A School of Industrial Art

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I

"The ideal university," James Russell Lowell once said, "is a place where nothing useful is taught." It is clear that Lowell approved a purely intellectual and aesthetic education. He meant that the school should be controlled as little as possible by practical needs, should lie outside of employments or other conditions, and be devoted to increasing the capacity of enjoying books and art and enriching passively the spiritual life. The transcendental conception of education is lordly, ideal and attractive, and in a state of society that permits the maintenance of a leisure class it is an ideal of ready acceptance. As a matter of fact it was the ideal cherished by the New England colleges throughout their early history, whose model instructor was at once a scholar and a gentleman, and as a consequence of their influence, education in America has been associated largely with the leisuristic and pecuniary classes. While nominally open to all, our schools have always been schools of privilege. The primary three Rs are fundamentals only of an intellectual culture. The New England colleges built up a genuine aristocracy, which was not less inclusive in that it was intellectual, or, as the saying is, "an aristocracy of brains," which, in contradistinction to the European feudalism of family, was asserted proudly to be the "only aristocracy worthy the name." Meanwhile the American people, as to their masses, were developing their vast industrial system, and the leisuristic tendency was crossed and recrossed by the industrial stream. In the effort latterly to reconstruct an education more in harmony with the social democracy, the first intention was to extend the privilege of education to all members of the social whole. During this period of reconstruction, through liberal public and private endowments, a widely extended and nearly inclusive system of popular education has been established. But for the most part the education thus extended was the same education of privilege that had its rise in the leisure class. Hence the emphasis placed upon the mere symbols of learning, reading and
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writing. The tendency is still to create a culture representative of caste. Notwithstanding the modifications in the scope of the school forced by the industrial democracy, such as are signified by technical, commercial, and manual-training departments in the midst of cultural studies, it must be acknowledged that the leisure-class theory of education is still in the ascendent. The benefits of even the public schools, supported though they are by general taxation, accrue to an intellectual aristocracy. The divorce between the hand and the brain, which is destructive of any genuine integral education, continues in full force. The people, as to their industrial activities, remain unserved and even unrecognized. Except in certain schools for Indians and negroes it is not possible to-day to receive instruction in the fundamentals of industrial education. What is needed at this juncture is not a further extension of an education of privilege, but the complete abrogation of privilege and the establishment of schools upon entirely new grounds. Mr. Albert Shaw, in a paper descriptive of Hampton Institute, recently made the statement that “the finest, soundest, and most effective educational methods in use in the United States are to be found in certain schools for negroes and Indians and in others for young criminals in reformatory prisons.” Can it be that Hampton Institute, founded for the instruction of negroes in the fundamental employments, is the model institute for America! Such may prove to be the case. The time has come for schools whose aim shall be to serve the needs of modern industrial democracy, that shall build upon that fine instinct for workmanship that is the very life of industry when not permeated by caste,—schools that shall declare: “The ideal university is a place where nothing useless is taught.” It belongs to an aristocracy to support the useless—useless garments, ceremonies, athletics, learning and whatnot—as the sign of an ability to indulge itself in reputable expenditure. A democracy justifies its existence on the ground of its usefulness, its ability to create and do, and its faculty to enjoy creating and doing. The new school will start with the constructive energies; it will unite the senses and the soul; it will employ the hand equally with the brain; it will exalt the active over the passive life; it will
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love knowledge for its service; it will make a real and not a false use of books; it will test production not alone by its pecuniary results but by human values—whether it yields pleasure or pain. The problem of democratic education is not to give the people a culture alien to their lives, but to transform that which they have into something more rational and harmonious. The old humanities were secured by refining and secluding; the new humanities will be discovered among the people. The chief agency of popular education will be the very labor through which life is sustained. Industry employs the mind that its work may be intelligent; it provides for moral training in that its work must be sincere.

The folly of the extension of an exclusive culture is made very evident in the case of the American negro. When released from slavery he became, through the zeal of Northern abolitionists, a victim of an intellectual civilization. He was provided with schools of the Northern type, instructed in the caste distinctions of New England, and directed henceforth to live by his wits. The assumption of the superiority of separate mental training is proven by the history of the negro to be untrue. It is now conceded that the philanthropic policy of the North was mistaken. It was not access to libraries or knowledge of the classics that the negro needed; and not necessarily the ability to read the printed ballot the North placed in his hands. His field is that of the elementary employments: here alone is his energy initial and educative. Hampton Institute demonstrated the way of entrance into the promised land. When independent in elementary labor, the negro may learn an independence of wider application.

If called upon to write a prospectus of a school fitted for industrial democracy I would not have in mind a trades-school that should be simply an adjunct to the present industrial system, though I am willing to acknowledge the necessity of such a school and the importance of the present system. Calculation should be made of tendencies and growth. The domestic system of production gave way to the factory system with its machinery, and this in its turn seems destined to yield to a higher industrialism wherein the individual will have freer scope than ever before to control his hand and
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brain, and will need therefore a more skillful hand and a more cunning brain. Under present conditions of specialization the master is separated from the man, the designer from his tool. These conditions would require that the tool be sharpened for the designer, that the man be disciplined for the master. However advantageous this relationship may be economically it has little value educationally. It destroys the totality of work and the integrity of life. It sinks the individual in the product. It permits no one in the whole series of specialized activities to be, in the full sense of the term, a creator. It tends to develop experts, but not full rounded men. It is almost totally defective in idealism. The theory of the new industrialism is that in industry the whole of life may be contained. The true workman loves his craft for its life quality, because the thing upon which he works is somehow a part of his own inner ideal. His work must be creative and in becoming creative it is also educative. If this theory of independent industry seems to be in opposition to the machine and the “trust,” it will be seen that the machine, through becoming more and more automatic—and a self-acting machine is promised by physicists—and the corporation, through greater and greater centralization, will bring about the release of innumerable agents now engaged in production and control, and permit their advance to a more intelligent private workmanship. The plea for a new education is necessarily linked with an argument for a new industrialism. The new industrialism embodies first of all as a fundamental factor the principle of self-activity. So long as a man works for another, or after another’s plans or designs, he is not self-directive and his work is not therefore educative. The individual is to be treated as integral, having his own talents to employ and his own faculties to exercise. Under conditions of freedom industry changes its character and becomes aesthetic. Beauty is whatever is added to an object to make it expressive. In an object of utility it is the sign of the pleasure the maker takes in his own activities. It is the flowering of labor, the decoration of materials at the hand of a free workman. The new school brings art and labor into necessary association—labor to give substance, art to yield pleasure.
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The same principle of self-activity provides for the inherency of design. The separation between the designer and his mechanical or human tool is detrimental to both the designer and the workman. This form of specialization implies that a brain is not motor and that hands are not intelligent. With proper care during the first stages of education the hand and the brain become coördinated and the best brain coincides with the best hands. When working in separation the brain tends to refine and to weaken its tissues, and the hand to coarsen and become mechanical. After centuries of such divorce the fine arts on the one hand have become too refined for industrial use, and industry on the other hand is too coarse for the artist. The breach between the castes is not closed when the artist condescends to design for the workman: the division ought not to exist. It would be the function of the new school to create a class of craftsmen who would have ideas to communicate and perfect rhetorical skill for their expression. To associate art and industry: to change the character of labor so as to make industry educative, and to develop the instinct of workmanship and elicit the pleasure belonging to good workmanship so as to make the industrial life complete—such may be said to be the aims of industrial education.

II

The aim of the school is suggestive of its proper designation. The term Manual-Training has come into popular use as descriptive of institutes or departments of schools that seek to educate the hand. The objection to the title is that, having arisen at a time when the caste divisions between the hand and brain were in force, it represents the opposition between manual training and mental training, whereas the new education is not primarily manual and afterwards mental, but wholly integral. Trade School and Industrial Institute seem to emphasize too much the mechanical and professional aspects. The term Arts and Crafts is advocated as representing the fusion of mental and manual education, but while descriptive, the term is awkward. I have chosen as an equally significant and more dignified appellation, the caption: Industrial Art.
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III

The location of a School of Industrial Art is a most important matter for reflection. It should be in the environs of a large industrial city, not so far from the city as to obscure the commercial and social bearing of industry, and not so far from nature as to lose the suggestiveness of natural forms and growths. Fields, streams, and woods should be accessible. It would be necessary to maintain a garden for the propagation of plants for scientific and industrial purposes. In order that the local flora and fauna may provide the basic motive for design it is essential that with these forms there should be intimate and loving association. Nature alone initiates. If either factor is to be ignored it should be the city rather than the country that should be abandoned.

IV

The buildings should be substantial but need not be conspicuous or in any way extravagant. The tendency of the leisure classes is to uphold their reputability by vain expense and useless display. Let an industrial school be at least sincere. The architecture should be native, its styles suggested by the buildings' use, its symbols indicative of the social environment. All evolution of structure represents, of course, growth out of the past; but it is more necessary in the case of an industrial school to create types for future use, however simple, than to employ the mature and complex modes of past stages of civilization. However, if an historic style should be preferred, study may be given to the Gothic of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, when the prophesy of a people's art was first uttered, when there was the most complete cooperation between artist and workman. But happy the architect who can take his stand among the people of his own time, realize the significance of the modern forces, and create symbols and styles for democracy. The buildings should be of such size and character as to provide class-rooms, laboratories, a museum, a library, and other features dependent upon the scope of the school.
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V

Instruction would proceed upon the belief that in work of the nature I have described, and in the knowledge attendant upon such work, the integral personality may be contained and from work and the knowledge necessary to make work intelligent the fullest democratic culture is to be achieved. A few principles will govern the emphasis of instruction. The aim of the school being to employ the creative energies, the work-shops become the central feature. From the work-shops all other interests radiate; back to them the results of laboratories and class-rooms return. As a plan, an ideal, is the initial stage of any work, especial attention should be given to the study of design—not design in the abstract so much as design in relation to given materials and usage. From general culture and science those studies will be selected which are best calculated to equip a workman with ideas and to render his work intelligent. These principles lead to a threefold division of the work of the school, according as design, construction, or instruction receives the emphasis. In the drawing-rooms training would be given in free-hand, mechanical and architectural drawing, representation of nature and the human figure, clay-modeling, composition, color and decoration. In the work-shops, equipped with hand and power tools, furnaces, dyevats, presses and other necessary appliances, would develop all the constructive processes in wood, metal, leather, stone, glass, the earths, paper and textiles. Adjacent to the designing rooms and work-shops would be chemical and biological laboratories and the general experimental rooms. In the class-rooms would proceed instruction in geography, history, psychology, the English language, rhetoric and general literature. In tabulated form the work of the school would appear according to the following scheme:

I. Department of Design

\[
\begin{align*}
(1) & \text{ Drawing} \\
(2) & \text{ Clay Modeling} \\
(3) & \text{ Composition}
\end{align*}
\]
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II. The Work Shops

A. The History Group
   (1) History
   (2) Political Science
   (3) Sociology
   (4) Economy

B. The Philosophy Group
   (1) Psychology
   (2) Ethics

C. The Mathematical Group
   (1) Numbers
   (2) Geometry

D. The Art Group
   (1) English Language
   (2) Rhetoric
   (3) Music
   (4) Literature

E. The Science Group
   (1) Geography
   (2) Physics
   (3) Chemistry
   (4) Biology

It is understood that the work of any pupil is to be coördinated as fully as possible. While a general course, say of chemistry, may be undertaken, yet the chief function of chemistry in the school would be to assist those engaged in work involving a knowledge of chemistry for its prosecution. Printing would be associated with composition, free-hand lettering and page decoration, illustration, the related processes of paper making and bookbinding, and the general history of language and of human culture. The history, philosophy and art groups that have reference to more general
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Ideals would be more universally prescribed. Of the cultural subjects geography and the history group which disclose the development of the earth as the home of the human race and the evolution of man in his industrial, economic and artistic aspects, are the most important. Free-hand drawing in various color media, modeling in clay, composition, music, language and rhetoric are fundamental courses in the art of expression. Training in music might be given to all in daily assembly. Architectural and mechanical drawing are subservient to special needs. The processes of the work-shop all relate to objects of social utility, and while primarily educative of personality, aim to prepare pupils for professionalism in the different crafts. No provision is made in this plan for the study of language other than English, all other literatures being used in translation. Physical culture as an independent object is rendered unnecessary by reason of the absorption of physical energy in the work-shops, though opportunity should be given for the recreation of outdoor sports.

This scheme contemplates also the complete harmonization of all the incidents of education in line with the general democratic import of the school: the centralization of administration, but fully coöperative instruction; the individual treatment of pupils according to capacity and intention; free education, under counsel, both as to choice of work and the time employed: the coördination of courses; a continuous session of the school without special assemblage or ceremonials; the giving of certificates of proficiency (but not degrees); the encouragement of independent organizations among the pupils; and instruction above all else in self-control.

Such a school may be wholly autonomous, itself a free creative activity, its initiation extending even to the writing and printing of its text-books and the invention and manufacture of its tools and equipment. It would organize a research into fields that are today almost untouched by trained explorers—the field of industrial physics and industrial chemistry. A laboratory devoted to the problem of the industrial application of energy might become a factor in racial progress. The school might hope to become a training place for inventors.
Perhaps the greatest obstacle to noble living is the low view we take of ourselves. People are ashamed of honest feeling, and often consider it an indication of culture to treat the simple realities of love and work with flippancy. A whole literature has grown up expressing the attitude, so poisoning to the springs of action. When this view is not present, frequently life is regarded on a wholly sordid plane, where work is merely to make a living and love to gratify selfishness. There is no hope that we can appreciate the worth and meaning of life until our love and work come to be to us great ideals to which we must consecrate ourselves.

Edward Howard Griggs—
“A Book of Meditations”