

# Civilization

Ernest Crosby

1997

Do you think it will go on forever?

The foul city spreading its ugly suburbs like an ink-blot over the fresh green woods and meadows,

Its buildings climbing up to ten, twenty, thirty shapeless stories,

Its lurid smoke smothering the blue sky;

The mad rushing hither and thither, by steam and electricity, as of insects on a stagnant pool, ever faster and faster;

Forests falling in a day to fill the world with waste paper;

Presses turning out aimless books and magazines and newspapers by the ton;

Factory chimneys poisoning the west wind with unnamed stench;

Dark pollution from chemical works and sewers sucking up the limpid purity of our streams;

Squalid brick-yards eating like leprosy into the banks of the river;

Coal-mines belching forth black vomit over whole counties;

The endless labor of digging gold and silver out of their natural deposits under the distant mountain and heaping them up in unnatural and equally useless deposits under our sidewalks;

The raging whirl of machinery forever whirling its tasteless, shoddy, adulterated products into the laps of the idle;

Stalwart country folk, lured into overcrowded slums, to be bleached and stifled and enervated in the slavery of dull toil;

The army of tramps and unemployed swelling, suicides multiplying, starvation widening in the wake of steam yachts and auto-cars of multi-millionaires;

Prisons, poorhouses, insane asylums, hospitals, and armories growing bigger and bigger;

And yet in all this wild, material maelstrom scarcely a glimmer of art or beauty or dignity or repose or self-respect—

Do you think it can go on forever?

Do you think it ought to go on forever?

—Ernest Crosby (1856–1907)

# fifth Estate

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Fifth Estate #350, Fall, 1997

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