CHAPTER XVI

ARTS AT HULL-HOUSE

THE FIRST BUILDING erected for Hull-House contained an art gallery well lighted for day and evening use, and our first exhibit of loaned pictures was opened in June, 1891, by Mr. And Mrs. Barnett of London. It is always pleasant to associate their hearty sympathy with that first exhibit, and thus to connect it with their pioneer efforts at Toynbee Hall to secure for working people the opportunity to know the best art, and with their establishment of the first permanent art gallery in an industrial quarter.

We took pride in the fact that our first exhibit contained some of the best pictures Chicago afforded, and we conscientiously insured them against fire and carefully guarded them by night and day.

We had five of these exhibits during two years, after the gallery was completed: two of oil paintings, one of old engravings and etchings, one of water colors, and one of pictures especially selected for use in the public schools. These exhibits were surprisingly well attended and thousands of votes were cast for the most popular pictures. Their value to the neighborhood of course had to be determined by each one of us according to the value he attached to beauty and the escape it offers from dreary reality into the realm of the imagination. Miss Starr always insisted that the arts should receive adequate recognition at Hull-House and urged that one must always remember “the hungry individual soul which without art will have passed unsolaced and unfed, followed by other souls who lack the impulse his should have given.”

The exhibits afforded pathetic evidence that the older immigrants do not expect the solace of art in this country; an Italian expressed great surprise when he found that we, although Americans, still liked pictures, and said quite naively that he didn’t know that Americans cared for anything but dollars—that looking at pictures was something people only did in Italy.

The extreme isolation of the Italian colony was demonstrated by the fact that he did not know that there was a public art gallery in the city nor any houses in which pictures were regarded as treasures.

A Greek was much surprised to see a photograph of the Acropolis at Hull-House because he had lived in Chicago for thirteen years and had never before met any Americans who knew about this foremost glory of the world. Before he left Greece he had imagined that Americans would be most eager to see pictures of Athens, and as he was a graduate of a school of technology, he had prepared a book of colored drawings and had made a collection of photographs which he was sure Americans would enjoy. But although from his fruit stand near one of the large railroad stations he had conversed with many Americans and had often

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tried to lead the conversation back to ancient Greece, no one had responded, and he had at last concluded that “the people of Chicago knew nothing of ancient times.”

The loan exhibits were continued until the Chicago Art Institute was opened free to the public on Sunday afternoons and parties were arranged at Hull-House and conducted there by a guide. In time even these parties were discontinued as the galleries became better known in all parts of the city and the Art Institute management did much to make pictures popular.

From the first a studio was maintained at Hull-House which has developed through the changing years under the direction of Miss Benedict, one of the residents who is a member of the faculty in the Art Institute. Buildings on the Hull-House quadrangle furnish studios for artists who find something of the same spirit in the contiguous Italian colony that the French artist is traditionally supposed to discover in his beloved Latin Quarter. These artists uncover something of the picturesque in the foreign colonies, which they have reproduced in painting, etching, and lithography. They find their classes filled not only by young people possessing facility and sometimes talent, but also by older people to whom the studio affords the one opportunity of escape from dreariness; a widow with four children who supplemented a very inadequate income by teaching the piano, for six years never missed her weekly painting lesson because it was “her one pleasure”; another woman, whose youth and strength had gone into the care of an invalid father, poured into her afternoon in the studio once a week, all of the longing for self-expression which she habitually suppressed.

Perhaps the most satisfactory results of the studio have been obtained through the classes of young men who are engaged in the commercial arts, and who are glad to have an opportunity to work out their own ideas. This is true of young engravers and lithographers; of the men who have to do with posters and illustrations in various ways. The little pile of stones and the lithographer’s handpress in a corner of the studio have been used in many an experiment, as has a set of beautiful type loaned to Hull-House by a bibliophile.

The work of the studio almost imperceptibly merged into the crafts and well within the first decade a shop was opened at Hull-House under the direction of several residents who were also members of the Chicago Arts and Crafts Society. This shop is not merely a school where people are taught and then sent forth to use their teaching in art according to their individual initiative and opportunity, but where those who have already been carefully trained, may express the best they can in wood or metal. The Settlement soon discovers how difficult it is to put a fringe of art on the end of a day spent in a factory. We constantly see young people doing overhurried work. Wrapping bars of soap in pieces of paper might at least give the pleasure of accuracy and repetition if it could be done at a normal pace, but when paid for by the piece, speed becomes the sole requirement and the last suggestion of human interest is taken away. In contrast to this the Hull-House shop affords many examples of the restorative power in the exercise of a genuine craft; a young Russian who, like too many of his countrymen, had made a desperate effort to fit himself for a learned profession, and who had almost finished his course in a night law school, used to watch constantly the work being done in the metal shop at Hull-House. One evening in a moment of sudden resolve, he took off his coat, sat down at one of the benches, and began to work, obviously as

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a very clever silversmith. He had long concealed his craft because he thought it would hurt his efforts as a lawyer and because he imagined an office more honorable and "more American" than a shop. As he worked on during his two leisure evenings each week, his entire bearing and conversation registered the relief of one who abandons the effort he is not fitted for and becomes a man on his own feet, expressing himself through a familiar and delicate technique.

Miss Starr at length found herself quite impatient with her role of lecturer on the arts, while all the handicraft about her was untouched by beauty and did not even reflect the interest of the workman. She took a training in bookbinding in London under Mr. Cobden-Sanderson and established her bindery at Hull-House in which design and workmanship, beauty and thoroughness are taught to a small number of apprentices.

From the very first winter, concerts which are still continued were given every Sunday afternoon in the Hull-House drawing-room and later, as the audiences increased, in the larger halls. For these we are indebted to musicians from every part of the city. Mr. William Tomlins early trained large choruses of adults as his assistants did of children, and the response to all of these showed that while the number of people in our vicinity caring for the best music was not large, they constituted a steady and appreciative group. It was in connection with these first choruses that a public-spirited citizen of Chicago offered a prize for the best labor song, competition to be open to the entire country. The responses to the offer literally filled three large barrels and speaking at least for myself as one of the bewildered judges, we were more disheartened by their quality than even by their overwhelming bulk. Apparently the workers of America are not yet ready to sing, although I recall a creditable chorus trained at Hull-House for a large meeting in sympathy with the anthracite coal strike in which the swinging lines

> "Who was it made the coal?
> Our God as well as theirs."

seemed to relieve the tension of the moment. Miss Eleanor Smith, the head of the Hull-House Music School, who had put the words to music, performed the same office for the "Sweatshop" of the Yiddish poet, the translation of which presents so graphically the bewilderment and tedium of the New York shop that it might be applied to almost any other machinery industry as the first verse indicates:—

> "The roaring of the wheels has filled my ears,
> The clashing and the clamor shut me in,
> Myself, my soul, in chaos disappears,
> I cannot think or feel amid the din."

It may be that this plaint explains the lack of labor songs in this period of industrial maladjustment when the worker is overmastered by his very tools. In addition to sharing with our neighborhood the best music we could procure, we have conscientiously provided careful musical instruction that at least a few young people might understand those old usages of art;

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that they might master its trade secrets, for after all it is only through a careful technique that artistic ability can express itself and be preserved.

From the beginning we had classes in music, and the Hull-House Music School, which is housed in quarters of its own in our quieter court, was opened in 1893. The school is designed to give a thorough musical instruction to a limited number of children. From the first lessons they are taught to compose and to reduce to order the musical suggestions which may come to them, and in this wise the school has sometimes been able to recover the songs of the immigrants through their children. Some of these folk songs have never been committed to paper, but have survived through the centuries because of a touch of undying poetry which the world has always cherished; as in the song of a Russian who is digging a post hole and finds his task dull and difficult until he strikes a stratum of red sand, which in addition to making digging easy, reminds him of the red hair of his sweetheart, and all goes merrily as the song lifts into a joyous melody. I recall again the almost hilarious enjoyment of the adult audience to whom it was sung by the children who had revived it, as well as the more sober appreciation of the hymns taken from the lips of the cantor, whose father before him had officiated in the synagogue.

The recitals and concerts given by the school are attended by large and appreciative audiences. On the Sunday before Christmas the program of Christmas songs draws together people of the most diverging faiths. In the deep tones of the memorial organ erected at Hull-House, we realize that music is perhaps the most potent agent for making the universal appeal and inducing men to forget their differences.

Some of the pupils in the music school have developed during the years into trained musicians and are supporting themselves in their chosen profession. On the other hand, we constantly see the most promising musical ability extinguished when the young people enter industries which so sap their vitality that they cannot carry on serious study in the scanty hours outside of factory work. Many cases indisputably illustrate this: a Bohemian girl, who, in order to earn money for pressing family needs, first ruined her voice in a six months' constant vaudeville engagement, returned to her trade working overtime in a vain effort to continue the vaudeville income; another young girl whom Hull-House had sent to the high school so long as her parents consented, because we realized that a beautiful voice is often unavailable through lack of the informing mind, later extinguished her promise in a tobacco factory; a third girl who had supported her little sisters since she was fourteen, eagerly used her fine voice for earning money at entertainments held late after her day's work, until exposure and fatigue ruined her health as well as a musician's future; a young man whose music-loving family gave him every possible opportunity, and who produced some charming and even joyous songs during the long struggle with tuberculosis which preceded his death, had made a brave beginning, not only as a teacher of music but as a composer. In the little service held at Hull-House in his memory, when the children sang his composition, "How Sweet is the Shepherd's Sweet Lot," it was hard to realize that such an interpretive pastoral could have been produced by one whose childhood had been passed in a crowded city quarter.

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Even that bitter experience did not prepare us for the sorrowful year when six promising pupils out of a class of fifteen, developed tuberculosis. It required but little penetration to see that during the eight years the class of fifteen school children had come together to the music school, they had approximately an even chance, but as soon as they reached the legal working age only a scanty moiety of those who became self-supporting could endure the strain of long hours and bad air. Thus the average human youth, "With all the sweetness of the common dawn," is flung into the vortex of industrial life wherein the everyday tragedy escapes us save when one of them becomes conspicuously unfortunate. Twice in one year we were compelled

> "To find the inheritance of this poor child
> His little kingdom of a forced grave."

It has been pointed out many times that Art lives by devouring her own offspring and the world has come to justify even that sacrifice, but we are unfortified and unsolaced when we see the children of Art devoured, not by her, but by the uncouth stranger, Modern Industry, who, needlessly ruthless and brutal to her own children, is quickly fatal to the offspring of the gentler mother. And so schools in art for those who go to work at the age when more fortunate young people are still sheltered and educated, constantly epitomize one of the haunting problems of life; why do we permit the waste of this most precious human faculty, this consummate possession of civilization? When we fail to provide the vessel in which it may be treasured, it runs out upon the ground and is irretrievably lost.

The universal desire for the portrayal of life lying quite outside of personal experience evinces itself in many forms. One of the conspicuous features of our neighborhood, as of all industrial quarters, is the persistency with which the entire population attends the theater. The very first day I saw Halsted Street a long line of young men and boys stood outside the gallery entrance of the Bijou Theater, waiting for the Sunday matinee to begin at two o'clock, although it was only high noon. This waiting crowd might have been seen every Sunday afternoon during the twenty years which have elapsed since then. Our first Sunday evening in Hull-House, when a group of small boys sat on our piazza and told us "about things around here," their talk was all of the theater and of the astonishing things they had seen that afternoon.

But quite as it was difficult to discover the habits and purposes of this group of boys because they much preferred talking about the theater to contemplating their own lives, so it was all along the line; the young men told us their ambitions in the phrases of stage heroes, and the girls, so far as their romantic dreams could be shyly put into words, possessed no others but those soiled by long use in the melodrama. All of these young people looked upon an afternoon a week in the gallery of a Halsted Street theater as their one opportunity to see life. The sort of melodrama they see there has recently been described as "the ten commandments written in red fire." Certainly the villain always comes to a violent end, and the young and handsome hero is rewarded by marriage with a beautiful girl, usually the daughter of a millionaire, but after all that is not a portrayal of the morality of the ten

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commandments any more than of life itself.

Nevertheless the theater, such as it was, appeared to be the one agency which freed the boys and girls from that destructive isolation of those who drag themselves up to maturity by themselves, and it gave them a glimpse of that order and beauty into which even the poorest drama endeavors to restore the bewildering facts of life. The most prosaic young people bear testimony to this overmastering desire. A striking illustration of this came to us during our second year's residence on Halsted Street through an incident in the Italian colony, where the men have always boasted that they were able to guard their daughters from the dangers of city life, and until evil Italians entered the business of the "white slave traffic," their boast was well founded. The first Italian girl to go astray known to the residents of Hull-House, was so fascinated by the stage that on her way home from work she always loitered outside a theater before the enticing posters. Three months after her elopement with an actor, her distracted mother received a picture of her dressed in the men's clothes in which she appeared in vaudeville. Her family mourned her as dead and her name was never mentioned among them nor in the entire colony. In further illustration of an overmastering desire to see life as portrayed on the stage are two young girls whose sober parents did not approve of the theater and would allow no money for such foolish purposes. In sheer desperation the sisters evolved a plot that one of them would feign a toothache, and while she was having her tooth pulled by a neighboring dentist the other would steal the gold crowns from his table, and with the money thus procured they could attend the vaudeville theater every night on their way home from work. Apparently the pain and wrongdoing did not weigh for a moment against the anticipated pleasure. The plan was carried out to the point of selling the gold crowns to a pawnbroker when the disappointed girls were arrested.

All this effort to see the play took place in the years before the five-cent theaters had become a feature of every crowded city thoroughfare and before their popularity had induced the attendance of two and a quarter million people in the United States every twenty-four hours. The eagerness of the penniless children to get into these magic spaces is responsible for an entire crop of petty crimes made more easy because two children are admitted for one nickel at the last performance when the hour is late and the theater nearly deserted. The Hull-House residents were aghast at the early popularity of these mimic shows, and in the days before the inspection of films and the present regulations for the five-cent theaters we established at Hull-House a moving picture show. Although its success justified its existence, it was so obviously but one in the midst of hundreds that it seemed much more advisable to turn our attention to the improvement of all of them or rather to assist as best we could, the successful efforts in this direction by the Juvenile Protective Association.

However, long before the five-cent theater was even heard of, we had accumulated much testimony as to the power of the drama, and we would have been dull indeed if we had not availed ourselves of the use of the play at Hull-House, not only as an agent of recreation and education, but as a vehicle of self-expression for the teeming young life all about us.

Long before the Hull-House theater was built we had many plays, first in the drawing-room and later in the gymnasium. The young people's clubs never tired of rehearsing and

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preparing for these dramatic occasions, and we also discovered that older people were almost equally ready and talented. We quickly learned that no celebration at Thanksgiving was so popular as a graphic portrayal on the stage of the Pilgrim Fathers, and we were often put to it to reduce to dramatic effects the great days of patriotism and religion.

At one of our early Christmas celebrations Longfellow's "Golden Legend" was given, the actors portraying it with the touch of the miracle play spirit which it reflects. I remember an old blind man, who took the part of a shepherd, said, at the end of the last performance, "Kind Heart," a name by which he always addressed me, "it seems to me that I have been waiting all my life to hear some of these things said. I am glad we had so many performances, for I think I can remember them to the end. It is getting hard for me to listen to reading, but the different voices and all made this very plain." Had he not perhaps made a legitimate demand upon the drama, that it shall express for us that which we have not been able to formulate for ourselves, that it shall warm us with a sense of companionship with the experiences of others; does not every genuine drama present our relations to each other and to the world in which we find ourselves in such wise as may fortify us to the end of the journey?

The immigrants in the neighborhood of Hull-House have utilized our little stage in an endeavor to reproduce the past of their own nations through those immortal dramas which have escaped from the restraining bond of one country into the land of the universal.

A large colony of Greeks near Hull-House, who often feel that their history and classic background are completely ignored by Americans, and that they are easily confused with the more ignorant immigrants from other parts of southeastern Europe, welcome an occasion to present Greek plays in the ancient text. With expert help in the difficulties of staging and rehearsing a classic play, they reproduced the "Ajax" of Sophocles upon the Hull-House stage. It was a genuine triumph to the actors who felt that they were "showing forth the glory of Greece" to "ignorant Americans." The scholar who came with a copy of Sophocles in hand and followed the play with real enjoyment, did not in the least realize that the revelation of the love of Greek poets was mutual between the audience and the actors. The Greeks have quite recently assisted an enthusiast in producing "Electra," while the Lithuanians, the Poles, and other Russian subjects often use the Hull-House stage to present plays in their own tongue, which shall at one and the same time keep alive their sense of participation in the great Russian revolution and relieve their feelings in regard to it. There is something still more appealing in the yearning efforts the immigrants sometimes make to formulate their situation in America. I recall a play written by an Italian playwright of our neighborhood, which depicted the insolent break between Americanized sons and old country parents, so touchingly that it moved to tears all the older Italians in the audience. Did the tears of each express relief in finding that others had had the same experience as himself, and did the knowledge free each one from a sense of isolation and an injured belief that his children were the worst of all?

This effort to understand life through its dramatic portrayal, to see one's own participation intelligibly set forth, becomes difficult when one enters the field of social development, but

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even here it is not impossible if a Settlement group is constantly searching for new material.

A labor story appearing in the *Atlantic Monthly* was kindly dramatized for us by the author who also superintended its presentation upon the Hull-House stage. The little drama presented the untutored effort of a trades-union man to secure for his side the beauty of self-sacrifice, the glamour of martyrdom, which so often seems to belong solely to the nonunion forces. The presentation of the play was attended by an audience of trades-unionists and employers and those other people who are supposed to make public opinion. Together they felt the moral beauty of the man's conclusion that "it's the side that suffers most that will win out in this war—the saints is the only ones that has got the world under their feet—we've got to do the way they done if the unions is to stand," so completely that it seemed quite natural that he should forfeit his life upon the truth of this statement.

The dramatic arts have gradually been developed at Hull-House through amateur companies, one of which has held together for more than fifteen years. The members were originally selected from the young people who had evinced talent in the plays the social clubs were always giving, but the association now adds to itself only as a vacancy occurs. Some of them have developed almost a professional ability, although contrary to all predictions and in spite of several offers, none of them have taken to a stage career. They present all sorts of plays from melodrama and comedy to those of Shaw, Ibsen, and Galsworthy. The latter are surprisingly popular, perhaps because of their sincere attempt to expose the shams and pretenses of contemporary life and to penetrate into some of its perplexing social and domestic situations. Through such plays the stage may become a pioneer teacher of social righteousness.

I have come to believe, however, that the stage may do more than teach, that much of our current moral instruction will not endure the test of being cast into a lifelike mold, and when presented in dramatic form will reveal itself as platitudinous and effete. That which may have sounded like righteous teaching when it was remote and wordy, will be challenged afresh when it is obliged to simulate life itself.

This function of the stage, as a reconstructing and reorganizing agent of accepted moral truths, came to me with overwhelming force as I listened to the Passion Play at Oberammergau one beautiful summer's day in 1900. The peasants who portrayed exactly the successive scenes of the wonderful Life, who used only the very words found in the accepted version of the Gospels, yet curiously modernized and reorientated the message. They made clear that the opposition to the young Teacher sprang from the merchants whose traffic in the temple He had disturbed and from the Pharisees who were dependent upon them for support. Their query was curiously familiar, as they demanded the antecedents of the Radical who dared to touch vested interests, who presumed to dictate the morality of trade, and who insulted the marts of honest merchants by calling them "a den of thieves." As the play developed, it became clear that this powerful opposition had friends in Church and State, that they controlled influences which ramified in all directions. They obviously believed in their statement of the case and their very wealth and position in the community gave their words such weight that finally all of their hearers were convinced that the young Agitator must be

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done away with in order that the highest interests of society might be conserved. These simple peasants made it clear that it was the money power which induced one of the Agitator's closest friends to betray him, and the villain of the piece, Judas himself, was only a man who was so dazzled by money, so under the domination of all it represented, that he was perpetually blind to the spiritual vision unrolling before him. As I sat through the long summer day, seeing the shadows on the beautiful mountain back of the open stage shift from one side to the other and finally grow long and pointed in the soft evening light, my mind was filled with perplexing questions. Did the dramatization of the life of Jesus set forth its meaning more clearly and conclusively than talking and preaching could possibly do as a shadowy following of the command "to do the will"?

The peasant actors whom I had seen returning from mass that morning had prayed only to portray the life as He had lived it and, behold, out of their simplicity and piety arose this modern version which even Harnack was only then venturing to suggest to his advanced colleagues in Berlin. Yet the Oberammergau fold were very like thousands of immigrant men and women of Chicago, both in their experiences and in their familiarity with the hard facts of life, and throughout that day as my mind dwelt on my far-away neighbors, I was reproached with the sense of an ungarnered harvest.

Of course such a generally uplifted state comes only at rare moments, while the development of the little theater at Hull-House has not depended upon the moods of any one, but upon the genuine enthusiasm and sustained effort of a group of residents, several of them artists who have ungrudgingly given their time to it year after year. This group has long fostered junior dramatic associations, through which it seems possible to give a training in manners and morals more directly than through any other medium. They have learned to determine very cleverly the ages at which various types of the drama are most congruous and expressive of the sentiments of the little troupes, from the fairy plays such as "Snow-White" and "Puss-in-Boots" which appeal to the youngest children, to the heroic plays of "William Tell," "King John," and "Wat Tyler" for the older lads, and to the romances and comedies which set forth in stately fashion the elaborated life which so many young people admire. A group of Jewish boys gave a dramatic version of the story of Joseph and his brethren and again of Queen Esther. They had almost a sense of proprietorship in the fine old lines and were pleased to bring from home bits of Talmudic lore for the stage setting. The same club of boys at one time will buoyantly give a roaring comedy and five years later will solemnly demand a drama dealing with modern industrial conditions. The Hull-House theater is also rented from time to time to members of the Young People's Socialist League who give plays both in Yiddish and English which reduce their propaganda to conversation. Through such humble experiments as the Hull-House stage, as well as through the more ambitious reforms which are attempted in various parts of the country, the theatre may at last be restored to its rightful place in the community.

There have been times when our little stage was able to serve the *théatre libre*. A Chicago troupe, finding it difficult to break into a trust theater, used it one winter twice a week for the presentation of Ibsen and old French comedy. A visit from the Irish poet Yeats inspired us to

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do our share toward freeing the stage from its slavery to expensive scene setting, and a forest of stiff conventional trees against a gilt sky still remains with us as a reminder of an attempt not wholly unsuccessful, in this direction.

This group of Hull-House artists have filled our little foyer with a series of charming playbills and by dint of painting their own scenery and making their own costumes have obtained beguiling results in stage setting. Sometimes all the artistic resources of the House unite in a Wagnerian combination; thus, the text of the "Troll's Holiday" was written by one resident, set to music by another; sung by the Music School, and placed upon the stage under the careful direction and training of the dramatic committee; and the little brown trolls could never have tumbled about so gracefully in their gleaming caves unless they had been taught in the gymnasium.

Some such synthesis takes place every year at the Hull-House annual exhibition, when an effort is made to bring together in a spirit of holiday the nine thousand people who come to the House every week during duller times. Curiously enough the central feature at the annual exhibition seems to be the brass band of the boys' club which apparently dominates the situation by sheer size and noise, but perhaps their fresh boyish enthusiasm expresses that which the older people take more soberly.

As the stage of our little theater had attempted to portray the heroes of many lands, so we planned one early spring seven years ago, to carry out a scheme of mural decoration upon the walls of the theater itself, which should portray those cosmopolitan heroes who have become great through identification with the common lot, in preference to the heroes of mere achievement. In addition to the group of artists living at Hull-House several others were in temporary residence, and they all threw themselves enthusiastically into the plan. The series began with Tolstoy plowing his field which was painted by an artist of the Glasgow school, and the next was of the young Lincoln pushing his flatboat down the Mississippi River at the moment he received his first impression of the "great iniquity." This was done by a promising young artist of Chicago, and the wall spaces nearest to the two selected heroes were quickly filled with their immortal sayings.

A spirited discussion thereupon ensued in regard to the heroes for the two remaining large wall spaces, when to the surprise of all of us the group of twenty-five residents who had lived in unbroken harmony for more than ten years, suddenly broke up into cults and even camps of hero worship. Each cult exhibited drawings of its own hero in his most heroic moment, and of course each drawing received enthusiastic backing from the neighborhood, each according to the nationality of the hero. Thus Phidias standing high on his scaffold as he finished the heroic head of Athene; the young David dreamily playing his harp as he tended his father's sheep at Bethlehem; St. Francis washing the feet of the leper; the young slave Patrick guiding his master through the bogs of Ireland, which he later rid of their dangers; the poet Hans Sachs cobbling shoes; Jeanne d'Arc dropping her spindle in startled wonder before the heavenly visitants, naturally all obtained such enthusiastic following from our cosmopolitan neighborhood that it was certain to give offense if any two were selected. Then there was the cult of residents who wished to keep the series contemporaneous with the two

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heroes already painted, and they advocated William Morris at his loom, Walt Whitman tramping the open road, Pasteur in his laboratory, or Florence Nightingale seeking the wounded on the field of battle. But beyond the socialists, few of the neighbors had heard of William Morris, and the fame of Walt Whitman was still more apocryphal; Pasteur was considered merely a clever scientist without the romance which evokes popular affection and in the provisional drawing submitted for votes, gentle Florence Nightingale was said “to look more as if she were robbing the dead than succoring the wounded.” The remark shows how high the feeling ran, and then, as something must be done quickly, we tried to unite upon strictly local heroes such as the famous fire marshal who had lived for many years in our neighborhood—but why prolong this description which demonstrates once more that art, if not always the handmaid of religion, yet insists upon serving those deeper sentiments for which we unexpectedly find ourselves ready to fight. When we were all fatigued and hopeless of compromise, we took refuge in a series of landscapes connected with our two heroes by a quotation from Wordsworth slightly distorted to meet our dire need, but still stating his impassioned belief in the efficacious spirit capable of companionship with man which resides in “particular spots.” Certainly peace emanates from the particular folding of the hills in one of our treasured mural landscapes, yet occasionally when a guest with a bewildered air looks from one side of the theater to the other, we are forced to conclude that the connection is not convincing.

In spite of its stormy career this attempt at mural decoration connects itself quite naturally with the spirit of our earlier efforts to make Hull-House as beautiful as we could, which had in it a desire to embody in the outward aspect of the House something of the reminiscence and aspiration of the neighborhood life.

As the House enlarged for new needs and mellowed through slow-growing associations, we endeavored to fashion it from without, as it were, as well as from within. A tiny wall fountain modeled in classic pattern, for us penetrates into the world of the past, but for the Italian immigrant it may defy distance and barriers as he dimly responds to that typical beauty in which Italy has ever written its message, even as classic art knew no region of the gods which was not also sensuous, and as the art of Dante mysteriously blended the material and the spiritual.

Perhaps the early devotion of the Hull-House residents to the pre-Raphaelites recognized that they above all English speaking poets and painters reveal “the sense of the expressiveness of outward things” which is at once the glory and the limitation of the arts.

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