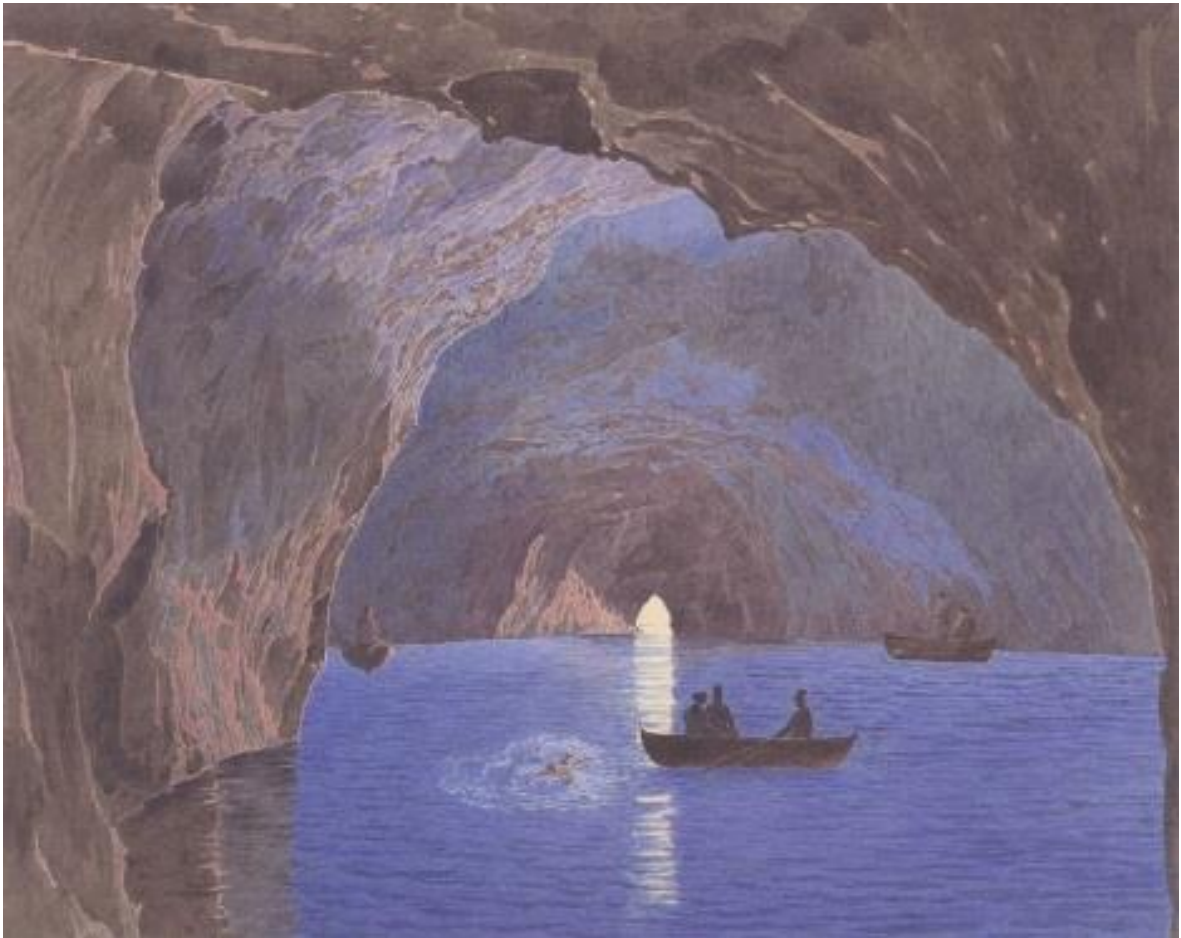


Civilization, the death of Art and Beauty

A civilization that leads to the destruction of every noble, artistic feeling in man, can only deserve the epithet of barbarous.

Ancient civilizations have never sacrificed Nature to speculation, but holding it as divine, have honoured her natural beauties by the erection of works of art, such as our modern electric civilization could never produce even in dream.



Die Blaue Grotte auf der Insel Capri (1835-36) Jakob Alt, Albertina, Vienna

First published in *Lucifer*, Vol. VIII, No. 45, May 1891, pp. 177-86; republished in *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (CIVILIZATION, THE DEATH OF ART AND BEAUTY) XIII pp. 177-90.

This essay was introduced by the following note signed by the Sub-Editor:¹

“I regret to have to announce that the second part of the Editorial, ‘The Negators of Science,’ cannot appear this month, owing to the alarming illness of H.P. Blavatsky, who is suffering from a severe attack of the prevalent influenza. The following which was written by her as an extra article will take its place.”

The reader will find the second instalment spoken of in its right chronological order a few pages back.

In an interview with the celebrated Hungarian violinist, M. Remenyi, the *Pall Mall Gazette*² reporter makes the artist narrate some very interesting experiences in the Far East. “I am the first Englishman who ever played before the Mikado of Japan,” he said; and reverting to that which has ever been a matter of deep regret for every lover of the artistic and the picturesque, the violinist added:

On August 8th, 1886, I appeared before His Majesty — a day memorable, unfortunately, for the change of costume commanded by the Empress. She herself, abandoning the exquisite beauty of the feminine Japanese costume, appeared on that day for the first time and at my concert in European costume, and it made my heart ache to see her. I could have greeted her had I dared with a long wail of despair upon my travelled violin. Six ladies accompanied her, they themselves being clad in their native costume, and walking with infinite grace and charm.

Alas, alas, but this is not all! The Mikado — this hitherto sacred, mysterious, invisible and unreachable personage:

The Mikado himself was in the uniform of a European general! At that time the Court etiquette was so strict that my accompanist was not permitted into His Majesty’s drawing-room, and this was told me beforehand. I had a good *replacement*, as my ambassador, Count Zaluski, who had been a pupil of Liszt, was able himself to accompany me. You will be astonished when I tell you that, having chosen for the first piece in the programme my transcription for the violin of a C sharp minor polonaise by Chopin, a musical piece of the most intrinsic value and poetic depths, the Emperor, when I had finished, intimated to Count Ito, his first minister, that I should play it again. The Japanese taste is good. I was laden with presents of untold value, one item only being a gold-lacquer box of the seventeenth century. I played in Hong Kong and *outside*

¹ [Annie Besant]

² [Vol. LII, No. 8080, February 11th, 1891, p. 3]

Canton, no European being allowed to live inside. There I made an interesting excursion to the Portuguese possession of Macao, visiting the cave where Camoens wrote his *Lusiad*. It was very interesting to see outside the Chinese town of Macao, a European Portuguese town, which to this day has remained unchanged since the sixteenth century. In the midst of the exquisite tropical vegetation of Java, and despite the terrific heat, I gave sixty-two concerts in sixty-seven days, travelling all over the island, inspecting its antiquities, the chief of which is a most wonderful Buddhist temple, the Boro Budhur, or Many Bud-dhas. This building contains six miles of figures, and is a solid pile of stone, larger than the pyramids. They have, these Javans, an extraordinarily sweet orchestra in the national Samelang, which consists of percussion instruments played by eighteen people; but to hear this orchestra, with its most weird Oriental chorus and ecstatic dances, one must have had the privilege of being invited by the Sultan of Solo, 'Sole Emperor of the World.' I have seen and heard nothing more dreamy and poetic than the Serimpis danced by nine Royal Princesses."

Where are the Aesthetes of a few years ago? Or was this little confederation of the lovers of art but one of the soap-bubbles of our *fin de siècle*, rich in promise and suggestion of many a possibility, but dead in works and act? Or, if there are any true lovers of art yet left among them, why do they not organize and send out missionaries the world over, to tell picturesque Japan and other countries ready to fall victims that, to imitate the will-o'-the-wisp of European culture and fascination, means for a non-Christian land, the committing of suicide; that it means sacrificing one's individuality for an empty show and shadow; at best it is to exchange the original and the picturesque for the vulgar and the hideous. Truly and indeed it is high time that at last something should be done in this direction, and before the deceitful civilization of the conceited nations of but yesterday has irretrievably hypnotized the older races, and made them succumb to its upas-tree³ wiles and supposed superiority. Otherwise, old arts and artistic creations, everything original and unique will very soon disappear. Already national dresses and time-honoured customs, and everything beautiful, artistic, and worth preservation is fast disappearing from view. At no distant day, alas, the best relics of the past will perhaps be found only in museums in sorry, solitary, and be-ticketed samples preserved under glass!

Such is the work and the unavoidable result of our modern civilization. Skin-deep in reality in its visible effects, in the "blessings" it is alleged to have given to the world, its roots are rotten to the core. It is to its progress that selfishness and materialism, the greatest curses of the nation, are due; and the latter will most surely lead to the annihilation of art and of the appreciation of the truly harmonious and beautiful. Hitherto, materialism has only led to a universal tendency to unification on the material plane and a corresponding diversity on that of thought and spirit. It is this universal tendency, which by propelling humanity, through its ambition and selfish greed, to an incessant chase after wealth and the obtaining *at any price* of the supposed blessings of this life, causes it to aspire or rather gravitate to one level, the lowest of all — the plane of empty appearance. Materialism and indifference to all

³ [*Antiaris toxicaria*]

save the selfish realization of wealth and power, and the over-feeding of national and personal vanity, have gradually led nations and men to the almost entire oblivion of spiritual ideals, of the love of nature to the correct appreciation of things. Like a hideous leprosy our Western civilization has eaten its way through all the quarters of the globe and hardened the human heart. "Soul-saving" is its deceitful, lying pretext; greed for additional revenue through opium, rum, and the inoculation of European vices — the real aim. In the far East it has infected with the spirit of imitation the higher classes of the "pagans" — save China, whose national conservatism deserves our respect; and in Europe it has engrafted *fashion* — save the mark — even on the dirty, — starving proletariat itself! For the last thirty years, as if some deceitful semblance of a reversion to the ancestral type — awarded to men by the Darwinian theory in its moral added to its physical characteristics — were contemplated by an evil spirit tempting mankind, almost every race and nation under the Sun in Asia has gone mad in its passion for *aping* Europe. This, added to the frantic endeavour to destroy Nature in every direction, and also every vestige of older civilizations — far superior to our own in arts, godliness, and the appreciation of the grandiose and harmonious — must result in such national calamities. Therefore, do we find hitherto artistic and picturesque Japan succumbing wholly to the temptation of justifying the "ape theory" by *simianizing* its populations in order to bring the country on a level with canting, greedy and artificial Europe!

For certainly Europe is all this. It is canting and deceitful from its diplomats down to its custodians of religion, from its political down to its social laws, selfish, greedy and brutal beyond expression in its grabbing characteristics. And yet there are those who wonder at the gradual decadence of true art, as if art could exist without imagination, fancy, and a just appreciation of the beautiful in Nature, or without poetry and high religious, hence, metaphysical aspirations! The galleries of paintings and sculpture, we hear, become every year poorer in quality, if richer in quantity. It is lamented that while there is a plethora of ordinary productions, the greatest scarcity of remarkable pictures and statuary prevails. Is this not most evidently due to the facts that

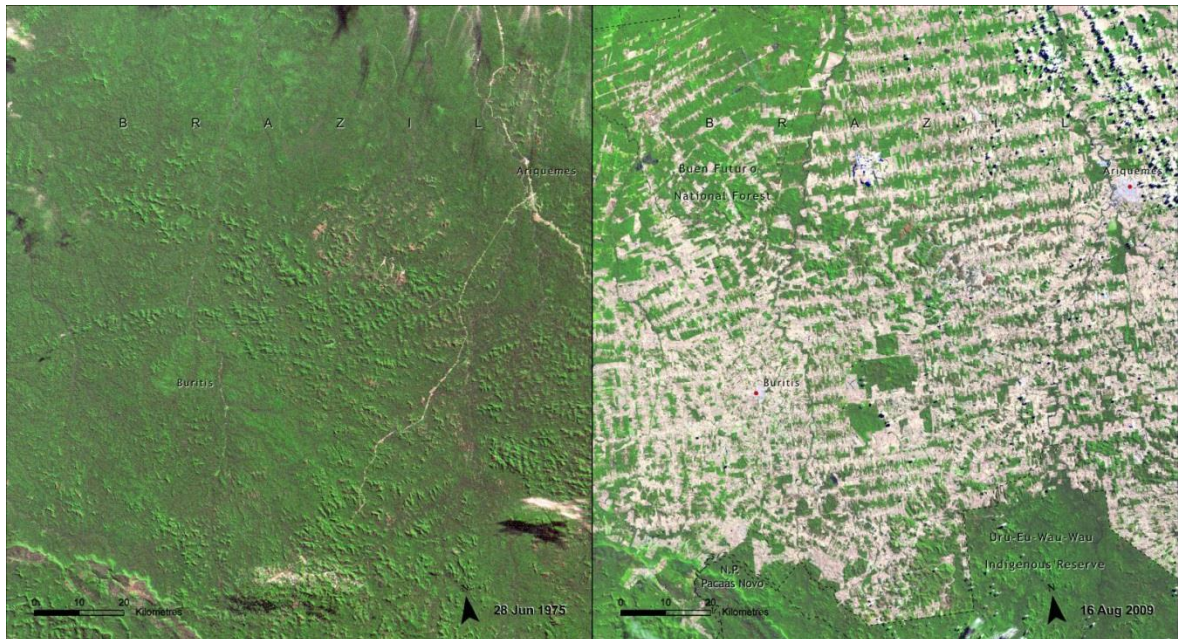
(a) the artists will very soon remain with no better models than *nature morte* (or "still life") to inspire themselves with; and

(b) that the chief concern is not the creation of artistic objects, but their speedy sale and profits?

Under such conditions, the fall of true art is only a natural consequence.

Owing to the triumphant march and the invasion of civilization, Nature, as well as man and ethics, is sacrificed, and is fast becoming artificial. Climates are changing, and the face of the whole world will soon be altered. Under the murderous hand of the pioneers of civilization, the destruction of whole primeval forests is leading to the drying up of rivers, and the opening of the Canal of Suez has changed the climate of Egypt as that of Panama will divert the course of the Gulf Stream. Almost tropical countries are now becoming cold and rainy, and fertile lands threaten to be soon transformed into sandy deserts. A few years more and there will not remain within a

radius of fifty miles around our large cities one single rural spot inviolate from vulgar speculation.



The deforestation of Rondônia, Brazil, between 1975 and 2009⁴

In scenery, the picturesque and the natural is daily replaced by the grotesque and the artificial. Scarce a landscape in England but the fair body of nature is desecrated by the advertisements of “Pears’ Soap” and “Beecham’s Pills.” The pure air of the country is polluted with smoke, the smells of greasy railway-engines, and the sickening odours of gin, whiskey, and beer. And once that every natural spot in the surrounding scenery is gone, and the eye of the painter finds but the artificial and hideous products of modern speculation to rest upon, artistic taste will have to follow suit and disappear along with them.

“No man ever did or ever will work well, but either from actual sight or sight of faith,” says Ruskin, speaking of art. Thus, the first quarter of the coming century may witness painters of landscapes, who have never seen an acre of land free from human improvement; and painters of figures whose ideas of female beauty of form will be based on the wasp-like pinched-in waists of corseted, hollow-chested and consumptive society *belles*. It is not from such models that a picture deserving of the definition of Horace — “a poem without words” — is produced. Artificially draped *Parisiennes* and London Cockneys sitting for Italian *contadini*⁵ or Arab Bedouins can never replace the genuine article; and both free Bedouins and genuine Italian peasant girls are, thanks to “civilization,” fast becoming things of the past. Where shall

⁴ [From the U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Geological Survey:

“The conversion of tropical rain forests to pasture and cropland is having dramatic effects on the environment. Particularly intense and rapid deforestation is taking place in the state of Rondônia, Brazil.

“About 30% (3,562,800 km²) of the world’s tropical forests are in Brazil. The estimated average deforestation rate from 1978 to 1988 was 15,000 km² per year. In Rondônia, 67,764 km² of rain forest had been cleared through 2003 — an area larger than the U.S. State of West Virginia.”]

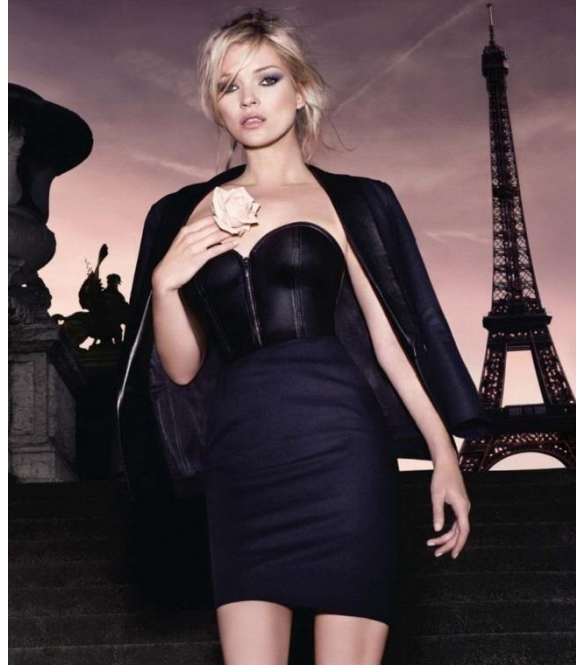
⁵ [Italian peasants]

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artists find genuine models in the coming century, when the hosts of the free Nomads of the Desert, and perchance all the negro-tribes of Africa — or what will remain of them after their decimation by Christian cannons, and the rum and opium of the Christian civilizer — will have donned European coats and top hats? And that this is precisely what awaits art under the beneficial progress of modern civilization, is self-evident to all.



La Parisienne by Édouard Manet, 1874



La Parisienne by Yves Saint Laurent, 2009

Aye! let us boast of the blessings of civilization, by all means. Let us brag of our sciences and the grand discoveries of the age, its achievements in mechanical arts, its railroads, telephones and electric batteries; but let us not forget, meanwhile, to purchase at fabulous prices (almost as great as those given in our day for a prize dog, or an old prima donna's song) the paintings and statuary of uncivilized, barbarous antiquity and of the middle ages: for such objects of art will be reproduced no more. Civilization has tolled their eleventh hour. It has rung the death-knell of the old arts, and the last decade of our century is summoning the world to the funeral of all that was grand, genuine, and original in the old civilizations. Would Raphael, O ye lovers of art, have created one single of his many Madonnas had he had, instead of Fornarina and the once Juno-like women of the Trastevere of Rome to inspire his genius, only the present-day models, or the niched Virgins of the nooks and corners of modern Italy, in crinolines and high-heeled boots? Or would Andrea del Sarto have produced his famous "Venus and Cupid" from a modern East End working girl one of the latest victims to fashion — holding under the shadow of a gigantic hat *à la mousquetaire*, feathered like the scalp of an Indian chief, a dirty, scrofulous brat from the slums? How could Titian have ever immortalized his golden-haired patrician ladies of Venice, had he been compelled to move all his life in the society of our actual "professional beauties," with their straw-coloured, dyed capillaries that transform human hair into the fur of a yellow Angora cat? May not one venture to state with the utmost confidence that the world would never have had the Athena Lemnia of

Phidias — that ideal of beauty *in face and form* — had Aspasia, the Milesian, or the fair daughters of Hellas, whether in the days of Pericles or in any other, disfigured that “form” with stays and bustle, and coated that “face” with white enamel, after the fashion of the varnished features of the mummies of the dead Egyptians.

We see the same in architecture. Not even the genius of Michelangelo himself could have failed to receive its death-blow at the first sight of the Eiffel Tower, or the Albert Hall, or more horrible still, the Albert Memorial. Nor, for the matter of that, could it have received any suggestive idea from the Colosseum and the palace of the Caesars, in their present *whitewashed* and *repaired* state! Whither, then shall we, in our days of civilization, go to find the natural, or even simply the picturesque? Is it still to Italy, to Switzerland or Spain? But the Bay of Naples — even if its waters be as blue and transparent as on the day when the people of Cumæ selected its shores for a colony and its surrounding scenery as gloriously beautiful as ever — thanks to that spirit of mimicry which has infected sea and land, has now lost its most artistic and most original features. It is bereft of its lazy, dirty, but intensely picturesque figures of old; of its *lazzaroni and barcaiolos*,⁶ its fishermen and country girls. Instead of the former’s red or blue Phrygian cap, and the latter’s statuesque, half-nude figure and poetical rags, we see now-a-days but the caricatured specimens of modern civilization and fashion. The gay *tarantella* resounds no longer on the cool sands of the moonlit shore; it is replaced by that libel on Terpsichore, the modern quadrille, in the gas-lit, gin-smelling sailor’s *trattorias*. Filth still pervades the land, as of yore; but it is made the more apparent on the threadbare city coat, the mangled chimney-pot hat and the once fashionable, now castaway European bonnet. Picked up in the hotel gutters, they now grace the unkempt heads of the once picturesque Neapolitans. The type of the latter has died out, and there is nothing to distinguish the *lazzaroni* from the Venetian *gondoliere*, the Calabrian brigand, or the London street-sweeper and beggar. The still, sunlit waters of *Canal Grande* bear no longer their gondolas, filled on festival days with gaily dressed Venetians, with picturesque boatmen and girls. The black gondola that glides silently under the heavy carved balconies of the old patrician palazze, reminds one now more of a black floating coffin, with a solemn-looking, dark-clothed undertaker paddling it on towards the Styx, than of the gondola of thirty years ago. Venice looks more gloomy now than during the days of Austrian slavery from which it was rescued by Napoleon III. Once on shore, its *gondoliere* is scarcely distinguishable from his “fare,” the British M.P. on his holiday-tour in the old city of the Doges. Such is the levelling hand of all-destroying civilization.

It is the same all over Europe. Look at Switzerland. Hardly a decade ago, every Canton had its distinguishing national costume, as clean and fresh as it was peculiar. Now the people are ashamed to wear it. They want to be mistaken for foreign guests, to be regarded as a civilized nation which follows suit even in fashion. Cross over to Spain. Of all the relics of old, the smell of rancid oil and garlic is alone left to remind one of the poetry of the old days in the country of the Cid. The graceful mantilla⁷ has almost disappeared; the proud hidalgo-beggar has taken himself off from the street-corner; the nightly serenades of lovesick Romeos are gone out of fashion, and the du-

⁶ [the poorest of the lower class and boatmen]

⁷ [a lace or silk veil worn over head and shoulders]

enna⁸ contemplates going in for woman's rights. The members of the "Social Purity" Associations may say "thank God" to this and lay the change at the door of Christian and moral reforms of civilization. But has morality gained anything in Spain with the disappearance of the nocturnal lovers and duennas? We have every right to say, *no*. A Don Juan *outside* a house is less dangerous than one *inside*. Social immorality is as rife as ever — if not more so, in Spain, and it must be so, indeed, when even *Harper's Guide Book* quotes in its last edition as follows:

"Morals in all classes, especially in the higher, are in the most degraded state. Veils, indeed, are thrown aside, and serenades are rare, but gallantry and intrigue are as active as ever. The men think little of their married obligations; the women . . . are willing victims of unprincipled gallantry."⁹

In this, Spain is but on a par with all other countries civilized or now civilizing, and is assuredly not worse than many another country that could be named; but that which may be said of it with truth is, that what it has lost in poetry through civilization, it has gained in hypocrisy and loose morals. The *Cortejo* has turned into the *petit crevé*;¹⁰ the castanets have become silent, because, perhaps, the noise of the uncorked champagne bottles affords more excitement to the rapidly civilizing nation; and the "Andalouse au teint bruni"¹¹ having taken to cosmetics and face-enamel, "la Marquesa d' Almedi" may be said to have been buried with Alfred de Musset.

The gods have indeed been propitious to the Alhambra. They have permitted it to be burnt before its chaste Moresque beauty had been finally desecrated, as are the rock-cut temples of India, the Pyramids and other relics by drunken orgies. This superb relic of the Moors had already suffered, once before, by Christian improvement. It is a tradition still told in Granada, and history too, that the monks of Ferdinand and Isabella had made of Alhambra — that "palace of petrified flowers dyed with the hues of the wings of angels" — a filthy prison for thieves and murderers. Modern speculators might have done worse; they might have polluted its walls and pearl-inlaid ceilings, the lovely gilding and stucco, the fairy-like arabesques, and the marble and gossamer-like carvings, with commercial advertisements, after the Inquisitors had already once before covered the building with whitewash and permitted the prison-keepers to use Alhambra Halls for their donkeys and cattle. Doubting but little that the fury of the *Madrienos* for imitating the French and English must have already, at this stage of modern civilization, infected every province of Spain, we may regard that lovely country as dead. A friend speaks, as an eye-witness, of "cocktails" spilled near the marble fountain of the Alhambra, over the blood-marks left by the

⁸ [chaperone]

⁹ *Spain*, "Madrid," p. 678

¹⁰ [*i.e.*, the old finesse of courtship has turned to the glib go and dissipated virility of the dandy young man, who lives a life of privileges and of pleasure.]

¹¹ [Here are the first five lines of de Musset's famous song l'Andalouse, from *Contes d'Espagne et d'Italie*:

Avez-vous vu, dans Barcelone,
Une Andalouse au sein bruni?
Pâle comme un beau soir d'automne!
C'est ma maîtresse, ma lionne!
La Marquesa d'Amaëgui!]

hapless Abancerages slain by Boabdil, and of a Parisian *cancan pur sang* performed by working girls and soldiers of Granada, in the Court of Lions!

But these are only trifling signs of the time and the spread of *culture* among the middle and lower classes. Wherever the spirit of aping possesses the heart of the nation — the poor working classes — there the elements of nationality disappear and the country is on the eve of losing its individuality and all things change for the worse. What is the use of talking so loudly of “the benefits of *Christian* civilization,” of its having softened public morals, refined national customs and manners, *etc., etc.*, when our modern civilization has achieved quite the reverse! Civilization has depended, for ages, says Burke, “upon two principles . . . the spirit of a gentleman and the spirit of religion.” And how many true *gentlemen* have we left, when compared even with the days of half-barbarous knighthood? Religion has become canting hypocrisy and the genuine religious spirit is regarded now-a-days as insanity. Civilization, it is averred, “has destroyed brigandage, established public security, elevated morality and built railways which now honeycomb the face of the globe.” Indeed? Let us analyse seriously and impartially all these “benefits” and we shall soon find that civilization has done nothing of the kind. At best it has put a false nose on every evil of the Past, adding hypocrisy and false pretence to the natural ugliness of each. If it is true to say that it has put down in some civilized centres of Europe — near Rome, in the Bois de Boulogne or on Hampstead Heath — *banditti* and highwaymen, it is also as true that it has, thereby, destroyed robbery only as a speciality, the latter having now become a common occupation in every city great or small. The robber and cut-throat has only exchanged his dress and appearance by donning the livery of civilization — the ugly modern attire. Instead of being robbed under the vault of thick woods and the protection of darkness, people are robbed now-a-days under the electric light of saloons and the protection of trade-laws and police-regulations. As to open day-light brigandage, the *Mafia* of New Orleans and the *Mala Vita* of Sicily, with high officialdom, population, police, and jury forced to play into the hands of regularly organized bands of murderers, thieves and tyrants¹² in the full glare of European “culture,” show how far our civilization has succeeded in establishing public security, or Christian religion in softening the hearts of men and the ways and customs of a barbarous past. Modern Cyclopædias are very fond of expatiating upon the decadence of Rome and its *pagan* horrors. But if the latest editions of the *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography* were honest enough to make a parallel between those “monsters of depravity” of ancient civilization, Messalina and Faustina, Nero and Commodus, and modern European aristocracy, it might be found that the latter could give odds to the former — in social hypocrisy, at any rate. Between “the shameless and beastly debauchery” of an Emperor Commodus, and as beastly a depravity of more than one “Honourable,” high official representative of the people, the only difference to be found is that while Commodus was a member of all the sacerdotal colleges of Paganism, the modern debauchee may be a high member of the Evangelical Christian Churches, a distinguished and pious pupil of Moody and Sankey¹³ and what not. It

¹² Read the “Cut Throats’ Paradise” in the *Edinburgh Review* for April 1877, and the digest of it in the *Pall Mall Gazette* of April 15th, 1891, “Murder as a Profession.”

¹³ [The evangelical duo of Ira David Sankey and Dwight Lyman Moody.]

is not the Calchas of Homer, who was the type of the Calchas in the Operette *La Belle Hélène*, but the modern sacerdotal Pecksniff¹⁴ and his followers.

As to the blessings of railways and “the annihilation of space and time,” it is still an undecided question — without speaking of the misery and starvation the introduction of steam engines and machinery in general has brought for years on those who depend on their manual labour — whether railways do not kill more people in one month than the brigands of all Europe used to murder in a whole year. The victims of railroads, moreover, are killed under circumstances which surpass in horror anything the cut-throats may have devised. One reads almost daily of railway disasters in which people are “burned to death in the blazing wreckage,” “mangled and crushed out of recognition” and killed by dozens and scores.¹⁵ This is a trifle worse than the highwaymen of old Newgate.

Nor has crime been abated at all by the spread of civilization; though owing to the progress of science in chemistry and physics, it has become more secure from detection and more ghastly in its realization than it ever has been. Speak of Christian civilization having improved public morals; of Christianity being the only religion which has established and recognized Universal Brotherhood! Look at the brotherly feeling shown by American Christians to the Red Indian and the Negro, whose *citizenship* is the farce of the age. Witness the love of the Anglo-Indians for the “mild Hindu,” the Mussulman, and the Buddhist. See “how these Christians love each other” in their incessant law litigations, their libels against each other, the mutual hatred of the Churches and of the sects. Modern civilization and Christianity are oil and water — they will never mix. Nations among which the most horrible crimes are daily perpetrated; nations which rejoice in Tropmanns and Jack the Rippers, in fiends like Mrs. Reeves the trader in baby slaughter — to the number of 300 victims as is believed — for the sake of filthy lucre; nations which not only permit but encourage a Monaco with its hosts of suicides, that patronize prize-fights, bull-fights, useless and cruel sport and even indiscriminate vivisection — such nations have no right to boast of their civilization. Nations furthermore which from political considerations, dare not put down slave-trade *once for all*, and out of revenue-greed, hesitate to abolish opium and whiskey trades, fattening on the untold misery and degradation of millions of human beings, have no right to call themselves either Christian or civilized. A civilization finally that leads only to the destruction of every noble, artistic feeling in man, can only deserve the epithet of barbarous. We, the modern-day Europeans, are Vandals as great, if not greater than Attila with his savage hordes.

*Consummatum est.*¹⁶ Such is the work of our modern Christian civilization and its direct effects. The destroyer of art, the Shylock, who, for every mite of gold it gives,

¹⁴ [An extreme hypocrite, after Seth Pecksniff, a character in Charles Dickens “Martin Chuzzlewit.”]

¹⁵ To take one instance. A Reuter’s telegram from America, where such accidents are almost a daily occurrence, gives the following details of a wrecked train:

“One of the cars which was attached to a gravel train and which contained five Italian workmen, was thrown forward into the centre of the wreck, and the whole mass caught fire. Two of the men were killed outright and the remaining three were injured, pinioned in the wreckage. As the flames reached them their cries and groans were heartrending. Owing to the position of the car and the intense heat the rescuers were unable to reach them, and were compelled to watch them slowly burn to death. It is understood that all the victims leave families.”

¹⁶ [“It is completed,” the last words of Jesus on the cross in the Latin translation of *John* xix, 30.]

demands and receives in return a pound of human flesh, in the heart-blood, in the physical and mental suffering of the masses, in the loss of everything true and loveable — can hardly pretend to deserve grateful or respectful recognition. The unconsciously prophetic *fin de siècle*, in short, is the long ago foreseen *fin de cycle*; when according to *Manjunātha Sutra*,

“Justice will have died, leaving as its successor blind Law, and as its Guru and guide — *Selfishness*; when wicked things and deeds will have to be regarded as meritorious, and holy actions as madness.”

Beliefs are dying out, divine life is mocked at; art and genius, truth and justice are daily sacrificed to the insatiable mammon of the age — money grubbing. The artificial replaces everywhere the real, the false substitutes the true. Not a sunny valley, not a shadowy grove left immaculate on the bosom of mother nature. And yet what marble fountain in fashionable square or city park, what bronze lions or tumble-down dolphins with upturned tails can compare with an old worm-eaten, moss-covered, weather-stained country well, or a rural windmill in a green meadow! What Arc de Triomphe can ever compare with the low arch of Grotta Azzurra, at Capri, and what city park or Champs Élysées, rival Sorrento, “the wild garden of the world,” the birth-place of Tasso? Ancient civilizations have never sacrificed Nature to speculation, but holding it as divine, have honoured her natural beauties by the erection of works of art, such as our modern electric civilization could never produce even in dream. The sublime grandeur, the mournful gloom and majesty of the ruined temples of Paestum, that stand for ages like so many sentries over the sepulchre of the Past and the forlorn hope of the Future amid the mountain wilderness of Sorrento, have inspired more men of genius than the new civilization will ever produce. Give us the *banditti* who once infested these ruins, rather than the railroads that cut through the old Etruscan tombs; the first may take the purse and life of the few; the second are undermining the lives of the millions by poisoning with foul gases the sweet breath of the pure air. In ten years, by century the XXth, Southern France with its Nice and Cannes, and even Engadine, may hope to rival the London atmosphere with its fogs, thanks to the increase of population and changes in climate. We hear that Speculation is preparing a new iniquity against Nature: smoky, greasy, stench-breathing *funiculaires* (baby-railways)¹⁷ are being contemplated for some world-renowned mountains. They are preparing to creep like so many loathsome, fire-vomiting reptiles over the immaculate body of the Jungfrau,¹⁸ and a railway-tunnel is to pierce the heart of the snow-capped Virgin mountain, the glory of Europe. And why not? Has not national speculation pulled down the priceless remains of the grand Temple of Neptune at Rome, to build over its colossal corpse and sculptured pillars the present Custom House?

¹⁷ [Inclined plane or cliff railway, is a cable railway in which a cable attached to a pair of tram-like vehicles on rails moves them up and down a steep slope; the ascending and descending vehicles counterbalance each other.]

¹⁸ [One of the main summits in the Bernese Alps, situated between the cantons of Valais and Bern in Switzerland.]

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Are we so wrong then, in maintaining that modern civilization with its Spirit of Speculation is the very *Genius of Destruction*; and as such, what better words can be addressed to it than this definition of Burke:

“A Spirit of innovation is generally the result of a selfish temper and confined views. People will not look forward to posterity, who never look backward to their ancestors.”¹⁹

H. P. B.



A quiet evening by Thomas Kinkadee

¹⁹ [Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 1790. Answer to Question 2.]