



THE GOLDEN AGE: OR, FUTURE GLORY OF NORTH AMERICA

ANONYMOUS _1785 _ EXCERPTS

A young man falls asleep on the bank of a stream and is awakened by an angel sent "to resolve certain doubts" he has about America's future. Yes, the colonies had "an indispensable duty" to become independent from Britain. Yes, they will resist tyranny and dissolution from within. From a mountaintop in the continent's center, the angel shows him the cities and farms that will spread across the land and assures him that homelands will be created in the west for Indians and "Negroes." He learns that the dispersed Jewish people will come to America and convert to Christianity, fulfilling part of God's plan for the biblical end time. Representative of a

prevalent millennial interpretation of American history, and likely written by a southern Protestant clergyman, this allegory champions America's destiny as "the glorious cause of truth"—the truth of Christianity and God's kingdom on earth. It also reflects the insistent hope nurtured by Americans during the precarious decade of the 1780s.

— Ferrea / Desinet, *ac toto surget gens aurea Mundo*. Virgil, *Eclogues IV*
The iron past, the golden Age shall rise, / And make the whole World happy, free, and wise.

In one of our American States lives the retired and devout Celadon.¹ A man strictly honest and a real lover of his country. That such is his true character appears by the whole tenor of his conduct for several years past.

During our late noble contest with British fury, he signalized himself above many of his equals in age and fortune. Not contented to plead the glorious cause of liberty in private only, he bravely entered the bloody field and actually served several campaigns in vindication of our common rights. Nor did he once discover the least timidity in the day of battle.

Since the restoration of peace and establishment of our independence, he, like another Daniel,² has been anxious to know the future condition of his people — and what may be the consequences of a revolution so extraordinary in itself — which is the wonder of the present and will probably be the joy of many succeeding generations.

Often musing on this delightful subject, he was at last indulged with an agreeable vision which gave him the greatest satisfaction. This, as related by himself, is faithfully recorded in the following pages.

Having walked out on a summer's evening and grown weary, I sat down on the verdant bank of a neighboring stream, leaning against a tree whose spreading branches sheltered me from the solar blaze. In this easy posture, I was awhile delighted with the music of the groves. The murmuring waters below and chirping birds — together with the sighing gales above, soothed my imagination and by degrees lulled every ungrateful care to rest 'till, in short, I fell into a kind of drowsy trance.

Whilst thus dissolved in slumberous indolence, lo, to my apprehension, a wondrous form darting from the sky swift as the lightning's flash stood before me.— His countenance sparkled like the morning star, and his robes outshone the glowing brilliance of the rainbow. . . . I indeed was at first smitten with a trembling awe as in the presence of so superior a being. But perceiving an ineffable sweetness in his looks

¹ *Celadon*: shepherd in the 17th-c. French novel *L'Astrée* by Honoré d'Urfé.

² *Daniel*: Jewish exile in Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar who received prophetic visions about the future of Israel and the Jewish people. [Book of Daniel]

and nothing vindictive in his aspect, this at length recovered my dejected spirit — so that I ventured to accost him with words to this effect and was kindly answered as in the sequel [following].

Celadon. Good Angel! For such I am convinced you are, may I know your errand? What strange cause could induce you to leave the mansions of light and condescend to visit this wretched, fallen, and offending world?

Angel. My present business is to resolve certain doubts with which you have been lately puzzled and to give you intelligence respecting several as yet unknown events whereby you and others may be comforted and encouraged to stand fast in a resolute attachment to the glorious cause of truth and the inviolable interest of American freedom and independence.

Celadon. Dare a poor mortal ask by what name to honor your dignity? And what rank you bear among the Empyrean Hierarchies?³

Angel. Inquire not after my name for it is secret — but as to my present station, I belong to a bright squadron of Seraphic warriors⁴ who are appointed as guardians of these confederated States. — We inspired your statesmen with wisdom and your heroes with courage in all their late [recent] gallant struggles for freedom. — We baffled the counsels of your enemies and struck terror into their hearts, insomuch that they often fled without any visible pursuer. — Yet were we but generous instruments at most. God himself was the supreme agent. — He it was that succeeded your enterprises⁵ and, at last, crowned your combined forces with victory. — Without his blessing, neither men nor angels could have saved America from the rapacious jaws of tyranny and oppression. To him, therefore, let all the glory be ascribed for ever.

Celadon. What you have now said might be sufficient was it disputable before to convince the whole world that America was very right in casting off the British yoke.

Angel. Her so doing was in every view a most equitable transaction. — *colonies' duty to separate from tyrannical government*
That once flourishing kingdom, having reached the zenith of temporal grandeur, has been several years on the decline. — Britain was once indeed a land of patriots and heroes. But now alas! The majority of her sons are lamentably degenerated. In days of old, what zealous advocates for freedom were they! — The very name of bondage made the whole nation start, as at the sight of an infernal ghost! — But of late they seem determined as by some strange fatality to introduce an arbitrary and despotic government — a submission to which is the reproach of reason and a scandal to humanity. It was therefore the indispensable duty of these States to resolve on an entire separation, as from a family deeply infected with the plague. Even the law of self-preservation required it.

Celadon. And may not our legislators also follow their example? Allured *danger of American leaders becoming tyrannical?*
by the splendid baits of lucre [money] and ambition, will they not hereafter aspire to absolute sovereignty themselves? Should that be the case, we have no great reason to triumph. It would only be changing one imperious lord for another. A doleful recompense that, for the rivers of blood we have spilt and the millions of gold we have spent.

Tyranny will always prove the same insatiable, sanguinary, cruel monster in whatever shape she appears and in whatever part of the globe she reigns!

Angel. All sublunary things are subject to mutation.⁶ The greatest empires have had their birth, their growth, their maturity, and their fall. Nor can America, should the world stand long enough,

³ *Empyrean Hierarchies*: in Christianity, the orders of celestial beings.

⁴ *Seraphic warriors*: of the seraphim, the highest order of celestial being.

⁵ I.e., caused the success of your struggle for liberty.

⁶ I.e., all earthly things are subject to change.

expect an exemption from the usual vicissitudes of fortune. — Yet, such a change is not likely to happen very soon. — A republic being composed of many parts is not so liable to enslaving measures as monarchies in general are. — The States will doubtless watch over one another with the strictest vigilance, so that no gross innovation can long be concealed but must soon be discovered and detected by that matchless sagacity with which this country is distinguished — and is indeed one of your peculiar characteristics as a nation. May you never forfeit it by willfully shutting your eyes against the truth, as too many others have done!

Celadon. Yet should some sovereign power cast an avaricious eye on our fertile fields and blooming forests, how could we repel the encroachment? *danger of U.S. being invaded?*

Should they invade our territories in their infancy and before our constitution is well settled, might we not be reduced to the basest vassalage after all? — A burnt child dreads even the most distant thought of fire!

Angel. If you live in amity and concord, there can be no danger of that calamity, especially if you join to suppress vice and encourage virtue. — Whilst you labor to worship God in sincerity and promote the interest of religion and morality, you need fear no external enemy nor dread any hostile invasion. — Your country is so situated that it would prove very difficult, if not morally speaking impossible, to subdue it by outward force. — It needs no artificial bulwark or sumptuous fortification. — Nature itself, has made it impregnable. And which is much more: As long as you retain your integrity, the Lord of Hosts will be with you; the God of Jacob will be your refuge. — Nothing can ruin America but the degeneracy of her own offspring. — Beware of that, and you may be easy [assured] on all other accounts.

Celadon. Good news! But, may not the now United States differ among themselves! Should they hereafter quarrel with one another, it would certainly be to their mutual injury. Yea, perhaps, prove destructive to the whole empire. — Divide and overthrow them is Satan's maxim — the ancient logic of that malignant spirit. *danger of disunity and collapse?*

Angel. Should they do so, they must blame themselves for their own perdition. And like self-murderers, die condemned and be buried in the horrid vaults of infamy. — But this is not likely to happen without some great and general depravity of manners [behavior]. — Seeing each State is of itself independent as to its own internal jurisdiction, and enjoys all the immunities it can desire as a distinct substantive commonwealth, what ground can there be for jealousy or emulation, for envy or bickerment between them? — These atrocious fiends will, 'tis hoped, never prevail in this new and flourishing continent. On the contrary, the inhabitants daily tasting the delicious sweets of equal freedom, will, you may trust my word, be more and more united and join as one mighty champion to maintain the tranquility of the whole community.

Celadon. Should this be our propitious lot, we shall probably increase in number very fast, which will by consequence augment our warlike force and be a continual addition to our national strength. So that by a long course of prosperity, we may become as the sand on the sea shore for multitude. *strength through population increase*

Angel. Multiply you doubtless will, and that to a prodigy [extraordinary amount]. To this, not only your own fruitfulness, but continual emigration from several parts of the world will annually contribute. *population increase through immigration*
— The poor, the oppressed, and the persecuted will fly to America as doves to their windows. — This Western World will be the dernier [last] resort, the last refuge and asylum for afflicted merit. — Nor will room be wanting. This continent is the largest and will be the most populous empire upon earth, provided the pride and luxury of the inhabitants do not prove an obstacle to its growth. — Of all such enormities therefore, they will do well timely

to beware — which, as history informs you, have in past ages sapped the foundations of and laid the most opulent and powerful states in ruins.

Celadon. Heaven grant they ever may! But alas! The relentless Indians are still ravaging our helpless frontiers. Their perpetual depredations will, 'tis feared, greatly retard the population of our as yet woodland regions. The related horrors of their scalping massacres have hitherto prevented not a few in their designs of removing thither.⁷

*westward expansion
limited by Indians?*

Angel. That impediment is not likely to last very long. Their ammunition will soon be spent. Nor can their game last many years. — The deer, buffalo, &c. will gradually grow scarce and at last fail of course.⁸ — So that in conclusion they will find themselves under a necessity of working or starving. — Hunger will compel them to sue for peace. They will apply to Congress for an assured settlement of their own which, being granted, they will betake themselves to honest labor, and by industry in due time become a polite, wealthy, and pious nation.

future of Indians

Celadon. Pious! And will such savages ever be converted to Christianity! When at present they seem to be implacable enemies to the name of Christ!

Angel. You may be assured of it. — Why this paroxysm of admiration?⁹ Your progenitors, the now refined Britons, were formerly as wild Pagans, as rank Idolaters, and as adverse to embracing the gospel as the Indians now are. — Remember, it is God's work to convert men. Divine power can do everything. — And time may produce yet greater wonders. Every operation is alike easy to omnipotence.¹⁰

Celadon. And what is to be done with the poor Negroes? Nothing! There are vast crowds of them in some States. — And is not their rigorous servitude an odious blot in our scutcheon [shield] of honor? — Wretched creatures! Must they alone remain in irrevocable bondage? I hope not.

*future of
enslaved blacks*

Angel. No, they too shall in the proper season be set at liberty. — A tract of land will be allowed them. — They shall be furnished with implements of husbandry [farming] and everything necessary to begin the world with. — They will by degrees form a State of their own. — And at length also prove a rich, a religious, and useful people. But there must be time for their manumission [emancipation]. It cannot be done at once.

Thus saying, the Angel, as I thought, took me up in his arms and in an instant set me down again on the top of an exceeding high mountain. — This mountain stands in the center of North America and for altitude surmounts all others. . . . Then the Angel washed my eyes with a crystalline elixir, which he carried in a pearly vial. Whereupon I found my visive faculty [vision] amazingly strengthened so that I could distinctly view the whole continent from shore to shore.

*growth & resources
of the new nation*

This done, he bid me turn to the east. I did so. And looking from north to south, what a grand and majestic prospect was presented to my sight!

Several spacious cities and a great many thriving towns already founded. — What a thick conjunction of farms, plantations, gardens, orchards, vineyards, &c. laden with every kind of fruit! — How charmingly diversified with lofty hills and flowery dales! Extensive forests and shady groves! How plentifully watered with living fountains, purling rills,¹¹ and navigable rivers throughout the whole, for fifteen hundred miles in length and near a thousand in breadth! — And what elegant buildings adapted to

⁷ I.e., have prevented many in their plans of moving there.

⁸ *Of course*, here meaning at the end of the course (the process of becoming more scarce).

⁹ I.e., why this expression of surprise [that the Indians will be converted]?

¹⁰ I.e., easy for God to perform.

¹¹ Swirling streams.

all the purposes of life, both civil and religious! — I stood and gazed with pleasing astonishment, till the Angel ordered me to turn my face westward. I obeyed, and was equally surprised at the wide extended landscape.

This western part of America is as yet but an uncultivated desert — the haunt of savages and range of wild beasts. — But the soil in general is much richer than that of the eastern division. The rivers too are larger and flow in greater numbers. The mountains indeed are numerous and very high, yet between them lie exceeding wide and level valleys, and to appearance fertile as the plains of Shinar,¹² which they say used to yield a hundred fold. I also perceived that the settled part of our continent is really but a little spot in comparison of the vast regions to white men as yet unknown.

*western region of
the continent*

Upon the whole, lost in wonder, I could not avoid falling into this agreeable reflection whilst surveying a beauteous world rising out of a dreary wilderness.

“It is as yet scarce three hundred years since this quarter of the globe was first discovered by the European nations. Nor is above one hundred years elapsed since any considerable improvements have been made in this northern continent. Yet at this day it contains by computation at least three millions of Christian inhabitants, beside the heathenish tribes, of whom there is perhaps a much greater number than are yet registered in our accounts of those formidable warriors. — How rapid must have been the growth of my native country! When in that short space of time it has arisen to such a degree of wealth and grandeur as to be able not only to cope with but to bid defiance to Great Britain itself — a power which for ages past was renowned for military prowess and famous for victory and triumph. — Blessed art thou, O America! Thou shalt both do great things and shall still prevail!”

How long I might have remained in this contemplative rapture I cannot tell, had not the Angel recalled my attention by a gentle touch on my side and pointing his finger a little to the southwest, “Celadon,” says he, “do you see yonder long valley? — How full of the choicest timber! What fine springs it contains! And how many perennial rivers glide through it, at suitable distances! — That whole region you may call Savagenia, it being designed for the future habitation of your now troublesome Indians. — And that other valley — it is, you may notice, as well wooded and watered and every way furnished with all the preparative accommodations for human life as the first I showed you. It lies to the northwest and enjoys of the two, the clearest air, and by consequence will prove the healthiest climate. — This you may call Nigrania, it being allotted for the Negroes to dwell there when the term of their vassalage is come to a period.¹³ — And in all those vast spaces westward to the great ocean, there may be a French, a Spanish, a Dutch, an Irish, an English, &c. yea, a Jewish State here in process of time. — And all of them united in brotherly affection, will at last form the most potent empire on the face of the earth.

*future regions for
Indians & blacks*

*possible future nations
of Europeans & Jews*

The Angel predicts that the Jewish people, dispersed for centuries from Palestine, will create a New Jerusalem in America and eventually convert to Christianity.

Celadon. Thrice happy event! The Lord hasten it. That occurrence will probably have a blessed influence toward the resuscitation of primitive piety, which was the splendid ornament of Christianity in the apostolic age, but seems at present like a plant in the drought of summer which, by long fading, has lost much both of its original verdure and fragrance.

*America as the fruition of
God’s plan for humankind*

¹² *Plain of Shinar*: fertile plain in Mesopotamia between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers (in present-day Iraq); region cited in Genesis.

¹³ I.e., when the period of their enslavement comes to an end.

Angel. You are not mistaken. The conversion of the Jews will be as life from the dead to the Gentile church. — It will greatly animate and revive true believers themselves. . . . In short, it will be nothing less than the commencement of that stupendous work, which your divines [clergy] justly denominate the glory of the latter days. — This is that most illustrious operation of sovereign mercy, for which you have heard several pious ministers so often pray, and of which they speak in such high and lofty strains. — In America God has determined to begin his last and greatest wonders among mankind. — And in the west shall that propitious cloud arise, whose salutary shower will in the end refresh and in an evangelical sense fructify the whole continent. — It will water the Jewish state first, and in progression, borne as on the wings of the wind, visit all the rest until the whole wilderness is gladdened by the nectareous drops, and the desert is made to rejoice and blossom as a rose. — It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing.

Celadon. And is this gracious visitation to be limited only to our American shores, and must it reach no farther than our western coasts?

Angel. No indeed! It shall by degrees extend to the extremities of the Globe. The report will soon be borne by fame over the great ocean, and like a clap of seven-fold thunder rouse every nation where it comes and force them to a serious consideration of their latter end. — None of them shall be excepted from this common privilege, for the whole earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Then will be fulfilled that emblematical prediction recorded in the revelation. — The seventh Angel sounded,¹⁴ and all Heaven rang with reverberating, solemn, triumphant acclamations: And as with one voice proclaimed his coronation who is the adored proprietor of the universe. — The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ: And he shall reign for ever and ever. — Then will the illustrious morning dawn, the true golden age commence. — That era of light and love, foretold by so many inspired Prophets, and long expected by your progenitors of different nations, for several generations past. — America, I say, will be irradiated with the first and brightest rays of that resplendent day, whose dazzling effulgence shall by degrees illuminate the darkest regions of the earth and at length replenish the whole world of mankind with spiritual glory.

. . .

Here my celestial visitant paused for a little while and seemed like one lost in deep meditation. Then bounding from the earth, in the twinkling of an eye mingled with the blue ether.

And I saw him at that time no more.

Startled at the suddenness of his departure, I awoke and found myself in the place and posture aforesaid. — The sun was by this time gone down, and night had drawn her starry curtain over the prostrate world. I arose, and greatly delighted with what I had seen and heard, walked softly home to my dwelling.

F I N I S

¹⁴ Revelation 11:15: "And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become [the kingdoms] of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever." [King James Version]