

John Cooper - A Protestant Martyr Who Was Not Burnt At The Stake

The Suffolk village of Wattisham is not very large. The traveler is surprised to find in it a large Baptist Chapel. It has been a center of evangelical witness for many years. The parts of our country where there is a strong evangelical testimony today are often places where in the times of bitter persecution steadfast souls kept the faith and lost their lives in its defense. Wattisham is such a place. Unlike many other Suffolk Martyrs, its martyr John Cooper was not burnt at the stake but was accused of treason, of which he was not guilty, and hung, drawn and quartered as a traitor.

The difference between the Protestant martyrs and the Roman Catholic martyrs was that the Roman Catholic martyrs were all charged with treason and justly condemned for either treason or sedition, or both. They were therefore hung, drawn, and quartered, that being legal penalty for their crime of treason. They were tried by secular courts and their trial was not an ecclesiastical matter. The Protestant martyrs were accused of heresy and tried by church courts, who handed them over to the sheriff to be burnt alive, the penalty for heresy. Their heresy was the denial of the doctrine of transubstantiation, that of the Mass. This was a Church matter and the responsibility for their deaths is with the Roman church. It was so with John Cooper of Wattisham that he was accused of treason and this was used to get him out of the way for he was known to be a Protestant.

A Village Craftsman

It would seem that like most of the village craftsmen he would have farmed some land as well, it would have been a family farm for he had a wife and nine children. A man named William Fenning had seen a couple of bullocks belonging to John Cooper, the carpenter, which he wished to buy. The bullocks would have been important to the carpenter, for they were used in those times as draught animals and beasts of burden. When Master Fenning saw that John Cooper would not sell his bullocks he engaged him in conversation and later accused him of saying, "How should he pray, if God would not take away Queen Mary that then he should wish that the devil would take her away."

He was charged before Sir Henry Doiel, by Fenning. He was taken before his knight by Master Timperley of Hintlesham and the constable Grimwood, of Lawshall. John Cooper denied that he ever spoke these words. He was then sent to Bury St. Edmunds to appear before Sir Clement Higham. This lawyer was the last Roman Catholic Speaker of the House of Commons and noted for his cruelty. He presided at the trial of that godly martyr Alice Driver, she was burnt at the stake in Ipswich on November 4, 1558. At her trial Sir Clement Higham ordered her ears to be cut off for a remark she made! John Cooper had no mercy from this cruel judge and was condemned as a traitor and

suffered the dread penalty for that offense. All his goods were confiscated, his wife and family left with only the clothes they wore. The real cause of his death was that he was regarded as a heretic, a Protestant.

The Cost of our Protestant Faith and Freedom was Very Great.

Today as evangelicals make peace with Rome, they neglect the testimony of history and the clear teaching of the Bible and forfeit their Gospel heritage.
