

Getting Back To Cases

Meanwhile Catherine labors on the Road to our imaginary destination. She engages William in debates over the obstacles to her prospects. William focuses on this remarkable woman once again, only somewhat distracted by the hypothetical, involving her sister.

“Mr. D., I know we have been over most of this before. I still feel a need to discuss things until they take some final shape.

“We have concurred that some kind of heavy hand must come into play. We are in a position of taking the toy away from the child, mostly because it fritters its time away on nothingness. We wish for it to do something else with its life. We find we must deny the child the happiness it derives from its plaything.

“Should we not be glad that the child is occupied, self-contained, even in a limited way?

“No, because his preoccupation has repercussions for all of us. For all of life.

“We do acknowledge a ‘way of life’. This thing has happened. Our engineers put this package together from the raw materials of the earth. Some ore, some tree sap, and a black goo, all diligently refined into a thing that moved under its own power. It displaced another ‘way of life’ wholly dependent on animals. A form of enhanced locomotion; transportation, however much horseshit ended on the streets he must also walk. On the surface, a remarkable feat. Transportation became a thing in itself, a ‘social complex’, an unnerving scurrying. It became a status thing, a thing that involved sex. An allusion to the femme fatal was freely associated with a thing. The manufacturers baited the hook with alluring enticements wanting everyone to yield his or her wherewithal in order to produce riches. We even heard ‘Jump-start the economy, Buy a Car.’

“Our forefathers fell for it. For us, it was here when we arrived, it was everywhere, ubiquitously. We went along for the ride, literally; no horseshit.

“Before the environmental crisis, the energy crisis, there were voices decrying this thing that had taken over our lives, often on spiritual grounds. In our nation alone; some 50,000 deaths a year through collisions. Noise, our stupid unimaginative insistence upon sidewalks along the roadways, rather than separating people from the noise and the smells. As time wore on transportation became a thing for planned obsolescence, a source of guaranteed wealth for producers.

“Then came the knock and knell of hydrocarbons, greenhouse gasses; and lo!, the diminishment of availability of the black goo.

On The Road To Civilization

“We have seen that this ‘way of life’ has created a stubborn insistence upon individual transportation, mostly kept alive from habit, but also kept alive by the promoters, in industry, and in government (collusion between the two).

“Even sensible solutions to an ever growing problem are denied because the corporate world makes more gold doing it their way, their way doesn’t care about anything more than the wealth that it generates, and the influence that the wealth carries. The bottom line. Industry and corporations call the shots.

“Man, the child, has been left to decide something. He has planned a lot of communities based on his contraption. He mostly refuses to walk, even to use public transportation, very little of which originates or serves suburbia, or to use other means, bicycles, animals.

“Will man rather go the last mile in his contraption before he will do what must be done? As Will intoned, ‘going to the poor house in his automobile’?

“Someone must intervene when common sense is lost in bad habits and promotional schemes intended to perpetuate something that cannot be perpetuated. Lemmings, Sheep!”

“Two choices, Catherine. Let it run its course. Use the Heavy Hand. A third choice does exist, the one we would prefer; that man ‘would get a grip!’

“What is the most likely thing that will happen? Best Guess?”

“That it will run its course. That is, for others.

“For myself, an imperative enters the equation. Plan for a future, a different future.

“Assuming I will live another 50 years; assuming I will not be knocked off in the upcoming upheaval, whether or not I plan for a future, a different set of circumstances will dictate part of that future.

“Can I anticipate any part of it?”

“If I take action NOW, that is, find a place where I can grow things, have a few animals, at least to function on a subsistence level, possibly as part of a cooperative. Get used to working the land with a few basic implements, hopefully using animals, if they can be fed.

“A different future than I had envisioned only a few years ago.

“A survival gambit. I do not believe this is premature. It is that something will be gone; how does one plan for what will be gone. Hopefully the land will not have been totally devastated by the squandering of its soils and nutrients by Agribusiness.

“To think upon it, this thing that will soon be gone, has it not been a run of luck only for some. What has this ‘way of life’ really produced in the way of equality, fairness, and justice, or are these not synonymous with an advanced civilization? Are we fooling ourselves about the

On The Road To Civilization

advance, when we are really in this heap? What has it done to alleviate the true sufferings of man? Of Life? What has it done to our home?

“One might regard physical ‘toil’ as a suffering. If we had more of what is necessary to continue unabated this ‘way of life’, would we act to preserve the environment in any meaningful way? It goes without saying, we would not return to the land. We would persevere in this toyland.

“There are those who believe they will find another source to fuel and perpetuate this toyland life. The objective of consumption must be fulfilled for as long as possible; to coin your phrase ‘don’t think of it as less later, think of it as more now’. Ironically, the Industrial Revolution did little more than make some people very rich, while the rest of humanity went to the poor house as we supported somebody else’s ‘way of life’. What indeed is our ‘way of life’? Are we so insignificant a thing as we seem?

“Frankly, I welcome that which will cause us to ask deeper more meaningful questions; that will force upon us a better life than this ‘way of life’. Scurrying mobility is not a ‘way of life’.

“If I follow the gist of my own thinking, I will not wait. I will act.

“So much of what I have been has been predicated in a status quo that will soon disappear, that will be replaced by something that will be unpredictable. At this point in time, the status quo has become our nemesis. It is not in our interest to uphold it; or wait for it to discover another way of exploiting us in order to remain as our controller.”

“Harsh words from you, my dearest.

“I find I am unable to offer any solutions, other than what you suggest. The good girl scout must be prepared.

“No, you cannot wait.

“It would seem you must lead, as well.

“Just think for a moment, though. How this will complicate and frustrate your other tendencies. I am thinking now of the Africa thing, which, outside of its metropolitan areas, is conducted at a subsistence level; in many cases well below any reasonable standards of a subsistence level.”

“Perhaps that is where I should begin then. Something is already in place.”

“Why not seek out a more developed agrarian society, where subsistence level existence has been going on uninterrupted for centuries, despite all the temptations to abandon it for the lure of some other kind of life.”

“What do you have in mind?”

“If Africa was a healthy place, I suspect that would be a good place to learn basics. However, I suspect it might be better to go almost anywhere else that the pressure of population had not produced an impossible dilemma.

On The Road To Civilization

“We might find sufficient cultures in South America, still in Europe, but in Europe, mostly because of the centuries of dealing with survival in a very overrun place. New Zealand would close its borders.

“The potential still exists in North America, though there are only a very small percentage of people living at a sustainable subsistence level. One cannot pay the taxes at the subsistence level, hence ownership of the land by such a contingent is nil. Yes Cooperatives might function, ‘truck gardening’ (horse and buggy gardening) might assure for a way to defray expenses. There are still some vestiges of share-cropping. The land is not readily available for those who need it the most, who might be willing, if only.

“If I chose to acquire a piece of land in order to practice what I preach, I could still do that, with the help of my family. Then I could do the Wendell Berry, or Bill McGibben thing. My hands would develop calluses, by skin would become weathered, my body would become bowed; all just to survive?”

“Catherine, you may prove something by engaging in such activity. Perhaps that would satisfy you in some magical way. However, I suspect your education would lead you in other directions, those of a social planner, or as a social conscience.”

“I do not discount that possibility. However, my ‘education’ as you put it, cannot claim any special place for itself. If it happens as you imagine, then it happens. The other side of my education has resulted in being made aware of dire things. If I address that awareness on a personal, selfish level, I will be searching for a place in the landscape where it makes sense to pursue a different kind of existence, one that would stand a better chance of assuring my total survival. First things first.

“The second thing would be the second thing. There will be all kinds of people attempting to avoid those who pursue the first; they will make a lot of noise, they may be armed, they will want to control something. They may want to take something away from me, or others; because it is easier to exploit and to steal, than to get with the program. Mr. D., I am saying that my humanity and my education may not be what is needed. We would be living in a revolutionary situation. It would be a good piece of fortune for anyone to escape the forces that would run amok, to find a corner where one can truly subsist in peace. I think of what happened in our own Civil War, or the Civil War in Spain, or what has happened in Africa where the blacks regained preeminence. It seems doubtful. I see bloodshed, perhaps a long period of bloodshed, until some better sense can prevail; when one will no longer be deciding to accept something, but that the something will already be here, the something to which we will all be obliged to adapt in order to survive.

“We might go way back to ‘survival of the fittest’. First things first.

On The Road To Civilization

“Should I arm myself to the teeth, when I make my move? Learn how to defend myself against those who would wish to trample me?”

“Tough questions, Catherine. To which I would reply Yes! A different kind of girl scout. Truly prepared. A prophetess with savvy.”

“Mock me not, Mr. D. What do I know, or even suspect, that leads me to envision such horror? Will we shed all our civilizing in the coming fall? I think of all the educational institutions in this country of ours, how they have delved into, and questioned the appearance of man in the landscape, how they have examined his evolution and studied his history; how they have found it difficult to find a consistent frame of reference for understanding the aegis of civilization; and how many contradictions exist in the record; words and deeds not finding accord.

“We study ecology, ignoring the message.

“How tentative it all seems; perhaps illusory.”

“Something will be preserved. The ideals, particularly those of the young, seem to find force, energy. Yes! Amidst the status quo, these young voices are often swallowed up, nullified, or pooh –poohed by those in control. In the New World, can they be as equally stilled by a disparate force, a non-existent status quo?”

“Trouble ahead; an overthrown status quo still trying to maintain the upper hand. What will persevere?”

“Idle conjecture, I suspect. We do not know what will happen?”

“I recall something that happened during the ‘energy crisis’, the oil embargo days. Our neighborhood was appearing before its august City Council, petitioning to be regarded differently than the rest of the City, as a neighborhood somewhat isolated by topography, with large lots, zoned for more rural activity, wanting to preserve that aspect, rather than yield to the highest and best use which would result in a higher tax base for the City. The hearing promised to be long, and the Council only seemed in a receptive mood; because there were so many of us there, filling the chambers. An intermission was declared wherein a commodious atmosphere seemed to prevail. The topic of discussion amongst the Council members was fully occupied with where each of them managed to get a tankful; doubtlessly a pressing matter; for all of us at the time, making our neighborhood concerns seem insignificant indeed. However, we did obtain a moratorium on any further development until a comprehensive growth plan was developed for the area. It became our task to come up with the goods; to show why and how we were better planners of our own neighborhood than was the City. An exercise in civics, which failed for sheer lack of commitment on the part of the neighborhood, and an insistence on the part of the City to conform; to increase its tax base. The majority of the Council was comprised of members of the business community. Besides all the statutes in place in state government gave all the power to City Hall, and none to its

On The Road To Civilization

occupants. Why cannot one fight City Hall? Because! That's why. Institutional denial of the plebes, of the ordinary folk. One of the very first tasks of a democratic humanitarian government is to deny the results of the process. Most people are too involved in earning a living to be bothered with the refinements of democracy.

"Anyway, the energy crisis passed; the oil cartel realized it was cutting off its noses to spite its proverbials. Nowadays, the oil cartellers see the end of their bonanza. The last barrel available on the open market will go for Bill Gates' Philanthropic Institutions or Mr. Chen's bordello."

"Mr. D., that is not amusing!"

"Probably not true anyway. That Chen fellow we mentioned in previous assessments of World Affairs will simply abscond with the last barrel in a futile attempt to carry out a futile 'way of life'; then its back to basics. If Mr. Chen intends to conquer the world and collect all that is owing, it had better act sooner rather than later, to coin an old phrase "more now, less later". Soon it will be back to night soil and survival of the fittest. Question is; does one risk something now while it is possible, when later the risk, and an impossibility of execution will have vanished? That later may be as soon as tomorrow. Japan decided to act when it realized its fuel supply could not be increased."

"Mr. D., when you get into one of these 'moods' I want for us to part company. I do not find your 'sense of reality' at all constructive."

"Dearest one, you are the one who stirred the pot, bringing reality to the surface; your talk of subsistence level existence."

"I did try to confine the discussion to practical matters that concern us, you and I, my family, maybe your grandkids.

"I wanted to ask, more, to know, who will be looking after what we have gained, over the centuries, in our more human institutions. Despite all your cynicism on the subject, I happen to believe there is something to be salvaged from the process. We do not need to begin again by sacrificing virgins in an effort to propitiate non-existent deities. We simply know better; we must not forget."

"Salvaging something from the process? Yes! How odd things seem though. My childhood was spent in the boonies, using the most primitive of tools, our bodies, to do things that enabled us to survive the cold winter. Amenities; imagine, kerosene lamps. Axes buck-saws and cross-cut saws (imagine what we would have been able to do with a chain saw). Shovels, spading forks, hoes, grub hoes and potato hooks; a wheelbarrow. A hand operated water pump. An outhouse. A saltbox. A one cow barn. A 'corn crib'. A woodshed, a chicken house. A hillside of yellow clay which we terraced for our crops of potatoes, cabbage, tomatoes, beans. A flock of chickens. No cow. A couple of useless goats. A pig that got auctioned off. A concord grape, a pear tree, two peach trees left over from someone else's homesteading, like all the buildings. The

On The Road To Civilization

corn crib was torn down, the one cow barn was converted into a painting studio by father where he could escape into his miserably ineffectual Quixotic ruminations with Grumbacher.

“Marie Scalli was out there in the world, a tangible presence that I touched once with sweaty hands. In those days we walked a mile to the train depot where we would wait for a lumbering steam locomotive to transport us to another depot, where we would walk another distance to our school. Marie didn’t need to walk a mile to the train depot; her father drove her to the Catholic School located in the same town as our Public School.

“All the while, beyond this circumscribed existence, some kind of fantasy was being promoted in the outside world. There was the cowboy stuff. A ranch with a herd where one sang all day long on the range amidst the antelope. There was the Lone Ranger who raced around after William Tell doing all the Don Quixote things while the West was being won and dominated by a bunch of cattle barons, and while the rest of humanity, trying to eke out something, was harassed. Stuff of nightmares and stuff of the silver screen. Imbued with nonsense; unreality; no sense of a future that was all in the past. Meanwhile the wars raged on; our fabled west came through unscathed; the beef flowed to the front. A new dawn in the west; ranchland, for those who could afford the set-piece. Those who could not, tried anyway, on stump ranches where one couldn’t grow hay. Diminishing returns. The belle of the plains becoming disenchanting with the lack of fulfillment of a promise. They had bought into the fantasy, discovering reality instead. Pain Without Locus.

“Salvage something from that if you will.

“What will we salvage from this run at life, this last one hundred years of the rise and fall of oil, the rise and fall of frantic scurrying to go from here to there without accomplishing diddely squat? Materiality, consumer goods, that started out with a durability, intended to last, to finally, a throwaway society, of waste and pollution, squandering it as fast as we can convert it to a ‘way of life’? Some life. We all fell for it, bar none; even in the jungle, in the vast outreaches of our planet, the junk accumulates; even more in the overpopulated areas that cannot conveniently dispose of it fast enough, even with mountainous land fills.

“It will soon end; will we fill our museums with the remnants of this age of consumption? We will tire of erecting the buildings to house it all; hopefully we will move on, from necessity, abandoning something that was a clear failure on so many fronts. Three clear fronts; it did not serve all the people equally, although ironically more than did other benefits of civilization, it produced mountains of waste, squandered the resources, and polluted the planet, perhaps irremediably. What remains? Indeed, what is salvageable?”

On The Road To Civilization

“Every thing we have believed in. They are the basis for a continuance. From the ruins you envision, our beliefs will prevail. There can be no alternative. We cannot go backwards. We will not sacrifice virgins on some holy pyre. We will not torture one another. We will see the light, the human light, the sacred human light, the inviolable human light. No!?”

“Question is, ‘have we and will we ever?’”

“Mr. D., to me, it is clear what we must do. We have for so long paid lip service to human, to humanity, to humanitarianism. Perhaps for selfish reasons we invoke the human thing, similar to our vested interest in the Golden Rule. Whatever works, so long as we do more than talk about it.

“I am not suggesting ‘Christian’ here. ‘Christian’ comes with baggage, a holier than thou baggage, an unbearable, righteous, and unforgivable intolerance. Though the Man might qualify as some kind of decent human being, he was a crack pot.”

“Careful what you say. Invoking a humanitarian deity might get you anointed with such an epithet.”

“I know you know what I mean.”

“Others might not.”

“Are others all that important?”

“If you want support in your crusade, Yes!”

“Crusade!? Perhaps. I hadn’t thought of it that way. Getting up off your ass is the important part. Crawling out of the words, becoming the words; there you have it.”

“Make yourself sick again. Some kind of masochist.”

“Mr. D., your concern is very heart warming.

“If I did not do what I believe in, if I only entertained myself with theoretical possibilities, I would not have a right to speak.”

“Observe my silence in the matter, if you will.”

“You imagine you pass muster because you feel there is no possibility for anything; that man is an animal before he is a human; in that order; that he will always do the animal thing before he does the human thing. So why bother? Right!?”

“I imagine that to be a crude assessment of what I think and what I am.”

“Mr. D., I don’t mean to be testy. I want to give back to you a certain lack of understanding that equates with my being a masochist. Perhaps I will fall in the traces again; if I do, it will not be because I am seeking my own destruction.

“I know a lot of what you say emerges from a disbelief in what the human animal can accomplish. You see whatever he does as doomed to failure because he is a selfish beast. You know this because you

On The Road To Civilization

recognize yourself as a selfish beast, regardless of your nobler sentiments.”

“Something like that.”

“Mr. D. there is a lot of kindness out there, too. Where does that come from?”

“Granted Catherine, but not reliable.”

“I notice Mr. D., your first impulse is to be considerate of others, to be, gee whiz, kind, despite all your rankling dislike of what you perceive humanity to be. ‘Are people worth it?’ does not come into your mind. You are not a testament to your own thesis. How can you be so kind to such a duplicitous unworthy beast?”

“Because I am kind to you and your sisters, does not a kind person make. If I am able, I avoid putting myself in situations where I feel obliged to be kind.”

“You mean, human!”

“No, not human, a going out of my way, extra human. It is not natural for me to be kind; it is only an argument, ‘kindness is ever the begetter of kindness’. Do I want people to be kind to me?”

“Come, come, Mr. D., I happen to know you respond rather well to kindness.”

“Don’t use your self as a measure. You qualify in ways that others do not.”

“If others are kind to you, does that cause you to feel an obligation, a need to reciprocate? Isn’t that the way it is supposed to work?”

“What, no room for spontaneity? Kindness forced upon one?”

“Mr. D., you are playing hard to get.”

“Not with you.”

“Am I not also an animal, a beast?”

“Some beast!”

“A very kind beast.”

“However, to pursue another train of thought. It is not fair for you to think of me as a person who seeks her own destruction, just to prove a point. I would not be proving a point if that is what happened. Getting up off one’s ass, leaving the ivory tower, doing or becoming what one is, does not a masochist make.

“I have thought much about the Big City experience, how meaningful, how effective. It depends how one measures his expectations. Yes!, at first the expectations were unrealistic. The thought of a touch from the human hand would alleviate a lot of suffering. It does and it doesn’t. At first it does, then one builds up in the other person an expectation beyond the initial impulse; one wants more, or one wants it continuously, like an IV. The limits are unknown until one is forced to define them out of self-preservation.

On The Road To Civilization

“At such a moment, one feels his own lacks. Every giving becomes a measured thing in the interest of self-preservation. Your remark about masochism is unfounded.

“Because I went to Africa, perhaps naively, unrealistically, out of curiosity, on a wild-goose chase, as you might perceive it, I exposed myself unnecessarily to something that would harm me. Some of that is hindsight. I was not seeking to immolate myself in order to discover the true meaning of personal sacrifice.

“In Africa, I found something I had not found in the Big City, or for that matter, in my experience in the US of A. I did not know what to expect, but what I did find I had not expected to find. What I found also draws me back to that continent.

“I’ll preface what I am about to say with a statement regarding humanity. I was moved by the humanity I encountered in the Big City. It was a challenge for me to learn the realities involved in helping other people at such a level of need. The need overwhelmed most considerations. As I have indicated, time revealed dependencies with which I could not cope. I was forced to set limits. I had compromised my desire to help with self-saving. I have come to terms with that in myself. I do not rationalize it beyond what I have now just said. However, the humanity in question was a western humanity, a mostly failed humanity in a scheme of things, in which it might have been said, ‘bound to fail’. In a scheme we are often referring as ‘our way of life’, some, many, fall by the wayside, for a variety of lacks. ‘Our way of life’ mocks that failure. The things that people do to themselves when they perceive themselves as a failure. Sometimes dangerous for the rest of us, but often, all too often, people take it out on themselves. Something is missing from our equation when that happens. Say what you will about our sacred documents, they are only words. True, there are no guarantees. I am not that guarantor.

“To many, ‘our way of life’ sucks. It is perceived by many as inhuman. What does that mean? One does not need to be anything special in order to become a member of a consumerist society. We all want to be special in some way. We cannot feel special when what we are is measured by our exteriority, our surface. We might as well be dogs, or manikins.

“The Africa experience provided a very different perspective for me, some of which draws me to it, although I could not at present ‘live like they do’. A qualified statement?, Yes!

“I have tried to describe to you, Theresa, myself, what I felt there in the ‘outback’, outside the urban areas. Where the poverty stricken specimens of black humanity dwelled. What strikes me most significantly is a dignity I had not encountered in the Big City. What do I mean by that? Though only somewhat exposed to the goods produced in that other world, those goods soon find their inane repose along the byways

On The Road To Civilization

when their function expires; the life that had partaken of it, was essentially unfazed by the failure of something that was little understood beyond its amusement value. 'Their way of life', while not an intended antithesis to 'our way of life', **is** nonetheless. What prevails in theirs is a humanity, for that is how I perceive it, that glows. It has lived in its milieu for ages, It survives an almost hand to mouth existence, but the movements, the grace of their being is remarkable, not like a crouching ape.

"Sure, to an outsider, a lot may be seeming, while beneath the surface much might be teeming. Indeed that is so. They seek their gratifications, besides satisfying hunger and thirst, their sexual appetite and gratification might become a paramount experience for them. The hot quiescence of their surround is endured because it is there to be endured. One would ask, how would they like some air conditioning? A very humane thought? An untoward remark?

"I must think about the impact, the impressions. How people can thrive with so little, can welcome one without envy or rancor; an inexpressible human warmth is present. It makes no pretense about what it is. It lives from day to day with the best or worst of what it is. I found easy concourse with the people, wordlessly, it seemed. I respected their lifestyle. I did not see the suffering that would seem to be inherent to the situation if it was in the US of A. I saw endurance; but not the gritting of one's teeth. Another part of 'man in the landscape'. Their expectations were few, if any.

"I come away with thoughts and perspectives. I want to go there again to immerse myself in this feeling I had experienced, as though I had found some of that 'missingness' we have described."

"Something will always be 'missing'. Perhaps you imagine yourself immersing yourself in something that will osmotically be absorbed into your being. I don't think it possible. You are you. You do not need to live like someone else in order to gain something for yourself; to enrich your understanding. You already know. You are a sensitive intelligent educated being.

"I might find accord with your sentiments regarding the 'missingness'; but I do not believe what you seek will be found in that milieu. Your tendency will be to 'raise' them up with enlightenment. What good will that do them?

"Sweet one, appreciate them from a distance."

"Mr. D. I think you are 'missing' something important in what I am saying. It is not that I want to live like they do, although if the proposition was put to me that I continue in a mostly loveless world or that I change venue for an apparently less loveless one, which would I choose? Would I accept the whole as part of the bargain? Would I simply adapt to a culture and another way of life? I suspect that is what would

On The Road To Civilization

be required of me. I would not be amongst them to proselytize another way of life; at least that would not be my initial intent; could I resist the impulse to make suggestions? Question is: would I need to?

“I know there might be unexpected things that could occur; some of which I might naively ignore at a distance. For example, being courted by natives. Stirring up jealousies on the distaff side. Also, exposure to all kinds of disease. Also, exposure to rampant bands of marauders bent on raping, stealing, and malicious destruction. I might also imagine things about our own civilization that pose a threat to my existence.

“I want to know something first hand. I want to exchange human feelings with others who lead a simple uncomplicated life.”

“A white girl amongst the natives. They might marvel at your whiteness; may even revere it. They might not want to see your human side for their worship of a white goddess. Could you dispel their worshipfulness? What would be ‘missing’?”

“Mr. D., specious concerns.

“I don’t know. I want to know.

“We are asking: Is anything salvageable from ‘our way of life’?”

“We are seeking a reference of some kind in order to answer the question. I might be mindful of Mennonites surviving within their own sectarian culture. But I suspect what they are is somewhat dependent upon what we are, although they would deny the imputation. However, I will not dismiss their simple self-sufficient attempts. They might undergo any radical transition with far greater ease than most others.

“The Africa experience does provide me with another frame of reference. They will experience no transition, as they had not experienced the advent of modern civilization. To them it will be as though it had never happened, as perhaps colonialism might never have happened. Only the inutile refuse will serve as some kind of challenge to their curiosity; will they want to know what they have not experienced, and about that which no longer exists? The colonialists were driven out by others, perhaps akin to them, but unknown to them, names only; and true modernism passed them by.

“In the Africa which so interests me, ‘salvage’ means little. When I speak of ‘salvage’ from ‘our way of life’, I see an immense difference between the two. One will continue to thrive in its entirety, with all of its humanity intact. It does not need to remake itself into a ‘new way of life’ It already exists, and to say again, with all of its humanity. We do not know whether or not there exists a redefinition of humanity that will arise from the forced discontinuance from ‘our way of life’. If it could achieve what already exists in the Africa to which I refer.

“Perhaps my whiteness would prove an obstacle to that of which I might innocently wish to partake. In myself I would be both observer and participant.

On The Road To Civilization

“The character of the exchanges between those in the Big City and those in Africa was considerably different. In the Big City, even though I wished it to be otherwise, the people who came to our hostel were not equal with us. They were in need, seeking some kind of hand-out, putting aside their dignity, perhaps humiliated; not by us, but by the social convention that had established certain relationships of individuals in an hierarchal ‘way of life’.

“In Africa, an hierarchy exists as well, but not in relationship to me. We are equals in our humanity. They retain their dignity, they do not feel humiliated by what I am. Their hierarchy does not affect me, and initially they do not impose it upon me. I know they feel their own degree of circumspection with regard to any outsider. I would always be an outsider; but their degree of acceptance of outsiders might be less complicated than it is in our hierarchal ‘way of life’. I always felt greeted warmly, and without suspicion. I felt welcomed; perhaps, as you say, the whiteness may have influenced a special kind of response.”

“I certainly do respond to you.”

“Mr. D., you are up to your usual tricks.”

“You’re some trick.”

“Careful Mr. D.; a chick, but not a trick. A white chick.

“Anyway, I am not wholly ignorant on what might be expected of me if I intended to fully integrate into their ‘way of life’. My whiteness might always prove an obstacle. That is, my obvious outer differences might prove an obstacle. My humanity may mean less to them than I believe, under the circumstances. That would disappoint me greatly.”

“Recall, in *Typee*, in that romantic adventure, Melville described what the natives expected of those who wanted and needed to be integrated into their ‘way of life’; one would need to be tattooed.

“Are there not other things to consider? Is there not a ‘first things first’ situation here?”

“Is our relationship always to remain tentative, because of my age? You cannot really commit to something that has all probability of ending on schedule, Yes!, on schedule!

“If it should seem a commitment is in order, how will that affect all your other ‘doings’, the most neutral expression I can apply at this moment?”

“Suppose we did decide to live together every day, how would that affect your career, your ambitions; your needs?”

“I know I need to answer that question honestly, and perhaps frankly.

“Mr. D., I am not ambivalent about what I feel for you. The Boola-Boola scare has sobered me in some respects. However I do feel good now, strong, resilient, ready to do more physical stuff; that is, resume an active life.

On The Road To Civilization

“As I had indicated earlier, I can envision making the break from the overcivilized life I lead to lead another life altogether, apart from the dreamier aspects of Africa. If I was alone, unattached, that is, I would most likely return to Africa. I realize I cannot ask you to go there; I do not want for us to be apart any longer.

“We might be able to continue here until you can no longer do the physical stuff required. That would be OK with me. I feel I am able to help you in most every way. I say this only because I know how important this place is to you, and what it contributes to your happiness. Otherwise I might envision this other life style I imagined earlier, where I, or we, acquired some land upon which we could wholly subsist, perhaps as part of a cooperative; yes!, in anticipation of something I will need to consider, Soon.

“I would ask if it might be possible to share this place with others as part of a cooperative, although what is here might not be sufficient to sustain even our life. So I will not ask it?”

“We might not be able to subsist here, that is true.

“I am pleased that you are thinking in terms of commitment, at least, that we should no longer be apart.

“By all means we should be seriously looking ahead.

“We could retain this place as long as it seemed to be of benefit to us. The ultimate benefit to us might be in its sale, if it was done before the crunch came, to realize its inflated value, but also to help capitalize the other.

“Am I saying this is my part of the commitment? Could I sacrifice this for you? At this point in time, it will require some serious rethinking.”

“Mr. D. I would not ask that of you; I am willing to be by your side here; but do believe we must act on the other front anyway. We must act. Can you see your way to spending some time looking – with me?”

“Yes!”

“Mr. D., I do not for an instant dismiss the importance of this place to you; and if you could not bear to leave, I would not abandon you. But I am prepared to do the other as well; for myself, if necessary.”

“I want to support you, do support you, and will support you, my dearest one. We shall see what we can make of our avowels.”

“If you sold this place, would you feel obliged to give half of the proceeds to your wife?”

“Yes, it goes without saying. It’s the fair thing to do, unquestionably; her support made it all possible. I did a lot of what was done here, for her; things I would not have done for myself. The only disturbing part of such a consideration was her easy abandonment of it.”

“I can imagine you feel you are getting into a similar situation with me.”

On The Road To Civilization

“I haven’t thought of our relationship in those terms. One does what one does. I love you, Catherine. I cannot be held responsible for what that promotes in me.

“I sense from your words, a great willingness to accommodate me, which in its own way, causes me to reciprocate in kind.”

“Mr. D., be that as it may, I will not ask anything of you.”

Catherine came up to him, placing her arms around his neck, pulling him toward her lips, which she offered to him as she had done when they first kissed in the lava fields on the mountain pass. He responded differently than he had done then; he eagerly accepted the invitation, encircling the young woman with desire; kissing her with passion and abandon. They were comfortable together once again, the more onerous past receding into the background of happenings. More than ever they were committing to being together.

William had not forgotten about Theresa in these moments, but knew he must be careful, ever careful not to jeopardize the happiness of this person he was embracing with such abandon. He realized in that moment that he and Theresa could not be. He hoped that Theresa would be able to continue with a relationship that did not ask the ultimate; a betrayal of her sister.

He thought how we selfishly all ask too much of this life.

He reflected on the beginnings of his relationship with Catherine, trying not to forget any detail, recalling the great surge of happiness, his awkwardness, her radiant beauty, her unhesitating willingness to enter into relationship with him. How wonderful for him. Still wonderful. As was the sea still wonderful if he would but regard it. He must not become as inured to Catherine as he was to the sea. He must be ever mindful of her presence; not lapse into his customary oblivion.

Catherine was, by all stretches of the imagination, a mystery to him; how she could face this old geezur with such equanimity. Upon serious reflection, his amazement exceeded all sensibility. She was truly a tactile marvel, although an elusive mysterious presence, even as he stared into her blue eyes only a few inches away. So close in one sense, where he wanted her to be; but her proximity did not yield any clues to who she was, what she was, even as the most serious counterpart to himself. All those years with his wife, at times seemingly close, but always distant in the envelope of herself. Catherine, though seemingly closer during the intensity of their burgeoning relationship, still distant in her envelope, only brought closer through her illness. He had forgotten the terrible intensity of his beginnings with his wife, where he and she were entangled in other relationships that were eventually broken by that intensity, so they could be together. His relationship with Catherine flowed much more easily, mostly because of her, who she was, what she

On The Road To Civilization

was, however, objectively speaking, distant she might be, in her own skin.

We are afforded mere glimpses into another person. We assume so much about them as being so much like ourselves, which often proves to be mostly untrue; we simply do not know them.

The telephone sounded its deeedileeee, deeedileeee, deeedileeee.

William answered. It was Lydia.

“Hello, to what do we owe this honor?”

“Mr. D., how is Cate doing?”

“Very well, indeed.”

“That’s very good news.”

“I’ll get her.”

“Before you do, I’d like to ask up front if you would mind a visit from me. I feel a need for a vacation from what’s happening around here.”

“You’d be most welcome, Lydia.

“Catherine, phone! Its Lydia.”

Lydia thanked him for the welcome.

Catherine took the receiver. “What a nice surprise, sis. Anything wrong?”

“How wonderful, it would be most wonderful to see you, to have you here for however long.

“This weekend, I’m sure that would be OK.

“We might need to meet you to do a little shopping. We are so remiss here, never wanting to leave the island. We wait until the cupboard is bare. We wouldn’t want to deprive you with our bad habits; you might want to exit prematurely.

“If you would arrive at the little airfield on Saturday morning, we can pick you up there, if you would be willing to wait for about a half hour.

“No, my condition is considered stabilized. We just do the weekly titers here, mostly to satisfy Dr. Klein. There’s never anything indicating a change. But I’m still careful in my exertions, never allowing myself to feel tired, or if I do feel tired, to rest immediately, which always feels delicious, afterward.

“OK, it’s settled them, Saturday morning; how wonderful!”

“What a surprise, No!?”

“I would have to conjecture in the affirmative.

“Tired of the BS in Center Of The Universe.”

“You had better not say that to Lydia. Give her a chance to let us know what is wearing her down. Don’t make fun of her.”

“I don’t intend to. After our last encounter, we seemed to find some common ground amenable to both of us. Perhaps I am a fixture now; and

On The Road To Civilization

perhaps I appear in a better light after some of the wonderful specimens she has met in the Center Of The Universe.”

“Modesty is not your strong suit at this moment.

“Aw, come on, allow me a momentary gloat; I promise not to make an issue of anything, unless she does.”

“I wonder if you can be trusted,”

“I truly like your sister. She has worked hard. She has a good head. She is a human being. She is also very lovely.

“I think she has gotten over some of her scruples with regard to you and I; a most necessary condition if we all expect to get along.”

“Mr. D., I suspect she will never entirely accept you and I. But she might view you as a definite restraining influence on me and my wilder notions. In her mind that may mean to her that I will be around for a while.”

As you might have doubtlessly noticed the author’s insistence upon relating to the three graces brings us to these incredibly unbelievable criss-crossings. I wonder what is his intent in this latest arranged meeting.

The reader must understand the telephone, along with the aero plane, has shortened the necessary filler needed to make the transition from one boring state to another, where Mr. Clemens observed, the weather was allowed to fill the vacuum. It may be unkind to describe anything associated with Catherine as boring; but we can not save all the one-liners for her. That would make of her a sage beyond her years, and a seer that only finds shape in the imagination. A real person with too many abilities, and too much savvy makes others feel inadequate. It has become necessary to diminish someone in order to enable others not feel so desperately their shortcomings.

Give your author some credit for his otherwise insensitive sensitivities. Also his most dubious denouements.

He could attempt to reveal in some suitable language a busy day on the island, which usually consists of time at the computer in the morning, while Catherine snoozes; putting the teakettle upon the propane stove; getting the oatmeal started on the same stove; brewing some green tea, while continuing to provide the hypothetical reader with some bull chaff full of wisdom, full of other ingredients to hold his interest.

The projects for the day begin to demand his attention. After he green teas the occupant of the bed, and later presents her with a bowl of oatmeal, with a glass of orange juice, at the dining table, not in the bed, he proceeds with a typical day of catch up. Pumping water from the well to the storage tank that feeds a gravity system. In order to get that

On The Road To Civilization

started it is necessary to flush the line to the tank with well water; maybe fifty gallons worth (he uses the same line to supply water to the green house from another ground source); he must adjourn to his trusty 1950 Air Force Kohler 4 cylinder Waukesha 6.3 KVA surplus generator he had acquired at a State Auction for 50 dollars, to provide the 220 volts AC ½ hp pump located some 400 feet away, submerged into the well water some 100 feet beneath terra firma. It is started by applying 32 (36) volts to the start winding in the generator by pushing on a relay with a piece of wooden dowl through a hole in the control panel. Before he does that he must connect a wire to the coil from a fourth 12 volt battery (the three other 12 volt batteries were joined in series to provide the 36 volts for the start winding) to provide spark for the gasoline being compressed in the cylinders. He must perform this operation 6 or 7 times until the storage tank is filled, waiting 2 to 3 hours between each pumping while the well fills. He runs about in the 1979 Suzuki Forsa which only the previous week required him to replace its water pump, another story in itself, from which he will spare the reader (did the reader really want to know?). He drives to the generator to get that started, he drives to the well to turn on the pump, he drives to the water storage area which has an 80 gallon tank located outside the water storage shed into which he will pump the 50 gallons of flushing water; then he will enter the shed to open the valve to the 1350 gallon storage tank, then return outside to turn off the valve to the 80 gallon tank, then return to the well head to wait for the well column of water to be pumped out, which usually takes between 10 to 13 minutes to empty. He turns off the pump switch, drives to the generator to shut it down. He needs to flush the water line only once for each series of 6 or 7 pumpings. When its all done he must remember to OFF the valve that controls the supply of water to the 1350 gallon tank

Since he is already involved in doing mundane things he decides to change the rear bumper on his 14 year old pickup, an appendage that has rust/rotted away. After several years on the island's muddy roads, the bolts that hold the bumper to the rest of the vehicle have suffered the anomalies and the vicissitudes to such an extent that they require an oxy-acetylene cutting torch to remove them. It should have been an easy task if the torch had been functioning properly; it was not. Eventually, after many attempts the bolts were severed enough to allow a chisel to cut away the slag, and to make it possible to drive the remains out with a drift punch.

Then to position the replacement bumper which came from an even older vehicle. He had already, using that same oxy-acetylene set up, used a rose bud tip to heat the protruding mounting members on the replacement bumper to glowing red for the purposes of bending to fit their potentially new home.

On The Road To Civilization

The bending had been a success permitting him to slide those bent tangs to be placed alongside the salvaged tangs from the mounting of the previous bumper, extending from the rear of the vehicle. There was a tango, where it takes two to get it on. But that was only the beginning. The truck tangs required shaping which he had done by using his newly acquired plasma cutter (from Harbor Freight, a front for Chinese knock-offs). Once he had accomplished that task, it became necessary to perform a similar shaping of the replacement bumper tangs. Each must sacrifice something in this union. Eventually a positioning had taken place which then required a drilling operation to install new bolts to hold the whole thing together, somewhat like a marriage license.

Rest assured this was not accomplished methodically, or with perfect equanimity. There was head-knocking, eyes full of mud dust, knuckle busting, swearing, even cursing all things made by man, mostly for their insufficiency, their obsolescing manufacture. Eventually the holes were drilled, and the bolts installed. Thus the new was free to be bumped, and to pull trailers.

Enough for that day? No way. He wanted to repair his aluminum ladders with some aluminum welding, something at which he was completely inexpert. He tried anyway with his TIG welder. He managed to bungle through the first ladder to the degree that it might hold together. The second was a struggle in futility that was not working at all. He would therefore cease until he had read his welder's manual. He was determined to try upon another day.

That day began to wind down with the covering of the wood pile with tarps, anticipating rain, recovering the TIG welder's generator in anticipation also, then proceeding to the house where he poured himself a Pilsner into tomato cocktail juice, munched on a crust with some garlic and herb cream cheese, and sat reading his welder's manual.

The welder's manual reaffirmed something he had known while he was trying to weld the aluminum, that dirty aluminum does not weld. He was welding dirty aluminum. He also had switched his switches too many times; in doing so he had them placed in the wrong position for what he was attempting to do. Lesson!? Clean the metal thoroughly; put the switches in the correct position; try your luck again.

After those revelations, he pumped one more time from the well, before covering the pump generator in anticipation. Catherine had prepared dinner to be devoured at some point in all these perambulations. He finished off a tiring day with a lousy FBI movie titled *The Forgotten*. If you think this writing improbable, try that one on for size for probability; not only improbable; impossible. The author feels he has scored one point.

The next morning they would be leaving to pick up Lydia, and to do some much needed survival shopping, and goodie shopping for the guest.

On The Road To Civilization

Lydia was waiting at the village airfield, waving, with a smile.

She greeted Catherine with an unusually long emotional squeezing hug, and loving kisses. She also greeted Mr. D. with more emotion and warmth than she had previously, also with a long kiss to his cheek.

Catherine was obviously affected by Lydia's different manner, wondering if she had been hurt or abused by someone. It was not like her to be so effusive. It was not like her to suddenly appear, to break away from her reserve and her very controlled life. All in good time, she thought.

Lydia continued her affectionate manner; while pleasing, and gratefully accepted, it was cause for concern. But Catherine was saving the questions until they were settled on the island. She nudged William, cautioning him to restrain his curiosity, his desire to probe the depths. It was also obvious that he was pleased by Lydia's seemingly altered attitude.

Lydia, not wanting to be surprised by probing questions, broke the ice, only a few minutes after their arrival at the house.

"Cate, Mr.D., I wanted to come here in order to hopefully obtain some different perspective. I am relinquishing my usual reticence, my usual tight hold upon myself. I am sincere, and feel secure in doing this with you."

"Oh, Lyd, there is no need to explain anything. You are such a welcome guest; it does not matter why you have come."

"I want you to know, though. I want you to know how I regard both, Yes!, both of you. Theresa, as well. I had called Theresa before I came, wondering if she could come as well. She declined for some non-specific reasons.

"The last two months have been very trying for me. My usual resilience suddenly failed me. I realized I was not putting forth the usual effort. I felt the effort was wasted. I feel it even more keenly now as I speak. This all comes as part of some revelations. Difficult to explain in some ways. I might have known that mankind has had a troubled journey. While I am not a history buff, I do continually ask questions about how and why things happen, when I believe they should not be occurring as they do. In the profession of Law one is always looking for precedents, for decisions made by judges that point to the recurrence of things, that each case might seem unique, but is not in truth completely so, at least, not to a 'land mark' degree. When one applies this kind of thinking to the broader historical record he realizes almost dramatically man has always been this partly formed and partly fulfilled creature. So what's new? What's new is the revelation itself, the truth of a thing itself.

"I will try not to be melodramatic, mimicking some soap-opera.

On The Road To Civilization

“I realize my trials are insignificant compared to all the trials and tribulations of my fellow men and women.

“Lately I have been unable to provide any convincing arguments for myself to continue working so close to our government.

“I feel very strongly that our nation is on the slide, and is doomed to a very bad end; it will not be rescued by its government; it more than likely will be abandoned by it.”

“Perhaps all you need is a rest from it all, sis.”

“I had been thinking so. Yes!, I had been putting in long hours; I did feel drained. So, I did back off for a while, made excuses for not doing things as agreed. I forsook my credibility in the hope of a respite from the grind. But it didn’t relieve me of anything. My head still whirled away; and I felt guilty as well for deserting my post.

“Revelation #1: Something is rotten in Denmark.”

“Had you no inklings before you went there?” Mr. D. inquires.

“No, and Yes. Of course, one reads things, one hears things. One dismisses these things as the usual disgruntlement with the slow turning wheels of government; those who are frustrated by the lack of access to that government; or because of some bias.

“When I was hired by the ACLU, I was fresh out of Law School, idealistic, ready for engagement, ready to do things that needed doing. My employers liked what I did; they even began to rely upon me to testify before Congressional Committees.

“I believe I did a credible job in that capacity. I expected some results from the testimonies.

“Nothing. They were asking questions that made them and myself look good. We were concerned; they were showing their concern. As time wore on, the same questions and the same answers announced themselves regularly without any real response; just a kind of pro forma nonsense. Government trying to look good, pretending to be earning its keep.

“I began to feel the waste of my time; and the ineffectuality of government. Was it truly ineffectuality, or was it something else? A failure of something. The message was clear enough; who could not understand the message?

“I began to realize I knew nothing about the real substance of a government of men and women representing other men and women. I felt they were not listening; that they were abandoning their constituencies for something else. I wasn’t sure what that something else was.

“I imagined private agendas, the pressure of vested interests, the lure of special interests, membership in the ‘club’. Meanwhile, the job of doing the part required by the consent of the governed, was effected through the keeping up of appearances, the lip service, the equivocations, the temporizings; that was the real meat of the opus.

On The Road To Civilization

“This whole scenario is entrenched, immersed, in bad habits, in flag waving, in patriotic paranoia.

“I do not attribute the whole failure to the Bush Administration. Congress has been party to that failure. Congress is not what ‘We the people’ intended it to be, something removed from the demos, something out of touch with the demos, running its own circus with its own set of amazing tricks and high-wire acts; all a performance that has absolutely nothing to do with representative government.

“‘We, the people’, has been usurped in this sham thing.

“When one gets out of line in his or her testimonies, he or she is ruled out of order, or mocked and ridiculed. One must always follow their procedures, answer their questions with what they want to hear, not with accusations, or even intimations that they are not listening, or are not doing their job. They have become good at play acting, at deceiving their audience. They hold the chair as well as the gavel. We have put them there.

“One adjusts, initially; one tries to be clever with his or her answers; to get something into the record that will reveal their bias and incompetence.

“What one finally realizes is that the whole system is corrupt. The average citizen is so removed from his government, out of touch with it, also through habit; also, out of sight, out of mind, as though mindlessness was the way of things; which it is, by the way.

“Government has become a thing in itself. The people are not being represented. However, the people are paying the tab, in so many ways, so many ways.”

“Has it ever been any different? Was there ever a time when it was more to your liking?” Again William is doing the asking.

“Key to the revelations Mr. D.. I have thought seriously about that. I am mindful of your story of the Physics professor giving the Browsing Room lecture concerning the birth of the Universe to the laypersons in the audience, making his grand bowing and sweeping gesture as he exclaimed: ‘In the beginning there was gas!’. It might be like that.

“In the beginning, I refer to the beginning of our nation, other beginnings might be relevant, but our beginning was intended as a liberating thing from the oppression of distant rulers exacting unfair levies for their own enrichment (that was the ‘gas’ anyway). All were affected by such a state of affairs, but it was the aristocrats, the land holders, the stakeholders, the shakers and movers upon this new land that were most affected. They wanted to be free of the yoke of the Empire. Of course they needed the Paul Reveres to do their fighting, their dirty work. Yes Paul had something at stake too. He was part of the New Land. He was his own taker user grabber pioneer, along with the rest; as a matter of fact he was the one who led the rush against the frontier,

On The Road To Civilization

encountering the gradually displaced native inhabitants on daily basis, making peace with them, or mostly killing them, never stepping backwards in their pursuit of the takings.

“At this point I do not wish to demean the beginnings, only to put them in their proper perspective.

“What came of their need for emancipation from the King across the sea was, on the surface, an achievement. A consensus was found in forming a government that addressed many things not fully addressed in any previous attempts at forming a ‘democratic’ ‘union’, for the lack of a better word.

“A remarkable achievement it was, at least on the face of it, a document to seal the bargain of the many; gaining mostly support, at least from those who stood most to gain.

“Conspicuously omitted were the native inhabitants, or the slaves. The natives had no status and the blacks were property. A glaring omission in the testament to democracy. A failure at the very beginning. We had learned from our masters how to conquer and give little quarter.

“We possessed the right and righteousness of the strong, the bite of steel that mortified the flesh. We took something away; in its place we planted a flag, insisting all behold, and worship, and bend to its will.

“Let us rationalize together. Sound like a prayer?”

“Lydia, what can we say to mitigate your feelings at this point in time?” William inquires yet again.

“Mr.D., perhaps nothing. Did I come to the wrong place with all of this baggage?”

“No way, sis. Your concern is our concern. Your take on the anomalies and vicissitudes is ‘our’ take on the anomalies and the vicissitudes. We want to hear all you have to say. All!

“Yes!, we are here in our little limbo, our hideaway, but we are aware of the connection, our connection to what else exists. We deal with it every day; it is part of our reason-to-be. We want certain things to happen; maybe things that have never happened before; or things that should happen with a great deal of regularity and consistency.

“Mr. D., and I, have often alluded to a ‘missing’, the ‘missing’, ingredient.”

“I can assure you there is great deal ‘missing’ in our nation’s capital.

“Forget any reference to a Constitution; it is something the Administration spends most of its time finding ways to circumvent. ‘Humanity, per se, is a great inconvenience to them. Congress is a lackluster patsy, controlled by an Administration that constantly berates them with National Security, and accuses them of lacking in Patriotism. They fall for it; they are on the dole from the American Public and from their other bankrollers. There’s hardly one of them that stands on principle. Equivocation is what one gets. Covering their Asses. Are there

On The Road To Civilization

any exceptions? At least regarding our foreign adventurism, Robert Byrd stands out.

“Yeah!, is it ingrained in, I hesitate to use the phrase, ‘human’ nature? Perhaps!

“Are you asking yourself, is this really Lydia talking, the cool objective Lydia?

“I remember mother’s gambit of working with the system; don’t disturb the status quo with lot of radical notions. This thing has been running pretty well for 250 years.

“A doctor’s wife gloating.

“Barely. What is the measure? The yardstick?

“Ever since the ‘Pilgrims’ landed, its been an expansion of something, a land grab, exploitation of the land and what was upon it and within it. Everyone and everything else shoved aside in the process. Now it is becoming like an ingrown toenail. Or a pit bull snapping at its tail. We’ve done it and we’re done. ‘Mission Accomplished’.

“Mother gloats about something that does not exist.”

“Forget mother, sis. This is beyond her; beyond us;’ beyond.

“The “missing’ something may not be achievable.”

“So that your disappointment should have some perspective, you must not forget those beginnings to which we referred. Survival dictated its own terms. ‘Other’ people were only marginally important, perhaps necessary to beat off the natives, then the British. The social and legal constructs were designed to assure for the survival of a class of people who were there first, were clever, were better armed, etc. They were not inclined to share, to uplift mankind with the benefit of the spoils.

“It was a non-egalitarian beginning. It was selfish, greedy, exploitive. It was class-conscious, it was superior to the natives (savages), it became racial with advent of the slave-trade.

“In our schooling we have been presented with a rosy picture concerning our beginnings. To assume there was more humanity, or brotherly love, altruism, kindness, generosity, all because we paint ourselves as such nice ‘Christian’ people, is to ignore what really happened in those early days. For many, it was a case of raw survival. Many did not survive. Many did not survive from neglect, that might have survived if somebody, leaders, governors, had given a damn. Those who did survive were exploited, or maybe taxed beyond their means by their own ‘countrymen’.

“The statistics show that a small percentage, 1 to 5 % of the population owned 50 % of the land, the best land. As is the case now, where 10 % of the people control 90 % of the wealth of the nation. Something has always been out of whack. Wackiness has been institutionalized since the beginning. Wackiness is another word for man’s inhumanity to man.

On The Road To Civilization

“Lydia, I know you have not had any illusions about this last. Therefore I do not understand your involvement in the first place, in something that was bound and is bound to bring you disappointment, horrible, soul-crushing disappointment.”

“Mr. D., I know what I had chosen to do might have proceeded from a naively interpreted state of affairs. Believing, as do my sisters, where there is a will there is way. If we talk the talk, and I mean when our leaders talk the talk, our expectations rise. We assume they are aware of something, if they talk the talk. They can't be using some ploy, or another, merely to obtain and hold a public office, a place of influence, a place where they can serve their own interests. What makes a person so duplicitous? Why can't we heave these people out the door forever?”

“The whole of the human race would require heaving, Lydia.”

“Mr. D., not us!?”

“I can't imagine we will solve 'the' problem with reason or logic. That has been tried. However, heaving is logical. We would spare the remainder of the life on the planet the absence of our presence. Could we make an exception of ourselves? Yes! A few of us good people could mind our own business. But what do we begin with, at which stage of civilization do we begin to function as people who mind their own business.

“Recall, if you will, the beginnings of those who landed upon these shores when they faced their winters without adequate food supplies and marginal shelter. Many of them perished, others fell upon the 'kind indulgence' of the natives, still others survived on the 'carrying capacity' of the landscape.

“Where would we fit in? Lets not fool ourselves here.

“Square one?”

“It seems we are stuck somewhere in our assumptions.”

“It would seem so.

“Perhaps you have just provided me with a perspective. Yes, we must assume a starting place.

“We are where we are now. If we heaved the many or most, what remains? When we heave, we most assuredly get rid of all the barons, the ones who control the flow of goods upon which we have depended. Our dependence is the source of their wealth. Their wealth is their means to enslave us. The commodity doesn't matter; what matters is the wealth it generates, and the control it imparts. As bad as the system is in our minds we are dependent upon it. We cannot alter it through appeals to common humanity. Common humanity does not exist in the business world. Providing food is a lucrative enterprise, not a humanitarian involvement. People need to eat, they provide a 'captive audience' a ready consumer.

On The Road To Civilization

“If we would be lucky, that is, if we were prepared, we might have secured our nice little piece of land where we could farm and husband. We would need to be prepared for such enterprise.

“Only self-government would exist. No specific laws to be broken. A basic understanding; that is a Golden Rule, the Golden Rule would suffice. We have not improved upon that Rule with all the finely bound editions of Laws upon Laws upon Laws. All agreements would be verbal; a person’s word would be his most honored and treasured asset.”

“You might do better to return to the traces to fight for what you believe in. Do it with a new dedication, and a fierceness of demeanor. Arm yourself with all the truths about mans inhumanity to man; ‘heave’ them at those who chose to ignore them, shame them without remorse. Accuse them of being inhuman with every doublespeak, every equivocation, every lip service, every temporizing, every evasion.”

“Mr. D., you cannot shame a rat. I know this for a fact. A rat does not recognize such high sounding epithets as ‘humanitarian’. To such a creature one might as well use ‘ratitarian’.”

“There must be some who are not rats. Can you not work with them, build fires under them, appeal to them, insist they get up off’n their asses; be more than token assenters?”

“I do, Mr. D. I do. I do.”

“Mr. D., lets back off for a bit. I think Lyd is about to wail at us. We need not provoke that in her.”

“Its OK Cate. This is small potatoes compared to the daily barrage. Fortunately I do not need to remain cool amongst my friends. I can reveal my frustrations, my discouragement, my hurt. I do not in the least resent any of Mr. D.’s probings. I trust his motivation. I believe he cares for me, as he cares for you and Theresa. He knows we are special; perhaps the best there is in this world. He feels we are all destined for pain if we pursue our humanitarian gambit. I know he is right. We must decide if we are prepared to remain on the front lines for what we imagine we believe. We do believe in these things, do we not? We are not unaccountable idealists, the opposite of which might be said to be ‘unrealists’, are we? These are not ‘pie in the sky’, utopian dreamings, are they?”

“Sis, I summon from Mr. D.; his irony in his Knotted Twine chapter titled, ‘A Ship Without A Flag’, where he speaks of a dog tearing away at a rag doll; the rag doll proves symbolic for our misguided perceptions of Utopia. Bitterly he quotes from the judgmental lexicon: *‘Utopia is a visionary scheme which fails to recognize the defects inherent in human nature’*. He further elaborated by denouncing us as a bunch of Ωucking bastards. He continued in this rankling vein to set a stage for something we cannot mistake for something it isn’t; defects and all, we persist: as he puts it: *TO WIT: UTOPIA, PARADISE, EDEN, ATLANTIS, SHANGRI-*

On The Road To Civilization

LA, HAPPY VALLEY, EL DORADO, CASTLE IN THE AIR, ICARIA, LEMURIA, LYONESSE, PARNASSUS, ELYSIAN FIELDS, ARCADIA, LOST HORIZON, PROMISED LAND, MECCA, SWEET FELICITY, THE PRIMROSE PATH, UNALLOYED HAPPINESS, GOLDEN AGE, GREENER PASTURES, ENCHANTED ISLAND, ENCHANTED FOREST, ONE'S HEART LEAPING WITH JOY, LIFE LIBERTY AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS, THE MORE PERFECT UNION, NEW(ARK), NEW ATLANTIS, NEW ATHENS, NEW BEDFORD, NEWBURG, NEW ENGLAND, NEWFOUNDLAND, NEW FRANCE, NEW GRANADA, NEW HEBRIDES, NEW SPAIN, NEW SPAPER, NEW YEAR, NEW YAWK, AND FOR CRIPES SAKE, NEW ZEEEEELAND; NEW, NEW NEW. THERE'S NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN!!!

Then from Rabelais he quotes: *Gargantua would not permit the purblind, blinkards, the lame, crooked, ill-favored, misshapen fools, senseless, spoiled or corrupt women; or men sickly, subject to defluxions, or ill-bred louts, simple sots or peevish trouble-houses, as nuns or monks into the ABBEY of THELEME; but only such women as were fair, well-featured and of sweet disposition, and men that were comely, personable and well-conditioned.*

He further conjectured: 'We are so wise nowadays as to cast aspersion upon these dreamy projections (Utopias). 'In absolute terms they are impractical'. So say those whose meaner alignment finds them serving their bowels or grosser innards as though implying we cannot rise above our vacuolations. The UNITED NATIONS Charter specifically states: NO VACUOLES. So these untoward manifestations of peristaltic rhythms raise the cry in unison, 'Down wit the U.N.'.'

"You are not alone, sweetheart."

"I appreciate the reference, Cate. I do not regard what I am attempting to do as impractical, whether or not it takes into account the inherent defects in man.

"You may argue that I seek the unattainable perfection of a model. I will not accept lame excuses for not putting out the effort, even if it seems unattainable.

"Yes, the irony is clear, the symbolism is clear; granted. But I do not believe Mr. D. has succumbed either; nor have you, nor has Tess; right now I am vulnerable. Although I might have come here for some liberation from my seeming dedicated commitment, I want to fight against the imputations of the argument.

"If I am to return, I must believe totally."

"Lydia, my suggestion is 'Don't return.' One hears that kind of advice around here. Ask your sister. Talk to Theresa about her feelings about what she is doing.

"The question before you is, 'Is it worth it?'

"Would your energies be better spent in trying to do what Catherine has been discussing with me lately, the very thing to which you alluded

On The Road To Civilization

with regard to a piece of land?”

“It is true sis, we were discussing that very thing when you called. It was a response to something else we were discussing, concerning the breakdown of our civilization, as we recognize it today, when nothing any longer flows from the pump, when dog eat dog will be upon us. It was my notion to be prepared to work the land, something we need to acquire now, before it all happens. It will cost us, perhaps dearly; all we have, or are able to ‘steal’ in order to acquire what we think we need. A postage stamp will not do if we expect to survive even at a subsistence level. We will need to have something already stored in the larder, the cellar, something that we know we can produce for ourselves. We may need to stockpile certain essentials; I do not mean toilet paper, but things like canning supplies. We will need to have our animals already in place.

“Don’t ask, ‘How many of us can expect to do such a thing?’ ‘Will we not be vulnerable to marauders?’

“We will need to be prepared to defend what we have. It may require many more of us, a cooperative in order to share the work load and the defense.

“It is my belief that our salvation, our selfish salvation exists in our returning to the land.”

“Gee, Cate, this is a long way from Africa.”

“It is. I would return there tomorrow if Mr. D. would go. There is something already in place there.”

“Yes!, for them! But not for you, or Mr. D.

“I imagine you visualize a much simpler existence, very close to the earth and the eternal rhythms. However you are vulnerable to more than Boola-Boola.”

“Yes there is that, but there is something else, their unpretentious humanity. In all the poverty, their lack of consumerist things, they have a self that is formed by the very conditions you mention, the simpler, for a lack of another word, simpler existence, their closeness to the earth, and their attunement to the not so ‘eternal’ rhythms. They are the children of the earth.”

“A bit dreamy sis, but I catch the drift. Is such a state of affairs attainable here amongst ourselves? Suppose we obtain that piece of land and we do the things which you hypothesize, perhaps as part of a cooperative; I’m not too sure of the cooperative part, given human nature, but hopefully enough kinship to make something workable; would we not be defining that something you feel amongst them?”

“I am aware of the failures of these cooperative efforts, many of which were born in the ‘hippie’ days, where free love and drugs were a large component of the ‘back to earth’ movement. A few may be said to have survived their ongoing fits and starts.

“We have a different concept; we anticipate, we plan, we do not just

On The Road To Civilization

exist, we seek comfort, we seek nourishing, filling meals. We also want more than adequate shelter. We know of these things, we want them, they are our standard; we will aim to achieve them. So what we would do would be different. Yes, it bears repeating, we will become attuned to more elemental things. We may adjust to them eventually, making it our way of life; if we are lucky. We must remain healthy, alert, be prepared to defend ourselves, perhaps against rape and pillage, even slavery. Also we must be prepared to work hard physically. We will always be in the field, we will always be looking after the animals. We will be needing to make our own clothing, our own footwear, household goods. We will eventually need to make tools, plows, harnesses, all manner of things that will wear out, even should we anticipate, plan ahead for many years.

“In Africa, each of these things I mention would constitute a luxury, something unknown to them. But if I could endure any part of what I might envision with the equanimity I observe amongst them, I feel I would have achieved something.

“They do not have any luxury to do anything I might envision for myself. I cannot know what they might feel if they were to come with me upon my anticipated venture.”

“Cate, I didn’t realize you were headed in that direction.”

“It’s very recent, of course. Although I have been aware of some of what has been said regarding the ‘energy sector’, while I have been sitting on my ass with this Boolo-Boola thing, I have had the ‘luxury’ to read some of the particulars in detail.

“We simply cannot ignore what is there. We cannot stick our heads in the sand; we cannot be sheep, or lemmings. At least I feel I cannot.

“I know I cannot sound the clarion call; it is already sounded; few are listening, because they do not want to hear any of it. They do not want the bubble to burst; so they believe it will not burst in their lifetime; they listen to those who pooh-pooh, rather than listen to those who know what we are facing.

“I cannot ignore the facts. Numbers; the numbers do not lie. I do not know what to do with the facts. I realize I must act in some way. This proposed action has been the subject of our recent discussions.

“Mr. D. and I had thought of the whole family involved in our project, along with others.”

“Whoa there Catherine, you did; I will not be around; remember?”

“For the purposes of this discussion, you will be around, because we cannot dally. How about it Lyd, do you think you could get it on in the dirt, in the barn?”

“While I have been involved in the environmental issues, I hadn’t given much thought to such a proposition, but I too have not paid a serious amount of attention to the pros and cons of the energy issue. I do suppose, however, the finite aspect of this thing is soon to visit us; can

On The Road To Civilization

we be prepared for its eventuality? I might envision the prospect as a relief to the environment.”

“Its not a matter of ‘can we’; it is ‘we must be’.

“Understand me clearly here. This is not a frivolous thing, a communal ‘back to the earth’ thing; a ‘tune in, drop out thing’ a thing where well-off people do communal LSD, meth, dope, Psilocybin, designer stuff, deliberate counter-culture stuff, a free love, escapist, joy ride. None of which was done from necessity. What I envision is done completely from necessity; no frills; no exotics; but not deliberately austere, especially if we begin now to build this future which will require total commitment. Bear in mind there will be no petroleum products; only the plastics that we save from this world. We will be dependent upon wood for heat, we will need a stream, or a catchment system; or, with luck, some kind of well, for a source of water. We will want the best soil we can find where water is available. We will need to grow feed for our animals; we will need land for them to graze. We will need to build structures to house ourselves and our animals, to store our stuffs, if we do not find something already developed. We will require good tools. In the best of circumstances we might live by a river which we could use to drive a water wheel, or provide a ducting of water to provide a source of power for our various needs; lighting, sawing; perhaps various other power tools we might have saved from this civilization, but above all, irrigation.

“To me, it is our chance to survive. At least, until some marauders come to try to take it away. We will need to be prepared to defend ourselves, not with sweet talk.”

“You have given this lot of thought. It sounds all too serious. It gives me the shivers.”

“Lydia, how do you really evaluate things as we know them? Our consumerist society, for example? How does that really measure up to a non-consumerist society? Will we really be going backwards a hundred years? What if we do? What does a hundred years in any particular scale of historical recollection mean, really? How much has any 100 year period in history yielded to the overall civilizational picture? It all becomes a blur. Somewhere in the back of my mind I am haunted by the ruins (remains) of past civilizations. I think of the Aztec, the Mayan, the Inca civilizations that totally disappeared.

“The last hundred years would have happened differently if it had not been for fossil fuel. Sure, we were already burning coal, and would have burned it all up as we will do in the near future. There are three times more people on this planet than there were in 1950. Imagine what that will do to the consumption of coal, if we try to maintain something, rather than redesign something, scale things down, drastically. We had killed all the sperm whales for their oil for our lamps, long before the

On The Road To Civilization

population explosion. We have likewise exploited every species that has yielded some kind of gain, some kind of prosperity, 'til there is very little remaining.

"We have not been in the habit of husbanding resources; we merely go from one to the other until they have been exhausted. It is the story of man for him to conduct himself in such a manner. Man is not conservative by nature. He marginally plans, but he cannot see far enough into the future, or is unwilling to truly sacrifice as his intelligence will dictate. He is driven by his viscera.

"But we must not do this thing; we must not contribute to this thing any longer, you and I, and Mr. D. and Tess, and those of like kinship. We haven't any real alternative. We must for the very first time take our own lives into our own hands. We cannot tarry, the imperative beckons us down that very road we must take."

"Have you been looking for something?"

"Only scantily on the internet. As you were telephoning I was asking Mr. D. if he would accompany me on a search? We are preparing to do so. Mr. D. even suggested the marketing of this place in order to capitalize such a venture. He realizes we could not subsist here. Of course, I would not have considered such a thing, and in my heart of hearts cannot consider it."

"Alas!, we live like kings and queens here. We are riding the crest of a set of circumstances that have favored us; I hesitate to label those set of circumstances 'civilization'.

"Perhaps, it is only I who perceive things thus. Perhaps you three view things differently. Perhaps you assume it as your entitlement to live as you do, an expectation. It would not be an unwarranted assumption on your part; it comes with the territory."

"Mr. D., this kind of harangue is not necessary; it is also inaccurate. Nothing is ours by entitlement. We have been favored by a certain set of circumstances, as were our parents. Its not that we have not been aware of those circumstances, but in knowing you, we have been doubly challenged to a more critical and truer perception of things."

"Even I, who grew up 'on the other side of the tracks', never experienced hunger, never was without shelter. There were those who seemingly were more favored, not only by circumstances, but by right. As long as one was not compelled to recognize their right at all times; that is, as long as one was free to avoid them and the implications of relating to them, one might experience, and explore his own set of circumstances without feeling something was lacking or missing.

"Having eventually arrived here constitutes part of that exploration; it also was an opportunity that came at a particularly favorable time; perhaps never to be repeated. As it is, now, even without the buildings here, the land is so costly, there isn't any way I could possibly come up

On The Road To Civilization

with the means to afford it; even if I had saved most of all the earnings accumulated during my lifetime.

“In a certain sense, I have no right to it because I could not afford it. That is also true of the place I occupy elsewhere, when I am forced to leave this country. If that is true of my circumstances, how even more true of countless others, who haven’t any rights at all, who are forced to live under the yoke of landlords, or to live on the commons.

“Imagine how much worse it will become, as the crash of civilization as we know it, trickles down to nothing.

“Catherine has good instincts about things. She is looking ahead to a time when that favorable set of circumstances will have vanished. She sees it ahead in the not too distant future; to borrow a phrase we have used often as ‘fatefully inevitable’. She is unwilling to calculate when she will need to move. The adjustment is ahead in her future; sooner rather than later, while she still has some energy and strength”

“Also, Mr. D., while I have the benefit of your company, and your savvy. A certain set of imperatives replace the certain set of circumstances, favorable or not; by right or not. We are destined to do this thing. We must not be turned into beggars, slaves, or prey.

“However, while an illusion might sustain us, there is much that might be overlooked. For example, will we be obliged to grow everything’, like grains to grind into flour in order to make bread. Or will we be able to trade, or have earnings enough, or savings enough to procure the grain to grind, or the flour itself; not an insignificant consideration; we must have ‘bread’ to eat, in order to sustain ourselves. How much will we be able to depend upon the world at large for our needs. Will we need to return to the tuber culture (the potato culture)? As this ‘civilization’ built upon fossil fuels collapses, much else might collapse along with it. Because there are so many occupants now, compared to our reference point, the pre-petroleum days, returning to a former way of life may not be so orderly. Most people will not be prepared for any kind of transition. They will need to reacquire survival skills that have atrophied from lack of use, attitude adjustment not being the least amongst them. Just imagine the chaos in the cities.

“First things first, the land with water; enough land with enough water. Also the surreptitious search for kinsman. We must do what we do quietly, revealing nothing to anyone concerning our intentions, our objectives.”

“Listen to Catherine, will you. Remarkable!”

“If one accepts the premise, one must act.”

“You are beginning to influence me Cate. Has Theresa any inkling of what you are considering?”

“While we have alluded to many things wrong with our social apparatus, we have not alluded to radical changes in our own lives as

On The Road To Civilization

any kind of self-saving remedy. Obviously we have been on a different tack, having made a certain set of assumptions. We might still follow such a course if the social apparatus would remain in tact. But we cannot make any further assumptions that will auger to our detriment.

“Yes!, Theresa must know what we have only recently seriously considered.

“We must change our base.”

“Wow! Is what I am inclined to say.

“Do I question your wisdom in this?”

“With Mr. D. in the background, I imagine you being cautioned all around, if for no other reason than your health considerations. One supposes such a consideration to become moot if all hell breaks loose anyway.

“On the one hand your direction seems precipitous; on the other it shows sensibility. You are not ignoring the facts, and you are not counting upon things you do not have at hand; false promises, for example; panaceas; falling victim to others whims.

“There is wisdom in that.

“Oh!, you must call Theresa; persuade her, convince her, to attend a sister’s council.”

“How long would you intend to be here?”

“At least as long as it takes to persuade Theresa to come for the council.”

“I had better get with it then.”

“Allow me to amend that answer; as long as you will have me.”

“Very, very happy to have you. Still I will get with it.

“Right away as a matter of fact.”

Catherine goes to the phone. She touch-tones the numbers to the hostel in the Big City. Someone answers; Catherine waits.

“Hello Tess, this is your ‘big’ sister. How’s it going?”

“How would you like a break?”

“Well, Lydia is here for a break from her travails.

“We had hoped to persuade you to come for what we have called a ‘sister’s council’.

“I imagine them to be important matters.

“To do with how we should respond to the forthcoming collapse of Western Civilization as we have come to know it.

“I know it sounds precipitous; in a way it is. It is the result of Mr. D. and I weighing the makings of my, our, future.

“No, this time it has some serious implications.

“Sure I can tell you some of it over the phone, but it should really be chewed and digested thoroughly will all of us present.

“Could we do it in the Big City? I suppose. But Lydia is out here now,

On The Road To Civilization

and welcome to stay as long as she likes. She is going through a 'burn-out' right now.

"I'll call her to the phone. Lydia, Theresa wishes to speak to you.

"Hello Sis.

"Yes, I have come for a rest; I felt a need for a different perspective, which by the way has nothing to do with Cate's request, although I would love to see you, and for the three of us to be together for a few.

"I cannot tell you in three easy words; it is all new to me. I do not wish to be mysterious, but I do not wish to dilute the effect of what we have been discussing, which we immediately realized must include you.

"I see. I was unaware of such things happening.

"You imagine it to be an obstacle.

"I feel certain everyone involved will forego pressing the issue.

"Perhaps your concerns are inflated.

"Tess, Please come.

"I realize what you are saying comes after much consideration, but I feel all of us are big enough and wise enough to ride through these entanglements.

"What's important is what is important.

"You'll come then. In a couple of days. Wonderful, wonderful.

"OK, I'll tell Cate. Take care of yourself, Be of good cheer! I love you my sweet, we all love you!"

"She is coming in a couple of days, will let us know what she arranges. She felt it unnecessary to prolong the call, so bid us all her 'bye 'til later'"

"Is something wrong there."

"Just the politics of human interaction; we are remiss in our teachings regarding basic diplomacy. She is frustrated by politics, which seems to creep into every endeavor that involves other people.

"She was hesitant to leave while things are unsettled there, but felt that some things will not be resolved in her presence any more than they will in her absence. Ongoing stuff, one supposes. She seemed reluctant to discuss it in the presence of other possible listeners."

"Yes! Wonderful that she will come; thank you, Lydia."

Theresa had let a cat out of the bag about which Lydia was anxious to query Mr. D, in private. She felt it necessary to help defuse a potentially destructive thing from happening.

She was initially angered by what Theresa had revealed, wanting to take William to task, maybe with a club.

Lydia, although containing what she was feeling, sought the earliest opportunity to draw William aside without provoking any suspicion from Catherine. Catherine herself had made it possible by requesting some time to work at the computer on one of her projects.

On The Road To Civilization



Lydia approached William, drawing him outside to the bluff, the very bluff where Lydia had first shown some softening in her attitude toward Mr. D. She was not inclined to be soft during this encounter.

“Mr. D., I do not know how attentively you were listening to my words to Theresa, but if you were very much attuned you would have deduced that she had revealed something to me of her’s and your growing emotional involvement.”

“I imagined as you suppose. I cannot offer anything especial to enlighten you. Things happen. They often do not happen by plan or intent, they just happen.”

“Is that all you will say in the matter?”

“Its nobody’s business but ours. She wanted to let you know that she is struggling with the implications of our emotional attachments; so am I. We have foresworn never to cause Catherine any knowledge of what has happened; she must be spared any hurt from any involvement. Actually we have not had any opportunity to test our resolve or our behavior in the company of Catherine.

“Theresa and I have not had sexual relations, although we have shared certain intimacies, mostly by letter, and only recently.

“I don’t mean to cut you off; and unless you become very testy I will not cut you off. It pains both of us that we cannot divulge anything to Catherine.

“It is hopeful we will keep our more pressing emotions to ourselves, that we can function as we have in the past as very close friends. I do view Theresa as a very close friend; and she views me as a very close friend.

“The flare up of emotions came when I visited the Big City looking for Catherine. When Theresa learned of Catherine’s illness, she acted promptly, shrewdly, and with dispatch. Cool, very cool on the surface. But underneath she was hurting. She started to cry; I attempted to comfort her, feeling very great concern myself, for her sister. Without intending anything beyond comforting, by physically embracing her, she yielding to the comfort to some extent, suddenly withdrawing. The latter act embarrassed her to such an extent she explained to me its cause: revulsion, for which she tried to apologize, feeling doubly embarrassed by such an admission.

“It seemed to end there; we went on to do as we had been doing in our relating, until a more recent happening which occasioned further explanation of Theresa’s feelings in the Big City.

On The Road To Civilization

“As you perhaps know and knew, that Theresa and I hit it off from the very beginning, that is, she accepted the two-headed old geezer from the beginning. Of course, coming from such a lovely child/woman such as herself, I responded to her welcome and her charms, her intelligence, her good cheer, her equanimity, what else, ‘God’ knows. I still do, and will always.

“Let it be understood, I love Catherine beyond any words that might be used to describe that love. If I was to hurt her it would most likely destroy me as a person. Catherine and I have worked through the difficulties that arose from her African experience, some of the details of which you are not aware.

“I also love Theresa, in a different way, which only recently has become something more complicated for each of us, conducted by mail. We have not faced each other since certain revelations conducted in that manner, preceded by another physical contact in Catherine’s presence that strongly affected Theresa, probably awakening the unresolved feelings of the first such awakening.

“Her letters to me speak volumes of a very fine person; your very own sister. I would share them with you under the right circumstances. You must trust both of our motives; and I must trust yours.

“In the meantime, when Theresa arrives, those letters will be out there, between us. Hopefully we will be able to dodge dealing with emotions; I believe it will be more difficult for her. I have already declared to Theresa that I cannot in any way hurt Catherine. I will not.

“If we can function with effective reserve, perhaps some of the intensity will pass, and we will be able to resume our relationship without any further complication. I do not want hands-off entirely, because we are each affectionate people, who show our affection with hugs, and touches, communicating acknowledgement, concern, affection, even love, our feelings of the specialness of the other person.”

“Alright, Mr. D., I will reserve judgment. Perhaps, if you will trust me, I would like to read my sister’s letters.”

“Thank you for indulging both of us in this. I am glad that she revealed enough to you to precipitate these revelations; I have found them burdensome, and much too secretive; we both realize Catherine cannot know. Your knowing may help both Theresa and myself.

“I should add, though Catherine wants both Theresa and yourself to feel good about me, it has been easy enough for Theresa and I to form a bond, and a way of relating to each other that makes us feel trusting, and comfortable. Catherine has noted the way Theresa and I relate, even mentioning the enjoyment we derive from hugging one another, wondering if it has other meanings. She then relieves herself of her concern by indicating that is what she wants to happen; acceptance, closeness, warmth, trust, perhaps love. I must not betray that trust; I

On The Road To Civilization

cannot. I know Theresa feels she cannot.”

“Mr. D., I should mention to you that I do not form relationships with anyone with ease. I know I am reluctant for a number of reasons. I do envy Theresa in the fluidity of her personality. She is open and trusting; for the most part she has good enough instincts not to get into situations where she would find herself at a disadvantage or compromised.

“I am not open and trusting. I am very guarded. I do not have Theresa’s instincts.

“It might interest you to know that I have crossed a threshold with you. I do trust you. You are my sister’s favorite; her lover, her man, her soul mate.

“You alluded to something that happened during her Africa experience, details omitted, which the two of you had resolved between you, details of which I was not aware, which I might interpret to mean she had an affair with someone. Is that true?”

“Yes it is. A deeply painful experience for her; a very big mistake, as it turned out. Yes!, we had to work through that. She was very ill; I needed to wait until she was strong enough to confront her with my feelings in the matter. But your sister, being the magnificent person she is, she desperately wanted to and did confess every detail, remorsefully, asking my forgiveness. She could not wait for an opportune time to unburden what was in her heart.

“She knew how I felt about the impermanence of our relationship, that I felt eventually someone would come along to really sweep her off her feet; she knew I believed and expected this would happen. But she did not refer to any part of it; only her own feelings of remorse for her betrayal of our avowed betrothal. A truly remarkable, wonderful beautiful person. She reaffirmed her love for me; and her earnest desire to continue our relationship. I believe in her totally. Still I have no presumptive right to her, no claim to her; she is free to do as her nature dictates.”

“You are both remarkable people, Mr. D. My admiration for you grows.”

“I’ll take that in the spirit it was given Lydia. I welcome your friendship and trust.

“But lets not dwell on these matters; rest assured I am prepared to make all necessary sacrifices for the happiness of your sisters.

“I have been most fortunate in meeting each of you; my life has become enriched, it has been charmed; it has found a very special love. May all that continue for the remainder of my days.”

Lydia sat down at the log bench on the bluff, looking over the water. She motioned William to join her. Catherine watched them through the window, tempted to join them, but felt it was the first time the two of

On The Road To Civilization

them seemed relaxed in each other's company; she didn't want to be responsible for breaking the spell; if that is what it was.

Catherine did not know what to expect of her feelings these days. In the beginning she wanted both sisters to welcome this man, to want to know him, even to love him. What does a person mean by 'love'? 'Love' between herself and Mr. D. has been tested, and has affected her. She feels less secure in herself because she had broken the spell she herself had created. What kind of person is she? Is not Mr. D. allowed to score his own points somewhere along the line? Certainly I hurt him; can he want to avenge that hurt in some way?

Of course, it is not a matter of scoring points. But he should have the same right, nonetheless, to do as she has done. Instead he seems content to resume something, even at great risk to himself. Does he trust me more now because I seem to be a penitent? Am I penitent? He doesn't want me to be penitent. He wants me to be free in all respects. If I choose him freely, then he will feel more secure. I must proceed carefully; never awakening in him doubts about my affections.

Look at him out there with my sister, my hold-out reserved sister, my condemning sister, beckoning him to sit beside her. Could I have asked for more? His closeness to Theresa has bothered me, yet objectively speaking I want them to have this closeness, because of my own closeness to each of them. But I know that closeness might not readily recognize any boundary. I have stepped beyond a boundary. Sometimes I suspect Mr. D. has crossed the boundary with Theresa. There he is now with my other sister. But how wonderful it must be for him to have this gorgeous young woman take him into her confidence.

"Mr. D., I feel I am at some turning point in my life. What I have been doing lacks something. I may be thorough, diligent, maybe even the best person to be doing what I am doing, but I am in the trenches, not up on the ground with others, sharing in a meaningful give and take. I am involved in a sham thing because everyone is in it for him or her self. Objectively speaking I am able to recognize such a state of affairs as being part of the human animal, or the 'human condition'. It is difficult for me to understand this through myself. I realize that, while I can be the measure of all men, or women, that in truth I am not; simply because I am different. Not holier than thou, but a person who defines things, adheres to the definition; does not equivocate. I am sincere in what I do believe; my beliefs are not showy things.

"I want to be effective; I am not effective in the role in which I am engaged. Perhaps it is my perspective. When there seems to be some defined purpose to a thing, ones lives within the parameters of that defined purpose, having expectations commensurate with that involvement. But there seems to be a deliberate evasion on the part of

On The Road To Civilization

others who do not allow the defined purpose to interfere with their own private agendas, which are never revealed.

“I do not want to be deterred from my purpose; I do not want to get into trading insults. I do not want to have to be put in a position where my integrity is assaulted by people who are not prepared to be up front about their hidden agendas. I do not want to have to grit my teeth in observance of some notion about progress, ‘a snail’s pace’, accepting token advances for real advances. The spirit is all wrong; there is no spirit; the spirit to stay within the bounds of the defined purpose, with the idea of seriously addressing that purpose. Instead it is a plodding spiritless evasion.

“I have learned something. What I have learned might force me into laboring futilely for incremental change, by making of myself a battering ram. What else have I learned? I do not want to be a battering ram.

“I know I am a person with integrity, someone who relates to others in good faith. I stick to the issues. I am involved in the issues because I perceive them as important, perhaps crucial to the betterment of the human condition. When our government pretends to be doing its job by acknowledging that there is an issue, then refuses not to take the issue seriously, where does that leave the citizen or the constituent? No where.

“I have been at this now for two years. I am being regarded as a meddlesome person, but one who is given the floor only because to deny me would make it all too obvious that no one cared, so now I am regarded as a Ralph Nader type; I am a token dissenter; only a dissenter, nothing else; tolerated, but ignored at the same time. Anyone who serves in a similar capacity is also regarded. Government at this disinclined level, this disinterested level, sucks!

“Oh!, but they listen very attentively to Michael Crichton; that duplicitous bastard! He salves their consciences. Sure, I can take on Crichton, easily; but I would be more effective if I punched him on the nose; imagine the press!”

“Another remarkable spirited Tellerman. So very valuable, Lydia. I cannot imagine your niche in all of this. I don’t imagine that Nader had imagined his niche, his pigeon hole. He was effective though, like I.F Stone was effective. He grew old in the traces, sadly.”

“I suspect I have already made my decision not to fill that niche. As I sit here with you, as I see you and my sister living this life you live, and what you are now contemplating for a future, something else is being validated for me.

“I do not know if I could live the life of a scholar; or if I could live my life as a legal scholar. I have been approached by two of the Supreme’s offices to be so engaged, but the Supreme is now corrupted by politics. Because the Legislative arm of our government is so corrupt, all the enactments become suspect; and, with study, prove to be suspect. These

On The Road To Civilization

enactments become the Law of the Land, with an immense bias that favors those who already occupy the favorable places in our Land. To me that is intolerable. The Supremes cannot change that when their favorable imbalance becomes part of the process of judging the application of the enactment. The Court's task is corrupted before it even considers a case. Now we have a conservative, right wing court. There have times when we have had a liberal left wing court. The pendulum of fairness, equity and justice swings harmfully to the system, to the process. The Law itself means nothing but a persecution of those who are adversely affected by it; often those who have the least access to the Law.

"Yes!, some remarkable things do happen. The judges sometimes do exercise independence, especially when something so gross confronts even the most rigid sensibility; but, seldom, be it noted. More often than not the equivocation one receives in the halls of congress finds its way into the Law; fairness, equity and justice become stumbling blocks to judges whose inclination is to proceed with prejudice. Representative government finding its way into the Court; representing vested interests, the status quo, even popular opinion.

"So I do not perceive any options for myself involving government. I could try to run for some kind of local judgeship, or try to become elected as a representative, only to become known as carping back-bencher. Imagine some stupid broad harping about fairness equity and justice, and a few other unmentionables regarding the human condition."

"Bitter words, Lydia."

"It will pass.

"I could teach; I have received offers to teach, at prestigious Law Schools. I am considering that. I would want to teach at the most liberal Law School, where I could become a firebrand concerning inviolable basic principles, urging students to get up off"n their asses, to do the job with conscience, and to do it right.'

"I can imagine doing what you and Catherine are doing also, and what you are contemplating with regard to the strange unknown future; or reenactment of the past, we will be facing very soon. I can imagine how much worse the situation in those sacred halls as the frequenters of those sacred halls feel the world they have been controlling begin to slip away from them.

"You see, already I am gaining perspective. Perhaps a healthy perspective. What do you think?"

"Lydia, we would welcome you in our enterprise; so long as you didn't imagine yourself throwing your life away.

"It remains, one must lead their life, regardless of the impetus to save mankind from himself. It is my belief that mankind cannot be saved from itself; one must lead their own life as best they can. The ideals will not be totally abandoned in such a pursuit; one will not cease to think, to feel,

On The Road To Civilization

to care; but more in a one to one level. No frills, no fanfare; simple human interaction at a meaningful level.”

“It has its appeal, Mr. D.. I would like to chew it over with Catherine and Theresa. There are a few people I have met in DC whom I would recommend as candidates for an expanded enterprise, like a cooperative. Solid people, who care. However I do not know if they would welcome such an order of magnitude change in their lives. The ones to whom I refer have been dedicated public servants. I don’t know if they have allowed themselves to think in the most radical terms regarding the future; certainly not as have Catherine and you.

“Have you two boiled it down to the essentials? It would seem so. Something to think about seriously? It would seem so. I cannot find fault with the direction. There is something in the wings for which we must be prepared, without knowing its full magnitude.”

“Lydia, when Theresa arrives, I look forward to a meaningful discussion of our anticipated future. I do not believe we are engaged in precipitous paranoid contemplations. Perhaps after our council, we will be acting, with will and without hesitation. Catherine already seems determined to head in that direction, alone, if necessary. I will not reveal any of her other thoughts or plans until all of us are together. It would be best if she spoke for herself. I feel I would follow her in whatever she decided; it has already been decided that we wish no longer to be apart. She has agreed, although what she has seen in African ‘outback’, so to speak, has demonstrated a way of living in its simplest form, and what for herself she might prefer, she realizes she cannot expose me, or herself, to the dangerous diseases, endemic, and persistent in that part of the world. She has felt her time there was all too short, and incomplete in experience. She feels she will return one day.”

“Catherine sure keeps us hopping. Will she abandon the Big City thing?”

“When the crunch comes, the Big City, all cities, will become entrapments, perhaps death camps, for millions. What she has started in the Big City, while barely scratching the surface of answering a need now, would become something luxurious if it continued to operate. Not a chance in Hell, literally!”

“What I am hearing causes me to wonder where might be the center of the Universe; not in DC by the way. It might be here where you two germinate such all encompassing ideas.”

“Base flattery from one with such a credulous disposition?”

“Mr. D., There more to each of us than meets the eye.”

“The eye beholds a very beautiful woman. Beneath all that beauty lives a person with high standards, with a keen sense of exactitude in thought and in the use of language. Also a person who cares about the human condition and the environment; who shares in the same

On The Road To Civilization

motivation as her sisters, to do good, to spread equity fairness and justice to those who are denied and overlooked, and to rid the environment of its 'uncontrolled substances'. Noble aims.

"Perhaps, now, a challenge to certain assumptions, brought on by man's seeming indifference to things that mean a great deal to you. Leading to a host of doubts about assumptions and questions regarding the purpose of your own life."

"Fair enough Mr. D.. I like your use of 'uncontrolled substances'.

"You slipped that 'beautiful woman' comment in their rather adroitly; eliciting no offense. Catherine has told me how you first addressed her.

"The noble aims, in all probability, have come to us through our father. Our education has not been lacking in promoting the 'higher calling'. I would assume such to be an expected beginning, given our social mores, our claim to ethical and moral standards, also to participating in the maintenance of civilization, and what we have been implicitly expected to do to improve and maintain it.

"We begin naively with ideals and expectations to go along with them. Now that I have been in the trenches for a few, I do not feel it is universally held that these things are self-evident; I believe quite the opposite. As a matter of fact I believe they are hard to come by.

"The most crucial question for me; 'Do I still wish to participate? If so, am I prepared to fight?

"Participation also assumes certain responses to the activity; also assuming 'we are all in this together', the activity ought remain within the boundaries of certain expected responses.

"The great error, and/or realization: we are not all in this together.

"The responses are not commensurate with the purpose of our activity. It's a set up from the beginning. Its like, we do not begin today to assume and expect things to happen. They have been happening for years; as such they have assumed a fixed shape all their own. We newcomers have no right to occupy or influence any part of what has been developed over the years. We get the leavings of what no one else has wanted, have abandoned; make of it what you will.

"I cannot make anything of it, because all of my assumptions and expectations do not fit within the shape of the monster that has been developed. The longer we are exposed, the greater the risk of being devoured by the monster.

"For me, do I fight, or do I lead my own life, develop my own style of living? If I fight, it means complete dedication; most likely disavowal of my own development into a natural being relating to the landscape. When one fights he fights his look-a-likes; none other.

"I know there are others who persevere, with incremental success. I know it seems that all those increments add up. A noise in the background that cannot be ignored. Yes!, it has become politically

On The Road To Civilization

expedient now to say the right things about the environment, as it has always been to laud fairness, equity, and justice; apple pie, motherhood, and the flag.

“I propose to desert the cause when it seems we are making a little headway.

“Mr. D., as standoffish and abrasive as I may seem to you, or may have seemed to you, I am not, by nature, a fighter. To me fighting is not where it is at. To be contentious about something that should be obvious to everyone reveals aspects to our natures that both demoralize and enrage me, neither of which augment my life experience; more, detract from it.

“Man is what he is. A lot of what man is is visceral. Greed, avarice and gluttony, and pride, as well as sloth, operate just beneath the surface of most of humanity. Perhaps these serve some function not apparent to the more civilized amongst us. These visceral operatives influence the decisions we make, whether in our private life, or in the halls of Congress. These operatives are not revealed. Instead one hears arguments that fly in the face of sensitivity and sensibility, arguments that question the very basis of our reason, reason based upon factuality, on credible evidence; we hear blatant dilution of important and significant data. In arguments from the other side, it is sufficient to merely suggest that one is producing skewed information, that no direct cause and effect relationship can be demonstrated. Correlations do not stand the test of credibility, however possible, plausible, or probable.

“With that kind of malicious interference in our attempts to get at the truth, with that kind of equivocation, temporizing, dissembling, many ingenuous and outright lies, and distortions of the truth, amended with statements that their concern is the same as ours; lip service to divert the plausibility of their culpability; we are lost.

“Our government is corrupted by political campaigns being financed by vested interests. This corruption leads to biased legislation that favors the vested interests. It becomes manifestly clear we are not all in this together. Can we change something at a grass roots level, where we cannot change things in the Halls of Congress?

“Now, comes the clincher, does it really matter in the long run?

“Mankind doesn’t seem to be headed in any particular direction, either as civilized entity or as an animal that serves all his visceral appetites. That he is a creature that consumes, destroys, ransacks, despoils, we might argue he is unfit as an occupant for this place; this paradise.

“Am I a fit occupant of this place if I appear to be lying down on the job?”

“Only you will be able to answer. What I might say could be said in the right spirit at the wrong time.”

On The Road To Civilization

“What would that be, Mr. D.?”

“Lydia, you should not attach any significance to what I might say. I am terribly biased in my perception of man’s intentions. As you have stated regarding the visceral side of our natures; I agree they do rule us, for the most part; those without conscience, even more.

“What you have noted with regard to the additive effect of incremental change should argue for your continuance on the ramparts. But because your sensibilities are so affronted by the obvious corruption of representative government, you do not know where to turn; you no longer want to act out your drama in such a shabby theatre.

“I would sympathize totally with your withdrawal to lead your own life. That doesn’t mean you will desert your concerns. It might mean you could do your incremental part in another way, both by example, and by doing something similar to Catherine with your intellectual conundrums.

“You might give yourself a year or two to a more cloistered existence where you will become more acquainted with your self, where you might hone your arguments into their keenest edge; much like Catherine is doing now.

“As you know, now, Catherine is contemplating a very big change in which she would like to involve her sisters. Back to basics? I think it is a step in a direction that will eventually yield a different understanding of what is considered necessary to live. I don’t know what that might mean eventually; maybe just a way of life that is rewarding enough in itself; working hard, growing weary, enjoying rest. Nothing is foreclosed by such an engagement. A different lifestyle. One might imagine you would still have access to information, more information than you might want to digest; although some of this conjecture is not foregone.

“Just so much talk, another ‘pie in the sky?’”

“Right now, it has it’s appeal.”

“Catherine has someone in her life, for the now. Hopefully the compromises she is making for that someone, will not compromise the remainder of her life. If you and Theresa follow your sister, it would not be without the expectation of having someones in your lives, perhaps made more possible by the different circumstances. What compromises will you be forced to make? Perhaps nebulous questions at this juncture.”

“It would seem so.”

“I know this may seem out of place in this discussion, but is there any significant other in your life?”

“I don’t object to the question, as pertains to its timeliness.

“I seem to be attracted to people who upon closer scrutiny, and after certain revelations that develop with time, become the antithesis to myself. I do not seem to be able to intuit certain things about certain people to whom I allow myself to be attracted; with hindsight, I might

On The Road To Civilization

seem very gullible.

“The most recent relationship, which by the way, did not involve intimacies, but which were rapidly developing into that eventuality, ended when I began to feel the projected charm too contrived. It was not that I so much objected to the purpose of the persuasions, that is, for this guy to get his hands on my body, which, if he had not laid it on so thick, might have happened, but that he had deliberately avoided speaking of things he knew would affront me. As we grew closer he began to reveal more of himself, feeling overconfident with the snares he set for me, as I imagine it now.

“To put it bluntly, it was all smarm to get into my pants. When I confronted him with his deceitfulness, he tried to worm his way with more smarm, claiming I had it all wrong. He tried to minimize our philosophical differences as incidental to what was really happening between us.

“I was aware of what happened to Catherine with the simpatico with whom she trundled off to Africa. I began to feel like an object, something to be used for another’s pleasure, if you will; a possible hole. As much as I might have desired something for myself in the relationship, I became unwilling to get into a situation where I would become a castoff.

“As the attraction and involvement state accelerated, little seemed to matter; as time wore on, all the ‘little differences’ began to matter. His more masculine activities, like hunting, or killing for sport, even for macho showiness, began to bother me; why had they not bothered me at first? His general insensitivities to life and the living began to register. His general language seemed cruder, had taken upon a harder edge. A very self-centered uncaring person seemed to be taking shape as it emerged from the cloud of romance. So help me, I was still trying to convince myself this was my sticky self that was imagining the worst; why, because I wanted to get laid? I suddenly found it difficult to face myself. I was being complicit in something that I began to abhor.

“I recalled all that Catherine had revealed to me concerning her relationship to the hunk that got into her pants, how she felt after the sexual intimacy had begun. Obviously her feelings were already compromised by her relationship with you, and all her guilt regarding that relationship. She realized there was no relationship, that this guy was using her for his own gratification, his objective had been that selfish end, that she was just a nice looking chick who gave him a hard on. There never was any intention for any kind of commitment. Her needs became an inconvenience to him; and her sickness clinched the bad deal.

“One thing she told me made a particular impression, of not having a feeling of satisfaction after all the screwing; more like a hangover, a cloying sensation instead of something else. Rough and jagged on the

On The Road To Civilization

edges. She never did feel what she has felt with you, a oneness, a wholeness, fulfilled in some way; smooth, even, full of equanimity; love, Mr. D. Then Remorse, Mr. D.”

“I blame myself, Lydia, for not being by her side in the Big City. I wasn’t there. Also I always projected that I expected her to find someone more her own age, someone who could keep up with her. She always denied she was looking elsewhere. That it was me, not sex, per se. Something reassuring for the old geezur, which I never took seriously, as much as I wanted.”

“Do you take her more seriously now?”

“I do not misconstrue contrition as an assurance. I love her; I care for her. We have resumed an intimate relationship. She seems happy with that. I suspect I wouldn’t want the relationship to change to something more strained; which might cause me to reflect badly on myself, emphasizing some deficiency in myself.

“She, you, Theresa, are remarkable people, beautiful women, whom it is my distinct pleasure to know. Each of you is so alive, aware of the world surrounding you, keen observers, empathetic to the living, moral and ethical individuals, sincere, reliable in every way.

“Because Catherine did what she did within the realm of my expectations, I do not fault her. I know what it is to get carried away. Theresa and I will have to back away from things we have allowed ourselves to feel in the absence of another, where closeness became too close. A painful admission for me; and for Theresa. We began to feel pretty shabby. Its truly a wonderful experience to be loved by someone like Theresa; at least for me it is; without any prurient overtones.

“Perhaps you have learned that I have a daughter, who could not possibly begin to become what each of you has become and is becoming. She turned her back on everything, closed her mind, if ever she had one; locked onto Jesus; and that tome upon which people swear to speak the truth. I don’t see the connection.

“Because I am who I am, intolerant of those who pray for me, while condemning me to the eternal fires if I don’t get the message, my daughter and I have nothing in common. At one point in my life and in her life she meant something to me; I worried over her. She was never daddy’s little girl. She resented me at an early age, continuing to resent me until she left home, and long after, as it turned out. Have I ceased to care about her because she didn’t turn out to be an exponent of her father? I do not think it was necessary for her to become what I might have imagined I wished her to become. If only she had shown some interest in ideas; even questioned the premises by which she was expected to live (by others).”

“A sad chapter in your life Mr. D.”

“Yes!, emphasized recently when I received a package unexpectedly in

On The Road To Civilization

the mail; mail for which I needed to travel the eight miles to and fro the post office to obtain my signature. I hadn't even imagined any connection with family as I retrieved the package.

"It was from my granddaughter, my daughter's child; someone I hadn't seen in six years, when she was twelve.

"The package contained a framed photograph of her, someone very different than she that I remembered. It was the photo of an eighteen year old, someone I might not recognize; truly someone I might not recognize in many other ways. Along with the photo was a notice of a high school graduation several days after its happening. Not a word from her. Silence."

"A cool wind, Mr. D.

"If blood is important in this matter, which I suspect was the case, sad, sad indeed."

"It matters that one has failed some simple test in this life, of developing a lasting loving relationship with his offspring. I have failed. I do not have any specific regrets, only the feeling of loss.

"When I think upon it, I wonder what I might have done differently. Perhaps given more of myself; what self?"

"I reflected upon my relationship to my parents. Very poor criterion to be used as the measure of the whole prospect of familial relationships."

"Mr. D., you may measure who you are now, by the likes of your friends; the three of us."

"As Catherine declared she might like to be a surrogate daughter, though too large to sit upon my lap. That was in the beginning. Then Theresa accepting me instantly upon our meeting. Now you, with your reassuring 'three of us'.

"Offsetting, compensation? Filling a need? Unquestionably, apart from any comparisons. Thank You, Lydia."

"Mr. D., I know you will take what was said, in the spirit it was spoken. I will add that it is you, as Catherine has clearly indicated. Knowing you has stimulated each of us, challenged each of us, has broadened each of us.

"It has taken time for me. I still feel what I felt in the beginning, that yours and Catherine's relationship is something I could not envision for myself.

"But I too have failed something in myself in my relationships to those who fit the model. Through those failures, I am forced to find less fault with yours and Catherine's relationship. She is happy.

"She had to stray, to betray, in order to discover something in herself. Is that not so?"

"I do not know the answer to that; I do not think Catherine does. Her 'stray and betray' might have become permanent if she had been treated differently. She could very easily have rationalized, if she even had that

On The Road To Civilization

inclination, that what she was doing was within the realm of my expectations. One might wonder whether or not she would have looked back from a more successful venture.

“She said a lot of things to me before she was entranced away; things I knew I could not expect to be binding, as much as I wanted them to be. By not accompanying her to the Big City, I was not doing my part. That is my rationalization. Who knows if she might still not have been entranced, given that Africa was in the offing.

“She has said a lot of things to me, now, that she has returned. We have, or I have, learned, that we do not wish to be apart.”

“What you say brings to mind something I was reading not too long ago, about the mid nineteenth century before the age of steam. About people who were escaping the old world into the new. Young people who were betrothed, the man venturing off to make his fortune before he became a bridegroom. I remember one in particular. They were apart for seven years. Their letters would reach each other with an average frequency of three months.

“Can you imagine such a thing today?”

“Instant gratification, Lydia.”

“Not my point, Mr. D.

“The mores and the expectations were different then, although temptation was always present, as it is now; a different attitude.

“Let us not discount ‘true love’ in any age.

“I don’t know what Catherine might say regarding ‘true love’ at this juncture.”

“Proximity helps!”

“Perhaps, M. D.; not to give credibility to your ‘instant gratification’.”

“Often we look too closely at motivation, desiring, expecting, something pure; idealized. We are of this world; we soon learn the reality. If we remain within ourselves seeking that perfection, we are bound for disappointment; and injury.

“I do not say this in relation to Catherine, I cannot. She is one very decent human being; also very loving.”

“Beautiful too, Mr. D.”

“For a beautiful person to also be a decent human being; and loving, is OK with me. Catherine put it very well when we first met, when my stuttering interiority regarding her beauty became all too apparent, ‘Sir, has the cat got your tongue?’, and, after finding the words to remark upon her loveliness, she noted, ‘Mr. D., I must say I suspect this conversation is a long way from what either of us might have anticipated.’”

“Nice, Mr. D., kind of romantic.”

“It was; it rent my heart asunder.”

On The Road To Civilization

“But it sounds like Catherine. Wonderful she is, Mr. D., remarkably open and sincere.”

“Yes, it has been so, remarkably, as you say.

“Her desire to communicate every detail of her other failed romantic adventure has convinced me of her sincerity; also her remorse and her love.

“While all of this seems past, it is rewarding to recall some of the details; the ‘kiss and make-up part’. It is truly something to be enveloped by your sister. Such yearning and eagerness to give of herself.”

“To you, Mr. D., to you!”

“To her sisters, as well. I have observed the three of you.”

Catherine’s curiosity impelled her to join them on the bluff.

“Am I missing something here?”

Lydia replied, “Mr. D. and I were talking about several things; just now about relationships, in particular, yours and his.”

“No wonder my ears were burning. Pray tell – Tell!”

To which Mr. D. responded, “We were openly declaring how remarkably wonderful you are.

“Also I mentioned your query when we first met, when it was apparent I had been smote, ‘Sir, has the cat got your tongue?’”

“AH Yes!, I was on the offensive quite early, speaking of being smitten by shyness, and disarming charm.”

“Now, she tells all!”

“What do you have to tell, Mr. D.?”

“About cats?”

“About, about?”

“I was smitten. One does become smitten, you know. You were a breath away with all your lovely youness.”

“Not many adjectives there, Mr. D.”

“A ‘stutterer and stammerer’ I have become in the presence of thee whom I love to my very depths.”

Catherine dropped to her knees behind him, enveloping him in her arms from behind, in a meaningfully tender embrace, brushing her hair on to his neck and cheek, cheek to cheek.

“Words!”

Lydia studied this exchange between them, feeling happy for them both. She wanted to hug them both in that moment. Before she could move, Catherine disengaged herself from Mr. D, moving behind her, putting her arms around her, hugging her fiercely. “You too, my beautiful sister.”

Lydia blushed; the intensity of her sister’s embrace surprising her. “Gosh, Cate.”

On The Road To Civilization

“Words! Sis.”

Bit of a skit for the Audience.

We are about to return to the main theme. If only we would embrace each other with sincere heart felt human warmth and love in this cold forbidding indifferent world, there would be little need for words.

We are often estranged from each other, locked within ourselves, like shellfish at the seashore, as the oceans wash over us. Given life to live in shells.

No!, we are not always as I describe in these few words; is it better to say ‘not always’ than ‘seldom’, or ‘rarely’? ‘Often’ does not describe the truer human relationship.

Shells have a way of using each other, exploiting each other; how to describe the significance of that statement. One might imagine the congregation serves some purpose; the lone shell easy pickings for those who fly overhead.

But we are not shells, are we? We wear our hearts on our sleeves; easy pickings too.

Insensibility, irrationality, prejudice, incomplete thought, is rampant amongst us, coming from our words, complicated by our needs, our drives, our compulsions; words do not enhance our understanding when we are in the throes.

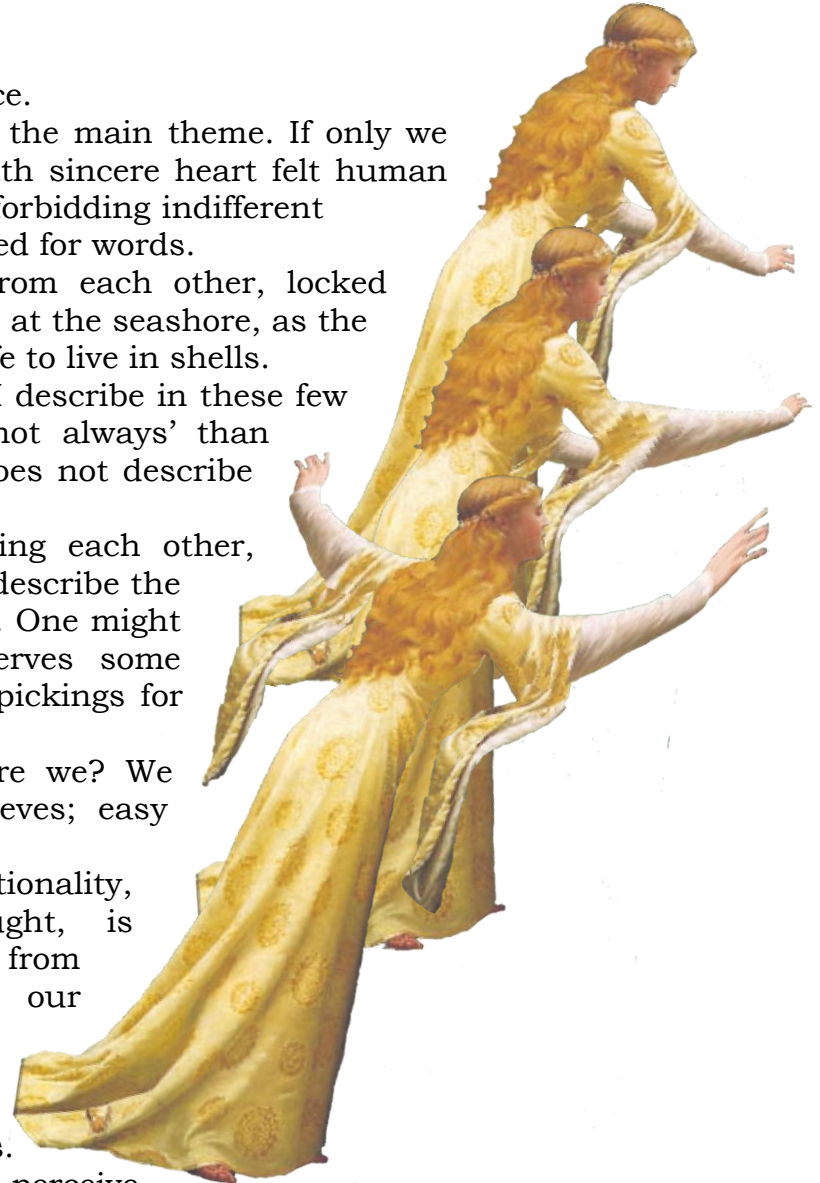
They are empty vessels. We perceive them depicting a kind of madness; or anxiety, or misguided passion, fanaticism, even panic, or paranoia. We want something, the truth of the want is unclear; especially amidst all the lies and deceptions designed to cloud the truth.

Wonder it is that we can speak of ‘civilization’.

Is it so that it is out of reach?

“You know, I am so very pleased that you two could sit for so long side by side speaking to each other. Judging from your body language, you seemed very comfortable with each other.”

“Spying on us?”



On The Road To Civilization

“Observing something that cheers me greatly.”

“Will you join us?”

“Not at this time; carry on.”

“Actually, Cate we were discussing romance; yours and Mr. D.’s with all of its ups and downs; its enduring qualities.

“Also how I have found it within me to welcome you as you two. For the first time I am really open to discussions with Mr. D., any and all subjects included. I have been rewarded.”

“As have I, Lydia.”

“The ‘you two’ applies rather nicely then.”

“Careful Cate, where you let this kind of speculation to lead you. I have just now rather frankly stated to Mr. D. my own personal qualms about having an intimate relationship with someone considerably older than myself. It does not fit my model.”

“I didn’t mean to suggest that you and Mr. D. might be becoming ‘chummy’.

“I am speaking of something that means a great deal to me. In observing ‘you two’ I am witnessing something I have desired from the very beginning. It has taken these almost seven years for this desire to come to fruition. It might never have happened if I hadn’t gone to Africa, if I hadn’t had a relationship with another, if I hadn’t become so ill. It might not have happened if I hadn’t been forced to convalesce here with Mr. D. as you were flaming out in DC, needing a retreat. It is an ideal place for all kinds of convalescing. I am so very very happy that you would think of me, think of us, and call upon us. You have been and are given a heart-felt welcome.

“You arrive also when Mr. D. and I are contemplating something that may be important to each of us in the longer run.

“When Theresa arrives, the discussion may intensify. It ought to be stimulating, enlightening and rewarding. I so look forward.”

The author weaves his somewhat smarmy threads hither and thither.

As a somewhat less smarmy project, in his previous epistle he had depicted the arch-terrorist in the person of his president.

It was Lydia who drew his attention to the contemporary archetype of the Arab, the Muslim, the Islamist, the Imam, as the bona-fide terrorist, only in the sense that he or she has been more effective, not to discount our own homegrown Kazinsky’s and McVeigh’s, and those the government has singled out for a life readjustment She pointed out that instilling fear in one’s fellow man is not new to the species; and that those in the Bush Administration are becoming able practitioners in the art of terror; not directed at the ‘terrorists’ explicitly, but at everyone, implicitly. The Red Alert gives inordinate power to some pretty low characters.

On The Road To Civilization

She asks, 'An extreme measure? Commensurate with what?'

She propounds further, 'Slipping backwards.'

Lydia was particularly disenthralled when the arch terrorist commuted the sentence of 'Scooter' Libby. She felt it a Presidential Power that must be revoked, for it promotes the low characters like George W. Bush pardoning equally low characters of their gross sins, for which the highest price will be paid by the ordinary citizen. It is opined he will be the first chief to pardon himself. When the Republicans raised over 3 Million Dollars to pay the Scooter's \$250,000.00 fine, she wondered what happened to the 2.75 million in loose change. In the face of every citizen, the thought of ridding oneself of certain nuisances gladdened one's heart. The question was seriously asked 'Is it so that it is out of reach?' When one's thought is brought to the threshold of drastic measures like the absolute finalizing of the situation, the whole gambit for civilization is wasted. That one's leader should so provoke one is so terribly wrong. There has to be a redress for these usurpations, but the bullies walk off the stage waving the banner, beating it to death; murderers themselves. Love It Or Leave It!

If you think its so bad here Just cause? She fretted over the mockery of Justice with the Attorney General Gonzalez, and his predecessor, Ashcroft; and now the rigid right-wing emphasis in the Supreme Court. Supreme!!?? Huge steps backwards. How could this have happened; the attrition of something that had been worth preserving? Now perhaps gone forever, as people begin to tear at each others throats; the righteous rich and powerful believing they can control the ball game; when it is clear, in their minority, they will be the first to go; amongst them, there is absolutely nothing worth preserving; their greed and avarice, an overutilized function of existence. They can only leave a meaningless trail of blood, and refuse behind them.

As well as disenthralled, Lydia was provoked to rage, almost uncontrollably. A festering something inside her being. It was dangerous for her to confess too deeply her agitation to Mr. D. She did not want to fall under his spell of persuasions, abetting her inclination to rave about the rampant injustice. She wanted to feel her own strengths, whatever they were; at this time, perhaps anger was a strength, an appropriate thing to feel. She did not want to yield to the sense of futility the whole prospect evoked, feeling certain Mr. D. would be too gleefully sympathetic.

Yes!, something was slipping away, if anything real had existed beyond one's delusional imaginings of civilization. Trashed! The People stand by with their mouths agape as the Compassionate Conservative shoves it up!!!!

There was Mr. D. on the sidelines, almost gloating, believing the 'Least Common Denominator' was receiving its just desserts. Lydia did not

On The Road To Civilization

want to fall under the spell of such thinking. It was a defeatist mentality; and grossly cynical; corrosive of her spirit, as well as unfair to many.

How to remedy the situation was her most preeminent consideration.

She did not want to encourage Mr. D. in his prepossessing attitude toward certain truths, ones that undermined her shaky resolve to seek a remedy. She wanted and needed a chance to think through the whole human condition, but even more, the whole prospect of life on the planet. She realized that man held the key; to which door? Yes!, she was afraid of the persuasions of Mr. D..

She marveled at her sister's determination to follow her own course, her remedy. There was Mr. D. falling under her spell. Or perhaps he knows already what needs to be done, but would not do any of it on his own; it is for her that he will do.

Of course, at his age, he would do nothing of what she proposes, for himself. He will dig in the ground for her. Lydia softened her opinion of him. To herself she had to recognize her inability to fully understand this man, this person. That capable intellect, that intuition, and belief in both; are almost unshakable. He yields it all to his love for Catherine. He senses, or knows, or is willing to believe, she has found a solution; and he has found a solution to his own life in her.

Mr. D. was never 'of the land', although his father was a horticulturist, who earned his living during Mr. D.'s youth as a man who understood and worked the land for others, and who picked up spending money later in life cultivating well-to-do ladies gardens. It was the other drift, the arty drift, that caught him. But during Mr. D.'s youth his father had put him to the land early working in other's gardens weeding, and later, as a ready-made live-in slave, terracing, spading, planting, weeding, picking bugs, and the watering, and harvesting, and preserving of his father's enterprises at self-sufficiency. As much as Mr. D. grew to dislike what the land demanded of him, his gardens always grew well; he was affectionate toward his plants and trees, although like the Least Common Denominator, the insects and weeds were always in there pushing for advantage, for the usurpation of the luscious flowering civilization he had created; at times he used deadly weapons against them.

The author is leaping ahead in the script. Catherine is mostly unaware of Mr. D.'s efforts at working the land, although his fruit trees and asparagus bed are thriving. She and her sisters' have had little exposure to such experience. One might think her somewhat presumptuous to think she can simply turn her hands to the land in order to survive the coming collapse of Western Civilization. While it might seem a natural union of creature and planet, it will not happen by plugging an extension cord into a wall socket.

On The Road To Civilization

'Back to the earth' will not be a yuppie frill or a glamour prospect of Hollywood celebrities, so dependent upon on all those things that will be lacking when the day arrives; it will be the only proximate hope of survival for those who are able to stand to the task; more like tenant farmers.

The realities and the discussions will become ponderous for Mr. D. and the sisters.

Catherine makes her departure from the two sitting on the bluff, wondering about the closeness of Mr. D. and Lydia, as she had with Theresa. Lydia is so gorgeous, and so perfect; how enchanting for Mr. D. But no cause for concern; Lydia is straight as the proverbial arrow; besides she has strongly stated her aversion to the notion of intimacy with a 'withered old thing'.

Catherine is hoping for a family involvement in her new project. However she is preparing herself emotionally and spiritually to go it alone; that is, with Mr. D., and some others of like mind.

She intuits that her sisters are vulnerable at this time in their lives. Uncertain about what they are doing, no significant others to placate and reassure them in their doubting soliloquies. It is opportune for her to approach them, not with a panacea, but with a cool decision that will affect the rest of their lives. She knows the reasons will argue for themselves; so much that is apparent is pointing in a direction where foresight and intelligence will yield its own apparent solution to something that must be endured; not in an urban or suburban setting, but within and upon what remains of the very substance of the planet.

We are not in a position to challenge Catherine. We might wonder how she will fare as a field hand, or barnyard acolyte. We might also wonder whether she will be able to continue with her intellectual pursuits and her interests in alleviating the human condition. As a member of a commune, should that be the case, the most practical arrangement, hypothetically she would be allowed time for other pursuits than those more menial ones associated with survival.

As Catherine was approaching the house, she heard the phone ringing. She hurried inside to pick up the receiver.

It was Theresa calling to tell when she would be leaving the Big City, hoping to arrive the following day. Could she be picked up from the late ferry run on Saturday? Today was Wednesday.

"How's it been going with Lydia?"

"Oh, she and Mr. D. have been rattling away on the bluff. They seem to be finally relaxed with each other. Otherwise she has been troubled by what she has experienced in DC. She isn't sure how she plans to continue, if at all."

On The Road To Civilization

"I'm looking forward to our discussions about what to do next. Especially, with Mr. D. there. I can hardly wait.

"I'll say 'Bye' til Saturday, when I can hug all three of you; and feel your hugs."

"'Bye' sweetheart. 'Til then. You have my hugs already."

Enthusiastically, Catherine decided to pass on the good news. She skipped outside, bouncing along toward the bluff.

"Tess will be here on Saturday."

The two on the bluff turned to face the bright-eyed Catherine. She raced up to them again putting her arms around their shoulders with big squeezes. Suddenly her eyes grew moist; tears began to form. She put her head down between them, beginning to cry softly with happiness. Both Lydia and Mr. D. reached an arm around to touch and sooth her.

Once again Catherine took her leave, silently, somewhat morosely.

Lydia seemed concerned.

"She'll be OK, Lydia." he assured her.

Lydia was not convinced. She rose to follow Catherine into the house. Before Mr. D. could dissuade her intentions, she raised a hand in a dismissive gesture, already on her way to her sister.

William let it alone. His thoughts turned to Theresa. His discussion with Lydia concerning his involvement with her younger sister seemed to relieve the pressure he was feeling. He felt Lydia was a reluctant ally who might empathize, but counsel her younger sister to keep her cool.

Perhaps he was imagining too much what might happen, while, on the positive side, Theresa may have already come to her senses. Hopefully she would not have become guarded in her display of affection; he would consider a withdrawal a great loss to himself. Also, hopefully, once again, she would not suddenly have felt waves of revulsion concerning him. Such a happening would most likely hurt him the most. Vanitas! Vanitas!

Lydia offered to be the one to meet Theresa, which caused only a small debate between the two sisters. Catherine also wanted to be the one. 'Well, why not all of us?' was countered with Lydia's insistence. She wanted to talk privately with Theresa before they all got together. She wanted to let her know the extent of Mr. D's. confidence, and to reassure her she was prepared to be supportive of her desire to continue with a circumspect untroubled relationship; and that she would conciliate between she and Mr. D. She wanted to assure her she did not think ill of her, but she would strenuously caution her against revealing, in a moment of conscience, what she felt for Mr. D., to Catherine. 'Be Cool, and don't worry about 'white lies', or modest deceptions; it was important

On The Road To Civilization

to preserve a relationship with Mr. D., and not to alarm her sister'. Then Lydia wondered if it was possible. If there was a triangle, all might be lost. She would do her very best to prevent such a thing from happening.

For her own part, she was beginning to enjoy Mr. D. He seemed refreshingly honest after her latest experiences in the nation's capital, where every word was couched in duplicity; an uncomfortable seat of defeated expectations. Mr. D's words were straightforward, always searching for the kernel of meaning in what he was trying to communicate, it being earnestly important for such to happen; to elicit some responsive chord in the listener.

Theresa and Lydia arrived bubbling and gabbing way; Theresa hugged Catherine with such warmth and glee. She also hugged Mr. D. with more than her usual warmth, Lydia looking on with some apprehension. Catherine did not take note of Theresa's greeting of Mr. D., thinking nothing unusual had taken place in the rush of the moment.

Theresa had not agreed to keep silent, if her conscience bade her to do otherwise. She assured Lydia that her intentions were not to reveal something that would tear at her sister's heart. Time would tell how everyone would act. Theresa did consent to the idea that white lies were fine as incidental things, but such lies took upon a different hue when someone was hurting. Theresa assured her sister she would do her best to contain anything that might arise in the near future. She and Mr. D had not had a chance to exchange their thoughts and feelings confidentially in a face to face confrontation. She assured Lydia that she and Mr. D. had agreed tacitly to 'cool it' in the presence of Catherine.

The younger sister spoke to her older sister with confidence and maturity. She asked her sister not to concern herself unduly.

Life was, after all, meant to be lived on its own terms. Having said this, Theresa indicated she understood the cornerstones of civilized behavior; that she shared in upholding such a perception. She also indicated it was unlikely she would sacrifice her sister's pain to ease her own; that she would most likely make herself scarce, which might be less painful to everyone.

Meanwhile, none the wiser, Catherine exulted in the presence of her sisters, so happy to have them there, and to once again share them with Mr. D. in a rambunctious banter regarding the state of the world.

In a brief aside, Lydia informed Mr. D. of Theresa's independence of thought in the matters they had discussed.

The author leaves the reader to imagine the delicate situation hovering in the background while he continues to plumb the depths of life and the living. Pertinent to such considerations, like wretched ghosts, the tribulations in the human community, appeared to haunt him with

On The Road To Civilization

an insistent demand for resolution. How could he possibly introduce trouble into Catherine's life beyond what she had already endured? It's as though he liked to paint himself into a corner in order to force himself to find an escape route. Yes!, he could remain uncomfortably fixed while the paint dried.

He promises the reader not to do anything untoward to burden Catherine. He may not be able to offer the same assurances with regard to Theresa, or Mr. D. Is this to say that Catherine and Mr. D. will remain together until the end, as if to partly answer the question, 'Where will it all end?'

It may seem inconsequential how that question is answered when the larger question of 'Where will it all end?', that is, the human condition; 'Where will it all end?'

If the author can retain decency and self-sacrifice as a way to preserve the better human condition it would seem he hasn't any choice but to do so; if it is a matter of choice. We may choose to do things, sticking by a certain choice, although it requires self-sacrifice, when other more real and pressing forces working on the frail and imperfect human construction, and conscience, confound such feeble choice. His desire is to avoid tragedy, mostly because, while palpably, a real possibility, in the last analysis, a probability, he cannot appear to favor such a circumstance.

He but adds these to his other aberrations to hopefully keep the reader suspended in his otherwise trying debates with regard to the human condition.

The labor of the debates must persist, all reasoning points in that direction. Others may indulge in formula and connived denouements. He feels it his obligation to do otherwise.

When the moment arrived Mr. D. and Theresa enveloped each other in a long lingering embrace. Theresa softly uttered words of love and longing, while Mr. D. remained silent.

When the intensity of the embrace began to subside, Theresa promised to be a good girl; again Mr. D.'s silence became obvious to the degree that Theresa drew back a little to look questioningly into his eyes.

"Theresa, you wonder at me; where are my feelings? I cannot yield to them now or ever; I am forsworn to it, by every tenet of a code of decency in which I do believe; in which each of us believes. If we tease each other with these overpowering moments, we will be headed for trouble; we will be discovered. We must back away from such an eventuality. Of these things we have already treated in our correspondence; we must adhere to what we have already acceded, not allowing these proximities to overwhelm us; though so very greatly tempting, and however briefly rewarding. The more we indulge the more the pain of withdrawal."

On The Road To Civilization

“Mr. D. you speak such wise words to this foolishly excited girl. The two-headed monster that aroused my curiosity has turned into something I could not have anticipated; all things within me unknown, but evoked by my exposure to you.

“I sense your words contain urgencies to which I must listen, to which I am inclined not to listen. I cannot tell if the ‘die are truly cast’.

“I realize our lives must go on; that they must be lived with circumspection and particular care not to injure others with our wanton behavior. We are both struck by this tender regard which our hearts acknowledge and desire.

“No, I do not intend to flaunt what my heart urges, for I know it to be a selfish thing it does. That other me must step in to avoid certain consequences to both myself and others. However, at this moment it seems impossible to live within the confines of these words.”

“How truly you speak, dearest one.

“If we but concentrate upon your sister, how much each of us loves her, we cannot fail her.”

“Yes, Mr. D., it must be so.”

They disengage their embrace, but remain within the aura of the happening, wanting to touch, to hold, when Lydia appears to wonder at their closeness, and the expressions of strained emotions.

“You two seem too distraught to have come to a happy conclusion for your romantic leanings. Let me act as consoler to each of you. You must not torment yourselves with secret meetings.

“Your sister is a sensitive person, who will detect something, if it lingers. As we have seen she has already questioned your closeness in the past; and she has even questioned my closeness when it seemed Mr. D. and I were hitting it off.

“It does not intimate that Catherine is jealous; she would cringe before the thought. She is human, wonderfully human; and cannot waive her insecurities with regard to Mr. D.. Even though she had lapsed in her connection to Mr. D., she is, nonetheless, wholly committed to him now, for good or ill. Her mistake must not become yours; and you must not provoke guilt in her.”

Having taunted the reader with a connived reality to which he may not assent, the opus moves along into things that make all else seem irrelevant.

Does he hope and pretend to know what is relevant?

Striking a more strident tone, the author declares that ‘quality of life’ is relevant. Quality of life for the merest amongst us. If each man is the measure of the other, that is, if we believe that no man can stand while the other falls, we thus set a parameter of relevance. Intolerance to the condition becomes the parameter. Man must not suffer through neglect.

On The Road To Civilization

Man cannot get by with 'God helps those who help themselves' which serves as a righteous abandonment of that which we all share. 'Made in the image of man' holds special meaning in the affairs of men.

We are a civilization. Ineluctably, we are burdened with the perception of who we are. Solitary, Yes!, within ourselves, but each must give way to the other as a matter of common human decency. If we selfishly and rashly ignore others, we invite the same condition upon ourselves. Having uttered this last, your author knows there are those who do not care.

We may hide behind imperfect laws designed and enacted to protect our heaps and piles, while others go wanting, but I believe our human conscience must undergo a brutal persecution within the individual for such a condition to persist as a human, and not an animal act. We separate ourselves as species, but cannot separate ourselves from the life lived in every other. Our kinship remains that unexplained property of life at which many of us seem to marvel – still – though there are so many of us as to cause the consciousness of the fact to seem redundant and purposeless.

The author reasserts his concern for 'quality of life'.

Politicians, bankers, corporate executives, and all the other movers and shakers cannot be what they are without resting on the shoulders of the remainder of the human pyramid. To believe they can cast aside their underpinnings with indifference or spurning castigations 'god helps those who help themselves' can only be a temporary condition as the base crumbles beneath them. They may feel that life is not worth living unless they can live in the executive suite in the penthouse, while the many others live in hovels they would not enter, fearful of the contaminations. One is reminded in Boccaccio of the gentry escaping to their country estates to fritter while the plague raged in the cities.

Yes!, each of these who live 'above' others, should be cast out, as unfit to bear the description of 'human'.

The author returns to his old refrains: 'No man will have dominion over the other' 'Any system of government that does not account the least must be marked a failure'. Writing these words over and over should be self-evident to the caring, but to those who do not care, but a noise in the background.

Catherine too ponders these things, accountably, by herself, as a conscionable human being, but with such absorption and emphasis since her exposure to Mr. D. She senses something is drastically amiss in the affairs of mankind. In the face of the failure of reason, which seems not to avail her in her dealings with them, she feels the hapless, as much as, hopeless, condition.

On The Road To Civilization

She knows in her own heart there isn't any deity, or omnipotent, that can, or will, intervene. If she thought to believe in a maker of all things, she would also think the maker indifferent to his (or her) creation, not fashioning things with conscience or purpose.

In light of her knowledge, her beliefs, one would wonder why she persists in doing futile things. Perhaps it is because, when she reviews the historical record, she observes some improvement in the civilizational aegis, garnering hope from little steps in the right direction, despite the fatefully inevitable steps in a backward direction. The genetics of the beast seem to remain the same; the experience and the learning of one generation does not seem to be incorporated into the genesis of the next. It is only after the birth of the new that a process must be repeated to assure of any continuity in the learning. A confounding situation, truly an oversight of the maker; and a glaring deficiency in nature's design.

She surmises that in the olden days mankind did not know how to behave, whereas today, in his most conscionable moments, he is aware and alludes to better ways, so much so as to embed such vision into meaningful documents that are intended to preserve the intent of his momentous realizations and commitments; as though he himself believed himself a possible creation of his own making. He continues to pay lip service to justice fairness and equity. Does one deceive himself into imagining there is more to these assentings than the declarations themselves infer?

Has he truly learned something after all?

Catherine distractedly watches the two rams that have been frequenting the premises all summer, wondering at their head-butting; their provocations, actually shoving each other, then pawing, or hooving each other with their front legs. A love/hate relationship? Each unable to tolerate what the other represents as the carrier of the sacred seed, selfishly insisting upon its prerogatives at mating; preparing for an event one wonders if they are clearly able to remember. Unable to be alone, so they tolerate each other in this awkward arrangement. Then, as if they drew a blank, all the provocations lapse into ruminations. But she ponders further upon nature's 'designs' and her 'intents', finding them simple, yet unfathomable. The extrapolations to man seem apparent, too primitive, too frightening. That additional caveat; the acute memory of man, the purpose of which, causes further pause in her ponderings. It is all the blood that has been shed that confounds everything she might think.

William enters the house, to be greeted by the somewhat perplexed Catherine. She comes up to him seeking the known comfort of his embrace. He asks her if she is feeling alright.

On The Road To Civilization

"I'm dwelling upon things that trouble me, as usual. Not about myself; only those old nemeses, the human condition, and the fatefully inevitable.

"I have been to the mountain; I have come away with so little."

"Ah yes, love, I remember our first sojourn to the mountain, whereupon you insistently tempted me with your sweetness and light, though the storm raged."

"Yes!, if life were only constructed of a long series of such moments than these we are forced to contemplate and endure.

"I love you Mr. D.. You are the mountain."

"I love thee Catherine, my corollary valley."

The two sisters arrive to increase the agitations of the moment. Theresa enters first to observe William and Catherine holding each meaningfully. She tries not to reveal what she feels in the instant, but William observes the awkward wave that passes through her countenance. Soon Lydia follows, more gladdened to see the two of them happily, nearly unselfconsciously, holding each other.

"Ah Hah!, caught you two at it again.", she exclaims.

"Yes!" Catherine responds, "One gravitates to the warmth."

"You have hit upon it Catherine. Such are thee."

Lydia comes up to them with an embrace of her own. "Ah, Yes, I too feel the radiance."

"Very nice of you to say such a thing Lydia"

Theresa registers a scowling look at Lydia when their eyes meet.

But Lydia is not put off by the admonition. With a beckoning gesture, she invites her younger sister to join them.

Theresa is compromised by this action; she must join them without betraying what she might be feeling. Mr. D. peers at her with compassion, and true affection. Theresa is mollified by his glance; she joins them enthusiastically, both happily relieved and pained to be close to him. Suddenly she realizes she must deal with this situation. It could never have transpired if Catherine had remained loyally at home. If Catherine had not become ill, she would still be on the dark continent, perhaps somehow still in the company of her dubious lover. That in itself would not have precipitated what had happened as a result of her becoming ill. Mr. D. might have come and gone from the Big City after learning what he had come not to learn, saddened, and anxious to get away from such depressing surroundings, to return to his lair where he could nurse his wounds. She might have become merely a shadow in those circumstances, instead of the emotionally overwrought individual in the moment when Mr. D. comforted her.

'Curiosity killed the cat'. Theresa found herself too close to something that awakened the opposite of what she might have anticipated.

On The Road To Civilization

Mr. D. understood what Theresa might have been feeling. He recalled his early love entanglement with someone who was unable to reciprocate his feelings; perhaps for different reasons, but the resultant, a seemingly painful rejection. He did not equate the two, but sensed what Theresa felt nonetheless. He imagined she did not want his indulgent compassion. He knew it would be cruel to encourage her.

Yes! It would be her task to find a way to go on. Mr. D. believed she would outgrow this strange infatuation or attachment. In any event his time would run out. He believed someone else would come into her life. He believed it was destined thus. He realized too that he must not transgress something innately forbidden, all temptations clearly selfishly motivated. Theresa was a beautiful young woman.

With Catherine, everything was different. She and he grew upon each other through her intriguing insistence and guile at first. Then he had become hopelessly smitten by everything she was. Although, with time, his feelings moderated, challenged by her veritable youth, her absence, and lately by her wandering, he still loved her deeply, once again, for everything she is. He had grown comfortable with her in their new relationship of being together each day on the island; on the surface, idyllic. Any adventurism with Theresa would ultimately estrange such a tranquil ambience.

The author once again chooses to break the spell of distractions brought about by the mundane involvements of the participants.

Despite the charms of romantic involvements, he feels he needs to hear their voices regarding the music, or the cacophony, of the spheres. Turgid may be the viscera amidst the risings and fallings of swooning affirmations and painful denials, the young women have been challenged to consider higher callings, whether finely, or not so finely disposed.

The theme: Civilization, or the lack thereof, or more realistically, you get what you get because that's all there is, awaits our disposition. If what exists also appears as an immovable object, is there any way of knowing how we should all respond?

Because it is incorporated into our genesis, most of those who beget us take it upon themselves to instruct us in the ways of the world. They also admonish us with obligations, a good part of these directed toward the begetters themselves, but also toward our look-a-likes. On the surface, most of the dictum is intended for our own good, and for our safety. But we rebel, almost instinctively; we, not incidentally, note all the failures and hypocrisy of our instructors.

Our instructions are rendered through a method we identify as reasoning; that is, where edict or dogma fails to enlist our compliance, reason attempts to prevail, as a matter of necessity. During the course

On The Road To Civilization

our instructions, where reason seems not to avail the instructor, certain persuasions come in the form of harsh treatment if we fail to get the message.

Then we break loose of all these confinements, or refinements, if you will, or are peremptorily turned loose from them; not without having been burdened with certain expectations regarding either our behavior, or our future accomplishments. The world awaits us, or as it truly happens, we are thrust into a world not of our own making. Therein lies the rub. Our beggeters only marginally prepared us for this eventuality, so inept in the presentation of, and lacking were they in their stock of wisdom regarding, the immensity of that world; most of the teachings appearing as mutely, impotently, and haphazardly, irrelevant.

Most of us are discharged tentatively, and in large part, leaning upon ignorance; we are truly ill prepared for what confronts and confounds.

Let us regard the simple before we regard the complex. The complex with which we are confronted overwhelms us. The reason that might have availed us in the simple fails us in the complex. As we attempt to understand that into which we have been thrust, we find we must return to the teacher with a myriad of additional questions; and often accusations of neglect; or ignorance.

We are then informed it is up to us to make our own way, and that this has always been the case. We feel our underpinnings, if ever we had any, being taken away.

If we are able, we piece together some method of surviving from day to day, whether the road is paved or unpaved, as we go about our business of living, drawing and exhaling from the ether the breathings that sustain us.

To some, the Tellermans of this world, the road seems paved, the direction more certain. Theirs is to refine their knowledge to its finest edge, in order to further a mission of those who came before them; to labor in the temple of humanity, understanding and perfecting human goals and human institutions. Theirs is also to chip away at that fabled tower of Babel, their desire to finally reduce it to rubble. Noble sentiments? Or true exponents of something in which they truly believe, having been inculcated in the extreme to do this good thing? Perhaps the latter, the sentiments holding sway, in any case.

To others, like Mr. D., a self-made individual, of unknown persuasions, without having been set upon any road, has arrived to become the alter-ego of the author, a distinction only the reader will confer.

The one, an ideal that hope leads him to construct, and prefer, despite all the persuasions of reality that convey and construe the opposite.

On The Road To Civilization

Has Mr. D. arrived where the young women begin? Does he regret not having done any of what the young women not only propose to do, but are doing?

Ah Yes! that other theme: or question, if you will: A Place Of Few Regrets?

What have you done to better the human condition? If that prove too complex a question, what have you done with wanton abandon, unconscionable abandon, to wreak havoc upon the environment, that is, what have you done to erode the one and only home that was given to all of life in perpetuity? Have you taken life needlessly, have you polluted or destroyed the habitat of other life? Have you encroached upon and decreased the stock of places where life may be lived? Or has it been yours not to care, but only to perceive the world as your oyster?

Do you care? How much? In a timely manner? Now! not Tomorrow?

Will the author be able to answer his own questions openly and candidly, forthrightly, without any equivocation?

We already suspect the fateful cynicism of Mr. D. as the true revelation of the author.

Does the potential burnout of Lydia, and the impending burnout of Theresa, portend anything? Can they, as individuals, recover their equanimity, reaffirm their apparent purpose and direction?

Do we, by now, accept the purposeful direction and dedication of Catherine as a true exponent of her self? If so, do we favor her continuance as a guide and conscience to us all?

Does the author insinuate, that underneath everything we are and seem to be, that we do champion this young woman; that it is our earnest desire that she carry forth the pennant that we have so often abandoned with our selfish aims, for which we harbor regrets? Do we want her to succeed where we have failed? Would we be so defiantly cruel, and so eager to dismiss our paltry regrets by wishing ill upon this wonderful person, who might in spirit resemble another of our own better selves?

If we continue as we have been, the answer is thus written.

Will Mr. D. leave the stage unaffected by Catherine; that is, will he leave as the confirmed cynic, despite all her persuasions? Will he make of Catherine an exception? Will he acknowledge possibility in doing so? Can he admit his failure; that he took the easier road, the more luxurious road of cynicism, to that of laboring thanklessly in the trenches? How inconvenient such a juxtaposition.

Laboring in the trenches! What an accursed fate! Glamourless.
Do we imagine then, that something else was intended?

On The Road To Civilization

In all his accumulated wisdom, man understands that 'effort' is part of the formula, not so much for success, but for a dubious fulfillment of our various callings.

Is there an average man (or woman)? Is there an average life?

Do we imagine indulgent tender mercies for ourselves? From what, or from whom?

Our delicate, or sometimes flagrant, egos confuse the issue. Egos do not rate consideration. They are anathema to the more purposeful endeavor. The driving force must come from another quarter in order to avoid the clash, the trail of blood.

What is there to be found in the mere concept of humanity? Mere it is, or must seem, when the living erupt into a destructive force. Certain incompatibilities of notions with regard to what we are?

As it has been argued in these pages, or seems to be argued in these pages, as civilized entities, we leave much to be desired.

What different, or should he ask, or better, course can we take with our apparently disposable, or is it, indifferent, humanity?

It is argued by those nearly smug, complacent ones, usually as a putdown, that if we have complaints that we should be able to provide alternatives. A plausible argument, the offender dictating the terms of engagement; it is clear to them that we are not our brother's keeper. Such clarity of vision! Their 'effort' expended upon a righteous end. For the lack of a clear path that would scale the heights, they take the lower trail formed by their most lowly viscera.

Alternatives!? Could they conceive of an acceptable alternative? There are none that would not require sacrifice.

Why waste words upon this entrenched unvarying theme? We cannot tempt the obviously insensitive inhuman amongst us. Their words serve as thwarts to ours. Equivocators, rationalizers, double talkers, temporizers, lip servicers, ambivalent at their best, avoiding the consequences of the argument is their main objective. They challenge us to wrest from them their perceived and assumed prerogatives, imaginarily willed to them through tradition, through inheritance, and through all manner of implied successions, grabbings, righteous overwhelmings, and 'might makes right' (was it said that justice was in the interest of the stronger?).

We have been unable to wrest anything from them with words.

The cogency of these dubious confabulations doesn't bear witness to the outstanding imperatives facing the human contingent. Human contingent? Life; all of life upon this planet, perhaps in the universe. Truly a lonely endeavor, even at best.

If, we, by some chance succeed where all life forms have seemed to fail, in some extraordinary devisings; as 'they' are inclined to utter from their privileged ensconements, 'How marvelous!'

On The Road To Civilization

You'll not make a believer from his base clay.

What is it that makes believers? Mr. D thought of his mindless daughter yapping the yap about Jesus. Here is this mind of Catherine believing in something almost as ridiculous, reason.

Belief in something.

The recently arrived Chinaman from the closed up shop of Hong Kong, who had invested his gatherings, from that enduring not so defunct place, in a condominium consortium, waiting for the new pile to mature, was obliged to labor as a night receptionist at a somewhat upscale motel on the way into the big city where his investment lay. Upon arriving at the motel, an unplanned stop, Mr. D. was in need of information which would help him through a pressing dilemma, that had caused this side-trip. As midnight approached the two had engaged in a somewhat philosophical discussion whereupon the Chinaman revealed the secret of success. He declared 'Money Talks' as though it served both as medium of exchange and prophet (profit). Indeed the Chinaman revealed his nightly service was intended as oblation to his God. To earn enough to gamble. Whereupon he began to sermonize upon the art of gambling, in service to his Confucian deity, the God of practicality. He was not the first Chinaman to hear and heed the voice of 'Money'. A local Chinese television personality aired his advice on monetary matters every morning during the week. Mr. D. had heard of this Confucian ensconcement, when, through a concerned son of a neighbor, having recently lost her husband, became prey to those who stood to gain through the grief of others. He told of the sound advice given by the Chinaman 'If you want to get rich, read the obituaries.' Not only was the Chinaman heard, but followed assiduously, both by those who prey from the outside, also by the needy son.

We take our cues from the Capital Sins. Not very pretty as things go, but practical. The first Chinaman told how one must have courage to gamble. The first step required commitment. In order to serve your God you must set aside that which you are prepared to lose. When you lose you must be prepared to double your commitment upon the next chance, in order to make up the loss, if the gods favor you. Doubling several consecutive losses soon becomes impossible. In order to follow this course, one must have faith and belief, most necessary if one is also to gain as well as lose.

The following morning the Chinaman was gone.

However, a second stay at the motel two days later, also unplanned, found the Chinaman absent in the evening, but present the next morning. He had arranged for Mr.D. a taxi ride at a certain appointed time, then took him to breakfast in the adjunct restaurant, where they continued more on philosophy, mostly regarding his faith in his dictum

On The Road To Civilization

'Money Talks!' He revealed that his losses were many, but his gains compensated for the losses often enough to bolster his faith. He could neither cut his losses, nor be satisfied with his gains. A true believer?

How to measure Jesus, Reason and Money, how to calculate their utility, their ability to assuage the pressures of life?

The great bard observed 'Time passes.' The great bard set ablaze both ends of the wick, thus shortening his time; while he admonished, 'Do not go gentle into that good night.' Sobered by life, he drank the dregs to escape it. Jesus, Reason and Money, words that rhymed with nothing.

Perhaps we should end this epistle on that note, leaving for the reader to imagine what might have happened to the three graces, and the dubious fellow who came into their lives, while the author buggers off.

But No! the reader exclaims. We want our civilization to be rescued from the dragons (monsters) that beset it.

Will the reader be patient enough while the paint is drying?

The author returns to the place that is most comfortable within himself. Others do not enter; they have passed by, feeling they have narrowly escaped the man-eating monster.

Very soon now, very soon now; all will cease. Then we shall rest.

That we rose to do something so futile as to live our lives, when if we had done nothing, the tally would have been the same as if we had. The eternal conceit of our insignificant lives.

The young women are not aware of these cogitations, either by him or concerning the life they lead. They are oblivious of their own deaths, even Catherine who became so ill, and is now well. The memory of her illness stirs barely within her as she augurs toward her imaginary destiny.

The author's destiny is tied together with the young women, as it is with his shadow in Mr. D. As are all others, within the human race.

Should they fail, the author fails. Should the human race fail, it has been so destined

He abandons the world of the reader, leaving them behind him, to follow or not, where he goes. The reader has available to him millions of fantasies to entertain him, or even to enlist his beliefs and energies, such as they are. There are many authors who will abet someone's inclinations.

The author has entered his own world of fantasy, in spite of the real world that surrounds him with all its frightening prospects.

He believes in the humanity of his protagonists. Humanity, that ill-defined promise of a creature to itself, as it imagines its potential, while mired in earthly glut and gloat. Rise Up! Rise Up!

On The Road To Civilization

Do you wonder how this can go on? This endless traveling on a road that leads nowhere? Where the most one attains is regret for all the things he did not accomplish with his life. Vanitas!, Vanitas!

As Catherine has adjusted her thinking, she is more reacting to the pressure of a failing world, than attempting to fill her destiny. Life cannot involve itself in its destiny if the surroundings are trashed beyond what appears reasonable enough to enlist our belief in the sustainability of our imaginary contribution. To imagine that it perishes with us, knells an awful fate; the consciousness of our own worthlessness as a life. If only, if only; what purpose serves consciousness beyond conceit?

Catherine will not succumb to this bleak outlook; she will not tolerate the author's funeral drumbeat. She will charm Mr. D. away from the influence of the author.

We must look up, not gaze fixedly at our feet, where unavoidably we do our trampling. Squashed.

The reader exclaims, 'Open The Window, Let The Air In, Though It Rages Outside.

The author will not yield in his early morning soliloquy (rant).

We continue thus. Theresa calmed, Mr. D. contemplative, Catherine anxious to resolve in her self, her next step; and Lydia willing to listen.

Catherine begins by mentioning part of the purpose of their get together. She explains, while she would want all present to be involved in some kind of decision making process, that she has already looked into certain aspects of what she is planning to do. She has both searched for land and for prospective partners, finding some of each. She has also discovered something unexpected, a farmer who is unwilling to sell out to agribusiness in order to lead a more comfortable life, even though he is past his prime and beset by various infirmities. He is willing to entertain notions of selling on terms to those who would preserve and continue what he has so long labored to further and keep alive. He might wish to retain his dwelling of so many years plus a small acreage to serve as a comfort zone. He would also be willing to impart all that he has learned to any aspiring individual; or group of individuals, regarding the parcel in question. He does not wish to abandon something that has been so vital to his life. He does not wish to will his land to a family that would sell it to agribusiness. Catherine feels this is worth pursuing.

Other parcels of land, with dwellings, do exist in the State in which they have been looking. Partners would come from more distant places. She encourages and welcomes the others to do as she, by looking into the possibilities.

On The Road To Civilization

She states her objective clearly, to live a life on the land, sustaining oneself there from, as independently as possible of the civilization that presumes upon them. She has located some sources of the necessary capital required in order to proceed any further; some from the girl's parents, some from prospective partners, and wonderfully, but not assuredly, from a Foundation dedicated to encouraging what it is she proposes to do; and of, course, what we would be able to raise amongst ourselves.

Theresa indicates that she has nothing in the way of capital. Catherine herself indicates she has little capital as well. Lydia, somewhat reluctantly indicates she has some savings, and Mr. D. indicates he has this property as an asset. Catherine reveals that a conservancy foundation has offered to grant up to \$100,000.00 for a well-defined and worthy program. Four prospective partners are prepared to ante up approx. another \$100,000.00. Her parents would be able to furnish the same, perhaps more, if it made a difference. Lydia then mentions that what she could offer would be substantially less than those amounts, but might be able to come up with \$20,000. She indicated she might also do some legal work to hopefully keep some capital coming in.

Catherine adds up this prospective total, suggesting that it might be increased by the addition of other prospective partners.

It is then she urges all parties to meet at some time soonest. Each of us, the prospective partners, and the Foundation representatives, their parents unnecessary for such a meeting. To be accomplished in such a meeting, the direction to be taken in land acquisition, where, and how much, the discussion of responsibilities of the partners, the manner in which decisions will be made for and by the group. And, all other matters attendant to such an undertaking. She also wants it to be known that she does not figure the offer of Mr. D's. property into her equation; she insists upon no further discussion of this last, at least for the purposes of the first gathering of the principals; maybe never.

Mr. D. indicated he would leave, in his will, his share of the property, to them.

“How many acres of land would be required?”

“We would know better when the partner thing is ironed out, and when the prospective Foundation gives its recommendations. We might be able to do something without partners; but I see some advantage in sharing the work load, as well as the responsibility of such an undertaking. The idea of partners might appeal to the granting agency. It would seem to be a matter of design and scale. Crops, fruit trees, animals, feed for animals. Separate, or communal dwellings, for various partners, would affect costs. At first we should plan on separate

On The Road To Civilization

dwellings, depending on individual requirements. This may not be economically feasible, communal stuff, serving in the interim.

“What is most important in this undertaking are the reasons we are becoming so involved. All will be for naught unless we keep ourselves focused on an objective.

“There is one planet. Man has survived for as long as he has as a species through his working of the planet’s surface, the ‘land’, as we call it. Three quarters of that planet is composed of water. Of what remains, an amazing amount is not arable, made of rocky mountains, and dry barren deserts. All that can be occupied is occupied.

“We should be hearing from the Down To Earth Foundation any time now.

“We have prospects on three different farm sites, two in the valley, one in an irrigation district in the cascades, all approximately the same size, the cascade land at a more attractive or affordable price. Each of the properties has a house, a barn, and outbuildings, assorted farm machinery, fencing and available water, each approximately the same vintage as one another. One of the valley properties has not been farmed during the last five years. Each is comprised of approximately 100 acres. While this size may seem large, with the probability of partners it will not seem so.

“Three of the prospective partners are ready to sign on immediately, that is ready to begin this new life we are proposing. Another prospective partner has also been searching for land, finding two possible sites located in the cascades. He and his partner have looked at the unworked farm property in the valley, feeling it might be more to our liking, even though initially it will require more work. Since we intend not to rely upon machinery, the somewhat neglected condition of the equipment would not be an important consideration.

“These prospective partners will be continuing their search in the cascade area, feeling a more remote location would be safer, but that any reliance on irrigation would be a mistake. One must be near water.”

“Wow!, I hadn’t realized you were already looking so seriously.”

“The temptation is to wait things out because of our inborn inertia, our tendency to follow the least path of resistance.

“It’s a matter of making ones actions consonant with his thoughts. Waiting does not seem an option.”

“Wow!, again!, Cate!”

“Yes!, things have been moving along. I needed to be ready to present something for our gathering. As indicated earlier, while I am looking at a lot of possibilities, I am inclined to the farmer in the dell. He has said he would grant us right of first refusal until such time that did not seem feasible. The land he would propose to sell amounts to approximately 120 to 150 acres depending upon how much he would want to retain for

On The Road To Civilization

himself his wife and oldest daughter. All the outbuildings would be included in the sale; and perhaps some arrangement where his daughter could keep a horse sheltered in the barn. He would like to leave the option open of his daughter perhaps joining a group where she was not required to do all the labor in which she is presently engaged, but to be an equal participant if she chose to become involved.

“The criterion for partnerships has received a lot of consideration. For example, as a group, we would constitute one partner. Other partnerships would be modeled on that concept. Regardless of the size of a contribution, splitting family units into individual partnerships might cause problems, if dissatisfactions should arise.

“We could try to go it alone because of the things that could go wrong. But we haven’t had to face meetings with anyone yet. We have arranged tentatively to meet, as early as next week, with the current possible partners as soon as we, that is, the four of us, could agree on which way to proceed. If we hear from the Foundation before then, we could invite a representative to that meeting, to add to the momentum.

We need to decide what we actually want to do in the way of complete self-sufficiency, how many partners working how large a parcel of land. If we deal with the farmer in the dell, perhaps he could answer many of these questions for us.

“So, Yes!, things are in motion. We may have a houseful as early as next week. If we can find some agreement amongst ourselves it would help to give impetus to the momentum.”

“Gee, sis, no dalliance, huh!?”

“That would seem to be the case, Tess.”

“I’m impressed, you guys.”

“Its mostly Catherine’s doing, Lydia.”

“She is certainly a go-getter, as always. Maybe this time she has hit upon a winner.”

“Callouses!, my dear sister. Not from playing tennis. Think upon it.”

“Are you mocking me, Cate.”

“Lyd, I am more stressing a reality than mocking; creating a frame of reference to stir the imagination. The rose has thorns.”

“Granted, sis. ‘Tis a harsh reality, but not one I have not thought upon. In the right cause, I will not mind getting my hands dirty.”

“We’ll talk more of what might be expected of us, when we convene our mini-summit. Yes! A serious undertaking, a lifetime commitment.

“The proposed partner who has mentioned safety, our personal safety, has recommended a more remote location, off the beaten path, as a survival consideration. He has also proposed arming ourselves to fend off potential marauders. He is carrying the argument to its logical end, that, if social cohesion breaks down, then we must be prepared.

On The Road To Civilization

“I know this sounds grim, but we are being forced to think upon it. Amongst ourselves we may abhor the prospect of the bearing of arms, but at the same time we do not want to become passive targets. The reality of our projections cannot shy away from something that, if we do not consider it, might result in exposing ourselves to mortal peril.”

“Yes!, we have been hinting at, and maybe anticipating, the breakdown of civilized society as we have been living within it. We cannot know the shape of any eventualities. Passively awaiting these unknowns would seem not to be a wise response to what we already imagine we know.

“We are proceeding from a rational basis, we must hold to that principle. We cannot overlook any aspect of what we reason to be the case. The imperatives, while irrational in one way of thinking, are nonetheless paramountly rational in another way of thinking.

“Enough said on that subject; just something not to be ignored.”

“Again Cate, you do amaze me.”

“Mr. D’s influence; that is, to carry the argument to its logical extreme. When one truly contemplates that extreme, it does not seem all that extreme. As Mr. Rumsfeld has speculated, ‘we know what we know’.

“We seem to have a choice, and then no choice, to follow our noses in this endeavor, and to assure for something that we cannot envision. We do not have the luxury, or the option, to think differently. I know this means we paint man to be a very black thing. I am not alone in seeing man as he sees himself. His recourse to violence seems matter of fact in his portrayals.

“Am I then become a prophetess, a Cassandra of doom? Heed my words at your own peril? As Mr. D. points out, martyrs are not guaranteed results for their sacrifices. Also, that one needs to be alive in order to accomplish anything, however little the accomplishment. Contentiousness, or words of wisdom? At this point, I’ll choose the latter. A new Catherine?”

“A fuller, more well-rounded Catherine.”

“Watch yourself, Mr. D.”

“No allusion to your physical shape, which is more than adequate for any situation.

“You asked the question. To put things another way. You came into this argument an idealist; also one who is prepared to work toward your ideals. Another ingredient has come to the fore, to account the environment in which one is to carry out those ideals, the human environment, as well as the ‘other’ environment. You truly want to become an effective agent of your own premise. Therefore you must consider things not previously considered. It is almost certain your illness, and how you contracted it, forced these considerations upon you, much more than any ranting on my part.”

On The Road To Civilization

“Perhaps that is so, Mr. D.”

“Hence you have become more well-rounded. Perhaps with more opportunity to become a more effective agent of your premise.”

“I suspect I shall not become as you suggest, but more a drudge as a field hand.”

“Not all the time my dearest. Without the furtherance of certain ideals, it will still become possible to enjoy aspects of the drudge; the plantings, harvestings, and the partakings of your own fruitful drudgeries. You will become attuned to the equinoxes. The swing of the scythe will bring forth a welcome moo, or whinny, more rewarding than the scowling of your fellow man as he chews upon your utopian notions.”

“Sounds almost romantic Mr. D. More misplaced idealism?”

“You may think not when it is upon you. Because we seem to abhor labor, we are not unwise enough not to realize the benefits, and to contemplate them in order to ease the burden.

“I’ll not minimize the potential disappointments ahead. Everyone who has ever worked the land has had to endure them. It is not of our choosing, it is merely a simpler fact of life that everything that happens is part of the equation. Drought, cold or wet weather, sickness, parasites, disease, are part, as much as sunshine, pastoral days and nights are part. We enjoy the one while we endure the other; as we must.”

Theresa speaks. “For my part, I imagine I am ready to engage, at least as ready to engage as I imagine you propose, as I am to return to the career I have thusfar followed. It can be no more burdensome, or fruitless.”

“We must enliven this girl; she speaks a demoralized chant. Wherefore hast her spirit gone? Not behind the plow!??

“It is opined, we must save ourselves. It had been thought we could save ourselves by saving the world. But the world cannot be saved. Some have opined the world must be saved first, lest the saving of oneself cannot be achieved.

“What is beyond is beyond. What is here and now? What can we fashion from it? If it could be said that we fashioned peace, inner peace, would we have failed to answer the question, and would we have failed in some other way? One of the ways to inner peace is through the enjoyment of simple things, simple happenings, because most of life is made up of a series of simple things. This is ever true when one is close to the land. Most of what one does with the land is found in a series of small coaxing, and fondly wishing labors, as he handles, and sifts the soil; and tends the plants that spring from the stuff of dirt, producing his sustenance. It cannot not be thought menial or beneath oneself. In the very beginning, before there were serfs and slaves, was it always a menial thing to live consonantly with the earth found upon the orb? How say you with regard to life in general, menial? How distant we have grown

On The Road To Civilization

from our roots, sustained on air and bullshit. Fie!!! Fie!!! Is life then reduced to dirt? Most likely. To dig out from under one's fingernails? Most likely. The hands become roughened, the back often bowed, the rewards found in the salivating palate. Not life!, you exclaim. As true as that might seem, traipsing the ramparts and the heights of Babel, one must be surefooted, lest he plunge. There's a Comeupins, if ever there is one.

"One of the most enjoyable simple things for me has been the juicing and blending of apples, apple flavors; or providing the tomato juice for the beer and tomato cocktail. I do not discount the potato harvests, all the other stuffs we attempt to grow nurture and bring to fruition. Its as one lady on the island has said, 'you plant a whole host of seeds, when you do, it seems you will always get something'. It seemed a good attitude. It wears well. Everything we grow, we need to find some way to preserve for the times when we can grow little or nothing. There is some enjoyment involved in doing so, as alluded in the blending of apple flavors.

"Even such as I describe here, if the truth were to be known, would seem luxurious to many. To others, it would seem like being 'sold down the river'."

"Back to the earth for the multitudes, Mr. D.?"

"Do you imagine the whole prospect as a demeaning servitude?"

"I would have to guess it depends on how one views man in the landscape. Man as an abstract, and then man as you or I.

"As an abstract, as something for which we must account, to assure that the familiar figure of man will always appear in that landscape, and the you and I, close to the bone, real embodiment of what appears.

"The You and I are examples of a product of a certain kind of civilizational model, or accretion, if you will.

"We imagine a whole complete rational thing, as a true exponent of the apex.

"When I say rational, I mean we have accounted that which needs to be accounted, we have imagined a functional system based in the accounting. It is not a matter of ideals any longer. It is a matter of practicality. Perhaps something more consonant with our technological advances.

"If we enter the data into an unbiased program, that is designed to distribute something in order to meet the needs of the accounting, we are able to obtain answers or solutions.

"When someone tries to corrupt the program with 'God helps those who help themselves', or 'But for the grace of God go I', or 'don't think of it as less later, but more now', or 'In fifty years nobody will no the difference', or 'private sector' or 'trickle down', 'preemptive something or other', 'collateral damage' or any other imaginable corruption,

On The Road To Civilization

equivocation, dissembling, temporizing, 'lip service', double talk, 'disinformation', a red flag will flash across the screen.

"We replace our idealizations with hard data that accords not an ideal, but a consensual arrangement that assures fairness equity, and justice.

"Anything that smacks of exploitation, monopolization, profiteering, would again trigger the red flag."

"What does one do when the red flag appears?"

"I haven't figured that one out.

"If one is to become part of the ledger, he must submit to its dictates. If one wants to operate his own cartel outside the system, it must function on its own within its own circle of peddlers; otherwise it will be automatically boycotted by the system."

"Sounds far-fetched to me."

"It does to me too.

"If anyone running for public office was to propose such a thing, he or she would be laughed off the face of the earth (speaking of man in the landscape), by the 'vested interests'."

"Who are, what are, the 'vested interests'?"

"The usual ones that 'crop up' in our conversations. Those who have mastered 'making something out of nothing'; the controllers, often described in our conversations as 'control addicts', as a broad category, perhaps further amended as 'deniers'. Chief amongst them are Agribusiness, most any entity that answers to the Corporate epithet, to all their derivative sycophants in government; Lending Institutions, The Media, the Militia (both local and federal). The list seems long. The laughter would echo, reverberate throughout the land. Death would follow."

"Mr. D., such awful dire pessimism."

"Regrettably!

"But take note of the history of the Poor Laws, their permutations, the arguments against them. The rationalizations fill one with disgust. Regard how we have treated the American Indian, not to mention all other 'minorities', women included.

"Only recently our great nation reasserted its right to harass the Poor with the advent of Bonzo, who busted Unions, ended Welfare, returned to Workfare, and stigmatization of the Poor by labeling them 'social retards'. The Gip just didn't get it. Our great nation still has not recovered. It grows more inhumane every day; just to prove a point, that it can do worse, so stop complaining. Remember the Raiders; it may come to that again. Their purpose is achieved politely by the militias nowadays – Move On, Or Else! It is socially and legally unacceptable to become vagrant. Vagrancy is a breeding ground for social ills. Just ask anybody.

"Animals is what we are, animals. You know what an animal is don't ya, it ain't human. By definition, I ain't human."

On The Road To Civilization

“Mr. D., it is not necessary to exaggerate. We would all come up short if we defined things too precisely.

“I suspect I know what you mean. To be ‘human’ as we might define the term suffers with idealization. If we did not conceptualize what it is we hope to become, we would be at an even greater loss. I am willing to accept the fact that I do not measure up to the ideal human. Probably none of us do.

“Our nature is self-contradictory in this gambit. We must be aware of our own nature, not specifically identifying it as ‘animal’, when it seems we are not all we might expect of ourselves.

“We give our best shot consistently, unfailingly, that is our best shot at being ‘human’, because we believe in that.

“What the ‘Gip’ projected was most unkind, and most likely inhuman. It showed a great insensitivity to others suffering, not a treasured trait in a leader.

“The Poor Laws showed a similar thing, skirting the problem with enlightened equivocations by people who knew better, but could not rise above something rather ambivalent in themselves. It is a frightening thing to contemplate ‘poorness’ as though it was a disease, even anointed with ‘there but the grace of god go I’. The Poor Laws evolved in a country where class was important. The leaders of that social system became vested in their life styles. Everyone could not become like them; there would be no class. They confused ‘class’, that is, dressed to the nines, living on their estates in fancy houses, partaking of the fruits to satiation, with being ‘human’, more human than underlings, myrmidons; workers, slaves, menials. The clothes make the man. Its so superficial, so trite, yes!, so hah, hah, human.

“We cannot accept such definition for ourselves, although our society operates in that manner, and in following that manner, we would gravitate, or settle out in our own economic strata. We would not be alone in our strata; it is intended we would feel comfortable surrounded by those like us, the rest left up to their own devices. Its still a ‘class’ system, with fewer fears and fewer compunctions. That is, until the revolution comes.

“The disenfranchised know away at the base of the pyramid.

“The knowing may have produced a Wilberforce, and a Dickens, whose efforts eventually called up something more humane in that society. When you are painted as a grasping evil, ‘god forbid’, ‘inhuman’ thing, your ambivalence becomes exposed. The Golden Rule, while clear in one sense, must endure its obversions. To say ‘Do unto others as you would be done by’ seems clear enough. But an obversion states, Do unto others before they do unto you’ or as ‘they would do unto you’. One anticipates he will be done by in a manner that omits how the other feels about his part of the bargain, which may be more consonant with ‘get

On The Road To Civilization

away with what you can get away with'. One, whose social position, place in the hierarchy, gains him favor with righteous claims, with entitlements as a matter of 'class' does not fit within the confines of the Rule, unless he is mocked into a realization that his assuming manner may be visited upon him some day.

"It seems like a lousy way to achieve our objective; we are forced to recognize the worst, in others, and in our selves."

"Yes!, we are obliged to regard each person we meet with a jaundiced eye, as a survivor, not by doing all the 'right' things, but by living by ones wits, through a system of rationalizations that, in themselves, might indicate some kind of consciousness of the other, and of some notion of what a civilized life might consist, 'civilized', as opposed to something less constrained, but not, in any way limited by it. As you say, 'getting away with what one can get away with'. In a certain sense, there is no obligation, there is only the skirting of, the avoidance of accountability.

"I find myself believing this last to be the case, when juxtaposed to believing in altruism, brotherly love, etc."

"Mr. D., one supposes all these concerns might be considered extraneous to our lives. It is only that we are aware of more than what serves us in our own lives.

"You have opined that I was wasting my beautiful life, implying, on something that would take all that I had, without giving anything in return.

"Mr. D., I do not ask for anything in return; at least that is not my motivation. Do I want recognition? Not for myself, but for the cause.

"True, there have been unforeseen consequences, that might have been accounted by any careful person; that is, in the realm of expectations, it might be said that certain consequences could be perceived as inevitable.

"But the consequences, whether or not foreseen, do not earn any special consideration, only as something to be avoided by others.

"There is a larger issue than oneself in all of this. It is part of our involvement and commitment as humans in a human society. The 'no man is an island' thing."

"Ah, sweet one, but we are each an island."

"Mr. D., I am cognizant of the basis of your argument. While an element of what you argue is true, none of us arrived here by fiat. This does not make us beholden, but, for someone like yourself, an intelligent, sentient, thoughtful, reflective individual, it does have implications, despite what you might argue concerning purpose.

"We have acknowledged the basic questions, 'where do we come from, why are we here, and where are we going'. Our best answers fail us in absolute terms.

On The Road To Civilization

“We try to link up the whole notion of life as an evolved thing, headed in some imperative direction arrived at through happenstance. Ordinarily we would question any such mechanism as happenstance serving as an operative, but we cannot improve upon this basic conjecture. There are those on both sides of the argument who want to posit an unseen intelligence directing the whole. We substitute belief in place of ignorance. Ignorance is intolerable to our conceits.”

“Ah!, ‘tis true enough, we are unable to utter, ‘we don’t know’, when it is also true enough that ‘we don’t know’.”

“To get back to the ‘no man is an island’, which you have contested.”

“Hold on a second, a point of clarification. I have stated something essentially irrefutable in terms of what we are able to observe. What is observable may not constitute all the other imaginary links between individuals. Those imaginary links exist precisely in the ‘imagination’, whether one is abandoned at the bottom of the sea or upon Mars, or behind a closed door. Even at close range, in the closest of proximities, a physical link, even amongst sexual partners, does not break the skin. Even when individuals break the skin to be come ‘blood brothers’ it is only a symbolic thing, lest one account any resultant infection arising from such dubious mingling, as evidence of the act.

“So love, construe it not that I violate some observable thing to which we might both agree; for I do not ask for anything else, that we point and observe.”

“Clarification noted, Mr. D.

“Perhaps it is obvious that I cannot easily remain in the confines of what is observable. What is observable is that man, or men (and women) will often do things in unison.”

“You mean, follow the Pied Piper?”

“Not exactly, but that cannot be discounted as an example.

“I meant they will help one another, as though they were in unison of thought and deed, the one observing and addressing the need of the other; in a feel good, egoless action.

“Your island moving closer to another island.”

“Yes, it happens, but it is a spurious unreliable relationship, subject to whimsy and opportunity. The gesture can be withdrawn or not proffered in another moment. One always reserves the right to resume his or her island identity, the final resting place for the soul.”

“Mr. D., ‘final resting place for the soul?’ Is that an observable phenomenon?”

“No, but it is deductively logical, whether or not observable, or believable.”

“You posit something you cannot know.”

“That is true, but if the logical inference leads to such a conclusion, while, my soul may in fact appear to exist as a dispersal amongst my

On The Road To Civilization

friends, or within the confines of realities I have created, lets say, I must provide the animate part. Soul may be absorbed by you; soul may leap from the words, or the two or three dimensional depictions; that may always seem to be true, but is not observable, or demonstrable. It can only be taken on faith that it is true.

“We don’t seem to be able to live egoless lives. Is apparent altruism egoless? Is doing good egoless? We must attach meaning and significance to something that merely exists, one life essentially no different than the other. We cannot tolerate the notion of our own insignificance and inconsequentiality. We imagine thus immortality for something of no consequence.”

“Quite a mouthful, Mr. D.

“Very discomfoting, even frightening.”

“Yes it is, when one considers that we are not a bunch of souls with a common purpose, lest it be in the quest for immortality.

“If one examines the record closely, he notes the willfulness and arbitrariness involved in the quest. One might also ascribe other meanings, such as, ignorance, lunacy, madness, fanaticism, megalomania, egocentricity, possession; and gross malingering stupidity.”

