CULTURE, COMMERCE, AND INDUSTRY IN MANCHESTER.¹

It was customary not many years ago to separate culture from business and industry, with very questionable results.

The contention was that great libraries, universities, and institutions of that character were well enough for such places as Oxford and Cambridge, but that Manchester existed to supply us with cotton, Leeds and Bradford with woollen goods, Newcastle with coals, Leicester and Nottingham with hosiery, and there was no need to trouble about supplying these places with the instruments of higher culture.

That this attitude of mind still survives to some extent was revealed quite recently, when one of the so-called captains of industry was heard to remark that he had no belief in all the present-day talk about education; “what is wanted,” he declared, “are machines with which to increase our industrial output and the world’s commerce.” No one can deny the importance of machines, the world is full of them, and their purpose is to save time, and space, and money. This, however, must be said: that no matter how perfect a machine may be it is the man behind the machine that makes it go, and that the extent to which any machine will fulfil the purpose of its installation depends upon the man controlling it. Unless the right man is selected for the job the machine will suffer, and not the machine alone. The machine is a product of man’s own brain and hand; it is his child, and if properly treated it is the most docile and helpful child he has produced. One man is able to get more out of a machine than another, because he has a kind of a sympathy with it, and it responds to his touch. That being the case it stands to reason that

¹ This short article was printed in the “Manchester Evening News,” in a much abbreviated form, and we venture to print it here as it was originally written.
the mind must be cared for if the hand has to do the work, and that, surely, is the function of education; and to the credit of a number of the commercial and industrial firms in this great community it should be stated that they have realised their responsibility in this matter, and with great vision and foresight are offering every facility to their younger employees in particular to continue their general and technical training. Education is not a matter of the early years only, it is a matter of the whole life, for as soon as we cease to learn the mind ceases to grow. The primary object of education is to give the pupil the desire to learn, but the real part of his education commences when he steps out from the school or from the university into life. Sir Walter Scott was quite right when he said "the better part of every man's education is that which he gives to himself."

One of the immediate and far-reaching results of the widespread employment of machinery is that much time has been saved, and thousands of people who formerly worked all day now have leisure; unfortunately, many of them do not know what to do with it. Could they but be made to realise how much the thoughts and desires indulged in during leisure react upon the whole outlook of life, the relationship between culture and industrial concerns would change from an ill-disguised mutual contempt to serious and whole-hearted collaboration. The man or the woman who could show the world how to employ its leisure to advantage would be a greater benefactor than any of the great inventors of machines.

True civilisation lies not in machines but in mind and soul. The most highly civilised nation of history was Athens in the fifth century B.C., and the people of Athens scarcely knew what a machine was, but they were one of the most cultured races of our planet. To them the poet was the teacher, and Homer who was the greatest of their poets was the greatest of their teachers; and we might with advantage follow their example and turn our attention to literature, and therewith employ our leisure. It is quite true that poetry will not make a machine, that it may not directly earn us one shilling of money, but it will fill the mind with wisdom and beauty. Many of our foremost scientists have been assisted to their most important discoveries by the quickening power of a suggestive imagination, and the food of the imagination may be said to consist of those masterpieces of the great imaginative artists, which are so instinct with life that they refuse to
die. Those great books are to be found upon the shelves of any public library which is worthy of the name.

It is quite true that a man may live and live bravely without imagination, just as a house may be well compacted to keep out rain and let in light, and yet be ugly; but no man would prefer to live in an ugly house if he could have a beautiful one, and so beauty, which is the natural food of a healthy imagination should be sought after by every one anxious to make the most of himself. Shelley held that if a man strengthens his imagination by intellectual stimulants he is likely to be a better man, because strength of sympathy depends on strength of imagination, and kindness issues from sympathy.

Not only is the divorce of culture from commerce singularly unwise but it is opposed to the best traditions of European history. The mediæval city richest in art and letters, and in the genius which excelled in both, was not Rome, or Cologne, or Canterbury, where royal popes and regal archbishops reigned, nor was it Bologna, or Paris, or Oxford, cities of famous universities, but Florence, the city of commerce and of merchants, whose greatest sons were Dante, Michel Angelo, Giotto, Machiavelli, Savonarola, and the Medici. The people of Florence in the fifteenth century were a sober, striving, industrious race of citizens engaged from day to day in the work of the day, but their interests were not concentrated upon the struggle for material subsistence. They had a passion for the city, a sense of citizenship, a love for what was beautiful, and a critical sense which enabled them to distinguish between false beauty and true. Their patriotism found expression in beautifying the city by noble public and private buildings. Indeed, there was not a department of life in which art did not have its recognised and appropriate place. But, before all things, Florence was essentially a commercial city. It was the wealth resulting from her commercial prosperity and the consequences which follow from wealth that determined the bent of her intellectual and artistic activities. It was the oil of commerce which kept the lamp of culture burning.

Again, the city that did most of all Italian cities for printing the ancient humanities, the city that made Greece articulate to modern minds was not imperial Vienna, or kingly Madrid, or royal Paris, but commercial Venice, the city of Saint Mark, "that fair and famed queen of the Adriatic." She was at one and the same time an
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Emporium and a centre of art and culture; her art was the better for her commerce, just as her commerce was the better for her culture.

These cities, like Genoa, Nuremberg, Antwerp, and many another of the Middle Ages, finding it impossible to live by bread alone, built up those great monuments of culture and art which excite our admiration and our envy to-day. It is not, therefore, exceptional, but historical that Manchester, this metropolis of the North, not content with the position of commercial supremacy to which she had raised herself, should, during the last three-quarters of a century, make determined efforts to place herself in the front rank of cities which are true cities, efforts in which, aided by the benefactions of many of the citizens she has delighted to honour, and whose names have become household words, she has been eminently successful. Not only has she raised herself to university rank, but to a position of eminence among the universities of the world. She has provided herself with colleges and schools which, in point of equipment and efficiency, are probably without equal. Her art galleries are amongst the most important in the country, and she is justly proud of her museum. She has furnished a home for the drama, and it was here in Manchester that the repertory theatre came to life. Music has been said to divide with Mammon the devotion of the people of Manchester, and in addition to an orchestra of international repute she possesses one of the finest music libraries in the country. Literature, too, has found not merely a hospitable shelter but a home in this city, which can also claim to have more journalists than any city outside London, and the most literary daily newspaper in this or in any country. In the matter of libraries, from the time when the first rate-supported public library was established in 1852, libraries have gone on multiplying in and around the city, until to-day Manchester is regarded as one of the most important library centres in the world. There are in the city considerably more than a million volumes to which readers have access, amongst which are many of the world's most famous literary treasures. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that she has become a place of pilgrimage for the lover of rare and beautiful books, and at the same time a centre of attraction for scholars from all parts of the world.

As a result, it is not too much to say that the educational and cultural facilities which Manchester offers are now singularly complete; from the lowest rung of the educational ladder to the highest there is
no gap, and each year many examples show what a career is open to character and ability.

These instruments of culture are intended to benefit all classes of the community: not only the leisured classes but also the workers. Many of the men who have seen visions and dreamed dreams of great things have been not men of the leisured and wealthy classes, but sons of toil, men like Paul the tentmaker, Epictetus the slave, Piers the ploughman, Shakespeare the actor, John Bunyan the brazier, Robert Burns the farmer. In the realms of commerce and industry great ideals have been and may yet be born, for idealism is the heritage of those who labour, redeeming them from that which seems to soil and begrime.

Thus, by cultivating a large and generous idealism, our city stands proudly alongside the great merchant cities of the world. She bears a name that is honoured in letters, in art, and in the achievement of what we call culture and refinement, as in those that adorn secular life. Disraeli, in "Coningsby," mentions her in the same breath as Athens.

Here in Manchester, as in the case of Florence and the other great cities of a bygone age to which reference has been made, we are proud to say that it is the oil of commerce and industry that keeps the lamp of culture burning.