

The Influence of Wealth in Imperial Rome.
By William Stearns Davis. New York:
The Macmillan Co. Pp. xi, 340. \$2.

Professor Davis has been widely known as the writer of several historical novels, and something of their influence is shown in the style of the present volume, a style which is never tedious and which is now and then highly diverting. Thus the opening chapter has to do with "the business panic of 33 A. D.":

"As with most panics, the causes of this were not obvious. About a year before, the firm of Seuthes & Son, of Alexandria, lost three richly laden spice ships on the Red Sea in a hurricane. Their ventures in the Ethiopian caravan trade also were unprofitable, ostrich feathers and ivory having lately fallen in value. It soon began to be rumored that they might be obliged to suspend. A little later the well known purple house of Malchus & Co. (centered at Tyre, but with factories at Antioch and Ephesus) suddenly became bankrupt."

The result was a "run" on the great banking house which had made loans to these firms, and a crisis on the Via Sacra ("the first century Wall Street") which had disastrous effects in Lyons, Byzantium, Corinth and other distant parts of the empire. To an erudite German scholar such language might savor of levity; it will, however, serve to enlist the interest of ordinary men in a subject which usually attracts only the specialists. The book was written with the idea that both the greatness and the ultimate failure of the Romans was largely due to the supreme regard which they gave to wealth and all that wealth could bring. Professor Davis does not draw a flattering picture of Roman character. Even the Jew had more sentiment in business. If the average Roman realized that honesty was the best policy, he gave that virtue a narrow and formal definition. "The love of gain and of the enjoyments which followed gain too often blunted his vision utterly; and made him a harsh father, an unfilial son, a faithless husband, a brutal master, a

corrupt citizen." All phases of economic life are considered, even those which have to do with the effects of rampant commercialism. There is a chapter devoted to marriage and divorce, legacy hunters and childlessness.

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