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A MIRROR FOR ARTISTS

WHAT is the industrial theory of the arts? It is something to which industry has not turned its corporate brains in any large measure. Yet however unformulated, there seems to be the phantom of a theory in the air; perhaps it may materialize into some formidable managerial body which will take care of the matter for us—a United States Chamber of Art or a National Arts Council, with a distinguished board of directors and local committees in every state. In the absence of the reassuring information which it would undoubtedly be the function of such a body to collect and disseminate, I must beg leave to define the industrial theory of the arts as best I can.

Whenever it is attacked for dirtying up the landscape and rendering human life generally dull, mechanical, standardized, and mean, industrialism replies by pointing out compensatory benefits. In the field of the arts, these are the benefits that a plodding Mæcenas might think about without greatly agitating his intellect: When material prosperity has finally become permanent, when we are all rich, when life has been reduced to some last pattern of efficiency, then we shall all sit down and enjoy ourselves. Since nice, civilized people are supposed to have art, we shall have art. We shall buy it, hire it, can it, or—most conclusively—manufacture it. That is a sufficient answer to the whole

question, so far as the industrial Mæcenas is concerned—and he does not, of course, realize what a strange part he plays in the rôle of Mæcenas. The *nouveau riche* is never sensible of his own errors. If the industrial Mæcenas were alone to be considered, I should not be writing this essay. Other people, some of them persons of learning and thoughtfulness, hold essentially the same theory. They talk of “mastering the machine” or “riding the wild horses” of industrial power, with the idea that industrialism may furnish the basis for a society which will foster art. It is a convenient doctrine, and a popular one.

The contention of this essay is that such theories are wrong in their foundation. Industrialism cannot play the rôle of Mæcenas, because its complete ascendancy will mean that there will be no arts left to foster; or, if they exist at all, they will flourish only in a diseased and disordered condition, and the industrial Mæcenas will find himself in the embarrassing position of having to patronize an art that secretly hates him and calls him bad names. More completely, the making of an industrialized society will extinguish the meaning of the arts, as humanity has known them in the past, by changing the conditions of life that have given art a meaning. For they have been produced in societies which were for the most part stable, religious, and agrarian; where the goodness of life was measured by a scale of values having little to do with the material values of industrialism; where men were never too far removed from nature to forget that the chief subject of art, in the final sense, is nature.

It is my further contention that the cause of the arts,

thus viewed, offers an additional reason among many reasons for submitting the industrial program to a stern criticism and for upholding a contrary program, that of an agrarian restoration; and that, in America, the South, past and present, furnishes a living example of an agrarian society, the preservation of which is worth the most heroic effort that men can give in a time of crisis.

Let us recall the song of the sirens, which Sir Thomas Browne ventured to say was not beyond conjecture. I dare to make the conjecture, though well knowing how we moderns have shattered all myths in our wish to flood our brows with the light of reason, and how lightly we hold the wisdom of untruths or double truths in which the ancients often shadowed their greatest mysteries. Whatever the words and melody, the song of the sirens must have had this meaning: "You shall enjoy beauty without the toil of winning it, if you will forsake your ship and dwell with us." It was an alluring promise, and few of those who yielded thought of the condition on which it was made. They were attracted by the first clause and forgot the second, which implied, yet revealed not that alien shore where the bones of victims littered the rocks. For the sirens were cannibals; their embrace was death.

Industrialism makes the promise of the sirens, though of course with no real malignancy—rather with a mild innocence which we could forgive if it were not so stupid. Industrialism wants to take a short-cut to art. Seeing the world altogether in terms of commodities, it simply proposes to add one more commodity to the list, as a conces-

sion to humanity's perfectly unaccountable craving, or as just one more market—why not? It will buy art, if any fool wants art. And industrialism is quite unconscious that the bargain (which the Middle Ages would have described as a devil's bargain, ending in the delivery of the soul to torment) involves the destruction of the thing bargained for. The takers of the bargain, if there are any, are likely to be equally unconscious of what is happening to them, except as they are vaguely aware of being somehow betrayed. Hence results a situation that might be put into a dialogue:

"Incompetent wretch," says the industrialist, "is this sorry product what I bargained for? Have I not endowed you with leisure and comfort in which to produce your masterpieces? Do I not reward you with great wealth and provide you with all the proper facilities in all manner of institutions? Yet you perform no great works, but oddly prefer to indulge in maudlin ravings that no sensible person can understand or in obscene scoldings that no right-minded citizen can approve."

"You do not understand the nature of genius," the artist answers, haughtily. "I am what I am. I do not expect to be appreciated in my lifetime, anyway, and certainly not by vulgar persons unlearned in the modern theories of art. Art makes its own rules, which are not the rules of commerce. If you want to play my game, you must play it by my rules."

The industrialist, reorganizing society according to theories of material progress, avows his good intentions. He naturally expects the arts to flourish as a matter of course, perhaps even more joyously and quickly than in the past.

For he thinks his dispensation sets men free to use the blessings of art, however minor and incidental these may be in his cosmic scheme. The artist, who is in spirit dissociated from the industrialist's scheme of society but forced to live under it, magnifies his dissociation into a special privilege and becomes a noble exile.

Do the arts require leisure for their creation and enjoyment? The industrialist claims that he increases the sum-total of human leisure through machines that save labor; furthermore, that this leisure is more widely distributed than ever before in history, and that the proportion of leisure to labor and the extent of its distribution are bound to increase as industrialism waxes mightier and ever more efficient. With leisure goes physical security—greater length of life, freedom from disease and poverty, increase of material comforts. If, under this benevolent dispensation, men do not spontaneously devote themselves to art, then the further presumption is that industrial philanthropy will be equal to the emergency, for its accumulations of surplus capital can be used for promoting the "finer things of life."

Through his command over nature the modern man can move his art about at will. Literary masterpieces, chosen by the best critics that can be hired, can be distributed once a month to hundreds of thousands of disciples of culture. Symphony concerts, heavily endowed and directed by world-famous experts, can be broadcast to millions. Much as the Red Cross mobilizes against disease, the guardians of public taste can mobilize against bad art or lack of art; one visualizes caravans of art, manned by regiments of lecturers, rushed hastily to future epidemic centers of

barbarism when some new Mencken discovers a Sahara of the Bozart. Or, *vice versa*, modern man can move himself to the place where art is—to the Louvre, to the cathedrals, to the pagodas, to meetings of the Poetry Society of America. Through power of accumulated wealth, in public or private hands, he can bring precious canvasses and sculptures together for multitudes to stare at. He can build immense libraries or put little libraries on wheels—the flying library may be looked for eventually. The millionaire can retain an expert to buy his gallery of Corots—or of the newest, surest masters declared by modern dealers. Or, as wealth trickles down to humbler hands, the shop girl can get a ten-cent print of Corot to hang above her dressing-table, or buy her dollar edition of Shakespeare, with an introduction by Carl Van Doren. Between the shop girl and the millionaire will of course be a universal art-audience of all the people, introduced to the classics through schemes of mass-education and trained from babyhood (in nursery schools) in all varieties of art-appreciation.

In short, the artist is to have a freer and fuller opportunity than he has ever known before. With leisure to enjoy art, with command over the materials of art, with remarkable schemes for communicating, distributing, manufacturing, and inculcating art—how can the creative spirit fail to respond to the challenge? Why not a golden age of the arts, wherein ideal cities, grandiosely designed, shelter a race of super-beings who spend all their unemployed moments (destined to be numerous, when production is finally regulated) in visiting art museums, reading immortal

works, and dwelling in beautiful homes adorned with designs approved by the best interior decorators?

What a shame if, with all this tremendous array of compulsions, the stubborn pig still refuses to get over the stile! Yet that is what happens. The arts behave with piggish contrariness. They will not budge, or they run crazily off into briar patches and mud puddles, squealing hideously.

It is common knowledge that, wherever it can be said to exist at all, the kind of leisure provided by industrialism is a dubious benefit. It helps nobody but merchants and manufacturers, who have taught us to use it in industriously consuming the products they make in great excess over the demand. Moreover, it is spoiled, as leisure, by the kind of work that industrialism compels. The furious pace of our working hours is carried over into our leisure hours, which are feverish and energetic. We live by the clock. Our days are a muddle of "activities," strenuously pursued. We do not have the free mind and easy temper that should characterize true leisure. Nor does the separation of our lives into two distinct parts, of which one is all labor—too often mechanical and deadening—and the other all play, undertaken as a nervous relief, seem to be conducive to a harmonious life. The arts will not easily survive a condition under which we work and play at cross-purposes. We cannot separate our being into contradictory halves without a certain amount of spiritual damage. The leisure thus offered is really no leisure at all; either it is pure sloth, under which the arts take on the character of mere entertainment, purchased in boredom and enjoyed in utter

passivity, or it is another kind of labor, taken up out of a sense of duty, pursued as a kind of fashionable enterprise for which one's courage must be continually whipped up by reminders of one's obligation to culture.

The promise of distribution is equally deceptive. One thing has obviously happened that nobody counted on when industrialism first appeared as Messiah. It has been generally assumed that the art to be distributed will naturally be good art. But it is just as easy to distribute bad art—in fact, it is much easier, because bad art is more profitable. The shop-girl does not recite Shakespeare before breakfast. Henry Ford's hired hands do not hum themes from Beethoven as they go to work. Instead, the shop-girl reads the comic strip with her bowl of patent cereal and puts on a jazz record while she rouges her lips. She reads the confession magazines and goes to the movies. The factory hand simply does not hum; the *Daily Mirror* will do for him, with pictures and titles that can be torpidly eyed. The industrialists in art—that is, the Hollywood producers, the McFadden publications, the Tin Pan Alley crowd, the Haldeman-Julius Blue Books—will naturally make their appeal to the lowest common denominator. They know the technique of mass-production, which, if applied to the arts, must invariably sacrifice quality to quantity. Small margins of profit, large sales, the technique of forcing the market through salesmanship and high-pressure advertising, will all work havoc; nor have we much reason to hope that the ravages will eventually be limited to the vulgar enterprises I have named, of which the movies offer perhaps the most convincing example.

What have we to hope for when eminent critics sell their prestige and ability to book clubs whose entire scheme of operations is based on the technique of mass-production; when publishers begin to imitate the methods of William Wrigley and Lydia E. Pinkham? What but a gradual corruption of integrity and good taste, a preference for the mediocre and "safe," if not for the positively bad. The magnificent possibilities for distributing art become appalling opportunities for distributing bad art. One has only to glance at magazines of large circulation, at the advertising columns of reviews (if not at the articles themselves), at the general critical confusion of New York, to see what inroads have already been made.

At this point somebody might argue that the lower classes never produced or enjoyed good art, anyway; and the number of persons of good taste is steadily increasing.

This objection would ask us to view good art as an aristocratic affair. It cannot be granted without ignoring history, which shows that art in its great periods has rarely been purely aristocratic. It has generally been also "popular" art in a good sense and has been widely diffused. The "popular" art that has survived for inspection is good art, certainly as compared with the McFadden publications. Furthermore, this objection would at once subtract from consideration one of the major claims of industrialism, which proposes to enlarge and not to diminish the audience of the artist—even to make his audience universal. And even if there should be proved to be, by actual census, a larger number of people who enjoy good art through the agency of industrialism than in past times, I should still

suspect the validity of the process by which they achieved good taste. For good taste cannot be had by simply going into the market for it. It will be but a superficial property, the less valued because it was easily got; and it will be dangerous to society if society is merely gilded with culture and not permeated. Such an aristocracy, if it could be achieved, would reign very insecurely; and it would always be more likely that its manners would be perverted by the "lower" class than that the manners of the "lower" class would be raised.

Education, we are told, should deal with such matters as this. In the long run we shall educate everybody, and good art will win because only good art will be taught.

Under ideal circumstances education can probably accomplish a great deal, and even under the worst handicaps it produces intangible results in which we can well afford to rejoice. However, again we encounter the old difficulty. Education can do comparatively little to aid the cause of the arts as long as it must turn out graduates into an industrialized society which demands specialists in vocational, technical, and scientific subjects. The humanities, which could reasonably be expected to foster the arts, have fought a losing battle since the issue between vocational and liberal education was raised in the nineteenth century. Or, they have kept their place by imitating the technique of their rivals, so that one studies the biology of language, the chemistry of drama, the evolution of the novel, and the geological strata or fossil forms of literature and the fine arts. That is, they abdicate the function by which they were formerly able to affect the tone of society. So

far as they still maintain this function, they still face a dilemma. Either they will appear as decorative and useless to the rising generations who know that poetry sells no bonds and music manages no factories, and hence will be taken under duress or enjoyed as a pleasant concession to the softer and more frivolous side of life. Or, the more successfully they indoctrinate the student with their values, the more unhappy they will make him. For he will be spoiled for industrial tasks by being rendered inefficient. He will not fit in. The more refined and intelligent he becomes, the more surely will he see in the material world the lack of the image of nobility and beauty that the humanities inculcate in him. The product of a humanistic education in an industrial age is most likely to be an exotic, unrelated creature—a disillusionist or a dilettante. Lastly, there is the almost overwhelming difficulty of communicating the humanities at all under systems of education, gigantic in their scope, that have become committed to industrial methods of administration—the entire repulsive fabric of standards, credits, units, scientific pedagogy, over-organization. The sign of these difficulties is found in the great confusion and argument that exists today in the educational profession itself. On the whole, though we may allow that some institutions, notably some colleges and universities, are oases hospitable to the arts—oases that might become centers of leadership—the educational situation offers more cause for discouragement than for hope.

As to art museums and other philanthropic schemes for promoting art, I do not speak against them in any denunciatory sense. Yet one cannot help but fear that they too

only serve to emphasize the discrepancy between our life and our art. Alone, they can hardly supply the impulses which a thousand other influences are negating and destroying. It is futile to imagine that the arts will penetrate our life in exact proportion to the number of art galleries, orchestras, and libraries that philanthropy may endow. Rather it is probable that a multiplication of art galleries (to take a separate example) is a mark of a diseased, not a healthy civilization. If paintings and sculptures are made for the purpose of being viewed in the carefully studied surroundings of art galleries, they have certainly lost their intimate connection with life. What is a picture for, if not to put on one's own wall? But the principle of the art gallery requires me to think that a picture has some occult quality in itself and for itself that can only be appreciated on a quiet anonymous wall, utterly removed from the tumult of my private affairs.

The art gallery or art museum theory of art to which philanthropists and promoters would persuade us views art as a luxury quite beyond the reach of ordinary people. Its attempt to glorify the arts by setting them aside in specially consecrated shrines can hardly supply more than a superficial gilding to a national culture, if the private direction of that culture is ugly and materialistic—Keyserling would say, animalistic. The proposition is as absurd as this: Should we eat our meals regularly from crude, thick dishes like those used in Greek restaurants, but go on solemn occasions to a restaurant museum where somebody's munificence would permit us to enjoy a meal on china of the most delicate design? The truly artistic life is

surely that in which the æsthetic experience is not curtailed off but is mixed up with all sorts of instruments and occupations pertaining to the round of daily life. It ranges all the way from pots and pans, chairs and rugs, clothing and houses, up to dramas publicly performed and government buildings. Likewise public libraries, which tend ever to become more immense and numerous, pervert public taste as much as they encourage it. For the patrons are by implication discouraged from getting their own books and keeping them at home. Their notion is that the state—or some local Mæcenas—will take care of their taste for them, just as the police take care of public safety. Art galleries and libraries are fine enough in their way, but we should not be deceived into putting our larger hope in them.

~~The final evidence of the false promise of industrialism is in the condition of the arts themselves. That they have in our time a real excellence as arts I should be the last to deny. I am, however, not so much concerned with defining that excellence as with discovering their general status in relation to the profound changes which industrialism has brought into human society. Those who study the modern arts seriously and disinterestedly are obliged to note that their excellence is maintained somewhat desperately and defiantly. It has a back-against-the-wall heroism. It has the fierce courage that flares up when one is cornered by an overwhelming adversary, or it has the malaise of defeat. The arts are subject to exactly the same confusion of purpose that Matthew Arnold once attributed to the English Romantic poets. Their work, he said, was "premature,"~~

largely because they did not participate in a "current of ideas in the highest degree animating and nourishing to the creative power"—such a "current of ideas" or a "national glow of life and thought" as Sophocles or Pindar enjoyed. Arnold thus put his finger on the difficulty that beset not only the Romantic poets, but Arnold himself and the Victorian writers in general, and that is exaggerated rather than diminished today.

For Arnold's "premature," however, I should substitute "belated." Romantic writers, from William Blake to T. S. Eliot, are not so much an advance guard leading the way to new conquests as a rear guard—a survival of happier days when the artist's profession was not so much a separate and special one as it is now. Romantic writers—and modern writers, who are also romantic—behave like persons whose position is threatened and needs fresh justification. The rebellion against tradition, so marked in some kinds of Romanticism, is thus an abandonment of one untenable fortress in order to take a new position that the artist hopes will be unassailable. In turn it too is besieged, and a new manœuvre must be attempted. Yet every time it is not merely Neo-classic art or Victorian art that is invaded. It is art itself, as art, that is being attacked by an enemy so blind and careless that he does not know what citadel he is approaching.

Mr. Babbitt, Mr. More, and other critics of the Humanist school have dragged the weaknesses of Romantic art into the light, but seemingly fail to realize that if there is to be any art at all under the conditions of modern life, it must probably be Romantic art, and must have the weaknesses of Romantic art, with such excellences as may be allowed

~~to the unvictorious. It is alarming and somewhat tragic to witness a Humanist attack upon the retiring outposts of the army whose ancient generals they are pleased to commend. The fury and ridicule that young men of letters, like Edmund Wilson, have heaped upon the Humanist program must be at least partly due to their awareness that the Humanists, in their bombardment of all modernisms, are demolishing the walls of Troy in order to admit the wooden horse.~~

~~Mr. Eugene O'Neill may have every wish to be Sophocles, but he cannot be Sophocles in a New York skyscraper, any more than Mr. Thornton Wilder can be God by sending his astral body to Peru. The Humanists commend us to Sophocles and God, *in vacuo*. Their thinking stops where it should begin, with social conditions that shape the artist's reaction. Like Arnold they imagine that culture will conquer Philistinism and have faith that the "best" ideas will prevail over the false ideas or no-ideas of the great Anarch. In Arnold's time it was reasonable to entertain such a hope. Today it is the academic equivalent of Y. M. C. A. "leadership."~~

~~Unpredictable though the great artist may be, no study of the past can fail to reveal that social conditions to a large extent direct the temper and form of art. And many though the varieties of Romanticism may be, their origin is probably always in an artificial or maladjusted relation between the artist and society. We shall not be far wrong if we describe Romanticism somewhat in the terms that Mr. Harold J. Laski has used for Rousseau: "He (Rousseau) never lost the sense of anger against an order the tradition~~

~~of which forced him at every step to fight for himself. . . . He was driven by the law of his being to deny the foundations of the world he had hoped to conquer. He saw between himself and its spirit a fundamental contradiction of principle which neither compromise nor recognition could bridge."~~

~~Eighteenth Century society, which pretended to classicism artistically and maintained a kind of feudalism politically, was with all its defects a fairly harmonious society in which the artist was not yet out of place, although he was already beginning to be. But in the middle of the eighteenth century, democracy and the industrial revolution got under way almost simultaneously. The rise of the middle classes to power, through commercial prosperity, prepared the way for the one; scientific discovery, backed by eighteenth century rationalism, prepared for the other, and society speedily fell into a disharmony, where it has remained. Political democracy, as Mr. Laski has shown, left social democracy unrealized. The way was clear for the materialistic reorganization of society that in effect brought a spiritual disorganization.~~

~~Thus arise the works of the Romantic school, in which the artist sets forth "the fundamental contradiction of principle" between himself and society. The artist is no longer with society, as perhaps even Milton, last of classicists, was. He is against or away from society, and the disturbed relation becomes his essential theme, always underlying his work, no matter whether he evades or accepts the treatment of the theme itself. His evasion may consist in nostalgia for a remote past, mediæval, Elizabethan, Grecian, which~~

~~he revives imaginatively or whose characteristic modes he appropriates. He has thus the spiritual solace of retreating to a refuge secure against the doubtful implications of his position in contemporary society. His retreat is a psychological compensation, but there is also an appeal to something that has survival value. He does not so much rebel against a crystallized tradition (the misleading notion of Lowes' "convention and revolt") as retire more deeply within the body of the tradition to some point where he can utter himself with the greatest consciousness of his dignity as artist. He is like a weaponless warrior who plucks a sword from the tomb of an ancient hero.~~

~~Or with greater hardihood the artist may defy the logic of circumstances. Individuality being imperilled, he reaffirms the sacredness of the individual. In Romantic poetry we have from the beginning a vast increase in lyric poetry, personal and subjective, with the objective practically ruled out. The poet sings less and less for the crowd in whose experiences he no longer shares intimately. The lonely artist appears, who sings for a narrower and ever diminishing audience; or having in effect no audience, he sings for himself. He develops not only a peculiar set of ideas, more and more personal to himself, but a personal style that in time becomes the "unique" style demanded of modern poets, highly idiomatic, perhaps obscure.~~

~~Likewise he exaggerates feeling at the expense of thought. The works of sensibility emerge. Shelley's skylark and Keats's nightingale are not birds, but causes, stimuli, barely tangible perceptions that start a flow of feeling which the poets struggle almost vainly to declare. Later the Imagists~~

~~repeat the Romantic mode in a slightly different pattern. Their art is exclamatory and personal; it avoids synthesis and meaning. Other modern poets retreat into a still more impregnable world of feeling—the bristling and rugged metaphysical world of Donne, where every approach is labyrinthean, and the tender soul of the poet goes armored in an array of blossoming thorns. There are more and more poems about the difficulty of writing poetry; such a one is “The Waste Land.”~~

~~The more combative and critical artist may prefer a different method. Turning upon what has foiled him, he proposes to reform and change it. Thus occur—most frequently in the novel or the drama—works of social criticism and protest. The history of the novel reveals how rapid has been the shift from objective narrative to the problematic, the satirical, and the critical. The shift occurred, in fact, almost as soon as the eighteenth-century novel was born, and it has continued until pure story is now relegated to minor types of fiction, and serious novels are, by and large, those that tell us how wrong the world is.~~

~~The last choice for the artist is to accept the disturbed state of society as something which cannot be altered by him or as promising an altogether new kind of society that will require to be interpreted in some wholly new kind of art. The enemy is too strong for him; so he joins the enemy, hoping thus to secure the integration that otherwise is denied him. The disturbing element, which is science pure and applied, offers methods, attitudes, subjects that he determines to appropriate.~~

~~Perhaps he becomes a realist. Without a hint of moraliz-~~

~~ing, and disdaining escape and protest, he merely observes, classifies, reports. But the works of realists which ought—if science has merit in art—to disclose the beauty that is truth more often reveal the truth that is ugliness or injured beauty. The realist turns out to be a historian rather than an artist, and, at that, a historian of calamities. Or the more he verges toward art, the more he will be found to depart from scientific method, which is a negation of art to begin with. In any case, no matter what his pretensions, the realist succeeds no better than the romanticist in avoiding the ill relation between the artist and society. Although he may seem definitely to enlarge the field of art and get hold of new materials, he is singularly ill at ease in his rôle of reporter. Having accepted the valuations of science along with its method, he finds himself confronted with a purposeless world of men and things whose lack of meaning he must honestly reveal. His honesty, however, is quite uncheerful and it is not objective. Tragedy may be impossible, in a world where men behave as their glands make them behave; but painful literature remains to exhibit the repugnance of the scientific-artist toward the rôle he has chosen.~~

~~Wordsworth's hope that the objects of science—such as, presumably, dynamos, atoms, skyscrapers, knitting-machines, and chemical reactions—might one day become materials of art, when they are as familiar as trees and rocks, seems as far from realization as ever. The attempt to sublimate them, which has something of the attitude of the realist without his method, does not yet show much promise of success. The objects appear in art, of course, but that art is already conditioned by the social trends that~~

~~machines and scientific theories have caused. They become a part of the background of artistic interpretation or they furnish motives, but their rôle is mainly Satanic. Since their influence on humanity is to dehumanize, to emphasize utilitarian ends, to exalt abstraction over particularity and uniformity over variety, the artist tends to view them as evil. He cannot accept them as offering an approach to some "new" art unless he adopts the resolution of Satan, "Evil, be thou my good!" A world committed to some hypothetical and as yet unheard-of form of art-science can today be visioned only as a monstrous and misshapen nightmare which we pray we may not survive to witness. Whether or not science and art are actually hostile to each other, as I have argued, it is certainly true that they have no common ground; they are as far apart as science and religion.~~

~~In short, the condition of the arts themselves, in whatever field, gives little ground for thinking that they are actually cherished in an industrial civilization. The sporadic vitality that they show is probably not a mark of abundant health, but of a lingering and lusty capacity to survive every disaster and disease short of complete extinction. The ultimate disaster of extinction must honestly be faced—unless the arts accept a rôle inferior to anything they have previously enjoyed, so greatly in contrast to their old state as to make them appear slavish and parasitical.~~

~~In his *Portrait of the Artist as American* Matthew Josephson has shown to what an astonishing extent the careers of American artists have been distorted and erratic. Rarely if ever in America do we find a great artist slowly maturing his powers in full communion with a society of which he is~~

~~an integral part. Instead we have seclusionists like Emily Dickinson, retiring within a narrow subjective cell; or at the other extreme exiles like Henry James and Lafcadio Hearn who sought salvation in flight. Van Wyck Brooks has tended, in such cases, to blame the insufficiency of the artists themselves—that is, Mark Twain should not have let himself be gentled; Henry James should have drawn strength from his native earth. Rightly, I think, Mr. Josephson finds that American society was to blame, and not the artists, for their defeatism was but a corollary of their dislocated relation to society. The rule of mechanism, though it began early in America, promised for a while to be checked by the New England group who might have established a society hospitable to the arts. But New England idealism failed in the débâcle of the Civil War that it egged on. Thenceforth industrialism, which had been long resisted by the agrarian South and its old ally, the West of the transition period, held strong sway. The schism between the artist and society, already foreshadowed in the inherent weaknesses of New England, became more and more exaggerated until today France and England harbor veritable colonies of expatriates, while at home new tribes of artists repeat the subjective tragedy of Emily Dickinson or Poe, or with a vain assurance attempt like Whitman to adumbrate the glory of a democratic, muscular future that forever recedes in mists of retreating hope.~~

~~Mr. Josephson makes a strong case, but states it too narrowly. His America is New England or New York; he is blissfully oblivious to the agrarian South, past and present. He does not realize that the malady he pictures appears in~~

~~the United States only in its most exaggerated and obvious form. Geographically, it covers Western civilization wherever industrialism has fully entered. Historically, its ravages may be studied throughout the nineteenth century. The long list from Byron to Tennyson to Eliot, from Hugo to the Symbolists, from Goethe to the Expressionists, will reveal the lamentable story of dissociation and illustrate profusely, with examples of exile, distortion, sensibility, Mr. Josephson's dictum, "Under mechanism, the eternal drama of the artist becomes *resistance to the milieu*."~~

~~It is significant, as I have previously indicated, that the Romanticism which could be defined under this principle begins almost simultaneously with the industrial revolution. Democracy began its great rule at the same time; but we should do wrong to blame democracy too much, as Mr. Josephson does, for the bad estate of the artist. Democracy did not, after all, disturb society unduly. It was a slow growth, it had some continuity with the past, and in an agrarian country like pre-Civil War America it permitted and favored a balanced life. Industrialism came suddenly and marched swiftly. It left a tremendous gap. Only as democracy becomes allied with industrialism can it be considered really dangerous, as when, in the United States, it becomes politically and socially impotent; or, as in the extreme democracy of the Soviets, where, converted into equalitarianism within class limits, it threatens the existence of man's humanity. Democracy, if not made too acquisitive by industrialism, does not appear as an enemy to the arts. Industrialism does so appear, and has played its hostile rôle for upwards of a hundred and fifty years. As socialism~~

~~in its various forms may be considered the natural political antitoxin that industrialism produces, Romanticism is the artistic antitoxin and will appear inevitably if the artist retains enough courage and sincerity to function at all. To yield to industrialism means to surrender the artistic function, to play the clown at Dives' feast, to become a kind of engineer—which is, for example, just what the architects of skyscrapers have become. Not to yield means to invite and even to exploit the unbalance that is a unique characteristic of modern Romanticism, all the more marked because of the modern tendency to exalt the separate rôle of the artist as artist and to make art itself sacrosanct and professional.~~

There is but one other possibility. The supremacy of industrialism itself can be repudiated. Industrialism can be deposed as the regulating god of modern society.

This is no doubt a desperate counsel. But the artist may well find in it more promise for his cause than in all the talk of progressivists about "mastering the machine." Mastery of the machine, he will reflect, can only begin with a despol of the machine and the supposed benefits it offers. He has no reason to hope that those who hold the machine in awe will ever subdue it. Lonely exile though he be, he must be practical enough to distrust the social philosophers who promise him a humble corner in the Great Reconstruction that they are undertaking to produce for our age.

Harmony between the artist and society must be regained; the dissociation must be broken down. That can only be done, however, by first putting society itself in order. In this

connection we must realize that discussions of what is good or bad art, no matter how devoted or learned, cannot avail to reëstablish the arts in their old places. Criticism, for which Arnold and others have hoped so much, is futile for the emergency if it remains wholly aloof from the central problem, which is the remaking of life itself. We are drawn irresistibly toward social criticism, as the Victorian artists were. But we cannot hope, as they did, that we can win men to beauty by simply loving the beautiful and preaching its merits as they are revealed to us in an admirable body of tradition. We cannot have much faith in, though we may respect, Mr. Frank Jewett Mather's suggestion that we civilize from the top down; for our whole powerful economic system rests on mass motives—the motives of society's lowest common denominator. This counsel leads us toward fastidiousness, dilettantism, at best a kind of survival on sufferance.

As in the crisis of war, when men drop their private occupations for one supreme task, the artist must step into the ranks and bear the brunt of the battle against the common foe. He must share in the general concern as to the conditions of life. He must learn to understand and must try to restore and preserve a social economy that is in danger of being replaced altogether by an industrial economy hostile to his interests.

For strategic purposes, at least, I feel he will ally himself with programs of agrarian restoration. Out of conviction he should do so, since only in an agrarian society does there remain much hope of a balanced life, where the arts are not luxuries to be purchased but belong as a matter of

course in the routine of his living. Again, both strategy and conviction will almost inevitably lead him to the sections of America that are provincial, conservative, agrarian, for there only will he find a lingering preference for values not industrial. The very wilderness is his friend, not as a refuge, but as an ally. But he does not need to go into the wilderness. There are American communities throughout the country from the West, even to the fringes of the industrialized East, that are in the industrial sense backward, and are naturally on his side. Negatively to his advantage are the discontent and confusion in the heart of industrialism itself.

The largest and most consistent exhibit of such communities is in the South. For a century and a half the South has preserved its agrarian economy. On one occasion it fought to the death for principles now clearly defined, in the light of history, as representing fundamentally the cause of agrarianism against industrialism. The South lost its battle. What was worse for the nation, it lost the peace—first in the Reconstruction, second by temporarily conforming, under the leadership of men like Walter H. Page and Henry W. Grady, to “new South” doctrines subversive of its native genius. Yet the agrarian South did not vanish. Only at this late day has it given any general promise of following the industrial program with much real consent. The danger of such consent is real. So far as industrialism triumphs and is able to construct a really “new” South, the South will have nothing to contribute to modern issues. It will merely imitate and repeat the mistakes of other sec-

tions. The larger promise of the South is in another direction. Its historic and social contribution should be utilized.

It offers the possibility of an integrated life, American in the older rather than the newer sense. Its population is homogeneous. Its people share a common past, which they are not likely to forget; for aside from having Civil War battlefields at their doorsteps, the Southern people have long cultivated a historical consciousness that permeates manners, localities, institutions, the very words and cadence of social intercourse. This consciousness, too often misdescribed as merely romantic and gallant, really signifies a close connection with the eighteenth-century European America that is elsewhere forgotten. In the South the eighteenth-century social inheritance flowered into a gracious civilization that, despite its defects, was actually a civilization, true and indigenous, well diffused, well established. Its culture was sound and realistic in that it was not at war with its own economic foundations. It did not need to be paraded loudly; it was not thought about particularly. The manners of planters and countrymen did not require them to change their beliefs and temper in going from cornfield to drawing-room, from cotton rows to church or frolic. They were the same persons everywhere. There was also a fair balance of aristocratic and democratic elements. Plantation affected frontier; frontier affected plantation. The balance might be illustrated by pairings; it was no purely aristocratic or purely democratic South that produced Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson, Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, John C. Calhoun and Andrew Johnson, Poe and Simms. There was diversity within unity.

There were also leisureliness, devotion to family and neighborhood, local self-sufficiency and self-government, and a capacity, up through the 'sixties, for developing leaders.

Above all, the South was agrarian, and agrarian it still remains very largely. Whether it still retains its native, inborn ways is a question open to argument in the minds of those who know the South mainly from hearsay. In the South itself, especially in its scattering and deluded industrial centres, there is much lip-service to progress—the more because industrialism makes a very loud noise, with all its extravagant proclamations of better times; and the South has known hard times only too well. Yet probably the secret ambition of most Southern city-dwellers, especially those in apartment houses, is to retire to the farm and live like gentlemen. There are still plenty of people who find the brassy methods of tradesmen a little uncouth. The Southern tradition is probably more vital than its recent epitaphists have announced. If it were not alive, even in the younger generations, this book would never be written. But these are considerations which are touched upon elsewhere. My business is to consider to what extent it offers the kind of society we are looking for.

One must allow that the South of the past, for all its ways of life, did not produce much "great" art. An obvious retort to such a criticism would be, "Neither did the rest of America." Also I might say, as it is frequently said, that the long quarrel between Southern agrarianism and Northern industrialism drove the genius of the South largely into the political rather than the artistic field. A good case might

be made out, indeed, for political writing itself as a kind of art in which the South excelled, as in forensic art.

Yet this is not the whole story. So far as the arts have flourished in the South, they have been, up to a very recent period, in excellent harmony with their milieu. The South has always had a native architecture, adapted from classic models into something distinctly Southern; and nothing more clearly and satisfactorily belongs where it is, or better expresses the beauty and stability of an ordered life, than its old country homes, with their pillared porches, their simplicity of design, their sheltering groves, their walks bordered with boxwood shrubs. The South has been rich in the folk-arts, and is still rich in them—in ballads, country songs and dances, in hymns and spirituals, in folk tales, in the folk crafts of weaving, quilting, furniture-making. Though these are best preserved in mountain fastnesses and remote rural localities, they were not originally so limited. They were widespread; and though now they merely survive, they are certainly indicative of a society that could not be termed inartistic. As for the more sophisticated arts, the South has always practised them as a matter of course. I shall not attempt to estimate the Southern contribution to literature with some special array of names; the impassioned scholars who are busily resurrecting Chivers, Kennedy, Byrd, Longstreet, Sut Lovengood, and such minor persons, in their rediscovery of American literature, will presently also get around again to Cooke, Page, Cable, Allen, and the like. What I should particularly like to note is that the specious theory that an "independent" country ought to originate an independent art, worthy of its na-

tional greatness, did not originate in the South. Emerson fostered such a theory, Whitman tried to practice it, and the call for the "great American novel" has only lately died of its own futility. Since the day when Southerners read Mr. Addison or got Mr. Stuart to paint grandfather's portrait, they have not, on the whole, been greatly excited over the idea that America is obliged to demonstrate its originality by some sharp divorce from the European tradition.

What might have happened, had not the Civil War disrupted the natural course of affairs, I cannot venture to say. Certainly an indigenous art would have had a good chance to spring up in the South, as the inevitable expression of modes of life rather favorable to the arts. What kind of art it might have been, or whether it would have been "great," I do not know. We should, however, recognize that the appearance or non-appearance of a "great" art or a "great" artist can hardly be accepted as a final criterion for judging a society. That is a typically modern view, implying that society merely exists to produce the artist, and it is wrong. Certainly the "great" art cannot be made by fiat; it probably hates compulsion. But an artistic life, in the social sense, is achievable under right conditions; and then, probably when we least expect it, the unpredictable great art arrives. If art has any real importance in life, it is as a significant and beautiful way of shaping whatever there is to be shaped in life, secular and religious, private and public. Let me go back to my thesis. I do not suggest that the South itself is about to become the seat of some grand revival of the arts—though such might happen. I do suggest that the South, as a distinct, provincial region, offers terms

of life favorable to the arts, which in the last analysis are a by-product anyway and will not bear too much self-conscious solicitude.

Our megalopolitan agglomerations, which make great ado about art, are actually sterile on the creative side; they patronize art, they merchandise it, but do not produce it. The despised hinterland, which is rather carefree about the matter, somehow manages to beget the great majority of American artists. True, they often migrate to New York, at considerable risk to their growth; they as often move away again, to Europe or some treasured local retreat. Our large cities affect a cosmopolitan air but have little of the artistic cosmopolitanism that once made Paris a Mecca. They do not breed literary groups; the groups appear in the hinterland. We have only to examine the biographies of our artists to learn how provincial are the sources of our arts. The Mid-Western excitement of some years ago was a provincial movement, as is today the Southern outburst. Zona Gale, Robert Frost, James Branch Cabell, Julia Peterkin, Sherwood Anderson, Willa Cather, and many others are provincialists. The Little Theater movement is provincial; it has decentralized dramatic art and broken the grip of Broadway.

And certainly the provincial artist ought to enjoy special blessings. More nearly than his big-city colleague, he should be able to approximate a harmonious relation between artist and environment. Especially to his advantage is his nearness to nature in the physical sense—which ought to mean, not that he becomes in the narrow sense an artist “of the soil,” dealing in the picturesque, but that nature is an eternal balancing factor in his art, a presence neither

wholly benign nor wholly hostile, continually reminding him that art is not a substitute for nature. Likewise he is far from the commercial fury and the extreme knowingness of the merchandising centers. He works unaware of critical politics; he is ignorant of how this or that career was "put over," he does not have to truckle and wear himself out at drinking bouts and literary teas, he is not obliged to predict cleverly the swings of the artistic pendulum before they fairly begin to swing.

Even so, he cannot escape the infection of the cities by mere geographical remoteness. The skepticism and malaise of the industrial mind reach him anyway, though somewhat subdued, and attack his art in the very process of creation. Unself-conscious expression cannot fully be attained. It is conditioned by the general state of society, which he cannot escape. It is inhibited by the ideals of the market place, which are, after all, very powerful.

In the South today we have artists whose work reveals richness, repose, brilliance, continuity. The performance of James Branch Cabell has a consistency that might have been more flickering and unstable if it had originated in some less quiet region than Virginia. The novels of Ellen Glasgow have a strength that may come from long, slow prosecution by a mind far from nervous. Yet these and others have not gone untainted. Why does Mr. Cabell seem so much nearer to Paris than to Richmond, to Anatole France than to Lee and Jefferson? Why does Miss Glasgow, self-styled the "social historian" of Virginia, propagate ideas that would be more quickly approved by Oswald Garrison Villard than by the descendants of first families? Why are

DuBose Heyward's and Paul Green's studies of negro life so palpably tinged with latter-day abolitionism? Why does T. S. Stribling write like a spiritual companion of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Clarence Darrow?

The answer is in every case the same. The Southern tradition in which these writers would share has been discredited and made artistically inaccessible; and the ideas, modes, attitudes that discredited it, largely not Southern, have been current and could be used. One has to look closely at the provincial Southern artists to discover traces of the indigenous Southern. Some would argue that this is as it should be. Perhaps they should not be expected to perform like Southerners, but like artists, and in that case we could do no better than to admonish them to be artists without regard to geography. Still it remains astonishing that they should adopt somebody else's geography and contrarily write like Northerners—at that, like Northerners made sick by an overdose of their own industrialism.

We should not here fall into the typically American mistake of imagining that admonition will succeed in getting the Southern artist to perform more like a Southerner and a provincial. For many reasons the Southern tradition deserves rehabilitation, but not among them is the reason that it would thus enable Southern artists to be strictly Southern artists. If the Southern tradition were an industrial tradition, it would deserve to be cast out rather than cherished. It happens, however, to be an agrarian tradition. And so it needs to be defined for the present age, as a mode of life congenial to the arts which are among the things we esteem as more than material blessings. In the emer-

gency it needs, in fact, to be consciously studied and maintained by artists, Southern or not, as affording a last stand in America against the industrial devourer—a stand that might prove to be a turning-point.

The artist should not forget that in these times he is called on to play the part both of a person and of an artist. Of the two, that of person is more immediately important. As an artist he will do best to flee the infection of our times, to stand for decentralization in the arts, to resist with every atom of his strength the false gospels of art as a luxury which can be sold in commercial quantities or which can be hallowed by segregation in discreet shrines. But he cannot wage this fight by remaining on his perch as artist. He must be a person first of all, even though for the time being he may become less of an artist. He must enter the common arena and become a citizen. Whether he chooses, as citizen-person, to be a farmer or to run for Congress is a matter of individual choice; but in that general direction his duty lies.