Manuscript: The Meaning of the Day's Work

Tarbell, Ida M.

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THE MEANING OF THE DAY'S WORK

Only that day's work is good which is done for the sake of one's soul. Money, fame, causes - good as they may be - are exterior and secondary reasons for work. A primal necessity - a law of life - gives the day's work its first meaning. Bread depends on the sweat of men's brows. He who refuses to do his share of the sweating lives off some other man's brow. It is not a pleasant thing to remember that there should be men and women doing ten hours because you decline to do eight. Somebody must make up your quota. It is the law.

To keep your face in the world as it is you must pay your way; that is, you must make or do something for which other workers are willing to exchange the fruits of what they make or do.

He who with fair health and normal brains refuses to keep his own pot boiling misses the primal meaning in the day's work. It's universal reason. He denies himself the experiences which alone can make him understand the dignity, the pathos and the joy of the life of the mass. Not to be able to feel the great qualities in the mass is to miss humanity. It is humanity. To work until you know you are a part of the mass - that you contribute in the same way and for the same reason is to get at the bottom of the meaning of the day's work; and that meaning is a boiling pot. The pot is not for yourself alone. It is not merely to save your pride. It is that you may know love - love of the mate - of the weak - of the old, the ill-fated. Their contribution to the earth is the most precious of all. What they can give you is far beyond anything you can give them. Joy, sorrow, reverence, gentleness, courage and cheer
come through them. Unless they sit beside the pot and you with thanksgiving in your heart share with them, you're missing the second primal meaning of the day's work. A meaning that the man knows best — that only those who labor with respect for the pot ever fully know.

It is only by so understanding the primitive dignity of paying your way that it becomes a necessity to you, something which if you do not do your soul hangs its head — that you get at the next meaning of the day's work and that is freedom — not freedom of action. Freedom of action is out of the question in a world where those in power have such fantastic notions of what is just and beautiful — even of what is agreeable and amusing are held up by the inhabitants of this globe.

Only a world whose people are so developed that there is not a law — making body or alive — a law book outside of the curiosity shops will allow free action. There are few women, of sufficient cultivation to be happy in such a world. Most of us are yet at that point of development where our highest ideal is to make other people do and believe as we do and believe — a very inferior stage.

There is no freedom of action possible — but there is freedom of soul and that is a third meaning in a day's work based on a boiling pot. You can think your own thoughts, dream your own dreams, seek your own love and live with yourself, if you have a pot of your own.

Eat out of the other man's and you must think of him — and of those meaner parts of yourself which thrive when the primitive meanings in the day's work is not understood. The soul is like soil. You must have certain ingredients or you will have weeds. The pride which comes from making a fair return for what you use of men's products is as basic a soul ingredient as nitrogen is basic as a soil ingredient.
You sit by your own pot and you think your own thoughts and they run on what you make or do - sooner or later you hit another meaning in the day's work; joy in the thing you do - in fresh and better ways of doing it. This thing which keeps your pot full and hot, which gives you dignity and freedom in itself, it interests, stirs, inspires. You tremble as it begins - you glow as it grows - you see at last that you have a craft - something that men loving have been doing long and perfecting since the first forked stick scratched the ground - the first clay was fashioned into a vessel - the first flint trimmed to a pointed arrow. That you can do it better - do it in the way your mind sees it, your soul feels it, that becomes a new and resplendent discovery.

It is a discovery which you must prove. This new meaning in the day's work is no trick.

You thought that the sweat of setting up your first pot, of learning to keep a sufficient and perpetual fire under it was the great effort of your life. You did not dream that you were to see a new meaning in the day's work which to realize would wet your brow with such bitter sweat as you had not known men could endure. If you are wise to know the full joy of your craft you must pay the price of craftsmanship and work and sweat. You can not know it by talking about it - by letting your discovery that there is a meaning there suffice. You must dig it out. Make the same mark - give the same blow - sound the same note ten thousand times until you have it. There are many who have seen the joy of doing well. There are few who have known it. It does not matter what your work is - growing vegetables, making machines, painting pictures, lopping off injustices from the social order, you must prove your dream - make it a communicable fact in which others can
build as you have built on the realized dreams of successive generations of men who
since Adam have sweated to make the thing they saw come true. It is fairy gold - moon shines -
until you have it where men see it, the perfect cabbage, the engine that does what no other engine ever did - the picture that catches a stir of the soul that no man ever caught before - the injustice placed forever where those who have learned to value the title culture, though they may have caught no hint of its meaning - will never again dare its practice.

There was a man, a very great man who wanted a sword as smooth as velvet and as firm as a stretched carpet. None such grew in our country. He made thousands upon thousands of experiments with different under different conditions, he tested hundreds of combinations of grass food and water. Over a great stretch of lawn, his tiny experimental patches spread like a patch work in green, while in his laboratory blue prints as careful and complete as for any great building recorded every element and every stage of each experiment. For years he worked until now there are on golf links near Philadelphia, putting greens which proves that the sword he dreamed is possible - a velvet in texture, a stretched carpet in firmness.

There was a man who wanted an automobile so cheap that any man who had anything to do with its making could have one. He was a poor man but as money goes, he had learned the primal meanings of work one after another and when he saw the thing which fired him he set out to make it true. No one knew how many nights he was sleepless, how many suppers he went without, how many hours he lay on his back under the sputtering little engine he had set his mind on. He made it go. It goes today for tens of thousands of poor men. They are able to own it. But it is still too dear to suit and the man and he and a great group who have caught his enthusiasm, sweat with hand and brain to make the little car still cheaper.

Great pictures and books and statues and temples have come into being - wrongs have been righted and justices established by the
discovery that they were possible through work.

It is by this hard work that still another meaning of the Day's work is uncovered, and that is, that there are many things in yourself which you have never suspected. This effort which you have determined upon awakes powers which were asleep. They feel the stir of the soul - hear the new noises it is making, become conscious of its stretching and groaning - and they get up to help.

Singular things one learns of himself when he calls upon his whole being to lend a hand in a task which is big and strong and unploted. He finds himself putting aside sluggard ways, indifferences, antipathies, pet vices and pet self-complaisances which he had thought were part of his nature. They were only parasitic growths, which had flourished because undisturbed. He finds himself revaluing his own powers and notions.

He knows some clever tricks in his trade and they had served him good stead but he finds they had been his ruin. He has no place in demonstrating a dream to be a fact. It is for one to discover that or a great thing has happened. He does not need to depend on tricks or bluffs and pretenses that he can not do a real thing. And so it goes on. Each new need he experiences in his effort is answered by a power within him unknown until now - a power which he must develop to have its aid.

And so you come to greatest of all meanings in the Day's work - a realization of the almost limitless possibilities shut within the human soul - and the consciousness that to free them so that they have full play is a man's greatest service to his kind.

Not often do these meanings unfold for us in this logical order. The face of labor the young first look upon is too often starred with pain and drenched with tears. The hard it holds out is hard - the week road it points seems to lead away from every inviting thing in life. It leads out of the sunshine and air into hot and dusty chambers away from music and beauty into roaring shrill and varying noises. It is not good to look upon or pleasant to follow.
Shrinking from the Day's work as something hateful imposed by men and not by God.

It is long before the worker finds the dignity and pride which underlies all its meanings. More often than not it is the joy or the need of sharing its fruits that reveal its foundation.

If the hardness of the face labor presents to us many keeps them in a true meaning from them and sometimes—alas! forever—still less chance of ever discovering these meanings have those born where they rarely see labor's face and who in look upon it with patronizing curiosity as something alien to the world to which they belong. The desire to produce, the need to act and do which is an impelling force in healthy human beings may drive them to work—but they come at it from the top. There is no foundation under them or have they ever discovered that results depend on foundations. All they have wished has come to them. They now wish to write a poem, paint a picture, serve a cause. They consent to work for the sake of this. Slowly they discover that though what they do may be "free" it lacks blood and bone. It may be clever but it is thin. Something of the meaning of craft comes to them—and if they persist all the meanings in the Day's work hidden from them by the unhappy contempt they had been born to, are on the way to are one by one made clear. At last they becoming a full-sized human beings.

Until a man or woman has caught all these meanings in the Day's work and has set himself to realize them, he cannot be called a worthy laborer.