

In Regard To This Aged England



I FEEL in regard to this aged England, with the possessions, honours, and trophies, and also with the infirmities of 1000 years gathering around her, irretrievably committed as she now is to many old customs which cannot be 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 all 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 at the present hour." Emerson

THOUGH the ship be out among the billows, yet it will remain sound and unbroken if the cable holdeth.

Alfred the Great

THIS England never did, nor never shall,

Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror,
But when it first did help to wound itself
Now these her princes are come home again,

Come the three corners of the world in arms,

And we shall shock them; nought shall make us rue,

If England to itself do rest but true.

Shakespeare,
"King John."

THERE must be a beginning of any great matter, but the continuing unto the end until it be thoroughly finished yields the true glory.

Sir Francis Drake,
in a letter after Cadiz,
May 17, 1587.

I KNOW I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England, too; and think foul scorn that Parma or Spain, or any prince of



THE words inscribed above are not our own. They were not spoken of our own time, nor were they even spoken by an Englishman. Ralph Waldo Emerson used them a hundred years ago. The full quotation is printed below, and is followed by others that have been selected for what they can tell us of the variety, the contradictions, and the fundamental consistency of the English character. Of necessity, it can be only a brief glance at a theme which runs through English literature and which may be found also in writings from other lands. For the Englishman has been studied for centuries in anger, admiration, amused exasperation and unwilling respect. In these last days before the Coronation it seems appropriate to bring together a few passages which may show why the subject remains endlessly interesting, not only to ourselves, but to the world.

Europe should dare to invade the borders of my realm.

Queen Elizabeth I,

Speech to the troops at Tilbury on the Approach of the Armada, 1588.

HOW does he appear to us? He comes tramping down to us through the ages in his great wide boots, a countenance swollen and reddish, a voice harsh, sharp, and untunable, with a country-made suit, a hat with no band,

a doubtful linen with a speck of blood upon it. He tramps over England, he tramps over Scotland, he tramps over Ireland, his sword in one hand, his Bible in the other. Then he tramps back to London, from whence he puts forth that heavy foot of his into Europe, and all Europe bows before him. When he is not scattering enemies and battering castles he is scattering Parliaments and battering general assemblies. He seems to be the very spirit of destruction, an angel of vengeance permitted to reign for a season and efface what he had to efface, and then to disappear.

Lord Rosebery,

"Cromwell," a speech delivered at the Cromwell Tercentenary Celebration, 1899.

GO thy ways, old Jack: die when thou wilt. If manhood, good manhood, be not forgot upon the face of the earth, then I am a shotten herring. There live not three good men unchanged in England, and one of them is fat and grows old.

Shakespeare,

King Henry IV, Part I.

OUR Trimmer is far from idolatry in other things, in one thing only he cometh near it, his country is in some degree his idol; he doth not worship the sun, because 'tis not peculiar to us, it rambles about the world, and is less kind to us than others; but for the earth of England, though perhaps inferior to many places abroad, to him there is a divinity in it, and he would rather die than see a spire of English grass trampled down by a foreign trespasser: he thinketh there are a great many of his mind, for all

plants are apt to taste of the soil in which they grow, and we that grow here, have a root that produceth in us a stalk of English juice, which is not to be changed by grafting or foreign infusion.

George Savile, Marquess of Halifax,
"The Character of a Trimmer," 1688.

THE royal navy of England hath ever been its greatest defence and ornament; it is its ancient and natural strength; the floating bulwark of the island.

William Blackstone,
"Commentaries."

THEY who consider the Freedom of Britons to be only their own concern, discern not the political connexions between the different states of mankind. Every Nation, that desires to be free, is interested in the fate of Great Britain. There is erected the Temple of Liberty,

where her votaries are animated with the purest flame; there is her Fortress to which they, whose freedom is in danger, resort for protection; if Liberty is once lost there, it must soon cease to exist upon the face of the earth. It is no wonder therefore that those Princes, who have fettered their own subjects and prepared chains for the rest of mankind, should express their resentment at the power of Great Britain.

Pietas et Gratulatio collegii Cantabrigieensis apud Novanglos,
From preface by the President and Fellows of Harvard College to the King, 1761.

NO, Sir, when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life; for there is in London all that life can afford.

Samuel Johnson

(Quoted by Boswell in his "Life.")

I REJOICE that America has resisted.

1766, H of C.

IF I were an American, as I am an Englishman, while a foreign troop was landed in my country, I never would lay down my arms — never — never — never!

H of L, 1777.

Earl of Chatham

DENY them this participation of freedom, and you break that sole

bond, which originally made, and must still preserve the unity of the empire.

Edmund Burke

Conciliation with America, 1775.

... a power to which, for purposes of foreign conquest and subjugation, Rome, in the height of her glory, is not to be compared; a power which has dotted over the surface of the whole globe with her possessions and military posts, whose morning drum-beat, following the sun, and keeping company with the hours, circles the earth with one continuous and unbroken strain of the martial airs of England.

Daniel Webster, 1834

"THEY feel themselves," said Goethe, "by no means strange or embarrassed in this foreign atmosphere; on the contrary, their deportment in society is as full of confidence, and as easy, as if they were lords everywhere, and the whole world belonged to them. This it is which pleases our women, and by which they make such havoc in the hearts of our young ladies."

"Still I would not assert," answered Eckermann, "that the young Englishmen in Weimar are more clever, more intelligent, better informed, or more excellent at heart than other people."

"The secret does not lie in these things, my good friend," returned Goethe. "Neither does it lie in birth and riches; it lies in the courage they have to be that for which nature has made them. ... Such as they are, they are thoroughly complete men. That they are also sometimes complete fools, I allow with all my heart; but that is still something, and has still always some weight in the scale of nature."

Conversations of Goethe, 1828

SLAVES cannot breathe in England. . .

William Cowper,
"The Task."

NO fruit ripens in England but a baked apple.

Rivarol



THE Government was contemplating the dispatch of an expedition to Burma, with a view to taking Rangoon, and a question arose as to who would be the fittest general to be sent in command of the expedition. The Cabinet sent for the Duke of Wellington, and asked his advice. He instantly replied,

"Send Lord Combermere."

"But we have always understood that your Grace thought Lord Combermere a fool."

N.Z. LISTENER, MAY 29, 1953.