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BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

Conversations with Bob: Why everything's going to be okay
Robert Gentle
CreateSpace
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Intelligent and entertaining, a modern man interviews scholars from previous centuries to nitpick.

Catastrophic scenarios and dire predictions are often proven incorrect, an astounding, historical phenomenon that Robert Gentle explores in four creative interviews. He tackles food, coal, manure, and doomsday. This concise, documented book is nonfiction with a fictional twist, placing Bob, the hero of this story, in a time capsule that allows him to communicate with pessimists from the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries.

At a glance, one may be inclined to scoff at the simplistic presentation in *Conversations with Bob*, which paints a rosy picture of the future. On deeper scrutiny, the author's research and perceptive approach will, at the very least, amuse his audience. The crux of the message is not complicated: knowledge is limited to the era in which we live. Consequently, determining what will happen in the next century, or even the next decade, may not be possible.

In 1798, educated individuals in England believed the world would run out of food. Based on available technology, the assertion was without question pointing toward starvation. Yet today, obesity may be killing more people than malnutrition. In certain parts of the globe, unfortunate victims will die from a poor diet and distribution problems, not insufficient production. This is but one example of faulty reasoning rooted in a present-day frame of mind.

The use of coal in 1865 had escalated to such a high degree that experts warned of a shortage and an eventual shutdown of civilization, as well as pollution so severe that it presented a health hazard. They could not foresee the development of later sources of energy. The coal scare ended, but another environmental concern lurked on the horizon.

In 1900, New York wallowed in mountains of manure because the horse and carriage remained a primary means of transportation. Some thought humanity would drown in "the filth of its own progress." The subway and automobile eliminated this concern, though others were

created.

By 1975, soothsayers thought the earth was on the brink of mayhem for a barrage of reasons, such as disease, war, communism, inflation, gas shortage, and global cooling. “A perpetual mood of doom and gloom hung over much of the world.”

Though reassuring, some readers may feel as if Bob glosses over the complex nature of many of these serious issues. However, the intelligence behind this brief work is outstanding.

Robert Gentle is an optimist, journalist, and author of business and marketing titles. His potential as a humorist is evident in *Conversations with Bob*.

Julia Ann Charpentier