

**REMAINS HISTORICAL & LITERARY
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JACOBITE TRIALS AT MANCHESTER IN 1694:
FROM AN UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPT**

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From an Unpublished Manuscript by William Beamont

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WILLIAM BEAMONT

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M.DCCCLIII.



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INTRODUCTION.

THERE are epidemics in the moral as well as in the physical world. Society, at certain stages, seems to yield to a sort of possession which sways it to and fro beyond the bounds, and even against the dictates, of right reason. Whilst the fit lasts, it rages with all the virulence of active disease; and when it subsides, sense and reason resume their reign only to be dispossessed by a new recurrence of the moral disorder. In the latter half of the seventeenth century, England had scarcely recovered from one of these attacks before another succeeded. Our history during that interval is a continual record of real or pretended conspiracies. No term can be found more fit to characterize the period than the age of *plots*. Whoever looks, however casually, into our annals from 1660 to the close of the century, will not fail to see how infectious the credulity of the public mind became on the subject of the prevailing plot — how it was swayed on all sides like a ship in a gale, and during the same period how little share sense and reason appeared to have in its guidance. The ferment into which men were thrown by the extraordinary events of the late reign; the

king's death; the subsequent usurpation, and the unwonted activity of mind prevailing on all subjects, moral, religious, and political, to which we are indebted for much of our present liberty; the subsequent restoration of monarchy, and the complexion which it took from recent events and the character of the reigning king,—were circumstances not unlikely to give rise to those numerous plots which, after having distinguished and disgraced the reign of Charles II., almost, by a natural consequence, cast their spawn upon the reigns of his two successors. The inventor of a plot, if he were only bold enough, found his trade a gainful one. Witness the plots distinguished by the names of Oates's, the Meal Tub, and the Rye-house plots, with many others of a public nature, which were caught at and believed with the greatest eagerness by the nation! Witness, also, the annals of our courts, which are filled with records of similar transactions of a private nature!

The Lancashire plot, out of which arose the trials now published, was amongst the last but not the least important of the plots of King William's reign. The plot is stated with great care and much minuteness of detail by Richard Kingston, the court scribe, in his "True History of the several designs and conspiracies against his majesty's person and government, as they were carried on from 1688 till 1697;" in which he professes "that neither the desire of expressing his gratitude to the best of kings and the most regular establishment in the world, the hopes of future reward, nor the advantage of revenging former piques, should influence him to deviate from truth, the life and

soul of history ;" and he adds, that "to convince the world that this is not precariously asserted, I have, after the example of the most considerable historians, cited my authorities in the margin."⁽¹⁾

According to Mr. Kingston, the Lancashire plot had the honour not only to be the parent but the companion of all the other conspiracies, and its contrivance was owing to the politics of King James II., who, flattering himself with hopes of regaining the crown which he had lost by his misconduct, concerted with his friends before his departure for France, that they should endeavour to raise a ferment in these kingdoms, and that some trusty person should be commissioned on that errand and for that object.

Mr. Bromfield, a pretended quaker, was the person fixed on, and he advanced towards Scotland, sowing as he went the seeds of discontent through the northern parts of England. From Scotland, when he had laid the foundations of a civil war there, he passed over into Ireland, and having satisfied himself that the zeal of the party in that country needed no further inflaming, he returned into Lancashire,

(1) The "True History of the late conspiracy against the King and the nation, with a particular account of the Lancashire Plot, and all the other attempts and machinations of the disaffected party since his majesty's accession to the throne, (extracted out of the original informations of the witnesses and other authentic papers,)" printed in 1696, traces the conspiracy step by step, and arrives at the same conclusions as Mr. Kingston. This latter work was the production of Dr. Abbadie, a friend of King William, whom he advanced to be dean of Killaloe. The work was originally written in French, and afterwards translated into English. See Kippis's *Biographia Briannica*, art. Abbadie.