

SAINT EDMUND CAMPION.

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WE have, here, simply wished to make a sketch of Campion, without so much as writing his 'life', which certainly could not well be compressed into such narrow limits.

Campion was born in 1540. Campion's family was middle-class and commercial — his father, a 'very honest bookseller'. Enormously rich people then had become richer by being purchasers of the monastic lands, but the great economic upheaval could hardly have enriched London tradesmen, though it doubtless altered their outlook. Simpler folk were not then possessed by the desire to imitate, nor to use their sturdy ambitions merely to get rich quick. It was not from snobbishness that Edmund's father wanted to educate him well, but because a guild or company (probably the grocers') saw the boy's quick wits, sent him to a grammar school that the older man could not afford and then to Christ's College in Newgate Street which King Edward's advisers had made him found out of the relics of confiscated moneys. To my mind, it was here that Edmund Campion ran his first real perils. If there was not a social snobbery then as there is now, there was a far greater educational or literary snobbery. The idols of the New Learning were everywhere being worshipped. But Campion's cleverness must certainly have been notable, since, when Queen Mary Tudor (1553-1558) made her state entry into London in 1553 and passed by Saint Paul's School, they left that school aside and chose Campion, winner of all prizes, to be boy-declamer at her welcome. She was 'pleased' and this began a whole series of appearances before queens. Meanwhile, Sir Thomas White, founder of Saint John's College, Oxford, had also liked him; and by grace of the Grocers' Company, he was sent on there and became a Fellow at eighteen!

His oratorical gifts made him noticeable: in 1560, though a layman, he preached the panegyric over Amy Robsart, whom people were saying her husband, Lord Robert Dudley, had murdered to be more at his ease with Queen Elizabeth; afterwards he was to preach the funeral oration for Sir Thomas White also. Did he, in 1564, take the Oath of Supremacy at the time of receiving his Master's degree? Seemingly he did, though helping others to escape it. Oxford had gone to his head. He was its idol. Students mobbed him, imitated his walk, his accent, his dress. He was temporizing, playing tricks with conscience, committing himself in neither direction. When in 1566 the queen herself came to Oxford, he greeted her in the name of the university. Afterwards, he 'disputed' in her presence, but on safer topics than the semi-political ones entrusted to others — whether rule by prince alone were not better than rule by law alone;

whether princes did not rule better by succession than by election. Campion merely had to argue that the moon rules the tides, on which certainly he talked much nonsense and was in arrears upon Aquinas, but he made up for it by an adulation no less inevitable than disgusting both of the queen and of her lover, Dudley, chancellor of the university. They fell into ecstasies over Campion. He was made to discourse extempore before the Spanish ambassador, and again before the queen at Woodstock. Cecil and Dudley took him up and, when Dudley had become Earl of Leicester, Campion still was to pursue him with flatteries that we must condone because princes exacted them.

None the less, Campion was sick at heart. He revolted against the inscriptions put up at Christ Church, as though Elizabeth's father, if not she herself, had created Wolsey's college. A brilliant Latinist, Hellenist and Hebrew scholar, he now was studying the Fathers, and could see neither how not to be a Catholic, nor how to be one. He found that Saint Peter Martyr (Peter of Verona 1206-1252) had said that it was not absolutely prohibited for a Catholic to assist at profane and execrable rites, and, in a moment, I think, of nervous exasperation, took the enormous step of being ordained deacon in the queen's new church in 1564. At once, his conscience started to torment him.

Yet he still temporized, but drew back. His 'tone' in preaching was all too Catholic. Invited by the suspicious grocers to preach at Paul's Cross at Candlemas (February 2nd), he hesitated, and asked for a reprieve till Michaelmas (September 29th). Then he met them and asked to be let off. They suggested somewhere less important — Walbrook. He resisted. They delivered an ultimatum. He refused it, resigned his exhibition, and on the feast of Saint Peter in Chains, August 1st 1569, resigned also his proctorial office and left Oxford.

In the midst of this brilliancy, or glitter, of this suspicion and adulation, Campion had genuinely loved education, had worked hard and had hated unchastity. This, to my mind, is what really saved him.

Off, now, he went to Ireland, where there was question of reviving the old Dublin university, dead because of the suppression of those monasteries without which there would have been no universities at all. Under Leicester's unfailing patronage, he seemed to have new scholastic glories ahead of him. He wrote a treatise on *The Academic Man*, anticipating thus [Blessed John Henry] Newman's *Idea of a University*; and indeed how strange is the resemblance-in-contrast between these two men, not excluding the visit of each to Ireland and the respective causes of their going and leaving! Certainly, Campion's 'Academic Youth' was to be equipped with qualities beyond any Crichton (James Crichton – the 'Admirable Crichton'); still, his ideal young man was not only to be a scholar: 'he must wash thoroughly and dress properly'; he must always stand to study; he must live not only among those corpses that books are. The intellectual vitality of Campion reveals itself.

But the Catholic hinterland of his mind also revealed itself. Almost at once, they suspected him, though he had not been received back into the Church. One difference between him and Erasmus

surely was that Erasmus was a humanist who could not help being a Catholic; Campion, irrevocably a Catholic with a convinced longing to be a humanist: and, again, Campion urged positive ideals and criticized others only in so far as they fell short of his standard; Erasmus really disliked men personally.

Campion, hidden away from pursuit, put together a *History of Ireland*. For this he had really tried to make due researches. Foiled in this, he wrote the least kindly book he ever did write, unredeemed, to my mind, by its glittering style; but acute, full of observation, of knowledge of human nature and of happy vivacity. But his presence was exposing his good hosts to too much danger; he resolved on flight. Campion always possessed a sort of sanctified impertinence. He enjoyed, I feel sure, dressing as the lackey of the Earl of Kildare's steward, who was crossing to England, and standing under the very nose of officers who boarded the ship to search for him and who questioned every person save himself. He spent the time invoking in his mind Saint Patrick, a new patron to whom he was thenceforward ever true.

In England, he not only missed the warm-hearted hospitality of the Irish but found himself in a world of 'fears, suspicions, arrestings, condemnations, torturings and executions'. In the June of that year, 1571, the aged Doctor [Blessed John] Story was kidnapped by a base trick in the Lowlands and executed in a manner even more revolting than was usual. Campion, in Westminster Hall, attended his trial. I cannot but think this was a turning-point. Shocked beyond measure, he made an end of temporizing and took boat for Douai. An English frigate stopped them in mid-Channel, arrested Campion, brought him back; but, succumbing to a tip, the captain winked and let him go. The seaman walked west; Campion, east. In Kent, he found means to get across to France. Cecil said that England had lost one of her diamonds.

He went to the English seminary at Douai, founded by Doctor, afterwards Cardinal, William Allen, and found himself in an all-but-Oxford atmosphere once more. He thrived, was ordained sub-deacon, delved into Saint Thomas and wrote boldly 'martyrdom' against a passage dealing with 'baptism of blood'. He also taught eloquence and wrote controversial letters; but I feel that, his conscience now being clear, there is already much more of his native sweetness and less artificiality in his style. He writes like a simple Englishman, not like a Ciceronian in disguise.

But, suddenly, he asked to go to Rome and become a Jesuit. His deepening piety may have made him desire the religious vows, and his adventurous spirit seek companionship with men who, they said, were the Church's skirmishers and light cavalry. But he could have got all that in the destiny that any English priest had to foresee. Possibly, he did not feel quite in sympathy with Allen. Much had happened in England since Allen had left. Campion felt sure that Elizabeth had come to stay; Allen thought that Philip of Spain was rightful king there. But the generous-hearted Allen gave him leave; off he went, on foot, meeting on the way an Oxford friend who had last seen him 'in great pomp', thought he must have been robbed and offered him his purse. Campion answered in terms of self-sacrifice for Christ's sake, and plodded on.

In Rome, catechized about the effect of the Pope's Bull of Deposition, he said frankly that it had

made things harder for Catholics and begged for a 'mitigation'; Elizabeth could not be unexcommunicated, but might not Catholics acknowledge her as queen without themselves incurring excommunication? Thus, they could honestly say they were not traitors nor teachers of treachery. He was duly received into the Society as a novice.

There was then no English Jesuit province; foreign provincials fought for him; Austria won and he was sent to Prague, where he could contemplate the spiritual and moral decline due to Hussism (the heresies of John Huss). But he was soon shifted to Brunn, in Moravia, where things were still worse. He was put to teach the poorer people, almost as a reparation, recalling that Huss derived more anarchic ideas from Wycliffe. Brought back to Prague, every task in the house seemed placed on his not over-strong shoulders; he also taught rhetoric and, afterwards, Aristotelian philosophy. You might have feared he would relapse into artificialities, especially as the only model allowed was Cicero. But no, his directions are definite. First, think exactly what you want to say, and then, only, say it as well as you can. Thus, you will not be mimicking what Cicero said but speaking as Cicero would have spoken. Meanwhile, he wrote plays and dramatic dialogues with incredible fluency and had much talk with his old and dear friend, Sir Philip Sidney, Elizabeth's envoy to the Emperor Rudolph II. Sidney professed himself convinced of the truth of the Faith but alleged that he could not draw back from the brilliant career that already, at twenty-three, was his. Campion prayed that some missionary, home in England, could help this 'poor wavering soul'.

Ordained in 1578, he was begged for by Allen as a member of the English mission now to be developed and, with Robert Persons (or Parsons), was allotted to it. Everyone realized what it held in store. One of his colleagues painted a wreath of lilies and roses over his bed; another wrote, 'Father Edmund Campion, Martyr', over his door. On March 25, 1580, he went to Rome and learnt that he would be starting for England somewhat after Easter. Rome seems to me to have been filled with men as ignorant as possible of the real state of things, or of feeling, in England, yet extremely wise about the technique, so to say, of missionary work there. Indeed, the situation was everywhere confused. Henry VIII had really thought he could remain a devout Catholic while calling himself head of the Church of England; Elizabeth, the perfect cynic, yet imperious, was finding she had to play off king against king, parties and nobles one against the other, and really might have urged that she had been forced into anti-Catholicism by Rome itself. English Catholics did not at all want to apostatize but, by now, I think, did regard Elizabeth as their queen and may have been almost proud of her.

Campion left Rome with the 'mitigation' he had asked for and the advice to let laymen do all the spade-work of instruction — the priest was to arrive only to put the finishing touch to conversion. They must avoid sarcasm or the appearance of seeking alms or legacies; they must eschew politics and not even write to Rome about them. Yet, just at that moment, a papally-backed expedition sailed for Ireland to assist rebellion both by money and arms, so that there was not the least chance of the missionaries in England seeming anything but hostile intriguers, sent by Pope

Gregory XIII who could not possibly be thought neutral, let alone friendly. The medieval notion that the Holy See had rights over every island may have prompted the feeling that the Pope was able to take away Ireland from the English crown, just as Adrian IV had given it; it was in this spirit that Pius V had excommunicated and deposed Elizabeth: none the less, and despite the affectionate farewell spoken to the missionaries by Saint Philip Neri, not to insist on the fuss and notoriety that surrounded the departure so that everyone in authority in England knew all about the expedition before it had got halfway; the enterprise was doomed from the outset.

They travelled by foot and on horseback, Campion, in the poorest clothes, gaily alleging that a man en route for martyrdom need not worry about the fashion. Morning and night, he pushed on ahead for meditation and prayer. During the day, his infectious high spirits encouraged the others, some of whom were old. At Milan, they met Saint Charles Borromeo; and, having crossed by Mont Cenis, at last they reached Geneva. In Geneva was living Beza, successor to Calvin. With almost school-boyish audacity, five of them visited him. They definitely ‘cheeked’ him, and when soon afterwards, they challenged him and his fellows to a discussion — the vanquished to be burned at the stake — no wonder it was hinted that they had better leave Geneva quickly.

In May 1580, they arrived at Rheims. Allen welcomed them, and a great tragedy occurred. Bishop Goldwell, who, with the Bishop of Lincoln now in prison, was sole survivor of the deposed Catholic hierarchy, fell ill and had to return. He implored that bishops might be created for England. They were not. No one at Rome imagined that Protestantism would survive there; mendicant bishops destined to the rack and the gallows did not appeal to the official mind; none were sent. When, long afterwards, bishops were given back to us in England, a tradition had been irreparably snapped.

Next, on all sides, the little band was being told that their mission was a hopeless one. Campion, sensitive to every mood, began to wonder if he had done right in abandoning the manifestly successful work in Bohemia for so forlorn a hope.

Every detail, even the appearance of the missionaries, was known to Francis Walsingham by means of his superb system of espionage. The Irish expedition made it inevitable that they should be regarded as political intriguers. But no, Allen said that Campion’s Bohemian apostolate could be done by anyone equally qualified — or ‘at least by two or three such persons’; so let him persevere. They crossed from Flanders by ones or twos — Persons dressed as a soldier: ‘such a peacock! — such a swaggerer!’ Campion wrote to Rome. He himself went as ‘Mr. Edmunds’, jewel-merchant, along with the little lay-brother, Ralph Emerson. The ‘searcher’ of all such immigrants at Dover had been so perfectly taken in by Persons that he actually helped him with a horse on his way to London. Reprimanded and bidden to be more careful, he arrested Campion and Emerson, thinking that Campion answered to the description of a brother of Allen’s. They were freed — who knows why — and finally reached London.

He was lodged in the very house of the chief pursuivant — was this another instance of his

audacity, that he had found to pay so well, or had the man been bought over? Both explanations are offered. But, at any rate, the apostolate had now begun.

The stay in London was not a long one. The place was full of un-confessed Catholics, longing to meet the priests; but, almost at once, an apostate spy had caused the arrest of a Mr. Orton and of Father {Blessed} Robert Johnson and it was decided that both Persons and Campion must go further away from this storm-centre. Before leaving, Campion, by request, wrote a rapid profession of his sincerity. Politics were 'straitly forbidden' to him; from them he 'gladly estranged and sequestered his mind'. His extreme simplicity of soul and candour are seen in his petition that he might be heard by three audiences — by the Lords in Council, on the relation of the Church to the English Government; by the heads of houses in both universities, on the proofs of the Catholic Faith; and by the courts spiritual and temporal, to justify the Faith by 'the common wisdom of the laws standing'. Begging, too, a special audience of the queen, he ended with often-quoted words:

'Hearken unto those which spend the best blood in their bodies for your salvation. Many innocent hands are lifted up unto Heaven for you, daily and hourly, by those English students whose posterity shall not die, which, beyond the seas, gathering virtue and sufficient knowledge for the purpose, are determined never to give you over, but either to win you to Heaven or to die upon your pikes. And touching our Society, be it known to you that we have made a league: cheerfully to carry the cross that you shall lay upon us, and never to despair of your recovery while we have a man left to enjoy your Tyburn, or to be racked with your torments, or to be consumed with your prisons. The expense is reckoned; the enterprise is begun; it is of God; it cannot be withstood. So the Faith was planted; so it must be restored.'

He concludes by saying that if he be refused, and rewarded with rigour, he can add no more, but commends their cause, and his own, to God, prays that they may find themselves at accord at least on the Day of Payment, and at last 'be friends in Heaven, where all injuries shall be forgiven'.

This document at once became known, though it was meant to be kept private, save in the case of his arrest, and was nicknamed '*Campion's Brag and Challenge*'.

He moved from house to house in the more southerly Midlands, finding everywhere hosts of Catholics, desperately grateful to receive at last their sacraments, instruction and encouragement. This occupied the latter half of 1580 and most of the next year. He went, of course, further north too; into Derbyshire and Nottingham, and finally to Lancashire. All were fascinated by his clear discourse and extreme personal charm, yet acknowledged that a certain 'hidden infused power' gave him his efficacy. The saint was beginning to grow within him; and when sanctity had been achieved, martyrdom was assured. He could not doubt of that. Five of the little band that had set out from Rheims were already in prison cells, broken by the rack. Yet, in all this, his irrepressible vivacity kept breaking out. I can but recall the day when, speaking to a village girl by a duck-

pond covered with green scum, he saw the pursuivants turn the corner. He pretended to insult her; she pushed him into the pond; he emerged unrecognizable; the officers passed by laughing.

The 'event' of this period was the writing, printing and publishing of his *Ten Reasons*. They were ten considerations put forward 'on the side of the Faith'. At first he wanted to call it 'Heresy Hopeless' — De Haersi Desperata; but no one could help smiling. Heresy, just then, and as it turned out justifiably, was so very sure of itself!

At Campion's suggestion, Persons set up a private printing press in the attics of Dame Cicely Stonor, near Henley. Some 400 copies were rushed through (not even being stitched); and, on June 27, the church of Saint Mary the Virgin, then used for the learned effervescences of commemoration, was snowed under with the pamphlet which undergraduates eagerly read while the solemn function was proceeding. The dons were furious. They, a second-rate crew imposed by Elizabeth, were trying to dragoon the intelligence of young men more alert than they into thinking with the State. Opposition was mobilized. It was almost wholly abuse, not argument.

Despite the all-but total confiscation of the original edition (it is said that only two copies exist), nearly thirty Latin editions are said to have been demanded, and many translations into European languages were made. In this booklet there was some true 'Campion', especially when he appeals to the queen herself: when he assures her that 'one heaven cannot contain Calvin and these your ancestors' — he had alluded to Saint Edward, Saint Louis, Saint Henry of Saxony, Saint Stephen of Hungary and other sainted kings; and cries that the day will come that shall make it clear 'which of the two did love you best: the company of Jesus or the brood of Luther'. The book roused the authorities to fury, and Campion was warned to run back into Lancashire. But he received a letter from a Mr. Yate, in prison for the Catholic Faith, begging him to visit his house, Lyford Grange, in Berkshire, where his wife, his mother and some Brigittine nuns were living. Persons gave leave reluctantly. Campion was too 'easygoing'. 'If they once get you there,' he said, 'you will never break away.'

Campion went; he spent a night there and was actually leaving when news came that a large number of Catholics had arrived, all longing to see him.

Among the crowd of sixty who heard Campion preach, that Sunday, was George Eliot, an apostate and a spy. Mrs. Yate's cook had known him in old days, let him in at once, and actually told him that Campion (the warrant for whose arrest he had upon him) was in the house. Eliot sent to Abingdon for one hundred men to effect that arrest, went upstairs, heard Campion's Mass 'devoutly' and then left. After dinner, a look-out man saw the armed force approaching and Campion hurried into a hiding-place, though he had begged them let him try to escape alone, without involving them in his danger. The magistrate, who loathed Eliot, arrived, and, at his bidding, was forced to make his men ransack the house and then return to tear down the very panelling. Mrs. Yate raised an outcry; the magistrate apologized and, seeing she was an invalid, said she might sleep where she pleased. She had a bed made up close to the hiding-place — thus, she hoped to protect it.

Late at night, having smashed all they could, and by now probably half drunk, the men went downstairs and slept. Mrs. Yate thereupon collected her guests, caused Campion to get out of his hiding-place, and demanded just one more sermon. Campion spoke. As they tip-toed away, someone tripped; others fell over him; there was a clatter. The men awoke and, with lanterns and axes, poured up the stairs. They could find nothing, and were for making Eliot pay for their interrupted sleep. Eliot felt sure that something had been implied by that midnight noise, and abruptly noticed the bit of panelling as yet unbroken. He demanded that it too should be pierced. A servant, who knew that the hiding-place was just behind it, protested that enough damage had been done, and then, catching Eliot's eye, could not prevent himself from turning white. That settled it. Eliot, seizing a hammer, struck it into the woodwork and Campion was revealed. Two priests, seven gentlemen and two yeomen were taken with him.

After four days' imprisonment, orders came from London that they were to be removed thither, strongly guarded. The Berkshire sheriff did what he could to show respect to his prisoners, but could not prevent the indecent exultation of Eliot, at whom the people shouted 'Judas' all the way. At Abingdon, men came across from Oxford to salute what they knew would be the last they saw of their scholastic glory and the man whom still they loved. Eliot half apologized to Campion: 'Mr. Campion, I know well you are wroth with me for this work'. 'Nay; I forgive you, and in token thereof, I drink to you! And if you repent and come to Confession, I will absolve you . . . but large penance must you have!' At Henley, they passed close to Persons, who was forbidden, most wisely, to show himself; but Campion recognized his servant and greeted him as best he could; and a young priest who tried to speak to him was at once arrested as a 'comforter of Jesuits'. At Colebrook, the sheriff received orders from London to treat with ignominy the men he had gladly hitherto respected; their elbows were tied behind, their wrists in front, their feet beneath their horses. On Campion's hat (Persons's hat really, for they had exchanged hats when they last parted) was fastened a placard: 'Campion, the Seditious Jesuit'. So was he exhibited through London.

He was taken to the Tower and put at once into the 'Little Ease', where he could neither stand nor lie down. There he was kept for four days, till his spirit should have been broken.

And then he was taken out by the Traitor's Gate. Whither? If the almost too dramatic tale can be authenticated — to the town house of the Earl of Leicester, who, with Lord Bedford and two secretaries of State, stood at the side of Elizabeth on a great chair. I cannot but think that the earl and the queen had not even now quite recovered from their long-ago fascination; perhaps they felt that, if Campion could be won, the Catholic game was up. They catechized him; they assured him there was nothing wrong with him save his papistry. 'My greatest glory!' he answered.

Elizabeth offered him liberty and honours, would he but recant; still smiling on him, she sent him back to the Tower; for three days promises and cajoleries were applied — even up to the offer of the Canterbury archbishopric if no post at court could satisfy him. Word was sent round London

that he was about to yield — soon he would be preaching at Paul's Cross, burn the *Ten Reasons* with his own hand and be crowned with the Protestant mitre. On the third day of Campion's obstinacy these cynics, to whom caress and cruelty came with equal ease, sent Campion to the rack, and the hideous engine tugged his limbs apart. During the torture he was plied with questions; he was asked for his views of certain old political utterances of his friends; his own views as to the legitimacy of Elizabeth's position; whom he had met in England; who had welcomed him; whose confessions he had heard; and much more.

Lord Burghley wrote to Lord Shrewsbury a letter, still existing, that proves he said nothing of moment. Still, he said something. . . . Exactly what? The world was informed that he had yielded to pain, acknowledged every detail; and a series of arrests, trials and condemnations went forward on the strength of this. Campion was branded among all, Catholics included, as renegade and traitor. Exactly what Campion said may never be ascertained. I think, when names were mentioned to him as already known, he may have acknowledged them as Catholic, knowing they were known, and having — even so — exacted an oath that no additional harm would befall them owing to this corroboration. The first and only real informants had been, it seems probable, three panic-stricken servants. If indeed, then, Campion, delirious with pain, did say anything, he made up for it amply afterwards and immediately rose above it.

For Campion was an object of interest. He had often asked for a public discussion. This was when they chose to grant it, out of curiosity, and, indeed, forced it on him. Without warning or preparation he was suddenly taken to the Norman chapel, filled with personages — Deans of Saint Paul's and Windsor, Regius Professors, Puritan preachers and what not. They sat with books, paper and ink before them; they could raise any objection they chose; he had nothing for reference and had to answer without being allowed to offer his own objections, let alone to put forward any harmonious statement of the Catholic Faith. Sitting on his little stool, his body and nerves still desperately in anguish, he made the wicked absurdity of his position clear enough. Their 'argument' was chiefly vituperation and jeering. He never lost his temper. They actually gave him a Greek Testament of such small print that in that gloomy place he could not read it, and then had the triple nerve to say he knew no Greek. At least the laity were both shocked and impressed. Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel, found here the origin of what became a life and death of noble fidelity, leading to his own canonization in 1970. In that same Tower, he was to die. Again racked, Campion was made similarly to answer questions before other assessors; his ease, charm, and learning brought it about that the Bishop of London decided that the system did more harm than good and broke the discussions off.

For the third time Campion was racked, so violently that he thought they meant to kill him. A cousin of the queen cried that it were easier to tear the heart from his breast than one word, against his conscience, from his lips. This time the pain had taken him beyond sensation itself. Next day, his gaoler, who had been won by Campion's gentleness, asked 'How do you feel?' 'Not ill', he answered, 'because not at all.'

Other tactics were tried. Campion was accused of having been involved in the Roman-Spanish-Irish expedition and rising of a year back. But they could find no evidence — naturally; there was none. He had not been involved in it. Then they invented, all of a piece, a ‘Rheims-Rome’ Plot, and spent time briefing false witnesses as to what they should say. Then the Duc d’Alençon, whom Elizabeth had said that she would marry at last, arrived. Much younger than she, he was also brother-in-law to Mary, the Queen of Scots, a prisoner then in Sheffield. Did it look as if Elizabeth was parleying with Papists? Best make a counter-manifesto.

On November 14, nine men, of whom Campion was one, were arraigned in Westminster Hall on a charge of high treason and much more.

They were told to plead guilty or not guilty. The men ‘who had travelled’, said Campion, ‘only for souls’ raised their right hands, to answer ‘Not Guilty’ — all save he. Racked and re-racked, he could not. From his swollen hands the very finger-nails had fallen. A comrade took off his fur cuff and, kissing the poor hand, lifted it that it too might attest the man’s guiltlessness. Even had not Ralph Sherwin (also canonised in 1970) cried aloud: ‘The plain ground of our standing here is religion, not treason’, all knew in their hearts that the men were innocent. The Chief Justice, a Catholic at heart, remembered evermore the disgraceful day with anguish.

It is impossible to relate the trial in detail. Campion, whose ‘sweetness of disposition’ all men knew, had to say of the witnesses (amongst whom was Eliot) that ‘they have nothing left to swear by, neither religion nor honesty’.

It has to be confessed that Campion, when suitable, eluded, and, when apt, demolished the arguments of his accusers; so much so that the queen’s prosecutor, Anderson, lost his temper and exclaimed that, logic or none, ‘I will bring it to purpose anon’.

The men were foredoomed, even though Campion, questioned about his allegiance, was able to rehearse by heart what he had said to Elizabeth in Leicester’s house and how he had satisfied her with his words . . . and he reminded the jury that, again and again, he and his comrades had been promised that if they would but become Anglicans all would be well. ‘So great are the treasons’ that he and they were, in honesty, believed to have wrought!

Public opinion was wholly on their side; but ‘the poor twelve’ came back from their consultation; the accused were guilty on all points; yet again Caesar had conquered Christ.

When asked what ‘Campion and the rest had to say why they should not die’ — this was his answer:

‘It was not our death that ever we feared! But we knew that we were not lords of our own lives, and therefore for want of answer would not be guilty of our own deaths. The only thing we have now to say is, that if our religion do make us traitors, we are worthy to be condemned; but otherwise we are and have been as ‘true subjects’ as ever the Queen has had. In condemning us, you condemn all your own ancestors, Bishops and Kings: all that was once the glory of England, the Island of Saints, and the most devoted child of the See

of Peter. For what have we taught (however you may qualify it with the odious name of treason), that they did not uniformly teach? To be condemned with these old lights, not of England only but the world, by their degenerate descendants, is both gladness and glory to us! God lives. Posterity will live. Their judgment is not so liable to corruption as that of those who are now going to sentence us to death.'

They were condemned and sentenced. A cry of protest echoed in the very hall; but above it could be heard Champion's voice: 'We praise You, O God!'; and Sherwin's: 'This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!' Protest was hushed in astonishment, then the cries of exultation were taken up, and it seemed to be already the martyrs' Easter Day.

Elizabeth did not at all believe the charges of treason and continued to send offers of Church preferment to Champion, would he but apostatize. Champion's own sister was one of those chosen to make this offer. And, as though no act of melodrama, even, were to be omitted in that strange world, Eliot too arrived, trembling for his safety, sure that the Catholics would take vengeance on him and begging Champion to protect him. Champion, without one word of rebuke, sweet and attentive as ever, promised him a letter of recommendation to a German duke, who would accept his service. The gaoler, present at this conversation, was overwhelmed; he never forgot the talk and it became the beginning of his conversion to the Faith. Authority deemed it wise to hasten the date of execution, lest petitions addressed to the queen might occasion a reprieve.

One pitiable incident occurred. The Duc d'Alençon, still present in England, had promised to intercede for Champion. As the days went by and he seemed to be doing nothing, his confessor actually went into the tennis-court where d'Alençon was playing. He said that France's royal blood would be forever disgraced were so foul a judicial murder not prevented. The duke stood still for a minute, stroked his face with his left hand, then said: 'Play!' and the game proceeded.

Together with Sherwin, Champion endured another long argument and, as ever, had the best of it. But that would not help. 'Soon I shall be above yon fellow!' said Sherwin gallantly, looking at the sun as they passed through an open court on their way back to their all-but lightless, airless confinement.

But they could not quite always keep their spirits high, as the days dragged. Just how to kill them had not been settled. 'Delay of our death doth somewhat dull me', Sherwin wrote. But finally, December 1 was chosen. Champion represented the Society of Jesus; Sherwin, Douai and the English College at Rome; Saint Alexander Briant, Rheims.

The day dawned cold and raining. 'God save you all, gentlemen!' cried Champion as they left the Tower, 'God bless you all and make you all good Catholics!'

Then he was thrown down and tied to his hurdle; the two younger men shared another. Each hurdle was tied to the tails of two horses, dragged at full speed down Cheapside, under the New Gate, and then along Holborn. After this came a mile of open country, then Tyburn. As they went under Newgate, Champion struggled to raise himself a little, in order to salute the statue of Our

Lady over the arch. Now and again, the pitiful procession halted its pace; then the martyrs spoke cheerily to the horrified crowds; and once a gentleman leaned down and gently wiped the mud from Campion's face.

So anxious was officialdom, that no less than 3,000 horsemen had been gathered round the gallows; and 'an infinite number of souls'. Just as the hurdles reached the place, the sun shone out. Campion was the first to mount the cart and to put the noose round his own neck.

He began to speak — it was his right. 'We are made a spectacle unto the world, to angels and to men — we are fools for Christ's sake.'

But they prevented him, and kept arguing about 'treason'.

'If you esteem my religion treason, then am I guilty. As for any other treason, I never committed any — God is my judge.' But a proclamation was read out in the queen's name — a plan unparalleled before or after — stating that it was for treason, not religion, that these three men were being killed.

Again and again, he was questioned, and had to repeat the wearisome denials. Then he tried to pray. He used liturgical words, in Latin.

Someone shouted to him to pray in English: 'I will pray to God', said he, 'in a language we both well understand!'

Still once more, they harried him and told him to pray for Elizabeth. 'Yes', he replied, 'I do pray for Elizabeth, your queen and my queen, unto whom I wish a long quiet reign with all prosperity.'

At these words, they drew the cart away. An official, touched with mercy, had ordered that he should remain hanging till he was quite dead. He was not, therefore, according to the directions of the sentence, conscious when his limbs were placed upon the quartering-block to be hacked asunder. But, as the executioner tossed them into a cauldron for boiling before they were exhibited on spikes, some of his blood fell on the sleeve of a young and brilliant writer, Henry Walpole. The lad had not been pious but had felt indignation at the treatment given to men like Campion, and had already befriended him; this blood turned him into the hero and martyr that he afterwards became, (canonised in 1970) and was but a symbol of the wave of conversion which all over England swept men back into the Church. And all Europe rang with the news; so much so that the English government had to send out its apologies on all sides. But not a soul believed them. Campion died a martyr, and as such, we venerate him.

Edmund Campion was canonised by Pope Paul VI on October 25, 1970, along with thirty-nine others of his English and Welsh compatriots.
