

The Seventh Vial Chapter XXII. The Fifth Vial—Darkness In The Kingdom Of The Beast



Continued from [Chapter XXI. The Fourth Vial—The Sun Of Fire](#)

WE now transfer ourselves to the banks of the Ticino, in upper Italy. It is a quiet eventide in April, 1859. The squadrons of Austria, two hundred thousand strong, are defiling (marching in a line) along the noble granite bridge which spans the river; while the little army of Piedmont hastily assembles in front, in order to delay the advance of the Austrian host, and give time to the French legions, which are at this moment descending the slopes of the Cottian Alps, to come to their aid. The campaign for Italian Independence—the fifth act of the drama—is about to open.

“And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness.” – Revelation 16:10

The locality this vial was to smite was the “seat,” or, as it is in the original, the “throne” of the beast. The order of progression, according to which the judgment rises higher and higher, is here maintained. This vial strikes the loftiest seat—the very pinnacle of the Papal power—the very center of the Papal world. We were previously told, when shown the rise of the beast, that the dragon that is imperial Rome gave him his “throne and power;” and it was actually the boast of the Pope that his palace, his city, his territories, “the patrimony (inheritance) of Peter,” he had received as a gift from Caesar. It is thus clear that the fifth vial was to be poured upon the Temporal Power, and the territorial possessions of the Pope.

How do the historic events of 1859 fulfill this supposition? Did the war-cloud which so suddenly rolled down from the Alps, after sweeping over Italy, discharge its last and heaviest burst over the city and throne of the Popes? It did.

The strife was begun in that spacious Lombard Plain, on which so many bloody fields have been stricken, and where countless hosts sleep their last sleep. The campaign was short, sharp, and decisive. First came the great battle of Montebello: this was immediately followed by the yet greater battle of

Magenta; and, last and bloodiest of all, came Solferino; and now Austria retreated beyond the Adige, and all of Italy on the west of that river was free.

These exploits of France in the north of Italy were immediately followed by the yet more brilliant campaign of Garibaldi in the south of the Peninsula. Setting sail from Genoa with a thousand followers, he liberated Sicily, and crossing the Straits of Messina, completed almost as soon as he had begun the conquest of the Neapolitan kingdom, the soldiers laying down their arms, and the king fleeing at his approach. The Almighty had given the Neapolitan princes as stubble to his bow.

And now the cloud which had discharged itself in peals so terrific first in the north and next in the south of the Peninsula gathered darkly round the territory and throne of the Pontiff. Victor Emmanuel carried the war into the Papal States, and reft (robbed) the chair of Peter of its goodliest possessions. Bologna on the north, the Marches of Ancoha, and the fertile Umbria on the east were taken from the "Holy Father," and he was left with only the herbless and treeless plain around Rome, and half a million of subjects. Thus was the "throne of the beast" not extinguished indeed, but eclipsed—shorn of its power and revenues.

The events that fulfilled this vial are characterized, in common with those that fulfill all the other vials, with a startling and dazzling suddenness. This characteristic was eminently to mark the third woe;—it "cometh quickly." The very words in which the pouring out of the vials are narrated indicate celerity of execution. This unexpectedness—this launching of the bolt with lightning speed and power was designed, not only to make the blow more stunning, but to make the hand of God more manifest, if men would but see it.

Alas! They have extolled the genius of the human agents, they have lauded their promptitude in action, their fertility of resource, their courage; but they have not acknowledged the God who endowed them with these gifts, and used them for the execution of His holy purposes.

This vial was to shroud the kingdom of the beast in darkness. "Darkness" is the symbol of social and political confusion. No term but "darkness" could adequately describe the condition in which the events of 1859 left the affairs of Italy and of the whole Roman Catholic world. The actors in these scenes thought they were advancing to a settlement of European affairs; the Italians were dreaming of a fully emancipated kingdom, with Rome for its capital, when suddenly all parties found themselves unexpectedly confronted with a great insoluble problem. This problem ramified into a hundred other enigmas which equally defied adjustment, and which presented a state of affairs of the utmost perplexity and entanglement. The exigencies (urgent demands) of Victor Emmanuel require that the Pope should demit (resign) his temporal power: the exigencies of the other Popish sovereigns require that he should retain it. The Italians demand Rome as their capital: but Rome is precisely the city which the Pope cannot give up. Italy wishes to be consolidated as a kingdom; but this she cannot be while there are two sovereigns in her. But two sovereigns there must remain, for the Temporal Princedom is the center of the Papal empire, and its destruction would infer

a violent rending and dissolution of that whole empire: it would convulse the "Catholic world" to its extremities.

It is nothing to say that it is not within the compass of diplomacy to reconcile these antagonistic claims: it is not in the nature of things—it is not within the compass of possibilities to reconcile them. The position is darkness—darkness that may be felt. "We dwell in darkness," says M. Guizot, referring to these numerous insoluble problems, "we walk on ruins."

This awful night, foretold to fall down on the Papal world, was typified by the plague of darkness in Egypt, during which no one rose from his seat. At this hour there is a complete arrest upon the three leading actors in the Papal world—the Emperor of France, the King of Italy, and the Pontiff. Not one of the three can adopt a definite line of political action. They can but sit still, and wait. They are galled, and they fret in their position: yet stir they dare not, save at the risk of bringing on a convulsion which would shake the whole of Europe.

This darkness is the prelude to the long night that awaits the Papacy. In its sky, sun and stars will shine no more; the gloom will be dispersed not otherwise than by the fiery light streaming in through the rents of ruin.

It was foretold that they should "gnaw their tongues for pain;"—that is, kings, priests, and people, all of whom were to be cast into this darkness. The result of affairs in Italy has been disappointing to all parties. Their most cherished hopes have been falsified; and in the bitter recriminations which one has urged against another, and in the expressions of chagrin and mortification which have come from all, we behold the predicted "gnawing of the tongue." No one has raised so loud and persistent a wail over the misfortunes which have come upon him as the Pope. His sacred person has been insulted; his divine prerogatives have been contemned (treated with contempt); sacrilegious hands have been laid upon the revenues of his Church; and horrible blasphemies have been spoken against his holy seat, and he has not been slow to publish to the world the anguish of soul which these multiplied afflictions have caused him. Allocution (spoken address, formal speech) has followed allocution; expressed in almost the very words of prophecy. As for instance, in his allocution of August 1860, he tells us that he is "drinking to the lees the cup of bitterness and sorrow." The *Times*, putting into the Saxon of England what the Pope expresses in the theological language of Italy, called these allocutions "a continuous shriek of cursing."

Again we hear the thrice melancholy announcement, "they repented not of their deeds." Kings, priests, people, go on, like Pharaoh, impenitent, tormented, blaspheming to the very end. What an awful picture of the state of the Papal world, as it is here beheld on the brink of its last woe! The plagues of all the vials are pressing upon it at once; the atheistic sores of the first vial; the revolutionary and sanguinary (blood thirsty, murderous) doctrines of the second; the wars of the third, in the shape of overgrown armaments; the tyrannic inflictions of the fourth; and now the "darkness" of the fifth; for the judgment is cumulative, and each vial as it is poured out, so far from revoking the plague of that which went before it, but adds to it, till the suffering becomes overwhelming and intolerable, and the last expression

of physical torment is exhibited in “the gnawing of the tongue.”

Still there is no confession of their own and their fathers' sins; there is no turning to the God of heaven; and no forsaking of their idolatries. They still wear the chains of their great spiritual oppressor. Their conscience is still in his keeping. The nation of Italy has not even yet escaped from the prison of the Vatican. The Bible has entered at the red gap of war, but alas! The liberty it offers is little prized. We are the Church's children, say they, and were never in bondage to any man. And so, instead of bathing their eyes, long darkened, in the blessed radiance of the gospel, they love the shade of the old darkness, and resent as an injury rather than welcome as a kindness, any attempt to dispel it. Thus they repent not of their deeds.

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