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An Autobiography

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was a panic. Although his speeches were caricatured, they were brilliantly characteristic of the rhetoric and philosophy of whomever he imitated. These imitations revealed his creative genius—his keen perception of the artifices of oratorical technique and his gift for illuminating what was human and at the same time ridiculous in the conduct of man.

A few days after the meeting at Carnegie Hall, I had the pleasure of an evening with him. Several other friends were there, and we talked of "the good old days." Art was in very fine form. In referring to a mutual friend, someone remarked, "Ah, he's not the man he used to be." Art, in his quiet humorous way, replied, "He never was." When the evening broke up, I drove him home. During the ride we both became somewhat wistful. However, he soon dispelled the mood. "Life is a nuisance to captivate me at my age when I should be thinking of other things," he said whimsically. "Your point of view must have changed," I said, reminding him of one of his famous cartoons of several years ago—a courtroom scene in which he was snoring, with the caption, "Art Young on trial for his life."

In talking of the world today he said, "I'm afraid I won't live long enough to go through the chaos. It's a pity . . . nevertheless, there's a wonderment and a beauty in walking through the fog." I dropped him off at his house and that was the last I saw of him.

It is remarkable when I think of the regard and deep affection I hold for Art Young, for in all my life I met him only three times; and that I have created such a feeling on such a brief acquaintance is, I believe, a tribute to his work and to the charm of his personality.

### William Young

ONE of my most vivid recollections of my brother is the enthusiasm he exhibited at the time of the founding of the *Masses*. It seemed to him the most important happening in his life. And that enthusiasm for his magazine, now *NEW MASSES*, never left him to his dying day. I have reason to believe from talks we have had recently that at the time of his death he felt that most of the important things that he had hoped for, had been accomplished, or with the turn of events in the world, would soon happen.

### Gilbert Wilson

ART YOUNG and I were rather like Walt Whitman and Horace Traubel during the last years. I am very proud to say Art came to depend on me almost exclusively for the various little helps and chores of keeping his work going

—to answer letters—to select drawings and send them off to exhibitions—maybe to make a decision on some matter like lending his support to some one of the many, many organizations that were always seeking the endorsement of his venerable name—or maybe it was just to keep him company through the night when he'd have one of his "spells" and couldn't sleep.

He and I had a standing agreement that he should always call me whenever he woke up at night with nervous indigestion, to which he was subject—when his heart, he said, "would beat so hard it would shake the bed," and he'd be depressed and apprehensive and couldn't get back to sleep. At such times he'd get what he called "dark purple thoughts" and lie there and relive his life, thinking about all his unhappy years, plus the condition of world affairs, and it would torment him being alone. He would want someone to talk to. So I always urged him never to hesitate calling me. My phone would ring about two or three o'clock in the morning and Art's quavery voice would apologize for waking me. He never had to ask, but I would assure him I'd come right away. I'd go to his apartment, the door would be ajar—and Art would be snoring peacefully. So I'd stretch out in a big chair in the living room. The next morning, Art would say, very surprised, "Why, Gilbert, did I call you last night?" Then he would be apology itself. I never minded going to stay with him. It seemed just his knowing that someone was on his way to see him was all he needed to relax so that he could get back to sleep.

My very first visit was to make some sketches of Art Young. I was at the time gathering material on the life of Gene Debs for a mural in my home town of Terre Haute, Indiana, and learning that Art Young and John Reed had interviewed Debs at Terre Haute just after the last war, I wanted to depict that famous event of three famous world figures in my home town. I expected my visit with Art Young that day to last a couple of hours. Instead it lasted almost uninterruptedly for seven years. And the friendship that grew up was always getting in the way of my own work as a mural painter.

My home town refused to let me paint the Debs mural, so I accepted a position as an artist in residence at Antioch College in Ohio. (This was about the time I first met Art Young.) I had been with him three months when I got letters and finally a telegram from Antioch: "When are you coming here to start your work?" I took it to Art. Art got a panicky, helpless look and expressed his wonder about how he'd manage all the details of his many letters, appointments, books to be inscribed and sent off, pictures to be gotten to exhibitions, etc., and it made me feel very much like a "heel." This happened regularly at our periods of separation, so that I just got

in the habit of going away without telling him. Then I'd get a letter like the one he wrote me on August 5, 1941: "Dear Gilbert: I don't think it quite fair for you to drop out—with no word of your whereabouts. I'm struggling with my problems and feel so hopelessly alone. Rent goes on—everything goes on and the confusion yells at me—from telephones, newspapers, and from a hundred other directions. Oh for my old serenity! What a good helpful friend you have been to me—and I'm always in danger of not appreciating it—in the whirl of my problems—but I really do. Thanking you—your friend, Art."

It got so I had to arrange to spend three months at my own work and then three months with Art, but the inspiration of being around him, studying his work, sorting and cataloguing his drawings and writings, absorbing his philosophy, was fully worth neglecting even my own creative work in order to live as close to him as it was humanly possible.

I am, I trust, pardonably proud of all his many letters and cards. These almost invariably carried his whimsical sketches. If it was summertime, it was a tree and birds in the wind. If it was autumn, a few leaves blew across the lower corner. Once in the spring came a small portrait of Art with a single flower growing out of the top of his bald head. You could never predict his humor. And it could be tragic in tone, too, like the time a card came bearing nothing more than the hand of a drowning victim reaching up for help. The message was unmistakable, and brought me hurrying back east. Once when I was broke, I hitch-hiked. Happily I always found it possible to get enough money from a wealthy family in Terre Haute to support myself when I was with Art. This family also paid him \$750 for two of his drawings, and bought over a hundred dollars worth of his books which they distributed to their friends. They always bought directly from Art Young, giving him as much of the profit as possible. The royalties from all Art Young's books were a most negligible sum. Once a publisher's treatment of him brought on an attack of high blood pressure and sent him to a hospital. I happen to know that Art never felt secure economically. He lived on the verge of a constant unrest. Somehow, though, he seemed to accept the fact that since he was the kind of artist he was, it was to be expected. Hence, the famous closing chapter of his book, *On My Way*.

Art was always turning over to me bits of epigrammatic writing and small manuscripts through which he said he hoped to put himself on record. I believe, in his later years, Art actually thought of himself in the capacity of a philosopher. The past year he read a lot of the writings of Ben Franklin, Montaigne, and Marcus Aurelius. He seriously considered setting forth his own

thoughts in some similar fashion. I always urged him on when he would speak of writing, feeling that it was important for him to keep writing. He took a great interest in a proposed book of my own about himself—something that could present Art Young in his place as a truly incomparable American and world figure. And he wrote: "I am pleased that you think you ought to formulate your ideas about my part in the art scheme of this America and my trend as related to the wide world."

## Elizabeth Gurley Flynn

"SOMETIMES I'm lonely, but I am never discouraged," Art said to my sister Katherine, her daughter Frances, and me, when we were together at what was to be his last supper. He died a few hours later. In retrospect, it seemed as if he unconsciously spoke his own epitaph, not in a somber or foreboding spirit but in his naturally philosophical and calm manner. "I figure I should be able to live another twenty years," he continued, "and I know that in that time I will see socialism spread through the world." Our conversation was desultory—now serious, now gay, but with an undercurrent of the great changes taking place in the world, of which he was so keenly aware.

Art was tired from the task of sending out over 1,500 New Year's cards, to which he had added in red ink, after the four freedoms, "Also Teheran." He signed them all; on many he added personal greetings and he mailed them before he went to rest that night, at different boxes and post offices so that he wouldn't load down the postal employees. He must have been very weary.

He spoke considerably on longevity that night, of George Bernard Shaw and Mother Bloor and of our mother. He and my sister told stories, as usual. Kathie told him of a woman who came to her defense booth, a woman whose husband had walked out fifteen years ago to buy cigarettes and never returned. She confessed that she occasionally wondered what had happened to him. Art countered with a story of an enterprising reporter who went to the British Museum where Lenin used to go regularly to study. He described him to the musty old attendant who finally said, "Oh, I remember—a short, bald stocky man with a beard!" The reporter said eagerly, "Yes—yes," but the attendant continued, "I wonder what ever happened to him?" Art chuckled at how close to history the old recluse was and didn't know it.

Our family's acquaintance with Art Young goes back over a quarter of a century. He was especially fond of my beautiful Irish mother and we treasure particularly among his books the one he dedi-

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