

Ida M. Tarbell
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CARRYING THE BOOK TO THE WORK BENCH

morning

Several years ago at a great meeting of striking textile workers in one of our eastern cities, I heard an inspired labor leader describing the factory of the future. He told of the air and the sun, of the space that the work rooms would have, of the cleanliness and the conveniences. There was much of this, but only two details remain in my mind. There were to be beautiful rest rooms, he said, and in them were to be "velvet covered Morris chairs". It made the tears come to one's eyes to hear him, so clearly was it true that a "velvet covered Morris chair" was the most elegant thing he had encountered in his limited material life.

The second striking thing ~~to me~~ in his picture, was that there were to be books in the factory--books of every kind--to be read at noon hours, and to be carried home at night. When he talked of these books his eyes glowed as if he were offering to the great body of pale faced, staring hearers before him, the greatest possession of earth.

It was years ago that I heard that passionate demand to open the book to the worker, every worker, and for years I have watched the reply of industry--a reply unconscious for the most part, but none the less a reply, an effort to meet what now this man, now that, in east or west, felt to be a need. These efforts often halting, half-doubting, have persisted and multiplied, until today the picture of my labor leader has come ~~to~~ many a factory in this country. There are books, books of every kind, to read at noon and to carry home at night. *true / in /*

One cannot easily trace a growth of this kind, where it began, how it spread; enough to know that it is here. But what can the factory worker, the miner, the 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. "They won't appreciate," "It will spoil them," "Take their minds from their tasks." There are so many reasons for keeping life's treasures among the few! But try it. Put a book shelf in your factory. Turn librarian yourself, or, if you are not wise enough, find someone else and watch the results. Slow they may be, but sure they will be. Nothing more interesting than to watch it dawning on workers who have never had access to books, that they can give them help they need--answer questions, simple and complex--that books are the great servants of mankind, giving and asking nothing in return.

It is not an easy thing to teach, perhaps, to those who have never dreamed of it, but men and women to learn it if there is the right leadership. Factory and town librarians are leading men and women, all over this land, to know what they can get out of the printed word. Not when Rome was founded, or Shakespeare died, at least not to start with, but something much nearer home. What these wise people are trying to show to workers is that there is help for daily living and daily tasks to be had in ~~literature~~ *libraries*. At more than one point this has gone on until the first person called in, in case of trouble, is 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."

It is the help in their work, the surprise that books know much that the foremen and superintendents do not know, or knowing, do not communicate, that makes the large following of men from the bench. There seems to be no question that they do not ask. A glowing-eyed young woman, to whom the joy of helping people was the very wine of life, will tell you how she, she who never knew a forge from a lathe, has helped men to find every sort of practical information about both. Here is a typical list of questions asked the librarian in the Seattle Public Library. Most of them came from men in actual factory work.

What is the best process of brazing?
How is brass annealed?
What is the best way to sharpen wood and metal cutting tools?
How are animal skins dyed and tanned?
How can names be etched on steel tools?
How are the various knots tied?
How can a luminous sign be made?
What are the ways of jointing pipes?
How to read water, electric and gas meters.
How is the horsepower of engines calculated?
What is the best way to make a mirror?
How to distinguish the positive wire from the negative.

This library, like everyone of its kind, does its utmost to advertise the kind of service it can render in meeting the everyday needs of everyday people. It sends out to factories and shops its invitation to come in and be helped. "The carpenter who wants to know the various tricks of saw sharpening, the machinist who inquires as to the best speeds and combinations of gears, the steam engineer who wants to install and operate an oil burner under his boiler, the prospector who wants to learn practical methods of identifying minerals, the farmer who wants to know how to clear off land, the metal worker who wants to find new methods of welding or of laying off patterns, the janitor who wants to get the latest and quickest way of cleaning, and the housewife who wants to take out the peach stains Johnny put on her tablecloth, should take advantage of the opportunity to be had in the technology department."

As this paragraph shows, the factory librarians are not content to catch only the worker; they want his wife and child, his home, and they are getting them.

its collection say

"Miss Amy, how do you make a snow man? Is there a book or a picture about it?" I heard this asked in 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 very best way to make his snow man. This boy's mother sends to the library for books on dyeing woollens, on raising poultry, on "manners". It is the family's guide, counselor, adviser. Can one dream of greater democratization of books than making them serve the daily needs of workers and their households?

There is no question but what a tremendous impulse has been given to this practical use of the library, as a consultant in difficult problems, by the ~~A. E. F. in France~~. *in the army* The American Library Association, in its library service to the Boys, included all sorts of practical help for their problems. Boys were set, of necessity, at all kinds of tasks for which they were unprepared; a bank clerk to take care of sick horses, a college student to construct a sewer. The Library Camp Service was their only hope in their difficulties. Now that they are back, they are making demands from all parts of the country on the A. L. A. to continue the work; and the devoted people connected with the camp service are answering nobly. Heaps of such letters as the following find their way in.

"While in the A. E. F. I read a lot of books and those on technical subjects interested me in particular. A handbook for mechanical 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."

This hints at what is true, that many a worker is getting much more than an answer to an occasional problem. ~~He~~ is getting practical training in a trade, through books. There is not a librarian at the head of a factory library, or at the head of a technical collection in a public library, who will not tell you stories of men who, through the use of his books, have had practical results in dollars and cents. A recent report of the Technology Library in Detroit gives this instance: "One of our readers, a young man returned from the War, is reading the 1917 edition of "Modern Business" published by the Alexander Hamilton Inst. in twenty-four volumes. When he had finished Vol. 2 he said he had derived great benefit from the reading of the two volumes, and that he ascribed to the improvement in himself brought about by the reading of them, the fact that he was then considering an offer of a position at a salary 80% more than he was then receiving."

And what could be better testimony than this from the library at Waltham, Mass.?

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And what could be better testimony than this from the library at Waltham, Mass.?

"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."

And here is a case from one of ~~those~~ who has benefited, a letter put into my hands by a worker in the A. L. A. It would be difficult to get a more conclusive proof of what books can do for a young man, than this. —

"I'm 23 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 a little 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.

"One of my latest benefits, which I partly 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."

mainly to

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? As a matter of fact, some of the most genuine Americanization work in the country is being done by our libraries, and under the direction of the A. L. A. they are getting down, or at least trying to, to those neglected spots which are the only real habitat of Communist and I. W. W. in the country; the only spots where they can really flourish. ~~It is to them that~~ "Red" literature goes. ~~These~~ places where men have nothing else to read, and nothing to which to turn their minds when their laboring hours are done, but their own "homeless, ~~voteless~~, jobless" condition. To the spots where the migrant labor groups gather, the library is reaching out its kindly hand, and the more of this sort of work that is done, the less we will hear of the "Red" in this country.

The problem of reaching the non-English speaking immigrant through the library is not simple. The older men and women read nothing but their own tongue, and many industrial libraries have been slow in putting in foreign books; but it is their only hope of service and they are learning it, have learned it well at some points. Take the library work at the Calumet & Hecla Mining Co. in northern Michigan, and you have as intelligent and humane meeting of the problem as could be found. There are sixteen or more nations outside of the English speaking nationalities in these mines. Probably half of them are Finns. The children learn to speak and read English in the schools, but not so the older people. The library has built up some six thousand volumes in foreign tongues, and these books are constantly in circulation. The librarian argues ably in answer to the objection that, if foreigners expect to live in this country they should learn to read English. "We must not forget", she says, "that many come to our country in middle life or perhaps later, and that those have long ago lost the habit of study if, indeed, they ever acquired it. Many of these older men would find it almost an impossible task to acquire a good reading knowledge of English, even if a teacher were provided; and we cannot wonder at this when we consider that the only time they would have for study would be at the close of a long day's work, when rest and recreation seem to be the most needed good. Any of us who have tried to acquire a language after we have passed the age of thirty remember the time, money and labor we have put upon it, unless, perhaps, we had a natural aptitude for the languages, which few Americans have. Such will see at once the absurdity of expecting a woman who does all the work for a family of eight or ten children (for the size of our Calumet families would delight the heart of a Roosevelt) the manifest absurdity, I say, of expecting such a woman to acquire a reading knowledge of a foreign language. She will probably learn to speak English to some extent, especially after her children learn it in school, but that is as far as she will ever go. Should she for that reason be entirely debarred from reading? I think not."

It is well for us to remember that Americanization is something more than speaking or reading the English language. America means to the foreigner an answering to his hopes, and unless he find himself in an atmosphere of helpfulness, in touch with those who appreciate his limitations, and who try to serve him in ways that he needs to be served, He is never going to know what America really means.

Great is the practical service that books may do the worker, answering the definite questions of his daily life, helping him to climb up in his trade, or business. Their great function, after all, is re-creation. The greatest service that the book can render is to restore the fatigued senses, revive the tired mind, freshen the fading hopes. Nobody needs more of this re-creation than the toiler at bench and desk. Who does not remember O. Henry's little clerk, who, after his long days, rushed to his hall bedroom, and, sitting with stockingless feet on the radiator, lost himself blissfully, night after night, in volumes of romance. It is here that the book can do most, after all, for the worker, and they are learning it. A wise woman at the head of a group of girls in a Wisconsin factory told me recently that she kept thirty volumes of fairy tales in constant circulation among her girls.

In a recent number of this magazine I described the crowds that flocked at noontime to the schoolhouse of the National Cash Register, but while those crowds were watching the pictures and listening to the songs, a hundred and fifty or two hundred other workers could always be found, at noon time, in the big and comfortable library of the factory. Here they found the book they wanted on the open shelves, selected a periodical from a most generous stock, covering a wide range of interests and of thought, and through the noon hour, read. Here they come, to be sure, for all sorts of help in the problems of their work, but here they find, too, the re-creation they need for that work.

What the workers think of the library, let them say. Not long ago, the public library of Ft. Arthur, Texas, a memorial library which aims particularly to serve the industries of the town, offered prizes for the best papers upon the theme "What the Library Has Done For Me." Here are two, coming obviously from toilers. Could we have better evidence of the value of taking the book to the worker?

"I live a local life; my work limits me. I narrow. It is part of the price I pay for achievement. Yet my heart longs to go.

Here they find too a chance at what they have needed - perhaps education - intellectual - of mind. So many of these factory librarians can quote your experience like the first time head of the fine library of the Sears Roebuck Co in Chicago.

Amr

"Yesterday I was asked in a book by Neal-
shan who says we are related to the monkey.
The man who wanted Darwin is a truck driver
and reads everything we give him, don't
give me nothin' light please mine, just
somethin' to learn in a little more."

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part

The earth is big; I would see it. Strange men live; I would know them. Other lands are; I would visit them. Strange customs prevail; I would understand them. Must I ever pay this price for any achievement? Must the commandment "Six days shalt thou labor" cost my soul such sacrifice? No longer! I have a magic carpet. Between my tasks I seat myself upon it. In an eye-flash, with Stoddard I ride the surf at Honolulu, I gaze upon beautiful torii, strange spire for temple I call "heathen" but another calls "the gate of Paradise." I make my way through jungles like another Tarzan. I round the world in eighty seconds. Two Thousand Leagues Under the Sea are nothing on my magic carpet. I ride in comfort through the resurrected streets of Pompeii and am carried up the vine-clad hill of Vesuvius to the sulphurous crater. Between my days I journey with Livingstone as he lays the cross of his exploration upon unknown Africa. I hear his untutored bearers facing the unknown sea cry "The land; it says 'I am no more' ". A Protestant, I nevertheless adventure with far-visioned Xavier. Between two days Jack London leads me in to ambuscades of the unexpected. Thus, on magic carpet day by day, despite my tasks, I travel "from Greenland's icy mountains to India's coral strand." I wander at will and in safety. Adventures strange with men, with beasts, with elements, befall me; hunger, strife, famine, war, slay my every companion but my magic carpet keeps me safe, and I journey on again. I see the rats in "No Man's Land" and go "over the tope" with Empey. Yet my magic carpet safe-folds me and on the morrow I am again at my desk. Thank you, magic carpet! You are a friend indeed! You make me glad for home and toil and task!

Taken me very close
intricacies of the
soul-tormented & Divine

Space.

"My head is pillowed upon the hard facts of life; body and soul are tired with the eternal grind; my soul desponds. Then, in the library, my eyes are open and I behold red-crossed angels of mercy ministering to the sad, the suffering, and the needy. I see human greed combatted by divine compassion in human form. I see the lowly ~~climbing~~ climbing upward. I see the haughty coming down. I hear the prayer of contrite heart. I catch the tears of penitence. Prophet and priest, sage and philosopher lead me to a growing Light. I seek the Truth of God. I find it in a Book. It is a Word. Wearied no longer, I start myself at last to climb. The Heavens open. My soul is glad.

"All this the library is to me--and more."