Aug. 10, 1920

Mem. of Conversation with Mary Gilson

Mary Gilson is giving a week a month to a big New England cotton firm--Green and somebody, with mills in various parts of New England, Canada and the South.

She gives a picture of an industry clamped into tradition, such as I had not realized although What I know of it corroborates what she says. The cotton industry is run by tradition.

One tradition is that all executive and managerial positions belong to men, therefore the introduction of Miss Gilson as an influential element in the Boston office has thrown every mill into which she goes into fits.

Each mill is run by what they call an agent. The Boston office for which the staff at the mill itself expresses a profound contempt, considering them impractical and interfering, will stand by the agent, though they may resent him as an autocrat, as he frequently is. According to tradition, he has certain prerogatives and dignities which must not be slighted. For instance, in going through the mills at one place, the agent apologized to Miss Gilson for keeping his hat on, saying that it was never proper for an agent to take off his hat when he went through a room. The agent lives on a hill or some elevated place so that his home is looked up to. One of the agents explained to Miss Gilson that he would much rather live in town, but that it was not considered propr.

The overseers have their positions very definitely defined and are very jealous of their rights. The idea of a woman coming in to introduce an entirely new department--employment and service--has been a terrible shock to them.

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dismissed because his wife had made herself so unpopular in the town. She would not mix. She was indiscreet enough to say, "I have had to go riding with those horrible overseers' wives" and of course it went from house to house and created such a feeling that the employment manager's life was made miserable. Yesterday, she told me, in talking with an excellent man that she wanted to employ for a mill, she said to him, "I shall have to know about your wife." Is she a good mixer?" And he had to say, "I don't think she is a snob, but she is not a mixer, and I cannot see her associating with the overseers' wives." Unless this bunker can be taken, this young man is kept from an excellent position.

Received some interesting side lights on women in industry from Miss Gilson's experience--the kind of women that have been put into service departments. She finds a woman in one place in Pennsylvania that had worked with Morris Cook in Philadelphia. She finds her with a staff of 16 when she ought not to have more than six or eight at the outside, shut in her office, almost never going herself among the operatives, very strong on sentiment; her staff, all lively, progressive young people, find they cannot take a suggestion to her. She treats a suggestion as a criticism: if it comes from the staff, she is haughty, tells them she knows her own business; if it comes from her superiors, she is tearful and tells them how sorry she is they do not appreciate her work. She conceals her lack of definite scientific knowledge by diffusive sentiment. It is Miss Gilson's business to judge, after sufficient investigation, such a person as this. She finds herself obliged to recommend that this woman be removed. She will make a very hateful enemy in industrial circles in doing this.

One very serious criticism on this woman is that she

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has always insisted with her staff that it was not necessary for them to know anything about the processes of work, about machines. Not knowing herself, she was not large enough to allow them to know.

In a New England mill a very difficult situation has arisen for Miss Gilson from a woman in charge of what welfare work they have. This woman resented Miss Gilson's appointment, went to her agent and the overseers and said, "We have got to stand together against this insolence of the Boston office in sending a woman down here to interfere with our work." This woman has a nasty tongue, and had made an attempt to blacken the character of the industrial nurse, a woman of high standing whose husband had recently died. Both the woman and her husband had been friends of Mr. Green's, one of the owners of the business, and as the woman was left without means, he, knowing that she had been a trained nurse, found this position for her. He had gone out of his way on various occasions to show her little attentions and in one case had sent her flowers. The woman in charge of the welfare work found this out and immediately went around circulating the story that there was an immoral relation between this woman and Mr. Green. Miss Gilson heard this, and is her habit, went to the bottom of it. She told this woman she was wrong. She retorted, "I know what you don't know." Miss Gilson then took the thing promptly to Mr. Green and the upshot was that the slanderer was called before the Boston board. It must have been a pretty scene. The woman insisted that such attentions were compromising. Miss Gilson, who recently has been a year in the hospital, said before the board and everybody, "All the time that I was in the hospital, Mr. Feiss sent me flowers twice a week, and I assure you there is no improper relation

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between us." Her outspokenness, absolute honesty and fearlessness of course routs the jealous, petty and gossiping.

Miss Gilson feels that the cotton industry somehow has got to be broken open and an opportunity made for women to advance even to overseership, which would be almost as great a revolution as establishing a Soviet government.

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