Digital Image, 2011. The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library.

Red Cross Magazine "School House in a Factory"

## The Book and the Work Bench

In a recent number of this Magazine, I gave my impressions of a school house in one of our grat factories--a school house where from 1500 to 2000 people gather every noon to listen to as brisk and wholesome an entertainment as it is often one's pleasure to enjoy. But ~~the group in~~ the school house was not so I found the only place noon-time group in that ~~particular~~ factory which called together. A second center ~~where at noon the workers gathered~~ was ~~the~~ a library. In a spacious room, with hundreds upon hundreds of books on the open shelves, & with scores of magazines of ~~all kinds~~ widely different points of view on the racks, at least 150 men and women were to be found daily around the tables or standing before the shelves in the delightful task of dipping into books.

This particular library has been going on possibly fifteen years. It is as stable a part of the factory as the office or the engine room. It has a librarian who himself has grown up from the ranks, knows what it is to sit at a machine, and knows, too, what the man who sits at a machine can get from books--nobody better adapted to pass on knowledge to those who have not yet learned the Book. Every man that comes into this factory--it is the National Cash Register works at Dayton, Ohio--receives when his name goes on the rolls a little note from this understanding librarian. This note tells him the hours when the library is open, that he will be welcome to anything that is there,

This astonished workman would not have failed of the same kind of an invitation if he had fallen into any one of a large number of mills and factories in this country, for the factory library--an undertaking which has had to make its way through the doubt of management and the suspicion of employees--has proved itself to be ~~unquestionably~~ one of the essential adjuncts of the factory of the future.

One cannot easily trace a growth of this kind--where it began and how it spread itself. It is enough to know that it has established itself and at the present moment is multiplying from one end of the country to the other.

But what can a factory worker, a miner or mill man get out of books? It is the question of the exclusive--those people who are convinced that there are tools in the world that cannot be put into the hands of the many. We can be certain that unless the practical and watchful management at the top had learned that books were worth something more to their employees than passing an idle hour they would not consider themselves justified in supporting libraries of 8, 10, 12 or more thousands of carefully selected books, with scores of periodicals; and in many cases employing well trained librarians.

What do they do with them? Probably the first serious

Digital Image, 2011. The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library.

What do they do with them? Probably the first serious thing that convinced the hard-headed man at the top is the discovery that the workers, properly directed, use books to find the solution for all sorts of practical problems that come up in carrying out their tasks. A worker's advancement--and a pushing, ambitious workman, as every employer knows, is one of his most valuable possessions--also the keeping of his foreman's respect, depends often on whether he can turn this or that unexpected trick in his day's work. He has a difficult knot to tie. His foreman expects him to know how to do it; and he does not.

Digital Image, 2011, The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1850-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library.

He has heard that the "library boss" tells a fellow things, and so he slips in at noon. This is an easy one for the librarian, of course, and he goes out half an hour later, amazed to find that he not only knows how to tie the particular knot required of him, but he has found where he can learn how to tie any kind of a knot.

This is often the beginning of one of the most profitable relations of this man's life. He spreads the news--"Got it out of a book." And if a book tells him how to tie knots, it may tell him about other things. And the man next to him wonders if he cannot learn how to read the gas meter or etch a name on a steel tool or purify his lubricating oil or sharpen wood or join a pipe or a hundred and one common problems of the worker. He approaches it, suspiciously, awkwardly perhaps, but he gets his answer, and faith grows until the time comes that he and many of his companions carry practically all of their problems to the librarian.

"They actually call me up sometimes after I have gone home and am settled for the evening," a librarian in a great iron and steel town once told me. "Something must be done early in the morning. They don't know how, and Isn't there a book about it? I got out of bed one night not long ago, and went to the library at the factory to get a worried man help in a difficult problem in photography that he must solve at once, or, as he feared, lose his job."

Digital Image, 2011, The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library.

But this new helper in a man's life is not confined to the shop. Almost invariably its spreads into a man's family. Indeed the factory librarian takes care to see that the news is carried home and that here is a place that serves everybody, young and old. There is nothing she has more care for than to catch that workman's family. With the children he has immediate success, through his picture books and the children's story telling hour he quickly wins their confidence; and it is not unusual for them to bring him all sorts of requests.

"Miss Amy, how do you make a snow man? Is there a book or a picture about it?" I heard this asked in a breathless eagerness by a youngster who wanted to take advantage of a fresh snowfall and do something scientific. His faith in the endless resources of the library were such that he never doubted for a moment but what he would be told there the best way to make his snow man. This boy's mother sends to the library for books on dyeing woolens, on raising poultry, on "manners." It is the family's guide, counselor, adviser. Can one dream a greater democratization of books than making them serve the daily needs of workers and their households?

Digital Image, 2011. The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library.

of workers and their households?

If the librarian is canny--and I don't know a position in which canniness is more desirable than that of the industrial librarian, since he must encounter doubt and suspicion both at the top and the bottom--he will see that annually at least the management gets reports of this kind of service.

And this nothing, more than what our great public libraries are doing. Take that of New York City. It recently published a captivating pamphlet, entitled "Why they come to the Library," showing the ways in which people have learned in the great city to depend upon this great public friend. The object of this book was not to advertise itself, it was to convince the

Digital Image, 2011. The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library.

powers that be that the library really reaches down into the everyday life of people and so is worth supporting.

But important and humanizing as this kind of service is, it is by no means all that the industrial library is doing for the workers in many parts of the country. All over the land, ambitious and serious workmen are getting through these centers trade and business education for which they would otherwise have no opportunity at all. You will scarcely go into an industrial library any more that you will not be told the story of some progressive craftsman whose education, outside of that he had at his machine, was all gained within the walls of this particular room.

There is no question but a tremendous impulse has been given to the use of the library as a school for trade education by what thousands upon thousands of men learned through the American Library Association in France. Too much cannot be said of the quality of the service that was given to our boys by the A.L.A. It is probable that they discovered there that books not only solved all sorts of problems for you but that from them you can carry on in your particular trade or profession, if you have

Digital Image, 2011. The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library.

can carry on in your particular trade or profession, if you have the will to do it. They have not forgotten what they learned, and back on this side heaps of such letters as the following have been finding their way to the Library Association:

"While in the A.E.F. I read a lot of books and those on technical subjects interested me in particular. A handbook for mehhanical engineers that I read 'over there' would be a great help to me in my trade as garageman. I have lost the name of the publishers and other data I had, so if you could help me procure this book by giving me the name of publishers or dealers, I would appreciate it very much."

Digital Image, 2011. The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library.

A splendid and concerted effort is making to render it possible that such boys, wherever they may be in the country, can be supplied with books. One of the first things done was to publish an illustrated pamphlet known as "The Job Book", telling about simple, practical books from which one could learn about all sorts of things--market gardening, structural steel work, potato raising, dairying, lumbering, salesmanship, mining, wireless telegraphy, train dispatching, drafting, bridge building, road making, electric work, engineering, mine and mill work--everything that is.

The answer to the "Job Book" was instantaneous and almost universal. Libraries wanted it, the Y.M.C.A. centers wanted it, and factories from one end of the country to the other wrote for it, many of them saying that they wanted to put in the books and some of them asking for further lists. The result of this demand was that they have since published a widely circulated list of 500 business books and 1000 technical books, and they show you page upon page of requests for these particular lists.

Digital Image, 2011. The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library.

particular lists.

Now all this means a great increase of thorough trade education. It means not only fitting men for better jobs, but it means fitting men better for the jobs that they already hold--a very important matter.

You will not find an industrial library in the country which has had an experience of as many as ten years in which this latter effect of the use of books is not noted. Everywhere the experience is that recorded in this letter from the excellent librarian at Walton, Mass.:

Digital Image, 2011. The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library.

"We have many industries in our city, mostly engaged in making fine tools and fine machines. Many times I have had men come to the desk and say that this or that book had brought them a raise of three dollars, or some such sum, per week.

"When we began enlarging our collection of mechanical books several years ago, our chief users of those mechanical books were the men at the bottom of the ladder. We still have those men with us, but some of them are now foremen and superintendents; also some of the older foremen are now using the collection, and the men who worked under them were the ones who had taught their superiors the value of our books."

The industrial and technical libraries have been for a long time rendering a substantial service in what we have come to speak of as Americanization, for which they have perhaps not had full credit. They represent something to the foreigner which, unhappily, he doesnot often encounter in his early experiences. He comes to a land of opportunity, so he is told, and unquestionably the opportunity is here; but rarely has anyone represented to him his tremendous handicaps in laying hold of that opportunity. He doesn't know the language, and he knows nothing of the ways, the practices, the prejudices, the ideas of the new land; and it is only a chance that he finds a patient, helpful friend to help him overcome his handicaps and make him realize that the country does offer the thing he came for. Often, purely by chance, he is led into a library, and finds there the thing which has not been extended to him by any other agency, and for lack of which he is becoming ever more and more embittered against the country.

Digital Image, 2011, The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library.

The factory librarians, as a rule, who have dealings with foreigners tell you that they love to work with them, they are so earnest and so appreciative, so quick to take advantage when it comes in their way, of suggestions offered. One thing that they discover very quickly is that the library can help them in their daily life. Mr. Rancke, head of the remarkable library in Grand Rapids, Mich., tells a story of a young Greek which they caught in a rather amusing way.

It is the habit of this library to send out what are known as the "Better Bay" lists to all the new mothers listed in the daily papers. One Sunday afternoon a new client came into the library, a foreigner, they saw, who wandered about as if he were looking for something. Of course he was offered help, and in reply he pulled out this "Better Babies" list, saying that they had a baby now and they didn't know what to do with it. After a few questions were asked, two books on the care of babies were selected and given him. He sat down at once

Digital Image, 2011. The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library.

care of babies were selected and given him. He sat down at once and read steadily for a number of hours. Finally he brought the books back, saying sagely; "I know a lot more about babies than I ever did before." That was the beginning of a steady connection with the library; he came regularly every week for books. Let the library catch a man in this vital way, the care of the baby, and it has the family.

Such an experience is bound to spread in the foreign community. Everywhere it is the young immigrant that is particularly responsive to the opportunity of the book. Again and again it is in the library that they begin their education. I don't know a more heartening and touching sight that to study the faces of the readers, so many of them young and so many of them foreign, at the tables of the library in any great city of the country or in any industrial town. And if you take the

Digital Image, 2011. The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library.

trouble to trace their work, you will find it often a very severe course of education. A letter was recently put in my hands by a worker in the American Library Association. It gives the impressions of but one young immigrant, but there is many a librarian in the country that could multiply the story.

"I'm 25 years old and an Austrian by birth. I came to this country in 1907 at the age of eleven, and did not know a word of the English language. As I did not go to school my only source of information was the daily contact with the English speaking people, and the use of the library. I cannot say to which of the two I'm mostly indebted, as both in conjunction enabled me to acquire sufficient knowledge of English so that now I'm hardly ever taken for a foreigner.

As a means to general education the library stands high in my esteem. One particular instance will illustrate the value of reading library books. Last year I entered high school, and to my surprise found that I have at some time or other studied practically all the subjects offered with the exception of mathematics and music. I did not use the same books nor follow the same plan but I used the various books I picked from the book shelves dealing with those subjects and studied them in my own way.

In fiction I found that I have already read most of the standard books required for outside reading. With this previously acquired knowledge I was allowed to get ahead of the other students, and the result is that I am now a senior in alittle over one year in school. This only shows that an education may be had not only at school through the help of teachers, but also by being a diligent reader of library books. In this undertaking, wisdom in the selection of books is required, but then we have books dealing with this subject, and the library once more takes the credit.

Digital Image, 2011. The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library.

dealing with this subject, and the library once more takes the credit.

One of my latest benefits, which I party credit to the library, is my position as an electrician in the Gary steel mill, with an income of about three thousand dollars a year. I'm able to hold this job because I resorted to books on that subject at the library in addition to actual experience I got in the mill."

What better Americanization could one ask than the library has done in this case? Or what better answer to the sweeping charge that the foreigner has no chance in a steel town like Gary?

Digital Image, 2011. The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library.

an admirable method of enabling the foreigner to learn to read English. There is possibly no more direct way of learning to read a foreign language than having the translation side by side, having something near when you are stuck to appeal to. Such a practice would serve the double purpose of recognizing the handicap of the immigrant and educating him at the same time.

But there is a higher, a cultural side to the services that the industrial library is rendering, which though so far less rich in achievement is still richer in possibility. In our ignorance and narrowness we unashamed indeed often deny the aspiration of the ignorant worker for knowledge--knowledge of truth and beauty. We have little enough machinery in our great educational system to meet this. If the library can be brought into the life of the worker in which this flame of desire for culture exists we will be going a long way towards one of the greatest problems of the cnetury, what that traveling philosopher and teacher, William Davidson, called the greatest problem of the 20th century--the education of the worker.

The library is adapted to catching the man or woman

Digital Image, 2011. The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library.

The library is adapted to catching the man or woman that has a desire for real cultivation at the point where he stands. It is the most democratic of institutions. It does not require from him any kind of certification or examination--it takes him just where it finds him. And sometimes in the worker's world, that is pretty far down.

(5)

The house librarian in that remarkable mail order house, Seers-Roebuck of Chicago, tells about a truck driver who has made this discovery and who reads everything that she gives him. "Don't give me nothing light, please, Miss," is his continual warning, "just something to learn me a little more," Depending on her at the start to give him "something to learn him more," he has begun to make his own selections. "I want a book by that man who says we're related to monkeys" was one of his latest requests.

Digital Image, 2011. The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library.

If there are truck drivers with such a craving for cultivation--and what else is behind his plea for something that "will learn him a little more," can anyone doubt that there exists at every point in the industrial organization the few that are hungry for the same thing and hopeless and often embittered because they see no way to get it. Men doubt it, but that is because of <u>their</u> ignorance. It is always there, that hungering, in every group. In every 10,000 men you will find an Elihue Burritt, an Eckermann, and William Davidson; and one of the most magnificent opportunities of the industrial librarian is finding and directing these men and women. It requires intelligence of course.

Digital Image, 2011. The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library.