

THE CONFESSION AND EXECUTION OF Letitia Wigington of Rat

Letitia Wigington

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THE CONFESSION AND EXECUTION OF Letitia Wigington of Ratclif, who suffered at TYBURN, on Fryday the 9 h of this instant September, 1681, written by her own hand in the Goal of Newgate two days before her death, being Condemned for whipping her Apprentice Girl to Death.

n We are fully satisfied, that the following Paper was written by this unhappy womans own hand, a while before her Death, and though at her Tryal for this horrid fact, the Evidence against her, was full, clear and undeniable, yea which is more, though she was then so ingenious to confess her self really guilty thereof, having lain so many months in Newgate, we have very great reason to judg she has been too well acquainted with that cursed crew of Popish Priests and Jesuites, who it is to feared have debauched her with their own damnable Principles, whereby they have perswaded her to deny what she before had so full confessed, which she does in the very words of those Jesuites who lately deservedly suffered for Treason against his Majesty, etc. who though they were Tried and condemned (as well well as her self) upon the clearest Evidence imaginable, yet Atheistically even with their last Breath affirmed, That they were as innocent as the Child newborn.

nMicah the 7th Chapt and 8 9 Verses.

nRejoyce not against me, O mine Enemy : when I fall, I shall arise, when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a Light unto me.

nI will bear the Indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and excuse judgment for me : he will bring me forth to the Light, and I shall behold his Righteousness.

nThis place of Scripture I made choice of, as being somewhat pertinent to the business, and troubles and afflictions that are inflicted on me, wherefore upon my bended Knees I humbly desire all you that have been my loving Neighbours and Friends, and all other good Christians, that have heard of this horrid and dreadful misfortune that hath befallen me, and you that shall read these doleful Lines, let pity move your hearts to read them, and you that have had any hand in taking away my Life wrongfully, I pray God forgive you all, but let me admonish you not to abuse the dead by giving out your cruel speeches by me, as you have done in my Life time (that never did you any harm) first for Imprison me wrongfully, and that not satisfying, but to prompt on one, that was my Apprentice Rebecca Clifford by name, who was not full 12 years of age, to swear against me, she not being sensible of the danger of taking a false Oath, so that you have used me at your pleasure. I speak to you all, Rich and Poor, great and small, that have any hand in my Death whoever you are, for you cannot, be ignorant of the great evil you have done me, (a poor friendless Creature) for you have made it your business to take away my life, who am as innocent as concerning the Murder for which I suffer as the Child unborn: but why should I reflect

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upon my Innocence and the abuse put upon on me who am a person full of sin and corruption, when our blessed Saviour who knew no sin, neither was Guilt found in him, and yet he was buffeted and spit on and falsly accused and crucified between two Thieves, and yet he took it patiently, and was led as a Lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her Shearer is dumb, so opened he not his mouth, but took the Cup of his Father's Indignation with chearfulness and all this for the sins of poor lost Man, and therefore why should I think it a burden to take his Yoke upon me which is made to me both easie and light, oh no, for though I were to be torn Limb from Limb, or to be burned in flames, I could chearfully undergo it for meet my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, for this is my comfort, in all my troubles that though you kill my Body, you cannot touch my precious and immortal Soul, that is bound up in the bundle of Life, and I thank my God, that I have a good assurance of everlasting happiness in another world, though I suffer a shameful and ignominious Death here, there is laid up for me a Crown of Glory which fadeth not away eternally in the Heavens, and if this be the way that my dear Redeemer hath ordained for me to obtain it, welcome, yea thrice welcome is that Rope which is to put a period to all my miseries and oppressions which have been very numerous and great, for I have been kept a prisoner now 8 Months, where I have lain upon the hard boards having nothing but bread and water, and no more than a penny-Loaf a day neither; and my Flesh black and blew with lying upon the boards for want of a Bed, and I can say with that blessed Man of old (David) I have watered the boards as I laid on with bitter Tears for my manifold sins and wickedness. For though the Lord did suffer Man to be so cruel to me, it was my sins was the cause that the Lord laid this Yoke upon me, but our Saviour hath said, Come unto me all you that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest, which promise I can with comfort say, hath been made good to me, for though my body hath wanted Food and suffered great hardships, yet my Soul hath been fed with the bread of Heaven, for though I am here confined amongst a company of poor blind ignorant and gross sinners that have not the fear of God before their eyes, yet as the Bee sucks honny out of the worst of herbs and flowers, so I though hearing their horrid cursing and swearing, do the more though my self at the Lords Feet with a true and faithful zeal in serving him night and day, with fervent Prayers, and never left wrestling with God, and crying with bitter Tears to the Lord, till I found his lively Faith springing in my Soul. I never left lying prostrated at the Lords Feet, begging Mercy for my poor Soul till I found some assurances of his Love and favour, and now I doubt not but that when the thred of my Life shall be cut off, my Soul will be received into that Glory which no Tongue can express, neither hath it entered into the heart of Man to conceive. The Lord hath wrought great works on me, and hath been very merciful to me, but if my Lord and Saviour had been so cruel as Men and Women have been to me, I had been ere this time burning in the Flames of Hell; wherefore I do here humbly beseech and exhort all that shall read this, that you serve the Lord with ferventness of Spirit, and cease not day nor night to power out your prayes to him, that he will subdue your sins in you and to ingraft his Grace in your hearts, the Lord hath many ways to bring them that are his, home to himself: and the Lord is minded this way to bring me to the him as to let my person to suffer this shameful Death, and to be a Spectacle to the World and be scandalized in a very gross manner, but seeing it is the good Will and Pleasure of my Redeemer, to take me to himself this way, I take it as well as though I dyed in my Bed, and imbrace it with the more Joy, considering the great Conflict my dear Saviour suffered for me, O then, how sweet is the Death to me. I have lain in the horrid place ever since Christmas last, in which time I have not ceased day nor night to cry unto the Lord, for mercy on my poor Soul, and crying as the Jaylor did once to Paul and Silas, What shall I do to be saved, I thought when I was at Liberty that I did serve the Lord well in my Family, but now I find I was nothing but a filthy bag of Corruption, and came very short of any good performances, wherefore I do upon my bended Knees, and with floods of Tears as being the last request of a dying woman, humbly beseech all Masters and Mistresses of Families (that shall read this, that you will be careful and diligent in performing Family duties, and to pray with ferventness amongst them that are under your care and tuition knowing that if through your neglect any of them be lost, the Lord will require them at your hands.

nI do think it my duty (and I doubt not but it will be matter of satisfaction to some who are my friends) to declare unto them the whole circumstance of the thing for which I am to suffer, and I do here in the presence of Almighty God, who knows the secrets of all hearts (and know my innocence) declare nothing but the real truth, which is as follows, viz.

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nAs for this John Sadler, I never saw him in all my Life, but a Week before he came to Lodge at my House, and that was at one Ann Thornby's Home, and she told me, That he was a very Civil Man, and his Wife a very Honest Woman, and she asked me. Whether they should Lodge at my House? And I poor Creature, with the advice of Elisabeth Holton, (who was Aunt to the Girl that was Murdered by this unfortunate Lodger John Sadler,) took them to Lodge in my House, by reason I had a great Charge, and an unkind Husband, who left his Ship and Living and I having three small Children to keep, poor silly Woman thought that I might maintain them the better with the Monny, that I should have for their Lodging, paying me but one shilling a Week, as to buy my Dear Babes bread, and to feed my two Apprentices as never got me half their Bread; but with one groat more than the shilling found us all Bread. This John Sadler was a Sea man, and he and a Water-man, was a runner of Goods, and he used to have hot Victuals every day, and with dressing of my Victuals and some small releif of them by their Victuals. made me let them Lodge at my house: but I call God to be my witness, that I did not know, but that they were Man and Wife, but as for that Sin they were Guilty of it, and not I, but since I was imprisoned here in this horrid place, I heard that by John Sadlers Sister, that they were not Man and Wife, but that lyes at their own Door, therefore people have been very cruel to me in giving our such gross Lies of me. as to say, that I lay with John Sadler, and that I was a VVhore to other before: and upon no other grounds, but only by reason I did plead my Belly, which thing I was advised to, after I came into this place, that so I might save my Life. But do here in the presence of Almighty God declare, that I was never in all my Life Guilty of the horrid Sins of Adultery or Fornication, for I ever all my Life, thought that if I should be Guilty of them sins, that I should be Damned to all Eternity, I do not speak this to justifie my self out of a Vain-glorious way, for I do confess, that I have been a great Sinner, but as for that Sin I did ever abhor it in all my Life, and should I have slandered any person in that manner, I should have feared that the Lord would have shown some heavy Judgment upon me immediately, besides the woe that is pronounced against Liers and Slanderers: and as for the Girl that Swore against me, I wish one would reason the Case with her to know whether she thinks that I am Guilty when I am Dead and gone, for she knows that John Sadler did this Evil, and hath given an account for his Sins, I came up when he was beating the Girl and asked him, What he did? and she knows that when the Girl was Dead, he would have condescended to have me Bury the Girl, and he would have bought a Crape Mourning Suit and a Coffin, he said this to me, and Mrs. Thornby, I told him No, as for what he had done, I knew not, but I would have him go before a Justice to Answer what he had done; upon these Words, he turned to Ann Thornby, and the Woman who pretended she was Sadlers Wife, for she was by all the time, that this Man did the Murder, and then I sent the Girl to one Mr. Robert Acton to call him, to come and bring other Neighbours to carry this Man before a Justice, but Mrs. Acton sent one Thomas Miliner his Man, while this Man and the Girl was coming, this Ann Thornby came and told me, that her Mother and her Partner which were the Searchers, would yield to give it in that the Girl did dye a Natural Death, but I said that I would not be Guilty of that for all the World, then this Ann Thornby, asked me, Where the Girl was gone, I said, to call Mr. Acton then said she let me out, for I will not see him, whereupon I being almost half Distracted, I opened the Door a little, for fear John Sadler should make his escape; but this Ann Thornby clapped her Foot against the Door and ran away, and bid him run for his Life, with that I ran and caught him by the Hair, and then the Girl and Thomas Milliner came and found me strugling with him, and I told this young Man all that had hapned to me; and this John Sadler, told him how that I was clear, and how that he would perswade me to let him Bury it, but I said no, I would have him before a Justice, then came the Woman his Wife, and Ann Thornby's Mother, and would fain have him be gone away with them; but I said he should not stir till he had went before a Justice, with with that he said, he would go up Stairs and fetch his Gloves and he went up and Leapt to that the Window, but I seeing the lower Window darkened, I look up and sow him leap out at the Window, and I run out and Cryed out, Murder, Murder, and Thieves after him, Thomas Milliner,, and Ann Thornby, and the Woman as Swore to me, that John Sadler was her Husband, and Ann Thornby's Mother were by when this John Sadler made his escape; and when I came in from crying out Murder and Theives after him, I thought to have kept her, but when I came in they were all gone, and this way I am cheated of my Life, for the Man ran a private way up a place which is in Ratcliff called the Orchard, and being Christmassday towarhs the Evening and people were not abroad in the Streets, and I went to Mr. Actons, and to Mrs. Mills, and to Mr. Eltons the Apothecary, and made my complaint, and from thence to the Girls Aunt to tell her what was befallen me, and that I had not taken these Lodgers in, but that she perswaded me to let them Lodge in my House. But they were dear Lodgers to me and mine, and to the Girl that is deceased, and when I was at Elisabeth Holtons House, which is the Girls Aunt,

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one Cardom a Bailiff, one as I think a little fears the Lord, caused me to be taken and brought to this horrid place, or else I had been an Evidence against John Sadler, and this Girl which Swore against me, Rebecka Clifford, Cryed by me and said, She knew that I was innocent from the Fact for which I now dye, to the World, but shall Live in the Lord for ever, this is the whole Truth and the last Words of a dying Woman, who truly and senerely feares the Lord of Heaven and Earth, and I could heartily wish I were as free from Committing of all other Sins, as I am of that Murder, Adultery and Fornication or Swearing, four things which I was never guilty of in my Life, though I must confess I have been a great Sinner, but I am assured,, that they are washed away in the Blood of that Imaculate Lamb, which was shed to take away the Sins of all them that truly sinsereely repent, but the Lord suffered this great affliction to fall on me to draw me nearer to himself, for whom the Lord loveth he Chastiseth, even as a Father the Son in whom he delighteth, I desire all good Christians to Judge Charitably of this my Speech, and not to think that I Pen this to justifie myself, but I desire to condemn my self, that I may be Justified by my dear Redeemer: but I do this to satisfy all that are my Friends, that I dye in the faith and fear of my Creator and Redeemer, who shall change my vile body, that it may be like his glorious Body, and one chief Reason of my penning this, is to satisfy my dear Husband, whom I ever lover dearer then any thing in this World, but when he heard, that I pleaded my Belly, he was incenced against me by wicked people, who incensed him, that I was disloyal to him, and that scandal which was raised by them hindered him from coming to me, though I had not seen him in almost two years, and unkind Friends at Deal, kept the Letter from him which I sent, so that my Life as to this World was lost through the Treachery of unkind Friends, but as to the eternal State never more sure then now; my Husband did send up some Mony about Whitsuntide last to get my Reprieve, but but being informed that I was with Child, ordered it back again, which was occasioned by the Malice of wicked people, who did not care what scandals they did raise upon me, I pray God forgive them, and lay not this Sin to their charge, and as for the Girl that swore against me and was the cause of my dying this shameful Death, though as innocent as the Child unborn, I pray God to forgive her, and let not my innocent Blood be required at her hands, though she hath been the cause of all this, my great Tryal and afflictions, and without the great mercy of God, the ruins of my three poor Children, who I am afraid will be bound to curse her, but the Lord hath promised to be a Father to the Fatherless and to fee the need and oppressed to have right, and as for them whoever they were that did make Ballads and Books upon me after I was brought to Newgate; and raised great scandal and ignominy, and added grief to my Afflictions, I pray God forgive them all, and my dear Husband for giving Credit to their slanderous Reports, and not to be so kind as to come and know the Truth of the woe matter, I do here in the presence of Almighty God declare, that I dye as innocent of the Crime for which my Body suffers, as the Child yet unborn, and I can truly say, that I am in Charity with all the World, and do conclude with that excellent prayer of the Littany. That it may please the to forgive my enemies persecutors and Slanderers, and to turn their Hearts; I beseech thee to hear us good Lord.

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