

- 1) Read and annotate. Look at highlighted text and be sure to summarise or note what it means
- 2) Define circled words using context

Physical science has expanded its knowledge by building on the work of its predecessors, and by making millions of careful experiments, the results of which are meticulously recorded. Such methods have not yet been employed in the study of world history. Our piecemeal historical work is still mainly dominated by emotion and prejudice.

endeavour to deduce from them any lessons which seem to be applicable to them all. The word 'empire', by association with the British Empire, is visualised by some people as an organisation consisting of a home-country in Europe and 'colonies' in other continents. In this essay, the term 'empire' is used to signify a great power, often called today a superpower. Most of the empires in history have been large landblocks, almost without overseas possessions.

We possess a considerable amount of information on many empires recorded in history, and of their vicissitudes and the lengths of their lives, for example:

The nation	Dates of rise and fall	Duration in years
Assyria	859-612 B.C.	247
Persia (Cyrus and his descendants)	538-330 B.C.	208
Greece (Alexander and his successors)	331-100 B.C.	231
Roman Republic	280-27 B.C.	233
Roman Empire	27 B.C.-A.D. 180	207
Arab Empire	A.D. 634-880	246
Mameluke Empire	1250-1517	267
Ottoman Empire	1320-1570	250
Spain	1500-1750	250
Romanov Russia	1682-1916	234
Britain	1700-1950	250

This list calls for certain comments. (1) The present writer is exploring the facts, not trying to prove anything. The dates given are largely arbitrary. Empires do not usually begin or end on a certain date. There is normally a gradual period of expansion and then a period of decline. The resemblance in the duration of these great powers may be queried. Human affairs are subject to many chances, and it is not to be expected that they

## The Fate of Empires

### 1. Learning from history

The only thing we learn from history, it has been said, is that men never learn from history; a sweeping generalisation perhaps, but one which the chaos in the world today goes far to confirm. What then can be the reason why, in a society which claims to probe every problem, the bases of history are still so completely unknown?

Several reasons for the futility of our historical studies may be suggested.

- 1) First, our historical work is limited to short periods—the history of our own country, or that of some past age which, for some reason, we hold in respect.
- 2) Second, even within these short periods, we seldom give to our narrative its governed by our own family rather than by objectivity. If we are considering the history of our own country, we write at length of the periods when our ancestors were prosperous and victorious, but we pass quickly over their shortcomings or their defeats. Our people are represented as patriotic heroes; their enemies as grasping imperialists, or subversive rebels. In other words, our national histories are propaganda, not well-balanced investigations.
- 3) Third, in the sphere of world history, we study certain short, usually unconnected periods, which fashion at certain epochs has made popular. Greece 500 years before Christ, and the Roman Republic and early Roman Empire are cases in point. The

intervals between the 'great periods' are neglected. Recently Greece and Rome have become largely discredited, and history tends to become increasingly the parochial history of our own countries.

To derive any useful instruction from history, it seems to me essential first of all to grasp the principles that history, to be meaningful, must be the history of the human race. For history is a continuous process, gradually developing, changing and turning back, but in general moving forward in a single mighty stream. Any useful lessons to be derived must be learned by the study of the whole flow of human development, not by the selection of short periods here and there in one country or another.

Every age and culture is derived from its predecessors, adds some contribution of its own, and passes it on to its successors. If we boycott various periods of history, the origins of the new cultures which succeeded them cannot be explained.

Sir John Gubb, better known as Gubb Pasha, was born in 1897, and served in France in the First World War from 1915 to 1918. In 1926 he left the regular army to serve the Iraq Government. From 1939 to 1956, he commanded the famous Jordan Arab Legion. Since retirement, he has published sixteen books, chiefly on the Middle East, and has lectured widely.

### II. The lives of empires

If we desire to ascertain the laws which govern the rise and fall of empires, the obvious course is to investigate the imperial experiments recorded in history, and to

Study this. What do you see?

Golden Age of Rome  
Heraclius & Rome  
Greece  
Greece

Empire =

### The Savage State

The first painting, *The Savage State*, shows the valley from the shore opposite the crag, in the dim light of a dawning stormy day. A hunter clad in skins hastens through the wilderness, pursuing a deer; canoes paddle up the river; on the far shore can be seen a clearing with a cluster of wigwams around a fire, the nucleus of the city that is to be. The visual references are those of Native American life.

### The Arcadian or Pastoral State

In the second painting, *The Arcadian or Pastoral State*, the sky has cleared and we are in the fresh morning of a day in spring. The sun is high, and the viewpoint has shifted further down the river, so the crag with the forested peak can be seen in the distance beyond it. Much of the wilderness has given way to settled lands, with plowed fields and lawns visible. Various activities are in progress: plowing, boat-building, herding sheep, dancing in the forest, and the like. On a bluff at the near side of the river, a magnificent temple has been built, and smoke (presumably from sacrifices) arises from it. The images reflect an idealized, pre-urban ancient Greece.

### The Consummation of Empire

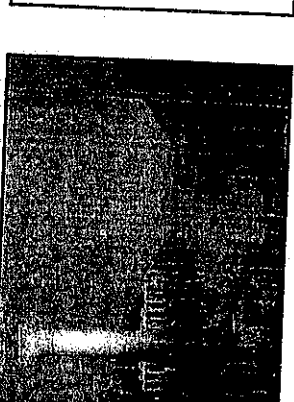
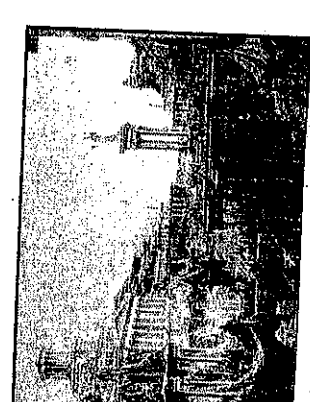
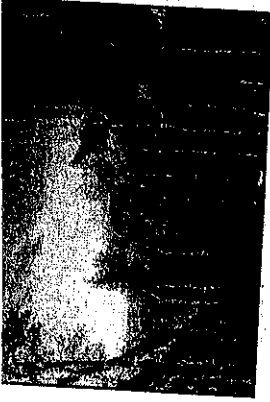
The third painting, *The Consummation of Empire*, shifts the viewpoint to the opposite shore, showing us directly the site of the summer day. Both sides of the river valley are now covered in walled cities. The residential structures, whose steep run down into the river, have now been transformed into a huge domed structure, the temple of the river-god. The great sails go out to the sea beyond. A pyrous crowd throngs the general crossing a bridge, as the two sides of the river in a triumphal procession. In the background an elaborate fountain gushes. The overall look suggests the height of ancient Rome.

### Destruction

The fourth painting, *Destruction*, has shifted the scene perspective as the bridge, though the artist has stepped back a bit to show the action in the sack and covered himself to the center of the river. The temples seen in the distance. It seems that the city, in the course of a long and successful career, has now reached its end. In the foreground, which the triumphant procession had embellished. The bridge across the river is being struck under the weight of soldiers and refugees. Calamity is being announced to the upper floors of a palace on the river bank. In the foreground a scene of horror is unfolding. The soldiers (Borghese *Uffizi*) stand headless, still awaiting for the blow. The scene is perhaps suggested by the Sarcophagus of *Boissac* in 455.

### Desolation

The fifth painting, *Desolation*, shows the results, years later. We view the remains of the city in the livid light of a winter day. The landscape has begun to return to wilderness, and no human beings are to be seen; but the remains of the city's architecture emerge from beneath the stumps of the plumed trees in the background. The arches of the shattered bridge, a single column of the temple are still visible; a single column of the foreground, now a rustling place for birds. The sunrise of the first painting is mirrored here by a moonrise, a pale light reflecting in the ruin-choked river while the standing pillar reflects the last rays of sunset.



age of eighty or ninety. Nevertheless, in spite of such exceptions, we are justified in saying that seventy years is a fair estimate of the average person's expectation of life.

(7) We may perhaps at this stage be allowed to draw certain conclusions:

- (a) In spite of the accidents of fortune, and the apparent circumstances of the human race at different epochs, the periods of duration of different empires at varied epochs show a remarkable similarity.
- (b) Immense changes in the technology of transport or in methods of warfare do not seem to affect the life-expectation of an empire.
- (c) The changes in the technology of transport and of war have, however, affected the shape of empires. The Assyrians, marching on foot, could only conquer their neighbours, who were accessible by land—the Medes, the Babylonians, the Persians and the Egyptians.

The British, making use of ocean-going ships, conquered many countries and continents, which were accessible to them: by water—North America, India, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand—but they never succeeded in conquering their neighbours, France, Germany and Spain. But, although the shapes of the Assyrian and the British Empires were entirely different, both lasted about the same length of time.

~~The human world is not a homogeneous whole. We may say, however, that the same laws govern the rise and fall of empires, and that the average length of their life is about the same. This is not a generalization, but a statement of fact.~~

How does technology affect the life of an empire? The Fate of Empires

could be calculated with mathematical accuracy.

(2) Nevertheless, it is suggested that there is sufficient resemblance between the life periods of these different empires to justify further study.

(3) The division of Rome into two periods may be thought unwarranted. The first, or republican, period dates from the time when Rome became the mistress of Italy, and ends with the accession of Augustus. The imperial period extends from the accession of Augustus to the death of Marcus Aurelius. It is true that the empire survived nominally for more than a century after this date, but it did so in constant confusion, rebellions, civil wars and barbarian invasions.

(4) Not all empires endured for their full lifespan. The Babylonian Empire of Nebuchadnezzar, for example, was overthrown by Cyrus, after a life duration of only some seventy-four years.

(5) An interesting deduction from the figures seems to be that the duration of empires does not depend on the speed of travel or the nature of weapons. The Assyrians marched on foot and fought with spears and bow and arrows. The British used artillery, railways and ocean-going ships. Yet the two empires lasted for approximately the same periods. There is a tendency nowadays to say that this is the jet-age, and consequently there is nothing for us to learn from past empires. Such an attitude seems to be erroneous.

(6) It is tempting to compare the lives of empires with those of human beings. We may choose a figure and say that the average life of a human being is seventy years. Not all human beings live exactly seventy years. Some die in infancy, others are killed in accidents in middle life, some survive to the