

QUOTH THE RAVEN...

Prophets of Gloom Are Always With Us

NO one who has a sense of responsibility will belittle the crisis in which Britain is now caught, or try to shut his eyes to it. The situation is far too serious for the airier kinds of optimism whether we base them on our present resources or on our past escapes. One of the worst of all public nuisances is the man whose smiling confidence means no more than that he is ignorant or a fool. But it is at least worth remembering that Britain and Europe have been in trouble before. The purpose of the quotations on this page is to show that all those who have seen Britain and the West dying in the past have been wrong. Perhaps they will be wrong again.

TO say that Public Credit has hitherto passed safely through the fiery trial of war and rebellion proves nothing. No conclusion can be drawn from a debt of forty-six millions, at which it stood in 1740, to the present debt of a hundred and forty millions. At that time our resources were hardly known, at this period they are known and exhausted. We are arrived at that point when new taxes either produce nothing, or defeat the old ones, and when new duties only operate as a prohibition; yet these are the times, Sir, when every ignorant boy thinks himself fit to be a Minister.

BUT I see the spirit which has gone abroad through the colonies, and I know what consequences that spirit must and will produce. If it be determined to enforce the authority of the Legislature, the event will be uncertain; but if we yield to the pretensions of America there is no further doubt about the matter. From the moment they become an independent people they open their trade with the rest of the world, and England is undone.

—JUNIUS (from a letter in the "Public Advertiser," 1768).

IT is time for England to slip her own cables and float away into some unknown ocean. —HORACE WALPOLE (Letter to Mann, 1757).

I DO not write, Madam, to tell you of politics; you will hear them better from Lord Ossory: nor indeed have I words to paint the abject poltroonery of the ministers, or the blockish stupidity of the Parliament.

Lord North yesterday declared he should during the recess prepare to lay before the Parliament proposals of peace to be offered to the Americans! I trust we have force enough to bring forward an accommodation. They were his very words. Was ever proud insolent nation sunk so low! Burke and Charles Fox told him the administration thought of nothing but keeping their places; and so they will, and the members their pensions, and the nation its infamy. Were I Franklin, I would order the Cabinet Council to come to me at Paris with ropes about their necks, and then kick them back to St. James's.

Well, Madam, as I told Lord Ossory t'other day, I am satisfied—Old England is safe, that is, America, whither the true

English retired under Charles the First—this is Nova Scotia, and I care not what becomes of it.

—HORACE WALPOLE (Letter to the Countess of Upper Ossory, Dec. 11, 1777)

THE friends of Government, who have thought of nothing but of reducing us to our islandhood, and bringing us back to the simplicity of ancient times, when we were the frugal, temperate, virtuous old English, ask how we did before tea and sugar were known. Better, no doubt, but, as I did not happen to be born two or three hundred years ago, I cannot

THE people of England are never so happy as when you tell them they are ruined.—ARTHUR MURPHY ("The Upholsterer," 1758).

recollect precisely whether diluted acorns and barley bread, spread with honey, made a very luxurious breakfast.

—HORACE WALPOLE (Letters, 1779)

ALL trade is dead, and pleasure is scarce alive. Nothing almost is purchased, but such things as the buyer cannot be without, so that a general sluggishness and general discontent is spread over the town (London). All the trades of luxury and elegance are at a stand. What the Parliament when it meets will do, and indeed what it ought to do is very difficult to say.

—SAMUEL JOHNSON (Letter to Mrs. Aston, 1779).

I HAVE no national news that is not in the papers, and almost all news is bad. Perhaps no nation not absolutely conquered has declined so much in so short a time. We seem to be sinking.

—SAMUEL JOHNSON (Letter to Rev. Dr. Taylor, 1782).

WHEN a great military monarch of our time was at the lowest ebb of his fortunes, and had sustained a defeat that seemed to extinguish all his remaining hopes, the terms of his letter, written from the field of battle,

were: "We have lost everything but our honour." Would to God, that the same consolation, in circumstances liable to become in time not less disastrous, remained to Great Britain! I should feel a far less painful load of depression upon my mind, than weighs upon it at this moment.

—WILLIAM WINDHAM (Speech on the Peace of Amiens, 1801).

LORD NORTH is said to have received the news of Cornwallis's surrender at Yorktown (October 19, 1781) "as he would have taken a ball in his breast, opening his arms, and exclaiming wildly 'O God! it is all over!'"

—Dictionary of National Biography.

IF I had time, I would make an actual survey of one whole county, and find out how many of the old gentry have lost their estates, and have been supplanted by the Jews, since Pitt began his reign. I am sure I should prove that, in number, they are one-half extinguished. But it is now that they go. The little ones are, indeed, gone; and the rest will follow in proportion as the present farmers are exhausted. These will keep on giving rents as long as they can beg or borrow the money to pay rents with. But a little more time will so completely exhaust them, that they will be unable to pay; and as that takes place, the landlords will lose their estates. Indeed many of them, and even a large portion of them, have, in fact, no estates now. They are called theirs; but the mortgagees and annuitants receive the rents. As the rents fall off, sales must take place, unless in case of entails; and if this thing go on, we shall see acts passed to cut off entails in order that the Jews may be put into full possession. Such, thus far, will be the result of our "glorious victories" over the French! Such will be, in part, the price of the deeds of Pitt, Addington, Perceval and their successors. For having applauded such deeds; for having boasted of the Wellesleys; for having bragged of battles won by money and by money only, the nation deserves that which it will receive; and as to the landlords, they, above all men living, deserve punishment.

—WILLIAM COBBETT ("Rural Rides," 1823).

THE condition of England, on which so many pamphlets are now in the course of publication, and many thoughts unpublished are going on in every reflective head, is justly regarded as one of the most ominous, and withal one of the strangest, ever seen in the

MILTON! thou shouldst be living at this hour: England hath need of thee: she is a ten Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen, Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower, Have forfeited their ancient English dower Of inward happiness. We are selfish men; Oh! raise us up, return to us again; And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.

—WILLIAM WORDSWORTH (Independence and Liberty, XIV, 1802).

world. England is full of wealth, of multifarious produce, supply for human want in every kind; yet England is dying of inanition. . . . In the midst of plethoric plenty, the people perish.—CARLYLE ("Midas," 1842).



SUSPENDED

animation itself is a frightful possibility for Britain: this anarchy whither all Europe has preceded us, where all Europe is now weltering, would suit us as ill as any!

—CARLYLE

("Latter Day Pamphlets," 1850).

NEXT week my Lord Marlborough was promoted to the Garter, and to be Captain General of Her Majesty's Forces at home and abroad. This appointment only inflamed the Dowager's rage, or, as

A Hundred Years Ago

I FEEL in regard to this aged England, with the possessions, honours, and trophies, and also with the infirmities of 1000 years gathering round her, irretrievably committed as she now is



to many old customs which cannot suddenly changed; pressed upon by the transitions of trade, and new and all incalculable modes, fabrics, arts, machines, and competing populations—I see her not dispirited, not weak,

but well remembering that she has seen dark days before; indeed, with a kind of instinct that she sees a little better in a cloudy day, and that in storm of battle and calamity she has a secret vigour and a pulse like a cannon. I see her in her old age, not decrepit, but young, and still daring to believe in her power of endurance and expansion. Seeing this, I say, All hail! mother of nations, mother of heroes, with strength still equal to the time; still wise to entertain and swift to execute the policy which the mind and heart of mankind require in the present hour.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

(Speech at Manchester, 1847).

she thought it, her fidelity to her rightful sovereign. "The Princess is but a puppet in the hands of that fury of a woman who comes into my drawing room and insults me to my face. What can come to a country that is given over to such a woman?" says the Dowager. "As for that double-faced traitor, my Lord Marlborough, he has betrayed every man and every woman with whom he has to deal, except his horrid wife, who makes him tremble. 'Tis all over with the country when it has got into the clutches of such wretches as these.

—W. M. THAKARAY

("Henry Esmonde," 1852).

ENGLAND, an old and exhausted island, must one day be contented, like other parents, to be strong only in her children.

—EMERSON (English Traits, 1848).

THE nether sky opens, and Europe is disclosed as a prone and emaciated figure, the Alps shaping like a backbone, and the branching mountain-chains like ribs, the peninsular plateau

