

"THE FEAR OF EFFICIENCY"

By Miss Ida M. Tarbell of New York City,
Delivered before the Detroit Board
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There is no more fertile cause of misunderstanding among men and women than that which comes from attaching different meanings to the same word. A perfectly good word, which arouses you to exaltation, joy and interest, may be like a red flag to me. It arouses me to anger, irritation and disgust. All those who deal much with public affairs understand the danger that lies in the use of the word. Mr. Lincoln was one of the most careful of men in the particular use of words. A number of years ago, a man who had served in a hospital in Washington during the war, told me a story which I often repeat, and which illustrates, I think, very well this point. Mr. Lincoln was being shown through one of the hospitals in Washington, where there were large numbers of the wounded, from both sides. He came to a ward which he was about to enter, when the boy stopped and said, "Mr. Lincoln, you shouldn't go in there. They're only rebels in there". And this man said he never could forget the gentleness with which Mr. Lincoln turned to him, and putting his hand on his shoulder, said, "Don't use that word, my boy. Say confederates."

These words which have bitter and controversial meanings cause us all a great deal of trouble, and there are always good words which are in danger of going wrong, of becoming controversial.

We have now a perfectly good, useful word which is in danger of having meanings read into it which are going to make it harmful and disputations for all of us, and that is the word "efficiency". It is a fine word. You know what it means - doing a thing in a competent, clean, best fashion; doing things with the least expenditure of force and of brain; doing them without fuss; making a thing do the work it is intended to do - that is efficiency. For years we have all been saying that is the great thing in America - efficiency. We needed it in the schools, we needed it in the churches, we needed it in our government, and there are plenty of proofs in all of these departments of life to show that we do need it.

Now, the only department of American life which has been able to develop efficiency into anything like a science, is that department to which I expect most of you present here belong, in one way or another, our great industrial world. In our industrial world efficiency has been developed into something like a science. It has been developed into a science. We call it the science of management, and there have been many men interested in the development of this science of management, but to one man preeminently the country, the industrial life of this country, owes a very great debt. The day will come when the real value of his service will be understood. This man, Mr. Frederick Taylor, gave twenty five or more years of the hardest kind of effort to developing the true science of management. The quality of effort which he put into this work of his compares in method very well with the work of Pasteur in developing his discoveries, with the work of Darwin in developing his theories. That is, it was work which had in it the passion of achievement, above everything else, and then it had that wonderful, divine quality of patience, which, having caught a glimpse of truth, is willing to go on and on and on, and gather details and compare and sacrifice everything else to prove it is the truth. The man that sees the truth,

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and then sacrifices everything to prove it is the truth, gives the greatest service to the world, and Frederick Taylor did something of that kind.

Now this science of efficiency, of management, which has been taken up by many men throughout the country, applied in this way, and that was always with more or less consideration for Mr. Taylor's very elaborate working out of this science of efficiency. You all know more or less what it means. Certainly the men connected with your great industries here know a great deal of what it means.

It means, for one thing, to put it popularly, that there is no work which men and women do that cannot be made in a sense skilled work. This science says there is no task which is serviceable in the world that is not worth being studied and the best way found to do it, and it says that when you have found this best way to do anything, whether it be sweeping a floor or digging a ditch, that that becomes a kind of skilled work, and then it is the business of men and women who direct others, to see that those who are to do this work are taught that true way. That is, in a sense you lift all men and women out of the class of the unskilled, because you do away with unskilled labor. Therefore, perhaps there is no more important thing at work today in industrial life than just this one thing, and that is one of the foundation things of the science of efficiency, or of management. It says that you cannot be putting men to do things for which they are not fitted. It says that you must study men as you study work. It says that you must route and manage and direct things until all your operations are running smoothly, like one of your great machines; that you must give as much care to the fitting together and the directing of men in your operations, as you do to your great wheels, and so forth.

That is what efficiency in a way means. Well now, no one can study its principles without saying, "Why, of course, this is common sense." You cannot study it without seeing that it has that quality of simplicity which immediately, when you see it put before you, appeals to you as the truth, and the real thing. Anyone that studies it knows that those principles are universal. They fit all human operations. They fit government; they fit schools; they fit the home; they fit everything; they are universal principles. But in spite of that, there has grown up in this country a great fear of efficiency. I sometimes feel when I use that word often, that even my best friends are angry with me. They can't talk with me about it. They lose their patience before they know what you are talking about. The whole thing is wrong.

Well, I have been going about a great deal for the last three or four years, looking into our industrial operations, and I see a great many cases of where efficiency in its highest form is applied, and I have gathered up a great many of the objections that men and women make to it. I have tried to analyze this fear which I find of it, and I have come to feel that most of the reasons for this fear are very human and understandable reasons.

Efficiency comes to you and says, You must change your way of doing things. Well, don't you know how all of us, the moment a man says "You must change your way", is put on the defensive. If you have done something, worked something out - it may be a very little thing, but you have worked it out the best you could - you know what it cost you, you know the effort and the pain and the sacrifice that that little imperfect achievement cost; and when a man comes along and says, "You should not have done so; you should have done so. This was all wrong. You

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wasted your time and your strength and your money. Do it this way," your vanity is picked, and you don't like it. What you want is congratulation and praise. You don't want criticism, and one of the primary elements in this fear of efficiency is because it attacks our way of doing things, our vanity, and wants to show us a better way, when we would like to believe that we have got the best way possible.

There is another thing that comes home to us all, I suppose more or less. Efficiency mentions our achievement, and it says, Well, you have quite a privilege here, you have little perquisites, you have little bits of graft all through this business, and you have got to cut them all out. And all the people who are enjoying the privileges, the man who works a little shorter hours than his neighbor, or the man who has it a little easier, all these men say, "That's a bad system. That's a bad system." They want to keep that little bit of thing they have lopped off somewhere in the operation in which they are connected. It is one of the most curious things in the world how we democratic people, we Americans, pride ourselves and fight for the little privilege that we have somehow gotten hold of. If you have a little income for which you did not have to work, if you have a little advantage over your fellow, you don't examine it and say, "I don't want that. It is not right." Instead, you pride yourself, as if it were a virtue to you that somehow you got an advantage over your neighbor. We are all, more or less, like that, and efficiency says, That is not efficiency; you have got to cut out the privileges, and put it all down for just what it is worth. And the fear of that is one of the criticisms of efficiency. How general that kind of thing is,

Four or five years ago an acquaintance of mine, who belonged to the young reform politicians of that period, was given a rather important position in a department in Washington. He had under him a large number of men and women. He said, "This is going to be the most efficient department there is in Washington. There are no efficient departments in Washington, but mine is going to be." And so he made a study of his department, and he began with his stenographers, and he graded them, and he said, "Those people are doing twenty five dollars' worth of work a week, and these people are doing fifteen dollars' worth, but some of them are getting twenty five for it. The fifteen dollar man has got to take fifteen. And he began by cutting off a lady or a gentleman - I forget which - and said, "You are only doing fifteen dollars' worth of work a week, and that is all you are going to get until you bring up your product. Well, the next day my acquaintance was waited upon by one member of the cabinet, by two United States senators, and by an indefinite number of congressmen. They said "You have done this, you say, in the interest of efficiency, but you must remember that there is such a thing as political efficiency, and political efficiency requires that this lady or gentleman - should have twenty five dollars a week, although they may only do fifteen dollars' worth of work." We have a great deal of that kind of objection to efficiency.

We have another kind - an element of fear - that comes from the fact that this science of management is a very slow institution. It is no short-cut. It is no short-cut to larger opportunities, to better conditions. It is a thing that has to be worked out, and we Americans don't like that. We like the quick way. We would like in this country to get laws that would settle everything right off, without any effort on our part. Whenever anything is wrong, we say, Let's

makes a law, let's get a new way, let's get a system. And so we go to work at the law, and pass it. Now there are enormous numbers of laws passed in this country by the best intentioned people in the world, who don't know the first thing about the matter that they are legislating and this is particularly true in our industrial life. Now, I have no plea for industrial life as it has existed in many places in this country. It needed legislating against, and it seemed as if bad laws were the only attention we could give it. We didn't know how to make good laws, but we knew something was wrong, and the men most concerned did not get together and work with those who were complaining, and show them how to make good laws; and we are never going to get good laws in this country until the employers of labor, and labor, and legislators get together and work them out. You have got to show them how it can be done. Why, in the state of Wisconsin, away back in '67 they had an eight hour law for women. They had one in New Hampshire. These laws were never obeyed. They didn't know how to get the work done if they obeyed them. They were laws which were the expression of an ideal. They were not at all worked out, and today, according to law, women work fifty four hours in Wisconsin. That's what happens. But they are learning in Wisconsin. There is no law in regard to industry passes in that state that has not been supervised, even for weeks and months, by the interested employers, by leaders of labor, as well as by industrial commissions and by politicians. That is, they learn what they can, and they make the best possible law, and when they get it, it works.

Now, we don't want to spend so much time on things. We want to take a short-cut. We want to get there quickly, and one fear of efficiency is that it demands so much time. Why, Mr. Taylor spent three years and half of the hardest kind of work in developing a law which he called the "Law of Heavy Labor". That was developed down indefinitely, and all the time that he was working on it, his managers from other places were coming in to see what Taylor did, because he was the important man, and they knew it, and they rocked with laughter when they saw him trying to work out a law for handling pig iron. They said, "That is the most absurd thing in the world. There is no law that governs the handling of pig iron". But at the end of three and a half years he had a law which was one of the most important ever developed in this country. In the twenty five or thirty years of his work he recorded sixty thousand experiments. Sixty thousand. That is the way that Darwin worked. That is the way that Pasteur worked. But we want to get there quicker, and we don't like efficiency because it is not a quick way.

Now, there are people who will tell you that it is a quick way. You just do this and do that, and you have efficiency. That is a little series of efficiency tricks. There is a great deal of difference between the science of efficiency, the science of management, and the tricks of efficiency, and that is what every intelligent industrial leader in this country must learn, the difference. It takes a long time, and we don't like it, and it means discipline.

Oh, it is so hard in this country, built as ours is, on the idea of liberty for every man, to understand the difference between discipline and suppression.

What is discipline? Discipline is nothing in the world but training yourself to do in the best possible way the thing you have to

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do, to learn what that thing is, and then to hold yourself to that. Until you have learned that, you are not fit for liberty. You must learn to do everything in the best possible way, and then to build on that. That is what all our education is for. All our education is to teach us all that is known, and then give us freedom to go on and learn more, to cast aside what we have learned if we find it is wrong.

You find everywhere, where this subject is brought up, this fear of the discipline. It was my happy - or unhappy - lot to be called before the industrial commission when it was sitting in New York, and this subject of the science of management came up, and there were some gentlemen on the commission that did not like it. They were afraid of it, and they said to me, "Miss Tarbell, how would you like to have somebody supervising all your sentences, telling you what words to use, throwing out a piece of work you have done?" Well, if the gentleman who asked me that question had known anything about the life of a journalist, he would have known that from start to finish nothing else happens to us. If he had ever seen the blue pencil in the editorial office, he would know it is much more severe than any efficiency engineer I ever came in contact with. The day has not come when you can question your editor. That blue pencil is final. So that question didn't trouble me in the least.

As a matter of fact, most of us know, if we are honest, that the thing that corresponds to the blue pencil, the thing that corresponds to your instruction card, this discipline we get, is the best thing that ever happened to us. It may be hard, but out of that we come into something like a true liberty, and a true realization. We learn through it. So that this fear of discipline, I think, is an utterly misplaced fear, utterly misplaced. People fear it because they fear the discipline. They fear it because efficiency demands a continuous effort.

There is an almost universal desire in this country to get on to what we call "Easy Street". That is where we all want to land, on Easy Street. Well, I never lived on Easy Street. I visit there occasionally, and there is something about Easy Street that I always notice. My blood never circulates quite so riotously and freely there as it does when I am in the thick of things in New York, when I am going home so tired at eight o'clock that I drop into bed, when I cut out amusements, dinners and visits, and the hundred pleasant things I would have on Easy Street. I notice there is a difference in my circulation.

People say to me, this discipline that you require, this continuous effort that you require in efficiency, takes all the interest out of it, out of your work. Work should be easy, should go smoothly. It goes smoothly under efficiency. It doesn't always go easily. It requires a great deal of effort, and after all, isn't that the thing that makes life interesting? Isn't it? What do you get your greatest joys out of? The things with the snap and the sparkle? They come through effort, all the time. Anyone who has lived at all knows that they are pretty nearly in proportion to your effort. Life is made interesting by its continual expansion, by the call it makes upon you to do something a little harder, something newer, something that you have learned, something that you did not know how to do. That's what makes life interesting. It is like mountain climbing. You pull yourself up

and up and up, and you sweat, and blister your feet and make your head ache, but you are finding a glorious place in the world. Life should not be a soporific. The kind of thing we do should be an elixir, should not put us to sleep.

Now, I am not saying that this wine of effort has not got a great deal that is bitter in it, that this scheme of doing things through effort does not sometimes make a bitter draft instead of an elixir of the thing we are doing, but we, everyone of us, know that it is out of that that we get our great results. Now it is out of this effort in industry, under this science, that you get your great results. There are many people who will say, "Well, granted that it does all this, that you do get your results, that it is a great thing to do things in the best possible way, that it is a great thing to do them in the new way, that it is a great thing to discipline honestly, to keep up your continuous effort - all good." But they condemn efficiency on another and a most serious charge. There are many people, of many minds, in this country, of different points of view, and different situations in life, who say that they want none of this system of management because it is incompatible with human development, with those fine notions of humanity which we must have if we are to work out our democracy. They show that efficiency makes a machine of a man, that it cuts out his aspirations, that it makes him what you will, not what he would be. Now if this charge is true, the science of management is doomed. There is nothing so sure in the world - and that all history tells us - as that whatever the device of men, whatever the invention whatever the scheme, if that device, that invention, that scheme, gets in the way of the human aspiration, gets in the way of those things which men and women hold dearest - their ideas of justice and of right and of progress - no matter what that thing be, if it gets in the way of those aspirations, it is sooner or later doomed. There is nothing that men can devise which will not have to go down finally before the aspirations of humanity. We have had that illustrated again and again, even in our immediate work. It is not so long ago, forty or fifty years ago, that a number of very able men in this country said to the government, "You give us certain privileges on the highways, on our railways and we can work out such tremendous industrial results as have never before been seen anywhere in the world," and they did. They took the privilege, and they worked out enormous and wonderful businesses, but what became of your rights and mine on the highways of America? They were sacrificed. That is, that human sense of fair play in us all was sacrificed in order that a great industrial thing might be worked out, and you know how the country felt when it saw that. You know how we fought, and how almost all of us have had to sacrifice more or less to establish the principle that in this country the highways must be ever free, because that is the human way. That is the only thing that accords with our sense of fair play, of justice.

It is not so long ago that we were all thrashing away, fighting day and night against what we called the alliances between big business and politics, when a group of able business men, with big vision, who saw noble things that might be done, said, you must let us have a certain control over the government in order that we might work out these things. They showed us wonderful results, but it was a sacrifice which was so inconsistent with our own ideals that we said, No matter what the material results, we cannot have that, and there is nothing more certain than that we won't have that. It doesn't matter what men invent, what they build up, if it is inconsistent with the highest

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human aspirations, it has got to go down. They may build the most marvelous machines for militarism, more marvelous than have ever been dreamed of before, but if those machines are incompatible with the highest laws that we, in our years of civilization, have worked out, those things must go down. There is nothing more certain than that humanity is going to prevail.

Now, if this science of management is inconsistent with the highest development of men and women to whom it is applied, then it is doomed, no matter what you do with it, no matter what profit you show, no matter how you divide your profits. If it is inconsistent with developing men and women into better men and women, it is doomed. But is it? Let me tell you some of the things I have seen the science of management doing.

Take some of the practical ideals we have in this country now for all men and women. One of the finest and sweetest and most wholesome of them is that all our men and women in this country, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, should be well, healthy. National health. That is an ideal that is growing through the land, and has been for years. We have a vision of a time when in the city of Detroit there will not be a man go to work with dull eyes, or faltering steps, or an uncertain hand, or a heavy brain, when everybody will go to work well and strong, and feeling like work. That thing is going all over this country, and in no place outside of the higher class homes and the higher class schools is there so much being done to realize that ideal as in factories - industries. All over this country there are factories that are saying, Every man who works here is going to be a well man. They are doing many many things. I won't talk about sanitation. That's an old story. But one of the things that did interest me very much is a thing that is being tried in many factories of the land. That is simply the physical examination - to take your body of three, or four or five hundred men, or three or four or five thousand, and go straight through it, and tell every man if there is anything the matter with him, and what he must do to correct that thing.

Now there has been an idea bred among labor - and I always respect the suspicions of labor; labor has had ample cause to be suspicious of everything that is done in the country - there has been a suspicion bred that there must be some trick about this thing. It could not be what they call "straight goods". They have some sinister purpose. Well, I am not saying that somebody may not have had some sinister purpose, but I visited the other day a factory where there are three or four thousand men, where the physical examination has been in practice for three years. The first year about half of these men took it, and they had an eye on it, too. Last year there were two doctors, as able as the management could find, that were put in to examine them. It was discovered by the employes - not the employer - that one of these doctors was a great deal more thorough than the other, and a perfect wail went up in the factory by all that had been given the less thorough doctor. They said, It is not a square deal; we want this physical examination as thorough as it can be. And in the end the one man had to examine everybody, and out of the three or four thousand there, only fifteen had not presented themselves for this, and the change in health in that factory is almost unbelievable. Here is a body of men who have caught the idea, who understand that health is our right, that health is God's will, but we have got to do our part to get it. They are being shown that it is their inheritance, and they are being shown how to enter into

that inheritance. And that is being done in factories - the despised factories.

I was in a big concern in Cincinnati not long ago, where when times are good they have seven thousand men. They have employed a doctor - as cultivated a man as I ever saw - of large experience, who once had a great social position, and who has come on what is for him a meager earning of ten thousand a year, to help and direct the lives of those men. That man works from seven o'clock in the morning until seven o'clock the next morning, sometimes. He refuses a nurse, and he told me, "Why, this is the most interesting problem I ever had. I never saw anything that paid such dividends. Why," he said, "these men - I am helping them, and I am showing them how they can keep well, and there are seven thousand and skilled mechanics." Can you conceive of a better social service than that? And that was all done in the name of efficiency, for you cannot have efficiency unless you have well men. That is the science that is falling into line with one of our great aspirations.

There is another thing, and that is fitting men to the thing that they can do. Oh, the misery that we have had in the world, and what we have all probably suffered by being put into the place where we did not belong, and knowing that there was probably somewhere something that we could do well, but there was nobody to help us to get to it. If to the people who have had some chance of education, that problem is a hard one, think what it must be for the men and women in the mills, in our factories. Efficiency comes to the man and says, You don't like to do that, you are not fitted to do that, but don't you think you can do this?

I went into a concern the other day where the principles of scientific management are applied in the most intelligent fashion possible, and I saw in the office of the manager a handsome boy. He was using a typewriter at that moment. There were certain records wanted, and he was asked to bring them, and while he was gone, the manager said to me, "Isn't that an interesting looking boy?" I said, "Yes, a handsome little chap." He said, "You know, that boy came here as an errand boy. He had no father or mother, was just a waif on the street. We put him to do some common labor. I saw him one day doing some figuring, and asked him if he had been to school. He said, 'I am trying to teach myself arithmetic.' I saw that he went to night school. The first thing I knew, he was learning the typewriter, and he is going right ahead." That man is watching every man and woman in his shop to find out what they are best fitted for. The science of management demands so many people of higher grade, that a manager has to study his people to find out who can do things in the best possible way. He has got to have the better kind. He is forced to have the highest kind by the very principles of his management, by the very principles of his science.

Justice must be served, or the whole thing falls to the ground. You are not going to get men and women to make their best effort - and I thank God this is true in this country - you cannot get men and women to do their best unless they have the sense of justice in their hearts. The science of management demands justice, demands that a man gets in accordance to his effort, and it demands, too, that he should be happy, for it has learned that great thing, that we do not get the best out of ourselves or anybody unless we have the thing that we want, unless there is a chance of happiness, a little of the joy of life, a little of something besides hard labor. No man or woman ever develops, ever does his best, unless he has a little of the joy of life, or sees it coming, and sometimes it is such a simple thing that makes the joy of life.

I saw a bright-faced girl working like mad at a machine in a laundry one day, and singing to herself. I said, "Well, you have got one happy girl there." The woman who directed the social service work there said, "Yes, and I find it is such simple things that make people happy. That girl used to be a poor worker; she used to be morose, and we used to think we would have to let her go. I knew that somewhere there was something that girl wanted and did not see a way to get, and this is what it was, such a simple thing, yet it shows just how men and women are made." After a long time this social service worker got the confidence of that girl, and this is what she found. The girl was one of a big family. She turned all her wages into the big family, but she never had any privacy at home, and the one thing in the world that girl wanted was a room to herself, and so, my wise friend said, "I got acquainted with the mother, and I got acquainted with the children, and I studied the household, and finally, by a great deal of diplomacy and effort I got this little girl a room to herself, and now she has it and she is the happiest and most efficient worker we have in this laundry."

Thus you have a science which in its effort to develop people will find everything and anything that refers to this worker of which it wants to make a better man or woman. Now you tell me that is paternalism. Well, I don't care what you call it. I don't care what anybody calls anything, if it serves humanity. I don't care what it is called if it is developing men and women. I call it just good common-sense, myself, and an application of what efficiency really means, and an application which we have got to have if we are ever going to have this science in its fullness in our industrial life.

Efficiency cannot go down, because it is a system of developing men. It is a system of teaching men and women to live together, in their great activities and operations, in peace, and is there anything so important in this country?

There is only one great question before the world today for men and women. It is that terrific question, have we in operation in our civilization principles which, finally worked out, are going to put an end to such horrors as the world is now seeing? Must we forever have a world which periodically has got to suffer these convulsions? Is that not unthinkable to intelligence? Is that not unthinkable to those that believe in self control? Is not that unthinkable to these who have hope, or those who believe in the religion that governs us? Must we consent to such a world as that, and how are we ever going to stop it if we cannot learn to live in peace at home?

Just so long as in what we call our peaceful pursuits we must settle questions of common justice by war, just so long as in our peaceful pursuits one body fights the hopes and aspirations of another, can you expect that we will not have international wars? What makes them? It is the greed and bitterness and lack of self control in the individual bodies and the individual nations; and a nation is made up of its citizens, and if its citizens have not learned to live in peace among themselves, they cannot be expected to live in peace with other nations.

The question of war comes right home to you and me, for we are the people, and we make the temper of the people, and until we have learned to do justice, to develop men, as I believe the science of management does develop men, until we have learned to develop men we can never hope to put an end to wars.

Thank you.

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