

From *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, vol. 8: January- July 1535*, edited by James Gairdner. London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1885, pp. 247-49.

4 May [1535]
Vatican Archives

661. REYNOLDS, FERON, AND THE CARTHUSIANS.

On the 28th¹ April 1535 the Lords of England met in the Great Chamber, with many officials and ministers of justice, to hear the defence of certain monks and secular priests who had been prosecuted for writing and giving counsel against the King. Among them a D.D. of Sion Abbey of the Order of St. Bridget² was interrogated by the Chancellor why he had persisted in an opinion against which so many lords and bishops in Parliament and the whole realm had decreed. He replied, "I had intended to imitate our Lord Jesus Christ when he was questioned by Herod and not to answer. But since you compel me to clear both my own conscience and that of the bystanders, I say that if we propose to maintain opinions by [248] proofs, testimony, or reasons, mine will be far stronger than yours, because I have all the rest of Christendom in my favor:—I dare even say all this kingdom, although the smaller part holds with you, for I am sure the larger part is at heart of our opinion, although outwardly, partly from fear and partly from hope, they profess to be of yours." On this he was commanded by the Secretary, under the heaviest penalties of the law, to declare who held with him. He replied, "All good men of the kingdom." He added "As to proofs of dead witnesses, I have in my favor all the General Councils, all the historians (*scriptori*), the holy doctors of the Church for the last fifteen hundred years, especially St. Ambrose, St. Jerome, St. Augustine, and St. Gregory; and I am sure that when the King knows the truth, he will be very ill pleased, or rather indignant against certain bishops who have given him such counsel."

He was ordered to speak no more, but merely to reply to the question why he had, against the King's authority, maliciously counselled many persons within the kingdom not to be of the King's opinion. "From the time I was first brought into court," he said, "I answered as if I were before God, that I would never declare my opinion for malice against the King or any other person, unless it was asked me in confession, when I could not refuse for discharge of my conscience. It is true I am much grieved that the King should be in such error. Therefore I have never said it in public, nor have ever spoken of it except as I have said above; and if I had not done so I would do it now, because I am so bound to God and my conscience; and in this I do not mean to offend God or the Prince or any one." Here he was ordered to hold his tongue, and he added "Since you do not wish me to speak further, *secundum legem restrain judicate me.*"

After hearing his sentence he said with the greatest constancy "This is of the things of this world." He then prayed the judges to obtain for him two or three days of life considering that he had been eight days "*come irregular*" in the Tower of London, and in those three he proposed to prepare his conscience and die like a good religious man. They answered that it was not in their power, but in the grace of the King. He then said, "*Credo videre bona Domini in terra viventium.*"

The prior of the Grande Chartreuse of Flanders (*qu.* of London?) went to the King's almoner and two other doctors and desired them in discharge of his conscience to let him ask them three things:—1. Seeing that our Lord gave power to men upon earth by the words *Et tibi dabo claves Regni Caelorum*, which no doctor understood to be addressed to any other than St. Peter alone, then to the Apostles, and consequently to the Popes and bishops, how could the King, a layman, be Head of the Church of England? The Secretary replied, "You would make the King a priest, then?" and commanded him to speak no further.

The arrest was then made, and execution followed 4 May in the following

1 Should be 29th.

2 Richd. Reynolds.

manner:—³

First, the “said” four monks and one of the secular priests (because the young man⁴ was pardoned) were drawn from the Tower of London to the place of execution (about a French league distant) and without respect for their Order hanged with great ropes. While they were still alive the hangman cut out their hearts and bowels and burned them. Then they were beheaded and quartered, and the parts placed in public places on long spears. And it is believed that one saw the other’s execution fully carried out before he died,—a pitiful and strange spectacle, for it is long since persons have [249] been known to die with greater constancy. No change was noticed in their colour or tone of speech, and while the execution was going on they preached and exhorted the bystanders with the greatest boldness to do well and obey the King in everything that was not against the honor of God and the Church.

Ital., from a modern copy, pp. 3. The original is endd.: “Anglia. Mors monachi unius S. Brigittæ, trium Carthusianorum et unius presbyteri secularis in Anglia, 1535.”

3 “Et allora la presa, ovvero arresto, quale fo exequito alli quatro di Maio in questa maniera.”

4 Robert Feron.