

1666 : THE YEAR OF THE BEAST

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FROM the Reformation until about the fourth decade of the nineteenth century there was considered to be only one sound and orthodox way in which to interpret the biblical Book of Revelation. It was an exegetic scheme which no longer carries academic respectability, but the three centuries during which historicism reigned supreme in Apocalyptic exegesis testify to the fact that this method of interpretation had great potency over the minds of both educated and ignorant men. If men believed that the visions of the Apocalypse contained the prophetic history of the world and the church from the ascension of Christ until his second coming in glory, then godly watchmen might survey the events unfolding around them and discover the vital relevance of the last revelation on the pages of Scripture.

Yet the Achilles heel of the historical method was the inherent danger of date-fixing, a pitfall to which the figurative numbers of the Apocalypse lent themselves all too readily. In this article we are concerned with just one of those Apocalyptic numbers and the way in which it was applied to that year of prodigies, 1666. We read in Revelation xiii. 18 : "Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast : for it is the number of a man ; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six." Who was this beast, and how in history were men to recognize the unfolding of his number ?

Even before the seventeenth century dawned, the rumour had begun to spread that the number of the beast pointed to a fateful year which, perhaps within the lifetime of some, would dawn in the Christian calendar. Perhaps the first suggestion that the number 666 indicated the year 1666 occurred in a pamphlet published in 1597, possibly written by Thomas Lupton.¹ Lupton might be described as an Elizabethan pur-

¹ *Babylon is Fallen* (London, 1597), fol. 26^r. Published anonymously, but attributed to Lupton by B. S. Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men: a Study in*

veyor of miscellaneous knowledge, the kind of miscellaneous knowledge amongst which the interpretation of the number of the beast readily found a place. Earlier, in 1581, he had been in earnest to prove that the Pope of Rome was "the very whore of *Babylon*" and in so doing he had made free use of William Fulke's sermon preached in 1570 at Hampton Court in which Fulke had sought to prove from Scripture and the Fathers that Babylon in the Apocalypse was Rome. Like Fulke, he gratefully laid hold of Irenaeus's remarks about the number 666 being a cipher for the word *Λατῆινος*, a word which might indicate the Pope of Rome; but, also like Fulke, he failed to point out Irenaeus's own dissatisfaction with the word as a solution to the beast's number.¹ *Babylon is Fallen* was intended as a commentary on the eleventh chapter of the Apocryphal book of 2 Esdras, a chapter which portrays the destiny of imperial Rome under the figure of a great eagle. Lupton felt that the forty-fifth verse of the chapter should be understood as prophesying the destruction of papal Rome in 1666 and he noted in the margin the connection of this interpretation with Revelation xiii. 18.² It is interesting that this same chapter from 2 Esdras should be noticed again in 1630 by Sir Thomas Gardiner, a firm royalist during the Civil War period who became recorder of the City of London in 1636. On 13 August Gardiner wrote to Secretary Dorchester telling him of a letter written to the Secretary which he had himself received from his son. Apparently the writer had promised to disclose "wonderful things which are like to come to pass before the year 1666". He had identified the beast of the Apocalypse with the three-headed eagle of 2 Esdras 11 and had interpreted those heads as representing France, Spain, and the Emperor, which were to be completely destroyed in the fatal year. "The particulars of these things which God had given him he was about to present to the King in a book which he had in hand, but

Seventeenth-Century Millenarianism (London, 1972), p. 290. It was reprinted under various titles: *A Prophetie that hath lyen hid above these 2000. Yeares* (1610 and 1614); *The Mourners Song* (1651); and again as *Babylon is Fallen* in 1620 and 1651. The edition of 1620 suggested (no doubt erroneously) that the first edition had been published in 1595.

¹ *A Persuasion from Papistrie* (London, 1581), p. 108 f.

² *Op. cit.* fol. 26^r.

could not finish by reason of his employment for his Majesty's and the Queen's fruits."¹ It is a pity that more details are not given, because it is by no means evident from the text of 2 Esdras how the fatal year 1666 was arrived at.

Turning from these veiled hints, thrown out in the course of expounding a little-regarded passage in 2 Esdras, probably the first English writer to connect 1666 with the number of the beast in the course of a systematic exposition of the Book of Revelation was Thomas Goodwin. In 1639 Goodwin fled to Arnhem and served there for a short period as co-pastor of an English church with John Archer (to whom we shall turn presently). He had, however, returned to London before the outbreak of the Civil War. Probably his most important work was his *Exposition upon the Book of the Revelation*, published posthumously in 1683 but actually the fruits of sermons preached by him during his stay in Holland in 1639. Goodwin's tone was devotional and practical, but at the same time he had established a fairly intricate system of prophetic chronology. He counted 1260 years (cf. the "1260 days" of Rev. xii. 6) from A.D. 406 in order to arrive at 1666 as the time of Antichrist's destruction. A.D. 406 was, however, only an approximate date and events which he cited in connection with that year were the beginning of the Goths' kingdom in 410, the invasion of the Huns in 412, the succession of Innocent I in 404-6, and the excommunication of the eastern Emperor Arcadius in 407—many of the dates given being open to question on chronological grounds.²

A writer who was probably greatly influenced by Goodwin, either through his sermons or through personal association, was John Archer, who had been a London lecturer in 1629 but who had been suspended by Laud. He was presented to All Saints', Hertford, by the Feoffees for Improvements in 1631, but he had probably fled the country by 1637 and until his death (c. 1642) he served as pastor of the English church at Arnhem. Although much respected by the Fifth Monarchist movement, Archer

¹ *Cal. State Papers, Domestic, 1629-31*, p. 327 (henceforth *CSP, Dom.*).

² *Op. cit.* ii. 67-70; cf. p. 115. Goodwin was deemed after the event to have been quite successful in date-fixing and for this reason portions and new editions of his *Exposition* were republished about the time of the French Revolution and in the 1840s.

himself held to the non-violent interpretation of the Fifth Monarchy, as his comments on Daniel ii. 34 ("a stone was cut out without hands") indicated: "... which Kingdome or *Monarchy* shall swallow up in it, all foregoeing *Monarchies*, and that by no humane meanes or policie; for it was without hands, or not in hand; that is, not of man, but a divine worke every way." Like almost all expositors of the Book of Revelation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Archer expounded the 1260 days of Revelation xii. 6 as 1260 years. He made this period to commence c. A.D. 400-6, when "the *Bishop of Rome* began to usurpe Papall power, and about that time some of the 10. Kingdomes [represented by the toes of Daniel's image] in *Europe* began to arise . . . it maketh," declared Archer, "1666. *which is the time made the number of the Beast . . . that is, the Papacies duration.*"¹ We shall see below how Fifth Monarchist writers were to make use of Archer's suggestion concerning 1666.

In 1650 a pamphlet appeared in celebration of the arrival in Scotland of the young King Charles II. It contained a collection of prophecies attributed to Paul Grebner, a German Protestant and biblical commentator whose prophecies had been presented to Elizabeth I and subsequently deposited in Trinity College, Cambridge. Whilst rejecting the millenarian writings of Archer, the author nevertheless agreed with the latter in asserting the prophetic importance of 1666. He declared that civil wars would continue in Europe until that year, when a great army of true worshippers would ruin Rome, so that the Jews of the western Dispersion would begin to learn the ways of God and to believe his gospel. The writer asserted that 1666 years had elapsed from the confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel to the return of the Jews from Babylon. In addition, he counted

¹ *The Personall Reign of Christ upon Earth* (London, 1642), pp. 8, 47. This work was first published in 1641 and frequently reprinted. In the edition cited the author's Christian name appears as Henry. Archer dated the 1290 days (interpreted as years) of Dan. xii. 11 from the apostasy of Julian in A.D. 366 (Julian actually died in 363) and so arrived at 1656, when he declared that the Jews would be persecuted by the combined energies of Muhammadans, heathens, and papists, but c. 1700 (366 + the 1335 "days" of Dan. xii. 12) Christ would come from heaven and inaugurate the Millennium (*ibid.* pp. 51-53).

666 years from Pompey's profanation of the temple to the birth of Antichrist and the apostasy of the Church of God.¹ By a mistaken calculation, he then added to this date (c. A.D. 606) a further 1000 years during which the saints must suffer persecution and martyrdom, arriving at A.D. 1666, the year of the beast's fatal ruin.² It is an unusual conception indeed to incorporate into a prophetic scheme of chronology a Millennium of tribulation in place of the normal Millennium of peace and happiness, but the interpretation seemed necessary to the author's understanding of the Roman Church's prophetic role.

During the 1640s and 1650s, the chaotic period of the Innerregnum, premonitions regarding 1666 steadily hardened into a well-established popular concept and, as might be expected, the astrologers were not behindhand in the matter.³ The most notable among them was probably William Lilly, who in 1644 declared that

My selfe am confident, that an high, a mighty, and a supream piece of work is already upon the stage of Europe in action, answering to the greatest of preceding ages, and verily this so great a mutation, or transmigration of Kings, Kingdomes, Monarchies and Commonwealths shall absolutely be apparent, if not in some measure compleated before or neare 1666.⁴

The chief inspiration of Lilly's prognostication appears to have been a document described as "a prophetic found in a wall, in a Carthusian house in the County of Sommerset, *Anno. Dom.* 1548. by a Mason, a Copy whereof was taken by *Richard Mogg.* 1623" and in 1645 he made it known once again in *A Collection of Ancient and Moderne Prophetes concerning these Present Times, with Modest Observations thereon*:

¹ For an analysis of the interpretation of the number 666 based on this chronology, see D. Brady, "The Contribution of British Writers between 1560 and 1830 to the Interpretation of Revelation 13.16-18 (the Number of the Beast): a Study in the History of Exegesis" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Manchester, 1975), pp. 38 ff.

² *A Brief Description of the Future History of Europe*, sig. A2 and p. 8. On pp. 2, 9 of this work the author recognized the year A.D. 666 as one of ecclesiastical apostasy. It is evident that he ought to have calculated the terminus of his Millennium of persecutions from that date rather than from A.D. 606.

³ See e.g. R. Le Wright, *Nuncius Propheticus* (London, 1642), p. 13.

⁴ *A Prophecy of the White King* (London, 1644), p. 19.

From *Caesar* did the Tell begin,
 Six hundred yeer ere *Will* did win ;
 Sixty six hoyst Normans Saile,
 Six hundred more makes up the Tale :
 Remember M.D.C.L.X.
 V. and I. then neere a Rex.
 Mark the holy written Beast,
 Six hundred sixty six it heast.
 Daniels, *Iohn* and Maidens Sonne,
 Vast it was, and vast is done.
 Accurst in E. Normans Heire,
 Englands Crowne shall never weare . . .

 More I ken, but quake to tell,
 I ken too much in kenning Hell.
 From sixty till the Beast be dead,
 The Heavens warme with fiery red.¹

Lilly had some difficulty in interpreting the first two lines of the conundrum, suggesting that 600 years was perhaps put for about 1200 years, the time between the first coming of the Romans to Britain and the coming of William the Conqueror, referred to in the doggerel as "*Will*". Alternatively, he suggested that if 600 years were counted back from William the Conqueror, then the reference was probably to the Saxon invasions, i.e. the end of Caesar's power in Britain. He was much more certain as to the termination of the prophetic period in 1666, a year which would see the full conclusion of the Norman dominion in England.² The reference to "*Daniels, Iohn and Maidens Sonne*" he understood to refer to great enlightenment about the year 1666 concerning the apocalyptic texts of Daniel and the Revelation and concerning the person of Jesus Christ, while the words "*Accurst in E. Normans Heire*" he understood as referring to Edward VI and Elizabeth, who died without issue and with whom the Norman race became extinguished among England's monarchs. On hindsight a reader of the verse living in 1666 might have recognized the fulfilment of the closing line of the poem in the Great Fire of London, but Lilly did not interpret it in that sense. He averred rather that from the year 1666 "all the Heavens or

¹ Op. cit. p. 12 f.

² For a discussion of the political myth of the Norman yoke in the seventeenth century, see C. Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution* (London, 1958), pp. 50 ff.

Kingdomes of *Europe* (but especially we in *England*) will be wholly busied in strong disputations, concerning Antichrist and his ruine."¹ The expectation proved true enough, but must have required little foresight in an atmosphere already so much fired by eschatological fervour.

In 1647 Lilly once again asserted on the authority of astrological calculations that by 1666 the false miracles of the world would be discovered and all sects destroyed.² Four years later he listed eight ancient English prophecies affirming the abolition of monarchy in England. The sixth of these was an extract from the verse already quoted—"Remember MD.C.LX./V and I, then near a REX"—which he interpreted to mean that in 1666 there would no longer be a king in England.³ The event, although quite probable to one writing in 1651, was, however, to prove otherwise in the fated year. Elsewhere in this document there was evidence to suggest that Lilly had foreseen the Plague and Fire of London and on the event he was summoned before some Parliament men and questioned as to the causes of the Fire, for treachery was suspected. Lilly's inquisitors in October 1666 were, however, satisfied with the answers which he gave. One of them particularly asked, "Did you foresee the year?" and Lilly replied dogmatically, "I did not . . . or was desirous: of that I made no scrutiny."⁴ What seems to have aroused the suspicions of the government was the series of prints appended to *Monarchy or no Monarchy in England*, one of which appeared to depict the whole city of London in flames and boats sinking in the Thames as men, relinquishing weapons of war, tried to swim for safety. Concerning these illustrations, Lilly had commented that, "*Had the curtesie of the present Times deserved it at my hands, thou hadst seene an Explanation of the sixteen Pages following, which in Aenigmaticall Types, Formes, Figures, Shapes, doth perfectly represent the future condition of the English Nation and Commonwealth for many hundred of years yet to come.*" On

¹ Op. cit. pp. 12-15, 22.

² *The Worlds Catastrophe, or Europes many Mutations untill 1666*, p. 32.

³ *Monarchy or no Monarchy in England* (London, 1651), p. 57.

⁴ *William Lilly's History of his Life and Times, from the Year 1602 to 1681* (London, 1826), p. 94.

the evidence, it is difficult for us to believe his disavowal before his questioners,¹ while the fact that the question was raised that this astrologer might have foreseen the events of 1666 is an indication of the general concern and tension which was abroad with regard to prophecies relating to that year.

In 1653 the Independent minister John Rogers again published the lines of doggerel beginning "*Remember M.D.C.LX/V. and I. then never a Rex*", which Lilly had made known to the English public nine years previously. Rogers came to the conclusion that these prophetic words pointed to 1666 for the full accomplishment of Rome's downfall and in consequence exhorted the present rulers of England to prepare for the establishment of Christ's Kingdom. He appealed to Cromwell for an annual election of governors, "least they should in time assume an *absolutenesse* to themselves, and become *oppressors*", and at the same time inveighed against tithes and the corruptions attached to ecclesiastical preferment. He referred to the comparison made by some of Queen Elizabeth to a sluttish housewife, "*who swept the house, but left the dust behinde the door*" and his appeal to Cromwell was therefore to "set not aside the *Broom* now! (For *new brooms sweep clean*!) Go on, until you cast all the *dust* and *filth* that lay behinde the *door* (in the *late Parliament*) out, as fittest for the *common Sewer*." He launched into Apocalyptic language and exhorted, "O be in that *number* sealed! *Revel. 7.3.* Stand on Mount *Sion* with the *Lamb*, amongst the 144000! *Revel. 14.1.* Help the *Woman* (the *Churches*!) [Rogers meant the Congregational churches] *Revel. 12.16.* And *hate the Whore* till you make her *desolate*! and *naked*! and *burn* her with *fire*! *Revel. 17.16.*" Rogers was convinced that the present wars were a clear sign of the coming of Christ's Kingdom and he declared that the only nobility who would remain after this shaking of the earth would be those who were truly noble in spirit. England, he was sure, would never again support a king. "This *Toe*", he declared, "is dashed all to peeces by the stone cut

¹ In a manuscript written by Lilly probably about the end of March 1666 he deliberately rejected speculations connecting the number of the beast with the year 1666 (Bodl., Ashmolean MS. 241, item XV.1, fol. 200^v), another indication of his volte-face from earlier opinions.

Without hands, and cannot rise more."¹ It is not surprising that the following year he threw in his lot with the Fifth Monarchists, even though his opposition to the government and to Cromwell as Lord Protector was to cost him some years of imprisonment.²

In 1652 Edward Haughton proposed in lectures given to his congregation at Horsham, Sussex, that the number of the beast pointed to the final overthrow of Antichrist in 1666. He did, however, allow that the event might be three or four years either side of 1666, but nevertheless predicted that Rome would be burnt "about 16. years hence."³ Another, anonymous tract, appearing in 1653, managed so to arrange prophetic chronology as to juxtapose the years 1666, "numerus bestiae", and 1777, "numerus ecclesiae".⁴ The sights of most prognosticators, however, did not look so far into the future for the fulfilment of the Apocalyptic visions. We gain some awareness of the way in which civil and political upheavals of the mid-seventeenth century acted as a catalyst in inspiring men to look to the very near future for divine intervention from a letter addressed to Secretary Thurloe by John Pell⁵ in March 1655. Pell wrote that,

Men variously impoverished by the long troubles, full of discontents, and tired by long expectation of amendment, must needs have great propensions to hearken

¹ *Ohel or Beth-Shemesh: a Tabernacle for the Sun* (London, 1653), pp. 6 ff., 16, 23 f. Rogers alluded to the number of the beast again in *Jegar Sahadutha: an Oyled Pillar set up for Posterity against the Present Wickednesses* ([London?], 1657), p. 148.

² For further information on John Rogers, see *Some Account of the Life and Opinions of a Fifth-Monarchy-Man, chiefly extracted from the Writings of John Rogers . . . by . . . E. Rogers* (London, 1867) and Capp, op. cit. *passim*. John Canne, another Fifth Monarchist, also argued that 1666 would be a time of Apocalyptic fulfilment (*A Voice from the Temple to the Higher Powers* (London, 1653), p. 24 f.)

³ *The Rise, Growth, and Fall of Antichrist*, p. 111.

⁴ *Clavis Apocalyptica ad Incudem Revocata; vel Clavis Recusa*: for a summary of the argument involved in this tract, see B. W. Ball, "A Study of Eschatological Thought in English Protestant Theology, 1640-1662, with Special Reference to the Second Coming of Christ and the End of the Age" (London University Ph.D. thesis, 1970) p. 221.

⁵ John Pell gained repute as a mathematician. He was despatched as Cromwell's political agent to the Protestant cantons of Switzerland with the aim of detaching those cantons from France and drawing them into a Protestant league headed by England.

to those that proclaim times of refreshing—a golden age—at hand, &c. Nor is it a wonder that some should willingly listen to those that publish such glad tidings, under the name of the kingdom of Christ and of the saints ; especially when so many prophecies are cited and applied to these times.

He proceeded to remark on various popular expectations for the years 1655 and 1656 and observed that some pitched on 1666 on account of the number of the beast in Revelation xiii.18. Pell, however, attempted his own calculations. To 325 (the date of the First Council of Nicaea) he added 1332 (i.e. twice 666) and thus arrived at 1657.¹ Some years later, in 1679, he referred again to Revelation xiii.18 as an example of the prophetic use of numbers, but on this later occasion he attempted to show that Rome's final ruin would occur toward the end of the year 1688.² This is, of course, evidence that to outlive a date prophetically determined was by no means to dampen the enthusiasm of the date-fixers.

Another attempt to connect the number of the beast with 1666 appeared in print later in 1655. This anonymous pamphlet³ was also an attack on the Pope of the day, Alexander VII, concerning whose name, written in the form *aLeXanDer 7 epIsCopVs roMae*, it was observed that "all the letters used as numerals by the Latins M.D.C.L.X.V. and I. conjunctively make up the critical amount !" and that they also pointed to the fateful year 1666. The author remarked that the first three Roman numerals (M, D, and C) were said to have been adopted as the initials of their respective values (*mille*, *dimidium mille* and *centum*), while the four remaining characters spelt the word *luxi*, which was the preterite both of *luceo*, "to shine" (a characteristic which he connected with the words of Revelation xviii.7 : "she [Babylon] saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow") and of *lugeo*, "to mourn" (a characteristic which he connected with the words of Rev. xviii.19 : "for in one hour is

¹ R. Vaughan, *The Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell* (London, 1839), i. 156 f.

² J. Aubrey, "Day-Fatality of Rome", in *Miscellanies upon Various Subjects*, 5th edn. (London, 1890), pp. 21-24.

³ The dedication to Oliver Cromwell was headed "Inclytissimo . . . Protectori Autor" and signed "J.W.", whilst the signatures "W.A., T.H., R.W., J.G., S.S., J.W." occurred at the end of the work. I have not been able to identify these signatories.

she made desolate"). Taken, however, by pairs, he suggested that the first two letters of *luxi*, when added to the preceding three, pointed to the very year in which he published these discoveries, 1655, in which Alexander VII entered on his pontificate. With the addition of the remaining two letters, the author suggested (but cautiously added, "quod divinare non ausim") we might arrive at the precise duration of Alexander's pontificate. The 1260 days (interpreted as years) also pointed to 1666, since he made this period commence in A.D. 406 with the Emperor Honorius's granting certain rights to Pope Innocent I.¹ The prediction proved almost, but only almost, correct, for Alexander VII died in May 1667.² This scheme of commencing the 1260 "years" in A.D. 406 was echoed again in 1660 in another tract bearing only the initials of its author, "I.F."³

In 1662 there was published anonymously a pamphlet of seventy-six pages' length entitled *Christ and Antichrist; or, 666. multiplied by 2½, whereby the True Number of Antichrist's Reign is Discovered*. It did not become well known,⁴ but that was probably because, as the author confessed, the work was only printed in a small edition, the author only wishing to have enough copies available to pass on to friends. He did not, he declared,

¹ *Romae Ruina Finalis, Anno Dom. 1666. Mundique Finis sub Quadragesimum Quintum Post Annum; sive, Literae ad Anglos Romae Versantes Datae, quibus . . . & Bestiam Derelinquere, & Babylone, Urbe nempe Romanâ Anno jam dicto . . . excidio, & Incendio delendâ . . . confestim Exire admonentur* (London, 1655), sig. π^{1v} and *passim*. J. A. Bengel was probably referring to this tract when he suggested that its author was Tobias Littleton (an error for Thomas Lupton? v. sup., p. 314), who penned the work during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, wishing to persuade the English who were living at Rome (this is evidently a mistranslation of the words "ad Anglos Romae Versantes" in the title) of that city's downfall in A.D. 1666 (*Gnomon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh, 1858), v. 314).

² We may note in passing that William Lilly rejected the cipher *aLeXanDer epIsCopVs roMae*, apparently on the ground that there had been many popes bearing the name Alexander, none of whom adequately fulfilled all that was predicted of the beast (cf. Bodl., Ashmolean MS. 241, item XV. 1, fol. 200^r).

³ *A Sober Inquiry, or Christs Reign with his Saints a Thousand Years: modestly asserted from Scripture* (London, 1660), pp. 8-19.

⁴ The only contemporary reference to this pamphlet which I have come across was in the letter referred to below p. 330, n. 1. The author of that letter, although opposing the suggestion that the number of the beast referred to 1666, did in some measure approve of this pamphlet.

have the least design to make a noise in the world, nor to cause any offence.¹ In the introduction to his work he forewarned his readers against fixing positively on the year 1666, since the fact that the actual date of Christ's birth was uncertain lent a certain amount of doubt to any chronological computations in the Christian era ; this did not, however, prevent him from making pretty definite use of this date as the time of Antichrist's fall. The most unusual feature of the work was the author's peculiar interpretation of the words " the number of a man " as referring not to the beast's number, but to Christ's, since " the man " *par excellence* was Jesus Christ. Christ's number, therefore, was 666 and this was only the number of the beast in the sense that by Christ's number we are able to determine the number, i.e. the date, of the beast's downfall. Although he expressed some sympathy with Thomas Lupton's interpretation of the number 666 as being the number of the beast and an elliptical way of referring to the year 1666, the author of *Christ and Antichrist* sought to arrive at a similar conclusion, but by a different means, insisting that the expression " his number " referred to " the man " and that that man was Christ. He sought to base his argument on the analysis made by John Lightfoot of the duration of Christ's life on earth,² allowing a total of $32\frac{1}{2}$ years from his Birth to the Crucifixion, the first 30 years " current before he was baptized, or took upon him the office of his Mediatorship ", $3\frac{1}{2}$ years in the execution of that office,³ and the latter $2\frac{1}{2}$ years of that time under the persecution of the Jews. This last point he sought to prove by a careful examination of the narrative of John's Gospel, as well as by other (more specious) arguments (e.g. a comparison made with the $2\frac{1}{2}$ years of Christ's residence as a child in Egypt).⁴

The first period of 30 years he related to the 42 months of Antichrist's power (Rev. xi.2), since if 42 were multiplied by 30

¹ Op. cit. sig. A4v.

² See J. Lightfoot, *The Harmony, Chronicle and Order of the New-Testament . . . The Times of the Revelation observed, etc.* (London, 1655), pp. 8, 11.

³ Lightfoot had placed the baptism of Jesus at the *beginning* of his 30th year, so that with the added $3\frac{1}{2}$ years of his ministry, the total duration of his life would be $32\frac{1}{2}$ years.

⁴ Op. cit. pp. 10-25.

it would produce 1260, the days of the prophesying of the two witnesses (Rev. xi.3). The $3\frac{1}{2}$ years of Christ's ministry he related to the $3\frac{1}{2}$ days during which the witnesses lay slain (Rev. xi.9), equivalent to 1260 natural days. Thirdly, he pointed out that if 666 were multiplied by $2\frac{1}{2}$, we should arrive at the year 1665, at the end of which would come 1666 and the year of Christ's triumph over Antichrist. Similarly, he argued, basing his thoughts on a comparison previously made by Lightfoot, the life of David, who was a type of Christ, might also be divided into three periods of time: (1) 30 years as a private man before he began to reign; (2) $7\frac{1}{2}$ years during which he reigned in Hebron; and (3) $32\frac{1}{2}$ years during which he reigned in Jerusalem. As for the 30 years, he observed that this was equivalent to the length of time that Christ also spent as a private man, while the $32\frac{1}{2}$ years were also equivalent to the full time of Christ's life in the flesh. The $7\frac{1}{2}$ years, during which David reigned in Hebron, were also equivalent to the time of Christ's persecution ($2\frac{1}{2}$ years) multiplied by 3, and he further observed that if these $7\frac{1}{2}$ years were multiplied by 222 ($\frac{1}{3}$ of 666), we should again arrive at 1665. Perhaps, he added, Solomon might also be considered as a type of Christ, since his "Crown of Excellency" was recorded to be 666 talents of gold as his revenue for one year (1 Kgs. x.14/2 Chr. ix.13); this might, he believed, be a type of the glory that Christ would inherit in the year 1666.¹

The author then proceeded to manipulate in a quite arbitrary fashion several other numbers in an apparent attempt to astonish his readers with the unexpected results. It might safely be assumed that his arguments in this portion of the work must have produced some puzzlement among his selected readers and not the admiration he might have hoped for. But he was not content with these brief examples of celestial arithmetic, for he added a second section to the work in which he sought in similar ways to expound the numbers 1250, 1290, and 1335 (cf. Dan. xii.11 f.), again arriving at 1666 for the termination of Antichrist's reign.² With the year of Antichrist's fall so close at hand, he

¹ Ibid. pp. 13-16. For other comments on this Old Testament passage, made in expounding the number of the beast, see Brady, op. cit. p. 208.

² Ibid. pp. 25-60.

added yet more pages to his pamphlet with the purpose of exhorting his readers to awake from careless sleep and so to prepare for the Coming of the Son of Man. His words to them were,

You live in the fag of Antichrists lease, whose destruction slumbers not ; and therefore as you desire to escape that cup already begun to be poured out upon the people of God, (the dregs whereof Antichrist & his party must shortly drink) bethink yourselves in time, and shew yourselves men, & not beasts, Christians in truth, and not in shew onely.¹

As exemplifying the spirit of religious unrest and prophetic expectation abroad in the early Restoration society and also as expressing the Quaker protest against the speculative approach to the interpretation of Apocalyptic numbers, we may consider the words of George Fox entered in his *Journal* for 1661. It is an appeal for sanity and sanctity rather than fanaticism and pious fraud :

And ye 5th Monarchy men I was moved to give foorth a paper to y^m : whoe lookt for Christ personall comeinge in : 66 : & some of y^m did prepare y^mselves when it thundered & rained & thought Christ was comeinge to sett uppe his kingedome & then they thought they was to kill ye whore without y^m but I tolde y^m ye whore was alife in y^m & was not burnt with Gods fire : & Judged in y^m : with ye same power & spiritt ye Apostles was in . . . but Christ was come & had sett uppe his kingedome above 1600 yeers since . . . And though yee carnall weapond men : who are in ye beasts whores pharoh & nebuchandnezars armor : sees it not : yet his kingedome remains & changhes not & ye saintes takes ye kingedome.²

But the obsession with signs and prodigies did not lessen, as is evidenced by a series of three pamphlets published in 1661 and 1662, all bearing some variation of the title *Mirabilis Annus*.³ According to the calculations of B. W. Ball, the three pamphlets recorded a total of 146 prodigies seen in the heavens, 75 observed on the earth, 26 in the rivers and seas, plus 91 remarkable

¹ Ibid. p. 67 f.

² Op. cit., ed. N. Penney (Cambridge, 1911). ii. 12 f.

³ The first, dated 1661, was entitled *Eniautos Terastios: Mirabilis Annus, or the Year of Prodigies and Wonders*, the second *Mirabilis Annus Secundus; or, the Second Year of Prodigies*, and the third *Mirabilis Annus Secundus; or the Second Part of the Second Years Prodigies*. The last two were published in 1662.

accidents which had come as judgements to a variety of people.¹ Although it was not the purpose of these tracts to point to 1666 as marked out by prophecy, there is evidence to suggest that they were an important contributory influence in inspiring Dryden to compose his *Annus Mirabilis*, which *was* intended "to counter certain vague and superstitious terrors that filled the air" with regard to 1666, "and in particular to oppose certain seditious tracts the effects of which, it was feared, would call the people forth to rebellion in times of disaster."² As an example of the credence given to those who interpreted unusual phenomena as auguries of catastrophic events to occur around 1666, we may take the account given in the records of a Baptist church in Bristol (still flourishing). Three blazing stars were seen in the heavens in 1664 and were interpreted by Thomas Ewins, the minister of the congregation, according to the direction in which the tail of each star lay, as indicating God's imminent judgements on England, Holland and Germany, and France and Spain,

but Fraunce Especially, that it may be y^e Lord showed us, should taste of y^e Third Cup, (after England and Holland); and by y^e manner of y^e Third Starr's appearing and abideing, who knows but it shows that their, viz. Fraunce's trouble shall continue untill y^e daylight of y^e Protestant Interest appear, and breake forth, to y^e daylingt of God's fulfilling his glorious promises in y^e Holy Scriptures, to a visible manifestation of God's hastening y^e Pulling downe of y^e Papal Power and y^e Pope? Amen; soe come, Lord Jesus.³

More evidence testifying to the popular apprehensions which filled the air with grim expectations as the year 1666 drew nearer is to be found in occasional notices in the *Calendar of State Papers*. Some of these notices have particular reference to the

¹ Op. cit. p. 197 f. C. E. Whiting believed that the author shared Fifth Monarchist sympathies and suggested that Henry Jessey was closely associated with the pamphlets (*Studies in English Puritanism from the Restoration to the Revolution, 1660-1688* (New York, 1931), pp. 547-51). Ball noted that Jessey's *The Lords Loud Call to England* (1660) did in fact repeat incidents recorded in *Mirabilis Annus*, although with varying details in some cases (op. cit. p. 197).

² E. N. Hooker, "The Purpose of Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis*", *Huntington Library Quarterly*, x (1946), 67.

³ *The Records of a Church of Christ in Bristol, 1640-1687*, ed. R. Hayden, *Bristol Record Soc. Publications*, xxvii (1974), 120.

Dutch hostilities,¹ whilst another records a "prediction in verse of a contest between the English and French and other troubles, to begin when a one and three sixes meet for the year."² We also find reference to Vavasor Powell, the Welsh Independent minister of Fifth Monarchist inclinations, who is said to have been imprisoned on account of his foretelling calamities in 1666.³ John Spencer, the famous Hebraist and scholar of Corpus Christi, Cambridge who later became Dean of Ely, wrote derisively in 1665, "'Tis a time wherein (as 'tis usual) *Folly* is as busy as *Wisdom*. Never greater talk of terrible *Signs, Revelations and Visions* in our own and other Kingdoms then now."⁴ More fuel was added to the fire by the supposed discovery of a British prophecy like the one mentioned earlier as having been discovered in a Carthusian house in Somerset. This was edited and published under the title *The Prophecie of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury . . . concerning the Wars betwixt England, France, and Holland, lately found in an Ancient Manuscript at Abington by Dr. Ailsworth* (London, 1666). The prophecy seems

¹ E.g. CSP, Dom., 1663-4, p. 468 (where it is recorded that certain people "hope that by the year 1666 the beast will be destroyed"); and p. 652 (where there is reference to "many mean persons and some discontented Irish" who "are possessed by writers that much will take place between now [27 July 1664] and 1666").

² Ibid. 1665-6, p. 184.

³ Ibid. p. 191. Powell was imprisoned from Sept. 1662 to Nov. 1667 on account of the official verdict that he refused to take the oaths of allegiance and supremacy. Powell's fellow Welsh Fifth Monarchist Morgan Llwyd also appears to have suggested various dates for the commencement of the Millennium: 1650, 1656, 1660 and 1666. His most important literary composition was *Llyfr y Tri Aderyn* ("The Book of the Three Birds"), in which he embodied his own Puritan sentiments under the figure of a dove, whilst the raven spoke for the royalist point of view and the eagle, who represented the government and perhaps Cromwell himself, presided over their discourse. A translation of the fuller title of his book is "A Mystery for Some to Understand and Others to Mock at, that is to say, Three Birds Discoursing, the Eagle, the Dove, and the Raven . . . A Sign to Greet the Welsh . . . before the Coming of 666" (see T. Parry, *A History of Welsh Literature*, trans. H. I. Bell (Oxford, 1955), pp. 246-51). Other examples of contemporary apocalyptic fervour are found in CSP, Dom., 1663-4, p. 652; ibid. 1664-5, p. 484; cf. also *The Rev. Oliver Heywood . . . his Autobiography, Diaries, Anecdote and Event Books*, ed. J. Horsfall Turner (Brighouse and Bingley, 1882-5), iii. 93; K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London, 1973), p. 141 f.; and Capp, op. cit. p. 213 f.

⁴ *A Discourse concerning Prodigies*, 2nd edn. (London, 1665), p. 6.

to have gained great popularity, although a counterblast did appear from the press in the same year, bearing the signature "T.T." and obviously intending to cry down the popular ferment abroad concerning this prophecy (foolishly attributed to the great British saint) and the irrationality of connecting the number of the beast with chronological computations in general and particularly to the year commonly referred to as 1666.¹ The fact that expectations for 1666 were not confined to England, noticed in John Spencer's remarks above, has been adequately demonstrated by Capp, particularly remarkable being the popular acclaim by Jews throughout the Ottoman Empire for the self-styled Messiah Sabbatai Sevi, to whom many from lands as far away as Poland, Germany, and the Netherlands flocked at Constantinople and whose activities were keenly watched by many in western Europe, not least among whom were the Fifth Monarchists.²

When 1666 arrived at last, Clarendon recorded in the *Continuation of his History of the Grand Rebellion* that,

In the beginning of the year 1666, a year long destined by all astrologers for the production of dismal changes and alterations throughout the world, and by some for the end of it, the king found his condition so much worse than it had been the last year, as the addition of France and Denmark could make it : against all which, and the prodigies which the year was to produce, (and it did truly produce many,) the king prepared with his accustomed vigour and resolution, though the predictions had a strange operation upon vulgar minds.³

Indeed they did and not only upon vulgar minds. Pepys, for example, recorded in his *Diary* a conversation which he had had

¹ *A Letter written to a Friend in Wilts, upon Occasion of a Late Ridiculous Pamphlet, wherein was inserted a Pretended Prophecie of Thomas Becket's* (London, 1666), *passim*.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 213 f. As late as 1735, when Pelham's bill for the naturalization of the Jews was making heavy weather through Parliament, the follies of the Jews in 1666 were remembered again and it was also noticed that "according to the predictions of several Christian Writers, especially of such who comment on the *Apocalyps*, or *Revelations*, this Year 1666 was to prove a Year of Wonders, of strange Revolutions in the World, and particularly of Blessing to the Jews" (*A Looking-Glass for the Jews: or, the Credulous Unbelievers, containing . . . the Surprising History of Sabatay Sevi, the Counterfeit Messiah, in 1666* (London, 1753), p. 23).

³ *The Life of Edward Earl of Clarendon*, new edn. (Oxford, 1827), iii. 39 f.

with Lord Sandwich on 25 February 1666, reporting that, "He dreads the issue of this year, and fears there will be some very great revolutions before his coming back again." Pepys himself was stirred to investigate whether or not the number 666 truly pointed to the year 1666, for only one week before his conversation with Sandwich he had bought a copy of Francis Potter's work on the number of the beast,¹ mistakenly believing that it had been "writ about twenty years ago in prophecy of this year coming on, 1666, explaining it to be the marke of the beast".

In a series of lucubrations published between 1643 and 1662 the poet George Wither had sought to demonstrate how the number of the beast pointed to the last years of the seventeenth century as the time of Rome's destruction on account of the value of all the Roman numerals added together plus the date of Christ's Crucifixion, but when the year 1666 arrived he seemed ready to agree that the number of the beast might also in some partial sense refer to that year. The title page of his *Sigh for the Pitchers* depicted two pitchers representing England and Holland, with two hands (those of the poet ?) raised to restrain them from colliding with each other. The caption read, "Hold, hold, if ye knock, ye are broke, unless God prevent", whilst the imprint read, "Imprinted in the sad year expressed in this seasonable CHRONOGRAM, LorD haVe MerCie Vpon Vs." Surprisingly enough however, Wither's verse in this publication was not overcast with doom, but replete with encouragement for the English nation :

assured then I am,

That, he, (according to the *Chronogram*
Upon my *Title-page*,) us will *so hear*,
That, this will prove to be a happy year.
Let us forbear to vaunt, as we have done,
Of *Conquests*, whilst our Arms are putting on :
For, an example of that folly have I
In their invincible (so called) *Navie*
Which was in *Eighty eight* upon our Coasts
Destroyed after many shameless Boasts.
God grant that *Sixty six*, be not to us
For such like Vauntings as unprosperous.²

¹ For a discussion of this important work by Potter, see Brady, op. cit. pp. 154-72.

² Op. cit. p. 32.

Nevertheless, however encouraging Wither's doggerel might have appeared to some, the government of the day viewed the pamphlet with suspicion and on 23 July 1666 warrants were issued for the arrest of the poet and of those who sold his compositions.¹ But there were other versifiers with pens at the ready, among them the astrologer George Wharton whose last "Kalendarium Carolinum" discovered among his remains was for the year 1666 and read,

Now *Sixteen hundred sixty six* is come :
 When (as some say) shall be the *Day of Doom* :
 Or else the *Pope* and *Hierarchy* destroy'd,
Presbytery Advanc'd and over-joy'd.
 Here's *Seven Years Purchase* offer'd for his *Land*,
 Who thinks that *Dreadful Day* so nigh at hand :
 And (if his *Holyness* suspect his *Chair*)
 I'le tak't *my self*, though but for this *One Year*.²

It is rather ironical that Wharton's editor, John Gadbury, had to note at the end of the astrologer's almanac for 1666 that "*This was the very last Year that this Learned Person wrote Almanacks.*"³

For others, too, the year proved ill-starred. In an autobiographical memorandum, Aubrey noted against 1666, "This yeare all my business and affairs ran kim kam, nothing tooke effect, as if I had been under an ill tongue. Treacheries and enmities in abundance against me", and, again, in an essay entitled "Day-Fatality: or, some Observations of Days Lucky and Unlucky", he noted how the days 2-6 September of 1666 proved dismal and unhappy not only for himself but for the whole city of London.⁴ The Plague had been succeeded by the Great Fire and the nation was threatened by wars with the Dutch. Concerning the political convulsions of the time, Sir William Coventry, who had been sent to Holland in order to conclude a triple alliance of Protestant England, Holland, and Sweden against the French, wrote to Sir William Temple on 2 November,

¹ See *CSP, Dom.*, 1665-6, p. 569.

² *The Works*, ed. J. Gadbury (London, 1683), p. 410.

³ *Ibid.* p. 414.

⁴ *Op. cit.* pp. xii f., 10.

We have great expectations what the *Suedes* army at *Bremen*, and the new Confederation against them will produce. We hear the Duke of *Savoy*, and the state of *Geneva* are falling out, which probably will not want Partners in its Success : So that the influence of 66 will extend itself further than the Puritans Allowance for the *Revelations* to be fulfilled in, which they confine to England.¹

But some Puritans were not content to leave things to chance or even to God. If the power of Rome could not be broken in England in 1666, then Rome might at least be blamed for England's injuries. In the abstract of Titus Oates's narrative of the Popish Plot, Oates declared how Richard Strange together with other Jesuits and a Dominican were plotting the king's murder to take place during the Great Fire, " *that the number of the Beast might be accomplished* ",² a statement which not only indicates that Oates connected the number of the beast with 1666, but also that such a connection was readily recognized by men in general even twelve years later. It is also worthy of note that as late as 1787 one writer could still commence the 1260 " years " in the autumn of A.D. 406 and consequently discover their termination in the autumn of 1666, when, as was popularly believed, the papists burnt the city of London including St. Paul's and eighty-eight other churches, a fact which was regarded as a remarkable coincidence of the number 666.³

But 1666 came and went. The end was not yet and neither Roman Catholicism nor monarchy were *in extremis*. Strange irony it was that 1666 happened to be the year in which another more sober, albeit historicist, expounder of the Apocalyptic Scriptures, Sir Isaac Newton, was inspired by the alleged episode of the falling apple to postulate the laws of universal gravitation

¹ *Letters written by Sir W. Temple, Bart., and other Ministers of State* (London, 1700), i. 439.

² *A True Narrative of the Horrid Plot and Conspiracy of the Popish Party against the Life of his Sacred Majesty* (London, 1779), pp. 22 ff. James Duport, Dean of Peterborough, also supposed the number of the beast to contain some prophetic allusion to the Great Fire, kindled by the papists, in his *Musae Subsecivae, seu Poetica Stromata* (Cambridge, 1676) (cf. F. Wrangham, " Six Hundred Threescore and Six. Rev. xiii. 18 ", in *Sermons Practical and Occasional; Dissertations, Translations, etc.* (London, 1816), ii. 417).

³ R. Moody, *Observations on Certain Prophecies in the Book of Daniel, and the Revelation of St. John, which relate to the Second Appearing of our Lord* (London, 1787), p. 14.

whereby the stars and planets whose fluctuations had hitherto been viewed with ominous intent, were kept on their respective courses. The following year Thomas Sprat, Bishop of Rochester, while writing *The History of the Royal-Society of London*, was moved on account of recent prophetic fervour to lay greater stress on the importance of scientific experiment as a very seasonable study calculated to dissipate obsessions with prodigies and special providences, since, as he wrote, "at this time, especially this last year, this gloomy, and ill-boding humor has prevail'd." Calamities, such as plague and fire, he remarked, should inspire a general searching of conscience and repentance and he added that it was mere spiritual pride to lay the blame for these events at the door of particular men.¹ Another leading divine of the Established Church, Robert South, who was later to be offered but decline the see of Rochester, also added some sarcastic comments directed against "our pretenders to the Spirit", meaning the revolutionaries of the Interregnum, in a sermon on Romans viii.14 ("For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God") and he offered two examples illustrating the foolishness of their prophecies. The first example consisted of their prophecies of Oliver Cromwell's recovery and long life just two days before his actual death, whilst the second was "the so much talked of prophecies of 1666, which for a long time made the first article of the fanatics' creed, till that year came at length, and fired them out of it",² a sarcastic allusion to the effects of the Great Fire itself. Preaching again in Westminster Abbey in 1692 on the gifts of the Spirit from 1 Corinthians xii.4 and paying particular attention to recent examples of false prophecy, he again commented that,

These men [our gifted brethren] were once full of a prophecy that the world should be destroyed in the year 1656; because, forsooth, the flood came upon the old world in that year reckoning from the creation. And again, that the downfall of Pope and Antichrist, together with that of monarchy and episcopacy, (which they always accounted as limbs of Antichrist,) should be in the year 1666. And that because some remarkable mention is made of the number 666 in the Revelation; with many other such like predictions: the event of all which has

¹ Op. cit. pp. 362-5.

² *Sermons preached upon Several Occasions*, new edn. (Oxford, 1842), iii. 242 f.

shewn, that those men were not of God's privy council ; but, on the contrary, that all their prophecies were like those of almanacks, which warn every wise body to prepare against foul weather, by their foretelling fair.¹

Even the Fifth Monarchist leader Henry Danvers, reflecting after the passing of the year 1666, was compelled to admit that it was impossible so to interpret the prophecies as to specify exact years.²

It is easy to be wise after the event and to spurn the credulity of those who so long ago hoped that 1666 would witness events of apocalyptic magnitude, but it is hard for us to lend the sympathetic ear which is necessary in order to understand how this apocalyptic fervour had risen to such a pitch that the expectation was recognized, if not owned, by the populace at large. Wishful thinking was in fact so strong that no one seems definitely to have questioned the connection of the Apocalyptic number with the year A.D. 1666, a connection which appears by no means obvious to those living over three centuries later. Quite clearly 666 is not the same as 1666. The usual explanation was that the number 666 was simply an abbreviated way of referring to that year. In the words of Griffith Williams, Bishop of Ossory, "for *brevities* sake . . . we say, the *Spanish Armado*, was in 588. for 1588. and the *Gun-powder plot* was in 605. for 1605. and so forth of the like".³ But the evidence suggests that it was no more the practice in the seventeenth century than it is in the twentieth century to refer to a date by the last three numerals rather than by the last two. We have, for example, the words of the Yorkshire Nonconformist minister Oliver Heywood :

Mr Ball⁴ that made the Catich, having many schollars in his house, had one who since is one Captain Jackson to whom he said, (clapping him on the head) thou wilt be among them in 66 wch wil be a dreadful day in England : Seeing him an active spark, he said thou wilt be busy amongst them in 66.⁵

¹ Ibid. ii. 307.

² *Theopolis, or the City of God, New Jerusalem* (London, 1672), p. 46.

³ *The Great Antichrist Revealed* (London, 1661), pt. 3, p. 42. The work was a piece of Restoration invective directed against Cromwell and the Parliament.

⁴ I.e. the Puritan John Ball.

⁵ Op. cit. iii. 93.

The same usage of the expression "66" rather than "666" for the year 1666 is also evidenced in the quotations from George Fox, George Wither, and Sir William Coventry given above.¹ However, even supposing that the expression 666 were used popularly for 1666, it is difficult in the extreme to imagine that the author of the Revelation had 1666 in mind. He might just as well have intended the year 2666 or 3666, but more probably 666,² and yet more probably still no such year at all, since, as George Bingham observed when discussing the supposed connection of the number 666 with the year 1666, 1666 is probably not the 1666th year after the birth of Christ, the traditional chronology being in error as to the date of Christ's birth.³ The real failure of the 1666 interpretation of the number of the beast was, of course, that the year came and went without the events predicted of it coming to pass, although the troubles borne by the English in that year might have caused many erstwhile heedless people to prepare, in a way to which they were not accustomed, to meet their God.⁴

¹ V. sup. pp. 327, 331, 333.

² For a discussion of this interpretation, see Brady, op. cit. pp. 50 ff.

³ *Dissertations, Essays, and Sermons* (London, 1804), ii. 328 ff.

⁴ In 1667 Tillotson, the future Archbishop of Canterbury, preached a sermon entitled "Of the End of Judgments, and the Reason of their Continuance" in which he publicly acknowledged the Plague, the Fire, and the foreign war as the judgements of God on an unrepentant nation. He declared that "such judgments as these should not only rouse us a little for the present, but that they should have a permanent operation and effect upon us, and work a lasting reformation amongst us". But Restoration society gained no repute for reformation of manners and Tillotson felt bound to observe, "I am afraid that this dreadful fire hath had no other influence upon us but what it uses to have upon metals, which are only melted by it for the present; but when the fire is removed they suddenly cool and return to their former hardness" (*The Works* (London, 1820), ii. 12). Such was the unfortunate testimony of one who was contemporary to the events of 1666. Cf. also D. Neal, *The History of the Puritans*, 2nd edn. (London, 1754), ii. 656, where the Plague and Fire are again recognized as divine judgements.