NOTES ON CHILD LABOR

CHENEY BROS.

The Connecticutt Law forbids a child to work before 14 years of age. Cheney Brothers tell me that they refuse to take a child under 16, unless there is some situation in the family which makes it seem imperative that the childs wage be added. They do not do it in that case, so they claim, unless the child is physically fit. The matter of deciding is in the hands of Miss Marjorie Cheney; it would be difficult to have it in safer hands I should judge.

When a girl or boy under 16 applies, she makes a study of the family, the mothers, the income, the way it is managed, the health of the various members, the steadiness of the father, the managing capacity of the mother. Then she studies the particular child, its physical condition, its mental capacity, the record in school, ambitions etc. These family analysis are kept carefully tabulated; Miss Cheney allowed me to go through a number of them. For instance, here is the case of Sarah J-------, 14 years old, who wants to go into the throwing department. She is the oldest of 4 children; the grandmother lives with them, making 7 in the family.

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The father earns $16. per week, and that is the entire income. This income is mortgaged by a gooddeal of sickness, indeed they owe the doctor for a year, and the father must soon undergo an operation for appendicitis. There is no doubt the family needs all that Sarah could urn, but the girl is of only a fair physique, and mentally dull. She was a poor student and at present has been allowed to stay at home to help her mother.

Miss Cheney decided against her coming into the factory at present, but consented that it should be done when the father went to the hospital.

Here is the case of Frank S---------, who is the second in the family of 5 children. His father is in the printing department of the factory; and an older brother is in the weaving department. Between them they have an income of $16.27 per week for seven people, but this is uncertain for the father both gambles and drinks, so that some weeks he brings nothing home.

Where Miss Cheney finds a case of this kind, that is a drinking father, she goes to the head of the department in which he works, trying to bring influence upon the man to sober up, and in any case arranging

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that the whole or part of his wages would be given to his wife.

This boy Frank had a good mind, but was not over strong, and his request to be taken into the factory was refused.

Another case, that of Alice J---------, shows how these poor little budgets are thrown into confusion by the on the part of those contributing.

Alice is 14 years old, only fairly strong, and fairly bright; there are nine in the family, 7 children. At the time that Alice applied for work the only ones contributing to the support were the girl 18 and boy 17, who between them earned $2.64 per day. The father had served 90 days in jail, and when released had disappeared. In this case Alice was allowed to work through the summer, but was to be sent back to school in the Fall. It was found however, that the income would not keep the family,,and it resulted in her remaining permanently in the factory.

Another case where the girl was forced to go to work at 14, although of only fair health, and rather

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backward in her mind was where the father had thrown up his employment and deserted her. The mother was in poor health and needed an operation, and was obliged to take in washing. In such a case as this, there is nothing for it but that the girl be employed.

There are cases in which Miss Cheney finds that the child applies for work without the family knowing it, and when they do not consider it necessary for their support.

Here was a case in which the family of 6, having an income of $21.92, all of it earned by the two oldest children, father being dead, and a firl of 14, unknown to her mother tries to get work. In such as case as this the girl is refused. As a rule the attempt is to find either to persuade the child to continue longer in school, or to have them study for some particular occupation for which they seem to be inclined, or for which they seem to have some talent. So, as far as possible Miss Cheney enlists other members of the family already established in an effort to develop and look after the child seeking work but refused.

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