

The Shirt-Waist Chain.

Virginia Woodward Cloud.

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The Shirt-Waist Chain.

MRS. CHEEVER assured us that it was perfectly reliable and legitimate.

“You give me your thirty cents, and I send the money on with all the other names, and you each get a silk shirt-waist. That is all.” We listened, speechless. “It is the immensity of the scheme which makes it profitable to the firm. Did n’t I

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tell you? Each of you secures five others to do likewise, and of course each gets a shirt-waist, too. My coupon is the only security necessary for this chain, as I am the head. I'm perfectly willing to do so simple a thing to get a good silk shirt-waist for thirty cents. Are n't you? And only think of the charity!"

"The charity?" we echoed.

"The firm promises a percentage upon all names sent with money after the first three hundred are received. Is n't that kind? I think the Eye and Ear is our most needy one, don't you?"

We did; but our eyes and ears were busy with the possibilities of this novel scheme. Three were counting out thirty cents for Mrs. Cheever, and two were demurring about asking other women to write letters or join an endless chain of any sort.

"But this is quite different, in that it is to their own advantage," she argued.

"For, after all, every one gets her shirt-waist, and the names and money go straight to Mrs. Cheever," said one convert.

"I send them on as soon as the first round of my chain is heard from," said Mrs. Cheever. "It is like a generation, you know. First I hand in the parents, then the children, then the grandchildren, and so on. For instance, my shirt-waist will be grandmother to the five you secure, and the next five will be great-grand—"

"Oh, Mrs. Cheever, don't!" cried some one. "A family tree grafted on an endless chain would be distraction. I can only go so far as to hand you these thirty cents and ask five others to do likewise, if they want a silk shirt-waist cheap."

"Quite far enough," said Mrs. Cheever, promptly. "For economy's sake, I'm sure, no one would refuse. It occurred to me to make the suggestion at this board meeting, for if we promise to start the chain it will grow immensely, and, too, secure a good sum for the Eye and Ear."

In the end it was decided worth while, by nearly every one present, to buy a silk shirt-waist under such economical and charitable auspices. The names were inscribed in Mrs. Cheever's book, with the promise from each to secure five others.

We did not see Mrs. Cheever for several days, but we saw her results. The thirty-cent epidemic spread like a fire under way. Every other woman one met was beseeching somebody else to subscribe thirty cents, and five unsuspecting names. On the third day Mrs. Cheever came to a meeting of the Girls' Auxiliary, exploding with a still greater idea.

"We shall give a tea in the Guild-room and sell refreshments, and ask every one who has subscribed; we shall put the shirt-waists on exhibition, and every one will be given her own according to her number."

The Auxiliary waxed enthusiastic over the unique scheme, and the president and secretary proceeded to call a meeting and appoint a committee of arrangements for the Shirt-Waist Tea. The novelty of such a scheme was not to be lightly ignored, and there was a lively discussion as to whether it should be called the "Endless Shirt-

Waist Chain" or the "Chain of Endless Shirt-Waists."

On the following Tuesday Mrs. Cheever was "at home," and reported to some of us that she had already received two hundred letters and had forwarded to the magnanimous firm the first instalment of names and money; also, that her own shirt-waist had arrived, and she would show it to several of us on the sly, as it was to be reserved for the tea. The waist was, indeed, dark-green silk of rather good quality and make. If any one of us had been of a backsliding mind she was then and there convinced by her own eyes. As for Mrs. Cheever, she could talk of no thing else.

"I have spent all yesterday and to-day, so far, writing and reading letters and arranging money," she said. "To-day fifty withdrew because they would not ask others; but in so large a scheme fifty will not count."

We took our leave, congratulating ourselves that we had been sufficiently far-sighted to secure a silk shirt-waist for thirty cents.

The next afternoon we saw Mrs. Cheever again. She looked jaded and owned to a headache.

"How *can* people be so unreliable?" she said. "I had twenty-seven more letters last night from persons withdrawing after having promised, and as most of them were stupid enough to inclose thirty cents as an apology, I had to sit up until two o'clock this morning returning their money. However, the acceptances are still pouring in; it has taken me all to-day to attend to them. And I have had the most absurd letters, too, brought by the item in the 'Planet.' One man wants me to start an endless chain for the benefit of his five motherless children. A country church wishes to be supplied with carpets and coal. A man in the country wishes me to help publish his novel by the same means. Really, the world is not backward in asking for what it wants, is it?"

The following Monday Mrs. Cheever attended a meeting of the Auxiliary. She was very pale, and her right arm was done up in a black silk handkerchief, and her younger sister acted as secretary pro tem.

"It is nothing," said Mrs. Cheever—"a little touch of neurosis. The doctor says I have used my right hand too much of late. You would be amazed to see the letters I have received. They are still pouring in. I keep one room just for them now. It is remarkable how small a place this world is, and how endless an endless chain can be. But I really do not begrudge the dollar I paid little Annie Kett yesterday to help me; for a silk shirt-waist would have cost six, at least. I have forwarded all the money, and the box will be expressed to-morrow. I shall have it sent here to the Guild-room, so that we can open it together when we meet to decorate the place for the tea."

This also met with acclamation, and on the following Wednesday we were at the Guild-room early, and made it beautiful. The canary-birds trilled in their smilax-wreathed cages, the fire crackled on the hearth, the cozy tea-tables shone in the corners, and the red-shaded lamps only

awaited afternoon to be lighted. The whole of the Auxiliary was present in a flutter. But the expressman had not arrived. Presently the door opened, and admitted Mrs. Cheever. She stood still and faced us with a telegram in her well hand.

"This is—perfectly—perfectly—" she waved the telegram, and sank into the nearest chair, and burst into tears. "I've walked the floor—with it—three nights—my arm—" she rocked to and fro and sobbed. "I've worked so—over the miserable things—the shirt-waists—and now—now—oh, oh!"

We crowded around her in alarm, while the secretary pro tem. read the telegram aloud.

Factory closed. No more waists made. Hope sample was satisfactory. O'KEEFE & Co.

"And they have all the money," wailed Mrs. Cheever, nursing her arm, "and—and letters are pouring in. I see them all night. What will all the people think of me? I shall have to write to them all, and—and I can't hold a pen! I shall go crazy if I try. Oh!" Here she went into genuine, irresistible hysterics, and the secretary pro tem. called a cab and took her home.

The Auxiliary held a tea and sold refreshments, none of which were priced thirty cents. The words were not mentioned. An item was put in the evening paper announcing the failure of the firm of O'Keefe & Co., but later investigation failed to show any such clothing firm on record.

At a meeting of the board of the Auxiliary, some time afterward, the secretary pro tem. confidentially showed a bill which she had drawn up, but never rendered. She said it was for our future moral digestion. It read:

O'KEEFE & Co., Drs.

To MRS. B. M. CHEEVER.

Value of one thirty-cent shirt-waist, mediocre quality.

Cash:

To secretary	\$ 2.00
To messengers	1.50
Five weeks in sanatorium	200.00
Incidentals uncalculated	25.00
Trained nurse at home	75.00
Medical attention at home.	50.00
Total	\$353.50

Extra expense involved :

Item: Fifteen sleepless nights and days.

" Mental exhaustion of one long-suffering husband.

" Loss of the use of one right hand through neurosis.

" Loss of temper by one exasperated sister.

Total of above items uncalculated, because the chain of results is as yet endless.

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