

The Seventh Vial Chapter XV. The Ten-Horned And Seven-Headed Beast Of The Sea



Continued from [Chapter XIV. Resurrection Of The Witnesses](#)

BEFORE describing the third and last woe, we must speak of the object of that woe. We have had no occasion to do so till now, because he has not appeared on the Apocalyptic scene. The next vision of John, however, brings him before us. Paul, as well as other apostles, had spoken of one whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders—the Man of Sin, the Son of Perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. (2 Thess. 2:3,4) But when Paul wrote, as he himself tells us, there were lets and hindrances in existence, which obstructed the appearance of the Man of Sin, and would continue to do so for some ages to come. But the apostle intimated, at the same time, that these obstructions should in due time cease to exist—that the *let* (restraining force) would be taken out of the way, and then that that Wicked would be revealed, affording to the saints an opportunity of displaying their patience in the endurance of his tyranny, and to God of manifesting His power in breaking him in pieces.

The Roman empire, in its imperial form, was the grand let to the rise of Popery in Paul's time, and for some time after. It was necessary that the throne of the Emperor should be abolished, in order that the chair of the Bishop might be erected in its room (designated position). And to what were the great acts of the drama we have been contemplating—the events falling under the seals and trumpets—directed, but just to break in pieces the fabric of imperial Rome, that, the let being taken out of the way, the Man of Sin might be revealed. Accordingly, in the vision to which we have now come, we witness his portentous rise.

“And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.” (Rev. 13:1)

This chapter contains an account of the rise of two beasts. The first beast is represented as rising out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns;

the second beast is represented as rising out of the earth, having two horns like a lamb, and speaking as a dragon. We shall briefly indicate what we are to understand by these two beasts. This will enable us to enter with advantage upon the exposition of the details of the symbols.

The first beast—that which rose out of the sea—we take to be the secular empire, with its Papal head. The second beast—that which rose out of the earth—we take to be the hierarchy or ecclesiastical state. It was by the union of these two that the world was so long oppressed, and the Church brought to the very brink of extermination. Between the two branches of the Papacy there was as close and intimate alliance almost as between body and soul. The State served the same purpose to the Popedom which the horse does to the rider—which the hand does to the will. It was the beast on which the harlot rode; it was the arm by which the Papacy executed all its cruel and bloody decrees.

It appeared to John as if he were stationed on the seashore; and, as he gazed upon the waters, which at the time were agitated with tempest (the Gothic invasion), he saw a monster emerging from the deep. His appearance was sufficiently dreadful. He had seven heads, indicative of craft; ten horns, the symbol of power; crowns upon his horns, the emblem of royalty; on his head blasphemous titles, plainly indicating an idolatrous and impious character. Such was the frightful combination of evil qualities—craft, ferocity, power, impiety—which was apparent at the very first glance.

Spencer has well hit off the salient features of this monster:—

“Such one it was as that renowned snake
Which great Alcides in Stremona slew,
Long foster’d in the filth of Lerna Lake,
Whose many heads out-budding ever new
Did breed him endless labour to subdue.
But this same monster much more ugly was;
For seven great heads out of his body grew,
An iron breast, and back of scaley brass,
And all embru’d in blood his eyes did shine as glass.
“His tail was stretched out in wondrous length,
That to the house of heavenly gods it raught;
And, with extorted power, and borrow’d strength,
The ever-burning lamps from thence it brought,
And proudly threw to ground, as things of naught;
And underneath his filthy feet did tread
The sacred things, and holy hests foretaught.
Upon this dreadful beast, with seven-fold head,
He set the false Duessa for more awe and dread.”—
Faerie Queen, Book i., c. 7.

It is usual in Scripture to represent a tyrannical kingdom under the symbol of a wild beast. It is impossible not to admire the propriety of the symbol. It is the property of man to be ruled by reason, to be accessible to considerations of clemency and pity, and to have respect in his actions to the will of his Maker. It is the attribute of a beast, on the other hand, to

be actuated only by brute passion and appetite. Now, have not the kingdoms of the world hitherto, and especially the four great Despotisms seen by Daniel in vision, acted more like the beast of prey than as associations of reasonable and accountable beings? Have they not exercised at lawless violence all along, and done whatever they listed, without regard to the will of Him who ruleth among men? The ascertained import of the symbol, then, renders it clear that it is the rise of a tyrannical and persecuting power that is here prefigured. A reference to the prophecy of Daniel will give us material aid in determining the kingdom here symbolized.

There is the closest resemblance, as any one may see who compares the two descriptions, between the fourth beast of Daniel and the beast of the sea seen by John. The description given by Daniel is such as to lead us to conclude that the fourth beast was a compound of the preceding three—that it had the teeth of the Babylonian lion, the claws of the Persian bear, and the spotted skin of the Macedonian leopard—that is, it possessed all the propensities of its predecessors, in addition to its own characteristic qualities. Now, such is precisely the appearance of the beast of the sea, verse 2:—

“And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion.”

Hence we conclude that it is one and the same political association which is symbolized by the fourth beast of Daniel and the beast of the sea of John. But the fourth beast of Daniel is, by the universal consent of expositors, the symbol of the Roman empire; and it is this empire, therefore, that is symbolized by the beast of the sea; only we have mainly to do with it in its divided form, as held forth by the ten horns. We may note this farther point of resemblance—that the two beasts came to the same end: Daniel’s is slain, and his body is given to the devouring flame; John’s is taken prisoner at the battle of Armageddon, and is cast into the lake burning with fire and brimstone. A short commentary will make the application of the vision to the Papal empire exceedingly plain.

The beast rose out of the sea. The sea is the symbol of society in a state of agitation. The western world at this time was convulsed. The winds that agitated it blew from the north, and were formed of the Gothic nations, whose successive eruptions completely destroyed the fabric of the empire, and plunged society into frightful confusion. It was out of this social flood that the ten Roman kingdoms of modern Europe emerged.

“Having seven heads.” Let us here avail ourselves of the aid of an interpreter who, we are sure will not mislead us. In Revelation 17:9,10, we are told the seven heads have a twofold signification. First, they symbolize the seven hills which were to be the seat of the government of the kingdom. This, as Elliot remarks, “is a character as important as it is obvious. It binds the power symbolized, through all its various mutations, from its earliest beginning to its end, to that same seven-hilled locality, even like one *adscriptus glebae* (Latin, a tenant tied to the land), and as an essential part of his very constitution and life.” This leads us at once to the city of Rome.

In the passage just referred to, we are further informed that the seven heads also symbolize seven kings, i.e., seven forms of government. Now, such is the number of distinct forms of government which the Roman empire has assumed from first to last, as enumerated both by Livy and Tacitus—kings, consuls, dictators, decemvirs (official ten-man commissions established by the Roman Republic), military tribunes, emperors. Of these kings, or forms of government, it was said, “five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come.” Five of these had fallen before the days of John; the sixth—namely, the imperial—was then in being; and the seventh was then future.

It was intimated, “and when he [the seventh head] cometh, he must continue a short space.” Who is this seventh head, whose term of existence was to be so brief? On no point are Apocalyptic commentators more divided, or their conclusions more vague. Mead makes the seventh head the demi-Caesar, or western emperor. Bishop Newton thinks the dukedom of Rome, established after the conquest of the Heruli, is meant. Others suppose that the Christian emperors, extending from Constantine to Augustulus, constituted the seventh head, and had its wound by the sword of the Heruli. Mr. Elliot finds the seventh head in the change of government that took place under Diocletian, who, together with his successors, in place of emperor or general of the Roman armies, became king or lord; and, in place of the laurel crown and purple, assumed the diadem and robe of silk—the Asiatic symbols of absolute rule. This was followed by great and fundamental changes in the administration, and is marked by Gibbon as the “New Form of Administration.” The empire henceforward was under the joint administration of four princes—two supreme rulers, or *Augusti*, and two inferior ones, or *Caesars*. This was introduced, not as a temporary expedient, but as a fundamental law of the Constitution. These are the nearest approaches which have been made to the solution of the difficulty of the seventh head.

To our mind none of these expositions are satisfactory; and, therefore, we here adopt a line of interpretation which, we think, takes us clear of all these difficulties. There is no reason, as it appears to us, why we should confine our view to the last form of Satan’s idolatrous empire—the Roman, to wit—and seek in connection with it all these seven heads. Rather let us take Satan’s empire in its totality. The beast that rose out of the sea was no new monster; he had been seen on earth before. He had momentarily disappeared in a great catastrophe, but he rose again to resume his ravages. Idolatry was one continued confederacy from the beginning, being inspired all through by the same spirit—even the old serpent, the devil.

Nevertheless, it culminated in seven great empires or heads, which rose in succession. The first was Egypt—the earliest persecutor of the Church. The second was Assyria; the third was Babylon; the fourth was the Medo-Persian; then, fifth, came the Grecian Power; and, sixth, the Roman, which was in being at the time of the prophecy. Under the sixth head, the head then in being, was the beast destined to pass out of view for a short time—to suffer a brief extinction—it was to be slain by the sword of the Goths, and so to become “the beast that was and is not.” “And I saw one of its heads as it were wounded to death.” But it was to revive in the form of the Ten kingdoms

of modern Europe.

It was essentially the same Pagan kingdom, Satan-inspired, which had lived in its five previous heads—Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Medo—Persia, and Greece; and which in John's time was existing in its Roman head; which was to arise from its apparent death by the Gothic invasion—emerge from the weltering flood of the sixth century, and to live a second time, in the Ten kingdoms of Europe, under its head the Pope.

A sort of dual character was to belong to this head; for it is counted as both the seventh and the eighth. And in actual fact this duality of head or government has characterized modern Europe. In one aspect its ten kings were its head; in another its head was the Papacy. In the Papacy the ten kingdoms found a common bond of union, and a common center of action. Under their chief, the Pope, they were marshaled in one empire, which was inspired by one spirit, and ruled by one law, which obeyed one will, and pursued one grand aim—all having a common source in the chair of the Popes. Both a temporal and spiritual supremacy did the Pope wield over Europe. This supremacy is necessarily inherent in the fundamental dogma of the Papacy.

The Pope is the vicar of Christ, according to the Romish teaching; but to Christ has been given "all power in heaven and in earth." He is a King of kings; and if the Pope be what Christ is, he must possess the power which Christ possesses—he must be a King of kings. And in fact he did claim this power for many ages; and in deposing sovereigns, releasing subjects from their allegiance, disposing of crowns, and annulling laws, the Pope demeaned himself as the Lord paramount of Europe, both in temporals and spirituals. This jurisdiction he exercised, not as the modern Popish gloss would have it, by the general consent and acquiescence of the kings and nations of the period; he claimed it as of divine right, and as one to whom the God of heaven had delegated His divine prerogatives, commissioning him to represent Him on earth; in short, as one who had been enthroned as vice-God, and into whose hands had been delivered all the kings and kingdoms of earth.

A singular, and apparently contradictory account is given of the beast—"the beast that was, and is not, and yet is." How was it possible that both statements could be true—that the beast had ceased to exist, and yet was in existence, i.e., when it was the object of wonder to all who dwelt on the earth? What we have already said will enable us to understand this. The beast was in the five idolatrous empires or heads which had already fallen. The beast *is not*, for its sixth head, the Roman, had followed its predecessors, and gone out of existence during the Gothic irruption. The beast *is*, that is, when the whole world wondered after it, and bowed down in worship before it, because it had returned from the abyss, and was living again in its last head, the Papal. It was the same infernal idolatrous beast throughout; but in respect of the successive eras at which its heads flourished, it was "the beast that was, and is not, and yet is." "He is the eighth, and is of the seventh, and goeth into perdition." This discloses its end. The eighth head will have no successor. The decem-regal form, such as is seen in modern Papal Europe, will be the last organization which Idolatry will be suffered to assume. When Rome imperial fell, Rome Papal rose. But this will not occur over again. The beast will have no second resurrection. In its form of ten

kingdoms, under its chief the Pope, it will fill up its cup, and go to its own place. It "goeth into perdition"—final perdition; for never will it be seen coming up again from the abyss which will then open to receive it.

"And ten horns." This is explained in chapter 17:12. "And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings"—not individual kings, but lines of rulers or kingdoms—"which have received no kingdom as yet;"—an intimation that their appearance was still future. The empire had to be broken in pieces by the shock of the barbarous nations, and out of what had been one undivided monarchy, ten distinct and independent kingdoms were to arise. It is well known that such was the origin of the ten Roman kingdoms of Europe. Let us trace the boundary line of the western empire. The wall of Adrian, dividing Scotland from England, forms the boundary on the north. This line we prolong across the German Ocean to the Rhine. We ascend that river to Baden-Baden; thence strike eastward to the source of the Danube, which we descend to Belgrade, and thence in a south-western direction, across the Adriatic and Mediterranean, to the great desert of Africa. This line will include the Roman empire of the west; and on this platform were the ten kingdoms to arise. We should expect that these ten kingdoms would be formed not long after the Gothic invasion, for the beast emerged from the flood, with all the ten horns already apparent.

We are disposed to take the era A.D. 532. At that epoch we find the following ten kingdoms within the limits we have traced:—the Anglo-Saxons; the Franks of central, the Allaman-Franks of eastern, and the Burgundic-Franks of south-eastern France; the Visigoths; the Suevi; the Vandals; the Ostrogoths in Italy; the Bavarians; and the Lombards. Great changes have occurred at various periods in Europe. Some of its states have fallen, and others have arisen; but from the Gothic invasion to the present era, ten has been the prevailing number of its kingdoms.

Of these ten kings or kingdoms it was said, that they "receive power as kings one hour with the beast." The (Greek word), *one hour*, indicates not the duration of their power, but the time when they should receive it. Their formation as independent kingdoms, and the development of the beast, would synchronize; both should receive their power at one and the same time.

It was at the end of the fifth century, or rather the beginning of the sixth, that the formation of the ten Gothic kingdoms was completed; and by this time the Pope, supported by the decrees of councils and the acquiescence of kings, had asserted his character of vicar of Christ and vicegerent of God, and had begun to exhibit the antichristian characteristics of blasphemy against God, and rage against His saints.

No sooner had the beast of the sea appeared, than "the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority." The dragon recognized the beast newly arisen as the lineal descendant of Pagan Rome, and, as such, hastened to serve him heir to all the power, wealth, and dominion of that empire. By the seat of the dragon is denoted the countries over which Rome had swayed the sceptre, which included the richest lands and the wealthiest cities of the western world.

Of all these, once the possession of Pagan Rome, Papal Rome has long been mistress. She occupies the same seat as the dragon of old. "On his heads were names of blasphemy." All the great empires, from Egypt downwards, were idolatrous. Blasphemy was written on every one of them. Every form of government which has arisen at Rome has assumed titles and arrogated powers of a blasphemous character.

The chief magistrate of the Romans from the first was the high priest—Pontifex Maximus—and the supreme authority in matters ecclesiastical. To come down to the emperors, some of them were addressed as the "august" and the "eternal one." Most of them were worshipped as God after death, and some of them were so even before it. But the last head—the Papacy—has far surpassed its predecessors. There is nothing in the history of the universe that equals the blasphemous titles and powers which the Popes have assumed. They have openly laid claim to be regarded as vicar of Christ, the vicegerent of the Creator, and governor of the world; and on that claim is built up the tremendous and monstrous fabric, partly civil and partly ecclesiastical, that constitutes the Papacy.

"And all the world wondered after the beast." This was partly owing to what is stated before, namely, that "his deadly wound was healed." The event was so marvelous, that it drew the admiration of all that dwelt upon the earth to the beast that was the subject of it. When it was pierced by the sword of the Goths, men thought there was now an end of that terrible kingdom, which had shed so much blood and devoured so much flesh; but when they saw it revive in its ten horns or kingdoms—occupying the same territory, governed by the same laws, as its predecessor, and finding a new bond of union in the Papacy—it appeared to them as if Rome had returned from her grave—so completely had the wound been healed. This appeared little less than a miracle in the eyes of a blinded world, which accordingly fell down before the beast. They had worshiped the dragon—given unbounded admiration and implicit obedience to every edict of Pagan Rome, whether it regarded things civil or things spiritual—it had dictated supremely both law and religion. And when they saw the beast sitting on the same throne, and wielding the same power, as the dragon, they could render nothing less to the beast than they had given aforetime to the dragon.

"And they worshipped the dragon, which gave power unto the beast; and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" The religion of Papal Rome was but a revival of that of Pagan Rome, under different names; and it became an easy matter to those who dwelt upon the earth to transfer their worship from the one to the other. They who had worshipped demons could do so by whatever name they were called, whether the classic one of Venus, or the Christian one of Mary.

"And there was given unto him a mouth, speaking great things and blasphemies." When the beast found himself on the throne of the dragon, and the world prostrate before him, his heart was lifted up within him, like that of the king of Babylon of old. He imagined himself to be some great one—to be God, and the pride of his heart found vent in the dreadfully blasphemous words of his mouth." He opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, and His tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven." No

names have been so fearfully blasphemous as those which the Pope has assumed. He has claimed dominion over the whole world; and, as if this were not enough, he has extended it into the other. Whom he will he can consign to hell, and whom he will he can save from it. The gates of paradise he can lock and unlock. He has issued his order to angels, straitly charging them to do his bidding. "We command the angels of paradise to introduce that soul into heaven," said Clement the Sixth, of such as might die on their pilgrimage to Rome in the year of Jubilee. He has exercised authority over devils, compelling them to release such as he wished to deliver from flames. Gregory the Great rescued thus the soul of the Pagan emperor Trajan.

To speak of his setting his throne above that of kings is nothing remarkable: he has exalted it above that of angels and archangels—he has exalted it above God Himself; he has annulled Divine ordinances, and claimed a power to abrogate the moral law, thus challenging an authority superior to that from which the law emanated; he has sat in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. "To the Romish Church," writes Clement the Second, "every knee must bow of things on earth, and that at his pleasure even the door of heaven is opened and shut." We find Cardinal Domiani, writing to Victor the Second, introducing Christ as speaking—"I have appointed thee to be as the father of emperors; I have delivered into thy hands the keys of the whole Church universal, and placed thee my vicar over her: yea, by the removal of a king" (the Emperor Henry the Third had just died), "have granted thee the rights of the whole Roman empire now vacant." We find Innocent the Third calling himself the "Lieutenant of Him who hath written upon His vesture and on His thigh, the King of kings and Lord of lords," and telling King Richard that "he held the place of God upon the earth; and, without distinction of persons, he would punish the men and the nations that presumed to oppose his commands."

We find Clement the Seventh affirming, in a letter to King Charles the Sixth, that "as there is but one God in the heavens, so there cannot nor ought to be of right but one God on earth." Politianus thus addresses Alexander the Sixth: "We rejoice to see you raised above all human things, and exalted even to Divinity itself, seeing there is nothing, except God, which is not put under you." Under the pontifical arms, at the coronation of the Pope we have just named, was inscribed this distich—

**"Caesar: magna fuit, nunc Roma est maxim, Sextus
Regnat Alexander: ille vir, inde Deus."**

But, not to multiply proofs, we close with the very extraordinary titles assumed by Martin the Fifth, in the instructions given to a nuncio sent to Constantinople:—"The most holy and most blessed, who is invested with heavenly power, who is lord on earth, the successor of Peter, the Christ or anointed of the Lord, the lord of the universe, the father of kings, the light of the world, the sovereign pontiff, Pope Martin." Nor are we to suppose that this was a mere empty boast, or unallowed claim, like the high-sounding titles which eastern despots have sometimes assumed. It was ratified by councils, submitted to by kings, and exercised, in the very spirit in which it was arrogated, over the persons, consciences, and lives of all men.

There is not a fact in history better established than the literal fulfillment of what is here foretold:—"These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast." "And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

And thus, too, was Paul's prophecy in his epistle to the Thessalonians fulfilled:—"Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God."

"And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them." We have already spoken of this war under the head of the witnesses, and our space does not permit us to re-open the subject. There is not one of the ten horns which has not at one period or another of its history persecuted the saints; nor is there a spot in Europe, within the limits we have formerly traced, which has not been sprinkled with their blood. We need only name the murderous crusades carried on for ages against the Waldenses and Albigenses;—the slaughter of the Piedmontese, whose bones whitened the Alps; the martyrs of Provence, whose blood tinged so oft the blue waters of the Rhone; the massacre of St. Bartholomew, in August 1572, which continued three days, and in which, in Paris alone, thirty thousand Protestants, and throughout the departments of France forty thousand more, perished.

The news of this terrible slaughter was received at Rome with the ringing of bells and the firing of cannon, while the medal of Gregory commemorates it to this day as a deed of illustrious virtue;—the revocation of the edict of Nantes, in 1685, under Louis the Fourteenth, when, as has been computed, many thousand Protestant churches were razed, a million of citizens were driven into banishment, an hundred thousand were murdered, while those whom the sword spared were consigned to the galleys, and many of the youth of both sexes were transported as slaves to the West Indies;—the bloody wars of Alva in the Low Countries, who boasted that in the course of a few years thirty-six thousand had died by the common executioner;—the suppression of the Reformation in Spain and Italy by the terrors of the axe, the fagot, and the horrors of the Inquisition;—besides the countless thousands who perished at other times, and in other parts of Europe, of whom no record has been kept, and whose names shall never be known till the books are opened.

Engraven on the page of history stands the record of her crimes. Rome shall perish, but this record is eternal. To the end of time not a line of its crimson writing shall be effaced; and so long as it continues to be read, it will excite the mingled horror and indignation of mankind.

But the most marvelous thing in the prophecy is, that the beast should overcome in the war, i.e., in the first instance, for in the final issue the Lamb shall overcome. Let us here mark the adorable sovereignty of God. This power to make war, and to overcome in the war, was given unto the beast. "Thou couldest have no power at all against me," said Christ, when standing before Pilate to be judged, "had it not been given thee from above." The beast, in the plenitude of his pride and power, thought that he might do according to his will, without having respect to any God or man, saying, no

doubt, with the king of old, Who is he that can deliver out of mine hand? The beast was mistaken herein: he could not have spilt a drop of the Church's blood, nor have touched a hair of her head, had he not received power from above.

But why did God permit His fold so long to be a field of slaughter? Why did the Church's blood continue to flow, and her groans to ascend to heaven, while He stood by as one who either would not or could not deliver? We know not. But this we know, that it was God who did it, and that He had wise purposes for doing it, and that He will yet bring good out of it all, and glorify both Himself and the Church by the course of suffering through which He has led her.

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