

## THE FACTORY CHILD

BY REV. JOHN TALBOT SMITH.

The lucky people who were on intimate terms with Miss Hyland thought her a happy and fortunate young woman. She had a large income, and nothing to do but study the bachelors who offered to help her manage and spend it. This was the fortunate side of her existence. She was pious, good-looking, healthy and clever; she believed that whatever pleased her was right, and what did not please her she avoided as something wrong, and tried to be ignorant of; these facts made up the happy side of her life. She never troubled herself about anything except her income, which she looked after sharply, having little faith in hired managers, and the basis of securities. In her own estimation she was as good a girl as ever breathed, outside of the saints. She never said so, never even thought it, and would not have believed it from the lips of the most impartial judge. But when a pious and clever woman falls into a routine of religious duties that do not exhaust her at any time, that give her much pleasure, and leave lofty standards to be forgotten or neglected, it means that she has ceased to improve, and has become to her own mind quite as virtuous as the circumstances require. So Miss Hyland went to Mass every morning, gave liberally to charities, spent the summer abroad and the winter at home, and knew no more of the life around her than she did of the moon.

So many virtuous people go through life in this innocent way that Providence must have intended it. In supplying charities with money Miss Hyland never concerned herself about its disposal, what a relief it was to the beneficiaries can be imagined. Prodigal Mrs. Baker, whose family shoes were got at Miss Hyland's expense, often spent the shoe money in canned pears and brandied peaches of the best kind. A more exacting charity would have deprived the Bakers of these transient luxuries. If remonstrated with on her carelessness in these matters, Miss Hyland would have replied that the time and trouble spent in revising charities would take away all pleasure in giving. Trouble she would not have, unless it was pleasurable, such as going to early Mass on a winter morning. This feat she was fond of, and, as she never took cold from it and got a fine appetite for breakfast, it made her feel heroic. She practised it constantly, except when her head ached or bedtime had come late the preceding evening. One morning she got caught in a sudden storm. Wind and blizzards snow came on so suddenly that escape to shelter was impossible. To return to the church was bothersome and she went on with the wind, feeling as if she were enjoying a thrilling adventure, until she met Annie Russell, hugging a tree box with all her might, and crying with terror.

"What's the matter, child?" said Miss Hyland.

"I'm afraid," said Annie, "and I can't get to the mill in time in this awful storm."

"What brings you out at such an hour?" said Miss Hyland; "you ought to be in bed. Children should stay in bed these cold, dark mornings."

The child ceased crying now that she had company on the lonely street, and replied crossly.

"Haven't I got to go to work, and mustn't I be in the mill at half-past six or get the sack?"

"You work," said the lady somewhat stupidly, as she peered into the child's face, plump and tear-stained. The little figure was well wrapped in a heavy cloak. A hood, mittens, and stout shoes protected her from the cold, and she carried a lunch-pail. "How old are you, child?" said the lady doubtfully.

"Nine, goin' on ten," said Annie.

"And you work in a mill— for what?"

"For eight dollars a month, ma'am, but I'll get twelve when I can run six sides."

"And what were you crying for dear?"

"I was afraid," said Annie breaking into sobs again. "I'm alone, and it's so stormy, and I'll be late, and how will I ever get there?"

"Oh, don't cry, I'll go with you. Is it very far?"

"Only five blocks, ma'am."

"Then come on, take my hand, and see how soon we shall be there, and if you wish I'll tell the boss to excuse you on account of the storm."

It was a wearisome task to reach the mill in the face of the wind and snow, and Miss Hyland was a very tired and bewildered heroine when they entered the factory. Its shelter was very disagreeable. The roar of machinery and the rank smell of oil made her feel faint for a moment. She could not hear, and in an atmosphere full of cotton was impossible for her to see. The place was brilliantly lighted. The floor trembled under her feet with continuous vibration. Dark figures flitted through the luminous mist.

"Don't leave me," she half shrieked to Annie. "This is awful." She could not hear her own voice, and was hardly reassured by the child's laughing face.

"You'll get used to it," Annie shrieked into her ear. "Sit down till the boss comes."

Miss Hyland sat down on a three-legged stool, feeling that the day of judgment could not be much worse than this, but after a few minutes she grew tranquil, and when the boss came along she was able to tell him of her service to the child, and to ask him to excuse Annie.

"Oh, that's all right, ma'am," said the foreman. "It was very kind of you. Half the children aren't here, and the storm is getting worse. I think, ma'am, you had better stay here till it's brighter, and I can get a cab for you."

Miss Hyland accepted the suggestion, and amused her leisure by watching the proceedings of the baby she had rescued from the storm. After the fashion of a mature woman, Annie removed cloak, hood and mittens, and placed them with her lunch-pail in a closet, rolled up her sleeves over a muscular arm, put on an immense jean apron, and began mysterious performances on a machine that looked to Miss Hyland like a gigantic piano. For ten minutes Annie was too busy with this machine to look about her, then she came over to Miss Hyland and began to instruct her in the mysteries of spinning. But the lady's interest had taken another direction. She found out where the child lived, how many hours she worked each day, and the contents of the lunch-pail bread and butter, pork and beans, she examined the material of her cloak, mittens and dress, and found how a clever mother had produced these comforts out of old, discarded felt with the aid of black dye and handy scissors; she heard of the dead father, the dying sister, and the courageous mother battling against hunger and death; Annie told all with sweet unconsciousness to a beautiful and well-dressed woman who seemed interested in a commonplace story. When Miss Hyland went home in her coach her clothes were covered with cotton, she smelled of machine oil, her ears were deaf and her head was dizzy; and these things did not disturb her, because she had just rated herself as a humbug. She wished to shed tears, but here was a matter beyond tears. All her heroics were in the dust-heap. What was a trip to a church on a wintry morning to three hundred annual trips to a stinking, deafening, everlasting mill;

what were the mock heroics of a wealthy grown woman to the daily labor of a little mill-child; what was her money gift to the poor compared with this child's contribution of two dollars a week to the support of a household! It can be seen what a bright mind Miss Hyland had that she could make these telling comparisons upon accidental encouragement. Yet she did not know what influence was disturbing her, and when she sent for Annie Russell the following Sunday, and fed her on cakes for an hour just to hear her talk about the home, and the factory, and the girls, the notion seemed foolish.

Annie knew her business well, was healthy and self-reliant, and asked no odds of the world. If her sister were only well and her mother did not cry so much, she would be perfectly happy.

"Did your sister work in the mill?" said Miss Hyland.

"For fifteen years, ma'am."

"No wonder she's dying," thought the lady. "And will you work in the mill as long as that, Annie?"

"I've got to," said the child, cheerfully. "Kate Cronin worked in it forty years."

Miss Hyland was so delighted with her first visit to the mill that she went again and again to revive her impression of the novelty, and soon became well known to the foreman and the children. Then she made bold to call on Annie's mother, in a neighborly way, to see with her own eyes the sorrow of those whose tears were not salt-water, but blood; and thus in a short time she became acquainted with the life the little girl led, its green and desert places, its bareness, and its occasional terrors. Her warm and attractive nature made the poor friendly from the first, and their stories of suffering were freely poured into her ear. Miss Hyland at first was inclined to weep over them, finding, however, that each separate family had its own special sorrows she deferred her tears and devoted her time to the Russells. The elder girl was near death and required her mother's constant attention.

"So that I have little time to work on the shirts," said the poor mother, pointing to the work sent her from the mill. "It isn't that I begrudge my poor child the care she needs. It isn't long she'll trouble me. And what a faithful poor girl she's been to me only God knows. When her father died she was only eight years old. She went to work then and for fifteen years, day in and day out, she worked in the mill, bringing me her wages very month, and never asking a cent for herself, nor a holiday, nor even a dress. I had to force them on her. She wouldn't tell me how she was feeling until I made her come with me to the doctor. She had a dread of doctors' bills, and losing her wages. Then it was too late to save her, my poor child. And now that she's dying the only thing that troubles her is the expense of her sickness and her funeral, and leaving me alone. Thanks be to God for His goodness, she hasn't wanted for anything since she took sick. It's fruit from one, and brandy from another, until Annie has to eat the nice things for fear they'll spoil."

And the mother had to laugh amid her tears at the joys which fell to the child throughout this sickness. Miss Hyland listened to her calm story with polite interest, but her heart was weeping, and as she sat by Kate Russell's chair and looked into the transparent, emaciated face she felt that no martyr ever merited crown more nobly than this humble girl who had stood by her mother from her babyhood in the bitter martyrdom of the mills. Without any formality she took her place in the household, and spent most of her time there. She pretended it was interest in Annie, but while that was true the real motive was a feeling of

devotion to dying Kate. She read to her, and attended to her wants; and knowing how the patient sufferer concealed her little needs to save others trouble, Miss Hyland invented all kinds of necessities for her, and supplied them. Mrs. Russell found herself able to do her work on the shirts steadily, and to get regular sleep, for Miss Hyland shared the night watch. In this way the young lady soon arrived at the end of her journey, which was the heart of Kate, who now poured into her ear, as comrade to comrade, the story of her life, her hopes and fears and last wishes. To Miss Hyland these tender confidences were like draughts of old wine. They were the sacred and secret thoughts of a true martyr. Nothing in them terrified her more than the poor girl's self-reproaches for having felt wearied at times in helping her mother, for having conceived a hatred for the mill-life, and having longed for better things.

"Nonsense, Kate," said she. "There is nothing to be sorry for. One must get weary of doing good now and then, and as for the mills they are horrible places for grinding men to powder. I detest them, and I am glad you do."

"The are not so bad if they paid better wages," said Kate, "and if one could afford to rest once in a while. Poor mother and Annie will get enough of them before they die."

"I see that troubles you."

"A little," the girl answered, smiling. "But I leave all my troubles to God now. He must attend to them, for I can't take trouble any more."

"You've had your share," said Miss Hyland, drily. "Now, some of us, who have been dancing while you were crying, will begin to take trouble. When you are gone, Kate, I shall see to it that your mother gets paying work and can send Annie to school. So no more fretting on their account."

"The thought of their grief has really kept me from dying," said Kate. "But now that they have a friend like you, I can go at once."

She said this so earnestly, and grew so much paler that the lady thought for a moment death had really come. It was delayed for a few days. Miss Hyland saw its gray shadow stealing over the patient face, and warned the mother. They watched steadily until the change came. The wealthy lady had never seen a death agony, and ordinarily would have dreaded it, but in this instance there was neither dread nor repugnance. Death was the mere condition of a great and deserved reward.

"Pray for me when I am in Purgatory," whispered Kate.

"Don't fear," answered Miss Hyland, more drily than usual. "I fear our prayers won't be of much use to you."

A slight, notable change passed swiftly over the girl's face, and Miss Hyland, bending closer, kissed her cheek, for she saw that Kate was dead. It was just dawn. Annie had not been disturbed from her sleep to go to work, and was hugging her pillow with fervor. The two women alone prepared her body for burial, and when the neighbors came in Miss Hyland went demurely home.

There can be no question that Miss Hyland was a young woman of strong character and much ingenuity. Her friends admit this with visible embarrassment. She took great pleasure in carrying flowers to Kate Russell's grave in company with mother and daughter, helped to keep the plot in trim with her own hands, and selected an epitaph for the stone which Mrs. Russell erected. But she took more pleasure in annoying the mill proprietors on such questions as the hours of labor for children, their wages, the sanitary condition of factories, the moral character of foremen and superintendents. It is painful to put such statements on paper about a