



Guy Fawkes or the Gunpowder Treason: An Historical Romance (Classic Reprint)

William Harrison Ainsworth

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Excerpt from Guy Fawkes or the Gunpowder Treason: An Historical Romance

The tyrannical measures adopted against the Roman Catholics in the early part of the reign of James the First, when the severe penal enactments against recusants were revived, and with additional rigour, and which led to the remarkable conspiracy about to be related, have been so forcibly and faithfully described by Doctor Lingard, that the following extract from his history will form a fitting introduction to the present work.

"The oppressive and sanguinary code framed in the reign of Elizabeth, was re-enacted to its full extent, and even improved with additional severities. Every individual who had studied or resided, or should afterwards study or reside in any college or seminary beyond the sea, was rendered incapable of inheriting, or purchasing, or enjoying lands, annuities, chattels, debts, or sums of money, within the realm; and as missionaries sometimes eluded detection under the disguise of tutors, it was provided that no man should teach even the rudiments of grammar in public or in private, without the previous approbation of the diocesan.

"The execution of the penal laws enabled the king, by an ingenious comment, to derive considerable profit from his past forbearance. It was pretended that he had never forgiven the penalties of recusancy; he had merely forbidden them to be exacted for a time, in the hope that this indulgence would lead to conformity; but his expectations had been deceived; the obstinacy of the Catholics had grown with the lenity of the sovereign; and, as they were unworthy of further favour, they should now be left to the severity of the law. To their dismay, the legal fine of twenty pounds per lunar month was again demanded, and not only for the time to come, but for the whole period of the suspension; a demand which, by crowding thirteen payments into one, reduced many families of moderate incomes to a state of absolute beggary. Nor was this all James was surrounded by numbers of his indigent countrymen. Their habits were expensive, their wants many, and their importunities incessant. To satisfy the more clamorous, a new expedient was devised.

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