

CHAPTER XVII.

THE WOMAN REPORTER AND THE DINNER PAIL BRIGADE.

(Read before the Detroit Press Club.)

The relation of the woman reporter to the dinner pail brigade is much closer than might on the surface seem to be the fact. More people in Detroit swing the tin dinner pail than even themselves are aware of. For the term "dinner pail brigade" has a wider significance than reference to those alone who actually carry their dinners from their homes to their work in such receptacles. It has been made to and does include all who work for wages. Thus the clerk in the store, the assistant behind the cashier's desk, the journeyman or journeywoman who is a skilled mechanic, the typewriter in the lawyer's office, the teacher in the public or private school, as well as the girl in the factory, is a member of the dinner pail brigade. More than this, the members of the Detroit Press Club are in the same great army, and though they do not actually eat their modest or immodest lunches from tin pails, or even from baskets, but perhaps sit down in nicely furnished and well-served restaurants, and are waited on by dusky attendants, yet they lose sight of a great economic fact if they do not see that their common interests are with the horny-handed sons and daughters of toil, who, grimy, greasy, dirty and often smelling to heaven, actually feed themselves out of tin pails.

The swinger of a dinner pail—man or woman, girl or boy—is a study worthy the careful consideration, in more directions than one, of the woman reporter. Some of these humble men and women are born to the

trade they work at all their weary lives. The son follows the calling of the father; the daughter treads in the footsteps of the mother. After a few generations of one family working at one thing, the children pick up the tricks of the trade much quicker than a newcomer in that particular industry. Like the birds of the air, they are born with aptitudes making them mechanics from their birth. This has its pathetic side, for when instincts are above the normal in any one direction, the effect is to lessen the strength of other faculties, producing uneven human beings, who are more easily swayed from well-established and well-beaten paths into strange beliefs, and are attracted by what has no fascination for the normally minded.

I will not now attempt to draw the line between those who are and those who are not wealth producers. Nor is it necessary for my purpose at this time to say who work at productive and who at unproductive labor, in the sense of creating wealth. Suffice it to say that all labor is honorable that has an honorable purpose, and all such laborers are at least entitled to the good will and best wishes for their happiness and prosperity of the general public.

The labor question is so closely related to the dinner pail brigade that one cannot be understood without something is known of the historical development of the other. Time was with the human race when it was eat or be eaten. In some respects the same conditions prevail today, though in so called civilized countries we have stopped eating our sisters and brothers—the fat ones having the first choice, to be sure—yet many manage to live off others, sending the less physically or mentally developed into unknown and untimely graves. Still, we have stopped dealing directly in flesh and blood as a source of food supply, just as our ancestors finally did when they awoke one morning of a new age to a realization of the fact that it paid better to let those captured in war survive and

become slaves, as in the long run this provided the masters the most enjoyment with the least effort.

Then, as hamlets grew into villages and villages into cities, other conditions forced upon the lords of the land the problem of serfdom, when a worker wasn't exactly a slave, yet he could not without the consent of someone in authority, generally the land owner, leave the vicinity of the place where he was born. But not all the people were fools. Some of them welcomed the hard lines of a freedman without a master to the comparative safety and protection of a lord, who ministered to their physical and spiritual needs; and they fled to the free walled cities growing up, and united with other bondsmen to produce and exchange their wealth in their own way and at their own option.

Whence came the capitalists originally? They had their foundation in the expropriation of the agricultural population. The class began in England in the usurpation of the common lands, and gradually there grew up capitalist farmers, who grew rich at the expense of their laborers. The small peasants were transferred into wage-laborers, and their means of subsistence and of labor into material elements of capital.

"The spoliation of the church's property, the fraudulent alienation of the state domains, the robbery of the common lands, the usurpation of feudal and clan property and its transformation into modern private property under circumstances of reckless terrorism," says Marx, "were just so many idyllic methods of primitive accumulation. They conquered the field for capitalistic agriculture, made the soil part and parcel of capital, and created for the town industries the necessary supply of 'free' and outlawed proletariat."

These expropriated people could not be absorbed by the towns as fast as they were made. Manufactures did not advance rapidly enough. So the laborers were turned into beggars, robbers and vagabonds, partly from inclination and partly from stress of circum-

stances. Thus were created the necessary conditions that gave plenty of cheap labor material to manufacturers, who were enabled to buy the time of laborers at a price just a little above the actual cost of their keep.

How does the dinner pail brigade live? In many a humble home in Detroit are unwritten tragedies. Henry Ward Beecher talked of people living, loving and being happy on a dollar a day, with bread and good water for breakfast, good water and bread for dinner, and the dose repeated for supper. I doubt if anyone in the Press Club has tried it, except, mayhap, under stress of circumstances for a short time. Certainly they have never brought up a family on any such meager wage. And if they have, then in their own lives are incidents which, if rightly written, and timely, should command the attention of the world. Tolstoi's fame arises from this one thing: that he tells truthfully what he has seen and knows of lowly life among the Russian agricultural classes. It is true that he has also graphically described the wickedness and wastes of the Russian aristocracy, yet he is known as the writer of the lowly—the dinner pail brigade of Russian peasantry who have just emerged from serfdom to find themselves still in the grasp of landlordism.

How does the dinner pail brigade work? Here, too, is a vast field for the really enterprising woman reporter. Thus far the surface has merely been touched. There are factories in Detroit employing women, to write of which as they really are would move the most callous heart to compassion. I am not enthusiastic over the methods of a Nellie Bly in getting information for the papers, but it is a fact that some of these establishments could not be written up as they should be except one was actually employed there. There are also factories that, so far as sanitary arrangements are concerned, are an honor to proprietors. There is plenty of both light and air, with rooms for

the dinner pail brigade to eat its humble lunch, and warm its humble coffee, and wash its humble hands and face, and disrobe and robe its humble self when changing work clothes for street costumes. This is as it should be, and such factories contain stories of better health, and greater proficiency, by reason of all these advantages. And what a splendid opportunity do they give for the woman reporter to draw contrasts, to show what has been done, what can be done, and what should be done.

What are the recreations of the dinner pail brigade? Here is a bottomless pit, with a single span of life all too short to attempt to sound its depth. The Saturday night balls, the Sunday picnics, the weekly excursions, the moonlight rides on lake and river, the marriage carousals and the equally hilarious though weeping death scenes—for funerals as well as marriages are made to minister to the demands of the poor for recreation—here a thousand and one or more avenues have never yet been adequately explored; for it is a peculiarity of all these incidents in the life of the members of the dinner pail brigade that, like the human countenance, no one is exactly like any other. These infinite varieties of the inward desire for pleasures are at the beck and call of the perceptive faculties of the woman reporter, and Detroit, with its scores of nationalities, offers one of the most prolific fields in the world for successful explorations.

What are the ethics of the dinner pail brigade? What does its vast membership know of Rightness and Oughtness? What are its aspirations? How does it correlate its idea of a just God with a God who allows all the misery and suffering in the world? Through what peculiar mental operation does the brain of the average member of the dinner pail brigade go to reconcile present pains and penalties with the love of the Creator who allows it? The dog licks the hand that smites it. It seems to me the same spirit is shown by the simple-minded worker who has a blind confi-

dence in his spiritual advisers—a confidence that is too often misplaced, a confidence that gives up present happiness for the promise of future ecstasy. I admit the enigma is too deep for my comprehension, yet I doubt not that among the women reporters of Detroit are bright minds that by intuition alone can arrive at the comprehension and expression of great truths in this connection. Here are mental mysteries worthy the most profound study; here are vast problems calling for the exercise of the keenest faculties.

What little has been said has been in the hopes of impressing you with the importance of the dinner pail brigade in the industrial and social world, and even in literature. And the field in some directions can alone be explored by the woman reporter. Lift up your eyes and behold harvests ready for reapers and gleaners. The reward will be in proportion to the diligence, the perseverance, the intelligence and the comprehension of the worker, and will amply repay all for the physical and mental exertion it calls forth. The woman reporter holds an honored position in the world and must rise equal to the occasion. Girding on the armor of compassion for the lowly, the distressed and the downtrodden, let her go forth resolved that, whatever may befall, come joy or woe, come prosperity or adversity, come renown or oblivion, the world shall be the better for her having lived in it, and the dinner pail brigade shall ever rejoice that she wielded the pen and followed the rugged paths of literature.

Dost thou desire to climb the heights divine?
Inquire and seek. 'Tis this that overcomes.
So learn what more doth weigh, what less
In balances of God's eternal justice.