

**AMERICA'S
ECONOMIC
SUPREMACY**

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America's economic supremacy by Brooks Adams

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BY

BROOKS ADAMS

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New York

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PREFACE

DURING the summer of 1893 I became convinced that the financial convulsion which involved so many widely separated communities could only be due to some profound perturbation which extended throughout the world. Further reflection led me to surmise not only that such a disturbance actually existed, but that it originated at the very heart of the modern social system, or, in other words, at London, and that it was caused by a relative decline in British vitality and energy. On examining the evidence, I concluded that the old social equilibrium, which had been established in 1815 upon the fall of Napoleon I., had received its first shock in 1870, when Germany consolidated after the overthrow of France; but that the ultimate effects of this shock only began to be apparent twenty years later. In 1890 the panic took place which ruined the Barings, and thenceforward, year by year, graver phenomena have been developed, until war supervened in 1898, and the outbreak in China in 1900.

It is only with the last three years of this decade that the following essays deal. They have been written from time to time without conscious reference to each other, but I find on looking them over

that they form, to some degree, a connected whole, and that they admit of being published in chronological order.

If I am right in my conjectures, most of the greatest catastrophes in history have occurred because of the instinctive effort of humanity to adjust itself to changes in the conditions of life, wrought by the movement from point to point of the international centre of empire and wealth. The French Revolution was the last of these spasms. At the close of the Napoleonic wars the world's capital had definitely established itself upon the Thames. It indisputably remained there during nearly three generations. Apparently, however, toward 1890, a new period of instability opened. Civilization then seems to have entered upon a fresh epoch of unrest, and the inference is that no condition of permanent tranquillity can be reached until a new equipoise shall have been attained.

Approached from this standpoint, the most important and absorbing phenomenon of our time is the condition of Great Britain; for, should she not be maintaining her energy relatively to the development of energy elsewhere, her supremacy must be passing from her, either toward the east or west.

At present indications are not wanting that the seat of wealth and power is migrating westward, and may even now have entered America. How long it will abide there must depend upon the operation of forces as yet hardly brought into action, chief among

which, doubtless, is the industrial development of the East.

A discussion of the changes which must be wrought in American social and political institutions before the United States can successfully assume the responsibilities, and cope with the dangers incident to such an unquestioned supremacy as that which England has enjoyed during almost a century, lies beyond the scope of the following articles. It suffices to observe that, if the reasoning upon which they are based is sound, regrets and opposition are alike unavailing. These mighty revolutions move on as inexorably as any other force of nature, and with the same results. Should the United States be destined to fulfil the functions which have been fulfilled by the dominant nations of the past, the corresponding administrative machinery will be duly evolved, as well as the men fitted to put that machinery in action.

The essays stand in the following chronological order:—

“The Spanish War and the Equilibrium of the World” appeared in the *Forum* for August, 1898; “The New Struggle for Life among Nations,” in *McClure's Magazine* for April, 1899; “England's Decadence in the West Indies,” in the *Forum* for June, 1899; “Natural Selection in Literature,” in the *Anglo-Saxon* for September, 1899; and “Russia's Interest in China,” in the *Atlantic Monthly* for September, 1900.