

70. An Image to the Beast

Continuing the story of the "lamb turned dragon," what wonders did John learn he would perform in the sight of an amazed world?

"And he does great wonders, so that he makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men." Revelation 13:13.

Compared with past ages we may truly say that we live today in an age of wonders. These wonders of science and invention are not, of course, confined to any one nation. Every nation can claim its contribution to the phenomenal progress of modern times. The vast resources and wealth of the United States, however, have made it possible for the ideas of inventors the world over to be developed and brought to wonderful fruition in America in a way that has not been possible anywhere else on the earth. In consequence, the United States may justly be described as the "wonder nation" of the world.

According to the prophecy, the final "wonder" which the "lamb turned dragon" would exhibit to the world would be to make "fire come, down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men." Pondering this vivid phrase one cannot resist the conclusion that one aspect at least of its fulfillment is that culminating product of American research and technology, the atomic bomb. Which brought consternation as well as wonder to the hearts of men everywhere when it crashed down out of the Japanese sky upon Hiroshima on August 6, 1945.

Significantly enough, R. E. Wimperis begins his book, *World Power and Atomic Energy*, with the words: "The door of Creation's great storehouse of atomic energy has been forced and stands ajar. Nothing since the discovery of how to make Fire has so added to man's physical control over the forces of Nature." - Page v.

The capacity of the lamb-like beast to make "fire come down from heaven," however, has doubtless a spiritual as well as a material application. The descent of fire at the call of the prophets of God has a number of times in the Scriptures been an evidence of divine favor. (Leviticus 9: 24; Judges 13:19,20; 2 Chronicles 7:1; Num. 16:35.) Pentecost was signalized by the descent of the Spirit in the "tongues like as of fire" upon the assembled disciples. (Acts 2:3) As Satan has attempted to counterfeit every manifestation of divine power it is only to be expected that he would endeavor to simulate this sign also among the "signs and lying wonders" (Matthew 24:24; 2 Thessalonians 2:9) which he will work in the prosecution of this last work of deception.

We ask, therefore, whether any spectacular spiritual deception has emanated from America during the last century or so, and at once the phenomenon of modern Spiritualism comes to mind.

Contact between evil spiritual intelligences and man goes back, of course, to the beginnings of human history and has occurred where ever human beings have permitted themselves to be "possessed," but nothing so widespread as the Spiritualism of our time has ever occurred in any other period of human history.

Beginning with the mysterious rappings heard by Margaret and Catherine (Kate) Fox at their home in Hydesville, a suburb of the town of Arcadia, in New York State, in 1848, "the contagion," as C. E. Beckhofer Roberts says in *The Truth About Spiritualism*, "spread with rapidity". And "by 1851 it was estimated that there were a hundred mediums in New York alone, and fifty in Philadelphia." - Page 46.

Since then Spiritualism has swept through America until to-day it is claimed that there are 112,250 Spiritualist churches, societies, and clubs, with 3,400,000 enrolled members.

The first Spiritualist medium arrived in England in 1852, and in a few decades there were hundreds of thousands of Spiritualists, including noted scientists, public leaders, and even high-ranking clergy. Two world wars in our century have given Spiritualism further immense impetus, with the result that Spiritualism has now become a world-wide movement of vast proportions, and its devotees have no lesser plans for it than spiritual world domination.

On the material and the spiritual level, therefore, the lamb-like beast has certainly worked "wonders," even to calling down fire from heaven.

To what tragic ends will the prestige of this miracle-working power be used?

"And deceives them that dwell on the earth by means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast." Revelation 13:14. "And causes the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed." Revelation 13:12.

Fascinated by the miracle-working power of the "lamb turned dragon," men will be constrained to

follow credulously and uncritically in the way it leads. This, prophecy declares, will ultimately bring the world back again into the control of the very power which, a century and a half ago, they struck down and left as dead.

Reading this startling prediction, one may well exclaim: Is it possible that the great American nation could so far forget its spiritual heritage as to induce men to bow the knee to the great apostasy? But what has been written cannot be unwritten and in later visions this power is actually called the "false prophet" (Revelation 16:13; 19:20; 20:10) among the many "false prophets" of the last days (Matthew 24:11,24; Mark 13:22).

Strange as it may seem, so complete a change of heart in the American nation was not entirely unforeseen by some of the founding fathers. Thomas Jefferson, for example, was one who realized how easily the noblest ideals could be subverted if the first glowing convictions were lost. Because of this he uttered the solemn warning: "The spirit of the times may alter, will alter. Our rulers will become corrupt, our people careless. A single zealot may commence persecution, and better men be his victims. It can never be too often repeated, that the time for fixing every essential right on a legal basis, is while our rulers are honest and ourselves united." - "Notes on the State of Virginia," page 169.

How true his premonitions were is realized when one begins to study the profound and far-reaching changes which have taken place in the social and religious life of America since the days when the Pilgrim Fathers landed on the shores of New England.

However surprising it may be to many outside America, the fact is that the largest religious group in the United States today is the Roman Catholic Church. Its 25,000,000 adherents are actually more than twice the membership of the largest Protestant denomination, the Methodist, which has no more than ten million church members-and these latter are divided into twenty-one separated sections. Actually, the total number of members of all the great Protestant denominations is now but little in excess of the adherents of the Roman communion.

No wonder that the Christian Century, at the close of a series of articles discussing the possibilities of Catholic ascendancy in America should remark: "From this continent, the church may yet regroup its retreating forces and counter-attack successfully."

Without a doubt the "counter-attack" of the Papacy upon the European nations through America began when Mr. Myron Taylor was, appointed President Roosevelt's personal representative at the Vatican, and for the first time in the history of the United States the two powers established relations with each other. During the post-war years the effects of the liaison between the United States and the Vatican have become increasingly evident. Italy has received more generous treatment than any other European country. America has repeatedly indicated that it wants to see Spain restored to favor. Visits by the leaders of the Catholic supported Christian Democratic parties in Europe have been welcomed, and the work of the Roman Catholic Church on behalf of peace has been lauded in extravagant terms.

Nor is American influence making itself felt only on behalf of the Vatican in Europe. In other parts of the world as well, marked deference and favor is being shown to Rome. Every opportunity, for example, is being given to the Roman Catholic Church to attain a place of dominance in Japan, and the protests of the United States hierarchy have resulted in a noticeable restriction of the work of Protestant missionaries in the Catholic states of South America.

In these and many other ways the lamb-like beast is "causing" men to return to the worship of the papal beast.

In what other indirect way will the lamb-like beast promote the cause of the beast?

"Saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live!" Revelation 13:14.

What are we to understand by this "image to the beast"? An illuminating comment by the Revelation A. Plummer, MA, D.D., past principal of University College, Durham, will guide us in its identification. It will be suggested, he says, in the Pulpit Commentary, that there should be set up an image of the first beast "not in order to pay greater honor to the first beast, but that an apparent alternative might be offered to men. So that those who hesitated to pay direct allegiance to the first beast might overcome their scruples and worship something that resembled him, while allowing them to, as it were, cheat their own consciences by persuading themselves that they were not worshipping the beast himself."

Now if, as we have seen, the "beast" is the apostate ecclesiastical system of Rome, an "image to the beast" would be some other ecclesiastical system, ostensibly independent of Rome, but in reality, a replica of that apostate church. In other words, a Protestantism which has abandoned its "protest," and