

FACTS AND MEN

BEING PAGES FROM

ENGLISH CHURCH HISTORY,

BETWEEN 1553 AND 1683.

WITH A PREFACE FOR THE TIMES.

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ROWLAND TAYLOR: MARTYR.

ROWLAND TAYLOR, Rector of Hadleigh, in Suffolk, one of the famous Protestant martyrs in Queen Mary's days, is a man about whom the Church possesses singularly little information. Excepting the facts related by John Fox in the "Book of Martyrs," we know scarcely anything about him. Enough, however, is on record to show that among the noble champions of Christ's truth, who sealed their faith with their blood at the time of the English Reformation, Rowland Taylor was second to none.

The causes of this absence of information are easily explained. For one thing, the good man lived, and laboured, and died, in a small country town, fifty miles from London. Such a position is fatal to a world-wide celebrity. It is the dwellers in large cities, and the occupiers of metropolitan pulpits, whose doings are chronicled by admirers, and whose lives are carefully handed down to posterity. For another thing, he wrote no books, either expository, or controversial, or practical. Not even a single sermon of the martyred Rector of Hadleigh exists in print, and enables him, though dead, to speak. When he died, he left nothing behind him to keep his memory alive in libraries. These two facts must not be forgotten.

The account of Taylor, which Fox has supplied, is so peculiarly graphic and vivid, that one might almost suppose that the martyrologist was a personal friend of the martyr, or an eye-witness of his sufferings. Of this, however, I can find no evidence. Yet it is worthy of notice, that Fox, after Queen Elizabeth came to the throne, resided for a considerable time with Parkhurst, Bishop of Norwich, in whose diocese Hadleigh was then situated. He also seems to have had friends and acquaintances at Ipswich, which is only ten miles from Hadleigh. It is therefore highly probable that he had frequent opportunities of visiting Taylor's parish, and very likely received much information from people who were actually present when the noble martyr was burned, and could supply full and accurate accounts both of his ministry and his sufferings. To condense and modernize Fox's narrative, and to present it to my readers in a convenient form, is the simple object of these pages.

Rowland Taylor, according to Strype, was born at Rothbury, in Northumberland; the same county, it may be remembered, from which Bishop Ridley came. The date of his birth, the rank or position of his family, his early history, and the place of his education, are all things about which nothing whatever is known. We only gather from various sources, that in due time he became a student at Cambridge, and there imbibed the principles of the Protestant Reformation. Among other means by which he was influenced at this important crisis of his life, the

sermons of Bishop Latimer are especially named. The first distinct fact in his life that we know, is his intimacy with Archbishop Cranmer. In that great man's household he seems to have occupied some office, and to have worked with him in carrying forward the mighty building of the English Reformation. How long he lived with Cranmer, we have, unfortunately, no means of finding out. But there is strong internal evidence that he was so long and so intimately connected with him, that he became a marked man among the English Reformers. Upon no other supposition can we explain the peculiar enmity with which he was sought out and persecuted to death in Queen Mary's reign. The old parson of Hadleigh must surely have obtained an honourable reputation in London, in the days of Edward VI.

Hadleigh, in Suffolk, was the first and only piece of preferment which we know of Rowland Taylor holding. To this he was appointed by his friend Archbishop Cranmer, but at what date we have no means of ascertaining. One thing only is quite certain: as soon as he was appointed to Hadleigh, he resigned all his offices in London, and devoted himself entirely to the work of his parish.

Hadleigh is a small town on the south-west border of Suffolk, containing, at this time, about 4,000 people. The character of the place in the days of Edward VI., and the nature of Rowland Taylor's ministry, are so well and graphically described by Fox in his "Acts and Monuments," that I cannot do better than quote his words:—

"The town of Hadleigh was one of the first that received the Word of God in all England, at the preaching of Master Thomas Bilney, by whose industry the Gospel of Christ had such gracious success, and took such root there, that a great number in that parish became exceeding well learned in the Holy Scripture, as well women as men; so that a man might have found among them many that had often read the whole Bible through, and that could have said a great part of St. Paul's Epistles by heart, and very well and readily have given a godly learned sentence in any matter of controversy.

"Their children and servants were also brought up and trained diligently in the right knowledge of God's Word, so that the whole town seemed rather an university of the learned, than a town of cloth-making or labouring people; and what most is to be commended, they were for the most part followers of God's Word in their living.

"In this town of Hadleigh, Dr. Taylor was a good shepherd, abiding and dwelling among his sheep. He gave himself wholly to the study of Holy Scripture, most faithfully endeavouring himself to fulfil that charge which the Lord gave unto Peter, saying, 'Peter, lovest thou Me? Feed my lambs;' 'Feed my sheep;' 'Feed my sheep.' This love of Christ so

wrought in him, that no Sunday nor holy day passed, nor other time, when he might get the people together, but he preached to them the Word of God, the doctrine of their salvation.

“Not only was his word a preaching unto them, but all his life and conversation was an example of unfeigned Christian life and true holiness. He was void of all pride, humble and meek as any child; so that none were so poor but they might boldly, as unto their father, resort unto him. Neither was his lowliness childish or fearful; but as occasion, time, and place required, he would be stout in rebuking the sinful and evil doers: so that none was so rich but he would tell him plainly his fault, with such earnest and grave rebukes as became a good curate and pastor. He was a man very mild, void of all rancour, grudge, or evil will, ready to do good to all men, readily forgiving his enemies, and never sought to do evil to any.

“To the poor that were blind, sick, lame, bedridden, or that had many children, he was a very father, a careful patron, a diligent provider, inasmuch that he caused the parishioners to make a general provision for them; and he himself (beside the continual relief that they always found at his house) gave an honest portion yearly to the common alms’ box.

“His wife, also, was an honest, discreet, and sober matron; and his children well nurtured, brought up in the fear of God and good learning.

“To conclude, he was a right and lively image or pattern of all those virtuous qualities described by St. Paul in a true bishop,—a good salt of the earth, savourily, biting the corrupt manners of evil men; a light in God’s house set upon a candlestick, for all good men to imitate and follow.”

How long Taylor’s ministry lasted at Hadleigh we do not exactly know. Fox only says that he continued there “all the days of the most innocent and holy King of blessed memory, King Edward VI. “We may, however, safely conclude that he was there more than ten years. When he was put in prison in Queen Mary’s days, he was the father of nine children; and as it is not probable that he would marry until he left Cranmer’s household and had a home of his own, it seems likely that his children were all born at Hadleigh. All this, however, is only matter of conjecture. Enough for us to know that he was evidently Rector of Hadleigh long enough to be loved and honoured by the mass of his parishioners.

Rowland Taylor’s quiet days at Hadleigh were soon brought to an end when Queen Mary came to the throne. A man of his eminence and high reputation as a Protestant, was sure to be marked for destruction by the Popish party, and an excuse was soon found for putting him in prison.

In the best worked parishes, and under the most faithful preaching of the Gospel, there will always be found many who hate vital religion, and remain hardened, impenitent, and unbelieving. It was so in the days of the Apostles. It is so at the present time, in our own parishes. It was so at Hadleigh, when Rowland Taylor was Rector. There were men who hated him, because his doctrine condemned their own lives and opinions; and as soon as they had an opportunity of doing him an injury, they eagerly seized it. Two of these men, named Foster and Clerke, conspired to bring the worthy Rector into collision with the higher powers, by hiring one John Avreth, Rector of Aldham, to come to Hadleigh church and celebrate the Popish Mass. The result answered their expectations. Rowland Taylor, with righteous indignation, rushed into the church as the Mass was about to begin, and protested warmly against the whole proceeding, as illegal and idolatrous. Then followed an unseemly altercation,—the forcible expulsion of the Rector of Hadleigh from his own church, — great excitement among the faithful parishioners,—throwing of stones into the church, and a general ferment among the people. All this was duly reported to Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester and Lord Chancellor of England; and the upshot of the affair, as the malignants had foreseen, was a summons from Gardiner to Dr. Taylor, to appear before him in London without delay. This summons the gallant Reformer promptly obeyed, and left Hadleigh, never to return till the day of his death.

When the summons arrived, Rowland Taylor's many friends tried in vain to persuade him to fly to the Continent to save his life, as many other faithful Protestants had done. But they had no more effect on the good old man than Paul's friends had on the Apostle, when they entreated him not to go up to Jerusalem. This was his reply: "What will ye have me to do? I am now old, and have already lived too long to see these terrible and most wicked days. Fly you, and do as your conscience leadeth you. I am fully determined, with God's grace, to go to this Bishop, and to his beard, to tell him that he doth naught. God shall well hereafter raise up teachers of His people, which shall with much more diligence and fruit teach them than I have done. For God will not forsake His Church, though now for a time He trieth and correcteth us, and not without just cause.

"As for me, I believe before God I shall never be able to do God so good a service as I may do now, nor shall I ever have so glorious a calling as I have now, nor so great mercy of God proffered me, as is now at this present. For what Christian man would not gladly die against the Pope and his adherents? I know that the Papacy is the kingdom of Anti-

christ, altogether full of falsehoods; so that all their doctrine is nothing but idolatry, superstition, error, hypocrisy, and lies.

“Wherefore I beseech you and all other my friends to pray for me, and to doubt not but God will give me strength and His Holy Spirit, that all mine adversaries shall have shame of their doings. “

Armed with this frame of mind, Rowland Taylor went voluntarily to London, and most manfully kept his word. The opening of his first interview with Gardiner is thus described by Fox: —

“Now when Gardiner saw Dr. Taylor, according to his common custom, he reviled him, calling him knave, traitor, heretic, with many other villainous reproaches. All this Dr. Taylor heard patiently, and at last said, ‘My lord, I am neither traitor nor heretic, but a true subject, and a faithful Christian man; and I am come according to your commandment, to know what is the cause why your lordship hath sent for me.’

“Then said the Bishop, ‘Art thou come thus, villain? How darest thou look me in the face for shame? Knowest thou not who I am?’

“‘Yea!’ said Dr. Taylor, ‘I know who you are: you are Dr. Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester and Lord Chancellor, and yet but a mortal man. If I should be afraid of your lordly looks, why fear you not God, the Lord of us all? How dare you for shame look any Christian man in the face, seeing you have forsaken the truth, denied our Saviour Christ and His Word, and done contrary to your oath-taking? With what countenance will you appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, and answer to your oath made first to King Henry VIII., and afterward unto King Edward VI., his son?’”

The interview, which began in this extraordinary manner, terminated as might have been expected. After several sharp arguments and wrangles, in which the Suffolk Rector showed himself more than a match for the Bishop of Winchester, Taylor was committed to the King’s Bench prison. On hearing his committal, he kneeled down, and holding up both his hands, said, “Good Lord, I thank Thee. From the tyranny of the Bishop of Borne, and all his detestable errors, idolatries, and abominations, good Lord, deliver us. And God be praised for good King Edward.”

Rowland Taylor lay in prison two years, and spent most of his time in prayer, reading the Scriptures, and writing. He had also opportunities of exhorting and addressing the prisoners. How much he saw of the other Reformers who were in prison at the same time, is not quite clear. It is certain, however, that he was very often in company of the famous John Bradford, and told his friends that God had sent him to a prison, where he “found an angel of God to comfort him.” It is also highly probable that he had occasional interviews with the illustrious Reformers, Hooper,

Rogers, Ferrar, and Saunders, who all, like himself, were finally burned at the stake.

The end of Rowland Taylor's weary imprisonment came at last. On the 22nd of January, 1555, he was brought before the Lord Chancellor, Bishop Gardiner, and other Commissioners, and subjected to a lengthy examination. To go into the details of all that was said on this occasion would be wearisome and unprofitable. The whole affair was conducted with the same gross unfairness and partiality which characterized all the proceedings against the English Reformers, and the result, as a matter of course, was the good man's condemnation. To use his own words, in a letter to a friend, he was pronounced a heretic because he defended the marriage of priests, and denied the doctrine of transubstantiation. Never let it be forgotten in these days, that the denial of any corporal presence of Christ's Body and Blood in the elements of bread and wine at the Lord's Supper, was the turning-point which decided the fate of our martyred Reformers. If they gave way on that point they might have lived. Because they would not admit any corporal presence they died. These things are recorded for our learning.

On the last day of January, 1555, Taylor, together with Bradford and Saunders, was called to appear before the Bishops of Winchester, Norwich, London, Salisbury, and Durham. They were all three charged with heresy and schism, and required to answer determinately whether they would submit themselves to the Bishop of Rome, and abjure their errors. On their refusal they were condemned to death. "For this," says Fox, "they gave God thanks, and stoutly said unto the Bishops, 'We doubt not but God, the righteous Judge, will require our blood at your hands, and the proudest of you all shall repent this receiving again of Antichrist, and your tyranny that ye now show against the flock of Christ.'" On the evening of this day, Taylor was sent to the Compter prison, and parted from his brethren.

On the 4th of February, Bonner, Bishop of London, came to the Compter prison, and formally degraded Taylor from the office of priest, with many absurd ceremonies, of which Fox supplies a ludicrous description. The night after his degradation, his wife and his son Thomas were permitted to visit and sup with him, and after supper they parted, with much affection and many tears. The next day, the 5th of February, he set out on his journey to Hadleigh, in order that he might be burned in the presence of his parishioners. The circumstances of his departure from London are so touchingly described by Fox, that I think it best to let the old historian speak for himself.

"On the next morrow after that Dr. Taylor had supped with his wife in the Compter prison, which was the 5th day of February, the Sheriff of

London, with his officers, came to the Compter by two o'clock in the morning, and so brought forth Dr. Taylor; and without any light led him to the Woolsack, an inn without Aldgate. Dr. Taylor's wife, suspecting that her husband should that night be carried away, watched all night in St. Botolph's Church porch, beside Aldgate, having with her two children, the one named Elizabeth, of thirteen years of age, whom, being left without father or mother, Dr. Taylor had brought up of alms from three years old; the other named Mary, Dr. Taylor's own daughter.

"Now when the Sheriff and his company came against St. Botolph's Church, Elizabeth cried, saying, 'O my dear father! Mother, mother: here is my father led away!' Then cried his wife, 'Rowland, Rowland: where art thou?' for it was a very dark morning, that the one could not see the other. Dr. Taylor answered, 'Dear wife, I am here,' and stayed. The Sheriff's men would have led him forth, but the Sheriff said, 'Stay a little, masters, I pray you, and let him speak to his wife;' and so they stayed.

"Then came she to him, and he took his daughter Mary in his arms, and he, his wife, and Elizabeth kneeled down and said the Lord's prayer. At which sight the Sheriff wept apace, and so did divers others of the company. After they had prayed, he rose up and kissed his wife, and shook her by the hand, and said, 'Farewell, my dear wife: be of good comfort, for I am quiet in my conscience. God shall raise up a father for my children. And then he kissed his daughter Mary, and said, 'God bless thee, and make thee His servant;' and, kissing Elizabeth, he said, 'God bless thee. I pray you all stand strong and steadfast to Christ and His Word, and keep you from idolatry.' Then said his wife, 'God be with thee, dear Rowland: I will, with God's grace, meet thee at Hadleigh.'

"And so was he led forth to the Woolsack, and his wife followed him. As soon as they came to the Woolsack, he was put into a chamber, wherein he was kept, with four yeomen of the guard and the Sheriff's men. Dr. Taylor, as soon as he was come into the chamber, fell down on his knees, and gave himself wholly to prayer. The Sheriff then, seeing Dr. Taylor's wife there, would in no case grant her to speak any more with her husband; but gently desired her to go to his house, and take it as her own, and promised her she should lack nothing, and sent two officers to conduct her thither. Notwithstanding, she desired to go to her mother's, whither the officers led her, and charged her mother to keep her there till they came again. "Rowland Taylor's journey from London to Hadleigh is minutely described by Fox. He travelled on horseback, according to the custom of those days, and stopped at Brentwood, Chelmsford, and Lavenham. "All the way he was joyful and merry, as one that accounted himself going to a most pleasant banquet or bridal. "But we

must content ourselves with the account of the closing scene in the worthy martyr's history, which shall be given in Fox's own words:—

“On the 9th February, 1555 (the same day that Bishop Hooper was burnt at Gloucester), the Sheriff and his company led Dr. Taylor towards Hadleigh; and coming within two miles of Hadleigh, he desired for somewhat to light off his horse; which done, he leaped, and set a-frisk, or twain, as men commonly do in dancing. ‘Why, master Doctor,’ quoth the Sheriff, ‘how do you now?’ He answered, ‘Well, God be praised, good master Sheriff, never better; for now I know I am almost at home. I lack not past two stiles to go over, and I am at even at my Father's house. But, master Sheriff,’ said he, ‘shall we not go through Hadleigh?’ ‘Yes,’ said the Sheriff, ‘you shall go through Hadleigh.’ Then said he, ‘O good Lord, I thank Thee! I shall yet once ere I die, see my flock whom Thou Lord knowest I have most heartily loved and most truly taught. Good Lord, bless them, and keep them steadfast in Thy Word and truth.’

“When they were now come to Hadleigh, and came riding over the bridge, at the bridge foot waited a poor man with five small children, who, when he saw Dr. Taylor, he and his children fell down upon their knees and held up their hands, and cried with a loud voice, and said, ‘O dear father and good shepherd, Dr. Taylor, God help and succour thee, as thou hast many a time succoured me and my poor children.’ Such witness had this servant of God of his virtuous and charitable alms-given in his lifetime; for God would now the poor should testify of his good deeds to his singular comfort, to the example of others, and confusion of his persecutors and tyrannous adversaries. For the Sheriff and others that led him to death were wonderfully astonished at this, and the Sheriff sore rebuked the poor man for so crying. The streets of Hadleigh were beset on both sides the way with men and women of the town and country who waited to see him; whom, when they beheld so led to death, with weeping eyes and lamentable voices they cried, saying one to another, ‘Ah, good Lord, there goeth our good shepherd from us, that so faithfully hath taught us, so fatherly hath cared for us, and so godly hath governed us. O merciful God! What shall we poor scattered lambs do? What shall come of this most wicked world? Good Lord, strengthen him and comfort him.’ With such other most lamentable and piteous voices. Wherefore the people were sore rebuked by the Sheriff and the catchpoles, his men, that led him. And Dr. Taylor evermore said to the people, ‘I have preached to you God's Word and truth, and am come this day to seal it with my blood.’

“Coming against the almshouses, which he well knew, he cast to the good people money which remained of that good people had given him

in time of his imprisonment. As for his living, they took it from him at his first going to prison, so that he was sustained all the time of his imprisonment by the charitable alms of good people that visited him. Therefore the money that now remained he put in a glove ready for the same purpose, and, as is said, gave it to the poor almsmen standing at their door to see him. And coming to the last of the almshouses, and not seeing the poor that there dwelt ready at their doors as the others were, he asked, 'Is the blind man and blind woman that dwelt here alive?' It was answered, 'Yea, they are there within.' Then threw he glove and all in at the window, and so rode forth.

"At the last, coming to Aldham Common, the place assigned where he should suffer, and seeing a great multitude of people gathered thither, he asked, 'What place is this, and what meaneth it that so much people are gathered hither?' It was answered, 'It is Aldham Common, the place where you must suffer, and the people are come to look upon you.' Then said he, 'Thanked be God, I am even at home;' and so alighted from his horse, and rent the hood from his head.

"Now was his head knotted ill-favouredly, and clipped much as a man would clip a fool's head; which cost the good Bishop Bonner had bestowed upon him when he degraded him. But when the people saw his reverend and ancient face, with a long white beard, they burst out with weeping tears, and cried, saying, 'God save thee, good Dr. Taylor! Jesus Christ strengthen thee; the Holy Ghost comfort thee,' with such other like godly wishes. Then would he have spoken to the people, but the yeomen of the guard were so busy about him, that as soon as he opened his mouth, one or other thrust a tipstaff into his mouth, and would in no wise permit him to speak.

"Dr. Taylor, perceiving that he could not be permitted to speak, sat down, and seeing one named Soyce, he called him, and said, 'Soyce, I pray thee come and pull off my boots, and take them for thy labour. Thou hast long looked for them, now take them.' Then rose he up, and put off his clothes unto his shirt, and gave them away; which done, he said with a loud voice, 'Good people, I have taught you nothing but God's Holy Word, and those lessons that I have taken out of God's blessed Book, —the Holy Bible; and I am come hither this day to seal it with my blood.' With that word, a certain yeoman of the guard, who had used Dr. Taylor very cruelly all the way, gave him a great stroke upon the head with a waster, and said, 'Is that the keeping of thy promise, thou heretic?' Then he, seeing they would not permit him to speak, kneeled down and prayed, and a poor woman that was among the people stepped in and prayed with him, but they thrust her away, and threatened to tread her down with horses; notwithstanding, she would not remove, but

abode and prayed with him. When he had prayed, he went to the stake and kissed it, and set himself into a pitch-barrel, which they had set for him to stand in, and so stood with his back upright against the stake, with his hands folded together, and his eyes toward heaven, and so he continually prayed.”

After some painful delay, and some miserable insults from the Popish helpers, who were assisting, the fire was lighted. Then says Fox, “Dr. Taylor, holding up both his hands, called upon God, and said, ‘ Merciful Father of heaven, for Jesus Christ my Saviour’s sake, receive my soul into Thy hands.’ So stood he still, without either crying or moving, until one struck him on the head with a halbert, so that his brains fell out, and the dead corpse fell down into the fire. “

Thus died one of the best and bravest of the English martyrs. An old rude stone still marks the spot where he was burned, in the midst of an enclosed field, which once formed part of Aldham Common. It bears the following quaint but pithy inscription: —

“1555.

“Dr. Taylor, in defending that
which was good, at this
place left his blood.”

In the year 1819 another and more pretentious monument was erected on the same spot, with a long poetical inscription written by the Rector of Hadleigh. But the martyr’s history is still remembered in the parish, without the aid of stones and monuments. “Being dead, he yet speaketh.”

Taylor’s last parting wishes to his wife and family and parishioners were written in a book which he gave his son as a parting legacy, only five days before his martyrdom. They can hardly fail to interest the reader.

“I say to my wife and to my children, The Lord gave you unto me, and the Lord hath taken me from you and you from me: blessed be the name of the Lord! I believe that they are blessed which die in the Lord. God careth for sparrows, and for the hairs of our heads. I have ever found Him more faithful and favourable than is any father or husband. Trust ye, therefore, in Him by the means of our dear Saviour Christ’s merits. Believe, love, fear, and obey Him: pray to Him, for He hath promised to help. Count me not dead, for I shall certainly live and never die. I go before, and you shall follow after, to our long home. I go to the rest of my children, —Susan, George, Ellen, Robert, and Zachary. I have bequeathed you to the only Omnipotent.

“I say to my dear friends of Hadleigh, and to all others which have heard me preach, that I depart hence with a quiet conscience as touching my doctrine, for the which I pray you thank God with me. For I have, after my little talent, declared to others those lessons that I gathered out of God’s Book, the blessed Bible. ‘Therefore, if I, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you any other Gospel than that ye have received,’ God’s great curse be upon that preacher!

“Beware, for God’s sake, that ye deny not God, neither decline from the word of faith, lest God decline from you, and so do ye everlastingly perish. For God’s sake beware of Popery, for though it appear to have in it unity, yet the same is vanity and anti-Christianity, and not in Christ’s faith and verity.

“Beware of the sin against the Holy Ghost, now after such a light opened so plainly and simply, truly, thoroughly, and generally to all England.

“The Lord grant all men His good and Holy Spirit, increase of His wisdom, contemning the wicked world, hearty desire to be with God and the heavenly company; through Jesus Christ, our only Mediator, Advocate, Righteousness, Life, Sanctification, and Hope. Amen. Amen. Pray. Pray.

“Rowland Taylor, departing hence in sure hope, without all doubting of eternal salvation. I thank God, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, my certain Saviour. Amen. 5th of February, anno 1555.

“‘The Lord is my Light and my Salvation, whom then shall I fear? God is He that justifieth: who is he that can condemn?’ ‘In Thee, O Lord, have I trusted: let me never be confounded.’”

Does anyone wish to know whether the Church of Rome is infallible? Let him carefully study the history of such martyrdoms as that of Rowland Taylor. Of all the stupid and suicidal mistakes that the Romish Church ever made, none was greater than the mistake of burning the Reformers. It cemented the work of the Reformation, and made Englishmen Protestants by thousands. When plain Englishmen saw the Church of Rome so cruelly wicked and Protestants so brave, they ceased to doubt on which side was the truth. May the memory of our martyred Reformers never be forgotten in England until the Lord comes!