

LADIES OF THE COVENANT

MARION HARVEY.

MARION HARVEY was a servant girl in Borrowstounness. Her father, who lived in that village, appears to have been a man of piety, and had sworn the National Covenant and Solemn League. It may, therefore, be presumed that she had received a religious education. But it was not till she had passed her fourteenth or fifteenth year that her attention was turned, in good earnest, to divine and eternal things. Previous to that period, thoughtless about God and her own spiritual interests, she had conducted herself like thoughtless young people; yea, she tells us that, in the fourteenth or fifteenth year of her age, she was a “blasphemer and Sabbath-breaker.” About this time, however, a decided change took place upon her character. Attracted by curiosity, or following the crowd, she began to attend meetings for the preaching of the gospel in the fields, which had become very frequent in the part of the country where she lived, as well as extremely popular - thousands flocking to hear the persecuted ministers. These conventicles, as they were nicknamed, though denounced by the government, and prohibited, under the penalty of death to the minister, and severe penalties to the hearers, were accompanied with signal tokens of the divine approbation; and among the many thousands who, by their instrumentality, were brought to the saving knowledge of Christ, was the subject of this notice. The change produced upon her character soon became apparent in her life. She left off hearing the curates, whose ministry she had formerly attended without scruple; she venerated the name of God, which she had formerly blasphemed; she sanctified the Sabbath, which she had formerly desecrated; and she delighted in reading the Bible, which she had formerly neglected and undervalued. Among the ministers whom she heard at these field meetings were, Mr. John Welsh, Mr. Archibald Riddell, Mr. Donald Cargill, and Mr. Richard Cameron. In her examination before the privy council, she expresses how much spiritual profit she had derived from the sermons of these worthy men; and in her dying testimony she says, “I bless the Lord that ever I heard Mr. Cargill, that faithful servant of Jesus Christ: I bless the Lord that ever I heard Mr. Richard Cameron; my soul. has been refreshed with the hearing of him, particularly at a communion in Carrick, on these words, in Psalm lxxxv. 8: ‘The Lord will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints; but let them not turn again to folly.’” The two last of these ministers, as we have seen before, separated from the rest of the Presbyterian ministers, forming a party by themselves, and to this party Marion Harvey was a zealous adherent.

Like many others in those unhappy times, she fell into the hands of the government, through the malignity and avarice of a base informer. One of this class, named James Henderson, who lived in North Queensberry, and who was habit and repute in such infamous transactions, had informed against her, [*This person was, as Marion Harvey expresses it, “the Judas that sold Archibald Stewart and Mr. Skene to the bloody soldiers, for so much money.” Both these men suffered martyrdom.*] for which he received a sum of money; and when going out of Edinburgh, to hear a sermon to be preached in the fields by one of the persecuted ministers, she was apprehended on the road, by Sergeant Warrock and a party of soldiers, who, it seems, having, by ensnaring questions, extorted from her a confession that she had attended field conventicles, carried her to Edinburgh, where she was imprisoned. Such was the first step of the bloody proceedings of which this humble female, who was only about twenty years of age, was made the victim. She was next brought before the lords of his majesty’s privy council, who had nothing with which to charge her except that she had attended field conventicles; and no evidence that she had committed even this offence except her own confession. To have inflicted upon her, in the absence of other evidence, the penalties of the laws then in force against such as were guilty of being present at field conventicles, would have been vagrantly unjust. But to rest satisfied with the perpetration of even this injustice was too lenient a course for the privy council. Apparently with the design of extracting from her self-criminating confessions, on the ground of which they might take away her life, they proceeded to subject her to the same style of inquisitorial examination to which they had subjected Isabel Alison; and they succeeded in drawing from

her an expression of her approbation of Cargill's Covenant, of the Sanquhar Declaration, of the killing of Archbishop Sharp, in so far as the Lord raised up instruments for that purpose, and of the Torwood Excommunication. Her examination was conducted with the same inhuman levity as that of Isabel Alison. One of the counsellors scornfully said to her, that "a rock, a cod, and bobbins would set her better than these debates;" and "yet," says Wodrow, "they cast them up to her, and murder her upon them." Such was the brutality of Dalziel that he threatened her with the boot, as she mentions in her dying testimony. Her answers to the artful questions of the privy council show that, like her fellow-martyr, Isabel Alison, she had adopted some extreme opinions; but her behaviour was dignified, compared with that of her lordly inquisitors.

The following are the questions put to her by the privy council, and the answers she returned: -

P. C. "How long is it since you saw Mr. Donald Cargill?"

M. H. "I cannot tell particularly when I saw him."

P. C. "Did you see him within these three months?"

M. H. "It may be I have."

P. C. "Do you own his Covenant?"

K. H. "What Covenant?"

Then they read it to her, and she said she owned it.

P. C. "Do you own the Sanquhar Declaration?"

M. H. "Yes."

P. C. "Do you own these to be lawful?"

M. H. "Yes; because they are according to the Scriptures and our Covenants, which ye swore yourselves, and my father swore them."

P. C. "Yea; but the Covenant does not bind you to deny the king's authority."

M. H. "So long as the king held the truths of God, which he swore we were obliged to own him; but when he broke his oath, and robbed Christ of his kingly rights, which do not belong to him, we were bound to disown him and you also."

P. C. "Do you know what you say?"

M. H. "Yes."

P. C. "Were you ever mad?"

M. H. "I have all the wit that ever God gave me; do you see any mad act in me?"

P. C. "Where was you born?"

M. H. "In Borrowstounness."

P. C. "What was your occupation there?"

M. H. "I served."

P. C. "Did you serve the woman that gave Mr. Donald Cargill quarters?"

M. H. "That is a question which I will not answer."

P. C. "Who grounded you in these principles?"

M. H. "Christ, by his Word."

P. C. "Did not ministers ground you in these?"

M. H. "When the ministers preached the Word, the Spirit of God backed and confirmed it to me."

P. C. "Did you ever see Mr. John Welsh?"

M. H. "Yes; my soul hath been refreshed by hearing him."

P. C. "Have you ever heard Mr. Archibald Riddell?"

M. H. "Yes; and I bless the Lord that ever I heard him."

P. C. "Did ever they preach to take up arms against the king?"

M. H. "I have heard them preach to defend the gospel, which we are all sworn to do." *[Though Welsh, Riddell, and Blackadder did not join with the Cameronians in disowning the authority of the government, yet as the government not only refused to protect the nonconformists in hearing the gospel, but sent out the military to disperse, apprehend, and murder them*

when so engaged in the fields, they asserted the lawfulness of carrying arms to field conventicles for self-defence, on the principle of the law of self-preservation, which is antecedent to all human laws, and which is in truth a law of God.]

P. C. "Did you ever swear to Mr. Donald Cargill's Covenant?"

M. H. "No; but we are bound to own it."

P. C. "Did you ever hear Mr. George Johnston?" [*Mr. George Johnston was, at the Restoration, minister of Newbottle, from which he was ejected for nonconformity, by the act of the privy council at Glasgow, 1662. He was a noted field preacher; but had accepted of the third indulgence granted in the middle of the year 1679. This accounts for the somewhat disrespectful tone in which Marion Harvey speaks concerning him in her answer to this question. The disaffection between the Cameronians, to which party she belonged, and those who had accepted the indulgence, was in truth about equally cordial on both sides. Both parties, as is almost universally the case in religious controversy, acted very much on the lex talionis principle, - if you disrespect me, I'll disrespect you.*]

M. H. "I am not concerned with him; I would not hear him, for he is joined in a confederacy with yourselves."

P. C. "Did you hear the excommunication at the Torwood?"

M. H. "No; I could not win to it."

P. C. "Do you approve of it?"

M. H. "Yes."

P. C. "Do you approve of the killing the Lord St. Andrews?"

M. H. "In so far as the Lord raised up instruments to execute his just judgments upon him, I have nothing to say against it; for he was a perjured wretch, and a betrayer of the Kirk of Scotland."

P. C. "What age are you of?"

M. H. "I cannot tell."

They said among themselves, that she would be about twenty years of age, and began to regret her case, and said to her, "Will you cast away [your] self so?"

M. H. "I love my life as well as any of you do; but will not redeem it upon sinful terms; for Christ says, 'He that seeks to save his life shall lose it.'"

Then one of them asked when the jury should sit? and some other of them answered, "On Monday."

P. C. "Can you write?"

M. H. "Yes."

P. C. "Will you subscribe what you have said?"

M. H. "No."

They bade the clerk set down that she could write, but refused to subscribe.

P. C. "Do you desire to converse with one of your ministers?"

M. H. "What ministers?"

P. C. "Mr. Riddell."

M. H. "I will have none of your ministers." [*Cloud of Witnesses, pp. 95-97.*]

For the opinions expressed in these answers, the government were resolved to take the life of this inoffensive girl. But as the confession of her holding such opinions could only become judicial and be used in judgment against her when made before the lords of justiciary, she was next, in conformity with the usual practice, brought before them on the 6th of December 1680, to undergo a similar examination. On her being brought before them, and examined, the answers she gave were substantially the same as those she had given when examined before the privy council; and the following is the substance of her answers, as drawn up by the clerk of the justiciary court, and subscribed by the lords as her confession: -

"Edinburgh, 6th December 1680.

"In presence of the lords justice-clerk and commissioners of justiciary sitting in judgment, compeared Marion Harvey, prisoner, and being examined, adhered to the fourth article of the Fanatics' New Covenant, the

same being read to her, and disowns the king and his authority, and the authority of the lords of justiciary, and adheres and abides at the treasonable declaration emitted at Sanquhar, and approves of the same, and says it was lawful to kill the Archbishop of St. Andrews, when the Lord raised up instruments for that effect, and that he was as miserable and perjured a wretch as ever betrayed the Kirk of Scotland: declares that ministers brought them up to these principles, and now they have left them, and that she has heard Mr. John Welsh and Mr. Riddell preach up these principles she now owns, and blesses God she ever heard them preach so, for her soul has been refreshed by them: She approves of Mr. Cargill's excommunicating the king; declares she can write, but refuses to sign the same.

(Sic subscribitur,)

“MAITLAND.

“DAVID BALFOUR.

“JA. FALCONER.

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

On the sole ground of this confession, an indictment was drawn up against her, and she was brought to trial on the 17th of January 1681. Tried on the same indictment with Isabel Alison, she was charged with the same crimes, with the addition that she had “most treasonably approved of the execrable excommunication used by Mr. Donald Cargill, against his sacred sovereign at Torwood, upon the - day of [September] last, and likewise owned and approved of the killing of the Archbishop of St. Andrews as lawful, declaring that he was as miserable a wretch as ever betrayed the Kirk of Scotland.”

Her indictment having been read, she was asked if she pleaded guilty to the charges it contained, to which she answered in the affirmative. They next successively read the Sanquhar Declaration, and the Queensferry Paper, asking her at the close of the reading of each paper, if she owned it; to which she answered that she did. She then protested before the court, that they had nothing to say against her as to matter of fact, but only that she owned Christ and his truth; to which they made no reply, but called the jury, who, as we have seen before, showed considerable reluctance to appear. She offered no objections to any of the jury, but on their taking their places, she addressed them in these words: “Now beware what you are doing, for they have nothing to say against me, but only for owning Jesus Christ and his persecuted truths; for you will get my blood upon your heads.” The court then proceeded with the evidence against her. But the only proof which the prosecutor, his majesty's advocate, could adduce, was her own confession before the lords of justiciary. This confession, as they had taken it down, was accordingly read, and being asked if she adhered to it, she objected to the clause which represented her as having said that the ministers had taught her these principles, observing, that what she said was, that it was Christ by his Word who taught her; but she adhered to the rest of her confession as it was read. The king's advocate then addressed the jury. He told them, as has been stated before, that much dealing had been employed with her and Isabel Alison, and that ministers had been sent to them in prison, to endeavour, if possible, to reclaim them, but that every effort had proved unavailing. “We are not concerned with you and your ministers,” said Marion, sharply. The advocate, turning to her, replied, “It is not for religion that we are pursuing you, but for treason.” “It is for religion that you are pursuing me,” she instantly retorted; “and I am of the same religion that you are all sworn to be of. I am a true Presbyterian in my judgment.” On the conclusion of the advocate's address, the jury retired for consultation, but soon returned to court and delivered their verdict, unanimously finding Marion Harvey “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 and receiptor of rebels, they found it not proven.”

The lords delayed the pronouncing of the sentence upon her till Friday at twelve o'clock, being the 21st of the current month. On the minute of delay being read, she said, “I charge you before the tribunal of God, as ye shall answer there! for ye have nothing to say against me but for my owning the persecuted gospel.”

On the 21st, she was again brought before the court to receive her sentence, 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.]

During the whole of the proceedings now detailed, Marion betrayed no symptoms of wavering, hesitation, or timidity; and now when her days on earth were numbered – when she had only five brief days to live – she maintained to the last her christian fortitude. The testimony of her conscience that she had done nothing worthy of death, and that she was in reality doomed to die on the scaffold for her adherence to the truths of Christ, was to her a source of great satisfaction. In her dying testimony which she left behind her, dated "from the Tolbooth of Edinburgh, the Woman House on the east side of the prison, January 21st, 1681," she begins as follows: – "Christian Friends and Acquaintances, – I being to lay down my life on Wednesday next, January 26, I thought fit to let it be known to the world wherefore I lay down my life; and to let it be seen that I die not as a fool, or an evil-doer, or as a busy-body, in other men's matters. No; it is for adhering to the truths of Jesus Christ, and avowing him to be King in Zion, and head of his Church; and the testimony against the ungodly laws of men, and their robbing Christ of his rights, and usurping his prerogative royal, which I durst not but testify against."

Nor was she deprived of those heavenly consolations which have so often sustained the soul of the martyr, and made him triumph over death. The presence of a reconciled God, and the peace and comfort which he spoke to her soul, divested death of its terrors, and inspired her with a holy willingness and cheerfulness to surrender her life, in testimony of her love to him and his cause. "I desire," says she, in the same document, "to bless and magnify the Lord for my lot, and may say, he hath brought me to the wilderness to allure me there, and speak comfortably to my soul. It was but little of him I knew when I came to prison; but now he has said to me, Because he lives I shall live also. And he has told me, I am he that blotteth out thine iniquity for my own name's sake. Kind has he been to me since he brought me out to witness for him. I have never sought any thing from him that was for his glory, since I came to prison, but he granted me my desire. For the most part, I have found him in every thing that hath come in my way, ordering it himself for his own glory. And now I bless him, that thoughts of death are not terrible to me. He hath made me as willing to lay down my life for him as ever I was willing to live in the world. And now, ye that are his witnesses, be not afraid to venture on the cross of Christ, for his yoke is easy and his burden light. For many times I have been made to think strange what makes folk cast at the cross of Christ, that hath been so light to me that I have found no burden of it at all; he bore me and it both. Now let not the frowns of men, nor their flatteries, put you from your duty..... It is my grief that I have not been more faithful for my master, Christ. All his dealings with me have been in love and in mercy. His corrections have been all in love and free grace. O free love! I may say I am a brand plucked out of the fire; I am a limb of the devil plucked out from his fireside. O! I am made to wonder and admire at his condescending love." And she concludes with these words: "Now farewell lovely and sweet Scriptures, which were aye my comfort in the midst of all my difficulties! farewell faith! farewell hope! farewell wanderers, who have been comfortable to my soul, in the hearing of them commend Christ's love! Farewell brethren! farewell sisters! farewell christian acquaintances! farewell sun, moon, and stars! And now welcome my lovely and heartsome Christ Jesus, into whose hands I commit my spirit throughout all eternity. I may say, few and evil have the days of the years of my pilgrimage been, I being about twenty years of age."

[Cloud of Witnesses, pp. 98-101.]

There is one thing in the dying testimony of this female which we could wish had been modified, and that is the paragraph in which she leaves her blood upon the tyrant on the throne, upon the Duke of York, who was sitting in the council the first day on which she was examined, and upon all others who were concerned in her death, whom she particularly names. This was done by others of the Cameronian martyrs; and it was done, we believe, not in a spirit of revenge, but simply to impress, if possible, upon their murderers a conviction of their guilt, and to awaken them to repentance. *[The words of Jeremiah, in his address to the princes of Judah (chap. xxvi. 15), have been adduced in vindication of these martyrs on this head.]* In proof of this, we may quote the testimony of a very

intelligent gentleman, who had opportunities of being very much among the Cameronian party who suffered between the years 1680 and 1685, and who conversed with most, if not all, who suffered till August 1685 – that of Mr. Gray of Chryston; and his testimony is the more valuable from his having belonged, not to the Cameronians, but to the Moderate Presbyterians. In a letter to Wodrow, he says, “As to their leaving their blood upon their enemies in general, or upon particular persons accessory to their trouble, I could never understand that they meant more by it than the fastening a conviction upon a brutish persecuting generation, who vainly justified themselves as acting by law, and inferred that not they, but the legislature, were answerable, if any injustice was done.” [*Wodrow’s History, vol. iii., p. 214.*] This explains the ground upon which Marion Harvey and others left their blood upon their persecutors, and it amply vindicates them from acting under the impulse of a revengeful spirit. Something more, however, is required of the Christian than the mere absence of revenge towards his enemies; he is bound from the heart to forgive them. We do not affirm that this female martyr, and other Cameronian martyrs, did not forgive their persecutors. We are persuaded of the contrary. They knew the New Testament too well not to know that the forgiveness of enemies is an imperative christian duty, and, they possessed too much of the christian spirit not to exercise it. But they erred in not being sufficiently forward to express this feeling, and in not giving it prominence in their dying testimonies. If, instead of the clause to which we are now objecting, they had substituted a clause cordially forgiving their persecutors, it would have been more in harmony with the precepts of the New Testament, and it would have been more like Jesus, who, on the cross, showed how intensely forgiving his heart was when he prayed his holy Father to forgive his murderers, and urged in their behalf the only extenuating plea of which their crime admitted – “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Nor is it unworthy of notice, that had they taken this course, they would have deprived their enemies of an occasion which they eagerly laid hold on, and over which they gloated, of charging them, falsely indeed, but still with some degree of colour, of being baited into savageness and stubbornness, of being actuated by vindictive feelings, and of mistaking these feelings for emotions of piety.

On the day of her execution, Marion not only retained her composure, but experienced the utmost joy in the anticipation of future felicity. When coming out of the tolbooth door to go to the council house, whence she was to be conducted to the place of execution, she said, to some friends attending her, in a tone of heavenly joy and ecstasy, at once surprising and delightful to them, “Behold, I hear my beloved saying unto me, Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.” In the council house, a base and heartless attempt was made, by Bishop Paterson, to disturb her tranquillity, and the tranquillity of her fellow-sufferer in the same cause, Isabel Alison. This man, who had an active hand in bringing them to the scaffold, and who, with a meanness and wanton cruelty worthy of a persecutor, had brought a curate with him to the council house, for the express purpose of annoying them, said to Marion Harvey, “Marion, you said you would never hear a curate, now you shall be forced to hear one;” upon which he called on the curate to pray. This cruel insult, offered to them when placed in circumstances calculated to excite the deepest commiseration, was met by the sufferers, with becoming spirit. They made no reply to the bishop, but as soon as the curate began to pray; Marion said to her fellow-martyr, “Come, Isabel, let us sing the 23d Psalm,” which they accordingly did – Marion repeating the psalm line by line without book – which drowned the curate’s voice, and confounded both him and the bishop. When they were brought to the scaffold, a second attempt was made to harass their feelings and disturb their composure in their last moments, by one of the prelatial curates of the city, who came to pray with the five women condemned to be executed at the same time for child-murder. This man, who appears to have had neither correct views of religion, nor humane feelings, flattered these five murderers with the hope of heaven, though they had given no evidence of repentance, while he vehemently railed on our two martyrs, and remorselessly told them that they were on the road to damnation. But they remained unmoved; “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, kept their hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” On the scaffold, Marion sung the 84th Psalm, and read the 3d chapter of Malachi; after which she shortly addressed the vast crowd of spectators. “I am come here to-day,” she said, “for avowing Christ to be head of his Church, and King in Zion. O seek him, sirs! seek him, and ye shall find him; I sought him and found him; I held him and would not let him go.” Then she briefly narrated the manner in which she was apprehended, and the leading questions put, to her by the privy council, with the answers she returned. “They asked me if I adhered to the

papers gotten at the Ferry? I said I did own them, and all the rest of Christ's truths. If I would have denied any of them, my life was in my offer; but I durst not do it, no, not for my soul. Ere I wanted an hour of his presence, I had rather die ten deaths. I durst not speak against him, lest I should have sinned against God. I adhere to the Bible, and Confession of Faith, Catechisms, and Covenants, which are according to this Bible." But, in her dying speech, she chiefly spoke of God's love to her, and in commendation of free grace. "Much of the Lord's presence," said she, "have I enjoyed in prison; and now I bless the Lord the snare is broken, and we are escaped." When she came to the foot of the ladder, she engaged in prayer; and, on going up the ladder, she exclaimed, "O my fair one, my lovely one, come away;" and sitting down upon it, she said, "I am not come here for murder, for they have no matter of fact to charge me with, but only my judgment. I am about twenty years of age; at fourteen or fifteen I was a hearer of the curates, and indulged; and while I was a hearer of these, I was a blasphemer and Sabbath-breaker, and a chapter of the Bible was a burden to me; but since I heard this persecuted gospel, I durst not blaspheme nor break the Sabbath, and the Bible became my delight." These were her last words; for on her having uttered them, the hangman, at the orders of the provost, cast her over. Her body, as a mark of reprobation, was buried, it is probable, in the Greyfriars' churchyard, Edinburgh, along with the body of her fellow-martyr, Isabel Alison*, in the spot appropriated as a burying-place for the

The following notices of Marion Harvey and Isabel Alison, written by a contemporary belonging to the government party, may be interesting to the reader: – "26th January 1681. There were hanged at Edinburgh two women of ordinary rank, for their uttering treasonable words, and other principles and opinions contrary to all our government; the one was named Janet [Isabel] Alison, a Perth woman, the other [Marion] Hervey, from Borrowstounness; they were of Cameron's faction, bigot and sworn enemies to the king and the bishops; of the same stamp with Rathillet, Skene, Stewart, and Potter; of whom *supra*, p. 4 *et seq.*, where we debate how far men (for women are scarce to be honoured with that martyrdom, as they think it) are to be punished capitally for their bare perverse judgment without acting. Some thought the threatening to drown them privately in the North Loch, without giving them the credit of a public suffering, would have more effectually reclaimed them nor any arguments which were used; and the bringing them to a scaffold but disseminates the infection. However, the women proved, very obstinate, and for all the pains taken, would not once acknowledge the king to be their lawful prince, but called him a perjured bloody man. At the stage, one of them told so long as she followed and heard the curates, she was a swearer, Sabbath-breaker, and with much aversion read the Scriptures, but found much joy upon her spirit since she followed the conventicle preachers. There were five other miserable women executed with them, for infant murder. See with what wonderful patience most execrable heretics suffer in Baker's Chronicle, in the reign of King Henry the 2d, p. 58, and of Henry the 3d, p. 89." – Fountainhall's Historical Observes, pp. 26, 27.]

most vagrant criminals; but whatever indignities were put upon her mortal part, her spirit, brought out of great tribulation, was, doubtless, put in possession of that exceeding great reward reserved for those who "overcome by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony, and who love not their lives unto the death."



