

The Seventh Vial Chapter XXIII. The Sixth Vial—Drying Up Of the Euphrates



Continued from [Chapter XXII. The Fifth Vial—Darkness In The Kingdom Of The Beast](#).

THE shadow of the sevenfold night into which the symbolic earth of the Apocalypse was cast when the fifth angel poured out his vial is still seen resting upon it, when suddenly another terrible peal is heard rolling from its sky, and another flaming bolt is seen cleaving the darkness, and, falling upon one of its principal streams, it drinks up its waters, and lays dry its bed.

“And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates ; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the East might be prepared.” – Revelation 16:12

Expositors of the Apocalypse have been much divided hitherto as regards their interpretations of this vial. They were of opinion that it predicted the overthrow of some leading power of the Papal world—some power which stood related to the Church of Rome, much as the Euphrates did to the ancient Babylon; but which power it was, and whether it was a European or an Asiatic one, they were not agreed.

One class of expositors thought that the “Euphrates” was put as the representative or symbol of that great empire of which it is the principal stream, and saw in the apocalyptic picturings the gradual exhaustion of the Turkish empire, and its ultimate and total subversion. Another class of interpreters were of opinion that the kingdom in question was to be sought for within the limits of the Papal earth, and that it must be a kingdom holding a pre-eminent rank as a supporter of the Papacy, and that it was most probably Austria.

Providence, the one and only interpreter of prophecy, has now, as it appears to us, decided this question, and has decided it in favour of the latter class of interpreters. We say this all the more freely, inasmuch as we were inclined to be of the opinion of those who saw in the figurations of this vial the approaching fall of the Turkish Empire, and the doom of Mohammedan superstition. That event, so much to be desired, is manifestly at no great distance; the morning will break, the darkness that has so long covered these once glorious lands will flee away; but instead of preceding the fall of Romanism in the West, it will most probably accompany it; and the events of the sixth vial will pave the way for the execution of the Divine purposes

upon both idolatries. In a common catastrophe—unexampled in its extent, in its terror, and in its completeness—will Romanism and Mohammedanism most probably find their end.

We return to the vial. It takes us to the East, and carries us a long way back in history. We are beside the Euphrates; its stream has been suddenly smitten, and the kings of the East are crossing its dry bed. This calls up before us the last eventful night of the literal Babylon. Inside the walls all is revelry. The monarch and his nobles, gathered in the palace, keep a feast in honor of the gods of Babylon, and the vessels of Jehovah are brought forth to grace the banquet. While they are praising the gods of wood and stone, sudden consternation strikes the assembly, for there, in the midst of the city, is the host of Media and Persia. But how have they entered? In the darkness of the night the beseigers, having dug a trench, draw off the waters of the Euphrates, and, marching along the dry bed of the river, penetrate within the walls, and Babylon is taken.

The same thing, in substance, is to take place over again in the siege of the mystic Babylon, and this, we conceive, is the event which is brought before us in the symbols of the sixth vial. We are shown "Great Babylon" sitting within the shadow of her last night. The vial which immediately preceded the one we are now considering, had covered her with darkness, and that darkness is to pass away only when on her shall break the lightnings of ruin, and on the Church shall open the golden morning of deliverance.

In the gloom that mantles her we can see the agents of her destruction busy at work: for she who once was worshiped by the nations is now hated of them, and they have come up against her to besiege her. Already her towers and battlements totter to their fall. The five previous vials which have been emptied in fury upon her have made hideous gaps in her defenses. For what do we see in the demoralized and prostrate state of the Popish nations—Spain beggared, France revolutionary, Italy in revolt, and committing acts of sacrilegious spoliation, as Rome accounts them, upon the property of "the Church"—but the demolition of those ramparts, which, in former ages, stood in impregnable strength around the Papacy.

But there still remains, that is, at the time just anterior to the pouring out of the sixth vial, one state, which has escaped, in good degree, the general decadence of the Popish nations, and which is still thoroughly loyal to Rome. That state covers her with the shield of her policy and her arms. That state is to the mystic Babylon what the Euphrates, rolling its deep floods beneath its walls, was to the literal city. It is on this symbolic Euphrates that the next judgment is to be executed, that its waters—its people, revenues, and military prestige—may be dried up. Upon this power is the sixth vial emptied: it falls, and its crash announces to Rome that her last political bulwark has given way, and that the road is now open for the entrance of her foes, whatever time they may judge it fitting to put an end to her dominion. So much the symbol suggests. Let us now come to facts.

The events of Divine Providence have made it plain, we think, that the one remaining defense of the antichristian system, here specially marked out for sudden and unexpected overthrow, was Austria. That empire had largely escaped

the general blight of the Popish kingdoms. It was not revolutionary. It retained its military prestige up till the very morning of the battle of Sadowa. Among the great powers it was pre-eminently the champion of Rome, and the only one which she thoroughly trusted. To the last Austria preserved her fidelity to the concordat which placed her political and military strength at the service of the Papacy. If France was the "Nile" or "Sea" in which thereby Rome traded and carried on her spiritual commerce and became rich, Austria was her "Euphrates," her encircling rampart; for the arms of that empire were in Rome's last days her main reliance. But the hour came when the sixth vial must be poured out.

On the one terrible day of Sadowa was this vial emptied upon the devoted kingdom. Like all the vials it came quickly. On the morning of that day—9th July, 1866—Austria stood forth before the world the same mighty empire it had always been. The injury it had sustained in the tempests of 1848 it had repaired. Its territories were as wide, its subject races as numerous, and its military renown as great as before. But the same day which opened so proudly for Austria set upon it an appalling and irretrievable wreck. We know not if in all history there be such another collapse of a great empire. Her archdukes and princes slain: her armies routed, her place among the great powers lost: the renown acquired on a hundred battle-fields perished, and the prestige which had come down to her from six centuries vanished; all this forms a catalog of calamities greater perhaps than ever before befell kingdom in one day. It seemed as if an angel had come down from heaven and breathed upon this empire, and its strength, glory, and dominion were in an instant gone.

And what a blow to Rome! Austria was an embodiment of absolutist (absolutism: a political theory that absolute power should be vested in one or more rulers) and reactionary (ultraconservative in politics) principles—the principles against which Providence has been making war these three centuries. She existed only to guard these principles. Her soil was an interdicted one to the Bible and the missionary. There art stood still, knowledge was proscribed (forbidden as harmful or unlawful), and commerce was fettered. On the frontier of Austria progress of all kinds was arrested.

One art only did that empire study—the art of war. Austria was a great military power, and it employed its arms to restrict the rights of peoples and to uphold and enlarge the claims of prerogative. It was an embodied "right divine." It was the political cesspool of Europe. To it there gravitated whatever tyrannous maxim or noxious prejudice had been expelled from neighbouring states. Other Papal kingdoms moved a little with the tide, Austria lay immovably fixed above her old moorings. She was a very tower of strength to that "Church" whose last authoritative utterance, the Encyclical of 1864 (Webmaster: Also known as the [Syllabus of Errors](#)), is one compendious anathema upon liberty, religion, and progress.

It is not Austria only—old absolutist and priest-ridden Austria—which has closed its career; it is Europe—Europe as readjusted in 1815, and readjusted in the interests of the Papal power—which has closed its career, and which must be reconstructed. Those famous treaties which Rome always appealed to, and behind which she entrenched herself, are now torn in pieces. This is a

rampart fallen, a source of defense dried up.

While Austria retires from the stage which she has alternately desolated by her arms and illumined by her glory, Prussia (a historical nation that consisted of parts of Germany, Poland, Russia, and Lithuania) comes in her room. Population, territory, political influence, and military power, now pass over to the latter state. This is a mighty gain on the side of Protestantism and civilization. The shadow that rested on the east of Europe recedes, and the sphere of the light is enlarged. Draw a line along by the Main eastward through Germany; all the states on the north of that line are ranged on the side of Prussia.

Here is a Power governing a territory, which embraces middle and northern Germany, and is inhabited by upwards of thirty millions, having one policy, and one military organization, substantially Protestant. On the south of the Main we behold another confederation, amounting to about ten millions of Germans, not yet formerly united with Prussia, but in all likelihood destined to be so, but of which she is even now virtually the ruler. Thus, as the result of a campaign of only ten days in the July of 1866, we behold the rise of a great German and Protestant Power, forty millions strong, under the leadership of Prussia. While Austria—the champion of the Papacy, the persecutor of the saints—finds herself suddenly shorn of her power, and the numerous races which, like a great river, she had gathered into her immense channel, are fleeing from under her scepter, and leaving her without strength on the battle-field, or influence at the council-table. In both respects Rome will sorely miss her.

But all these dark events turn their silver lining to the Church. Christ has heard the cry of His saints, and broken Austria “in pieces as a potter’s vessel.” So shall He one day lay low the towers and pinnacles of all those proud empires which have lifted themselves up “against the Lord and His anointed.”

Though sorely humiliated, Austria has not been altogether extinguished. With a change of policy, and under the direction of a Protestant prime minister, there may yet await her a future of no small promise. To become a first-rate power, a great predominating military empire, stretching her wings from the border of Asia to the heart of Germany, she can no longer hope to be: but dissevered from the Papacy, it is possible that she may recover not a little of what she has lost, and maintain a respectable position among the kingdoms of the world.

On the morrow after Sadowa her star seemed to be set for ever; but no sooner did she begin to part company with the Papacy than her star re-appeared, and began to mount into the horizon. Loosed from the chains of Rome, new life entered into her, and already she has made great progress in the work of reconstruction. The constitution recently sanctioned by the emperor contains a pretty full measure of constitutional liberties. But the greatest achievement of the new Austria is that by a fundamental law of the state she has nullified the concordat. This made her the slave of the Papacy, and to have flung aside that incubus was indeed a wonderful triumph over the old ultramontane spirit and a most gladdening manifestation of the growing power

of the principle of a free conscience.

If Austria is making these strides into the open air of liberty, if Austria declares that her sword shall no longer be at the service of priestcraft, and that a Papal bull shall no longer override an imperial edict; if Austria proclaims the equality of all religions before the law, of what European country shall we despair? There is a spirit at work, which grows as it passes, like a great ocean wave, and which is driving the night before it, and bringing in the day of evangelical truth. From the carnage-covered field of Sadowa what blessings have already arisen, and what blessings may yet arise, to Austria and to Europe. In the thunders of that battle-field, Rome heard the fall of her last political defense, and liberty and religion saw a barrier swept out of their path which had long withstood their advance. When the smoke of the battle-field had cleared away, an unexpected and blessed sight met the eye! The ancient and venerable Churches of Bohemia, Moravia, and Hungary, which had suffered an all but total extinction by the House of Austria, were seen rising out of the dust into which they had been trodden, and taking quiet and sure possession of a soil which had been so abundantly watered by their fathers' tears and blood. As they look around on the new world, into which they have been ushered, and find all so changed;—that now they build their Churches, and organize their missions, and exercise all their civil and religious rights, none making them afraid, they scarce believe for joy. But when at length they feel that their new privileges are real, they give vent to their wonder and joy in the ancient song,

“Lo! the winter is past; the rain is over and gone: the flowers appear upon the earth: the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.”

Continued in [Chapter XXIV. The Kings Of The East—The Three Frogs](#)

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