

Ladies of the Covenant

ISABEL ALISON

WE have previously met with some of our female worthies who suffered great hardships, though not unto the death. We now come to record the history of others of them who were called to seal their testimony with their blood. Of this class were Isabel Alison and Marion Harvey, two young women in humble life, but of unsullied character and genuine piety. Their tragic and deeply interesting story, is enough of itself to entail everlasting infamy on the bloody rulers who pursued them to the death, not for any crime, for they had committed none, but simply and solely for their private opinions, which the council had extorted from them by artful and ensnaring questions. They were tried together upon the same indictment, and executed on the same day at the Grassmarket of Edinburgh. We shall give a separate account of each, beginning with the eldest.

ISABEL ALISON was an unmarried woman who lived at Perth, and probably did not exceed twenty-seven years of age. Among her religious acquaintances she maintained a high reputation for sobriety of character and enlightened piety. She had sometimes heard Mr. Donald Cargill and some other ministers preach in the fields, before the battle of Bothwell Bridge, but not often, field conventicles not having been common in the part of the country where she lived. The sermons she heard on these occasions were greatly blessed to her, and if not the means of her conversion, had consumed her in the faith, and fortified her for suffering in the cause of Christ. By the ministrations of Mr. Cargill, she had in particular been deeply impressed, and had imbibed the peculiar opinions held by him and Mr. Richard Cameron.

These two ministers, though different as to age, were one in spirit. Cargill had seen many years pass over him; his head had become gray in the service of his Master: Cameron was in the prime of youth, and had but



Cargill preaching in the Fields

recently put on the harness. Yet both were actuated by the fearless intrepidity which high principle and deep piety, combined with constitutional fortitude, often impart. With the exception of Mr. John Blackadder, they were the only ministers, who, after the battle of Bothwell Bridge, preached in the fields, till Mr. James Renwick appeared on the stage; the other field preachers having desisted, by reason of the increased danger arising from the increased exasperation of the government. They and their followers thus became the special objects of persecuting vengeance, and the consequence was, that, driven to extremity, they renounced Charles Stuart as their lawful sovereign, and proclaimed war against him as a tyrant and usurper.* To this party, we have said, Isabel Alson belonged; and it was for holding their principles in regard to the unlawfulness of the then existing civil government, that she was doomed to undergo a traitor's death. These principles, as we learn from herself, she had been led to embrace from the severities exercised by the curates of Perth upon the Presbyterians in that place, and from the cruelty of the government in publicly executing many of the Presbyterians in the Grassmarket of Edinburgh, and sending soldiers through the country to oppress and murder the poor inoffensive people. But while holding these sentiments, she held them quietly, there being no evidence that she had endeavoured to propagate them in any way, either by calm representation or by inflammatory speeches; nor had the government any ground for alarm from any influence which a female, in so humble a condition of life, could have in weakening, or undermining their authority.

She was first apprehended for the freedom of her remarks upon the harsh treatment to which some religious nonconforming people in Perth were subjected; and when brought before the magistrates of that town, they had nothing else than this of which to accuse her, till, in her simplicity, she voluntarily confessed that she had conversed with some whom the government had denounced rebels; by which she had exposed, herself to heavy penalties. Having been examined, she was dismissed by the magistrates; but not long after, she was apprehended in her chamber at Perth by a party of soldiers, in execution of an order from the privy council, and carried to Edinburgh, where she was thrown into prison. She was next brought before a committee of the privy council, who, having no evidence that she had violated the laws then in force against nonconformists, proceeded, in the true spirit of the inquisition, to put to her entrapping questions, with the view of extracting matter which might form the ground of criminal procedure against her. Besides the injustice of this treatment in itself, the heartless levity with which her examination was conducted, and the attempts made at one time to overawe a young inexperienced female by threatenings, and at another time to coax her by promises and commendations, was in the highest degree disgraceful to the privy council. But though her life was at stake, she was in no wise daunted in the presence of her persecutors; she retained her self-possession in the novel and embarrassing circumstances in which she was placed, and the pointed answers she returned to the questions put to her, though they show that on one or two points she had adopted extreme opinions, are yet highly creditable not only to the integrity of her character, but to the soundness of her judgment, while her whole demeanour was marked by a propriety and dignity above her station, and which stand favourably contrasted with the behaviour of the lords of his majesty's privy council, who, as Wodrow observes, "acted the buffoon," instead of maintaining the decorum and dignity which became their high office. Indeed the wisdom and self-possession with which, without premeditation, she answered the questions put to her by the council, is so striking, that we cannot resist the impression that the promise which the Saviour made to his disciples, when brought into such circumstances, was remarkably verified in her case: "And ye shall be brought before gover

* Cargill and Cameron, with their followers, separated from all the other Presbyterian ministers and people who could not go the length of disowning the authority of Charles, or who had accepted the Indulgence, or who, though they had not accepted it, continued to maintain christian fellowship with such as had done so. Mr. John Blackadder, though one of the most intrepid field preachers, did, not join with Cargill and Cameron's party, not only because he could not see it to be his duty to disown the then existing government, tyrannical as it was, but also because, though he would rather have laid his head on the block than have accepted the Indulgence himself, he considered it wrong to separate as they did from the indulged ministers. Between the Cameronians and the indulged party, much bitterness and animosity prevailed. Blackadder, who occupied a middle position between the two parties, was anxious to compose their differences, and to prevent them, if he could not unite them, from receding farther from each other - a very laudable undertaking, but very fruitless in its results, as too frequently happens in regard to the efforts of peace-makers, to allay the contentions and heal the divisions which arise even among good men in this world of strife.

nors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak; for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak,” (Matt. x. 18, 19.)

The questions put to her by the privy council, and the answers she returned, which we give entire, are as follows: -

P. C. “Where do you live, at St. Johnstoun?” [*The old name of Perth.*]

I. A. “Yes.”

P. C. “What is your occupation?”

To this question she returned no answer.

Bishop Paterson. “Have you conversed with Mr. Donald Cargill?”

I. A. “Sir, you seem to be a man whom I have no clearness to speak to.” He desired another member of council to put the same question; which being done, she answered, “I have seen him, and I wish that I had seen him oftener.”

P. C. “Do you own what he has done against the civil magistrate?”

I. A. “I do own it.”

P. C. “Can you read the Bible?”

I. A. “Yes.”

P. C. “Do you know the duty we owe to the civil magistrate?”

I. A. “When the magistrate carrieth the sword for God, according to what the Scripture calls for, we owe him all due reverence; but when magistrates overturn the work of God and set themselves in opposition to him, it is the duty of his servants to execute his laws and ordinances on them.”

P. C. “Do you own the Sanquhar Declaration?”*

* This was a paper or manifesto drawn up in 1680 by Mr. Richard Cameron and some of his followers, in which they “disown Charles Stuart as having any right, title to, or interest in the said crown of Scotland for government, as forfeited several years since by his perjury and breach of covenant both to God and his Kirk, and usurpation of his crown and royal prerogatives therein, and many other breaches in matters ecclesiastic, and by his tyranny and breach of the very *leges regnandi* in matters civil;” and in which they declare war against him as a tyrant and usurper. About twenty of the party came together in arms to Sanquhar upon the 22d of June, and after the Declaration was read at the cross, affixed a copy of it there. It is, accordingly, usually called The Sanquhar Declaration, from the place where it was published. What share Cargill had in the compilation of this paper is not known. At his examination before the privy council, he denied that he was at the emitting of it, and declared that he did not see it till after it was published, but refused to say whether he had any hand in drawing it up.- Wodrow’s History, vol. iii., pp. 212, 280. The Sanquhar Declaration, as might have been expected, infuriated the government against the Cameronians, and one of the questions which, after its proclamation, was usually put to the Presbyterians brought before the privy council was, Do you own the Sanquhar Declaration? If they answered in the affirmative, this was considered equivalent to a confession of high treason, and on this confession they were hanged at the Grassmarket.

I. A. “I do own it.”

P. C. “Do you own the papers taken at the Queensferry on Henry Hall?”[**next page]

I. A. “You need not question that.”

P. C. “Do you know Mr. Skene?”

I. A. “I never saw him.”

P. C. “Have you conversed with rebels?”

I. A. “I never conversed with rebels.”

P. C. “Have you conversed with David Hackstoun?”

I. A. “I have conversed with him, and I bless the Lord that ever I saw him, for I never saw ought in him but a godly pious youth.”

P. C. “Was the killing of the bishop of St. Andrews a pious act?” [*James Sharp, archbishop of St. Andrews, fell by violence on Saturday, the 3d of May 1679, at mid-day, on Magus muir, within two miles of St. Andrews. “Saturday had been fatal to him,” says Fountainhall, “on it Mitchell made his attempt,” &c. - Historical Notices, &c., vol. i., p. 225.*]

** The papers here referred to were what was commonly called, "The Queensferry Paper," or "Cargill's Covenant," and by the government, "The Fanatics' New Covenant." This document was found on Henry Hall of Haughead, in the following manner: - He and Mr. Cargill, when travelling in the South Queensferry by the castle of Blackness, about the beginning of June 1680, were followed by the captain of the garrison of the castle, and taken immediately on their arrival at the town of Queensferry, but were soon after rescued by a company of women. Cargill made his escape; but Hall, having in a scuffle with the soldiers been mortally wounded, soon after fell into the hands of a party under the command of Dalziel; and on his being searched, there was found upon him an unsubscribed paper in the form of a covenant, in which, among other things, Charles is rejected from being king. It was generally supposed to have been drawn up by Cargill, with the advice and knowledge of only a very few of his party, and was merely a rude draught intended to be sent over to the banished and refugee Presbyterians in Holland for their consideration, and to be laid aside, or acted upon, as they should advise. Hall was waiting for an opportunity of going over to Holland when he fell into the hands of the enemy. After this paper was discovered, a constant question put by the privy council to the Presbyterians brought before them was, "Do you own the Queensferry Paper?" - Wodrow's History, vol. iii., pp. 206-212. And not a few were hanged simply for declaring that they adhered to it. - Fountainhall's Historical Notices, &c., vol. i., p. 284. The Sanquhar Declaration, mentioned in the preceding note, was drawn up in less than three weeks after the discovery of the Queensferry Paper.

I. A. "I never heard him say that he killed him; but if God moved any, and put it upon them to execute his righteous judgments upon him, I have nothing to say to that."

P. C. "When saw you John Balfour, that pious youth?"

I. A. "I have seen him."

P. C. "When?"

I. A. "These are frivolous questions I am not bound to answer them."

At which they said, "You don't think that a testimony."

P. C. "What think you of that in the Confession of Faith, That magistrates should be owned though they were heathens?"

I. A. "It was another matter than when those who seemed to own the truth have now overturned it, and made themselves avowed enemies to it."

P. C. "Who should be judge of these things?"

I. A. "The Scriptures of truth and the Spirit of God, and not men that have overturned the work themselves."

P. C. "Do you know the two Hendersons that murdered the Lord St. Andrews?"

I. A. "I never knew any Lord St. Andrews."

P. C. "Mr. James Sharp, if you call him so?"

I. A. "I never thought it murder; but if God moved and stirred them up to execute his righteous judgment upon him, I have nothing to say to that."

P. C. "Whether or not will you own all that you have said, for you will be put to own it in the Grassmarket?" And they expressed their regret that she should put her life in hazard in such a quarrel.

I. A. "I think my life little enough in the quarrel of owning my Lord and Master's sweet truths; for he hath freed me from everlasting wrath, and redeemed me: and as for my body, it is at his disposal."

P. C. "You do not follow the Lord's practice in that anent Pilate."

I. A. "Christ owned his kingly office when he was questioned on it, and he told them he was a king, and for that end was he born. And it is for that we are called in question this day, the owning of his kingly government."

Bishop Paterson. "We own it."

I. A. "We have found the sad consequence of the contrary."

Bishop Paterson. "I pity you for the loss of your life."

I. A. "You have done me much more hurt than the loss of my life, or all the lives you and they have taken; for it hath much more affected me that many souls have been killed by your doctrine."

Bishop Paterson. "Wherein is our doctrine erroneous?"

I. A. "That has been better debated already than a poor lass can debate it."

P. C. "Your ministers do not approve of these things; and you have said more than some of your ministers; for your ministers have brought you on to these opinions, and left you there."

I. A. "You have cast in baits among the ministers, and harled them aside; and although ministers say one thing to-day, and another to-morrow, we are not obliged to follow them in that."

P. C. "We pity you; for we find reason and a quick wit in you; and would have you to take the matter into consideration."

I. A. "I have been advising on it these seven years, and I hope not to change now."

P. C. "Do you lecture any?" asked they, mockingly.

I. A. "Quakers [Quakeresses?] use to do so."

P. C. "Do you own Presbyterian principles?"

I. A. "I do."

P. C. "Are you distempered?"

I. A. "I was always solid in the wit that God has given me."

P. C. "What is your name?"

I. A. "Since you have staged me, you might remember my name, for I have told you already, and will not always be telling you."

One of them said, "May you not tell us your name?" Then one of themselves told it. [*Cloud of Witnesses*, pp. 85-87.]

From these answers, the council had now discovered all that they deemed necessary for instituting criminal proceedings against her for high treason. But what had they discovered? Merely certain opinions which she had adopted, some of them indeed extreme, such as it was natural enough for a young unlettered religious female, in the circumstances of the times, to embrace, but which an upright and honourable government would have deemed it beneath its dignity to notice. "There is no treason, sure," says one of Sir Walter Scott's characters, "in a man enjoying his own thoughts under the shadow of his own bonnet;" and every man possessing an ordinary sense of justice will be of the same mind. The opinions of this female as to the unlawfulness of the civil government then existing, could certainly do no harm so long as they were confined within the recesses of her own mind; and the council had no evidence that she had ever given utterance to them even in a single instance, except in answer to the harassing questions with which they plied her; and yet for mere opinions thus extorted, they resolved to pursue her to the death. She was accordingly next brought before the lords of justiciary on the 6th of December 1680, with the design of bringing her to own, before that court, the confession she had made before the privy council, that the confession, thus becoming judicial, might be made the ground of a criminal process. Such was the constant practice of the privy council at this time, - the one day to bring the Covenanters who fell into their hands before them, and there involve them by inquisitorial examinations into a confession of statutory crimes, sometimes threatening them with the thumb-screw and boot, if they were not free and ingenuous; and the next day to bring them before the justiciary court, "where, if they were silent, they were asked if they would quit the testimony they had given yesterday." [*Wodrow's History*, vol. iii., p. 276.] From the confessions thus extorted, an indictment was framed, and a packed jury having brought them in guilty, they were hanged at the Grassmarket or the Gallowlee. Such was the mode of procedure which the government thought proper to adopt against this excellent woman.

The questions put to her when brought before the lords of justiciary, and the answers she returned, are as follows: -

L. J. "Will you abide by what you said last day?"

L. A. "I am not about to deny any thing of it."

L. J. "You confessed that you harboured the killers of the bishop though you would not call it murder?"

I. A. "I confessed no such thing."

Lord Advocate. "You did."

I. A. "I did not; and I will take with no untruths."

Lord Advocate. "Did you not converse with them?"

I. A. "I said I did converse with David Hackstoun, and I bless the Lord for it."

L. J. "When saw you him last?"

I. A. "Never since you murdered him."

Then they desired her to say over what she said the last day; to which she replied, "Would you have me to be my own accuser?" They said to her that the advocate was her accuser. "Let him say on, then," rejoined she, with spirit. Then they repeated what had passed between the council and her the other day, and required her to say whether or not that was true - yes or no. She answered, "Ye have troubled me too much with answering questions, seeing ye are a judicature which I have no clearness to answer."

L. J. "Do you disown us, and the king's authority in us?"

I. A. "I disown you all, because you carry the sword against God, and not for him, and, have, these nineteen or twenty years, made it your work to dethrone him, by swearing, year after year, against him and his work, and assuming that power to a human creature which is due to him alone, and have rent the ministers from their Head - Christ, and one another."

L. J. "Who taught you these principles?"

I. A. "I am beholden to God that taught me these principles."

L. J. "Are you a Quaker?"

I. A. "Did you hear me say I was led by a spirit within me? I bless the Lord I profited much by the persecuted gospel; and your acts of indemnity, after Bothwell, cleared me more than any thing I met with since."

L. J. "How could that be?"

I. A. "By your meddling with Christ's interests, and parting them as you pleased."

L. J. "We do not usurp Christ's prerogatives."

I. A. "What, then, mean your indulgences, and your setting up of prelacy? for there has none preached publicly these twenty years without persecution, but those that have had their orders from you."

Then they caused bring the Sanquhar Declaration, and the paper found on Mr. Richard Cameron, and the papers taken at Queensferry, and asked, "Will you adhere to them?"

I. A. "I will, as they are according to the Scriptures, and I see not wherein they contradict them."

L. J. "Did ever Mr. Welsh or Mr. Riddell teach you these principles?"

I. A. "I would be far in the wrong to speak any thing that might wrong them."

L. J. "Take heed what you are saying, for it is upon life and death that you are questioned."

I. A. "Would you have me to lie? I would not quit one truth though it would purchase my life a thousand years, which you cannot purchase nor promise me an hour."

L. J. "When saw you the two Hendersons and John Balfour? Seeing you love ingenuity [ingenuousness], will you be ingenuous, and tell us if you saw them since the death of the bishop?"

I. A. "They appeared publicly within the land since."

L. J. "Have you conversed with them within these twelve months?"

At this question she remained silent.

L. J. "Say either yea or nay."

I. A. "Yes."

L. J. "Your blood be upon your own head; we shall be free of it."

I. A. "So said Pilate; but it was a question if it was so; and you have nothing to say against me but for owning of Christ's truths, and his persecuted members."

To this they made no answer. Then they desired her to subscribe what she had owned, but she refused; upon which they subscribed it for her. [*Cloud of Witnesses.*]

The substance of the answers she had given, in so far as the court judged them criminating, was drawn up by the clerk into the following document, which they called her confession, and which was subscribed by the lords justiciary: -

“Edinburgh, 6th Dec., 1680.

“The said day, in presence of the lords justice-clerk and commissioners of justiciary, sitting in judgment, compeared Isabel Alison, prisoner; and being interrogate concerning several matters, answered, That she was not obliged to answer to the lords of justiciary, for she did not look upon them as judges, and declined their authority, and the king’s authority, by which they sit, because they carry the sword against the Lord; and, owns the Bond of Combination, [*This was a bond or covenant for mutual defence, which Richard Cameron, and about thirty more, entered into and subscribed shortly after the publication of the Sanquhar Declaration. Among other things, it disowned the civil government then existing. It was found on Richard Cameron at Airmoss, where he fell fighting bravely in self-defence.- See Wodrow’s History, vol. iii., p. 218.*] subscribed by Mr. Richard Cameron, Mr. Thomas Douglas, and others, and adheres thereto, the same being publicly read to her; and the fourth article of the Fanatics’ New Covenant * being read to her, as also the Declaration at Sanquhar, she adhered thereto; and said she saw nothing in them against the Scriptures, and therefore she owned them, but refused to sign this her declaration, though she can write.

(*Sic subscribitur,*)

“MAITLAND.

“DANIEL BALFOUR.

“JA. FALCONER.

“ROGER HOG.” [*Records of the Justiciary Court.*]

It was now resolved to proceed against her before the justiciary court, and a libel was drawn up, founded solely upon her own confession. Her trial took place on the 17th of January 1681. In the indictment, she is charged with receiving, maintaining, supplying, intercommuning, and keeping correspondence with Mr. Donald Cargill, Mr. Thomas Douglas, Mr. John Welsh, the deceased Mr. Richard Cameron, the bloody and sacrilegious murderers of Archbishop Sharp, and with having heard the said ministers preach up treason and rebellion. In it she is farther charged with owning and adhering to the “horrid and treasonable papers” called “The Fanatics’ New Covenant,” and the Sanquhar Declaration, which the above ministers and their associates, it is asserted, formed and devised, and with owning and adhering to the “unchristian expressions, principles, and opinions therein contained.” And it concludes with declaring that of the above treasonable crimes she was actor, art and part, which being found proven by a jury, she ought to be punished with forfeiture of life, land, and goods, to the terror of others to commit the like hereafter. [See her indictment, and that of Marion Harvey, in Appendix, No. vi.]

* That is, the Queensferry Paper or Covenant. The fourth article of this Covenant runs as follows: - “That we shall endeavour, to our utmost, the overthrow of the kingdom of darkness, and whatever is contrary to the kingdom of Christ, especially idolatry and popery, in all the articles of it, as we are bound in our national Covenants; superstition, will-worship, and prelacy, with its hierarchy, as we are bound in our solemn League and Covenant; and that we shall, with the same sincerity, endeavour the overthrow of that power, (it being no more authority,) that hath established, and upholds that kingdom of darkness, that prelacy, to wit, and erastianism over the Church, and hath exercised such a lustful and arbitrary tyranny over the subjects, taken all power in their hand, that they may at their pleasure introduce popery in the Church, as they have done arbitrary government in the State.” - Wodrow’s History, vol. iii, p. 208.

The indictment having been read, she was asked by the court if she had any objections against it, to which she answered that she had none. They next successively read the Sanquhar Declaration, and the document called the New Covenant, asking, at the close of the reading of each paper, if she owned it, to which she answered in the affirmative. The indictment having been found relevant by the court, and remitted to the knowledge of a jury, the jury were next called, who showed considerable reluctance to appear, and only came forward on being threatened with fines. Two of them absented themselves altogether, for which they were fined by the court; [*“December 22, 1680. The said day Robert Campbell, merchant, and Alexander Hume, his majesty’s taylor, being oftentimes called to have compeared before the said lords this day and place, in the hour of cause to have passed upon the assize of Isabel Allison and Marion Harvey, prisoners, as they were lawfully cited for that effect, lawful time of day bidden, and they not compearand; the lords justice-clerk and commissioners of justiciary therefore, by the mouth of John Bauzie, macer of court, decerned and adjudged them, and each of them, to be an unlaawe, and americiat of one hundred merks Scots, which was pronounced for*

doom." - *Records of the Justiciary Court.*] and one of them had so strong a conviction of the iniquity of the whole proceedings, that when, after the court refused, at his desire, to exempt him from being a juryman, he was required to swear the usual oath, he trembled so much that he could not hold up his hand. Before the jury was sworn, on being asked by the court if she had any objections to offer against any of them, she answered that they were all alike, for no honest man would take the trade in hand. The jury being sworn, she told them that all authority is of God, (Rom. xiii. 1;) that when they appeared against him, she was clear to disown them; that had they not been against him, she would not have been there, and added, "I take every one of you witness against another at your appearance before God, that your proceeding against me is only for owning of Christ, his gospel and members; which I could not disown, lest I should come under the hazard of denying Christ, and so be denied of him." [*Cloud of Witnesses, p. 89.*]

The probation then proceeded. But the only proof which the prosecutor, Sir George M'Kenzie, his majesty's advocate, could adduce, was her own confession which she had made before the lords of justiciary. This document was now read in court; and in answer to a question put to her, she owned and adhered to it in presence of the jury. The king's advocate then addressed the jury. "You know," said he, "that these women [*Marion Harvey, as has been said before, was trial at the same time, and on the same indictment with Isabel Alison.*] are guilty of treason." "They are not guilty of matter of fact," said the jury. "Treason is fact," said he; but correcting himself, he added, "It is true, it is but treason in their judgment; but go on according to our law, and if you will not do it, I will proceed." [*This seems like threatening them with an assize of error. "This relict of barbarous times was a power intrusted to the public prosecutor to bring any of the jurymen, or a majority of them, to trial, for not having decided according to the law as laid down to them. Of this absurd and tyrannical engine to intimidate the jury from deciding according to their convictions, M'Kenzie made ample use; he no sooner observes any symptoms of hesitation, or of a desire to befriend the prisoners at the bar, than, with a terrific frown, he would swear that if they did not give their verdict according to law, he knew what to do with them!" - M'Crie's Sketches of Scottish Church History, 2d Edition, p. 483.*] He farther said, making a feeble attempt to ward off from the government the odium of taking the lives of these two confessors, "We do not desire to take their lives; for we have dealt with them many ways, and sent ministers to deal with them, and we cannot prevail with them."

The speech of the lord advocate being concluded, the jury removed from the court to the jury-house, to reason and vote upon the articles of the indictment and the proof, but soon returned to the court, and by their chancellor delivered their verdict in presence of the lords of justiciary, unanimously finding Isabel Alison "guilty, conform to her confession of adherence to the fourth article of The Fanatics' New Covenant, and to the Declaration at Sanquhar, and to the Bond of Combination; but as actor or recepter of rebels, they find it not proven."

The lords delayed the pronouncing of doom and sentence against her till Friday at twelve o'clock, being the 21st of the current month. On the 21st, she was again brought before the court to receive her "doom and sentence for the treasonable crimes mentioned in her dittay" [indictment], which was, that she "be taken to the Grassmarket of Edinburgh, upon Wednesday next, the 26th instant, betwixt two and four o'clock in the afternoon, and there to be hanged on a gibbet till she be dead, and all her lands, heritages, goods, and gear whatsoever, to be escheat and inbrought to our sovereign lord's use, which was pronounced for doom." [*Records of the Justiciary Court.*]

Such was the bloody sentence pronounced upon this female, not for any act of resistance to the laws, but solely for the opinions she held, and which had been discovered only by the artful and captious questions with which she had been teased. But though condemned to die ostensibly for treason, she felt perfectly persuaded in her own mind, that the real ground upon which her condemnation proceeded was her adherence to the persecuted cause of Christ. In her dying testimony, which she subscribed and left behind her, dated Edinburgh Tolbooth, January 26, 1681, speaking on this subject, she says, "The manner of my examination [before the committee of the privy council, and before the justiciary court,] was, 1st, If I conversed with David Hackstoun, and others of our friends? Which I owned upon good grounds. 2dly, If I owned. the excommunica-

tion at the Torwood, and the Papers found at the Queensferry, and the Sanquhar Declaration, and a paper found, on Mr. Cameron at Airmoss? All which I owned. Likewise I declined their authority, and told them that they had declared war against Christ, and had usurped and taken his prerogatives, and so carried the sword against him, and not for him: So I think none can own them, unless they disown Christ Jesus. Therefore, let enemies and pretended friends say what they will, I could have my life on no easier terms than the denying of Christ's kingly office. So I lay down my life for owning and adhering to Jesus Christ, his being a free king in his own house, and I bless the Lord that ever he called me to that."

Among other things, she expresses her adherence to the National Covenant, and Solemn League and Covenant, [*Like "the testimony" of the two Apocalyptic witnesses, which "tormented them that dwelt on the earth," the Solemn League and Covenant was gall and wormwood to the government. So deeply did they hate it, that, on the 18th of January 1682, by act of the privy council, it, along with Cargill's Covenant and some other papers, were solemnly burnt at the Market Cross of Edinburgh, the magistrates being present in their robes. This stupid malignity is justly censured by Fountainhall, one of their own party, while at the same time he betrays his hatred of the Solemn League. "Some wondered," says he, "to see their policy in reviving the memory of so old and buried a legend as the Solemn League was (which was burnt in 1661 before); and set people now a-work to buy it and read it. And for Cargill's ridiculous Covenant, they had, about a twelve-month before this, caused print it, though that was only in contempt of it."* - Fountainhall's *Historical Notices of Scottish Affairs* vol. i., p. 346.] and enters her protestation against all the violence done to the work of God for twenty years bygone.

During the time which elapsed from her condemnation to her execution, the grace of God by which she had been hitherto sustained, did not forsake her. She not only retained her composure and fortitude, but was full of hope and of joy, accounting it her honour that she had been called to surrender her life in the cause of Christ. "O, the everlasting covenant," she says, "is sweet to me now! And I would also say, they that would follow Christ need not scare at the cross, for I can set my seal to it, 'His yoke is easy and his burden is light.' Yea, many times he hath made me go very easy through things that I have thought I would never have win through. He is the only desirable master, but he must be followed fully. Rejoice in him, all ye that love him, 'wherefore lift up your heads, and be exceeding glad, for the day of your redemption draweth nigh.' Let not your hearts faint, nor your hands grow feeble; go on in the strength of the Lord, my dear friends, for I hope he will yet have a remnant both of sons and daughters, that will cleave to him, though they will be very few, 'even as the berries on the top of the outmost branches.' As for such as are grown weary of the cross of Christ, and have drawn to a lee-shore that God never allowed, it may be, ere all be done, it will turn like a tottering fence, and a bowing wall to them, and they shall have little profit of it, and as little credit. But what shall I say to the commendation of Christ and his cross? I bless the Lord, praise to his holy name, that hath made my prison a palace to me; and what am I that he should have dealt thus with me? I have looked greedy-like to such a lot as this, but still thought it was too high for me, when I saw how vile I was; but now the Lord hath made that Scripture sweet to me, Isaiah vi. 6, 7, 'Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand - and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo! this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away; and thy sin purged.' O how great is his love to me! that hath brought me forth to testify against the abominations of the times, and kept me from fainting hitherto, and hath made me to rejoice in him. Now I bless the Lord that ever he gave me a life to lay down for him. Now, farewell all creature comforts; farewell sweet Bible; farewell ye real friends in Christ; farewell faith and hope; farewell prayers and all duties; farewell sun and moon. Within a little I shall be free from sin, and all sorrows that follow thereon. Welcome everlasting enjoyment of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, everlasting love, everlasting joy, everlasting life!" [*Cloud of Witnesses*, pp. 93, 94.]

According to her sentence, she was conducted, on the 26th of January, to the Grassmarket, to be executed. An immense crowd assembled to witness the scene. Marion Harvey suffered along with her. Five women of bad fame were also executed at the same time, for the murder of their illegitimate children. [*"17 and 18 January, 1681. At the criminal court, one Sibilla Bell and her mother are sentenced to be hanged, for murdering and strangling a child born by the said Sibilla, in adultery. Item, three other women are condemned for the same crime committed by them on their bastards; which sentences were accordingly put to execution the 26 of January, thereafter, on them. As also two other women were then hanged for their opinions and principles, disowning the king and the government, and adhering to Cameron's treasonable Declaration. They*

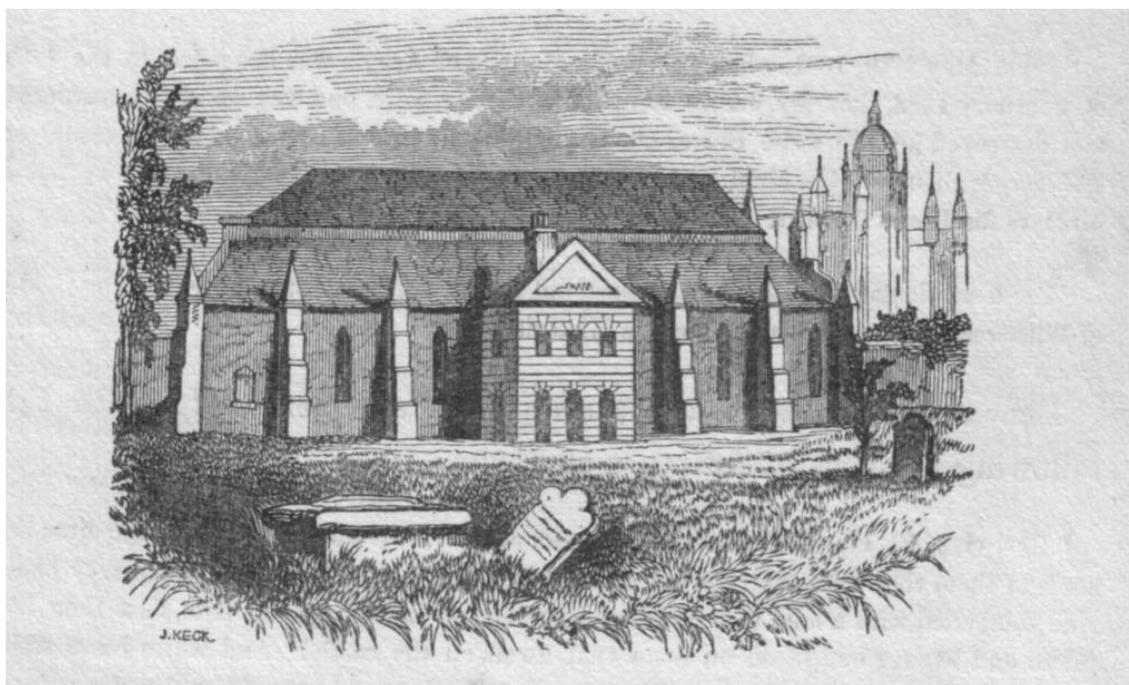
called the one of them Isabel Alison, from Perth, and the other [Marion] Harvey, brought from Borrowstounness.” - Fountainhall’s Historical Notices, vol. i., p. 281.]

On coming to the scaffold, she sung the 84th Psalm, to the tune called “The Martyrs” - the melody most frequently used by the suffering Covenanters in singing their Psalms, as in some parts of Scotland has been handed down by a rude rhyme: -

“This is the tune the Martyrs sang,
When at the gallows-tree they stood,
When they were gaen to die,
Their God to glorifie.”

She next read the 16th chapter of Mark; after which she desired to pray at the place where she then stood; but the provost took her away to the foot of the ladder, and there she engaged in prayer. In this her last trying hour, God, in whom she trusted, did not fail to sustain her spirit, and carry her unscathed through the fires of martyrdom. The greatness of her peace, and courage, and joy, was such as strong faith in a reconciled God, and the unclouded hope of heaven, could alone impart. Only one thing seemed to wound her delicacy, and that was the circumstance of her being exposed in the company of those five unhappy females, who had murdered their own offspring. But this indignity she bore with meekness and patience, on reflecting that her Saviour was crucified between two thieves, as if he had been the most criminal of the three. She addressed a few sentences to the spectators; and her last words were, “farewell all created comforts; farewell sweet Bible, in which I delighted most, and which has been sweet to me since I came to prison; farewell christian acquaintances. Now into thy hands I commit my spirit, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!” On her uttering these words, the hangman threw her over, and her spirit returned to her God and Saviour to receive the martyr’s crown.

We are not informed where her body was buried; but there is little doubt that it was disgracefully cast into that spot, in the Greyfriars’ churchyard, which was the receptacle of the dead bodies of malefactors, and into which the dead bodies of most of the martyrs who suffered death at Edinburgh during the reigns of Charles II and James VII were consigned. The ignominy which once attached to this spot, as the burial-place appropriated for condemned robbers and murderers, has been obliterated by the sacredness with which, as the last resting-place of nearly a hundred martyrs, it is now invested.



Greyfriars Church, Edinburgh, in 1640.

A large and handsome tombstone has been here erected in honour of their memory, bearing the following inscription: -

“Halt, passenger, take heed what you do see,
This tomb doth show for what some men did die.
Here lies interr’d the dust of those who stood
‘Gainst perjury, resisting unto blood;
Adhering to the Covenants, and Laws
Establishing the same; which was the cause
Their lives were sacrific’d unto the lust
Of Prelatists abjur’d. Though here their dust
Lies mixt with murderers and other crew,
Whom justice justly did to death pursue:
But as for them no cause was to be found
Worthy of death, but only they were sound,
Constant, and stedfast; zealous, witnessing,
For the prerogatives of CHRIST, their KING.
Which truths were seal’d by famous Guthrie’s head;
And all along to Mr. Renwick’s blood.
They did endure the wrath of enemies,
Reproaches, torments, deaths, and injuries.
But yet they’re those, who from such troubles came,
And now triumph in glory with the LAMB.

“From May 27th, 1661, when the noble Marquis of Argyle was beheaded, to the 17th of February 1688, that Mr. James Renwick suffered; were, one way or other, murdered and destroyed for the same cause, about eighteen thousand, of whom were executed at *Edinburgh* about an Hundred of Noblemen, Gentlemen, Ministers, and Others; noble Martyrs for JESUS CHRIST. The most of them lie here.

“For a particular account of the cause and manner of their sufferings, see *The Cloud of Witnesses*, Crookshank’s and Defoe’s Histories.”

Beneath this inscription is sculptured an open Bible, with the following passages of Scripture engraven: -

“Rev. vi. 9, 10, 11. - And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they *were*, should be fulfilled.

“Rev. vii. 14. - These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

“Chap. 2d, 10. - Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”