

**PROPHETIC VOICES  
CONCERNING AMERICA.  
A MONOGRAPH**

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Prophetic voices concerning America. A monograph by Charles Sumner

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# PROPHETIC VOICES

CONCERNING

## A M E R I C A.

A MONOGRAPH.

BY

CHARLES SUMNER.

I have a far other and far brighter vision before my gaze. It may be but a vision, but I will cherish it. I see one vast confederation stretching from the frozen North in unbroken line to the glowing South, and from the wild billows of the Atlantic westward to the calmer waters of the Pacific main, — and I see one people, and one law, and one language, and one faith, and, over all that wide continent, the home of freedom, and a refuge for the oppressed of every race and of every clime. — JOHN BRONTE, *Speech at Birmingham*, December 18, 1862; *Speeches by Rogers*, Vol. I. p. 225.

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**T**HIS monograph appeared originally in the "Atlantic Monthly." It is now revised and enlarged. In the celebration of our hundredth birthday as a nation, now fast approaching, these prophetic voices will be heard, teaching how much of present fame and power was foreseen, also what remains to be accomplished.

C. S.



History shows that the civilization on which we depend is subject to a general law which makes it journey by halts, in the manner of armies, in the direction of the Occident, making the sceptre pass successively into the hands of nations more worthy to hold it, more strong and more able to employ it for the general good.

So it seems that the supreme authority is about to escape from Western and Central Europe, to pass to the New World. In the northern part of that other hemisphere offshoots of the European race have founded a vigorous society full of sap, whose influence grows with a rapidity that has never yet been seen anywhere. In crossing the ocean it has left behind on the soil of old Europe traditions, prejudices, and usages which, as *impediments* heavy to move, would have embarrassed its movements and retarded its progressive march. In about thirty years the United States will have, according to all probability, a hundred millions of population, in possession of the most powerful means, distributed over a territory which would make France fifteen or sixteen times over, and of the most wonderful disposition. . . .

Vainly do the occidental and central nations of Europe attribute to themselves a primacy which, in their vanity, they think sheltered from events and eternal; as if there were anything eternal in the grandeur and prosperity of societies, the works of men! — MICHEL CHEVALIER, *Rapports du Jury International: Exposition Universelle de 1867 à Paris*, Tom. I., pp. dxiv.-dxvi.

America, and especially Saxon America, with its immense virgin territories, with its republic, with its equilibrium between stability and progress, with its harmony between liberty and democracy, is the continent of the future, — the immense continent stretched by God between the Atlantic and Pacific, where mankind may plant, essay, and resolve all social problems. [*Loud cheers.*] Europe has to decide whether she will confound herself with Asia, placing upon her buds old altars, and upon the altars old idols, and upon the idols immovable theocracies, and upon the theocracies despotic empires, or whether she will go by labor, by liberty, and by the republic, to collaborate with America in the grand work of universal civilization. — EMILIO CASTELLAR, *Speech in the Spanish Cortes*, June 22, 1871.

## MONOGRAPH.

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**T**HE discovery of America by Christopher Columbus is the greatest event of secular history. Besides the potato, the turkey, and maize, which it introduced at once for the nourishment and comfort of the Old World,<sup>1</sup> and also tobacco, which only blind passion for the weed could place in the beneficent group, this discovery opened the door to influences infinite in extent and beneficence. Measure them, describe them, picture them, you cannot. While yet unknown, imagination invested this continent with proverbial magnificence. It was the Orient and the land of Cathay. When afterwards it took a place in geography, imagination found another field in trying to portray its future history. If the Golden Age is before, and not behind, as is now happily the prevailing faith, then indeed must America share at least, if it does not monopolize, the promised good.

Before the voyage of Columbus in 1492, nothing of America was really known. Scanty scraps from antiq-

<sup>1</sup> In the Description of England, prefixed to Holinshed's Chronicles and dated 1586, one of these gifts is mentioned: "Of the potato and such venereal roots as are brought out of Spain, Portugal, and the Indies to furnish up our banquets, I speak not." Introduction, Book II., Chap. VI., Vol. I. p. 281. (London, 1807.)

uity, vague rumors from the resounding ocean, and the hesitating speculations of science, were all that the inspired navigator found to guide him. Foremost among these were the well-known verses of Seneca, so interesting from ethical genius and a tragical death, in the chorus of his "Medea," which for generations had been the finger-point to an undiscovered world.

" . . . venient annis  
 Secula seris quibus Oceanus  
 Vincula rerum laxet, et ingens  
 Pateat tellus, Tiphys que novos  
 Detegat orbis, nec sit terris  
 Ultima Thule."<sup>1</sup>

These verses are vague and lofty rather than specific; but Bacon, after setting them forth, says of them, "A prophecy of the discovery of America"; and this they may well be, if we adopt the translation of Archbishop Whately, in his notes to the *Essay on Prophecies*: "There shall come a time in later ages, when ocean shall relax his chains and a vast continent appear, and a pilot shall find new worlds, and Thule shall be no more earth's bound." Fox, turning from statesmanship to scholarship, wrote to Wakefield:<sup>2</sup> "The prophecy in Seneca's 'Medea' is very curious indeed." Irving says of it: "Wonderfully apposite, and shows, at least, how nearly the warm imagination of a poet may approach to prophecy. The predictions of the ancient oracle were rarely so unequivocal."<sup>3</sup> These verses were adopted by Irving as a motto on the title-page of the revised edition of his "Life of Columbus."

<sup>1</sup> Act II, v. 371.

<sup>2</sup> June 29, 1806. *Memorials and Correspondence*, by Lord John Russell, Vol. IV, p. 393.

<sup>3</sup> *Life of Columbus*, Appendix, No. XXII., author's revised edition, Vol. III, p. 402.