

## Prophecy Validated by Events

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Any non-Adventist who happened to open the May 1851 issue of the *Review and Herald* could have been pardoned for guffawing at that article by a youthful J.N. Andrews identifying the two-horned beast of Revelation 13:11-17 as the United States.<sup>1</sup> What a crackpot he was! For nothing in American society or world affairs suggested the vaguest possibility of such a development. Especially silly would have been the idea of cooperation between Protestants and Catholics. Nevertheless, “on the strength of the prophecy alone” he maintained “that the enforcement of Sunday as the Sabbath would be the point on which a union of church and state would finally be founded in this nation.”<sup>2</sup>

At that very time, in both the leading political parties, a virulent anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic movement was gathering momentum like a hurricane, which threatened to sweep it into national office. It had massive support for candidates favorable to its cause. In angry reaction to the Irish that were pouring into the country, its members at first observed considerable secrecy and often answered questions by saying, “I know nothing!” For this, they soon earned themselves the sobriquet of the *Know-Nothings*. In 1854, just three years after that seminal Adventist article, “they won significant victories in Congress and at the state level, again as an unofficial party driven by coordinated votes for sympathetic candidates.” Thereupon, these people organized themselves as the American Party. In the same year, some of its members “stole and destroyed the block of granite contributed by Pope Pius IX for the Washington Monument.” They reached the zenith of their power in the 1856 presidential election. Millard Fillmore, a former Whig president, won 22 percent of the popular vote and Maryland’s eight electoral votes. However, though “the American Party remained strong on the local and state levels in many northern states,” it largely petered out by 1860.<sup>3</sup>

Despite an unfavorable sociopolitical environment, others like Joseph Bates and Uriah Smith followed Andrews in his views. Smith embodied this interpretation in his *Thoughts, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Revelation* which first appeared in 1867. He went on to write an entire book on the topic, *The United States in Prophecy*. I am fortunate to possess an original print of its third, enlarged edition, printed on the old steam press at Battle Creek, Michigan, in 1876.

From the earliest period and for many generations, the Protestants who settled in what would later become the United States of America resolutely rejected popery. Even Maryland, founded by Catholics, soon had a Protestant majority. This general situation persisted for a hundred and seventy years and more. “At the time of the Revolution only about one per cent of the people of the American colonies were Catholic.”<sup>4</sup>

Afterwards, too, the Roman Church remained weak in these territories, though soon additional Catholics began to swell its numbers, first a trickle and then a tide. By 1835, this was noted by Noah Webster, famous for his *American Dictionary* and also a farsighted man, who frequently amazed his friends with accurate predictions about the future. Of Romanism he said, “The latter evil is alarming, and [it] is not improbable that the inquisition may, at some future time, be established in the West.”<sup>5</sup>

For the rest of the nineteenth century, however, Catholicism in America was organizationally weak. “As late as 1908 it was a missionary branch within the Roman system, supported partly by contributions from abroad, and treated with conspicuous condescension by the European hierarchy. It was so unimportant, in the total scheme of world Catholicism before 1875, that until that date not a single American cardinal had been appointed.” Even in 1948, the papacy laid claim to the allegiance of only twenty-six million U.S. members.<sup>6</sup> But further immigration since World War II, conversions, and natural increase have greatly swelled that figure. Today some forty

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percent of Christians in the United States are said to belong to the Roman Church, which makes it the single largest ecclesiastical system in the country.

Let us also note that in the nineteenth century America was not yet a superpower. Andrews and those who accepted his explanation were simply interpreting prophecy, with faith in the Bible. They could not turn the page of the future to see beyond their century and read about the unprecedented position that the United States would come to occupy in the twentieth century after World War I. This is a vital factor for evaluating the Adventist view of the two-horned beast.

When Benjamin Franklin, “the father of all the Yankees,” was born in 1706—precisely a century after the settlement of Jamestown—“the British North American colonies contained 350,000 persons clustering along the Atlantic seacoast and the broad tidewater rivers.” To be frank, at that time they were, in the eyes of their mother country, small potatoes: “Almost any tiny sugar island in the West Indies or steaming slave castle on the Guinea Coast was worth more to Britain than any of the mainland colonies.” Nevertheless, by 1790, Franklin’s death year, the United States was already a full-fledged country, with more than four million inhabitants.<sup>7</sup> But still that did not make it a world power. To realize this, we only need to consider that the Revolution freeing it from British domination could not have been won without foreign allies and especially the French navy.

Today the United States, with almost 300 million residents, has a population seventy-five times as large as in Benjamin Franklin’s time and sits athwart a continent. A map by Guy Fleming that superimposes its territory—excluding Alaska—on that of the Roman Empire in Hadrian’s day<sup>8</sup> reveals a similar size. But the might of America is almost unimaginably greater. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it seems as though it may soon be able to impose its will on our entire planet. But a hundred and fifty or even a hundred years ago this was still unthinkable.

In the last part of the nineteenth and early in the twentieth century, Ellen G. White, whom Seventh-day Adventists regard as an inspired writer, enlarged on the prophecy about the two-horned beast. To the explanations by Andrews, Smith, and others, she added startling predictions, which were also oddly at variance with the facts of her time—though nowadays they are, from a secular point of view, becoming perfectly credible.

As long ago as 1888, in *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*, she declared: “The Protestants of the United States will be foremost in stretching their hands across the gulf to grasp the hand of spiritualism; they will reach across the abyss to clasp hands with the Roman power; and under the influence of this threefold union, this country will follow in the steps of Rome in trampling on the rights of conscience.”<sup>9</sup> In those days, Protestants would as soon have shaken hands with the Devil.

Even more amazing for that day and age, was the following prediction, from the same book: “When the leading churches of the United States, uniting upon such points of doctrine as are held by them in common, shall influence the state to enforce their decrees and to sustain their institutions, then Protestant America will have formed an image of the Roman hierarchy, and the infliction of civil penalties upon dissenters will inevitably result.”<sup>10</sup>

In 1900, she made another remark that was quite astonishing: “As America, the land of religious liberty, shall unite with the papacy in forcing the conscience and compelling men to honor the false sabbath, the people of *every country on the globe will be led to follow her example*”<sup>11</sup> (emphasis added).

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From the perspective of that date, this was simply ridiculous, for the United States was not, as it has since then become, a planet-wide superpower. Only five years earlier, as Barbara Tuchman points out, its navy had “exactly one battleship in commission,”<sup>12</sup> because America was still following George Washington’s advice to mind its own business and avoid international adventures after the European pattern.

But a departure from this philosophy was already under way, with Theodore Roosevelt—first the Rough Rider in the war over Cuba during 1898 and afterwards United States President—leading the charge. In the late nineteenth century, he was being strongly influenced by two men, a historian and a naval strategist.

The former was Brooks Adams, a great-grandson of John Adams, the second American President, who succeeded George Washington. In *The Law of Civilization and Decay*, Brooks Adams—an evolutionist and a neo-Marxist thinker—taught that a nation first developed as a martial, imaginative, and religious enterprise. Later, however, “the economic and scientific mentality” takes over. The consequence is that “competition of the traders and the lagging salaries of the workers sap the nation’s energies.” The result is social decay. For his own country, he “saw Darwinian struggles ahead, with the United States either accepting its decline or emerging through war as a superpower, an empire.” When Roosevelt went to Washington as President McKinley’s Assistant Secretary of the Navy, he became “one of Brooks’s intimates, having lunch with him almost daily, absorbing and later radiating his views.”<sup>13</sup>

The other man whose imperialist notions increasingly fascinated Roosevelt on a practical level was Captain A.T. Mahan, who wrote *The Influence of Sea Power on History* (1890). Mahan inter alia urged the annexation of Hawaii.<sup>14</sup> More ships were built. With the opening of the Panama Canal, it appeared desirable for America to reach out and plant her flag abroad.

In 1901, on the threshold of the twentieth century, after McKinley’s assassination, Theodore Roosevelt became president and vigorously espoused imperialism as a basis for America’s greatness. “Brooks became the President’s confidential adviser, consulted almost daily on all manner of affairs. Behind the Square Deal was Brooks Adams, reiterating to Roosevelt the need for the control of capital, the control of labor, in preparation for expansion and war. His influence is traceable in Roosevelt’s seizure of the Panama Canal Zone, his response to Russia’s threat to Manchuria, his mediation in the Russo-Japanese War, and in much else that is otherwise puzzling in the Roosevelt foreign policies.”<sup>15</sup>

But even so, at that time, the United States was still far from being an actual superpower. The greatest political entity on Earth continued to be the British Empire, with the Germans in second place. The command centers of the world, in military as in cultural matters, lay along the North Sea, which separates England from France and Germany—not west of the Atlantic.

It is true that already in 1898 America had made a dramatic entry onto the international stage, laying the groundwork for a greater possible role in the coming century, as Ernest R. May makes plain in his book-length analysis. In that crucial year, the United States demolished the western remnants of the Spanish Empire. Supporting the ill-treated Cuban people and the rebels in their desire for independence, she defeated Spain and sank its entire fleet. In the aftermath, America acquired Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines. She also finally made up her mind to annex Hawaii.<sup>16</sup>

Nonetheless, she was not then nor would she for many more years be in a position to command, much less compel, the entire planet to follow her lead in anything. She certainly was not yet involving herself in the affairs of Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. Therefore, as

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Graham Ross points out, until the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the great powers were generally still considered to be Britain, France, Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy.<sup>17</sup>

As for the United States, the Europeans “tended to underestimate her potential as a world power. She had a navy but only a small volunteer army that could have no influence on a short European war. In coal and steel production she was far ahead of the European powers and her exports were increasing at a faster rate; but her economic expansion owed much to European investment and she was still on balance a debtor to Europe. Only in a lengthy war would her latent strength come into play.” The power shift that endowed America with a brand-new status in global affairs took place as it entered into and determined the outcome of World War I. “Only with the help of the United States were Britain, France, and Italy able to defeat the central powers.”<sup>18</sup>

Ellen White had died almost two years before, on July 16, 1915.<sup>19</sup> She could therefore not have witnessed in her lifetime how America broke the deadlock of the Great War, enabling the Allies to defeat the mighty Germans, and how World War II would virtually bring a repeat performance. Afterwards, for more than forty years, the United States would prevent the Soviet Union from overwhelming Western Europe as well as the planet.

Like others in those days, Ellen White could not from her own experience have known that her country was, at least in human terms, to become the arbiter of destiny or ever hear people talk about “the American Century.” For her and her contemporaries, the stature and might of the United States as a global superpower did not yet exist, and neither did the ecumenical rapprochement between Protestants and Catholics as a major force in contemporary politics.

In those days, it was all a matter of faith in Bible prophecy. For us, it hardly requires imagination.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> John Norton Loughborough, *The Great Second Advent Movement, Its Rise and Progress* (Loma Linda, Calif.: Adventist Pioneer Library, 1992 reprint of 1905 ed.), p. 284.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> *Wikipedia*, s.v. “Know-Nothing Movement,” Sept. 20, 2005 [www.en.wikipedia.org](http://www.en.wikipedia.org).

<sup>4</sup> Paul Blanshard, *American Freedom and Catholic Power* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1949), pp. 8, 11.

<sup>5</sup> Noah Webster, quoted in Harry R. Warfel, *Noah Webster: Schoolmaster to America* (New York: Octagon Books, 1966), p. 424.

<sup>6</sup> Blanshard, *American Freedom and Catholic Power*, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> J. Bell Whitfield, Jr., in Earl Schenck Miers, ed., *The American Story: The Age of Exploration to the Age of the Atom* (Great Neck, N.Y.: Channel Press, 1956), pp. 73, 74.

<sup>8</sup> Guy Fleming, “The Size of the Roman Empire in Hadrian’s Day,” in Stringfellow Barr, *The Mask of Jove: A History of Graeco-Roman Civilization from the Death of Alexander to the Death of Constantine* (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1966).

<sup>9</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan: The Conflict of the Ages in the Christian Dispensation*, in *The Complete Published Ellen G. White Writings* (CD-ROM) (Silver Spring, Md.: Ellen G. White Estate, Inc., 2005), s.v. “GC88 – The Great Controversy (1888),” p. 587.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 445.

<sup>11</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6 (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1948), p.18.

<sup>12</sup> Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Proud Tower: A Portrait of the World Before the War: 1890-1914* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1966), p. 138.

<sup>13</sup> Francis Russell, *Adams: An American Dynasty* (New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., 1976), pp. 360, 361.

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<sup>14</sup> Tuchman, *The Proud Tower*, p. 131.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 362.

<sup>16</sup> Ernest R. May, *Imperial Democracy: The Emergence of America as a Great Power* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, Harper Torchbooks, 1961, 1973).

<sup>17</sup> Graham Ross, *The Great Powers and the Decline of the European States System 1914-1945* (New York: Longman, 1985), p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 7.

<sup>19</sup> Ellen G. White et al., *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White: Being a Narrative of Her Experience to 1881 as Written by Herself; With a Sketch of Her Subsequent Labors and of Her Last Sickness Compiled From Original Sources* (Portland: Pacific Press, 1915, 1943), p. 449.

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