

The New Place of Women in Industry

VI.

The New Industrial Professions

In the rapid review of the new place of women in industry, which has been made in recent numbers of Industrial Management, emphasis has been put on the wide extension of the area of operations open to them and the fine demonstrations which they have been making of their executive capacity as instructors, inspectors and foremen. One other feature of the enlarged opportunity that is coming to women in industrial life should be considered. That is the new and promising professions which are being developed and which require for their filling not only education and experience, but something of the pioneer's patience and willingness to experiment.

These new professions are an outgrowth of the effort that has been going on in recent years to apply both science and modern social conceptions to industrial organization. In undertaking what is generally spoken of as welfare work - experiments on the part of employers to meet the well-founded criticisms of conditions under which large bodies of men and women were working - it was naturally recognized that a woman was needed for leadership where it was a question of woman labor.

At the start welfare work was each man's notion of what might or should be done to better things. Nobody knew quite what could be done or how it could be done. A woman introduced into a factory as a welfare worker had received no systematic training as she would have done if she were to be a teacher or a secretary, or head of an institution. She came to "see what she could do." If she had good sense, some knowledge of human nature, and was willing to go slow, the chances are that she succeeded. That is, she succeeded if the management that had engaged her had equal good sense, recognized that her coming meant change, that that was what she was there for, and gave her sympathetic co-operation. Many women failed at the start in welfare work because their only equipment was certain theoretical notions which they insisted should be immediately imposed. Others failed because the management was suspicious of all their efforts, contemptuous of their propositions, did not in its heart want a change but only to give the idea that it was doing something.

In spite of the difficulties, however, many women in factories in different parts of the country, did gradually so assist in improving conditions that their employers were enthusiastic over the results, and the factories attained that reputation for being "a good place to work" that always means the pick of the labor body and a low turn over.

The early experiments with welfare worker often convinced employers that what was really needed in the factory was a trained nurse, that on the whole she could best take care of the problems. I have known not a few factories in which it was required that the welfare worker should be a nurse. That meant that she took on a variety of duties outside of her purely professional ones. It was not only her business to tie up a damaged finger, to look after hysteria and fainting fits, but to find out why this girl was late, another irregular at her machine, why a promising worker did not come back. She was expected to advise about a lunch room, to look after toilet rooms, to arrange as she could for rest rooms.

One great concern in this country, having twenty-five or thirty branch factories, at the start employed no woman who was not a nurse of at least three years' practical experience and who had not had in addition a year in a settlement or some form of social work. She must also be at least thirty years of age. She was expected to cover all factory needs, directing assistants as it was demonstrated that they were needed.

The difficulty of finding the industrial nurse that is willing to do something outside of strictly professional tasks has influenced more than one factory management to fall back on the "practical nurse" as one more flexible in the peculiar situations which arise, and more willing and experienced

in extending advice and sympathy. Just how far this overlapping of function should be allowed to go is a debated point in industrial circles. That there must be an understanding of the social needs and some training and ability to meet them seems to be the opinion among the most progressive leaders in nursing circles today. An evidence of this comes from the nursing school of the Johns Hopkins Hospital, the leading institution of its kind of the country, which is considering offering post graduate social training to its classes; the needs of the industrial nurse is one of their reasons for undertaking this enlargement in training.

The point to be emphasized here, however, is that in the awakening of industry to its obligations to the worker, a new field of service requiring social as well as professional training has been opened to the woman nurse, and that she has tackled the problem with such zest and patience that she has become a necessity in the personnel of the new industrial organization.

Health, sanitation and safety were the first objects of welfare work, but the attention given to them helped uncover more than one weakness of factory practice. Thus the welfare worker and the nurse were not slow in seeing that one of the obstacles to building a steady and competent working force of girls and women was the way that they were hired - and fired.

Employers were understanding this and studying the new ideas of scientific employment. At more than one point the original welfare worker helped to install a kind of employment bureau, using the hints that she could pick up. Gradually women, under intelligent employers, in various parts of the country, developed employment bureaus until they became an indispensable factor in the particular organization.

Employment management and personnel work have been developed until there is no industrial profession for women today in which the duties are so thoroughly defined and where the machinery and training are more easily get-at-able. The courses for employment management instituted by the War Industries Board in 1918, opened to women on equal terms with men, did a great deal to put these positions on a professional basis. Miss Mary Gilson, of the Clothcraft Shop of Cleveland, one of the few women of the country who, entering industry perhaps fifteen years ago, had the imagination and intelligence to see that if the experiments in scientific management which were being inaugurated in various parts of the country could be carried out, a new industrial day must follow, and who had at the same time the fine courage to stay by and follow her leader, Richard Feiss, in his experiments, was asked by the War Industries Board to look after the courses which should be arranged for women employment managers.

It was due to her intelligent insistence that the same courses were given to women as to men. It was due to her insistence, too, that candidates were required to have at least two months' training at the machine before they were admitted to the training.

The rush of finely educated women of large social experience into the courses was as interesting a result of the undertaking as the number of applications that came from employers either to have women already in their organization admitted or to be put on the list of those who had positions for women taking the work.

The close of the War put an end to the War Industries Board and its undertakings; but the courses for women employment managers have gone on at various colleges, notably at Bryn Mawr where it looks as if the work has been more highly and intelligently developed than anywhere else in the country. That is, in these twenty years or more of pioneer effort to help women to adapt themselves to the slowly developing needs of industrial life, there has come out a clearly defined new position, that of employment manager and with it have come opportunities for scientific training.

A woman, to be successful in employment management, must have something more, however, than the theory and the technique. She must have, like the industrial nurse, trained

social sympathies and understanding. To her come the applicants, and upon what she knows of and feels for human beings will depend largely what she is able to do both for the factory and for the worker.

Whether this woman employment manager should handle men as well as women is one of the debated questions of those concerned in the new industrial reorganization. It is one of those questions which cannot be settled arbitrarily. It depends upon the woman. I have known at least two employment managers whose work is entirely with men and whose success in choosing and in helping to hold workers is really brilliant; and this success comes very largely from a finely developed, entirely controlled, womanly sympathy. They intuitively knew if something is the matter with a man. He trusts them, comes to them when his wife is sick, a boy in mischief or he has a misunderstanding with his foreman. He takes their advice or reproof, counts on them as his friend. What more valuable work to industrial life could a woman be doing?

Of course this takes a high order of woman. Enthusiasm, breadth of view, unselfishness, self-control, power to win confidence and to command - these are a few of the qualities which the woman employment manager is supposed to have. The cynical reading this says: "We will have no women employment managers" -

but we have. And we are getting more and more of them. And then why not "Hitch your wagon to a star?"

Another less clearly defined profession that is beginning to develop is that of the woman consultant. We have of course many highly trained industrial engineers in this profession, but we have very few women. The only one whose work I have followed at all is a Western woman, Miss Nesta B. Edwards. No one who goes to the annual meetings of the National Safety Council but knows Miss Edwards. Her sense, her experience, her humor, her free and fetching expression of ideas - are a refreshment and stimulus in any gathering. She has been breaking ground for some fifteen years, and the result is something very significant to those who believe that women can bring into industrial life various things which will be good for it. For our purpose here it is enough to say that she began with welfare work, fortunately in one of the International Harvester Company's plants, whose organizer was C. W. Price, the present head of the National Safety Council.

Miss Edwards began with an invaluable asset - she knew what work meant, for she had started out at thirteen in the basement of a Chicago department store, where, for six years, as she says, she studied human nature. Then she had learned something of clerical work, that is, she took hold of welfare activities more or less from the worker's point of view. After eight years

she decided to set up for herself as an industrial consultant. That is, she decided to offer to employers what she had learned in these eight years about the essentials for the re-organization of a plant.

She had learned how essential accounting is; she understood the practical features of scientific management; she had been with the safety movement from the start and had caught the missionary spirit in it as well as absorbing all the practical features for safety organization and education. Then she had a genius for seeing factory arrangements that are uncomfortable, inconvenient, unhealthy, needless, and the practical sense of how they might be remedied. It was the woman's housekeeping sense and the woman's joy in applying it.

For eight years now she has been passed on from one factory to another in the North-west, diagnosing their conditions, suggesting practical changes, always with rare good sense adapting her suggestions to what she finds to be the limitations in either the finances, the understanding or the temperament of her employer.

Her ambition is not for the big plants, although she has been urged by influential friends to try for them. She always shakes her head; she is a "doctor for small plants", she says, they are the ones that need her, and she has learned how to help them. The big plant is another problem, and there are plenty of consultants in that field.

I asked a man who has known her industrial work from the start what were the qualities that made it possible for her to handle men and boards of directors as she does; and with his permission I quote the list of characteristics on which, in his judgment, her success is based!

- "1) Character - to me she has true nobility of character - she is really a Christian.
- 2) She has in a very rare sense what we all mean when we use the term 'horse sense.'
- 3) She knows industrial conditions and knows how to fit her work into a going concern, so it does not obtrude itself, but takes its place as a part of efficiency.
- 4) Her knowledge of industrial betterment work is based wholly on experience and first-hand observation and not at all on theory. Therefore she always knows what will work.
- 5) She has extraordinary ability in handling men of the type of superintendents and foremen. They forget she is a woman and think of her only as a big, strong, efficient and likable human being.
- 6) She is fearless - a board of directors sitting behind mahogany tables does not overawe her.
- 7) Because of her splendid character and her sympathetic temperament, and her hail-fellow-well-met democracy she has the remarkable faculty of winning the confidence and affection of all classes of people.
- 8) She has the kind of enthusiasm which is indispensable to leadership."

Although it is true that these new opportunities for women overlap sometimes in a bewildering and discouraging way, that the requirements which make for success in one place may fail in another, that every factory has its special needs which can only be understood by being on the ground, yet it is certain that the functions are becoming more clearly defined and that opportunities for training are following in the wake of the definitions.

What it all amounts to is that the woman's place in industry includes a large field of opportunity for trained professional work. Success in it means that the woman must make herself part of industrial life, that she must come to have the feel of it from top to bottom and to comprehend manager and worker, to understand their inter-relations, and help to develop the actual cooperation upon which anything that approaches industrial democracy, in spirit and in fact depends.

The woman who goes into this work has a serious responsibility towards women who have made their way into the new area of mechanical operations which has previously been pointed out, as well as to the women who are coming from the bench into executive and managerial positions. It is desirable that in the future as much as possible of the material for these new professions should come from the machine. Unless the educated women going now into these professions can cooperate with the workers,

organized or unorganized, arousing their ambition and pointing out the way to training, they will not discharge their whole obligation. I have heard women in the unions say, "These positions should be ours." They recognize, however, that training and education are requisite in these particular fields, and what they ask is that when one of their number shows the capacity, she should have opportunity. To establish the open door from the machine to the desk of the employment manager and the office of the industrial consultant is one of the fine things that the leaders of the unions and the women who are coming into these interesting professions should have in mind.

At the moment it is of course out of the question that all that women gained by their war service should be held, impossible that their new place be enlarged. In the present depressed state of industry in the country, it is inevitable that many women should be dropped from the new tasks, many of them lose their executive or managerial positions, that many industrial nurses, many women who have prepared themselves and had held positions as employment managers, be out of employment. The new movement cannot march now; the present obligation is for all women interested in industry to get a view of the concrete things that have been gained; and when the wheels shall be moving again, industry be crying for workers, to see that what has been gained

is not lost. The future will all depend upon the willingness of women to train and push forward, to hold the new line and upon the open mindedness that the employer shows towards their enlarged ambitions.
