

Making Things Happen

The chief duty of men here below is making things happen--big, useful things which give more happiness to more people. How to discharge the duty has always been puzzling, as well as a fertile cause of dispute, suspicion and general unpleasantness among people honestly desiring to contribute to human happiness. How do we get things done in the world? What is the relation in the process of talk, law, fight, experiment, practice? And what are the driving powers behind these factors?

Something--a great deal, I think, can be learned of this from that group of practical enthusiasts who set out in this country some ten years ago to make the world safe for human life. What a dream it is, when you come to think of it--quite as marvellous as dream as that of making the world safe for democracy.. Wars have never been the destroyers of men that accidents have. Disease itself is scarcely more fatal to human lives and happiness. Men have a feeling of inevitableness about accidents, too, that makes any attack on them seem all the more hopeless. Disease, we have come to recognize, has its cause, wars have their causes; but accidents,--why, accidents happen. And practical men have been content in this

world to let them happen. Impractical folks might harangue and legislate, but that did not stop accidents. To the great part of mankind, this talk and legislation were quite as futile as if directed against earthquakes and tornadoes.

But, figure it as you will, talk and legislation do have their part in bringing things to pass in the world. They are certain, if their cause is good, sooner or later, to reach that constructive imagination which is the saving thing in mankind, and to set somebody to figuring on causes and how to deal with them. This is what happened in this effort to make the world safe for human life. For a hundred years, the havoc machinery was causing among men has inspired endless talk, and, finally, the constructive imagination got to work on causes and somebody, somewhere, seeing how obviously dangerous an open gear or saw or wheel was, snatching at hands or legs and even heads, suggested covering the monster up, making it impossible for him to get at a human body.

Now, for the purpose of this story, of the movement to make the world safe for human beings, this use of guards on devilish machines begins not further back than 1908, when a group of Chicago women--Jane Addams and Mary McDowell of Hull House, and Mrs. Henrotin, then the president of the Chicago Women's Club, had the inspiration to bring together an exhibit of all of the guards against the cruelties of machinery that

they could get their hands on. One can never tell where the seed of such exhibits will take root. I only know where one seed of this particular exhibit fell *hazel sprouted and grew* ~~and when it sprouted~~.

Among those who came to look at this collection of mechanical guards in 1908 was a man who had spent considerable time in his life in talking, and who had come to the point where talk was dust and ashes on his tongue. To help make something happen alone would now satisfy his soul. This man, C. W. Price, now General Manager of the National Safety Council, had already gone into a great manufacturing company, the Harvester Company, with the hope of doing something actual to relieve the misery of industrial life. The sight of these guards stirred a great hope within him. He went out to learn all he could of them in the few factories of the country where they had been installed. One of these, and the one which had done the most, was at hand, the Illinois Steel Company, where a man, who has as good a claim as anybody to be considered the founder of the safety movement as we now know it, Robert J. Young, was doing, by guarding machinery, what to Price was almost a miracle.

It was a great idea to him, and he went back to the Harvester Company with tales of what he had seen. Nobody believed that they could afford to do it. It sounded very expensive. But Mr. Price met them with the argument that he had

learned from Mr. Young that it paid--paid in dollars and cents, that, as a matter of fact, the Illinois Steel Company had cut their accidents 65%. And 65% out of the cost of paying for accidents, as they were all obliged to do, was something that made any manager consider. The Company sent men to examine what was being done at the Illinois Steel Company's plant; and in surprise they came back to report that Price was right--it paid.

It came as a new discovery--a double discovery. In the first place, that machinery could be so guarded that accidents would be cut; and, in the second place, that efficiency was increased and cost cut by the effort.

Nothing perhaps had ever stirred Price as this discovery. It was something to be told to men, and he set about to make converts. He realized at once that he had something here which would appeal to the type of man that was at the head of American industry. This man had no patience with talk and theory, but he could be stirred to the very depths if you could show him that he could do something. He was not interested in reform and discussion, he was interested in action, and so much the better if it was an action that redounded to the direct benefit of men. Moreover, this man who could only be moved by proof that a thing worked, was a man of power. He was in position

to make something happen when once he was convinced. His great complaint against industrial reform was that it never made anything ~~really~~ happen.

So the Harvester Company took hold of the new idea. The results were sensational. And Price went around like a Crusader, talking night and day of what had been done. The Industrial Commission of Wisconsin heard of him, and asked him to come into their State and take charge of their safety work. Price was wary. His experience with industrial commissions had led him to believe that they knew ~~far~~ more about political ~~than~~ industrial machinery. When he finally agreed to act as their counsel, he made his own conditions. "You must wipe out of your minds all your old notions of safety," he told them. "We have been trying for a hundred years or more to get safety through the club and the star--laws and prosecutions. You must pledge me that there shall be no prosecutions, that I shall be allowed to appeal directly to the manufacturer on the ground that his present system of indifference to life is inefficient and costly, that it is possible for him ~~to~~ so arrange and guard his machinery that a large percentage of accidents will be cut down; that what we want is to coöperate with him and with labor in a voluntary

campaign to cut out all unnecessary killing and maiming of men.

Price won the Commission. He won certain leading manufacturers and in the end he won the labor leaders. They gave him his way, and as a proof that they kept faith with him, he will tell you that while in the five years before he joined the Wisconsin Industrial Commission, as safety expert, there had been 365 prosecutions, there was none during his time.

On all sides accidents came down. One great concern in the State showed by its records that in 1912, the time it had lost through accidents was 76% less than in 1907, the saving being attributed solely to its safety campaign. Another concern reported that it had reduced its machinery accidents 50% in four years. A steel plant of the State reported a decrease of 68% in its casualties. All over the commonwealth these figures showed that human life was being saved in a way that no one had ever before dreamed was possible.

~~But~~ Yet accidents continued to happen. The private concerns that carried the guarding and placing of machinery to the limit that experts advised, that were continually making experiments and changes, were not long in coming to the conclusion that, do your utmost with the mechanical side of the safety problem, you can only go so far. Men began to take

Mr. Price aside and say to him, "You know, after all, you can't prevent accidents. Killing men is part of industry. They won't take care of themselves." And they had figures, plenty of them, to show that the larger percentage of accidents of all kinds were due to somebody's inattention or carelessness.

Robert J. Young had discovered this, but he was unwilling to admit that the movement must be limited by this fact. What he argued was that the inattention and the carelessness of men can be corrected by education, that if you could so train a workman that he would automatically be on his guard, ~~that he would be unconsciously on his guard~~, unconsciously a careful man, you would eliminate a ^{large} ~~great~~ factor in the accident list of industry.

And so there began in his plant, as early as 1909, a shop organization for safety. Shop committees were appointed or elected, safety foremen were placed over them. It was a coöperative movement inside the factory, something quite new in industry; and from the very start the results were surprising. The men themselves responded in a way that was amazing to many employers, with their entirely unnatural notions about the reactions of workmen.

The plant was alive with suggestions and criticisms.

Every accident was subjected to the closest analysis by the men. Their ambition was to see that no disaster should ever be repeated. And they went further than this. They made it their business to forestall accidents by seeing where they might be possible.

Price took hold of this new discovery as eagerly as he had the first. He traveled over Wisconsin from plant to plant, making personal visits to the managers, converting them to the plan of shop organization for safety. The idea spread as rapidly as had the former discovery, and the results were not less striking. As a matter of fact, it was not very long before the Industrial Commission of Wisconsin laid down as laws of safety:

- 1) One-third of accident reduction may be made by safeguards;
- 2) Two-thirds must be made by instruction, education and organization--that is, by the care of the men.

A typical safety experience in the industrial world at that period is told in the following letter from a pioneer in the campaign:

"I know a plant manager who one Sunday afternoon called his foremen and workmen together (I was there), and he stood up and said:

"Men, this is the first time in the history of this company that all of the employees have come together. We have met today to discuss how

we can make this plant safe, how to keep men from being injured and killed.

"There have been a number of men seriously injured in this plant during the past eight years who would never have been injured if I, the manager, had done my part. I am ashamed to confess it, but it's true. And there have been a number of men injured and several killed who would never have been injured or killed if the men had done their part. We both have been to blame.

"Tomorrow morning, when the whistle blows at seven o'clock, we are going to start a safety campaign in this plant and I want every one of you men to come to work with the determination to put your shoulder to the wheel and do your part to stop accidents. I want to say that anything that I can do I will do, and if anything that money can buy will keep you men from being injured, I will furnish the money--I will go the limit if you will go with me.

"Three of our neighbor plants in the same industry have been doing splendid work in safety; one has reduced lost time accidents 65 per cent., another 50%, and the third 70%. Now men, if they can do it, we can do it."

At this meeting a safety committee of five of the best known men was appointed--and within 30 days the safety campaign was under full steam. At the end of a year this plant in a contest with five other plants, won the banner for the best safety record.

Pioneer."

What had happened to this point in Wisconsin was simply this, that a man of unusual training and power, with a Crusader's spirit, capable of the sustained and steady enthusiasm without which great things are never carried to completion, had collected the scattered experiments going on in different parts of

the country, had aroused a great body of openminded employers to adopt them and had led a State to work out an entirely new technique for safety. That is, he had made the enterprise of individuals the property and the policy of a State.

But he was not satisfied, nor were the men who, like Price, ^{had} a passion for bringing things about and who, like him, had caught a glimmer of what might be done (1) through mechanical devices, and (2) through organization and education, ^{and} were attacking the safety problem, each in his own way in many different parts of the country. These men were usually handicapped by the cynical indifference of those about them, those who believed that accidents would happen, that it was folly to try to prevent it. Few of them had the stimulus of knowing what was being done by their fellows in other parts of the country, but all of them stuck to their undertaking. These pioneers* were bound to come together, for nothing is so contagious as ~~constructive~~ ^{acumade fa conquering misery, and} imagination.

^{sure enough} In 1912, under the direction of the Iron and Steel Association, a National Safety Council was formed for the express purpose of

* The leaders of these pioneers, all of them still active in the safety work, were H. W. Belknap, Dave Beyer, W. H. Campbell, Lucien W. Chaney, C. L. Close, Dr. J. A. Holmes, C. C. McChord, J. T. McCleary, Charles P. Neill, Lew R. Palmer, R. C. Richards, F. C. Schwedtman, Dr. M. J. Shields, Dr. E. A. Steiner, David Van Schwack, and H. M. Wilson.

passing to the industry of the whole nation what the members might discover. The spirit of this organization was the finest and most generous. "Nothing that any one of us can discover by experiment and labor, however costly, should be held back. We want to give everything that we learn in this matter of saving life to our fellow manufacturers." And they meant it. And they have continued to mean it. It has made the National Safety Council from the start more like an assembly of inspired missionaries than any gathering that I have ever had anything to do with.

Practical men, their inspiration is the saving of human life. And such a record have they already made that they do not fear now to commit themselves to the extraordinary proposition of making not only industry but the country itself safe for human life. There is a constant growth not only in membership but in organization. There are some 4000 industrial concerns in the country today enrolled as active members of the National Safety Council. This includes all of the large railroads and all great undertakings like the U. S. Steel Corporation and the Harvester Company. Local councils have begun to appear in different districts, often with paid staffs. The safety inspector has become so important a factor in industrial plants that the National Safety Council has begun to organize

schools to educate men for the position. Last year eight of these schools were held in different districts, with the result that some 1600 picked men, all of whom had had previous practical experience with safety inside some plant, were turned back to industry with a scientific training in safety principles.

Wherever you touch one of the great industrial undertakings of the country, committed to safety, you are met with a record of surprising results. In 1907 the iron and steel industry was having an accident frequency rate per every 1000 300-day workers of 242.4; in 1918 it had reduced this to 120. Accident severity rate had been reduced from 21.6 to 10.6. In coal mining the number of men killed in 1907 was 3242, 680,492 being employed. In 1918 this number has been reduced to 2,580, the number employed being 760,427. And take what has been done by the electric railways. Between 1902 and 1907, there was an increase of street car fatalities in our cities of exactly 100%, but during the ten years after the railways committed themselves to the "Safety First" enterprise, 1907 to 1917, the increase was but 8%. In non-fatal injuries, there was an increase between the years 1902 and 1907 of 150%; but in the ten years between 1907 and 1917, of only 20%. You can duplicate this record ~~in mines~~ on the railroads, in all sorts of manufacturing enterprises.

Possibly the most significant feature of the movement is the demonstration that it has given, that in this world things are so ordered that consideration of human life and happiness goes hand in hand with prosperity, that a more abundant production of the things necessary for men is one of the results of caring for men. In the effort to make things safe there have come into industry after industry most unexpected results in increased production. One finds them often reported at the meetings of the Safety Council. Take this:—A new method, wholly mechanical, was worked out by the chief engineer of a large company, to replace one which required several skilled men. It happened that these men were exposed to injurious dust, which the new method would eliminate. The plan was opposed by the directors on the ground that it would require large expenditure for installation and would not increase production. The president of the company said, "Even if it does not increase production, we we hope, it will remove this danger to the health of the men. Let's try it." And it was tried. It did exactly what its inventor had believed it would, it cut down the number of men required in handling the process and it removed all risk from those that remained. It increased production so tremendously that it looks as if it were going to revolutionize the entire industry. That is, here was something adopted

because it would prevent injury to men, and it not only saved the men but increased the production.

A safety man in a certain factory where punch presses were much used and where fingers were constantly being cut off, devised a new method of operation to prevent the loss of fingers. But he found that not only did he save fingers but he increased production from 25 to 100%.

Unwilling as men have been to believe it, nothing is so wasteful, nothing so hinders free production as disregard of human life and limb. This the safety movement of this country has proved over and over again. ~~And this proof has been~~
~~an enormous factor in getting the thing done.~~ Nothing is so inspiring as results, particularly when these results are generously shared with other men. One of the extraordinary features of ^{the Safety Council's} putting everything on the table where everybody can reach it, try it out, has been the constant improvement in methods of organization, in methods of education, as well as in mechanical devices. What has happened is that all of the talent in an industry has been brought in and concentrated on safety. The work has not been in the hands of the few who started the movement or left to the men at the top of the plant.

^{at the bottom,}
 The boy, ^{even} educated or uneducated, has been taken in, has been

asked to put his fresh young brain, as well as his fresh young enthusiasm on these problems so that everybody, everywhere, over the plant has been working.

From the experience one could draw up an illuminating code of the steps necessary to make things happen. These must be:

- 1) An initial revolt against a stupid and wrong condition
- 2) The instinctive recognition of the practicability of a proposed method of attack
- 3) A human sympathy broad enough to take the trouble to convince the men that are responsible that the proposed correction will work
- 4) Recognition of the limitation of each step and and readiness to take each new step necessary
- 5) A catholicity that does not attempt to confine effort to any set of individuals or to any particular organization but unselfishly attempts to draw all into the campaign.
- 6) The patience to coöperate with all the elements involved
- 7) Keeping the end in constant view, never hindering that end by ambition for personal power or credit.

These certainly are the principles on which the National Safety Council has been consciously or unconsciously working. They are as good for any movement.

But there are other heartening and significant features of its work and its ambition which show even more fully the breadth of mind and of sympathy with which it is carrying on its campaign. One of these is the story of its contribution to Government industrial safety during the War, and another is the bigness of its latest effort and the surprising results which it already has brought about. Both of these will be told in coming numbers of this Magazine.
