

same level as the states nearest to us on the Continent, populous, but less so than Germany and scarcely equal to France. But two states, Russia and the United States would be on an altogether higher scale of magnitude, Russia having at once, and the United States perhaps before very long, twice our population. Our trade too would be exposed to wholly new risks.

The other alternative is, that England may prove able to do what the United States does so easily, that is, hold together in a federal union countries very remote from each other. In that case England will take rank with Russia and the United States in the first rank of state, measured by population and area, and in a higher rank than the states of the Continent. We ought by no means to take for granted that this is desirable. Bigness is not necessarily greatness; if by remaining in the second rank of magnitude we can hold the first rank morally and intellectually, let us sacrifice mere material magnitude. But though we must not prejudge the question whether we ought to retain our Empire, we may fairly assume that it is desirable after due consideration to judge it.

With a view to forming such a judgment, I propose in these lectures to examine historically the tendency to expansion which England has so long displayed. We shall learn to think of it more seriously if we discover it to be profound, persistent, necessary to the national life, and more hopefully if we can satisfy ourselves that the secession of our first colonies was not a mere normal result of expansion, like the bursting of a bubble, but the result of temporary conditions, removable and which have been removed.