

RISE AND FALL OF CIVILIZATIONS

Suggested by a course on this topic given by Mr. A. L. Kleigman  
1954

What makes a nation civilized?  
The answer's hard to find,  
For first of all, this word you see,  
Has got to be defined.

When savages are civilized  
How different must they be  
From ancestors who lived in caves,  
Or sometimes in a tree?

So many are the views expressed,  
With reasons for the same,  
It seems worth while to make a list  
Of what some writers claim.

Take Winwood Reade, who seems to think  
That pain and war must act  
To make all men inventive,  
And give them what they lack:

He thought the Malthus Theory right,  
And Darwinism, too;  
When animals discarded tails  
Then into men they grew.

But once they formed communities,  
A man like Bagehot said,  
"A cake of customs forms a crust,  
Preventing growth," we read.

Clyde Bell came back with, "Not at all,  
That upper crust is right;  
Most men are only fit to toil,  
For just the few are bright."

The more you study Toynbee's works,  
His erudition mounts,  
Confusing his deductions  
With the history he recounts.

He tells you of the impasse  
Between the Ying and Yang --  
When men forgot religion,  
Their own deathknell they rang.

Then Oswald Spengler comes along  
And tells about the West;  
"It's bound to be a wreck," he says,  
"And crumble like the rest."

For if one can't discriminate  
Between what culture is,  
And what is meant by civilized,  
No progress will be his.

The rise of cities he deplored,  
The country he thought best,  
For there each man is thrifty,  
And honest toil is blest.

He also said that you are born  
With "a priori" will --  
The fatalism in your blood  
Works on for good or ill.

But "Material expansion,"  
Says Mr. Shepard Clough,  
"Gives men a chance for greatness  
When they have food enough."

Then Williams analyzes Marx,  
His socialism's wrong,  
For it isn't scientific,  
And it will not work for long.

Said George, who knew philosophy,  
And studied science, too,  
These must supplement each other,  
If each of them is true.

To win this goal each man must have  
His birthright to the earth,  
By sharing in the common fund  
That represents its worth.

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And now to Mr. Kleigman,  
Who served us as our guide  
From ancient times to present days,  
We point with thankful pride.

Each one of us has done our part  
To add our little bit,  
But it's really Mr. Kleigman  
Who made the biggest hit.

For he made a skillful chairman,  
His points of order sound,  
So whether nations rise or fall,  
A fine emcee we've found.