THE MORAL EFFECT OF THE TOURIST
UPON THE NATIVE: THE DANGER OF
ADAPTATION WITHOUT ASSIMILATION:
BY KATHARINE METCALF ROOF

THE pursuit of the picturesque! What a self-conscious
pursuit it is becoming! Romance-seeking travelers
recommend places to each other as “undiscovered by the
tourist,” and in their subsequent descriptions the some-
what overworked terms “atmosphere” and “local color”
inevitably figure. What, analyzed, is this quality of
picturesqueness but the effect produced upon the mind by contrast,
the sensation we have in contact with the unaccustomed? The inhabi-
tants of this great new country must cross the water to find the obvious
contrast of the color and tone of time, or, at a pinch, search for the
unusual in isolated corners of their own land. These places we hear
characterized as “quaint,” “remote,” or “un-American.” Europeans,
on the same principle, find picturesqueness in phases of American life
unfamiliar to them—hence the French and English mania for “coon
songs,” and the “cack-wack”—as the French pronounce it—the Eng-
lish desire for Indian and ranch stories, and the large French audience
attracted to what is billed as “Le vrai Buffalo Bill.”

It is interesting in this connection to note that our magazines give
less attention than formerly to the so-called article of travel. The rea-
sons for this are supposed to be that the majority of the readers of the
first-class magazines are people who travel and get their impressions at
first hand, and that the great popular magazine public which has
grown to such enormous proportions in America during the last few
years—the large, literate, yet uncultured public of a land of high
wages and easy commercial advantages, is conceived to be interested
only in home topics of an obvious character.

There is, of course, a large class of traveling Americans not ad-
ddicted to the pursuit of the picturesque, whose travels do not usually
extend beyond the large cities, the Riviera, and the fashionable water-
ing places. Many of these are not entirely clear as to why they have
gone abroad. Somehow the consciousness has come to them or their
children that Europe is a place where people go. Yet even these
vague money-spending, rather than money-enjoying, travelers leave
Europe with a collection of crude, yet more or less definite impressions
with regard to that money spending, even if their conclusions do not lead them beyond the conviction that they have been cheated and that Europe is less comfortable than America.

Any traveler who goes outside the usual line of travel, whether he thinks deeply or superficially upon the subject, learns the difference between the country “spoiled” by the tourist and the corner as yet untouched. What then constitutes this condition of being spoiled? The obvious, most frequently commented upon quality in it is the tendency to raise prices for the traveler. In London and Paris during the season when the American migration is expected this difference in prices is perceptible even in the shops and is recognized by all the permanent residents in those cities. In Italy, too, it has long been the case. The effect of a people spending money with the careless ease characteristic of even the poor American on a holiday, has had its logical effect upon the mind of the more frugal Latin and Briton. Then, too, Americans seldom question prices or indulge in the bargaining that the Latin expects, and this racial difference has again had its effect upon the fragile commercial honesty of the Frenchman and Italian.

The same thing frequently happens for that matter in the New England village that has become suddenly popular as a summer resort. In short, when essential differences, whether of race, class or custom, are brought into conflict it seems inevitable that there should be a deteriorating effect upon one side or the other or both. Such a condition Lafcadio Hearn has pointed out in describing the effect of the first British merchants upon the Japanese in the seaport towns.

Unquestionably the more quickly the new has to be assimilated the greater its power to injure. Such a result is very patent here in our own country, where a family can pass in one generation from ignorance and squalor to comparative wealth. The undeveloped, half-baked product of generations of unthinking laborers or paupers landed here, finds himself suddenly in possession of unlimited personal liberty with, in most cases, an easy opportunity for money-making. The result in a few years—depending upon the measure of his success—is probably a member of a militant union, a socialist, or a man with more money than is well for one of his limited moral and mental development.

In Europe the sudden introduction through the automobile of the luxurious money-spending world to the simple and primitive has had its effect. In France especially, where the roads are so fine, it has been
THE TOURIST AND THE NATIVE

the means of opening up hitherto remote country districts. The automobilist shooting through does not stop to question the price. The effect upon the business methods of the inn or shopkeeper is almost invariable, and it must be admitted the temptation undoubtedly is great.

Individuals living for a season in a foreign country learn to know relative values. In some places which have been the seat of American colonies for years the natives are gradually learning that all Americans are not rich and have come to treat them more as their own people.

The exception exists in such cases as that of the well-to-do American colony in Paris where the Americans demand luxuries—principally in the matter of personal daintiness—unheard of in the Parisian philosophy. In that instance a permanent and more or less legitimate raise in prices has come about, so that Paris is now as expensive a place of residence as New York.

All this, however, is the superficial aspect of the question. There is a deeper reflection that must occur to the thoughtful tourist and that is the gravity of the moral effect upon the simpler people of remote psychology and inferior intelligence at suddenly finding themselves an object of interest to the traveler. This occurs in localities, obviously picturesque, which have retained some peculiarity of costume or custom that brings the visitor from afar to see them. Familiar instances are to be found in the little island of Maarken on the Zuyder Zee, and at Oberammergau.

The inhabitants of Maarken, in spite of their proximity to the large modern city of Amsterdam, are, as the guide books chronicle, "still wearing the costume." It is a costume quaint rather than beautiful, of ancient pattern and rich in color. Superficially it is all gay and picturesque. Yet considered ethically that little island with its crowded red-roofed houses, its vivid color patches of boat and costume, is a saddening, even a tragic, spectacle. All through the season of summer travel, boat loads of tourists—"personally conducted" and independent—arrive hourly and walk through the little streets and into such houses as are open, peering into the doors and windows, staring at the islanders and hiring them to pose for photographs. All day, all summer, for many summers, the people have been on exhibition, on dress parade—a comic opera spectacle, a passing show for the passing crowd. What has been the effect upon the people? Nothing less than the
THE TOURIST AND THE NATIVE

destruction of their self respect; the undermining of the moral fiber of their children. A few of the old sailors and older women grumble apart with resentful glances for the intruders. To the majority it has brought the curse of self-consciousness and the greed of gold. Everything is on sale at an exorbitant price. All the children are selling things in the street or posing for the amateur photographer, singly and in groups, for money, showing the manner of their headdress for the same purpose, or being used to illustrate a dissertation by the personally conducting one; they are teasing the traveler to buy worthless souvenirs and running after the departing boat to beg for pennies (in English). The expression of greed on those little sunburned childish faces is enough to make one heartsick. What kind of men and women can they become? We are accustomed in southern countries to see the children begging. The Italian child, taught by beggar parents, will put out its dirty little hand with an angelic smile to the traveler before it can talk. Yet somehow one does not feel the same moral deterioration there. Latin psychology—particularly that of the lower classes—is ethically so unlike ours. In Holland the case is different. Holland has never been a land of beggars. They have been from the first a sturdy, self respecting people. It is written in the faces of the humblest peasants. This discovery of themselves as a negotiable commercial quantity has done the people of Maarken a moral injury that it could not do to an individual of the more supple Latin morals. They have sold their self respect and the inevitable deterioration has set in.

IN OBERAMMERGAU another aspect of this situation may be studied. In this little Bavarian town—as everyone knows—the Passion Play, which has been given ever since the seventeenth century, is performed once every ten years by the peasants who have organized themselves for that purpose into the School of the Cross. One day, fifty-five years ago, two Englishmen, Dean Tate and Professor Henry, heard of this religious observance and went to see it. Ten years later Dean Stanley visited Oberammergau and wrote an article about it for Macmillan’s Magazine. The four subsequent performances have attracted an increasing crowd of spectators. The performers and their local audience apparently remained unself-conscious for many years, then the inevitable happened: the Oberammergau peasants came also to eat of the tree of knowledge. Many who saw the play at its last celebra-
tion five years ago were impressed with this fact. Some have written
and thought differently, but it is to be feared that they were of the
class of unobservant enthusiasts. A visitor at the play given at what
one is tempted to call the "supplementary season," summer before last,
must have been the blindest of optimists not to realize that the spell of
unconscious religious fervor was broken forever.

The play given was a dramatization of the life of King David,
divided by tableaux representing scenes from the life of Christ. It
consisted of long declamatory dialogues with little or no action, and
songs—incidental music one is tempted to call it—composed for the
occasion by Wilhelm Müller of Munich.

One would hesitate to set down the opinion that the players in this
religious drama were not actuated by religious motives, yet the mere
fact of giving an extra play, without the precedent of old custom and
in a day when such things are no longer a form of religious expression,
—and also throughout the tourist season and with raised prices—causes
one to feel that the commercial advantages were appreciated by some
one. There seems little doubt that a different spirit came in with the
new performers of 1900. The members of the School of the Cross are
constantly on exhibition about the streets of the little town on the
days of the performance—long-haired, picturesquely hatted, clad in
the Tyrolean costume, conscious and seemingly covetous of the tour-
ist’s glances. Some of them are pale, suggesting types of the Latin
Quarter in Paris, rather than the sturdy devotional Bavarian peasant.

One family which is largely represented in the cast—two members
of it playing David (as boy and man) another the impersonator of
Christ at the last performance of the Passion Play—own an enormous
wood carving and pottery industry. In their Oberammergau shop
souvenirs of all description from crucifixes to post cards are for sale.
Their pottery has even been imported to America and displayed in
shop windows placarded with the seductive prophesy that at some fu-
ture date it will be unprocuurable. Some of the ruder varieties of wood
carving and cutting—once a primitive industry of the place—are now
made by machinery and sold at absurd prices. In a little house on an
off street a tall old man with a sweet face still carves the little toy
animals with his knife. They are scarcely visible behind his small cob-
webbed window and he still asks the simpler price of other days. The
difference between Oberammergau past and present lies there.
THE TOURIST AND THE NATIVE

NOT to go so far as to question the religious sincerity of the performers, it is yet difficult to feel that these men, picturesquely and consciously posing in wide-brimmed hats for photographs and post cards, have anything in common with the old-worldness and unworldliness that we associate with the name of Oberammergau. A little book got out by the Lang family last year for the tourist season read like any "boom" for a summer resort. A "tennis court near the Passion theater" is offered as one of the inducements.

Yet the King David play is a worthy enough entertainment for those whom it pleases, although such plays of Old Testament history are infinitely better done at the Yiddish theaters in New York. The tourist who enjoyed the Oberammergau entertainment was not being cheated. The intention of the costuming was not economical, and the music was not bad of its sentimental kind. The tableaux, as in the Passion Play, were copied from old masters with an ambition more creditable than the result. The price of seats was not exorbitant. It was all mediocre judged by an art standard, and the simple devotional thing it was in the past seems lost forever, yet, since it was not dishonest as an entertainment, what is there about it all that hurts and offends? It is not just the objection that some of us feel to having a moneymaking enterprise made out of a religious play—the objection raised by many to the American production of "Parsifal"—the distressing quality seems to lie rather in one's realization of the moral deterioration that must inevitably come to a people made self-conscious about a thing that was once an intense religious impulse. The Oberammergau peasants of to-day have come to know themselves as "copy," "material," an object of interest. Their greed has been more or less appealed to simultaneously with the awakening of this consciousness, so that their attitude seems to have become, in many cases, instead of a simple expression of faith, an egoistic anæmic pose; again the loss of self-respect and dignity. It is a downfall less wholesale and ignominious than that of Maarken, yet it is a greater tragedy, for in Oberammergau the commercialism has been the outgrowth of what was once an expression of the religious aspiration of a people. It is perhaps one of the inevitable results of the thing we call progress, and the history of progress is always redolent of tragedy. But the phase of it illustrated by Maarken and Oberammergau seems an essentially modern tragedy.

676