

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE DREAM OF EMPIRE

For thousands of years Mesopotamia was the centre of the world. Here modern history had its beginnings. Here jurisprudence had its origin. Here poetry, art, philosophy, and science flourished for centuries. Here was the original home of the Jews. The influence of Mesopotamia was felt from Siberia to Africa, and from India to the Atlantic Ocean. There were great cities—Babylon, Nineveh, Damascus, Jerusalem, and Bagdad. The country was rich. It produced crops in abundance. It was the highway of antiquity and the clearing-house of trade as well.

Herodotus speaks of the riches of Babylonia in the fifth century before Christ:

“This,” he says, “is the best demonstration I can give of the wealth of the Babylonians. The king [of Persia] is maintained for four months out of the twelve by Babylonia, and for the remaining eight by the rest of Asia to-

gether; so that in wealth the Assyrian province is equivalent to a third of all Asia."<sup>1</sup>

To-day this part of the world is for the most part desert waste. It produces but scanty crops. Yet Herodotus describes it as an intensively cultivated region. He says:

"The land has little rain, and this nourishes the corn at the root; but the crops are matured and brought to harvest by water from the river—not, as in Egypt, by the river flooding over the field, but by human labor and 'shadufs.' For Babylonia, like Egypt, is one network of canals, the largest of which is navigable. . . . It is far the best corn land of all the countries I know. There is no attempt at arboriculture—figs or vines or olives—but it is such superb corn land that the average yield is two hundredfold, and three hundredfold in the best years. The wheat and barley there are a good four inches broad in the blade and millet and sesame grow as big as trees—but I will not state the dimensions I have ascertained, because I know that, for any one who has not visited Babylonia and witnessed these facts about the crops for himself, they would be altogether beyond belief."<sup>2</sup>

According to Herodotus, the walls about Babylon were 300 feet high and 75 feet broad.

<sup>1</sup> Bk. I, chap. 192.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, chap. 193.

They were 58 miles in circumference. Houses were three and four stories high. Streets were broad and spacious. For centuries after Christ the irrigated lands maintained a dense population. Even as late as the seventh century A. D. there were 12,000,000 acres of land under cultivation, and a total population in town and country of more than 5,000,000 people.

Mesopotamia lies between two great waterways, the Tigris and the Euphrates, and extends from the mountains of Armenia to Bagdad, and thence south to the Persian Gulf. It is the natural gateway between Asia and Europe. Nation after nation struggled for its control. It was possessed by the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, and Turks. Conqueror after conqueror sought for this part of the world, and to-day the ruins of palaces and cities suggest the wealth and power of the Mesopotamia valleys. It was here that Haroun-al-Raschid in the ninth century A. D. made Bagdad the centre of his empire, and attracted to it the art and learning of the world. Bagdad was for generations a highly developed city. It contained a population of 2,000,000 people.

From the beginning of history the world has been at war for the control of Mesopotamia and the trade routes to India. Cyrus the Persian was lured to the conquest of this territory. It was from Mesopotamia that Darius crossed over Asia Minor, and bridged the Hellespont, only to be defeated by the Greeks at Marathon. His son, Xerxes, it is said, organized an army of 5,000,000 men for the conquest of Greece. He, too, crossed the Dardanelles and fought the Greeks at Thermopylæ. He destroyed Athens and only returned to Asia after the defeat of his fleet at Salamis. Greece could not resist the lure of Mesopotamia. Alexander the Great defeated the Persians and penetrated as far as India. On his return he selected the heart of Mesopotamia as the capital of his empire. Mark Antony, at the height of his power, led the legions of Rome into the heart of Assyria, but was defeated by the Parthians. For four centuries Rome was at war with the world. Trajan penetrated down the Euphrates valley to the head of the Persian Gulf. Aurelian defeated the Parthians, and Queen Zenobia was captured on the banks of the Euphrates and taken in triumph to Rome. Finally,

the ascendancy of Rome was acknowledged in this part of the world.

For centuries Rome maintained her power over western Asia. Then came the incursion of the barbarians. The dark ages followed. The capital of the world was moved to Constantinople. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the Italian cities rose to power. They took up the trade with the East. They struggled for its control. They kept open the trade routes until the Ottomans in the fifteenth century ended the order which had been maintained for thousands of years, and left the caravans a prey to brigands and robbers. Then the dream of Oriental empire passed from the ambitions of men. It was awakened again by Napoleon, who transported his troops to Egypt. He, too, contemplated dominion over this vast territory, and with it control of the trade routes to the East.

Now, in the twentieth century, romantic, historical writers have visualized a Teutonic empire which would include this vast territory. These writers exalt the Kaiser as the legal and legitimate successor of Cæsar, whose Germanized title he bears. They assert that

the German Empire is the inheritor of all the rights, titles, and dignities of the Holy Roman Empire which dominated the imagination of Europe from the time of Charlemagne down to the nineteenth century. The empire of which they dream is the empire of Rome at the height of its greatest power, when the Roman eagles had been carried from the forests of Germany as far east as the Persian Gulf. It was to be an empire washed by the North Sea and the Baltic, the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. It was to begin at Hamburg and extend to the Persian Gulf. It was an empire of substantially the same territorial limits as the empire of Rome in the time of Trajan. It included Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Roumania in Europe, and Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, and Mesopotamia in western Asia. Italy and Greece, Holland, Denmark, and Belgium were to be under German influence. They fell within the Teutonic orbit. The population of these combined states was in excess of 200,000,000. The subject states alone contained 130,000,000 people. This great empire was to be under the political and economic dominion of Ger-

many. Germany in turn was to be under the dominion of Prussia, and Prussia was to be ruled by the Kaiser and the Junker class. This is the dream of Mitteleuropa, with its dependencies extending to the Persian Gulf.

The Pan-Germans who dreamed of such an empire may be relatively few in number. And they possibly do not represent the German people. However, as under the constitution of Germany the Kaiser and the military-Junker-commercial classes are the government, it makes little difference what the great majority of the people think. And the Prussian aristocracy believes in its class. It frankly avows *Machtspolitik*. It has a contempt for democracy and for the idea of permanent peace. It is opposed to disarmament for with disarmament the war caste would have nothing to do.

Along with the Junkers are the big industrial groups which are the imperialistic classes of Germany. They, like the Junkers, have no respect for the little state. It has no place in the world. And the sooner all of the smaller states are absorbed in their natural spheres of influence the better for everybody concerned. Neither Holland, Switzerland, nor Den-

mark, nor any of the Balkan states, have any right to separate existence. They should all pass into the orbit of Germany because of economic, racial or political necessity. However, these classes accept a similar destiny for the lesser nations within the influence of the other Powers, of which they recognized but three, Great Britain, the United States, and Russia. All other nations, all other peoples, white, yellow, and black, fell within the inevitable control, and proper control, of the four great empires among which the world is to be ultimately divided. This at least is the conception of the organization of the world held by many Pan-German publicists.