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PROPHETS OF UNREST.

It was, I confess, very late, and only in dearth of other reading, that I took up the last, and, if popularity and circulation are the tests, the most successful, of all the "Utopias." I am little attracted by compositions of this class, either as fictions or as speculations. As fictions they seem to me inevitably insipid, whatever the talents of the author, since they deal with characters which are preterhuman. Speculation can no longer interest when it loses hold of reality and probability, and when, if you are so matter-of-fact as to attempt criticism, the hypothesis or project slips away into the inane.

An historical interest and a social importance of a certain kind these visions have. They are apt like the rainbow in the spray of Niagara, to mark a cataract in the stream of history. That of More, from which the general name is taken, and that of Rabelais, marked the fall of the stream from the middle ages into modern times. Plato's "Republic" marked the catastrophe of Greek republicanism, though it is not a mere "Utopia" but a great treatise on morality, and even as a political speculation not wholly beyond the pale of what a Greek citizen might have regarded as practical reform, since it is in its main features an idealization of Sparta. Langland's vision of reform heralded the outbreak of Lollardism and the insurrection of the serfs.

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