

Be Thou Faithful Unto Death



In Memory of a True Child of Christ

Dean John Finlay

1842 - 1921

Brutally Murdered for his Protestant Faith

by

50 Sinn Feiners

By the spring of 1921, in Ireland a vicious civil war was raging. Ambush and cowardly attacks on isolated targets were the main tactics employed by IRA factions. Under the dubious scheme of rooting out loyalist supporters, rebel forces had started to target Protestants in rural areas.

They murdered and burned the homes of a large number in the hope of driving those of the Reformed Faith from Ireland. One of the worst on record at this time was the brutal murder of a retired Church of Ireland clergyman; Dean John Finlay.

On the 12th June 1921, the slight and inoffensive octogenarian was the target of "50 armed Sinn Feiners". Speaking about the attack in the House of Commons, the Chief Secretary of Ireland, Sir Hamar Greenwood, said it was "a diabolical outrage". In a time of daily murder, what brought the expression of such strong sentiments?

Noted historical author Marcus Tanner, gives this account of the Dean's murder: -

"There was nothing chivalrous about the murder on 12th June of John Finlay, a retired Church of Ireland Dean at Bawnboy, County Cavan. Some IRA soldiers masquerading as British officers called at the deanery and were entertained to supper. While the Dean chatted, indiscreetly the soldiers smiled and nodded. Then they dragged him from the dinner table and slashed his throat on the lawn".

On the return of the Dean's wife who had been sent to a neighbour's house on the assailants' arrival, she found her murdered husband's body in front of their blazing home. Lord Carson, speaking of the murder said the "case of the Very Rev. John Finlay is one of the most pathetic out of all the horrible crimes that have been committed during the last two or three years in Ireland". The murder of this

innocent and inoffensive man, just because of his religion, caused a deep sense of hurt in Cavan's Protestant community. One of his close friends and a neighbour of the Dean wrote to the Spectator:-

"He was not only an earnest Churchman, but a man of broad and tolerant views, a true Christian, of whom it might well be said that his heart was as wide as the Church of Christ. To these high qualities were added a youthfulness and buoyancy of spirit and a sense of humour which made him a delightful friend and neighbour and a welcome guest wherever he went. It would be difficult indeed to believe that a man of so simple and kindly a nature and of so much charm of manner to all alike, could ever have made an enemy, or to find any excuse for the crime which must remain forever a blot on the fair fame of Ireland".

Dean John Finlay was a martyr of Jesus Christ whose blood was shed simply because of his Faith. It stands as a testament against those who rejected Christ at the time of his murder and today.

Revelation 16 verses 5 - 7

And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy. And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.

Revelation 17

Our Fathers knew thee, Rome of old,
And evil is thy fame;
Thy fond embrace, the galling chain;
Thy kiss, the blazing flame.

Thy blessing, fierce anathema;
Thy honeyed words, deceit;
Thy worship, base idolatry;
Thy sacrament, a cheat.

The Mystery of Wickedness,
Right surely is thy name.
The Harlot in the Bride's attire,
As all thy ways proclaim.

No peace with Rome shall be our cry,
While Rome abides the same;
We'll let her know that Protestants
Will not disgrace their name.

Our martyred Fathers' dying words
As at the stake they stood
Bid us resist thee to the end,
Words written in their blood.

Long hast thou sat in Queen's attire,
Of purple, pearls and gold;
O soon shalt thou be stripped of all—
Thrown down be thy stronghold.

Thy sentence dread is now pronounced,
Soon shalt thou pass away.
O soon shall earth have rest and peace—
Good Lord, haste Thou that day.

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