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ANNUAL MEETING OF
THE GIRLS' SERVICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA
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I have been saying for allong time and trying to apply the conviction to myself without success that nobody ought to be allowed to talk on men or women in industry until they have worked for a year at the machine and had followed that by a year's work as a manager. I think that if we could apply that rule to all people who talk and write about industry, "The Girl in Industry" or any phase of it, that we might get more practical results than we do get. I feel apologetic every time I consent to talk on such a subject as this, of woman in industry, because I never have been a worker and I have never managed workers and I think you might fairly say, "Why are you here?" Why did you accept this kind invitation?"

It is true that for a long time, twenty-five years or more, I have been writing more or less on this theme. This writing has not been theoretical. I am painfully devoid of theories about industry. I have no pet form of industrial organization. I don't know how to solve the problems of industry, but what I have written has been based always on observation. For many years I have been going up and down the country in a professional capacity studying businesses, studying exhibits of all kinds that come out of our great commercial and industrial life, and naturally you see a great deal of a worker in any such undertaking as that. I think I must have walked twenty thousand miles, to say the least, through factories and mines and mills in the last twenty-five years, so you see it is just on the basis of observation that I have any claim at all to come here, and I am willing to

do it, because— well, you see out of such an experience as that one naturally comes to a certain well — we will just call them notions. I don't want to give them -- Notions of what ought or might be done, things that you would like to spread. That is, I have some ideas, notions that I should like to spread, and I came here because it seems to me that in this GIRLS' SERVICE LEAGUE these things are at work, and because I feel that this is a strategic position. I don't know of anybody in any better strategic position of advancing these particular ideas, these notions that I have.

In the first place, this Service League appeals to me very much when you come to connect the girl and industry because it always puts the emphasis on the girl. It is the girl they are talking about here, the girl; it is not the girl and the way she can serve industry, but it is what that industry is going — what kind of an effect that industry is going to have upon her, how she can be saved from its maladjustments and its imperfections and its bad conditions. What can this League do to help this girl who accidentally, oh, so very accidentally so often gets into our big industrial machine in a town like this. It is this, as I say, this emphasis on the girl which you don't always get. Most people talk about women in industry. They talk about it as if this woman in industry was a separate thing from the mass of women, that she was a misrelated thing, something like a block of the sisterhood that you took out and set aside, that she wasn't like other girls. Oh, she is so like other girls and that is what this League sees, that this girl has all the ignorance, she has all the inspirations, the aspirations, she has all the temptation, she has all the needs of the girls in all ranks of society. Nora Grady and the Colonel's lady are sisters under the skin. That is what this League realizes, and it is considering this girl from the point of view of girlhood, girlhood and her needs and not from the point of view of any theory at all.

I have an idea that there-- I am pretty sure that there is already being done a very great deal both for the girl and for industry. In the first place, there is one thing that this League has at least the opportunity to convey to the girls that come to it and seek places in the industrial world of this city, one thing that it can emphasize is the fact that there is a very great and signified opportunity in industry if you could only get at it. We discovered a great deal about the girl in industry in the war. There used to be an idea that -- it was pretty general -- that we had no mechanical genius at all, nothing in our fingers that made us of any use on machines. They said there were such things as feminine blind spots, I believe that is what they called them, when it comes to machines, feminine blind spots. Well, I am not so sure but what the gentlemen are right, you know. How many women know the difference between a million and ten thousand. Well, you know I don't always, although I deal a good deal with figures. I find myself often saying, "Why there are a million there" when there are ten thousand, and how many of us know the difference between an inch and a half and an inch, and they say that we never, never take pains to have our tools sharp. All these things they bring up against us when they talk about our achieving anything at all in the mechanical world, and yet all of that old tradition was upset by the experience in war. Women proved themselves admirable mechanics and in many, many places bodies of women had been kept in preference to men because of certain qualities which they showed when properly developed.

Now you find a group of women in the General Electric up at Schenectady. They came there through the war contrary to the judgment of the leaders. Only on necessity were they brought there. Two years ago I visited a machine shop out on one of the Northwestern cities, Milwaukee, I think it was, a machine shop in which some five or six thousand men were employed. In that big plant there was one small shop run entirely by women, about twenty-five women with a woman foreman in overalls, covered with grease, the happiest lot of contented women you ever say, able to throw their own

belts, to set up their own machines, to do all that a man would do--and loving it. Those were women that had the mechanical instinct, and a club like this, dealing with women is bound to find now and then a woman that has that kind of thing, a girl who has that kind of thing, and if she can be properly placed she can be developed to be a very good mechanic.

Now what I am talking so much about is that there is an opportunity in our mechanical world for something more than sitting at a machine and turning a crank as the idea sometimes is. Moreover, as we are getting our industry organized and systematic chances for advancement developed, there is if we can put it properly before the girl, if we can get it properly placed, there is a good chance of advancement. Women are coming into the places of instructors, of supervisors, even of superintendents in our scientifically managed industries, a fine place for the girl who has got the thing in her.

And I think it is fine to have an organization like this --which is more or less after all a laboratory, more or less of a trying-out place, a testing of the girl and what is in her to hold before her the idea that here is something very big possible for women in the future.

Well, of course, another thing that an organization like this has a chance to do--and I don't know of any organization in this city at least that is attempting to do it -- and that is to give the girl whom it places, for whom it finds employment, some chance of the meaning of the industry into which she goes, its relation to society, the need, the bigness of the thing and also some notion of the meaning of the operation that she is to perform in the whole industry.

Now there is nothing that has hurt me more really in traveling up and down factories, as I have for so many years, than finding so many workers who hadn't the remotest idea about what this thing they were doing was for. They were employed-- your employment places a girl into industry; she is put down at a machine and she is told how to do this thing and she goes on day in and

day out doing it and she has no more conception of what the meaning of that thing is than I would have if I passed by a machine, perhaps not so much.

Now you can't tell me that you can keep human beings day after day doing any one particular thing and they not understanding the meaning, and not deprave them or suppress them and perhaps in the end make them very dangerous creatures. If I had to work at anything week in and week out and not know its meaning and not be able to find its meaning I would become a revolutionist and I think I ought to.

I had this experience two or three years ago in a great factory in Ohio. I passed a machine near to me and it was very remarkable, I have never seen anything like it. There was a little girl there turning out a delicate, unusual-looking wheel and I stopped and asked her, "What do you call your machine", and she said, "I don't know".

"Well," I said, "what is that piece you are turning out for?"

She said, "I haven't the least idea."

I said, "I mean where does it go in the machine that they turn out in this factory?" They turn out a very complicated machine, much more complicated than the one this young lady is running here. There are two or three thousand pieces in it, a very remarkable thing.

I said, "Where does it go in the big machine?"

She said, "I don't know."

"Well," I said, "how long have you worked in this factory?"

She said, "Five years."

Now I call that — well, I call that very dangerous to society and a crime to the girl. You can't do things that way without some kind of serious suppression.

Now right away when there is some knowledge of the meaning of the operation there is a loosening of progress. I have seen that again and