

*The Testimony of James Parnel*  
*“The Quaker Boy”*  
*from Sewell’s History, pp. 124-6*

James Parnel was born at Retford, in Nottinghamshire, and trained up in the schools of literature. He laboured very early in the ministry of the gospel, having been convinced by G. Fox, when not quite sixteen years of age, and then embraced the Truth; though for that reason despised and rejected by his relations. He was, (though of low stature,) endued with great ability, and did not fear, whereve he came, to call people to repentance. Being imprisoned at Cambridge for his zealous testimony, and afterward turned out of town like a vagabond, he soon came back and disputed with the scholars of the university; but met with rude and bad entertainment from them. In the beginning of this year he came into Essex, being then about eighteen years of age, and preached the gospel in several parts of that country, as Felsted, Stebbing, Witham, Coggeshall, Halsted, and other places, and many received the word by his ministry. About the middle of the summer he came to Colchester, and there preached the gospel on the First day of the week in a steeple-house, after the sermon; then in a great meeting appointed on purpose; and after that disputed with the town-lecturer, and another priest, in the French school, all in one day; so that many were convinced of the Truth preached by him; and among those also Stephen Crisp, of whom more will be said hereafter. J. Parnel spent that week in the said town, preaching, exhorting, and disputing, to the convincing of many; though others were enraged, insomuch, that his godly zeal was often rewarded with blows; as once coming out of Nicholas’ steeple-house, he was struck by one with a great staff, who said, ‘There, take that for Christ’s sake.’ To which he meekly answered, ‘Friend, I do receive it for Jesus Christ’s sake.’ Many other grievous affronts he bore, without showing any heat or anger; so that he was a real pattern of patience and meekness.

Having laboured in the gospel about ten days in Colchester, he went to Coggeshall, where a fast was proclaimed, to be held upon the 12<sup>th</sup> of the month called July, to pray against the errors of the people called Quakers. J. Parnel being come thither, went into the steeple-house, where he stood still, till the priest was coming out of the pulpit. Now since this priest Sammes, who was an Independent, had cried out fiercely against the Quakers, as deceivers, J. Parnel esteemed it his duty to say something to that; and the first words he spoke were, ‘This is the order of the true church, that all may speak one by one; and if any thing be revealed to him that stands by, let the first hold his peace.’ Then he spoke on behalf of those called Quakers: but the priest, interrupting, asked what he would object against him? To which J. Parnel answered, in that he reviled the people called Quakers, and said they were built upon a sandy foundation, and so called them Shakers. ‘But,’ said he, ‘I will prove their foundation not to be sandy, and thee to be a false prophet.’ After some more words spoken by him, some accused him, that he owned no church: to which he said it was false. Then it was asked him what church he owned? And he answered, the church in God. Then priest Willis stood up, and said, he spoke nothing but nonsense. Parnel bade him name one word which he had spoken that

was nonsense. At which Willis said, 'To say the church in God.' Then Parnel took out his bible, and read 1Thes.i. 1. where the apostle writes to the church, which is in God the Father. The priest now was at a loss, and Parnel told him, that he blasphemed in saying the church in God was nonsense. Then priest Stellum stood up, and accused Parnel with lies and slanders, and not suffering him to clear himself from those accusations, he got up into the pulpit, and began to pray; but Parnel not taking off his hat, the magistrates called to him to put it off. To which he returned, 'Order the priest to put off his cap;' and further said, before he should be subject to their wills, he would rather pass out of the meeting place; and so he went out.

Not long after, justice Dionysius Wakering followed him, and struck him with his hand upon his back, saying he arrested him in the name of the lord protector. Parnel, not knowing him to be a magistrate, asked him where his writ was. Wakering said he had one; but showed none. Then Parnel was hurried into an house, and some of his friends engaged, that he should be forthcoming when their worship was done. And accordingly he appeared where four justices and six or seven priests were met together. Then justice Wakering pulled his hat off his head, and threw it away; and they questioned him concerning many things; all which he answered, with many frivolous questions asked to ensnare him. At last he was committed to the common jail at Colchester, where none of his friends were permitted to come to him. The time of the sessions at Chelmsford being come, he, with several felons and murderers was fastened to a chain, and thus led about eighteen miles through the country, remaining chained both night and day.

Being brought into the court before judge Hills, the jailer took off his hat and cast it upon the floor. Then the clerk read his indictment, and asked him if he was guilty; to which he said, that he denied all guilt; and he called for his accusers. The judge said he might see them; and that he ought to say guilty, or not guilty. On which Parnel told him, he was not guilty. Then a jury of twelve men was called, whose foreman was a drunkard; priest Willis was also called, who swore against him, and so did two justices; one of their men swearing that they would speak nothing against him but the truth. The accusations were, that in a riotous manner he did enter into the parish church at Great Coggeshall; that he there did stand up, and told the minister he blasphemed, and spoke falsely, using many other reproachful words against him: and he could not give a good account where he was last settled; or of his life and conversation, appearing to be an idle person. He was also accused with contempt of the magistracy, and of the ministry. To this he answered, that he no ways in a riotous manner entered the steeple-house, but came thither quietly, and alone: for being followed by several boys that would have come in after him, he bade them go in before, rather than to go in disorderly, whereby to occasion any disturbance. That he had said to priest Willis, he blasphemed, by saying the church in God was nonsense, he denied not; but did not own himself to be a vagabond and idle person. And he did not think it indecent to call an unjust judge, unrighteous; a persecutor, persecutor; and a deceiver, deceiver. Thus Parnel pleaded his cause. Yet the judge said to the jury, that if they did not find him guilty, the sin would be upon their heads; thus condemning the prisoner before the jury had considered the case. Then J. Parnel began to speak, to inform them concerning his cause, but the judge would not suffer him, though one of the jury desired it. After consultation, the jury had nothing to lay to his charge, but a paper in which he had answered the mittimus, though he had already owned this paper to be his writing. But in that they were at a loss, because in the indictment he was accused of a riot: yet the judge and the clerk strove to draw some words from the foreman, which the other jurymen did not consent to, and he himself

was unwilling to answer fully to their questions. Then J. Parnel was made to withdraw; and being called in again, the judge fined him to the value of about forty pounds, for contempt of the magistracy and ministry; for he said the lord protector had charged him to punish such persons as should contemn either magistracy or ministry. Thereupon J. Parnel was carried back again to the prison, being an old ruinous castle, built as it is reported, in the time of the ancient Romans: here he was to be kept until the fine should be paid: and the jailer was commanded, not to let any giddy-headed people, (by which denomination they meant his friends,) come at him.

The jailer was willing enough to comply with this order, suffering none to come to him, but such as abused him; and his wife, who was a wicked shrew, did not only set her man to beat him, but several times herself laid violent hands upon him, and swore she would have his blood: she also set other prisoners to take away the victuals brought to him by his friends; and would not let him have a trundle bed, which they would have brought him to lie on, so that he was forced to lie on the cold and damp stones. Afterwards he was put into the hole in the wall, a room much like a baker's oven; for the walls of that building, which is indeed a direful nest, are of an excessive thickness, as I have seen myself, having been in the hole where this pious young man ended his days, as will be said by and by. Being confined in the said hole, which was, as I remember, about twelve feet high from the ground, and the ladder too short by six feet; he must climb up and down by a rope on a broken wall, which he was forced to do to fetch his victuals, or for other necessities: for though his friends would have given him a cord and a basket to draw up his victuals in, yet such was the malice of his keepers, that they would not suffer it.

Continuing in this most hole, his limbs grew benumbed; and thus it once happened, that as he was climbing up the ladder, with his victuals in one hand, and come to the top thereof, catching at the rope with his other, he missed the same, and fell down upon the stones, whereby he was exceedingly wounded in his head, and his body so bruised, that he was taken for dead. Then they put him into a hole underneath the other; for there were two rows of such vaulted holes in the wall. This hole was called the oven, and so little, that some baker's ovens were bigger, though not so high. Here, (the door being shut,) was scarcely any air, there being no window or hole. And after he was a little recovered from his fall, they would not suffer him to take the air, though he was almost spent for want of breath: and though some of his friends, viz., William Talcot and Edward Grant, did offer their bond of forty pounds to the justice Henry Barrington, and another, whose name was Thomas Shortland, to lie body for body, that Parnel might but have his liberty to come to W. Talcot's house, and return, when recovered; yet this was denied; nay so immoveable were they set against him, that when it was desired that he might only walk a little sometimes in the yard, they would not grant it by any means: and once the door of the hole being open, and he coming forth, and walking in a narrow yard between two high walls, so incensed the jailer, that he locked up the hole, and shut him out in the yard all night, being in the coldest time of the winter. This hard imprisonment did so weaken him, that after ten or eleven months he fell sick and died. At his departure, there were with him Thomas Shortland, and Ann Langley: and it was one of these, that came often to him, who long after brought me into this hole where he died.

Several things which are related here, I had from the mouth of eyewitnesses, who lived in that town. When death approached, he said, 'Here I die innocently.' A little after he was heard to say, 'Now I must go:' and turning his head to Thomas, he said, 'This

death must I die; Thomas, I have seen great things: don't hold me, but let me go.' Then he said again, 'Will you hold me?' To which Ann answered, 'No, dear heart, we will not hold thee.' He had often said that one hour's sleep would cure him of all: and the last words he was heard to say, were, 'Now I go;' and then stretched out himself; and slept about an hour, and breathed his last. Thus this valiant soldier of the Lamb conquered through sufferings.