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ADELAIDE LOVETT BAKER PAPERS

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Adelaide Lovett Baker, Houston, Texas,  
April, 1979.

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Contents in order of filming:

1. Address of Edgar Odell Lovett  
to the Houston Art League, 1918
2. 1926 Annual Report of Fourth  
Annual Series of Thursday Art  
Reviews

Abstract of some remarks made at a meeting of the Houston Art League 12th April 1918.

We are all reading soldiers' letters. Some of them at first hand, others through friends, and still many others in print. I had lately the privilege of reading such letters addressed to a father by his son and one of the latter's classmates. The young men were aboard an American battleship in foreign waters. They had been recommended for promotion earned in the service. Arduous as had been their duties they still had had time for reading. And they were reading. They had learned to read at Rice. And what do you suppose they were reading? They were reading books on history, law and political philosophy they had picked up from port to port. Laying out anew their fundamental principles, they wrote, for the days of reconstruction that shall follow in the wake of these days of conflict. Recalling with appreciation and renewed understanding, they said, courses in these subjects which they had followed at Rice, under the direction and tutelage of Professors Guerard and Teanoff, Axson and Caldwell.

And as I read I recalled three lines from another soldier. This time a postcard from the first Rice B.A. to reach the Western

front. He too had felt the brains of the place, and his life had been changed by its beauty. He too had been touched by its thought, and his thinking been thrilled by its beauty. He had lived under the noble architecture of his university - an architecture established by Dr. Ralph Adams Cran, an honorary member of this League, and its traditions maintained, by three other members of the League, in the instruction of Professor Watkin and his associates Messrs. Tidden and Chillman. He had read great poetry in college. He had heard the music Houston's music-loving women had brought to Houston. He had himself sung the songs of many composers. He had attended this League's exhibitions. Hear his complaint. "On a week's furlough", he wrote on the back of a print from Versailles. "Old buildings fine, but Paris all changed. The Louvre is closed!" "The Louvre is closed!" Such was the inspiration he sought to carry him over the top. And he did well to seek, for men can no more win battles on empty souls than they can fight them on empty stomachs.

Every age has its keyword. Our age has its keyword. Our age had that keyword long before the War. The keyword of our age is life. Better life for the millions of men, better life also for the leaders of men developed from those millions of men. Only recall the headlines and captions, Art and Life, Literature and Life, Religion and Life, Science and Life. Only recall the three splendid speeches to which you have listened

this afternoon. These are indicative of a new realism that would relate letters and science, politics and religion, art and philosophy, to life. Not to life in the abstract, but to life in the concrete. To your life and to my life. To the life of "doctor, lawyer, merchant, chief, rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief." To the life of each of these, not as a thinking, or a feeling, or a willing being, but to his life as a feeling and thinking and willing being. To his mental life, to his moral life, to his physical life, to his spiritual life.

This keyword is also the keynote of this League's programme, for, as I understand that programme, it would bring Art into the life of the community and Life into the art of the community. Because we so understand it, we are here to bid you good cheer on this anniversary day. Your resolve for an Art Museum is a high resolve. "Where there's a will there's a way", is more profoundly true than are most proverbs. There's only one thing in this world stronger than a resolute will, and that is a more resolute will. You are not allowing the War to break your wills, nor will you allow the War to block the way. Your work in education of public opinion must not be interrupted. Your work in encouragement of private collecting of works of art must not be interrupted, for this also is one of the first steps towards a community feeling of need for a Museum. You will continue to take your work as seriously as though there were no war. Perhaps quite as seriously

as Tommy took his uncle.

"Where is your uncle, Tommy?" inquired a friend of the family.

"In France", the lad replied.

"What is he doing?"

"I don't know; but I think he's in charge of the war."

John Morley in his 'Recollections' relates a curious story about Ruskin that he carried away from one of many visits to Gladstone twenty-five years ago. 'Ruskin used to attend Mr. Gladstone's breakfasts, and at one of them the host pronounced three grand things to be done to the ways of the world by mankind. First, the introduction of more lenient and humane practice with prisoners; second, a general sentiment against war; and third, the abolition of slaves. 'Yes', said Ruskin in his mild tones, 'but then I don't think prisons ought to be made humane; and I'm not against slavery; and I'm not against war.'" Thus did the last of the prophets in art meet the great liberal in politics halfway! But the Directors of this League are known for their tact. And they recognize, as all prophets have learned, that without tact the way of the promoter or reformer is just about as hard as is that of the transgressor.

You have a great programme. On that programme you have already made great progress. You have a great purpose. In that purpose you should be sustained by hope correspondingly great. We share that great hope, for, when good women work and pray and wait, we men have learned to watch out. For your encouragement, permit me to recite a few incidents of local history.

There was no Rice Institute. Many people said there would be no Rice Institute. There stands the Rice Institute, shining against the sky, and fairly singing through the shining! There was no Hermann Park. Many people said that George Hermann would never give the land to the city. Behold its broad acres and circling drives, and the ground on which we stand. There was no Main Boulevard. Behold the Boulevard. There was no system of parks for the city. There is a great system of parks evolving. There was no symphony orchestra. For three years we've enjoyed its twilight concerts. There is no Art Museum. There will be an Art Museum, for these women have resolved there shall be an Art Museum. The logic may be faulty, but the faith is firm and sound.

In her 'Friends and Memories', Maude Valeric White records a visit to Watts the painter. She had gone to his house one afternoon to play him a song she had written. "We had a little music first", she says, "and then he took us into his studio, where his great picture, 'Love Triumphant over Death and Time', was still hanging. The beautiful ecstatic figure of Love flying upwards affected me very strongly. I only remember being moved to tears by two pictures in all my life, and there was the same look of ecstasy in the faces of both the principal figures. One was Titian's 'Assumption of the Madonna' in the Accademia in Venice, and the other was this picture by C. F. Watts. Watts, as is well known, bore a strong resemblance to Titian." "A few days after that visit", continues Miss White, "I received a letter from

Mrs. Watts, accompanied by a beautiful signed photograph of the picture by which I had been so strongly moved. The photograph hung for some years over the piano in my cottage at Taormina. One day I found my Sicilian servant Giovannino gazing at it very earnestly. As I came into the room he turned to me and said -

'I am glad this picture hangs over your piano Signorina!'

I was surprised and said, 'Why are you glad I hung it there?'

'Because', he answered, 'you work here, Signorina, and that figure', pointing to the central figure of Love flying upwards, 'looks to me as if it were saying to you, Coraggio! Avanti!''

On this commemorative occasion I venture to bid you go forward with great courage in your high purpose. And I can do so in no better words than those of the song-writer's Sicilian servant who had caught from a distinguished work of art the spirit of inspiration you seek to bring to all of us who dwell in Houston.

Edgar Odell Lovett