

POWDER TREASON¹

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EVEN before his accession King James is said to have given a verbal promise to Thomas Percy, the future conspirator, that the Catholics would be granted some degree of liberty. There is, in the very nature of things, no written evidence of this promise, and the King later denied having given it, but the Catholics firmly believed that some assurance of toleration had been given. But by the beginning of 1604 all hope of toleration for papists was gone. On 19 February, James I protested 'his utter detestation of their superstitious religion, and that he was so far from favouring it, as if he thought his son and heir after him would give any toleration thereunto, he would wish him fairly buried before his eyes'. And fairly buried he was in 1612.

On 22 February, 1604, a proclamation was issued ordering all Jesuits and seminary priests to depart the kingdom before 19 March. On the same day the fine of £20 a month for recusancy was again put in force, and was made to include the whole period since the King's coming, thus negating what little relief had been granted.

On 24 April, a bill was introduced in the lower house, classing Catholics with forgers, perjurers and outlaws, and disabling them from sitting in parliament, while an 'Act for the due execution of the statutes against Jesuits, seminary priests and recusants' made in this session, not only re-enforced all the laws made in Elizabeth's reign but even added to their severity. On the third reading of this bill Viscount Montague courageously denounced it, and the following day found himself in the Fleet for his 'scandalous and offensive speech'. Further proclamations followed and on 16 July the bloody persecution broke out again when John Sugar, a priest, and Robert Grissold his servant, were executed at Warwick. They were followed in August by two

¹ Extracts from a chapter of Fr Anstruther's *Vaux of Harrowden*, to be published shortly.

laymen, Lawrence Bailey and one Rawson, executed at Lancaster. Thomas Pound, who had been a friend of Campion and had languished in prison a quarter of a century, was arraigned before the Star Chamber for protesting against the cruelty of the law and the execution of Bailey and Rawson. He was now old and senile, but was sentenced to lose one ear in London and the other in Lancaster and to continue in prison for life, as well as to pay a fine of £1,000. The mutilation was later commuted to standing in the pillory one day in each town, with ears nailed but not cut off.

There were signs also of the bitter disappointment and desperation of the Catholics. A minor revolt broke out in Herefordshire in the summer, and there were rumours that the papists were collecting armour, lethal weapons and horses. There was some slight foundation for these rumours, at least as regards the horses, but like all rumours they soon became exaggerated. Thus an obscure person in Northampton, one Godley by name, spread the story that the Catholics were preparing a sudden coup that was to be a sort of cross between the massacres of St Bartholomew's Day and the Destroying Angel. All Protestant houses were to be marked with the Sign of the Cross in preparation for the purge. Godley was arrested, and all the evidence that he vouchsafed was that

'Sir Thomas Tresham was seen with others, no small babes and eighty in his company, to come in the night to Boughton, within two miles of Northampton, and wherefor should that be? This he vouched from Edward Martin who was sent for and said indeed that he had heard so, and that there were two hundred in the company, but not that they came in the night: and heard another time that there were two thousand, and since he heard that there were but six.'

In 1605 the penal laws were being enforced with great rigour in the north of England. Two more laymen were executed in the summer. Not unnaturally there was considerable unrest among the disappointed Catholics who had waited so long and with such hopes for the new reign. We need look no further than to Fr Garnet's letters. On

29 August, 1604, he writes: 'Catholics will no more be quiet. What shall we do? Jesuits cannot hinder it. Let Pope forbid all Catholics to stir.' On 8 May, 1605, he wrote to Fr Persons:

'All are desperate here; divers Catholics are offended with Jesuits: they say that Jesuits do impugn and hinder all forcible enterprises. I dare not inform myself of their affairs because of the prohibition of Father General for meddling in such affairs.'

On the same day he wrote to the Jesuit General in precisely similar terms, but in Latin, and received a letter from him, dated 25 July, 1605, which may or may not be an answer to his:

'We have heard, though with the utmost secrecy, what I am persuaded your lordship knows, that the Catholics are planning something for liberty; but as such an attempt, especially at this time, will bring not only many grave inconveniences to religion, but will call into question the whole body of Catholics, Our Holy Father orders me to write to your Reverence in his name that you should use all your influence with these noblemen and gentlemen, especially with the Archpriest, that nothing of the sort should be discussed or carried out on account of the above mentioned causes.'

It must not be supposed that the Earl of Salisbury was entirely unaware of the trouble brewing. Though he was careful never to give any hint in England that he had any foreknowledge, he wrote to his ambassadors abroad on 9 November, 1605, after describing the plot:

'Not but that I had sufficient advertisements that most of those that now are fled (being all notorious Recusants), with many others of that kind, had a practice in hand for some stir this Parliament, but I never dreamed it should have been in such nature, because I never read nor heard the like in any State to be attempted in gross by any conspiracy without some distinction of persons.'

The problem remains how and when he got his first intimation of the plot. There is not a single spy's report among his papers or the State papers that clearly refers to the subject. But there is an interesting document among the Flan-

ders State Papers that seems to have been overlooked. It is headed: 'The manner of my first arrival and entertainment at Brussels the 21 of April, 1605'. From internal evidence it is clear that the writer was a soldier, who tells us he has served fourteen years in Ireland, France and the Low Countries, and has a brother serving with Count Maurice of Nassau and the Dutch Protestants. It bears the very distinctive signature of William Turner. Turner was one of Salisbury's spies in the Low Countries. As early as 1598 he sent 'The names of those Jesuitters that are in the Netherlands in the entertainment of the King of Spain', a long, accurate account of the exiles, showing a considerable acquaintance with Catholic affairs. On 26 April, 1604, he received a safe conduct to come to England and on 22 March, 1606, Salisbury himself signs a pass for him to repair to England 'on the King's service'. There are other reports from him in 1606, and his name occurs several times in letters from William Newce (another spy) who was obviously jealous of him.

Writing from Flanders Turner relates at length how he met a certain Mr Redish, and one Colonel Simple, both popish exiles serving the Archduke of Austria. They recommended him to get in touch with Fr Baldwin the Jesuit Superior in Brussels, and with Hugh Owen, a Catholic layman, 'for they were the Spanish Secretary's instruments in matters of the nation'. He met Owen walking with a Mr Bayly. Owen 'looked on me scornfully', and said that he could get no employment there unless he became a Catholic, as the King of Spain wanted only Catholics.

Three days later he met Owen at Court, and 'he said he understood I had a brother served the States, and asked if I could persuade my brother to come over to the Archduke's side, and withal to render some town of importance'. Turner was sent to Holland with a hundred pounds. 'At my arrival there I told Count Maurice the cause of my coming thither, for which I received thanks and rewards at his hands, and returned to the other side, informing them of such things as I thought could best please their humours.'

He gives no indication of how long this mission took; he merely states that a few days after his return 'Owen sent for

Greenway and Fawkes and made me to be acquainted with them, assuring me they were very honest men and such as he loved dearly, and purposed hereafter to employ me with them. . . . After this Owen sent me with Fawkes to the army, to make relation to the Marquis [of Spinola] what I had done in Holland.' Seven weeks later Owen sent for him and they had a long conversation about a plot to invade England. Turner says he was reconciled to the Church by Fr Baldwin 'and next morning received of him the Sacrament'. The same evening he went to Owen, who carefully locked the door, and unfolded the details of the plot. The spearhead was to be a company of 1,500 Spaniards who were actually at Dover at the time (this was in July, 1605), awaiting passage to Flanders. They were to be reinforced by the volunteer regiment fighting with the Archduke, and by some 300 horse 'which he was assured would be ready to join them' in England. They were to drive from Dover to Rochester, capture the bridge there, and immobilise the English Fleet that was riding at anchor there. Five hundred musketeers and some small pieces of artillery were to be carried in pinnaces, which were in readiness at Dunkirk, Nieuport, Gravelines, and Ostend. There is a great deal about the details of this invasion, and Turner's role had been already determined:

'First he told me that I should be presently furnished with money convenient to defray my charges from hence to London, but that I should stay at Dover for Greenway, who was gone by the way of Douay, whither he carried from Brussels many packets of writings and books. At his coming to Dover he should take me in his company, and bring me to Mr Catesby, who as Owen said expected my assistance in such things as they appointed to employ me, straitly commanding me to do all things he should require at my hands for the advancement of the service, but above all to be secret, by which means I should get many honourable friends of the nobility and others who would have arms and horses in readiness.'

Turner informs us that he kept Sir Thomas Edmunds, our Ambassador at Brussels, *au fait* with these proceedings, and presumably the information was passed on to Salisbury.

But the only extant letter of Edmunds concerning Turner was not sent till 27 September, 1605. It speaks of Turner's 'light and dissolute life', and his desire to recover Salisbury's good opinion of him, and it gives a long account of his treachery in Holland. It makes no reference to the coming invasion, but Edmunds states that he is sending Captain James, who can be trusted and who will tell him more.

In October, Turner went to Paris, and presented Sir Thomas Parry, our ambassador there, with 'divers papers of intelligences and practices of sundry his Majesty's disaffected subject as well on this side of the sea as at home', but this was not reported to Salisbury till 28 November, too late to help in the discovery of the Plot. The ambassador also sent a copy of Turner's instructions from Owen:

'You shall repair from your landing place to London, to Mons. Hobock, the Ambassador resident for the Archduke, and there to deliver the letters you have in charge, and withal to enquire for one Dr Taylor, who shall give you such order as he hath received from here. You shall have a care that you have no conference with the Earl of Salisbury, the King's principal Secretary of State, or any person whatsoever, unless it be with those that are to be treated with.'

Turner's own statement contains no reference to the blowing up of Parliament, and it is probable that he knew nothing about it. He wrote himself to Salisbury on 5 December, referring to his former letters, and expressing his desire to merit the King's pardon, and to return to England. 'If I might have had it I should have made known the grounds of many accidents that have now fallen out to be true. The ground of this treason (i.e. the Powder Plot) was unknown to me: God is my judge. . . . Many other things of importance I have related to the Ambassador long before these treasons were known to you . . . I told the Ambassador before of many of them that are in these treasons. I have sent you instructions that Owen and Baldwin have given me to put in execution, with many other directions most detestable and damnable . . . I came with tears to Edmunds, and

told him I would fain speak with you to make known the same.'

It is not possible to say when Salisbury received Turner's statement. If Turner wrote it after the discovery of the Powder Plot he shows remarkable restraint in making no reference to it. But even supposing that the actual document was among those sent by Sir Thomas Parry just after the Plot, the information in it belongs to the previous summer and was in the hands of Edmunds some months before the Plot was discovered. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that Salisbury was aware that something was on foot, and that he was furnished with the names of Fawkes and Catesby before the end of the summer. With his excellent secret service it should not have taken him long to discover that these gentlemen were taking liberties with the foundations of the Parliament House.

The traditional story of the Gunpowder Plot so bristles with difficulties that some writers have maintained that it was a Government fabrication from the start, cleverly foisted on the Catholics. There are, however, grave objections to this theory which should be frankly faced. There is, for instance, the account in the Brudenell collection of the death of Francis Tresham in the Tower, written by William Vavisor his servant, who was with him when he died. This document has never been in the hands of the Government and is above suspicion. Tresham told Vavisor how on 14 October, 1605, Catesby and Thomas Winter came to him at Lord Stourton's house in Clerkenwell, and after supper called him into his bedchamber, and having extracted a promise of secrecy, 'entered presently into matters of treason, and said they intended to blow up the Parliament Houses with gunpowder'.

There was certainly a good deal of forgery, and tampering with genuine documents, but this can be accounted for without denying the existence of the Plot. Salisbury was determined to exploit his advantage to the utmost, and to use the Plot for the ruin of the English Catholics at home and abroad. His efforts to inculcate Hugh Owen is a good example of his methods. This exile was agent for English affairs at the Court of the Archduke, and obnoxious to the

English government, and every device was used to compass his extradition. Owen was arrested and his papers were searched, but there was no *prima facie* case against him, and the Archduke resisted the pressure even of King James himself, to send Owen to stand his trial, and be hanged with the rest. In order to convince the Archduke of Owen's guilt a copy of Fawkes' confession was sent to him, in which Fawkes is made to say:

'I retired into the Low Countries *by the advice and direction of the rest, as well to acquaint Owen with the particulars of the plot, as also lest by my longer stay I might have grown suspicious.*'

The words in italics do not occur in the original, and were dishonestly interpolated for obvious reasons.

There is a somewhat similar passage about Owen in the declaration of Garnet dated 8 March, 1606:

'He [Greenway] affirmed to me to be privy to that action eight, Catesby, Thomas Winter, Percy, Faux (*who he told me went over at Easter to acquaint Owen, which I never imagined before nor thought any such resolution to be in Faux*), the two Wrights I think he named but not Bates nor Robert Winter nor Grant nor Sir Everard Digby.'

The words in italics fit so unnaturally into the context that they sound suspiciously like a later addition. They are also rather nonsensical. When Fawkes left England at Easter Garnet had no inkling of the Plot. Why should he go to the trouble to protest that he then had no suspicion of Fawkes' true reason for leaving England?

But if this passage is an interpolation, then the whole of the declaration of Garnet, 'all in his own hand', must be a forgery, for the words form an integral part of the declaration, and are not added afterwards. An endorsement to the effect that a document is all in the hand of the alleged writer only seems to be found on documents that are highly suspicious.

To make the Plot appear as heinous as possible it was stressed that the object was to blow up the King and the royal family. But when the conspirators began their work they had no reason to suppose that the King would be there. Parliament had not been dissolved but only prorogued, and

it was never the custom for the sovereign to open a new session. King James was, of course, not there on the 5th, and when he did come, on the afternoon of the 9th, he told the House that he came 'contrary to the custom of any of his predecessors, at the beginning of any session of Parliament holden by prorogation'. He was not given to attending Parliament; he much preferred hunting. He had been present only three times in the previous two-and-a-half years. The conspirators had no reason to think that he would oblige them by being there, and by bringing the whole royal family with him at the very time when the mine went up. The spectacle of Guy Fawkes, with tinder and flint, awaiting the psychological moment is picturesque but not convincing.

Much capital was made out of the absence of certain Catholic peers when Parliament assembled on 5 November. Peers were not bound to sit, but if they were not coming they had to appoint a proxy. One might have expected that any Catholic peer who had been warned to stay away would have taken the elementary precaution of appointing a proxy. But whether he appointed one or not, he would not have been conspicuous by his absence. There were ten bishops and forty peers absent on the 5th, and only twenty-nine had appointed proxies. Salisbury himself was not there, and this was not a last-minute decision, as he had appointed Lord Gray as his proxy. Gray was not there. The most suspect of all the Catholic peers, the Earl of Northumberland, was among the few who did attend, but it was only the Catholic peers who got into trouble for staying away.

There are indications that the Government was expecting some plot, and preparing for a possible coup. As early as 11 June, 1605, the Bishop of Ely was asked 'whether he be willing that the priests shall be sent to Wisbech Castle, to be there at the King's charges without any burthen to him, and if he be, then to appoint some fit person to look after them'. The Bishop evidently considered this a profitable proposition, for on 23 June he appointed his own brother, Mr Heton, and on 27 June the Sheriffs were instructed to send priests there. A similar emptying of the London prisons took place just before the Government chose to 'discover' the Babington Plot.

Another indication of official foreknowledge is the behaviour of the Sheriffs. They were all due to relinquish their office on the very 5 November, but in fact they all stayed on till the following January. They must have received instructions to do so some time before the discovery of the Plot.

It seems certain then that Salisbury had a genuine plot to exploit and ample time to prepare. How well he exploited it is common knowledge. Anyone who has the patience to read steadily through the two folio volumes of miscellaneous manuscripts known as the 'Gunpowder Plot Book' will find that there is scarcely any reference to gunpowder, and not much more about the plot. Most of the documents are concerned with papists and Masses. Salisbury's determination to embroil as many priests as possible and Jesuits in particular could hardly be more obvious.



HOLY NAME

Jesu, Jesu, Jesu, the heart is a bird mourning,
 The sun has left the thicket where I was singing.
 The sun has left the thicket, the day is turning,
 The blue night hazes the air, my Jesu, Jesu, Jesu.

Jesu, Jesu, Jesu, the child cannot check its crying,
 The lonely child in the long summer evening,
 Forbidden the orchard where the others are heard playing,
 Their voices distant and innocent, calling, Jesu, Jesu, Jesu.

Jesu, Jesu, Jesu, a fountain evening and morning,
 Its lively waters crying, calling and singing,
 Its lively waters blossoming and returning,
 The stalk, the glittering seeds, all Jesu, Jesu, Jesu.

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