1912

Dec. 10, 1922.

Mr. J. S. Phillips,
American Magazine,
381 - Fourth Ave.
New York City.

My dear Mr. Phillips,

I don't know whether you understood or not what I wanted to get at Cheney Bros. I had heard of their sick and benefit association, also their house, but I was quite unprepared at what I have found. I do not believe there is anything like Cheney Bros. in the United States. They have been making silk since 1838. The whole story of their start is most picturesque. It is now, and always has been a family affair. There are seventeen Cheneys in the factory now. They all live around the factory at South Manchester and it is a beautiful place. I did not, in the two days I spent there, see a single condition that was offensive. I would not have believed that a factory town could be what this one is and they do not by any means, pride themselves on what they have. That is, they do not think they have the best yet. There are literally, acres of factories. The steam and lint which goes with all textiles and which are at the root of the tuberculosis trouble, are almost entirely overcome. The methods of disposing of the silk fly and of ventilating the factories are revelations to me. It simply means that they have studied these things here and abroad in the most thorough fashion and have installed absolute the best that they could find.

There are four thousand employees now. There is a Tuberculer Society and in the past year they have only found in the community five persons to deal with. This is, of course, a very extraordinary showing for this sort of an industry. I saw their payroll- something over 4000 men, women and children, not including anything higher than 60- $4.00 a day overseers, average $1.90 a day. The Connecticut Law allows children to work at 14 years of age. Cheney Bros. refuses to take them under 15 yrs. and only take them under 16 when it has been shown that the family condition is such that it is absolutely necessary. I don't think they have been doing this very long and that they are doing so is due to one of the most interesting girls I have come across in a long time, - Margaret Cheney who about four or five years ago, was on the point

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of exploding because she had nothing to do. She went into a settlement and returned convinced that there was something to do in South Manchester and she told me she was trying to earn her dividends and she is doing it all right.

I dined last evening with Margaret and her sister and also three of the most active Cheney men. It was like a Hull House talk. That is, everything you hear talked over at Hull House was discussed there. They are in everything up to their ears and they never leave it for a minute as near as I can make out. Five of these Cheney men are in the So. Manchester Fire Co. They send their children to the public schools. All of the men served an apprenticeship in the factory. Horace Cheney, with whom I had most to do, worked seven years going up from the bottom.

I can't get over the dignity, efficiency and soundness of the thing. They say the place is due to their staying by it and to the protective tariff.

The great thing about it to me is the sense of responsibility they all show. There is something terrible about it. They are born to this thing and a Cheney who does not stay by it is, I think, regarded as a traitor.

Now, what do you think about my taking Cheney Bros. as a separate article. There are many sides of the plant which I can treat in the separate articles as I had arranged them, but I somehow feel that a picture of this extraordinary place, entrenched property, living up to the highest responsibility of property and families, might be a good thing.

They are very reluctant to consider doing anything that would look like exploitation. They reminded me that as they were advertisers it might be difficult to do an article which would not seem to be a "write up" and I reminded them that they need not expect that I should write an article which would be a "whitewash."

There may be, of course, much more unrest among the workmen than I have any idea of, it does not look it, however as hundreds

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of the men own their own houses. Their bank accounts are large and the workmen's organizations seem prosperous. They have never had but one strike and that one, they claim was political in its origin, but I do not know.

I doubt if manufacturing in this country has worked out anywhere so satisfactory as at Cheney Brothers. I suppose it is largely paternal, but so is socialism. At all events, I wish you would think a bit about this and write me how, from this letter, the idea of a separate article strikes you.

I reached here this afternoon, have had a rest and am going to spend the evening with Mr. Aldrich and Gilbreth and their friends. I think I shall get to Boston, Hotel Brunswick, Friday forenoon, probably I may get away from here Thursday afternoon.

Faithfully yours,

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