

A BRIEF HISTORY OF "THE GUNPOWDER PLOT."

(Compiled from original and unpublished documents.)

Of all the plots and conspiracies that ever entered into the mind of man, the Gunpowder plot stands pre-eminent in horror and wickedness.

The singular perseverance of the conspirators is shown by the fact, that so early as in Lent of the year 1603, Robert Catesby, who appears to have been the prime mover of the plot, in a conversation with Thomas Wintour and John Wright, first broke with them about a design for delivering England from her bondage, and to replant the Catholic religion. Wintour expressed himself doubtful whether so grand a scheme could be accomplished, when Catesby informed him that he had projected a plan for that purpose, which was no less than to blow up the Parliament House with gunpowder.

Wintour consented to join in the scheme, and, at the suggestion of Catesby, went over to Flanders to arrange some preliminary affairs there, and to communicate the design to Mr. Fawkes, who was personally known to Catesby. At Ostend, Wintour was introduced to Mr. Fawkes by Sir Wm. Stanley. Guy Fawkes was a man of desperate character. In his person he was tall and athletic, his countenance was manly, and the determined expression of his features was not a little heightened by a profusion of brown hair, and an auburn-coloured beard. He was descended from a respectable family in Yorkshire, and having soon squandered

the property he inherited at the decease of his father, his restless spirit associated itself with the discontented and factious of his age. Wintour and Fawkes came over to England together, and shortly after met Catesby, Thomas Percy, and John Wright, in a house behind St. Clements's; where, in a chamber with no other person present, each administered an oath of secrecy to the other, and then went into another room to hear mass, and to receive the sacrament. Percy was then sent to hire a house fit for their purpose, and found one belonging to Mr. Whinniard, Yeoman to the King's Wardrobe of the Beds, then in the occupation of one Henry Ferrers; of which, after some negotiation, he succeeded in obtaining possession, at the rent of twelve pounds per annum, and the key was delivered to Guy Fawkes, who acted as Mr. Percy's man, and assumed the name of John Johnson. Their object in hiring this house was to obtain an easy communication with the upper Parliament House, and by digging through the wall that separated them, to form an extensive mine under the foundations. A house was also hired in Lambeth, to serve as a depository for the powder, and Mr. Keys, who was then admitted as one of the number, was placed in charge. The whole party then dispersed, and agreed to meet again at Michaelmas. At Michaelmas it was resolved that the time was arrived when they should commence working at their mine; but various causes hindered them from beginning, till within a fortnight of Christmas. The party, at that time, consisting of five, then entered upon their work; and, having first provided themselves with baked meat that they might not have occasion to leave the house, they worked incessantly till Christmas Eve, underpropping the walls, as they proceeded, with wood. A little before Christmas, Christopher Wright was

added to the number; and, finding their work to be extremely laborious, the walls being upwards of three yards in thickness, they afterwards admitted Robert Wintour to assist them. Taking advantage of the long and dreary nights between Christmas and Candlemas, they then brought their powder over from Lambeth in a boat and lodged it in Percy's house, and afterwards continued to labour at the mine. In the Easter following (1605) as they were at their work, the whole party were dreadfully alarmed on hearing a rushing noise near them; but on inquiry they found no danger menaced them, but that it proceeded from the removal of some coals in an adjoining vault, under the Parliament House. Nothing could be more propitious for the conspirators; and, ascertaining that it belonged to the same parties of whom they held the house, but in the possession of a man of the name of Skinner, they lost no time in purchasing the good-will of Skinner, and eventually hired the vault of Whinniard, at the rate of four pounds per annum. Abandoning their original intention of forming a mine under the walls, they placed the powder in this vault, and afterwards gradually conveyed into it three thousand billets of wood, and five hundred fagots; Guy Fawkes arranging them in order, making the place clean and neat, in order that if any strangers, by accident or otherwise, entered the house, no suspicion might be excited. Fawkes then went into Flanders to inform Sir W. Stanley and Mr. Owen of their progress, and returned in the following August. Catesby, meeting Percy at Bath, proposed that himself should have authority to call in whom he pleased, as at that time they were but few in number, and were very short of money. This being acceded to, he imparted the design to Sir Everard Digby, Francis Tresam, Ambrose Rookwood, and John

Grant. Digby promised to subscribe one thousand five hundred pounds, and Tresam two thousand pounds. Percy engaged to procure all he could of the Duke of Northumberland's rents, which would amount to about four thousand pounds, and to furnish ten good horses.

Thus far, every thing had prospered with the conspirators; success had followed every effort they had made.

On Thursday evening, the 24th of October, eleven days before the intended meeting of Parliament, an anonymous letter was put into the hands of the servant of Lord Monteagle, warning his Lordship not to attend the Parliament that season, for that God and man had concurred to punish the wickedness of the times. It is a most extraordinary fact, that the conspirators knew of the delivery of this letter to the Lord Monteagle, and that it was in the possession of the Earl of Salisbury, Secretary of State, for eight days before the disclosure took place, as developed in Thomas Wintour's confession, taken before the Lord's Commissioners on the 23rd of November, 1605; yet so strong was their infatuation, and so desperately had they set their fortunes on the event, that they unanimously resolved "to abyde the uttermost tryall."

The generally received opinion has been, that it was to the sagacity and penetration of King James that the detection of the conspiracy must be ascribed, and that it was his Majesty who first suggested the agency of gunpowder: but the Earl of Salisbury, in a letter to Sir Charles Cornwallis, ambassador at Madrid, asserts, that in a conversation between the Earl of Suffolk (Lord Chamberlain) and himself, on perusal of the

anonymous letter, the employment of gunpowder first occurred to them, and that the King subsequently concurred in their opinion. The letter, after having been communicated to several of the Privy Council, was shown to the King three or four days before the opening of Parliament, who, with great prudence, gave orders that no notice whatever should be taken of it, but that every thing should go on as usual, until the very day appointed. On Saturday, the Lord Chamberlain, according to the customary forms of his office previous to the meeting of every Parliament, viewed every room and cellar belonging to the Parliament House, and amongst others the identical vault in which the wood and powder was deposited, and observed a man, who subsequently proved to be Guy Fawkes, standing there to answer any questions that might have been asked. The Lord Chamberlain then went to the Privy Council and reported what he had seen. After much discussion it was resolved that a more minute search should be made, under pretence of seeking for stolen goods, in order that no suspicion might arise if nothing should be discovered. Accordingly, on Monday at midnight, Sir T. Knyvett, accompanied by a small band of men, went to Percy's house, where, at the door, they found Guy Fawkes with his clothes and boots on. Sir Thomas immediately apprehended him, and then proceeded to search the house and vault, and upon removing some of the wood, they soon discovered the powder ready prepared for the explosion; then, directly afterwards, searching Guy Fawkes, they found on him three matches and other instruments for setting fire to the train. He confessed himself guilty, and boldly declared, that if he had happened to have been within the house when Sir T. Knyvett apprehended him, he would instantly have blown him up, house and all.

On the arrest of Guy Fawkes, such of the conspirators as at the time were in London, fled into the country to meet Catesby at Dunchurch, according to previous arrangement; and after taking some horses out of a stable at Warwick, they reached Robert Wintour's house, at Huddington, on the Wednesday night. On Thursday morning the whole party, amounting to about twenty persons, confessed themselves to Hammond, a priest, received absolution from him, and partook of the sacrament together, and then, with their followers and servants, proceeded to Lord Windsor's house, at Hewell, from whence they took a great quantity of armour and weapons. They then passed into Staffordshire, and by night reached the house of Stephen Littleton, called Holbeach house, about two miles from Stourbridge. By this time the whole country was raised in pursuit of the rebels; and a large party, under the direction of Sir Richard Walshe, high sheriff of Worcestershire, early on Friday morning arrived at Holbeach house. The party in the house--consisting of Catesby, Percy, Sir E. Digby, Robert, John, and Thomas Wintour, Grant Rookewood, the two Wrights, Stephen Littleton, and their servants,--finding their condition now to be desperate, determined to fight resolutely to the last, treating the summons to surrender with contempt, and defying their pursuers. A singular accident, however, put an end to all conference between the parties. Some gunpowder, which the conspirators had provided for their defence, proving damp, they had placed nearly two pounds in a pan near the fire to dry; and a person incautiously raking together the fading embers, a spark flew into the pan, ignited the powder, which blew up with a great explosion, shattered the house, and severely maimed Catesby, Rookewood, and Grant; but the most remarkable circumstance was, that

about sixteen pounds of powder, in a linen bag, which was actually under the pan wherein the powder exploded, was blown through the roof of the house, and fell into the court-yard amongst the assailants, without igniting, or even bursting.

Sir R. Walshe then gave orders for a general assault to be made upon the house; and, in the attack that followed, Thomas Wintour, going into the court-yard, was the first who was wounded, having received a shot in the shoulder, which disabled him; the next was Mr. Wright, and after him the younger Wright, who were both killed; Rookewood was then wounded. Catesby, now seeing all was lost, and their condition totally hopeless, exclaimed to Thomas Wintour, "Tom, we will die together." Wintour could only answer by pointing to his disabled arm, that hung useless by his side, and as they were speaking, Catesby and Percy were struck dead at the same instant, and the rest then surrendered themselves into the hands of the sheriff.

At the end of January, 1606, the whole of the conspirators, at that time in custody, being eight in number, were brought to their trial in Westminster Hall, and were all tried upon one indictment, except Sir E. Digby, who had a separate trial. On Thursday, January 30th, Sir E. Digby, Robert Wintour, John Grant, and Thomas Bates, were executed at the west end of St. Paul's Church, and on the next day Thomas Wintour, Ambrose Rookewood, Robert Keys, and Guy Fawkes, suffered within the Old Palace-yard at Westminster.

On the 28th of February, 1606, Garnet was brought to trial at Guildhall, before nine Commissioners specially appointed

for that purpose. Of his participation in the plot there was no doubt; and he admitted himself criminal in not revealing it, although, as he asserts, it was imparted to him only in confession: but it is more than probable that the valuable papers, lately rescued from oblivion, and preserved in his Majesty's State Paper Office, will be able to prove his extensive connexion with the plot, his knowledge of it, both in and out of confession, and his influential character with all the conspirators.

Garnet was hanged on the 3rd of May, 1606, on a scaffold, erected for that purpose, at the west end of St. Paul's Church. Held up to infamy by one party as a rebel and a traitor, and venerated as a saint and a martyr by the other; the same party spirit, and the same conflicting opinions, have descended from generation to generation, down to the controversialists of the present day.

All the principal conspirators were married and had families; several of them possessed considerable property, and were highly, and, in some instances, nobly related.

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