

Ni3 A Prince out of the North shall come

Notes. This poem on James I, often titled “Merlin’s Prophecy”, had an uncertain status in manuscript culture. John Rous, whose 1622 version is reproduced here, prefaces his copy with some notes about Merlin (“who was famous about the yeere of Chr. 433”), and speculation that the poem was known to an author in 1588. This suggests that he, if not others, took the poem seriously as prophecy.

A Prince out of the North¹ shall come,
King borne, Crownde babe,² his brest upon
a lyon rampant³ strange to see,
& C J S shall cleped be⁴
borne in a Country rude & stony,⁵
yet he Couragious wise & holie.

5

At beste of strength his Fortunes beste
he shall receive,⁶ & then in reste
couche as a Lyon in his denne,
& live in peace so long, till men
shall wonder, & all Christendome
thinke the time long, both all & some.

10

At last he calles a Parliament,
& breakes it up in discontent.⁷

And shortlie then shall rowzed be,
by enemie beyonde the sea;

15

But when in wrath he drawes his sworde,
Woe, that the sleeping Lyon stird’e.

For ere he sheathes the same againe
he puttes his foes to mickle⁸ paine

20

The Valiant acts he then shall doe,
greate Alexanders⁹ fame out-goe.

He passeth seas & fame doth winne,

till many Princes joyne with him,
 & chuse him for theire Governor, 25
 & crowne him Westerne Emperour.
 And after a while he shall beguile,
 the City auncient oulde & greate,
 which on seaven hilles is scituate,¹⁰
 till he her walles hath ruinate. 30
 Then shall a foe from Easte¹¹ appeere
 the brinke of one greate river¹² neere,
 The Lyon rampant shall him meete,
 & if on this side they shall fight
 the day is loste, but he shall crosse 35
 the river greate, & being paste
 shall in the strength of his greate god,
 be to his foes a scourging rodde.
 causing him thence to take his flight
 of Easterne kings succour to seeke 40
 Then shall he be in an hower
 of East & west crownde Emperour.¹³
 Then shall the foe in fury burne,
 & from the Easte in haste returne,
 with aide of Kinges & Princes greate, 45
 into the Vale of Jehosaphat.¹⁴
 There shall he meete the Lyon strong,
 who in a battaile fierce & long
 shall foile his foes. Then cruell death
 shall take away his aged breathe.

Source. BL Add. MS 28640, fol. 101r-v

Other known sources. Bodleian MS Ashmole 423, fol. 263r; Bodleian MS Eng. Poet. c.50, fol. 26v; Bodleian MS Rawl. Poet. 26, fol. 67r; Bodleian MS Tanner 88, fol. 253r; BL Add. MS 27879, fol. 239v;

BL MS Sloane 1479, fol. 6r; Brotherton MS Lt. q. 9, fol. 63v; Beinecke MS Osborn b.197, p. 174; Folger STC 14344, t.p.; Folger MS V.a.275, p. 176; Folger MS V.b.303, p. 232

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- ¹ *A Prince out of the North*: i.e. James VI of Scotland, who became James I of England in 1603.
 - ² *Crownde babe*: James became King of Scotland when he was one year old.
 - ³ *a lyon rampant*: the heraldic badge of the Scottish king.
 - ⁴ *C J S shall cleped be*: Rous adds here a cryptic note: “Charles James Stuart the K. of Fr. named his Ch. & Queene Eliz. James”. “Cleped” means “called”.
 - ⁵ *a Country rude & stony*: Scotland. The English had a low opinion of Scotland’s charms (see Section E).
 - ⁶ *At beste...receive*: this refers to James’s inheritance of the English throne in 1603.
 - ⁷ *calles a Parliament...in discontent*: the obvious “prophetic” allusion is to the 1621 Parliament.
 - ⁸ *mickle*: much.
 - ⁹ *greate Alexanders*: Alexander the Great, fourth-century BC King of Macedonia, and conqueror of massive swathes of territory.
 - ¹⁰ *the City auncient...scituate*: the city of Rome, seat of the papacy, and built on seven hills.
 - ¹¹ *a foe from Easte*: probably the Turkish Ottoman empire.
 - ¹² *one greate river*: the river’s identity is unclear.
 - ¹³ *of East & west crownde Emperour*: presumably the Lion/James would be crowned Emperor of the East in Constantinople, then under Ottoman Turk control.
 - ¹⁴ *Vale of Jehosaphat*: the valley where God will judge the heathen (see Joel 3.2, 3.12).
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