

The Great Red Dragon; Or The Master Key to Popery



THE
GREAT RED DRAGON;
OR THE
MASTER-KEY TO POPERY.

BY

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FORMERLY ONE OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIESTS OF SARAGOSSA, SPAIN.

And behold a GREAT RED DRAGON, having seven heads and ten horns," etc. — Rev. xii. 3.

BOSTON:

PUBLISHED BY SAMUEL JONES, 86 WASHINGTON STREET.
1856.

Preface.

When I first designed to publish the following sheets, it was a matter of some doubt with me, whether or no I should put my name to them; for if I did, I considered that I exposed myself to the malice of a great body of men, who would endeavor on all occasions to injure me in my reputation and fortune, if not in my life; which last (to say no more) was no unnatural suspicion of a Spaniard, and one in my case, to entertain of some fiery zealots of the Church of Rome.

But on the other hand, I foresaw, that if I concealed my name, a great part of the benefit intended to the public by this work, might be lost. For I have often observed, as to books of this kind, where facts only are related, (the truth of which in the greatest measure must depend on the credit of the relater,) that wherever the authors, out of caution or fear, have concealed themselves, the event commonly has been, that even the friends to the cause, which the facts support, give but a cold assent to them, and the enemies reject them entirely as calumnies and forgeries, without ever giving themselves the trouble of examining into the truth of that which the relater dares not openly avow. On this account, whatever the consequences may be, I resolved to put my name to this; and accordingly did so to the first proposals which were made for printing it.

But, by this means, I am at the same time obliged to say something in vindication of myself from several aspersions (false or damaging accusations or insinuations) which I lie under, and which indeed I have already in a great degree been a sufferer by, in the opinion of many worthy gentlemen. The first is, that I never was a priest (meaning the first false accusation that Anthony Gavin was never a priest), because I have not my letters of orders to produce. This, it must be confessed, is a testimonial, without which no one has a right, or can expect to be regarded as a person of that character; unless he has very convincing arguments to offer the world, that, in his circumstances, no such thing could reasonably be expected from him; and whether or no, mine are such, I leave the world to judge. My case was this:

As soon as it had pleased God by his grace to overcome in me the prejudices of my education in favor of that corrupt church, in which I had been bred up, and to inspire me with a resolution to embrace the Protestant religion, I saw, that in order to preserve my life, I must immediately, quit **Spain, where all persons who do not publicly profess the Romish religion, are condemned to death**. Upon this, I resolved to lose no time in making my escape, but how to make it was a matter of the greatest difficulty and danger. However, I determined rather to hazard all events, than either to continue in that church, or **expose myself to certain death**; and accordingly made choice of disguises as the most probable method of favoring my escape. The first I made use of, was the habit of an officer in the army: and as I was sure there would be strict inquiry and search made after me, I durst not bring along with me my letters of orders, which, upon my being suspected in any place, for the person searched after, or on any other unhappy accident, would have been an undeniable evidence against me, and consequently **would have condemned me to the inquisition**. By this means I got safely to London, where I was most civilly received by the late Earl Stanhope, to whom I had the honor to be known when he was in Saragossa. He told me that there were some other new converts of my nation in town, and that he hoped I would follow the command of Jesus to Peter, viz. *When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren*.

Upon this I went to the late Lord Bishop of London, and by his lordship's order, his domestic chaplain examined me three days together; and as I could not produce the letters of orders, he advised me to get a certificate from my Lord Stanhope, that he knew me, and that I was a priest, which I obtained the very same day; and upon his certificate, his lordship received my

recantation, after morning prayers in his chapel of Somerset house, and licensed me to preach and officiate in a Spanish congregation composed of my Lord Stanhope, several English officers, and a few Spanish officers, new converts. My first sermon I had the honor to dedicate to my Lord Stanhope; it was printed by Mr. William Bowyer, and was sold afterwards by Mr. Denoyer, a French bookseller, at Erasmus's head in the Strand. By virtue of this license, I preached two years and eight months, first in the chapel of Queen's Square, Westminster, and afterwards in Oxenden's chapel, near the haymarket. But my benefactor, desirous to settle me in the English church, advised me to go chaplain to the Preston man of war, where I might have a great deal of leisure to learn the language ; and being presented and approved by the Bishop of London, the Lords of the Admiralty granted me the warrant or commission of chaplain. Then his lordship, though he had given me his consent in writing, to preach in Spanish, enlarged it in the warrant of the Admiralty, which license I shall take leave to insert here at large.

"Whereas the Reverend Mr. Anthony Gavin was recommended to me by the right honorable Lord Stanhope, and by the same and other English gentlemen, I was certified that the said Reverend Mr. Gavin was a secular priest, and master of arts in the university of the city of Saragossa, in the kingdom of Aragon, in Spain, and that they knew him in the said city, and conversed with him several times: This is to certify that the said Reverend Mr. Gavin, after having publicly and solemnly abjured the errors of the Romish religion, and being thereupon by me reconciled to the Church of England, on the 2d day of January, 1715-16, he then had my leave to officiate in the Spanish language, in the chapel of Queen's Square, Westminster; and now being appointed chaplain of his Majesty's ship, the Preston, has my license to preach in English, and to administer the sacraments at home and abroad, in all the churches and chapels of my diocese.

Given under my hand in London, the 13th of July. 1720.

Signed, JOHN LONDON."

The certificate, license, and warrant, may be seen at any time, for I have them by me.

After that, the ship being put out of commission, and my Lord Stanhope being in Hanover with the king, I came over to Ireland on the importunity of a friend, with a desire to stay here until my lord's return into England: but when I was thinking of going over again, I heard of my lord's death, and having in him lost my best patron, I resolved to try in this kingdom, whether I could find any settlement; and in a few days after, by the favor of his grace my Lord Archbishop of Cashel, and the Reverend Dean Percival, I got the curacy of Gowran, which I served almost eleven months, by the license of my Lord Bishop of Ossory, who afterwards, upon my going to Cork, gave me his letters dismissory. (Letters given by a bishop dismissing a person who is removing into another diocese, and recommending him for reception there.)

Another objection raised against me is, that I have perjured myself in discovering the private confessions which were made to me. In one point indeed they may call me perjured, and it is my comfort and glory that I am so

in it, viz: that I have broke the oath I took, when I was ordained priest, which was, to live and die in the Roman Catholic faith. But as to the other perjury charged upon me, they lie under a mistake; for there is no oath of secrecy at all administered to confessors, as most Protestants imagine. Secrecy indeed is recommended to all confessors by the casuists, and enjoined by the councils and popes so strictly, that if a confessor reveals (except in some particular cases) what is confessed to him, so as the penitent is discovered, he is to be punished for it in the inquisition; which, it must be owned, is a more effectual way of enjoining secrecy than oaths themselves.

However, I am far from imagining, that because in this case I have broken no oath, I should therefore be guilty of no crime, though I revealed every thing which was committed to my trust as a confessor, of whatever ill consequence it might be to the penitent; no, such a practice I take to be exceedingly criminal, and I do, from my soul, abhor it.

But nevertheless there are cases where, by the constitution of the church of Rome itself, the most dangerous secrets may and ought to be revealed: such as those which are called reserved cases," of which there are many; some reserved to the pope himself, as *heresy*; some to his apostolic commissary or deputy, as *incest in the first degree*; some to the bishop of the diocese, as the *setting a neighbor's house on fire*. Now in such cases the confessor cannot absolve the penitent, and therefore he is obliged to reveal the confession to the person to whom the absolution of that sin is reserved; though indeed he never mentions the penitent's name, or any circumstance by which he may be discovered.

Again, there are other cases (such as a *conspiracy against the life of Ike Prince, or a traitorous design to overturn the government*) which the confessor is obliged in conscience, and for the safety of the public, to reveal.

But besides all these, whenever the penitent's case happens to have any thing of an uncommon difficulty in it, common prudence, and a due regard to the faithful discharge of his office, will oblige a confessor to discover it to men of experience and judgment in casuistry, that he may have their advice how to proceed in it. And that is what confessors in Spain not only may do, but are bound by the word of a priest to do wherever they have an opportunity of consulting a college of confessors, or, as it is commonly called, a *moral academy*.

I believe it may be of some service on the present occasion, to inform my readers what those *moral academies* are, which are to be met with through Spain, in every city and town where there is a number of secular and regular priests. But I shall speak only of those in the city of Saragossa, as being the most perfectly acquainted with them.

A moral academy is a college or assembly consisting of several Father Confessors, in which each of them proposes some moral case which has happened to him in confession, with an exact and particular account of the confession, without mentioning the penitent's name: and the proponent having done this, every member is to deliver his opinion upon it. This is constantly practiced

every Friday, from two of the clock in the afternoon, till six, and sometimes till eight, as the cases proposed happen to be more or less difficult. But when there is an extraordinary intricate case to be resolved, and the members cannot agree in the resolution of it, they send one of their assembly to the great academy which is a college composed of sixteen casuistical (relating to the use of ethical principles to resolve moral problems) doctors, and four professors of divinity, the most learned and experienced in moral cases that may be had; and by them the case in debate is resolved, and the resolution of it entered in the books of the academy by the consent of the president and members.

Now after all that has been said upon this head, I believe I need not be at much trouble to vindicate myself from the imputation of any criminal breach of secrecy; for if the reader observe, that on the foregoing grounds, there is no confession whatever which may not lawfully be revealed, (provided the confessor do not discover the penitent,) he cannot in justice condemn me for publishing a few, by which it is morally impossible, in the present circumstances, that the penitents should be known. Had I been much more particular than I am in my relations, and mentioned even the names and every thing else I knew of the persons, there would scarce be a possibility (considering the distance and little intercourse there is between this place and Saragossa) of their suffering in any degree by it: and I need not observe that the chief, and indeed only reason of enjoining and keeping secrecy, is the hazards the penitent may run by a discovery, but I do assure the reader, that in every confession I have related, I have made use of feigned names; and avoided every circumstance by which I had the least cause to suspect the parties might be found out. And I assure him further, that most of the cases here published by me are, in their most material points, already printed in the compendiums of that moral academy of which I was a member.

As for the reasons which moved me to publish this book, I shall only say, that as the corrupt practices, which are the subject of it, first set me upon examining into the principles of the Church of Rome, and by that means of renouncing them; so I thought that the making of them public, might happily produce the same effect in some others.

I did design on this occasion to give a particular account of the motives of my conversion, and leaving Spain; but being confined to three hundred pages, I must leave that and some other things relating to the sacraments of the church of Rome, to the second part, which I intend to print if the public think fit to encourage me.

Continued in [The Great Red dragon. Part I. The Roman Catholics' Auricular Confession.](#)