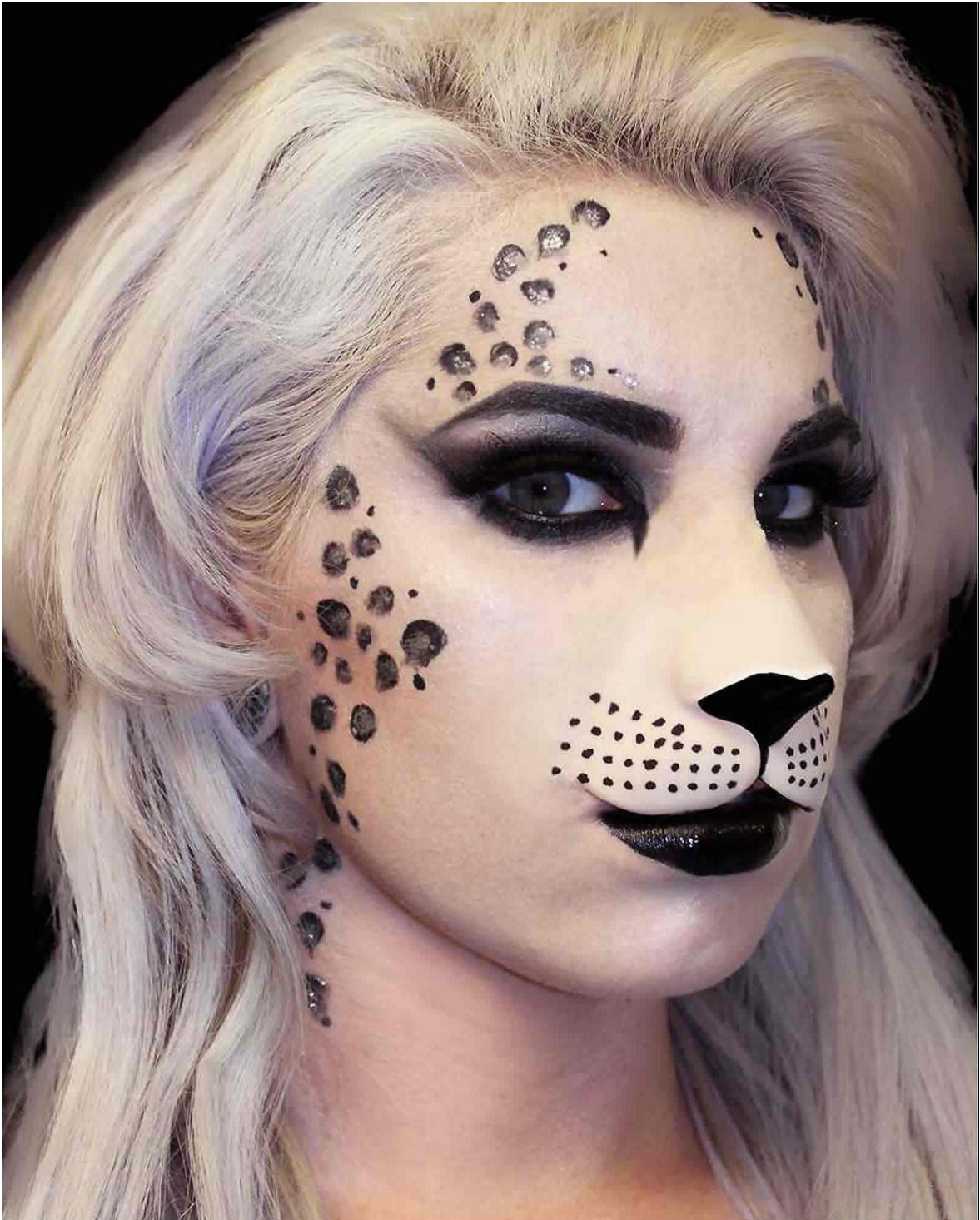


*Madame Blavatsky on the
New Year and false noses*



Hail, 1890!

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*“Annum novum faustum felicemque tibi!”*¹

Such was the sacramental phrase on the lips of all Gentiles, great or lowly, rich or poor, during the day of the first of January, centuries before the Christian era; and we hear it even today, especially in Paris. This mutual greeting was exchanged on that day throughout the length and breadth of the Roman Empire. It awoke the echoes in the palaces of Caesars, made cheerful the poor hovel of the slave, and soared to the clouds in the spacious open galleries of the Colosseum, at the Capitol and the Forum, everywhere under the blue sky of Rome. On that day, everybody assumed, in honour of the double-faced Janus, a more or less prominent false nose of goodness, frank cordiality and sincerity.

“May the New Year bring you happiness and prosperity!” — we say to every one of our readers. “Let it be light to you,” we say to our enemies and traducers. Brothers — we say to Theosophists in every part of the world — Brothers, let us discard, at least for today, *all our respective false noses*, in order to wish each other health and success, and, especially, *a little more cordial mutual understanding* than in the year 1889, now happily defunct.

However, whether we repeat the old Latin formula one way or another, in French or in English, it will never be but a variation of the ancient pagan phrase. For the New Year, as well as every other festival, is but a legacy to the Christian people from the worshippers of the Olympian gods. Let us, by all means, exchange wishes and gifts (*étrennes*), but let us not be ungrateful, Theosophists! Let us not forget that these customs come to us from paganism; and that felicitations and gifts also came to us from the same source.

As a matter of fact, gifts (*étrennes*) are but the *strenae*, the presents exchanged by the Latins on the first of January,² the day that opened the New Year. As everybody does or does not know — which is all the same to me — this day was consecrated to Janus, who gave his name to the month of *Januarius* or January, and even to the Saint of that name, the patron of Naples and of its lazzarone [beggars]. But, after all,

¹ [May the new year bring you happiness and prosperity!]

² From *Janua* — “door” or any kind of entrance; the door that opens up the year.

this amiable Saint is but one of the false noses of the god *Bifrons*. The old pagan was called in his early youth *Diaus*, after his Vedic name, the beautiful god of the day and of light. Having immigrated to Thessaly, and thence to Italy, where he established himself in the little hamlet of Janiculum, on the Tiber, Latinising his name and becoming *Dianus*, god of light (whence *Diana*). His false noses were many, and history has lost count of them. However, since those days he has let himself be converted. Thus it is that for more than eighteen centuries, having replaced his latest and more modest false nose with a more respectable, if not more impenetrable, mask — he is called Saint Peter.

Let the reader kindly abstain from protesting, and particularly from slinging offensive epithets at us, which would not harm us, but might well lower him in our estimation. I am but the humble interpreter of the more or less veiled truths and symbols, well known to all who have studied their Virgil and their Horace, as well as their Ovid. Neither a false nose nor a mask could prevent an old pagan from recognizing his double-faced Janus in the Apostle who denied his Master.¹ The two are identical, and everybody has the right to take what is his own, wherever he finds it. Saint Peter is the *coeli Janitor* merely because Janus was that too. The old doorkeeper of heaven, who pulled the door-cord at the palace of the Sun, at every dawn and every New Year, and closed it again when ushering them out, is but too easily recognizable in his new role. It is written in the stars which rule the destiny of gods as well as mortals, that Janus — who held the key to heaven in one hand and a halberd in the other, just as St. Peter, having succeeded him, does — would relinquish his role of janitor to the Sun to him who would become the guardian of the portals to Paradise, the abode of Christ-Sun. The new *coeli Janitor* has become the successor to all the functions and privileges of the ancient one, and we see no harm in that. Solomon has said: “There is nothing new under the sun”; and he was right. It would be silly to invent new functions and new gods — which we fashion in our image — when our forefathers on the other side of the flood went to all the trouble of doing so for us. That is why everything has been allowed to remain as in the past, and why nothing has been changed in this world — except the names.

In all the religious ceremonies the name of Janus was always invoked first, for it was only through his immediate intercession that the prayers of the pagan devotees could reach the ear of the immortal gods. Thus it is even today. Anyone who would presume to communicate with one of the personages of the Trinity over the head of St. Peter would certainly be caught. His prayer would suffer the fate of a petition one sought to leave at the office of the janitor, after having had an argument with him and having called him “old door-keeper”; it would never reach the higher levels.

The fact is, the Great Army of the “Pipelets” and the “Anastasies”² should recognize Janus *Bifrons* as their patron, the god in whose image it was created. It is only then that it would have a legal right to its gifts, the first of the year, while its great patron

¹ [Cf. “Peter not an Initiate and the enemy of Paul” in our Buddhas and Initiates Series. — ED. PHIL.]

² [Monsieur and Madame Pipelet are characters in Eugène Sue’s work, *Mystères de Paris* (1842), who typify the curious habits and peculiarities of the French *portier*, or Janitor. “Anastasie”* has not been identified. — Boris de Zirkoff.

*Anastasie was the garrulous wife of Monsieur Pipelet, the Parisian concierge. — ED. PHIL.]

would receive his *mite* from the beginning to the end of the year. Everything is relative in this world of illusion; nevertheless there should exist a difference of degree between a celestial and a terrestrial janitor. As for the *gifts*, they have existed in all ages both for lowly and great men alike. Caligula, emperor as he was, did not disdain remaining throughout New Year's day in the vestibule of his palace, in order to receive the *strenae* of his trembling subjects; sometimes, their own heads, for a change. The Virgin-Queen, "Queen Bess" of England, when she died, left three thousand court dresses, which represented her most recent gifts. Both great and lowly behave similarly even now, in the year of our Lord 1890, on this crazy ball we call *Terra* — the "footstool" of God.

Did not this same God of Abraham and of Jacob allow himself to be moved to pity by promises and presents, just like the gods of other nations? This God and these gods, did they not receive, just like mortals, gifts for services rendered or about to be rendered? Did not Jacob himself bargain with his God, promising him as *gifts* "the tithe of all that thou [God] wilt give me"? And he added, this good patriarch, at Luz near "Bethel": ". . . If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on . . . then shall the Lord be my God." Saying this he did not forget to make an offering (*étrenner*) to the stone "Bethel" which he had raised, by pouring some oil on its top, in a simple but beautiful phallic ceremony.¹

This touching ceremony came to the Israelites direct from India, where the stone of *Śiva*, the *lingam*, is today the object of the same exoteric rite with oil and flowers, every time his worshippers celebrate the festival of the god of Destruction (of brute matter) and of the Yogis.

All has remained as of yore. In Christian countries, especially in France, the New Year makes its triumphal entrance just as it did two thousand years ago, when the Pagans celebrated it with indigestion caused by the figs and gilded prunes they ate. The latter fruit have migrated since to the Christmas tree, which does not alter the fact that they came to us from the temples of Janus. It is true that the priests no longer sacrifice a young white bull upon his altar; that is replaced by a lamb of the same colour, but whole hecatombs of quadrupeds and fowl are slaughtered annually in his honour on that day. Certainly more innocent blood is spilled today to satisfy the voracious appetite of one Paris street alone, on New Year's day, than was necessary to feed a whole Roman city in the time of the Caesars. The gentle Julian, the pagan who rediscovered his well-beloved gods in Lutetia — after the gods of Gaul had been disguised by order of Caesar, with the false noses of Roman divinities — spent his leisure hours taming doves in honour of Venus. The ferocious potentates who came after him, the elder sons of the Church, tamed only Venuses that made pigeons out of them. Servile history called the former *Apostate*, to please the Church, and added to the names of the others some high-sounding epithets: the "Great," the "Saint," the "Beautiful." But if Julian became the "Apostate," it was perhaps because he had a horror of false noses, while his Christian successors would hardly be presentable in good society without such an artificial appendage. A false nose, when

¹ *Genesis* xxviii, 18, 20-22

necessary, becomes a guardian angel, and upon occasion even a god. This is history. The metamorphosis of the divinities of barbarous Gaul into the gods of Olympus and Parnassus did not stop there. In their turn, these Olympians had to undergo treatment by order of the successors of Janus St. Peter — namely, a forced baptism. With the help of tinsel and brass, of paste and cement, we find the beloved gods of Julian appearing, after their violent death, in the *Golden Legend* and the calendar of the good Pope Gregory, under the titles of beatified Saints.

The world is like the sea: it often changes in appearance, but remains basically the same. The false noses of civilization and of the bigots, however, have hardly embellished it: on the contrary, with every New Year it becomes more ugly and more dangerous. We ponder and compare, but in the sight of a philosopher comparison with its predecessors of ancient days does not reflect favourably upon the modern New Year's Day. The millions stored in the safes and vaults of state banks do not make either the rich or the poor any happier. Ten bronze coins with the effigy of Janus, given as a gift, were worth more in those days than ten gold coins, with the effigy of the Republic or the Queen, are worth today; the baskets of gilded prunes, a few cents worth, contained less cause of indigestion than the boxes of candy exchanged on New Year's Day today — these candies representing in Paris alone the sum of half a million francs. Five hundred thousand francs *in candies*, and the same number of men and women dying from hunger and privations! Let us go back in our minds, my readers, fifteen centuries, and try to make a comparison between a New Year's dinner in the years 355 to 360, and a similar dinner in 1890. Let us seek out the same good and kind Julian, when he lived in the palace of Thermae, which is known today as the Hotel de Cluny — or what is left of it.¹ Do you see him, this great general, at his dinner, surrounded by his soldiers whom he loves better than anyone else in the world outside of his gods, and who idolize him! It is the first of January and they are celebrating the day of Janus. In two days, the third of January, they will render a similar homage to Isis, patroness of the good city of *Lutetia Parisiorum*. Since those days, the virgin-mother of ancient Egypt was rebaptized as Geneviève, and this Saint and Martyr (of Typhon?) has remained the patroness of the good city of Paris — true symbol of a false nose furnished by Rome for the Christian world. We see neither knives nor forks, neither silver nor porcelain of Sèvres, at that imperial table, not even a napkin; but the meats and other foods which the guests consume with so much appetite do not have to be inspected under the microscope of chemists attached to public health offices. No artificial or poisonous product is to be found in their bread or wine. Arsenic does not add to their vegetables the false nose of a deceptive freshness; rust does not hide itself in the corners of their preserved food containers, and red brick pulverized in a mortar does not play the role of their pepper. Their sugar (or that which takes its place) is not extracted from the tar in the wheels of their chariots of war; in swallowing their liqueurs and cognac, they do not swallow a solution made from the old boots of a policeman, found in the basket of a rag picker; they did not devour, with a casual smile on their lips, a bouillon condensed from the grease of corpses (of men as well as of animals) and the rags used in all the hos-

¹ [Cf. The Musée National du Moyen Âge in Paris, France. It is located in the 5th arrondissement at 6 Place Paul Painlevé, south of the Boulevard Saint-Germain, between the Boulevard Saint-Michel and the Rue Saint-Jacques.]

pitals of Paris — as a substitute for butter. For all of this is a product of modern culture, the fruit of civilization and scientific progress, while Gaul at the time of Julian was but a barbarous and savage land. But what they ate on their New Year’s Day could be eaten with safety and with advantage (except for the doctors) at the dinners on the first of the year 1890.

“They had neither forks nor silver,” they will say; “and they ate with their fingers, those barbarians!”

That’s true; they had no use for forks, and probably for handkerchiefs also; but on the other hand, they did not have to swallow their ancestors in their kitchen grease, and the bones of their dogs in their white bread, as we do daily.

If given a choice, we would definitely not choose the gala dinner of the first of the year of grace 1890, at Paris, but the one of a thousand years ago, at Lutetia. A case of barbarian taste, don’t you see! A ridiculous and baroque preference, according to the opinion of the majority, for *natural* in the fourth century, attracts us infinitely more than the false noses and the artificiality of everything in the nineteenth century.

