, Oxford, in 1585, took his B.A. degree in March 1589 and his M.A. degree in 1591 (Boase and Clark, II, ii, p. 141; II, iii, p. 153).
8. Sir Francis Knollys (supra p. 770).
9. Harcourt Taverner, youngest son of Richard Taverner, of Woodeaton, Oxfordshire. The father was Clerk of the Signet from 1537 to 1553, Sheriff of Oxfordshire in 1569, and a distinguished Protestant writer. Harcourt Taverner was hanged in the Castle yard at Oxford in October 1587. Cf. A. Davidson in Essex Deewan xiii (147) p. 30.

EXCERPT FROM FR. ROBERT PERSONS' 'RELACION DE ALGUNOS MARTYRIOS'.

- Relacion de algunos martyrios, que de nuevo han hecho los hereges en Inglaterra ... , traduzida de Ingles en Castellano por el Padre Roberto Personio ... , Madrid 1590, ff. 2lv - 4lv.

(Reprinted in Diego de Yepes, Historia particular de la persecucion de Inglaterra, Madrid 1599, pp. 618 - 633.)

On Fr. Robert Persons, S.J., cf. supra p. 24. On the Relacion de algunos martyrios cf. supra p. 680. We cite here the third item in the work, an account of the four Oxford martyrs of 1589. The account is clearly dependent either on the Breve relatione (doc. 5) or on the earlier account which we have suggested was sent by Richard Verstegan to Cardinal William Allen in Rome (supra p. 773). It follows exactly the same order of events: (i) the arrest of the four martyrs at Oxford; (ii) their imprisonment and examination there; (iii) their examination and sufferings in London; (iv) their return to Oxford and trial there; (v) their execution in Oxford; (vi) the reconciliation of a highwayman by George Nichols. It is, however, longer than the Breve relatione and gives more detail on some points, though without adding anything of really essential importance.

As in the Breve relatione, we have broken up the account into sections and supplied headings. The section regarding the reconciliation of the highwayman has been omitted.

Relacion de algunos martyrios muy notables hechos en la villa y Universidad de Oxonio de Inglaterra en el mes de Iulio, deste año passado de 1589.

/f. 22r/ Arrest of the four Martyrs at Oxford

Entre los sacerdotes que cada año se embian en missiones del seminario de Rhems en Francia, para enseñar la fe Catolica en Inglaterra, fu uno llamado Iorge Nicolas, hombre de mucha virtud y de buenas letras. Este en el repartimiento que hizo con sus companeros, tomo por su partido la ciudad de Oxonio con su comarca, donde trabajo muy provechosamente, por espacio de seys años, reduziendo a Christo nuestro Señor muchas animas perdidas, y plantando y confirmando la fe Catolica per todas /f. 22r/ las partes de su distrito: de lo qual teniendo invidia el demonio, y queriendo Dios tambien premiar sus trabajos con la corona dichosa del martyrio, permitio que una espia descubriese al Consejo de Estado de la Reyna,¹ que en Oxonio avia algunos clerigos que frequentavan y escandalizavan aquellas partes.

Los del Consejo ordenaron que de Londres fuesse luego un alcalde con algunos alguaziles, y con la misma espia, para prenderlos. Fueronse a Oxonio, y juntandose con la justicia de la villa, començaron a media noche a entrar en las casas de los Catolicos, y no hallandoles la primera vez, passaron adelante a la case de una biuda vieja muy piadosa y Catolica, que tenia posadas para gente principal, pero particularmente para Catolicos, y clerigos, que passavan por alli.

/f. 22v/ En esta casa entro la justicia a media noche con mucho ruydo para buscar los Catolicos, y para que no faltassen corderos a estos lobos, ni ofrenda para el sacrificio que Dios avia determinado hazer, ordeno tambien que no solamente el dicho clerigo Iorge se halasse en esta coyuntura en ella, pero tambien un otro sacerdote llamado Iaxleo, que nuevamente avia venido de Rhems, y un cavallero de aquella provincia llamado Belsono, que avia venido a visitar al buen sacerdote Iorge, y Dios avia determinado que con el tambien muriesse.

En llamando la justicia a la puerta, abrioles luego un criado de casa llamado Omfrido, muy siervo de Dios, el qual mas de doze anos avia servido continuamente a los Catolicos necessitados, y agora avia llegada el tiempo en que Dios queria /f. 23r/ pagarle sua servicios con la gracia inestimabile del martyrio.

Prendieronlos a todos quatro, y aunque examinandolos no hallaron cosa de que echar mano, ni color para prenderlos, toda via avisados por la espia, que mirassen bien la ropa que traian, hallaron unos ornamentos para dezir Missa, y de aqui barruntaron, que avia entre ellos algun sacerdote, y esto basto para llevarlos a todos presos a la carcel: lo qual hizieron con mucho ruydo y regozijo. Parecio esta noche muy semejante a aquella en que los Iudios llevaron preso a nuestro Señor a Ierusalem, cum lanternis et facibus.

A la biuda por ser vieja, no hizieron otra cosa por entonces, sino rebolverle la casa, para mirar las cosas que tenia, y embargar toda su hazienda para la Reyna, y darle su casa por [f. 23v] carcel, hasta que otro se determinasse, finalmente tomarle muy buenas fiancas que no huyria.

Pero rebolviendo la casa, acontecio que entre otras cosas hallaron algunas cucharas de plata muy buenas, las quales tenian en las puntas labradas algunas imagenes de Santos, y porque el alcalde tenia gana de tomarlas para si, dixo, que eran cosas de supersticion, y que por esto las llevaria el como confiscadas. Respondiole un hombre honrado, que estava delante (y en secreto tenia la stima a la pobre biuda) que si en las puntas de las cucharas avia alguna supersticion, que las cortasse y dexasse lo demas, que era muy buena plata, y no tenia de suyo supersticion alguna, y assi las dexo.

[ii. Imprisonment and Examinations at Oxford]

La mañana siguiente divulgado ya el caso por la villa y Universidad [f. 24r], concurría mucha gente, y junto se Consejo de los Doctores con el Vicecancelario de la Universidad, el qual es juez ordinario de todo aquwl distrito en ausencia del Cancelario, que ordinariamente es uno del Consejo de Estado de la Reyna, y reside en Londres.

Fueron les presentados los quatro presos, y començco luego el Vicecancelario a examinarlos muy por menudo en cosas de la fe, a las quales ellos respondieron, confessando libre y alegremente, que eran Catolicos. Preguntavanles los hereges, si avia entre ellos algun sacerdote, y ellos repararon un poco, por el peligro que para otros traia consigo la respuesta, diziendo que les bastava aver confessado ser Catolicos, y averse empleado en ganar almas en Inglaterra. Tornaron los hereges a apretarles mas en este particular: y viendo el [f. 24v] clerigo Iorge la muchedumbre de gente que estava presente, y pareciendole que era tiempo de confessar a su Señor, dixo con boz

alta y claro, Yo confieso, que por la gracia di Dios y de la Sede Apostolica, soy sacerdote de la verdadera, santa, Catolica, y apostolica Yglesia Romana.

Oyda esta tan clara y libre confession, enojaronse mucho los hereges: y llamaronle traydor, conforme a su ley, que a todos los sacerdotes Catolicos condena por traydores.² Dixeron tambien, que era blasfemia llamarse sacerdote, pues Christo solo era el verdadero sacerdote, y otras palabras necias y fundadas en algunos lugares de la sagrada Escritura mal entendidos, los quales començo a declarar el buen sacerdote, y a responder a los disparates que ellos dezian: y de aqui se vino a travar una disputa [f. 25r] muy reñida, y el santo y valeroso soldado de Christo, a apretarlos y a convencerlos de manera, que ellos tuvieron por bien de dexarle, y no disputar mas, porque vehian que no sabian responder; y que los circunstantes (que ya eran muchos) con los ojos, y con el semblante del rostro, davan a entender, que quedavan persuadidos de las verdaderas y eficaces razones que el Padre dezia; y con esto se acabo la junta. Y embiaron los dos sacerdotes a una carcel apartada, y al cavallero con el criado a otra: ordenando que a los unos y a los otros los cargassen muy bien de hierros, y cadenas, como se hizo.

Y para tentar si por este medio serian mas flacos, y pusilanimos, embiaron un ministro suyo, que entre ellos tenia reputacion de hombre letrado, para disputar con los clerigos en la prision; vino y quiso disputar de la [f. 25v] santissima Eucharistia: pero el ministro de Dios Iorge le stapo la boca, y con los lugares claros y irrefragables de las divinas letras, y con el uso universal de toda la santa Yglesia Catolica, y con la dotrina maciça y verdadera de todos los Doctores, y Santos antiguos, que con tanta uniformidad en todos los siglos passados, y en todas las pro incias y reynos de la Christiandad por diferentes y distantes que sean han enseñado esta verdad, y con las determinaciones y decretos de infinitos Concilios: y finalmente con los desatinos de los mismos hereges, y con la inconstancia y mutabilidad de su falsa dotrina: la qual cada dia mudan en los demas articulos, y en el del santissimo Sacramento del altar, son tan varios, que en posos años han inventado mas de ochenta y dos interpretaciones, todas falsas, sobre quatro [f. 26r] palabras del Evangelio.

Con estas armas digo, de tal suerte peleo el soldado de Christo con el falso ministro de Satanás, que le rindio y confundio con admiracion y edificacion de los circumstantes, que avian entrado en la carcel para cyr la disputa, y eran muchos. Con esto se determinaron de dexar las palabras, y venir a las obras, y que pues no bastavan razones para ablandarlos, apretarlos y afligirlos con tormentos, que son las mas ciertas y ordinarias armas del demonio, y de sus ministros, para perseguir, y si pudiesen aniquilar los Santos, y siervos del Señor.

Para esto, el dia siguiene los sacaron a todos quatro encadenados, y cargados de hierros, como hemos dicho, y los presentaron otra vez delante el mismo Consejo del Vicecancelario y Doctores, y les preguntaron, no ya cosas de la fe, sino de estado, [f. 26v] conviene a saber: que cosa hazian: con que intencion avian entrado los clerigos en el reyno; con quien avian conversado: de que avian tratado: a quienes conocian por Catolicos en Inglaterra, y otras semejantes preguntas: a las quales los siervos de Dios respondieron, que ellos no sabian, ni tratavan, ni pensavan de otra cosa, sino de ganar almas a Christo nuestro Señor, y enseñarles la fe Catolica, y costumbres Christianas; y sunque bien sabian quanto peligro temporal avia en hazer esto, conforme a las leyes de Inglaterra, toda via, como en esto yua tanto para el servicio y honra de su Redemptor, no podian dexar de hazerlo, aunque fuesse con perdida de sus vidas.

Los hereges al contrario no hazian sino interpretarlo todo a mal, y dezir, que aquel no era zelo de los animas, sino animo iniquo y perverso, [f. 27r] e inclinado a trayciones contra la Reyna, conforme a las leyes que han hecho contra los Catolicos: segun las quales, el confessar sus pecados a sacerdote es traycion contra la Reyna; el dar absolucion sacramental, o recibirla, y persuadir a alguno que sea Catolico, es crimen de lessa magestad. Pero como vieron que se les dava poco de tales trayciones y calunnias, los mandaron bolver a las carceles, y dieron aviso de todo lo que passava al Consejo de Estado, que esta en Londres. Esto se hizo en el mes de Iunio, de mil y quinientos y ochenta y nueve.

[iii. Journey to London, Examinations there, and
Torture of the two Priests]

Los del Consejo, aunque sabian ya lo que avian de hazer con estos Catolicos, y que no avia que preguntarles mas, ni pensar de sacar dellos

mas de lo que voluntariamente de suyo avian confessado, toda via por mayor afrenta de la religion Catolica, y por [f. 27v] que Dios queria que a su imitacion hiziesse esta larga y penosa estacion, y por poner terror y espanto a los demas, ordenaron que se llevassen a Londres con la mayor deshonra que se pudiesse, y anzi se hizo: porque poniendolos en cavallos muy flacos, y que a penas se podian tener, atando a todos los braços atras, y a los sacerdotes tambien los pies, de manera que no pudiesse moverse para ninguna parte, acompañados con muchos archeros, alabarderos, y arcabuzeros, como a ladrones, los llevaron a Londres con esta manera de procession y triunfo.

No se puede referir las afrentas, injurias, y baldones que padecieron estos siervos de Christo en esta camino, que es dezisiete leguas,³ destes lobos infernales; porque primero para començar la tragedia, en Oxonio dieron al criado Onfrido un cavallo [f. 28r] tan rebelde, y de tan malas mañas, que en subiendo en el començo a dar brincos y saltos, y a tirar coces con tanta furia y ferocidad, que le derribo en el suelo, y como el estava stado, y no se podia ayudar, se hirio en el rostro malamente. Riyendo se los hereges de su danno, y tomando solaz de lo que si fueran hombres, y no fieras, devian tomar pena.

Despues en todos los lugares del camino por donde passavan, demas de tratarlos muy cruelmente en todas las cosas, hablando con la gente que de todas las partes los venian a ver, los infamavan, diziendo dellos mil mentiras en su presencia, sin que a ellos se permitiesse responder palabra: pero la modestia y paciencia de los santos harto hablava por ellos, y la crueldad manifiesta de los sayones causava mucha compassion en las animos de toda la gente cuerda [f. 28v] y desapassionada que los vehia.

Llegados a Londres, no se puede facilmente creer el recebimiento que les hizieron, los gritos, blasfemias, y palabras injuriosas con que fueron recibidos de aquel pueblo herege y malvado: saliendo toda la gente a ver los y acompañarlos hasta las carceles: pero ellos ya yuan apercebidos, y muy bien armados de paciencia y mortificacion, y determinados de sufrir con alegria toda la deshonra y afrenta que la malicia de los enemigos les podia inventar, por amor de su dulcissimo Salvador; cuya cruz y oprobio tenian delante los ojos, y la yuan con atenta y devota consideracion meditando en aquel punto.

Una cosa en particular les dio mucha pena, y fue la crueldad usada con un estudiante graduado de Artes en la Universidad de Oxonio: el qual

saliendo con ellos a pie de Oxonio, o /f. 29r/ fuesse por algunos negocios que tenia en Londres, o por la devocion que tuviesse de servirles en el camino, como lo hizo con mucha caridad y zelo; llegando a Londres, los alguaziles le prendieron, y no aviendo de que acusarle, le achacaron que era loco, y por tal lo pusieron en la casa y carcel de los locos, donde con grandes abstinencias y muchos açotes los suelen curar; y en efeto le trataron como a tal, queriendo con asperos castigos y penosos remedios quitarle la locura que ellos fingian, y darle el seso que el pobre moço tenia, y con las respuestas cuerdas que dava mostrava tener, y hasta oy le tienen preso y captivo en aquella dura carcel, solamente porque sirvio en aquel camino a los Catolicos, y porque no sea testigo cierto de vista de la barbara crueldad con que ellos por todo aquel camino los trataron.

/f. 29v/ Despues de aver estado en la carcel de Londres algunos dias, fueron presentados al Secretario de Estado, llamado Walsingham, grandissimo herege, y enemigo de los Catolicos; este hombre les hizo muchas preguntas: quien eran, y donde venian: que cosas tratavan: con quien avian negociado, y otras semejantes; a las quales el clerigo Iorge, hizo luego la misma respuesta y confession, que antes avia hecho in Oxonio, y dixo, que todos eran Catolicos, y que el era sacerdote, aunque indigno, de la santa Yglesia Romana, y que su negociacion era, para enseñar a todos la fe Catolica, y costumbres Christianas. Dixo el Secretario, en siendo sacerdote sois traidor a la corona real. Respondio el siervo de Dios, Yo me espanto desta vuestra conclusion, pues el pimero que nos alumbro y reduxo este reyno al conocimiento /f. 30r/ de Christo fue sacerdote, y los que despues mas le han sustentado, y honrado, han sido siempre sacerdotes y perlados. Dixo al Secretario, Otro oficio tenian entonces les sacerdotes que no agora; porque al presente vuestro sacerdocio consiste en levantar el pueblo contra la Reyna. Respondio Iorge, Si enseñar la fe Catolica y buenas costumbres fuesse levantar el pueblo contra la Reyna, tendria esso alguna razon; pero pues no es assi, grande injuria se haze a la verdad y a los siervos de Dios en echar les tal culpa: y con esto se acabo aquel examen.

Despues fueron presentados al Consejo Real, y examinatos en las mismas cosas ya dichas, y particularmente de los complices que avian en el reyno, conviene a saber, de los Catolicos que conocian; a los quales no /f. 30v/ queriendo ellos descubrir en ninguna manera, mandaron finalmente los del Consejo poner a question de tormento a los dos clerigos en una casa llamada Briduel, adonde

suelen embiar personas infames y perdidas: y assi se hizo, y los atormentaron en la dicha carcel con tormentos de cuerdas: con las quales estando colgados de los braços en el ayre, los estiravan, y los descoyuntavan; duro este horrible tormento por espacio de quinze horas continuas.

Mientras que estaban los santos en estos tormentos, llevaron muchos hombres, y particularmente algunas espias para que los mirassen atentamente, y reconociessen, si por ventura los avain visto en algunas casas de Catolicos del reyno.

Arcabados los tormentos y examenes rigurosos, los de Consejo viendo que por esta via no se podia [f. 31r] sacar nada de lo que ellos pretendian, usaron otra maña y artificio de los que suelen para engañarlos. Embiaronles un hombre fingido, que dezia que era amigo de Catolicos, y desseoso de ser instruydo en la fe, y confessarse con ellos; pero, que como la persecucion era tan cruda y furiosa en el reyno, no se atrevia a descubrir a nadie, sino a ellos, por no caer en manos de algun malsin y falso Catolico, que a ellos acudia, porque sabia que lo eran verdaderos, y personas a quien Dios hazia tanta merced que padeciessen por su fe, y de quien el se podia fiar; y que assi les rogava que con confiança y secreto le dixessen, que persona podria hallar para remedio de su alma. El padre Iorge, que era siervo de Dios y prudente, luego sospecho lo que era, y el animo del lobo, que debaxo de la piel de cueja se encubria. Y assi instruyendole en las [f. 31v] cosas de la fe, quanto le parecia necessario, no quiso passar mas adelante con el, ni revelarle algun Catolico: con que enojado el verdadero herege, y fingido Catolico, se fue al Consejo, y hizo echar a Iorge en una cuena honda y fuzia, y llena de animales ponçoñosos, y el otro fue embiado al castillo de Londres, llamado la Torre, con muchas amenazas de nuevos tormentos: y alli quedaron, hasta que el Consejo determino, que a todos quatro se diesse la muerte en la Universidad de Oxonio, para escarmiento y terror, principalmente de los estudiantes.

[iv. Return to Oxford and Trial at the Assizes]

Aviendo los del Consejo determinado esto, despues que un mes avian estado a Londres, mandaron que bolviessen a los dichos presos a Oxonio, con las mismas guardas que los avian traydo a Londres: los quales si los avian tratado mal antes, [f. 32r] aora entendiendo que todos avian de morir, facilmente se puede imaginar como los tratarian, y assi en realidad de

verdad, mucho mas penosas fueron a los siervos de Dios estas largas processiones, que no la muerte que despues se les dio.

Pero es de advertir, que siendo costumbre en Inglaterra, que ninguno pueda ser condenado a muerte, sin ser oyda publicamente, y vista su causa en la Chancilleria de la provincia donde el ha de morir, y sin que doze hombres de la mesma provincia escogidos para este efeto, den sentencia de comun consentimiento contra el (porque si uno solo contradize, no vale la sentencia). Los del Consejo de Estado dudando que sino hazian diligencias y prevenciones, no se hallarian en la provincia de Oxonio (adonde ay muchos Catolicos) doze hombres de tan mala consciencia que [f. 32v] condenassen a muerte a estos quatro presos, por causa solamente de la religion, para facilitar el negocio, y alcançar por sobornos y engaños lo que no podian por justicia, determinaron de embier a uno del mismo Consejo Real, para procurar la dicha condenacion: y assi embiaron a Francisco Knols, pariente de la Reyna, y grande Luterano: el qual por las causas dichas, y por tener el oficio de sindico mayor en aquella provincia, puede mucho en ella:⁴ y ansi llegado a Oxonio hizo las diligencias que convenia.

Y primeramente para començar a dar espanto a todos, hizo sentenciar a prision perpetua, y confiscacion de todos sus bienes, a la buena vieja y santa biuda, en cuya casa se hallaron los quatro Catolicos: esta avia sido siempre una muy honrada muger en la Universidad de Oxonio, y muy estimada de [f. 33r] todos, por sus esclarecidas virtudes, particularmente por lo modestia, devocion, zelo, y caridad gran de que tenia, y mas de treynta años avia sido huespeda de Catolicos en aquella ciudad: y aora viendo se despojado de todo quanto tenia en este mundo, y condenada a la carcel por toda su vida, no mostro tristeza ninguna, sino mucha alegria, y mas desseava morir con sus huespedes, y padres espirituales, que no quedar en esta vida: pero Dios queria darle un martyrio mas largo en aquella prision para su mayor corona.

Pero tornando a Francisco Knolis, hizo despues sentenciar a muerte tambien a los dichos quatro Catolicos, por cuya causa avia venido; y hizo leer publicamente la sentencia, que fue la siguiente.⁵

Que a los dos clerigos Iorge, y Iaxleo, por averse ordenado de Missa [f. 33v] en tierras estrangeras, con autoridad del Papa, contra la ordenacion de la magesdad de la Reyna, y por aver despues entrado en su reyno, sin licencia, para enseñar dotrinas falsas, y alborotar al pueblo, y apartarle

de la obediencia devida a la dicha Reyna, se dava sentencia de muerte, en esta manera: que fuessen arrastrados primero a colas de cavallos por las calles, y despues ahorcados, y hechos quartos, como traydores. Y a los dos otros legos, por aver sido sus compañeros, y encubridores, solamente los ahorcassen sin hazerlos quartos.⁶

Oyda la sentencia los siervos de Dios, dieron gracias al Señor, abracando se el uno al otro, y mostrando grandissimas señales de alegria interior.

/v. Execution at Oxford/

Y lo mismo hizieron despues quando los sacaron al lugar del martyrio, adonde los aguardava una infinita muchedumbre de gente: a la qual /f. 34r/ ellos saludaron con rostro alegre, diziendo: Venimos para morir por la confession de la fe Catolica, que es la fe de nuestros padres, y predecesores.

El primero que se ofrecio en sacrificio a su Señor fue el clerigo Iorge, padre de los demas: el qual aviendo hecho muy humilde oracion a Dios, y tras ella la protestacion de la fe, por la qual moria, quiso dezir algunas palabras al pueblo, pero los ministros de la Reyna, no lo permitieron: y assi acabo santamente su vida sin hablar mas.

Tras el se siguió el otro clerigo compañero suyo; el qual como tenia a Iorge por padre y maestro, abraçando su cuerpo muerto, y pidiendo a su alma que rogasse a Dios por el, quiso hablar tambien al pueblo, mas no se le permitio: y assi hecha la confession de la fe, murio con grande sentimiento /f. 34v/ de todos los que illi estuvieron, porque era moço, noble, y de lindissimo aspecto.

En el terçaro lugar vino a lo corona del martyrio el cavallero Belsono, el qual era tambien moço, y muy gentilhombre; y llegando a la horca, y viendo que los cuerpos muertos de sus padres los hazian ya quartos, los beso con grande reverncia y ternura, pidiendo a las dichas almas (que ya estaban gozando de Dios) que le alcançassen gracia, para seguir las con fortaleza y constancia, pues se tenia por muy dichoso por aver de padecer con ellos, y de presentarse a Dios con tan buena compañía, y por aver sido hijo espiritual dellos; y assi con much alegria dio el espiritu a su Señor.

El postero que cumplio este glorioso auto fue el buen criado Onfrido; el qual subio al lugar del martyrio /f. 35r/ con rostro muy alegre, y con la risa en la boca, como si fuera a

alguna fiesta. Subido en la escalera, se bolvio al pueblo, y dixo: Buena gente, yo os llamo por testigos oy en la presencia de Dios, y de sus angeles, para que el dia del juyzio universal lo seays, que yo muero por la confession de la fe Catolica. Enojo se un ministro herege mucho destas palabras, y le dixo: Pobrezillo tu no sabes aun lo que quiere dezir Catolico, y con todo esto hablas desta manera. Respondio al martyr, Bien se lo que es ser Catolico, y aunque con palabras de teologia no lo sepa explicar, bien se lo que devo creer, y lo que vengo al presente a testificar y confirmar con mi sangre, que es todo lo que cree y manda creer y obrar la santa madre Yglesia Romana; y con esto despidio se de todos, y fue de los hereges echado a baxo, y murio santamente.

[f. 35v] Este espectaculo, por la variedad de las cosas y sucessos, y por la innocencia y virtud esclarecida de los martires, y por la crueldad e injusticia de los hereges, fue tan insigne, que causo grande sentimiento en el pueblo: y se signio al pie de la letra lo que escribe el sagrado Evangelista San Lucas en el fin de su evangelio, que toda la muchedumbre de gente, que estuvo presente a la passio de nuestro Señor, bolvia a sus casas hiriendo sus pechos, por lo que en ella avian visto.⁷

Acrecentose mucho este sentimiento con una cosa notable, que luego sucedio: y fue, que aviendo los hereges cortado las cabeças y hecho quartos a los dos sacerdotes, les pusieron por entonces sobre las murallas viejas del castillo de Oxonio; adonde subiendo los ministros hereges para mirarlos, no contentos con averlos ya muerto, de pura ravia les davan cuchilladas [f. 36r] en los rostros para desfigurarlos, porque muertos como estaban aun les parecian muy hermosos.

Por esta causa la justicia despues de dos dias, les quito de donde estaban, y puso las cabeças y los quartos sobre las puertas de la ciudad; y aunque los quartos estaban colgados de tal manera, que las manos de todos cahian hazia abaxo, con todo esto la mano derecha del sacerdote Iorge se hallo despues alçada de suyo, y levantada en el ayre, y estendida contra la ciudad a la manera que un predicador quando en el pulpito amenaza a algun lugar, la suele estender: con grande maravilla, no solamente de los Catolicos, mas aun de los hereges: entre los quales aunque avia algunos que lo querian atribuyr a causa natural, y dezian, que era encogimiento de los nervios: pero otros menos apassionados, considerando que [f. 36v] en quartos ya cozidos en agua herviente, no puede aver

este encogimiento de nervios, lo atribuyeron (como era) a milagro, particularmente acordando se como el dicho Iorge en el tiempo del juyzio, viendo las muchas calumnias y manifiestas injusticias que se les hazian (aun contra las leyes propias del reino), amonestava a los juezes que mirassen bien que avia otro juez mas grande y poderoso, que les pediria cuenta de todos aquellos agravios, y como en vida no le quisieron oyr aquellos endurecidos coraçones de los hereges, parecia que les tornava a predicar ya muerto, y amenazarlos con la mano estendida contra la ciudad, como avemos dicho.

Mucho se confirmo esto con la opinion comun que tenian de Iorge, como de varon apostolico, fervoroso, y santo, y avia lo el bien mostrado en la paciencia, alegria, y constancia que [f. 37r] tuvo en aquel injusto juyzio con que fue condenado: en las protestaciones, y confesiones aposjtolicas que hizo de la fe: en las otras obras que el avia hecho en ayuda de los proximos por ganar almas a su Señor en el espacio de seys anos, que en aquel distrito de Oxonio avia trabajado: no perdonando, ni a fatigas, ni a peligros, para socorrerlos. Y aunque desta su caridad y serviente zelo se cuentan muchas cosas muy particulares, pondre yo aqui sola una, que es muy notable ...

An account of the reconciliation of the highwayman by George Nichols follows here, ff. 37r - 41r, after which the 'relacion' concludes:

Mucho edifico la muerte deste ladron: y assi quando se supo que de su conversion avia en gran parte sido causa el sacerdote Iorge, le yuan todos cobrando grande aficion, y mucho mas quando vieron el martyrio, y santo fino suyo, y de sus companeros: los quales eran hijos suyos. Tiene se por cierto, que el martyrio destes quatro tan [f. 41v] esclarecidos siervos de Dios, a de hazer muy notables efetos en aquellas partes de Inglaterra, y que ha sido muy particular providencia de la divina misericordia, que ayán padecido en estos tiempos en Oxonio, para consolar, acrecentar, y confirmar los Catolicos que alli ay.

El Señor sea glorificado que les dio a ellos tal esfuerço y espiritu, y a nosotros exemplo con su muerte, y a toda su santa Yglesia, nuevos y animosos soldados, y sea servido de oyr las plegarias y ruegos de todos sus escogidos, y dar fin a una tyrania tan impia, y cruel, y barbara, como la que al presente reyna en aquel reyno, para que todos le conozcamos, y sirvamos, como por tantos y tan grandes titulos estamos obligados.

Notes

1. The Privy Council.
2. The statute of 1585 (27 Eliz. I, cap. 2).
3. Seventeen leagues. A league was about three miles. The distance from Oxford to London at present is reckoned as 57 miles.
4. On Knollys cf. doc. 3, supra p. 770. Knollys' wife, Catherine, née Carey (d. 1569) was a niece of Anne Boleyn and thus first cousin of Elizabeth I. Knollys was Member of Parliament for Oxfordshire from 1572 to 1596.
6. Persons blames Knollys very heavily and writes here as if he were solely responsible for the condemnation of the martyrs. It is clear, however, that they were tried at the Assizes in the ordinary way, but probably the jury was packed, as Persons says, and a verdict of guilty was in the circumstances a certainty.
6. Clearly all four were sentenced under the statute of 1585 (27 Eliz. I, cap. 2).

EXCERPT FROM PETER PENKEVELL'S RELATION, c. 1591. - Stonyhurst MSS, Grene B, p. 4 (probably holograph). (Mod. ver. in AEM, p. 289.)

On Peter Penkevell and the present relation cf. supra p. 401. Penkevell records very briefly the chief facts regarding the four martyrs: their arrest at Oxford, their journey to London and torture there, their return to Oxford, and their trial and execution.

... Not long after this¹ M^r Nichols and an other preyst (interlined: M^r Yeats²) was taken at Oxford, and two laymen, one M^r Belson and a chamberlyne.³ The preystes, and I think the other two, were brought to London, and after [cruel] torture in Brydwell were all sent agayne to Oxford and there arraynd and put to death. Both the preystes were hanged and quartered ...

Notes

1. The relation has just dealt with Bls. William Hartley, John Hewett, and Robert Sutton, martyred in London on 5 October 1588.
2. Richard Yaxley.
3. Humphrey Pritchard.

EXCERPT FROM LIST OF PRIESTS SENT ON THE ENGLISH MISSION FROM ROME
AND RHEIMS DURING PONTIFICATE OF GREGORY XIII (1575-85), c. 1591.
- A.E.C.R., Martyrs' File, M. I. Transcript in P.R.O., PRO 31/9/13.
DDA, p. 296 (from transcript).

On this list cf. supra p. 404. It records the martyrdom of
George Nichols, Richard Yaxley, Thomas Belson, and Humphrey Pritchard
at Oxford in 1589.

Anno Domini 1584 missi fuerunt sacerdotes in Angliam 18, ex
quibus 9 sunt martirio coronati ...
D. Georgius Nicolseus et D. Richardus Yaxleius, sacerdotes, martirio
coronati sun Oxonii;¹ wr xum illis duo alii laici, alter juvenis
nobilis Thomas Belsonus, quondam seminarii Rhemensis alumnus, alter
Humfredus Gryffithus, 1589 ...

Notes

1. Nichols is 11th in the list of 18 priests sent to England in 1584. Yaxley did not come to England till 1586, and he is not counted in the 18 in the list.

EXCERPT FROM FR. CHRISTOPHER GRENE'S 'COLLECTANEA', c. 1592.

- Oscott College, Grene E, p. 79. (Mod. ver. in Troubles, III, p. 38.)

On Grene E cf. supra p. 191. The excerpt below is from the second paper in the collection, an account of the persecution in England in the latter part of the 16th century, written about 1592, by an unknown author (supra p. 192). The eighth chapter gives brief details of some seventy martyrs executed in England and Wales between 1582 and 1592.

Cap. 8^{um}. Martiria Catholicorum.

... Anno 1589. In Julye M^r Nicholles and M^r Richard Yaxlye, priests, M^r Belson, gent/leman, and one Humphrye, a poore tayler in Oxford, were removed from the Gatehouse to Oxford Assizes, where they were taken,¹ and there all executed, the priestes for remayninge in the realme contrarye to the statute,² the lay men for aydinge them in there function.

(Interlined: All executed but the tayler. He was offered, yf he would goe to church, to be saved; he answered, he had rather dye with his frendes then live with those conditions. There faces turned ...³)

Notes

1. I.e. arrested.
2. The statute of 1585 (27 Eliz. I, cap. 2).
3. A few words here are now illegible. The last sentence is given in Troubles, loc. cit., as 'Their faces turned all east, the chiefest west.'

EXCERPT FROM FR. PEDRO DE RIBADENEIRA'S 'APPENDIX' TO DR. NICHOLAS SANDERS AND FR. EDWARD RISHTON'S 'DE ORIGINE AC PROGRESSU SCHISMATIS ANGLICANI', 1593. - Reprinted in Historias de la Contrarreforma, ed. E. Rey, S.J., Madrid 1945, pp. 1211-1216.

On Fr. Pedro de Ribadeneira, S.J., and the 'Appendix' cited here, cf. supra p. 48. Ribadeneira's account follows the Breve relatione (doc. 5) and Fr. Robert Persons' Relacion de algunos martyrios (doc. 6), and does not add anything new. Clearly it is dependent either on these earlier accounts or on their common source. It deals with events in the same order: (i) the arrest of the four martyrs at Oxford; (ii) their imprisonment and examination there; (iii) their examinations and sufferings in London; (iv) their return to Oxford and trial there; (v) their execution in Oxford; (vi) the reconciliation of a highwayman by George Nichols. We have abbreviated the account and omitted the section regarding the highwayman. The paragraphing has been adapted very slightly and the sections numbered to facilitate comparison with the earlier accounts.

Capitulo III

El Martirio que se hizo en Oxford de dos Sacerdotes y dos Legos Católicos

[i] No se contentaron los herejes con la sangre de los Católicos, tan copiosa, que derramaron el año de 1588, por la ocasión y modo que habemos referido; mas llevaron su crueldad adelante, y el año de 1589 hicieron otros martirios no menos atroces e ilustres que los pasados. Entre ellos, en la ciudad y Universidad de Oxford, en casa de una viuda vieja, muy Católica, a media noche, con grande ruido prendieron a dos sacerdotes; el uno se llamaba Jorge Nicolás y el otro Yaxley, ambos del seminario de Reims, y a un caballero, llamado Belson, que había venido a visitar al Padre Jorge, y a un criado de casa, que tenia por nombre Hunfredo, muy siervo de Dios, el cual había servido con mucha devoción a los Católicos necesitados más de doce años ...

[ii] A los cuatro, dos sacerdotes y dos legos, presentaron al Vicecancelario de la Universidad, que los examinó, en compañía de algunos otros jueces ... No podido convencerlos, ni sacar de ellos cosa de las que querían, ordenaron los jueces que todos cuatro se llevasen a Londres con la mayor deshonra que se pudiese; y así se hizo, padeciendo per todo el camino infinitas injurias, afrentas y malos tratamientos, por la crueldad y fieréza de los sayones que los acompañaban ...

[iii] Después que estuvieron en las cárceles de Londres algunos días, fueron presentados a Francisco Walsingham, secretario del Consejo de Estado, que era grandísimo hereje e inimicísimo de los Católicos; éste les preguntó muchas cosas, para enredarlos y tener ocasión de perseguir a los que los habían recibido en sus casas y favorecido; pero el Padre Jorge Nicolás no respondió sino que todos eran Católicos, y él sacerdote (aunque indigno) de la Iglesia Romana ... Finalmente, como no pudiese sacar lo que deseaba, echaron a los dos sacerdotes en una casa infame, con los hombres facinerosos y perdidos, y allí los atormentaron y los tuvieron colgados en el aire por espacio de quince horas, sin poder sacar palabra de la que pretendían, sufriendo con grande paciencia y alegría los santos sacerdotes las penas que les quisieron dar.

Como no les sucedió el camino de los tormentos, volviéronse los herejes a sus mañas y artificios. Enviaron a un hombre de manga, bien instruído, para que se fingiese Católico y se confesase con ellos, y les dijese que él era Católico y deseaba ser enseñado en las cosas de nuestra santa fe, y que como había tanto peligro y tantos espías y Católicos fingidos, no se osaba descubrir a nadie, sino a ellos, por ver la merced tan señalada que Dios les hacía de ser mártires y padecer por su fe; que les rogaba que le instruyesen en lo que debía hacer, y que le dijesen a qué persona podría él acudir para que en su lugar encaminase su ánima a la vida eterna. El Padre Jorge, que demás de ser hombre docto y siervo de Dios, era también muy prudente, olió luego la malicia, y diciéndole lo que le pareció, no quiso pasar adelante ni nombrarle persona. Con estó el falso Católico quedó burlado,

e hizo echar al Padre Jorge en una sucia y honda cueva, llena de sabandijas ponsoñosas, y al otro llevaron a la Torre de Londres, amenazándolos con nuevos tormentos.

/iv/ Allí estuvieron hasta que el Consejo determinó que ellos y los otros dos legos fuesen vueltos a la ciudad de Oxford, y que para temor y escarmiento de los estudiantes, se hiciese justicia de ellos en aquella ciudad. Con esta resolución, los volvieron a Oxford con el mismo y aun mucho peor tratamiento que los habían traído. Ante todas cosas sentenciaron a la buena vieja, en cuya casa habían sido presos, a cárcel perpetua y a confiscación de todos sus bienes ... Hecho esto, se dió la sentencia contra los clérigos, que fuesen arrastrados y ahorcados y hechos cuartos, como traidores, porque habían sido ordenados con autoridad del Papa, contra el mandato de la Reina, y por haber entrado en su reino sin su licencia, para alborotarle y enseñar doctrina falsa; y a los dos legos, que los ahorcasen, por haber sido compañeros y encubridores de los dichos sacerdotes. Oída esta sentencia, los siervos de Dios le dieron muchas gracias por aquel beneficio inestimable que les hacía, y se abrazaron unos a otros, mostrando grandísimas señales de alegría.

/v/ Y el día que los sacaron para darles la muerte, con n semblante devoto y alegre saludaron a una grande multitud de gente que los estaba aguardoando, diciendo: 'Venimos a morir por la confesión de la fe Católica, que es la fe de nuestros padres y de nuestros abuelos.' El primero que se ofreció al sacrificio fué el Padre Jorge, el cual hizo primero oración al Señor, y luego la protestación de su fe ... Tras él fué el otro sacerdote, el cual ... queriendo hablar al pueblo, tampoco se lo permitieron, y hecha la confesión de la fe, murió con grande sentimiento de todos los circunstantes ... En tercero lugar vino el caballero Belson, el cual ... dió el espíritu al Señor con mucha alegría. El postrero que complió este glorioso auto fué el buen criado Hunfredo, el cual subió al lugar del martirio como su fuera a alguna fiesta, con rostro alegre y risueño ...

Este espectáculo y esta justicia que se hizo en Oxford causó grande sentimiento en los que se hallaron presentes, y no menor admiración, la cual se acrecentó más con la novedad de lo que aquí diré. Los cuartos de los sacerdotes y santos mártires, conforme al tenor de la sentencia, se pusieron, con sus cabezas, sobre las murallas viejas del Castillo de Oxford, adonde los ministros herejes fueron después a verlas con grande contento y regocijo; y como las viesan muy lindas, con la rabia y espíritu diabólico que traen consigo, arremetieron a ellas y les dieron muchas cuchilladas en las caras, para afearlas y desfigurarlas: y por esta causa, los jueces después las mandaron quitar y ponerlas, con sus cuartos, sobre les puertas de la ciudad. Allí colgaron los cuartos delanteros de tal manera, que las manos de todos caían hacia abajo; pero fué cosa maravillosa que lo mano derecha del sacerdote Jorge se halló de suya levantada hacia arriba y como amenazando a la ciudad; y aunque los herejes procuraron (como suelen) oscurecer esta maravilla, y sembraron que era cosa natural y algún encogimiento de nervios, todavía todos los Católicos y los mas de los mismos herejes entendieron que era obra sobrenatural y propria del Señor ...

EXCERPT FROM DR. ANTHONY CHAMPNEY'S 'ANNALES ELIZABETH REGINAE',
c. 1618. - A.A.W., F. I, pp. 868-875 (holograph).

On Dr. Anthony Champney cf. supra p. 72. In his account of the Oxford martyrs Champney is clearly dependent on the earlier accounts, which he follows closely. He has the same order of events: (i) the arrest of the four martyrs at Oxford; (ii) their imprisonment and examination there; (iii) their examination and sufferings in London; (iv) their return to Oxford and trial there; (v) their execution in Oxford; (vi) the reconciliation of a highwayman by George Nichols. Champney's account is a little more concise than those of Persons (doc. 6) and Ribadeneira (doc. 10); he includes all the essential facts, but adds nothing new.

We have abbreviated Champney's narrative, broken it up into paragraphs, and numbered the sections to facilitate comparison with the earlier accounts. The section regarding the highwayman has been omitted.

A.C. 1589

Eliz. 31

/i/ Mense deinde Julii die quinto gloriosum pro Christo
cwrta men subierunt Oxonii quatuor strenuissimi milites Christi,
quorum duo sacerdotes Collegii Duaceni erant, Georgius scilicet
Nicolaus, et Richardus Yaxleus, duo vero laici, Thomas Belsonus,
nobilis, et Humphredus Richardus, stabularius, vir simplex,
timens Deum et recedens a malo. Horum autem historia est
hujusmodi. In civitate Oxoniensi est hospitium quoddam sub
insigni Rotae S. Catherinae, quod a vidua quadam religiosa
Catholica tenebatur, in quo hospitabantur /p. 869/ nonnunquam
sacerdotes. In domum illam maximo cum tumultu et strepitu nocte
profunda irruerunt universitatis Oxoniensis magistratus (in
margin: qui potestate etiam civili in illa urbe pollent),
praedictos sacerdotes comprehenderunt, cum quibus abduxerunt
etiam Thomam Belsonum, nobilem et venustissimum juvenem, qui
illuc, ut patrem suum spiritualem D. Nicolaum conveniret,
adventarat. Illis adjunxerunt praefatum Humphredum famulum
domesticum, egregium Dei servum, qui duodecim integros annos
magna in devotione et fidelitate Catholicis in omni occasione
studiose inservierat ...

[ii] Quatuor autem predictos Dei servos, duos puta sacerdotes cum duobus laicis, ad Vicecancellarium Universitatis, qui ordinarius est loci illius magistratus pacisque publicae conservator, adduxerunt ut ab illo examinarentur ... Cum vero nihil eorum de quibus interrogati fuerant (nimirum cum quibus versati, a quibus recepti in hospitium, quibus in locis commorati fuerant, et cetera hujusmodi) prodere vellent, ne scilicet Catholicis illis et quos cognoverant nocerent, Londinum transvehuntur. In quo itinere injuriis ludibriisque saturati, (in margin: patientia Christiana armati) omnia pro amore Jesu Christi qui plura pro nobis pertulit, magno animo, nec absque interioris voluptatis sensu, patiebantur.

[iii] Cum autem Londini aliquot dies in carcere substitissent, Walsinghamo, primario Secretario, capitali Catholicorum hosti, presentabantur. [p. 870] A quo interrogati et multiplici artificio sollicitati ut eos apud quos divertissent proderent, respondit senior Dei sacerdos: Sciat, D[ominatio] tua quod sumus omnes Catholici, ego autem Ecclesiae Catholicae Romanae sacerdos indignus, nec amplius addidit. Quo audito, hereticus magna vocis contentione vociferatur: Si sacerdos es, erga et proditor ... Respondit Christi confessor ... Sed surdo cecinit sacerdos Dei, qui statim uno cum socio suo in locum infamen retrusus, illiberaliterque tractatus, quinque horarum spacio in aere [sic] per manus suspendium subit uterque magna constantia ut animi fortitudine. Videntes itaque fidei hostes nihil se tanta immanitate proficere, nec quicquam quod desiderabant a Dei militibus vi extorqueri posse, ad fraudes confugerunt. Hominem ergo egregie vafrum et callidum subornarunt qui in fide Catholica se instrui velle fingeret, et quia ab eis id commode absque periculo suo fieri non posset, rogat ut aliquem qui libertate sua fruitur indicarent, cujus monitis et instructione ad cognitionem veritatis et salutis viam aspicere posset. Advertit confictam fraudem et malitiam sanctus confessor Nicolaus, homo praeter raram doctrinam et pietatem egregie prudens et circumspectus, qui propterea fictitium illum catecumenum nonnihil confusum a se caute repulit. [p. 871] Post hoc separati fuerunt ab invicem isti duo sacerdotes Dei, seniore in locum subterraneum tenebricosum

dimisso, juniore vero in Turri Londinensi acutae torturae subjecto.

[iv] Tandem jussu Concilii Regis ambo una cum laicis praenominatis Oxonium quo tempore Judices Assisas suas ibi tenerent revehuntur, mortem illic in studiosorum exemplum et terrorem (ut putabatur) subituri. Cum Oxonium perducti essent illi, vidua illa in cujus hospicio capti erant, perpetuis carceribus sententia Judicis adjudicatur, bonisque omnibus spoliatur, quia scilicet sacerdotes contra leges recepisset eosque fovisset ... Sententiam deinde in duos sacerdotes tulerunt Judices ut, quia regno exeuntes, sacerdotium auctoritate papali suscepissent regnumque iterum ingressi, ibi contra leges morati essent, munus sacerdotale exercentes, subditosque Reginae Ecclesiae Romanae reconcilians, unde laesae majestatis ex lege rei essent effecti, a carcere ad locum supplicii tractarentur ibique semi-suspensi in terram dimitterentur, partibusque virilibus praecisis, visceribusque extractis atque in ignem coram oculis suis projectis, capite deinde exsecto, truncum corpus in quatuor partes dissecaretur, quae partes ad beneplacitum Reginae in diversis locis disponerentur. Duo autem qui supererant laici ad simplicem suspensionem condemnati fuerunt, quia videlicet dictos sacerdotes cognovissent, juvassent, et quantum in illis erat, fovissent. Has sententias sancti martyres non constanter modo sed etiam laetanter susceperunt, gratias Deo quas poterant agentes, quod tanto honore eos dignatus esset, ut pro fide et veritate sua ad martyrii gloriam vocarentur, mutuisque amplexibus se invicem constringentes, maximi gaudii signa ediderunt manifesta.

[v] [p. 872] Et cum ad supplicium traherentur, hilari serenoque vultu magnam hominum accedentium multitudinem salutantes, dicebant: Ecce nos ad mortem pro fidei Catholicae confessione, quam patres nostri et maiores omnes coluerunt, abducimur. Obtulit se primus illi certamini sanctus Dei sacerdos Nicolaus, utpote aetate senior, et qui ceteris loco ducis et patris esse videbatur. Ille oratione ad Deum fusa et fidei Catholicae professione ad populum facta, cum plura dicere vellet, a ministris iniquae executionis prohibitus, animam suam Deo commendans, vitam pro

illius honore reddidit, a quo illum acceperat. Eum continuo sequitur socius ejus in passione, frater in vocatione et filius in affectu, qui sicut viventem sanctum martyrem patris et magistri loco habuerat, ita interfecti corpus magno ardore amplexatus, ejus sanctam animam obsecrabat ut se suumque conflictum apud Deum commendaret. Moxque scalam ascendens populumque paucis alloqui exorsus sed prohibitus sicut et prior, fidei confessione facta, non sine magno circumstantium dolore et compassione vitam hanc mortalem finivit ... Post istos adductus fuit Belsonus adolescens similiter nobilis et venustissimus, qui cum patibulo appropinquasset sanctorum martyrum corpora magna cum venerantia exosculatus, eorum animas oratus obsecravit ut sua intercessione gratiam caelestem illi impetrarent ut pari constantia et fortitudine martyrium consummaret. Gaudio enim magno exultabat quod eorum aliquando fuerat filius spiritualis, et cum eis familiariter olim versatus fuisset, ac denique eis ex hac vita migrans sequeretur, quos gloriosam martyrii coronam de manu justissimi Judicis jam accepisse no dubitabat. Sic exultanter animam suam Deo reddidit. [p. 873] Postremus in hoc glorioso certamine fuit Humfredus, qui quanta cum alacritate imo et voluptate ad mortem et martyrii locum procurrerit explicari nequit ... Iste cum scalae insisteret, ad populum conversus dixit: Testor vos, quotquot adestis universos, in praesentia Dei sanctorumque suorum Angelorum me Catholicum esse et pro fidei Catholicae professione mortis sententiam accepisse mortemque ipsam libenter appetere ... Quibus dictis, extra scalam ejectus, sancte in Domino et pro Domino obdormivit.

Peracto hoc spectaculo, membra disjecta sanctorum sacerdotum (quorum corpora juxta sententiam in eos prolatam in quatuor partes dispertiebantur) una cum venerandis eorum capitibus partim veteribus castelli Oxoniensis muris, partim portis civitatis, contibus infixa in sublimi locabantur. Et quia facies et vultus eorum vivorum splendorem et venustatem retinere videbantur, quidam, ut fertur, timentes ne miraculo id tribueretur, ferali crudelitate cultorum ictibus eos incudendo, deformare non sunt veriti. Aliud quoque mirandum de dextra martyris Nicolai traditur: nimirum quod cum

humerus ejus dexter una cum branchio et manu viri in portis civitatis imponeretur, ita ut manus versus terram deorsum penderet (ill enim ratio sive modus in talibus occasionibus observatur), visa est postea ita elevata manus et contra civitatem extendi, ut minitantis formam prae se ferre videretur. Quod ad contractionem nervorum ascribebant obstinatiores haeretici (omnes enim rem adverterunt), cum tamen alii [p. 874] aliquid supernaturalis operationis rei inesse varius existimarunt ...

[Champney's account concludes with the account of the reconciliation of the highwayman by George Nichols, pp. 874-875.]

EXCERPT FROM BISHOP RICHARD CHALLONER'S 'MEMOIRS OF MISSIONARY PRIESTS'. - Richard Challoner, D.D., Memoirs of Missionary Priests, Part I, [London] 1741, pp. 239-248.

Challoner first deals with 'George Nicols and Richard Yaxley, Priests', but in fact in his account of them he also includes details of the arrest, examination and trial of Thomas Belson and Humphrey Pritchard. There follows a separate item, 'Thomas Belson, Gentleman', in which he deals with both Belson and Pritchard, giving briefly the facts of their lives and describing their execution.

Writing on these four martyrs, Challoner is entirely dependent on sources already cited or referred to (see notes below). Consequently we have abbreviated his account somewhat and omitted the details of the reconciliation of the highwayman.

GEORGE NICOLS AND RICHARD YAXLEY, Priests

From the Doway catalogues,¹ from Father Ribadeneira in his Appendix to Dr. Saunders, chap. 3,² from the Bishop of Tarrasona's History of the Persecution, book V, chap. 3,³ and from Dr. Champney's manuscript.⁴

George Nicols was a native of Oxford, and an alumnus and priest of Doway College, during its residence at Rhemes, from whence he was sent upon the mission in 1583. My author gives him the character of a man of extraordinary virtue and learning, and of a zealous and laborious missionary, who, during the six years of his mission, was the happy instrument, in the hands of God, of the conversion of many souls. His mission was chiefly in and about Oxford, where, amongst other pious adventures, the writers of his life particularly take notice of the reconciliation of a noted highwayman ...

Richard Yaxley, who was Mr. Nicols's companion in death, was born at Boston in Lincolnshire, of a gentleman's family, and was also an alumnus and priest of the same College, and was sent from Rhemes upon the English mission in 1586. He was by many years younger than Mr. Nicols, and having his mission in the same country, regarded him as his father.

They were apprehended together at the house of a pious Catholic widow, who kept the St. Catherine's Wheel in Oxford, by the officers of the University, who broke in at midnight and hurried them away, together with Mr. Belson, a Catholic gentleman, who was come thither to visit his ghostly father Mr. Nicols, and Humphrey ap Richard, the servant of the inn.

The next morning they were all carried before the Vice-Chancellor, where several Doctors were assembled, with many others who had the curiosity to see and hear the prisoners. Here they were examined concerning their religion ... The Vice-Chancellor thought proper to put an end to the controversy by sending away the two priests to one prison, and Mr. Belson and the servant to another, and ordered them all to be put in irons. Having thus, as they flattered themselves, tamed their spirits, they sent one of their most celebrated divines to the two priests, to confer with them concerning the Blessed Sacrament ...

The next day they were all four brought, in their irons, before the Vice-Chancellor and his Council, and examined again, not now concerning their faith, but why they, being priests, had presumed to come over into England, how they had employed their time there, with whom they had conversed and upon what subjects, what acquaintances they had amongst Catholics, etc. To these questions the servants of God answered that they came over upon no other errand but to win souls to Jesus Christ and to teach them the Catholic faith ... As for any other Catholics, they could not be prevailed on to name any or to bring any into danger. Upon this they were sent back to their prisons, and the Queen's Council was informed of all that had pass'd.

Soon after this an order came down from the Council to have the prisoners sent up to London; who, pursuant to the instructions given from above, were set upon Rosinantes,⁵ with their hands tied behind them, and the two priests also, for greater disgrace, with their legs tied under their horses' bellies, and in this manner were conducted under a strong guard from Oxford to London, being treated all the way with great cruelty by their guards, and affronted and abused by the populace, more especially when they

came to London ... And to add to their affliction, a young gentleman of the University, a graduate in arts, who, out of pure compassion had attended them all the way from Oxford and afforded them what service he could, was, in reward of his charity, taken up as soon as he came to London, and whereas the persecutors could not proceed against him with any colour of law, they charged him with being mad and as such confined him to Bedlam⁶ ...

After they had remained some days in prison at London, they were carried before Secretary Walsingham, the capital enemy of the Catholics, who put the like questions to them as the Vice-Chancellor had done before ... The two priests were ordered to Bridewell, where they were tortured, and hanged up in the air, for the space of five hours together, to make them confess by whom they had been harboured or entertained etc. But these torments they bore with great courage and constancy, and generously refused, to the end, to name any one who might be brought into trouble upon their account. Artifices were also employed, and a pretended convert was sent to Mr. Nicols ... After this they separated the two priests from each other, and thrust Mr. Nicols down into a dark and stinking dungeon, full of nauseous insects, but translated Mr. Yaxley from Bridewell to the Tower, where he was every day put upon the rack, till at length it was resolv'd in the Council that they should be sent back to Oxford to be executed there for an example to the scholars and other inhabitants of that city.

This resolution was no sooner taken than the prisoners, under the same guard as before had brought them up to town, and with the like cruel treatment, were conducted back again to Oxford, to be tried at the Assizes there; and that none of them might escape, Sir Francis Knollys, one of the Privy Council, was appointed to be present at their trial, to overawe the jury that they might bring in a verdict agreeable to the inclination of the court. And first the good widow, their hostess, was tried, and cast in a praemunire, condemn'd to the loss of all her goods and to perpetual imprisonment ... Then the two priests were condemned to die, as in cases of high treason. And lastly Mr. Belson and the servant

being convicted of having been aiding and assisting to the priests, were on that account sentenced to die, as in cases of felony. They all received their respective sentences with cheerfulness, giving thanks to God for the honour he did them of dying for his cause, and mutually embraced one another with extraordinary marks of the inward joy of their hearts.

They were drawn to the place of execution on July the 5th, 1589, still retaining the same serenity in their countenances and joy in their hearts, and meeting there with an infinite multitude of people, assembled to see their last conflict, they saluted them, saying, Behold, we are brought here to die for the confession of the Catholic faith, the old religion, in which our forefathers and ancestors all lived and died.

The first that was called upon to go up the ladder was Mr. Nicols, who, after having made his prayer to God, and to the people the profession of his faith, would have spoke more at large upon the subject, but was interrupted and forbid to go on; so recommending his soul into the hands of his creator, he was thrown off the ladder, and happily finish'd his course. He was follow'd by Mr. Yaxley, who, after having embraced the dead body of his companion with great affection, and recommended himself in this his last conflict to the prayers of his happy soul, going up the ladder, and beginning to speak to the people, was in like manner interrupted; and, after a short profession of his faith, was also flung off ... Their bodies were cut down, bowell'd and quarter'd, and their heads were set on the old walls of the Castle, and their quarters over the gates of the city. Some false zealots disfigured their faces, cutting and hacking them with their knives, because of the extraordinary beauty which was observed in them; and it was much taken notice of that, in the disposing of their quarters, the right hand of Mr. Nicols, instead of hanging down from the shoulder, as is natural on the like occasions, stood up erected on high, and turned against the city in the posture and manner of one that was threatening.

THOMAS BELSON, Gentleman

From the same writers,
and the Doway Diary.

Thomas Belson was born at Brill, the seat of the family in the county of Oxford⁵ ... We have already seen how he was apprehended in the company of Mr. Nicols and Mr. Yaxley, examined both at Oxford and at London, and finally tried and condemn'd with them for his hospitality and charity to them, and God was pleased he should be their companion in death. For no sooner was Mr. Nicols and Mr. Yaxley dead, but Mr. Belson was also ordered up the ladder to finish his course. He first embraced the dead bodies of his pastors, which were then in quartering, and begg'd the intercession of their happy souls, that he might have the grace to imitate their course and constancy ... And thus, with great cheerfulness, he deliver'd his body to the executioner, and his soul to his maker.

The last in the combat was Humphrey Prichard, a Welchman, a plain, honest, and well-meaning soul, and, as our authors all agree, a great servant of God, who for twelve years had done signal service to the poor afflicted persecuted Catholics in those evil days. He came to the gallows with a cheerful and smiling countenance, and being now upon the ladder, and turning to the people, he said, I call you all to witness ... that I was condemn'd to die for the confession of the Catholic faith, and that I die willingly for the Catholic faith. A minister that stood by told him he was a poor ignorant fellow and did not know what it was to be a Catholic. To whom Humphrey replied that he very well knew what it was to be a Catholic ... and that he willingly died for so good a cause. With that he was thrown off the ladder, and so reposed in the Lord.

They all suffer'd July 5, 1589.

Notes

1. The catalogues of martyrs preserved at the English College of Douai. Cf. doc. 13, infra p. 823.
2. Fr. Pedro de Ribadeneira's 'Appendix' to Dr. Nicholas Sanders and Fr. Edward Rishton's De origine ac progressu schismatis Anglicani (doc. 10).
3. Diego de Yepes, Historia particular de la persecucion de Inglaterra, Madrid 1599. Book V, chap. 3 (pp. 618-633) is, as already noted, a reprint of Fr. Robert Persons' account of the four martyrs in his Relacion de algunos martyrios, ff. 21v-41v (doc. 6).
4. Dr. Anthony Champney's Annals (doc. 11).
5. Rocinante, Don Quixote's horse; 'a poor, worn-out, or ill-conditioned horse' (OED).
6. The Hospital of St. Mary of Bethlehem, Bishopsgate, London, founded as a priory in 1247, and in 1547 incorporated as a royal foundation for the mentally ill.
7. Brill was in fact in Buckinghamshire, but very near the Oxfordshire border (supra p. 757).

THE CATALOGUES OF MARTYRS, 1590 - c. 1730.

(a) Catalogues which record the martyrdom of George Nichols and Richard Yaxley.¹

<u>Barret</u> , 1590.	<u>Raissius</u> , <u>HB</u> , 1628.
<u>John Gerard</u> , c. 1594.	<u>Paris Catalogue</u> , c. 1628.
<u>Worthington I</u> , 1608.	<u>Chalcedon's Catalogue</u> , 1628.
<u>Wilson</u> , 1608.	<u>Molanus</u> , 1629.
<u>More I</u> , 1609.	<u>Raissius</u> , <u>CCS</u> , 1630.
<u>More II</u> , 1609.	<u>Grene</u> , 1664/97.
<u>Eudaemon</u> , 1610.	<u>Douai Catalogues</u> , 1680/1700.
<u>Worthington II</u> , 1612.	<u>Knaresborough</u> , 1705/20.
<u>I.C., Theatre</u> , 1620.	<u>Challoner</u> , before 1730.

George Nichols and Richard Yaxley are also indicated as martyrs in the First and Second Douai Diaries.²

(b) Catalogues which record the martyrdom of Thomas Belson and Humphrey Pritchard.

The martyrdom of Thomas Belson and Humphrey Pritchard is also recorded in the above catalogues, with the exception of Barret, More II, I.C., Theatre, Raissius, HB, Raissius, CCS, and the Douai Catalogues.³ All of these, except I.C., Theatre, are catalogues of priest-martyrs only. Barret includes Belson, since he had been a student of the English College of Douai, but not Pritchard. I.C., Theatre also includes Belson, but not Pritchard.

(c) Excerpt from John Gerard, c. 1594. - Stonyhurst MSS, Anglia VII, no. 26. CRS, V, London 1908, p. 292.

George Nicolls, borne in Oxford, he was usher of Poules,⁴ and Richard Yaxley, a Lincolnshier man, of Rheins, preests, quartered; and Thomas Belson, gent/leman, an Oxfordshier man,⁵ and Humfrey /blank, hanged at Oxford, Julii 5 /15897.⁶

(d) Excerpt from Worthington III, Douai 1614.

Anno 1589

Georgius Nicolles et Richardus Yaxleus, Collegii Duaceni pres/byteri7, et Thomas Belsonus, nobilis laicus, occisi sunt Oxonii, 5 Julii. Ac una cum his occisus est Humphredus Prichardus, illius hospitii famulus, in quo alii pernoctabant.

(e) Excerpt from Chalcedon's Catalogue, 1628. - A.P.F., SOCG, 347, f. 603r.

Anno 1589

Georgius Nichols, natus Oxonii, alumnus et presbyter secularis Collegii Duaceni Rhemis residentis, et Richardus Yaxleus, ex nobili familia natus apud Boston in comitatu Lincolniae, alumnus et presbyter secularis Collegii Duaceni Rhemis residentis, quod sacerdotes in Angliam ingressi fuissent ibique permansissent, simul tracti, suspensi, exenterati, et in partes dissecti, Oxonii, die quinto Julii.

Worthing/ton7 et Wilson in Catalogis. Ribadeneira in Appendice, cap. 3. Catal/ogi7 Duacen/ūs7 et Hispanus.

Suspensi sunt cum illis Thomas Belsonus, nobilis, laicus, natus Brillae in comitatu Oxoniensi,⁷ et Humphredus Prichardus, publici hospitii famulus, in quo praedicti sacerdotes pernoctabant, quod praedictos sacerdotes sublevassent.

Ribadeneira in Appendice, cap. 3. Worthing/ton7 et Wilson in Catalogis.⁸

Notes

1. Cf. Pollen, Table, CRS, V, pp. 12-13.
2. DD1, pp. 11, 29 (Nichols); ibid., 12, 30 (Yaxley); DD2, p. 227 (an entry in October 1589 describes Nichols and Yaxley as 'pro fide Catholica Oxonii tanquam laesae majestatis reus in crucem actus').
3. Cf. Pollen, Table, loc. cit.
4. Usher, or assistant master, at St. Paul's School, London.
5. Belson was in fact born in Buckinghamshire, but just across the border from Oxfordshire (supra p. 757).
6. On the different scripts in the manuscript of this catalogue, represented here by italic and roman type, cf. supra p. 477.
7. See note 5 above.
8. On Chalcedon's sources cf. supra p. xlix, and Appendix, infra p. 2513.

DOCUMENT RELATING TO VENS. RICHARD YAXLEY AND THOMAS BELSON.

14

EXCERPTS FROM THE TOWER BILLS, 1585-86, 1589. - P.R.O., E 407/56, nos. 40, 42, 43, 44, 55. CRS, III, London 1906, pp. 21-24, 29.

On the Tower Bills cf. supra p. 38. Bills for 1585-86 attest the imprisonment of Thomas Belson in the Tower from 24 June 1585 to 30 September 1586. Unfortunately, after this some bills are missing: from Christmas 1586 to Christmas 1587 inclusive. We know from other evidence that Belson was still a prisoner in the Tower at the end of November 1586; he was released and banished from England probably some time in December of that year (doc. 15).

A bill for 1589 attests the imprisonment in the Tower of Richard Tankard, vere Yaxley, for one week, 24 June - 1 July.

Christmas, 1585.

The demaunds of Sir Owine Hopton, Knighte Lieutenaunt of the Tower of London, for the dietts and chardges of certein prisoners there remaynyng, as herafter are particulerlye declared ...

Thomas Belson. Item for the dyett and chardgis of Thomas Belson beginninge the 24th of June 1585 and endinge the 27th of December then next followinge, being 26 wicks at 13s. 4d. the wicke for hymselfe - £17 6s. 8d. One keaper at 5s. the wycke - £6 10s. Fewell and candell at 4s. the wicke - £5 4s. Amountinge to the some of £29 0s. 8d.

Lady Day, 1586.

The demaunds of Sir Owine Hopton ...

Thomas Belson. Item for the dyett and chardgs of Thomas Belson beginninge

the 27th of December 1585 and endinge the 18th of March 1586
 then next followinge, being 13 wicks at 13s 4d. the wicke for
 hymselfe - £8 13s. 4d. One keaper at 5s. the wicke - £3 5s.
 Fewell and candell at 4s. the wicke - 52s. Amountinge to the
 some of £14 10s. 4d.

Midsummer, 1586.

The demaunds of Sir Owen Hopton ...

Thomas Belson. Item for the diett and charges of Thomas Belson
 begynnyne the 25th daie of Marche 1586 and ending the 24th of
 June then next followinge, being 13 weicks at 13s. 4d. the weicke
 for himself - £8 13s. 4d. One keaper at 5s. the weicke -
 £3 5s. Fewell and candell at 4s. the weicke - 52s. Amountinge
 to the some of £14 10s. 4d.

Michaelmas, 1586.

The demaunds of Sir Owine Hopton ...

Thomas Belson. Item for the diett and chardgs of Thomas Belson
 beginnunge the 24th daye of June 1586 and endinge the laste
 daye of September then next followinge, beinge 14 wicks at
 13s. 4d. the wicke for hymselfe - £9 6s. 8d. One keaper at
 5s. the wicke - £3 10s. Fewell and candell at 4s. the wicke -
 56s. Amountinge to the some of £15 12s. 8d.¹

Christmas, 1589.²

The demaunds of Sir Owyn Hopton ...

Richard Tankard. Item for the diett and chardges of Richard
 Tankard beginnunge the 24th of June 1589 and endinge the first
 of July then next followinge, beeing one weeke at 13s. 4d
 the weeke for himself -

13s. 4d. One keaper at 5s. the weeke - 5s. Fewell and
candell at 4s the weeke - 4s. Summa amountinge 22s. 4d.

Notes

1. The next bill is no. 47, for Lady Day 1588. CRS, III, p. 26.
2. This bill is for the half year, 24 June to Christmas 1589.
Usually bills are for a quarter year.

DOCUMENT RELATING TO VEN. THOMAS BELSON ONLY

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EXCERPTS FROM TWO PRISON LISTS, 30 November 1586. P.R.O.,
 SP 12/195, nos. 30, 32. CRS, II, London 1906, pp. 261, 264.

(a) SP 12/195, no. 30. CRS, II, p. 261.

This list is described by the editor as 'Sir Francis Walsingham's report of the resolutions of the Privy Council, held on 30th November 1586'. He suggests that it is probably the actual notes taken by Walsingham at the meeting of the Council. It deals with a large number of prisoners, grouped according to the London prisons in which they were confined. Amongst those in the Tower of London was Thomas Belson, who, according to the list, was to be released and then banished from England.

The Tower

Belson. To be released upon bondes to depart the realme.

/Belson is 10th in a list of 17 prisoners in the Tower.7

Endorsed: 30 November, 1586. The Lordes resolution upon the prisoners.

(b) SP 12/195, no. 32. CRS, II, p. 264.

This list is a rearrangement of the preceding one, with the prisoners now grouped according to the way in which they were to be treated: 'to be continued in prison', 'to be proceeded against in the course of law', etc. Thomas Belson appears amongst those who were to be banished from England.

To be banished the realme

Belson, for conveying intelligence betweene Bridges the priest¹
 and others beyonde the seas and some in this realm, by
 unknowen meanes.

/Belson is 2nd amongst 5 prisoners named under this heading.7

Endorsed: 30 November 1586. The Lordes resolution upon the prisoners.

Note

1. Probably Edward Gratley, alias Bridges, who was ordained priest in Rome in 1580 and returned to England in 1584. He was on the Continent again in 1585. Unsuspected by Catholics, he had become a government agent and was responsible for the arrest of St. Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel, whose chaplain he had been, this same year. Cf. ASP, I, p. 135.

BX
1492
.A25
1589a

Venerable George Nichols,
secular priest, Venerable Richard
Yaxley, secular priest, Venerable
Thomas Belson, layman, martyred at O

