

The Strategic Characteristics of the Roman Empire

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ABOUT THE STUDY

It is one of the commonplaces of our time that the world has become small and closely united, but the practical consequences of this fact, as bearing on our own future, we of the United States have not yet appreciated. We are entering with the rest of the world upon a new era of history, in which the conditions that have prevailed in the past will no longer be the determining conditions, and in which our own best and highest interests can no longer be measured by the standard of Washington's Farewell Address. The drama of international politics has already passed into a new act, whose stage is the world, and whose actors are no longer nations in the sense of a hundred years ago, but great races or nations with a world-position; an act in which the petty questions of European boundary lines or the balance of power—the chief objects of the entangling alliances against which we were warned—will sink, as they are even now sinking, into the most trivial byplay. It is the dawn of this era which gives to the Napoleonic struggle its real significance in the history of the world as distinguished from the history of Europe. It is the consciousness of this fact, as can easily be ascertained, which is behind the desperate efforts of France and of Germany to secure colonial empires before it is finally too late. It is this fact which gives all its peculiar importance to the rise of Japan to the possible headship of the Mongolian world, and to the struggle with Russia for the control of China which seems inevitable; and this the Japanese most clearly recognize. No doubt the mere independence of the small nation has never been so secure as it will be in the future, but it is equally certain that the uncombined or "unexpanded" nation is doomed to sink to a constantly lower depth of provincial insignificance. The fate which has overtaken the peoples

of Wales and of Scotland, of Provence and of Aragon, in competition with stronger peoples, lies now before all the smaller nations of the world, and is not to be avoided. The final result to which this stage of history will lead can be nothing less than the domination of the world, in ideas and arts and institutions, by some one racial type. to any observer of ancient international politics who saw the Mediterranean Sea surrounded by a series of independent and apparently powerful states, and who did not reckon Rome the greatest of these, the prediction would have seemed extremely rash that before the close of another century the whole civilized world would be under the control of the Romans, and would be rapidly learning their language, institutions, and laws. Indeed, the Roman of that date did not have so fair a start for leadership in his world as the Anglo-Saxon has in ours. But leadership speedily followed the victory of Rome in the struggle with Carthage. Yet the world of that time which was united under one rule was practically larger than the whole earth of our day. The strategic points of the Roman Empire, measured by any true standards of distance—the transmission of news and the concentration of men and supplies, — were as far from Rome as the strategic points of the world to-day are from London or New York. We can understand that a prediction of the result which was so soon to follow would have seemed rash to the men of 220 B. C., but we ought not to find it difficult to realize the strong probability of a similar result which stands before us, — the domination of the earth by some one race, one civilization, one type of ideas and institutions, not to the exclusion or extinction of the others in a greater degree than in the older case, but to their real and increasing subjugation and to their absorption in the dominant type.

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