

THE STORY OF ROBERT ROWDEN

[Spelling & punctuation modernised]

In the time of that unhappy war which began in the year 1641 between the best of Kings Charles I and the worst of men, the rebellious Parliament, there was only envy, hatred and malice and all uncharitableness in this distracted kingdom. Murder and plunder was too common. I was at that time 26 years old and was taking a journey from Northleach where I lived to Dursley about 20 miles distant, in the month of November with an Irish horse under me.

The days being short and the evening dark I lost my way and came to a place called Nympsfield. Here was an inn where I lodged. After supper the inn-keeper did tell me there was a garrison of the Parliament at a place called Eastington 4 miles north towards the city of Gloucester.

I went to bed and fastened the chamber door. About 10 or 11 o'clock I heard a great noise. About 20 foot soldiers came from the garrison at Eastington with their muskets and in a violent manner broke open the door, took all my clothes and in an unseemly manner made me leave the warm bed, and out of the chamber, down the stairs, into the cold air, only my shirt loose about me.

The innkeeper hearing how I was abused by them rose in haste and ran to them saying, "What do you mean to do with him? You go the way to starve him. Give him his clothes to put on him, for pity, for shame!" Their answer was, "He is a Cavalier, and we are resolved to make him go to our garrison with us as the soldiers did from Cirencester to Oxford, that is, naked."

Thus being in the midst of these Roundheads about 11 of the clock in the dark night, naked from the sole of my foot to the crown of my head, only my shirt loose about me, they were making haste to bring me to their garrison, my tender feet treading upon the cold ground. The soldiers that followed me were ready to tread upon my bare heels to force me forwards. In this manner they had me forward nearly a mile from the inn. I began to think that this is the last night that I have to live, and I did desire Almighty God to be merciful unto me and to enable me to undergo with patience whatsoever affliction should be laid upon me.

And now man's necessity is God's opportunity. It pleased the Lord to put into the heart of one of these soldiers being more pitiful than the rest, to ask me, "What is your name: whither are you travelling?" I told him my name and that my journey was to visit my mother's sister that lives in Dursley. He asked me "What is your mother's sister's name?" I told him that her name was Bridget Everet. He said that she was an honest woman, and one that he did respect, and that for her sake I should go back to the inn again.

Seeing me in such a naked condition he went to one of the soldiers that had my doublet, he took it from him and gave it to me saying, "Put it on, you must needs be very cold and make haste to the inn again." I gave him thanks for had it not been for him that cold night, I should have been starved to death or murdered. The rest of the soldiers went away with my horse and with all my clothes but my doublet and shirt.

I was glad that I was at liberty and I went with as much speed as I could to the inn again. The innkeeper called to the maid to rise quickly and make a good fire to warm me – and to take a cloth and wipe the dirt from my feet, and seeing me naked from my hips downwards, only my shirt between my legs, the maid put off one of her petticoats, and she gave it to me saying, "Put it on to hide your nakedness." I went to put it on the wrong way. She took it from me and put it over my head saying that was the way to put on a petticoat. When I had well warmed myself I called for a pair of slippers to go to bed again.

That I was thus used, or rather abused, by the Parliament soldiers in the year 1643 witness my hand.

Signed: Robert Rowdon

Born the 17th May 1617 – now in the 92nd year of my age. 1709

That soldier that took pity upon me did say to some of my relations at Dursley that had it not been for him, when they had brought me something further from the inn, they would have beaten out my brains with their muskets and then have left me. From battle, murder, sudden death, and from civil war, which is greatly to be feared good Lord deliver us.

Amen

In the year 1643, the King dined at Northleach at my father's. When the king was in his house many poor people prayed to the King that clothing might go forward, for they could not live without it. I heard the King say, "Alas, poor people, how can I help you when I cannot help myself?" This I heard the King say.

Signed: Robert Rowdon