

## CHAPTER III

### CIVILIZATIONS GONE BEFORE

THE southeast wind has sprung up at sunset. It blows freely over the stern and swells the sails. The vessel leaps forward. As she rounds Cape Sounion and enters the Saronic Sea, Athens — superb, imperious, beloved Athens — though more than a score of miles away, shimmers through the crystalline atmosphere. There, distant, soft and mellow, is the temple-crowned citadel of the violet-crowned city. There the matchless Parthenon rises, and beside its columns and pediment shine flamelike the golden helmet and spear-head of the colossal goddess, Athene Promachus — “she who fights in the foremost rank.” Behind the city lies Mount Hymettus, “violet-bathed” in the sunset. Later, as the vessel speeds on, ranges into view “rosy-tinted” Mount Pentelicus; and then Mount Lycabettus, as in a “furnace glow.”

How the traveler's heart beats and leaps before him as he gazes! Never before has his native city seemed so radiant, so majestic, so inspiring, so heaven-endowed. Returning from travels through the civilized world, he realizes beyond all cavil and peradventure that in art, in feats of arms, in intellect, Greece is preëminent. And Greece is led by Attica, while Attica is ruled by Athens, the mistress of the world.

It is the Golden Age of Pericles. Greece leads civilization. Take Athens alone, and where is the nation with names to compare with her sons? What sculpture can rival the works of Phidias and Praxiteles; what painting

that of Polygnotus? Is not the architecture of Ictinus and Callicrates the despair of the world? Has not dramatic poetry come to exquisite flower in the persons of Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes? Where are there orators like Demosthenes, Æschines, Isocrates and Lysias; historians like Thucydides and Xenophon? Who of the living has surpassed the generalship of Miltiades and Nicias; will mortal memory forget the sea fight of Themistocles at Salamis? Where in the sweep of civilization is a statesmanship comparable with that of Pericles and of Cimon; where have the gods raised philosophy and morals to the heights of Socrates and Plato; where paralleled Aristotle's formulation of knowledge?

All these men are citizens of the state of Attica. Other Greek states have sons whose names are likewise monuments to art, to learning, to literature, to statecraft, to military prowess, to philosophy, to morals. Does not intellect govern the world? How then can Greek supremacy fail? Other civilizations have faded and gone out. But with such a constellation of genius, how can Greek progress falter?

Thus with natural pride might have reasoned the Greek traveler as he eagerly pressed homeward.

Yet even then, with all her dazzling splendor, Greece, and particularly Athens, was as a statue with head of gold and feet of clay. An aristocracy held as their private property the soil and all the avenues of production. The mass of the population was composed part of slaves and part of dependent freemen who had to compete with slaves for subsistence. The community was divided into mutually hating classes — those who possessed special privileges, and those who possessed them not; those who basked in appropriated riches, and those who toiled in poverty. Plato called these classes the "hares and lions."

"Even poor Athenians kept a slave or two," says Professor Mahaffy in his *Critical Introduction to Duruy's*

"History of Greece." "They were saved the worry of all the more troublesome or degrading manual labor, and so the Athenian . . . was in a serious sense an aristocrat as well as a democrat. He belonged to a small minority ruling a far greater population."

And as Athens and Attica were, so was all Greece. Her people were not truly free. They were organized into democratic states, but each of those states was part bond and part free. Each was an imperial democracy, where, indeed, there was a free and equal citizenship, but where below that citizenship was a mass of slaves who labored the fields, conducted the manufacturing, and engaged in menial toil.

Aristotle, the master intellect of antiquity, relegated all manual labor to the slaves, whom he called "the living machines which a man possesses"; while the master moralist, Plato, in his disgust of the war of factions among the upper, or citizen class for control of the state and of the privilege-making powers, eschewed Agora, Senate, tribunals, laws, decrees, political parties and candidatures. As he says through the mouth of Socrates in the "Theætetus," and suggests elsewhere, he would have the state governed by "the lords of philosophy."

This was not democratic. It was the theocratic idea. It was the revolt against things that the moral philosopher's penetrating eyes saw about him: below, a multitude so degraded that they appeared beneath the estate of man; above them, the members of the ruling-citizen class grappling with each other for power and riches.

This ruling class, not content with dominance at home, sought dominion abroad. It conducted foreign wars and drew upon Greece's best blood to plant colonies and hold subject territories. Large revenues flowed from without into the coffers of private citizens, but all the while Greece grew weaker. Her slave and dependent population increased, while more and more of her free citizens, who in former days had carried her arms so gloriously against

the hosts of the Great King, became scattered to the four winds.

What booted all her civilization, all her enlightenment?  
Says Professor Mahaffy:—

The fact remains that the highest education is not all-powerful in producing internal concord and external peace. There seems, as it were, a national strain exercised by a conquering and imperial democracy, which its members may sustain for a generation or two, but which cannot endure. The sweets of accumulated wealth and domestic comfort in a civilized and agreeable society become so delightful that the better classes will not sustain their energy. . . . There is a natural tendency in the cultivated classes to stand aside from politics, and allow the established laws to run in their now established grooves. Hence the field of politics is left to the poorer, needier, more discontented classes, who turn public life into a means of glory and gain, and set to work to disturb the state that they may satisfy their followers and obtain fuel to feed their own ambition. To such persons either a successful war upon neighbors, or an attack upon propertied classes at home, becomes a necessity. Even the Athenian democracy, when its funds were low and higher taxes were threatened, hailed with approval informations against rich citizens, in the hope that by confiscations of their property the treasury might be replenished.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, where the historian speaks of "classes" he means the factions among the citizens. He does not include the slaves, most of whom had been freemen taken in war and many of whom were white, like the Greeks themselves. And when he speaks of the "discontented classes" he means those elements among the citizens who did not enjoy all the privileges possessed by other citizens. The factions among the privileged class fought among themselves over privileges and the riches flowing from them. Even as early as the never-to-be-forgotten days of Salamis and Plataia, "rich citizens" were ready to sell the general freedom to the Great King for security of their "property" and peace to enjoy it. Like the privileged classes everywhere, they were guilty of a long line of treasonable acts against liberty, such as it was — that narrow

<sup>1</sup> Critical Introduction to Duruy's "History of Greece," p. 75.

class liberty which was the only kind of liberty Greece ever knew.

Through the perspective of time, and in light of her subsequent career, *we* can see how impossible it was for the Greek nation to hold its separate and independent station in the world. But could the Greeks themselves realize it in the time of their outward glory and fruitage?

Behold in the plains of Olympia the quadrennial games in honor of Zeus. Under the unclouded, transparent sky lies the great stadium, a ninth of a mile long, packed with a vast multitude of pilgrims from all the states of Greece and their colonies, and with travelers from distant parts of the outside world. Only free-born Greeks of unblemished name may enter the contests. Each state sends her fleetest, strongest, handsomest. Even now a roar of acclamation greets the six-horse chariot victor. The judge gravely awards the prize — not money, not lands, not even a fillet studded with gems. It is a simple wreath of wild olives to crown the victor's head and a palm branch to carry in his hand. Of all earthly trophies, these are highest. If the victor chances to be a son of Sparta, that state will decree him an additional and supreme honor — the post of greatest danger in her next war. The proudest Greeks struggle for the glory of transmitting to their remotest posterity trophies won in the Olympian games.

Stop a man, any one in the concourse pouring forth as the games cease for the day. Ask him if *he* thinks Greece can have but a short career of independence. He will, perhaps, stare at you for a moment, and pass on.

Turn and wander to the sacred grove — the grove inclosed by Hercules, containing, among the exquisite sacred buildings, the temple of Zeus, with its wondrous figure in gold and ivory from the hand of Phidias. Or go to the quiet spots where poets sing — and such poets! — or where historians relate the heroic exploits of the little states, or where, in small groups, are discussed the intricate, word-fencing systems of philosophy. Pluck this

one or another by the gown and, chatting in an easy strain, venture presently to observe that Greece at last may sink into the dust before freer peoples! What would such a one think of you? That you had taken leave of your senses. As well expect to witness the current of the Alpheios run toward its source or Mount Phellon cast itself into the sea, as the fall of incomparable Greece!

And yet, after having reached such heights of knowledge and wisdom and wealth and power, Greece, led by Athens, declined and fell. The reason is plain. The law of civilization is association in a condition of equality. It is not a man-made, but a natural law; and it is as inexorable as are the other laws of nature. A nation that disregards it courts death. It matters not how poor in material things a community shall remain or how rich it may become. Its units must be equals. As equals they will rise in concord from plane to plane. Each link of the chain will cling to each other link, and all will bear an equal strain. This is the law of human progress.

But when inequality arises in a community, community defects develop. The links change relatively in power. Some strengthen, some weaken. Discord mars harmony. Aristocracy and a mob supplant a general, enlightened and serene democracy. The state rushes to self-destruction or becomes an easy prey to conquerors from without.

The Greek people were part free and part slave. There was no general social harmony. Class hated class. The clay feet crumbled under the gold head. Soon, very soon, Greece was overborne by those whom she had scorned as barbarians. She bowed under the yoke of successive conquerors, and the glory of her civilization passed as a priceless heritage to other and freer peoples.

If peerless Greece fell, shall the American nation escape? We have public schools, the printing-press and manhood suffrage. We have far more democratic political institutions. Yet Francis Galton, the eminent anthropologist, avers that the average ability of the Athenian race was as

much superior to that of the Anglo-Saxon as is the latter's ability to that of the negro in Africa. If great intellectual advancement could not save socially unequal Greece, how can it save this Republic, with its widening social gulf?

Chattel slavery does not exist among us, but a widespread, extending and deepening industrial slavery does. For those who own the soil and the avenues of transportation and who order taxation are the masters in fact of those who have to submit to these things. The march of concentration is bringing these privileges into amazingly few hands, and the real, if indirect, slavery that this entails is more heartless than the old-time chattel slavery, because it operates through the bitter competition of the masses for opportunities of employment which Privilege controls.

So fearful are many that they will not be able to find other means of livelihood should they lose such as they have, that they are reduced to a pitiable and totally un-American state of dependence. They may in a sense be said to go with their employment, much as serfs went with the land they tilled. And in that sense they may be described in Aristotle's words, "The living machines which a man [the owner of a privilege] possesses."

Because we verbally subscribe to principles of democratic-republicanism we feel that we are and that we act as democratic-republicans. Yet the Greeks uttered principles not a whit less broad and deep. Witness the funeral oration attributed to Pericles: —

The republican government is one that feels no jealousy or rivalry with the institutions of others. We have no wish to imitate them; we prefer to be an example to them. It is true that our constitution is a democracy, for it is framed in the interest of all, not of any privileged class. . . . But whilst ours is the law of perfect liberty to each citizen to live freely as it suits him, we are bound by loyalty to the common law which we reverence as the voice of the Republic. . . . To sum it all up together, we may boast that our commonwealth is the school of the civilized world. Each citizen of our Republic is endowed with the power in his own person of adapting himself to the most varied form of activity and life with consummate versatility and ease. This is no passing and idle word, but truth and fact; the

truth of which lies in the splendid position which our Republic now holds in the world to-day. There is a latent strength within us which ever rises above even all that our neighbors expect that we can show.

Controlling the getting of a living, the privileged class must control in all other respects. No matter how free and equal political institutions be, such social inequality inevitably converts the community into Plato's "hares and lions." In the ordinary run of political affairs we now have, as Professor Mahaffy said of conditions in Greece, a "small minority ruling a far greater population." Methods differ from those employed in Greece, but results must be practically the same.

And is there not here, as there was in Greece, a "tendency in the cultivated classes to stand aside from politics," meaning, to refuse to participate as equal citizens? How many of our very rich vote? Their influence too often tells through campaign contributions and the control of political machines. It is the rule of corruption. And those of the "cultured classes" who have a disgust for this kind of thing try to escape it by eschewing politics. More and more well-circumstanced American citizens are not exercising the right of suffrage. Partisan newspapers deplore its abandonment for golf, yachting or house-parties. Among those who thus shirk their duty are not a few who speak of manhood suffrage as being a failure; who describe Thomas Jefferson as an "impractical theorist" and the Declaration of Independence as false in asserting "equal" and "inalienable" rights. On the other hand, they are ready to condone in government any new step, however revolutionary, or the holding to any precedent, however reactionary, if such course will conserve "property."

Greece fell, not because of an absence of real democracy in her political organization, but because of social inequality. A community of social equals can easily and will quickly change what does not suit its needs. Greece



fell because socially she was, as Voltaire said of France anterior to the Revolution, "rotten before ripe." Some of her people were intellectually and materially lifted to high Olympus. The mass were plunged into the black waters of the river Styx. Privilege was the cause of these social disparities. It degraded politics at home, it made of the nation a "conquering and imperial democracy" abroad.

Is not Privilege working parallel transformations with us? Has it not degraded our politics at home? Is it not making of us a "conquering and imperial democracy" abroad?

Nor is it less disquieting to compare our results and tendencies with the conditions that accompanied the downfall of imperial Rome. Sallust, in his history of the Catiline political conspiracy just before the ascendancy of Cæsar, compares the material simplicity and the moral grandeur of earlier Rome with the heaped wealth, the blood-stained plunder, the lavish show, the prodigal extravagance and the base public and private morals of his own time.

To see the difference between modern and ancient manners, one needs but take a view of the houses of particular citizens, both in town and country, all resembling in magnificence so many cities; and then behold the temples of the gods, built by our ancestors, the most religious of all men. But they thought of no other ornament for their temples than devotion; nor for their houses but glory; neither did they take anything from the conquered but the power of doing hurt. Whereas their descendants . . . have plundered from their allies, by the most flagrant injustice, whatever their brave ancestors left to their conquered enemies, as if the only use of power was to do wrong. It is needless to recount other things, which none but those who saw them will believe: as the leveling of mountains by private citizens, and even covering the sea itself with fine edifices. These men appear to me to have sported with their riches, since they lavish them in the most shameless manner, instead of enjoying them with honor. Nor were they less addicted to all manner of extravagant gratifications. Men and women laid aside all regard for chastity. To procure dainties for their tables sea and land were ransacked. They indulged in sleep before nature craved it; the returns of hunger

and thirst were anticipated with luxury, and cold and fatigue were never so much as felt. The Roman youth, after they had spent their fortunes, were prompted by such deprivations to commit all manner of enormities; for their minds, impregnated with evil habits and unable to resist their craving appetites, were violently bent on all manner of extravagances and all the means of supplying them.

Sallust wrote this before the Christian era began. It revealed the course of the nation down to the turbulent, surging time that brought forth the first and greatest Cæsar. It showed to what a pass Rome had come before she changed her republican toga for the purple and diadem of an emperor.

The testimony is the stronger because it was probably written before Sallust himself had bowed to avarice and injustice. In extenuation it might be said that he had no means to support him save his brains. Mere brains without special privilege were as nothing at that stage in Rome's history. Philosophers, poets, scientists, artists, architects and engineers were among the chattel slaves made so by war. Sallust was harried by poverty and allured by voluptuousness. Hope of remedial social and political change grew cold within him. He yielded to the fascinations of sensual delights. Becoming Governor of the African province of Numidia, he used extortion to heap together a huge fortune. On his return to Rome he built a villa on the Pincian Hill, whose luxury later made it the abode of Emperors. About that villa he laid out gardens whose beauty compelled the wonder and admiration of succeeding generations.

In effect Sallust said: To see the difference between present and earlier conditions one needs but to take a view of the houses of particular citizens both in town and country and compare them with the temples and fortunes of the Fathers of the Republic. Might not we of this nation make a like comparison with particular profit? Is it not a fact that some of our citizens live like crowned monarchs rather than equals in a democratic-republic?

Here, as in the Roman world, there has been a great concentration of wealth. Had the Romans expressed themselves in modern style, some one among them might have said, "The Gods in their infinite wisdom have given the wealth-producing and wealth-appropriating powers of this empire into the hands of devout men who will take care of every one else."

For such was the concentration of wealth in Julius Cæsar's time that of 450,000 citizens in Rome, 320,500 were living at public expense. And this took no note of the multitudes of freedmen and slaves beneath, who were not citizens. The tribune Phillipus left on record the statement that "there are but 2000 individuals in Rome who own anything."

What was the cause of this? Pliny summed it up in a phrase, "*Latifundia perdidere Italiam*," meaning, "The great estates have ruined Italy." Not only had the small ownerships been absorbed, but the great stretches of public domain had been seized by the nobles. "The powerful men of our time," complained Columella, "have estates so large that they cannot make the circuit of them in a day on horseback." An old Italian inscription shows that an aqueduct nine miles in length traversed the domains of only six proprietors. By the fourth century the evil of great estates had extended to the provinces; the *latifundia* had everywhere absorbed petty ownerships. Eleven men owned the Province of Africa and eighty-three the whole territory of Leontini in Sicily.

Thus the small landowners, the independent husbandmen who had formed the brawn and sinew of the legions in the early days of the Republic, were squeezed out of their holdings and forced to become renters. Rents were extortionate; and falling into arrears and becoming insolvent, these men became *coloni*, or serfs. In the words of the law, they were "slaves of the land." Or else, avoiding the crushing burdens of rent and taxes, these small farmers sought employment of the great estate owners in

degrading competition with the slaves whom Varro called "*instrumentum vocale*," meaning, "the talking kind of agricultural implements," and whom the great Greek, Aristotle, had called "the living machines which a man possesses."

Usury in a variety of forms was practiced by the landed class. The rate ranged from twenty per cent. upward, with imprisonment, slavery or death as the penalty of non-payment.

Nor was this all. A comparatively few had a complete monopoly of commerce. The exercise of the right of free commerce (*jus commercii*) was restricted to Roman citizens. The allies and subjugated nations were prohibited from commercial relations beyond their respective territories. This commercial monopoly brought superabundant riches to a small number of men, who, at first not nobles, bought vast estates and were quickly admitted to the noble class. One of these men boasted that he had more money than "three kings." Rabirius found no difficulty in lending on a sudden to a fugitive prince 100,000,000 sesterces (perhaps not above \$4,500,000); and Didius Julianus gave what is variously estimated at from \$12,000,000 to \$18,000,000 to the Prætorian Guards in donatives to be made Emperor.

Are we not beginning to show some points of similarity with these things?

Mr. Andrew Carnegie, after donating \$100,000,000 toward public library buildings and other purposes, probably has remaining more than twenty times the sum Julianus paid for the purple. The mere interest at four per cent. on Mr. John D. Rockefeller's reputed fortune would have paid for the purple two or three times over!

Eleven men owned the Province of Africa. Half-a-dozen men control and practically own the railroads and the coal and oil deposits of the State of West Virginia. Do we not commonly speak of this or that individual, or



this or that corporate combination, as owning such and such town, or county, or State?

"The great estates have ruined Italy." And shall the still greater estates — square mile after square mile of agricultural country, of timber region, or mineral resources and the large and augmenting holdings in towns and cities — make for the health and prosperity of this Republic?

The *ager publicus*, or Roman common lands, were for most part seized by the Roman nobles. Has not the last of what is available of our seemingly limitless public domain gone into the hands of large speculators and great corporations of one kind or another?

Heavy taxes, exorbitant rents and debts destroyed the small holdings and swelled the *latifundia* throughout the Roman Empire. Have not great loan companies in New York, Boston, Chicago and other cities plastered our Western country with mortgages, and are they not, through foreclosure, absorbing it?

Huge fortunes were rolled up for a few Roman citizens by the operation of the *jus commercii*. Does not our tariff law center trade and manufacturing in a few favored hands?

The \$4,500,000 that Rabirius could at short notice lend would be held a small loan for some of our citizens like a Stillman, a Clarke, or a Ryan; while Mr. Morgan in the course of a dinner arranged the plans that within a few weeks resulted in the formation of the \$1,400,000,000 Steel Trust.

Have we not palatial private residences that recall the gilded roofs, the colonnades, the baths, the statues of bronze mixed with gold and silver of the "Golden House" that once stood upon the Palatine Hill, where the Emperor Nero ruled in the very madness of pride — the Golden House wherein the beautiful Poppæa, with her wondrous garments of "woven air," charmed the masters of mankind?

Nor are we unlike the imperial Romans touching game preserves. They turned into solitudes for breeding and hunting extensive tracts where agriculture had decked the earth and population had nestled in happy hamlets. With all our wealth of unused land, hamlets and villages are being cleared from some parts of the Adirondack Mountains in upper New York State, and chosen spots west of the Mississippi are being divested of all habitations, save those of keepers, to make vast game preserves for foolish pride and restless desire.

If there are not here now, as there were in Rome, large fortunes founded upon conquest, we may see that parallel soon develop out of our centralizing movement and foreign aggression.

Our power of producing wealth is far greater than that which the ancients enjoyed. With that fair distribution that would occur through observance of equal rights, our people generally might and would live in comfort and harmony. But special privileges are preventing just distribution. While robbing the many, they are heaping into the hands of a few men, far, far larger private and corporate fortunes than the masters of the Roman world possessed. Certain it is that we have among us Princes of Privilege who wield a power over their fellow-citizens in some respects as imperious as had those ancient masters of civilization who discussed world politics in the Forum, argued philosophy in the porticoes of Octavia, loitered in the luxurious baths of Caracalla, sat in the man-killing theater of the Flavians, or reclined far into the night at Lucullan feasts, as about them fountains breathed forth perfumes, lutes played, poets sang, historians told of long-gone days, or garlanded girls glided in the dance.

To those belonging to the privileged classes of Rome the surface aspect of things must have been fair enough. "For," says Froude in his "Cæsar," "it was an age of material civilization; an age of civil liberty and intellectual culture; an age of pamphlets and epigrams, of salons

and dinner parties, of senatorial majorities and electoral corruption. The highest offices of state were open in theory to the meanest citizen; they were confined, in fact, to those who had the longest purses, or the most ready use of the tongue on popular platforms."

Does this not fit our own case after a short century and a quarter of national life?

The name of Mæcenas, the great minister of state under Augustus, is a synonym for patron of literature. He was the host and friend of wits and poets. By his encouragement and bounty Virgil and Horace, Propertius and Domitius Marsus flourished, to the delight of the contracted world of culture of their day. Mæcenas did this with riches flowing from privileges conferred upon him by the Emperor. He has in some respects an after-type in the person of our compatriot, Mr. Andrew Carnegie, who, from privileges under our laws, draws a revenue that could outdo the Roman Mæcenas's munificence tenfold.

Perhaps most of us require a repetition of all outward conditions to realize a true historical parallel. We disregard the underlying principles. But no truth is more clearly printed on the pages of history than that social and political changes of great and lasting moment often occur without violent outward circumstance. The transition from a democratic-republican form of government to that of an imperium necessarily needs no dramatic *coup d'état* to be effective. The change that occurred in Rome was not so. Augustus made the transformation, but not as a revolutionist. It was as a conservator of the old institutions that were falling into disrepute. He directed the government ostensibly not as a self-raised autocrat, hostile to the laws. He protested that he desired not to destroy, but to preserve. He feigned to shrink from the responsibilities and burdens of state, and with outward reluctance consented to have various established powers conferred temporarily upon him, so that he

should be the embodiment of the law in its various functions. He contrived to be made Consul, Tribune, Censor, Pontifex Maximus, military Imperator and Dictator all at one time. These several powers did no violence to the old forms and they were centered in his person on the plea that he could thereby best bring "peace" and "order," and protect "rights" and "property." He frequently reminded the public that he accepted these responsibilities and labors but for a temporary season, and he once did actually abdicate. But those about him trembled and the outside world stood spellbound until, with great show of sorrowful bowing to the call of duty, he resumed his powers. To the end of his long life he professed to defer to the Senate, whereas that body really cringed before the master of the legions. He professed always to be a servant of the Roman people, but that people had become careless or incapable of calling him to account.

It was the new order under the old forms. It introduced the Empire while pretending to preserve the Republic. And what followed was only what could be expected. The Empire rested not upon the will of a free people, but upon the swords of soldiers. The soldiers learned of the secret and took possession of their own. Telling of the murder of Galba and the acclamation of Otho as Emperor, Tacitus says: "Two common soldiers engaged to transfer the Empire of the Roman people and they did transfer it. . . . The walls and temples all around were thronged with spectators of this mournful sight. Yet not a voice was heard from the better class of people or even from the rabble." Later Vespasian came with the veterans from Palestine to overthrow the brief usurpation of Vitellius and to found the Flavian line. The fighting continued even into Rome itself. "The populace," observed Tacitus, "stood by and watched the combatants, and, as though it had been mimic combat, encouraged one party and then the other by their shouts and plaudits. Whenever either side gave way, they cried out that those



who concealed themselves in the shops or took refuge in any private house, should be dragged out and butchered, and they secured the larger share of the booty; for, while the soldiers were busy with bloodshed and massacre, the spoils fell to the crowd."

That crowd was composed mainly of Roman citizens and slaves. To what a depth had fallen that proud name! Roman citizens had become mere vultures of the battlefield!

It is not that the Romans did not have a good code of laws. Of all people of which we know they preëminently had the genius for law. They were lawgivers to succeeding nations.

Nor was it that they did not begin with good morals. They were essentially moral. They were at beginning, as Sallust says, "the most religious of all men." Froude says in his "Cæsar," "They built temples and offered sacrifices to the highest human excellences, to 'Valor,' to 'Truth,' to 'Good Faith,' to 'Modesty,' to 'Charity,' to 'Concord.'"

In these qualities lay all that raised man above the animals with which he had so much in common. In them, therefore, were to be found the link which connected him with the divine nature, and moral qualities were regarded as divine influences which gave his life its meaning and its worth. The "Virtues" were elevated into beings to whom disobedience would be punished as a crime, and the superstitious fears which run so often into mischievous idolatries were enlisted with conscience in the direct service of right action. . . . Morality thus ingrained in the national character and grooved into action creates strength, as nothing else creates it. The difficulty of right conduct does not lie in knowing what it is right to do, but in doing it when known. Intellectual culture does not touch the conscience. It provides no motives to overcome the weakness of the will, and with wider knowledge it brings also new temptations. The sense of duty is present in each detail of life; the obligatory "must" which binds the will to the course which right principle has marked out for it produces a fiber like the fiber of the oak.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Cæsar: a Sketch," Chap. II.

Yet in face of all this, public and private morality melted down to almost nothing in the furnace of passions awakened by the despoilment of the masses for the advantage of the few. "The ties of family life," says Mommsen, "became relaxed with fearful rapidity. The evil of grissettes and boy favorites spread like a pestilence, and, as matters stood, it was not possible to take any material steps in the way of legislation against it." Long before Cæsar's time, he tells us, marriage had become on both sides a matter of mercantile speculation.

Celibacy and childlessness became more and more common, especially among the upper classes. While among these marriage had been for long regarded as a burden which people took upon them at the best in the public interest. . . . We encounter even in Cato's sentiments the maxim to which Polybius a century before traced the decay of Hellas, that it is the duty of a citizen to keep great wealth together, and therefore not to beget too many children. Where were the times when the designation "children-producer" (*proletarius*) had been an honor for the Roman? <sup>1</sup>

Marriage, once so sacred to the Roman, came to be almost the lightest of ties. Lecky, in his "History of European Morals," condenses the matter into a few lines:—

We find Cicero repudiating his wife Terentia, because he desired a new dowry; Augustus compelling the husband of Livia to repudiate her when she was already pregnant, that he might marry her himself; Cato ceding his wife, with the consent of her father, to his friend Hortensius, and resuming her after his death; Mæcenus continually changing his wife; Sempronius Sophus repudiating his wife because she had once been to the public games without his knowledge; Paulus Æmilius taking the same step without assigning any reason, and defending himself by saying, "My shoes are new and well made, but no one knows where they pinch me."

Nor did women show less alacrity in repudiating their husbands. Seneca denounced this evil with especial vehemence, declaring that divorce in Rome no longer brought with it any shame, and that there were women who reckoned their years rather by their husbands than by the consuls. Christians and Pagans echoed the same complaint.

<sup>1</sup> "The History of Rome," Book V, Chap. XI.

According to Tertullian, "divorce is the fruit of marriage." Martial speaks of a woman who had already arrived at her tenth husband; Juvenal, of a woman who had eight husbands in five years. But the most extraordinary recorded instance of this kind is related by St. Jerome, who assures us that there existed at Rome a wife who was married to her twenty-third husband, she herself being his twenty-first wife.<sup>1</sup>

Does all this not have a solemn lesson for us? We, as a nation, started with high moral public and private precepts, yet have we not merely to look about to see them broken down and flouted? What is the significance of our fine "bachelor" hotels and apartments? Is it not notorious that the very rich do not want the care and responsibility of children? Do we not hear it explained almost as a matter of course that many heirs would divide and dissipate estates? Therefore the aim is to have few heirs, so that the great estates shall hold together and augment. And marriage, venerated by our people of old, is being attacked by divorces of the "get-married-again-quick" order, and at a shocking rate of increase. Yet it cannot with justice be implied that even the "smart set" of our Princes of Privilege have come to the Roman pass in divorces. That may never come. We may turn to the old French, rather than follow the Roman example to its extreme.

To appreciate what this means, observe what Taine, in his "Ancient Régime," tells us: That under the old régime 270,000 persons constituted the privileged classes of France — the classes that sat upon the necks of the people, and at last caused the horrors of the Revolution. This was but little more than one per cent. of that nation's population, which at that time was approximately 26,000,000.<sup>2</sup>

Those privileged classes comprised the nobility and the clergy. They were the direct offspring of feudalism which

<sup>1</sup> Vol. II, Chap. V.

<sup>2</sup> "The Ancient Régime," Book I, Chap. II, Sec. I.

had its roots in the soil. A fifth of the territory of France at that time belonged to the crown and the communes, a fifth to the Third Estate or middle class, a fifth to the rural population, a fifth to the nobles and a fifth to the clergy. "Accordingly," remarks Taine, "if we deduct the public lands, the privileged own one half the kingdom" which "at the same time is the richest, for it comprises almost all the large and handsome buildings, the palaces, castles, convents and cathedrals, and almost all the valuable movable property, such as furniture, plate, objects of art, the accumulated masterpieces of centuries."<sup>1</sup>

Reduced to its lowest terms this means: that the privileged classes of France before the Revolution, constituting one per cent. of the population, owned one half the land, and almost all the important improvements and valuable movables.

Rousseau summed up the attitude of the privileged classes toward the rest of the population in these words, "I make an agreement with you wholly at your expense, and to my advantage, which I shall respect as long as I please, and which you shall respect as long as it pleases me." And as a result of this order of things, we have the court at Versailles. "It is said," remarks Taine, "that a hundred thousand roses are required to make an ounce of the unique perfume used by Persian kings; such is this drawing-room, the frail vial of crystal and gold containing the substance of a human vegetation. To fill it a great aristocracy had to be transplanted to a hothouse and become sterile in fruit and flowers, and then in the royal alembic, its pure sap is concentrated into a few drops of aroma. The price is excessive, but only at this price can the most delicate perfumes be manufactured."

How much this sounds like young Mr. Rockefeller's parable, that modern great fortunes are produced like the American Beauty rose — by nipping off most of the surrounding buds.

<sup>1</sup> Book I, Chap II, Sec. II.

The price is, indeed, excessive. Says Taine again, "Each largess of the monarch, considering the state of the taxes, is based on the privation of the peasants, the sovereign, through his clerks, taking bread from the poor to give coaches to the rich." From wanton heedlessness a quarter of the soil of France was, according to competent authority, lying waste. Listen to the testimony of the English traveler, Arthur Young, who journeyed through France, making notes even after the first mutterings of the Revolution had begun:—

*Montauban-de-Bretagne, Sept. 5, 1788.* — One third of what I have seen of this province seems uncultivated, and nearly all of it is in misery. What have kings, and ministers, and parliaments, and states to answer for their prejudices, seeing millions of hands that would be industrious, idle and starving, through the execrable maxims of despotism, or the equally detestable prejudices of a feudal nobility.

*Nantes, Sept. 21, 1788.* — *Mon dieu!* said I to myself, do all the wastes, the deserts, the heath, the ling, furze, broom and bog that I have passed for 300 miles lead to this spectacle? What a miracle, that all this splendor and wealth of the cities of France should be so unconnected with the country! There are no gentle transitions from ease to comfort, from comfort to wealth. You pass at once from beggary to profusion, from misery in mud cabins to Mademoiselle St. Hubert in splendid spectacles at 500 livres a night. . . . Maine and Anjou have the appearance of deserts.

*Mar-le-Tour, July 13, 1789.* — Walking up a long hill, to ease my mare, I was joined by a poor woman, who complained of the times, and that it was a sad country. Demanding her reasons, she said that her husband had but a morsel of land, one cow, and a poor little horse, yet they had a franchar (forty-two pounds) of wheat and three chickens to pay as quit-rent to one Seigneur; and four franchar of oats, one chicken, and one franc to pay to another, besides very heavy tailles and other taxes. She had seven children. . . . This woman, at no great distance, might be taken for sixty or seventy, her figure was so bent and her face so furrowed and hardened by labor; but she said she was only twenty-eight.

What could be expected of morals in the small but brilliant world of privilege in and about the French court? In some respects they were *nil*, at least as measured by the standards we have been taught to accept. The French

aristocrat and his wife were for all society rather than for each other. The woman to whom a man paid the least attention was his wife, and *vice versa*. Taine quotes M. de Bezenval, a contemporary of those times, who wrote:—

If morals lost by this, society was infinitely the gainer. Having got rid of the annoyance and dullness caused by the husband's presence, the freedom was extreme. The coquetry, both of men and women, kept up social vivacity and daily provided piquant adventures.

And here is the parallel in our own conditions, as described by an ex-vicar of a fashionable Episcopal church, in New York:—

We all know how difficult it is for a member of the smart set to strike out something truly original in one's whole mode of living, but here we have it. A young married couple of the smartest set are deeply in love; but at the request of the wife, upon their return from their summer villa, she is to have her own house and servants, carriages and stables, in fact, a complete and costly establishment of her own, in the very next street to that in which her husband lives, close to millionaires' row. This semi-detached couple will be frequent dinner guests at each other's tables.

What are we to suppose this means?

"Freedom, facilities, Monsieur l'Abbé: without these, life would be a desert." Such was the utterance of Cardinal Rohan to his secretary. It was in that order of things in France when the cassock took equal liberty and license with the robe. And what his Eminence, the Cardinal, meant by "freedom and facilities," we learn from a manuscript from which Taine quotes, describing how the Cardinal conducted a hunt on his estate at Saverne:—

Six hundred peasants and keepers ranged in a line a league long from early in the morning and beat up the surrounding country, while hunters, men and women, are posted at their stations. "For fear that the ladies might be frightened if left alone by themselves, the men whom they hated least were always left with them," and as nobody was allowed to leave his post before the signal, "it was impossible to be surprised."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "The Ancient Régime," Book II, Chap. II, Sec. VI.

The one great, rigid law for this privileged class of old France was that appearances be sacredly respected. An uninformed stranger would detect nothing to excite suspicion. "Whatever indecency there may be," says Taine, "it is never expressed in words, the sense of propriety in language imposing itself not only on the outbursts of the passions, but again on the grossness of instincts."<sup>1</sup>

Will not the observant and thoughtful find much food for serious meditation in these things when taken in connection with facts and tendencies among us?

<sup>1</sup> Taine offers two typical anecdotes from manuscripts of the time (Book II, Chap. II, Sec. III):—

"A husband said to his wife, 'I allow you everybody outside of princes and lackeys.' He was true to the fact, these two bringing dishonor on account of the scandal attending them."

"On a wife being discovered by her husband, he simply exclaims: 'Madam, what imprudence! Suppose I was another man!'"