

**THE CONDITION OF
ENGLISH CATHOLICS
UNDER CHARLES II**

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The condition of English Catholics under Charles II by R. de Courson & F. Raymond-Barker

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THE CONDITION
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UNDER CHARLES II



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Translated and amplified from original sources by

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PREFACE

IN "Quatre Portraits de Femmes" we endeavoured, in a very simple form, to make the land of our adoption acquainted with some unknown episodes of the glorious drama of the persecutions of the English Catholics. The same motive inspired the present sketch, first published in France for French readers, and now, at the request of friends in England, reproduced in their own tongue.

We find various phases in the course of these persecutions.

At times, an interval of comparative calm, often due to political reasons, held in suspense the sword always unsheathed in readiness to strike the Papists.

At other times a plot, real or pretended, served as a pretext for measures of the utmost severity and sent many innocent men to execution.

Such was the dark drama which disgraced the reign of Charles II and of which the history is here related.

Never perhaps was more clearly shown to what excesses of injustice and cruelty a nation may be driven by religious bigotry.

The narrative of these events, in which absurdity and horror are so strangely intermingled, would well-

nigh overpower the reader with indignation and disgust did he not behold, bright amid the surrounding gloom like stars in a storm-swept sky, so many consoling examples of grand and simple heroism.

"More and more stars, and ever as I gaze,
Brighter and brighter seem."

By the side of the pusillanimous king who suffered so many innocent persons to be put to death, the corrupt statesmen who, out of popular fanaticism, forged a political weapon for their own ends, and the wretched perjurers whose every word was a lie stands the company of martyrs of every age and condition. We see among them aged missionaries whose whole life has been a preparation for death, servants, men of the people, artisans, strong in their innocence and their faith, and men of gentle blood who mount the scaffold with the same knightly courage that they and their ancestors have shown in former times on many another battlefield.

These men were one and all filled with the same courage, patience and faith, and also, let us add, with the same attachment to that king who, convinced as he was of their innocence, left them to the mercy of their executioners. His name was one of the last they uttered, and with their dying breath they affirmed their loyalty together with their faith.

Already a large number of our martyrs are beatified by the Church. The cause of those whose history

is here related has not yet been judged at Rome. It will shortly be so: and then, let us hope, the English Catholics who now enjoy a peace and freedom so dearly purchased will be able to honour on their altars these valiant soldiers of Christ, among whom some of us may reckon one or more of our own ancestry, direct or collateral, and ponder with mingled pride and self-abasement on so grand a page in our family records as that illuminated by their blood.

In the general plan of our work we have followed Lingard,* whose history of England is a classic with Catholics, and whose conscientious accuracy is universally acknowledged.

We have at the same time controlled and corroborated his testimony by that of Protestant historians who cannot be suspected of any bias in favour of the Papists, such as Macaulay, Hume, Gardiner, Strickland, Green and others.

The history of the secular priests who were martyred is chiefly taken from Challoner's "Missionary priests." † Dr Challoner, vicar apostolic of the London district, wrote in the last century, at a time when the memory of those of whom he wrote was still fresh and vivid in the minds of Catholics.

The details relating to the personality, labours and judicial trials of the Jesuit fathers, and the relations

* *History of England*, by John Lingard, D.D., 6th edition. London: Dolman, 1855 [also Duffy and Sons, 1878].

† *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, by the Right Rev. Dr Challoner, V.A.L. Dublin 1874.