

Casting the National Horoscope

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HISTORY is hindsight; prophecy, foresight. It is well known that America has had distinguished historians, but where is the beadroll of her prophets? Should the ability to chart the future be rated lower than the ability to retrace the past? Or has this supposed faculty no real significance, being merely a delusion of the ignorant and superstitious? The answer is not self-evident. In our personal affairs none of us is content to let the future take care of itself. Consciously or unconsciously, we order our lives upon some theory of things to come. We marry, educate our children, conduct our businesses, plant our crops, cast our ballots, always with reference to a projected course of events.

It is true that colleges and universities have not dignified this exertion of the human mind by establishing chairs of prophecy; yet, without saying so, they maintain many departments in which the prophetic function bulks large. Thus the student of meteorology is taught to make predictions about winds, tides, heat, and cold; the beginner in astronomy learns how to foretell an eclipse or a comet five hundred years in advance; and in the courses on public health one aim is to anticipate the probable movement of epidemics. Even the economist tries through his study of business cycles to plot the economic road ahead.

At a less scholarly level the American people have always indulged freely in public prophecy—those in high stations as well as low. It is not that they felt with Shelley,

The world is weary of the past,
Oh, might it die or rest at last!

but rather that in a country on the make the future was more exciting than the past.¹ This rich and abundant literature of conjecture, though neglected by historians, illumines an important and enduring aspect of the many-sided national character. Some of its manifestations form the subject of this essay.

I

Twice during the year 1844 thousands of people scattered all the way from the Atlantic seaboard to Illinois watched through the night for the second coming of the Lord. For centuries the religious-minded had been looking forward to the grand event, basing their hopes especially upon the Books of Daniel and Revelation whose allegories, it was believed, contained clues to the exact time when Christ would begin His thousand-year reign on earth. Long before Columbus made his voyage, many in Europe thought that the year 1000 would usher in the divine millennium. Though the expectation was not fulfilled, speculation continued undampened, for the obscurities of prophetic chronology amply accounted for human frailties of calculation. In the colonial and early national periods Americans of piety and learning added their voices to the chorus. Jonathan Edwards fixed on the time as about the year 2000, and so did President Eliphalet Nott of Union College. The Reverend Joseph Bellamy, one of Edwards's followers, unburdened himself of a book on the subject in 1758; and as late as 1813 President Timothy Dwight of Yale, Edwards's grandson, stated,

¹ P. B. Shelley, "Hellas," *Complete Poetical Works*, Cambridge Edition, Boston, 1901, p. 339.

"Almost all judicious commentators have agreed, that the Millennium, in the full and perfect sense, will begin at a period, not far from the year 2000."

Yet persons of equal repute, if perhaps less numerous, preferred other dates. Jedidiah Morse and Edward D. Griffin, both stalwart Massachusetts Congregational clergymen, joined with the Reverend Ethan Smith of Vermont in scheduling the Second Advent for 1866; Professor John McKnight of Columbia discovered reasons for 1900; Professor William Linn of Rutgers declared for 1916; while President Ezra Stiles, Dwight's predecessor at Yale, postponed the occasion till around the year 2500. Judge John Bacon of Berkshire County, Massachusetts, reviewing the scriptural evidence in 1799 with an open-mindedness uncharacteristic of most millenarians, found support for 1941 in Daniel, 1975 in Ezekiel and a possibility of 1926, 1956 or 2001 in Revelation.² And there, without handing down a court decree, he left the matter.

Such prognosticators ran little risk of having their predictions upset during their lifetime. Others were not so prudent. The Reverend David Austin of Elizabethtown, New Jersey, who after studying with Joseph Bellamy aired his own views in *The Millennium; or, the Thousand Years of Prosperity, Promised to the Church of God, in the Old Testament and the New, Shortly to Commence* (1794), boldly set the date for May 15, 1796. Disappointed but not disillusioned when the day came, this Yale graduate removed to New Haven, where he built houses and a wharf for the Jews whom he expected soon to gather there on their way to greet

² John Bacon, *Conjectures on Prophecies; Written in the Fore Part of the Year 1799* Boston, 1805, pp. 7, 14, 21. For the other forecasts, see Leon Howard, *The Connecticut Wits*, New Haven, 1943, pp. 387-8; O. W. Elsbree, "The Rise of the Missionary Spirit in New England, 1790-1815," *New England Quarterly*, vol. 1 (1928), pp. 295-305; D. M. Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont, 1791-1850*, New York, 1939, pp. 38-40; D. R. Fox, *Ideas in Motion*, New York, 1935, pp. 111-5; and J. W. Thornton, *The Pulpit of the American Revolution*, Boston, 1876, p. 485.

the Messiah in the Holy Land.³ With equal confidence Nathaniel Wood of Middletown, Vermont, settled on January 14, 1801, when, as he informed his little band of followers, a great earthquake would take care of the unregenerate. At the appointed time the authorities called out the militia to protect skeptics from possible violence at the hands of the millenarians, but again the Saviour failed to appear.⁴ In 1831 the religious exhorter Harriet Livermore, daughter of a Massachusetts Congressman, took up the torch, proclaiming the Second Advent as of the year 1847 and the place as Jerusalem, whither she expected the American Indians as the lost tribe of Israel to migrate. Though winning few converts, she expounded her views even in the Hall of the House of Representatives, and ultimately in the British Isles and Palestine.⁵

Perhaps this new evangel would have created more of a stir if a rival prophet had not stolen her audience.⁶ William Miller, of Massachusetts birth, was the son of a Revolutionary soldier and himself a veteran of the War of 1812. Unlike most of his precursors in millennialism, he was largely self-educated and of the common clay. After some years of religious waywardness he became a close student of the Bible, and while farming at Low Hampton, New York,

³ E. F. Hatfield, *History of Elizabeth, New Jersey*, New York, 1868, pp. 598-603; W. B. Sprague, ed., *Annals of the American Pulpit*, New York, 1856, vol. 2, pp. 195-206.

⁴ Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont*, p. 242. Another instance was that of George Rapp who, coming from Germany in 1803, founded a communistic society which flourished for many years. Rapp expected the world to end in 1836, outliving his prediction by eleven years. The celibacy practiced by the Harmony community stemmed logically from the leader's millenarian belief. D. E. Nevin, "The Late George Rapp and the Harmonists," *Scribner's Monthly*, vol. 17 (1878-1879), pp. 708, 711.

⁵ S. T. Livermore, *Harriet Livermore, the Pilgrim Stranger*, Hartford, 1884, pp. 76, 103-5, 113, 155; and Elizabeth F. Hoxie, "Harriet Livermore: 'Vixen and Devotee,'" *New England Quarterly*, vol. 18 (1945), pp. 39-50. John Greenleaf Whittier said of her, "A friend of mine found her, when quite an old woman, wandering in Syria with a tribe of Arabs, who with the Oriental notion that madness is inspiration, accepted her as their prophetess and leader." Whittier, *Works*, Standard Library Edition, Boston, 1892-1894, vol. 2, p. 134. She died in a Philadelphia almshouse in 1868.

⁶ Harriet Livermore, *A Testimony of the Times*, New York, 1843, app., p. ix.

arrived at the conclusion that Christ would descend from the clouds "about the year 1843" when the earth should be exactly six thousand years old.⁷ A rain of fire would exterminate all the wicked, and the righteous, whether living or dead, would join in His thousand-year rule. In 1831 Miller began his travels to warn distant communities of the impending doom.

Where other seers had aroused only a scattering interest, Miller's deep earnestness and obvious sincerity excited widespread conviction. Moreover, celestial omens came to his aid. A strange hour-long spectacle of shooting stars in 1833 was followed ten years later by a huge comet at high noon, hanging over mankind like a menacing sword. To the prophet and his adherents the economic depression starting in 1837 seemed another "sign of the last days" (see 2 Timothy 3: 1-7), and undoubtedly the prolonged hard times made many persons crave a Heavenly solution of their woes. Then, in 1839, the simple old man fell in with a high-pressure organizer, the Reverend Joshua V. Himes of Boston, who inspired Adventist journals in the principal cities and sent out preachers in all directions armed with great charts and diagrams of the forthcoming event.

But the year 1843 perversely drew to a close with the world intact. Miller, forced to reconsider his computations, pointed out that, according to the Jewish rather than the Christian calendar, the fated occasion might come as late as

⁷ Miller's mathematics, it may be remarked, had a highly subjective character. For example, the scriptural word "day" meant to him either a year or a thousand years or an indefinite period; but "If you put on the right construction it will harmonize with the Bible and make good sense, otherwise it will not." William Miller, *Views of the Prophecies and Prophetic Chronology*, J. V. Himes, ed., Boston, 1841, pp. 21-2. Sylvester Bliss, *Memoirs of William Miller*, Boston, 1853, is the basic biography; and Clara E. Sears, *Days of Delusion*, Boston, 1924, is a modern account. See also Emerson Davis, *The Half Century*, Boston, 1851, pp. 400-6, and I. V. Brown, "The Millerites and the Boston Press," *New England Quarterly*, vol. 16 (1943), pp. 592-614. The most recent study is F. D. Nichol, *The Midnight Cry, a Defense of the Character and Conduct of William Miller and the Millerites*, Washington, 1944.

Thursday, March 21, 1844. On that night, hosts of people, convinced of the impossibility of fresh postponement, gathered in many places throughout the North eager to acclaim the Lord and his retinue of angels. They had only their sleeplessness for their pains; once more the schedule had gone askew. The prophet, deeply dejected, would have foregone further forecasts, but his aides, inflamed only to greater zeal, prevailed upon the venerable man to announce Tuesday, October 22, as the true and incontestable date.

Anticipation now rose to fresh intensity; conversions multiplied; Millerites closed their shops or neglected their crops; many, it is reported, provided themselves with ascension robes; others lost their reason under the strain. When the newly appointed night arrived, untold numbers of men, women and children took up the vigil, some at home or in places of worship, some in open fields and cemeteries, some on hilltops and some even in trees. But again the dawn came without incident, except that many of the watchers suffered from hunger and exposure and here and there children were injured or lost. The leaders, reluctant to offer yet another revision of their timetable, contented themselves with proclaiming the millennium as still near at hand but of indefinite date. Most of the Millerites fell away from the movement, and the founder himself survived the de-nouement by only a few years. In after times isolated small groups continued to believe they had unlocked the secret. Even in the enlightened twentieth century a band of Reformed Seventh Day Adventists at East Patchogue, Long Island, bore watch through the night of February 6, 1925.⁸

The *Boston Transcript*, October 24, 1844, remarked of the Millerite excitement: "This is a free country and men have a sort of natural right to be fools." James Brisbane of Batavia, New York, when admonished by a neighbor that

⁸ *Boston Herald*, February 7, 1925.

the world was about to end, replied crustily, "Damned glad of it. This experiment of the human race is a total failure!"⁹ In more sober mood the poet-reformer John Greenleaf Whittier deplored a doctrine based upon "vague prophecies, Oriental imagery, and obscure Hebrew texts," whose only result was to distract attention from the urgent needs of the living.¹⁰ Yet, when due allowance is made for the overwhelming majority of persons who jeered or condemned, the Millerite episode holds a unique place in the history of American soothsaying, for no other seer succeeded in creating a nation-wide movement, or in working on the popular mind with such hypnotic effect. Behind Millerism, of course, lay a long tradition of millennial conjecture, but probably more important was the fact that the predicted Second Advent happened to fall in a period of horizonless optimism. As Emerson observed, the era delighted in "projects for the reform of domestic, civil, literary, and ecclesiastical institutions."¹¹ James Brisbane might despair of his fellow man, but his own son Albert, more typical of the generation, joined Horace Greeley in 1841 in founding a magazine *The Future* in hopes of hastening the establishment of the Fourieristic ideal of society.¹²

II

If optimism in the 1840's appeared to burst all bonds, it is also true that a lively sense of contemporaneity with the future had permeated the American spirit from the begin-

⁹ Albert Brisbane, *A Mental Biography*, Redelia Brisbane, ed., Boston, 1893, p. 51.

¹⁰ Whittier, *Works*, vol. 7, pp. 390-1.

¹¹ R. W. Emerson, *Works*, Standard Library Edition, Boston, 1883-87, vol. 1, p. 256.

¹² W. A. Linn, *Horace Greeley*, New York, 1903, pp. 79-80.

ning. Living in a raw but richly endowed land, the colonists constantly visioned the marvels to come. Nothing men could hope for seemed beyond reach: time alone was needed for fulfillment. Even those who peered toward an apocalyptic millennium assumed that in the interval big things of a mundane sort impended. It was George Berkeley, however, who gave immortal expression to the bravest of these anticipations. This Irish prelate and philosopher, his imagination whetted by an impending journey to Rhode Island, wrote in 1726 his "Verses, on the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America."¹³ Proclaiming a more glorious destiny for mankind

In happy climes the seat of innocence
Where nature guides and virtue rules,

he predicted a rebirth "of empire and of arts:"

Not such as Europe breeds in her decay;
Such as she bred when fresh and young,
When heavenly flame did animate her clay
Westward the course of empire takes its way;
The four first acts already past,
A fifth shall close the drama with the day;
Time's noblest offspring is the last.

Dean Berkeley's seed fell on well-prepared soil. According to colonial tradition, the Pilgrims more than a century before had carved on a rock at Plymouth the lines:

The eastern nations sink, their glory ends,
And empire rises where the sun descends.

¹³ George Berkeley, *Works*, London, 1820, vol. 3, pp. 233-4.

This couplet, the aged John Adams said, had "been repeated with rapture" as long as he could remember.¹⁴ The people, loath to think of themselves as exiles on the far fringes of civilization, stoutly believed they were to be the heir of the ages. Andrew Burnaby, traveling in the colonies some thirty years after Berkeley's prophecy, constantly encountered the view, which to him was "strange as it is visionary," that "empire is traveling westward" and that at the "destined moment" America would "give law to the rest of the world."¹⁵

This consciousness of future dominion was a potent factor in fortifying the colonists for the struggles that led to the break with England. In Berkeleyan spirit the youthful patriot, Philip Freneau, chose as his graduation theme at Princeton in 1771 "The Rising Glory of America," and the poem won a broader audience in pamphlet form.¹⁶ In the climactic years ahead the newspapers continually reprinted Berkeley's forecast and publicized other opinions of similar strain. Thus the *Essex Gazette*, March 1, 1774, quoted the Earl of Orrery as saying that "the ball of empire might roll westward and stop in America; a world unknown when Rome was in its meridian splendor." Tom Paine's great trumpet call to independence, *Common Sense*, published in January, 1776, played skillfully upon the same underlying theme. Nor did the actual attainment of freedom make men forget Berkeley's pronouncement. Many years later Daniel Webster, recalling the "extraordinary" verses, termed them "an intuitive glance into futurity," and Charles Sumner, citing Webster's characterization on the eve of the centennial of independence, added, "There is nothing from any

¹⁴ John Adams, *Works*, Boston, 1850-56, vol. 9, pp. 597, 599-600.

¹⁵ Andrew Burnaby, *Travels through the Middle Settlements in North America, in the Years 1759 and 1760*, R. R. Wilson, ed., New York, 1904, p. 149.

¹⁶ Philip Freneau, *Poems*, F. L. Pattee, ed., Princeton, 1902-07, vol. 1, pp. 49-84.

oracle, there is very little from any prophecy, which can compare with them."¹⁷

If the idea of the westward course of empire nurtured the sentiment of political separation from the mother country, the phrase did not necessarily imply that outcome. The alternative, however, was hardly more acceptable to the English ruling class. From the time of Berkeley's poem, the colonists—at least in the opinion of Josiah Tucker, English economist and divine—hoped for the eventual removal of the imperial capital from Great Britain to "Great America," and by 1774, he said, the provincial leaders had come to believe the "Time is approaching."¹⁸ Though Dean Tucker vastly overstated the case, such views were in the air. Thus a contributor in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 4, 1774, declared that the transfer of the seat of government was inevitable because of the decrepitude of the elder country and the abounding vigor of the younger; and John Adams, writ-

¹⁷ Sumner, *Prophetic Voices Concerning America*, Boston, 1874, pp. 24-5. The pregnant line was frequently manhandled by would-be quoters. John Quincy Adams in an oration at Plymouth in 1802 rendered it: "Westward the Star of empire takes its way"; and George Bancroft imprinted this version on the cover of his monumental history of the United States, which began publication in 1834. Though Edward Everett chided him for the error of saying "star" instead of "course," Bancroft did not change the wording. J. Q. Adams, *An Oration Delivered at Plymouth*, Boston, 1802, p. 31; M. A. DeW. Howe, *The Life and Letters of George Bancroft*, New York, 1908, vol. 2, p. 323 n. Without specific reference to Berkeley, the idea underlying his forecast became a commonplace of writers about America. Thus Michel Chevalier said in 1867, "History shows that the civilization on which we depend is subject to a general law which makes it journey . . . in the direction of the Occident, making the sceptre pass successively into the hands of nations more worthy to hold it . . . So it seems that the supreme authority is about to escape from Western and Central Europe, to pass to the New World." *Rapports du Jury International: Exposition Universelle de 1867 à Paris*, vol. 1, pp. dxiv-dxvi. And in a famous passage James Bryce wrote, "What Europe is to Asia, what England is to the rest of Europe, what America is to England, that the Western States and Territories are to the Atlantic States, the heat and pressure and hurry of life always growing as we follow the path of the sun." *The American Commonwealth*, 2-vol. ed., London, 1888, vol. 2, p. 681.

¹⁸ See Tucker's pamphlets: *A Letter from a Merchant in London to His Nephew in North America*, London, 1766, p. 42; *Four Tracts on Political and Commercial Subjects*, London, 1774, p. 201; and *A Series of Answers to Certain Popular Objections, against Separating from the Colonies*, Gloucester, 1776, pp. 58-9. Tucker dismissed the notion as "chimerical," adding that, if the worst came to the worst, "the English would rather submit to a French yoke, than to an American; as being the lesser Indignity of the two." *Four Tracts*, p. 202.

ing the same year as "Novanglus" in the *Boston Gazette*, dated the fulfillment not later than four decades off.¹⁹ Adams, of course, was presently to have a different idea about the relations of Britain and America, but Adam Smith, the Scotch political economist, publishing his famous *Wealth of Nations* in the very year of independence, was of the old opinion still, though he allowed "little more than a century" for the accomplishment.²⁰

Predictions of the still bolder step of colonial freedom reached back to earliest times. John Adams, reminiscing in a letter of 1807 to Dr. Benjamin Rush, derided the supposition that in 1776 American independence was "a novel idea" or "a modern discovery." On the contrary, "The idea of it as a possible thing, as a probable event, nay, as a necessary and unavoidable measure, in case Great Britain should assume an unconstitutional authority over us, has been familiar to Americans from the first settlement of the country."²¹ Numerous pamphlets, sermons and newspaper articles document Adams's view.²² Even before the train of events that precipitated the Revolution, the Swedish botanist, Peter Kalm, traveling in the colonies in 1748, reported Americans as saying that in thirty or fifty years they would set up a free state.²³

But prognostications on the other side were quite as emphatic. In 1721 Jeremiah Dummer, the Massachusetts

¹⁹ Adams, *Works*, vol. 4, pp. 101-2.

²⁰ Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 3d ed., Philadelphia, 1779, vol. 3, p. 377. In like spirit, though different manner, an anonymous London work in 1781 entitled *Anticipation; or the Voyage of an American to England, in the Year 1800* pictured the Britain of that later day as having long since yielded the seat of government to America, and as being itself almost bereft of inhabitants, whose curious customs the traveler described.

²¹ Adams, *Works*, vol. 9, p. 596.

²² For French forecasts of eventual American independence, see Sumner, *Prophetic Voices*, pp. 37, 40, 69-70, 74.

²³ Peter Kalm, *Travels into North America*, J. R. Forster, tr., Warrington, 1770, vol. 1 p. 264.

colonial agent, put forth the idea, soon to be hackneyed through repetition, that deep-seated antagonisms rendered it inconceivable that the colonies should ever unite against England.²⁴ Franklin himself in 1760 dismissed the notion of such a combination as something "not merely improbable, it is impossible."²⁵ But the palm goes to Andrew Burnaby who at about the same time found that "fire and water are not more heterogeneous than the different colonies in North America. . . . In short, such is the difference of character, of manners, of religion, of interest," that, "were they left to themselves, there would soon be a civil war from one end of the continent to the other; while the Indians and negroes would, with better reason, impatiently watch the opportunity of exterminating them all together." When history failed to take heed, he altered his opinion only to the extent of affirming that the newly established union would "not be permanent or last for any considerable length of time."²⁶

III

For a people dealing in futures no aspect of the American scene afforded warmer satisfaction than the mounting curve of population. Malthus to the contrary notwithstanding, the increase of inhabitants denoted greater man power, quicker economic development, a higher standard of general comfort, faster intellectual progress and enhanced military strength. It was "the great natural spring of the welfare of states."²⁷ Franklin as colonial spokesman seldom failed

²⁴ C. M. Andrews, *The Colonial Period of American History*, New Haven, 1934-38, vol. 4, p. 414-5 and footnotes; and Richard Frothingham, *The Rise of the Republic of the United States*, Boston, 1872, pp. 151-2.

²⁵ Benjamin Franklin, *Writings*, A. H. Smyth, ed., New York, 1905-07, vol. 4, p. 71.

²⁶ Burnaby, *Travels*, p. 153. For this revised view, dated 1798, see page 19.

²⁷ (A. H. Everett), *America; or a General Survey of the Political Situation of the Several Powers of the Western Continent, with Conjectures on Their Future Prospects*, Philadelphia, 1827, p. 339.

to press home the point that the population was doubling every twenty or twenty-five years and that in another century there would be more Englishmen in America than in England. Six months after the first blood was shed on Lexington Common he dryly remarked that, though the British in the meantime had succeeded in killing a hundred and fifty Yankees, "sixty thousand children have been born in America."²⁸ That same year (1775) Edward Wigglesworth, Professor of Divinity at Harvard, published his *Calculations on American Population* in which, estimating from past trends, he foretold a total of 1280 million persons in the distant year 2000.

With independence once won, an invigorated pride of country inspired the mathematically inclined to unveil a future for the new republic "in comparison with which the storied grandeur of the Roman Empire will dwindle into insignificance."²⁹ At this task, clergymen, journalists and statesmen vied with persons who supposedly had special qualifications for it. In 1783 the Reverend Ezra Stiles placed the American population in 1876 at 50 millions (which anticipated the true figure by only four years), and then, throwing caution to the winds, predicted that his countrymen would outnumber the Chinese before the millennium, which he expected in the year 2500.³⁰ The Reverend Jedidiah Morse in his *American Geography* (1796 edition) foretold 160 million people a century later, overshooting the mark by around 90 millions. In the 1830's the Frenchman, Alexis de Tocqueville, did somewhat better by putting the total for 1896 at 96 millions—an overestimate of perhaps 27 millions.³¹

²⁸ Franklin, *Writings*, vol. 3, p. 65; vol. 4, p. 54; vol. 6, p. 430.

²⁹ The quoted words are from H. D. A. Ward, "The United States in 1950," *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine*, vol. 26 (1852), p. 447.

³⁰ Thornton, *Pulpit of the American Revolution*, pp. 439-40.

³¹ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Henry Reeve, tr., New York, 1900, vol. 1, p. 403 n.

As the nineteenth century advanced, population predictions flew thick and fast. The accompanying table³² gives examples. Some were tossed off as rhetorical flourishes; most rested upon conscientious computations. James Madison became interested in the matter because of its bearing on the question of the extension of the suffrage.³³ Abraham Lincoln assumed the unfamiliar role of statistician in the effort to persuade Congress that the upswing of population would render financially feasible a federally supported program of gradual emancipation.³⁴ No admirer of these statesmen would wish to rest their reputations today on the accuracy of their second sight.

As might be expected, population forecasts generally grew wilder as distance lent enchantment. Estimates projected into the remote future obviously could not reckon with unknown factors: territorial expansion; changes in the volume of immigration; shifting attitudes regarding voluntary parenthood; technological developments affecting the size and accessibility of the food supply; the consequences of great natural disasters, epidemics, civil upheavals and foreign wars. But even if all these elements could have been ascertained in advance, it would have required a super-human genius to assess their interaction and strike a just balance.

³² Besides the references already given in this article, the table is based upon J. J. Spengler, "Population Prediction in Nineteenth Century America," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 1 (1936), pp. 905-21; and his footnote citations, and also upon the following: Howard, *Connecticut Wits*, p. 398 (for Dwight); *American Quarterly Review*, vol. 3, 1830-31, p. 141; Theodore Poesche and Charles Goepp, *The New Rome*, New York, 1853, p. 26; J. W. Draper, *Thoughts on the Future Civil Policy of America*, New York, 1865, p. 163; L. P. Brockett in C. L. Flint and others, *One Hundred Years' Progress of the United States*, Hartford, 1870, pp. 466-7; and William Gilpin, *The Cosmopolitan Railway*, San Francisco, 1890, p. 231.

³³ His prognostications are appended to a speech made in the Virginia constitutional convention of 1829-1830. Madison, *Writings*, Gaillard Hunt, ed., New York, 1900-10, vol. 9, pp. 358-60.

³⁴ J. D. Richardson, comp., *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, Washington, 1896-99, vol. 6, p. 137.

FORECASTS OF POPULATION GROWTH FOR 1850-1940 (in Millions)
(Compare with census figures in bottom row)

	1850	1860	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940
Elkanah Watson, 1815	23.2	31.8	42.3	56.6	77.3	100.4			133	177
Timothy Dwight, 1816								120		
A. H. Everett, 1827						80				
James Madison, 1829				48					192	
<i>Am. Quar. Register</i> , 1830										386.8
<i>Hunt's Merchants'</i> <i>Mag.</i> , 1843						92				
J. W. Scott, 1843					72					300
George Tucker, 1843	22.4	29.4	38.3	49.6	63	80				200
Francis Bonyngue, 1852		30.9	39.9	49.7	61.9	77.3	96.4	120.2	149.8	186.8
T. Poesche and C. Goepp, 1853		30.9	41.1	54.6	73.1	97.5	120	160	213	284.5
J. D. B. DeBow, 1854		31.5	42.8	58.2	79	100.3				
G. M. Weston, 1857						100				
Abraham Lincoln, 1862			42.3	56.9	76.7	103.2	138.9	186.9	251.7	
John W. Draper, 1865						99				
L. P. Brockett, 1870			38.9	52.1	69.3	91.5	119.9	155.9	201	255.4
Francis Walker, 1873						75				
Henry Gannett, 1883					64.6	81.9				
William Gilpin, 1890										200
H. S. Pritchett, 1900						77.5	94.7	114.4	136.9	162.3
James J. Hill, 1910								117	142	171
Census Returns	23.2	31.4	38.6	50.1	62.9	76	92	105.7	122.8	131.7

Most of the seers cut through such difficulties by relying, in greater or less degree, on a continuance of the rate of increase which Benjamin Franklin had cited for colonial times, and which the federal census in the first six decades of the nineteenth century tended to confirm. That is why prophecies made before the Civil War gave the United States in 1940 a population varying from 187 millions to nearly 387 (instead of the actual 132 millions), and why even later on in the century such figures as 200 and 255 millions were seriously proposed. Even the most restrained of these nineteenth-century conjectures exceeded the 1940 total by a number greater than the country's entire population in 1880. George Tucker, political economist at the University of Virginia, tried without success to expose the misleading premise on which these calculations rested. In *The Progress of the United States in Population and Wealth* (1843) he argued that, as the nation became more populous and urban and as wealth concentrated in fewer hands, the struggle for existence would sharpen, marriages would occur later and families would be smaller. "The natural increase of population is inversely as its density," he concluded.³⁵ Francis Bonyngue, a foreign visitor, composed his *Future Wealth of America* (1852) with similar considerations in mind.³⁶ As a result, these two analysts produced the soundest series of forecasts for the nineteenth century.

With rare exceptions the prognosticators ignored the possibility that a time might come when the number of inhabitants would cease to increase, or even begin to decrease. Du Pont de Nemours, one of the few to give thought to the matter, wrote in 1816 that the maximum point would not be attained for a thousand years.³⁷ As the accompany-

³⁵ See pages 101-7.

³⁶ See pages vii, 191-2.

³⁷ Thomas Jefferson and Du Pont de Nemours, *Correspondence*, Gilbert Chinard, ed., Baltimore, 1931, p. 255.

ing table indicates, the nineteenth-century auguries so far as they touched upon the second half of the twentieth century assumed a continuing enlargement. Some later students, however, impressed by the constantly declining birth rate, and taking into account the quota restrictions on immigration in the 1920's, reached an opposite conclusion. According to the National Resources Planning Committee in 1937, the American population will keep on growing at a steadily slower pace until 1980 or 1985 and then commence to diminish.³⁸ But only the future can disclose whether these modern prophets, with their presumably superior techniques of divination, are more reliable than their predecessors.

IV

How long would the American Union endure? Until the Civil War provided the answer, no question aroused more frequent discussion. The quick failure of the Articles of Confederation caused Alexander Hamilton and his group to view even the new Constitution as "a frail and worthless fabric" and to hold that, at best, government by the people was likely to be short-lived.³⁹ The Englishman, Andrew Burnaby, writing in 1798, believed that because of inherent disruptive tendencies the United States "must necessarily be divided into separate states and kingdoms" and hence would "never, at least for many ages, become formidable to Europe."⁴⁰ Not a few Americans shared this opinion of ultimate partition, particularly as time went on and huge gaps came to separate the settled regions. According to the San Francisco newspaper *Alta California*, September 14, 1851, "California and Oregon cannot be expected to remain

³⁸ Press release of the Census Bureau in the *New York Times*, July 23, 1941.

³⁹ Hamilton, *Works*, H. C. Lodge, ed., New York, 1903, vol. 10, p. 425.

⁴⁰ Burnaby, *Travels*, p. 19.

POPULATION FORECASTS FOR 1950-2000 (in Millions)⁴¹

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Edward Wigglesworth, 1775						1280
Elkanah Watson, 1815			236			283-300
A. H. Everett, 1827	300					
Francis Bonyngue, 1852	232.9	290.5	362.3	451.9	563.6	703
J. D. B. DeBow, 1854	150					
G. M. Weston, 1857		400				
Ed. <i>Hunt's Merchants' Mag.</i> , 1857		250				
Ed. <i>N. Y. Ledger</i> , 1858		300				
L. P. Brockett, 1870	319.3	391.7	474			
John Fiske, 1885						600-700
Josiah Strong, 1893					373	
H. S. Pritchett, 1900	190.7	222	257.7	296.8	339.2	385.9
James J. Hill, 1910	204					
W. S. Thompson and P. K. Whelpton, 1933	142.9	149.8	153.8	155.2		
National Resources Planning Committee, 1937	140.6	147	151.2	153		

attached to a government which has its seat at a month's journey from them. The bonds of empire must become feeble in proportion to the distance over which they are

⁴¹ Beyond the year 2000, Alexander H. Everett foretold 1200 millions for 2150, and H. S. Pritchett ventured 1112.9 millions for 2100, 11,856.3 for 2500 and 40,852.3 for 2900. For references for this table, see footnote of the preceding table and also the following: *New York Ledger*, April 3, 1858; John Fiske, *American Political Ideas*, New York, 1885, pp. 131-2; Josiah Strong, *The New Era*, New York, 1893, p. 75; and *World Almanac for 1943*, p. 469 (for the National Resources Planning Committee).

extended." That such predictions proved false resulted in considerable part from the rapid introduction of better means of transportation and communication: roads, canals, railways and the telegraph. These instrumentalities helped to counteract the very real dangers of wide dispersion.

A more conspicuous threat to the permanence of the Union was the spreading chasm between North and South due to differences growing out of the system of Negro bondage. The distances in this instance were economic, social and ideological rather than geographical; and as it turned out, they could not be bridged by physical means. Prophecies, ancient and modern, played a role in the waxing sectional controversy, notably on the Southern side. In their search for Biblical sanction proslavery spokesmen discovered oracular significance in Noah's outburst against his grandson Canaan. "Cursed be Canaan;" Noah had cried, "a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren" (Genesis 9:25). Since Canaan was the son of Ham and Ham was the reputed progenitor of the black race, it followed that the master class was faithfully carrying out a sacred commission. Statesmen and pamphleteers joined with clerics in thus linking the institution with divine revelation. Jefferson Davis went so far as to affirm that the reason the Negroes had quit their "unnatural state" in Africa was "to fulfill their own destiny, that of being the 'servant of servants.'"⁴²

Secular prophecy was a stock-in-trade of both parties to the dispute. Each side upon occasion indulged in dire predictions of what would happen if certain things should be done, or left undone, and in these exchanges the South as the weaker party became increasingly strident.⁴³ Except for a handful of proslavery extremists, however, forecasts of this

⁴² W. S. Jenkins, *Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South*, Chapel Hill, 1935, pp. 200-7, 252-3.

⁴³ See examples in U. B. Phillips, "The Literary Movement for Secession," in W. L. Fleming and others, *Studies in Southern History and Politics*, New York, 1914, pp. 33-60.

contingent character were merely gambits in a well-understood political game—a sort of blackmail designed to gain immediate concessions.

Two of the most elaborate and specific Southern predictions appeared in fictional dress. One was *The Partisan Leader, a Tale of the Future*, a full-length book bearing the date 1856 on the title page but actually published in the summer of 1836.⁴⁴ The author, who signed himself “Edward William Sidney,” was Beverley Tucker, Professor of Law at William and Mary and a half-brother of the fiery political jousting, John Randolph of Roanoke. Tucker, who had broken with the Jackson administration a few years before over the issue of South Carolina nullification, wove love interest and derring-do into what was really a preview of the consequences to the South, and particularly to Virginia, should Martin Van Buren be given the opportunity to continue Old Hickory’s policies by getting elected as President in the autumn of 1836.

As the tale unfolds, the states of the Lower South, exasperated by “northern cupidity and northern fanaticism,” secede from the Union when Van Buren runs for a fourth term in 1848.⁴⁵ Secessionist sentiment in Virginia increases as capital and trade begin to desert the state for the Southern confederacy, which enjoys free trade with Great Britain; but the Van Buren administration through bribery, governmental favors and armed intervention prevents the state from taking official action. Thereupon the Partisan Leader organizes guerrilla resistance in the mountain districts, and in battles at Jones’s Ford and Lynchburg on November 5

⁴⁴ The most recent edition (New York, 1933) is edited with an introduction by Carl Bridenbaugh who erroneously, I think, identifies the Partisan Leader as John C. Calhoun. From the context it is fairly clear that Tucker had no definite historical personage in mind.

⁴⁵ Actually, Van Buren did run as a candidate that year on the Free Soil ticket after having been defeated for re-election in 1840 on the Democratic ticket and failing to secure renomination in 1844.

and 13, 1849, defeats the federal troops. The Leader himself, however, is captured and taken to Washington where, as the book closes, preparations are being made for his escape. The author indicates that in the long run Virginia managed to achieve her independence.

Tucker described his volume as a "true history," not a novel. For obvious reasons it was reprinted as propaganda by both sides after the Civil War began. Before that time, however, it was joined by an even more sensational tome: *Anticipations of the Future, to Serve as Lessons for the Present Time*. Published anonymously at Richmond in the summer of 1860, it was written by Edmund Ruffin, the Virginia planter who was to fire the first shell against Fort Sumter, and it was cast in the form of letters supposedly sent by an Englishman in America to the London *Times* during the years 1864-1870. Ruffin, it is worth noting, was a long-time friend and correspondent of Tucker's.

The author, while disclaiming clairvoyant gifts, proceeds to relate in realistic detail the successive steps leading to the disruption of the Union. In Ruffin's magic mirror, Abraham Lincoln, though winning the election in the autumn of 1860, proves too timid a President either to disquiet the South or to satisfy the extremists of his own party. Hence the abolitionist faction prevents his renomination in 1864, choosing in his stead William H. Seward, who carries the country despite the solid vote of the slave states. Under the aggressive Seward, Congress boosts the tariff on Northern manufactures, creates new offices for distribution among the administration's friends, insures antislavery occupation of the territories by the device of free homesteads, packs the judiciary with abolitionists, and strengthens the North's military defenses. In December, 1867, six Northern legislatures set the stage for the final destruction of slavery by obtaining Congress's consent to divide each of these states

into two states, thus manufacturing the necessary three-fourths majority for a constitutional amendment.

Aroused by this last reckless stroke, the commonwealths from South Carolina to Louisiana secede and in January, 1868, form a confederacy. President Seward responds by establishing a futile blockade of the South and raising an army of invasion. He also appeals, vainly, to the blacks to rise against their masters, and for military security removes the federal capital to Albany. Virginia and the remaining slave states, their last doubts dissipated by the onset of war, now cast their lot with the Southern confederacy. In the hostilities the United States forces are hampered by distance from their sources of supply, and also by the need to use troops in the great Northern cities against hunger mobs composed of men rendered jobless by the loss of trade with the South. In July the New York rioters, forty thousand strong, overcome the soldiers and burn the city to the ground. Two months later peace negotiations are undertaken, and though the South's terms are unacceptable, the Northern people prove unwilling to resume the war. In fact, as the book ends, the Pacific Coast seems likely to set up as a separate nation, while the Midwest and the Middle Atlantic states appear on the point of gravitating to the Southern confederacy, which is now rising to prosperity as a result of throwing off the Northern yoke and establishing direct trade with Europe. "Fanatical New England" alone is left to comprise the old United States.

By demonstrating that a pro-Northern government could inflict "bondage, degradation and ruin" upon the South without acting unconstitutionally, Ruffin brilliantly illumined the weakness of John C. Calhoun's elaborate constitutional defense of Southern rights. As a prophet Ruffin ranked with Beverley Tucker in foretelling secession, the order in which the Deep South and border states would act,

and the creation of a Southern confederacy. Both blundered, however, in specifying particular dates, persons and incidents and, even more importantly, in not foreseeing the abolition of slavery and the military triumph of the North.⁴⁶

The errors of these Southern extremists seem more excusable than the speculations of two other analysts of the unfolding scene. Professor George Tucker, who so shrewdly forecast population trends, wrote in 1843 that, owing to steadily climbing overhead costs, slavery would come to an end probably between 1900 and 1920. With no prevision of Fort Sumter just eighteen years away he said, "It will be abolished with the consent of the master no less than the wishes of the slave."⁴⁷ His failure to foresee the Civil War as a compulsive factor classes him with the Frenchman, Alexis de Tocqueville, who in the 1830's considered the South's need for federal protection against the formidable Negro population a decisive reason why the plantation states would never secede. If the unanticipated should happen, however, he deemed it "unquestionable" that the loyal states "would not be able, nor indeed would they try, to prevent it."⁴⁸

V

Edmund Ruffin was not alone in thinking that Northern society bore the aspect of an uneasy volcano. Indeed, President E. N. Elliott of Planters' College in Mississippi, early in

⁴⁶ A third Southerner, identity unknown, took a yet longer leap into the future, picturing "The Country in 1950" as divided into a South, where the edifice of liberty rested soundly on the institution of black servitude, and a North racked with economic conflict and finding refuge in a dictatorship. L. C. B. (*pseud.*), "The Country in 1950, or the Conservatism of Slavery," *Southern Literary Messenger*, vol. 22 (1856), pp. 426-39.

⁴⁷ Tucker, *Progress of the United States*, pp. 109-17 (quotation from p. 110).

⁴⁸ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 1, pp. 395, 398. This last prediction was closely related to another strange misapprehension—Tocqueville's belief that the federal government was "constantly losing strength" and "retiring gradually from public affairs. . . . The Union is to subsist, but to subsist as a shadow." *Ibid.*, p. 421.

1860 went so far as to charge Northern businessmen with having abetted antislavery agitation for the selfish purpose of diverting attention from "the ever-active antagonism of labor and capital." As he saw the consequences: "When the mob shall have tasted the sweets of plunder and rapine in their raids upon the South, will they spare the hoarded millions of the money-princes and nabobs of the North? . . . Ye capitalists, ye merchant princes, ye master manufacturers, you may excite to frenzy your Jacobin clubs, you may demoralize their minds of all ideas of right and wrong, but remember! the guillotine is suspended over your own necks!"⁴⁹

This forecast was so quickly disproved by events as to leave little after trace, but another one, directed at the same underlying social conflict, has continued to stir anxiety to the present time. Its author, Thomas Babington Macaulay, whose fame in America was hardly less than in his own country, divulged his view of the future of the United States—a country he had never visited—in a letter of May 23, 1857, to Henry S. Randall of Cortland, New York, an early biographer of Thomas Jefferson.⁵⁰ "As long as you have a boundless extent of fertile and unoccupied land," the English historian wrote, "your labouring population will be far more at ease than the labouring population of the old world," but in the course of time America, too, will have her Manchesters and Birminghams teeming with people rendered desperate by low wages and unemployment. Then will arise the demagogue, "ranting about the tyranny of capitalists and usurers, and asking why anybody should be permitted

⁴⁹ E. N. Elliott, ed., *Cotton Is King, and Pro-slavery Arguments*, Augusta, 1862, pp. 897-8.

⁵⁰ Unless otherwise indicated, the present discussion is based upon H. M. Lydenberg, "What Did Macaulay Say about America?" *New York Public Library, Bulletin*, vol. 29 (1925), pp. 459-81 (the quoted passages are from pp. 478-91); and H. H. Clark, "The Vogue of Macaulay in America," *Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, Transactions*, vol. 34 (1942), pp. 237-92.

to drink Champagne and to ride in a carriage, while thousands of honest folks are in want of necessaries." Outnumbering the well-to-do, the malcontents will capture the government, despoil the capitalist class and, by so doing, destroy the springs of national prosperity.

When a society has entered on this downward progress, either civilisation or liberty must perish. Either some Caesar or Napoleon will seize the reins of government with a strong hand; or your republic will be as fearfully plundered and laid waste by barbarians in the twentieth Century as the Roman Empire was in the fifth— with this difference, that the Huns and Vandals who ravaged the Roman Empire came from without, and that your Huns and Vandals will have been engendered within your own country by your own institutions.

Lord Macaulay's obituary of American democracy first reached the public in March, 1860, when it was printed in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, where it neatly dovetailed with the editor's own aristocratic predilections and fears. The *New York Times* copied the piece with disapproving editorial comment, and one or two other Northern journals also took occasion to express dissent; but interest in the matter quickly died before the impact of the sectional crisis. Yet, as the sequel was to disclose, Macaulay's prophecy was a ghost that would not stay laid. Every great economic depression in the years that followed redirected attention to it. His foreboding words were cited either in a mood of resignation, or to underline the danger of entrusting power to the unpropertied classes, or to show why reform should be undertaken before it was too late.

In 1877, when the hard times precipitated by the Panic of 1873 were at their worst, *Harper's Magazine* republished the letter, and perhaps by this means it came to the attention of Henry George, who used it to support his argument for the single tax in *Progress and Poverty* (1879).⁵¹ Though normal

⁵¹ George, *Progress and Poverty*, London, 1931, pp. 10, 380.

conditions returned before the next presidential election, James A. Garfield, the Republican nominee, nevertheless felt it necessary to denounce this "most formidable indictment of democratic principles ever penned."⁵² Again, in the midst of the business recession of 1884-1885, Josiah Strong harked back to the prognostication. In his influential volume *Our Country* he agreed that "The time is coming when the pressure of population on the means of subsistence will be felt here as it is now felt in Europe and Asia," but he believed that the perils Macaulay foresaw would be averted by America's imperialistic expansion into Latin America and Africa.⁵³ The social distress occasioned by the Panic of 1893 and culminating in Bryan's free-silver crusade in 1896 prompted *Gunton's Magazine* a few months before the election to exhume the prophecy with the pointed comment that political democracy could survive only through prompt and intelligent treatment of economic injustices.

A quarter-century of forgetfulness followed, then the letter was again resurrected during the sharp postwar business revulsion of 1920-1921. This time a conservative, appalled by labor's increasing power at home and abroad, used Macaulay's missive as a text for warning *Sewanee Review* readers in 1920 against "dangers now indicated by things too obvious to be ignored." The document itself was rated newsworthy by papers as far apart as New York and Des Moines.⁵⁴ The Great Depression of the 1930's resusci-

⁵² C. H. Betts, "Macaulay's Criticism of Democracy and Garfield's Reply," *Open Court*, vol. 32 (1918), pp. 273-9. Other evidence indicates that the speech may have been delivered in 1873 or 1878 instead of 1880. See Lydenberg, "What Did Macaulay Say about America?" pp. 472-4, and T. C. Smith, *The Life and Letters of James Abram Garfield*, New Haven, 1925, vol. 2, p. 710.

⁵³ Strong, *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis*, New York, 1885, pp. 153-4, 175. The book sold 130,000 copies, and long extracts from it were reprinted by the daily press throughout the country. The revised edition, New York, 1891, retained the references to Macaulay unchanged (see pp. 203, 222-3).

⁵⁴ The *Des Moines Register*, May 23, 1921, acknowledges its indebtedness to the *New York Tribune*. Most of the letter also appeared in the *New York Times Current History*, vol. 14, p. 459 (June, 1921). There were probably other instances.

tated the letter once more. In the *Review of Reviews* in 1934 a contributor considered "Macaulay as a New Deal Prophet," while the *American Mercury* and many newspapers reprinted the forecast with mixed emotions. Who can believe that under similar circumstances in the future the famous ghost will not walk again?⁵⁵

The singular longevity of this pronouncement of 1857 arose in part from the fact that the premise which underlay Macaulay's dismal augury harmonized with a fairly general opinion. This premise accorded with a stream of thinking that began earlier and continued later. As far back as 1787 Jefferson had foretold grave difficulties when the vacant lands should be gone and the people "get piled upon one another in large cities, as in Europe."⁵⁶ The Englishman De Roos, visiting the United States in 1826, similarly observed, "Hitherto, the Americans have enjoyed the advantage of a country where the evils of an overflowing population have not been felt," but when conditions change, as "at some period" they must, "we may expect to see the disadvantages of a popular government."⁵⁷ "If some of our cities are not like Birmingham and Manchester," wrote George Bancroft a few years later, "it is owing not to our legislation, but to the happy accident of our possessing the West."⁵⁸ As the century lengthened and more of the public domain passed into private hands, such sentiments became almost commonplace.⁵⁹ Even the usually optimistic James

⁵⁵ A recent reference in a somewhat unexpected context is in an article by James Morgan in the *Boston Sunday Globe*, Feb. 4, 1945, which discussed the importance of domestic economic stability for peaceful international relations.

⁵⁶ Thomas Jefferson, *Writings*, P. L. Ford, ed., New York, 1892-99, vol. 4, pp. 479-80.

⁵⁷ F. F. De Roos, *Personal Narrative of Travels in the United States and Canada*, 3d ed., London, 1827, pp. 24-5. See also Thomas Hamilton, *Men and Manners in America*, Edinburgh, 1833, pp. 303-10.

⁵⁸ *Northampton (Mass.) Courier*, Oct. 29, 1834, cited in A. M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson*, Boston, 1945, p. 344.

⁵⁹ See, for example, Henry George, *Progress and Poverty*, pp. 276-8; Josiah Strong, *Our Country*, quoted earlier; D. G. Croly, *Glimpses of the Future*, New York, 1888, pp. 20-1; and some of the references cited in H. C. Nixon, "Precursors of Turner in the Interpretation of the American Frontier," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 28 (1929), pp. 83-9.

Bryce wrote in the 1880's of "mists and shadows" looming on the nation's horizon because of the exhaustion of the free lands, and early in the 1890's Professor Frederick Jackson Turner in his celebrated essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," announced that "the frontier is gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history."⁶⁰

Macaulay's deduction from this premise, though unsupported by a similar body of opinion, etched itself on men's minds because of the seer's scholarly eminence and the visible signs of increasing industrial unrest. Interestingly enough, his ominous words echoed the Communist Manifesto composed nine years before by Marx and Engels, who, approaching the problem from their own special angle and in its world-wide aspects, had also foretold social upheavals and the downfall of democracy. Was there a fallacy in Macaulay's reasoning? men asked. Yes, said the editor of America's most popular family journal as soon as the forecast was made public: in the United States, unlike England, all the people have a personal stake in bringing about needed changes peaceably and lawfully, for "every poor man expects to be rich himself" and would do nothing to destroy that chance.⁶¹ Yes, said James A. Garfield some years later, because universal education will serve as a brake on hasty and reckless action by the masses. Yes, said the forecaster's own countryman Matthew Arnold, since hatred of the wealthy can never attain great virulence in a country lacking Europe's permanent class divisions.⁶² Persuasive though such replies were, the lurking possibility that Macaulay might nevertheless be right kept alive interest in

⁶⁰ James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth*, 2-vol. ed., London, 1888, vol. 2, p. 701; F. J. Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, New York, 1920, p. 38.

⁶¹ "Macaulay on America," *New York Ledger*, April 21, 1860.

⁶² Matthew Arnold, *Civilization in the United States*, Boston, 1900, pp. 121-6. He visited America in 1883-1884.

his prognostication, especially in periods of economic affliction.

Looked at from a different point of view, much of the nineteenth-century alarm was premature since Macaulay definitely assigned the social overturn to some time in the twentieth century. Oddly enough, the twentieth-century alarm was equally unjustified, for in a supplementary statement to Randall on the matter, dated October 9, 1858, he affirmed that the precipitating factor would be a population density of 200 to the square mile, a situation which, if the National Resources Planning Committee is correct, will never arise. In 1940 the United States had but 44.2 persons to the square mile, and at the expected maximum point in 1980 it will reach only around 51.⁶³

Apostles of gloom might better have hearkened to certain native-born soothsayers who avoided this statistical booby-trap. In 1881 C. A. Grimmer, a Massachusetts astrologer, lived up to his name by prophesying that the six years immediately following would see "a war of classes," accompanied by famine, devastating plagues, tidal waves and volcanic eruptions. The United States would lose fifteen million by death, he said, but a world-wide conflagration between 1885 and 1887 would kill all disease germs and enable mankind—those who survived—to make a new start with a longer life span.⁶⁴ In 1889 John Ballou Newbrough, a New York ex-dentist who had founded a religious cult on *Oahspe, a New Bible*, which he said had been communicated to him from the spirit world, granted humanity a somewhat longer breathing spell, announcing that about 1947 "all the

⁶³ See earlier, page 76. On the other hand, the states of Massachusetts, Rhode Island and New Jersey far exceeded the supposed danger mark even before 1900, and they were joined in the next two decades by Connecticut, New York and Pennsylvania. *World Almanac for 1944*, p. 430. But Macaulay's "Huns and Vandals" have not yet appeared even in these states.

⁶⁴ C. A. Grimmer, *The Coming Catastrophe*, Cambridge, 1881, pp. 17-24.

present governments, religions and all moneyed monopolies are to be overthrown and go out of existence." In Europe "the disaster will be even more terrible" than in the United States, while the worst fate of all awaited China and India.⁶⁵

Other forecasts came from more conventional sources, and some of them, at least, pictured the prospective birth of a new and better world without either labor pains or a Caesarian operation. Edward Bellamy, William Dean Howells, and most of the many other utopian novelists in the closing years of the nineteenth century substituted evolution for revolution as society's means of solving the growing antagonism between poor and rich, and considered a hundred years as a sufficient period for the achievement.⁶⁶

These fables presently gave way to attempts at more circumstantial predictions, though still in fictional guise. Three of these efforts stand out because of the prominence of the authors. In 1907 the brilliant young Socialist Upton Sinclair, fresh from writing his muckraking best-seller *The Jungle*, published *The Industrial Republic, a Study of the America of Ten Years Hence*. In it he told of Taft's victory over Bryan in 1908; the resulting popular discontent with the rule of the plutocracy; William Randolph Hearst's election under the Democratic banner in 1912 on a platform denouncing class rule; and then, as a cyclical depression, attended by bloody riots and business prostration, fell on the country, the administration's action in taking over the railways—a step preliminary to the democratization of other forms of capitalistic enterprise. In other words, according to this prophet, socialism would arrive in 1913 with President Hearst as midwife.

But Jack London, who published *The Iron Heel* in the

⁶⁵ John Cournois, ed., *A Book of Prophecy*, New York, 1942, pp. 19, 260-1.

⁶⁶ A. B. Forbes, "The Literary Quest for Utopia, 1880-1900," *Social Forces*, vol. 6 (1927-28), pp. 179-89. A striking exception to the rule was Ignatius Donnelly (Edmund Boisgilbert, pseud.), *Caesar's Column*, Chicago, 1890, which portrayed a horrendous class war in the twentieth century, in which both sides met death and destruction and Macaulay's preview of the ruin of civilization was fully realized.

same year as his fellow Socialist's *The Industrial Republic*, anticipated a very different future. According to his version, the plutocracy or "Oligarchy," taking advantage of the social despair bred by the depression of 1912, gained a stranglehold on the country which secret revolutionary forces vainly sought to break in 1917 and again in 1932. Though the narrative actually ends at the latter date, the author notes that many later revolts, "all drowned in seas of blood," proved necessary before the socialist republic was finally achieved in the year 2212.

The third prognosticator was Colonel Edward M. House who, shortly after Woodrow Wilson's election in 1912, anonymously set forth his views in *Philip Dru: Administrator*.⁶⁷ As sensitive to the economic omens as the Socialist writers, this man, soon to be the new chief executive's adviser in working out a far-reaching reform program, expected a bloody revolution in 1928 as the result of President James R. Rockland's effort to keep his oppressive administration in power through the use of soldiers at the polls. By heading the forces of resistance Philip Dru, a high-minded ex-army officer, routed the government troops at the battle of Elma in New York and forthwith declared himself "Administrator of the Republic." In this self-appointed post he dispensed with Congress, decreed sweeping changes of an enlightened character, promulgated a new Constitution incorporating the principle of ministerial responsibility, and then, in 1935, generously turned the government back to the people.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ The subtitle was *A Story of Tomorrow, 1920-1935*. House, who had written the book during the winter and spring of 1911-1912, conceded it was "not much of a novel," but thought he could reach more people than with a scholarly treatise such as one reader of the manuscript, David R. Houston, Wilson's later Secretary of Agriculture, advised. Charles Seymour, *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, Boston, 1926-28, vol. 1, pp. 152-8.

⁶⁸ Many of Dru's reforms foreshadowed President Wilson's legislative accomplishments, and some even anticipated the New Deal. Curiously, neither Colonel House (who in 1916 still considered most of the book as expressing his "ethical and political faith"), nor his official biographer Charles Seymour, nor Matthew Josephson, who discusses the novel in *The President Makers*, New York, 1940, pp. 387-91, found fault with the undemocratic assumption that the desired changes could be effected only by civil war and a dictatorship.

All such writings betrayed Macaulayan premises without, however, following through to Macaulay's conclusions. If the authors agreed that portentous times lay ahead, they also all—or nearly all—subscribed to the traditional American belief in a happy ending.

VI

In no branch of soothsaying did the people operate with greater gusto than in that concerned with science and technology. From the start the Americans had been a race of tinkers, finding in homemade mechanical appliances a means of saving time in order to do more work. After the successful contriving of the cotton gin and the steamboat around the year 1800, their creative energies turned more and more to inventions of wide social and economic import. By 1843 the United States Commissioner of Patents could write, "The advancement of the arts from year to year taxes our credulity," and he imprudently added in a flare of prophecy that this progress "seems to presage the arrival of that period when human improvement must end."⁶⁹

Probably few of his countrymen would have agreed with him. The average citizen, far from having his credulity taxed, accepted, almost casually, scientific miracles which an earlier time would have denounced as witchcraft; nor could he conceive of any good reason why the fount of ingenuity should not spout perpetually. As Edwin H. Chapin, Universalist clergyman, put it in describing what he called this "Age of Machinery," man is "capable of endless invention. The necessity for this springs out, and is a prophecy of, his destiny."⁷⁰ Predictions of mechanical marvels just over the

⁶⁹ Commissioner of Patents, *Report for 1843*, p. 5. Henry L. Ellsworth, the official involved, was a son of Chief Justice Oliver Ellsworth of the United States Supreme Court.

⁷⁰ E. H. Chapin, *Humanity in the City*, New York, 1854, pp. 40, 43. His penetrating chapter on "Man and Machinery," though piously phrased, anticipates many of the insights of twentieth-century discussions of the Machine Age.

horizon were almost a habit. Thus in 1812, seventeen years before the first practical use of the locomotive in England, Oliver Evans of Philadelphia, a pioneer engine builder, foretold the time "when people will travel in stages moved by steam engines from one city to another almost as fast as birds fly—fifteen to twenty miles an hour."⁷¹

But the man who proved himself a virtuoso of prophecy in this field possessed very different antecedents and abilities. Andrew Jackson Davis, son of an illiterate shoemaker in Blooming Grove, New York, early discovered a talent for intercourse with the dead. While in a trance he found he could learn "things past, present, and to come"; and though having little or no formal schooling, he felt warranted in declaring in 1845, at the age of nineteen, "I have now arrived at the highest degree of knowledge which the human mind is capable of acquiring."⁷² So fortified, this deeply sincere man penned a whole shelf of books, one of which achieved thirty-four printings in thirty years. His principal theme was a mystical (and misty) reinterpretation of God and His universe, one presumably influenced by the shade of Emanuel Swedenborg; but Davis's ingrained practicality led him to connect man's spiritual regeneration with the leisure for soul-searching made possible by the introduction of predestined labor-saving inventions.⁷³

These inventions he did not hesitate to specify, for it seems that "the elder planets, Jupiter and Saturn," already enjoyed them. In the field of transportation the list included two-story railway cars crossing the continent in four days

⁷¹ Coleman Sellers, "Oliver Evans and His Inventions," Franklin Institute, *Journal*, vol. 122 (1886), p. 13.

⁷² Quoted from *Lectures on Clairmativeness* by E. D. Branch, *The Sentimental Years, 1836-1860*, New York, 1934, p. 366.

⁷³ "These improvements and discoveries will refresh the soul, give it leisure and prepare it for a natural voyage to post-mundane climes," he wrote in *The Penetralia; Being Harmonial Answers to Important Questions*, 3d ed., Boston, 1856, p. 236. The predictions cited are found in *ibid.*, pp. 224-33.

and containing rooms for concerts and balls; vehicles traveling on the highways "sans horses, sans steam, sans any visible motive-power," which would be run by means of a "simple admixture of aqueous and atmospheric gases" operating a hidden mechanism between the front wheels; and "aerial cars" which, driven by the same kind of power, would "sail as easily, and safely, and pleasantly, as birds." In agriculture he envisioned a quadrupling of production per acre, partly through machinery and partly through man's control over climate. "By arrangements of electricity and magnetism, he may prevent extreme heat or cold; also drouths and disastrous storms." Among his other forecasts were synthetic apparel—"Great trees will be wrought up into beautiful fabrics!"—apartment houses and portable dwellings. How many oracles have attained so high a score?⁷⁴

Later seers made up for some of Davis's oversights. Dr. Linus P. Brockett, graduate of Brown and Yale, promised in 1870 that the next hundred years would bring forth conveyances "propelled under the earth in tubes or above it on elevated railways [as already begun in New York City], or through the air" by means of a "new motive-power"; ships driven across the Atlantic in four days by "hot or condensed air, solar heat, or some application of electricity"; an improved form of illumination, "either the electric light, the magnesian light, or some yet undiscovered illuminator"; and a great variety of other inventions, including devices for "reducing the mechanical labor of writing," better methods of food preservation and the substitution "of new materials to take the place of wood, leather, stone, or some of the metals now in use."⁷⁵ Edward Bellamy in *Looking Back-*

⁷⁴ Davis's occult sources served him less well in the field of social development. He had no foreknowledge of the Civil War, just five years ahead; he expected slavery to be in existence in 1900; and with the improved status of agriculture, he anticipated a reversal of the exodus from country to city. *Penetralia*, pp. 225, 316.

⁷⁵ Flint and others, *One Hundred Years' Progress*, pp. 483, 492-3, 502.

ward, 2000-1887, published in 1888, added a crude form of the radio to the catalogue of prospective contrivances.⁷⁶

Air navigation became almost a truism of gazers into the future. Edmund Clarence Stedman, poet and Wall Street broker, predicted in 1879 that the airship would wipe out all trade barriers and usher in the long-dreamed-of "Congress of the Nations." "Troops, aërial squadrons, death-dealing armaments," he said, "will be maintained only for police surveillance over barbarous races, and for instantly enforcing the judicial decrees of the world's international court of appeal."⁷⁷ The journalist David Croly in 1888 favored the heavier-than-air machine, operated at first with hydrogen gas and eventually by a newly discovered kind of energy. Like Stedman, he believed that man's mastery of the skies would be used less for war and destruction and more for man's happiness and convenience.⁷⁸ Similarly, most of the writers of utopian fiction took aviation for granted, some even to the extent of interplanetary travel.⁷⁹ But the forecasters did not all agree. As late as 1903 the world-famous astronomer Simon Newcomb declared, "The example of the bird does not prove that man can fly. . . . May not our mechanics . . . be ultimately forced to admit that aerial flight is one of that great class of problems with which man can never cope, and give up all attempts to grapple with it?"⁸⁰ Just two months later the Wright brothers made their first successful flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

⁷⁶ Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward, 2000-1887*, Chicago, 1915, pp. 110-5. Curiously enough, Ignatius Donnelly in *Caesar's Column* (1890), while predicting the airplane and even television, did not anticipate the automobile.

⁷⁷ Stedman, "Aërial Navigation," *Scribner's Magazine*, vol. 17 (1878-79), pp. 580-1.

⁷⁸ Croly, *Glimpses of the Future*, pp. 153, 156-7, 159.

⁷⁹ John Jacob Astor, IV, *A Journey in Other Worlds*, New York, 1894, which is devoted largely to future developments in applied science, describes the initial voyage to Jupiter, Saturn and return as occurring between December 21, 2000, and June 10, 2001.

⁸⁰ Newcomb, "The Outlook for the Flying Machine," *Independent*, vol. 55, pp. 2508-9 (Oct. 22, 1903). An Englishman, George Sutherland, went even further in *Twentieth Century Inventions*, New York, 1901, pp. 241-2, saying, "The amount of misdirected ingenuity that has been expended on these two problems of submarine and aerial navigation during the nineteenth century will offer one of the most curious and interesting studies to the future historian of technological progress."

While most laymen avoided the sacred realm of pure science, a notable exception was Mme. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, the Russian-born theosophist, who in 1888 affirmed that between that date and 1897 there "will be a large rent in the veil of Nature, and materialistic science will receive a death blow."⁸¹ The phrasing was cryptic, but events seemed to spell out the meaning. In the years indicated, momentous advances occurred in science—the discoveries of the Roentgen ray, radioactivity and the electron—which did actually modify basic conceptions of the nature of matter.

A century after the United States Patent Commissioner held his burial service over science and invention, he would still have found few to agree with him. By every kind of evidence science and technology still faced an era of illimitable development.⁸² The shoe was now on the other foot. People were anxiously inquiring whether society could adjust itself quickly and wisely enough to the dynamic changes which man's progressive dominion over Nature was necessitating. Was man's servant becoming his master? Whatever the future held in store, no responsible citizen found the solution in a moratorium on human ingenuity.

VII

The themes of prediction varied far more widely than the few considered here might suggest. Hardly any facet of life, individual or public, religious or secular, domestic or international, escaped scrutiny. It was, of course, natural for a pioneer people to want to turn the next page of history, but the maturing of American civilization wrought no change

⁸¹ Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine*, vol. I, pp. 611-2, quoted in Cournos, *Book of Prophecy*, pp. 254-5.

⁸² For a comprehensive forecast, see "The Next Hundred Years" in Arthur Train, Jr., *The Story of Everyday Things*, New York, 1941, pp. 372-91.

in this respect. On the contrary, the increasing stresses and strains of society, the giant strides of technology, the ever-growing complexity of existence, led men to peer ahead with redoubled zeal. If some shivered at the future they saw, a great many more warmed their hands before it. But whatever the tenor of the findings, the public at large listened with mounting fascination.

The evidence of this interest in the years since the Civil War is impressive. In 1867 Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts brought together in the *Atlantic Monthly* some of the earlier prognostications, beginning with surmises as to the existence of a New World long before Columbus's voyage of discovery; and seven years later, in anticipation of the centennial of independence, he expanded the subject into a book, *Prophetic Voices Concerning America*.⁸³ Subsequent writers sometimes borrowed from Sumner's compilation, but their main purpose was to scan the horizon for themselves. In 1870 Linus P. Brockett devoted a bulky chapter to "Marvels Which Our Grandchildren Will See," in a work by Charles L. Flint and others entitled *One Hundred Years' Progress of the United States*. He covered the whole spectrum of American life, political, economic, intellectual and spiritual, clinching his points with a detailed description of a day's happenings in 1970.

Though no other person (the utopian novelists excepted) attempted so vast and variegated a canvas, the interest in soothsaying continued to rise. William Barrows presented his ideas in *The United States of Yesterday and of To-morrow* (1887), while James Bryce the same year put forth a critical appraisal of *The Predictions of Hamilton and De Tocqueville* as a springboard for offering some of his own in *The American*

⁸³ Since Sumner relished utterances foretelling "the great future of our Republic" (*Prophetic Voices*, p. 173), it is easy to understand why he omitted Macaulay's somber forecast.

Commonwealth a year later.⁸⁴ In 1888 David G. Croly, who had earlier established his credentials by conducting a "Prophetic Department" in the New York *Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, published his *Glimpses of the Future, Suggestions as to the Drift of Things (To Be Read Now and Judged in the Year 2000)*. Josiah Strong in 1893 added his bit in *The New Era*, and the same year Andrew Carnegie, taking "A Look Ahead" in the *North American Review*, foretold a political merger of the English and American peoples, a "Re-united States." Meanwhile the business of private divination flourished as never before, enabling the Ohio legislature in 1883 to increase the state revenues by imposing a license fee of \$300 on "astrologers, fortunetellers, clairvoyants, palmisters and seers."⁸⁵

The supposedly sophisticated twentieth century attached even greater importance to the prophetic function. Newspapers and magazines attracted subscribers by featuring the predictions of well-known publicists and scientists.⁸⁶ In the boom years of the 1920's a special branch of prognostication known as business forecasting gained repute. Self-appointed experts fingering the pulse of economic and political trends sold their findings at stiff prices to an eager

⁸⁴ See *The American Commonwealth*, vol. 2, chaps. cxv-cxvi. Seventeen years afterward Bryce reviewed his own predictions in an article in the *Outlook*, vol. 79, pp. 733-40, 846-55 (March 25, April 1, 1905).

⁸⁵ Bryce, *American Commonwealth*, vol. 2, p. 683 n.

⁸⁶ For examples of newspapers: the *New York Times*, November 22, 1908, conducted a symposium on "Inventions Which the World Yet Needs"; the *New York World* had one in 1910 on "Looking into the Future"; and in the *Boston Herald*, January 6, 1935, Donald Glassman appraised the latter in an article called "Checking up on the Prophets of 25 Years Ago." Hudson Maxim, Charles P. Steinmetz, Thomas A. Edison and Vannevar Bush were among those to vent their views in periodicals. For references to magazine articles pertaining to the future of science and invention, see S. C. Gilfillan, "The Prediction of Inventions," in *Technological Trends and National Policy*, National Resources Committee, Washington, 1937, pp. 15-23. A recent symposium, embracing social as well as mechanical changes, is "The Years Ahead—What May the Next Fifty Years Hold for Us?" in the *Pathfinder*, January 9, 1943. Juvenile fascination with the future wonders of science accounts for the continuing popularity of the cartoon strip describing Buck Rogers's adventures in the twenty-fifth century, a feature which also found its way onto the radio.

clientele; but the failure of most of these "prophets of profits" to foresee the Great Depression caused them either to shut up shop, or to qualify their subsequent utterances with discreet "ifs" and "buts."⁸⁷ The invention of the radio provided seers with a new avenue to the mass mind, of which the astrologer Evangeline Adams made early use. Soon this savant of the heavenly bodies was receiving 300,000 letters a year from her listeners.⁸⁸ In the 1930's two enterprising journalists, directing their attention to the hardly less inscrutable Milky Way of Washington politics, started broadcasting to the nation their weekly "Predictions of Things to Come."⁸⁹

In 1930 *Destiny*, a monthly journal devoted exclusively to soothsaying, began publication at Haverhill, Massachusetts, relying for inspiration on "the *only* authoritative source—the prophecies of the Holy Bible." The editors, who disclaimed sectarian ties, identified the Anglo-Saxon-Celtic stock (but not the Jewish) as the Chosen People, and from this mental slant judged the whole stream of human events.⁹⁰ Rival periodicals soon sprang up, notably a flock of pulp magazines bearing such titles as *Horoscope* and *Everyday Astrology*. Earth-bound prophecy also acquired an organ in December, 1942, when an experienced New York publisher started a bimonthly, *Predictions of Things to Come*. The initial number contained articles by Alexander de

⁸⁷ Dixon Wecter, "How Much News in the News Letter?" *Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 175 (1945), pp. 43-9, tells the story of these political and economic prognosticators.

⁸⁸ "Of all matters, she loves best to advise on marriage, the choice of a profession, and the date of birth of children. . . . It is one of her rules of life that she will not give specific information on definite stocks." Allene Talmey, "Evangeline Adams and Her Stars," *Outlook and Independent*, vol. 157, p. 258 (Feb. 18, 1931). See also H. J. Forman, *The Story of Prophecy*, New York, 1936, pp. 293-4.

⁸⁹ Drew Pearson, who continued alone after his partner Robert Allen entered the Second World War, is written up by Jack Alexander in "The Pugnacious Pearson," *Saturday Evening Post*, vol. 217, no. 28, pp. 9 ff. (Jan. 6, 1945). Alexander says that of 123 predictions in one six-month period 74 came true.

⁹⁰ "Foreword," *Destiny*, vol. 15 (1944), p. 219.

Seversky, George D. Strayer, Elizabeth Hawes, and others, who in their respective fields sought to set up future signposts from their knowledge of past ones.

Books based on a similar exercise of intelligence likewise multiplied. Among the most notable recent ones have been Joseph N. Leonard, *Tools of Tomorrow* (1935), C. C. Furnas, *The Next Hundred Years, the Unfinished Business of Science* (1936), Roger W. Babson, *Looking Ahead Fifty Years* (1942), Leo Cherne, *The Rest of Your Life* (1944), and A. W. Zelmek, *Here Comes Tomorrow* (1944). The planners of the New York World's Fair in 1939-1940 shrewdly mined the same vein of curiosity by organizing that great exposition around the theme: the "World of Tomorrow." Less significant, but not without interest, was Philip A. Brown's campaign in the spring of 1943 for a Baltimore municipal office. Informing the voters of his prediction that by 1968 their homes would be warmed and cooled by air radioed respectively from the equator and the poles, he modestly pointed out, "Men of this type with a vision are sorely needed in the City Council during the next 4 years."⁹¹ Though his fellow citizens did not agree, he managed to poll 5869 votes.

VIII

The energy which Americans through the years have spent on thinking in the future tense may at first view seem regrettable. On second thought, however, it becomes clear that the propensity need not be apologized for. What an individual or a nation does at a given time should have a logical relationship not only to the past but also to the expected future. If the preoccupation becomes mere reverie, it lays a paralyzing hand on the human spirit, but the long record of prediction in American history offers little evidence

⁹¹ Advertisement in the *Baltimore Sun*, quoted in the *New Yorker*, May 29, 1943.

that this has been the case. Hopeful forecasts (like Dean Berkeley's) have set up goals of achievement; gloomy ones (like Lord Macaulay's) have served as a spur to avert the anticipated disaster. It is more difficult to judge the social consequences of the millennial auguries, for in the most impressive instance the falsity of the prophecy was established too quickly to have any lasting effect good or bad.

It is evident that America has produced no oracle of the stature of Nostradamus, the sixteenth-century Frenchman, or even of Mother Shipton, who is said to have held forth in England about the same time.⁹² Our prognosticators, like our philosophers, have generally dealt in fragments rather than in wholes. Their record for accuracy has been subject to the usual human limitations. Whatever their claims to higher inspiration, they have been the creatures of their own hopes and fears. If, as the adage says, truth lies at the bottom of a well, so in the same sense does the imagined future, because the prophet sees mirrored in the water his own image. That so many forecasts have hit the mark is doubtless due to the fact that in a land distinguished by unparalleled social and material progress the improbable has always seemed credible and has tended to become actual. "With regard to this country," said Daniel Webster with pardonable exaggeration, "there is no poetry like the poetry of events, and all the prophecies lag behind the fulfilment."⁹³ As should be expected, the worst blunders occurred when the seers tied their predictions to specific dates, especially to dates close at hand.

The forecaster who disclaimed supernatural guidance generally based his findings on his interpretation of the past trend of events. But he frequently misread the trend, and

⁹² For recent discussions of these two figures, see Forman, *Story of Prophecy*, chaps. ix-xi, and Rolfe Boswell, *Nostradamus Speaks*, New York, 1941.

⁹³ Quoted in Barrows, *United States of Yesterday and To-morrow*, p. 355.

even more frequently failed to allow for imponderable factors that might alter or transform the direction.⁹⁴ "He that knows nothing of it," said Poor Richard, "may by chance be a prophet, while the wisest that is may happen to miss."⁹⁵ The past, in other words, can serve only as a clue to the future, not as a chart or compass: the unanticipated may always intervene. This is the lesson that Anatole France slyly imparts in a tale that may be allowed to conclude the whole matter.⁹⁶ In ancient Athens, Gallio, a Roman proconsul, was pondering the future of the gods with some companions when he was unexpectedly called away by a street riot. Returning shortly, he impatiently dismissed the disturbance as a foolish brawl between two factions of Hebrews over an uncouth person called Paul or Saul of Tarsus, the advocate of a new religious leader whose name Gallio could not remember. Let's not waste our breath talking about this "Jew weaver" of Tarsus and his alleged Messiah, he said to his friends; not from such sources will we ever learn the name of the deity who is to supplant Jupiter.

⁹⁴ Bryce emphasizes this latter point in *Predictions of Hamilton and De Tocqueville*, pp. 20-1, and *American Commonwealth*, vol. 2, p. 691.

⁹⁵ Benjamin Franklin, *Poor Richard's Almanack*, B. E. Smith, ed., New York, 1898, p. 74.

⁹⁶ France, *Sur la Pierre Blanche*, Paris (n. d.), pp. 67-131.

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