

Literature, &c.

THE AMERICAN MAGAZINES.

From Sartain's Magazine.

THE OLD AND THE NEW, FACE TO FACE.

A THUMB-NAIL SKETCH.

By the Rev. Edward E. Hale.

In a Roman audience-chamber, the old civilization and the new civilization brought out, at the very birth of the new—their chosen champions.

In that little scene, as in one of Rembrandt's thumb-nail studies for a great picture, the lights and shades are as distinct as they will ever be in the largest scene of history. The champions were perfect representations of parties. And any man, with the soul of a man, looking on, could have prophesied the issue of the great battle, from the issue of that contest.

The old civilization of the Roman Empire, just at that time, had reached a point, which, in all those outward forms which strike the eye, would regard our times as mean indeed. It had palaces of marble, where even modern kings would build of brick, with a marble front to catch the eye; it counted its armies by thousands where we count ours by hundreds; it surmounted long colonnades with its exquisite statues, for which modern labor digs deep in ruined cities, because it cannot equal them from its own genius; it had roads which are almost eternal, and which, for their purposes show a luxury of wealth and labor, that our boasted locomotion cannot rival. These are its works of a larger scale. And if you enter the palaces, you find pictures of matchless worth; rich dresses, which modern looms cannot rival; and sumptuous furniture, at which modern times can only wonder. The outside of the ancient civilization is unequalled by the outside of ours, and for centuries will be unequalled by it. We have not surpassed it there. And we see how it attained this distinction, such as it was. It came by the constant concentration of power. Power in few hands is the secret of its display and glory. And thus that form of civilization attained its very climax in the moment of the greatest unity of the Roman Empire. When the Empire nestled into rest after the convulsions in which it was born; when a generation had passed away of those who had been Roman citizens; when a generation arose, which, excepting one man, the emperor, was a nation of Roman subjects, then the Empire was at its height of power; its centralization was complete; the system of its civilization was at the zenith of its success.

At that moment it was, that there dawned at Rome the first gray morning light of the new civilization.

At that moment it was, that that short scene, in that one chamber, contrasted the two, as clearly as they can be contrasted even in long centuries.

There is one man, the emperor, who is a precise type, an exact representative of the old. That man is brought face to face with another, who is a precise type, an exact representative of the new.

Only look at them as they stand there! The man who best illustrates the old civilization owes it the most careful nurture. From his childhood he has been its petted darling. Its principle is concentrated under one head. He is that head. When he is a child, men knew he will be emperor of the world. The wise men of the world teach him; the poets of the world flatter him; the princes of the world bow to him. He is trained in all elegant accomplishments, he is led forward through a graceful, luxurious society. His bearing is that of an emperor, his face is the face of fine physical beauty. Imagine for yourself the sensual countenance of a young Bacchus, beautiful as Milton's devils; imagine him clad in splendor, before which even English luxury is mean. Arrayed in jewels, to which even Eastern pomp is tinsel. Imagine an expression of tired hate,—of low brutal lust—hanging on those exquisite licentious features, and you have before you the type of Roman civilization. It is the boy just budding into manhood, whom later times will name as the lowest embodiment of meanness and cruelty. You are looking upon Nero.

Not only is this man an exact type of the ancient civilization—its central power—its outside beauty—but the precise time of this our sketch, is the exact climax of the moral results of the ancient civilization. We are to look at Nero just when he has returned to Rome from a southern journey. That journey had one object, which succeeded. To his after life it gives one memory which never dies. He has travelled to his beautiful country palace—that he might kill his mother.

We can picture to ourselves Agrippina, by knowing that she was Nero's mother—and our picture will not fail in one feature. She has all the beauty of sense—all the attraction of passion. Indeed, she is the empress of Rome, because she is the queen of beauty and of lust. She is the most beautiful among the beautiful of Rome; but what is that beauty of feature in a state, of whose matrons not one is virtuous—of whose daughters not one is chaste? It is the beauty of sense alone—fit adornment of that external grandeur—of that old society.

In the infancy of her son, this beautiful Agrippina consulted a troop of fortune-tellers,

as to his fate; and they told her he would live to be emperor of Rome, and to kill his mother. With all the ecstasy of a mother's pride, fused so strangely with all the excess of an ambitious woman's love of power, she cried in answer:

'He may kill me, if he only but rules Rome.'

She spoke her own fate in these words. Here is the account of it by Tacitus:—Nero had made all the preparations—had arranged a barge that, of a sudden, its deck might fall heavily on those in the cabin, and crush them in an instant. He meant thus to give to the murder which he planned the aspect of an accident. To this fatal vessel he led Agrippina. He talked with her affectionately and gravely on the way; and when they parted at the lake side, with his old boyish familiarity he pressed her closely to his heart—either to conceal his purpose, or because the last sight of a mother on the eve of death touched even his cruel nature;—and then bade her farewell.

Just at the point upon the lake where he had directed, as the empress sat in her cabin talking with her attendants, the treacherous deck was let fall upon them all. But the plot failed. She saw death at her feet one of her favorites—crushed by the sudden blow. But she has escaped it. She saw that death awaited them all upon the vessel. The men around sprang forward, ready to do their master's bidding in a less clumsy and more certain way. But the Empress, with one of her attendants sprang from the treacherous vessel into the less treacherous waves; and this faithful friend of hers, with a woman's wit and woman's devotion, drew on her own head the blows and stabs of the murderers above by crying, as if drowning—'Save me—I am Nero's mother.' Uttering these words of self devotion, she was killed by the murderers above, while the Empress in safer silence, buoyed up by the fragments of the wreck, floated to the shore.

Nero had failed in this secret crime, and yet he knew that he could not stop here. And the next day after his mother's deliverance, he sent a soldier to her palace with a guard; and there, where she was deserted even by her last attendants, without pretence or secrecy, they put to death the daughter and the mother of a Cæsar. And Nero only waits to look with a laugh, upon the beauty of the corpse, before he returns to resume his Government of Rome.

That moment was the culminating moment of the ancient civilization. It is complete in its centralizing power. It is complete in its crime. Beautiful as Eden to the eye—with luxury—with comfort—with easy indulgence to all. But dust and ashes lie beneath the surface. It is corrupted at the head. It is corrupted at the heart. There is nothing firm.

This is the moment which I take for our little picture. At this very moment there is announced the first germ of the new civilization. In the very midst of this falsehood, there sounds one voice of truth. In the very arms of this giant there plays the baby boy who is to cleave him to the ground.

This Nero slowly returns to the city. He meets the congratulations of a Senate, which thank him and the gods that he has murdered his own mother. With the agony of an undying conscience torturing him, he strives to avert care by amusement. He hopes to turn the mob from despising him by the grandeur of their public entertainments. He enlarges for them the circus. He calls unnumbered beasts to be baited and killed for their enjoyment. The finest actors rant, the sweetest musicians sing, that Nero may forget his mother, and that his people may forget him.

At that period, the statesmen who direct the machinery of affairs, inform him that his personal attention is required, one morning, for a state trial, to be argued before the emperor in person.

Must the emperor be there? May he not waste the hours in the blandishments of lying courtiers, or the bonied falsehoods of a mistress? If he chooses thus to postpone the audience;—be it so; Seneca, Burrus and his other counsellors will obey. But the time will come when the worn out boy will be pleased, some morning, with the almost forgotten majesty of state. The time comes one day. Worn out by the dissipation of the week, fretted by some blunder of his flatterers, he sends for his wiser counsellors, and bids them lead him to the audience chamber, where he will attend to the cases which need an emperor's decision. It is at that moment that we are to look upon him.

He sits there, upon that unequalled throne, his face sickly and pale with boyish debauchery; his young forehead worn with the premature sensual wrinkles of lust; and his eyes bloodshot with last night's intemperance. He sits there, the Emperor-boy, vainly trying to excite himself, and forget her, in the blazonry of that pomp, and bids them call in the prisoner.

A soldier enters, at whose side the prisoner has been chained for years. The soldier is a tried veteran of the Pictorian cohorts. He was selected, that, from him, this prisoner could not escape. And, for that purpose they have been inseparably bound. But, as he leads that other through the hall, he looks at him with a regard and earnestness, which say he is no criminal to him. Long since, the criminal has been the guardian of his keeper. Long since the keeper has cared for the prisoner, with all the ardor of a new-found son's affection.

They lead that grey-haired captive forward and with his eagle eye he glances keenly around the hall. That flashing eye has, ere

now, bade monarchs quail; and those thin lips have uttered words which shall make the world ring, till the last moment of the world shall come. The stately eastern captive moves unawed through the assembly, till he makes a subject's salutation to the Emperor-judge, who is to hear him. And when, then, the grey-haired sage kneels before the sensual boy—you see the prophet of the new civilization kneel before the monarch of the old. You see Paul make a subject's formal reverence to Nero.

Let me do justice to the court which is to try him. In that judgement hall, there are not only the pomp of Rome, and its crime; but we have also the best of its wisdom. By the dissolute boy, Nero, there stands the prime minister, Seneca, the chief of the philosophers of his time; Seneca the Saint, cry the christians of the next century. We will own him to be Seneca the Wise; Seneca, almost, the Good. To this sage had been given the education of the boy who was to rule the world. This sage had introduced him into power; had restrained his madness when he could; and, with his colleague, had conducted the general administration of the empire with the greatest honor, while the boy was wearing out his life with debauchery in the palace.

Seneca dared say more to Nero, to venture more with him, than did any other man. For the young tiger was afraid of his old master long after he had tasted blood. Yet Seneca's system was a cowardly system. It was the best of Roman morality and Greek philosophy; and still it was mean. His daring was the bravest of the men of the old civilization. He is the type of their excellences, as Nero the model of their power and their adornments. And yet all that Seneca's daring could venture, was to seduce the baby-tyrant into the least injurious of tyrannies. From the plunder of a Province he would divert him by the carnage of the circus. From the murder of a senator he would lure him by some new lust at home. From the ruin of the empire he could seduce him, by diverting him with the ruin of a noble family, and Seneca did this with the best of motives. He said he used all the power in his hands, and he thought he did. He was one of those men of whom all times have their share. The bravest of his time, he satisfied himself with alluring the beardless Emperor, by petty crimes, from public wrong; he could flatter him to the expediency, he dared not order him to the right.

But Seneca knew what was right. Seneca also had a well-trained conscience, which told him of right and of wrong. Seneca's brother, Gallio, had saved Paul's life, when a Jewish mob would have dragged him to pieces at Corinth; and the legend is that Seneca and Paul had corresponded with each other, before they stood together in Nero's presence, the one as counsellor, the other as the criminal.

When Paul rose from that formal salutation—when the apostle of the new civilization spoke to the tottering monarch of the old; if there had been one man in that assemblage could he have failed to see that that was a turning point in the world's history? Before him, in that little hall, in that little hour, was passing the scene which for centuries would be acted out upon the larger stage. Faith on the one side, before expediency and cruelty on the other. Paul before Seneca and Nero! He was ready to address Nero, with the eloquence and vehemence which for years had been demanding utterance. He stood at length before the baby Cæsar to whose tribunal he had appealed from the Provincial court of a doubting Festus and a trembling Agrippa. And who shall ask what words the vigorous Christian spoke to the dastard boy! Who, that knows the eloquence which rung out on the ears of astonished stoics at Athens; which commanded the incense and the hecatombs of wandering peasants in Asia; which stilled the gabbling clamor of a wild mob at Jerusalem—who will doubt the tone in which Paul spoke to Nero.

The boy quailed for the moment before the man. The gilded dotard shrank back from the home truths of the new, young, vigorous faith;—the ruler of a hundred legions was nothing before the God-commissioned prisoner.

No; though at this audience all men forsook Paul, as he tells us; though not one of the timid converts were there, but the soldier chained at his side, still he triumphed over Nero and Nero's minister.

From that audience hall those three men retire. The boy, grown old in lust, goes thence to be an hour alone, to ponder for an hour on this God, this resurrection, and this truth, of which the Jew, in such uncourtly phrase, has haranged him. To be alone, until the spectre of a dying mother rises again to haunt him, to persecute him and drive him forth to his followers and feasters, where he will try to forget Paul and the Saviour and God; where he would be glad to banish them for ever. He does not banish them for ever! Henceforward, whenever that spectre of a mother comes before him, it must re-echo the words of God and eternity which Paul has spoken. Whenever the chained and bleeding captive of the arena bends suppliant before him, there must return the memory of the only captive who was never suppliant before him, and his words of sturdy power.

And Seneca? Seneca goes home with the mortified feelings of a great man, who has detected his own meanness. We all know the feeling; for all God's children might be great; and it is with miserable mortification that we detect ourselves in one or another pettiness. Seneca goes home to say, 'This wild

Easterner has rebuked the Emperor, as I have so often wanted to rebuke him. He stood there, as I have wanted to stand—a man before a brute. He said what I have thought and have been afraid to say. Downright, straightforward, he told the Emperor truths, as to Rome, as to man, and as to his vices, which I have longed to tell him. He has done what I am afraid to do. He has dared this; which I have dallied with, and left undone. What is the mystery of his power?'

Seneca did not know. Nero did not know. The 'Eastern mystery' was in presence before them, and they knew it not! What was the mystery of Paul's power?

Paul leaves them with the triumph of a man who has accomplished the hope of long years. Those solemn words of his, 'After that I must also see Rome,' express the longing of years, whose object now, in part, at least, is gratified. He must see Rome! It is God's mission to him that he see Rome and its Emperor. Paul has seen with the spirit's eye what we have seen since in history—that he is to be the living link, by which the electric fire of life should pass the first from religious Asia, to quicken this dead, brutish Europe. He knows that he is God's messenger to bear this mystery of Life Eternal from the one lamp to the other, and to unfold it there. And to day has made real, in fact, this, his inward confidence. To-day has put the seal of fact on that vision of his, years since, when he first left his Asiatic home. A prisoner in chains, still he has, to day, seen the accomplishment of the vows, hopes and resolutions of that field of Troy, most truly famous from the night he spent there. There was another of these hours when God brings into one spot, the acts which shall be the argument of centuries of history. Paul had come down there in his long Asiatic journeys—Eastern in his lineage, Eastern in his temperament, Eastern in his outward life and Eastern in his faith—so that narrow Hellespont, which for long years has separated East from West—tore madly up the chains which would unite them—overwhelmed even love when it sought to intermarry them, and left their cliffs frowning eternal hate from shore to shore. Paul stood upon the Asian shore and looked across upon the Western. There were Macedonia and the hills of Greece;—Troas and the ruins of Ilium. The names speak war. The blue Hellespont has no voice but separation, except to Paul. But to Paul—sleeping, it might be, on the Tomb of Achilles, that night the 'man of Macedonia' appears, and bids him come over to revenge Asia—to pay back the debt of Troy. 'Come over and help us.' Give us life; for we gave you death. Give us help; for we gave you ruin. Paul was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. The Christian Alexander, he crosses to Macedonia, with the words of peace instead of war;—the Christian shepherd of the people, he carries to Greece, from Troy, the tidings of salvation instead of carnage—of charity instead of license. And he knows that to Europe it is the beginning of her new civilization: it is the dawn of her new warfare; of her new poetry; of her reign of heroes who are immortal.

That faith of his—now years old, has this day received its crowning victory. This day when he has faced Nero and Seneca together, may well stand in his mind, as undoing centuries of bloodshed and of license.

And in this effect, and in that spiritual strength which had nerved him in planning it and carrying it through, was the 'Asian Mystery.' Ask what was the secret of Paul's power, as he bearded the baby Emperor, and abashed the baby philosopher? What did he give the praise to, as he left that scene?—What was the principle in action there, but faith in the new life—faith in the God who gave it. We do not wonder, as Seneca wondered, that such a man as Paul dared say any thing to such a boy as Nero! The absolute courage of the new faith was the motive power which forced it upon the world. Here were the sternest of morals driven forward with the most ultra bravery.

Perfect faith gave perfect courage to the first witnesses. And there was the 'mystery' of their victories.

And so in this case, when after a while Seneca reminded Nero of his captive, poor Nero did not dare but meet him again. Yet, when he met him again in that same judgement-hall, he did not dare hear him long—and we may be sure that there were but few words, before, with such affectation of dignity as he could summon, he bade them set the prisoner free.

Paul free! The old had faced the new.—Each had named its champion. And the new conquers.

From Harper's Magazine.

THE WIDOW OF COLOGNE.

In the year 1641, there lived in a narrow, obscure street of Cologne a poor woman named Marie Marianni. With an old female servant for her sole companion, she inhabited a small, tumble down, two-storied house, which had but two windows in front. Nothing could well be more miserable than the furniture of this dark dwelling. Two worm-eaten four-post bedsteads, a large deal-table, two rickety tables, three or four old wooden chairs, and a few rusty kitchen utensils, formed the whole of its domestic inventory.

Marie Marianni, despite of the wrinkles which nearly seventy years had left on her face, still preserved the trace of former beauty. There was a grace in her appearance, and a dignity in her manner, which prepossessed strangers in her favor whenever they happened to meet her; but this was rarely. Living in the strictest retirement