A. MONTAGUE FERRY
HORACE L. DAWSON

FERRY AND DAWSON
ORGANIZERS AND DIRECTORS OF TRADE ASSOCIATIONS

1427 Eye Street, N. W.
Washington, D. C.

March 27, 1937.

My dear Miss Tarbell:-

The enclosed little bedtime story is designed as a tribute to a first class writing lady and not as a literary effort.

Since the story is yours at least as much as mine, there is no apology for its length and detail.

With those few choice words, put on your glasses, take out your handkerchief, and prepare to weep.

Affectionately yours,

Miss Ida M. Tarbell,
120 East 19th Street,
New York, N. Y.

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Once upon a time (since all stories should start that way) there was a young and enthusiastic individual who, after serving apprenticeship as a newspaper cub, climbed or sank into the advertising profession. After a considerable period of hard labor he reached the point where he was calling upon advertisers in behalf of a large agency and advising them to spend their money (God save them).

On one occasion, and this was back in 1911 or 1912, he found himself facing a crisis. A large and substantial concern was ready and willing to spend its money on a national campaign but could not be sure of the necessary production to meet the huge demand which might result from our hero's plans. The problem was to get female help to run the sewing machines and turn out the product. The plant was located out in the hinterland in a medium sized town, but even in those circumstances there was a certain stigma attached to girls working in a factory.

The thought of this campaign being blocked by such a contingency induced earnest thought. It seemed highly desirable, if not absolutely essential, to make that factory a pleasant place for the female employees. In those days a good share of the well-known human race was interested in the tango, the maxixe, and other dances which could hardly be learned without special instruction. Naturally the younger generation were all agog to acquire these fancy steps.

As part of the inducements for working in this particular factory, the management promoted dancing classes out of hours and became so intrigued with the results of this first stumble toward proper industrial relations that they added many other activities of a nature which soon made it a privilege to be on their payroll. The obvious result was a very satisfactory waiting list, sufficient assured production to enable the advertising campaign to go on and everybody was happy. Incidentally, to the best of present knowledge and belief an entirely satisfactory condition still obtains both on the advertising and employment sides in that plant.

The incident made a deep impression on the struggling young advertising man and he found himself commencing to be more interested in this question of human relations on the employment side rather than on the advertising side. Within the next two years he went to work for the American Magazine and in those days that publication was paying much attention to the question of employee and human relations. It was natural, therefore, that when an opportunity offered to become advertising manager and personnel manager of a substantial concern in the middle west his only problem was to conceal part of his eagerness.

Very shortly thereafter we found him faced with the problem of a company divided against itself, the office employees being the elite and the factory employees feeling they were distinctly the underdogs socially and in every other way. The natural pulling and hauling did not make for the best results.

He had read much the writings by one Ida M. Tarbell in the American

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Magazine and while like many others he thought the woman was just a little bit sentimentally cracked, her conviction and spirit were such that he could not throw some of her ideas into the waste-basket. About this time she came to the city where he was located to make an address before what was then the principal cultural organization, known as the Knife and Fork Club. His standing in the community was not such that he could crash the gate of this very exclusive organization, but leaning upon his former connection with the American Magazine he barged in upon the lady at her hotel during her visit and in effect asked, "What the hell?" The lady loosened up and told him in no uncertain terms and he went back to his job full of the conviction that while her ideas could not be sold under the name of the Golden Rule or as ideals, the principle was practical and workable.

The question in that plant was solved on her principles through the medium of a bowling league, of entertainments in which both sides of the factory took part, in a baseball team which was drawn from all factors, and, most important of all, in a works council composed of elected representatives. In times past it had been the practice to close the premises against union representatives, but a new policy was adopted of inviting them in when they made application and letting the employees listen to them on company time. The plant was never unionized as the employees took the attitude that they were getting full representation and full access to the principals without paying dues to anybody.

The results obtained seemed to justify search with a large field in which to apply the Tarbell woman's principles. Our hero, somewhat flushed with the success of those principles, took his nerve and a very weak bank account to Chicago and opened an office as counselor in industrial relations. The idea was promising but its practical application was a total flop from the financial standpoint. The young man found that when he was called in to attack a problem, his principal song and dance consisted in telling the embattled employer something about the Golden Rule carefully disguised in different language. He found that neither his sense of humor nor his conscience would permit him to charge sufficient fees for preaching this rather time worn precept.

However, he kept his nose sufficiently above water to sustain his family in cakes and coffee (or bread and milk) and finally ran into a problem which seemed to promise practical and financial as well as sentimental results. He was asked to survey and make recommendations to an industry which had been having considerable difficulty. Although the manufacturers were small in number, it was an important field. One-half of the manufacturers were on a closed shop union basis and half of them were vociferously on an open shop basis. The union was well financed, constructively led, and bid fair to keep its contracts.

After sizing up the situation, the struggling doctor appeared before a meeting of the manufacturers and laid down the Tarbell principles

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which by this time he considered pretty much his own. After approximately thirty minutes of exposition, one of the manufacturers, an old New Englander with convictions, rose upon his hind legs and announced that he would have no more of sentimental twaddle from a beardless youth who obviously knew nothing about employment and union problems. However, curiosity got the better of the rest of the crowd and it was decided that the suggestions were worthy of a trial.

At this point, by the grace of God, the young man was called to make a survey of employment conditions in the shipyards under the Emergency Fleet Corporation. He made the survey on the basis of his expenses but without pay because in these days all of us were trying to be as patriotic as possible. The resulting report created a small tornado in Washington and he was called down to take over industrial relations work in the home office of the Fleet Corporation. The unions were feeling their oats, knowing full well that the necessity for a bridge of ships would overcome any trifling questions of pay or working conditions. Furthermore, private concerns with large advantageous contracts for war supplies were willing to meet and surpass the wage scales of the Shipyards. It was a nice mess and at times the Tarbell principles almost got torpedoed, but not quite.

Returning once again to private life, the prestige of this war work was of great assistance in furthering the big idea. The group of manufacturers beforementioned had made a stab at inaugurating better relations, but with the war over were ready to get down to real business. At that time there was initiated a plan of regular meetings between the executive committee of the union and the manufacturers. In order that both sides should feel protected, the president of the union and our hero were made joint chairman of these meetings. After a year or so the president of the union relinquished his part of the joint chairmanship and the meetings were held under the single chairman.

The meetings were frequently wrangles of the most violent sort, with occasional tendencies to resort to physical argument. However, they invariably broke up with handshakes all around and with agreements written to hold for twelve months and sometimes as much as two years. The union of course developed the disease of MORE and then some MORE with the manufacturers resisting the tendency as best they might. However, on one or two occasions the union accepted less when times were dark and competition from foreign countries demanded lower costs.

And so it has gone on for almost twenty years, with no time lost either through strikes or lockouts, with the union and the manufacturers cooperating in matters of common interest and with a rough and ready good feeling that has survived temporary flare-ups. We misspoke - one strike was called in a plant and the union itself broke up the strike and disciplined the recalcitrants.

When the NRA came along and the industrial relations problem was instrumental in blowing up the works, this particular group had no

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difficulties along that line. The industry and union had a contract which covered wages and all working conditions so satisfactorily that the NRA officials could see no reason for interfering with it.

A few days ago the narrator attended a meeting in New York where approximately 168 trade association secretaries and business men discussed with great earnestness what might be done to solve the industrial relations problem. For a variety of reasons our hero kept his mouth shut and, as every one knows, a tightly closed mouth is conducive to thought. He went back over this history as related and suddenly realized that he and several others owed a considerable debt to a first class writing woman by the name of Tarbell. He made up his mind that the best way of partially discharging that debt was to lay out in plain language the influence which her principles had had on this particular segment of industrial effort. For a large variety of reasons the story can have but one reader. The author hopes it will give that reader as much satisfaction as she deserves and as much pleasure as the writing of it has given the author.

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