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Elba, a Hundred Years After.

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There are striking parallels between Napoleon's struggle for world power a hundred years ago and that of Germany a century later. It was only in the period of the Revolution that France had begun to attain a vital national union. The older France had not been really united. Many provinces had come under the sway of the French crown, by conquest or by inheritance; but though they had one ruler they still retained in many respects their old character as separate states. There was not even free trade between these provinces. They had different modes of government, different systems of taxation and of laws. There was, it has been said, a French state but not a French nation. The ferment of the Revolution produced a France "one and indivisible" with an intense national spirit. It was Napoleon who organized this France, who gave it unity of system, and who made its national life a homogeneous reality. Under him France had found a head who directed all the energies of the nation. He did not give France freedom. He was the Emperor of the French, their leader and war-lord. In his mind was the thought that he was the successor of Charlemagne, the great world-ruler. The realm of Charlemagne had stretched eastward far across the Rhine. Napoleon felt called upon to revive this old dominion, for the successor of Charlemagne ought to rule over the territory that Charlemagne had ruled. The Empire thus meant expansion, reunion with peoples who had been separated from it by the incidents and accidents of history.

The Imperial idea involved of course aggression against neighbours. The Empire of Napoleon was military and in military equipment and method was far in advance of any other state of the time. At the head was one of the greatest soldiers of any age, a military genius, who evolved new conceptions of strategy and tactics. An army makes its strength effective, he said, not merely by mass of numbers but by the velocity of its blows. Strike in overwhelming force and strike quickly the enemy's weakest line. Take the initiative and keep it,