

SOME IMPRESSIONS OF EUROPE

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TO the native of the New World who is privileged to visit the great centres of western civilization across the seas, there comes not only an opportunity but also a duty. Born at some distance from the springs of his culture, living under new and special conditions which have modified to a certain extent the original character of that culture without essentially altering its nature, the North American cannot but rejoice at a chance of seeing the Old World for himself, of comparing his own type of civilization with that of the main body from which it developed. Privileged as he is, he can look to the rock from whence he was hewn. He will be reckless of opportunity and duty alike if he fail to keep an observant eye and a thoughtful mind in the presence of his new surroundings.

To a Canadian visiting the Old Land, there is an added interest. As a British citizen he has not formally dissociated himself from Europe; as a native of an important section in the great British Commonwealth of Nations, he looks to England as the heart of his empire and to London as his capital. In London he finds a common meeting-ground for himself and his fellow citizens—the Australian, the South African and the New Zealander. He feels that the history of Britain is his history, her traditions and customs his heritage, and that however quickly his own country may develop a distinct national consciousness of her own, there will always be a higher bond of unity uniting her to kindred nations and to the land from which she sprang.

The present writer does not presume to speak with authority on Europe. He spent but the better part of a year in England and on the continent, and is merely expressing his own opinions. It is notorious that travellers' impressions differ widely. Someone has remarked that visitors abroad usually see what they expect to see, and verify their existing conceptions, "malgré tout". One does not always find, in comparing notes with another who has been over the same ground, that the two impressions agree. Nevertheless the conscientious person will make an effort to divest himself of preconceptions and to see things as they are. He cannot hope that everyone else will agree with him, but will rest in the consciousness that he has made a sincere attempt to reach the truth.

For a person who has an eye for the beautiful, the best way of approaching England is unquestionably by the Channel route. The traveller bound for Plymouth, Southampton or London, eagerly awaiting the first glimpse of land, is rewarded at last by a fleeting vision of the white rocks of the Scilly Isles gleaming afar off in bright blue waters. Soon the rugged headlands of Cornwall loom up ahead; their austerity toned by green fields, clustering hamlets, and a castle here and there. If the passenger lands at Plymouth, he first sets foot in one of the loveliest parts of England. The green fields of Devon and the storied wilds of Cornwall are alike spread out before him. If on the other hand he goes on to London, his eyes will before many hours be gladdened by the chalk cliffs of Dover rising white and sheer from the turbid waters at their base. Such cities as Dover, Deal and Ramsgate will swim into his ken; after that the river Thames, Gravesend, Tilbury, and at last London.

It is useless to deny that London is smoky. The person who is so unfortunate as to enter it on a dull day will not cherish his first impression of the greatest of all cities. But blue sky and a clear atmosphere are not by any means so rare there as is sometimes supposed, and in summer the weather is frequently quite dry enough. Much has been written about forests of tall chimneys which belch black smoke into an atmosphere of yellow haze. Some parts of the city undoubtedly give this impression in certain kinds of weather. But London is not by any means "all of a piece." In its huge bulk—its immensity is simply staggering—are to be found streets of handsome dwellings, up-to-date business districts, extensive parks and beautiful suburbs, no less than wide areas occupied by squalid dwellings and dismal factories. London is a universe in itself; year by year it encroaches on the surrounding country, engorging villages which within the memory of man were well out in the open country.

A stupendous blend of the magnificent and the sordid, the beautiful and the ugly, the new and the old—that is London. Some parts of it may perhaps be described as merely dismal. But in others the sharpness of violent contrast is always apparent. In the midst of a depressingly modern commercial district one may stumble across a rarely beautiful Norman church, or a perfectly preserved Tudor dwelling—things of beauty which time and change have not dared to touch—and it is a far cry from the West End or Westminster to the slums of Whitechapel.

Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's Cathedral, the British Museum, the Houses of Parliament, Trafalgar Square, Hyde Park—these

are so familiar to every person of British race that it is scarcely necessary to mention them here. London has many splendid buildings and museums. Its art collections compare favourably with those on the Continent, but the monuments that encumber (one cannot say *adorn*) the streets leave one either mirthful or cold. Its parks are beautiful and extremely well kept. The Londoner is fortunate in being able to escape during his leisure hours to such havens of rest as Hyde Park and Kew Gardens. During the last two years one of these parks was the scene of an event very notable in the history of the world. The great Exhibition held at Wembley was a most inspiring demonstration of the almost unlimited capacities of the British Empire. Here, in appropriate and beautiful buildings, were displayed such a wealth of raw materials and manufactured articles of every conceivable description as to cause one to wonder what the rest of the world could offer in addition. It is true that advanced art critics frowned at the conservative designs of the pavilions, and that the supercilious professed to look down on the commercial aims of the Exhibition; but viewed simply as a demonstration of the resources of the British Empire, it was supremely successful. As a means of education, it was capable of accomplishing marvels. The Englishman could learn more about his overseas empire in a few hours here than by studying books for years; the Canadian could improve his knowledge about England and the sister Dominions; while the foreigner could have his eye opened to the possibilities of the British Empire as a whole. Even though the Exhibition result in a financial loss, if it accomplishes its educational purpose, it will not have been in vain.

One would probably be safe in saying that there is no respect in which greater misunderstanding prevails than in one nation's conception of another. We all tend to believe that the sun rises and sets on us alone, and that other people, because to a degree different from us, must therefore be inferior. Probably Canadians sin less in this respect than do certain larger and more highly-developed nations. We are only now beginning to develop a national consciousness, and have scarcely yet learned how to brag. What particular variety of national conceit we shall in time match with the Englishman's quiet self-satisfaction, the American's blatant assurance, the Frenchman's easily-wounded vanity and the German's over-weening arrogance, still remains to be seen. Perhaps we shall flee the plague. At the present time many of us entertain a mild distrust for foreigners and a slight feeling of condescension for the Englishman, who is even regarded

in some quarters as a sort of undeveloped Canadian. The present writer's short experience abroad goes far towards convincing him that most popular prejudices of this sort are wrong. We judge the natives of another country chiefly by any eccentric person who may come from its shores, concluding that because he happens to be different from us, he must be typical of his own people. Sometimes we get our false ideas from novels in which the writer has attempted to portray foreign character by means of an exaggerated type. Our idea of the stout, red-faced, beef-eating Englishman may have originated from *Punch's* cartoons of John Bull. The badly-battered theory of the unmixed origin of the English—the "Anglo-Saxon myth" as it is now called—may account for our idea of the "typical Englishman" as always having fair hair. But where we acquired the notion that the Englishman is stiff and inclined to be arrogant, remains a mystery.

To the visitor told by his text-books that the English are all of Teutonic origin it comes as a surprise to find a large proportion of them with rather dark hair, and more resembling in racial type the people of Northern France than those of Germany. One is safe in saying that the Celtic or Mediterranean strain is now the dominant one in Great Britain, and that with each successive generation comes a weakening of the Teutonic element. Perhaps it is owing to this fact that the English are developing a charm of manner and ease of bearing comparable to that of their cousins across the Channel. Unaffected politeness, at times amounting to a genial cordiality, is generously shown to the stranger. The average Englishman is neither unapproachable nor one whose acquaintance it is abnormally difficult to make. It is the easiest thing in the world to engage him in conversation in the compartment of a train. In all probability *he* will engage *you*, but there will be a total absence of the cheap and easy familiarity that might elsewhere characterize such an act. This general urbanity of the people, one might add, is manifesting itself also in the contemporary literature, as anyone who has read books by such writers as Sir A. Quiller-Couch and Mr. E. V. Lucas cannot have failed to observe.

But, after all, it is *character* that still remains the Englishman's great quality. He is innately conservative, and believes in holding fast to that which is good. His old standards of education and the traditional respect for authority are still maintained. Compulsory Greek may have gone by the board, but the love of the things of the mind for their own sake persists. The great schools and universities, with their immemorial traditions of learning, still mould the lives of the more favoured youth and instil into

them the highest ideals of life and of learning. The serious-minded youth breathes something in the very atmosphere of these places that is not to be found anywhere else. This power of tradition at its very best is revealed in such institutions as Oxford and Cambridge; and yet everywhere there is perfect freedom.

But there is another side of the medal. Poverty and unemployment are appallingly prevalent in England. Every day one may see the most heart-rending sights in the streets of London—men begging in every conceivable way for a bare, miserable existence, men who fought in the war and risked their lives. The war has been a fearful blow to England, and her disordered industries are staggering—none knows whither. Meanwhile, one notes disquieting signs of revolution, and fears that the future of the Mother Country may not be what her friends might wish.

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Immediately upon landing at any French Channel port, one is conscious of being already in touch with a different civilization. The uniforms of the officials, the language heard on every side, the very appearance of the buildings, all point to a difference of nationality and of culture. Travelling along on the *rapide* one is still more impressed by the contrast between the French country and the English rural districts. Here there is a certain bareness and monotony, from which the English fields are saved by their trim hedges and well-spaced groves of trees. Then, too, the north-east departments of France are monotonously flat. One field stretches into another with little relief to the eye. Such trees as there are—they are generally Lombardy poplars, next to the cypress the most mournful of all trees—are grown in straight, uniform rows along the highways. The cottages and the towns seen here and there are, as a rule, much less picturesque than those of England.

To be just, however, one must add that France contains a greater variety of scenery than does any other country in Europe, with the possible exception of Italy. If the north is flat, and uninteresting, the south and east are relieved by the Pyrenees, the Alps, the Vosges and the Cevennes. It is matter for surprise to learn that Mont Blanc, the highest mountain in Europe, is in France, and that the scenery in its neighbourhood is comparable to the best in Switzerland. Different again is the type of country in the extreme south. Here, in the lower valley of the Rhône, basking in the rays of a warm sun, is an exotic land of vineyards and cypress groves, olive orchards and limestone hills. Provence,

the seat of an advanced civilization from early Roman times, has felt but slightly the disastrous and violent changes that have elsewhere wrought such havoc from time to time. Roman ruins in better preservation than most of those at Rome are still to be seen at Nîmes and Arles, and the whole country is dotted with castles, mediaeval fortresses and picturesque towns of hoary age. From the point of view of climate and scenery, there are few regions in the entire world more favoured than the strip of coast in the south-east known as the Riviera or the Côte d'Azur. This earthly paradise, enjoying a climate of perpetual spring, is deservedly famous and has become a recreation ground for all Europe.

In one sense Paris may be regarded as highly typical of France, in another it may not. As the centre not only of government but of the national commerce, society, education, art, science and literature, Paris is the heart of France as no other modern capital is the heart of its country. Here the whole of the intellectual and artistic activities of the Republic come to a focus. Hither come the favoured youth of the land to be educated, and here do they remain, if possible, to make their mark in the world. But there is reason to believe that socially and morally Paris is not a good index of France. The freedom—one might say licence—of life as lived in certain circles in Paris has too much of a cosmopolitan tinge, is too much a result of special conditions, to be truly representative of the country as a whole. To acknowledge the reverse would be to libel the industrious and puritanical bourgeoisie who constitute the bulk of the inhabitants of the provinces—that splendid stock to whom France owes her tremendous vitality and her power of recovery from even the most crushing disasters.

But typical or not typical of France, Paris is a magnificent city which soon casts its spell over the stranger. The first impression received is one of harmony and orderliness. The broad, well-paved streets and boulevards, faced by uniform blocks of whitish stone buildings, bespeak a high achievement in the art of city planning. At times there is the barest suggestion of monotony. One could wish for an occasional break in those long rows of eight-storey apartment houses and shops, for the appearance of a building designed on different lines or constructed of different material. But if one takes the trouble to escape from the more modern thoroughfares, one will soon find many monuments of times gone by. Despite its uniform appearance, Paris enshrines within itself an unusually large number of splendid buildings of the earlier periods. In Romanesque architecture there is the Basilica of St. Denis—not strictly speaking within the city limits,

but within reach by tramway—and also St. Germain des Prés, one of the oldest churches in France. Two consummate examples of Gothic architecture are familiar by name to everybody—the Cathedral of Notre Dame and the Sainte Chapelle—but these are merely the most conspicuous of a large number that might be mentioned. Newer styles of architecture such as the Renaissance are nobly represented by the Louvre, Les Invalides, and the Hôtel de Ville; recent types by the Grand Palais, Trocadéro, and the Eiffel Tower.

On every hand one sees evidences of the Parisian's concern for the beauty of his city. Especially since the time of the Second Empire, he has spared no expense to increase its attractiveness and beauty. As someone has said, England has expanded beyond the seas, and can now boast such possessions as Canada and India, while France has spent much more of her time and energy within her borders, and can point with pride to the Avenue des Champs Elysées and the Place de la Concorde. The statuary that adorns the streets in Paris bears testimony to good taste and the sense of appropriateness. Not all of the examples are beautiful, but a large proportion are well-designed and at least not ugly. A pleasing custom in vogue is that of naming streets after literary or artistic celebrities, or great characters and events in the history of the country. Thus every name is fraught with significance to the Parisian, and the glories of his country are constantly kept before his mind.

In a sense, Paris may be said to be the most important city in the western world. As capital of one of the most progressive nations, conveniently reached by occidental peoples and so the meeting-place of all kinds and conditions of men, Paris is the clearing-house of ideas, fashions and artistic ideals, just as London is the clearing-house of the financial world. French primacy in art has made its capital the Mecca of artists for generations. There is little doubt that Paris has also assumed a similar position in the musical world. It is by no means to be despised in science and philosophy, as such names as Le Bon and Bergson testify, and its influence in these branches of knowledge is considerable. Last but not least, French literature, centring in Paris, preserves not unworthily the tradition of the greatest of modern literatures, that of England alone excepted.

Civilization owes much to the French people, and will doubtless continue to derive much from them in the future. If there is one quality which distinguishes them as a race, it is, in the mind of the present writer, that of *raffinement*—intellectual, emotional

and artistic refinement. The defect of this virtue is sometimes seen in an over-subtlety and a lack of robust vigour. Their poetry, painting and music not infrequently lose themselves in a complexity of technique, and pessimism is too often the reward of those whose thought-processes are over-subtle or too highly evolved. Yet the charm, the lucidity, and the brilliancy of French art and letters are so compelling that one can well tolerate their faults. Amazing also is their versatility. It might be said of the French, as it has been said of a British poet, that they have touched nothing which they have not adorned.

The people themselves are charming. French politeness is, of course, a byword, but unhappily the idea has gone abroad that it is not genuine. Such experience as he has had leads the present writer to dissent radically from this view. French politeness spring from a natural warmth and fineness of nature, and when completely disinterested, as one often finds it in the provinces, is a trait very engaging indeed. Another regrettable misconception still more widespread in English-speaking countries is that the French are by nature frivolous. Anyone so privileged as to come in contact with their domestic life (few foreigners have, by the way, as the average Frenchman is *mefiant* of strangers) soon parts company with this error. The bulk of both the men and the women work from morning till night, and know what it is to grapple with the problems of existence. The women in particular are characterized by the most practical spirit. It is a curious and somewhat ironical fact that they have employed the phrase *betes d'oiseau* to characterize the fragile fair of a certain other nation. A further error, for the spreading of which many of their own novelists must bear the blame, is that the French are reckless of the sanctities of the home. There are, of course, all kinds of people in France, just as there are all kinds in England and America, but of this one can be certain, that no finer family life exists in the world than that of the French middle class. Doubtless people will continue to gibe at the French as "decadent." The impress of German habits of thought so long prevalent unchecked is still upon us. The word, too, has long been a convenient and indiscriminate term of abuse, bandied by one nation at another and bandied as vigorously back again. But there is certainly as much warrant for supposing England, Germany or the United States to be decadent as for supposing France to be so, and all modern nations have at one time or another come under the charge.

The art of living, of making the most of the means available, whether material, aesthetic or intellectual, is pre-eminently under-

stood by the French. With a practical spirit are combined a quick intelligence and a sure taste for what is appropriate and fitting. They are withal a well-equilibrated race, despite their reputation for excitability. A careful balance is preserved between mental and physical activity, between work and recreation. The Frenchman knows how to leave his business cares behind him at the end of the day, and can amuse himself sanely, if only by chatting with his friends in a café. Conversation is still an art in France, and pride is taken in the correct use of the native language. The "man in the street" is, as often as not, interested in the fine arts, and able to expound with patriotic pride the merits of the national literature and art to the ignorant foreigner. In fact the average of intelligence is unusually high, and in Paris one is impressed by the comparative absence of the poverty and squalor that abound in most great cities.

In no way have the French shown their vitality and recuperative powers to better advantage than in their quick recovery from the war. The wheels of industry are turning in France to-day. Everybody is at work, and the nation is rapidly getting back to its normal condition of prosperity. Less heavily industrialized than Great Britain, and more completely self-supporting than the majority of nations, she has perhaps had fewer problems to solve. Nevertheless she did not issue from the war scatheless, and her present happy condition bears striking testimony to the perpetual vigour and resourcefulness of her people.

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To the south of the Alps, enclosed as it were by a circular wall of mountain chains, lies a long narrow peninsula of peculiar shape. Protected by its natural ramparts from too frequent invasion by savage tribes, and enjoying a much sunnier climate than the countries to the north, Italy long ago developed a type of civilization far in advance of any previously known in Northern Europe. Before the Roman came the Greek, and before either, flourished the Etruscan. Of this last-named race we know very little, but the remains of their civilization indicate a high degree of culture indeed for such an early period.

After the Etruscan and Greek had had their day, Rome enjoyed hers, and imposed her sway over the whole of the western world. Under her beneficent if despotic rule, civilization and prosperity waxed resplendent for several centuries. After the ruin of the ancient world by the barbarians, Rome transmuted her temporal authority into a spiritual one, and converted to Christianity those

same barbaric hordes that had wrought her material downfall. No longer ruler of their bodies, she aspired to be the ruler of their souls, and to her be the praise that the last embers of civilization and culture were not utterly extinguished during the Dark Ages.

It is to Italy likewise—if scarcely to Rome—that we owe the Renaissance. The cities of northern and central Italy, towards the end of the Middle Ages grown prosperous and wealthy, became veritable hotbeds of intellectual and artistic activity. Genius so rare at other times teemed at this period. Only at Athens during the Age of Pericles were so many men of undoubted genius born as saw the light in Florence during the fifteenth century. It is altogether beyond doubt that we owe our modern civilization in great part to the activity of these men, who, endowed with extraordinary powers, turned the mental, moral and artistic world upside down within the narrow space of a few generations.

It is not surprising, then, that the English-speaking visitor comes to Italy to study and admire the past rather than the present. One's first impression of an Italian city—particularly if it be Genoa or Florence—is of narrow streets, with ancient grimy buildings, and primitive habits of life. But once the fresh up-to-dateness of certain of the French and Swiss cities fades from the mind, the charm of Italy will surely force its way home. Here we have the past, crystallized as it were, with little alteration by modern conditions. Florence, much as it was in the times of the Medici, Venice with her old palaces and churches practically unimpaired, Rome the epitome of two thousand five hundred years of development, decline and re-development, Siena and San Gimignano, both mediaeval towns that are veritable museums of the past—such cities as these are not to be found anywhere in northern Europe. It has been said with a good measure of truth that, from the artistic point of view, every day that the tourist spends outside of Italy is a day wasted.

Rome, the capital of a united Italy, appeals to the average visitor far less for its present distinction than for the history of its past. There is a Classical Rome, a Christian Rome, and a Mediaeval and a Renaissance as well as a Modern Rome, and of these the last-named is much the least interesting. Conscientious tourists find a month or two insufficient to explore the Eternal City, and archaeologists spend the entire period of their lives delving among the ruins. Beautifully situated on the seven hills, in the midst of the immortally green Campagna, Rome, like the phoenix, rises for ever from its ashes. The forum and the Palatine, the Coliseum and the ruin-encumbered Via Appia, remind one poignantly of the

grandeur that was classic Rome. The catacombs and the early basilicas bring before one's eyes the faith and practices of the early Church. The castle of St. Angelo and the Aurelian Wall remind the beholder of barbarian invasion and siege, while the glories of Renaissance art are trumpeted forth by the *palazzi* of the nobility, the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel, and by Raphael's *stanze* in the Vatican. Intermingled inextricably with these remnants of all ages is modern Rome, neat, well-constructed, and not unworthy to serve as the capital of an intelligent and active people.

Naples, with a history almost as old as that of Rome, is far less beautiful as a city, and rather shocks the visitor by its squalor. It contains comparatively little of historic interest, but is justly famous for its situation. It is perhaps not necessary to die after having seen the bay of Naples, but one must admit the scenery here to be almost incomparable. The semicircular bay with its soft blue water, the graceful lines of Vesuvius surmounted by a perpetual column of smoke, the Isle of Capri guarding the bay and Sorrento glittering in the distance, make a panorama of most rare charm. Herculaneum and Pompeii beckon from afar. In their silent streets and roofless houses one feels poignantly the transiency of life and the perpetual power of death and decay.

Less attractive for its natural scenery than Naples, but more interesting from other points of view, is Tuscany—that extensive region in Northern Italy to which we owe so much of our heritage of art and literature. The country is flat or undulating, but is relieved from monotony and rendered beautiful by the hand of man. Knoll-like hills covered by vineyards and olive orchards are crowned with picturesque stone cottages almost hidden by the sombre cypress, while the roads are flanked by the umbrella pine and the exotic cedar of Lebanon. The cities, Florence, Pisa and Siena, speak to us not of classical but of mediaeval and Renaissance times. Florence, still redolent of Dante and the Medici, contains within the narrow radius of half a mile from its Duomo a greater accumulation of art than is to be found within a similar compass anywhere else in the world. Raphael, Michaelangelo, Andrea del Sarto, Giotto, Ghiberti, Brunelleschi and Donatello are but the most distinguished of those who lived and wrought in this amazing city. Pisa, no longer great in size or power, still boasts its entrancing cathedral and leaning tower with their memories of Galileo. Siena bequeaths its resplendent Gothic architecture and its unique school of painting to posterity. Those who know the modern inhabitants of Tuscany affirm them to be pre-eminent

among present-day Italians for their remarkable intelligence and sensibility. Venice is still the Queen of the Adriatic, and retains to a remarkable degree her ancient characteristics. Motor boats have not caused the disappearance of the gondola; St. Mark's Square and its incomparable buildings remain as they were in the times of the Doges. In fact, this city is almost too good to be true. But it is only too true that much of the attractiveness vanishes in rainy weather, as many tourists have good reason to know.

The mere mention of Milan, a place which—aside from its stupendous cathedral and its art galleries—is important chiefly as being the one great commercial city of Italy, opens the way for a few remarks on modern Italy and its inhabitants. The Italians, ancient as is their history, are not decadent or in decline. A powerful revulsion has set in within the last century, and Italy is now a progressive and active nation. The people share some characteristics with the French, but are less refined and subtle. They are, however, more simple-hearted, and are perhaps less spoiled by civilization. Still backward industrially, and clinging to ancient habits of life, they nevertheless produce strong men of genius worthy to take their places with the great figures of the past. Garibaldi, Mazzini and Carducci are now gathered to their fathers. But Italy has a great living poet and patriot in d'Annunzio, and a distinguished dramatist in Pirandello. Those who have heard the musical compositions of Don Lorenzo Perosi, director of the Sistine Chapel, will readily agree that modern Italian religious music has in him an interpreter of remarkable genius. Giacomo Puccini, recently dead, kept his country still to the foreground in the field of operatic music. Last but not least, the man who rules over Italy as an absolute and undisputed dictator may be mentioned as undoubtedly a political genius, however one may regard the methods and principles by which he has reached his goal.

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What impresses the visitor to Europe above everything else is the enormous significance of a country's past history and achievements. More and more one is forced to the conclusion that man cannot live in the present alone. Ours is an age marked by great material development, but one that is relatively sterile in artistic and spiritual activity. Those who insist on living only in the present, regardless of the past, divorce themselves from the majority of things that make life worth living, and narrow their lives down to a very small compass indeed. Yet it is only too apparent that many on our own continent have failed to realize this truth.

Geographical separation and an over-weening confidence in the all-sufficiency of modern "progress" have led to a widespread indifference to the higher values of life—an indifference from which the European is saved by the weight of unbroken tradition and by the visible presence of the great works of the past. The cultural Bolshevism of the American youth, the ideal of happiness which culminates in the possession of an automobile, in listening to "jazz" over the radio and attending the "movies", might be remedied by an acquaintance, though only at second hand, with European culture. The inhabitants of North America have every reason to be proud of their material and social advancement beyond the European nations, but it behooves them to be humble and patient students of Old-World civilization. Otherwise it is not difficult to foresee a period black indeed for the humanities and the arts—already struggling with difficulty against a rampant materialism.