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**Charles Southwell.
A Protest and a Vindication**

(Concluded from page 571)
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Southwell died, apparently of consumption, at the age of forty-six; he was one of those restless, eager, enthusiastic, impetuous artist-types that can do anything but make money, and can achieve anything but personal success. G.J. Holyoake began his public life as "curate" to Southwell; and this is how he speaks of his dead friend: —

Mr. Southwell had also a generous nature, which had no meanness and no pettiness in it. The poor envyings and little jealousies which often exist among leaders, he was very little troubled with. Under the misinformation of others he had a spasm now and then, but a frank explanation was always possible to him, and always successful. He was too generous to be envious in affection, and he was too strong to be envious upon necessity. (*Reasoner*, December 2, 1860.)

Holyoake *knew* Southwell intimately, as we have said before; Mr. Robertson was not born for several years after his death. It may be painful to say these things; but, if we can help it, Southwell's memory shall be rescued from undeserved and misinformed obloquy. Mr. Robertson's references to Southwell are ethically indefensible, appearing as they do in a "definitive" and considered History. Mr. McCabe's are even worse; as we shall proceed to show. Before we quote, however, we will state our view that Mr. Robertson does not appear to have troubled himself overmuch to ascertain the facts about this "imperfectly white sheep," or to be over-deeply read in his works. Most of them he does not mention. We cannot help wondering which, if any, he has read or even seen. Now for Mr. McCabe : —

He [*i.e.*, Holyoake] had known Southwell at Birmingham, but his pathetic and sincere references to the "martyr" are undone by the papers before me. Friends were subscribing a pound a week for the prisoner. In the caterer's manuscript-list of "necessaries" supplied, I find about four shillings' worth of cigars a month, much bear's grease, some silk handkerchiefs, and a generous supply of bottled stout. (*Life of Holyoake* (1908), i, 58.)

Here is Mr. McCabe, successful author (and he was successful, even in 1908), too careful and too timid to run any risks himself, grudging a pound a week to a man in quod for "blasphemy," prying into the past for evidence against him, and denying his claim to martyrdom because his friends provided him with a few cigars and a shillings worth of hair-oil. It seems to us to be mean to the limit, this ungenerous disparagement of an heroic and original pioneer. Mr. McCabe might realize that he is enabled to "blaspheme" safely as he will, both here and in the States, just because Southwell had the pluck to elect to go to prison, and the wit to know the importance of his sacrifice.

We will please ourselves by quoting, as antidote to our anti-Southwell citations, from Charles himself; our quotation is from the pamphlet *A Plain Answer to the Query, Ought there to be a Law against Blasphemy?* (1842):—

The intrepid Richard Carlile published the *Age of Reason* in spite of power, and though the clergy cast him into prison, they increased, not stopped the sale. That the *Oracle of Reason* will share the same fate should the clergy and magistracy of Bristol insist upon providing me *lodgement*—I doubt not. Richard Carlile lay nine years in prison rather than yield his right to publish his opinions. A noble, a great example of persevering endurance, such as the world's annals can scarcely parallel, nor do I hesitate to affirm that, by such voluntary suffering, he has done more for liberty, more for the freedom of the press than any man of the present age. The mushroom talking reformers of these times, who carp and cavil at him, remind one of

"The towering eagle, who, in his pride of place,
Was, by a mousing owl, hawked at and killed."

He furnished the world a striking example, and a cheering one, of what even one cool, talented, determined head can effect. To him we owe the theological works of Thomas Paine—I do not think any other man in England would have had the sense and nerve to print the *Age of Reason*, in the very teeth of the clergy. Alone he did it, and like an eagle in a dove-cot fluttered the bigots.

There, from this “unbalanced and unstable young man,” are sparks of the true Promethean fire. Southwell here towers above the jog-trotting, mediocre, respectable stylists as an eagle;—to borrow from his own quotation—soars above an owl. How utterly mean and pettifogging sound the strictures of his “respectable” critics against his own generous and unmeasured praise of the superb and heroic Richard Carlile.

Let us be honest. It is not the self-conscious prose-merchants, the comfortable arm-chair-settlers, who win us our freedom. It is the rude, uncomfortable, fiery Bohemians, the tactless, unbalanced chaps who either go to quod or just escape going; Richard Carlile, Robert Taylor, Charles Southwell, Thomas Patterson, George Jacob Holyoake, Charles Bradlaugh, George William Foote, Joseph William Gott; all nineteenth century heroes; only two of whose portraits appear in Mr. Robertson’s *History of Freethought in the Nineteenth Century*.

Poor Southwell! His luck is certainly out. When he was alive Christians imprisoned him for “Blasphemy”; now that he is dead superfine Freethinkers prove their gentility and gentlemanliness by kicking his corpse, although it was he and his like who made their lives easy—and even possible—for them. The erudite Mr. Robertson and the moral Mr. McCabe agree in deploring the vulgarity and tactlessness of the pioneers who cleared the way wherein they themselves walk so comfortably, and so honourably. We do not find the spectacle an inspiring one; and we are so rude and tactless as publicly to say so; hence this attempt to rescue Southwell’s all but friendless memory from the strictures of the over-punctilious.

Victor B. Neuburg