

# Voices of the English Reformation

*A Sourcebook*

*Edited by*  
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PENN

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#### D. The Hairbreadth Escape and Exile of the Duchess of Suffolk (1576)

Foxe added this rousing story about Catherine Brandon (née Willoughby, 1520–80), widow of Charles Brandon, duke of Suffolk, to the 1576 edition of the *Book of Martyrs*. Although she shared Queen Mary's Spanish descent, the Duchess Dowager was a zealous Protestant who belonged to Catherine Parr's pietistic circle and patronized Hugh Latimer and other reformers (see 2.3, 6.5.B, 7.5.C). According to Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, who spent Edward VI's reign in prison, she once travestied the Roman rite by dressing a dog in episcopal vestments, calling it by his name, and having it carried about in a mock religious procession. As lord chancellor under Mary I, the bishop alludes to Protestant attacks upon him as the "Winchester Wolf" who preyed upon Protestant "lambs" (see Figure 14).

This sensational story recounts how the duchess flees across the English Channel in the middle of winter with her infant daughter and an unlikely retinue that includes her fool, a gentlewoman, a cook, a laundress, a horse rider, a joiner, and a brewer. After reuniting with Richard Bertie, her second husband, they endure many hairbreadth escapes during an odyssey that passes across the Low Countries and through Germany to safe haven in Poland, where they receive protection from Baron Johannes à Lasco, who had been a prominent immigrant to London during Edward VI's reign. This romance-like narrative is filled with providential interventions that precede a "happy ending" in which Bertie becomes a Polish earl.

SOURCE: *STC* 22224, pp. 1971–73.

EDITION: Foxe 2000.

Stephen Gardiner, bishop of Winchester, surmising the Lady Catherine, Baroness Willoughby de Eresby, and Duchess Dowager of Suffolk, to be one of his ancient enemies, because he knew he had deserved no better of her, devised in the holy time of the first Lent in Queen Mary's reign a holy practice of revenge, first by touching her in the person of her husband, Master Richard Bertie, Esquire. . . .

[When Gardiner summoned Bertie for interrogation, he resisted the bishop's demand for repayment of a sizable debt already paid during the reign of Edward VI.]

"If it be true that you say," quoth the bishop, "I will show you favor. But of another thing, Master Bertie, I will admonish you, as meaning you well. I hear evil of your religion, yet I hardly can think evil of you, whose mother I know to be as godly and Catholic as any within this land, yourself brought up with a master whose education, if I should disallow, I might be charged as author of his error. Besides, partly I know you myself and understand of my friends enough to make me your friend; wherefore, I will not doubt of



Figure 14. *The* and Drawings, Stephen Gardiner who slaughters *wolf* as jargon beneath "sheep" grotesque parod Edmund Bonno the most famous (see 6.5.B and I transubstantiated ever made perfect that "now I fee

you, but I pray you if I may ask the question of my lady, your wife. Is she now as ready to set up the Mass as she was lately to pull it down, when she caused in her progress<sup>1</sup> a dog in a rochet to be carried and called by my name, or doth she think her lambs now safe enough, which said to me when I vailed my bonnet<sup>2</sup> to her out of my chamber window in the Tower, that it was merry with the lambs now the wolf was shut up? Another time my lord, her husband,<sup>3</sup> having invited me and diverse ladies to dinner, desired every lady to choose him whom she loved best and so place themselves. My lady, your wife, taking me by the hand for that my lord would not have her to take himself, said that, for so much as she could not sit down with my lord, whom she loved best, she had chosen me, whom she loved worst."

"Of the device of the dog," quoth Master Bertie, "she was neither the author nor the allower. The words, though in that season they sounded bitter to your lordship, yet if it should please you without offense to know the cause, I am sure the one will purge the other. As touching setting up of Mass, which she learned not only by strong persuasions of diverse excellent learned men but by universal consent and order whole six years past inwardly to abhor, if she should outwardly allow, she should both to Christ show herself a false Christian and to her prince a masking<sup>4</sup> subject. You know, my lord, one by judgement reformed is more worth than a thousand transformed temporizers. To force a confession of religion by mouth, contrary to that in the heart, worketh damnation where salvation is pretended."

"Yea, marry," quoth the bishop, "that deliberation would do well if she never required to come from an old religion to a new. But now she is to return from a new to an ancient religion, wherein, when she made me her gossip,<sup>5</sup> she was as earnest as any."

"For that, my lord," said Master Bertie, "not long since she answered a friend of hers, using your lordship's speech, that religion went not by age but by truth, and therefore she was to be turned by persuasion and not by commandment."

"I pray you," quoth the bishop, "think you it possible to persuade her?"

"Yea, verily," said Master Bertie, "with the truth, for she is reasonable enough."

The bishop, thereunto replying, said, "It will be a marvelous grief to the Prince of Spain<sup>6</sup> and to all the nobility that shall come with him when they shall find but two noble personages of the Spanish race within this land, the queen and my lady, your wife, and one of them gone from the faith."

[Government officials permitted Bertie to travel to the Continent, but the duchess remained in England at risk of death for heresy.]

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year of her reign, leaving the duchess behind, who, by agreement and consent betwixt her and her husband, followed, taking barge at Lyon Quay very early in the morning on the first day of January next ensuing, not without some peril.

There was none of those that went with her made privy to her going till the instant but one old gentleman called Master Robert Cranwell, whom Master Bertie had specially provided for that purpose. She took with her her daughter, an infant of one year, and the meanest of her servants, for she doubted the best would not adventure that fortune with her. They were in number four men: one a Greek born, which was a rider of horses; another a joiner; the third a brewer; the fourth a fool; one of the kitchen; one gentlewoman; and a laundress.

As she departed her house, called the Barbican,<sup>7</sup> betwixt four and five of the clock in the morning with her company and baggage, one Atkinson, a herald, keeper of her house, hearing noise about the house, rose and came out with a torch in his hand as she was yet issuing out of the gate. Where-with, being amazed, she was forced to leave a mail<sup>8</sup> with necessaries for her young daughter and a milk pot with milk in the same gatehouse, commanding all her servants to speed them away before to Lyon Quay, and, taking with her only the two women and her child, so soon as she was forth of her own house, perceiving the herald to follow, she stepped in at Charterhouse hard by. The herald, coming out of the duchess' house and seeing nobody stirring, not assured, though by the mail suspecting, that she was departed, returned in, and while he stayed ransacking parcels left in the mail, the duchess issued into the street and proceeded in her journey, knowing the place only by name where she should take her boat, but not the way thither, nor none with her. Likewise her servants, having divided themselves, none but one knew the way to the said quay.

So she, appareled like a mean merchant's wife, and the rest like mean servants, walking in the streets unknown, she took the way that led to Finsbury Field, and the others walked the city streets as they lay open before them till, by chance more than discretion, they met all suddenly together a little within Moorgate, from whence they passed directly to Lyon Quay and there took barge in a morning so misty that the steersman was loath to launch out, but that they urged him. So soon as the day permitted, the Council<sup>9</sup> was informed of her departure, and some of them came forthwith to her house to inquire of the manner thereof and to take an inventory of her goods, besides further order devised for search and watch to apprehend and stay her.

The fame of her departure reached to Leigh, a town at the Land's End.<sup>10</sup>

... When the time came that she should take ship, being constrained to lie

that night at an inn in Leigh, where she was again almost bewrayed,<sup>11</sup> yet notwithstanding, by God's good working she escaping that hazard, at length, as the tide and wind did serve, they went aboard and, being carried twice into the seas almost to the coast of Zeeland,<sup>12</sup> by contrary wind were driven to the place from whence they came. And at the last recoil certain persons came to the shore, suspecting she was within that ship; yet, having examined one of her company that was aland for fresh achates<sup>13</sup> and finding by the simplicity of his tale only the appearance of a mean merchant's wife to be ashboard, he ceased any further search.

To be short, so soon as the duchess had landed in Brabant, she and her women were appareled like the women of Netherland with hukes,<sup>14</sup> and so she and her husband took their journey towards Cleveland,<sup>15</sup> and being arrived at a town therein called Santon, took a house there until they might further devise of some sure place where to settle themselves.

About five miles from Santon is a free town called Wesel under the said Duke of Cleves' dominion and one of the Hansetowns,<sup>16</sup> privileged with the company of the Steelyard<sup>17</sup> in London, whither diverse Walloons<sup>18</sup> were fled for religion. . . . Which practice discovered by a gentleman of that country to Master Bertie, he without further delay, taking no more than the duchess, her daughter, and two other with them, as though he meant no more but to take the air, about three of the clock in the afternoon in February, on foot, without hiring of horse or wagon for fear of disclosing his purpose, meant privily that night to get to Wesel, leaving his other family still at Santon.

After the duchess and he were one English mile from the town, there fell a mighty rain of continuance whereby a long frost and ice before congealed was thawed, which doubled more the weariness of those new lackeys. But being now on the way and overtaken with the night, they sent their two servants, which only went with them, to villages as they passed to hire some carry for their case, but none could be hired. In the meantime Master Bertie was forced to carry the child, and the duchess his cloak and rapier. At last betwixt six and seven of the clock in the dark night, they came to Wesel, and repairing to their inns for lodging and some repose after such a painful journey, found hard entertainment, for going from inn to inn, offering large money for small lodging, they were refused of all the innholders, suspecting Master Bertie to be a lance-knight<sup>19</sup> and the duchess to be his woman. The child for cold and sustenance cried pitifully; the mother wept as fast; the heavens rained as fast as the clouds could pour.

Master Bertie, destitute of all other succor of hospitality, resolved to bring the duchess to the porch of the great church in the town and so to buy coals, victuals, and straw for their miserable repose there that night, or at least

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till by God's help he might provide her better lodging. Master Bertie at that time understood not much Dutch, and by reason of evil weather and late season of the night, he could not happen upon any that could speak English, French, Italian, or Latin, till at last going toward the church porch, he heard two striplings talking Latin, to whom he approached and offered them two stivers<sup>20</sup> to bring him to some Walloon's house.

By these boys and God's good conduct he chanced at the first upon the house where Master Perusell supped that night, who had procured them the protection of the magistrates of that town. At the first knock, the goodman of the house himself came to the door and, opening it, asked Master Bertie what he was. Master Bertie said, an Englishman that sought for one Master Perusell's house. The Walloon willed Master Bertie to stay awhile, who went back and told Master Perusell that the same English gentleman of whom they had talked the same supper had sent, by likelihood, his servant to speak with him. Whereupon Master Perusell came to the door and, beholding Master Bertie, the duchess, and their child, their faces, apparels, and bodies so far from their old form, deformed with dirt, weather, and heaviness, could not speak to them, nor they to him, for tears. At length recovering themselves, they saluted one another, and so together entered the house, God knoweth full joyfully. Master Bertie changing all his apparel with the goodman, the duchess with the goodwife, and their child with the child of the house.

Within a few days after, by Master Perusell's means, they hired a very fair house in the town and did not let to show themselves what they were, in such good sort as their present condition permitted. It was by this time through the whole town what discourtesy the innholders had showed unto them at their entry, insomuch as on the Sunday following, a preacher in the pulpit openly in sharp terms rebuked that great incivility towards strangers by allegation of sundry places out of Holy Scriptures, discoursing how not only princes sometime are received in the image of private persons but angels in the shape of men<sup>21</sup> and that God of his justice would make the[m] strangers one day in another land,<sup>22</sup> to have more sense of the afflicted heart of a stranger.

The time thus passing forth, as they thought themselves thus happily settled, suddenly a watchword came from Sir John Mason, then Queen Mary's ambassador in Netherland, that my Lord Paget<sup>23</sup> had feigned an errand to the baths that ways; and whereas the Duke of Brunswick was shortly with ten ensigns to pass by Wesel for the service of the House of Osterreich<sup>24</sup> against the French king, the said duchess and her husband should be with the same charge and company intercepted.

Wherefore, to prevent the cruelties of these enemies, Master Bertie with

his wife and child departed to a place called Weinheim in High Dutchland<sup>25</sup> under the Palsgrave's<sup>26</sup> dominion, where, under his protection, they continued till their necessities began to fail them and they, almost fainting under so heavy a burden, began to fail of hope. . . .

The said duchess and her husband with their family entered the journey in April 1557 from the castle of Weinheim where they before lay towards Frankfurt. In the which their journey it were long here to describe what dangers fell by the way upon them and their whole company by reason of the landgrave's<sup>27</sup> captain, who, under a quarrel pretended for a spaniel of Master Bertie's, set upon them in the highway with his horsemen, thrusting their boarspears through the wagon where the children and women were, Master Bertie having but four horsemen with him. In the which brabble it happened the captain's horse to be slain under him.

Whereupon a rumor was sparsed<sup>28</sup> immediately through towns and villages about that the landgrave's captain should be slain by certain Walloons, which incensed the ire of the countrymen there more fiercely against Master Bertie, as afterward it proved. For as he was motioned by his wife to save himself by the swiftness of his horse and to recover<sup>29</sup> some town thereby for his rescue, he so doing was in worse case than before, for the townsmen and the captain's brother, supposing no less but that the captain had been slain, pressed so eagerly upon him that he had been there taken and murdered among them had not he, as God would, spying a ladder leaning to a window, by the same got up into the house and so gone up into a garret in the top of the house, where he with his dag<sup>30</sup> and rapier defended himself for a space; but at length the burgomaster coming thither with another magistrate which could speak Latin, he was counseled to submit himself to the order of the law. Master Bertie, knowing himself clear and the captain to be alive, was the more bolder to submit himself to the judgment of the law, upon condition that the magistrate would receive him under safe conduct and defend him from the rage of the multitude. Which being promised, Master Bertie putteth himself and his weapon in the magistrate's hand and so was committed to safe custody while the truth of his cause should be tried. . . .

And thus Master Bertie and his wife, escaping that danger, proceeded in their journey toward Poland, where in conclusion they were quietly entertained of the king and placed honorably in the earldom of the said king of Poles in Sanogelia, called Crozan,<sup>31</sup> where Master Bertie with the duchess, having the king's absolute power of government over the said earldom, continued both in great quietness and honor till the death of Queen Mary.

## Notes

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## Notes

1. Procession.
2. Tipped my hat.
3. Her late husband, Charles Brandon.
4. Hypocritical.
5. Intimate friend (in an ironic sense).
6. Prince Philip of Spain, whom Mary I married on 25 July 1554.
7. Willoughby House was located in an aristocratic neighborhood north of London Wall.
8. Valise.
9. Privy Council.
10. At the mouth of the River Thames.
11. Betrayed.
12. Dutch province.
13. Provisions.
14. Hooded capes.
15. Duchy of Cleves.
16. Cities of the Hanseatic League.
17. A Hanseatic commercial enclave on the River Thames.
18. French-speaking residents of the Low Countries.
19. Mercenary.
20. Silver coins.
21. Gen. 18:2.
22. Exod. 2:22, 18:3.
23. William Paget, secretary of state under Henry VIII and Edward VI.
24. Hapsburg rulers of Austria.
25. Germany.
26. Count Palatine's.
27. A German count.
28. Spread.
29. Arrive at.
30. Pistol.
31. Earldom of Kroze in Samogitia.