

“The reliques and ragges of popish superstition”: The Effect of Richard Hooker’s *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Polity* on Book V of *The Faerie Queene*

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In the “Armada Portrait” of Elizabeth I, the queen sits placidly, observing her realm through her pasty makeup, secure in the knowledge that she is in control of England and the seas. Her eyes look off into the distance as if imagining great things for herself and her kingdom. The whole scene is one of studied serenity. In reality, however, she waged a constant battle against plotters and assassins, who wanted her off the throne and someone more suitable on it.

Even to a casual reader of English history, the late sixteenth century was full of events that threatened the survival of the Elizabethan monarchy: the Northern Uprising of 1569; the deposition and excommunication of the queen by Pope Pius V in 1570; the Ridolfi plot in 1571; the genesis of the Jesuit mission to re-convert England in 1580; the Babington Plot against the queen’s life in 1586; and the supposed *coup de grace* of all—the invasion of England by the Spanish Armada in 1588. It was no mistake that all the plots mentioned involved Catholic dissidents, because to a sixteenth century Catholic Englishman, Elizabeth was the “mother of all heretics.

These various plots in themselves, however, do not explain the difference in tenor between the first three books of Spenser’s *The Faerie Queen*, published in 1590, and the second three books, which appeared in 1596. In books I-III, the Catholic Church appears largely as a repository of heretical error, whereas in books IV-VI, the poet goes to great pains to demonstrate that the church is a hotbed of sedition, a refuge for traitors, and that

its continuation in England will cause the ruin of the realm. The cause of this shift in policy on Spenser's part, I believe, was none of the pre-1590 historical events mentioned above, or it would likely have surfaced before the 1590 edition of the first three books. Spenser's change in representation of the Catholic Church was caused, I believe, by a response to the work of a Protestant theologian, the representative of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and therefore of the queen herself. That work was Richard Hooker's *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie*, which appeared in 1594, two years before the second installment of *The Faerie Queene*, but well after the publication of the first. This essay will seek to explain why Hooker's work had such a profound impact upon our author. First, we will explore Spenser's type of Protestantism. Next, we will see how Spenser treats the Catholic Church in Book I of *The Faerie Queene*, and then how he treats it again in book V after the publication of Hooker's *Lawes*. Finally, we will examine Hooker and his famous work itself.

In order to understand why the theology of a Protestant pastor could inspire Spenser to realize danger to the realm that all of the plots of the twenty years previous could not, it is first important to understand what kind of a Protestant Edmund Spenser was, and what the state of religion was like during Elizabeth's reign.

Anthea Hume's work *Edmund Spenser: Protestant Poet* supposes that Spenser's religion "was a fervent Protestantism which requires the label 'Puritan' during a specific period" (9). Similarly, John N. King numbers Spenser with the progressive Protestants who were dismayed by the zealous Archbishop Edmund Grindal's removal from office as the primate of England: he points out lines 215-28 of the famous July Eclogue from the

*Shepherd's Calendar* as evidence (*Puritan*, 3).<sup>1</sup> While King stops short of calling Spenser a Puritan, he does say that Spenser was one of those authors who strove to finish the Reformation in England by attempting to abolish all vestiges of Romanism from the land. "All available circumstances," says King, "identify Spenser, during the period of the late 1570s through the 1590s, as a zealous Protestant. . . The work of *The Faerie Queene* is at one with the satirical eclogues of *The Shepherd's Calendar* in articulating the progressive Protestantism of his age" (23).

In the May Eclogue of *The Shepherd's Calendar*, Spenser tells his readers in the Argument that "*it is dangerous to mainteine any felowship, or giue too much credit*" to Catholic ministers' "*colourable and feyned goodwill.*" In Spenser's day, the Bible and sober preaching about salvation had often lost ground to the "superstitions and pagan idolatry" of the Catholic religion. In an effort to explain how God's grace was so often thwarted by the devil, Spenser demonstrates in the *Calendar* how Catholic priests fool the people into accepting Catholicism by appearing to be like them. Spenser calls these priests "foxes," alluding to their slyness and ability to hide when hunted. In the May Eclogue Piers (who represents the Protestants) tells Palinode (the Catholic representative) a story in which a "kid" is left alone by his mother, but warned about the foxes and their tricks. The fox appears at the door disguised as a "poore Sheepe," dark from being in the sun (266). The kid immediately forgets his mother's warnings and opens the door. The kid is snatched up and taken to the woods. The lesson for Protestants is that the fox never appears as a fox, and warning sheep against foxes avails little unless the sheep can

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<sup>1</sup> According to King, Grindal was appointed archbishop of Canterbury in early 1576 with the backing of most of the powerful progressive Protestants in the government. When he refused, however, to repress groups of "prophesying" clergy, he was removed by the queen in 1577. Algrin, according to Thomalin in

recognize all the shapes that the fox can take. As we are constantly reminded by the Protestant rhetoric of the time, Catholic priests are the foxes we are to guard against, and Jesuits are the worst foxes of them all.

These foxes are able to steal sheep away from the best shepherd, not by force, but by guile: they imitate the sound of the shepherd's voice, or the bark of the sheepdog, fooling the sheep into believing they are safe with them. The truth of the matter was that the Catholic mission (begun by exiled priests in 1580) was hurting the established church: the priests were stealing souls from the Protestant pastors.

The most sinister priest of them all is, of course, the leader of the Catholic Church, who appears in book I of *The Faerie Queene* as a demonic magician. In book I Spenser generally confines his considerations of Catholicism to the harm it does to the *minds* of those corrupted, making the surreptitious nature of the Roman doctrinal argument is one of the significant subjects of book I. The narrative makes it clear that the pope and the Catholic Church seduce the people of England by fair speech into religious damnation. Spenser's description of Archimago, who I believe stands for the Catholic Church, the devil, or the pope, shows him as "an aged Sire," with his "beard all hoarie gray." He seems "sober" and "very sagely sad," lowering his eyes to the ground (*FQ*, I.29.2,3,5). Spenser's portrait could describe the pope, perhaps even Pius V, the pope who excommunicated Elizabeth in 1570 and promulgated most of the reforms of the hated Council of Trent. While the pope openly appears harmless, Spenser, as a progressive Protestant, considers him to be the archenemy of true religion.

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the July Eclogue of *The Shepheardes Calender*, was brained by a shellfish dropped by a soaring eagle. "So now astonied with the stroke, / he lyes in lingring payne" (227-8).

Archimago kindly invites the tired Redcrosse Knight and his lady into his humble home, away from the “resort of people” (I.34.3). There, he entertains them in the time-honored tradition of telling stories to pass the time. This seems harmless enough, were it not for the type of stories the old man tells: “He told of Saintes and Popes, and euermore / he strowd an *Aue-Mary* after and before” (I.35.8-9). Of course, any devotee of the true religion (both Redcrosse and the reader) would be expected to realize the danger of listening to these fables, but the old man couches his fables in “faire discourse” and “plesing wordes” (I.1.35.5-6). The true danger of Archimago is missed because of his looks (“Simple in shew, and voyde of malice bad” (I.29.7)) and his ability to beguile audiences with his speech (He “well could file his tongue as smooth as glas” (I.35.7)). .

The devilish Archimago creates the false Una and he sends her to trick Redcrosse. Spenser declares the false Una “Full of the makers guile” (I.1.46.7). Like the pope himself, the apparition is intended not to directly confront, but to deceive her victims. And like the foxes in *The Sheapheardes Calender*, she overcomes her opponents by trickery and illusion, not by force. She is, as the poet relates, “fram’d of liquid ayre”; she is without substance herself, but her effect on the mind can prove deadly. The rest of Canto I concerns the apparition’s attempts both to draw Redcrosse away from his original and pure quest to help Una’s parents and to fall by his base instincts to lust. Although she is unsuccessful in her attempts to bring the knight down by lust, she does lead him to commit two of the other deadly sins, jealousy and anger. Archimago succeeds by his illusion of reality in diverting the knight from his task.

Archimago then usurps the appearance of the knight, but Spenser makes it clear to the reader that the appearance is far from the reality: his juxtaposition of terms such as

“coward brest” and “crauen crest” (I.2.11.4,5) leave no doubt that the magician is merely borrowing the respectable trappings of the pure knight. But, as before, the poet expects that many will be fooled: “And when he sate vpon his courser free, / *Saint George* himself ye would haue deemed him to be” (I.2.11.8-9). In canto iii, Archimago loses his only knightly battle to Sansloy. Spenser wants to portray the pope as powerless; his danger lies in his ability to beguile.

If the first book cautions Protestants to beware of the sophistry of the mission priests and their leader the fifth book takes the Catholic threat much more seriously. In that book, the black magic and tricks of the pope have become something much more sinister: rebellion and regicide. Although Archimago disappears before book V, his minions are present to foment rebellion and plot against their anointed sovereign.

Most critics have recognized the difficulty of attempting to sustain the historical allegory of the Faerie Queene to the point of finding exact matches for every episode and every person in the poem. However, almost every critic who has treated Book V of *The Faerie Queene* has agreed that Britomart represents the queen, and Radigund, Mary Queen of Scots. In Canto vi, Britomart (the female knight) rescues Artegall, (the knight of justice) who is in the Amazon’s thrall. Then she fights with Radigund in single combat, and finally beheads her. These facets of the poem certainly reflect historical events, culminating with the beheading of the Scottish queen at Fotheringhay Castle in 1587 (Fraser 539). Although many have examined Britomart’s battle with Radigund in considerable detail,<sup>2</sup> the episode of Britomart’s narrow escape from the disappearing bed

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Donald V. Stump’s explanation of this episode, in which he reconciles Britomart’s beheading of Mary Stuart, and then her subsequent trial and execution as Duessa in canto ix.. Donald V.

in the house of Dolon is largely glossed over as a mere impediment to the heroine's relentless quest to find and rescue her lover, Artegall. A.C. Hamilton, for instance, in his 1970 edition of the poem, notes that the "bed trick refers primarily to the allegory of marriage" (570). Although there may be elements of fidelity and the promises of marriage in the Dolon episode, I submit that there is a strong political undercurrent as well, one which relates directly to the impact of the English mission on the English Protestant world.

I believe that we see in this episode an exposition of the Babington plot and its failure. Despite great peril, Britomart escapes "by Gods grace, and her good heedinesse," being "preserued from their traytrous traine" (V.vi.34.6-7). It is significant how many times the words "traitor" or "traitorous" are used in this passage. It is evident that Spenser means to reflect a breach of loyalty, not merely treachery, in this canto.

The episode with Dolon begins, as did the one with Archimago, with a "seeming harmless old man" inviting a weary traveler to rest at the end of the day. Spenser gives the reader hints throughout that the old knight is, like Archimago, not what he appears on the surface. He tells us, for instance, that the knight "seem'd" to be old and that he was wearing a "vestment" (V.vi.19.6,8). Any reader who remembers Book I will recall that Archimago similarly appears as "An aged Sire, in long blacke weedes yclad" (I.i.29.2), and that he "seemed" sober and "Simple in shew" (I.i.29.5,7). The "vestment" of Dolon expresses more than merely what the knight is wearing: it shows that he, like Archimago, is a priest.

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Stump, "The Two Deaths of Mary Stuart: Historical Allegory in Spenser's Book of Justice." *Spenser Studies: A Renaissance Poetry Annual* 9 (1992): 81-105.

Dolon also has the capacity for artful conversation, just as Archimago. Spenser says that the knight, approaching Britomart,

... coming neare, gan gently her salute,  
 With curteous words, in the most comely wize;

.....

Then gan . . . further to deuize  
 Of things abrode, as next to hand did light,

And many things demaund, to which she answer'd light. (V.vi.20)

The fact that Dolon speaks to Britomart “of things abrode,” coupled with his “vestiments,” suggests that he is a priest trained in a foreign seminary. Although the Statute of 1585 previously forbade such priests from remaining in England under pain of death, many did remain to evangelize.

In Dolon’s house, Britomart and her companion the iron man Talus are brought to a chamber where they are to spend the night, waiting for the chance to travel again the next day. The attempt on Britomart’s life fails because she is watchful. The only place Britomart is not to be found is in her bed; had she been there when the bed “By a false trap was let adowne to fall,” (V.Vi. 27.7) she would surely have perished in the trap set for her by Dolon. Once this is discovered, Britomart understands the “treason” meant by this attempt. In the next seven stanzas, Spenser uses the word “treason” or “traytrous” five times, underscoring the political implications of Dolon’s act. When the disappearing bed trick fails, two knights appear in the bedchamber, followed by “a raskall rout,” prepared to kill Britomart and her companion. It is at this point that Talus attacks the rabble with his iron flail, causing them and the knights to flee for their lives, but not

before Talus is able to dispatch many of them, who “here and there like scattred sheep . . . lay” (V.vi.30.6). It is significant that it is Talus who tells Britomart the “treason” that was intended by the falling bed. But it is not surprising, given the fact that the primary purpose of Talus’s flail is not to kill, but to seek out the truth.

We may also point out here that, preparing for the upcoming battle with the knights, Talus holds what Spenser now calls a “thresher,” more appropriate for divining truth from treasonous miscreants.

The poet has proven by Dolon’s actions that he is not honorable. It is only now, though, after the attempt on Britomart’s life fails and Talus is able to thresh out the “treason” meant by it, that we learn the old knight’s true identity. Spenser identifies him this way:

The Goodman of this house was *Dolon* hight,  
 A man of subtill wit and wicked minde,  
 That whilome in his youth had been a Knight,  
 And armes had borne, but little good could finde,  
 And much lesse honour by that warlike kinde  
 Of life: for he was nothing valorous,  
 But with slie shiftes and wiles did vnderminde  
 Alle noble Knights, which were aduenterous,  
 And many brought to shame by treason treacherous. (V.vi.32)

Although Dolon had been a knight in the past, he was no longer one: he is “nothing valorous,” and he uses “slie shiftes and wiles” to undermine true knights by treason. This description points, I believe, to Robert Persons, the Jesuit who remained in charge of the

English mission from its inception in 1580, when Persons accompanied Edmund Campion and Ralph Sherwin into England, to his death in 1610. Persons, like Campion and many other converts, had been a convinced Protestant (a “knight,” as Spenser labels him) and in fact was a fellow at Balliol College. Due to a growing misgiving about the authenticity of Protestantism, he either left or was expelled from his post and went to Rome, where he was reconciled to the Catholic Church and became a Jesuit in 1575. He was one of a group of exiled Catholic clergy who believed, until the death of Mary Stuart, that it was permissible to remove the queen and place the Catholic queen of Scots on the throne. Shortly before the publication of the second part of *The Faerie Queene* in 1596, in fact, Persons had published under the pseudonym N. Dolman *A Conference About the Next Succession to the Crowne of Inghland*, in which he advocated the right of a people to supplant their sovereign for reasons of religion (*The Catholic Encyclopedia*). Progressive Protestants would have triply hated him: as a Catholic, as a clergy member, and as a Jesuit.

The Babington plot, represented in this episode, was named after the young English gentleman whose idea it was to assassinate the queen, but according to Wallace MacCaffrey, the “prime instigator was a priest, John Ballard.” John Savage, an ex-seminarian, and Babington joined him in attempting to kill the queen. In this plot, all the worst fears of the Elizabethan government came true: the Catholics planned to invade England, kill the queen, and replace her with a Catholic sovereign. No longer is the main danger merely an erroneous religious belief. These men, Ballard, Savage, and Babington, can be represented by Spenser as the sons of Dolon (the Jesuit Persons), who attempt to do their

father's bidding by killing the queen, just as Dolon's sons try to kill Britomart. As the details of the plot came to light, Elizabeth finally was shaken from her slumber and consented to the trial and subsequent execution of the Scottish queen.

While Elizabeth considered herself a Protestant, her desire to unite the kingdom politically and theologically under her control prompted her to pursue a path that negotiated a mean between Catholicism and Protestantism. As Harry Emerson Fosdick has written, "to be sure, she shut out faithful Romanists on one side and stalwart Puritans on the other, but she reached out so far in both directions that many who else would have remained Romanists and Puritans came into her communion" (334).

Until the publication of Hooker's *Lawes* in 1594, theological integrity of the English church was not settled: it was Protestant and not yet so; at the same time, it retained elements of the Roman hierarchy and celebrations. For those more progressive Protestants like Spenser, the Sidneys, and the Earl of Leicester, the farther removed the Church of England was from the Calvinist theology the Marian exiles had learned while in Geneva, the closer the church was to the hated antichristian papacy and its idolatrous mass. Richard Hooker's work defined for the sixteenth century Englishman what it meant to be a Protestant Christian. One critic has asserted that Hooker sought "to be both irenic and polemical as he defended his Archbishop and sought to perfect the church's position" on ecclesiastical authority (Almasy 252) when writing *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie*. While Hooker was Master of the Temple from 1585-91 (Hill, *Evolution* 121) he took up the archbishop's of Canterbury's argument with Thomas Cartwright, a leading "Puritan" who advocated purging the English Church of all Catholic tendencies.

By the time Hooker took up the standard, the argument was already twenty years old: the debate actually began in the 1560s between conformists and Puritans over whether the church could legislate ceremonies, vestments, and hierarchies that were left from pre-Reformation Roman practice. The Puritans believed that all aspects of a Christian's life were to be regulated by scripture, and since these orders and ceremonies were a later development, they believed them sinful. The conformists, on the other hand, considered such ceremonies to be things "indifferent" to the salvation of the individual, and, "since the established orders were not intrinsically unlawful and were not established for a superstitious purpose, they were to obeyed by private individuals without question" (Perrot 32). The problem came to a head in 1564, when Archbishop Mathew Parker enforced the wearing of the surplice, which many Puritan ministers could not in conscience comply with, since they believed that the surplice was a sinful Roman remnant from the unreformed past. The archbishop pressed the issue of ceremonial conformity, with the result that the reformist ministers published *An Admonition to the Parliament* in 1572. This anonymous document calls for the complete overhaul of English church ceremonies and practice. Several responses were written on both sides, the reformist mantle taken up by Thomas Cartwright, and that of the conformists by John Whitgift (32-4).

Hooker was already known as a conformist: his fellow-preacher at the Temple, Walter Travers, who was not a conformist, complained that Hooker's theology was so Roman that "the like to this. . . hath not been heard in public places within this land since Queen Mary's days" (qtd. in Hill, *Evolution* 126).

Speed Hill goes on to say that

The most damaging contention of the Puritans was that their proposed system of church government, modeled (according to Hooker) on Calvin's church at Geneva, was uniquely in accord with the Word of God as recorded in Scripture. If it could be refuted on the authority of "Scripture, or antiquity, or reason," the English church would stand acquitted of the charge that it possessed an ungodly discipline, contrary to divine law, nowhere authorized by Scripture, from which the godly were obliged to separate themselves should it refuse to reform itself or else be reformed by others. (135).

By siding with the authority of reason and tradition against pure scripture, Hooker placed himself and the established church squarely in the lap of the Roman Church, according to the puritans. In fact, many early Catholic polemicists pointed to Hooker's work as an example of how "there were those among the English Protestants who tended toward papist positions on vital issues" (Booty 212). And this was certainly the way that progressive Protestants would have seen it.

What about Hooker's work would incite men like Spenser to redouble their efforts to warn others away from his type of compromise? The answer is quite simple. The type of church rule imposed by the monarchy, and espoused by Hooker, was abhorrent to the more progressive Protestants, who believed that "no authority was to be obeyed but that of God's Word speaking in the hearts and minds of the presbytery or the congregation" (Pocock 291). Hooker, on the other hand, speaking for the established church, "replied with the image of a church charged with acting in tradition and history, obliged to perform many acts that were adiaphora but entitled in doing so to claim the authority of a

natural law in which men were naturally political but at the same time naturally obedient” (291).

J.S. Marshall says that Hooker was especially Roman in his view of the ministry: “Hooker’s position is the ancient Catholic doctrine of orders. . . . It is not a matter of a call, but of a commission at the hands of the Church” (146). Instead of agreeing with his fellow Protestants, Hooker agrees with the Roman Catholic Council of Trent. There was an essential difference in ecclesiology between the Admonitionists and Hooker, which could not be resolved any more than that between Calvin and the Fathers of the Council of Trent. The Puritans placed great emphasis on preaching, but, as Marshall says, in Hooker’s view, the priest’s “vocation was primarily pastoral and sacramental,” making “preaching . . . a very secondary matter” (146). Since preaching had become the hallmark of the reformed churches, giving it a second place to sacramental ministry made Hooker seem suspicious to the more zealous Protestants like Spenser.

Using reason and the authority of the ancient church fathers, Hooker’s work systematically takes his opponents’ argument apart. In his preface, he complains that each succeeding generation of Protestants has made it a point to be farther removed from the Church of Rome, “whereupon grewe maruelous great dissimilitudes, and by reason thereof, iealousies, hartburning, iarres and discords amongst them” (7). Hooker rejects a unity of Protestantism based solely on hatred of Rome as no unity at all. He then attacks the concept that every situation can be addressed by study of scripture. He condemns those who “by fashioning the very notions & conceipts of mens minds in such sort, that when they read the Scripture, they may thinke that euerything soundeth towards the aduancement of that discipline, and to the vtter disgrace of the contrary” (15). This, of

course, agrees with Trent in opposing Calvin and Zwingli, as well as the growing number of English puritans who believed that scripture gave specific answers to every aspect of human life. Here he begins to build his argument that things indifferent and not superstitious, even from pre-Reformation Roman usage, can be advantageous and even salvific to English Protestants. Hooker scorns those brethren who consider all ceremonies handed down from the Roman Church unusable, and he continues to argue that: first, scripture does not regulate all the minutiae of men's lives, and second, that at least some of the tradition the church received from Rome is not vile, and can fill in the gaps that scripture does not.

The author accuses the extremists of being more Genevan than the Genevans: in Geneva, he says, “[H]aue not they the old Popish custome of vsing Godfathers and Godmothers in Baptisme; the old Popish custome of administering the blessed sacrament of the holy Eucharist with Wafer-cakes? These things the godly there can digest. Wherefore should not the godly here learne to doe the like both in them in the rest of the like nature?” (187). Thus, Hooker takes away from the Puritans the excuse that they are following the precepts of Calvin and his Genevan authority; Hooker shows in his work that even the Swiss reformed churches do not reject as much of Roman ritual as the progressive English Protestants.

Hooker finally ingeniously demonstrates the illogical conclusion that the brethren are forced to, simply for the sake of being unlike the Church of Rome. “Theyr axiome is,” he says, “that the sound beleeuing Church of Iesus Christ may not be like Hereticall Churches in any of those indifferent thinges, which men make choice of, and doo not take by prescript appointment of the word of God.” He presents the case of a reformed church

that must make the choice to use leavened or unleavened bread for its Eucharistic celebration: according to Hooker, since the Roman Church uses unleavened bread, the reformed church may not use it. But, he continues, if the reformed church is near a Greek church that uses leavened bread, it also cannot use that type of bread, since the Greek Church is heretical like the Roman one in many respects. “Without eyther leauened or vnleauened bread,” he concludes, “it can haue no sacrament: the word of God doth tye it to neither, and their axiome doth exclude it from both. (189)

Thus, Hooker continues to hammer away at the arguments of the extremists until he has put the last nail in the Puritan coffin. While this may have satisfied the queen and the archbishop, Spenser and others like him would have seen in the *Lawes* a dangerous collusion at the highest levels of the church with the missionary priests whose job it was to re-convert the English to the darkness of pre-Reformation papistry and replace their Protestant queen. In book I of *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser warned his fellow Protestants against the religion of “the learned and crafty Papist,” as John Knox described them (272). With the publication of Hooker’s *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie*, however, Spenser’s fellow progressive Protestants must have felt that they were losing the war with Rome. Hooker’s work gave Spenser an uneasy feeling, I think. Therefore, the fifth book, far from merely justifying Elizabethan foreign policy, as it is more broadly taken, attempts to clarify for English Protestants the ultimate result of Hooker’s policy—a militant Catholicism that not only will try to convert Protestants, but also attempt to unseat their monarchs and murder their subjects. These were the Catholics Spenser finally wanted to government to see, as he himself had finally come to see them. For this reason, I believe, Spenser makes a supreme effort in book V of *The Faerie Queene* to

prove that Dolons do exist in England, and that they can do far more harm than just make papists of good Protestants.

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