

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

BOOK 14

REVELATION 6:1-8

**OPENING OF THE
FIRST FOUR SEALS**

EDWARD IRVING

1831



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EDWARD IRVING

*Exposition of the Book of Revelation:
in a series of Lectures*
1831

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WHY THIS WORK?

The first time I came across the writings of Edward Irving, deep in the back shelves of the Theology Library at UBC (Vancouver, BC, Canada), I was deeply impressed with the unusual treatment he gave to the final book of the Bible.

He wrote as one who knew his calling, and knew that he had a message from God for his generation. Combined with that urgency, Irving had a large sense of the glory of God in Christ, and God's purposes through Christ to reveal Himself unto the world through the Church.

He also possessed a large gift for language and expression, and apparently was quite an orator, as well as being a man of great compassion and sensitivity.

His work on the book of *Revelation*, which originally comprised two volumes, but only covered the first six chapters, towers above other similar commentaries because of its unique blend of gospel and prophecy.

Coming from a church founded on the Advent movement of the mid-1800's, I was somewhat familiar with books on the prophetic parts of Scripture. Irving's commentary was nothing like those.

Whereas the standard prophetic works tended to get quagmired in historical events and details, thus dwelling on the vessel by which God's purposes were worked out, Irving kept his eye single to the glory of God, and searched into those deep purposes as far as he was able. He rightly dwelt on the treasure that was in the vessel of prophecy. Like Moses, he wanted to see God's glory, or as much as was humanly possible. And he did see much, indeed.

And because most of the treasure he unearthed is practically lost to the Church today, I have for a long time had a strong desire to make these works more widely available.

In this republication, I have taken only a few liberties: correcting and modernizing spelling and grammar in a few places (including the language in the KJV Bible references), breaking up large paragraphs and sentences, and inserting full Bible references where appropriate. I have separated the original 2-volume work into smaller books, one for each of the fifteen original lectures. Otherwise it is as Irving wrote it.

This is Edward Irving's parting gift to the Church of Christ. In his own words, from the exposition on Laodicea:

"But my confidence in truth never fails me. I know that these things are not published in vain. It is not for myself, nor for my flock, but for the church of God, that I write these things, which I pray God for His own name's sake to hasten and bless."

Gather up the fragments, that none be lost.

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Revelation 6

¹ And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see.

² And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.

³ And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see.

⁴ And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.

⁵ And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand.

⁶ And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.

⁷ And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see.

⁸ And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.

INTRODUCTION

HITHERTO our way has been among the realities of doctrine, which every Christian can verify for himself, by appealing to the Spirit of truth within his own heart, and confirm in the word, by comparing Scripture with Scripture: and feeling the ground so sure beneath our feet, we have had pleasure in lingering upon it, and pointing out the objects far and near which are to be discerned from so good and safe a position.

Our subject has lain altogether beyond the limits of space and time, out of the region of mere appearances in the world of unchanging realities, and our discourse has been of God, of Christ, and of the Church: of God, with whom there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning; of Christ, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever; of the Church, which is His fullness, the fullness of Him that fills all in all.

After so much matter, purely theological, as we have set forth in the foregoing Lectures, profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, we ought to hear no more idle and ignorant, yea, foolish and wicked, speeches concerning the comparative unprofitableness of the *Apocalypse* among the other books of Scripture,—whereof we affirm it to be, except the Gospels, perhaps the most profitable of all.

We have justified its title to be placed in the canon, and its claim to the study of the Church, from its concert with the analogy of faith, its lofty flights, and deep researches into the secrets of Christian truth, its consummate wisdom, and its abundant revelations of truth; without once entering upon the debatable and the much debated part of the *Revelation*: whereby it may be seen that our object in undertaking this labor is truly catholic, for the glory of God, and the good of men: not selfish, for the establishing of some favorite inter-

pretation; nor partial, for the exaltation of one class or sect above another.

And now that we are to work our way through dangerous paths, where many before us have lost the track of truth, we take the reins not without anxiety, and ask the confidence of those whom we have undertaken to guide, only through our confidence in the Spirit of truth, that He will guide us into all truth; and if we have the anointing of the Holy One, that we shall not be permitted in any lie, for no lie is of the truth. *1 John 2:27.*

With all confidence in the Holy Spirit, who reveals to the saints the things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, we proceed upon our way, with a heedful wary step, and with an eye reverently fixed upon the sure word of prophecy, which God has hung up as a light in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise on our hearts.

In the two former Lectures we have endeavored to obtain, from the language and the circumstances connected with the sealed book, such fixed and determinate notions of its meaning and object, as will very much limit, and indeed altogether prevent conjecture, and reduce us to exact interpretation in the work to which we now advance, of opening the seals one by one.

If, as we have seen by close and continuous study of the preceding chapters, as well as by many cross lights cast upon it from other parts of Scripture, the sealed book, the names of Christ, and the songs of the heavenly companies, do conspire to give to the act of taking and opening the sealed book no other signification than that of Christ's entering into the right and taking the possession of this earth which we inhabit; then the several successive actions leading on thereto can admit no other interpretation than that of the several distinct actings of power and sovereignty, whereby Christ asserts that right

which God has acknowledged, and assumes that possession which God and every creature has guaranteed to the Lamb which was slain.

There may arise a difference of opinion as to what these seven actings of His power are, and at what times and in what places they fell out; and no doubt much discrimination and judgment will be required to ascertain these matters from the very language of the text. But there can be no difference of opinion among those who are fully satisfied of the meaning of the sealed book, that all interpretation of these seals, as if they contained:

- an allegorical history of the early propagation and triumphs of the faith; or
- a perfect epitome of Church history, or some part of it; or
- a series of the oppressions of the Jews under the four monarchies, and of the Church afterward,

are altogether beside the object of the vision, and not for a minute to be entertained.

By being careful to fix the meaning of the symbol of the seven-sealed book, trying it till no doubt is left on our mind, we have quietly set to a side these interpretations, however ingenious or learned. Their ingenuity and learning still remain with them; but they are pure speculations, and have nothing to do with the subject in hand.

Also those interpretations which make the seals to cover only a portion of the time between Christ's beginning to act as the possessor and His actually taking possession, and fill up the remainder with the trumpets and the vials, making a chronological series of the three, however simple and catching they may be, are equally out of the question; because the seven-sealed book is certainly the complete title to the possession, and the opening of all its seals the complete taking of possession.

When they are all done with being opened, He has taken possession, He is a possessor; and the blessed reign upon the earth is begun, and there can be no more trumpets of woe or vials of wrath.

In thus setting aside so many interpretations I am not arrogant in the least degree, unless the mathematician who derives so many corollaries from one proposition be deemed arrogant, or the man who having ascertained the meaning of words will interpret them according to that meaning be so deemed. I have labored to find out the proper signification of the sealed book; and having arrived at fixed conclusions, I must not lose my labor, or give up the truth, by admitting hypotheses which proceed upon another signification than that which I have made out to be the true one. This is honesty, not arrogance; this is interpretation, not speculation.

Let us now, before taking up the seals one by one, consider the document as a whole, and endeavor to gather from the face of it some principles which may guide us in our interpretation of them.

The first six seals lie before us in order in the 5th chapter. But the seventh, though announced as impending under the name of “the great day of the wrath of the Lamb” (*Revelation* 6:17), is not given in the next place; but instead there follows an act of sealing certain preserved tribes against its destructiveness. This being done, we find ourselves at the end of all things in the midst of the Millennial enjoyments (compare *Revelation* 7:9-17 with *Revelation* 21 and 22).

In the opening of the next act of *Revelation* we are told that the seven seals had been opened, and that there was a pause of half an hour, before the next exhibition commenced. The trumpets are therefore no part of the seventh seal, be they what they may; for the seventh seal was opened and away with, and half an hour had elapsed, ere ever the voice of trumpets began.

Where then are the contents of this seventh seal to be found? for, till we find them, we are not able to have under our eye at one glance the whole document of the seals, which is the thing we now desire.

To find out the seventh seal among the chapters of the *Apocalypse* we have a certain clue in the concluding verses of the sixth seal, which, like the hooks and taches of the coverings of the tabernacle, or like any two pieces in a well-constructed machine, leads us unerringly to its fellow and companion.

The seven seals are like the pieces which make up a complete map. We have all of them lying side by side, save one, which, for good reasons, is laid in another quarter. But we are at no loss to find which it is, by its fitting to the empty place and completing the whole.

The piece we lack is one which, beginning with the day of wrath, will bring us down to the end of all things. And this we have in *Revelation* chapters 15 and 16, which define themselves to be the day of wrath by distinct declarations to that effect (15:1,4,7; 16:1). These chapters bring this present condition of the world to an entire end (16:17-21).

This therefore is the piece which fills up the interval, and we do accordingly join chapters 15 and 16 to chapter 6, and say these three contain the complete document of the seven seals.

Nevertheless, there is another part of the book which ought also to be taken in, not as being necessary to the completeness of the document, but as illustrating the persons who bring the judgment, and the persons upon whom it is brought. And to find this other illustrative portion we have the sure clue given also in the close of the sixth seal (*Revelation* 6:15-16), where the rulers and judges of the earth are in utter consternation, and in an agony of approaching judgment.

This judgment they must find in the seventh seal, and they do find it in *Revelation* 19:11-21; whence we conclude that this also was intended by the Spirit to be included in the seventh seal.

“The departing of the heavens, and the removal of every mountain and island out of its place” (*Revelation* 6:14), leads us to chapters 15 and 16, which present us with the history of a complete system of nature, earth, sea, rivers, sun, mountains, and islands, clean removed.

The consternation and outcry of the heads and rulers of the earth (*Revelation* 6:15) lead us to *Revelation* chapter 19, where they meet their doom. And these two together complete the seventh seal, and bring this wicked form of nature and of nature’s rulers to an end.

The complete document of the seals includes therefore *Revelation* chapters 6, 15, 16, and the last ten verses of chapter 19, together with the first eight verses of chapter 7, which contains the bye-act of sealing certain tribes against its overwhelming destructiveness. Having thus obtained the complete document, let us first consider it as a whole before entering upon the consideration of its parts in detail.

The action of the seven seals being thus completed into one unbroken narrative, and considered as a whole, does evidently contain a series of events relative to this earth. Except the first, there is not one of them in which the earth is not mentioned as the scene of the violence which is done, threatened, or desired to be done. And the last contains the utter destruction and entire removal of those things which are seen.

Revelation 16

²⁰ And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.

This is accompanied also with the departure of the heavens like a scroll, and the falling of the stars like the untimely fruit

of the fig-tree when it is shaken of a mighty wind. And withal there is first the consternation, and then the entire destruction, of the powers, civil and political, at the hand of the Lamb and the hosts of heaven which accompany Him.

This subversion of the present system of things is beyond a question the consummation which the act of seals brought to pass; being the same which is prophesied in all the Scriptures as about to happen at the coming of the Lord (*Psalm 18; Isaiah 24; Jeremiah 4; Joel 3; Haggai 2; 2 Peter 3; Hebrews 12:26,27, &c*).

Whether it implies their annihilation, and vanishing from amongst the things which are, is a question easy to be resolved, by observing that in every one of the passages referred to above the catastrophe is followed by the history of the same earth with inhabitants still in flesh and blood, but under a new law of holiness and blessedness. The thrones are filled with risen saints (*Revelation 20:4*); the nations rejoice in righteousness (*Revelation 21:24*); and the fields are blessed with abundance, and there is nothing to hurt nor to destroy (*Revelation 22:2-3*).

To remove the dynasties of wickedness, to cast out the rulers of the darkness of this world, to purify the elements of nature, to restore the natural fertility of the earth, and to bring in the reign of peace, is therefore, beyond a question, the end and object to which the sevenfold act of opening the seals leads on, and in which it is consummated.

And, because these seals all appertain to one book, they are not seven different things, but seven parts of one thing, and therefore must all have a clear and distinct bearing upon, and be principally helpful to bring about, this great revolution of the world. In the light of this principal event they must be looked at and studied, and the interpretation which does not foreshow and reflect its coming is much to be questioned.

Let us now with the same circumspection feel our way

amongst the parts of this great action, and consider whether any principle of order and arrangement can be discovered amongst them. The first four present us each with one rider:

- the first a royal conqueror,
- the second a warrior bringing civil war upon the earth,
- the third a dealer out of food by weight and measure,
- the fourth a devastator to the extent of a fourth part of the earth.

During their times the power is in the hands of one person; under the sixth seal it is in the hands of many persons, “the kings of the earth” (*Revelation* 6:15): and under the seventh seal it is in the hands of one person, “the beast,” and “the kings of the earth” confederate with him, or under his command (*Revelation* 19:19, compared with 17:12-14).

This would indicate that some change had passed in the condition of the agents between the fourth and the sixth seals. We look into the fifth to discover what this may be. There we find a company of martyrs:

Revelation 6

⁹ And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held.

These martyrs pray for the day of vengeance and wrath upon those that dwell on the earth: but they are told that it is not till after a little season, during which another company of martyrs should be completed. This sheds a great light upon the subject: showing, first, that the fifth seal is consequent upon the completion of one company of martyrs, and introduces the way of another company, the fellow-servants and brethren of the former, who are to be killed as they were. And besides these two companies, there is not and cannot be a third; because it is expressly promised that upon the fulfillment of the second the vengeance upon the inhabitants of the earth who had shed their blood shall surely come.

Now can we by any means find out the description of this second company? The description of the first we have in this seal:

Revelation 6

⁹ ...[they] were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held.

And the description of the second company is given alongside of this:

Revelation 20

⁴ And which [Gr. *And whosoever*] had not worshiped the beast, neither had received his mark in their foreheads, or in their hands.

These two martyr companies live and reign with Christ upon the earth, when those kings that presently occupy the earth, and have shed their blood, are cast out. These two ideas are not only brought together in this fifth seal under a promise, but they are exhibited in the condition of a fact at the sounding of the last trumpet in the 11th chapter, verses 16-17. And the manner of bringing it to pass occupies the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th chapters.

The very characteristic and distinct denomination of these two martyr companies between whose sacrifice the fifth seal is opened, being carried to and compared with *Revelation* chapters 12 and 13, will cast a still greater light upon the subject.

The former of these chapters is, so to speak, wholly under the auspices of the first, and the latter of the second, martyr company. In the former those “who loved not their lives unto the death” are made to overcome Satan “by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony.” *Revelation* 12:11. Whereupon he is cast down unto the earth, and his angels are cast down with him, who persecute the mother of the martyrs, which is the Church. And from his violence she is fain to

flee, and glad to escape into the wilderness for a time, times, and half a time, or forty-and-two months.

Now this is the very period during which in *Revelation 13* the beast makes his image, and causes all to receive:

Revelation 13

¹⁶ ...the mark [of the beast] in their right hand, or in their foreheads:

¹⁷ ...or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

Those who will not comply with this edict are prevented from buying and selling, and many of them slain; because:

Revelation 13

⁷ It was given him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them.

Yea, and all that dwell upon the earth worship him in these various ways, save those only...

Revelation 13

⁸ ...whose names are written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

There can remain no doubt, therefore, that the martyrs of the second class and denomination are slain during the forty-and-two months, when the power is in the hands of a beast, and ten kings, and another lamb-like but dragon-speaking beast.

This brings the fifth seal to be commensurate in respect of time with the forty-and-two months of this prophecy, wherever that period occurs: for that seal lasts while the second company of martyrs is slaying, and until their slaughter is fulfilled; whereupon the vengeance arrives unto those who dwell upon the earth.

This also casts light upon the actions passing over from single persons in the first four seals to several kings in the sixth, and reappearing again in the seventh in the hands of both the one and the other. For in *Revelation 12*, where the first com-

pany of martyrs is concerned, the one beast is crowned; that is, the rule and dominion is in the possession of one person; whereas under the fifth seal, or during the forty-and-two months of the 13th chapter, while the same potentate continues, the crowns are ten upon his horns, and the word and wisdom is in the mouth of another beast, which counterfeits the Lamb.

This shows us why one king should appear in the first seal, and three successors in the next three, but in the sixth many kings; because during the fifth seal the unity of the power had broken up into ten parts, and had acted in the form of ten kingdoms against the saints, and slain the second company of martyrs.

That there is a continuity, however, of existence, notwithstanding this change of persons, is manifest from the promise made unto the first army of martyrs, that the vengeance should alight in the appointed season upon those very powers who had shed their blood, and still reigned upon the earth. The nature of this continuity appears from the 12th and the 13th chapters, where the beast continues, though his form and condition change. And accordingly in the end of all we find the beast and the ten kings, and another named "the false prophet," all upon the field of Armageddon, making war with the Lamb, and meeting their well-merited doom.

Who this third party is appears from the third party introduced into the action of *Revelation* 13; to wit, the beast who speaks like a dragon, and, for his own aggrandizement, works to the hand of the other beast; from which he is distinct and yet not separate, being the same with the "mouth speaking great things and blasphemies," and who is therefore well called "the false prophet."

The fifth seal therefore stands at that point of time when the confederate power of the false prophet and the beast with ten crowned horns came to act in concert against the saints of

the Most High: the first four seals refer to a period anterior, and joining on thereto: the last two seals are consequent upon the forty-and-two months during which the new form of power reaped the second company of martyrs.

And with these clues we could track our way through many other parts of this book, which appear to the unreflecting and incurious, to be hopeless labyrinths; but we rest satisfied with what has been already done.

We would make another observation, to ascertain what this power is, first and last, which makes havoc of the Church, and completes the two companies of martyrs;—a very important point, because it is with it that the judgment has to do, and upon it that the vengeance falls:

Revelation 6

¹⁰ And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, do You not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

To this point we come directly and at once by referring to the last verse of the 18th chapter, wherein the destruction of Babylon is amply described; of whom it is said:

Revelation 18

²⁴ And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were [Gr. *had been*] slain upon the earth.

Babylon then is guilty of the martyrs' blood: she is the slayer of the kindred whom the Redeemer rises to revenge; for, as we have said, it was one of the offices of the Redeemer "to inquire for blood," and to avenge it.

Now what is this Babylon, whose other names are given at length in the 17th chapter, verse 5? The answer is contained in that same chapter:

Revelation 17

¹⁸ And the woman which you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth.

There is no possibility of avoiding Rome as the only possible interpretation of these words: for she is the only city which has reigned over kings since the days of the Apostles: and herein stands one of the features in which she resembles the ancient Babylon.

Now, over what kings did Rome rule? Not over all the kings of the earth; for beyond the Euphrates, the Danube, and the Libyan deserts, she had no authority over, and even little knowledge of, the world. From this wide sovereignty she declined, to bear sway only over these western parts of Europe, having resigned the hold of the eastern to Constantinople.

And during this time it was that she bore sway over kings by the instrumentality of the pope. And to this period chiefly, though not entirely, it is that the expression refers. This however, is rather as a characteristic to know the city from all others, than a description of the period of her cruelty, for this doubtless is inclusive of the whole time from the death of the first martyr to the death of the last.

This observation is of itself sufficient to limit the place of this vision, so oft signified by the expression “the earth,” to the bounds of the Roman empire: because it is clear, from the fifth seal, that the judgment of the sixth and seventh come in revenge of the martyrs’ blood. And in the passage just quoted the guilt of all the martyrs’ blood is imputed to, and visited upon, that city which rules over the kings of the earth. Upon her therefore, and her dominions, the judgment alights.

Other reasons for this conclusion were set forth in the beginning of Lecture 11¹; and as we proceed, the evidence will accumulate from so many quarters as to leave no doubt whatever upon the mind of anyone.

Now the reason why the controversy should be maintained within that bound is, that there was the seat of the usurper of

1 *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Book 11 “The Vision of Heaven”, Chapter: “Christ the Redeemer and King”, p. 7-13.

the earth. Rome claimed the sovereignty; but to Jerusalem the sovereignty of the world had been decreed from of old. Jupiter of the Capitol had assumed the sovereignty which belonged to Jesus on Mount Zion. Formerly the emperors, and latterly the popes, of Rome have claimed the empire of the world, and within certain bounds have possessed it; and within these bounds of her dominion has God's royal city and world's metropolis been held in base thralldom. For these causes it was necessary that Jesus in making His way to possession should seek out the usurper in his stronghold, and contend with him in his own dominions.

But, as has been often observed, though for these reasons the Roman empire be chosen as the place of the action, that the prophecy may be capable of verification from the event, we are not to suppose that this portion of the earth has either any favor or disfavor in the sight of God; or that the principles of Divine providence applicable thereto are different from those applicable everywhere else. Such an idea were wholly to destroy the end and purpose of prophecy, which is to teach lessons of the Divine providence by means of particular examples.

Now if it be once believed that the example is treated according to a principle of its own, the whole use of it as an example is lost. The Roman empire, in which the whole mystery of Paganism and apostate Christianity was to be revealed, is the fullest and richest of all examples for showing the way of God's dealing with idolatry and apostasy, and the mystery of iniquity in all its forms; and for these reasons it is chosen to exemplify the universal and invariable laws of Divine providence, as well by the Church as by the world and the synagogue of Antichrist.

There is still another observation of a general kind which I wish to make before proceeding to the exposition of the seals one by one.

The first four are inflictions upon the earth, brought in succession by a single person; but they proceed not to utter extirpation and extinction of the powers that be; who have a second tragedy to act against the followers of the Lamb: this they do under the fifth seal, and then unto utter annihilation of the being and force and framework of their kingdom does the judgment go, under the direct agency of the Lamb.

An earthquake and a second earthquake: the former desolating but not destructive; for a warning only, not for utter wreck and ruin; the latter for entire subversion and explosion of all the things which are confederate against the Lamb, for the casting out of Satan, and the possession of the earth by its true and rightful King.

The point here to which I would direct attention is, that the reigning powers bring the judgments of the first four seals; in the sixth and seventh the Lamb brings them, and they suffer them. The four riders act the part which the Lamb afterwards acts; and therefore like him they are represented as riding upon horses.

No one reading the passage in the 19th chapter, where the Word of God comes forth upon the white horse, can doubt for a moment that He comes as a conqueror to triumph over his embattled foes. And if any doubt were left that the horse was emblematical of conquest over our enemies, it seems to me to be removed, by the explanation given upon the introduction of the first horseman:

Revelation 6

² He went forth conquering and to conquer.

Moreover, the horseman of *Revelation* 19 has a name written, "King of kings, and Lord of lords," and those who follow Him on white horses become the kings and the lords of the earth, being the same who sit upon the thrones (*Revelation* 20:4).

This observation, I think, goes far to add the idea of royalty to that of conquest, in order to complete the interpretation of the symbol of the horse, and to decide that these four riders ought to be interpreted of royal conquerors, whom God uses to bring judgment upon the earth.

What they conquer and what they triumph over appear not as yet; but this clearly appears, that they are royal or imperial personages, who have single authority, and are raised up and commissioned of God to bring judgment upon those who had slain the first army of martyrs.

They do partially that which He Himself in the person of the Word does completely, when the same evil city and its subject nations has filled up the cup of their iniquity, by destroying the second noble army of the martyrs.

This idea, that these are four Christian emperors, acting a prelude of that part which the King of saints completes, is much confirmed by observing that the beast in one form or another does always personate the enemies and persecutors of the Church, and bears the whore of Babylon; while the horse bears the avenger of the saints' blood, and ought therefore to have this meaning given to it uniformly.

With the lights obtained from the consideration of the document as a whole we now proceed to interpret it piecemeal, and in order. The whole act of the opening of the seals divides itself into three parts:

- first, the action of the four riders in the first four seals;
- second, the delay and postponement of the fifth seal;
- third, the consummate destruction brought upon the earth in the last two seals.

These we shall consider in order.

THE CAUSE OF THE FIRST FOUR SEALS

THE action of the first four seals being considered as a whole, and contemplated in the consummation, is—“to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth,”—does contain, as it seems to me, a complete judgment of that kind which God had heretofore been wont to inflict upon the nations, but not equal to that new form of judgment which is proper to the new form of guilt contracted by an apostate church, and wrecked upon her in the sixth and seventh seals.

I derive this notion of the completeness of the judgment contained in the four seals from the study of the 14th chapter of *Ezekiel*, wherein the Lord lays out the several forms of retribution which He inflicts upon a people who have turned a deaf ear to the warnings which He has sent them by His prophets; and thus He sums it up:

Ezekiel 14

²¹ How much more when I send my four sore judgments upon Jerusalem, the sword, and the famine, and the noisome beast, and the pestilence.

Now these are precisely the four (“death” being the same as “pestilence”) which come upon the fourth part of the earth by the hand of the fourth rider; yet not without the operation of the two preceding ones, whereof the former brings the sword, and the latter the pestilence.

But it may be asked, What form of judgment does the first bring? The answer is, He obtains the upper hand, and prepares the way of those who follow. His part is to work his way to the crown by conquest, over the powers which are afterwards to be judged. The powers that had been before him slew the martyrs: God is about to judge them for their impious cruelty; and He will do it by a succession, not of beasts, but of men riding on horses, that is of Christian rulers con-

quering and suppressing His enemies.

But first He must bring such a one into the possession of the dominion, which is the act of the first seal; after which comes the second with the sword, symbol of slaughter; the third with the balances, symbol of famine; and the fourth with death and hell, symbol of devastation,—whose ravages, being chiefly confined to the fourth part of the earth, work the complete devastation over that region.

The result of all these combined observations is to fix the beginning of the seals to the time of Constantine, the first Christian emperor, which also we determined upon other grounds, when treating expressly of the place and time to which this vision of seals had reference. And seeing these judgments are inflicted in revenge of the martyrs' blood, it will be necessary first that we take a step backward and set forth the sufferings of the Church at the hand of Rome, from the time that Christ, her foundation-stone, was crucified by the warrant of a Roman governor.

The recital of this miserable tale of the endurances of the Church divides itself into two parts:

1. That of which the Jews were the active instruments, Rome the heedless spectator; and,
2. That of which Rome was both the cause and the instrument.

To Rome, which for a long while had possessed the chief authority in Judea, all acts of violence are justly chargeable, though not actually inflicted by imperial edict, because she ought to have kept the peace amongst her subjects, and not permitted the violence and malice of one sect to break out against another.

Let us then begin with the Apostles of the Lord, and draw out a regular recount of the acts of cruelty permitted or inflicted by Rome upon the servants and subjects of Him who is

King of kings, and Lord of lords.

If we take the day of Pentecost as the date of the putting forth of that power which Christ received in heaven and on earth, when by the gift of the Holy Ghost He did finish and fit out His Church for the holy warfare, we may well believe that then also Satan began to take the field against them, with all that mighty power over which he had the control upon the earth.

Even before the crucifixion he had sought permission to sift the disciples as wheat; and judging from the nature of our Lord's intercession, which was not that they might be shielded, but that their faith might not fail under it, we have sufficient ground for concluding that he had received the commission to do so. And in that hour and power of darkness, when the Son of Man wrestled alone with all the principalities and powers of darkness, Satan scattered them like sheep, filling their hearts with blind doubtings, unworthy fears, and base denials.

But seeing them all return to their native Galilee, and betake themselves to their fishing nets again, he deemed, perhaps, that for the present the storm which he had apprehended to his kingdom and power was happily blown by, and so did not think it worth his while to molest them any further. Whence we may see the wisdom of the Lord in hiding them for a season from his fearful rage.

But when he perceived them come forth again, clad in power of word and deed, to declare the name of Jesus, and stir up the spirits of men anew to believe in that dreaded name, he took instruments in his hand at once, to crush this new head of opposition to his earthly empire; and the instruments which he used for the thirty years which followed from the day of Pentecost were the Jewish people, the same who had served him so well for the crucifixion of the Lord of glory: and this also came to pass from the commandment of the Lord

that they should begin to preach the Gospel of the kingdom, beginning at Jerusalem; which the Apostles also did, abiding there, notwithstanding the persecutions which scattered the rest of the brethren, for the space of twelve years; following, as it is handed down, an express commandment of the Lord.

And into whatever parts the brethren who were scattered abroad did come, they followed the rule of Paul and Barnabas, addressing themselves always to the circumcision first, as those who had the preference in the promise, and therefore ought to have the preference in the call. And so great was their diligence in preaching the Gospel to the circumcision, that though they were dispersed throughout the whole extent, and even beyond the bounds, of the Roman empire, Paul could say of the Jews before the first thirty years were fully expired, that they had all heard the ministry of the Gospel, whose...

Romans 10

¹⁸ ...sound [said he,] went into all the earth, and their words unto the end of the world.

It was not to be expected that Satan, who hates the name of Christ, and hinders the preaching of the Gospel by all the powers of earth and hell, could witness that empire of falsehood, which with such long and painful labors he had established over the Jews, torn and shaken asunder by the numerous converts which were made to the Gospel, and the flourishing churches which were planted among them by the apostles, and evangelists, and pastors, and teachers of these primitive times.

But because it may be here alleged, that this is to wander from the point in hand, which is to show Satan's persecutions of the Church through the instrumentality not of the Jews, but of the Roman empire, it is necessary to remark that though the Jews were the instruments of his malice and persecutions, both in the lifetime of our Lord, and during these thirty years of the Apostolic administration, the Roman em-

pire, into the body of which he had entered, was really and truly the main spring and guilty cause thereof.

For at this time the Roman emperors held the sovereign power, I may say, from the Indies, at least from the Euphrates, and beyond, to these our islands, and from the Elbe to the deserts of Africa, into which it would appear they had penetrated no small way. And being the sovereign lords over all the towns and cities where the Jews dwelt, and whither the Apostles came evangelizing the Jews, and the sole executioners of justice and equity, and masters of life and death, as we see in the instances both of Christ and of Paul,—which it is matter of history, that they had taken out of the hands of the Jews, some time before our Lord's incarnation,—they ought to have protected the inoffensive Christians and the harmless preachers of the Gospel from persecution, imprisonment, and death.

For it is carefully to be observed, that the Romans, who were a wise people,—wiser, perhaps, than any, either before or since, in all things which appertain to conquered countries,—made it a rule never to interfere in questions of religion. They were in this respect exactly what our liberal politicians and violent dissenters would have this Protestant nation to become, alike indifferent, and alike respectful, to all religions. They adopted the gods of the conquered nations into their Pantheon, with what liberality our enlightened statesman would adopt men of all religions into our legislative assemblies, and administrative government: only in justification of our superiority to them, I must confess they were not up to us in their respect for men of no religion.

The reason of this just and equitable toleration in Pagan Rome was, that Satan being in it as its ruling and inspiring principle, and well liking all sorts of idolatry, as equally derogatory from the honor of the only adorable and worshipful God, would have none of them destroyed, but did collect

them into one heaven on earth, one earthly pandemonium, the Pantheon of Rome, where he might sit supreme in council and authority, and through these inferior agencies wield the sovereignty of the earth.

What moves them in this day to the like liberality is, that the beast from the bottomless pit, who is blasphemy all over, can endure no form of the truth as it is in Jesus, and would trample it all under his feet, as vain babblings and old wives' fables. This indiscriminate toleration of all religions besides makes the prompt and instantaneous persecution of the Christian religion more manifestly a work of Satan. Had they been in the habit of persecuting for religion's sake, it would not have been surprising that they should have so soon fattened their sword with the blood of Christ and His faithful disciples; but being the avowed umpires between people of contending religions, the equal and indifferent patrons of all, it is surprising, yea astonishing, and devoutly to be contemplated as the fulfillment of prophecy, that they should at once have given a loose to the persecutions which were raised by the Jews against the Christians.

This was to take a part; because, as has been said, having already taken the power of life and death out of the hands of the Jews, even in Jerusalem, and being the guardians of the persons and the property of their subjects, it was the office of the magistrate,—his most solemn duty,—to have carried into effect the law of Roman policy, that no man should have been molested for his religion.

But Satan, who makes all things to work together for evil, had so laid his train for more than a century, as to undo all the honor and righteousness of the provincial magistrates, and lay them open to all manner of informations, and bribes, and rewards, in the matters of even-handed justice. From the time of the triumvirates,—that is, nearly a century before the resurrection of Christ,—the extravagant luxury and wild licentious-

ness, the enormous covetousness, of the Roman magistrates had come to such a height as is utterly incredible. They all loved gifts: like Pontius Pilate, they listened to the ruling party; like Festus, they wished to do the Jews a favor; or like Felix, they hoped that money should be given them; or like the philosophic Gallio, they cared for none of those things, but viewed them as superstitions in the which they might not intermingle.

From all which causes combined, the Christians, who had little money, and still less interest with the local magistrates, and were at little pains to justify themselves before men of corrupt minds, found no protection whatever for the exercise of their religion, and very scanty justice when they were called into question. The wealthy and the powerful nation of the Jews were every where against them. And the ear of the magistrate, if ever he were disposed to do justice, was filled with all manner of extravagant distortions of their character and worship. For all which, I say again, the empire of Rome was as entirely responsible as we at this time are for the sentences which are past, and the acts which are done, by our governors in the East or West Indies.

And in this way did Satan, by loosing and relaxing the principles of government over all the empire, but particularly over the rich and luxurious East, prepare the way for those cruel persecutions which, for thirty years, the Christians suffered at the hands of the Jews, whereof the particulars, gathered out of the *Acts of the Apostles* and other authorities still extant, are much as follows.

While yet the Church was confined within the walls of Jerusalem, her chief and most zealous Apostles had to endure no small persecution, were imprisoned and threatened with death, which seems only to have been prevented by the sage, and I may say divine, counsel of Gamaliel. But when they had embred their hands in Stephen's blood, Satan stirred up in

Jerusalem that persecution recorded in the 8th chapter of the *Acts*, whereof Saul was one of the chief agents, who made havoc of the Church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison; and his naming zeal against Christ, being not content with all manner of cruelties committed against His Church in Jerusalem, did follow them into all the cities whither they fled, even beyond the bounds of the nation unto Damascus, where he went with the highest authority, breathing out threatenings and slaughter in order to bring the disciples bound unto Jerusalem.

This persecution, which Eusebius, our great ecclesiastical historian, called the severest of all, although not included in the ten general persecutions, was the first effort of the devil against the Church. Judea was a part of the Roman state, and that generation of the Jews had, by our Lord, been declared to be of their father the devil—a generation of vipers or serpents, according to the Baptist. And now began to be fulfilled that word of the Lord:

Matthew 23

³³ You serpents, you generation of vipers...

³⁴ Behold I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes, and some of them you shall kill and crucify, and some of them shall you scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city:

³⁵ That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth; from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias, whom you slew between the temple and the altar.

This persecution of the Christian Church began from Jerusalem, and was overruled of God to the scattering abroad of the disciples, who went everywhere preaching the word. And wherever they went they were liable to the same confederation of the priests and magistrates which Paul encountered at Damascus, when they lay in wait at every gate of the city in order to destroy him; and he was hardly saved by the disci-

ples letting him down from the wall in a basket.

But of these persecutions of the dispersed Church at the hand of the Jews we have no account until we come down to the second persecution, which was raised against them in Jerusalem by Herod Agrippa, about ten years after the resurrection of the Lord. This also proceeded out of zeal for the Law of Moses against the twelve Apostles, who abode in Jerusalem, and had not yielded to the former storm, having been, as is reported, commanded by the Lord to abide there for twelve years.

In this second persecution fell James, one of Zebedee's children, who had been exalted from among the rest to be overseer of the Church in Jerusalem. He was willingly baptized with his Lord's baptism, and drank of His cup. It proceeded to the imprisonment of Peter, who was miraculously delivered by the angel; and we know not where it might have ended, but for the Lord's smiting of Herod the king who instigated it.

From this time forth the Apostles dispersed themselves into all parts of the known world, preaching the Gospel, and generally presenting the first overtures of it to the Jews. Of their persecutions and sufferings we have no very authentic accounts, save that we know they all came to their death by martyrdom—as also did all the seventy—save John the Apostle, who reached a great old age and died in peace.

But judging from what is recorded in the *Acts of the Apostles* concerning Paul and his companions, we may well believe that scourgings and imprisonment at the hand of the Jews awaited them in every city; that justice was denied them, that men in power were influenced against them, that they were loaded with all manner of contumelies, and oppressed with all manner of endurances.

Nor is this to be wondered at when we remember the grounds which the ignorant bigotry and error of the Jews had against them. They looked upon them as the enemies of

Moses and the Law, and of God's holy temple in Jerusalem. They cast them out of the synagogue as the enemies of God. They looked upon them as departing from the great and glorious hope of the nation, and setting up a low-cast impostor in place of their Messiah, the King of kings. All the feelings that are strongest in the breasts of men, zeal for God, love of country, ambition of empire the revenge of oppression, indignation at what they considered as treachery, did combine together in the minds of the Jewish nation to make them think that they did God service in putting to death such profligate men, of whom they falsely thought, that they had rifled all their treasures, in order therewith to deck a mean and contemptible person.

And to be convinced of this you have but to read the *Acts of the Apostles*, where every step of the first preachers of the Gospel is tracked with blood; insomuch that Paul, alluding to their life, sets it forth as the most grievous to which God had ever exposed any of His faithful servants:

1 Corinthians 4

⁹ For I think that God has set forth us, the Apostles, last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men.

¹⁰ Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place.

And in another place:

1 Corinthians 15

¹⁹ If in this life only we have hope, then are we of all men the most miserable.

And this cruel life was in all the Apostles save John, and in all the seventy disciples, and almost in all the saints whose names are mentioned in Scripture, terminated by a violent death, inflicted by the hand or with the concurrence of the powers of the Roman empire, within the bounds of which

they did first plant the Church.

Satan chiefly stirred up the Jews during the thirty years consequent upon the resurrection of the Lord, to be his agents in this direful work; and with what zeal they labored in it is abundantly manifest from the example of Saul himself, while yet unconverted. And in like manner did the zealous Jews towards the Christians in every city where the first preachers of the Gospel went: who made a conscience of first offering the Gospel unto the Jews, as being the fulfillment of their great national promise.

And they were thus brought into immediate contact with all their prejudices and passions which, wherever they went, prepared for them the most wretched entertainment; for Satan had succeeded in raising everywhere the most enormous falsehoods against the Christians, as the Jews at Rome honestly confessed to Paul:

Acts 28

²² ...for as concerning this sect, we know that it is every where spoken against.

Now these Jews were as demons incarnate against the Christians, who in the first years of the propagation of the Gospel chiefly came forth from their communion; and being spread abroad, and settled in every nation under heaven, at least within the bounds of the Roman empire, it came to pass that wherever the seed of the woman came, Satan stood arrayed against them.

And though in these first thirty years there was no movement of the emperors against the Christians, yet it was in effect the same, for the Jews were the subjects of the empire, and therefore ought by the magistrates to have been restrained. And the Christians were the subjects of the empire, and by the magistrates to be protected. If as yet there were no edicts against them sent forth from the imperial throne, they were left to the mercy of their persecutors not the less, and

suffered all manner of afflictions at their hands, of which take this as the catalog of one man's experience:

2 Corinthians 11

²³ ...in labors more abundant [he compares his experience with that of the rest of the Apostles, showing thereby that theirs was of the like kind], in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.

²⁴ Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.

²⁵ Thrice was I beaten with rods [that is, I suppose of the licitor or officer of the magistrate], once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep;

²⁶ In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;

²⁷ In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

And that this was a common experience of the brethren in those private persecutions of the Church, before the public one arose, is manifest from what the same Apostle writes to the Romans:

Romans 8

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

³⁶ As it is written, For Your sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

³⁷ Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.

³⁸ For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

³⁹ Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

For this form of persecution in the various parts of the Ro-

man empire Satan had, as I have said, prepared the way beforehand, by corrupting the minds of the governors of provinces to an extent, of which, in these times, we have hardly an idea. But such was the venality, the covetousness, the luxury, and the extravagance in every way, of the governors of provinces, that justice was sold to the highest bidder, and accusations invented beyond number for the very purpose of amassing gain by the fines which were imposed.

Indeed, there is hardly anything in any age or country to be likened to the corruption and bribery which was then carried on in all administrations of justice, except it be the corruption which the beast afterwards introduced into the Church of Rome, by the open selling of indulgences to commit sin.

And it is easy to see how the rich and substantial Jews, in the various titles, would easily influence the minds of ignorant and unprincipled men against the poor Christians, who had seldom the means, nor, if they had, would have availed themselves of them, to meet their foes in this unrighteous field. During these the first thirty years the Jews were filling up the measure of their iniquity, and accomplishing that which had been spoken by the Lord.

In permitting all which aggravated sufferings of His Church at the hands of the Jews, the Lord was showing forth the great iniquity and boundless cruelty, the invincible hardness of heart and blindness of mind, to which that people, with whom He had labored in all ways of mercy, and grace, and chastisement, had at length arrived, that He might be justified in the most awful judgments which He was about to bring upon them.

And from this time forth, that is, from about the thirtieth year after our Lord's resurrection, begins another act of the Divine purpose, both towards His Church and towards the Jews, and towards the empire of Rome. For the time drawing nigh which He had set for the destruction of the Jewish

church and state, which in these thirty years' warfare against the truth had filled up the measure of their iniquity, the Lord began now to prepare the way for that direful judgment. And because it was a judgment almost unto extermination which was decreed, it could not be brought about by the ordinary methods of war and invasion.

But there were two master feelings in the hearts of the Jewish and the Roman people, which, if they could be set against one another, would bait them to the contest until the one or the other were exterminated. That of the Roman was the glory and eternal durability of the Roman name and nation: that of the Jews was the expectation of the Messiah, to bruise all kingdoms to powder, and to set up the kingdom of the saints forever.

Now they well knew that the Roman was the fourth of the worldly empires, and that the fifth should be that of the Messiah: and for this reason, that Jesus would not take arms and head the people, they crucified Him, albeit they were then, and had for some time before been, looking out for Messiah's appearing. Now were they become doubly irritated: on the one hand sickened by hope deferred, on the other vexed to see their nation torn into two parts by the Christian religion, which seized upon and appropriated their national hopes, and carried off many of their people.

And thus, being maddened by the hand of God upon them, they were ready, like the wild bull, to cast themselves headlong upon anything which should offer itself to their fury. There only remained to prepare the snare and gin, in order to entangle this fierce and fiery people. And to prepare such a snare was the next act of God's providence towards these two great actors upon the stage of this world.

Now observe how wonderfully this was accomplished. The Roman state, which had grown and increased and now stood forth in its collected and dreadful might, was by the hand of

God made for twenty years to totter and tremble, and stand in continual peril of falling, insomuch that no man ever thought it should recover itself again. For which, indeed, the way had been prepared by the cunning policy of Augustus, and the suspicious cruelties of Tiberius, but most of all by the dissolute system of administering all offices of magistracy and government which had prevailed for more than a century.

There then followed such a succession of emperors as the world never heard of—Tiberius, Caius, Claudius, Nero, Otho, Galba, and Vitellius; so luxurious, so avaricious, so inhuman, so wasteful and destructive, that they involved all things in a state of turbulence and dissolution, which brought all men into the belief that the empire would never rally itself again.

And we may well believe that the Jews, who were looking for its fall, would be the first to grasp this hope, and now, thinking the occasion which they had long expected to be surely come, would look eagerly for the Messiah to take advantage of it, and give the death-blow to the expiring fabric, and erect the kingdom of the saints upon its ruins.

And to such an intensity of expectation did they come, that they were liable to continual delusion, and being filled with frenzy of desire, they took up with any one who offered himself, and made head against the Roman empire and name in all quarters of the world where they were found, but especially in Judea.

And thus the great master feelings of the two nations were brought into direct opposition, and continued so until the Jewish nation was all but extirpated. For when the passion of revolt had carried the Jews to all lengths, the Lord, having brought them into the snare, all of a sudden rallied the affairs of the empire beyond the expectation of all men, under Vespasian and Titus, and directed all its energies against His own people, who were now, because of the frequent mad insurrections against the Roman name, even considered as beyond

cure, and by no means to be brought back to loyal subjection.

Satan, embodied in the Roman empire, had, four years after the resurrection of our Lord, instigated the emperors of Rome to assume unto themselves the title of god and lord, which Augustus had positively refused, being content with the honor of high priest. And now they began to build temples unto themselves, and to exact Divine worship from all their subjects. This was his invention for bringing about both the persecution and destruction of all who would worship and serve only the living and true God.

And God turned it against himself by making it the chief cause of the destruction of the Jewish nation, who had been Satan's first tools against His Church; for this worship of the emperor took almost immediate effect upon the Jews in Egypt, who, refusing to permit the image of man to be set up in their synagogues and honored in their ordinances, were most cruelly insulted over, depressed, and massacred in great numbers.

Thereafter with very great difficulty was the emperor restrained from setting up his image in the most holy place of the temple in Jerusalem, but, under the peril of death, he prevented anyone from resisting his worship anywhere else in Judea.

Much about the same time, also, fifty thousand of that doomed people were massacred in Babylon, and they continued to suffer many things from the spirit of sedition which was gone abroad amongst them, and likewise from the resolutions of the emperors to make their image to be worshiped, until at length, about the time of Paul's arrival at Rome, they were all banished from that city, because of their continual uproars and tumults against the Christians; their rage carrying them to such excess as to make them a constant hindrance to the peace of the city: which is another example of Satan's arts being turned against himself.

At length, the time of doom drawing nigh, there was appointed over the province of Judea a man so abandoned of every sense and feeling of justice, that he actually promulgated free license to rob and pillage, provided he were permitted to share of the booty. The exorbitancy of this government grew at length to such a height, that, being added to the other causes of trouble, it plunged the whole country and city into that war which, after unheard-of cruelties and slaughters, ended in the complete destruction of the temple and the Jewish state.

From this time forth for seventy years the Jews in various parts suffered divers calamities from the hand of the Lord, brought on chiefly by their own headlong and passionate fondness for any usurper who, under the title of Messiah, would form a head against the Romans; whereby they became so universally odious over the empire, as prepared the way for the last destruction—I had almost said extermination—of the nation in the time of Adrian, when they arose under that false Messiah, Barcocabus, and with desperate valor for three years resisted the whole tide of the Roman power. From this time forth the judgment was accomplished upon that beloved people; and the Christians, having by their patience maintained the testimony of Jesus, were rewarded in the total overthrow of their enemies and the enemies of the Lord.

Now when Satan found that the Jews would no longer do his work of persecuting the Church, he found his servants in the Roman emperors; who, from this time forward, began to take it up as a great state enterprise to extirpate the Christian religion; which is the more to be admired, because, as has been said, in all times past they had maintained the utmost neutrality in this matter, leaving all the conquered nations to follow their own gods, and generally adopting them into the number of their own.

The first general persecution upon edict began in the time

of Nero, two years before he set on foot that war against the Jews which ended in the destruction of their state and nation: so that Satan had accomplished the conversion of the Roman empire to inordinate intolerance of the Christian religion before the Jews took other matters in hand. And the sword of persecution which they laid down he had another arm already prepared to take up, and that the arm of the chiefest man upon the earth;—in whose hand it rested not; for in little more than two centuries there succeeded ten persecutions, every one more violent than another, until the last exceeded all bounds and measure, and raged for not less than ten years in every part of the empire. During which it is not to be believed what myriads of Christians suffered; to that degree, indeed, that the terror of premature death wholly wore off, and they considered it as their calling to die for Christ, and rather rejoiced, like St. Paul, to be counted worthy to suffer for His sake.

But our part is not to narrate the history, but to open the mystery of Satan's persecution, and the great mystery of God's overruling providence. Now the mystery of the imperial persecution is this: After God had used the innocent Christians, who were led as sheep to the slaughter, for His witnesses against the Jewish nation, and began to proceed to the execution of judgment, He then began to use them as witnesses against the Paganism and rapacious tyranny of Rome, which now for the great part of eight centuries had vexed Him with its engrossing conquests, being His iron hammer to bruise many nations in pieces.

But now it had grown to an awful pitch of enormity, having set up emperors who required Divine honors to be paid to their image in all parts of their dominions; which the Christians would not yield to any other but the King of kings. This together with their refusal to partake of meats offered unto idols—that is to say, the testimony against Pagan idolatry, and

the idolatry of the emperor, or, in one word, against idol and man-worship—brought upon them three successive persecutions, in which every notable Father of the Church during these times was offered up upon the testimony of his faith. It was a long and sharp trial, and right nobly they stood the exterminating rage of the seven-headed dragon, until God, having given a sufficient testimony against that abomination, began to cut it short in judgment, in the time of Constantine, soon after the tenth persecution was ended.

I have expressed my conviction, in a former Lecture², that however persecution was overruled by God for the propagation of the faith, however much the blood of the martyrs proved to be the seed of the Church, the ten Pagan persecutions are nevertheless to be looked upon as acts of God's chastisement brought upon the Church for her unfaithfulness in some respect or another; which, at this distance of time, we may not be able to particularize, but of the existence of which we have no doubt.

THE FIRST PAGAN PERSECUTION

The cause of the first persecution, confined to the city of Rome, is, I think, to be found in that fear of man which made the Christians all shrink back from Paul, who declares that, at his first answer before Nero, no man stood by him, but all forsook him; and of this iniquity he is so deeply convinced, that he utters the prayer, "that it may not be laid to their charge." 2 *Timothy* 4:16.

To this most cowardly desertion of their great teacher and Apostle, add the schismatic spirit and impious cruelty which was displayed to him while he was in bonds, when they made the preaching of Christ into a weapon to wound, if they could,

² *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Book 5 "Epistle to the Church in Smyrna", Chapter: "His Second Charge", Sub-chapter: "Persecution as Chastisement", p. 108-110.

the heart of Christ's faithful prisoner (*Philemon* 1), also the heresies, as of Hymeneus and Philetus, which even then prevailed in the Church; and we shall see a sufficient reason to be already in being for the trial of every man's work by fire, for the separation of the wood and hay and stubble from the precious stones, silver, and gold.

This came to pass in Nero's time, destroying indiscriminately all who would not renounce the Christian name; and, amongst the rest, the two Apostles Paul and Peter. It is thus described by Tacitus, a historian of undoubted fidelity as to the facts though not as to the character of the sufferers, of whom he knew nothing, save by the universal execration in which they were held for their uncompromising condemnation of all other religions whatever.

Nero, by his inhuman and wanton conduct, had drawn upon himself the suspicion of having set fire to and consumed the greater part of Rome: which odium to divert from himself, and, if possible, to fix upon those who were thought bad enough for any wickedness, he instituted a regular persecution of the Christians wherever they could be found within the imperial city.

“With this view [says Tacitus] he inflicted the most exquisite tortures on those men who, under the vulgar appellation of Christians, were already branded with deserved infamy. They derived their name and origin from Christ, who, in the reign of Tiberius, had suffered death by the sentence of the Procurator Pontius Pilate. For a while this dire superstition was checked; but it again burst forth, and not only spread itself over Judea, the first seat of this mischievous sect, but was even introduced into Rome, the common asylum which receives and protects whatever is impure, whatever is atrocious.

“The confessions of those who were seized discovered a great multitude of their accomplices; and they were all convicted, not so much for the crime of setting fire to the city, as

for their hatred of human kind. They died in torments, and their torments were embittered by insult and derision. Some were nailed on crosses; others were sewn up in the skins of wild beasts, and exposed to the fury of dogs; others again, smeared over with combustible materials, were used as torches to illuminate the darkness of the night.

“The gardens of Nero were destined for the melancholy spectacle, which was accompanied with a horse-race, and honored with the presence of the emperor, who mingled with the populace in the dress and attitude of a charioteer. The guilt of the Christians deserved, indeed, the most exemplary punishment; but the public abhorrence was changed into commiseration, from the opinion that these unhappy wretches were sacrificed, not so much to the public welfare, as to the cruelty of a jealous tyrant.”³

THE SECOND PAGAN PERSECUTION

Before the next persecution, which fell out in the time of Domitian, the last of the Caesars, the Church had engendered many heresies, especially those of the Gnostics and the Ebionites; and there is good reason to believe that the discipline and the doctrine of the Church had greatly relaxed from their primitive wholesome purity.

Thirty-two years had passed since Paul, the most zealous and able defender of the faith, had been removed from the “care of the Churches,” and of all the Apostles, John alone was still in life. Into what state the Church had come let his three general epistles and the seven epistles in the Apocalypse declare.

- The heresy, that Jesus Christ had not come in the reality of our flesh, was spread and diligently propagated abroad (*1 John 4*).
- Many had separated themselves (*1 John 2*).
- Antichrist had already shown himself in the Church (*1 John 2:18-22; 2 John 7*).

3 Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. II, Chap. XVI.

- The many deceivers which had entered into the Church had begun to excommunicate the faithful (*3 John 9*).
- Judaizing preachers had crept in (*Revelation 3:9*); and loose living (*Revelation 2:20*), and erroneous doctrine (*Revelation 2:14*),
- and declension of love, and lukewarmness, and many more evil practices, which we have set forth at large in our discourses upon the seven epistles.

To separate the chaff from the wheat, the Head of the Church, and Prince of the kings of the earth, sent by the hand of Domitian the second persecution which spread itself over the empire, taking away Timothy at Ephesus, and Dionysius, the Areopagyte, at Athens. That inhuman emperor had, some short time before, assumed to himself Divine honors, and styled himself “our lord and our god”; ordering likewise that no man should presume to call him otherwise, either in writing or discourse. It is most likely that the resistance of this edict drew down both upon the Jews and Christians those sufferings which they endured in his reign. But, like his fore-runner Nero, he came to a violent end by the hands of his own household.

THE THIRD AND FOURTH PAGAN PERSECUTIONS

The next two persecutions of the Christian Church fell out during the reigns of the four most admirable emperors, whether for virtue or philosophy, that the world ever saw—Trajan, Adrian, Antoninus Pius, and Antoninus Philosophus: as if to teach the world, that the carnal man, in his best form, persecutes the spiritual man; and to teach the Church, that no excellence of governors will secure her from sore suffering, until the time come when the Son of David shall take the government upon His own shoulders.

The first of these persecutions, begun by Trajan (AD 107), and revived by Adrian (AD 118), was of so violent a kind, that

his own governors shrunk from the consequences of executing the edicts, and wrote for instructions. The younger Pliny bears testimony to the harmless and innocency of the Christians, and can see no cause in them worthy of death, except their incredible obstinacy; and Tiberianus writes:

“That he was wearied in executing the laws against the Galileans, who crowded to execution in such multitudes that he was at a loss how to proceed.”

Upon this, Trajan gave orders:

“That no particular inquisition should be made after the Christians; but if any offered themselves, they should suffer.”

In this persecution Clement bishop of Rome, Simeon bishop of Jerusalem, Ignatius bishop of Antioch, sealed their testimony with their blood. Of this persecution Adrian revived the slumbering fires, in the second year of his government. And it again broke out with such violence, in the reign of Antoninus the Pious, that Justin Martyr, in his Apology, represents to him the order taken by Adrian, that Christians should not any more be wantonly troubled, but enjoy the privilege of legal trial. By this Apology he was so far wrought upon as to issue a letter to the effect that Christians should not be inquisitorially sought out and:

“...if, after all, any shall still proceed to create them trouble, merely because they are Christians, let him who is indicted be discharged, though he should appear to be a Christian, and let the informer himself undergo the punishment.”

But such is the enmity of the world to the Church of Christ, and such the hold which Satan had got of the Roman empire, that in less than thirty years the flames of persecution were raging as violently as ever. It was a time of great trouble and perplexity to the empire from foreign invasion and inward distress, whereof the poor Christians, as being the enemies of the gods, were doomed to bear the odium and the punishment

from the hand of the philosophical Marcus Aurelius, then reigning under the name Antoninus Philosophus. In this persecution the Church lost her learned and undaunted apologist Justin, and also Polycarp bishop of Smyrna.

I will not be thought superstitious if I observe upon these two double persecutions, viewed in contrast with the first two, that they seem to me brought on by philosophical and sage emperors, in order to show the Church the vanity and enmity of those philosophical speculations with which so many were now corrupting Christianity, and which gave rise to those numerous heresies by which the Church was grieved all this century.

And perhaps it was to teach her the evil of permitting sensuality to intermingle with her services, that from the two greatest sensualists the world ever saw the first two persecutions proceeded. If any one doubt the principle on which we are proceeding, that these persecutions were sent into the Church for the chastisement of her wickedness, and for the correction of her faults, I refer him to passages of the seven epistles (*Revelation* 2:10, 16, 23, 3:3-19), which contain the threatening and prophecy of these evils.

And as we commonly find in natural things that God sends chastisement of a kind to tell the offense for which it is brought, so deem I it will be found in a more remarkable degree, when not individuals nor families are visited, but the Church, in His dealings with which God expresses the perfections of His wisdom unto all creatures.

THE FIFTH PAGAN PERSECUTION

From the time of Marcus Antoninus the Church had peace, and even favor from some who wore the purple, until the time of Severus: and during this interval she showed what need there was for new trials, by the desperate keenness with which the Eastern and Latin Churches carried on the dispute

concerning the time of celebrating Easter, forgetting the Apostle's commandment:

Colossians 2

¹⁶ Let no man therefore judge you...in respect of an holyday.

But to such lengths did the Church proceed, that they were ready to devour, and did actually excommunicate, one another. This shows us the superstitious spirit and uncharitable temper which now began to prevail; and was soon destined to receive another chastisement at the hand of Severus (AD 202), when persecution came with such severity that the Christians "really believed that the times of Antichrist did then take place." Then Victor bishop of Rome, Irenseus bishop of Lyons, and many others of note in the Church, received the crown of martyrdom.

THE SIXTH PAGAN PERSECUTION

After this tempest the Church had a calm for the space of eight-and-thirty years, during which she began to emerge from those secret hiding-places where she had conducted her worship, and to erect churches and purchase lands, and conduct her affairs in a public manner. And the bishops of the churches began to show themselves even in the palace. Perhaps this gave its speciality of character to the next persecution which arose in the days of his successor Maximin, and was principally leveled against the ministers and bishops of the Church.

THE SEVENTH PAGAN PERSECUTION

But all these six persecutions were nothing, it is said, to be compared to the extreme severities which the Christians experienced in the reign of the Emperor Decius (AD 250); whereof Nicephorus says, that it is easier to count the sand by the seashore than to reckon up all the martyrs that suffered.

It is hard to assign that special corruption which this perse-

cution was intended to purify. In the preceding reign the Church had received much countenance from the emperor, who, by some, is believed to have himself been baptized into the Christian faith. And from the writings, as well as the history, of this period we perceive a growing inclination in the Church to wed herself to the pomp and power of the State. Which propensity to cure, if might be, the Lord raised up Decius, strong in Roman hardihood, and bent upon restoring the ancient discipline, who might present to the Christians the dragon in his ancient, proud, and deadly form.

THE EIGHTH PAGAN PERSECUTION

Corruption of every kind began to gain a head within the Church; simony became common; the house of God was converted into a theater of applause; and heresy also prevailed. To punish these and other enormities the eighth persecution (AD 257) followed close upon the seventh; which was also revived during the interval, short as it was.

THE NINTH AND TENTH PAGAN PERSECUTIONS

The ninth persecution, which took place AD 275, is lost in the horrors of the tenth; which followed in the end of this century, under the Emperor Diocletian. Eusebius, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, who lived in these times, has shown us what great occasion there was for this sorest chastisement of God. Corruption in every form prevailed in the Church; ambition and envy amongst the ministers of religion, relaxation of discipline and depravity of manners amongst the people. And as a last effort of fatherly correction came the direful persecution of Diocletian, which has no parallel in the history of the Church.

Though in our account of these ten persecutions we have sought to justify God's good care over His Church, by pointing out the ends of holiness which they were intended to

serve, we do not thereby intend to mitigate them as the most cruel, blasphemous, and inhuman acts whereof licentious power has ever been guilty. Nor do we mean, in the least, to signify that the chastisement fell only upon the corrupters of the faith, or those whom they had corrupted.

This never is nor can be in the Church; which being essentially one, is treated as such in all chastisements, and in all rewards: so that whenever the blow is stricken the whole body suffers, and whenever the body is comforted all the members of it rejoice.

Truly in those ten persecutions there perished an innumerable multitude of saints, a noble army of martyrs; who fell before the shrine of Pagan worship, and were immolated by the high priest of Rome, to please the gods of Rome. Every one of them could have saved his life, by doing homage to the idols of the gods, or the images of the emperors; but they would not: they testified against the worship of any and every god, save the one living and true God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. They testified against the worship of any and every man, save the Man Jesus Christ, who is God as well as man. And they loved not their lives unto the death, but sealed their testimony with their blood.

It was Paganism, and the spirit of Paganism, of which the Roman emperors and their deputies were the servants; just as the martyrs were the servants of Christ, and the Spirit of Christ. The question lay between Christ and the gods, not between the Christians and their governors. As their lawful sovereigns, the Christians yielded obedience in all points without a murmur: it was only when they acted as ministers of Paganism that the Christians resisted unto blood.

When therefore God, wearied out by these acts of dishonor against His Son, and the servants of His Son, will begin to take vengeance, the blame must fall upon Paganism, the prime mover of all mischief, wherein demons were worshiped, or

deified men, instead of the Man Christ Jesus. And if the blow be struck by the hand of emperors themselves, the more notable will the vengeance appear. Now this is exactly the way which God has chosen, and which He has exhibited to us in the symbolical actions of the first four seals, which we now proceed carefully and minutely to interpret.

THE OPENING OF THE FIRST SEAL

Revelation 6

¹ And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see.

THE thing seen takes its origin and beginning from the Lamb's opening the first seal. That done, John saw the thing on the earth answerable thereto. The connection we have already derived from the meaning of the seals with which the title-deeds of alienated inheritances were sealed up. So long as these continued sealed, it was certain that the inheritance was not yet redeemed; but when it was unsealed it was equally certain that the inheritance was redeemed.

The opening of a seal, therefore, must lead to an act tending towards redemption. To show that these acts are various and successive, various seals are put upon the book; of which so soon as the first one was opened, there straightway ensues an act of mighty power against Satan the usurper of the inheritance: and when all the seven have been fully opened, Satan is bound and cast out into the bottomless pit. The whole proceeds under the active energy of the Lamb, who from within the veil sends out upon the earth these four riders to execute His wrath against His enemies, and at the last comes forth Himself in the same victorious guise, as the rider upon the white horse. And therefore the appropriateness of the name Lamb in this action stands, as I think, ostensibly in the attribute of right to the inheritance and power to redeem it, as declared in our former Lecture⁴, from *Isaiah* 16.

But this right to inherit the world is derived from the shedding of His blood, which purified the heavenly things, and

⁴ *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Book 13 "The Action of Constituting the Lamb-Slain Heir of All Things", Chapter "The Lamb", Sub-chapter: "The Morning and Evening Sacrifice", p. 27-32.

purchased the inheritance of the earth, as well as those who are to inherit it. The cup in the Lord's Supper is a beautiful illustration of this connection between the Lamb slain and the inheritance: over which these words are spoken:

Luke 22

²⁰ This cup is the New Testament in My blood, shed...

Matthew 26

²⁸ ...for the remission of sins.

The New Testament, as interpreted from the Old Testament, given in security for the promised land (*Exodus* ch. 20 to 24), which was confirmed in the blood of bulls (*Exodus* 24; *Hebrews* 9), is that world which Christ has purchased to Himself for an inheritance, those heavenly things which He has purified with His blood; and the cup is His pledge to believers that they shall inherit it along with Him:

Romans 8

¹⁷ ...if children, then heirs; heirs of God [God's heirs], and joint-heirs with Christ.

The cup is Christ's pledge to His people, that along with Him they...

Revelation 21

⁷ ...shall inherit all things.

The Baptism is the seal of a new life lost in Adam, and in Him recovered; the bread of the Supper is the seal of a holy flesh lost in Adam, and in Him recovered; the wine-cup is a seal of the lordship, the dominion lost in Adam, and in Him recovered. Now, in this holy symbol of possession and inheritance, behold how the blood of Christ is introduced as the only procuring cause:

Luke 22

²⁰ This is the New Testament in my blood...

Matthew 26

²⁸ This is my blood of the New Testament.....

1 Corinthians 10

¹⁶ The cup...is the communion of the blood of Christ.

And the reason of this connection is beautifully and completely stated in the remaining clause:

Matthew 26

²⁸ ...shed...for the remission of sins.

Being, I think, this, that as one sin had put Adam out of the possession and let the devil into it, so nothing short of the dismissal of all sin, the entire putting of it out and away from our nature altogether, which Christ actually did by the death of His cross, could restore the inheritance again to man its rightful owner.

Now because this was completely done in His cross, because then and there the substance of our sinful nature was put to death, and all those powers, shamed and confounded, which were wont to triumph in it over us were triumphed over, and openly exposed, this putting away of sin is always referred to the cross, and not to the generation.

Although doubtless His flesh was holy, but not separate from sin, from the instant of His conception, it was by the resurrection that it became utterly and entirely separate therefrom; and as the cross was the putting to death of the natural estate of it, to the blood of His cross is the work of putting away sin always referred.

These things are little looked into or cared for; but neither the Papal method of counting His groans and wounds, nor the Protestant method of the arithmetic of infinites, applied to His sufferings, will much longer avail. Paul's method, of which *Romans* 6:3-13, where our natural man is declared to have been crucified with Him and the body of sin destroyed, and *Colossians* 2:13-16, where all principalities and powers of darkness, which kept their palace and their throne in the flesh, are said to have been triumphed over in the flesh of His

cross, are instances, must be revived from that long sleep which they have had in that much be-praised but little perused book, the Bible.

Sin having been thus overcome by the sinless life of Christ in flesh of our flesh, and made impotent by His bringing that flesh to the grave, the hold which the usurper had obtained of the inheritance was done away with; he was judged; he was cast out; and it is the Lamb's forever, who therefore in all His actings to redeem it prefers to appear in that livery of slaughtered flesh of a slain lamb in which He won it. This is the reason why these seals are all opened by Him in the character of the Lamb slain.

The second thing of note in this verse introductory to all the seals is, that, besides the Lamb opening the seal in right of enfeoffed heir, the living creatures do one by one, until they have all taken a part, lift up their voice—which is described to be like the noise of thunder—in order to draw the attention of the seer to the thing which was to be seen.

We have now studied enough of this book to be satisfied that there is nothing accidental or superfluous in it, but that every single circumstance contains a something full of information and indispensable to the completeness of the whole. And what, it may be asked, is the thing here taught by this interposition of the voice of the cherubim four times repeated? It is taught, I think, that the Church, not in heaven or on earth, but the one Church, partly in heaven and partly on earth, the one undivided and indivisible Church, is deeply concerned in this transaction, that it is a work in which they have a great interest and joy, lifting up their voice like thunder, and calling upon the world to behold.

With the Lamb, and next to Him, have they interest in the deed;—He the actor, they the publishers of the action; the riders the instrument, and the earth the subject. This voice is one of the thunderings which proceeded out of the throne (*Revela-*

tion 4:5), and yet is not the voice of Him that sat upon the throne, speaking in His own person, but speaking by the Holy Ghost forth from the body of the Church.

The time is not yet come for Him to speak in His own person, nor arrives till *Revelation* 21, when He pronounces these words:

Revelation 21

⁶ It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

By putting these voices of invocation in the mouth of the cherubim, it does seem to me to be signified that the Church is the appointed expositor and demonstrator of the Lamb's works of Providence, until, all things having been completed, He Himself shall come the Omega or Ending, as He has already come the Alpha or Beginning of the perfect work; after which a new order of things shall begin their course.

If so, then I likewise believe that there is given to the Church a gift of pointing to the coming event; and a trust is reposed in her of warning the world thereof, and at once glorifying God's mercy and His judgment so that to be prophetic and fore-looking is one of the necessary attitudes and occupations of the Church, as we have already demonstrated at large when discoursing of the "eyes before" with which these cherubim were endowed⁵.

I would that if, instead of scoffing and jeering in private and preaching in public against those who do thus endeavor to exonerate the Church of this obligation, Christians and Christian ministers would give heed to this part of their vocation, for the glory of God, the good of the Church, and the saving of their own souls (*Amos* 3:7; *John* 16:13; *1 Corinthians* 2:10-

5 *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Book 11 "The Vision of Heaven", Chapter: "The Four Beasts, or Living Creatures", Sub-chapter: "Their Appearance", p. 92-93.

16).

Why that one of the four beasts which was like a lion should be appointed as the herald and proclaimer of the first seal, and so of the other three, I have already confessed that I want light to give an interpretation satisfactory to myself. I perceive that the character of the lion is given to the Lamb, and that this rider is like the Lamb (*Revelation* 19), he being placed upon a white horse.

Also I perceive that this first rider is he who achieves the mastery, and wins that upper hand which his successors keep; in which respect also he has no small resemblance to Christ, who, in His character of the Lion of the tribe of Israel, does win that mastery for His people which they afterwards retain, and in virtue of His action do exercise.

Beyond this, I can see no further into the mystery of the cherub with the Lion's face having to do with the seal rather than any other of them; but this I believe is not the whole of the mystery: yet so far as it goes it teaches us that in the action of the first rider there is couched a kind of figure or similitude of the action of the last rider, the Lamb, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, who brings the usurpation of the enemy to an end for ever. With the more care, therefore, let us proceed to the consideration thereof, as it is set forth.

A CONQUERING MAN ON A WHITE HORSE

Revelation 6

² And I saw, and behold a white horse; and he that sat on him had a bow, and a crown was given unto him, and he went forth conquering and to conquer.

On the grounds laid down in several parts of this Lecture, and argued at large above, we lay down the Emperor Constantine to be the subject of this seal; in whose days, and by whose hands, the first blow was struck against Paganism;—a first and most effectual and most notable blow. There are

doubts and disputes among historians whether or not there had not been emperors before him who were secretly Christian, and even one is thought to have been actually baptized. The very existence of these doubts and difficulties is in it itself proof enough that the prophecy has no reference to them; for prophecy must be notably and notoriously fulfilled.

Now it is the confession of all men whatever, that Constantine was the first who openly professed and patronized Christianity, and set Paganism to a side: smote it not, but set it to a side; dishonored, dethroned, dispossessed it. What he was in himself is beside my inquiry as an interpreter of prophecy, which looks upon him merely as an instrument in Christ's hand to execute the first of his seven blows against Satan the usurper of the inheritance.

That he has the figure of a man, and not of a beast, proves him to be a Christian, and not a Pagan or a Papal emperor; ruling under the avowal and acknowledgment of the Lord Jesus as his King and Lord, as Eusebius says, "A faithful subject and liege-man to the King of kings;" not under the avowal of Jove, or of an apostate priest, the counterfeit of the Lamb.

Whether it was a right thing for him to establish the Church by royal authority, a great commonplace of schismatics and sectarians, has nothing to do with our question. He did it, that is all. The fact is what our subject has respect to: for the rest, we leave it to the historian, civil or ecclesiastical. Now what is the fact? This will come out in the interpretation of the symbol.

The horse with the rider we have already explained to signify a Christian conqueror triumphing over the enemies of the cross. The whiteness is symbolical certainly of purity, because thus ride both the Lord and His hosts to their triumph over the beast and her armies. Now whether Constantine is worthy to bear the character or not let Eusebius, in the history of his life, testify, who has thus written of him:

“And it is clearly evident in our age, in which Constantine alone of all the Roman emperors, beloved of God, the moderator of all things, has left the idea of his own pious and religious life as an imitable example for all men to follow. And this that God Himself, whom Constantine did serve and worship, has confirmed by clear and evident testimonies, in regard that He did so graciously aid and assist him, not only in the entrance into his reign, but also in the middle and end thereof, instructing all men in him, to live a holy and religious life.

“Having therefore set him up amongst the most famous emperors, as a great and famous light of true piety, and furnished him with such glorious gifts, as did attract the eyes of all men unto him, He permitted him to reign thirty complete years with great honor and admiration. And after he had lived twice the number of those years, He set a period to his line of life.

“And that He might draw the picture of his monarchy more fair and glorious, He made him victorious over those tyrants, and giant-like brood of men, which warred against God, and being blown and puffed up with pride and insolence, durst wage a war against God Himself, who, as soon as they rose up, were extinguished and confounded. For God alone having armed His servant Constantine with His Divine protection against these multitudes of conspirators against him, by him He purified and purged the wickedness of these times, and made him the grand master to instruct others in the worship and adoration of His Divine Majesty, whose speaking virtues did, with the loud voice of action, declare and testify both his acknowledgment of the true God and his detestation of false gods.

“He being therefore the faithful servant of God, declares himself, both by his words and actions, to be himself a faithful subject and liege-man to the King of kings. And God not long after, in reward of his service, made him so victorious an emperor, that he could not be conquered or overcome, but always carried away trophies of victory, and made him more famous than any of his predecessors; and his piety had so en-

deared him into God's favor, and made him so happy and prosperous, that he not only easily subjected more nations than were formerly obedient to the Roman empire, but rested his empire quietly and graciously, even to the ending period of his life."

A BOW

The next part of the symbol is, that "he had a bow." This is generally interpreted of the extent of his conquests; and how extensive they will appear when we come to consider the words, "he went forth conquering and to conquer." And I am the more inclined to adopt this interpretation from observing, in the case of the sword and the balances, the two instruments in the hands of the next riders, there are two similar expositions of the former, "that he should take peace from the earth;" of the latter, that the necessaries of life should be sold at double price, and scantily weighed and measured out.

Had it not been for this analogy, I confess I should have been inclined to think that the bow has reference to instruction, as I understand it has in the picture-writing and symbolical language of the East. There is a passage in *Job* which seems to carry this meaning, and to have originated that application of Joseph's blessing to ministers so common in the prayers of the Church of Scotland, "that their bow may long abide in strength" (*Genesis* 49:24);

Job 29

²⁰ My glory was fresh in me, and my bow was renewed in my hand.

²¹ Unto me men gave ear, and waited, and kept silence at my counsel.

²² After my words they spoke not again, and my speech dropped upon them.

There is evidently no allusion here to war at all, but to instruction only. The blessing of Joseph, into which the bow is first introduced in a symbolical or figurative way, if it refer to

the historical events of Joseph's life in the first application of it, which I think most likely, must have reference in like manner to the Divine illumination and prophetic wisdom which he possessed, whereby he was able to overcome the malice of his brethren and the persecution of his enemies.

There is a passage in *Habakkuk*:

Habakkuk 3

⁹ Your bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even Your word.

This gives us somewhat of the same connection between the bow and the word. Perhaps the radical idea may be, that as the bow sends forth the arrows according to the aim of the archer, so the Word sends forth the various successive acts of execution, according to the intention of God.

It is to be observed, further, that this same Joseph, whose emblem is the bow, came to the headship and sovereignty of the tribes, and was the great interpreter of the word of God to his brethren: and further, that the destruction of the ten tribes, who are often called by the name of Joseph, or of Ephraim his son, is given in these words:

Hosea 1

⁵ I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel.

In the 45th *Psalms*, where Christ appears as the mighty Conqueror and the Husband of the Church, being exactly the same character in which He appears in the 19th chapter of this book, He is represented as having a bow:

Psalms 45

⁵ Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the King's enemy; wherefore the people fall under You.

And in the corresponding passage the sword with which He destroys His enemies is said to proceed out of His mouth. These scattered rays seem to me to cast some light upon the symbol of the bow, connecting it with instruction: and to this

agrees the Greek and Latin mythology, in which the bow was given to Apollo, the master of the prophetic lyre, and the leader of the Muses.

If thus the symbol of the bow should be interpreted, we ought to find in this first actor of the Lord's judgments against Paganism some great promotion of religious knowledge, some opening of the fountains of instruction, some discharging of the arrows of instruction from the bow or word of God. And surely, if ever there was an emperor in the world who gave promotion to the Christian religion, it was this man. Besides his wars and conquests, which were vast, his labors for the service of the Church were beyond all precedent.

As it is necessary to substantiate these symbols from history, I proceed to quote from Eusebius's *Life of Constantine*, though I hardly know where to begin and where to end. The quotations which we are about to make, in order to substantiate the symbol of the bow, must contain these three things in them: First, that Constantine was enlightened in the faith; and, out of the strength of his zeal, shot forth arrows with which he smote down Paganism, the enemy of the cross.

Now his edicts or proclamations were published amongst us, as they had formerly been in the other part of his empire; and he made good religious laws, not only commodious and profitable for all nations and provinces, but also for ecclesiastical government. For by these laws they were recalled home, whom the governors of provinces had banished out of their own country, because they would not sacrifice to idols; those that had been condemned to slavery were freed, and their goods which had been confiscated were restored to them.

Moreover, those who in the times of persecution had been constant sufferers, and had been racked or banished to desert islands, or enforced to undergo any slavery, by the same laws were freed from their former miseries. And those who in regard of their constant profession of religion were discarded and put out of their military offices, the emperor out of his

gracious favor restored them again to their places; giving them their choice, whether they would enjoy their former honors, or spend their age in a peaceable retiredness from action. And those that were condemned to the servility of feminine employments, he enfranchised from such base subjection.⁶

After many edicts of the like kind, concerning the worship of God and the protection of the Church, the recalling of the banished, the liberation of the imprisoned, the redressing of the dishonored, and the restoration of Church lands and reparation of churches, with everything else which might compose the affairs of the Church, almost distracted with the furious persecutions of the last twenty or thirty years, he thus concludes:

Thus far we have declared our royal pleasure. Now seeing God has many ways declared His omnipotent power, both in stirring me up to undertake His cause, and prospering my endeavors by His assistance, so that the whole world which groaned before under affliction and tyranny has, by God's power aiding me, been set at liberty, and enlightened with the knowledge of religion, you ought all to consider the great power of God, which has (as I may say) rooted out the seed of wicked men, and has given the good in all countries just cause to rejoice, and a free and open passage to the profession of religion, that religious men may perform their duties; who being illuminated with divine and heavenly knowledge, I think it fit that they should give due honor and praise unto God for their restoration and deliverance.⁷

From this he passed on to stronger and mightier acts, and discharged from his bow arrows of a more deadly force against the enemy:

The emperor having performed these aforesaid pious works in Palestine or the Holy Land, so also he founded and erected fair churches in all the provinces, fairer than those had been

6 Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, Book II, ch. 20.

7 Idem, Book II, ch. 41.

formerly built. And purposing to beautify Constantinople, because it was from him so denominated, as it were the city of Constantine, he adorned it with many temples and churches, and consecrated them to divers martyrs, which were built partly in the city, and others in the suburbs, to the honor of the martyrs, and consecrated the whole city to the honor of God.

Lastly, being moved by Divine inspiration, he purged the city which was called after his name of all superstitious idolatry, that the images of the heathen gods should not be worshiped in their temples, nor their altars defiled with impure burnt-sacrifices, nor demoniacal feasts celebrated, but that all superstitious ceremonies should be abolished.⁸

And this also he carried into effect in a great many cases, of which take the following as an instance:

The emperor endeavoured and labored to effect these things to the glory of God, which not only advanced Christ's honor, but also suppressed the superstitious errors of the heathen. So that some of the chapels by his command were unslated, and the gates pulled down. Others were quite demolished, and the tiles and timber carried away. And some brazen images (which the heathens had a long time ignorantly adored) were erected in the market-place of Constantinople as opprobrious spectacles. Here Pythius was placed, there Sminthius, in the Cirque the Delphian tripods, and the Heliconian Muses in the palace.

So that Constantinople (as I said) was full of brazen images, which the pagans had erected in honor of their false gods. But the emperor made those images the objects of contempt and derision, which were erected to honor their gods, and to which men, out of erroneous ignorance, did offer infinite hecatombs and burnt-sacrifices, and now at last discerned their blind folly.

But he took another course with the golden images: for when he understood that the multitude, like children, stood in fear of these golden and silver images, he thought to abol-

⁸ Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, Book III, ch. 47.

ish them, and take away these stumbling-blocks of error, and to lay open hereafter, as it were, a royal highway to heaven. Having thus resolved, he did not think fit to effect his desires by any hostile violence; but he made choice of some trusty and approved men for this business, and sent them with authority unto all nations.

And they being moved by the emperor's sanctimonious holiness, and their own piety towards God, went amongst divers people, suppressing their inveterate and anciently received errors: first commanding the priests of the idols to bring forth their gods, out of the dark caves, into the light, and afterward having defaced their outward beauty, he showed them their inward deformity: and so having broken them in pieces, he melted them, and kept the metal, and gave the heathens the superfluous rubbish, to let them see of what matter their gods were made.

Moreover, this following act of his did parallel the former. After he had thus defaced these dead images, composed of precious and rich materials, he attempted to demolish the brazen statues erected to perpetuate the memory of men, and carried away their fabulous gods.⁹

From his bow went forth arrows of another kind, for the destruction of heresies, and the establishing of the orthodox faith. By him the Council of Nice was called together, and he presided over it; from which we derive that precious symbol, the Nicene Creed. And while by all ecclesiastical methods he labored to preserve the Church from error, he did not fail to send forth many most instructive, and also destructive, edicts against them, of which take the following:

Know therefore by this law which I have established, you Moravians, Valentinians, Marcionists, Paulians, and Cathaphrygians, and all of you who desire that these sects and heresies should increase and spread abroad, which you have followed and maintained; know (I say) that your doctrine is both vain and false. O you enemies of truth and eternal life,

⁹ Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, Book III, ch. 52.

you authors and counselors of death, whose tenets and opinions are contrary to truth, consonant to wickedness, and full of vanity and fabulous fictions; whereby you do spread abroad lies, oppress the innocent, and hide from the faithful the light of truth! for you, wandering after a false idea and shape of piety you poison others with your contagion, and you lay heavy burdens on the conscience, and strive almost to take the daylight from man.

But why should I insist on particulars, seeing brevity of time and my own affairs do not permit me to describe your wickedness in such colors as it deserves? For your wickedness is so great and immense, abounding with all kind of cruelty, that it requires a large description and explication. Besides it is better to hide such actions from the knowledge of men, lest the explanation thereof might disgrace the Christian faith and religion.

What then? shall we suffer this evil contagion to spread further, seeing the whole and sound are daily infected with this pestilent disease? Why should not we rather with all celerity root out such wickedness, by taking notice of, and inflicting public punishments on, the offenders and delinquents?¹⁰

And not only within his dominions, but to the utmost bounds of the world, did he send forth his instructions to kings in favor of the Christian faith:

Moreover, when the king of Persia sent ambassadors unto Constantine, to present him with gifts, to renew their league and friendship, the emperor, desiring to continue all princely correspondence with him, requited the honor he had done him, by sending him far richer gifts. And understanding that there were many Christian churches in Persia, and many people that belonged to Christ's flock, he was very glad to hear; for as he was careful of the Church in general, so also he was solicitous for their good.

“I, keeping the Divine faith, do enjoy the light of truth, and

10 Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, Book III, ch. 62.

by the light of this truth I understand Divine faith. And thereby I discern the Divinity of Christian religion, which guides and brings me to the knowledge of God; by whose gracious assistance in my war I have, from the farthest parts of the East, raised the whole world to a true hope and belief: so that all nations formerly oppressed by tyranny, and almost extinguished with continual calamities, are by my labor and endeavor reduced to a happier estate. I confess that I do honor the true God, and do contemplate and with the pure eye of faith behold Him whose throne is in the highest heavens.”¹¹

It would be endless to quote from the life of this extraordinary man the speeches, and prayers, and epistles, and edicts, and instructions of all sorts which he issued continually; and by which he so effectually suppressed Paganism, that, though afterwards in his second successor, Julian the Apostate, it met with the most zealous supporter, it was only that it might gather its latent energies into a head of resistance, which Theodosius, the second rider, by sword and civil bloodshed was raised up to destroy.

So much I do give in justification of the symbol the bow, as applicable to Constantine: and there is no imperial power besides to whom it can apply. Therein he personated Christ, who shall come with a fiery law, a sharp two-edged sword, arrows of the strong, proceeding forth from His mouth to destroy the anti-Christian power, which He shall there find in being. For both by the bow and by the white horse do I think Constantine a type, and the only regal type, of what Christ shall be when He conies and makes naked the bow of God, and with His arrows pierces the hearts of the enemies of the King.

Constantine proceeded entirely by edicts and the execution of them. He drew no sword in his dominions after he had received his crown. He was not, like the next, a warrior for the faith; but one who, having got his elevated place, did thence

11 Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, Book IV, chaps. 8, 9.

discharge arrows while he lived against the enemies of the truth. How truly it may be said of Constantine, as it is written of Christ, in that day:

Psalm 7

¹³ He ordains His arrows against the persecutors.

And again:

Psalm 18

¹⁴ He sent out His arrows and scattered them.

And again:

Psalm 64

⁷ God shall shoot at them with an arrow.

Perhaps, however, the passage in the *Psalms* which most confirms the interpretation given above of the bow is one applied to the wicked, in which the arrows are literally explained to be words:

Psalm 64

² Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked; from the insurrection of the workers of iniquity:

³ Who whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words:

⁴ That they may shoot in secret at the perfect.

A CROWN

We now proceed to the next part of the symbol:

Revelation 6

² ...and a crown was given unto him.

There are two words used in the original which are both translated by the word “crown” in this book. If the crown upon the heads of the beast (*Revelation 12:3*), and the same crowns upon his horns (*Revelation 13:1*), and the many crowns upon the head of the Word (*Revelation 19:12*), had been translated *diadems*, the distinction in the original would have been preserved; for in all other places of this book, and

indeed of the New Testament, the word in the text is used.

Some have argued from this circumstance that this person cannot be regarded as a Roman emperor. But truly this is no objection, for the word before us is the common Scripture word for a crown. Why another word should be chosen in the symbols of the beast is the thing to be accounted for. And this we will endeavor to do in its own place: but there is no reason why we should here treat that as an extraordinary, which is indeed the ordinary, word of Scripture for the symbol of royalty.

Leaving this, therefore, we go on to examine what the expression “there was given to him a crown” may signify. It points him out to be a regal person, and a sole regent, as has already been observed; but whether it has reference to the wonderful providence which attended his exaltation to the imperial throne I know not.

He was the son of Constantius, one of the two Caesars who, in a second place to the two emperors, divided with them the empire. His mother Helen was, it is said, a British princess, from whom her husband was fain to part for the daughter of Maximinius, who with Diocletian shared the empire.

When these two in one day resigned the empire and retired into private life, Constantius with Galerius possessed the empire; of whom the latter took two Caesars into the fellowship of his government, so that the empire came to be divided a second time amongst four persons.

Constantine grew up in the court of Galerius in an honorable restraint, as a sort of hostage for his father’s fidelity, who lived, for the most part, at York. Being thus the son of a repudiated mother, and the hostage of a tyrannical emperor, there seemed little hope indeed of his ever reaching the throne of kingdoms. His escape is so remarkable, and his arrival so opportune, that I cannot refrain from copying the simple narrative, as it is given by Echard in his *Roman History*:

Constantius in the second year of his reign repaired to Britain, and resided at Eboracum, or York; where, falling into some sickness, he began to be much concerned for the safety of his son Constantine, who for several years had been kept at the court of Diocletian, as an honorable pledge for his father's fidelity, and, since his resignation, in that of Galerius in the East.

Galerius hated Constantius, and was jealous of his son, whom he would have removed by a violent death; but he knew that the army admired Constantine, and would revenge it. He sought, therefore, under pretense of sports and martial exercises, to have dispatched him, but he was still preserved by the hand of Providence.

His father had often sent for him, and had been as often denied, and now in this sickness he had renewed his importunity: so that Galerius, being ashamed to deny this reasonable request, signed him a warrant to go the next day, resolving upon some artifice to stop him in his journey, and prevent his arrival in Britain; and therefore ordered him to come the next morning to receive his final instructions.

But Constantine, as soon as Galerius was gone to his rest, took post-horses with all speed; and at every stage where he came, besides those few he made use of, he hamstrung all the horses that he left behind him. Galerius calling for him the next day, and understanding that he was gone the night before, he immediately commanded several to pursue him; but, hearing soon after that the post-horses were all disabled, he burst out into a violent passion of rage and grief.

In the meantime, Constantine traveled with the utmost speed, and, arriving at York, found his father past recovery. Constantius being asked which of his children should succeed him—having two sons by Theodora—neglecting his second wife and her offspring, he cried aloud, “None but the pious Constantine!” and shortly after expired in the arms of this beloved son.¹²

Constantine, being thus made emperor of the northern parts, had a fearful conflict to maintain before the crown was

12 Echar, *The Roman History*, Vol. II., Chap. VII., p. 539-540.

given to him. He escaped many treasons against his life, hatched by his own father-in-law; and overthrew Maxentius, carrying against him the banner of the cross, and under that banner conquering. Then he carried his arms against Licinius; over whom having also triumphed, he sat down the sole emperor of the Roman earth, which he governed in peace for many years.

The exact parallelism of the expressions in the first two seals, "There was given to him a crown," and "There was given unto him a great sword," seems to imply that the one was to be characterized by regal state, the other by warlike deeds. To play the king in a noble and distinguished way was to be the character of the one; to play the warrior, that of the other.

In the fullest sense was this accomplished in Constantine, who was looked up to by all the kingdoms of the world, and received honorable embassies from all kings. The style in which his edicts and letters ran was this:

"The High and Mighty and Victorious Constantine."

I think it is to this, the style and stateliness in which he sat and ruled the world, that the expression of our text refers. He had so much of the idea of the king, that he built another city to rival Rome, where he kept his court, and which still bears his name,—Constantinople, or the City of Constantine. I cannot better illustrate this point than by transcribing the fourth chapter of the first book of his history by Eusebius:

But this our emperor entered into his reign at what time Alexander died, living and reigning twice as long as Alexander. And moreover, having instructed his army in the precepts of piety, he invaded Britain and the western sea borders; and he adjoined to his empire all northern Scythia, divided before among the barbarians, different in conditions and manner of life; and also he enlarged the bounds of his empire to the farthest southern limits, namely, to the Blemianians and Ethiopians; and besides he subjected the eastern

parts.

Moreover, he subdued the princes and lords of divers countries, even to the Indies, and did illuminate their hearts with the splendor and light of piety. Barbarous nations did most willingly embrace his amity, and sought his favor by embassages and presents sent unto him; were ambitious of his familiarity and friendship; and to honor him the more, they erected his statue, and caused his picture to be drawn. In a word, Constantine only of all the emperors was generally praised of all men, and in royal magnificent words freely and ingenuously professed himself among those nations a servant of that God whom he served.

Neither did his actions contradict his profession, but, being placed in the sphere of virtue, he shined forth with bright beams of piety, obliging men of desert unto him by his liberality, winning men to goodness by his clemency and courtesy, not compelling them by his law; so that all men did willingly obey him, and were glad of his gracious reign; until at length, having spent himself, and being grown old in fighting God's battles, that God, under whose command he served in those holy wars, rewarded him with a military wreath of immortal glory, and having left behind him three children to succeed him in his empire, he changed his mortal empire, to live with God and His saints in an immortal kingdom.¹³

This passage serves likewise to introduce what we have to say upon the last words of this symbol:

Revelation 6

² ...and he went forth conquering and to conquer.

The extent of his conquests is detailed therein, which, beginning from York, stayed not until they reached over those widest regions of the world. Now it almost always happened, that in one battle he overthrew his enemies; and never were the vanquished but glad in his success. Wherever he went he conquered; and wherever he conquered he was hailed as a deliverer. And this so continued to characterize him, that his

13 Eusebius, *History of Constantine*, Book I, ch. 4.

very name may be said to have conquered, and that he died conquering. In proof of which take this other passage from Echard, which also contains a striking incident illustrative of the Church discipline of the period:

Not long before his death he made a funeral oration, in which he discoursed much of the immortality of the soul, and the rewards and punishments of another life; by these and such like methods preparing for himself an easy dismissal out of this; till his meditations were interrupted by the disturbance the Persians made in the East, of which as soon as he received an account, he raised a powerful army, intending, as he said, to make this his last victory. But the enemy being advertised of his sudden expedition, and fearing to be engaged in a war with him, dispatched away their ambassadors, who, upon a humble desire of his friendship, and a promise to make good whatever satisfaction should be required, obtained a peace.

After this, finding himself feverish and distempered, he made use of the warm baths of the city; but receiving no benefit from thence, he removed for change of air to Helenopolis (a city built by him in memory of his mother), and from thence to Nicomedia; in the suburbs of which place, called Achyrona, he was baptized, declaring he designed to have received that seal of his salvation in the waters of Jordan, but God of His infinite wisdom had otherwise disposed of him. Then, having partaken of the holy Eucharist, he departed this life, on the two-and-twentieth day of May, in the sixty-second year of his age and thirty-second of his reign.¹⁴

But I am clearly impressed that these words, “conquering and to conquer,” have reference to the most remarkable banner of the cross, inscribed with these words, “In this conquer,” under which his armies fought. Whether he had it revealed to him by a vision, or not is of no consequence to this point, seeing it is a matter beyond a doubt that from his first great victory over Maxentius to his last his soldiers fought and con-

14 Echard, *The Roman History*, Vol. III, p. 5.

quered under a banner inscribed with the word “Conquer.” How sacred this banner was esteemed, and how carefully it was guarded, will be seen from the following account, given in his *Life* by Eusebius:

As soon as it grew day, he rose up and acquainted his friends with the vision which he had seen; and then, sending for the best goldsmiths and lapidaries, sitting on his royal throne, he described unto them the shape and figure of the cross, and commanded them to make the like with gold and precious stones, which figure we chanced to behold, for the emperor himself vouchsafed to show it unto us.

The figure of the cross was in this manner: The staff was straight, long, and inlaid with gold; the cross-bar was figured in the form of a cross; on the top whereof was a golden crown beset with precious stones: in which was our Saviour’s name inscribed, and expressed in two letters (for the letter p was curiously inserted into the middle of the letter X), which did perspicuously express the name of Christ, which letters the emperor afterward did use to carry in his helmet.

At one of the corners of the cross-bar hung a thin banner of lawn curiously embroidered with gold and precious stones in a strange and admirable manner. This banner, fastened to the pendant, was as long and broad as the cross. The stem or staff was longer than the colors or banner: and under the cross, at the side or border of the banner, there were the pictures of the emperor and his children drawn to the middle, or breast-high; so that the Emperor used this salutary badge as a defensive or Divine charm against his enemies. And he commanded that his army should carry and bear the like cross in their colors.¹⁵

I cannot but look upon it as a most remarkable correspondence with the words “conquering and to conquer,” that these words should be inscribed on his banner, and should become the watchword of all his battles and the talisman of all his victories. I think that, take it for all and all, the symbol is wondrously characteristic of that man who struck the first blow,

15 Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, Book I. chaps. 24, 25.

an effectual and a deadly one, against Paganism.

And when it is remembered that the symbol by which Satan, embodied in Pagan Rome, is represented in the Apocalypse as “the dragon” (*Revelation* 12), and that it was against this Constantine was first raised up to strike a blow, the following account, given by Eusebius, of his statue, will be looked upon not as an accidental but a providential thing, serving to demonstrate that by those who lived in those times, and by the godlike emperor himself, was perfectly understood the end for which he was raised up, and the purpose of Divine Providence which he was fulfilling:

Besides, his own picture or statue was placed in open view over his palace gate, having the sign of the cross over the head thereof, with the figure of a wounded dragon lying couchant underneath his feet, to declare his victory over those savage tyrants that had oppressed and persecuted the Church. For the sacred Scripture, in the books of the Prophets, do call the devil (the instigators of the tyrants’ cruelty) a dragon.

And therefore the emperor, to shadow forth his conquest over the devil, the secret enemy of mankind; and to declare that by the power of the cross, which was over his head, he and his subjects had subdued him and trod him under their feet; he caused a dragon wounded through the belly to be drawn in lively colors underneath his statue.

And this was his emblematical device to express his own victories; being more wonderful in regard that his invention was agreeable to the words of the Prophets concerning this beast. And so this picture, which the emperor devised, did emblematically shadow out the words of the Prophets.¹⁶

16 Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, Book III, ch. 3.

THE OPENING OF THE SECOND SEAL

Revelation 6

³ And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see.

⁴ And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.

THE former seal bears throughout the impress of seated dignity putting itself forth in acts of power and great glory, ruling far and wide over the nations of the earth with a pure and holy sway. Therefore it is proclaimed by the first cherub, “like a lion” (*Revelation 4:7*), which, as we have seen, does personate Christ in His character of taking possession of His inheritance.

In Constantine the Church took the throne and scepter with the strength of the lion, and exercised rule with the purity and sincerity which are symbolized by the whiteness of the horse.

But now that a day of slaughter is to be introduced, the judgment of the sword, and the rider on the horse of flame, it is the second cherubim, “like a calf,” or ox, by whom it is ushered in; to signify, according to the best account I can give of the matter, that the Church was now to be called upon to tread down her enemies under her feet, as the ox treads out the corn.

As I have already said, I consider Theodosius, commonly called the Great, to be the person signified in these seals, because he was the next agent whom God used to subvert and supplant the Pagan idolatries. In the language of Gibbon:

The ruin of Paganism in the age of Theodosius is perhaps the only example of the total extirpation of any ancient and popular superstition; and may therefore be considered as a

singular event in the history of the human mind.¹⁷

Constantine did establish Christianity as the religion of the empire: Theodosius did trample Paganism under foot: to use the words of the same author:

The temples of the Roman world were subverted about sixty years after the conversion of Constantine.

Constantine died in the year 340, and Theodosius arose in the year 379. During this period Christianity had much to suffer from Constantius, the successor of Constantine, who favored the Arians and persecuted the orthodox; and still more from Julian, who, under the thin veil of toleration, sought to exterminate Christianity, by endeavoring to associate it with ignorance, of which it is the natural enemy.

From the following emperors it received an unenlightened and often a heretical patronage, until Theodosius arose; of whom, as standing in parallel with Constantine, the same learned and eloquent historian thus speaks:

Among the benefactors of the Church the fame of Constantine has been rivaled by the glory of Theodosius. If Constantine had the advantage of erecting the standard of the cross, the emulation of his successor assumed the merit of subduing the Arian heresy, and of abolishing the worship of idols in the Roman world. Theodosius was the first of the emperors baptized in the true faith of the Trinity.¹⁸

A RED HORSE

Let this suffice as our general reason for taking up Theodosius as the subject of this seal, which we now proceed to unfold in order.

Revelation 6

⁴ There went out another horse that was red.

17 Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. II, Chapter XXVIII.

18 *Idem*, Chapter XXVII.

This color, I think, has reference to the bloody times in which Theodosius arose and acted; as the white had reference to the progress of light and truth, and the quiet of peace, in which the times of Constantine passed.

From the innocent but humble labors of his farm Theodosius was transported, in less than four months, to the throne of the Eastern empire.

And no sooner had he arisen than he had to retrieve the most bloody field of Adrianople by successive actions, by which at length he prevailed against the barbarians, who had been let into the empire across the Danube by the Emperor Valens. Soon after he had to contend with the Ostrogoths, whom he overthrew by a great naval exploit on the Danube.

The next act of his red-handed scepter was the suppression of the Arians, and their expulsion from Constantinople, where they had held the supremacy since the days of the son of Constantine. Then he proceeded with a heavy hand to oppress, and even to slay, heretics, according to the degree of their error.

The remainder of his reign was of the like character, being mostly occupied with the two civil wars against Maximus and Eugenius (which properly belong to another part of the symbol): what has been said is sufficient to distinguish the red character of Theodosius's reign from the pure glory of that of Constantine; and to those characters of the times in which they lived it is that the colors of the horses refer.

POWER TO TAKE PEACE FROM THE EARTH

Revelation 6

⁵ ...and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth.

The earth, as we have seen all throughout this book, wherever the contrary is not declared, denotes the bounds of the Roman empire: from which that one of the emperors should

have it given him to take peace must signify that in his times civil warfare was permitted to arise. This occurred in the reign of Theodosius twice over; once by the usurpation of Maximus, and again by that of Eugenius.

Maximus raised the standard of revolt in Britain, passed over into Gaul, and at length brought Spain also under his dominion. Thence passing over into Italy, he seated himself upon the throne of Rome, and began to threaten the Eastern half of the empire. Whereupon Theodosius, being supplicated by the family of Gratian and Valentinian, the reigning emperors of the West; whom Maximus had overthrown, took arms in their behalf, overthrew the host of the usurper, and slew him.

It is remarkable that the orthodox emperor should himself attribute the misery which thus befell the Western half of Christendom to the guilt of heresy, which he had been so careful to put down over the East. These are the words of the historian relating his interview with the royal fugitives:

After the first tender expressions of friendship and sympathy, the pious emperor of the East gently admonished Justina that the guilt of heresy was sometimes punished in this world, as well as in the next: and that the public profession of the Nicene faith would be the most efficacious step to promote the restoration of her son, by the satisfaction which it must occasion both on earth and in heaven.¹⁹

A second time had Theodosius the Great to come forth into the field of civil conflict; against Eugenius, whom Arbogastes the Frank, having assassinated the legitimate emperor, had substituted in his stead: this victory being accomplished by an almost manifest interposition of Heaven. Theodosius a few months after paid the debt of nature, and was succeeded by his son Honorius (of whom more hereafter).

19 Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. II, Chap. XXVII.

A GREAT SWORD

Revelation 6

⁴ ...and there was given unto him a great sword.

These things which we have related fully justify the last symbolical feature of this personage, that there was given to him a great sword. As a warrior, no emperor had appeared of equal capacity, or of equal success, since the days of Trajan.

But, if I err not, this great sword, which was put into his hand, has reference to the warlike prowess of the barbarous nations, which he was the first to employ in his service, and by whom he achieved the greatest exploits of his reign.

To the zeal and valour of the barbarians Theodosius was indebted for the success of his arms....The formidable troops of barbarians marched under the ensigns of their natural chieftains. The Iberian, the Arab, and the Goth, who gazed on each other with mutual astonishment, were enlisted in the service of the same prince; and the renowned Alaric acquired in the school of Theodosius the knowledge of the art of war, which he afterwards so fatally exerted for the destruction of Rome.²⁰

The discipline of the Roman legions was greatly relaxed, and their valor also was much departed; but the new force which Theodosius knew how to employ gave him a mighty power, which no one could resist.

It is, moreover, most worthy of notice, as illustrative of these two seals, that while Constantine's wars, after he had received the crown, were altogether beyond the bounds of the empire, as became one who was stamped by Heaven with the sign of conqueror; so those of Theodosius, after he had received his great sword, were wholly within the bounds of the empire, as became one to whom it was appointed of Heaven that he should take peace from the earth.

20 Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. III, Chap. XXVI.

Thus the diversity of their commissions from God is likewise strikingly marked by the diverse forms—of the lion, to roar against his enemies and terrify them, and of the ox, to tread down under his feet—by which the Church is represented in these two actions. For it was as much the characteristic of Constantine's ecclesiastical administration to exalt and magnify Christianity, and make it to be feared, like the noble lion; as it was of Theodosius's to trample down the weeds of heresy, which had grown so rank in the Church.

But while these features do sufficiently identify and characterize these two imperial destroyers of Paganism, it is their characters as the destroyers thereof which bring them forth so prominently in this book of seals. What each accomplished in this way has been already in part declared; but it may be good to add here some further particulars of that greatest victory, which by these two men was achieved, over the rooted errors of thousands of years.

Notwithstanding all the labors of Constantine, there still remained in the city of Rome itself four hundred and twenty-four temples or chapels devoted to the worship of idols.

Paganism was still the constitutional religion of the senate: the hall or temple in which they assembled was adorned by the altar and statue of Victory.²¹

This had been removed by Constantius, restored by Julian, and again removed by Gratian; but by Theodosius the question was proposed in full senate, whether the worship of Jupiter or of Christ should be the religion of the Romans, and by a great majority the ancient superstition was renounced.

The decrees of the senate which proscribed the worship of idols were ratified by the general consent of the Romans, the splendour of the Capitol was defaced, and the solitary tem-

21 Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. III, Chap. XXVIII.

ples were abandoned to ruin and contempt.²²

After the defeat of Maximus, Theodosius, who had already struck several blows against Paganism, proceeded with a high hand to bring it low. He prohibited the use of sacrifices; he set on foot commissions to the chief officers of the provinces to shut the temples, to destroy the instruments of idolatry, and to confiscate the property of the gods for the benefit of the emperor, the Church, and the army.

This kindled the zeal of Christian bishops in all parts, who went forth to destroy and trample down all vestiges of the ancient superstition. The Pagans rallied their distressed affairs under the banner of Eugenius, by whom the altar of Victory was again restored in the senate-house, and the abominations of the idol-worship carried forth into the field: but this last effort of a doomed cause expired in the overthrow of that usurper; after which Paganism sank for ever; or rather Satan, giving up the controversy for Jupiter and Apollo and other gods and goddesses, insinuated the substance of the same wickedness into the Papacy, and gave to that new form of the pagan spirit his seat, and power, and great authority.

The generation that arose in the world after the promulgation of the imperial [Theodosian] laws was attracted within the pale of the Catholic Church; and so rapid, yet so gentle, was the fall of Paganism, that only twenty-eight years after the death of Theodosius the faint and minute vestiges were no longer visible to the ear and eye of the legislator.²³

This complete destruction of Paganism, which had subsisted for thousands of years, and, being gathered under Rome from all the regions of the earth, did there nestle as in the most secure place of the earth, is the most wonderful thing of which there is any record. And that it should have been accom-

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. II, Chap. XXVIII.

plished within the space of half a century is, to one who understands these things, the proof of the hand of God stretched out against it, and that it was not falling by a natural decay, but by the direful judgment of God.

When it is remembered that it was of such strength as, within the twenty years preceding its destruction, to have put forth its most violent, continuous, and powerful effort against Christianity, we see still more strikingly that dispensation of Providence towards it, which our Lord expressed towards the Jews when He said, "Fill up the cup of your iniquity." *Matthew 23:32*.

In the Dioclesian persecution Paganism filled up the cup of its iniquity; which done, the structure of thousands of years was battered down by the Almighty hand by two blows, brought by these two riders, within the space of less than half a century. So fearful are the judgments of God, when He rises to shake terribly the earth!

THE OPENING OF THE THIRD SEAL

Revelation 6

⁵ And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and, lo, a black horse: and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand.

⁶ And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see that you do not hurt the oil and the wine.

THIS introduces a new era in the history of that doomed city, in which was found the blood of all the martyrs. It is characterized by the color of blackness, as the former was by that of fiery redness, and the first of whiteness.

Those interpreters who see these four seals as mere characteristic periods of the primitive Church have not far erred in taking the colors of the horses for the general complexion of the successive times signified. This is an element of the interpretation—a small one indeed, but by no means to be omitted.

The whiteness of the first period is the mild effulgence and pure triumph of truth in the period of Constantine, who ever declared:

Those who still refuse to open their eyes to the celestial light may freely enjoy their temples and their fancied gods.²⁴

The fiery redness of the second period is the flaming zeal with which Theodosius went forth against Paganism and heresy, to root them out and destroy them. I believe that these colors have likewise respect to the civil as well as the ecclesiastical complexion of these several times; whereof the one, as has been said, was full of mild and tranquil glory, the other of civil heats and inflammations, civil wars and bloodshed.

We should expect that this third period, on which we are now to enter, will have about it something which may justify

²⁴ Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. I, Chap. XXI.

the blackness and darkness by which it is denoted. I believe that the emperor referred to is Honorius, and that the events of his time are symbolically described in the third seal, which let us now patiently examine.

A BLACK HORSE

If I err not, the blackness of the third horse is significant of the darkness and desolation, and oppression of death, which came on the Roman empire upon the death of Theodosius, with whom, according to Gibbon, “the glories of Rome expired.”

His two sons, Arcadius and Honorius, succeeded; the former in the East, the latter in the West. It is with the latter, as emperor in Rome, that we have to do; for the seals are chiefly confined to the West, as the trumpets are to the East. The following extract from that eloquent and learned historian well characterizes both the person and the period of Honorius.

The predecessors of Honorius were accustomed to animate by their example, or at least by their presence, the valour of the legions; and the dates of their laws attest the perpetual activity of their motions through the provinces of the Roman world. But the son of Theodosius passed the slumber of his life a captive in his palace, a stranger in his country, and the patient, almost the indifferent, spectator of the ruin of the Western empire, which was repeatedly attacked, and finally subverted, by the arms of the barbarians. In the eventful history of a reign of twenty-eight years it will seldom be necessary to mention the name of the Emperor Honorius.²⁵

A YOKE

Next to the blackness of the horse on which the rider sat is to be taken into account that which the rider had in his hand, translated in our version “a pair of balances,” but which in the original signifies “a yoke,” and is always so rendered in the

25 Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. IV, Chap. XXX.

New Testament (*Matthew* 11:29; *Acts* 15:10; *Galatians* 5:1; *1 Timothy* 6:1). It is not difficult to perceive what led our translators to the deviation from their own constant rule of rendering the word by its true and common signification. In the following verse they observed something indicative of a time of famine, and not apprehending but that this, in the hand of the presiding person, must have allusion to the same state of things, they chose to understand it of “a pair of balances.” Being convinced that interpretation should on no account be permitted to interfere with translation, I shall preserve the proper signification of the word, and try this first.

The bow with the crown, the sword, and the yoke, are the three symbolical characters of the three riders; given to distinguish them from one another, as the lion, the bear, and the leopard of Daniel’s vision distinguish the successive emperors of Babylon, Persia, and Greece.

The first we have interpreted of a royal potentate sending forth his decrees of righteousness to the ends of the earth: the second, of a great warrior who drew his sword in civil war: and the yoke which is in the hand of the third can only be the sign of subjection, not of one who imposes a yoke, but of one upon whom a yoke is imposed.

An emperor whose times should be characterized by oppression is what natural sagacity would make out of the rider with a yoke in his hand. To this answers the color of blackness, which oppression and strangulation bring over the countenance of man. This color is also in Scripture commonly connected with famine:

Lamentations 5

¹⁰ Our skin was black like an oven, because of the terrible famine.

If we understand this to indicate both the oppression of the yoke, and the blackness of famine, we will find ourselves confirmed by the color of the next horse, or period of judgment,

which is greenness; for the word translated “pale” should be rendered “green,” as it is in other parts of this book (*Revelation* 8:1, 9:4); indicating, as I take it, the color which flesh puts on in its progress to corruption. And this also I think to be signified by the person who rides thereon being denominated “death.”

There would then be a gradual succession from whiteness and purity of health, through this fiery redness of inflammation, to the coal blackness of violence or famine, and thence again to the livid greenness of corruption in death. It is not necessary that I should connect the black color either with the yoke separately, or with the famine separately, seeing both go together in the description of this symbol. While it is necessary sometimes to anticipate, we are not taking it for granted that the next verse refers to famine, which we now proceed to show.

It is introduced in a very peculiar and almost unprecedented way, by a voice from the midst of the four living creatures, which utters these words:

Revelation 6

⁶ A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny, and see that you do not hurt the wine and the oil.

Some have inclined to interpret these words symbolically, and to see under them a scarcity of the means of spiritual life; and some even are offended that everything whatever in the book should not be symbolically interpreted. To the former we make answer, that the voices which come from heaven, and in general all the voices put into the mouths of angels and spirits in this book, admit only of a literal interpretation.

For example, the three words, “Come and see,” with which each seal is introduced, signifies nothing more or less than come and see: there is no mystery or second meaning in the words at all.

In like manner, the voice in the fifth seal coming from the souls under the altar, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, do You not avenge our blood upon them that dwell on the earth?" and the words from the kings of the earth, "Fall on us and cover us," &c, and every other such voice, without any exception that we have been able to find, is strictly explicative, and as explanation to be received and interpreted.

This also is the answer to the second class of objectors, who would deprive us of all the helps scattered up and down the vision, and leave it as a riddle to be made out according to every man's notion. A sound and judicious interpreter will take his helps from every quarter, both from his natural sagacity in interpreting symbols, and from the hints which are cast out for his correction and guidance.

Such a hint I believe this before me to be; and because it comes out from the middle of the four beasts, and not from any one of them, I understand it to be a word of interpretation affecting not this seal only, but casting a light upon the general subject of the four seals; showing us that they are concerning judgments.

Now the words uttered surely refer to famine, and to nothing else. The measure of wheat for a penny, the three measures of barley for a penny, both indicate a state of famine, being double the common price at which these commodities were wont to be sold; reducing the allowance of the common people, which is commonly scanty enough, to one half of what is necessary to support life.

This would be felt in any part of the world as a state of famine, but especially in Rome; in which, long before this time, the people had been brought to the very edge of continual want.

The second part of the expression, "and see that you do not hurt the wine and the oil," does not convey to us the forcible meaning which it must have done to an inhabitant of Rome.

And indeed these words are almost a proof that unto the city of Rome this seal specially refers; for there only were large stores of wine and oil laid up.

It is not to the olive, or to the grape, that the words have reference, but to the stores of wine and of oil which were laid up in Rome, and which here are commanded not to be injured, because of their preciousness, in consequence of the destruction and desolation which was about to come over the oliveyards and the vineyards.

The words indicate a want of the ordinary supply, by calling for care of the stores which had been accumulated. The oil was wont to be obtained from Africa, the wine from Italy: these two together formed the fourth part of the earth whereon complete destruction comes in the next seal; and therefore, in anticipation thereof, the voice proceeds forth under this one. It is an actual scarcity therefore, with a prospective desolation of the regions from which the stores were wont to be supplied.

The state of society is so different among us, from what it was in those days in Rome, that it is necessary here to make a quotation of some length from the historian of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, in order to possess the unlearned reader with the true state of the case.

The name of that city was still pronounced with respect; the frequent and capricious tumults of its inhabitants were indulged with impunity; and the successors of Constantine, instead of crushing the last remains of the democracy, by the strong arm of military power, embraced the mild policy of Augustus, and studied to relieve the poverty and to amuse the idleness of an innumerable people.

I. For the convenience of the lazy plebeians, the monthly distributions of corn were converted into a daily allowance of bread; a great number of ovens was constructed and maintained at the public expense; and at the appointed hour each citizen who was furnished with a ticket ascended the flight of

steps which had been assigned to his peculiar quarter or division, and received, either as a gift, or at a very low price, a loaf of bread of the weight of three pounds for the use of his family.

II. The forests of Lucania, whose acorns fattened large droves of wild hogs, afforded, as a species of tribute, a plentiful supply of cheap and wholesome meat. During five months of the year a regular allowance of bacon was distributed to the poorer citizens; and the annual consumption of the capital, at a time when it was much declined from its former lustre, was ascertained, by an edict of Valentinian the Third, at three millions six hundred and twenty-eight thousand pounds.

III. In the manners of antiquity the use of oil was indispensable for the lamp, as well as for the bath: and the annual tax which was imposed on Africa for the benefit of Rome amounted to the weight of three millions of pounds, to the measure, perhaps, of three hundred thousand English gallons.

IV. The anxiety of Augustus to provide the metropolis with sufficient plenty of corn was not extended beyond that necessary article of human subsistence; and when the popular clamour accused the dearness and scarcity of wine, a proclamation was issued, by the grave reformer, to remind his subjects, that no man could reasonably complain of thirst, since the aqueducts of Agrippa had introduced into the city, so many copious streams of pure and salubrious water. This rigid sobriety was sensibly relaxed; and, although the generous design of Aurelian does not appear to have been executed in its full extent, the use of wine was allowed on very easy and liberal terms. The administration of the public cellars was delegated to a magistrate of honorable rank; and a considerable part of the vintage of Campania was reserved for the fortunate inhabitants of Rome.²⁶

It is evident from this account of the day, which is written for the very time we suppose our seal to be conversant with, that from Africa and Italy, Rome was supplied with the necessary articles mentioned in the text. And if it shall appear that

26 Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. III, Chap. XXXI.

in the time of this and the following seals these regions of the earth were doomed to utter spoliation, there is at once a beautiful harmony with the exposition given above, and a great light for that which is to follow, contained in this voice; which, coming as it does from the midst of the four beasts, we understand as having to do in some way or other with all the seals. Moreover it gives a distinctness of locality to this seal which none of the rest has.

1. The first indeed seems to have a largeness of plan, extending even beyond the earth—the bow and the “conquering and to conquer” convey somewhat of that vast circumference of surrounding nations, to which Constantine’s acting extended itself.
2. The second is expressly confined to the earth, as Theodosius’s action was.
3. The third is in a degree limited to Rome, where were the stores of wine and oil.
4. And the fourth is felt mostly upon a fourth part of the earth, namely, Africa and Italy, as we shall see in the sequel.

While I make this remark, it is not to bring into doubt that the Roman empire, and particularly the West, is the scene of all these seals; and that in this respect they have a common locality signified by the name “the earth,” and also by the riders, or horses,—of which locality to express the different states under four acts of progressive judgment, these four colors are given; but simply to point out the specialties which are to be found in each, and which being perceived goes so far to try a false and insufficient interpretation, to confirm a true and complete one.

The patience of an observer is his best quality: hurry and haste argue a theorist, not an observer. We are now prepared to proceed to interpretation, and to show that under Honorius, who succeeded Theodosius in the West, this symbol of

blackness, of yokes, and of famine, had exact fulfillment.

The master-key of our interpretation of the seals is, that they are acts of powerful judgment upon Satan and his servants, who have usurped the inheritance of this earth; to the end of their being utterly destroyed, cast out, and supplanted, in order to make room for Christ and His servants to possess it, and rule over it for ever. And because Rome had been the center of all opposition to Christ and His Church, and thence had gone forth the edicts for their persecution and martyrdom, therefore upon the arena of the Roman empire, which Satan had chosen for his seat and stronghold, is the controversy carried on, and the victory wrought out.

The first two seals have brought the invisible powers of darkness to an end; they have done judgment upon the gods, or rather the demons which as God were worshiped. Paganism is at an end; the dragon and his angels are cast down; the chief part of the victory is accomplished.

It remains now that the earthly powers, the constitutions of empire, the people and the language, the cities and the territories,—in one word, the whole Roman estate,—should be visited. First the idols, then the idolaters; first the rulers of the darkness, then the instruments with which they have served themselves.

This is according to the method of God in times past, and according to the rules of strict responsibility. These two latter seals we shall accordingly find do fall upon the earthly, as the two former fell upon the spiritual powers, who wrought together such havoc of the Church.

The “yoke” which this third rider carries in his hand is the symbol of that miserable bondage and subjection into which all the Western empire in his time were brought by the barbarous nations, which then came to act together as the scourge of God.

These nations occupied all the northern frontier of the Roman empire, from Scotland in the west to the extreme limits of Persia, and even of China, in the east. In the reign of Valens, the predecessor of Theodosius, they had been imprudently admitted across the Danube, within the bounds of the empire, which they continued to disturb until, Valens having fallen in battle against them, Theodosius was raised up and made them friendly, and even serviceable, to the empire in his time.

But no sooner was this master as well of policy as of war removed from the helm of the troubled state, than these Goths whom he had kept quiet in the plains of Thrace and Thessaly arose, and exchanging their recently adopted implements of agriculture for their ancient weapons of war, and having over them one raised up and endowed of God for such a work, Alaric, who under the second trumpet is represented by the symbol of a mountain burning with fire, they laid waste the whole of Greece, and there, being resisted with success by Stilicho, the general of Honorius, they shaped their course for Italy by the head of the Adriatic, and fell down upon Honorius enjoying his luxurious ease, in the palace of Milan.

Thence hardly escaping, and closely pursued, he was forced to throw himself into the fortified town of Asta or Asti, and there endured a siege from the Gothic king. So soon did he begin to wear the emblem of the yoke.

Though this storm blew over in a short time, it was sharp enough so to affright the Roman emperor, as to make him feel himself insecure at Rome, and retire to Ravenna, because of its position, impregnable to land forces; and here, for the rest of his life, he made himself a voluntary prisoner in his own dominions, justifying still more exactly the symbolical character of the rider with the yoke of bondage in his hands, rather than the sword or the bow.

This is so very remarkable an event in the history of the Ro-

man emperors, and so exactly fulfills the symbol of “the yoke,” that I shall give it in the very words of the historian.

The recent danger to which the person of the emperor had been exposed in the defenceless palace of Milan urged him to seek a retreat in some inaccessible fortress of Italy, where he might securely remain while the open country was covered by a deluge of barbarians....This advantageous situation was fortified by art and labor; and in the twentieth year of his age the emperor of the West, anxious only for his personal safety, retired to the perpetual confinement of the walls and morasses of Ravenna. The example of Honorius was imitated by his feeble successors, the Gothic kings, and afterwards the exarchs, who occupied the throne and palace of the emperors; and till the middle of the eighth century Ravenna was considered as the seat of government and the capital of Italy.²⁷

I consider this to be the personal thing proper to Honorius, which is represented under the figure of “the yoke.” But in this respect he was only an emblem of his kingdom, whose miserable bondage and wretchedness we proceed further to narrate.

FAMINE

It was not the Eastern half of the empire, or, as it is called in this book, the third part of the earth, alone which was to receive the scourge of the barbarous nations into its bosom, the hail mingled with blood of the first, and the burning mountain of the second trumpet. Now that Alaric is driven out of Italy, the Western or Roman half is to be deluged as with swarms of locusts following in swift succession.

First come the Northern Germans, under Radagasisus, to the very gates of Rome (AD 406), who were defeated and mostly destroyed by Stilicho; and those that were left fell back upon Gaul, and reduced it to a state of great misery.

Two years thereafter, Alaric a second time broke down from

27 Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. IV, Chap. XXX.

the north of Italy, moved, as he himself asseverated, “by a solemn and preternatural impulse which directed, and even compelled, his march to the gates of Rome.” And he invested it so closely as to bring upon it the uttermost extremities of famine.

The food the most repugnant to sense or imagination the elements the most unwholesome and pernicious to the constitution, were eagerly devoured, and fiercely disputed, by the rage of hunger. A dark suspicion was entertained, that some desperate wretches fed on the bodies of their fellow-creatures, whom they had secretly murdered; and even mothers (such was the horrid conflict of the two most powerful instincts implanted by nature in the human breast), even mothers are said to have tasted the flesh of their slaughtered infants. Many thousands of the inhabitants of Rome expired in their houses, or in the street, from want of sustenance.²⁸

When for a contribution of money this first siege was raised, and the communications with the country opened again, the historian observes, that:

...the future subsistence of the city was secured by the ample magazines which were deposited in the public and private granaries.²⁹

I quote these words as casting light upon the voice which came from the midst of the beasts, and in explanation of the condition of things under this seal.

This same year he besieged the city a second time, and overawed it in a manner which confirms still more the language of this seal, as applicable to these times. I give it again in the language of that historian who, less than all others, will be supposed capable of favoring prophecy; and yet one would almost think the following passage was written with an eye to this seal:

28 Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. III, Chap. XXXI.

29 *Ibid.*

The Roman port [Ostia] insensibly swelled to the size of an episcopal city, where the corn of Africa was deposited in spacious granaries, for the use of the capital. As soon as Alaric was in possession of that important place, he summoned the city to surrender at discretion; and his demands were enforced by the positive declaration, that a refusal, or even a delay, should be instantly followed by the destruction of the magazines, on which the life of the Roman people depended. The clamours of the people, and the terrors of famine, subdued the pride of the senate.³⁰

This year also the city was spared; but the year following (AD 410), being besieged a third time, it was taken and given up to the sack of the Goths. This was a direful retribution upon that wicked city for the blood of the martyrs which it had shed. In the midst of it, God spared His own people; for Alaric being a Christian, though, like the rest of his nation, devoted to the Arian heresy, had given orders that the churches should be spared, with all who took refuge therein.

And God's hand was both seen and acknowledged in the series of events which thus terminated the glory of Rome.

The learned work concerning the City of God was professedly composed by St. Augustine to justify the ways of Providence in the destruction of the Roman greatness. He celebrates with peculiar satisfaction this memorable triumph of Christ; and insults his adversaries, by challenging them to produce some similar example of a town taken by storm, in which the fabulous gods of antiquity had been able to protect either themselves or their deluded votaries.³¹

To describe the misery which attended and ensued upon this righteous judgment of God would be almost impossible; a few sentences, however, may be transcribed to help our conception.

The nations who invaded the Roman empire had driven be-

30 *Ibid.*

31 *Ibid.*

fore them whole troops of hungry and affrighted provincials, less apprehensive of servitude than of famine. The calamities of Rome and Italy dispersed the inhabitants to the most lonely, the most secure, the most distant places of refuge—the most noble maidens of Rome were basely sold to the lust and avarice of the Syrian merchants.

The Italian fugitives were dispersed through the provinces, along the coast of Egypt and Asia, as far as Constantinople; and the village of Bethlem, the solitary residence of St. Jerome and his female converts, was crowded with illustrious beggars of either sex, and every age, who excited the public compassion by the remembrance of their past fortune.

This awful catastrophe of Rome filled the astonished empire with grief and terror. So interesting a contrast of greatness and ruin disposed the fond credulity of the people to deplore, and even to exaggerate, the afflictions of the queen of cities. The clergy, who applied to recent events the lofty metaphors of oriental prophecy, were sometimes tempted to confound the destruction of the capital and the dissolution of the globe.³²

This is not the whole of that misery which entitles the reign of Honorius to be set forth by blackness, the yoke, and famine of corn and wine and oil. The same year in which Rome had been first besieged, the province of Spain was invaded by the Suevi, the Vandals, and the Alans, and other tribes, who brought it into a lower pass of misery almost than Italy itself.

The progress of famine reduced the miserable inhabitants to feed on the flesh of their fellow-creatures; and even the wild beasts, who multiplied without control in the desert, were exasperated by the taste of blood, and the impatience of hunger, boldly to attack and devour their human prey. Pestilence soon appeared, the inseparable companion of famine; a large proportion of the people was swept away; and the groans of the dying excited only the envy of their surviving friends.³³

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

There were also continual seditions and insurrections, and even usurpations, during the reign of Honorius, as of Constantine over Britain, and Gaul, and Spain, whom for a while Honorius admitted to the share of the Western empire; and of Jovinus in Gaul after his death, and of Heraclian in Africa, the granary of Rome, which greatly distressed the capital for food, until he fell in an attempt to obtain possession of it. The Burgundians, also, made good their position in those countries which are still called by their name.

It would be wearisome to travel over the details of bondage, famine, and bloodshed which followed the death of Theodosius, and got such a head, through the supineness of Honorius, as to proceed for a century after his death under the guidance of Genseric king of the Vandals, and Attila king of the Huns, and Euric king of the Visigoths, and Clovis king of the Franks, and Odoacer king of the Heruli, until the Western empire altogether sunk in the year 476, in the person of Augustulus, within fifty years of Honorius's death. The following passage from Dr. Robertson's *Charles V.* may well sum up the history of this fearful period, and confirm the symbols of the third seal.

Wherever they marched their route was marked with blood. They ravaged or destroyed all around them: they made no distinction between what was sacred and what was profane. They respected no age, or sex, or rank. What escaped the fury of the first inundation perished in those which followed it. The most fertile and populous provinces were converted into deserts, in which were scattered the ruins of villages and cities that afforded shelter to a few miserable inhabitants whom chance had preserved, or the sword of the enemy wearied with destroying had spared.

The conquerors who first settled in the countries which they had wasted were expelled or exterminated by new invaders, who, coming from regions farther removed from the civilized parts of the world, were still more fierce and rapacious. This brought new calamities upon mankind, which did

not cease until the North, by pouring forth successive swarms, was drained of people, and could no longer furnish instruments of destruction. Famine and pestilence, which always march in the train of war when it ravages with such inconsiderate cruelty, raged in every part of Europe and completed its sufferings.

If a man were called to fix upon the period in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most calamitous and afflicted, he would without any hesitation name that which elapsed from the death of Theodosius the Great to the establishment of the Lombards in Italy. [Theodosius died AD 395, the reign of Alboinus in Lombardy began AD 571, so that this period was 176 years.]

The contemporary authors, who beheld that scene of desolation, labor and are at a loss for expressions to describe the horror of it. The scourge of God, the destroyer of nations, are the dreadful epithets by which they distinguish the most noted of the barbarous leaders: and they compare the ruin which they had brought on the world to the havoc occasioned by earthquakes, conflagrations, or deluges, the most formidable and fatal calamities which the imagination of man can conceive.³⁴

Our view of the third seal, therefore, is, that:

- the blackness of the horse represents the empire in a state of famine, or in the agonies of violent death, covered over with mourning and misery and woe;
- the rider with the yoke in his hand represents Honorius the emperor living in a state of shameful imprisonment, a self-made bondsman, as also the state of bonds into which his empire was brought by his effeminacy;
- the voice from the midst of the four beasts represents the state of famine into which Rome was brought by all her sieges and sackings; and
- the whole exhibits God's judgment upon the idolaters after He had done judgment upon the idols.

34 William Robertson, *History of Charles V.*, Section I, p. 11-12.

The period mentioned by Dr. Robertson as the most calamitous in the history of mankind begins with the third seal, and extends, as we shall see, over the fourth also. These two seals together contain the catastrophe of the Western half or Roman part of the empire.

For it is most worthy of observation, that during this period the Eastern half continued tranquil, save in respect of religious disputes; and, when invaded from the side of Persia, had in general the advantage. Their time was not yet come: but when the time for the scourge of Rome arrived, those barbarians who had obtained seats in Thrace, and Thessaly, and Greece, and done therein the havoc of the first two trumpets, arose and came like eagles to the spoil, over into Italy; against which, together with Africa, Spain, Gaul, and Britain, they raged until they had subverted everything; and changed manners, names, dresses, language, and whatever else is the most durable of human inventions.

Rome was sacked by the Goths, and afterwards sacked again by the Vandals, and over again sacked by its own people; and with all Italy was brought into such a state as surpasses all description. It took little more than half a century from Constantine's conversion to eradicate Paganism: it took little more than half a century from the accession of Honorius to eradicate the Roman name, and plant over the wide provinces of the west of Europe barbarians who, anterior to that period, were utterly unknown.

He who looks upon these things with a thoughtful mind will not wonder that they should occupy such a prominent place in those seals of judgment by which Christ wins His way to the throne of kingdoms. Nobody who reflects upon the interpretation which we have given of these three seals will think that they are beneath the dignity of the actor and the end of the action, which is to possess Christ and the saints of all the kingdoms under heaven.

THE OPENING OF THE FOURTH SEAL

Revelation 6

⁷ And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see.

⁸ And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.

THE state of mortality and corruption into which the realms under the dominion of Rome had been brought by the barbarous nations is the thing which is set forth by the greenness (not paleness, as in our version) of the fourth horse—namely, the greenness which flesh takes on when passing into a state of putrefaction.

Since the termination of the former seal in the death of Honorius, Italy had undergone various subjugations and continual cruelties, from which it rested not until the conquest and reign of Theodoric from the year 493 to 526; during which it began to breathe again, and to recover strength.

But though a just and virtuous prince and a promoter of peace, he had, like all the rest of the barbarians, embraced the Arian creed; denying the faith of Jesus Christ as God, and believing Him to be only a creature. This in a king is direct treason against his Sovereign, for which no private or personal virtues can atone. If an Arian king, who sets up a head against Christ, not through ignorance, but out of bold and pertinacious opposition, is to be permitted to reign unmolested, then is Christ's name and office brought into entire contempt upon the earth, and the submission of kings to His authority is at an end. His providence no longer maintains His truth, and the way is opened for the denial of God Himself, by the denial of Jesus Christ whom He has sent.

During the same period that Arianism was upon the throne of Italy, it raged also over the whole extent of Africa with a violence not surpassed, if equaled, by that of the Pagan persecutions. The Vandal kings, one after another, from Genseric, AD 429, to Gelimer, AD 530, persecuted the orthodox Church in Africa with the most hideous violence; until the Vandal kingdom was subverted by Belisarius, the general of Justinian.

THE FOURTH PART OF THE EARTH

These two provinces of Italy and Africa constituted one of the four prefectures into which the whole empire was divided by Constantine, and so together made up what in the prophetic language is called the fourth part of the earth. And to this region it is, as I believe, that this seal specially applies itself under that name.

Why this region should have a seal specially appropriated to itself I can see no better reason to assign, than that in Italy and Africa the sea of confusion had come to rest, and produced two heterodox and antichristian kingdoms; whereas in Spain, and Gaul, and Britain, it was still working on in war and bloodshed. We shall find the same bad pre-eminence given to Italy in the act of vials, for the reason that she had shed the blood of saints and prophets. And for that same reason may the like preeminence be given to it among the seals.

But I rather incline to look upon this seal as the judgment of God upon the scourges of His Church. These Gothic nations, infected with zeal for Arianism, were permitted to invade the Catholic Church and persecute them, if it were possible, out of their monastic and papal services which were fast ripening into a body and system of error. In Egypt and other parts of Africa the monastic and ascetic life came fastest to a head: and in the African councils also the rites and ceremonies of the antichristian Church rushed up with the greatest rankness.

To bring them back from that region of the sense into the region of the reason, from conferring with Christ in the flesh to confer with Him in the Spirit, His Divinity is permitted to be contradicted by these Arian nations, and the heretics are suffered to have the power over the orthodox; whereby their monasteries, nunneries, cathedral colleges, and other hives of drones, or workshops of human merit, were all dispossessed, and their inmates forced to seek their religion all independent of such refuges of lies: and no doubt many were compelled to the stronghold of their faith in Christ Jesus, and to depend upon the Holy Spirit of promise, which also they received in wonderful outpourings.

I quote from Gibbon, one of the most skeptical writers of the last age, the following account of some who were driven to Constantinople by the persecutions of the Vandals.

Tepasa, a maritime colony of Mauritania, sixteen miles to the east of Caesarea, had been distinguished in every age by the orthodox zeal of its inhabitants. They had braved the fury of the Donatists; they resisted or chided the tyranny of the Arians. The town was deserted on the approach of an heretical bishop: most of the inhabitants who could procure ships passed over to the coast of Spain; and the unhappy remnant, refusing all communion with the usurper, still presumed to hold their pious, but illegal, assemblies.

Their disobedience exasperated the cruelty of Huneric. A military count was dispatched from Carthage to Tepasa: he collected the Catholics in the forum, and, in the presence of the whole province, deprived the guilty of their right hands and their tongues. But the holy confessors continued to speak without tongues; and this miracle is attested by Victor, an African bishop, who published an history of the persecution within two years after the event.

“If any one,” says Victor, “should doubt of the truth, let him repair to Constantinople and listen to the clear and perfect language of Restitutus, the subdeacon, one of these glorious sufferers, who is now lodged in the palace of the Emperor

Zeno, and is respected by the devout empress.”

At Constantinople, we are astonished to find a cool, a learned, and unexceptionable witness, without interest, and without passion, Aeneas of Gaza, a Platonic philosopher, has accurately described his own observations on these African sufferers.

“I saw them myself: I heard them speak: I diligently inquired by what means such an articulate voice could be formed without any organ of speech: I used my eyes to examine the report of my ears; I opened their mouth, and saw that the whole tongue had been completely torn away by the roots—an operation which the physicians generally suppose to be mortal.”

The testimony of Aeneas of Gaza might be confirmed by the superfluous evidence of the Emperor Justinian, in a perpetual edict; of Count Marcellinus, in his Chronicle of the Times; and of Pope Gregory the First, who had resided at Constantinople, as the minister of the Roman pontiff. They all lived within the compass of a century; and they all appeal to their personal knowledge, or the public notoriety, for the truth of a miracle, which was repeated in several instances, displayed on the greatest theatre of the world, and submitted, during a series of years, to the calm examination of the senses.

DEATH UPON A PALE HORSE

But when the Vandals of Africa and Italy had served the purpose of God in scourging the orthodox Church for the corruptions, they were neither permitted to extinguish it, nor yet to settle down into a bulwark of error in that portion of the earth where God had resolved to preserve His truth; and accordingly He raised up one, whom He strengthened to do the work of destruction with so vast and mighty a hand that he is symbolized in the text by Death.

He comes to reap his harvest, and he brings his gamer with him; which is Hades, or Hell, the receptacle of departed spirits: and they have power over the fourth part of the earth, to

kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth. This is perhaps the boldest and sublimest figure which was ever given by poet or prophet to represent destructive devastation.

But that it represents both a human act and a human actor is beyond a doubt from the analogy of the preceding seals, and from intrinsic evidence in the fourth seal itself, in that it is declared that the rider Death had power to kill with death; proving that the rider Death is only a symbol for some destructive person: for what were the meaning of saying that Death had power to kill with death?

There is, I confess, a startling grandeur in this seal, which rises high above the other three: a king, a warrior, and a bondsman, bring their appointed burdens upon the earth; but here one like Death comes to reap the harvest of it. They did but ripen things for this harvest of Death: and the Harvestman being come, he takes to himself his four chief instruments, the sword, hunger, death (I suppose by pestilence), and the beasts of the earth.

This is an emperor, otherwise the three preceding are not such; but no emperor would be the devastator and destroyer of his own dominions. There is a peculiarity in this which much confirms the interpretation.

These two provinces of Italy and Africa had been for half a century wrested from the empire, and were possessed by other kings, his enemies not only in power but in religion also. In order to recover them both to the empire, and to the Church, Justinian took the sword in hand, and wrought such fearful havoc by Belisarius and Narses as will be found to justify the extraordinary nature of the symbols.

It is indeed a very wonderful coincidence that Procopius, the historian of Justinian, should characterize him as a demon in human form sent forth for the destruction of mankind. He also relates how a monk saw the prince of the demons, in-

stead of Justinian, on the throne; and that Theodora's marriage was foretold to be with a great demon; and other things, which, however absurd they be, and wide of the truth, do yet express what was the sense of contemporaries concerning the man who in the text is figured by Death.

One quotation, however, I will make from Gibbon, a historian who would not willingly have confirmed any part of Holy Scripture. Speaking of the plague which raged during this reign, he thus expresses the substance of the fourth seal:

No facts have been preserved to sustain an account, or even a conjecture, of the numbers that perished in this extraordinary mortality. I find only, that during three months, five, and at length ten, thousand persons died each day at Constantinople; that many cities of the East were left vacant; and that in several districts of Italy the harvest and the vintage withered on the ground. The triple scourge of war, pestilence, and famine afflicted the subjects of Justinian; and his reign is disgraced by a visible decrease of the human species, which has never been repaired in some of the fairest countries of the globe.³⁵

And to this passage the following note is given as the confirmation:

After some figures of rhetoric, the sands of the sea, &c, Procopius (Anecdot. c. 18) attempts a more definite account that [three Greek words] had been exterminated under the reign of the imperial demon. The expression is obscure in grammar and arithmetic, and a literal interpretation would produce several millions of millions. Alemannus (p. 80,) and Cousin (tom. iii. p. 178,) translate this passage "two hundred millions;" but I am ignorant of their motives. If we drop the [Greek word], the remaining [two Greek words], "a myriad of myriads", would furnish one hundred millions, a number not wholly inadmissible.³⁶

35 Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. III, Chap. XLIII.
36 *Ibid.*

These observations of the best of the contemporary, and the most skeptical of the modern, historians ought to remove all hesitation from the minds of judicious men arising at the first hearing of the application of this Death upon the pale horse to a mortal man, and that a very renowned emperor.

The vial confines us to those acts of the Emperor Justinian which were consummated within the fourth part of the earth; that is, Africa and Italy, one of the four prefectures of Constantine, from whom the divisions of the empire both into three and into four parts are taken.

Constantine received the crown, perhaps, to indicate not only that he was the first Christian monarch whom God alone counts worthy of that designation, but that from his constitution the form and fashion of the kingdom are taken. And certain it is that both the third and fourth part, the only divisions of the earth referred to in this book, have their origin from him.

Confining ourselves then to the actions of Justinian within that limit, we are not permitted to enter into the first act of his reign, the wars against Persia, which brought to light the most soldierly qualities of Belisarius. Him he employed in the conquest of Africa; upon which entering in the year 533 AD, he achieved it with matchless diligence and conduct,—in little more than one year bringing forever to an end the conquests and the very race of the Vandals, in that region of the earth.

One might almost know in the page of history a prophetic event from any other; it is so expeditiously and so completely done, in so short a time, and with such inadequate means. Belisarius did not carry with him above thirty-five thousand men, and in one year the subjugation of Africa was complete, and the king brought captive to Constantinople.

With still more expedition was Sicily wrested from the Goths. But these things were only preparatory to the great work of recovering Italy out of the hands of the barbarians,

who had now enjoyed it for more than half a century. On this enterprise he entered Italy and prevailed against it, from Naples unto Rome, which (AD 536) was once more delivered from the hands of the barbarians.

This, being the center of the iniquity, became the center of the retribution. For in Rome and around Rome armies both valiant and strong now began to contend, and by their contentions to bring back the reign of desolation over that doomed city, in which is...

Revelation 18

²⁴ ...found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.

The Goths mustered their strength, and besieged the city with mighty hosts, and set the battle in array against it on every side; and there fell that day of them not less than thirty thousand men. Yet, with all the precautions and valor of such a man as Belisarius, the city was reduced to the utmost extremity of famine and distress; the country around was wasted beyond measure; and, by one form of death or another, it is believed that one third of the whole nation of the Ostrogoths perished under and around the walls.

Meanwhile, in the north of Italy, John, surnamed the Sanguinary, was letting loose the utmost havoc of intestine war. After a siege of more than one year, the Goths broke up with dismay, to chastise the northern enemy; but, being with equal valor withstood there, and pursued by the indefatigable Belisarius, they were utterly ruined and dispersed.

I observe, in the history of Divine Providence, that when the complete destruction of a people or a country is purposed of God, it never proceeds at one blow; but most frequently there are one or two intervals, during which the doomed and desperate people may breathe again, and make a head, and so be the more utterly eradicated. It was so with the Gothic nations of Italy, at this crisis of their fate; who found time to re-

cruit their disabled affairs by occasion of the envy conceived of Belisarius, and the elevation of Narses as his rival in the very bosom of his camp; while, by the same occasion, the desolation of Italy was carried on by two Roman armies, under leaders of almost equal skill.

I am not writing a history of these events, but justifying the ways of Providence, and vindicating the application of this seal to Justinian.

The distressed Goths called the Burgundians to their aid, who poured down upon the north of Italy like lions on the fold, took and sacked Milan, putting to the sword in this enterprise not less than three hundred thousand males. Which success brought down, next year, a hundred thousand Franks to ravage and destroy: of whom one third perished through the very devastation which they themselves had made; starving, or living on unwholesome food, in the midst of heaps of spoil.

Meanwhile Belisarius, by magnanimity and skill, brought Ravenna into his power, and made the Gothic king prisoner, and broke the people from being a nation, all in the space of about two years, with hardly at any time more than ten thousand regular soldiers under his command. Two such complete actions as the breaking of the Vandals and of the Goths from being a people, and taking their kings captive, and extinguishing the Arian dynasties within the space of seven years, occur not, perhaps, in the history of the world. And when the undisciplined character of the Roman armies, and the unstable jealous character of the Roman emperor, is taken into account, it seems little less than a miracle.

We have seen a parallel in our own day, when the cup of the iniquity of the papal nations was full. But the misery of Italy is not yet ended: as our historian says,

The calamities which followed the departure of Belisarius

accomplished the ruin of these unfortunate countries.³⁷

..namely, Italy and Africa. We return to Africa. Discontent arose through the avarice and injustice of the new governors, and broke out into a furious sedition at Carthage, “which desolated Africa for ten years.” It began with the indiscriminate slaughter of the inhabitants of Carthage, the capital of Africa; and thence proceeded...

...rapidly to sink that country into the state of barbarism from which it had been raised by the Phoenician colonies and Roman laws: and every step of intestine discord was marked by some deplorable victory of savage man over civilized society.³⁸

The Romans found a new enemy in the Moors, who wandered over the interminable deserts which lay behind the province, alternately conquerors and conquered. Poor Africa—Africa the granary of Rome—became so desolated,

...that in many parts a stranger might wander whole days without meeting the face either of a friend or an enemy...

When Procopius first landed [along with Belisarius], he admired the populousness of the cities and country, strenuously exercised in the labors of commerce and agriculture. In less than twenty years that busy scene was converted into a silent solitude; the wealthy citizens escaped to Sicily and Constantinople; and the secret historian has confidently affirmed that five millions of Africans were consumed by the wars and government of the Emperor Justinian.³⁹

Can anything represent this? Is any figure worthy to represent it, but that of Death riding through the region, and Hades following after him? If it shall appear that Italy was brought into a like pass of misery, I consider this fourth seal to be as wonderfully fulfilled as any of the three preceding ones.

37 *Ibid.*

38 *Ibid.*

39 *Ibid.*

Now observe how things proceeded after Belisarius, with his prisoner the Gothic king, was withdrawn. The feeble military government, left in the hands of twelve persons dispersed over the country, together with the iniquitous and insufferable exactions of Justinian's revenue officers, so opened the way of the remnant of the Goths, that they had as quickly recovered almost all Italy as they had lost it; and were lying in leaguer around Rome. Once more the much-enduring Belisarius was recalled from the Persian wars to make good his own conquests. Rome was reduced to the most desperate famine.

They were gradually reduced to feed on dead horses, dogs, cats, and mice, and eagerly to snatch the grass, and even the nettles, which grew among the ruins of the city.⁴⁰

It was taken, plundered, and on the eve of being "made a pasture for cattle;" and was so emptied by force and terror, that "during forty days it was abandoned to desolate and dreary solitude.": Yet after this it twice over became the theater of siege and war; until Belisarius, forsaken and abandoned, was able to do nothing, even in the defense of his conquests. Whereupon the Goths again obtained the mastery of Italy: but a day of retribution was at hand.

Narses, the favorite eunuch of Justinian, being intrusted with an army of almost all nations, gathered as to a prey, defeated and slew Totila, the king of the Goths, and the country suffered spoliation. Of one part of his army—the Lombards, now, for the first time, acting in that country which they were destined to conquer—it is said, that "they reduced the villages to ashes, and ravished matrons and virgins on the altar."

It is impossible to describe the desolation to which Rome was again reduced, or the combination of evil accidents which brought to an end "the institutions of Romulus, after a period of thirteen centuries."

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

At length the Gothic kingdom fell before the wisdom and skill of Narses, and never rose again. But the desolation of Italy was not at an end. Barbarians of a new name, the Alemanni, entered in time to keep up the work of war and devastation.

The churches which their [the Franks] piety had spared were stripped by the sacrilegious hands of the Alemanni, who sacrificed horses heads to their native deities of the woods and rivers: they melted or profaned the consecrated vessels, and the ruins of shrines and altars were stained with the blood of the faithful.⁴¹

They were utterly cut off and destroyed by the hand of Justinian's general, who, by the name of exarch, administered the kingdom of Italy for fifteen years in Ravenna (AD 554-568). This series of devastations our historian thus concludes:

The twenty years of the Gothic war had consummated the distress and depopulation of Italy. As early as the fourth campaign, under the discipline of Eelisarius himself, fifty thousand laborers died of hunger in the narrow region of Picenum; and a strict interpretation of the evidence of Procopius would swell the loss of Italy above the total sum of her present inhabitants.⁴²

To these evils of the sword and famine was added that of pestilence, which raged all over the world, but especially in the empire.

The fatal disease which depopulated the earth in the time of Justinian and his successors, first appeared in the neighbourhood of Pelusium, between the Sarbonian bog and the eastern channel of the Nile. From thence, tracing as it were a double path, it spread to the east over Syria, Persia, and the Indies, and penetrated to the west, along the coast of Africa, and over the continent of Europe....

The order of funerals and the rites of sepulchre were con-

41 *Ibid.*

42 *Ibid.*

founded; those who were left without friends or servants lay unburied in the streets, or in their desolate houses....Such was the universal corruption of the air, that the pestilence which burst forth in the reign of Justinian was not checked or alleviated by any difference of the seasons. In time its first malignity was abated and dispersed; the disease alternately languished and revived; but it was not until the end of a calamitous period of fifty-two years that mankind recovered their health, or the air resumed its pure and salubrious quality.⁴³

THE BEASTS OF THE EARTH

It only remains to complete this interpretation, that we explain what is meant by killing with the beasts of the earth. This needs no explanation to almost any people save ourselves, whose land has been blessed from almost all deadly creatures who invest the air, the earth, or the waters. But to other lands, just in proportion as they are nearer to the wilderness condition, is this one of the four great forms of mortal terror. The wild beasts of the woods coming forth singly, or in ravenous companies; the serpents lurking in the grass, and coming forth out of the ground; the amphibious creatures which come up out of the rivers; and the clouds of locusts which darken the air, and grub up the food of man and beast;—these creatures are ever hanging upon the outskirts of civilization and culture; ready, if man relax his diligence, to invade him from the four quarters of the earth, and from all the elements of nature.

When it is said, therefore, in this seal, that Death, with Hell following after him, should have power over the fourth part of the earth, to slay with the beasts of the earth, it is signified that these fairest and most fertile regions of the empire should be brought by the wars of Justinian into such a waste condition, as that the beasts should wrestle with man for their pos-

43 *Ibid.*

session, and prevail against him. That it was actually so with Italy (and Africa was at least in no better a condition) is declared in Dr. Robertson's *View of Society in Europe*, introductory to his *History of Charles V.*

From Spain the Vandals passed over to Africa, AD 428. Africa was, next to Egypt, the most fertile of the Roman provinces. It was one of the granaries of the empire, and is called by an ancient writer the soil of the commonwealth. Though the army with which the Vandals invaded it did not exceed 30,000 fighting men, they became absolute masters of the province in less than two years. A contemporary author gives a dreadful account of the havoc which they made:

“They found a province well cultivated, and enjoying plenty, the beauty of the whole earth: they carried their destructive arms into every corner of it: they dispeopled it by their devastations; exterminating everything with fire and sword. They did not even spare the vines and fruit trees, that those to whom caves and inaccessible mountains had afforded a retreat might find no nourishment of any kind. Their hostile rage could not be satiated, and there was no place exempted from the effects of it. They tortured their prisoners with the most exquisite cruelty, that they might force from them a discovery of their hidden treasures.

“The more they discovered, the more they expected, and the more implacable they became. Neither the infirmities of age nor of sex; neither the dignity of nobility, nor the sanctity of the sacerdotal office, could mitigate their fury; but the more illustrious their prisoners were, the more barbarously they insulted them.

“The public buildings which resisted the violence of the flames they levelled with the ground. They left many cities without an inhabitant. When they approached any fortified place, which their undisciplined army could not reduce, they gathered together a multitude of prisoners, and putting them to the sword, left their bodies unburied, that the stench of their carcasses might oblige the garrison to abandon it.” (Victor Vitensis de Persecutione Africana, ap. Bibl. Patrum, vol. viii. p. 666.) St. Augustin, an African, and a contemporary au-

thor, gives a similar description of their cruelties (Opera, vol. x. p. 372, edit. 1616).

About an hundred years after the settlement of the Vandals in Africa, Belisarius attacked and dispossessed them. Procopius, a contemporary historian, describes the devastation that was occasioned. "Africa," says he, "was so entirely depopled, that one might travel several days in it without meeting one man; and it is no exaggeration to say, that in the course of the war five millions of persons perished" (Proc. Hist. Arcana, cap. 18, ap. Byz. Scrip, vol. i. p. 315).

I have dwelt longer upon the calamities of this province, because they are described not only by contemporary authors but by eyewitnesses. The present state of Africa confirms their testimony. Many of the most flourishing and populous cities with which it was filled were so entirely ruined, that no vestiges remain to point out where they were situated. That fertile territory, which sustained the Roman empire, lies in a great measure uncultivated; and that province which Victor, in his barbarous Latin, called *Speciositas totius terrae florentis*, is now the retreat of pirates and banditti...But the state in which Italy appears to have been during several ages after the barbarous nations settled in it is the most decisive proof of the cruelty, as well as extent, of their devastations. Whenever any country is thinly inhabited, trees and shrubs spring up in the uncultivated fields, and, spreading by degrees, form large forests; by the overflowing of rivers, and the stagnating of waters, other parts of it are converted into lakes and marshes.

Ancient Italy, the seat of the Roman elegance and luxury, was cultivated to the highest pitch. But so effectually did the devastations of the barbarians destroy all the effects of their industry and cultivation, that in the eighth century Italy appears to have been covered with forests and marshes of vast extent. Muratori enters into a long detail concerning the situation and limits of these, and proves by the most authentic evidence, that great tracts of territory in all the different provinces of Italy were either overrun with wood, or laid under water.

Nor did these occupy parts of the country naturally barren,

or of little value, but were spread over districts which ancient writers represent as extremely fertile, and which at present are highly cultivated. Muratori adds, that during the eighth and ninth centuries Italy was greatly infested by wolves and other wild beasts, another mark of its being destitute of inhabitants. (Murat. Antiq. vol. ii. p. 163.) Thus Italy, the pride of the ancient world for its fertility and cultivation, was reduced to the state of a country newly peopled and rendered habitable.

THE CHERUBIM AND THE SEALS

There is one thing which I have left untouched in the interpretation of the last two seals, and but adverted to in that of the first two, because I felt that, in order to say anything to the purpose, it was necessary first to have the whole interpretation before us. This, to me, most difficult point is, why these four cherubim should, in the order of the lion, the ox, the man, and the flying eagle, connect themselves severally with the first, second, third, and fourth seals. For I do not doubt that there is something, and that no mean thing, couched under this order which they take.

These cherubim symbolize the Church beyond all question; and that not the Church outward and ostensible, but the Church real and spiritual; the very members of Christ's one and indivisible Church, partly in the body, and partly out of the body.

Now, in the first seal I understand how the form of the lion should be assumed, because it is the symbol of Christ taking possession of His dominion and inheritance, and roaring against His prey and terrifying them. This we showed when discoursing of the name of Christ, "the Lion of the tribe of Judah." In Constantine's time, the Church did take her right to the throne of the earth with a majestic and lion-like confidence, and the saints of God had a great and glorious triumph, and began to feel their dignity as the heirs of the world. With

this interpretation I feel tolerably satisfied.

And so do I with that of the ox-cherub, which takes the word in the days of Theodosius. For whether you regard the ox as the treader and trampler down of its enemies, or as the symbol of Ephraim, the tribe whose martial achievements are so wrought into the tissue of future prophecy, or as the beast by which the precious corn was trodden out from the stalk, it answers well to the action of the Church in Theodosius' time, which both by arms and arguments prevailed against its natural and ecclesiastical enemies, when the truth was, in a very remarkable manner, separated from the chaff and straw with which it had got mixed and confused, and all heresies were oppressed and borne down to the ground.

To render an account of the third seal, upon principles homogeneous with these, we should be able to exhibit the Church, in the reign of Honorius, acting a part which may as fitly be symbolized by the reason of a man, as the others by the majesty of a lion, and the oppression of an ox. But how is this to be made out? I confess that I am yet unequal to it, as also to explain how the action of Justinian's time should be compared to a flying eagle. There are some hints towards an interpretation which I can suggest.

The judgment of the third seal was brought by swarms of men, not by any embodied empire: and their religion was the worship of a man; for they denied the Divinity of Him whom they honored as their Lord, and by whose name they were called. The period from Honorius to Justinian was also that in which the Church employed the force of human reason in defending the truth, in which appeared the great defenders of the orthodox faith. For certain, the Church in these times had neither the lion-like majesty of Constantine to overawe, nor the strength of hand of Theodosius to beat down her enemies; but was fain to have recourse to the strength of reason, to depend upon man's natural resources in maintaining the cause

of truth.

Whether there be contained in these hints the elements of a solution of this very difficult question I will not take upon me to determine. There is perhaps a still better key, both to this and the next symbol of the flying eagle, to be had from the twelfth chapter of this book, which presents the Church first as in labor with the man child, and next as having given to her the wings of a great eagle.

Now, the latter certainly signifies her flying from persecution into the wilderness from the dragon, and abiding there during the period of the fifth seal, the time, times, and half a time of the Papacy. This answers at once so exactly to the time and description of the fourth cherubim, as to leave no doubt upon our mind that the flying eagle of the fourth cherubim represents the Church in the state of escaping for her safety into the place which God has prepared for her. This she began to do in the time of Justinian, whose edict, preparatory to his wars, gave to the Pope of Rome that power of tyranny and persecution which he exercised against the Church, and which forms the subject of the next seal, whereon we enter not in this Lecture.

SUMMARY

UPON reviewing this interpretation of the first four seals, I cannot refrain from expressing my conviction that it is the true one; and that, whether as respects its perfect coherency with the meaning of the sealed book, and the opening of it, its full and fair interpretation of the symbols, its exact accordance with the historical facts, its view of the great retribution of God for the blood of so many martyrs as were shed by Paganism and Arianism, it has a moral dignity and truth about it, which, I think, can hardly be gainsaid.

It requires a very calm, circumspect, and judicious mind to take in all the bearings of such an interpretation as has been given above. That which is prized in our schools, especially in our Scottish schools, under the name of acuteness, and practiced in the way of argumentation, is so much the property of a barren knowledge, and the accompaniment of a feeble conscience, as to be utterly incompetent to questions of this kind. And so also do I find critical nicety and ingenious refinements, that lawyer-like form of mind which is ever looking for differences, and arranging itself on this or on that side.

A solid and sound judgment, a catholic spirit, sufficient knowledge of history, and learning in the language and forms of Scripture, are the natural gifts for inquiries of this sort. The evidence for such an interpretation as we have just concluded is of that cumulative kind, which an impatient or schismatical mind cannot take the trouble of collecting and considering; which a mind untaught in the predictions of Holy Scripture, and unaccustomed to read the providence of God, will not entertain: a love of God's Word, and a reverence of His hand in human affairs, meditation, and reading, and thought, are the elements which I ask of those who peruse these discourses, and would give verdict upon these interpretations. I feel that I am writing:

- for the believers of God's Word, and not for the speculators upon it;
- for those ministers who compare Scripture with Scripture, not for those who compare notes with the leaders of the public taste and opinion;
- for those students in the schools who are patient of thought, and desirous of interpreting God's Word, not for those who love to dispute and strive for vain glory.

And I have the assurance in my own mind, that these Lectures upon the *Apocalypse* will be made by God serviceable to recall the Church from abstractions of theology to historical and real truths; from fictions and fallacies of mere terms to the substance and the nourishment of a present and progressive redemption of this created world. Theology is become hypocrisy, from not having under it a body of moral and historical truth.

- I seek to make it sincerity, by putting under it that body which is no where to be found but in the person, and offices, and work of the Son of Man.
- I seek to bring the spiritual into the real, and to give it the dominion over it.
- I seek to show the confused mass of terrestrial events as an orderly system of Divine government.

Whether these things be worthy our pains or not let all wise and good men judge. That it should meet with stern and stout opposition from those who think themselves to have sealed up the sum of knowledge, and occupy the place of first, second, or third-rate leaders of public opinion, delighting to give and to receive honor of one another, must be: it is the cross which, in this service, we have to bear. Let us not seek to be a stumbling-block in their way; but if God should make us so, it is only what He who would have been a sanctuary was made of His heavenly Father to that house of Israel which He loved so well, and for whose salvation He gave Himself to

die.

Let no one think the less of us, that all parties should unite to speak evil of us; and that our name should be cast out as an offense to pious ears; but remember Him whom Sadducees and Pharisees combined to persecute, and did destroy as a blasphemer, because He told them the truth, and said that He was the Son of God.

Oh it is a sifting time! there are things taking place, and things about to take place, which will shake the Church to its center; and if it will not receive the truth, will shiver it to pieces. No man can stand longer at the helm: He only who has the winds in the hollow of His hand can steer the ship. I feel, for myself, that I know not what a day may bring forth, and that it is the duty of every man in office under the King to have his department ready, his accounts prepared to give in.

*O God, remember me when You come in Your kingdom;
and not me only, but all those who love Your appearing.*

