The Seventh Vial Chapter XXI. The Fourth Vial—The Sun Of Fire


The Revolution of 1848

Continued from Chapter XX. The First Three Vials

WE have contemplated the period of judgment that passed over Europe, commencing on the 5th of May, 1789, with the splendid ceremonial of the assembling of the States General at the palace of Versailles, and terminating on the 18th of June, 1815, with the awful carnage of the field of Waterloo. History has been guilty of an untruth, if another period can be found, of the same length, in which so many dark woes befell the human race. But when the period of judgment came to an end, it was seen that, though the world had suffered much, it had learned nothing.

“They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.”- Revelation 16:11

No sooner had the deluge passed over, than the ancient landmarks began to be restored. “Where is the promise of his coming?” said the men of that time; and, concluding that all things would go on as before, they began to make provision accordingly. Absolutism set up the thrones which the revolutionary tempest had overturned; superstition purified the altars which atheism had profaned; and infidelity, unawed by the display which God had given of His being and His holiness began again to vent its horrible blasphemies, and propagate its shallow and impious dogmas.

On the same stage, the same three principles which had already convulsed Europe, and deluged it with blood, began anew to act with increased activity and energy. For three and thirty years had God waited for the repentance of the men of the Papal earth; but they repented not. And now the drama of vengeance is resumed.

“And the fourth angel (Revelation 16:8-9) poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire.”

Upon the sun of this symbolic universe was the fourth vial poured. The effect of the vial was that the sun was shorn of his light, but this obscuration lasted for only a little while, for immediately almost that luminary shone

out again, fiercer than before the vial had been poured upon him, and began to flame in such burning strength, that men were scorched with great heat.

Let us mark here the progression of the judgment; and the widening, according to a certain law, of the sphere of its infliction. The first vial was poured upon the individual men of the Papal earth; the second was poured upon one of its leading nations; the third fell upon all of the ten kingdoms that remained subject to the Papacy;—the symbolic rivers of the Papal world; and now the fourth vial is emptied upon its sun. The "sun" is a symbol of established usage in prophecy: it denotes the ruling powers of the world. The same office which the lights of the firmament perform to the earth do kings and statesmen perform to society, and hence in Scripture the sun and stars are put to denote these ruling authorities. The "sun" of this symbolic world can mean only the conjoined monarchies or monarchs of Papal Europe.

We are disposed to find the pouring out of the fourth vial in the Revolution of 1848.

> The revolutions of 1848, known in some countries as the springtime of the peoples or the springtime of nations, were a series of revolutions throughout Europe over the course of more than one year, from 1848 to 1849. It remains the most widespread revolutionary wave in European history to date. (Source: Wikipedia)

The events of that epoch fulfill all the conditions of this vial. The Revolution came suddenly. It extended to all the thrones of Papal Europe. Its effect was as if while the luminaries of the Papal firmament were shining, with light untroubled and serene, a vial of darkness had been poured upon them, and there followed a sudden night. And not less striking was the fulfillment of the remaining particulars. The symbolic lights, so suddenly and terribly smitten, soon resumed their functions; and, shooting from their lofty spheres more fervid rays than ever, scorched men with intolerable heat—the heat of a political reaction of unparalleled rigor and severity.

A deep calm preceded the outbreak of 1848. The great Revolution, which had so fearfully rocked the thrones and altars of the Papal world in the beginning of the century, had retreated to its deep cave, there to slumber profoundly, it was believed, for a very long period, if not for ever. The kings were at amity (peaceful with each other); and the nations were disposed to cultivate friendly relations, and take from one another pledges of peace. The world, it was said, was too old and too wise ever again to play at the game of war. The expectation of a lengthened period of tranquility was thus confidently entertained.

And so far as human foresight could reach, the hope appeared to be well founded. The generation had not yet passed away who had witnessed the horrors of the last war, and, before plunging into a new one, were likely to inquire whether they would derive more profit from it than they had reaped from that which preceded it. The warriors and statesmen were still alive who had sworn to wreathe with myrtle the sword of Waterloo. We possessed other and stronger

guarantees of tranquility. Peace was multiplying her trophies; commerce was enlarging her field of operation; the intercourse of nations, daily extending, was strengthening the feeling of amity and the bonds of concord. The press was forming a public opinion strongly adverse to war. In the July of 1847, the profound tranquility of the western world, and the probable continuance of that tranquility, were proclaimed from the thrones of England and France on almost the same day.

Such was the position of Europe six months before the outbreak. That part of the world had for ages been ruled by the twin powers of superstition and force. But now the Continental nations had in part loosened themselves from the restraints of superstition. Infidelity had broken that yoke. Force only remained. It was the last bulwark; and if it should give way, no human power could prevent the waters breaking in. Of that order of things Mettenich (Klemens von Metternich, a conservative German statesman and diplomat who was at the center of the European balance of power) was the type. He stood between the dynasties and the democracies—the last bulwark which guarded the ever increasing decrepitude of the one from the ever-growing strength of the other.

Such, we say, was the position of Europe immediately before that unexampled outbreak which took by surprise those only who were unacquainted with the true state of matters; and none shared so deeply in this dangerous ignorance as those who had most at stake, and to whom it was at once a matter of duty and interest to take measures of precaution. The avalanche had gathered, and hung trembling on the mountain’s brow; but, alas! the dwellers in the plain beneath lived on in profound security, little dreaming that a single breath might draw down upon them the thundering ruin. The breath stirred, and the avalanche descended.

On the 23rd of February the Revolution broke out at Paris; and before the 5th of March, every country lying between the Atlantic and the Vistula had, in a greater or less degree, been revolutionized. Although the outbreak in France had impregnated the whole atmosphere of Europe with the principles of revolution, the effect could not have been more striking. The contagion crossed the Alps, and gave additional urgency to demands which had already begun to be made by the Italian principalities for constitutional rights. It passed the Po (the longest river in Italy), and penetrated the very stronghold of European despotism. Metternich fled before it, leaving the once powerful empire, whose policy he had so long guided, a prey to terrible calamities. It descended the Rhine along its entire course from the mountains of the Black Forest, stirring its dukedoms and electorates into tumult and insurrection. It struck eastward into the very heart of Germany, still producing, wherever it came, the same commotions, popular assemblies, demands, threats, insurrections, skirmishings—all hostile to royal prerogative. The great kingdom of Prussia felt its shock, and was well nigh prostrated. The force of the movement was spent only when it had reached the Russian frontier. Providence had said to it, “Hitherto, but no farther;” and here, accordingly, its progress was arrested.

It did not cross the Vistula; for Russia forms no part of the Romish earth, and Providence has reserved this powerful kingdom, it would appear, for other

purposes. Such was the extent of the movement. On almost the same day, the various nations inhabiting from the hills of Sicily to the shores of the Baltic met, to discuss the same grievances and urge the same demands. They did not act by concert; nothing had been arranged beforehand; none were more astonished at what was going on than the actors themselves in these scenes. One mighty influence had moved the minds of an hundred nations, as the mind of one man; and all obeyed a power which every one felt to be irresistible. Thus suddenly were all the lights of the political firmament smitten, and, as it seemed at the time, extinguished.

Let us take a brief survey of the changes which this second and grand development of revolution so speedily achieved. We place ourselves at the spring of 1848. We look for the governments, the laws, the armies, which have borne sway in Europe these fifteen hundred years, and which existed, apparently in all their strength, when the current year opened, and find that they have been shivered by a tremendous blow, and driven away as chaff before the tempest. Ere the French Revolution was a month old, it had effected an entire change upon the aspect of Europe. The events of centuries were crowded into as many days; one astounding change followed another with a rapidity which dazzled the imagination; and the occurrences of yesterday gave place, in the astonishment of men, to that caused by the more surprising intelligence of today. Defying the checks of power, and transcending the anticipations of even the most sanguine, the great movement went on, gathering momentum as it proceeded, and leveling in the dust all the barriers of a venerable despotism. Let us follow its course, and mark its changes.

In certain of the Italian principalities some popular concessions had previously been made. To these it not only communicated permanency, but it still farther enlarged them. It extorted religious freedom from Charles Albert, monarch of Sardinia; it emancipated the duchies lying at the base of the Alps— Modena, Parma, Lucca; and lifted the long proscribed Waldenses to an equality with their countrymen in civil and religious rights; it excited the wealthy province of Lombardy—which, like Issachar of old, seeing that rest was good and the land pleasant, had couched down between the two burdens of Rome and Austria—to rebel against at least the latter yoke; it gave a new impulse to the war of independence in Sicily; above all, it told Pius the Ninth (Pope of the Catholic Church from 1846 to 1878) that he could no longer deal in sham reforms, and no longer amuse his subjects with verbal concessions, and constitutions on paper, but must begin in good earnest the work of reform, by bestowing real and substantial privileges on the Roman people.

But its greatest achievement awaited the Revolution on the east of the Po (river). Austria had been the key-stone in the arch of Continental despotism; and when Austria fell, the fabric of European feudalism became apparently a mass of crumbling ruin. The vast change which the revolutionary spirit effected on this country may be conceived of from the single fact, not to dwell on other particulars, that universal suffrage was established, and liberty given, for the time, to all the subjects of the empire to worship according to their conscience; and that, too, notwithstanding that the power of the aristocracy, and the wealth and pride of the Romish hierarchy, had

continued, up till that period, to be far greater in Austria than in any other country of Europe.

North of the Alps the effects of the great Revolution were just as palpable as on the south of these mountains. It awoke the spirit of the Germans, long repressed, and recalled the memory of their ancient liberties and their past renown. It darted a ray of light between the dark clouds which had long rested above the land of Huss. It gave a free Government to priest-ridden Bavaria; and it gave constitutional privileges to the numerous duchies that girdle the Black Forest, long enthralled by petty tyrants. In the electorates on the Rhine it produced popular demands, which were instantly followed by popular concessions.

In the great empire of Prussia, and in the neighboring kingdoms of Hanover and Saxony, it made its power equally felt. In the former kingdom, a momentary indecision of the monarch served only to render more apparent the force of the movement. In Berlin barricades arose, blood flowed, and the populace, triumphing over the throne, were able to dictate their own terms.

Thus, in the short space of a single month, the pouring out of this vial changed the condition of every country lying between the Straits of Messina and the shores of the Baltic. It created, in fact, a new Europe. It established in all its countries, by concession at least, the three great bulwarks of civil liberty, namely, constitutional government, trial by jury, and the right of public meeting. In the rear of its political changes it brought likewise vast social and moral meliorations (process of improving something). It rent asunder the chains that bound the press; it abolished the lines of custom-houses with which Europe was crossed and recrossed in all directions; and it swept away the restrictions employed to fetter the truth; thus giving to the nations an unrestricted commerce, the free diffusion of knowledge, and liberty to read the Bible and enjoy the gospel.

Had the Revolution stopped at the point it had now reached it would have accomplished more good for Europe than any similar movement which had preceded it. It embodied all that amount of civil and political freedom which it is right that civil society should enjoy. It was, so far, the passage of Europe from despotism to constitutional liberty. It left room for nothing to come after it, on just grounds, either in the way of demands or concessions: all that remained was to turn it to account, and especially to prosecute its moral ends. But here it did not stop. The vial became a vial of judgment to both the kings and the nations.

Let us mark with what terrible force the vial struck the sun. The Revolution soon passed the Rubicon; and the terrible fact stared men in the face, that it was on anarchy that Europe was drifting. We speak not of the confusion and misrule into which its little princedoms fell: its greatest monarchies were breaking up; its oldest statesmen were nonplussed; and its mightiest thrones were rendered powerless. A moral decomposition was going on everywhere: authority was prostrate; laws were violated with impunity; and from the Atlantic to the Vistula, kings were little better than captives, and the mob was the sovereign. In the train of these political evils came a host of commercial and social mischiefs. The ordinary business of life was to a great

degree suspended—commerce paralyzed—trade and manufactures at a stand-still—the exchequers woefully impoverished—the lower classes discontented, and at war with those above them-the upper classes terrified, and without confidence in the future. The towns swarmed with barricade-heroes, the country with rural marauders, and the masses everywhere were ripe for any mischief.

What a picture of dislocation and ruin did France then present! That once powerful kingdom—the eldest horn of the beast, and one of the chief agents in the slaughter of the witnesses—was then, as it has been before and since, **visited by God for the blood of His saints.** Her Government was unable to guarantee safety of life and property; her Assembly, instead of grappling vigorously with the evils that surrounded it, was torn by faction, and passed its time in indecorous and tumultuary (marked by haste, confusion, disorder, and irregularity) debates.

National bankruptcy was advancing with rapid strides; the expenditure of the monarchy exceeded its income by two-thirds of a million of francs; but the loss to the revenue of the Republic for the first year was calculated at twenty millions of pounds sterling. The citizens lived amidst perpetual alarms—*iras inter et timores* (Latin meaning between anger and fear) —and were harassed by never-ceasing calls to military duty. Fearful rumours and terrible threats distracted the minds of men, which were still farther agitated by conspiracies, having avowedly for their object the confiscation of all the property in the kingdom, and the surrender of the upper and middle classes into the hands of the ruffians and malefactors which infested the country.

Turning to Austria, there was seen a gigantic wreck where this magnificent empire once stood. The emperor had fled to the Tyrol, whither he was followed by a frightened herd of archdukes and nobles. The dying embers of Tyrolese loyalty were unexpectedly fanned by this mark of royal confidence; and it seemed just possible that the zeal of these mountaineers might bring upon the fallen empire the horrors of a civil war. Vienna was filled with barricades, concessions were demanded, and the same work of confusion commenced in Vienna which was in progress in Paris. Austria, the successor of the Germanic Caesars, had gathered under her eagle men of every race—the industrious and enterprising Lombard, the acute Illyrian, the stately Hungarian, the meditative German, the persevering Bohemian, the fiery Pole. She had drawn her riches from the flourishing trade of Lombardy, the waving harvests of Gallicia, the rich pastures of Bohemia, and the wealthy mines of Carinthia and Hungary. But the fall of the central authority had set loose all these various nations, and. dried up all these sources of wealth. The provinces were breaking away from the empire; and Austria exhibited a chaos great in proportion to her former grandeur.

In Italy disorganization had not proceeded to the same length, only because its progress meanwhile was arrested by the war with Austria; but dissensions were rife throughout the Peninsula. A sanguinary war raged on the Po, brought on by the ambition of King Charles Albert, who hoped that Milan would place her iron crown upon his head. The revolting massacre at Naples broke up the ill-omened league between the Pope, Albert of Sardinia, and Ferdinand of

Naples, and complicated still farther the affairs of Italy. Rome itself became the scene of tumult. The Jesuits, with their famous general, Roothann, were expelled; and though the Pope was still suffered to hold the rank and titles of sovereign of the Roman States, he was completely shorn of the sovereign power. He had the perplexing alternative proposed to him, of drawing the sword against those whom he calls his children, or abdicating the throne of the Quirinal.

If the kings who were compelled to bend their necks to the Gregories and Hildebrands of the middle ages had then looked up, how would they have grimly smiled to see the foot of the Roman mob upon the neck of Pius!

Thus was the vial poured upon the sun. All over Papal Europe royalty was smitten—suddenly, terribly smitten. Laws were abolished; armies were forced to flee; dynasties were sent into exile; the Supreme Power was in the dust; and the mob was the monarch.

The extinction of the sun was not intended by the vial. It would smite him with disastrous eclipse, but that eclipse would soon pass off, and he would reappear, but in such a blaze of fire as to scorch men. “And power,” it is said, “was given unto him to scorch men with fire; and men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, who hath power over these plagues.” — Revelation 16:8-9.

This manifestly implies a resumption of the powers of government, the suspension of which had been the first effect of the vial; but their resumption, not in their natural or usual way, but in some most malign and mischievous mode of working. The sun that usually enlightens and nourishes, was now to scorch those on whom it shone. This can mean only some grievous perversion of all the ends of government, whereby, instead of protecting and blessing society, it would blight and destroy it by the exercise of a fearful and cruel tyranny. Instead of light and warmth, this symbolic sun would rain fire upon men.

And the event very signally fulfilled the symbol. The Revolution of 1848 was followed by the Reaction of 1849. The first panic having subsided, the kings and dynasties whom the Revolution had chased into exile began to gather heart, and make a stand. They asked whether it were not possible to re-assemble their armies, confront anarchy, and recover their thrones. The attempt was made; and, after many a scene of conflict and carnage, it was successful. “Power was given ” to that sun whom the vial had smitten.

The battle of Order against Anarchy began in Paris. After a bloody struggle of three days in the streets of its capital, CAVAIGNAC (French general and politician) reduced France under the government of the saber. The example thus set was followed in all the countries of Western Europe, to which the revolt had extended. Rome was bombarded, and, after a heroic defense of two months, fell before the arms of the French; and the Pope, returning from Gaeta, entered through the riven walls of his capital, and over the slaughtered bodies of his subjects, to take possession once more of that chair which is mightier than the throne of kings. The head of the old confederacy being now lifted up, power returned to the limbs. The Bourbon of

Naples came back to violate the Constitution he had solemnly sworn to maintain—to deliver up Naples to the cruel rage and lust of his soldiers, as a chastisement for the insolence of its inhabitants in driving him out; and, by the unsparing exercise of a frightful tyranny, to fill with dungeons and doleful captives a land which nature has clothed with a dazzling beauty. By the orders of the same tyrant, Messina was besieged, and left only when it had become little better than a mass of mingled ruins, blood, and corpses.

The same scenes were enacted in most of the capitals of the principalities and dukedoms into which Italy then was portioned out. Radetzky and his Croats appeared on the Adige, and after a series of sanguinary conflicts, Lombardy was compelled again to submit to the yoke of Austria. Venice, once more, sat in fetters amid her glorious lagoons— all unconscious of her storied renown, and utterly bereft of her traditional gaiety. There was no song upon her waters, and the voice of the harp was silent in her palaces.

Milan, upon her noble plain, and in the presence of her glorious Alps, sat silent and sunk, oppressed by an intolerable sense of shame and woe. Many of her sons had fallen by the saber of the Croat, others had been swept off to prison, and those who were left were in hourly danger of a similar fate. Padua, Ferrara, Bologna, whose names recall a past of glory, presented the same images of sorrow. The Austrian was their master; their inhabitants trembled under the rod of the oppressor, and walked their streets more like corpses than living men. The passing traveler felt the prevalent and mysterious dread taking hold of him the moment he entered within their gates, and he made haste to depart, not without a touch of sorrow for the unhappy fate of those who would have gone with him, but could not. He passed on from city to city, and from province to province to find that “all joy was darkened,” and that “the mirth of the land was gone.”

Vienna itself, the proud capital of Austria, was bombarded; and, after the massacre of her citizens and the conflagration of some of her palaces, was taken by the imperial troops. Then it might be seen sitting silent and sullen by the Queenly Danube, brooding over the barbarities, cruel as useless, which followed its capture. A war of races was excited in Hungary, which, after opening brilliantly, and giving a deceitful promise of victory and independence, had, as everywhere else, for its issue, submission. Thus the Continent became a camp; soldiers and sabers were seen everywhere; and Europe was compelled at the sword’s point to return to her dungeon, and yield her limbs to the old fetters.

There was no loosening of these fetters—no intermission in the rain of fire which the sun poured upon men—for ten long years. We doubt whether another decade in the history of Europe could be found, in which its people suffered so dreadfully, day by day, and from one year to another, from the exercise of a minute, searching, envenomed, crushing tyranny. How appropriate the symbol —a rain of fire. That very authority which should have existed but to cherish and foster, studied only how to make itself a curse to its subjects, and by its thousand myrmidons to irritate and torment them.

In 1851, this Reaction took a new start. Then was struck the *coup d’état* in France; and immediately thereafter this symbolic sun attained the maximum of

his burning power. The *coup d'état* consolidated the Reaction. It produced upon the political stage a new prodigy—or rather, it advanced him to a higher position, for he had previously stood up. It brought forth a man of insoluble character and inscrutable thoughts, who, by some strange destiny, had come from exile and poverty to reign, not over France only, but, in a sense, over Europe. This man seemed to wield a mysterious influence over the Revolution. He had power to bid it cease; to bring order out of the wild chaos that existed before his advent. The political elements recognized in his voice that of a master, and the nations, quailing before him, lay down in their old chains. He swept off the Legislative Assembly to prison; he deported the citizens in thousands to Cayenne; he threw the press into fetters; and served by an obsequious priesthood, a devoted army, and numberless train-bands of gensd'armes and spies, he left only one will acting in France—his own.

This man became the center of the European coercion. All he did prospered: the fame of his sagacity rapidly grew, and his policy became the model on which other kings fashioned theirs. They asked his counsel; they borrowed his aid; they courted his friendship. They were lifted up or cast down according as the exile of former years smiled or frowned upon them. This tyranny waxed fiercer and yet more fierce, for the wrongs of today must be supported by the greater wrongs of tomorrow. This was the case especially in Italy and Austria. The populations in these countries were decimated—they were bastinadoed (beaten with a stick or cudgel, especially on the soles of the feet), imprisoned, banished, shot. Commerce and agriculture were overwhelmed by oppressive taxation. Progress was arrested; every aspiration for liberty was stifled; and a universal terror overspread the kingdoms. The sun of government shone not to nourish, but to scorch.

The rulers of Rome and Naples enjoyed an unenviable notoriety among these oppressors. But we refrain from any detailed account of the deplorable condition of the Papal and Neapolitan States, and of the frightful, and indeed, to all save those who had an opportunity of witnessing them, incredible atrocities which were committed upon their inhabitants during this period. A statesman of our own, whose veracity is as undoubted as his eloquence, has told us what he himself saw in the dungeons of Naples, where, as in those of Rome, some thirty thousand men were incarcerated; and it is not yet forgotten how the whole British nation was thrilled, shocked, and horrified by the revelation. "I believe," said Lord Palmerston, on June 14, 1852, "there is no example of misgovernment, of cruelty, of illegality, of violence, of abuse of power of every sort and kind, equal to that which prevails at present in the Neapolitan and Roman States."

It is added, emphatically but affectingly, that the men who were thus fearfully scorched "blasphemed the name of God, who hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give Him glory." The judgment was not more awful than it was righteous and holy. It was sent to call past sins to remembrance, and to induce repentance for them; but it utterly failed to accomplish its end. The men, now so terribly smitten, had been the instruments of these very governments in the slaughter of the martyrs of Jesus. The *tools* were now made the *victims*. They were now, in the providence of God, compelled to suffer at the hands of their merciless oppressors all

that variety of wrong which, three hundred years before, they themselves had inflicted upon the disciples of the gospel. They had this reflection further to embitter the judgment, that it was themselves who had opened the way for this tyranny. If the champions of religion had not perished in the sixteenth century, the champions of liberty could not have been put down in the nineteenth.

But the men of the Popish world neither saw the hand of God in their punishment, nor understood the lesson He meant to teach them thereby. Nay, they “blasphemed the name of God, who had power over these plagues.” It is a historic fact that these awful calamities seemed but to confirm them in their atheism. Some took occasion from them to revile God’s government, and deny His being; while others were led to greater excesses in their idolatries; betaking themselves for help to gods of wood and stone.

It is an instructive fact that this period was signalized by the proclamation of the crowning dogma of Popery, the Immaculate Conception. Thus both oppressor and oppressed continued impenitent, hardened, and blinded under the holy hand of God; and accordingly the curtain is dropped upon this the fourth act in the awful drama, with the emphatic announcement, “They repented not to give Him glory.”

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