The American Magazine
381 Fourth Avenue
New York

Editorial Rooms

October 6, 1914

Mr. John Fitch,
C/o The Survey Magazine,
105 East 22nd Street,
New York.

My dear Mr. Fitch:

I hope you will pardon the delay in replying to your letter of September 26th. It was received promptly but I have been very busy the last few days and I wanted to give time to my answer. I am afraid, from the length of this answer, that I am taking too much time; but it is only because of the importance that I attach to your letter.

I am glad that you think I have an opportunity to do a useful piece of work. The little announcement shows about how I came to undertake it. I have no idea that I shall be able to exhaust the subject or that I shall present it as well as it might be presented. Possibly, by the time I get through, you will be ready to make the survey that you have been thinking of.

And now as to your misgivings - taken up in the order that I find them in your letter;

You fear that I am going to give a comfortable feeling that industry is purging itself without effort and struggle. I should be sorry to give a comfortable feeling to anybody that the silent revolution which I believe is going on inside industry is being done easily; that industry will have to purge itself if that is ever done, I thoroughly believe. You cannot impress justice, a liberal spirit, democratic institutions, and the sense of brotherhood; you may present these ideas, argue for them, die for them; but if they are to be really incorporated in any body, that body has got to do it, because of some inner conviction and understanding of the things. And as for doing the thing easily, that, of course, is impossible. The hardest thing in the world is to improve from the inside, that is, in spirit and thought. This is only done by struggle and experiment, by mistakes and repeated returns to the attempt, by expenditure of brain and spirit as well as of money. There is a terrific price connected with all progress and any industry which has made a substantial achievement along the new industrial ideas has had to do it by struggle and effort. That seems to me

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a fundamental thing that everybody who knows the history of progress must take for granted.

You speak of Vandergrift and of the feeling there is against union organizers. I have known, of course, of these difficulties, of the effort to keep union agitation out of the mills and the town. There are, of course, many union men in the Vandergrift mills. I suppose the greater percentage of them belong to the union, at least that was what I gathered; but it is, of course, an open shop. The mills of Vandergrift are in the same state, so far as I know, that all the mills of the steel corporation are with regard to the unions. There has been a bitter war with pitched and open battles between the management and the unions and the bitterness and suspicion and intolerance and repressive measures, which always follow any kind of a war, are still seen and felt there. I think it will be a very long time before confidence is restored in the steel industry between the body of the men and the management. The conditions are not unlike that between the North and South after the Civil War,- between any two big forces which have carried on a hard and long battle. Do not, for a moment, think that I believe this is right. Of course it is not. But it is the inevitable human condition after such a struggle as has taken place in the steel industry. Of course the management at Vandergrift would be much more sensible, in my judgement, if they would say to the union organizers, "Here is the public square. Talk all you want to." They say that to Socialists. Socialists were talking in the public square when I was at Vandergrift last fall and they told me they usually came with the birds and disappeared with the first snow. An open forum would be a fine thing there, and I hope that they will have it one day.

I do not know when I have found a town in which there was so much discussion of certain things which concern the people vitally, as in Vandergrift. The beer-wagon, for instance. I rather think that anybody that came to Vandergrift and persistently and openly advocated open saloons would be run out of town. I presume, if the I. W. W. were active, they would be run out; and in both cases, they would be run out by the body of workingmen. I always gauge the democracy of a place a good deal by the social conditions I find, that is, the freedom of intercourse among people; and Vandergrift is the only town I know in this country where the man who carries a dinner-bucket sits on the City Council, carries the plate in church, is a member of the School Board, and is considered a candidate for any kind of a position. And it is not the officers of the company, the foremen and managers, who hold these positions, as you know. It is the workmen and not always the high-priced workmen. I do not mean to say that socially there are no undemocratic practices and feelings in the town, but I do think that there are about as little as there are anywhere.

You say you think of Vandergrift as a place of sadness, where men are not free. Well, dear Mr. Fitch, I never yet have found a place in the world where people were absolutely free. The philosophical anarchist, who is the most innocent of

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men, as I look upon him, is mobbed in Chicago, probably our most democratic of cities. The I. W. W. is clapped into jail in Lawrence, and the union man takes a hand in it. I take it that the workingman is about as free to express his opinions in Vandergrift as he is anywhere; and I know he has more opportunities for a decent life for himself and his family there than almost anyother town in the country of which I know.

You take objection to some paragraph in The Editor's Table of this same number of the magazine. You speak of it as an apology for throwing stones at the rich, even in satire. I don't think it was meant that way at all. It strikes me the writer was trying to speak lightly and didn't quite succeed. I fail to see in that introduction anything like that saccherine little plea for mercy of which you speak. It certainly is not the spirit of this office. There is something in that introduction, however, to which I think you might legitimately take exception and that is that the impression that the reader would get is that these articles represent industry as generally under the influence of these new ideals of which I am speaking. Of course, that is not true and it is the last impression which I, myself, would want to convey. If I had had my attention called to the Table, that is the thing to which I would have objected. Of course, if all businessmen were operating according to these new ideals in industry, I would not be writing these articles; it would not be necessary. As it is, it took three years to convince myself that the attempt to realize these ideals was sufficiently wide-spread and definite in the country for it to be wise and possible to dignify it by the name of a movement.

There is another point in that editorial to which I object much more than to the statement which troubles you. The writer says that businessmen are applying the Golden Rule because they find it pays. Now, that is one reason, no doubt, and a perfectly sound reason in my judgement; but it is not the only reason by any means. The personal satisfaction, the sense that they are serving the community that many men are getting out of this movement, is the very best guarantee that it will go on. Moreover, there has got to be something more than profit in a movement of this kind. Men who simply try to follow the Golden Rule because it means more profit could not succeed any more than a man, who is honest because he is taught that it is a good policy, can be thoroughly honest. You have got to have the feeling for honesty in your mind and live for it in your heart, to be really honest. The men that I have met in this business are getting their largest returns not from any added money, but from the joy and pride that they feel in seeing that business can be made a great social and educational institution, and an ally of all the movements which are going on in the world for extending justice and co-operation. That is why this movement is solid, as I see it.

You say you are wondering what has happened to the American Magazine; what has become of the energy and fearlessness of us all. Well, my dear Mr. Fitch, we are all doing

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business at the old stand and in just the same way that we have always worked, that is, really trying to get into the magazine the thing which seems to us important at this moment. You talk about your feeling that fearlessness has gone out of us. Now, my dear Mr. Fitch, there was nothing to be afraid of in writing a history of the Standard Oil or in going after vicious municipal conditions, or attacking the tariff or fighting the railroads. As a matter of fact, there was nothing so popular as doing those things. It has taken a great deal more courage for me, personally, and for the magazine to try to gather up and present as a real movement the constructive work which we believe is being done in this country, and which means enormous benefit to the workers, than it ever did to carry on any of the campaigns which you speak of. The kind of letter you are writing me, I know to be exactly what many good people are saying; and it cuts me that this should be so, that is, that I should have to be suspected and doubted by those that I believe have the same ends in view that I have. When I describe the misery of neglected, unsanitary, landlord and saloon-ridden towns, where the leaders of industry do not care if babies die like flies, if the women are evicted from their homes, and the men are chopped to pieces in the machinery, you applaud me. But when I describe a town which was built to prevent all these things which it is fighting to prove are unnecessary, you fear I have sold my soul to the corporation. Of course I understand why you fear that. It is because there are certain wrong things in that town and you think I ought to talk about them rather than the good things. But I have yet to find any good thing going on in the world which, in more or less close connection with it, has not something to deplore.

When this work was talked of, neither the magazine nor I had any doubt of the criticism which we would have to meet from good people. But if criticism of that which one is sure is wrong is the duty of the journalist, so is the presentation of that which one is sure is good. Men learn from that which has been done as well as from that which has not. Our whole system of education is founded on the theory that if we surround the young with that which is good and beautiful and decent, they will develop along right lines. One of the great influences that has driven the world on has been holding before it a vision of the good. What I am trying to do is to present a program of what seem to me good things which have proven practical, so that those who do not know and have not imagination enough to see, may be persuaded to try to do more; and, too, that those who fight as agitators or reformers may have something definite to point to and say it has been done, therefore you can do it.

You speak of the sadness which you have felt in listening to the selfish, callous testimony before the Industrial Commission. You were in Colorado, and if there is anything sadder in the country than the exhibit there, I do not know it. The fight there is just as truly between autocracy and democracy as the fight which is going on on the other side of the water. It is the duty of men and women who know enough of the practices which are at work in Colorado, to set them

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There is another side of this which I think we all ought to consider, dear Mr. Fitch. The men and women who are trying to realize these ideals in the businesses which they control, deserve all the encouragement and sympathy which can be given them. Actually to establish relations of freedom and justice and co-operation in even a small and enlightened group of people is enormously difficult. Did you ever try to live in perfect peace and freedom with half a dozen people of your own experience of life and of something like your own ideals and ambitions? If you did so, did you always find it easy? Did you ever try to work up a little business and have everybody in that business feeling that he was justly treated; to be sure yourself that everybody in there was getting his full chance? If so, you know something of the discouragement and difficulties there are in co-operative enterprises. To bring any one of the operations which I have observed to anything like a successful issue, seems to me a great achievement and something which ought to be known.

Of course, we are only in the first stages of this revolution - for this is what it is - but the important thing is that we are there. I believe, myself, that it is within industry to-day, in this country, that we find the most solid realizations of idealism that we have. Its achievements are quite as important as anything that we have had in our recent political and commercial overthrow. And I somehow feel that they may be the more solid because they have, so far, been accomplished with no sounding of drums and no flow of oratory. They have been the solitary and often unconscious efforts of men to do things which seemed to them just and right and which they could no more talk about than they could their efforts to conquer their base passions.

This is but one angle of the great struggle, of course. We present it because, in the very nature of our periodical, if we are to make any impressions or get any attention, we must come at questions freshly. Propaganda is not our business. Our business is to present life in as stimulating, fresh fashion as we able to do it. It is the tired, hard-working common man and woman that the American Magazine is made for. When we can give them wholesome amusement, a little instruction, an inspiring idea, stimulating reports of what men and women are doing in the world, in such a way that they can read and enjoy them, we have done what we conceive to be our

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Forgive this long letter, my dear Mr. Fitch. Your letter is important because it is yours, and because I know it is exactly what a large number of people whom I respect will say and think; and because I deplore the fact that we all do more or less to confuse and delay efforts for human betterment by our suspicions of one another's motives, our sense of the infallibility of our own ideas and formulae, and our failure to acknowledge that a thing may be honest or useful even if it is not what we would like to see the person doing.

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must remember

We ~~ought not to forget~~ that agitation which leads to nothing - which finds justification in itself, regardless of results - is a futile and dangerous thing. I heard a wise man say of this kind of work recently, that it must inevitably become finally nothing more than the sputtering of a malicious spirit. That is one of the terrible dangers in agitation and exposure which does not steady and sweeten itself by constructive effort. All our efforts, in order to be wholesome and sound, must combine construction with agitation.

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You fear that I am going to give a "comfortable feeling" that industry is purging itself without effort and struggle. I should be sorry to add to anybody's "comfortable feeling" that all is right in anything in the world. It isn't; but I thoroughly believe you cannot impress justice, a liberal spirit, democratic institutions, the sense of brotherhood from without. You may present these ideas, argue for them, die for them; but if they are to be really incorporated in any body, that body has got to do it, because of some inner conviction and understanding. And as for doing the thing easily, that, of course, is impossible. The hardest thing in the world is to improve from the inside, that is, in spirit and thought/ This is only done by struggle

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and experiment, by mistakes and repeated returns to the attempt, by expenditure of brain and spirit as well as of money. There is a terrific price connected with all progress and any industry which has made a substantial achievement along the new industrial ideas has had to do it by struggle and effort. That seems to me a fundamental thing that everybody who knows the history of progress must take for granted.

You speak of Vandergrift and of the feeling there is against union organizers. I have known, of course, of these difficulties, of the effort to keep union agitation out of the mills and the town. There are, I believe, many union men in the Vandergrift mills, but it is, an "open shop." The mills of Vandergrift are in the same state, so far as I know, that nearly all the mills of the steel corporation are with regard to the unions. There has been a bitter war with pitched and open battles between the management and the unions and the bitterness and suspicion and intolerance and repressive measures, which always follow any kind of a war, are still seen and felt. It will be a very long time before confidence is entirely restored in the steel industry between the body of the men and management. The conditions are not unlike that between the North and South after the Civil War, - between any two big forces which have carried on a hard and long battle. Do not, for a moment, think that I believe this is right. Of course it is not. But it is the inevitable human condition after such a struggle as has taken place in the steel industry. Wise management at Vandergrift would be much more sensible, in my judgement, if they would say to the union organizers, "Here is the public square. Take all you want to." They say that to Socialists. Socialists were talking in the public square when I was at Vandergrift last fall and they told me they usually came with the birds and disappeared with the first snow. An open forun would be a find thing there, and I hope that they will have it one day.

I do not know when I have found a town in which there was so much discussion of certain things which concern the people vitally, as in

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Vandergrift. The beer-wagon, for instance. I rather think that anybody that came to Vandergrift and persistently and openly advocated open saloons would be run out of town. I presume, if the I. W. W. were active, they would be run out; and in both cases, they would be run out by the body of workingmen. I always gauge the democracy of a place a good deal by the social conditions I find, that is, the freedom of intercourse among people; and Vandergrift is the only town I know in this countyr where the man who carries a dinner-bucket sits on the City Council, carries the plate in church, is a member of the School Board, and is considered an available candidate for any kind of a position. And it is not the officers of the company, the foremen and managers, who hold these position, as you know. It is the workmen and not always the high-priced workmen. I do not mean to say that socially there are no undemocratic practices and feelings in the town, but I do think that there are about as little as there are anywhere.

You say you think of Vandergrift as a place of sadness, where men are not free. Well, dear Mr. Fitch, I never yet found a place in the world where people were absolutely free. The philosophical anarchist, who is the most innocent of men, as I look upon him, is mobbed in Chicago, probably our most democratic of cities. The I. W. W. is clapped into jail in Lawrence, and the union man takes a hand in it. I take it that the workingman is about as free to express his opinions in Vandergrift as he is anywhere; and I know he has more opportunities for a decent life for himself and his family there than almost any other town in the country of which I know.

You take objection to some paragraph in The Editor's Table of this ame number of the magazine. You speak of it as an apology for throwing stones at the rich, even in satire. I don't think it was meant that way. I fail to see in that introduction the "saccherine little plea for mercy" of which you speak. It certainly is not the spirit of this office. There is

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something in thatintroduction, however, to which I think you might legitimately take exception and that is the impression that the reader might get that these articles represent all industry as under the influence of these new ideals of which I am speaking. Of course , that is not true and it is the last impression which I, myself, would want to convey. If I had had my attention called to the Table, that is the thing to which I would have objected. Of course, if all business men were operating according to these new ideals in industry, I would not be writing these articles; it would not be necessary. As it is, it took three years to convince myself that the attempt to realize them was sufficiently wide-spread and definite in the country for it to be wise and possibke to dignify it by the name of a movement.

There is another point in that editorial to which I object much more than to the statement which troubles you. The writer intimats that business men are applying the Golden Rule simply because they find it pays. Now, that is one reason, no doubt, and a perfectly sound reason in my judgement; but it is not the only reason by any means. The personal satisfaction, the sense that they are serving the dommunitythat many men are getting out of this movement, is the very best guarantee that it will go on. Moreover, there has got to be something more than a profit in a movement of this kind. Men who simply try to follow the Golden Rule because it means more profit could not succeed any more than men who are honest because they are taoght that it is a good policy, can be thoroughly honest. You have got to have the feeling for honesty in your mind and love for it in your heart, really to be honest. The men that I have met in this business are getting their largest returns not from any added money, but from the joy and pride that they feel in seeing that business can be made a great social and educational institution, and an ally of all the movements which are going on in the world for extending justice and co-operation. That is why this movement is solid,

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as I see it.

You say you are wondering what has happened to the American Magazine; what has become of the "energy and fearlessness of us all. Well, my dear Mr. Fitch, we are all doing business at the old stand and in just the same way that we have always worked, that is, really trying to get into the magazine the thing which seems to us important at this moment. You talk about your feeling that fearlessness has gone out of us. There was nothing to be afraid of in writing a history of the Standard Oil or in going after vicious municipal conditions, or attacking the tariff or fighting the railroads. As a matter of fact, there was nothing so popular as doing those things. It has taken a great deal more courage for me, personally, and for the magazine to try to gather up and present as a real movement the constructive work which we believe is being done in this country, and which means enormous benefit to the workers, than it ever did to carry on any of the campaigns which you speak of. When I describe the misery of neglect, unsanitary, landlord and saloon-ridden towns, where the leaders of industry do not care if babies die like flies, if the women are evicted from their homes, and the men are chopped to pieces in the machinery, good people applaud me. But when I describe a town which was built to prevent all these things which it is fighting to prove, they are unnecessary, they fear I have sold my soul to the corporation! Of course I understand why they fear this. It is because there are certain wrong things in that town and they think I ought to talk about them rather than the good things. But I have yet to find any good thing going on in the world which, in more or less close connection with it, has not something to deplore.

We must remember that agitation which leads to nothing - which finds justification in itself, regardless of results - is a futile and dangerous thing. I hear a wise man say of this kind of work recently, that it must inevitably become finally nothing more than "the sputtering of a malicious

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spirit." That is one of the terrible dangers in agitation and exposure which does not steady and sweeten itself by constructive effort. All our efforts, in order to be wholesome and sound, must combine construction with agitation.

When this work was talked of, neither the magazine nor I had any doubt of the criticism which we would have to meet from good people. But if criticism of that which one is sure is wrong is the duty of the journalist, so is the presentation of that which one is sure is good. Men learn from that which has been done as well as from that which has not. Our whole system of education is founded on the theory that if we surround the young with that which is good and beautiful and decent, they will develope along right lines. One of the great influences that has deiven the world on has been holding before it a vision of the good. What I am trying to do is to present a program of what seem to me good things which have proven practical, so that those who do not know and have not imagination enough to see, may be persuaded to try to do more; and, too, that those who fight as agitators or reformers may have something definite to point to and say it has been done, therefore you can do it.

You speak of the sadness of which you have felt in listening to the selfish, callous testimony before the Insustrial Commission. You were in Colorado, and if there is anything sadder in the country than the exhibit there, I do not know it. The fight there is just as truly between autocracy and democracy as the fight which is going on on the other side of the water. It is the duty of men and women who know enough of the practices which are at work in Colorado, to set them down - to make the public understand. But it is equally the duty of men and women who know that the Colorado situation is not universal, that the attitude of the Colorado mine owners and mine operatives is not that of all employers and employees, to say so. You say that you will not be sorry or apologize when you throw your little stone at the Colorado mine owners. Why should you? You ought to feel glad that you know enough about

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the situation to be able to do it. But believe me I shall not be sorry nor apologize if I can find efforts which men are making to work out an industry in such a way that justice shall rule and that such situations as have come about in Colorado will be impossible. I shall feel it quite as much my duty to do this as you feel it your duty to do what you are doing.

You cannot express any more strongly than I feel, that the old and the evil must be torn down before the new and the good can be built up. Before the great new, sunny, spacious building across the way from my window was possible, there had to be tearing down, carting away, blasting - all sorts of destructive work of old things. But even while that work was going on, the new building was preparing. The two must go together and the destruction of the old is only justified by the building of the new.

There is another side of this which I think we all ought to consider, dear Mr. Fitch. The men and women who are trying to realize these ideals in the business which they control, deserve all the encouragement and sympathy which can be given them. Actually to establish relations of freedom and justice and co-operation in even a small and enlightened group of people is enormously difficult. Did you ever try to live in perfect peace and freedom with half a dozen people of your own experience fo life and of something like your own ideals and ambitions? If you did so, did you always find it easy. Did you ever try to wrok up a little business and have everybody in that business feeling that he was justly treated; to be sure yourself that everybody in there was getting his full chance: If so, you know something of the discouragement and difficulties there are in co-operative enterpirses. To bring any one of the operations which I have observed to anything like a successful issue, seems to me a great achievement and something which ought to be known.

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Of course, we are only in the first stage of this revolution - for this is what it is - but the important thing is that we are there. I believe, myself, that it is within industry today, in this country, that we find the most solid realizations of idealism that we have. Its achievements are quite as important as anything that we have had in our recent political and commercial overthrew. And I somehow feel that they maybe the more solid because they have, so far, been accomplished with no sounding of drums and no flow of oratory. They have been the solitary andoften unconscious efforts of men to do things which seemed to them just and right and which they could no more talk about than they could their efforts to conquer their base passions.

This is but one angle of the great struggle, of course. We present it because, in the very "Nature" of our periodical, if we are to make any impressions or get any attention, we must come at questions freshly. Propaganda is not our business. Our business is to present life in as stimulating, fresh fashion as we are able to do. It is the tired, hardworking common man and woman that the American Magazine is made for. When we can give them wholesome amusement, a little instruction, an inspiring idea, stimulating reports of what men and women are doing in the world , in such a way that they can read,and enjoy them, we have done what we conceive to be our business. You may that you think we are no longer interested in the worker. When we make a magazine that interest the worker, we feel we are doing something for them.him. It is all we ever tried to do. As for not being interested in the worker, I don't know that there has ever been a shadow of an idea in this office that we didn't all belong to that class. Our whole desire is to do what we can to realize the highest form of cooperation between all the people engaged in any particular enterprise. I know, as far as I am concerned, I never believed so much in my life in the worker as I do today. I never wanted so much to serve him; but I feel quite

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confident that I have got to do it by presenting things as I see them, not by efforts to imitate anything that I may have done in the past or to do what somebody else thinks I ought to do.

Forgive this long letter, my dear Mr. Fitch. Your letter is importand because it is yours, and becuase the work you are doing is useful and needed and well done., and because I know it is what a number of people whom I respect will say andthink; and becuase I deplore the fact that we all do more or less to confuse and delay efforts for human betterment by our suspicions of one another's motives, our sense of the infallibility of our own ideas, and formulae, and our failure to acknowledge that a thing may be honest or useful even if it is not what we would like to see the person doing.

Very sincerely yours,

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