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**TO HELL
WITH CULTURE**

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

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THE DEMOCRATIC ORDER

Edited by FRANCIS WILLIAMS

No. 4

Herbert Read

TO HELL WITH
CULTURE

*DEMOCRATIC VALUES ARE
NEW VALUES*

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INTRODUCTION

by FRANCIS WILLIAMS

THIS is a war of ideas : a revolutionary war fought to determine the future of European civilisation. In that conflict military power is important, but the power of the idea is not less important. For we are fighting not simply to destroy the military power of Germany but to defeat the philosophy and idea of Naziism. We are fighting not simply for our own survival but for the survival and future of democracy.

Because we are fighting for these things our purpose will be unfulfilled if we fail to destroy the kind of conditions in our European society which made Naziism possible. To the challenge of the New European Order which Naziism preaches and seeks to impose upon Europe we must reply with a democratic order which shall offer to the people of our own country and of all countries their true inheritance of peace and economic security and social justice and freedom.

To-day democracy, facing its greatest challenge faces also its greatest opportunity : the opportunity to build, during and after the war, an order of society which shall serve honestly and resolutely "the forward march of the common people in all lands towards their just and true inheritance" of which Mr. Churchill has spoken.

It is to help onward that march that these pam-

phlets have been planned and written. Their theme is the new democratic order ; the practical steps necessary in economic affairs, finance, industry and agriculture, in political policy, education and the social services that are needed to establish that order and the growth in our own understanding of the values and ethics of civilisation which is necessary also. They are addressed to all who have faith in democracy and are determined upon victory : to the men and women in factories and workshops, in barracks and training camps, upon farms and upon the wide and dangerous seas, in the bombed cities and the little villages, in homes and schools and offices who are fighting for those great principles of freedom which are the heritage democracy brings to the world and who wish to make sure that this time there shall be no thwarting of just desires and rightful hopes. They are concerned to show that in starting work now upon the building of a true democratic order we shall not only be preparing for a better society after the war but taking a decisive step towards the actual achievement of victory.

For democracy is not only something to fight for, it is something to fight with. It is a weapon in our hands if we use it greatly, and if we use it greatly it will conquer.

TO HELL WITH CULTURE

When will revolutionary leaders realise that "culture" is dope, a worse dope than religion; for even if it were true that religion is the opiate of the people, it is worse to poison yourself than to be poisoned, and suicide is more dishonourable than murder. To hell with culture, culture as a thing added like a sauce to otherwise unpalatable stale fish!

THIS pamphlet is to be about the place of "culture" in the Democratic Order, so I begin with a quotation which gives me both a text and a title. It comes from the writings of a man recently dead who was both a true artist and a true socialist—Eric Gill.

What is culture? The Greeks hadn't a word for it. They had good architects, good sculptors, good poets, just as they had good craftsmen and good statesmen. They knew

that their way of life was a good way of life, and they were willing if necessary to fight to defend it. But it would never have occurred to them that they had a separate commodity, culture—something to be given a trademark by their academicians, something to be acquired by superior people with sufficient time and money, something to be exported to foreign countries along with figs and olives. It wasn't even an invisible export : it was something natural if it existed at all—something of which they were unconscious, something as instinctive as their language or the complexion of their skins. It could not even be described as a by-product of their way of life : it was that way of life itself.

It was the Romans, the first large-scale capitalists in Europe, who turned culture into a commodity. They began by importing culture—Greek culture—and then they grew autarkic and produced their own brand. As they extended their empire, they dumped their culture on the conquered nations. Roman architecture, Roman literature,

Roman manners—these set a standard to which all newly civilised people aspired. When a Roman poet like Ovid talks about a cultured man, there is already the sense of something polished, refined, a veneer on the surface of an otherwise rough humanity. It would not have occurred to a refined Roman of this sort that the craftsmen of his time had any contribution to make to the finer values of life. Nor had they—Roman pottery, for example, may be cultured, but it is dull and degraded.

Culture, as we all know, disappeared in the Dark Ages, and it was a long time before it came to the surface again. The next epoch, known as the Middle Ages, is rivalled only by the Greek Age ; but oddly enough, it too was not conscious of its culture. Its architects were foremen builders, its sculptors were masons, its illuminators and painters were clerks. They had no word for art in the sense of our “ fine arts ” : art was all that was pleasing to the sight : a cathedral, a candlestick, a chessman, a cheese-press.

But the Middle Ages came to an end and with them the guild system and the making of things for use. Certain clever people began to grab things—church property, common land, minerals, especially gold. They began to make things in order to acquire more than they could use, a surplus which they could convert into gold ; and because they couldn't eat gold, or build houses with it, they lent it to other people who were in need of it and charged them rent or interest. And thus the capitalist system came into existence, and with it the thing we call "culture".

The first recorded use of the word in its modern sense is 1510, just when capitalism began to get going. It is the time of the Revival of Learning and the Renaissance, and those two movements signify the very essence of culture for all educated people, even unto the present day. But it was not until the beginning of the nineteenth century, the period of the Industrial Revolution, that culture became finally divorced from work.

So long as people made things by hand, certain traditional ways of making them persisted, and were good. It was only when things began to be made by machines that the traditions inherent, as it were, in the minds and muscles of the handworker, finally disappeared.

To take the place of this instinctive tradition, the industrialists introduced certain new standards. They might be merely standards of utility and cheapness—that is to say, of profitableness; but since sensitive people were not satisfied with these, the manufacturers began to look back into the past, to collect and imitate the good things which had been made by their ancestors. If you knew all about the things of the past, you were recognised as a man of taste, and the sum of the nation's "tastes" was its "culture". Matthew Arnold, in fact, defined culture as "the acquainting ourselves with the best that has been known and said in the world". And with Matthew Arnold, the Prince Consort and the Great Exhibition we

reach the peak point of the English cult of culture. After the 'sixties its self-consciousness became too obvious, and we entered a period of decadence—Pre-Raphaelitism, the Yellow Book, Oscar Wilde, and all that, until the First World War came and gave a final push to the whole rotten fabric.

For the last quarter of a century we have been trying to pick up the pieces : we have had lectures and exhibitions, museums and art galleries, adult education and cheap books, and even an International Committee for Intellectual Co-operation sponsored by the League of Nations. But it was all a beating on a hollow drum, and a Second World War has brought us up finally against the realities of this question as of so many others.

NAZI CULTURE

To hell with culture ! Gill's curse finds an echo in a play by Hanns Johst, the most popular Nazi dramatist in Germany. There one of his characters, the mouthpiece of

the most violent Nazi doctrines, exclaims : “ When I hear the word culture, I release the safety-catch on my Browning.” The Nazis also hate the sauce on the stale fish, and they prepare to change it—but to change the sauce, not the fish ! They complain that the sauce they have been served with is Jewish, or Catholic, at any rate International, and what they want is an *echt* German sauce. So they go back to Wotan and the Nibelungs, to the mythology which Wagner exhumed from their misty past, and they mix it with mysticism and sentimentality and think they have got hold of the elements of a new culture. And a “ culture ” indeed it is, and being rather simple-minded and slow-witted behind their bombers and brassbands they are satisfied. They have found a culture to match their agriculture and industry, an autarkic culture made for home-consumption and not for export. We need neither envy them nor imitate them. It is “ culture ” anyhow, and when we say with Eric Gill “ To hell with culture ”, we mean

to hell with all forms of culture, ancient or modern, genuine or *ersatz*.

It is not that, Nazi-like, I want to burn a heap of books or knock down a lot of ancient monuments. All these things—the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome, medieval cathedrals and Chippendale furniture, the works of St. Thomas Aquinas and Mr. Charles Morgan, shall be preserved for those who can make any use of them ; but they shall not be unduly revered or made subjects for university degrees. A knowledge of them will no longer be a social certificate of taste and refinement. Those qualities, which will still exist (more than ever, we hope), will belong to the things we make, and to the people who make them. And the people who make the most efficient and the most pleasing things will be the people we shall honour as artists.

A democratic culture—*that is not the same thing as a democracy plus culture*. The first important point that I must make, and keep

on stressing, is that culture in the Democratic Order of the future will not be a separate and distinguishable thing—a body of learning that can be put into books and museums and mugged up in your spare time. Just because it will not exist as a separate entity, we had better stop using the word “culture”. We shall not need it in the future and it will only confuse the present issue. Culture belongs to the past : the future will not be conscious of its culture.

THE NATURAL ORDER

Let us now get down to details. The values which I am concerned with in this pamphlet—values which we call “the beautiful”—were not invented in ancient Athens or anywhere else. They are part of the structure of the universe and of our consciousness of that structure. To argue this point fully would carry us too far into the obscure regions of philosophy, and I have written enough about it in my more technical books. But what I mean, in simple lan-

guage, is that we should not be pleased with the way certain things look unless our physical organs and the senses which control them were not so constituted as to be pleased with certain definite proportions, relations, rhythms, harmonies, and so on. When we say, for example, that two colours "clash", we are not expressing a personal opinion: there is a definite scientific reason for the disagreeable impression they create, and it could no doubt be expressed in a mathematical formula. Again, when the printer decided to impose the type on this page so as to leave margins in the proportion of $3\frac{1}{2} : 3\frac{3}{4} : 7\frac{1}{2} : 8$, he was trusting to his eye, which told him by its muscular tensions that this particular arrangement was easeful. These are very elementary examples, and when large paintings or poems or musical compositions are in question, the whole business is infinitely more complicated. But, in general, we see that certain proportions in nature (in crystals, plants, the human figure, etc.) are "right", and we carry over these

proportions into the things we make—not deliberately, but instinctively.

For our present purposes that is all we need to know of the dreary science of æsthetics. There is a Natural Order and the Democratic Order is a reflection of it, not only in our way of living, but also in our way of doing and making. If we follow this Natural Order in all the ways of our life, we shall not need to talk about culture. We shall have it without being conscious of it.

But how are we to attain the Natural Order of making things, which is my particular concern in this pamphlet?

Obviously, we can't make things naturally in unnatural surroundings. We can't do things properly unless we are properly fed and properly housed. We must also be properly equipped with the necessary tools, and then left alone to get on with the job.

In other words, before we can make things naturally, we must establish the Natural Order in society: we must establish the

Democratic Order. It is useless to talk about a democratic art or a democratic literature until we are in fact a democracy. And we are a long way off that.

THE REAL GIST OF DEMOCRACY

Seventy years ago Walt Whitman wrote in his *Democratic Vistas* :

We have frequently printed the word Democracy. Yet I cannot too often repeat that it is a word the real gist of which still sleeps, quite unawakened, notwithstanding the resonance and the many angry tempests out of which its syllables have come, from pen and tongue. It is a great word, whose history, I suppose, remains unwritten, because that history has yet to be enacted.

Democracy is still a great word, and in spite of many wordy prophets who have used it since Whitman's time, its gist still sleeps, its history is still unenacted. Nothing is more absurd, among all the political absurdities committed by Fascists and Nazis, than their assumption that democracy is a system that has been tried and has failed. Democracy has been promulgated and its

principles endlessly proclaimed ; but in no country in the world has it ever, for more than the brief space of a few months, been put into practice. For democracy requires three conditions for its fulfilment, and until all three conditions are satisfied, it cannot be said to exist. It is only necessary to state these conditions to show that democracy never has existed in modern times :

The first condition of democracy is that *all production should be for use, and not for profit.*

The second condition is that *each should give according to his ability, and each receive according to his needs.*

The third condition is that *the workers in each industry should collectively own and control that industry.*

It is not my business in this particular pamphlet to defend the conception of democracy underlying these conditions, but nevertheless I would claim that it is the classical conception of democracy as gradually evolved by its philosophers—by Rousseau,

Jefferson, Lincoln, Proudhon, Owen, Ruskin, Marx, Morris, Kropotkin, and whoever else was democratic in his heart no less than in his head. But what I intend to demonstrate here is that the higher values of life, the democratic equivalent of the civilisation of Greece or of the Middle Ages, cannot be achieved unless all these three conditions are satisfied.

THE CHAIR YOU ARE SITTING ON

I think it will be generally admitted that production for use and not for profit is the basic economic doctrine of socialism. The opponents of socialism might argue that only a lunatic would neglect to take into consideration the needs of the public. But that is to miss the whole point of the statement. Capitalists do, of course, produce for use, and even invent uses for which to produce—in their own language, they create a demand. By their intensive methods of production and their extensive methods of publicity, they have keyed up the machinery of production

to unimagined levels, and up to a point mankind has benefited from the resulting plethora. Mankind would have benefited much more if capitalism had been able to solve the problem of supplying the consumer with sufficient purchasing power to absorb this plethora.

Capitalism can produce the goods, even if it cannot sell them. But what kind of goods? It is here that we have to introduce our æsthetic criterion—and don't let anyone be frightened by the word æsthetic. Let us first note that the quality of the goods so lavishly produced under capitalism varies enormously. Whatever you take—carpets or chairs, houses or clothes, cigarettes or sausages, you will find that there are not one but twenty or thirty grades—something very good and efficient at the top of the scale, and something very cheap and nasty at the bottom of the scale. And pyramid-like, the bottom of the scale is enormously bigger than the top.

Take the case of the chair you are sitting

on as you read this pamphlet. It may be one of three things : (1) a decent well-made chair inherited from your great-great-grandmother ; (2) a decent well-made chair which you bought at an expensive shop ; or (3) an indifferent, uncomfortable chair, shabby after a year's use, which was the best you could afford. (There are some subsidiary categories—expensive chairs which are also uncomfortable, for example ; and moderately comfortable seats in public vehicles.)

Production for profit means that at whatever cost to the comfort, appearance and durability of the chair, the capitalist must put chairs on the market to suit every kind of purse. And since the chair will be competing with other needs—carpets, clocks and sewing-machines—it must cost as little as possible even on the low scale of purchasing power at which he is aiming. Hence the capitalist must progressively lower the quality of the materials he is using : he must use cheap wood and little of it, cheap springs and cheap upholstery. He must evolve a

design which is cheap to produce and easy to sell, which means that he must disguise his cheap materials with veneer and varnish and other shams. Even if he is aiming at the top market, he still has to remember his margin of profits ; and as the size of the market shrinks, and mass-production becomes less possible, this margin has to be increased. That is to say, the difference between the intrinsic value of the materials used and the price charged to the consumer has to be bigger ; and the subterfuges necessary to disguise this difference have to be cleverer.

It is then that the capitalist has to put on, among other things, a bit of culture—a claw-and-ball foot in the manner of Chippendale, a wriggly bit of scrollwork in papier-maché, an inlay of mother-of-pearl. In extreme cases he must “distress” the picce—that is to say, employ a man to throw bolts and nails at the chair until it has been knocked about enough to look “antique”.

Such is production for profit. By pro-

duction for use we mean a system which will have only two considerations in mind—function and fulfilment. You want a chair to relax in—very well, we shall discover what are the best angles to allow a man's limbs to rest freely and without strain. We shall next consider which would be the most suitable materials to use in the manufacture of such a chair, bearing in mind, not only the purpose the chair has to serve, but also the other furniture with which the chair will be associated. Then, and then only, we shall design a chair to meet all these requirements. Finally we shall set about making the chair, and when it is made to our satisfaction, we shall offer it to you in exchange for the tokens which represent the good work which, all the time we were making the chair, you were doing for the community at your particular job.

That is the economic process under socialism. But I am supposed to be writing about spiritual values—about beauty and all that sort of thing, and where do they come in?

We have produced a chair which is strong and comfortable, but is it a work of art ?

The answer, according to my philosophy of art, is Yes. If an object is made of appropriate materials to an appropriate design and perfectly fulfils its function, then we need not worry any more about its æsthetic value : it is *automatically* a work of art. Fitness for function is the modern definition of the eternal quality we call beauty, and this fitness for function is the inevitable result of an economy directed to use and not to profit.

Incidentally, we may note that when the profit system has to place function before profit, as in the production of an aeroplane or a racing-car, it also inevitably produces a work of art. But the question to ask is : why are not all the things produced under capitalism as beautiful as its aeroplanes and racing-cars ?

THE MAN AND THE JOB

The second condition of democracy is expressed in the Marxian slogan : " From

each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.”

This condition is linked to the one we have already discussed. To take the question of ability first. A profit system of production subordinates the person to the job. In a rough-and-ready way it sorts people out according to their ability : that is to say, it continues to employ a man only so long as he is capable of doing the job efficiently, and only so long as there is a job to do. It rarely asks whether a particular man would be better at another job, and it gives that man little or no opportunity of finding out whether he could do another job better. Capitalism is concerned with labour only as a power element, the partner of steam and electricity. And since the cost of this power has to be reckoned against the possible profits, capitalism does all it can to reduce that cost.

One way of reducing the cost is to increase the quantity of work per human unit. Capitalism (and State socialism as estab-

lished in Russia) introduces the time element into the calculation of results. The best riveter is the man who can rivet the greatest number of bolts in a given time. The best miner is the man who can excavate the greatest quantity of coal in a given time. This time criterion is extended to all forms of production, and it is always at war with the criterion of quality. When the work is purely mechanical, the qualitative element may not be compromised. A quick riveter may also be a good riveter. But if the work requires any considerable degree of skill, care or deliberation, then the quality will decline in inverse ratio to the speed of production. This applies, not only to "artistic" work such as painting and sculpture, but also to "practical" work such as grinding the cylinders of an aero-engine or ploughing a field.

From each according to his ability can be replaced by another familiar phrase—equality of opportunity. In the Democratic Order it should be possible for people to sort

themselves out so that every man and woman is doing the job for which he or she feels naturally qualified ; and if, in this respect, nature needs a little assistance, it can be provided by schools and technical colleges which will enable young people to discover themselves and their abilities.

That half of the slogan does not present much difficulty : it is obviously reasonable that the right man should have the right job, and that he should do that job to the best of his ability. But then we say : “ to each according to his needs ”, and this is the more important half, and the essentially democratic half, of the socialist doctrine.

Let us ask : what are the needs of each one of us ? Sufficient food and clothing, adequate housing—a certain minimum of these necessities should be the inalienable right of every member of the community. Until it can provide these minimum necessities, a society must be branded as inhuman and inefficient.

And that is perhaps all that early socialists

like Marx and Engels meant by the phrase "to each according to his needs". But the underlying assumption of this pamphlet is that in any civilisation worth living in, the needs of man are not merely material. He hungers for other things—for beauty, for companionship, for joy. These, too, the Democratic Order must provide.

We have already seen that by establishing a system of production for use we shall inevitably secure the first of these spiritual needs—beauty. To see how the other spiritual values will be secured we must turn to the third condition of democracy—workers' ownership of industry.

FROM THE BOTTOM UPWARDS

This is a controversial issue, even within the democratic ranks. Since that fatal day in 1872 when Marx scuttled the First International, the socialist movement has been split into two irreconcilable camps. The fundamental nature of the division has been hidden by a confusion of names and a multi-

plicity of leagues, alliances, federations and societies. But the issue is simply whether industry is to be controlled from the bottom upwards, by the workers and their elected delegates ; or whether it is to be centralised and controlled from the top, by an abstraction we call the State, but which in effect means a small and exclusive class of bureaucrats.

The historical fact that everywhere in the north of Europe—Germany, Scandinavia, France and Great Britain—the authoritarian or bureaucratic conception of socialism triumphed should not blind us to the still living issue. For this “conceptual” triumph somehow has not brought with it what we mean by the Democratic Order. Indeed, in most of the countries named it has brought about just the opposite phenomenon—the Anti-democratic Order of Hitler, Mussolini and their satraps Pétain, Franco, Quisling, Antonescu, etc.

Do not let us deceive ourselves in thinking that this New Order which Hitler is trying

to establish in Europe is merely a temporary phase of reactionaryism. Reactionary it is, in the deepest sense of the word, for it denies the advance of the human spirit ; and it offers sinister accommodations to the industrial capitalists who have been democracy's most bitter enemies. But in many of its features it is but a development or adaptation of that authoritarian form of socialism which Marx made the predominant form of socialism. It even claims the name of socialism, and it is somewhat unfortunate that this fact is disguised and forgotten in the popular contraction : Nazi. Hitler's New Order is socialist in that it establishes a centralised State control of all production. It is socialist in that it establishes a system of social security—guaranteed employment, fair rates of wages, organised amenities of various kinds. It is socialist in that it subordinates the financial system to the industrial system. In many ways it is professedly socialist, but it remains profoundly undemocratic. Because whatever it gives in the way of

social security, it takes away in the form of spiritual liberty. Every Nazi worker must sell his soul before he can belong to this New Order.

“ IN THE PLENITUDE OF FREEDOM ”

The Nazis, as I have already said, are very culture-conscious—as culture-conscious as Matthew Arnold and all our Victorian forefathers. But the more conscious they become of culture, the less capable they become of producing it. Nazi Germany, in the eight years of its supremacy and intensive cultivation of the arts, has not been able to produce for the admiration of the world a single artist of any kind. Most of its great writers and painters—Thomas Mann, Franz Werfel, Oskar Kokoschka and many others—are living in exile. A few great artists who have remained in Germany—the composer Strauss, for example—are too old to produce any new work of significance, and too indifferent to the political order to want to produce anything at all. There are a

few writers of integrity and genius who remain in Germany—I am thinking particularly of Hans Carossa and Ernst Robert Curtius—but they must be living in spiritual agony. For this general impotence the Nazi leaders may offer the excuse of war and revolution, but other wars and revolutions have immediately inspired poets and painters. The great Romantic Movement in literature, for example, was directly inspired by the French Revolution and all the storm and stress of the wars that followed could not diminish its force.

The position in Italy is exactly the same, and shows in addition that the time factor makes no difference. It is eighteen years since Mussolini and his blackshirts marched on Rome (or travelled there in a railway carriage), but in all that time not a single work of art of universal significance has come from that country—nothing but bombast and vulgarity.

There is only one explanation of this failure of the Fascist and Nazi Revolutions

to inspire a great art, and I cannot describe it better than in the words of Giovanni Gentile, a liberal philosopher who sold himself to the Fascist régime. Speaking to an audience of teachers in Trieste shortly after that city had fallen into Italian hands at the end of the last war, he declared : “ *Spiritual activity works only in the plenitude of freedom.*” It was a fine moment for the Italian people, and this was a fine sentiment to match the occasion. More than twenty years have passed, and Gentile has served Mussolini as his Minister of Education for most of that time, and has done as much as anyone to give fascism a decent covering of intellectual respectability. As he surveys the tyranny he has helped to establish and sees all around him a spiritual poverty in keeping with an economic poverty, it is possible that this sad and disillusioned man may still repeat, in a whisper which is only heard in the secret recesses of his own mind : *Spiritual activity works only in the plenitude of freedom.*

EXIT THE ARTIST

One thing must be admitted : the lack of any spiritual activity in Germany and Italy is not due to a lack of official encouragement. In Germany there is a vast organisation, the Reichskulturkammer, charged with the specific task of supervising cultural activities of every kind, and in Italy there is a similar display of State patronage. Outside the Fascist countries there is a parallel activity in Russia, and in the U.S.A. there is the Federal Arts Project. This latter organisation has a different aim : to relieve distress among artists rather than to encourage the production of a national type of art. But all four types of State patronage illustrate the same truth—that no amount of sauce will disguise the staleness of the underlying fish. You cannot buy the spiritual values which make the greatness of a nation's art : you cannot even cultivate them unless you prepare the soil. And that soil is freedom—not Freedom with a capital F, not an abstraction of any kind, but simply “ letting alone ”.

“ Letting alone ” is not the same as “ laissez-faire ”. A person is not left alone if he has a cupboard full of cares. He must be left alone with sufficient food and shelter to safeguard his health, and he must be left alone with sufficient material to work with. Then “ laissez-faire ”—then let him do what he likes to do.

To keep a class of people in comfort and then let them do what they please offends the sense of social equity—every dustman might then set up as an artist. But that is not exactly what I propose. I have said : To hell with culture ; and to this consignment we might add another : To hell with the artist. Art as a separate profession is merely a consequence of culture as a separate entity. In our Democratic Order there will be no precious or privileged beings called artists : there will only be workers. Or if you prefer Gill’s more paradoxical statement of the same truth : in the Democratic Order there will be no despised and unprivileged beings called workers : there will only be

artists. "The artist is not a special kind of man, but every man is a special kind of artist."¹

But among workers there are various degrees of ability. And the people capable of recognising this ability are the workers themselves in their several professions. For example, the masons and stonecarvers will know which few individuals among them carve stone so superlatively well that they deserve, for the common good, to be exempted from routine work and encouraged to devote their working hours to those types of carving which are not so much utilitarian as "creative"—that is to say, expressive of emotions, intuitions and ideas.

It is the same with every other type of artist—the architect and the engineer no less than the painter and the sculptor. The possible exception is the poet, the "divine literatus" to whom Whitman gave such a

¹ I believe Gill took this paradox from the writings of another wise man, Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy, but it also sums up the teachings of William Morris and the practice of the medieval guild system.

vital function in the Democratic Order. There is no basic profession which stands in the same relation to poetry as stone-carving does to sculpture. Writing is, of course, a profession, and in the Democratic Order it will have its appropriate guild or collective—as it has in Russia to-day. Once it is free from the rivalries and log-rolling which accompany writing for profit (or writing on the backs of advertisements, as Chesterton called journalism), a Writers Guild might be entrusted with the economic organisation of this particular kind of work ; but genius will often elude its systematic survey. Against this eventuality there can be no social safeguard. There are certain types of genius which are always in advance of the general level of sensibility—even the general level of professional sensibility. In the past such men have been frustrated or have been starved. In the Democratic Order they will at least avoid the second fate.

A CREATIVE CIVILISATION

Production for use, mutual aid, workers' control—these are the slogans of democracy, and these are the slogans of a creative civilisation. There is nothing mysterious or difficult about such a civilisation ; indeed, some of the primitive civilisations still existing in remote corners of the world, and many primitive civilisations of the past, including that of prehistoric man, deserve to be called creative. What they make, if it is only a plaited basket or an unpainted pot, they make with instinctive rightness and directness. It is impossible to compare such primitive communities with our own highly organised modes of living, but their social economy in its simple way answers to our slogans. Production is for use and not for profit ; and all work is done without compulsion for the general benefit of the community. On their simple level of living, there is ample social security, and no man sells his labour to a middleman or boss ;

work is either individual or communal, and in either case it is free from the dispiriting influences of slavery and manumission.

But we are not a primitive society and there is no need to become primitive in order to secure the conditions of a democratic order. We want to retain all our scientific and industrial triumphs—electric power, machine tools, mass production and the rest. We do not propose to revert to the economy of the handloom and the plough—ideal as this may seem in retrospect. We propose that the workers and technicians who have *made* the modern instruments of production should *control* them—control their use and determine the flow of their production. It can be done. Russia has shown that the essential organisation can be created, and we should not be blinded to the significance of that great achievement by the perversion it has suffered at the hands of bureaucrats. For a brief spell democratic Spain showed us that workers' control could be an efficient reality. Workers' control can

be established in this country, and there is not much point in discussing the finer values of civilisation until that essential change has been effected.

The fundamental truth about economics is that the methods and instruments of production, freely used and fairly used, are capable of giving every human being a decent standard of living. The factors which obstruct the free and fair use of the methods and instruments of production are the factors which must disappear before a democratic order can be established. Whatever these factors are—an obsolete financial system, the private ownership of property, rent and usury—they are anti-democratic factors, and prevent the establishment of a democratic order and consequently prevent the establishment of a creative civilisation.

Economics are outside the scope of this pamphlet, but I cannot avoid them. Unless the present economic system is abolished, its roots eradicated and all its intricate branches lopped, the first conditions for a democratic

alternative to the fake culture of our present civilisation are not satisfied. For this reason one cannot be very specific about the features of a democratic culture. Engineers and designers can make the working drawings for a motor-car, and granted the right kind of machinery, they can be sure that the type of car they have designed will run when it is completed. But they cannot predict where that car will travel. A democratic culture is the journey a democratic society will make when once it has been established. If it is well made we know that our democratic society will travel far. And with the man for whom it was made at the wheel, we can be sure that it will travel in the right direction, discovering new countries, new prospects, new climates. We have already had brief glimpses down these democratic vistas, and presently I shall describe them more fully. But first let us take a backward glance at the dump we propose to leave behind us.

THE STRAYED RIVETER

I write, not as a philistine, but as a man who could not only claim to be cultured in the accepted sense of the word, but who has actually devoted most of his life to cultural things—to the practise of the arts of the present and the elucidation of the arts of the past. My philosophy is a direct product of my æsthetic experience, and I believe that life without art would be a graceless and brutish existence. I could not live without the spiritual values of art. I know that some people are insensitive to these values, but before allowing myself to pity or despise such people, I try to imagine how they got themselves into such a poor state of mind. The more I consider such people, the more clearly I begin to perceive that though there may be a minority who have been hopelessly brutalised by their environment and upbringing, the great majority are not insensitive, but indifferent. They have sensibility, but the thing we call culture does

not stir them. Architecture and sculpture, painting and poetry, are not the immediate concerns of their lives. They are therefore not sensibly moved by the baroque rhetoric of St. Paul's, or the painted ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, or any of the minor monuments of our culture. If they go into a museum or art gallery, they move about with dead eyes : they have strayed among people who do not speak their language, with whom they cannot by any means communicate.

Now the common assumption is that this strayed riveter, as we may call him, should set about it and learn the language of this strange country—that he should attend museum lectures and adult education classes in the little spare time he has, and so gradually lift himself on to the cultured level. Our whole educational system is built on that assumption, and very few democrats would be found to question it. And yet a moment's consideration should convince us that an educational system which is built

on such an assumption is fundamentally wrong, and fundamentally undemocratic. Our riveter has probably strayed from a cheerless street in Birmingham, where he inhabits a mean little house furnished with such shoddy comforts as he has been able to afford out of his inadequate wage. I need not pursue the man's life in all its dreary detail : there he stands, typical of millions of workers in this country, his clumsy boots on the parquet floor, and you are asking him to appreciate a painting by Botticelli or a bust by Bernini, a Spanish textile or a fine piece of Limoges enamel. If drink is the shortest road out of Manchester, there is a possibility that art may be the shortest road out of Birmingham ; but it will not be a crowded road, and only a very odd and eccentric worker will be found to respond to the æsthetic thrills that run down a cultured spine.

There are cultured people who, realising this fact, are honest enough to abandon their democratic pretensions—they put up an im-

penetrable barrier between the people and art, between the worker and "culture". It is much better, they say, "that civilisation should be retained in the hands of those persons to whom it professionally belongs. Until they are educated, and unless they are, it will be one worker in a million who wants to read a modern poem."¹

Such people are right, and such people are wrong. They are right to assume that an impenetrable barrier exists between *their* culture and the worker: they are wrong to imagine that the worker has no cultural sensibility. The worker has as much latent sensibility as any human being, but that sensibility can only be awakened when meaning is restored to his daily work, and he is allowed to create his own culture.

Do not let us be deceived by the argument that culture is the same for all time—that art is a unity and beauty an absolute value. If you are going to talk about abstract conceptions like beauty, then we can freely grant that

¹ Sacheverell Sitwell, *Sacred and Profane Love*, p. 88.

they are absolute and eternal. But abstract conceptions are not works of art. Works of art are things of use—houses and their furniture, for example ; and if, like sculpture and poetry, they are not things of immediate use, then they should be things consonant with the things we use—that is to say, part of our daily life, tuned to our daily habits, accessible to our daily needs. It is not until art expresses the immediate hopes and aspirations of humanity that it acquires its social relevance.

POTS AND PANS

A culture begins with simple things—with the way the potter moulds the clay on his wheel, the way a weaver threads his yarns, the way the builder builds his house. Greek culture did not begin with the Parthenon : it began with a white-washed hut on a hillside. Culture has always developed as an infinitely slow but sure refinement and elaboration of simple things—refinement and elaboration of speech, refinement

and elaboration of shapes, refinement and elaboration of proportions, with the original purity persisting right through. A democratic culture will begin in a *similar* way. We shall not revert to the peasant's hut or the potter's wheel. We shall begin with the elements of modern industry—electric power, metal alloys, cement, the tractor and the aeroplane. We shall consider these things as the raw materials of a civilisation and we shall work out their appropriate use and appropriate forms, without reference to the lath and plaster of the past.

To-day we are bound hand and foot to the past. Because property is a sacred thing and land values a source of untold wealth, our houses must be crowded together and our streets must follow their ancient illogical meanderings. Because houses must be built at the lowest possible cost to allow the highest possible profit, they are denied the art and science of the architect. Because everything we buy for use must be sold for profit, and because there must always be

this profitable margin between cost and price, our pots and our pans, our furniture and our clothes, have the same shoddy consistency, the same competitive cheapness. You know what a veneer is : a paper-thin layer of rosewood or walnut glued to a framework of pine or deal. The whole of our capitalist culture is one immense veneer : a surface refinement hiding the cheapness and shoddiness at the heart of things.

To hell with such a culture ! To the rubbish-heap and furnace with it all ! Let us celebrate the democratic revolution with the biggest holocaust in the history of the world. When Hitler has finished bombing our cities, let the demolition squads complete the good work. Then let us go out into the wide open spaces and build anew.

Let us build cities that are not too big, but spacious, with traffic flowing freely through their leafy avenues, with children playing safely in their green and flowery parks, with people living happily in bright efficient houses. Let us place our factories

and workshops where natural conditions of supply make their location most convenient—the necessary electric power can be laid on anywhere. Let us balance agriculture and industry, town and country—let us do all these sensible and elementary things and *then* let us talk about our culture.

A culture of pots and pans ! some of my readers may cry contemptuously. I do not despise a culture of pots and pans, because as I have already said, the best civilisations of the past may be judged by their pots and pans. But what I am now asserting, as a law of history no less than as a principle of social economy, is that until a society can produce beautiful pots and pans as naturally as it grows potatoes, it will be incapable of those higher forms of art which in the past have taken the form of temples and cathedrals, epics and operas.

As for the past, let the past take care of itself. I know that there is such a thing as tradition, but in so far as it is valuable it is a body of technical knowledge—the mys-

teries of the old guilds—and can safely be entrusted to the care of the new guilds. There is a traditional way of thatching haystacks and a traditional way of writing sonnets : they can be learned by any apprentice. If I am told that this is not the profoundest meaning of the word tradition, I will not be obtuse ; but I will merely suggest that the state of the world to-day is a sufficient comment on those traditional embodiments of wisdom, ecclesiastical or academic, which we are expected to honour. The cultural problem, we are told by these traditionalists, is at bottom a spiritual, even a religious one. But this is not true. At least, it is no truer of the cultural problem than of the economic problem, or any of the other problems which await the solution of the Democratic Order.

EDUCATING THE SENSES

Let us now suppose that we have got our democratic society, with its right way of living and its basic culture of pots and pans.

How then do we proceed to build on this foundation ?

My belief is that culture is a natural growth—that if a society has a plenitude of freedom and all the economic essentials of a democratic order, then culture will be added without any excessive striving after it. It will come as naturally as the fruit to the well-planted tree. But when I describe the tree as “ well-planted ”, I am perhaps implying more than a good soil and a sheltered position—the conditions which correspond to the political and economic provisions of the Democratic Order. I am perhaps implying a gardener to look after the tree, to safeguard it from pests, to prune away the growth when it is too crowded, to cut out the dead wood. I am. The wild fruit-tree is not to be despised : it is a pretty thing to look at, and it is the healthy stock from which all our garden trees have been cultivated. But cultivation is the distinctive power of man, the power which has enabled him to progress from the animal and the

savage state. In his progress man has cultivated, not only animals and plants, but also his own kind. It is just this self-cultivation which we call education, and cultivation, when man directs it to his own species, naturally includes the cultivation of those senses and faculties by means of which man gives form and shape to the things he makes.

I cannot deal adequately with this aspect of my subject without going into the whole question of education in the Democratic Order, and that subject is being dealt with by another contributor to this series of pamphlets. But I must state my point of view, because it is fundamental. Briefly, then, I cannot conceive education as a training in so many separate subjects. Education is integral : it is the encouragement of the growth of the whole man, the complete man. It follows that it is not entirely, nor even mainly, an affair of book learning, for that is only the education of one part of our nature—that part of the mind which deals with concepts and abstractions. In the

child, who is not yet mature enough to think by these short-cut methods, it should be largely an education of the senses—the senses of sight, touch and hearing : in one word, the education of the *sensibility*. From this point of view there is no valid distinction between art and science : there is only the whole man with his diverse interests and faculties, and the aim of education should be to develop all these in harmony and completeness.

It was Rousseau who first realised this truth, and since Rousseau's time there have been several great educationalists—Froebel, Montessori, Dalcroze, Dewey—who have worked out the practical methods of such an education of the sensibility. It is significant that the last of these, John Dewey, has been led to the conclusion that there is an intimate connection between the right kind of education and a democratic order. You can't have a good educational system except in a democracy—only a democracy guarantees the essential freedom. Equally, you

can't have a real democracy without a true system of education ; for only by education can a society teach that respect for natural law which is the basis of democracy.

“ I cannot repeat too often that it is only objects which can be perceived by the senses which can have any interest for children, especially children whose vanity has not been stimulated nor their minds corrupted by social conventions.” This observation of Rousseau's should be the foundation of our educational methods. A child learns through its senses, and its senses are stimulated by objects—first by natural objects, and then by objects which are the creation of man. Elementary education should teach children how to use their senses—how to see, to touch, to listen—it is far from easy to learn the full and exact use of these faculties. Then having learned how to use the senses, separately and conjointly, the child should learn how to apply his knowledge : how to judge and compare the true reports which are rendered by his senses .

how to construct things which give a true sensuous response and, finally, how to construct things which express his growing awareness of the world and its potentialities.

If we return to our pot and think of the delicate balance of the senses of sight and touch which must guide the potter as the clay turns between his finger-tips, we get some idea of the individual factors involved in all creative activity. If we then remember that the potter must direct the work of his senses towards some useful end—for the pot must function—we get some idea of the social factor involved in all creative activity. Substitute for the potter and his clay *any* worker and his material, and you are at the heart of all cultural activity: the same conditions persist, from the pot to the poem, from the cottage to the cathedral, from the horse-shoe to the aero-engine. Sensibility is the secret of success.

There are degrees of sensibility, just as there are degrees of skill, and education cannot, nor should not, smooth them out.

But I do not think a democratic order should unduly honour the possessor of exceptional sensibility. It is a gift he owes to the chances of birth, and the possibility of exercising his gift he owes to the society in which he lives. So much of the world's great art is anonymous, and is none the worse, or none the less appreciated, for the fact. Art always aspires to the impersonal. When every man is an artist, who should claim to be a superman? Which is only a modern version of the oldest and best of democratic slogans: When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?

THE NEW VALUES

When once the Democratic Order is established, it will inevitably lead to the creation of new values in art, literature, music and science. In some distant time men will call these new values the Democratic Civilisation, or the Culture of Democracy, and I believe it will be the greatest and most permanent culture ever created by man. It will have

the universal values which we associate with the greatest names in the culture of the past—the universality of Æschylus, Dante and Shakespeare ; and it will have these values in a less obscure and a less imperfect form. Æschylus and Dante and Shakespeare are immortal, but they addressed themselves to imperfect societies : to societies still full of moral cruelty, social injustice and perverse superstitions ; their works are “ poisonous to the idea of the pride and dignity of the common people, the life-blood of democracy ”. The limitations of their audiences hindered, in however small degree, the expression of their vision. A perfect society will not necessarily produce perfect works of art ; but in so far as it does produce works of art, the very fact that the artist is appealing to a more highly developed form of society will induce a higher degree of perfection. The artist has a more perfect instrument on which to play.

We should not be discouraged by the fact that all hitherto consciously democratic art

has suffered from having to be produced within the framework of a capitalist society. Hitherto not only has the democratic artist had to compromise with the means of communication open to him as a member of a capitalist order—the press, the cinema, the theatre, etc.—but he has had to use the human material and dramatic situations incidental to that order of society. His only alternative has been to stand self-consciously aside, limiting himself to “workers” and their experiences—all of which explains the dreariness and monotony of most so-called “proletarian art”. The artist cannot restrict himself to sectional interests of this kind without detriment to his art: he is only “all out” and capable of his greatest range when the society he works for is integral, and as wide and varied as humanity itself. It is only in so far as he is simply “human” that he is wholly “great”; and it is only in a democratic society that the artist can address humanity and society in the same terms.

THE GLITTERING PINNACLES

To this general rule we must admit certain rare exceptions. Certain types of art are "archetypal". That is to say, though they may have a limited range—indeed, by the nature of things, must have this limited range—they are formally perfect. A song by Shakespeare or Blake, a melody by Bach or Mozart, a Persian carpet or a Greek vase—such "forms", in the words of Keats, "tease us out of thought as doth eternity". They tease us out of our human pre-occupations—the theme of epic and drama and novel—and for a few brief seconds hold us suspended in a timeless existence. Such rare moments are beyond daily reality, super-social and in a sense superhuman. But in relation to the whole body of what we call "art", they are but the glittering pinnacles, and below them spreads the solid structure of human ideals, human vision and human insight: the world of passion and of sentiment, of love and labour and brotherhood.

THE FORERUNNER

The only other exception to the limitations that have inevitably beset artists of the pre-democratic eras is a particular one—a poet who, in spite of his evident weaknesses, is a prototype or forerunner of the democratic artist—I mean Walt Whitman. The nineteenth-century America in which he lived was by no means a perfect democracy ; but the early Americans, especially Jefferson and Lincoln, had had a clear vision of the requisites of a democratic order, and they inspired Whitman with the ambition to be the first poet of this order. He was inspired by a realisation of the tremendous potentialities of the New World into which he had been born.

Sole among nationalities, these States have assumed the task to put in forms of lasting power and practicality, on areas of amplitude rivaling the operations of the physical kosmos, the moral political speculations of ages, long, long deferr'd, the democratic republican principle, and the theory of development and perfection by voluntary standards, and self-reliance.

But these potentialities could never be realised on the political plane alone. "I say that democracy can never prove itself beyond cavil, until it founds and luxuriantly grows its own forms of art, poems, schools, theology, displacing all that exists, or that has been produced anywhere in the past, under opposite influences."

"*The priest departs, the divine literatus comes*". In these words Walt Whitman sums up the whole argument of this pamphlet. But let the reader turn to *Democratic Vistas*, that credo of Walt Whitman's from which my quotations come, and let him find there in fullness the essential democratic truths, and in particular those that relate to the enduring values of human life, and to their expression in enduring works of art. And from this prose work of the good gray poet, let the reader turn to *Leaves of Grass* and see if he does not find there, shining through the crudities and contradictions which Whitman himself was the first to admit, the lineaments of our divine literatus, our democratic poet

and exemplar. Such may not be the form of the art of the future, but it is its prophetic spirit—

Expanding and swift, henceforth,
Elements, breeds, adjustments, turbulent,
 quick and audacious,
A world primal again, vistas of glory in-
 cessant and branching,
A new race dominating previous ones and
 grander far, with new contests,
New politics, new literature and religions,
 new inventions and arts.

These, my voice announcing—I will sleep no
 more but arise,
You oceans that have been calm within me !
 how I feel you, fathomless, stirring, pre-
 paring unprecedented waves and storms.

