

Christine Frederick

THE NEW HOUSEKEEPING

***Efficiency Studies in
Home Management***

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Mrs. Frederick in Her Efficiency Experiment Kitchen, "Applecroft," Greenlawn, L. I.

Ch. One. Efficiency and the New House-Keeping

I was sitting by the library table, mending, while my husband and a business friend were talking,* one evening about a year ago. I heard them use several new words and phrases so often that I stopped to listen.

"Efficiency," I heard our caller say a dozen times; "standard practice," "motion study," and "scientific management," he repeated over and over again. The words suggested interesting things, and as I listened I grew absorbed and amazed.

"What are you men talking about?" I interrupted. "I can't help being interested. Won't you please tell me what 'efficiency' is, Mr. Watson? What were you saying about bricklaying?"

"Your husband and I were just discussing this new idea developed in business, called 'efficiency,' or 'scientific management'," Mr. Watson replied. "A group of men, Emerson and Taylor among others, have come to be known in the business and manufacturing world as 'efficiency engineers.' These men are able to go into a shop or factory, watch the men at work, make observations and studies of motions, and from these observations show where waste and false movements occur and why the men lose time. Then they go to work to build up the 'efficiency' of that shop, so that the men do more work in less time, with less waste and greater output or gain to the owners, while the workers have shorter hours, higher pay, and better working conditions."

"Just how do they find out what is wrong?" I asked, laying my sewing on the table, and listening eagerly, "and how do they actually increase this 'efficiency'?"

"Well, for instance," answered Mr. Watson, "this is how they improved the method of laying bricks: Formerly a workman stood before a wall, and when he wanted to lay a brick he had to stoop, pick a brick weighing four and a half pounds from a mixed pile at his feet, and carry it to the wall. Suppose he weighed one hundred and eighty pounds; that worker would have to lower his one hundred and eighty pounds four feet every time he picked up each of the two thousand bricks he laid in a day! Now an efficiency expert, after watching bricklayers at work, devised a simple little table which holds

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the bricks in an orderly pile at the workman's side. They are brought to him in orderly piles, proper side up. Because he doesn't need to stoop or sort, the same man who formerly could lay only one hundred and twenty bricks an hour can now lay three hundred and fifty bricks, and he uses only five motions, where formerly it required eighteen."

"That sounds like a fairy tale," I laughed skeptically. "What else wonderful can they do with this magic wand of 'efficiency'?"

"It does sound like magic," Mr. Watson replied, "but it is only common sense. There is just one best way, one shortest way to perform any task involving work done with the hands, or the hands and head working in coöperation. These efficiency men merely study to find that one best and shortest way, and when they have found it they call that task 'standardized.' Very often the efficiency is increased because the task is done with fewer motions, with better tools, because of even such a simple thing as changing the height of a work-bench, or the position of the worker." . . .

"Why, I suppose you smart men and efficiency experts will soon try to tell me and all the other women that washing dishes can be 'standardized,'" I bantered, "or that *we* could save a million dollars if we would run our homes on 'scientific management'!"

"Now, Mrs. Frederick," replied Mr. Watson seriously, "that is really not too much to imagine. There is no older saying than 'woman's work is never done.' If the principles of efficiency can be successfully carried out in every kind of shop, factory, and business, why couldn't they be carried out equally well in the home?"

"Because," I answered, "in a factory the workers do just one thing, like sewing shoes, or cutting envelopes, and it is easy to standardize one set of operations. But in a home there are dozens, yes, hundreds, of tasks requiring totally different knowledge and movements. There is ironing, dusting, cooking, sewing, baking, and care of children. No two tasks are alike. Instead of working as she would in a factory, at one task, the home-worker peels potatoes, washes dishes, and darns stockings all in the same hour. Yes, and right in the midst of peeling the potatoes she has to drop her knife, and see why the baby is crying.

"You men simply don't understand anything about work in a home," I continued, heatedly. "One day a woman sweeps and dusts, and the next she irons, and the next she bakes, and in-between-times she cares for babies, and sews, answers call bells and 'phones, and markets, and mends the lining of her husband's coat, and makes a cocoanut cake for Sunday!

"Perhaps she can afford one maid — perhaps she belongs to the fortunate but very small class that can afford *two*. But even then she has to see that servants don't waste, that they work the best way, and, in addition, put up with their foibles, which is almost as bad as having to do all the work herself.

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“Do you mean to tell me that so many kinds of household tasks could be ‘standardized,’ or that the principles of scientific management could be applied in the home?” I concluded a little triumphantly. “I’ve talked with numbers of maids, and they all have the same plaint: that there are too many kinds of work to be done by the same person, that they never have any dependable ‘off hours,’ and that no two families do the same task in the same way. That is why they prefer to work in factories where one set of operations *can* be standardized; and there you have the whole crux of the servant question.”

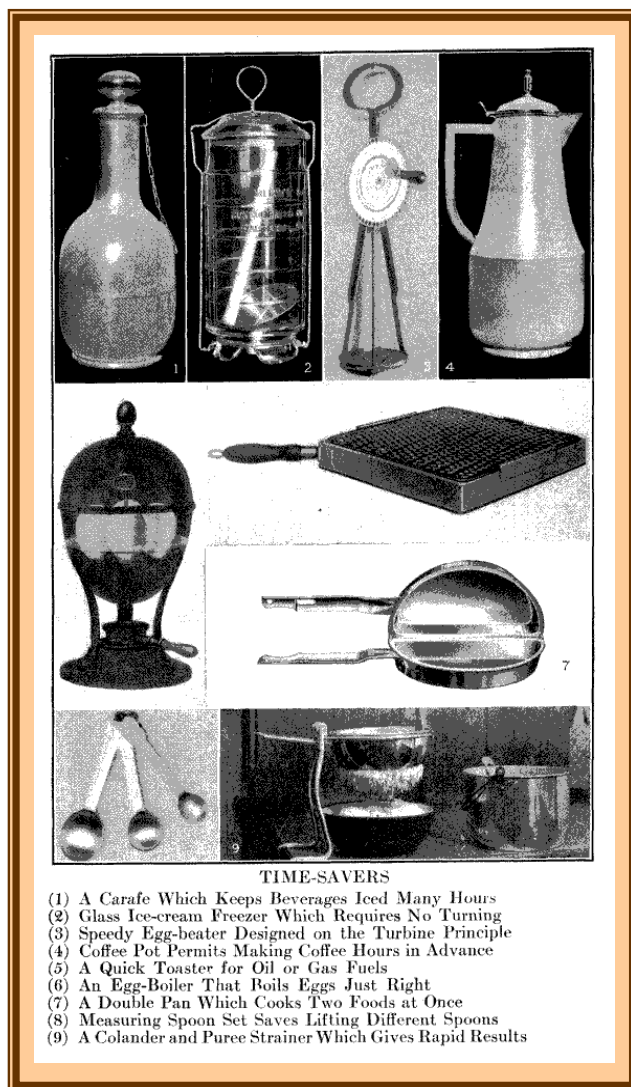
Mr. Watson shifted his chair with a realization that he had been put up against no simple problem, nor one in which he had experience. Then he answered, “Well, I hadn’t considered the idea before, but I believe so strongly in the principles of efficiency and have seen them work out so satisfactorily in every kind of shop where there *are* different kinds of work and where the owners have said just what you say, that I absolutely know that these principles must have application to *any* kind of work, and that they could be carried out successfully in the home if you women would only faithfully apply them.

“I must leave now, but I tell you what I’ll do. I’ll come over some evening to talk to you, and see what we can figure out on home efficiency. I certainly don’t see why you couldn’t work out some of its principles in a mighty interesting way. Suppose you read this book on scientific management?”

After Mr. Watson had gone, I turned eagerly to my husband. “George,” I said, “that efficiency gospel is going to mean a great deal to modern housekeeping, in spite of some doubts I have. Do you know that I am going to work out those principles here in our home! I won’t have you men doing all the great and noble things! I’m going to find out how these experts conduct investigations, and all about it, and then apply it to *my* factory, *my* business, *my* home.”

The more I thought about it, the stronger hold the idea took upon me. Just a few days previous I had been reading an article by a prominent clubwoman who was solving the servant problem by substituting expensive household equipment in place of her three servants. Another review discussed the number of women who were living in apartments and boarding-houses, and who refused to shoulder the burdens of real homemaking. A third writer enlarged on the lack of youthful marriages, a lack which he claimed was due to the fact that young women of this era refuse to enter the drudgery of household tasks. On all sides it was the problem of the home, the problem of housekeeping and homemaking.

The home problem for the woman of wealth is simple: it is *solved*. Money, enough of it, will always buy service, just as it can procure the best in any other regard. The home problem for the



women of the very poor is also fairly simple. The women of the poor themselves come from the class of servants. Their homemaking is far less complex, their tastes simple, and society demands no appearance-standard from them. Added to this, organized philanthropy *is* by every means teaching the women of the poor how to keep house in the most scientific, efficient manner. Settlements, domestic science classes, model kitchens and tenements, nursing stations, slum depots, charity boards, health boards, visiting nurses, night schools, and mission classes are teaching, *free*, the women of the poor how to transmute their old-world ignorance into the shining knowledge of the new hemisphere.

The problem, the real issue, confronts the *middle-class woman* of slight strength and still slighter means, and of whom society expects so much — the wives of ministers on small salary, wives of bank clerks, shoe salesmen, college professors, and young men in various businesses starting to make their way. They are refined, educated women, many with a college or business training. They have one or more babies to care for, and limited finances to meet the situation.

The soaring cost of living and the necessity for keeping up a fair standard of appearances obligatory on the middle class prevent any but the more than “average” well-to-do from employing regular help. Among ten average families I know (scattered the country over) whose incomes range from \$1,200 to \$2,500 a year, the occupations range as follows:

Two high-grade mechanics	One young doctor
One salesman in photo supplies	One lawyer
One salesman in office equipment	One advertising man
One artist and illustrator	One literary man . . .

I determined then to give this gospel of efficiency a fair trial, but first I wanted Mr. Watson, himself an efficiency engineer, to explain it thoroughly.

“Now, Mr. Watson,” I said a few evenings later, “I want you to explain the principles of efficiency to me — the how, the why — so that I and all the other homemakers can understand it fully.”

“Gladly,” replied Mr. Watson; “I’ll begin by stating the twelve principles on which the science of efficiency rests:

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|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Ideals | 7. Dispatching |
| 2. Common Sense | 8. Scheduling |
| 3. Competent Counsel | 9. Reliable Records |
| 4. Standardized Operations | 10. Discipline |
| 5. Standardized Conditions | 11. Fair Deal |
| 6. Standard Practice | 12. Efficiency Reward |

“You notice that the first principle is that of ‘ideals.’ The first thing an efficiency expert finds out when he wishes to improve the standard of a plant is, what are its ideals? What is it running for? These experts say it is astounding how many people are running businesses and don’t know *why* they are running them! I sometimes think that many women don’t consciously know *why* they are running their homes. The ideal should be so strong, so clearly kept in mind, that it will outweigh any present petty difficulties. Ideals look to the future, they are the ‘something’ that guides, directs, propels the whole machinery, whether of business or the home — do you get my meaning?

“Women *do* have ideals as to why they run their homes,” Mr. Watson continued “only they are not always concretely expressed to themselves. It may be health, it may be spotless cleanliness, social progress, or something else. I know a woman who takes her babies out for a morning’s airing and leaves the parlor undusted, even though she dislikes untidiness. But her ideal of health comes first. Then another woman has turned her guest-room over to her two boys for their wireless and electricity apparatus. You know what a pretty guest-room means to a woman! But this mother has such a strong ideal of the future training and habits of her boys that she is willing to sacrifice a present pleasure for a remote end. Ideals can be so strong as to buoy up, outweigh difficulty, and be a vital spur to effort, in the home particularly. The clearer a woman’s ideals, the easier her work, the greater her strength and success. She must know the ‘why’ of her business.

“Common Sense is the next principle, and some people think this homely term covers all the principles. It is only common sense not to stoop for a pot if you can hang it where you don’t need to stoop — and it is efficiency as well.”

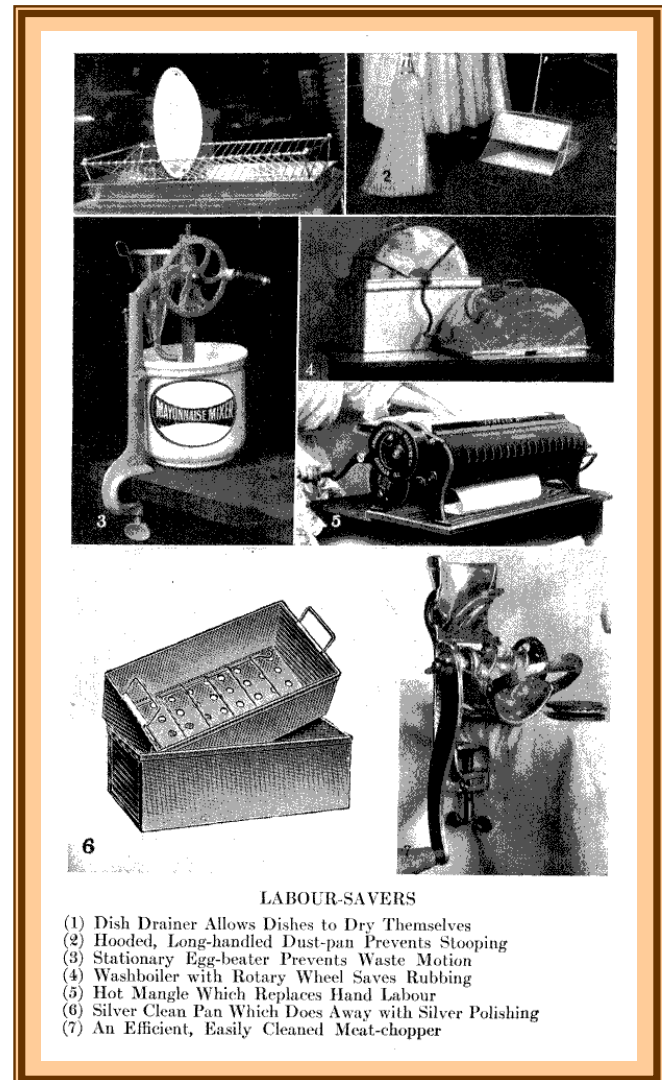
“And what does ‘competent counsel’ mean?” I questioned.

“Competent Counsel means expert advice and help. The efficiency engineers who are called in to large factories to find what is wrong, or suggest better methods, are one kind of competent counsel.”

“Yes, but there are no efficiency experts in housekeeping, are there?” I inquired.

“If the housewife would only realize it, there is more expert advice being offered her free than is being offered any manufacturer. Take the pages in all the best publications devoted to the science of home management. The finest specialists and experts are retained by magazines to tell women how to care for babies, prepare foods, how to economize and how to make clothing. Both the booklets and the advertisements of various advertisers inform the housewife of new methods, recipes, devices, materials. . . .

“Then comes Standardized Operations, which includes the oft-mentioned ‘motion study,’” Mr. Watson continued. “The homemaker takes countless steps and motions in every task, many of which are entirely avoidable. She may walk twenty feet to hang up the egg-beater; she may wash dishes in a way that wastes time and effort; or she lifts separately each piece of laundry from the basket at her feet, when the efficient thing would be to place the whole basket at her own level. Standardized conditions mean the right height of work-table, proper light, ventilation, and the correct tool for the purpose. . . .



“What is this next point of ‘Dispatching’?” . . .

“ . . . Planning and arranging work come under these points. . . Applied to housework it would mean that there was a definite regular time for each task, so that each task was done at a certain time in relation to other tasks. . . .

“Ninety per cent. of servant troubles are at bottom the fault of the mistress,” Mr. Watson declared. “Now if a woman knew and applied scientifically the principle of ‘fair play’ her help wouldn’t leave her, sick, in bed, as I have heard some maids have done. An efficient mistress would handle her help as scientifically as the manager of a big shop. She will use the principle of ‘efficiency reward’ with her helpers, and know how to secure from them that ‘initiative’ — that something over and above mere work which is essential, while at the same time she improves the conditions under which they work.” . . .

“If efficiency in the home can accomplish all you make me believe it can,” I replied, “a new housekeeping will have come, and homemaking will be the greatest profession.”

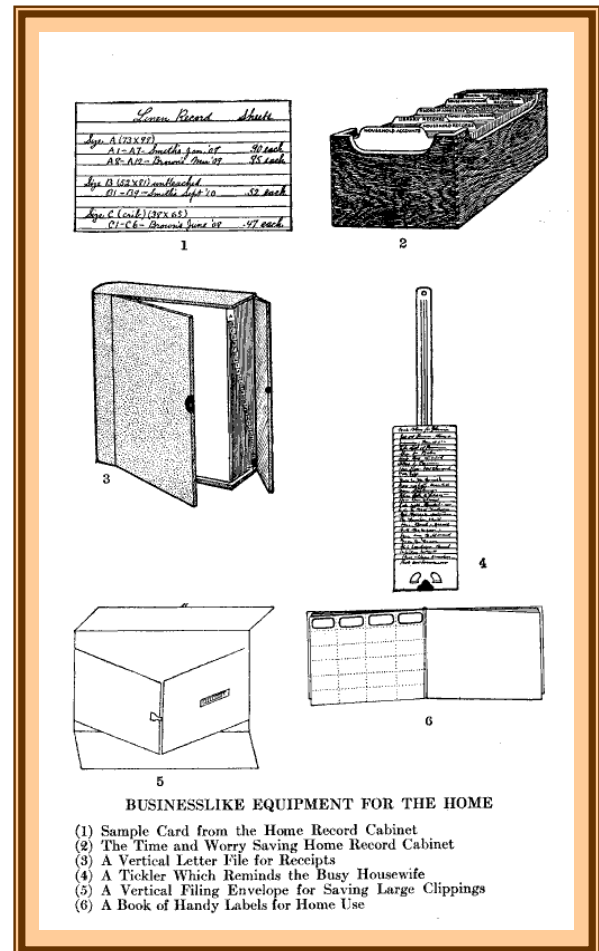


Ch. Twelve. Developing the Homemaker’s Personal Efficiency

We have talked a great deal about methods and systems, plans and schedules in the household: now comes the most vital, the most difficult point of all, and yet the keystone of the whole matter — *the personal attitude of the woman toward her work.*

Without properly applying the modern ideas of efficiency to her own mind (which is in itself a complete and separate organization) the whole plan of “the new housekeeping” falls to pieces. No stream can rise higher than its source, and no household efficiency can be greater than the personal efficiency of the woman who directs it. This explains why there are literally millions of women in the world to-day who feel “up against it” about their households. They have helpful household magazines a-plenty, and labour-saving devices a-plenty, but the never-endingness, the detailed-ness, the wearing-ness of their work become too much for them. It closes over women like water over a drowning person, and women confess themselves overcome, actually assuming the mental attitude, in regard to their work, of *slave to master*, instead of master to slave. . . .

The actual, widespread state of mind of many millions of women may be classified and divided about as follows, as I have excellent reason to believe after the closest and most confidential correspondence with many hundreds of women everywhere:

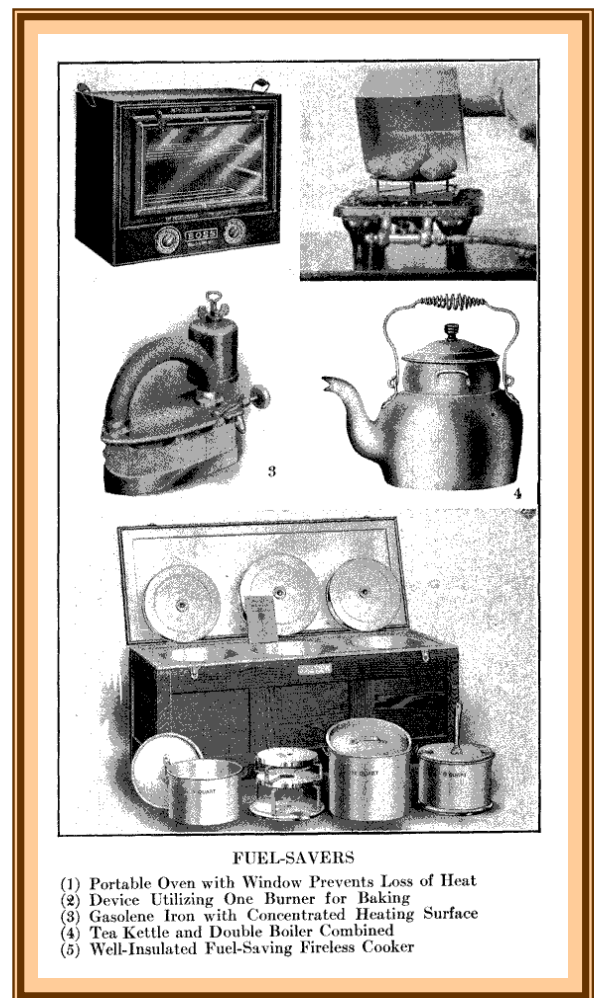


- (1) A general feeling that they are weighted down by fate and circumstances, and that their housework is a kind of ogre who has them in his grip, from which they cannot escape, or against which they do not seem to be making any headway.
- (2) An attitude which mistakes the physical work of *housekeeping* for the real ends of *homemaking* — which thinks it is making a home when in reality it is only keeping a house; which measures housekeeping ability by the amount and exhaustiveness of the physical work accomplished.
- (3) An automatic, dull sort of attitude which goes through the routine with as little thought or analysis as possible, following any traditional methods, aiming only to get it finished as soon as possible, and skeptical of any new way of getting work accomplished.
- (4) A mania for some one phase of housework — such as cleanliness, decoration, cooking, etc., on which all originality and effort is spent, to the neglect of general efficiency.
- (5) A puttering love for all housework, to the extent that work is prolonged, elaborated, and repeated, which takes up several times more energy than necessary.
- (6) A general lack of confidence, and inability to find and apply remedies for conditions they know to be wrong; a procrastination in applying remedies they already know to be effective; a half-heartedness and lack of patience and thoroughness in applying any new methods or routine; failure to maintain discipline over themselves.
- (7) An attitude of mere tolerance toward housework — preferring business or other careers, looking impatiently and contemptuously on all housework, hoping to be relieved of it entirely some day, and exchange it for something “more interesting.”

Every one of these attitudes of mind is really poisonous and antagonistic to either efficiency or the highest personal happiness and character. These seven typical attitudes of mind have hung like millstones around the neck of the real emancipation and development of women. The first great work of efficiency in the home, and of liberation of women from household drudgery, is to exchange any or all of these attitudes for the efficient attitude, my interpretation of which I write down here in italics so as to give it every possible emphasis:

First of all, the efficient attitude of mind for the housewife and homemaker is to realize that, no matter how difficult and trying are the household tasks and burdens she finds placed upon her, there positively are ways to meet and conquer them efficiently — IF she approaches these problems vigorously, hopefully, and patiently.

Second, that far from being dull drudgery,



homemaking in all its details is fascinating and stimulating if a woman applies to it her best intelligence and culture.

Third, that no matter how good a housekeeper and homemaker a woman may already be, she will be eager not only to TRY, but to persistently and intelligently keep on trying, to apply in her home the scientific methods of work and management already proved and tried in shop and office throughout the world. . . .

The mind must be taken in hand, *managed* and *organized*, in order to be efficient. It is a whole world in itself. We, the master of it, whose will it ought to obey, may be (and in thousands and thousands of cases are) as helpless and ineffective as a school teacher unable to manage a roomful of boys. One dare not let the mind doze and dream too much without coming to conclusions; the mind must be *commanded and manipulated*. It must be stimulated and encouraged and studied. It does not produce fine results by chance or accident or inherited genius. Left alone, the brain tends to idle and to make all our actions and thoughts automatic, dull, and habitlike. Our minds do not ordinarily prefer to think efficiently; they love to see things *as they prefer* to see them, rather than as they are. They love to dwell in impossible air-castles and imagine themselves in ideal surroundings. Therefore, any one wishing an alert mind must systematically coax, lure, or interest it to concentrate efficiently on problems of life as they are. So many thousands of women let their minds “play hookey,” so to speak, and become unable to *think through to the end* of a problem and arrive at efficient conclusions in which they have faith. . . .

The woman who interests herself deeply in the smallest detail and new angle or idea about her work is preparing, like the fireman, to act intelligently and successfully under trial and difficulty. Just as the efficient fireman loves to use his mind against any and all kinds of bad situations, so the efficient housewife loves to tackle anything that confronts her *with her trained, efficient attitude of mind*, taking hope, zest, and cheer in her job, and using all the knowledge, help, and suggestion from anywhere that promise to prove useful.

Notice that, as in the case of the fireman, *it is mind far more than muscle* that wins. The only reason that man is not still a savage is his capacity to analyze, study, and plan. Women have, however, relied far too much on custom and their emotions, with the result that they have not lifted their sphere of labor out of the hard physical drudgery era, as man has lifted his office and shop, by scientific management and invention. . . .

It is therefore *immensely, terribly important* that women get themselves in connection with modern efficiency science, and, most important of all, *bring themselves up to a really efficient attitude of mind*. . . .



It is deadly *indecisiveness* which has held back so many women, and given another arrow to the jokesmith to aim at our sex. Efficient thinking routs out indecision like fog driven before the rising sun. Women are also accused of deliberately cheating themselves by ignoring unpleasant facts and conditions. This has cost homemakers more than they realize.

Woman's vanity has often kept her from admitting that many of her problems are so distressing simply because of her own lack of personal efficiency, not because of circumstances, fate, or other people. In most cases, however, she never even suspects that she is not as efficient as she might be, and points to the hard *manual* labour she does as proof of her efficiency — as if that didn't prove *just the opposite!*

Many women have hard, even terrible, burdens to bear for which they are in no way responsible; but even if these burdens cannot be lightened, *after sincere, efficient thinking and acting*, there still remains one solution — to carry these burdens with an efficient attitude of mind. Such an attitude may be the entire difference between happiness and unhappiness.

The efficient attitude of mind is really the balance-wheel to the homemakers' entire life and work. I am more interested in making such an attitude universal among women than I am in urging upon them motion study, dispatching and scheduling, and other methods, for I know well that these will come if the attitude of mind is efficient; while I also know that they cannot come without it.

You see, I am so deeply convinced that the nutshell of the whole matter is *that women master their work, instead of letting their work master them*, that I am ready to recommend that all methods and schedules be occasionally thrown overboard in order to attain mastery and independence if necessary or advisable.

The end and aim of home efficiency is not a perfect system of work, or scientific scheduling, or ideal cleanliness and order; it is the personal happiness, health, and progress of the family in the home. The work, the science, the system, the schedule *are but some of the means to that end, not the end itself*. We must use them, or sidetrack them, just as needs be, to attain the real ends of homemaking. The point I want to make clear is *that in trying to master our work we do not want to be mastered by method and system*, thus jumping from the frying pan into the fire!

