Falling Like The Romans

As the evolution of humanity spread out of Africa, they bypassed the dense jungles of the western tropics and the desert to its north, and followed the Nile into the incredibly fertile Middle East. Around 8,000 BC the Sahara began to get rain, and gradually turned to savanna with numerous rivers flowing into the Nile and the Mediterranean. A gradual migration spread across the Sahara. They learned to farm and grow grain, but eventually the rains diminished and the population migrated north and south. To the south they gradually returned to the hunter gatherer lifestyle suited to the wet tropics, but to the north they were able to maintain a thriving agriculture in a climate well suited to growing grain. By the time the Roman Empire came along, they had sufficient surplus to export, and eventually supplied most of the grain and other crops consumed by the Romans; but the desert gradually pushed them ever closer to the Mediterranean coast, poor farming methods bankrupted the soil, and the surplus disappeared. By the 4'th century AD, famine began to spread in the Roman Empire.

Climate Change is beginning to put a very substantial damper on our contemporary civilization's ability to feed itself. The steadily increasing droughts, floods, hail, hotter summers, and colder winters are resulting in an ever increasing amount of crop failure, and our overwhelming dependency on the sterility of GMO mono-crop agriculture renders us extremely vulnerable to catastrophic famine.

Three or four thousand years ago there was a lot of tin and lead lying around and people gradually learned their uses. As the Roman Empire developed, they found that lead was useful for lots of good things and was integral to much of the infrastructure of the Roman Empire. If you melted it with tin you got a very malleable metal that melted at a very low temperature [pewter]. If you boiled young wine in a lead pot and added a little vinegar you got a condensed sugar with lead acetate {sugar of lead}. Plumbing, roofs, paint, kitchenware, tableware, containers, cosmetics, preservatives, sweeteners; the Romans used a lot of lead. In the first few centuries AD, annual production was up to about 4 kilograms per capita.

Today, we avoid lead in our lives because we know that lead is poisonous, but few Romans had the wisdom to connect lead with the many toxic symptoms of lead poisoning. If you were well-to-do, you came home to a house which may have been painted, caulked, and roofed with lead, and sat down to a dinner made in lead pots, with wine made and stored in lead containers, and a dessert sweetened with sapa [sugar of lead]. You drank and bathed in water from lead lined reservoirs and lead pipes. In the morning, you put on lead based makeup. Depending on the wind, you breathed smog from the lead ore furnaces and foundries.

The aristocracy consumed about 7 times as much lead as the plebeians, and about 16 times as much as a slave. For the slaves and plebeians, this wasn't particularly dangerous, it was actually less than the average contemporary American, but much of the aristocracy of the Roman Empire was ingesting around 250 mg of lead a day; not enough to cause substantial, immediately noticeable lead

poisoning, but enough to cause lower fertility, decreased mental acuity, increased insanity, increased health problems, and higher mortality amongst the ruling class. This led to a gradual but steady decline in the competency and sanity of government, with a corresponding increase in corruption.

The unknown poisons of contemporary civilization are much more numerous than the lead poisoning of the Romans, but the overwhelming subtle poisoning of those who manage and guide our civilization is the selective insidious de-evolution of Birth Control.

In 54 BC, Julius Caesar invaded Britain with a force of 27,000 soldiers. Over the next few hundred years the Romans conquered all of Britain, but it took many times that many troops to hold it against ever increasing guerilla war from numerous tribes and invaders, and by 410, they abandoned any official presence in Britain. Overall, their investment in the endeavor had a very negative return on investment and was a substantial drain on the Roman economy.

At it's height about 200 AD, the Roman Legions numbered almost 200,000 and the Auxilia another 250,000. The Roman Legions were well paid, professional soldiers. They were spread out all over Europe, North Africa, and the Eastern Mediterranean, fighting off a variety of barbarian incursions, but most of the standing army was at home training and maintaining, as well as policing and building infrastructure. Their version of the army corps of engineers was large, skilled, and busy. Big and strong as the Roman Army was, due mostly to overextension and poor governance, they were gradually losing ground to the barbarians.

Our contemporary incompetent investment in warfare is also having a very negative return on investment, and the barbarians of Radical Islam, Corruption, and the Radical Right are steadily encroaching.

In 535 AD, Krakatoa blew so big they could hear it in China. Around that same year, Ilopango Caldera in Central America did much the same. The ash cloud that covered the earth was so thick that the ensuing cold, crop failure, and famine was global and lasted for many years. Famine leads to plague, and a few years later the Plague of Justinian spread across the world and persisted for several centuries.

Life on the entire planet packed up and headed toward the equator. For the Romans, this meant a sudden increase in an already extensive encroachment of the barbarians from the north. Their overextended and incompetently deployed army was steadily pushed back, and the Roman Empire gradually dissolved.

The coming famine and plague facing our contemporary civilization is due to climate change on a scale exponentially greater than the results of Krakatoa.

The fall of the Roman Empire was a very gradual event, with a variety of causes, but the underlying theme was complacency in the face of rapid advances in technology. Things change, and bureaucracies don't. Us humans are ever so clever, but we're not very smart.

In our contemporary global civilization, we see a very similar complacency, and a similar lack of change and competency in our systems of commerce and

government. The latter half of the 20’th century produced a rise in comfort and leisure that has produced a complacency that is quite dangerous.

The problems facing contemporary civilization are exponentially greater than anything the Romans had to deal with, but we have something the Romans didn’t. We have the internet. We have exponentially more knowledge available to the general public. The problem is that availability means nothing to those who choose not to educate themselves or are denied access or are easily distracted and deceived.

In the world today we see a multi-polar polarization in our approach to knowledge. There are those who know enough to know that they don’t know what they don’t know, and they’re curious. There are those who don’t know that they don’t know what they don’t know, and they’re clueless. There are those who don’t want to know what they don’t know because they’re cowards. And then there are those who think they know, but what they know ain't so.