

Babylon and the Beast

Rev. 17.

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There are two forms of evil and rebellion against God which the Holy Spirit brings before us in this chapter, two figures more prominent than the rest, instruments of iniquity in the world since redemption, which the enemy has used and will yet use against God and His Christ. The first, as we clearly see, is the harlot or "great whore that sitteth upon many waters;" the second is what is called "the beast." Now there need not be any uncertainty as to either in the mind of a true-hearted believer. God has been pleased to give us distinct marks by which we may discern and be sure of His mind.

It is not to be admitted that the intimations of prophecy are equivocal until they are accomplished. On the other hand there are prophecies unquestionably fulfilled which are still far from being plain. The difficulty therefore depends on other conditions than the question of whether they be already fulfilled or not. Take, for instance, the seventy weeks of Daniel. It will not be disputed by any intelligent mind that at any rate sixty-nine of those weeks have been accomplished. No doubt there has been, and there is, a good deal of debate as to the seventieth week; but there are difficulties about the previous sixty-nine weeks no less than about the last. In fact, it would be easy enough to prove that the obscurity which overhangs the last week is considerably less than that which still rests for many Christians on the previous parts of that short but most striking prophecy, as for instance on the starting point of them all.

The fact is certain that people very commonly make difficulties for themselves in the word of God. Constantly too that which is regarded as the chief or only adequate means of enlightenment, if it be a mistake, complicates the whole matter, and darkens the subject instead of ensuring clearness. The true key of all prophecy is the very same that applies to all the Bible; it is Christ Himself. Were there greater singleness of eye in introducing the Lord Jesus into prophetic scripture in His real relation in each case, I am persuaded there would be incomparably more spiritual intelligence and communion, more of that happy and united conviction which is the fruit of faith and of the Spirit's own teaching, than exists at present. It is clear however that this is but a particular case of the hindrance everywhere. The temptation for students of the Bible is to leave Christ out for canons of exegesis and I know not what; the triumph of faith is to bring Christ in. So it will be found in this particular case.

Thus in the present case the woman is a totally different symbol from the beast, but both the woman and the beast are only understood when we compare them with the man Christ Jesus. He too appears in scripture, and sometimes symbolically. For instance, in this very book the Lord Jesus is introduced in some prophetic parts. Take Rev. 12 as an instance, where He is viewed as the male of might or man-child, as He is called in our version. For man the true moral glory is dependence on God and obedience, the very qualities of the spirit and walk of Jesus here below. He came to do God's will, and lived, as He says, on account of the Father, perfect man, though infinitely more than man — complete contrast of him who, only man, sought to be as God in independence of will, and sunk into the slavery of Satan. Clearly therefore it is in relation to the Lord Jesus that we have another subject there described as the woman of whom He is born, who can therefore be none other than Israel. (Rom. 9: 5) She is not in the relation of wife to Him like the church, but of mother. No matter what number of men may say the contrary, the word of God is clear and decisive on the momentous difference. People are the more apt to confound the two, because the constant tendency throughout Christendom is to mix

the relationships of the Jew and the Christian together, in standing and in walk, in doctrine and in hope.

In this case, however (Rev. 17), a corrupt woman is seen; as in Rev. 21 the bride, the Lamb's wife. I the more freely speak of it, because there are outward signs which place them in contrast, or lead us of themselves to compare the two women. One outward sign referred to is that the Spirit of God introduces the two visions with striking similarity. "And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will show thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters." Then in chapter 21: 9 we read, "And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife." Who can deny that these two verses have a stronger analogy than any others in the book? You can find nothing that so answers (it is true, in the way of contrast), for chapters 17 and 21 in this respect suggest each other. We never hear of one of the seven angels coming to show any other object; nor do we elsewhere hear of another object introduced with, "Come hither, and I will show thee" — this or that. Why so? Because, as is evident, the woman in chapter 17 is the earthly counterpart of the bride in chapter 21.

If the holy city, new Jerusalem of the later chapter, be the bride the Lamb's wife, or the glorified church, it naturally indicates that the great city of the earlier chapter is the antichurch, that corrupt evil body which professes to be the church, puts herself forward with supreme claims, and takes the highest ground in the Lord's name. But there is this fatal brand on her: Babylon seeks the earth; her communion is not with Christ. She courts and lavishes her guilty favours on the kings of the earth. She is the channel neither of blessing nor of glory for the dwellers on the earth, but only makes them drunk with the wine of her fornication. Can any traits be conceived more aptly descriptive of her who claims to be the representative of Christ, not in grace and suffering, but for her own pride and advantage on earth? We shall see other features less obvious but equally characteristic. What I am now stating lies on the surface of the scripture; and any one who reads the word of God as it is intended to be read — not merely a verse here or there and now or again — will not be disappointed. The connections of scripture should be looked into, as that which is given us to be read as a whole with faith and diligence, relying on God's goodness and wisdom, whose Spirit will lead us into all the truth.

Thus then the woman of chapter 17 is unmistakably the earthly contrast of the heavenly bride; a religious system, but a counterfeit, claiming to be the spouse of Christ, but only vile and corrupt in His sight, expressly pointed out by the revealing Spirit, in order to guard His people from being in any way carried away by her seductions or overmuch surprised by her persecutions. We have therefore the prophet brought in presence of this system in the vision. There was as yet only the mystery of lawlessness at work. Although the time was not yet come for the display of the fact, the apostle was permitted to see Babylon in the vision. "Come hither; I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore." God gives us next the stamp that is written upon her, and, more than this, the execution that will follow in due time. For she is one "with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication." Intellectual men, even those that might seem opposed, have often looked at this corrupt religious system with a considerable measure of satisfaction. They have admired the way in which she softened the barbarism of past times, and pruned away much of the asperity of savage tribes, whether of the heathen in earlier days or of men in the middle ages. But when the Spirit of God brings the prophet into his due place to regard this woman, we find only a wilderness. Babylon is seen where all was barren as far as divine enjoyment was concerned. No springs of living water were found there. "He carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness." Whatever may have been the civilizing effects of Babylon in the world, the Spirit of God sees in her only an object of divine judgment. It is so that she is pointed out to the

prophet.

"And I saw a woman," says he, "sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns." Here we have the other symbol. It is not one that pretended to be the spouse of the Lord, whilst really the basest of prostitutes. A "beast" is used for an imperial power in Scripture, but this with force indeed, but without intelligence or conscience, in plain contrast with Him who is called the "Lamb," the Lord Jesus viewed as the holy Sufferer; the same too who, in contrast with the beasts, will introduce the kingdom as the glorious Son of man. Jesus will hold the kingdom and openly administer it to the glory of God. This is its object as far as He is concerned — "that every knee should bow, and every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Not so the beasts. Whatever the powers so characterised may appear in the history of man, whatever may be their sphere or dignity, whatever the spread of art and science under any of them, whatever the nominal profession too of truth gathered from the Jews in former days, or from Christianity at the present time, — God represents them as "beasts." The reason is obvious. The essential difference between a beast and a man is, that the beast has no understanding of God, and is incapable of it, being only bent on its wants, or natural instincts: but there is no link of relationship with God in the conscience. Not so with man. He may be faithless; and so much the worse for him. He may reject the knowledge of the true God. He may be spiritually what Nebuchadnezzar became physically; that is to say, he may have a beast's heart given to him. Of course this was a miraculous judgment that was executed on the arrogant Chaldean; but it is morally applicable to every man who abandons the testimony of God, and gives himself up to the mere passing enjoyments of the moment.

In short then the beast represents an earthly power which owns not God, and has no thought beyond its own enjoyment, will, or passions. This was what stamped the beasts from the beginning. They were the powers that God raised up in His sovereign action when Israel became faithless. God then permitted the most cruel enemies of Israel to become world-kingdoms. There was Babylon first; there was Medo-Persia secondly; there was Greece or Macedonia thirdly; and, last of all there was the Roman empire. Imperial Rome had a most special place as well as ancient Babylon. For the Babylonian, being the first power that God owned, became typical of the last power in its judgment. In fact however the last empire had historically a most striking place in the providence of God. It was that power which in its servants or officials was guilty of the rejection and crucifixion of the Lord of glory. The Roman empire therefore had the most serious responsibility, little as they felt it; and you must remember, that in the government of God there is nothing forgotten. Who will not prove this true when he stands before the judgment-seat of Christ? There is nothing that can be hid. You will give an account of everything. Not that this should produce the smallest alarm in a child of God; but it is a solemn consideration. "We shall be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ." It does not matter as to this whether a person be a believer or an unbeliever: all done by the body will be made manifest.

On a similar principle in the government of the world, nothing is forgotten before God, — least of all the fact that an imperial power in this world which was set for just government rose up in its blind, guilty, folly, and allowed any reasons or excuses whatsoever to sanction the death of the Lord Jesus. And this the Roman empire did, though its representative in Judea well knew how wrong He was to suffer it. Under pressure of the people set on by the priests he did it, as a matter of public policy perhaps; certainly of expediency for himself as Caesar's friend, or to avoid possible trouble. It is often if not almost always so that the greatest crimes are winked at in this world, as far as its governmental authorities are concerned.

But there is another state of things in Babylon. For there is a great difference between the woman and the man, in the world of nature, now corrupted, not with a beast's heart only without conscience before God but even viewed as a beast. The empires ought to have served God like the Son of man, but in point of fact they were symbolically but beasts in pride of force and will without God. The woman (having the profession of being espoused to Christ, but really setting up to be mistress of all before the marriage to the deep dishonour of the future absent Bridegroom) has quite another position and guilt. She accordingly is seen in the vision "sitting upon the scarlet coloured beast full of names of blasphemy." She pretends to guide the beast or empire. This is the way in which the Spirit portrays her here.

It is plain that the time in John's day was not yet come historically for all this. When the vision was given, the believers were still persecuted by the empire, as he himself was an instance. John was "in the isle called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus." He was there no doubt as a sufferer, or, as he says, "a companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus." Hence it is plain that the world-power was a persecutor at that time rather than the woman. The vile harlot did not yet stand forth in her full-blown profligacy or her meretricious splendour. Even the Roman empire as it was then was not yet developed according to the form exhibited in the vision; for certainly neither had all the heads been yet realised, nor did the decem-regal division begin for long after in any sense. But all is carried forward in the power of the Spirit from first to last, when that which took the place of being the bride of Christ should rest on the Roman empire and seek to be its guide, no doubt directing badly, selfishly, and sinfully, according to her corruption; but still the picture drawn is that of the woman "sitting upon the scarlet-coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns." What a profanation of Christ's name falsely professed and abused to subserve the merest ambition and covetousness of man's dark heart!

Here let us for a few moments delay, because the question might be raised why the beast should be taken as the Roman empire. My answer is, that in all the visions of the imperial powers, in all the prophecies of Old or New Testament, you never find more than the fourth beast or Roman empire until the Lord Jesus introduces a new and everlasting kingdom, — until He brings in His own reign over all nations, tribes, and tongues of the world. We shall show how the difficulty of its actual disappearance from the world is met in this very chapter. The Roman empire has gone through various phases, and undergone extraordinary changes. Its course is not yet exhausted. All prophecy that treats of its close speaks of its existence just before it is extinguished by the Lord when He appears in glory. This very chapter proves not merely that all was open to God from first to last, but that He has made known to us in His word beforehand those singular revolutions that were afterwards to become facts. Some of these have been realised already; others remain to be verified shortly. But that this is the Roman empire is plain from the fact that it is always thus the fourth kingdom is described. A beast with seven heads and ten horns, the last empire before the Son of man takes the kingdom in power and glory, is the way in which Daniel 7 sets it out symbolically on the first occasion in which it was brought before any. There, closing the successive imperial powers, Rome appears, and is described yet more minutely than here.

On the other hand it is granted that there are features introduced into the description of St. John not found in the older prophecy. God does not introduce the subject without fresh reason and fresh light; but that it is the same imperial power, with added relationships as especially to the harlot, cannot be doubted in my judgment by any one subject to the written word. But the simplest and surest proof of all lies in the plain fact that, from first to last, we have four empires of the world, and only four, the last of which is destroyed by divine judgment, and followed immediately by the display of God's kingdom when Christ appears in power and glory. It must be quite evident, save to Romanists, or others almost

equally ignorant or visionary, that the kingdom so described is not yet established in the world. I say "*in the world*;" for it is not a question of heaven. Glory on high we have also revealed to us in Christ the head of the church: of this the New Testament speaks in the clearest possible manner. But it is plain that these world-powers have the earth for their theatre; and, further, that what displaces the last of them is a kingdom that God will establish by judgment executed on the quick in this world. A very great comfort it is to look onward to the certainty that God has not given up the earth for ever into the hands of the adversary — the certainty that Satan's plans shall be overthrown when they seem most ripe — the certainty that, when the evil becomes intolerable, God will interfere, and this by that Man whom He has ordained to judge the quick and the dead, the Lord Jesus. These truths are taught in both the Testaments. For the present occasion Daniel 2, 7 may suffice to prove what has been just affirmed. I only refer passingly to clench the proof of what is meant by the beast here.

I say no more then of the beast than that it is beyond doubt the Roman empire: in what stage of its existence, and at what particular time will appear as we go on.

Next, the woman is described as "arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls." It is not the bride arrayed in fine linen, white and clean; it is the gaudy splendour of the world to attract the flesh, and this very distinctly in royal, yea, imperial colours, so as to found a primary claim of supremacy for her ecclesiastical pretensions; it is false glory, natural enough in the world as it is and adapted to its lusts, but altogether contrary to the express object of the Lord Jesus in having His spouse in this world. The bride of Christ was intended to be His epistle, and is called by faith to manifest Him here below among men, the constant witness of His glory, character, ways, and heavenly place. Hence she must expect at present to share His rejection and sufferings in this world. But this woman who usurps the name seeks nothing but fleshly pleasure and worldly importance, all that is naturally coveted and prized in the earth. This too and worse she ministers to others; for she has "a golden cup in her hand, full of abomination, and filthiness of her fornication." How awful when religion with the highest pretensions to sanctity only sanctions man in the lowest, guiltiest inclinations of a nature fallen from God and subject to Satan! Further, we are told that "upon her forehead was a name written." The first word is most significant — "Mystery." "Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth."

Such a blazon on her forehead from the Spirit teaches us that here it is in no way a question of a heathen city with any amount of political influence. Its real heathenism, or rather its ungodly antagonism to God's people now fallen, may very well be couched under "Babylon the great;" for such was Babylon of old to the ancient people. But "Mystery" goes deeper, and shows the need of spiritual discernment according to the divine revelation vouchsafed to us, in order to detect the true character of this gigantic yet subtle imposture. Neither pagan Rome nor modern commerce, nor a future city rising on the Euphrates, can possibly answer to such a designation. It well suits Rome nominally Christian. Her fall therefore has an interest and joy for heaven which attaches to no other judgment.

I may just observe by the way that "the great city," as far as the bride of the Lamb is concerned, is excluded by all persons who profess to give the best reading according to the most ancient authorities for the word of God. And this is very interesting to us, because it is not a question merely of what prophetic students prefer. They might be liable perhaps to the thought of bias; but critics whom I could easily name if this were the place for it, who had not the slightest prepossession in favour of prophecy, have come to the conclusion now stated on the ground of nothing but clear and full external evidence. In short the way they read Rev. 21: 10 is "showed me," not that great city, the holy Jerusalem, but "the holy city Jerusalem." It is not a question of greatness for her even when glorified, but of holiness; whereas what Babylon affects and wins at cost not merely of herself but of truth, grace, and Christ

Himself, is present earthly greatness. "The great harlot" herself, she is the "mother of harlots," as we are told, "and abominations of the earth." Thus not only is she a corrupt system, but the parent of ecclesiastical corruptions outside herself yet akin to her.

Again she is the patron of what is most offensive before God — of idolatry in every shape. It is in vain to say that there never has been idolatry under Christianity; in vain to plead that the objects adored are only images for memory, not idols. The self-same excuse the old heathen philosophers used to urge. They sought to excuse their superstition by the assertion that nobody thought the idols were the gods, but only the visible tokens that reminded them of beings above and behind them. The apology of idolaters in Christendom is exactly similar to that of the pagans. The truth is, that to have such visible tokens or signs is the denial of faith, the destruction of the principle and power in which the Christian is told to walk. He is called to "walk by faith and not by sight." All efforts therefore to make people religious by palpable symbols of the sort is false and pernicious in principle; it is but heathenism christened. Every Christian person is bound to set his face against it. No doubt all this came in by slow degrees, with an apparent show of pious reasons: when have they been wanting for bad things? The truth is however that we are not competent to judge in divine things; and God therefore has revealed His will that we may be subject as children. Then, when we honour Him by subjection of spirit, we find out the excellence of God's will in Christ. We learn that there is nothing arbitrary but good, yea, the best in all the Lord lays on us. Although we accept it, not because we understand it but because He says it (and we accept it therefore gladly and simple-heartedly as His authority over our souls), yet, having done so, we learn that our God and Father is infinitely wise in all He says, and as good as He is wise.

The strange woman then not only corrupts herself and others, but is the parent of all religious corruptions here below. For there is not only a widespread system of ecclesiastical evil, but one pre-eminent, and others carried away and formed according to her pattern, though without her world-wide success. Further, she introduces and sanctions idolatry on the most prolific scale, and her idolatries have this peculiarly malignant brand in God's mind, that they betray departure from known truth for lies better loved. It may be presumed that every one here is aware that "abomination" is used for idol, according to language familiar to every reader of the Old Testament. The same style is found in Matthew, who cites the prophets, and in the Revelation, which habitually adopts Hebrew phraseology. And when the prophet saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus, he wondered with great admiration — not of course that anything heathen should be opposed to Jesus, or should attack the servants of the Lord: there was no such great matter for surprise in that. Heathen persecution was becoming an old story, as was Jewish instigation through hatred of the gospel. John himself, experiencing at that time pagan opposition, could hardly wonder if it grew hotter. But that what would bear the name of Jesus, however falsely — what would arrogate the place and title of God's church — that this body should become the greatest engine of persecution and tyranny the world ever saw, turning the power of the empire especially against the saints and witnesses of Jesus, did fill him with amazement beyond measure.

I am aware of the usual pleas of Romanist theologians. But "God is not mocked." The constant self-defence is that the church never persecutes; it is the civil power that punishes delinquents. But God looks at those who are really guilty — not at the mere hand which does the deed, but at the mind and will which morally and under the penalty of damnation compels it. Be it the civil power that hangs, stabs, or burns — the instrument is of small moment: His eye is on the true culprit, the more it covers its insatiable appetite for the blood of heretics under a sanctimonious cloak, and perverts the name of the meek and crucified Saviour into a sanction of unheard of cruelties, sometimes against men ignorant of truth and given over to folly, but far more frequently against saints of whom the world is not worthy,

the choicest of God's children here below. It is the woman therefore, not the beast, that is here charged with being "drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus."

Then comes the angel's explanation; and this we shall find gives fresh information of the most important kind. It is always thus in the interpretations of scripture. Man's explanations are merely founded on the thing to be explained; God out of His fulness loves to give us more, and of even deepening importance. So here we are told "the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns."

"The beast that thou sawest was and is not" — a striking and singular fact. The Roman empire, unlike all the other previous beasts, must cease to exist and then rise again. It was, and is not, "and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit." It was to reappear with a diabolical character in the sight of God for its last phase. Thus the last of the imperial powers should have a history altogether different from its predecessors. After having flourished and sunk into decay and death, it should revive before its final and unexampled destruction at the appearing of the Lord Jesus. Now there is no maxim among men more settled than that the powers of the world are in this just like men. They begin and advance till they reach their height; then they decline till they vanish. But you may without fail reckon that the maxims of men are untrustworthy where they touch divine things. It is not in the power of man to discover or enunciate the truth. In this case illustration and illustrated are alike. Man having lived and died is to rise again — not merely his spirit, but concrete man; spirit and soul and body will reappear. So must the Roman empire. I am not now speaking about other nations, though it is far from being confined to one; but the Roman empire is here singled out for the reason already pointed out, that it has a character in God's eye because of the rejection and judicial murder of the Son of God.

The Roman empire is not done with. It may have died and passed away, speaking now symbolically. The beast may have come to an end long since. But scripture declares that the beast, which was and is not, "shall ascend" — yea, dreadful to say — "out of the bottomless pit." Even when it rose up against the Son of God, it was not said then to have ascended out of the abyss. The empire is yet to be clothed with a still more distinctively diabolical character on its final reappearance than it ever had of old. It "shall ascend out of the bottomless pit and go into perdition; and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and *shall be present.*"

You observe the change in the latter words. It has the amplest warrant. There is no Biblical scholar now that would presume to contest the better reading or its version. I am putting forward no peculiar view, but the best representation of the undoubted word of the Holy Spirit in the passage. All classes, Catholic or Protestant, Lutheran or Reformed, Established or Nonconformist, if only acquainted with the authorities for the word of God here, will admit that what has just been given is indubitably true. It is impossible for intelligent men to stigmatize this critical correction as the peculiarity of any school whatever. It is a question now of fact, sure in itself and confessed by all competent men, many of whom never stopped to consider the difference of meaning which results from the emendation demanded by excellent authorities of every kind, and consequently no bad witnesses, inasmuch as they had and could have no object in what they introduced. As it stands in the common text, the phrase looks a sort of riddle; for what is the meaning of the proposition that the beast was, is not, and yet is? From the correct text the darkness vanishes at once. Can one hesitate which should be regarded as the voice of the Holy Spirit? Internal evidence there is as conclusively in favour of the critical change, as is external testimony. The sense that is elicited from καὶ ἄρ᾽ ἔστιν is simple and highly important; the only possible version of the vulgarly received καίπερ ἔστιν offers no just sense whatever, but a certain mystification which none would defend save prejudiced men who confound

mist with mystery, and see scarce anything with certainty and clearness in the Bible.

There is no enigma then in what the Spirit really wrote. He expressly tells us that universal wonder will be excited among men when they see the beast once more which had been and then ceased to exist. When it reappears, they are filled with astonishment. Just as John wondered greatly at the persecution carried on by her who bore the Lord's name ever so basely, so the world will marvel when the long departed empire of Rome lifts its head once more.

Our own day has seen serious steps toward that consummation, or at least the way paved for it. Not at all is it meant that anything at present existing indicates that the beast has ascended from the abyss, or that it can till the saints now living on earth (with those dead before them) are caught up changed into the glorious likeness of Christ. On the contrary, I would rather seek to guard all the children of God from being carried away by a hue and cry about this person or that kingdom. Still we have seen events in the providential history of the world of no ordinary magnitude and of strange character. But nothing has been yet seen that answers to this kingdom ascending out of the bottomless pit according to the language of prophecy. I am far from saying that the Sardinian or Piedmontese progress, through overthrowing their southern adversary and swallowing up the lesser duchies and taking possession of the Papal dominions, can be fairly so interpreted. But it is impossible to avoid seeing that these extensive and profound changes in raising Italy to a great and united kingdom are not more fatal to the temporal sovereignty of the Pope than they clear the ground for the revival of the empire with Rome for its capital. In short the state of things so rapidly brought about in Italy and even Rome seems to my mind no small step towards a far deeper and still graver assumption which God will not permit till a day that is not yet arrived. Let us not therefore in any way indulge the dream that we are yet in presence of this most solemn reappearance of the Roman empire; but one can scarce shut one's eyes to the fact that certain steps or stages, which must necessarily have preceded it in the wisdom of God, have recently been taken, and that not a few things are in train towards that which remains to be done.

Nevertheless the turning-point can be shown to be in no way a fact as yet. There is nothing in the least degree therefore that would warrant any one to point to what is now in course of formation as if the beast were being actually formed. The chief antecedent condition does not exist.

"Here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. And there are seven kings." In this statement the Spirit of God deigns to give a mark of another kind for determining the woman. We have already considered what may be styled the spiritual mark as contrasted with the bride of the Lamb. Here we are in presence of what may be called the geographical mark. For the woman is said to sit on seven mountains. Who in the world could doubt where the seven-hilled city is? Still less could it have been doubted in the time of St. John. There was but one such city, and that one rose up before every person's mind instinctively. It was Rome, and none other.

Further, there is what may be called the political mark added in the end of the chapter. "The woman which thou sawest is the great city which reigneth (or hath kingdom) over the kings of the earth." There was only one city which had reigned over kings. There can be no question therefore that Rome exclusively is the city intended here by the Spirit of God. This is so true that a great many learned persons of the Roman Catholic communion have acknowledged the fact, even some of their most celebrated controversialists. Probably there are many here who have heard of the famous Bishop of Meaux, J. B. Bossuet, as others have heard of Cardinals Baronius and Bellarmin. These officials, of high distinction in the Romish system, acknowledge Rome to be intended. They have their own way of

endeavouring to conciliate the fact admitted with their tenacious maintenance of Rome as the holy see. With this we need not concern ourselves. What we have to consider is not their way of reconciling their consciences, but their acknowledgement as far as it goes of the truth in the chapter. We have nothing to do with judging them; we can leave them in the hands of God. It is enough for me simply to use the concession, which has its importance in this place, coming as it does from those who have opposed to it the strongest possible interest if the reference were only carried out to the full. Let us beware of imputing bad motives — love of power, greed of money, pride of position in the world, or the like. These, I say, are questions for God to judge. I am only affirming now, that all the keenest prejudices of celebrated Romish ecclesiastics must assuredly be against acknowledging Rome as the city meant here; and yet, in spite of all, they have been obliged to own the fact, however they may seek to explain it away by limiting it to its ancient pagan phase.

It is certain therefore from the spiritual contrast with the bride, from the geographical place of the seven mountains, and from the special, that is supreme, relationship to the kings of the earth, that Rome and no other is the city aimed at by the woman Babylon in Rev. 17.

But we must distinguish between "the woman" and "the harlot." The woman is the city that is said to have sovereignty over the kings of the earth. The reason is manifest. Rome did not wait for her governing power till she became an ecclesiastical system. We see how perfectly the truth hangs together. It is not said, "the whore which reigneth over the kings of the earth," but "the woman" that does so. Beyond controversy her supreme authority was quite distinct from her assuming an ecclesiastical character. The latter was a change long subsequent. In virtue of its religious character, alas! false or corrupt, it is called a whore or harlot;* but "the woman" is in relation rather to her place as a certain system of power or authority in the earth, just as Tyre or Jerusalem are often each compared to a woman in Old Testament prophecies, with which we are all familiar.

* The Bishop of Meaux again and again reasons on "the harlot" as a decisive proof that Babylon is not an ecclesiastical body but a mere profane city of the world. He insists that "adulteress" must have been the designation of guilt in that case rather than "whore." (*Oeuvres de Messire Jacques-Benigne Bossuet*, (e., tome second, pp. 60-63, 310-312, 4to. Paris, 1743.) This is not fairly met by the allegation that the Spirit sometimes interchanges the terms "fornication" and "adultery" in the Revelation as elsewhere, though such an interchange does occur. For here, as Bossuet argues, the usage is too constant to be unintentional. The fact is however that, while Israel in the Old Testament stood in the relation of the married wife to Jehovah, it is not so with the church of God in the New Testament. There she is represented as in a certain sense the bride, but in truth espoused as a chaste virgin to Christ rather than as yet wedded. And this is necessarily and undeniably the image in this Apocalyptic prophecy, where beyond a doubt the marriage supper of the Lamb does not take place till *after* the destruction of Babylon, when the blessed bridal of the church is celebrated in heaven. The consummation is most fittingly when all are complete who go to make up the church. It is after the Lord shall have translated to heaven all who have been baptized by the Spirit into that one body, some fallen asleep, others alive and remaining till He come to change both into the likeness of His own glory. Thus the reasoning of the clever prelate rests on a premise which is the exact reverse of the truth; and all that is sound in it tells powerfully against his own aim. For when it is seen that the church while on earth is supposed to be espoused but not yet married, her corrupt counterpart, to be accurate, ought to be set forth as a harlot, not as an adulteress. The reference therefore in the great whore is precisely to a spurious church, and cannot but be fixed on Rome not pagan but ecclesiastical, on Rome professedly Christian.

But there is a great deal more. "There are seven kings," says the Spirit of God: "five are fallen;

the one is, and the other is not yet come." It is hard to doubt that these heads or kings here brought before us refer to the various forms of power which succeeded each other in Rome. Other beasts were simply said to have one head. The Macedonian might become four heads, and these evidently concurrent, not successive; but in Rome we hear of seven heads, and these from the language of the interpreter not concurrent but successive. The figure refers to the complete variety of political power that should characterise that empire. "Five," it is said, "were fallen." These were the previous kinds of power in Rome. "One is:" the sixth head was then exercising its rule. Thus the five fallen heads pointed to kings, consuls, decemvirs, military tribunes, dictators, or the like, which had been in Rome before but had now yielded to the emperor. Although there was a shadow of consuls still kept up, as is notorious, yet the imperial head was universally known to be then in force. This is the one that "now is," as we are told. But it is added that another was coming. "The other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space."

Here I still stand to what I hold to be an important though negative principle in looking at the prophetic word: to understand it you do not require history. In general indeed the students of history applied to the interpretation of the prophets least understand prophecy. After all a conjectural opinion as to the meaning of these heads is no such great matter; nor does it really help in the interpretation of the chapter. Supposing the simple Christian believe that the five forms of power fell before the existing imperial one, what of importance can history add? He is not able to explain the details; he knows not the successive forms of power — what has he lost? Supposing he did name them accurately, what has he gained? He is assured on the word of God that there were five, though he may not know what their histories or their characters were. He does know what was of great importance — that a sixth form existed, the imperial line of the Caesars, as they are called and as every body knew in John's day. Then he knows further that there was to be a seventh. What the seventh head would be is not here described; save that when he came, he must continue a short space. And what should we gather from this? That further minutiae are of no importance to the believer.

Whatever is of real value and for His glory God explains. Whatever is of no account in this point of view God passes by with the slightest notice or none. And so it is with these different heads of power. They are none of them explained. We are told the few words we have seen as to the seventh: no more than this was of consequence; and therefore the Lord gives us this fact alone in the case. "And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven." Thus there was to be a most curious compound character in the eighth head. He would be, on the one hand, of the seven; on the other, he would be an eighth. This seems, to my thinking, to be explained by what we find in another part of the book: the wounded head of the beast was to live. The imperial power, as it was wounded to death, so it was to appear again. When it revived, it would be an eighth; but it was one of the seven, because there had been such a form of power in Rome once before.

Hence I do not admit that there is in general anything so difficult to understand in these symbols. The information given is plain enough if we are content with the word of God. It is when we leave the simplicity of scripture that we fall into the by-path of speculation. For indeed we are in a wilderness-world, and where to turn we know not. But God has a way, though the vulture's eye sees it not; and in His word He has been pleased to reveal it, even Christ; and our wisdom is to hold fast to the way which grace has thus given us. Do we not need a way, if we are going through the wilderness? That way God alone can make known to us, or keep us in. But the way for us in Christ He has fully revealed.

As this is of immense importance everywhere, so is it, be assured, even in studying prophecy, just as much as anywhere else. To go from scripture to history, in order to find the explanation of prophecy, is invariably an error. It may not always work out its worst effects, because he that wanders into history

for this purpose may otherwise by faith keep fast hold of the word of God; and so far he will be preserved from evil. But the tendency of looking into man's account of the world to find the explanation of God's mind in prophecy is to abandon light for darkness.

Let me ask a question. How can history explain prophecy? It is evident that before history can be applied to the elucidation of prophecy, you must understand what the prophecy means; and when you know what it means, for what do you want history? Is it to ascertain that God knew or spoke the truth? You have already what God gave it for, and ought not, if a believer, to take the ground of an infidel. No doubt what you discover in history, as far as it is true, must exactly fall in with prophecy. And this may be interesting, — nothing more; but it must be evident to every one who reflects that, if we wish to be kept from fumbling in the dark, we must understand a prophecy before we can bring it into juxtaposition with the particular event we regard as its fulfilment.

For instance, take the beast before us. Supposing it is the question with me to whom or to what the beast applies here, how can history decide this? Am I to ransack all the annals of all times and all nations first? Or am I not to weigh the prophecy with prayer that I may know of what God is speaking? One man says, perhaps it is the pope; another affirms Napoleon Bonaparte or his nephew. How am I to decide? First let me seek to understand the scriptures about the beast with their context, and when I do so by the grace of God in my measure, this is what God meant me to get without going farther and faring probably worse.

The truth is, that when God's mind is seized in scripture, it will be found incomparably larger than questions of popery or politics. He is occupied with the glory of Christ in heaven; if on earth, with Israel as the centre when the kingdom is established by judgments on the Gentiles who now are allowed to rule exceptionally during the Lo-ammi state of the Jews. Hence what is described here is irreconcilable with men's thoughts. Take once more as an example the pope. The papacy may come in for a certain analogy, but is in no full sense the beast. It is not certainly for me to apologise for the papal power: none can justly insinuate that I sympathize with that monstrous imposture in any way. But the word of God ought to be dearer than all controversial objects; and although some may be keen enough Protestants, nothing justifies one in departing from the word of God, nor can any end consecrate an error.

The endeavour to find out the hardest things that can be found in the Bible, and to apply them blindly towards an object that you justly censure, is serious moral wrong. Whatever then the demerits of the papacy, the apocalyptic beast from the sea is really a quite different evil altogether, being the imperial power of the west in its last phase. It will be hardly disputed that the pope is an extremely diminished power now: is this honestly the lot of the little horn of Daniel 7? Judged by an imperial standard, there is not much resemblance between the two, as in my opinion there never was. The papacy never was anything politically, or at least territorially, but an inconsiderable power; whereas the beast here described is regarded as a commanding empire in the earth, and this of course Roman. But it clearly was when the Roman empire sunk into nonentity, weakened by the Eastern rent and its own corruption, and afterwards extinguished by the barbarian hordes, that the papacy sprang up into a temporal authority no less than an universal episcopate. So far is the papacy from really answering to the beast, that it has only come in during the non-existence of the beast. For the beast that was is not, according to St. John. Such is the true place and time of that strange incubus. Indeed the papacy is far more connected with the whore than with the beast, though I do not deny a sort of partial anticipation also. For I am not disposed to differ from the great and excellent men who attached the solemn description of Babylon to the see of Rome during the latter part of the middle ages, and at the time of the Reformation. To my mind Luther and others who so used it were justified in the main. They were

right in fixing the divine condemnation of Babylon on Rome, and this not merely as "the woman" but as "the whore," which involves other features of guilt as already pointed out.

But the beast is the imperial power of Rome, and here in its last open apostacy and rebellion against God. The other powers had disappeared as empires. The beast is the only one that will reappear imperially before final judgment, after having passed through these different states. "The beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition." The last holder of that power, the last head, will display, I presume, the resurrection of the empire without and against God by Satanic energy, and in this condition it is doomed to perish for ever under the judgment of God.

"And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings." This is another most material point for understanding the chapter. "And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast." Now if we look back upon ancient and mediaeval European history, what do we find? First of all the Roman beast unbroken, without any division whatsoever into separate kingdoms. There was a breach that gradually widened after the setting up of Constantinople, as it was overtly occasioned by that rival metropolis. There were sovereigns who divided between them the Roman empire for a season, as we know, when that empire began to decline; but in the days of its comparative solidity and world-wide grandeur (as you are aware, at any rate during the scriptural account of the Roman empire), it was an unbroken power wielded by one emperor. In the days of the Caesars it was invariably so. There might be a difference, as we know there was in history, between the Augustus and the Caesar; but I am speaking now of the emperor; and I say there was but one emperor during the days of the Caesars. Such was the earliest state. Passing over the changes or modifications that took place until the barbarians broke up the Roman empire, we find all changed when the empire was gone. "The beast that was" ceased to be, the new condition being briefly told in the words, "and is not."

What was found then? The various fragments of the Roman empire were gradually settled into separate kingdoms. I am willing now to meet our historical friends as much as possible, and will not raise questions about "ten" by contending for nine or eleven. Let us suppose there were exactly ten in round numbers. If ten, we have ten horns or kings of the middle ages, but no such thing as the empire or the beast; that is, no corporate bond existed for these ten kings — no single power held a suzeraineté over them all, so as to direct their united forces, and make them all to be parts of the great Roman empire. Such a state of things had not begun to be. But, mark, in the time which the prophet contemplates there will be this exactly. "The beast that was and is not shall ascend," that is, the old corporate bond of an emperor to control and lead all that once formed the beast, or properly Roman part of the empire, in short the west or western powers. The east appears not in the beast, as here looked at, for reasons that need not be entered into now. It is the strictly Roman part of the empire. The gold, the silver, and the brass are not spoken of here, but only the iron and clay, if we may speak in the language of Nebuchadnezzar's vision.

Here then is a new state of things — ten horns *as well as* the beast; not the beast alone as in ancient days, nor ten horns alone as in the middle ages, but the beast *and* the ten horns. You who desire to be under history as the rule for interpreting prophecy, do you not hear history? Can it be intelligently said that such a state of things has ever yet been? This is the state, I feel no hesitation in affirming, that *will be*. St. John shows us most clearly what we are to expect for the future of this age, and more particularly in the west. Naturally this must be of so much more solemn interest to us, inasmuch as our country forms a part of it. The continental powers with ourselves, the western powers, compose the material of the future ten horns or kingdoms. The countries of Europe, which boast of themselves as the flower of civilization at the present time, are destined to be redistributed into ten kingdoms when the

beast rises up from the abyss; that is, when an imperial power is allowed with Rome as the centre to become Satan's leader of the west. Such will be the beast, a Roman emperor with his satellite kings. When this future empire becomes established again, it will not be such an absorbing power as to blot out separate nationalities. There will be the combination of an imperial authority with each power acknowledged in its own quasi-independent state. I grant that there may be only a sham in such subordinate kings: still there has been usually no lack of vapour in the earth, and the future in question will be a day of shams. The grand point however will be this, that the chief who governs all will govern as firmly with iron hand as if the separate kingdoms belonged to himself exclusively. Such is the state of things described here.

It is not imagination: the word of God is perfectly plain about all. "These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast." And they "receive power as kings one hour with the beast." They have their kingly authority for one and the same time with the beast; not after nor before the beast, but contemporaneously and in association with him. How comes this to pass? It is explained a little afterwards. "God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will." It is not their own. National independence would refuse such servility. Is there anything for which a kingdom would be more ashamed of itself than to be merely the vassal of a grinding active power? But here they are absolutely subservient: it is the common lot of all the western powers that they for the first time in Europe do the bidding of one ruler. Who can say that such a state of things was ever known in the west? Under the Caesars there was no room for it, as there were no such divided kingdoms. Since the day that the German barbarians broke up the empire, since the Goths, etc., (our forefathers, as you know,) set up separate nationalities throughout the west, independence has been the ruling feature of all these little kingdoms. They have each had a will of its own; and all have fought most determinedly to have their own way. They have valued above all things their right to be governed as they liked.

A total change will pass over the west. When the redistribution comes (which will be as usual out of a revolutionary state; and a man must be rather blind not to see tokens of the storm brewing, not in our own country only but in every country where free thought and discussion have prepared the way); when all respect for what is ancient and has been in honour shall have passed away; when men are seized with a passion for destroying everything that used to exercise influence and hold in check; when the demon of revolution has acquired throughout the west full force, and broken up all that still survives, this is to be the shape it will take. There will be a dividing afresh into ten separate kingdoms of no great size; but what gives them importance is, that all will be under the central power which is here called "the beast." It is not of course a mere kingly power, which is styled a "horn" in the language of prophecy. The beast is the overruling corporate bond under which these horns range themselves as constituents and sinews of its strength. Accordingly there will be a novel unity unexampled in Europe or elsewhere. "They will have one mind, and give their power and strength unto the beast." And what use does he make of it? To what end does the beast lead the horns? "These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them (for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings) and they that are with him, called, and chosen, and faithful."

In the midst of such a dreary future, what a comfort that we shall be with Him then! You, if you love the Lord, will be with Him. Whoever you may be, if you are Christ's, you will come with Christ in that day. He will appear from heaven, and so will you in glory. It will not then be a question of gathering His people to Himself. Not a hint of such a removal is given in this context. The faithful are already with Him. They had been therefore caught up to Him before. How this could be we know from other parts of scripture; but I do not enter into them now. Keeping myself to the passage that lies before me, I say that it is quite plain that the faithful, chosen, and called will be then with Christ. Further,

these are not angels but saints. Angels are never said to be "called," nor are they ever said to be "faithful." It is not a question of the dealings of grace for an angel. The angels who are kept of God are holy no doubt, and, if holy, are "chosen" or elect. Such is the language of scripture about them. But an angel never is or could be said to be either "faithful" or "called." What is the meaning of "calling"? When man fell and went away from God, "calling" was the means grace used for bringing him to God by the faith of a Saviour of the world. This is not and never can be the history of an angel; it is only open to man. For he only of all fallen beings is called by grace — man when he calls on the name of the Lord Jesus — man visited in the infinite mercy of God, when His grace has shone upon him from on high, and brought him to Himself by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Such then shall be with the Lamb when the beast challenges the conflict which ends not in his perdition only, but in the ruin of the kings and their armies from these very lands. "But the *Lamb* shall overcome them (for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings)." It is no question of human resources in that day: the Lord shall be exalted, and we shall reign with Him.

Observe another thing. "The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues." This beyond controversy distinguishes between the whore and all other religious systems; for where do you find anything corresponding to this save with "the whore?" No doubt there are many religious systems bad enough. I am far from meaning that Romanism is the only corruption of Christianity. But is there no tangible difference? Others may influence for ill in their own land; but the dreadful plague-spot of Rome is that she claiming to be the universal mother and mistress is the corrupter of every land. Her claim of ecumenical dominion is the thing that points her out as the city of confusion, which answers to the Holy Spirit's warnings in this chapter. Thus the very boast of universality with corruption and idolatry determines at once what she is. Babylon is the harlot of the western kings, the most corrupting influence religiously of all the world. Hence "the waters, where the whore sitteth, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues." There may be, I repeat, grievous departure from Christ elsewhere; still this is a mere party, or at most a national blunder in religion; but, as for Babylon, she is according to scripture the common nuisance of all nations and tribes and tongues. The result will be that her lovers will all turn on her. The ten horns — those that she most of all sought to win and hold — will hate her in the end.

Let me mention at this point a fact in illustration which, as all may not have noticed it, it is as well to name now. A remarkable change has even now taken place over the nations of the earth. They are not getting better, but the form of their evil is changing. The last Ecumenical Council held at Rome is the only one which neither had nor invited crowned heads to send representatives. The time is not yet come for the ten horns to receive authority as kings for one and the same hour with the beast. But there are practically no Catholic powers at the beck of Babylon. They are no longer *her* vassals, if they are not yet the minions of the beast. This is another serious state. In that council the pope could count on no civil supporters, unless perhaps some petty ones which would have only made the absence of the great powers conspicuous. Hence the invitations were exclusively to Romish ecclesiastics. No representative of Austria, Bavaria, Belgium, France, Italy, etc. was there. Even Spain and Portugal sent no plenipotentiaries to declare their adhesion to the pope: those that always had proved most submissive were for one reason or another passed by. By Babylon's own confession the western powers though called Catholic could no longer be trusted. For the first time since they formed part of Christendom they were not called to an Ecumenical Council — none but ecclesiastics. It is not that the time is come for the horns to take their place with the beast and to devour Babylon; but certainly there seems to be somewhat of a preparation for it in so striking a sign of her actual mistrust in her old paramours.

"The ten horns that thou sawest, AND the beast," etc. It is not "*upon* the beast," as in the common

text, — an unquestionably superior reading, which no critic would think of defending. The true text runs, "The ten horns . . . *and* the beast." And this is of importance. Here one regrets that the strength of mere Protestant prejudice tends to make men false to scripture. Is it not disgraceful for any one, be he Catholic or Protestant, to keep up an error in what professes to be the word of God? Why should a Christian have an interest but in the truth? If we accept the best authorities, "*upon* the beast" must be rejected as unquestionably erroneous; if we are not swayed by the feeblest possible testimony, we cannot evade the overwhelming evidence that the true reading is "the ten horns . . . *and* the beast." And why, think you, should any one be so anxious to perpetuate the blunder of "the ten horns *upon* the beast?" Because the true reading is fatal to the old delusion that the beast is the pope — a delusion completely refuted by "the ten horns . . . *and* the beast," unless one can credit the pope with destroying his own city. It is too hard a saying even for that fanciful school that the pope should turn out so fierce a foe of his own capital. Yet the words are certain, "the ten horns . . . *and* the beast, these shall hate the whore."

On the other hand it cannot be denied to be perfectly intelligible that the Roman empire with all the ten subject kingdoms in its sphere will burn with implacable fury against ecclesiastical Rome, the old object of their deepest, superstitious, and passionate devotion; as I believe they will. We see that the power which has possessed itself of the papal temporalities is naturally by no means palatable to the Pope; as it also has shown but little scruple in taking his goods, we could not expect love or respect between the two parties. We know that the kingdom of Italy that is growing up has enriched itself very considerably by the spoils of the "church" so called. When the day comes for the beast and the ten horns the spoliation of Babylon will be complete. The beast will first enrich himself and his followers, and then destroy her. All that ecclesiastical Rome has — earthly power, wealth, grandeur, rank, — will seem but lawful spoil for them.

It will be thus seen how important the various reading is in ver. 16; and when we speak of a "various reading" here, it is not meant that any want of certainty exists. There are often various readings which have no real value. No man ought to adopt a reading lightly or for a fancy. My own sympathy is strongly with the man who is averse to change; but there are some various readings so amply supported and certain in themselves that to hold out against them would be high treason to the word of God. The authority for "*and* the beast" is so preponderant that nothing but stubbornness can account for any man rejecting it, unless there be gross ignorance also.

Hence there cannot be the smallest doubt that "the ten horns . . . *and* the beast" are to join against Babylon. This makes the meaning of the chapter substantially plain. After the closest links of religious attachment, we see the turning of the tide at the end. It is the day when the beast will no longer permit Rome in any way to guide the temporal powers, when the civil power, become proud of its imperialism, will turn and rend the harlot who was once the object of the most debasing affection and honour. But the greater the false love then shown to Rome, so much the more by and by will be the hatred with which the beast will turn and destroy what had been so extravagantly loved and honoured. "These shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire." They execute God's destructive judgment in His providence. Such is the explanation: "God hath put in their hearts to do his will."

More I need not add tonight, considering the lateness of the hour. But the subject is commended to your prayerful attention; for the Lord would have you study not only His revealed will but His word, that you may judge rightly of what is working now by seeing the end disclosed with divine clearness and certainty. You will thus also prove by experience that the prophetic word is most practical, "whereunto ye do well to take heed as unto a lamp that shineth in a dark place." Instead of giving it up

as precarious or unintelligible, you will learn increasingly how definite and interesting and important is every word for every child of God. May the present occasion stimulate you to read with confidence in His grace, honouring the word of Him who will strengthen and refresh you thereby for His service!

APPENDIX.

ROMANIST CONFESSION AS TO BABYLON.

It may interest the reader if I present him with copious extracts from two singularly intelligent writers of the Romish communion, both priests, one Spanish and the other French, who paid homage to the truth of our chapter far beyond the partial acknowledgment of those referred to in the lecture.

The first in order of time is from the famous *Venida del Mesias en gloria y magestad* of Juan Jos. Ben-Ezra (the nom de plume), or rather Emanuel Lacunza (his real name).

"Two chief things we have here to ascertain: first, who the woman seated on the beast is; secondly, what times are spoken of in the prophecy.

"As to the first, the doctors all agree that the woman here spoken of is the city of Rome, in other times the capital of the greatest empire in the world, and now the capital and centre of unity of the true Christian church. On this first point, which is not called in question, there is no occasion to tarry. In respect to the second, we find only two opinions. The first maintains that the prophecy was wholly accomplished in past ages in idolatrous and pagan Rome. The second confesses that till this day it has not been fully accomplished; and affirms that it will be accomplished in the times of Antichrist in another Rome yet future, and very much changed from the present.

"If we attentively consider these two opinions, and the obscure and embarrassed way in which their authors explain themselves, it is not very difficult to make out the pious end which they propose, and the true cause of their embarrassment. This point is the most delicate and critical which can be imagined. On the one hand the prophecy is terrible in all its circumstances: both the crimes of the woman, which are clearly related, and the chastisement denounced upon them, are innumerable. On the other hand, the respect, the love, the tenderness, the good conceit and estimation in which this very woman has been held ever since she abolished her idolatry, makes it incredible and improbable that of her should be spoken or in her should ever be verified such crimes and such a chastisement. In so critical a situation which side can we take? The truth of the prophecy must be sacred; for no one doubts its authenticity. But it likewise seems necessary to save the honour of the great queen, and to calm all her fears. As she is not ignorant of that which is expressed in the scriptures of truth, and which might or should lay her under great apprehensions, it has appeared becoming in her faithful subjects to deliver her entirely from this anxiety. Therefore have they said to her; some, that she had nothing to fear, the prophecy having been accomplished many ages ago upon pagan and idolatrous Rome, against which it is spoken; others, who have not been able to enter into an idea so repugnant to the text, have said to her, that she ought not to be afraid, because the prophecy is visibly directed to other times yet to come, and will not be verified upon the present Rome, upon Christian Rome, upon Rome the head of the church of Christ, but upon another Rome infinitely different, composed then of idolaters who shall have become masters of it, having driven out the Pontiff, and with him all his court and all Christians. In this Rome, thus regarded, will be verified the crimes and the punishments announced in this prophecy. Let us shortly examine these two opinions, or those two consolations, comparing them with the text of the prophecy The greatest crime of which the woman is accused is fornication, and, to shut the door against all equivocation, the accomplices of this metaphorical fornication are named, to wit, the kings of the earth; and as the kings with the harlot, so she with them lived deliciously.

"We ask then how this crime can be true of ancient Rome; which, according to all accounts given in history, was so far from this infamy, that on the contrary she even regarded all the kings of the earth with a sovereign contempt, nor was there any in the known world whom she did not humble and cast down under feet. Many times were they seen to enter by the triumphal gate loaded with chains, and to pass out at another to be beheaded or imprisoned. With what propriety then or appearance of truth can ancient Rome be accused of a metaphorical fornication with the kings of the earth? The second difficulty of this opinion grows out of the chastisement announced upon the harlot, which, if attention be given, will certainly appear not yet to have been verified. The expressions which St. John makes use of are all the most vivid, telling of a full and eternal extermination: consider them. Rev. 18: 21-23: 'And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all. And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee; and the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived.' Either this is all exaggeration, full of impropriety and falsehood, or it is not yet fulfilled and will be fulfilled in its time to a very tittle as it is written. Besides this, the whole context of the prophecy from the sixteenth chapter ought to be considered; where, after having spoken of the last plague in the seven vials, which the seven angels poured out upon the earth, in which is filled up the wrath of God, he proceeds immediately to say: 'And great Babylon came in remembrance before God to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.'

To all this ought to be added another very important reflection. If, as the author of this opinion alleges, the prophecy be wholly intended against the ancient idolatrous and iniquitous Rome, if on her be threatened the terrible chastisement whereof so much is spoken, when was that chastisement accomplished? They answer that it was accomplished when Alaric with his terrible army took it, sacked it, burned it, and almost entirely destroyed it. But in the first place it is certain that the evils which Alaric's army brought on Rome were not so great as those inflicted by the ancient Gauls, or those she suffered in the civil wars, or in the time of Nero, as we are assured by contemporary authors, and declared by Fleury, Miller, etc. Above all, they were not so great as those which are here clearly announced in the prophecy which speaks of total ruin and eternal extermination. Secondly, in the time of Alaric (that is, in the fifth century of the Christian era), what Rome did this barbarous prince sack? what Rome did he almost entirely burn and destroy? Was it Rome the idolatrous, Rome the iniquitous, Rome the adulteress and harlot for her idolatry? Certainly not, for at that time there was no such Rome. The only Rome which then existed and which continues till this day was wholly Christian, had already cast all her idols from her,* and consequently no longer deserved the name of adulteress and harlot; already adored the true God and His only Son Jesus Christ; was already full of churches in which holy offices were celebrated; for history tells us that Alaric commanded his soldiers not to touch the public buildings nor the temples. It was already Rome the penitent, Christian, and holy. This being so, does it appear to you credible that upon this woman, now Christian, penitent, and holy, should be accomplished the terrible chastisement denounced against the wicked adulteress?

* [This seems too strong, as we know that the heathen faction in Rome was strong enough during Alaric's siege to alarm men by the pretence that their troubles came because of neglecting the old religion, so much so that sacrifices were offered to the gods in the capital and elsewhere, *Pope Innocent himself consenting to it!* See Zosim. H. R. v. 14.]

"Considering the grave difficulties which the former opinion underlies, almost all the doctors have judged that it is not ancient Rome which is spoken of in the prophecy, but another Rome yet future, in which will be verified all the crimes as well as the terrible chastisement here denounced against her. And when is all this to happen? It is to happen, they say, and with good reason, in the days of Antichrist. But to reconcile this ingenuous confession with the honour and consolation of the sacerdotal city (to save which is the aim of both opinions), they make certain suppositions, and lay them as the basis on which their whole edifice may rest. These are as follows. First, the Roman empire is to endure until the end of the world. Secondly, that empire which now is (and for so many years has been) so dismembered that hardly a relic of it is to be seen, shall, toward the last time, recover its ancient greatness, magnificence, and splendour. Thirdly, the heads of that empire in those last times shall become, not only infidel and iniquitous, but even professed idolaters. Fourthly, they shall without much difficulty make themselves masters of Rome, establish in it anew the court of the Roman empire; and thereupon Rome shall resume that grandeur, wealth, profusion, majesty, and glory, which it displayed in ages past, as, *e.g.*, in the time of Augustus. Fifthly, that impious race shall root out from Rome the Christian priesthood, and likewise all the faithful who will not renounce their faith: whereby Rome, being free from that great hindrance, will set up anew the worship of idols, and return to be as idolatrous as before.

These positions being all assumed, and as such requiring no proof, it is truly most easy to conclude whatever you affirm, and to affirm whatever you please. It is easy to conclude that, although the prophecy certainly speaks against a future Rome, yet not in any way against a Christian Rome, the latter, as incapable of these crimes, being likewise not obnoxious to those threatenings and punishments. By this ingenuity the truth of the prophecy is saved, the honour of the great queen is saved, and she remains comforted, quiet and secure, without anything to disturb her peace or interfere with her repose, because the very heavy indignation of the spouse neither is nor can be measured out for her but for her enemies only. Those enemies, or this new Rome thus viewed (continues the explanation), shall doubtless commit new and greater crimes than the ancient Rome; shall return to be proud, haughty, unjust, and cruel; shall again shed Christian blood, and be drunk with it; and these crimes shall draw down on this city, now infidel, the whole burden of the anger and indignation of Almighty God. . . .

Is this mode of treating the subject, followed by the greater part of the doctors, also the most prudent in this other point of view; that it aims at not grieving our sovereign and common mother before the time? But this is the very reason why the pure truth ought with all humility and reverence to be spoken. For this very reason ought her true sons and faithful subjects to seek to afflict her and rejoice to see her afflicted, not because she is made sorry, but because she sorrowed to repentance. . . . Through the foreshowing of the danger, refuge may be sought and perdition escaped; but if by sparing sorrow the impression is given that there is no such danger, ruin will be inevitable, and, so much the greater, as it has been the less apprehended. It is very easy to remark the strange and singular conduct pursued in the treatment of this subject; I mean the great liberality with which many things are taken for granted which do not appear from revelation, and the very great economy with which others are withheld on which revelation is most explicit. No one tells us, for example, what is meant by the woman sitting on a scarlet-coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. Though the mystery be so great, novel, and strange, that St. John himself confesses he wondered with a great wonder at the sight of the woman in that state, yet they suppose it to signify no more than the figure by alliance between idolatrous Rome and Antichrist. One should think the beloved disciple had no cause for such admiration. What marvel that an idolatrous and iniquitous city should favour and help Antichrist! . . .

We are not ignorant that many unrighteous men, out of hatred to the Roman church, have misused in a most monstrous and impudent way this passage of scripture. But what thing is there so true and so holy which they cannot abuse? Wicked children, in what they have said of Rome under the head of this prophecy, have uttered injuries, calumnies, and invectives, and have mingled some one truth or another with endless fables. But what has all this to do, or what can it have to do, with the present subject? Because some have obscured certain truths by mingling them with errors and fables, ought we therefore not to give our diligence to set forth these very truths in their clearness and purity? Ought we therefore to deny them wholly, and pass entirely to the other extreme? Are we therefore prevented from taking a middle path equally wide of fatal error and mischievous flattery? What we say of the crimes of this woman, we say necessarily of her punishment also. Rome, not idolatrous but Christian, not the head of the Roman empire but the head of Christendom, and centre of unity of the true church of the living God, may very well (without ceasing from this dignity), at some time or other, incur this guilt, and before God be held guilty of fornication with the kings of the earth, and amenable to all its consequences. And in this there is no inconsistency, however much her defenders may shake the head. And this same Rome, in that same state, may receive on herself the horrible chastisement spoken of in the prophecy; nor is it necessary thereto that she previously be taken by the infidels, that she should return to become the court of the infidel Roman empire arisen from the grave with new and greater grandeur, nor that the new emperors should root out of her the Christian religion and reconstitute idolatry." (Tomo i. par. ii. fen. iii. § 14. Londres, 1826.)

I do not cite this as entirely agreeing with Lacunza's impressions, and of course not at all with his insensibility to the real and most grievous idolatry which has characterized Rome for so many centuries in the worship of the Virgin, saints, angels, and the host. This is clearly her characteristic to faith as blasphemy will characterize the beast. But Babylon is the mother of the harlots and of the abominations of the earth, instead of preserving her purity as the church, a chaste virgin espoused to one man even Christ. She who made herself drunk with the blood of the saints has guiltily courted the kings of the earth to the full, and has intoxicated therewith herself on the earth (not the heavenly-minded) with the wine of her fornication, for her golden cup is full of abominations, that is, of idols. Lacunza therefore deceived himself in overlooking much that is past and present in Rome; and he seems to me, however morally right in the main, less right prophetically than the doctors who see an apostate future for Rome, and judgment first providential, then finally and directly divine. But the description of Babylon as a whole is essentially idolatrous and so distinguished from the blaspheming beast, with which, strange to say, the most zealous Papists and Protestants alike confound her.

The second priest I summon is le père Lambert, whose *Exposition de Prédications et des Promesses faites à l'Eglise* appeared in Paris in 1806. But I need not cite words which more feebly convey arguments mostly given already from Lacunza, save perhaps that Lambert regards the evil which would justify the prophecy in so depicting Rome as more in the distant future. Substantially however his chapter 18 (tome ii. pp. 327-347) coincides, as far as it goes, with the great Spanish work, and is even fuller in combating the reasoning of Bossuet. Both insist that the awful destruction of Rev. 17 awaits Christian Rome. "I demand now" (says Lambert, near the close of the chapter and after citing the end of Rev. 18 and the beginning of chap. 19), "is there any one hardy enough to declare, contrary to the most unquestionable monuments of history, that the woes predicted by John for great Babylon are fallen on pagan Rome? or rather is it not a constant truth and generally recognised as such, that Rome has experienced nothing of the kind, either whilst it worshipped idols or since it embraced Christianity? Alaric took it and carried off part of its riches in the first years of the fifth century; Genseric did the same toward the middle of that century. Under Charles V., that perverse faithless prince, and on other occasions also it experienced similar losses. But besides that it was Christian then

and for a long time since; it has never been either destroyed or reduced to ashes. . . . There is then no middle ground: either one must boldly give the lie to the Apocalyptic oracle on the terrible catastrophe reserved for Rome, or accept in good faith that its threats look to Rome Christian, and that their execution belongs to a future for which we are waiting."

W.K.