

Heath. Evelyn there looked upon these forces on the 29th of June: "We saw the new-raised army encamped, designed against France, in pretence at least; but which gave umbrage to the Parliament. His majesty and a world of company were in the field, and the whole army in battalia, a very glorious sight. Now were brought into service a new sort of soldiers called grenadiers, who were dexterous in flinging hand grenades, every one having a pouch full." What Evelyn, a steady loyalist, thought a pretence, is the only justification for the undoubted fact that some of the opposition to the Court was the result of a secret connexion formed with the Ambassadors of Louis by some of the parliamentary leaders. Money was bestowed upon the more unscrupulous. We cannot think, even if the designs of Charles upon the liberties of his country had been manifest to Hollis, and Russell, and Sidney, instead of being merely suspected, that they were justified in their intrigues with any foreign prince, and especially with a monarch so opposed to freedom and national independence as Louis XIV. Undoubtedly their conduct was some apology for Charles in that policy of evasion and delay which allowed France to conclude a peace upon far more advantageous terms than Louis could have obtained if William of Orange had been adequately supported. The peace of Nimeguen, concluded on the 4th of August, left Louis a large portion of his gains in this war of aggression. England had the disgrace of the most complicated faithlessness to all honourable principle. She lost her national position in Europe, and became a by-word for despotic states, and a scandal to the few nations that were free. She stood alone in possessing a government in which the opinions of the people were supposed to have a voice through their representatives. These manifestations of weakness and dishonour were held to be inherent in a mixed constitution of king and parliament, and men were taught to think that arbitrary power was a safer and more glorious thing than regulated freedom. Despotism is always ready to rejoice when the due balance of representative government is disturbed by the violence or the corruption of selfish factions.

On the 8th of July an Act was passed for granting a supply to the king of upwards of £600,000, "for disbanding the army, and for other uses." On the 15th the Parliament was prorogued. Amidst the conflicts of party one Statute of this period marks the great fact that religious intolerance had assumed a milder form. "It is enacted "That the Writ commonly called Breve de Heret-

ico comburendo, with all process and proceedings thereupon, in order to the executing such Writ, or following or depending thereupon, and all punishment by death in pursuance of any Ecclesiastical Censures, be from henceforth utterly taken away and abolished."* But if the progress of opinion had wiped out of the Statute Book the horrible law that heretics should be burnt, the recollection of the days when that law was no dead letter was still strong and vivid as ever in the popular mind. The dread of Popery was the one inextinguishable spark in the temper of the people which the slightest breath might raise into a flame. The great bulk of the nation knew little of the vices of the Court; and even those who dwelt in and around Westminster looked with complacency upon the tall swarthy gentleman who walked up and down the Mall in St. James' Park at his "wonted large pace;" and who, when very humble strangers were presented to him in the Long Gallery at Whitehall, would give them his hand to kiss, and say "God bless you."† They were accustomed to hear of the duke of York's irregular life, and little heeded his private indiscretions; but when he became a declared Romanist and had married a Catholic princess, there were no bounds to their dislike and their suspicion. Dissenters from the Church, who practically knew all the hardships of exclusion from civil offices, and from the privilege of worship according to their own consciences, would hear of no scheme of toleration for Papists. Rousing themselves out of the apathy which had succeeded to their delirium of loyalty, the people had again begun to take a strong interest in public affairs. They felt that the nation had lost character in its foreign transactions. They saw the old principles of servile obedience, which had been struck down in 1640, again proclaimed as the duties of subjects. They believed, with lord Shaftesbury, that "popery and slavery, like two sisters, go hand in hand; and sometimes one goes first, and sometimes the other, but wheresoever the one enters the other is following close behind." In the temper that prevailed amongst the people in the summer of 1678, the excesses connected with what is known as the Popish Plot were, like Shakspeare's characteristic of murder, "most foul;" they were also "strange;" but they were not "unnatural." The nation was under a panic which manifested itself in a temporary insanity. But we are not therefore to conclude that the panic was wholly unreasonable; that the plot was a pure invention got up by witnesses altogether

* 29 Car. II. c. 9.

† See "Diary of Henry Teonge," p. 232

false, at the instigation of Shaftesbury and other unprincipled politicians; that there was no design on the part of Romish intriguers to restore their religion in England, to which the near prospect of a Popish successor to the throne gave abundant encouragement. It is unquestionable that the Jesuits did believe, as was expressed in the letter of Coleman, the secretary of the duke of York, that for "the subduing of a pestilent heresy"—the "mighty work" on their hands—"there were never such hopes of success since the death of queen Mary, as now in our days, when God has given us a prince who is become zealous of being the author and instrument of so glorious a work." The zeal of James was neutralised by the indifference of Charles; and therefore it was maintained that the destruction of the king was the first object of the Plot. Charles himself ridiculed the notion; but that is no proof that he wholly disbelieved the existence of some wild scheme for his removal.

The rumours of a Popish plot burst upon the nation at the beginning of October. Evelyn records, under date of the first of this month, that he went to Dr. Tonge, the rector of St. Michael's Wood Street, to see and converse with him at Whitehall, and "with Mr. Oates, one that was lately an apostate to the Church of Rome, and now returned again with this discovery" of the Popish plot. "Oates was encouraged," continues Evelyn, "and everything he affirmed taken for gospel. The truth is, the Roman Catholics were exceedingly bold and busy everywhere." Reresby says that the first news of the plot, "a design of the Papists to kill the king," came to him in the country, on the 10th of October. "Nobody can conceive that was not a witness thereof, what a ferment this raised amongst all ranks and degrees." Burnet, who says that he was so well instructed in all the steps of the plot, that he is more capable to give a full account of it than any man he knows, records that three days before Michaelmas Dr. Tonge came to him—"a very mean divine, and seemed credulous and simple, but I had always looked on him as a sincere man. At this time he told me of strange designs against the king's person." Burnet communicated the information to the Secretary's office; but learnt that Tonge had been already "making discoveries there, of which they made no other account, but that he intended to get himself to be made a dean." Burnet told Tonge's story "to Littleton and Powell, and they looked on it as a design of lord Danby's, to be laid before the next Session, thereby to dispose them to keep up a greater force, since the papists were plotting against the king's

life." Roger North, on the contrary, suggests that Shaftesbury "was behind the curtain, and in the depths of the contrivance."* The generally received account is that one Kirby, on the 13th of August, warned the king, who knew him, not to walk alone in the Park; that the same evening he brought Tonge to Charles, with a narrative of the plot; that the king referred it to the Lord Treasurer; that Charles was incredulous, and laughed at the simplicity of Danby in his wish to lay the narrative before the Privy Council. But it may occur to some, bearing in mind the time that elapsed between the first information to the king and the official notification to the Council, that there was some ground for the conjecture of Littleton and Powel that the Court had its own objects in raising the alleged Plot into importance, by encouraging the witnesses in their extravagant relations. The objection of lord Halifax to this theory was reasonable enough. He told Burnet that "considering the suspicions all people had of the duke's religion, he believed every discovery of that sort would raise a flame which it would not be easy to manage." But the objection assumed that the contrivers of such state-engines were duly sensible of the effects they might produce—that "the ingener might contemplate the possibility of being 'hoist with his own petar.'" If Danby stimulated the revelations of the plot to alarm the Commons into granting supplies, it did not follow that he would foresee such a storm as would give a violent impulse to all the political movements of the next ten years. Shaftesbury, says Roger North, "was the dry-nurse, and took the charge of leading the monstrous birth till it could crawl alone." It is quite within the range of probability that the Court got up the Plot for its own purposes; and that "the discontented party" took it out of the Court's hands for its own purposes also.

Burnet, who relates conversations that he had with the king, represents Charles as saying that after Tonge's audience he did not know but some of the particulars related to him might be true, and sent him to lord Danby, "The matter lay in a secret and remiss management for six weeks," till, on Michaelmas eve, Oates was brought before the Council. He related many discourses he had heard among the Jesuits at St. Omer's of their design to kill the king; he named persons, places, and times almost without number; he accused Coleman, the duke's secretary. Many Jesuits were seized. Coleman removed the bulk of his letters previous to his

* "Examen," p. 35.

apprehension; but two were accidentally left, addressed to the confessor of Louis XIV., which in some degree confirmed the belief of a design to overthrow the government. Burnet went to Whitehall, and there found Oates and Tonge under a guard. Previous to Oates being examined a second time by the Privy Council, he went before sir Edmondbury Godfrey, a zealous Protestant justice of peace, and made oath to the narrative which he afterwards published. A fortnight after, Godfrey was missing, having left his home on a Saturday morning. On the following Wednesday his corpse was found in a ditch at some distance out of the town, near Primrose-hill. His own sword was thrust through his body, but no blood was on his clothes; on his neck were the marks of strangulation. The Papists were, of course, suspected of his murder; although the motive was altogether a mystery. On the other hand it was maintained that he had committed suicide. A medal was struck ridiculing this notion, in showing the unfortunate Justice walking with a halter about his neck after he is dead, and St. Denis on the obverse, with his own head in his hand. There was another medal with a portrait of Godfrey, and a representation of the murderers carrying his body on a horse. Roger North, who labours in every way to fasten the invention of the Plot upon the party opposed to the Court, describes the fury of the people on the discovery of this supposed murder; and says that their leaders would have hounded them on to any massacre and destruction, had the military not been in good order. The popular notion was that the murder of Godfrey was to deter all men from any further inquiry into the Plot. There was great excitement at the funeral of the Protestant magistrate, which North has described with some humour. "The crowd was prodigious, both at the procession, and in and about the church; and so heated that anything called Popish, were it cat or dog, had probably gone to pieces in a moment. The Catholics all kept close in their houses and lodgings, thinking it a good composition to be safe there; so far were they from acting violently at that time. But there was all this while upheld among the common people an artificial fright, so as almost every man fancied a Popish knife just at his throat. And, at the sermon, besides the preacher, two other thumping divines stood upright in the pulpit, one on each side of him, to guard him from being killed, while he was preaching, by the Papists." * In this feverish state of the popular mind, the Parliament met on the 21st

* "Examen," p. 204.

of October. Charles alluded to information received by him of a design against his person by the Jesuits, but said he would leave the matter to the law. The Parliament immediately determined to take the subject into their own hands. They appointed a Committee to inquire into Godfrey's murder and into the Plot; they addressed the king to appoint a solemn fast; they further desired the removal of all Popish recusants from the metropolis and ten miles round; before a week had elapsed, a bill was passed by the Commons to exclude Catholics from both Houses. Oates was examined. Coleman's letters were read. On the 1st of November, the Commons came to a resolution, "That, upon the evidence that has already appeared to the House, this House is of opinion, that there hath been, and still is, a damnable and hellish Plot, contrived and carried on by Popish recusants, for the assassinating and murdering the king, and for subverting the government, and rooting out and destroying the Protestant religion." The Lords unanimously agreed in the Resolution of the Commons.

There are two descriptions by impartial witnesses which present striking pictures of the state of the popular mind at this season. On the 17th of November, queen Elizabeth's birth-day, there was a mock procession which Calamy, the son of the famous non-conformist, saw in his boyhood, and thus relates: "In the midst of vast crowds of spectators, who made great acclamations and showed abundance of satisfaction, there were carried in pageants upon men's shoulders through the chief streets of the city, the effigies of the Pope, with the representation of the devil behind him, whispering in his ear, and wonderfully soothing and caressing him (though he afterwards deserted him, and left him to shift for himself, before he was committed to the flames), together with the likeness of the dead body of sir Edmondbury Godfrey, carried before him by one that rode on horseback, designed to remind the people of his execrable murder. And a great number of dignitaries in their copes, with crosses; monks, friars, and Jesuits; Popish bishops in their mitres, with all their trinkets and appurtenances. Such things as these very discernibly heightened and inflamed the general aversion of the nation from Popery; but it is to be feared, on the other hand, they put some people, by way of revulsion, upon such desperate expedients as brought us even within an ace of ruin." Daniel Defoe, then also a youth, was greatly excited by the Popish plot, some of the credulities accompanying which he described in his maturer years: "I did firmly believe the reality

of the plot; yet, when we ran up that plot to general massacres, fleets of pilgrims, bits and bridles, knives, handcuffs, and a thousand such things, which people generally talk of, I confess, though a boy, I could not then, nor can now, come up to them. And my reasons were, as they still are, because I see no reason to believe the Papists to be fools, whatever else we had occasion to think of them. I cannot, indeed, spare room to examine the weakness of the notion of a general massacre in England, where the Papists all over the kingdom are not five to a hundred, in some counties not one, and within the city hardly one to a thousand. But, 'tis plain, these notions prevailed to a strange excess, made our city blunderbusses to be all new burnished, hat and feathers, shoulder-belt, and all our military gew-gaws come in mode again, till the city trained-bands began to be so rampant, that, like other standing armies, they began to ride upon their masters, and trampled under foot the liberty of that very city they were raised to defend. They were made engines of oppression and disorder, disturbed meeting-houses, possessed the Guildhall, chose sheriffs, got drunk upon guard, abused the citizens upon their rounds, and their prodigal drunken sentinels murdered several people upon pretence they would not stand at their command. In a populous city, it was impossible but innocent people, either ignorant or perhaps in drink, might run themselves into danger, not imagining they had to do with brutes that would kill their fellow-citizens for such trifles, with the same severity as if in an enemy's country, or on the frontiers."

As there was nothing in the terrors of massacres and invasions; of burnings of London and of the shipping in the Thames; of Jesuits about to rule the land under the seal of the Pope,—too absurd for the multitude to credit; so there was no eminent person, however loyal and peaceable, who might not become a victim to the accusations of those men who had brought a whole nation into a condition of senseless panic. "All Oates' evidence," says Burnet, "was now so well believed that it was not safe for any man to doubt any part of it." He named peers to whom the Pope had sent over his commissions. He accused Wakeman, the queen's physician, of a project to poison his sovereign. Bedloe, a man of notorious evil life, surrendered himself at Bristol, pretending that he was cognisant of the murder of Godfrey, and could point out the murderers and instigators; and he then came forward in support of the accusations of Oates against certain peers who had

been apprehended on Oates's charges. The consummation of the impudence of Oates was his attempt to involve the harmless queen in a charge of having concerted the murder of her husband. He told a story that the queen had sent for some Jesuits to Somerset House; that he went with them, and standing behind a door, heard one in a woman's voice, there being no other woman in the room than the queen, assure them that she would assist in taking off the king. North relates that Oates, at the bar of the House of Commons, said, "*Aye, Taitus Oates, accanse Catherine, Queen of England, of Haigh Traison.*"* Burnet has a curious relation of his own conversation with the king on this delicate subject. The good bishop's relations have been considered, though perhaps unjustly, a little open to doubt; but we are not entitled to question what he relates of his personal knowledge. "The king spoke much to me concerning Oates's accusing the queen, and acquainted me with the whole progress of it. He said she was a weak woman, and had some disagreeable humours; but was not capable of a wicked thing; and, considering his faultiness towards her in other things, he thought it a horrid thing to abandon her. He said he looked on falsehood and cruelty as the greatest crimes in the sight of God: he knew he had led a bad life, of which he spoke with some sense; but he was breaking himself of all his faults; and he would never do a base and a wicked thing. I spoke on all these subjects which I thought became me, which he took well; and I encouraged him much in his resolution of not exposing the queen to perish by false swearing."

We have thus shown some ludicrous aspects of this famous Plot. The horrible realities connected with it present a fearful example of the atrocities that may be committed under the excitement of religious animosity. The trials of the accused persons commenced in November. Stayley, a Catholic banker, was first sacrificed, upon a ridiculous accusation brought forward by Carstairs, a Scotchman, who saw that the trade of false witness was prosperous. He swore that he heard the banker say in French, that the king was a rogue, and that he himself would kill him, if nobody else would. Burnet gave offence by shewing that Carstairs was an infamous character; and Shaftesbury, as the bishop relates, told him "that all those who undermined the credit of the witnesses were public enemies." The poor banker was tried and was hanged. Coleman was next brought to trial upon charges

* Scott, from this hint, has given Oates his peculiar dialect in "Peveril of the Peak."

made against him by Oates and Bedloe. The evidence was very inconclusive; but his letters were against him, although he maintained that he had no idea of bringing in the Catholic religion, but by a general toleration. He was convicted of high treason, and executed. Three Jesuits, Ireland, Grove, and Pickering, were the next victims. Green and Hill, two Papists, and Berry, a Protestant, were then convicted of the murder of sir Edmondbury Godfrey, upon the testimony of Bedloe, and the pretended confession of Prance, a silversmith. The prisons were filled with hundreds of suspected traitors. Five peers were confined in the Tower under impeachment. Scroggs, the Chief Justice, conducted himself, in all the trials, with the most ferocious determination to procure a verdict against the prisoners. Oates in a few months was at the height of his greatness. "He walked about," says North, "with his guards assigned for fear of the Papists murdering him. He had lodgings in Whitehall, and 1200*l.* per annum pension: And no wonder, after he had the impudence to say to the House of Lords, in plain terms, that, if they would not help him to more money, he must be forced to help himself. He put on an episcopal garb, except the lawn sleeves; silk gown and cassock, great hat, satin hatband and rose, long scarf, and was called, or most blasphemously called himself, the Saviour of the nation. Whoever he pointed at was taken up and committed; so that many people got out of his way, as from a blast, and glad they could prove their two last years' conversation. The very breath of him was pestilential, and if it brought not imprisonment, or death, over such on whom it fell, it surely poisoned reputation, and left good protestants arant papists, and something worse than that, in danger of being put in the plot as traitors."*

We have dwelt at some length upon this Popish Plot; and in their order of time we shall have to give a few other details. It may be thought that such an occurrence might be more briefly related; but it is not only strikingly illustrative of the temper of the people, but was really pregnant with important consequences. Dr. Wellwood, who wrote his 'Memoirs' some twenty years after these events, has expressed, with tolerable impartiality, the view in which they were regarded after the Revolution:—"A great part of the Popish Plot, as it was then sworn to, will in all human probability lie among the darkest scenes of our English history. However, this is certain: the discovery of the Popish Plot had great and

* "Examen."

various effects upon the nation; and it's from this remarkable period of time we may justly reckon a new era in the English account. In the first place, it awakened the nation out of a deep lethargy they had been in for nineteen years together; and alarmed them with fears and jealousies that have been found to our sad experience but too well grounded. In the next, it gave the rise to, at least settled, that unhappy distinction of Whig and Tory among the people of England, that has since occasioned so many mischiefs. And lastly, the discovery of the Popish Plot began that open struggle between King Charles and his people, that occasioned him not only to dissolve his first favourite parliament, and the three others that succeeded; but likewise to call no more during the rest of his reign. All which made for bringing in question the Charters of London, and other Corporations, with a great many dismal effects that followed."*

* "Memoirs of the most material Transactions," &c. 1736, p. 111