

The Gunpowder Plot

THE
GUNPOWDER
PLOT

by

HUGH ROSS WILLIAMSON

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
NEW YORK

1952

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To
my brothers
REGINALD POLE
and
ALLESBROOK

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These four cartoons are reproduced from Carleton's *A Thankfull Remembrance of God's Mercie*, published in 1625, which gives a popular propaganda account of events. *By courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.*

HINDLIP HALL FROM THE SOUTH EAST *-facing page* 144

From Nash's *Worcestershire*. *By courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.*

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From an old print. *By courtesy of the Rev. D. Saunders Rees, Rector of Hawarden.*

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This Van Somers portrait of Lord Monteagle was exhibited at South Kensington in 1866 and was numbered 431 in the Catalogue. It was sold in 1869 and has not been traced since. According to the Catalogue, he is wearing a rich brown dress, ornamented with gold and silver. *By courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum.*

Illustrations

THE PROPAGANDA IN A PICTURE *-facing page 156*

The frontispiece of Carleton's *Thankfull Remembrance*, showing Queen Elizabeth and King James, holding banners depicting the Spanish Armada and the Gunpowder Plot, behind a symbolic figure of the Church of England, crowned with Canterbury Cathedral, and trampling on the Pope, a Cardinal and the Devil. *By courtesy of the British Museum.*

CARTOON OF THE DELIVERY OF THE LETTER TO CECIL *-facing page 157*

A woodcut from Vicars's *Mischeefes Mystery* (1617). *By courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.*

THE HANDWRITING OF THOMAS WINTER *following page 248*

By courtesy of the Most Hon. the Marquess of Salisbury, K.G., and the Public Record Office.

Introduction

On 5th November 1605, when Guy Fawkes was arrested in the proximity of barrels of gunpowder under the House of Lords, undoubtedly a plot was brought to light. But it is still not certain what kind of a plot it was—whether it was a conspiracy of Catholics against the Government or of the Government against the Catholics. The popular verdict, endorsed and repeated by generations of history books, is that it was what it seemed to be and that, by a series of events little short of miraculous, a desperate band of Roman Catholic gentlemen had, at the eleventh hour, been prevented from blowing up King, Lords and Commons assembled for the opening of Parliament. The opposite view is thus dismissed in the epitome in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*: ‘The allegation that the whole affair was an *agent-provocateur*’s plot for which Salisbury was responsible is now generally regarded as baseless.’

Yet no historian versed in the period who has studied the matter is likely to concur in so easy a generalization. He may be unwilling to commit himself to any positive judgment, for he knows too well the equivocal atmosphere which surrounds the whole affair, but it is unlikely that he will dissent, in the main, from the verdict that ‘the evidence available to us appears to establish principally two points—that the true history of the Gunpowder Plot is now known to no man and that the history commonly received is certainly untrue. It is impossible to believe that the proceedings of the conspirators were actually such as they are related to have been. It is unquestionable that the Government consistently falsified the story and the evidence presented to the world.’¹

Further than this the careful historian would hardly commit himself. Too much vital evidence is lacking. Gun-

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powder, for example, was at the time a government monopoly and the first question to arise in the inquirer's mind is how the conspirators procured such a great quantity without some kind of connivance—but in the Ordnance accounts of the stores in the Tower, those concerned with the years in question are missing. John Whynniard, Keeper of the Wardrobe, who leased the famous cellar to the conspirators, was a material witness of the first importance. He died suddenly on the morning of November 5th before he could give any evidence, and the cause of his death is unknown.

Concerned with the conspiracy from the beginning were four men, Robert Catesby and his cousin and inseparable friend, Thomas Winter; Thomas Percy and his brother-in-law, John Wright. Of these only Thomas Winter was taken alive, though all could have been, since, as they had no firearms, they were practically defenceless. The man who killed Percy and Catesby was given a government pension of two shillings a day (equal to at least a pound of our present money) for life and as Dr. Goodman, at the time of the trial of the conspirators a vicar in Essex and later Bishop of Gloucester, recorded: 'Some will not stick to report that the great statesman (Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury) sending to apprehend these traitors gave special charge and direction for Percy and Catesby, "Let me never see them alive", who it may be would have revealed some evil counsel given.'²

It is thus not altogether surprising that there have not been lacking from that day to this those who have endorsed the opinion of a contemporary who, writing on 10th December 1605, informed a correspondent abroad: 'Those that have practical experience of the way in which things are done hold it as certain that there has been foul play and that some of the Council secretly spun a web to entangle these poor gentlemen.'³

In 1857 the Protestant lawyer, David Jardine, published *A Narrative of the Gunpowder Plot* which was an enlargement and revision of the account he had written twenty-one years earlier as an introduction to his edition of the trial of the conspirators. This, though later research has shown some of its details to be incorrect, remained the basis of later works. Jardine accepted the theory of a Catholic plot—as indeed did his contemporary, the Catholic historian, John

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Lingard—but he was under no illusions as to the attitude of the Government. 'The object of the government was to turn the transaction to the best political account and nothing could be further from their intention than to publish truth merely for the information of the people.' Of the official account, the 'King's Book'* which was printed immediately after the trials and was 'not only dispersed profusely in England but was sent . . . to the ambassadors at foreign courts, translated into several languages and circulated with the utmost diligence in every part of Europe,' Jardine writes that 'there is no doubt that it is a narrative of no historical authority; it is merely the Court version of the transaction, given to the world for the express purpose of leading the public mind in a particular direction. Of several hundreds of examinations which were taken, two only were published in this narrative, namely a Declaration of Guy Fawkes and a Confession of Thomas Winter. That both of these were carefully settled and prepared for the purpose of publication is not only highly probable from a comparison of them with the other statements of the same individuals, which are still extant, but is demonstrated as a fact by the interlineations and alterations observable on the originals.'⁴

Jardine did not take the further step, which was later to become the focal point of the controversy, of suggesting that these two accounts, on which the Government case and the traditional story rest, are worthless as evidence for the simple reason that Fawkes was tortured into signing a version which the Government had prepared and that Thomas Winter's 'Confession' was a Government forgery.

In 1863, Samuel Rawson Gardiner published the first instalment of his monumental *History of England from 1603 to 1656* at which he was to labour till his death in 1902. His

* This official account, *His Majesties Speech in this last Session of Parliament . . . together with a discourse of the maner of the discovery of this late intended treason*, 1605, together with *A true and perfect relation of the proceedings against the late most barbarous traytors. . . . Imprinted at London by Robert Burke, Printer to the King's most Excellent Majestie*, 1606, form the basis of later controversial pamphlets in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was, substantially, reprinted in 1850 by W. J. Adams, incorporating the preface by Thomas Barlow, Bishop of Lincoln, an anti-Catholic propagandist, written in 1679, entitled *The Gunpowder Treason*. It is also the basis of 'popular' and school histories to-day.

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first volume contained his story of the Gunpowder Plot which, in essentials, is based on the Government version. In 1871, Father John Morris, S.J., edited and published *A Narrative of the Gunpowder Plot* which had been written in 1606 by Father John Gerard, S.J., one of the Jesuit priests actually implicated in the Plot. Gerard had written this after his escape from England—'I myself, when I came from England to Rome, was ordered to put in writing an account of the whole affair, and did so as well as I could.'⁵

With Gardiner, on the one hand, with his extreme Protestant and even Puritan bias, reinforcing the traditional version of the Plot and with the contemporary Catholic view, on the other, now generally accessible, it was inevitable that the debate should be carried further. In 1897 another Father John Gerard, S.J., published *What was the Gunpowder Plot?* which challenged the entire Government story, and drew from Gardiner in the same year a reply, *What the Gunpowder Plot was*, in which he defended the accepted version and concluded that 'the attempt to make Salisbury the originator of the Plot for his own purposes breaks down entirely'. Gardiner was now at the height of his fame—in Gerard's words 'beyond question a veteran and the foremost representative of the new Oxford school'—and so great was his reputation as the indisputable authority on the period that *What the Gunpowder Plot was* was—and, indeed, generally speaking, is—taken as the final word on the matter, closing the debate.

None but scholars are aware that Gerard returned to the attack and in *The Gunpowder Plot and the Gunpowder Plotters* (1897) and *Thomas Winter's Confession and the Gunpowder Plot* (1898)—neither of which is listed in Godfrey Davies's *Bibliography of British History, Stuart Period*—made a crushing reply to Gardiner. Nor can anyone who, refusing to be dazzled by his reputation, has carefully examined Gardiner's controversial method fail to realize how unsatisfactory is *What the Gunpowder Plot was*. The prestige still popularly attached to it might be adduced as an illustration of the cynical *mot*: 'History never repeats itself, but historians always repeat each other.'⁶

One thing, however, as Gerard immediately realized, Gardiner had done. He had clarified the issue. He had, by implication at least, admitted that the case for the traditional

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story rested on the authenticity of Thomas Winter's 'Confession'. If this could be shown to be a Government forgery, the case fell to the ground. And in the two little works mentioned—the second of which contains a facsimile of the 'Confession' in its entirety—Gerard addressed himself to this task with a conspicuous degree of success.

The reasons for supposing it a forgery will be dealt with later in the book, but it may be mentioned here that less than a fortnight earlier Winter had been wounded in the shoulder and found great difficulty in writing at all, that his genuine signature taken on the same day as the 'Confession' differs from the writing of the document (which resembles his hand before he was wounded), that in the 'Confession' he spells his name as 'Winter'—a form he never used, preferring 'Wintour'* which was the correct family spelling, whereas 'Winter' was a form which the Government always used in speaking of him, that the original was never allowed out of the hands of Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, who had a copy made 'from the original' and put the copy only—which differs in several respects from the original—into the Government collection of papers. The original 'Confession' remains to-day among the MSS. at Hatfield House relating to 1605, which were not calendared till 1938, so that, until Gerard's facsimile, very few people indeed were acquainted with it, though Gardiner had printed it (with several errors, which are now noted in the Calendar) in *What the Gunpowder Plot was*.

In this century what work has been done on the Plot has been directed mainly to elucidating specific points, such as the identity of the writer of the anonymous letter to Montague warning him to absent himself from the opening of Parliament—the famous letter which, according to the Government story, first revealed to them the existence of the conspiracy. But, in general, Jardine's warning has been taken to heart: 'If the truth is ever discovered, it will not be by State papers or recorded examinations and confessions. When such expert artists as Bacon and Cecil framed and propagated a State fiction in order to cover a State intrigue,

* The original name of the family was the Welsh Gwyn-Tour (White Tower), and the crest, a falcon mounted on a white tower, perpetuated the meaning.

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they took care to cut off or divert the channels of history so effectually as to make it hopeless at the distance of three centuries to trace the truth by means of documents which have ever been in their control. If the mystery should hereafter be unravelled, it will be probably by the discovery of some letters or papers of a domestic nature, which either slumber in private repositories or remain unnoticed in public collections.'7

Such new evidence might, of course, at any moment come to light, but, even without it, there is a justification for retelling the story. For something has taken place which neither Jardine nor Gardiner nor Gerard could have foreseen. Events have made it possible for us, in the second half of the twentieth century, to understand, and therefore to assess, the 'climate' of the Gunpowder Plot, as those in the second half of the nineteenth could not. The use of torture to extort signatures to convenient statements; the forgery of documents; the unscrupulous employment of propaganda; the services of the *agent-provocateur*; the sudden deaths of vital witnesses; the art of the 'double-cross' (which was known at the time of the Plot as 'practising') and, more importantly, the 'double double-cross'; the ruthlessness of the struggle between a national, secular State and a universal Church claiming unlimited spiritual authority and supra-national jurisdiction—all these concomitants of a revolutionary period are part of our day-to-day European experience. We may regard them with horror, but hardly with incredulity, and the present makes possible a better understanding of the past. We may have no new documents but we can read the old ones with new eyes.

Side by side with this positive gain, there is also a negative advantage. We are no longer troubled by the bitterness of theological controversy. From the beginning the Gunpowder Plot has been bedevilled by ecclesiastical propaganda. Its original effect (whatever its cause or purpose) was the virtual extinction of Roman Catholicism in England. The first republication of the story of the Plot in 1679 was a deliberate attempt to add fuel to the flames of popular anti-Catholicism in the year of terror following Titus Oates's 'discovery' of a 'Popish Plot'. The second popular republication in 1850—the reprinting of the 1679 material—coincided, hardly acci-

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dentally, with the 'No Popery' outbreak, associated with Lord John Russell and his government, following on the reorganization of Roman Catholicism in England. On the Catholic side, treatment of the Plot was directed towards exonerating from complicity the body of Catholic laity and exculpating the Jesuits. Now at last we are free of unfortunate fanaticisms and can view the Plot objectively, without any desire to prove a case but caring only to arrive at the probable truth.

Finally no excuse should be necessary for trying to retell a story which is one of the most famous and most fascinating in the annals of England.

My particular thanks are due to the Most Hon. The Marquess of Salisbury, K.G., K.C.V.O. for giving me access to the manuscripts at Hatfield and allowing me to photograph and reproduce relevant portions of two of them; to the Jesuits of Farm Street, London, for permitting me to use their transcript of Greenway's *Narrative*, a copy of the Stonyhurst MS. (this, a key document of the Plot, has been neither translated nor published); to the Editor of *The Month* for the loan of the blocks illustrating the Winter confession; to the Rector of Hawarden for having the photograph made of his copy of St. Winifred's Well; to Miss Jean Rowntree, both for lending me her copy of the 'King's Book' and for suggesting that I should write this book; and to Miss Joy Saint for invaluable help in research and for reading the proofs and making the index.

HUGH ROSS WILLIAMSON

London, 1948-50

BOOK ONE

THE BACKGROUND

Book I—The Background

One of the most difficult feats of historical imagination is to see an event in its proper perspective and the indispensable basis of any attempt to do so is some knowledge of the conditions and background against which the actors in it grew up.

A man born in the year that Elizabeth came to the throne would have been forty-six at the time of the Gunpowder Plot. If a Catholic, he could not have escaped the practical results of Elizabeth's ecclesiastical policy. If a Protestant, he would have accepted without question the Government's version of that mortal duel. And as an Englishman, whether Catholic or Protestant, he would have been affected by the international struggle with Spain which, though inevitably coloured by the religious issue, was in essence a matter of secular power-politics.

To understand the 'Papists' Conspiracy'—as the Gunpowder Plot was long referred to in the English Calendar—it is thus necessary to know, at least in outline, something of Elizabeth's attempt to suppress Catholicism; of the Government's technique in 'discovering plots'; of the main lines of international diplomacy; and, as in a sense a climax where the threads are drawn together, of the rebellion of Essex at the turn of the century in which the main actors in the Gunpowder Plot—the four cousins, Catesby, Tresham, Winter and Monteagle—were all involved.

1

The Suppression of Catholicism

(i) THE EARLY YEARS

IN 1559, within three months of Elizabeth's accession, the first Acts to be put on the Statute Book were those of Supremacy and Uniformity which were intended to extirpate the Catholic Faith in England. Supreme spiritual authority was vested in the Crown (a provision which made it impossible for a Catholic to take the Oath of Supremacy) and the only services allowed were those of the Prayer Book (which meant the end of the Mass—the service of Holy Communion in the form in which it had been invariably performed everywhere in Christendom since the year 600).

Some Catholics conformed openly, remaining faithful at heart—a proceeding rendered in these early days more possible because a great proportion of the priests, even if they practised the Anglican rites, were unquestionably validly ordained and their 'intention', whatever the formula, could not be doubted. But many younger Catholics saw the legislation, especially as it affected the universities, as a choice between apostasy and exile and embraced the latter. Within a year, over a hundred Oxford and Cambridge men had left for Louvain (where two houses were named 'Oxford' and 'Cambridge');¹ others went to universities of Paris, Padua and Salamanca; and from Louvain for the next sixteen years, came the stream of learned polemics against the new Anglican Establishment which the English Government made every effort to suppress.

In 1561, the Regent of the Netherlands wrote to her brother, Philip II of Spain, drawing his attention to the presence of so many English Catholic exiles in her territory and asking his help in providing pensions for them.² The

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same year, William Allen, a fellow of Oriel and principal of St. Mary's Hall, decided, at the age of twenty-nine, that he could no longer remain at Oxford and crossed to Louvain. Though he came back to England in disguise for three years (during which he strenuously opposed the practice of occasional conformity), it was to the Low Countries he eventually returned to found, in 1568, a Catholic seminary for Englishmen at Douay. In that same year, Robert Persons, who was twenty-four, became a fellow of Balliol and Edmund Campion, who was twenty-eight, junior proctor—two men whose names were later to be linked with Allen's in the Catholic counter-attack. Campion was to become the Jesuit proto-martyr of England: Persons, till his death in 1610, was to be the directing energy and brain behind the Jesuit missionary efforts.

Though the first-fruits of Douay were still in the future, other events in the next two years led to a hardening of the situation. In 1569 took place the last great English rising in arms for the Catholic Faith, the Rebellion in the North. It was suppressed and the Catholic peers, Norfolk and Northumberland, executed. In 1570 the Pope, who up to this point had not abandoned hope of the return of England to the Faith, formally excommunicated Elizabeth. Henceforth, for Catholics not only abroad but at home, the rightful ruler of England was technically Mary, Queen of Scots, whom Elizabeth kept prisoner for the next seventeen years, at the end of which she executed her.

The Papal Bull, *Regnans in Excelsis*, naturally provoked an immediate reply from the English Government. It was made high treason to introduce Bulls from Rome (Felton, who had affixed a copy of it to the gates of the Bishop of London's palace, was executed), to question Elizabeth's title, to attempt to liberate Mary Queen of Scots, and at the same time a determined inquisition was instituted among the clergy to eliminate secret Catholics, or any with Catholic sympathies.³

(ii) THE JESUIT COUNTER-ATTACK

The second great and well-defined phase of the struggle begins in 1579. The quiet but continuous pressure of the anti-Catholic legislation, the cutting-off of England from the

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Continent, the rise and consolidation of the power of the Protestant gentry, who alone could become magistrates or Members of Parliament, dons or clergymen, the circulation of exclusively Protestant literature and the growing prestige of Elizabeth had had its twenty years' effect. If, as was probably the case, the majority of the population was still Catholic at heart and, as was certainly the case, had inherited Catholic teaching and traditions; if there were still great areas, especially in the north and west, where Catholicism was still practised in no more than quasi-secrecy, England, with the passage of time and the working of inertia, was slowly but steadily becoming as Protestant as the official world of Court, Government, Church, Law and University. It seemed only a matter of years before the Faith died out.

What saved it was the foundation of Douay, the mission of the seminary priests and the fidelity of the English seculars, and, finally, the Jesuits—the men who, in a continuous stream, unflinchingly trod 'the *via dolorosa* from Douay to Tyburn'.⁴

To appreciate the part played at this juncture by the Jesuits who were to loom so large in the story of the Gunpowder Plot, it is important to remember that they were a new and contemporary Order. In 1530—only four years before Elizabeth's birth—Ignatius Loyola, their founder, had visited London during a long vacation at the University of Paris. As late as 1555—four years before her accession—he had written to Cardinal Pole, then in England, of 'the ardent desire which the divine and supreme Charity had imparted to him of saving the souls in that realm'.⁵ The fear which the English Government had of and the propaganda with which they vilified the Jesuits therefore was a 'modern' attack on something novel, not (as such attacks would be to-day) a traditional appeal to long-standing prejudice. The pattern of it has persisted and a twentieth-century reader could hardly feel the astonished surprise which must have affected Persons, when he wrote from the England of 1581: 'There is tremendous talk here of Jesuits and more fables perhaps are told about them than were told of old about monsters. For as to the origin of these men, their way of life, their institute, their morals and teaching, their plans and actions, stories of all sorts are spread abroad, not only in private conversations,

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but also in public sermons and printed books, and these contradict one another and have a striking resemblance to dreams.⁶

The legend finally was to obscure the truth, but 'it is a significant fact, explain it as we may, that in the latter half of the sixteenth century, the "call of God" for young Englishmen of culture and birth who were Catholics, meant almost invariably a call to enter the Society of Jesus: so completely had the new Order attracted to itself all the choice and lofty spirits among the Catholics, and so wonderfully had the Fathers of the Society impressed the minds of men with a belief in their sanctity, self-abnegation, and the sincerity of their devotion to a great cause.'⁷

Persons had become a member of the Society in 1575, Campion two years earlier. In 1578, Allen, to escape Calvinist persecution, moved his college to Rheims, where it was given hospitality in the house of the Jesuits; in 1579 he was concerned with the foundation of an English Jesuit college in Rome; and in 1580 he proposed to the General of the Jesuits, that the Society should undertake a mission to England to strengthen and organize the faithful and to reconvert the lapsed. So it was that in 1580 the English Mission set out, led by Persons and including Campion.

They were not, of course, the first seminary priests to enter the country—many missionaries, English Catholics trained abroad, had returned, risking and giving their lives in the seventies—but this was the first organized and directed assault, made by a Society which had been founded by a soldier and which was planned on the lines of military discipline and mobility, and, though the Jesuits in the forty years of their existence had already defended the Faith in Poland and in Germany, in Ireland and in the Indies, 'here in England they played a special part because here in England the conditions were those of active and continual battle, for which the special character and ideal of strict co-ordination under absolute obedience and the clarity of the object before them and their annealing discipline, peculiarly fitted them'.⁸

Their battle was concerned only with salvation of souls. They were forbidden to take any part in politics and so that no Catholic should feel that there was any incompatibility

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between temporal loyalty to Elizabeth and the claims of the Faith, the missionaries obtained from the Pope a declaration that as things stood the Bull of Excommunication did not bind Catholics.⁹

From one of Persons's letters, written in 1580, may be seen the nature of the work and the temper in which it was done: 'After Mass has been said and sermons preached—I am compelled sometimes to preach twice on the same day—I struggle with almost unending business. This consists mainly in solving cases of conscience which occur, in directing other priests to suitable places and occupations, in reconciling schismatics to the Church, in writing letters to those who are tempted at times in the course of this persecution, in trying to arrange temporal aid for the support of those who are in prison and in want; for every day they send to me, laying bare their needs. In short the burdens of this kind are so many that, unless I perceived clearly that the honour of God required what we are doing, and that very badly, I should not hesitate to say that I am weary. But weariness must never be acknowledged in these affairs. For I am firmly convinced that, unless my sins prevent it, God will always be with us as he has been up to now in our efforts; and no weariness of body or mind is of any account in comparison with the consolation we receive from the joy, which is almost unbelievable, of the people at our coming.'¹⁰

They were guarded, as well as possible, by the Catholic 'underground', but only one of them—Persons—escaped the Government's vigilance. The rest were taken, tried and either executed as traitors or left to languish in imprisonment. What they had accomplished in the seventeen months between their landing and Campion's martyrdom on 1st December 1581 cannot well be estimated statistically. It is said that they made four thousand converts,¹¹ besides the new hope and strength they brought to the faithful, the organization they planned for those who were to follow and the force of the example of their lives and deaths. But the most obvious tribute to their success was the violence of the Government's counter-attack.

In 1581 it was made high treason to endeavour to convert anyone to the Faith; to be present at Mass meant a year's imprisonment as well as a fine; and every person above six-

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teen was fined £20 a month for non-attendance at Anglican services (a penalty later adjusted to the confiscation by the Crown of two-thirds of their property). To facilitate the effective working of the new Act, informers were rewarded.

Despite these new measures, which made every priest guilty of high treason on no other grounds than his priesthood, the stream from the Continent never ceased. Persons himself, who was not allowed to return to what would have been certain death, used his knowledge and energy and powers of organization to direct affairs from the Continental base. We have a picture of him in another of his letters, written in the autumn of 1584: "There has been a most violent and searching persecution and the English ports have been guarded so carefully that there is no way open either to enter or to leave the country. . . . Some new way must be found. . . . To do this and a number of other things required for the equipment of this spiritual war, I am obliged to maintain a modest establishment at Rouen, which is a most convenient city on account of its nearness to the sea, so that from there some can make trips to the coast to arrange for boats to convey people across (for they cannot use either the public boats or the ordinary ports that are well known) whilst others take charge of the preparation and introduction into the country of books, written in English, both on spiritual and devotional subjects, and on matters of controversy and in answer to the calumnies with which the heretics assail us. . . . Then, too, there are the holy oils, chalices, vestments and Bibles to be sent over."¹²

The Government now saw quite clearly that if Catholicism were to be effectively eradicated from England, she must be shut off completely from the Continent. So long as Catholic youths were educated abroad and ardent missionaries could enter to neutralize effects of persecution and taxation on the Catholics at home, the factor of time was not on the Government side. In 1585 new measures were passed. All Jesuit and seminary priests were banished from the country on pain of death; the maintenance of them was made a felony; any person who did not inform against them within twelve days incurred a fine and imprisonment 'at the Queen's pleasure'; any English subject being educated abroad was to return within six months and take the oath of supremacy or incur

The Jesuit Counter-Attack

the penalties of high treason; no children were to be sent 'beyond the sea' without special licence from the Government. The strict watch at all ports was maintained—the more effectively since spies abroad regularly supplied the Government with descriptions of Catholics* who were likely to attempt to enter the country.

This new legislation affected, among hundreds of others, John Gerard who, twenty years later, was to be one of the Jesuits accused by the Government in the Gunpowder Plot. The son of a Lancashire knight who was being continually fined and imprisoned for his Catholicism, he had, after a year or two at Oxford, gone to the Continent where he had approached Persons and told him of his desire to become a Jesuit. Persons advised him, before taking the final step, to return to England to put his affairs and property in order. Gerard did so, but on trying to leave the country was arrested and imprisoned. As he put it in his autobiography: 'Being committed to the Marshalsea prison, I found there numbers of Catholics and some priests, awaiting judgment of death with the greatest joy. In this school of Christ I was detained from the beginning of one Lent to the end of the following.'¹³

Gerard has left us a first-hand account of what the Government legislation meant in practice to the ordinary Catholic gentleman.¹⁴ Though it is too long to reproduce here, it is worth quoting a Protestant historian's epitome of this and other evidence.

'The truth is, a detestable system had now begun to spring up under which no one with any conscience or religious scruples could hold himself safe for an hour. An army of spies and common informers were prowling about the length and breadth of the land, living by their wits, and feeding partly upon the terrors of others and partly upon the letter of the law as laid down by the recent Acts—wretches who had everything to gain by straining the penalties to the utmost, for they claimed their share of the spoil. Armed with warrants from weak magistrates, who were themselves afraid of suspicion, or, failing these, armed with an order from the Privy

* To take one example, in one of the Yelverton MSS. (vol. xxxiii) is an account of 295 Englishmen, with descriptions, written by a spy who had been given the hospitality of the English College in Rome.

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Council, which was only too easily to be obtained, they sallied forth on their mission of treachery. They were nothing better than bandits protected by the law, let loose upon that portion of the community which might be harried and robbed with impunity. In some cases the pursuivants, after arresting their victims and appropriating their money, were content to let them alone, and save themselves further trouble; in others they kept them till a ransom might come from friends; in any case there was always the fun of half-scuttling a big house and living at free quarters during the search, and the chance of securing a handsome bribe in consideration of being left unmolested for the future.¹⁵

(iii) AFTER THE ARMADA

The execution of Mary Queen of Scots in 1587 made a radical change in the situation. With the end of the hope that Elizabeth would be peacefully succeeded by a Catholic sovereign who was the indisputable heir, the succession question began to divide Catholics. It had its repercussions both at home and abroad and in 1588 the coming of the Great Armada of the Philip II (who had once been King-Consort of England and who was 'the most powerful and, in that sense, the most formidable'¹⁶ of the pretenders to the Crown) further heightened the patriotic tensions. During the nineties, controversy ran high as to the best method of re-establishing the Catholic Faith in England—by an invasion of Catholic powers, aided by the insurrection in the country and the placing of a Catholic sovereign, such as Philip II's daughter, the Infanta Isabella, on the throne, or by enduring persecution with as much patience as possible in the hope that the next sovereign—either Arabella Stewart or James of Scotland—would mitigate it.

It was not until 1597, when the English sack of Cadiz and the failure of the Third Armada, showed beyond contradiction the weakness of Spain, that 'the Papacy definitely and finally renounced all hopes of seeing the ancient religion restored in England by means of Spanish intervention or that of any other foreign power. A return to former religious conditions, or at least to liberty of conscience, could at the utmost be looked for by the Holy See from the accession to

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the throne of some prince who was not hostile to the Catholics; in the meantime it limited itself henceforward to an attempt to save and maintain by the peaceful means of preaching and instruction what still remained to be saved and preserved.¹⁷

These peaceful means—the 'spiritual warfare'—had, of course never ceased. The Acts of 1585 had been answered by a new Jesuit Mission of 1586, led by Father Henry Garnet, who, twenty years later, was to die for his alleged implication in the Gunpowder Plot.

Garnet, a Derbyshire man, was born in 1554, was educated at Winchester and, for two years before going abroad and joining the Society of Jesus, was a corrector of the press to Tottel, the celebrated law printer. In this capacity he first met Popham, who, as Lord Chief Justice, was to sit in judgment of him, and Coke who, as Attorney General, was to prosecute him in 1606. Coke, indeed, at the trial referred to him as 'by birth a gentleman, by education a scholar . . .' and mentioned his 'many gifts and endowments of nature, by art learned, a good linguist, and by profession a Jesuit'.¹⁸

Of Garnet's ability there was no doubt. Abroad, he studied under Bellarmine; at the English College at Rome, he was not only Professor of Hebrew but deputed for two years for the famous mathematician, Clavius. Everyone bore witness to the charm of his character and the depth of his devotion. The only doubt was of the strength of his personality and, at first, the General of the Jesuits hesitated to entrust him with the mission on the grounds that it was 'exposing the meekest lamb to the cruellest butchery'.¹⁹

'The cruellest butchery' was to come at last, but before it, Garnet was to rule the English province for nineteen years and to leave behind him a good organization and forty Jesuits where he found, on his coming, only three, William Weston, Thomas Metham and Thomas Pound. He was ordered to obey Weston as his Superior, should circumstances permit it, but Weston's imprisonment, first in the Clink, then in Wisbech Castle, meant that Garnet had almost immediately to assume the office.

Wisbech Castle becomes, in a sense, the focal point in the story of Catholicism between the years 1587 and 1597. Since 1579 a certain number of Catholics, whom the Govern-

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ment wished neither to execute nor to set at liberty, had been imprisoned there. In the critical years 1587 and 1588, prisoners from the London gaols were, largely for political reasons connected with the possible invasion, transferred there.*

Though at first confinement was strict, the appointment of a new director in 1593 led to a relaxation of the rules and the prisoners enjoyed a certain degree of liberty within the confines of the settlement. They had their own library. They could be visited by friends. Indeed some Catholics made long journeys to Wisbech to be able to breathe once more a purely Catholic atmosphere and, after one such visit, Garnet wrote that he had not enjoyed such consolation for seven years.²⁰

The Government's clemency, however, was not altogether disinterested. By the middle nineties, in spite of preparations in Spain for a new Armada, there was no real danger of invasion, and the new patriotism, combined with the inexorable economic pressure of the recusancy laws, was having its effect. The wealthier Catholics were steadily being made poorer; the number of schismatic Catholics (that is to say, those who heard Mass privately when they could, but publicly attended their parish church and so escaped the fines) was increasing. What is more, the new penal legislation enacted in 1593 had further checked Catholicism by forbidding Catholics to travel more than five miles from their homes and by banishing from the realm all Catholics too poor to pay the fines. By the same Act, anyone suspected of being a seminary priest or a Jesuit and refusing to answer the charge could be imprisoned till he would submit to examination.

Thus, as regards the Catholics at Wisbech, where seminary priests, secular priests and laymen were held, year after year, without hope of release, the Government judged it politic to proceed on the assumption that, as Professor Pollard has put it, 'if the Roman Catholics were given enough rope, they would hang themselves.' This calculation was to some extent justified.' Of the events which culminated in the 'Wisbech stir' of 1597 and the 'Archpriest con-

* The best analogy, rough and anachronistic though it is, is probably the concentration camp in the Isle of Man for those detained without trial as 'political prisoners' under Regulation 18B during the last war.

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troversy' of 1598 to 1602, only the merest outline is possible here.

In 1594, Allen died. It was an ominous death, for, if any man could be called irreplaceable, it was he. In 1587, he had been made a Cardinal and to him, had the Spanish Armada been successful, would have been entrusted the task of reconciling England to the Faith. He was, as the Pope said of him, 'the man who had kept the English Catholics united'.²¹ Catholics at home, exiles abroad, students at Rome or Douay or Paris could equally look to him as their head—an achievement of personality rather than of office. 'The secular priests took their instructions from the Jesuit Persons and the Jesuits from Allen.'²²

After the defeat of the Armada, Allen had retired quietly to Rome and Persons had gone to Spain, where he spent the next eight or nine years founding English colleges there, composing polemics, drawing up plans and keeping in touch with Philip II about a new 'enterprise of England'. The adherence of Persons in particular and the Jesuits in general to the pro-Spanish policy made it impossible for Persons to succeed Allen as the unchallenged head of the English Catholics, since it would have completely alienated the 'patriotic' party, which favoured the succession claims of the Stuarts (Arabella or James) and would have resisted any attempt to subjugate England by force. As the Jesuits and those who agreed with their reading of the situation would equally have repudiated a nominee of the 'patriotic' party, an impasse was reached and no successor to Allen was appointed.

Persons realized, however, that, if Catholicism were to survive in England there must be some acknowledged head and his perception was reinforced by events at Wisbech, where the laxity of some of the secular priests and laymen contrasting with the strictness of the missionary priests and Jesuits was leading to quarrels, divisions and treacheries which added the last straw to the burden and tensions of unending imprisonment. Eventually in 1598 the Pope appointed as Archpriest with authority in England, George Blackwell, a secular who, however, was sympathetic to the Jesuits; but when Blackwell endeavoured to enforce order and discipline, he was met with such opposition that some of

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the compromising seculars actually entered into communication with the Anglican authorities and obtained permission from the Government for their representatives (accompanied by a Dr. Cecil who had acted as spy for his influential namesake) to go to Rome to appeal against the Archpriest and his policy.

Having thus allowed the Catholics to weaken themselves by internal dissensions, the Government struck. By the last religious edict of Elizabeth—in 1602—the edifice of anti-Catholic legislation was completed. A distinction was made between the Jesuits and the secular priests. The former were, without exception, declared guilty of high treason; the latter were given time to submit and were assured of lenient treatment if they did so.

During the whole of this period, when the emphasis appears to be on politics, strife and weakness, the 'spiritual warfare' was, of course, proceeding. The Jesuits might be calumniated by the party of the compromising seculars;* Wisbech might be rent by 'stirs'; the English College at Rome might repeat the pattern of controversy; the exiles in Flanders might be divided bitterly into rival factions, but the essential work was not interrupted. As in the seventies and the eighties, so after the Armada, missionaries came and worked and died for the Faith, unaffected by tactical considerations as to how the Faith might best be safeguarded. Robert Southwell, the poet, who was martyred in 1595 was among them, as were the four Jesuits, who with Garnet, were to become involved in the Gunpowder Plot.

John Gerard returned to England in the October of 1588, landing on the Norfolk coast in company with Edward Oldcorne, a Yorkshireman, who was to become known as 'the Apostle of Worcestershire'. In 1597 there landed Oswald Tesimond, also a Yorkshireman, who had been at school with Oldcorne and who was to be better known under one of his *aliases*, Greenway. And among the lay-brothers of the Society was Nicholas Owen, usually known as 'Little John', 'by which name', wrote Gerard, 'he was so famous and so much esteemed by all Catholics, especially those of the

* It is important to draw a distinction, especially in these years, between the secular party in general and the anti-Jesuit 'appellant party', a minority which arrogated to itself the title of 'secular'.

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better sort, that few in England, either priests or others, were of more credit'.²³

Gerard's description of 'Little John' and his work may stand as a convenient epitome of the state of Catholics in England in the years immediately preceding the Gunpowder Plot.

'This man did for seventeen or eighteen years continually attend upon Father Garnet and assist him in many occasions. But his chief employment was in making of secret places to hide priests and church stuff in from the fury of the searches; in which kind he was so skilful . . . that I verily think no man can be said to have done more good of all those that laboured in the English vineyard. For, first, he was the immediate occasion of saving the lives of many hundreds of persons, both ecclesiastical and secular, and of the estates also of these seculars, which had been lost and forfeited many times over if the priests had been taken in their houses; of which some have escaped not once but many times. . . . Then for spiritual good, it is to be noted he was partner with them all in the gain of souls wherein he did preserve them; and to which end he intended directly all his works, labouring in that painful and dangerous business to keep them in safety for the saving of souls, which it appeared well he respected more than his own body, for he was not ignorant that his office was much subject to the danger of spies, and that when he should happen to be taken he was sure to be extremely handled to wrest out of him the secrets of other men's houses. . . . But above all, that which did most commend him both in the sight of God and man, was his innocent life and earnest practice of solid virtues. For the first it was such that I think no man can say that in all that seventeen or eighteen years they heard him swear by any oath or ever saw him out of charity.'

When the Government eventually caught him, they saw to it that he was indeed 'extremely handled'. They tortured him to death.²⁴

2

The Technique of Plots

(i) THE TIMING OF THE PLOTS

Even the bare outline of anti-Catholic legislation suggests something of the oppressive atmosphere of ruthless malignity which, as soon as the researcher penetrates the surface, is exhaled from the Elizabethan past. One is aware of the underlying element which 'the mass of our official historians ignore' and which has been well defined: 'There has been opposed to the Catholic Church from its foundation a spirit quite different from mere reaction against what is strong or organized. It is a special personal hatred of the Faith. This mood invariably emerges in every moment of schism or even of criticism. The moment (and wherever) the Church is fighting, that malign spirit appears. It had appeared on Calvary; it appears throughout the succeeding centuries; it appeared at once after the beginning of the revolt in the early sixteenth century.'¹ But once it has been recognized and the necessary allowance made, it is important to give due weight to more mundane and matter-of-fact considerations. Pre-eminent and obvious among them is the acquisitive instinct—the greed of the *nouveaux riches* to retain and increase what had been plundered.² From the meanest pursuivant to Burghley himself (whose title indicated a despoiled nunnery and who at his death possessed over 300 estates), the stability of the new ruling class was bound up with the suppression of Catholicism. There is no need, at this time of day, to enlarge on this admitted historical commonplace.

There was, too, hardening many hearts—the hearts of simple people who had gained nothing and had nothing to gain—the memory of the fires of Smithfield and the persecu-

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tions of the previous reign when Mary Tudor 'set herself to burn out "No Popery" and managed to burn it in. The concentration of her fanaticism into cruelty, especially its concentration in particular places and in a short time, did remain like something red-hot in the public memory.'³

Other factors were certain admitted corruptions in the Church and, in places, a genuine and even fanatical belief in the new doctrines of Calvinism. In reality, however, these are but secondary—secondary because the Catholic Church itself had by that time been reformed and the corruptions, such as they were, condemned by the Council of Trent; and because the genuine Calvinists, the Puritans, came in time to be persecuted by the Erastian State-Church hardly less than the Catholics. Finally there was, growing stronger with the years as Elizabeth's prestige increased and as the peril of foreign invasion appeared, the patriotism which, as we have seen, divided the Catholics themselves and which gradually made ordinary men and women honestly, if mistakenly, equate Catholicism with disloyalty.

Yet, when all these considerations are given their due weight, something is still lacking. The picture is psychologically false. It is not congruous with human nature that hatred should so unwearingly persist and that laws of increasing severity should be so simply acceptable and accepted. For Catholics were not a strange race apart; they were neighbours, friends, relatives. Even if they did not constitute the actual majority of the English people (reliable statistics in this matter are almost impossible to arrive at), there can have been few families of which some member was not an adherent, secret or open, of the Faith.

The missing factor which explains the strange temper of the nation is the continual discovery of 'plots' to assassinate Elizabeth—whose life was the thread on which the new State and Church depended.

The Ridolfi plot of 1571 facilitated the penal laws of that and the following year; Parry's plot of 1585 those of that year; the Babington plot of 1586 was used as an excuse for the execution of Mary Queen of Scots (for which purpose it was, indeed, 'framed') and the legislation of 1587; in the nineties, there were Polwhele's plot and Collen's plot and Squire's plot, to say nothing of the more important plots of

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Lopez and of Yorke and Williams. 'Public indignation and hatred were in this way constantly kept at fever-heat against a party which was represented as constantly plotting against the life of the Queen, though one loose hint of a spy or an impatient word from a distracted prisoner was evidently a sufficient foundation for the manufacture of a succession of such plots.'⁴

Widely differing in details, these plots have one constant feature. They were all known to, nursed by, and, at the right moment, 'discovered' by the Government who used in the elucidation (if not in the construction) of them its spies, forgers and torturers. One or two of them may have had a foundation in fact, in that some wild spirit among the exiles in Flanders could always be found to advocate the assassination of Elizabeth, the 'Grand Turk of the West' and, as long as Mary Queen of Scots was alive, some partisan would try to right her wrongs; but, the more that is known about them, the more suspect their authenticity becomes. As Martin Hume wrote as long ago as 1901: 'The accusations that have been repeated by nearly every English historian from Elizabeth's time to our own, of widespread and numerous plots to assassinate the Queen at this period, are to a large extent unsupported by serious evidence. . . . Pamphlets and broadsides, professing to give the whole story of the various murder plots, were numerous, and have formed the basis of our historical relations for three centuries; but they were written in nearly every instance with political or party object, and, from the nature of the case, were necessarily based upon an imperfect or partial statement of the facts. . . . Even the English refugees on the Continent must nearly all of them have been against the commission of such a crime, or the Queen would never have died a natural death. . . . The fact remains that, notwithstanding all the loose talk of the swashbucklers, no serious attempt was ever really made to commit the murder.'⁵

To narrate the story of all the plots would require another book, but two may be briefly mentioned. The Babington conspiracy of 1586, which resulted in the execution of Mary Queen of Scots is a key plot in that, as the facts are not in dispute, it lays bare the Government technique. Squire's plot of 1597 was still fresh in the public memory at the time

The Babington Conspiracy

of the Gunpowder Plot in 1605 and was specifically mentioned in Coke's speech at Garnet's trial as implicating the Jesuits.

(ii) THE BABINGTON CONSPIRACY

The Government's object in the Babington Conspiracy was to involve Mary Queen of Scots in an attempt by her partisans to take Elizabeth's life. If she could be proved privy to such an attempt, her own life would be forfeit under the new Act of 1585 which decreed that 'if anything shall be compassed or imagined tending to the hurt of Her Majesty's royal person by any person or with the privity of any person that may pretend title to the Crown of this realm . . . her Highness's subjects may lawfully . . . by all possible and forcible means pursue to death every such wicked person by whom or by whose means assent or privity . . . any such wicked act (shall be) attempted, or any other thing compassed or imagined'.⁶ The passing of this Act was, as everybody including Mary herself realized, the death-warrant of the Queen of Scots. All that remained to be done was to secure proof not necessarily of her assent to but merely of her knowledge of a mortal conspiracy.

On Christmas Eve, 1585, Mary was taken to a new place of imprisonment, Chartley, under the care of a new gaoler, Paulet, who was bitterly hostile to Catholicism and to her. 'Here the trap was set; a very ingenious trap.'

Among those in the Government spy service at this time were Gilbert Gifford, Thomas Phelippes and Robert Poley, all posing as Catholics. Gifford had the confidence of Thomas Morgan, who had once been Mary's secretary and was now in Paris working for her release. Phelippes was an expert decipherer and forger;* Poley was trusted both by the Catholic exiles and by the Catholic gentry. He became the special friend of Antony Babington, a wealthy, idealistic and somewhat unstable young man of twenty-four who had been page to Mary's earlier gaoler and who, seeing her often, had become devoted to her.

Gifford, trusted by Morgan and by Mary, acted as deliverer of letters, arranging that they should go in and out of Chartley by the hands of the brewer who supplied the

* See p. 97.

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beer from Burton. Having established this 'secret post', Gifford then showed all the letters to the Government, to be copied by Phelippes, who could also forge any interpolation which was considered necessary.

As nothing incriminating appeared in this correspondence, Gifford then went to the Continent to get into touch with the wilder spirits who favoured Elizabeth's assassination. Eventually, by some of these, aided later by Poley, Babington was persuaded to become the 'leader' of a murder-plot and, when he wished to withdraw from it, was skilfully kept involved. Gifford induced Babington to write of his plans to Mary, and, once this letter was safely delivered, the work was, in reality, done. The Queen of Scots had been made privy to a murder plot. To make assurance doubly sure, the Government when they had Mary's reply to Babington in their hands, decided to forge a postscript which should explicitly implicate Mary. Babington had written: 'For the dispatch of the usurper, from the obedience of whom we are by the excommunication of her made free, there be six noble gentlemen, all my private friends, who for the zeal they bear to the Catholic cause and your Majesty's service will undertake that tragical execution.' The famous 'forged postscript' added to Mary's letter by Phelippes on the Government's instructions ran: 'I would be glad to know the names and qualities of the six gentlemen which are to accomplish the designment, for it may be I shall be able, upon knowledge of the parties, to give you some further advice necessary to be followed therein, as also from time to time particularly how you proceed, and as soon as you may (for the same purpose) who be already, and how far, everyone is privy hereunto.'

A few days later, the Government 'discovered' the plot, arrested Babington and his associates and brought them to trial. 'The conspiracy proved to be so harmless—never at any time more than the silly talk of boys—that it was only by the wilful distortion and suppression of evidence that it was possible to make any case in court.'⁸ They were, of course, tortured, condemned and executed, as the prelude to the killing of Mary Queen of Scots five months later.

The Babington formula, simple and effective, could be varied to suit the circumstances. It might even be considered

Squire's Plot

a conventional device of statesmanship in an unstable or revolutionary situation, and though it neither originated in nor ended with the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England, the climate then was propitious for its use. To stir up popular indignation against a party obnoxious to the Government by the unmasking of an 'enterprise' undertaken by a few fanatics, unsuspectingly goaded on by Government spies (who suggested the matter in the first place) was a certain way to gain approbation for measures which would otherwise have been unpopular. And where, as with the execution of Mary in 1587 and the extreme measures for the extermination of Catholicism in 1606, there were diplomatic repercussions abroad to be considered, an elaborate plot—in the first the Babington, in the second the Gunpowder—complete with confessions, documentary evidence and a public trial, was essential. Squire's plot of 1597, however, was on a smaller scale and with a more limited objective and, because of certain inherent improbabilities, it lacks something of the brilliance of the larger achievements.

(iii) SQUIRE'S PLOT

Edward Squire was a jack-of-all-trades who lived by his wits. Originally an unsuccessful accountant, he decided to seek his fortune by joining Drake's expedition to the West Indies in 1595, but the ship in which he was serving was captured by the Spaniards and he was taken prisoner to Seville, where he was liberated on parole. Here he went about challenging Spaniards to debate the relative claims of the Anglican and the Catholic Churches and, not unnaturally, drew upon himself the attentions of the Holy Office, by which he was sentenced to two years' imprisonment in a Carmelite monastery. Once in the monastery, he soon professed himself converted to Catholicism and asked if he could consult the English Jesuit, Father Richard Walpole, Rector of the English College in Seville.

Walpole was immediately suspicious, since the gambit of Englishmen becoming reconciled to the Church and returning to Cecil with the information they had thus managed to acquire was, by now, an old one; and his suspicions were increased when Squire asked him for introductions to the

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Jesuits and seminary priests in England. He naturally refused to give any such introductions and shortly afterwards Squire managed to escape and return to England. Here he was given a post in the Royal stables and it was not long before he joined Essex's expedition—the Islands Voyage—which was as unsuccessful in the way of profit or plunder as Drake's had been. He returned, at the end of 1597, with no visible means of subsistence. In the spring of 1598 we know, from a letter of Chamberlain to Carleton, that 'Here be certain apprehended for a conspiracy against the Queen's person and my Lord of Essex . . . much buzzing hath been about it, but either the matter is not ripe or there is somewhat else in it, for it is kept very secret.'⁹ This is usually considered (though certain proof is lacking) as being the first indication of Squire's 'plot' which did not ripen till the autumn. When Squire was eventually arrested in the October of 1598, he confessed, after five hours on the rack, that Father Walpole had employed him to poison Elizabeth and Essex.

'Being demanded what directions he had from Walpole concerning (Squire) saith that he had certain directions from Walpole in his own handwriting, which as he saith he threw into the water the same day he came from Seville. . . . And saith that certain poisonous drugs whereof opium was one were to be compounded and beaten together and steeped in white mercury water and put in an earthen pot and set it a month in the sun, by Walpole's said directions.

'This examinant demanded of Walpole how he should apply the poison and he said it should be put in a double bladder, and the bladders to be pricked full of holes in the upper part and carried in the palm of his hand upon a thick glove for safeguard of his hand; and then to turn the holes downwards and press it hard upon the pommel of her Highness's saddle; and said that it would lie and tarry long there, and that it would not be checked by air. . . .

'He confesseth that at the persuasion of Walpole, the Jesuit, he undertook to poison the Earl of Essex, when he should be with him at sea, to the end to defeat the voyage, and that he carried the confection of the poison with him to sea in the Earl's ship . . . and did apply it to the pommel of the Earl's chair, where he did use to sit and lay his hand

Squire's Plot

. . . and saith that the confection was so clammy as it would stick to the pommel of the chair and that he rubbed it on with parchment. And soon after the Earl sat in the chair all supper-time. . . .

'And now at last confesseth that the Monday seven-night, after his coming home from Spain and had obtained leave to go with the Earl to sea, understanding that Her Majesty's horses were in preparing for Her Majesty to ride abroad, as her horse stood ready saddled in the stable-yard, this examinant came to the horse, and in the hearing of divers thereabout said "God save the Queen" and therewith laid his hand upon the pommel of the saddle, and out of a bladder which he had made full of holes with a big pin, he poisoned the pommel of the saddle, being covered with velvet, by brushing the poison on it through the holes of the bladder with his hand, and soon after Her Majesty rode abroad that afternoon.'¹⁰

Later he entirely recanted, saying that he had confessed anything he thought would satisfy the Commissioners and relieve him from torture; and at the gallows itself—knowing that such a course would ensure a vile and lingering death—he protested that this statement under torture was a lie. The story indeed is so preposterous that one cannot but agree with Lingard's judgment that 'if Titus Oates had never existed, the history of this ridiculous plot would suffice to show how easily the most absurd fictions obtain credit when the public mind is under the influence of religious prejudice'.¹¹ And, should Lingard, as a Catholic, be deemed to be prejudiced, there is the Protestant Jessop who, after a careful examination of the evidence, asserts: 'To me it seems only a monstrous fiction, which the more closely it is looked into the more entirely incredible does it appear.'¹² To-day, there is no historian who would take it seriously; but the importance of it is that, at the time, the Government worked it up to a point where public feeling was at fever-heat. Bacon prepared the Government pamphlet on it; Coke prosecuted the prisoner and, on this occasion, had recourse to the forensic trick of allowing his emotion to overcome him in the middle of the speech and having to pause for loyal tears,* and special

* The following year, Shakespeare wrote *Julius Caesar* in which Antony does the same in the Forum Speech.

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prayers were appointed to be used officially in all Anglican churches, one of which ended with a reference to the Jesuits as 'the hellish Chaplains of Antichrist' and exhorted the Almighty to 'let our gracious Queen still reign and rule in despite of Rome and Rheims and Spain and Hell',¹³ and another began: 'Almighty and Everlasting God Creator and Governor of all the world, by whom Kings do rule and under whose providence they are wonderfully and mightily oftentimes protected from many fearful dangers by which the malice of Satan and his wicked imps do seek to entrap them: We give unto thy heavenly Majesty most humble and hearty thanks for that it hath pleased thee of thine infinite mercy and goodness in Christ Jesu so wonderfully to uphold, deliver and preserve thine handmaid, our most dread and Sovereign Queen Elizabeth so many and sundry times from the cruel and bloody treacheries of desperate men who address themselves to all wickedness; and at this time especially, wherein her innocent life was not only attempted but, had it not been thy merciful power to prevent it, much endangered by wretched traitors appointed to that purpose, who had performed, as much as in them lay, their wicked designments of impoisoning her sacred Majesty.'¹⁴

And that there might be no doubt in the minds of the worshippers as to who Satan's wicked imps were and who had attempted the poisoning, the authorities prefaced the Prayers with an 'Admonition to the Reader' in which it was stated: 'That which passeth the rest and may be an effectual motive to work in all Christian hearts a sounder devotion of thankfulness to our God and a greater detestation of that blood-sucking Romish Antichrist with his whole swarm of shavelings, was that dreadful attempt of Squire . . . which we, her subjects, do tremble at to remember, utterly to quench the light of Israel and by poison to make away our Sovereign Prince . . . to which horrible practice the said Squire in his voluntary confession, without any torture at all, professed that he was first incited and afterward at several times persuaded, and, appearing somewhat backward, at last encouraged by one Walpole, a cursed Jebusite (Jesuite, I should say).'¹⁵

With such popularizing of the plot in the one place which everyone had by law to attend, the parish church, it is not

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surprising that eight years later, Coke, in his indictment of Garnet for complicity in the Gunpowder Plot, could be sure of making his point when, at the end of a list of plots, he said: 'Anno '97 came Squire from Spain to poison Her Majesty, incited, directed and warranted by Walpole, a Jesuit, then residing there; at whose hands, likewise, after absolution he received the sacrament, as well to put the practice in execution as to keep it secret.'¹⁶

Apart from this explicit reference, Squire's plot is bound to the Gunpowder Plot in other ways. They are separated in time by eight years only; the earlier plot shows in action the Government triumvirate—Robert Cecil, William Waad and Edward Coke—which was to manage the later; and the point of Squire's plot was to implicate the Jesuits and Spain* which was also the Government's main concern in the Gunpowder Plot. The propaganda value of this move was obvious, in that the first would further widen the cleavage between the Jesuits and the seculars and the second would rally the patriots of whatever religious allegiance.

Taking the Babington and the Squire conspiracies together, we find already present almost every feature of the Gunpowder Plot. The general framework was that of the former, some details that of the latter. In place of Babington and his friends, taking the suggestions of Gifford, whom they trusted but who was in the Government pay, and stiffened by fanatics among the exiles, we have Catesby and his friends, in close contact with Monteagle who, from circumstantial evidence, seems to have played a similar part to Gifford and who was indubitably instrumental in 'discovering' the plot, and employing the fanatic, Guy Fawkes, one of the exiles abroad. Thomas Phelippes who, beyond question, was employed on the forgeries in the Babington case, was at the Government's disposal, protesting his desire to

* In the confessions of Stanley, which led to the arrest of Squire (a circumstance which I have omitted in my very condensed epitome of the plot), Philip II himself was implicated in the murder attempt, in 'an utterly ridiculous story, which bears indications of its falsity on every line of it'. The judgment is Martin Hume's (*Treason and Plot*, p. 319) and he has no difficulty in sustaining it. For one thing, Philip was at the time on his death-bed.

In the Gunpowder Plot, as we shall see, the English Government made strenuous efforts to involve Hugh Owen, an exile in Spanish pay, as the Spanish *liaison*.

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serve them, during the Gunpowder Plot. Waad, who had been one of the trusted Government officials in the Babington trap and who was one of the three who extorted Squire's confession under torture, was, as Governor of the Tower, responsible for the torture and confession of Fawkes. The tying-in of the Gunpowder Plot with the Jesuits is, as we have seen, an obvious parallel with the Squire plot.

But though we know the Babington and the Squire conspiracies to have been what would now be called 'frame-ups' and can recognize the pattern of them, as well as the people in them, repeated in the Gunpowder Plot, we are not, of course, thereby entitled to assert that the latter was a 'frame-up' also. It is, however, necessary to think of the Gunpowder Plot not as an isolated event at the beginning of a new reign and a new dynasty, but as the last example of a twenty-year-long series. And it is hardly too much to say that any reader who cares to study in detail all the plots (rather than being content with this necessarily short abstract of two of them) will approach the Gunpowder Plot requiring above all proof not of the conspirators' guilt but of the Government's innocence.

3

Spain and the English Succession

(i) THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION

The dominant factor in foreign affairs during Elizabeth's reign is now so obviously seen as the rivalry of England and Spain that it is difficult, at this distance, to realize that then it was a new phenomenon. In the July of 1558 Philip of Spain began his fifth regnal year as King-Consort of England; in the July of 1588, the Great Armada was in the English Channel. During the thirty years between, Philip had been pushed slowly but inevitably and much against his will into war. 'The almost simultaneous accession to power of Elizabeth of England, Philip of Spain and Catherine de Medici, Queen Mother of France, radically changed the problems of European politics'¹ and, if the very complicated outcome may be conveniently summarized as a triangular struggle for power between the three, it is the duel between Elizabeth and Philip which occupies the centre of the stage.

That religion was one of the elements in it is not to be denied, but it played a far less important part than both parties, for propaganda purposes, pretended. Philip, for example, was angry with the Pope for excommunicating Elizabeth,² however he may later have availed himself of that excommunication. Also, he genuinely wanted peace with England even more than Elizabeth wanted peace with Spain. Both needed time to consolidate their power. What made war inevitable were Elizabeth's attempts to add to hers at the expense of his. And here the religious divisions formed convenient excuses for political intervention. Elizabeth could support Philip's rebellious subjects in the Netherlands on the ground that they were Protestants; Philip could foster

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the Irish rebelling against Elizabeth on the ground that they were Catholics. But, as Sir John Cloughton has rightly pointed out, it is quite incorrect 'to represent the war as religious; to describe it as a species of crusade instigated by the Pope, in order to bring heretical England once more into the fold of the true Church. In reality nothing can be more inaccurate. It is, indeed, quite certain that religious bitterness was imported into the quarrel; but the war had its origin in two perfectly clear and wholly mundane causes.'³

These causes were the raids made by English seamen, especially Drake, on the Spanish-American trade and Elizabeth's refusal to make restitution for or to disavow their acts and 'the countenance and assistance which had been given by the English to the king's rebellious subjects in the Netherlands'.⁴

During the late sixties, not only had there been persistent raids on the 'Spanish main' but Elizabeth had actually impounded money sent to pay Spanish troops in the Netherlands, with the result that the Governor there had to impose a tax on the Dutch which rekindled the rebellion. During the seventies, Drake brought home fortunes plundered from Spain. In 1585, Philip took the first step to bring matters to a head by placing an embargo on all English ships in Spanish ports. Elizabeth's reply was to authorize an attack on Spain in the West Indies, in which Drake and Frobisher 'capturing, plundering and destroying as they went . . . sacked and burnt Santiago and Porto Praya in the Cape Verde Islands, gutted San Domingo, plundered Cartagena on the Spanish main and held it to ransom, burning all the ships and galleys which they could not take away; cruised for a month off Cape St. Antonio, threatened Havana, the defences of which, however, were judged too strong; and, passing up the coast of Florida, took, plundered and burnt St. Augustine, a town of about two hundred and fifty houses, not one of which was left standing. They then relieved and took away from Wokokan the colonists who had been sent out the year before by Sir Walter Raleigh, and finally returned to Portsmouth at the end of July 1586. The booty brought home was valued at from sixty to sixty-five thousand pounds—small in comparison with what Drake had won with much smaller means.'⁵

