

MARGARET LACHLISON (MACLACHLAN) AND MARGARET WILSON.¹

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ONE of the most affecting narratives of the times of persecution circles round the name of Margaret Wilson, a young girl who sealed the principles she held by laying down her life. The odium of the cruel deed was so keenly felt by the admirers of the persecutors, that Sheriff Napier, in his Case for the Crown, did his utmost to prove that no such event as the Solway Firth drowning ever happened except in Covenanting, literature! He did not deny that Margaret Wilson and her aged companion, Margaret MacLachlan or Lachlison, were condemned to die, but maintained that they had been reprieved. Fortunately, the Sheriff found in Dr. Archibald Stewart, of Glasserton, a foeman worthy of his steel.

In his *History Vindicated*, and in Dr. King Hewison's *Covenanters*, recently published, there are irrefragable proofs of the dire tragedy enacted on the Solway sands. It has been asserted, in defence of the persecutors, that Margaret Lachlison petitioned the Council, and that a reprieve had been granted. This petition may be read in the Register House, Edinburgh, but the very terms in which it is couched bear evidence that it was more the kindly act of sympathising friends than that of the intrepid woman who was soon to lay down her life for the truths she held dear.

Dr. Smellie points out that the reprieve leaves a blank where we should expect the date on which the days of grace were to expire, and it discharges the Magistrates of Edinburgh, and not the Bailies of Wigtown, from carrying out the sentence pronounced. The women, however, refused to take the Abjuration Oath, and there is abundant evidence to show that they met their death at the hands of their persecutors.

Margaret Lachlison was the widow of John Milliken, carpenter, a tenant in the parish of Kirkinner, Galloway. In her petition to the Privy Council, she says that she is "about the age of threescore [and] ten years," though on her gravestone in the churchyard of Wigtown her age is given as sixty-three years. She lived a quiet life, but superior," says Anderson, "to most women of her station in religious

¹ This sketch, now somewhat altered, appeared in the *Protestant Woman*

knowledge; blameless in her deportment; and a pattern of virtue and piety." But these virtues did not appeal to the ruling powers in Scotland at this time. Margaret Lachlison had been guilty of absenting herself from the services of the curate, and she had attended the services of the outed ministers. She had also given shelter to some of the persecuted. In the eyes of those in power this conduct was considered highly reprehensible and criminal, and the strong hand of the law arrested all further attentions that this good woman might be inclined to show to her persecuted countrymen.

While engaged at family worship on the Lord's Day in her own house she was apprehended and carried to prison, where" she lay for a long time," says Anderson, "and was treated with great harshness, not being allowed a fire to warm her, nor a bed upon which to lie, nor even an adequate supply of food to satisfy the cravings of nature."

When Margaret Lachlison and Margaret Wilson were apprehended, they were asked to take the Abjuration Oath. This was an Oath abjuring the manifesto published by the Cameronians, entitled The Apologetic Declaration and admonitory Vindication of the True Presbyterians of the Church of Scotland, especially anent Intelligencers and Informers. The Cameronians in this manifesto gave expression to their adherence to their renunciation of Charles; they also warn all who may give information against them that they shall punish them according to their power and the degree of the offence committed. "This step," says Dr. MacCrie, "we do not undertake to vindicate."

At the same time, it is impossible to condemn them with great severity, when we reflect that they were cast out of the protection of law, driven out of the pale of society, and hunted like wild beasts in the woods and on the mountains, to which they had fled for shelter" (*Review of the Tales of My Landlord*).

When asked to take this Oath, Margaret Lachlison, Margaret Wilson, and her young sister, Agnes, refused to do so. Margaret Wilson was the daughter of Gilbert Wilson, a farmer. Both Gilbert Wilson and his wife were exemplary in their attentions to the High Church Episcopacy advocated by the powers that were. But, strange to say, their children - Margaret, who was eighteen, Thomas, who was sixteen, and Agnes, who was in her fourteenth year-refused to adopt the

religious faith of their parents, and cast in their lot with the persecuted Covenanters.

The strong pressure of the persecutors was brought to bear on Gilbert Wilson's home, until at last his children were outlawed and had to flee to the mountains. Such an existence must have told severely on the young people, and in the end: Margaret and Agnes ventured to steal to their father's home. They were soon discovered and cast into prison. After enduring imprisonment for six or seven weeks they were summoned before their judges and charged with the guilt of Bothwell. Bridge and Airsmoss. Needless to say, these young girls had no part or lot in these conflicts with the Royal troops.

But they were found guilty, and, along with Margaret Lachlison, they were sentenced to be "ty'd to palisades fixed in the sand, within the floodmark, and there to stand till the flood overflowed them and drowned them." Gilbert Wilson, well-nigh distracted with the cruel fate awaiting his children, made every effort to get the sentence revoked, but it was only with difficulty that he succeeded in saving the life of his thirteen-year-old daughter. He had to go to Edinburgh to plead for her and pay a sum of one hundred pounds sterling.

On the 11th of May, Margaret Lachlison and her companion were led out of their prison to die on the Solway sands. The officials who were entrusted with the cruel deed drove two stakes into the sand - one being further out towards the sea than the other. To the former Margaret Lachlison was fastened, in the hope that the dying struggles of the aged martyr might weaken the resolution of the brave young girl as the remorseless waves rolled on. The fate of the sufferers for conscience' sake appealed powerfully to the people gathered on the banks, and every effort was made to win them from their stern resolution to die rather than disown what they believed to be the truth of God.

As the waters of the Solway Firth came on and did their pitiless work, some of the bystanders directed Margaret's attention to her aged companion, asking at the same time what she thought of her now. "What do I see," came the reply, "but Christ wrestling there? Think ye that we are the sufferers? No, it is Christ in us; for He sends none a warfare on their own charges." Then she opened her Bible and read aloud the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. And as she read those deeply comforting words with the light of eternity already shining upon the holy

page, how unspeakably precious they must have been! "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: For Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord."

Then she sang the 25th Psalm in the Scottish metrical version, beginning at the 7th verse:

My sins and faults of youth
Do Thou, O Lord, forget;
After Thy mercy think on me,
And for Thy goodness great.

Ere the end came they pulled her out of the water, and, waiting until she was able to speak, they asked her if she would pray for King James. "I wish the salvation of all," she replied, "and the damnation of none." "Dear Margaret," pled one of the onlookers, "say 'God save the King.'" "God save him if He will," she replied, "for it is his salvation I desire." Eagerly her friends caught the words as a passport to the fleeting life of time. "She has said it! She has said it!" they cried.

But Major Winram was not the man to be robbed so easily of his prey. He offered to administer the Oath of Abjuration to her. By this Oath the National Covenant and Solemn League and Covenant were declared to be unlawful. As a true Covenanter Margaret resolutely refused to take the Oath. There was no wavering; that fair young life had been laid on the altar, consecrated to Christ, and she would not take it back. "Let me go," she said, "I am one of Christ's children." They plunged her into the unfeeling waters, and the battle so nobly fought ended in triumph for the young witness of Christ. To appropriate Carlyle's words as applied by him to the closing scene in Oliver Cromwell's career: -" Here is a life-battle right nobly done. Seest thou not,

The storm is changed into a calm,
At His command and will;

So that the waves which raged before
Now quiet are and still!
Then are they glad because at rest
And quiet now they be
So to the haven He them brings
Which they desire to see.”

- (*Scottish Metrical Psalms cvii. 29.*)

In Wigtown Churchyard a tombstone tells the story of the tragedy in the rude but graphic couplet:

“Within the sea, ty'd to a stake,
She suffered for Christ Jesus' sake.”

It was the terrible “Killing Times,” but the judgments of the Lord slumbered not, and already, in the High Court of Heaven, the decree had gone forth that King James would be a fugitive and that he would have to leave his royal throne to another. To quote the words of Mrs. Menteath, in her *Lays of the Kirk and Covenant*, in reference to the waves that drowned the Wigtown Martyrs:

“They will not cease, they will not sleep, those voices of the wave,
Forever, ever whispering, above the martyr's grave;
'Tis heard at night, 'tis heard at noon, the same low wailing song,
In murmur loud, in cadence low, 'How long, O Lord - how long?
A cry against thee from the tide! O tyrant, banned of Heaven.
It meets the blood-voice of the earth - and answer shall be given,
A little while, the cup fills fast, it overflows for thee,
And thine extremity shall prove the vengeance of the sea.”

Three years afterwards King James fled, and William Prince of Orange, landing at Torquay, was proclaimed King, with his consort as Queen, and the Killing Times were at an end.