

PROPHECY.

THERE seems to be an instinctive fondness for prophecy in human nature. To prophesy and to be prophesied to, seems to be alike congenial. It does not appear to be at all necessary that there should be any fulfilment, or any signs of fulfilment. After repeated failures, if the prophet is only loud and self-confident enough, people are as ready to believe as ever. The prophetic office so very conspicuous in semi-barbarous times does not seem to wane in importance in civilization. We see the confidence reposed in Vennor's weather predictions, notwithstanding constant failures, and also the ready ear that is given to every interpreter of the Book of Revelations, if only he foretells the immediate end of the world and deals satisfactorily with the marks of the beast and the number 666. A certain class of people take great satisfaction in predictions of England's decline and downfall. I had always thought that this kind of prophecy was enjoyed chiefly by a few snarling Americans like Hawthorne, and Germans like Heine and Hegel with whom the wish was father to the thought; but it seems we have a full-fledged prophet of this description in Montreal. One difference between them, however, is very noticeable. The Continental and American prophets base their predictions on England's vices and depravities, but Mr. Boodle bases his, on her virtues and good qualities. So long as England is rapacious and unprincipled in her dealings with her neighbours, ready to fight with or without provocation, she is great, and going on to a glorious maturity, but as soon as she begins to prefer justice in her domestic and foreign relations; when by the passage of the Reform Bill she extends political rights to a larger class of her citizens she shows signs of decay and old age; when she finds out that she has been waging an unjust war on the South African Boers her 'flag is disgraced by concessions to a victorious enemy.' With a show of italics as if he had made a great discovery, he announces that the passage of the Reform Bill of 1832—the first step in a series of reforms by which England has given equal rights to all classes of her citizens—was 'The first great mark of England's decline.'

It is difficult to understand the state

of mind which could lead any one to such a conclusion from such premises. Mr. Boodle admits himself, after recapitulating a lot of more or less imaginary symptoms of decay, that 'there seems to be no way of accounting for them except on the theory of natural decline.' He is not the first who has been misled by the analogy between the animal and the social organism. There is a very close resemblance, no doubt, in structure and function between the individual and the community; and the modes of working in the one case have thrown much light and illustration on the other. This has been admirably set forth by the greatest philosopher of modern times. But analogies between any two things are never complete at all points; they are never exact copies of each other. Although there are many curious and instructive resemblances in structure and function between the animal and the social organism, it does not follow that because the one has its inevitable period of decay and extinction, that the other has the same unavoidable destiny; and even though any proof could be adduced to this effect, no one can say what ratio there is between the lives of the two. How many decades or centuries in the life of a nation would be equal to a year in the life of an individual. There is no doubt that the earth itself will some time 'wax old as a garment,' but judging from the time it has already been in existence we may infer that there is a period in store for it so enormous in duration as practically to amount to an eternity; and similarly with nations. When we consider how their units are continually renewed by successive generations, how much more independent in their motions they are than those of an animal, it is reasonable to conclude that with favourable conditions, and especially with free institutions, their lives may be continued through long intervals of time. Mr. Boodle's formidable array of the symptoms of England's decay is quite superficial. A few years will overcome the worst of them. Neither the symptoms nor the energy displayed in curing them indicate a decline in the national constitution; nowhere are there any signs of age or weakness. A slight consideration of the parallel between the individual and the community will show that the case is quite the reverse. In the individual organism, youth and manhood are