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MEDEN AGAN

WILLIAM RENWICK RIDDELL

The old Greeks had an apothegm "Meden Agan," literally "in nothing too much," which may be rendered in American and Canadian: "Don't bite off more than you can chew."

An examination of the Secret Service accounts of King Charles II in a publication of the Camden Society, 1851; *Moneys received and paid for Secret Services of Charles II and James II . . . 1679 to . . . 1688* shows that it would have paid Titus Oates and his confrères to keep the maxim in mind and act upon it.

The "Popish Plot" of the reign of Charles II seems to have originated in the half-crazed brain of Dr. Israel (or Ezerel) Tonge (or Tong), the Anglican Rector of St. Michael's in Wood Street, London: he supplied the notorious Titus Oates with money wherewith to go to the College of St. Omer for evidence that the Pope and Catholics generally were plotting against Protestantism in general, and against King Charles in particular. Of course, the accomplished perjurer succeeded. A reasonably full and accurate account of this episode is given in a recent publication by John Lane, London, *The King's Journalis*, by J. G. Muddiman, M. A., chapter xi.

Titus Oates, of course, denied Tonge's initiative and assistance, but no one can believe him.

Coming to England, he was favored by circumstances; and with a strong public sentiment with him, he was forced upon the incredulous King: and we find that as early as the beginning of June, 1679, he was on the King's Secret Service List as receiving £10 per week "for dyet" and £2 more "for expenses," £12 per week in all (with at least as much as \$300 at the present time). Very shortly after this and as early as November, 1679, he was also furnished with free quarters at Whitehall which cost the King £5 a month. He also got a bonus now and then ranging from £10 to £50 (£110 in all) for discovering a Papist, and very considerable sums (£ 125 8s 10d in all) for expenses in getting witnesses, besides a Royal Bounty of £50 in June, 1679, and one of £30 in June, 1680.

Dr. Tonge was also fortunate: he started off in June, 1679, with a Royal Bounty of £50 and another of the same amount in September, £50 the next month "for his subsistence," in January, 1679-80, he received £50 "towards enabling him to provide for and settle him-

self and family in such accommodations as may be most suitable to his condition during his attendance in his Ma'ties service, and to pay for log'gs which he had in Whitehall" and a like sum the following month—he did not get a regular allowance but was paid for bringing a witness over into England and on his death, January, 1680-81, his funeral was paid for by the King, £50.

In November, 1679, a corroborating witness turned up as earnest if not quite as accomplished a liar as Oates himself, William Bedloe (or Bedlow) by name. He, however, had got on the King's list as early as the end of May, 1679, with an allowance of "£10 p. week for his dyet."

Bedloe got an allowance of £150 "to maintain witnesses in town about the plot," £17 "which he expended about causing Harcourt the Jesuit, lately executed to be seized" (about the trial of Harcourt see 7 *Howell's State Trials*, 311, sqq.), £20 for "bringing up witnesses to the tryal of the priests and jesuits"; he also received free lodging at Sir Paull Neale's at Whitehall for eleven weeks.

After the pair, Oates and Bedloe, had been galloping through the court swearing away the lives of better men, they went too far and attacked Sir George Wakeman, the Queen's physician, whom they accused of being bribed to poison the King; and not obscurely it was intimated that the Roman Catholic Queen was mixed up in the plot. This was too much even for Charles, who esteemed if he did not love his childless wife: he intimated to his Chief Justice, the notorious Scroggs, what he wanted; Scroggs discredited the witnesses much to their amazement and the doctor was acquitted, (1679) 7 *Howell's State Trials*, 591, sqq. Bedloe complained "my Lord, my evidence is not right summed up": but in vain, the tide had turned. Bedloe who had started off with £10 a week, got his last payment to carry him on to the end of August, 1780: but Oates got his pay until September 2, 1781.

The next entry we have of either of these workers is when in 1685, £800 was paid to depay the expenses of prosecuting Oates for perjury.

Quantum mutatus.