

# Paris Now Bows to Gauguin's Savagery in Art Which Thrice Was Rejected There as Repulsive

Tremendous Vogue That Has Founded a School Rests Mainly on the Weird and Brilliant Pictures of Tahiti Where He Found the Dream Woman, and Earlier but No Less Savage Work Done in Brittany and Provence—Artist's Own Writings Reveal Primitive Instincts



NAVE NAVE MAHANA (DELICIOUS DAYS) A PICTURE THAT HAS BEEN COMPARED TO BOTTICELLI'S "SPRING"

By WILLIS STEELL.

AN anecdote of Henry Heine had a great effect in his day. It relates to a visit paid by a portrait painter to a savage tribe in search of types. After pleasing several minor officials, so to speak, the "Great King" consented to sit, but the artist observed in his demeanor a reluctance that his evident pride in his own appearance contradicted. When he asked the king to explain the discrepancy the dusky monarch took him aside and whispered:

"Please paint me white!"

The black people of Tahiti immortalized, so it is thought by some, by the weird brush and the brilliant colors of Paul Gauguin and by the book *Noa Noa*, which is a poetic commentary on his Tahitian paintings, have no wish, according to this authority, to change their tint, and their feeling for the poor white people is pity.

Gauguin's vogue, which now is tremendous in Paris, where it has founded a school, rests mainly on these savage pictures and his earlier work done in Brittany and Provence, just as sad and savage are carried along with them. Paris thrice rejected this artist's work, denouncing it "repulsive," and Director Rougon of the Beaux Arts, who had been instrumental in getting the artist a gratuitous mission to Tahiti, when asked to carry out his promises of aid to the artist, starving and dying in that far off region, exclaimed:

"Never will the French Government spend one franc in the purchase of that savage's pictures!"

Gauguin has not, it is true, reached the Louvre, but the French Government has become the owner by purchase of several of his pictures which now hang in the Luxemburg and will go eventually to the great museum or to some of the museums of the smaller cities.

## Tribute to Popularity.

Meanwhile the vogue of Gauguin has grown immensely since the painter Pierre Giraud exposed his great canvas, the "Homage to Gauguin," in the autumn salon of 1905. This canvas shows the master in a group of young artists whom he influenced: Serusier, Daniel de Monfried, Francisco Durrio, Maurice Denis, Dufrenoy, O'Connor, Fayet, De Mathan.

It has spread until the statement of Durrio hardly seems exaggerated. This statement is that there is something of Gauguin, more or less, in all the young painters of to-day and that his influence is seen directly or indirectly in the work of Maillol, Filiger, Vuillard, Bonnard, La Rochefoucauld, Loiseau, Laval, Seguin, Chemillard and a score of other young men who have lately arrived.

A shadowed popularity like that of Degas, Manet, and perhaps Monet, is a higher mark than Gauguin is likely to ever reach. A prophecy like this is a little less absurd in Gauguin's case, for it is certainly true that the beauty he saw will never become the beauty of the general. That multiple head still finds it difficult to see paletritude in Manet's "Olympe," although the lady is really vulgarly lovely and the tasks set by the savage Gauguin are more intricate and involve too high an art education. However, a big step has been taken, say the artists, when the Beaux Arts have been converted.

Gauguin's life began and ended miserably, with no sunshine except what he put in his pictures. Nevertheless he was satisfied by it and almost with his last breath pronounced that it had been full and successful. He was an egoist of the most pronounced type and his pride was so immense that it figures as a virtue. He affirmed of himself this: "I want everything; I can not, but I meant to conquer." He had no vanity, he said, because his pride was too great. His explanations of himself whether in paint or in the words of "Noa Noa" intended to allegorize his canvases and which Charles Morice, an intimate friend and benefactor, says he made over from Gauguin's crude notes, publishing the book afterward at his own expense, compose an enigma which Paris is trying to solve. Was it the explanation of a child or a great poet?

That he was what Mallarme pronounced him, "the primitive man supreme," is

more than Gauguin at his haughtiest admitted; he was content to be a savage. He accepted Strindberg's definition that he was "the savage who hates an uneasy civilization; the Titan who, jealous of his Creator, makes his own little creation; the child who breaks his playthings to make new ones; the artist who preferred to see the sky red rather than blue like the mob."

Gauguin was proud of the Peruvian strain drawn from his maternal ancestry and believed that the mixed blood of peasant French and haughty Spanish accounted for some of his instincts. He was born in 1848 at Lima and taken to France at the age of 6, a little later carried back to Peru, and thence again, when the family fortune failed, to Paris. His education was so broken into that he may be said to have had no conventional training of his mind. At 17 he was a sailor in the French merchant mercantile marine; at 22 he was an agent on the bourse; at 24 he married a Danish girl. His leisure time during these various occupations was spent in trying to teach himself to draw and paint and to sculpt. This leisure meant his evenings and Sundays.

At length he made the acquaintance of Pissarro, who was his only teacher, and along with the now famous men of the impressionistic school Gauguin produced some pictures for their first exhibition. His early apprentice work thus was seen in connection with canvases by Pissarro, Cezanne, Guillaumin and Monet. One of his pictures gave an Englishman who happened into the exhibition a start. It furnished an anecdote which is still in circulation about Gauguin. The English visitor paused before a canvas by Gauguin and, throwing up his hands, exclaimed:

"My God! A red dog!" and never stopped running till he found a place where he could buy a hair of the dog that had bitten him.

From 1889 Gauguin devoted himself to art, and ere long impressionism itself began to bore him. He wished in his desire to copy nature exactly (and yet to compose freely), to stop the sun in its course like an artistic Joshua and thus seize one moment of life. In choosing the Breton field for his brush he said he did so "because of its sadness," and he was in truth born sad. He had a numerous family, but after his break with the impressionistic school the few merchants of art who had been purchasers failed him and in order to live he removed to Normandy, thence to Denmark, where he quarrelled with everybody indiscriminately, commencing with the relatives of his wife who lived at Copenhagen.

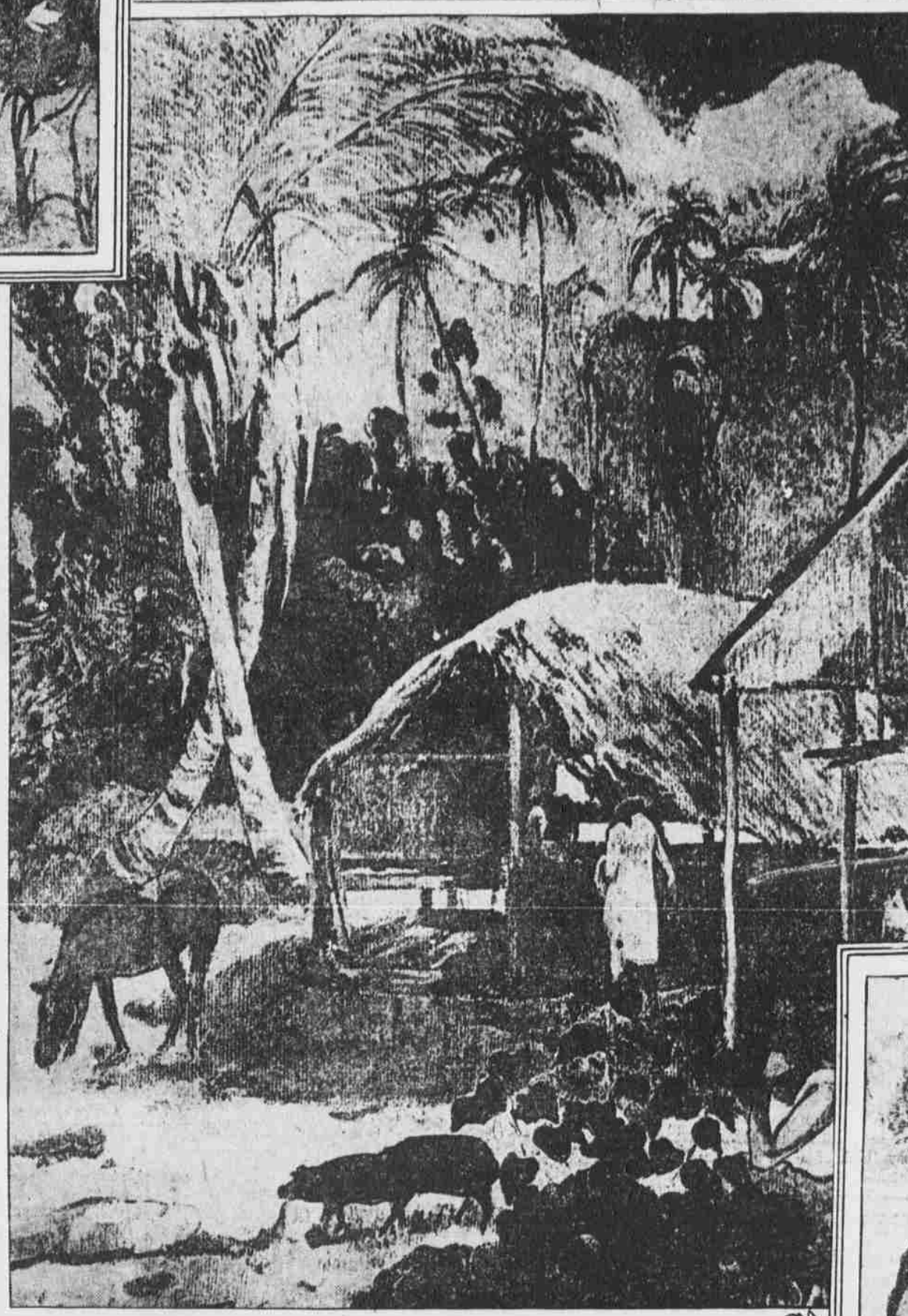
## Family Life Impossible to Him.

The truth seems to be that family life was impossible to him. After the separation from his wife he took two children with him to Paris and left three with his wife. They met, once only, years afterward. In a letter from Tahiti in his second exile Gauguin breathes this plaint, which reads like literary pathos: "I have never had a letter sent to me beginning with the words: 'Chere pere.'"

This period in Paris when he was burdened with the support of two children was Gauguin's darkest. Then he knew absolute want and to obtain a meagre living he served for a spell as a bill poster. But somehow he continued to paint, and in the eighth show of the impressionists he had nineteen pictures all showing the influence of Pissarro, although he claimed to have thrown it off.

Followed a return to Brittany and the painting of his now celebrated symbolistic and religious pictures, "Jesus on Calvary," "Who Are We?" "Whence Come We?" and "Where Are We Going?" And then he returned to Paris, where painters laughed at his ignorance and the public laughed at his art. A dabble in ceramics ensued, and then he fled for "light" to join his idolatrous fellow painter, Vincent Van Gogh at Arles.

A tragedy resulted from this visit. Gauguin has said that the men who cared for his art and for himself were apt to lose their minds, and Van Gogh did. He tried to kill Gauguin and, failing in his attempt, cut off his own ear and sent it as a present to the artist, who had taken refuge from his violence in an inn. A



THE BLACK PIGS, A PASTORAL SCENE IN TAHITI

little later Van Gogh committed suicide and Gauguin, saddened by the tragedy, returned to Paris to stop for a short time, for the Ecole de Pont Avon was forming. These synthesists, with Gauguin as their acknowledged head, exhibited in 1889 at the Cafe Volpini. Bernard, Augustin, Laval and Schuffenecker were his principal associates.

There were no sales from this show, and Gauguin, incensed by the indifference of Paris, longed to go far away and chose as his dream point Tahiti. But there had to be a sale before transportation could be provided, and a new exhibition comprehending Gauguin's pictures of Martinique scenes, Breton *paysages* and Aries sketches was offered. The result was poor but sufficed. He reached Tahiti as King Pomare lay dying, and there he saw the Queen Maru, and his portrait of her is one of his loveliest works.

"Savages? The word comes naturally to my lips when I consider these black beings with cannibal teeth. To them like-wise I was a savage. Which was wrong?"

## Refers to Savage Instincts.

Constantly he refers to his savage instincts and the joy he experienced in it, last yielding to them.

"There is nothing in my works of art which does not reveal myself, despite myself, as a savage. That is why they are inimitable. The work of a man is the explanation of that man."

Time and again he raises a panoply of thinking.

"It was so simple to paint what I saw, to paint without color relations, to put a red line next a blue if I saw it there. I was in the glow of light, saturated inside and out by light; why hesitate to put all this golden glow into my pictures?"

"These savages have told me how to know myself better, they have taught me the *crave verity*. All that I have learned from others bores me and if it be true that I know but little still I prefer that little which is myself. Who knows but that this little when it is exploited by others may become a great thing? How many years it required to create an appearance of movement?"

Gauguin was intoxicated by the light that shone on the dark naked bodies of

the Tahitians, burning and scorching the skin but lighting them up interiorly also, and he began at once to paint from the model. At first it was difficult to persuade the natives to sit. One day he was sitting at his easel when a Tahitian girl came in. He showed her a photograph of Manet's "Olympe," and she remarked:

"She is very beautiful. Is she your wife?"

"Yes," answered Gauguin without knowing exactly why he lied.

Then he begged the girl to sit for her portrait.

"Aita?" (Now?) she asked and ran away.

Presently she returned in a gorgeous robe with her hair caught up and a tiara of flowers.

"She was not pretty, precisely," comments Gauguin, "not pretty, but beautiful; so perfect was every feature and every part in their relations."

She and all the Tahitian maidens were to be taken, he explains, and the old chiefs tried to make him understand that there was no other form of love making recognized in Tahiti. Love came after the taking. But the artist affirms that civilization still fettered him and "he did not dare."

The woman Tehura who figures in "Noa Noa" was a dream woman, a symbol of the eternal woman as he thought he saw her darkly, through a veil of race and dialect. She allegorizes the woman in his pictures. A group of her is Gauguin's dream of spring and as beautiful and fresh after one learns to know the type as Botticelli's "Primavera." Gauguin called his group "Nave Nave Mahana," which means "Delicious Days."

Laden with his trove, Gauguin sailed away from Tahiti, as he feared, forever. In Paris he met with a staggering disappointment: his portrait of the Queen and this group, "Delicious Days," lovely as they are, were bunched with pictures of Tahitians of less attraction and called "revolting art."

Nevertheless, as his uncle had died and left him 13,000 francs he took a studio in the rue Vercingetorix, over the door of which he painted the legend, "Te Faruru" (Here they make love), and after decorating it in a peculiar manner proceeded

to make love to a Javanese neighbor. The pair went to Normandy, but the combination was ill starred. The Javanese invited attention which led to vulgar fights, she proved disloyal and back came Gauguin to startle Paris once more. But not for long. The nostalgia for Tahiti grew unbearable, it conquered, and he sold everything at the Hotel Druot and bade a final adieu to civilization.

## The Book "Noa Noa."

It was on the eve of this second voyage that Charles Morice says he proposed to Gauguin their collaboration on the book "Noa Noa." It was to be a comment in prose and poetry to accompany and explain Gauguin's visions of Tahiti. The artist accepted the idea with joy and sent back scraps of writing which Morice says he turned into French.

"Gauguin's vocabulary was very poor, meagre as a peasant's, and yet his art was purely literary. From his pictures I made my Tahitian poems; his prose was translated, but it was his."

Gauguin's second visit to Tahiti developed unhappily. He was ill and soon his little resource of money became exhausted; he also got involved in troubles with the authorities, religious and secular. He says himself that even in savagery a man is looked down upon if he has no money. So he went to Domenica, the most peopled island of the Marquesas.

From there he wrote to Morice:

"It is probable that I shall not see the book printed ("Noa Noa"), my days are numbered."

Although his art had by now grown calmer, almost serene, he wrote of it: "My Breton canvases, at first rejected, became comprehensible and even charming, rose water, because of the pictures from Tahiti. Tahiti will be as cologne water compared to what I send from the Marquesas."

At the same time he believed that he had renewed his vision, saying:



PAUL GAUGUIN, PAINTED BY HIMSELF IN THE ASTRACHAN HELMET AND BLUE CLOAK THAT PARIS USED TO STARE AT.



TAHITIANS—MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

"I have forgotten all I was ever taught, hence I am young. They have called me revolutionary. In art there are two classes, revolutionaries and plagiarists. Music I love in its hour and a few books, but it is art alone (painting) that gives an instantaneous reaction. My favorite authors are Poe and Balzac. When I saw Rodin's head of Balzac, I said: 'It is a beautiful work of art, yet if I had made one I would have made a giant and in his two hands I would have put two little monsters—Seraphitus and Seraphita.'"

These notes from Tahiti and Domenica have perhaps been edited. They do not show the defects his friends found in his letters when they say these were deformed by vulgarities painful to read, that conscious of his ignorance of literature and history he took refuge in a savage hauteur, labored and hard to read. His style

was a melange of barbarisms, maritime argot and the slang of the studio.

So much for the literary critics. His masters in art recognized his original talent from the first exhibition. Manet sought him out to praise his work when he was almost self taught and Degas admired him and constantly said so. Painters whose gaze is on the future were unanimous in their verdict that Gauguin was one of the "Most necessary artists for France of the nineteenth century." They defended him until their good offices were no longer needed, for shortly after his death he defended himself. He died utterly neglected on May 8, 1903. In the few scraps of paper left in his effects and sent back to France was found this line:

"The Gods are dead and Atuana sickens of their death."

## Wonderful Stained Glass

IN the cathedral at Chartres there are 1,350 subjects in 143 windows. York Cathedral has 117 subjects in one great window. Canterbury, Lincoln and Salisbury have beautiful examples of early glass.

There are many more in France, and often the same workmen had windows in different towns. They travelled in companies or guilds. In the event of an English military invasion of France they carried on their peaceful craft in England, and during a tranquil season across the Channel there they were.

It is of this epoch that subjects in medallions are typical. Circles alternated with squares to the full height of the window, each space having its story from the Old and New Testaments, with connecting patterns of ornament. The figures were smaller, of course, when so enclosed, but the orderly repetition of forms and colors and the assembling of so many pieces of glass resulted in magnificently harmonious carried aloft in varied courses.

The great number of subjects in Chartres Cathedral were made up in this way, indeed, Chartres is preeminent for Biblical legends in medallion windows. Glass of unusual thickness and radiance was used and substantial leading.

The modern awakening of interest in stained glass as a fine art is largely due to the initiative of the pre-Raphaelite group of devoted artists in England. About sixty years ago Edward Burnes-Jones, at the instance of his friend Rossetti, designed some windows following the early examples and in after years contributed many more to the art of his country.

Painted glass of European manufacture is usually of excellent finish. Under its native soft gray skies it is at its best. The brilliant sunshine of other lands tends to disintegrate its composition, especially in its black painted surfaces in sudden contrast with the glare of white glass. The details of its delicate grisaille often fuse in a cold, unpleasant glitter.