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**I T E R U M**  
**OR A FURTHER DISCUSSION**  
**OF THE ROMAN FATE**

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OF THE ROMAN FATE

BY  
W E HEITLAND MA

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Of London in 1778. *‘Wisdom forms empires, but folly dissolves them; and a great capital, that dictates to the rest of the community, is always the last to perceive the decays of the whole, because it takes its own greatness for health.’*  
Horace Walpole, 31 May 1778.

*‘No Empire has ever persisted when the people at its centre forgot how to till the land.’*

Mr Lansbury quoted in *Observer*, 12 April 1925.

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## PREFACE

THIS little work is an attempt to raise a question of importance to students of Roman history in such a form as to provoke a plain answer. If the conclusions herein offered for acceptance are based on error, the sooner they are disproved the better. But I think that, if they are to be rejected, they should be disproved.

As I am not writing a history, I feel at liberty to avoid many topics of interest that do not seem necessary in presenting the main issue. It is not that I ignore them. Such for instance are the varieties of what I call the ‘municipalities,’ the exceptional Free cities, the relations of *municipes* and *incolae*, the cases of *attributi*, and so forth. And I am almost wholly concerned with the period of 27 BC to 284 AD, only glancing at earlier or later matters as occasion seemed to require.

It is perhaps rash for one who holds no official post licensed for the propagation of historical doctrine to come forward and ask a hearing for somewhat unorthodox views. I had better say at once that I have been accused of completely misunderstanding the Roman Empire by a writer signing himself or herself H M L in the *Journal of Roman Studies*. Only the wish to do my bit in the quest of true interpretation nerves me to face criticism once more. I do not like anonymous censure in general. But this condemnation may be the voice of some highly qualified lady or gentleman, member of a great University in which correct opinions find a ready market. So I appeal

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to him or her for a clear and kindly refutation of my errors, if he or she do not find it consistent with truth to accept my views.

An article on the fate of Rome in the *Morning Post* of 26 Feb 1925 by Dean Inge impels me to add a few remarks. He very naturally refers to the parallel case of Spain, and speaks of ‘the sudden decay of Spain after the reign of Philip II.’ The causes of this decay he finds almost as obscure as the disease that overtook the ‘Romans.’ He then proceeds to discuss various explanations that have been offered for the decay of Rome; and his acute criticism leads to the conclusion that separately or in combination they are not adequate. A something remains unaccounted for. So far as it goes, this conclusion seems to me just. But I hold that it does not go far enough, and the reference to the case of Spain seems to me a good illustration of the reason why. I believe all the pictures of Roman strength and wellbeing in the first two centuries of the Empire to be drawn from evidence that is inevitably one-sided, and therefore misleading. I hold that the decay was not sudden, that its beginnings must be sought much further back than it has been the fashion to do, and that there is evidence enough to justify my view. In order to set this forth I have written the present work, as a sequel to my *Roman Fate*. If I had referred to Spain, most certainly I should have cited it as a case in which the very same error has blinded writers. The inner soundness of the Spanish imperial system and the real wellbeing of the Spanish people—after all, the kernel of Spanish strength,—these are the points that need demonstration, before the reign of Philip II. And I believe they are not demonstrated, and cannot be.

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The truth is, if I am not merely dreaming, that historic causes operate in steady and pitiless course. They sometimes escape the historian's eye because, working forward in the order of time, he meets with some phenomenon that appears sudden; in short, a contradiction of the scenes on which he has just now been dwelling. That his judgment should totter under the shock, is excusable. But every influence that weakens his grasp on the relations of effects and causes is a snare to him and misleading to his readers. He needs to look further back: how much further, nobody can tell. In so doing, he will probably find reason to reconsider his account of the state of things preceding the event that appeared so sudden, and end by being less convinced of its suddenness. This is what has been happening to me as a student, and I deem it my duty to confess it. Among the several hypotheses demolished by Dean Inge and others I have never met with a serious attempt to reconsider the prevalent view of the Roman municipal system and to treat it in connexion with the questions of land and labour, including slavery. Here is an inquiry that might be carried back to the very beginnings of civilization. On such a scale it is too large for a man of my age to attempt. But I think I can do something towards starting it on a sound footing. Even if I am convicted of error, I do not think my effort will be wasted.

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