

THE TAKING OF CROWLAND

Robert Ram, Rector of Spalding (1626–1656)

1643

Upon Saturday, 25 March, being Lady Day, early in the morning, Captain Thomas Stiles, Captain Cromwell, and Master William Stiles, the minister of Crowland, with about 80 or 90 men, came to our town of Spalding, which at that time was utterly unfurnished of men and arms, whereof they had intelligence the evening before by some of our malignant and treacherous neighbours. Near break of day they beset the house of Mr. Ram, the minister of the town, where they took John Harrington, Esquire and the said Mr. Ram in a violent and uncivil manner, and carried them away to Crowland, at the entering whereof all the people of the town generally were gathered together to see and triumph over their prisoners, which put us in mind of Sampson's entertainments when he was taken by the Philistines. Some others of our town they took at the same time, but released all save Edward Horne, one of Captain Escort's servants, so we 3 were kept together under strong guards, and about 10 days after, one Mr. William Slater, of Spalding, a man of about 66 years of age, was taken by some of their scouts and made prisoner with us.

Our usage for diet and lodging was indifferent good at the time of our imprisonment, which was 5 weeks, but some insolences we were forced now and then to endure. Captain Stiles one day quarreled with us for praying together, and forbade us to do so, saying we should pray every man for himself, threatening he would take away the Bible from us, saying it was not fit for traitors to have the Bible, and by no means would permit us to have pen, ink, or paper, though Mr. Ram did earnestly sue to him for them, and protested that he would write nothing but what they should see or hear if they pleased.

After we had continued there near three weeks, on Thursday, 12 April, some companies of our friends advanced towards our release, whereupon, about 8 o'clock that night we were all carried down to the bulwark on the north side of the town, where we continued amongst the rude soldiers and townsmen till after midnight, but by reason our forces fell not on that night, we were carried into an alehouse, where we continued till daylight, and then we were had to our lodgings.

But when our companies approached nearer our town, then were we all brought fourth again and another prisoner, one Daniel Pegg of Deeping, added to us and carried to that part of the town where the first onset was given, being all of us fast pinioned and made to stand in an open place where the cannon began to play. A while after we were all five of us set upon the top of the breast-work (according as we had been often threatened before) where we stood by the space of three hours, our trends shooting fiercely at us for a great part of the time before they knew. Harrington took one of his soldier's muskets, charging it with pistol powder, and himself made three shots at his own father, both he and all the rest of the soldiers on that side supposing we had been Crowlanders that stood there to brave them. When our friends perceived who we were, they left firing upon us and began to play more to the right hand of us, whither Mr. Ram and servant Horne were presently removed, which caused our party to hold their hands, so that little was done on that side of the town that day; indeed, their works were very strong and well-lined with muskeeters, who were backed with store of hassock-knives, long scythes, and such-like fenish weapons, and besides without their works was a great water both broad and deep, which encompassed all that side of the town, by reason whereof our small forces could do no good at that time, neither could they approach nearer without great hazard and loss.

The minister of the town, Mr. Stiles, was very active all the time of the fight on the west side, where he commanded in chief, running from place to place, and if fearful oaths be the character of a good soldier, he may well pass muster, which made us not so much to marvel at the abominable swearing which we continually heard almost from every mouth, yea, even when the bullets flew thickest. But as the fury of the assault did begin to abate in those points, so did it begin to increase in the north side, whither presently Mr. Ram and servant Horne were posted, and there set up upon the bulwark for our friends on that side to play upon, who

plied us with great and small shot for a great while together, supposing Mr. Ram had been the vapouring parson of the town; many of our dear and worthy friends have since told us how many times they shot at us with their own hands, and how heartily they desired to dispatch us. But the Lord of Hosts, Who numbers the hairs of our heads, so guided the bullets that of multitudes which flew about our ears (and many of them within half-musket shot), not one of them had the power to touch us (blessed be the name of our good God).

After we had continued about three hours more upon the north work, our forces began to retreat and then were we taken down and guarded to our lodgings. Mr. Harrington also and the two other prisoners which had continued all the while upon the west works were brought up to us, but the forces on the north side began to fire again, whereupon they were carried back towards these works by a base fellow of the town, and then our forces on both sides retreated.

Upon this great victory (as the Crowlanders vaunted) one Mr. Jackson, a minister then in the town, drew the people into the church, where he read them certain collects by way of thankfulness for their good success. The most part of the night following was spent in drinking, reveling, and railing upon the Parliament and Roundheads as if they had offered some extraordinary sacrifice to Bacchus, insomuch as that there was scarce a sober man in the whole town amongst them.

And since we are fallen into the mention of Mr. Jackson, we cannot omit some passages of his. He was formerly a great incendiary in another place some ten miles from Crowland, where he stirred up the people in a dangerous and rebellious manner to take up arms against the Parliament, and drew many of good estates into action under the command of Captain Welby, but God was pleased timely to rout that company without much loss of blood. Upon the defeat there Mr. Jackson, with some others, sheltered themselves at Crowland, where, what by preaching and what by private persuading, he was a chief instrument of stirring up the people of Crowland to take up arms and to commit such outrages as they did. The last Sabbath that we were prisoners there he preached, and in his sermon did mightily encourage the people to play the men, commending them highly for their courage and valour in the former encounter, and persuaded them by many arguments to go on in their resolution, saying that the cause was God's, and that he had fought for them and would do so still, and that all the good people of the land prayed for them. He said also these holy stones pray for you; these holy books pray for you, which your enemies tear in pieces to light tobacco withal; the holy vestments pray for you; that holy table prays for you, which they in many places make a horse rack; yea, the saints in heaven pray for you; but of this enough and too much.

To proceed in our relation, we heard no more of our friends' coming to relieve us till Tuesday, 25 April, and then the town was assaulted on three sides by part of the regiments of those noble gentlemen, Colonel Sir Miles Hobart, Colonel Sir Anthony Erby, and Colonel Cromwell. When the forces advanced something near the town, Mr. Ram was again called for and brought out of his lodging and carried with all speed to the north bulwark, and being very straightly pinioned, he was laid within the work upon the wet ground, where he laid by the space of five hours, often entreating that he might be set upon the bulwarks by reason of the numbness of his limbs and his extreme weariness with lying so long in that posture, but they would not suffer him; the reason we conceive was for that our friends threatened to give no quarter if any of us were again set upon the bulwarks.

That Tuesday proved a very windy, wet day, and so continued till Thursday morning, that most of our companies were forced to quit their moorish, rotten quarters and retreat, only some small parties on the west and south held them in exercise day and night most part of that time, though the weather was very extreme and they had no shelter to defend them from it.

On Thursday, in the afternoon, all the companies were drawn down... who so plied the Crowlanders upon every quarter that their hearts began to fail, diverse of them stealing away into the coverts and moorish grounds on the east side of the town, and many more that night followed their fellows. On the Friday morning, those few that remained set the best face they could upon so bad a business and seemed as if they would fight it out to

a man, but before daylight they moved for a treaty, which being granted, they sent their unreasonable propositions, which being torn asunder and scorned, our men advanced and entered the town without any opposition. Some of the chief actors got away, yet some were taken in the town, and many more since in several places of the country about—Captain Styles; Lieutenant Auburn of Linn; Thomas Bowre, a scrivener of London; Mr. Jackson, the minister, of Fleet; Mr. William Baldwer; and some three or four more are now prisoners at Cambridge; some are committed to the provost-marshal of Spalding.

Of Crowland only one was slain and one hurt; of our men were killed five, and some 18 or 20 wounded, whereof some are since dead, their wounds being incurable by reason of their poisoned bullets. Ten champed bullets were found in one man's pocket, some of their muskets being drawn by our men had such bullets in them, and abundance of the same sort found by our soldiers. The principal man we lost was Mr. Nicholas Norwood, a gentleman exceeding zealous and active in this and other services; he died of a shot in the shoulder some five or six days after, and was much lamented by all that knew him, and his forwardness for the public cause.

Thus it pleased the Lord to deliver us out of our imprisonment and miraculously to preserve those that were appointed to die, for which we desire to bless His name forever, and blessed be the Lord for raising up so many noble gentlemen and worthy friends not only of our neighbours in the country round about us, but of other parts far distant from us, who, with wonderful courage and resolution, engaged themselves to relieve us or to die in the place.

Samuel Tymms, ed. *The East Anglian, or Notes and Queries on Subjects Connected with the Counties of Suffolk, Cambridge, Essex, and Norfolk* (Lowestoft: Samuel Tymms, 1869), III:220–223.