WOMAN, THE VEHICLE OF LIFE
AND THE WASTER OF LIFE.

By Ida M. Tarbell.

A curious anomoly in the myriad activities of the American woman is her apparent indifference to safety in the home and on the highway. What could be more perplexing than that woman, the vehicle of life, should not at every point be its protector? Yet it is a fact that in the great movement for safety which for nearly twenty years has been building up sound principles and technique, no woman has come to the front as a leader.

Moreover, not one of our great national women's organizations has given to the movement more than perfunctory support. Only locally, when men have stirred a community to action have women taken the vital part which one would expect them naturally to take. Why is this? It is unfair to say that they do not care. The root of their indifference is rather that they do not see safety as their problem.

Accidents? Why, accidents are something that happen in factories, in mines and on railroads. They are industrial, they don't come within woman's bailiwick. Most women and many men believe this. They don't realize that of the 80,000 deaths that occur from preventable accidents each year in this country, approximately 22,000 occur within industry, and that the remaining 58,000 take place in or at the door of the home and on our streets and highways. It has not yet reached their consciousness that upwards of 10,000 little children are crushed, strangle

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

burned or torn to pieces every year in ways that we know how to prevent, nor do they realize that for every one of these little ones killed, at least twenty-five are maimed, many of them so hopelessly that one could pray that they might die.

Women do not know this, and when an accident forces itself on their attention, they fall back on those old lying, self-excusing maxims, "Accidents will happen" - "It is the will of the Lord," - maxims long responsible for the havoc of life in our industries. It was only when men began to admit that accidents have causes, that accidents can no more happen without a cause than an ear of corn without a grain, that their apathy broke and they took the burden of death off the shoulders of the Lord.

Even women who do look deaths by accidents square in the face and consent that they have preventable causes rarely see that anything can be done about it. As a group they are still ignorant of what the safety movement has achieved, and ignorant, too, of the fact that both industrial and public safety have reached a point where they cannot be carried much further without their active cooperation.

Both as a guide and as an inspiration women need to study the record that men have made in their attack on accidents in the industrial field. They need to understand how in twenty years the number of accidents on our railroads have been halved, how in factories and mines and mills the percentage of disasters have been reduced all the way from 25 per cent to even as high as 96 per cent. They need to know this record; but, above all, they need to understand how it is to be done, to grasp the principles, the practice and, above all, the spirit that

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

has brought about the large saving of life in industry. They need this because the principles that underly safety in the home are the same as those that underly it in the shop; and if the child is to be saved it must be done in the same way that men are being saved.

And how are men saved in industry? There was a time at the start when it was believed that all that was needed to stop the destruction of life was guards over wheels, gears and saws; safety lanterns in mines, better timbering, block systems, multiplied signals on railroads.

Guarding did cut down the havoc. A thorough trial proved that it would prevent possibly one out of every three accidents. But two still remained. How were they to be prevented?

It was then that the tabulation and classification of accidents and the detailed study of causes began. And it was proved by the facts that the cause of the greatest number of accidents in industry was fatalism, recklessness, carelessness.

That is, these men who had started out to eliminate accidents by making machines fool-proof found there was something more needed. Education, the development of an eye that would see danger, a nose that would smell it, a mind that would unconsciously look for it and that would as unconsciously attack it when found. They found, too, that there must be aroused a sense of the other fellow, that a man must be taught to feel that even if he was willing to take risks, it was not a fair thing to do since he was much more likely to injure somebody else. Thus the necessity for education for safety was the second step in the safety movement. It introduces the man as an observing, thinking, caring factor; and on

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

the heels of this discovery, of the discovery of the necessity of education, came the discovery of the necessity of cooperation - that you could not get safety in a shop unless everybody was committed to it. And that when they were so committed the results were almost spectacular.

All this came to the safety men as discoveries, thrilled them. They could save life, prevent crippling, and never has a group of men in this country gone to their job with more determination and more passionate interest than these safety workers. They have been persistent in gathering facts, in comparing, in deducting, in whipping one another to new efforts; and they persistently followed wherever their accumulating experience and knowledge led them; and it finally led them in the industrial movement straight to the home and the woman.

If they were to have a complete safety, they must begin earlier in training men; they must begin with the child. That is, step by step, they had gradually come down to that place where we all come in our efforts to correct evils - the child. Safety, like health, decent habits, unselfishness, must be taught from the start if you want anything like a complete result.

But they did not know how to get into the home, and so they went to the school. They went with moving pictures and talks and broadsides, in an effort to teach the child to save his own and others' lives. In 1917, Dr. E. George Payne undertook in St. Louis to make an adaptation of safety principles to the schools. He had the cooperation of the school board, of the teaching staff and of city officials, and the results that followed from this effort were exactly like those that followed in the industrial field. While in 1917 50 children were being killed annually,

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

going to and from school in St. Louis, in 1921, but 18 were killed. City after city has since taken up this movement and everywhere that it has been intelligently tested there has been a like saving of young life. So important have educators come to consider the movement that Dr. Payne has only this year been called to New York University as an instructor on safety. That is, into our school life a safety system, based on that which was worked out in industrial life, has come as a permanent factor.

This is a great achievement, with a splendid future of life saving, but there still remains those 10,000 little children annually killed, those 250,000 injured. The school doesn't reach them. Nobody but the mother can reach them.

Take the record of a month's accidents in New York City. We have it for last June, made by that admirable institution the Safety Institute of America, and the mother's responsibility is clear. In that month there were 234 persons who lost their lives through their own or somebody's else carelessness. Sixty-six of that number were little children. The record is heart-breaking:

Charlie, aged 2 1/2 years - fell from window

Willie " 1 year - run over by auto

Werner " 2 years - swallowed a stove bolt

William " 1 1/2 " - fell into a pail of boiling water.

John " 6 " - burned, playing with matches

Herman " 1 year - pulled over a wash boiler.

And so it goes, child after child, giving up its little life in agony, leaving behind never-to-be-forgotten pain for those whose ignorance or neglect were behind the tragedy.

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

Analyze these accidents and the mother's responsibility is clear enough. None but she could have prevented them. Who else can keep a child from falling from a window, from pulling over a vessel of boiling water, from being run over by an auto? Harsh as it sounds, she is the only person in a position to save the child. She is just as surely responsible as the manager of a factory is responsible for the accidents that happen under his direction.

Take the horrible death of little children from overturning and falling into boiling water - there is one or more in this country every day in the year - there were three in New York City in June. What is the difference between such a death and one from unguarded wheels? Here is a known danger. The ignorance of the child and the carelessness of the worker are equally known. The technique of prevention in both cases is the same. So far as the mechanical part of it is concerned, prevention lies in the home as in the factory in guarding whatever is dangerous. Guard the boiling water, poison, articles that will strangle exactly as dangerous saws, belts and wheels are guarded.

The woman's educational problem in safety is similar to that of the safety engineer in the factory. She deals as he does with a particular psychology. The ignorance and curiosity of the child is like the carelessness, the dislike of taking care of the workman. And yet it would seem that women were left to discover by experience the fact that little children will let nothing within reach go untouched - razors, coals, hot water; that there is nothing that they can put in their mouths that will

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

not go in - poison, acid, strychnine. It is a fact of child nature to look, touch, taste, investigate, as it is the nature of an untrained workman to take risks. And so long as it is not an established rule of the home that dangerous articles be kept out of the way, so long as there is not the habit of instinctively sensing what is dangerous and instinctively putting it out of reach, we will have these horrible tragedies exactly as we have them in industries where the same sense and practice have not been established. Safety in the home depends as in the shop on accepting one great rule: "Show me where an accident can happen, and I will show you where one will happen" - accepting this and regulating life and habits accordingly.

The preeminent hazard with which the mother has to concern herself today is not hot water or falls or poison, it is the great hazard of the highway. The most awful and sinister menace to life that we have in this country at the present is from traffic and particularly from the automobile. While accidents on our railroads have been halved in the last ten years, those on our highways are steadily increasing. In New York City in 1921, 1081 persons were killed by traffic accidents. On all the railroads in the United States during the same year but 105 passengers were killed out of more than a billion carried.

Mothers must no longer shirk the fact that the most pitiful havoc among their children by accidents is from the motor vehicle, and that if these little ones are to be saved, it is the mothers mainly that must save them. Of the 1081 people killed in traffic in 1921 in New York City, 417 were children, 15 years old or under. Let us say that

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

the safety of all children above seven or eight rested with the school, the traffic policemen; how about the accidents to the children of six and under? In June last, 27 tots, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 years old were crushed, mangled to death, by autos and trucks. If this destruction of life does not call for woman's help, nothing does. It cannot be stopped without her. The primary task which she must accept is the difficult one of teaching the child from the start caution on the street. This is possible even with very little children. In the last year the writer has seen a child of only a little more than two years taught to know and to heed the injunction: "That's the beel's road, this is Catharine's road." The care that has brought her to an acceptance of the fact must not be relaxed, is true; but what is the trouble of repeated warning compared with the despair and grief that may easily come from not taking the trouble? Again and again a woman who shirks that trouble has to bear the grief. It is one of the awful facts of this whole sad business that women so often neglect or refuse their obvious duty in the matter until a limp little crushed body has been put into their arms.

Just outside of New York there is a hill, particularly dangerous for automobiles even when free of pedestrians. In the neighborhood are many tenements, and, in spite of repeated warning of drivers and police, many of the mothers of the neighborhood let their children play there. The inevitable death toll finally came. Two little children were struck and killed. Since that time not a child has been allowed on the street. The mothers in the neighborhood have combined to prevent it and are doing it. But what a price to pay for resolution to discharge an obvious duty!

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

It is not for women to wait until they themselves are stricken to tackle this matter of safety in the home. Difficult? Yes. But it is not nearly so difficult to save the life of a child already romping about the home as it is to bring a child into the world. It would be interesting to know just how many of the 27 little ones of six years and under that were killed in New York City in June had no place but the street to play, and that not a closed street. Grant that the woman should have had a care where the little one went but put yourself in her place, sense her handicaps. What she needs is playgrounds. The greatest safety device in the world for the city children of the crowded districts where so many of these tragedies happen is the playground. To give it to them is only to parallel what it has been found necessary in industry to do for men if you would have them "safe men." Lunch rooms, ahtletic fields, fresh air, good sanitation have come to be regarded by scientific safety experts as a necessary part of their program. In this woman's campaign for safe homes, the playground is an essential factor.

Train the woman, however, to the utmost care, give her playgrounds, and so long as the present recklessness on the part of drivers of motor vehicles is tolerated, we will continue to have such peace-time casualty lists as the surveys of the Safety Institute reveal. There is no more imperative task for women at the moment than in arousing righteous indignation against the wanton abuse of the right of the road. If there ever was a just cause for public revolt it is the carnage of the automobilists, something so irresponsible and ugly that we who tolerate it in any degree become confederates. The woman is in the position where she can force public opinion against the

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

abuse if she will set herself resolutely to it.

But what has she done up to date? Practically nothing against a demoralizing practice that is taking annually the lives of thousands of her children and maiming many times that number.

Safety is not only a question of saving human life and preventing human suffering. Where you have apathy to destruction of life, you have hardness of heart, dullness of mind. The whole safety campaign to the aid of which women are called, isprofoundly social. The spirit of caution and restraint, the care for others, the cooperation with others in order to prevent accident, cannot but have a profound influence on society. They make for gentleness instead of recklessness; they make for thoughtfulness of others instead of indifference. Women who go into safety work are reaching down to the very roots of better living and finer things.

But let no woman put her hand to it thinking it to be a matter of occasional safety weeks, of showing pictures, distributing bulletins, joining organizations. Safety means knowledge, education, the cultivation of an instinct for danger, the training of the eye to see and the mind to act. It is something that must go on constantly like care for the health; it can only be achieved as we achieve cleanliness, truthfulness, all desirable things, and it cannot be achieved unless behind what is done there is a real hate of needless pain, a passion for saving human life - something so deep that you are willing to take on safety as one of the permanent interests and duties of life. When women accept safety work in this spirit, then men will at last have secured the cooperation which alone can make the principles and the technique which they have worked out really effective.

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