

* * The Story Page. * *

Edward.

BY ELIZABETH TILLEY.

My earliest remembrance of Edward is that of the day when he first came to do odd jobs around our house. He was then a thin, small, ragged, underfed, cross-eyed child of ten years old. Some squints have an effect of moral obliquity, as if the owner were slyly avoiding your eye; Edward's was a straightforward, honest deformity, that added to the general air of simplicity and helplessness that distinguished him. We took him just because he was so helpless, and because something had to be done with him. His mother had been left with seven small children to support, and no visible resources. Now, it is not right for children under twelve to work, of course; but what else can be done in such cases? Edward's two elder sisters went to the mill, and Edward, being too pitifully small even for that started out to find a living somehow, on the streets. He carried papers, he ran errands, he helped market people with their baskets; and, twice a week, he came to our house to do any odds and ends of work we might have for him. There wasn't much that he could do, except wash the pavement and clean the knives; and he was rather complicated by his eight-year old brother Jim, whom he always seemed to have in charge, and who was a lively and noisy child. If it had been anybody else but Edward the experiment would not have lasted a week; but before that first week was up we had learned that there were peculiar reasons for being patient with the little fellow, and peculiar virtues in him to admire, which balanced any objections. To be poor, sickly and stunted is handicap enough in the race of life; but Edward was more heavily weighted still. I hesitate to say that he was half-witted—because, like a squint, that seems to carry moral obliquity along with it. Rather, he was curiously limited in his intelligence, but unflinchingly conscientious.

For instance, he was instructed to wash the pavement once a week, and his sentiment of duty was so strong, and so unchecked by any mental perceptions, that he would go out cheerfully under a drenching rain and work away at the side-walk with his bucket and broom. And when my mother called him in and reproved him he would look so confused, and say so falteringly, "I didn't know it was wrong, ma'am!" that the reproof stopped at once. We finally arranged that he should not do the pavement without previous notice from the cook (who knew fine weather when she saw it), and after that he worked away as happily as possible, Jim always playing alongside under the fraternal eye. Whenever one of the household went by the two children, Edward always straightened up and took off his cap, and admonished Jim to do the same. Where he picked up his manners no one knew; but he evidently had a severe code of his own, for he always insisted on shaking hands with a new cook or housemaid, much to her astonishment.

This home experience with Edward did not last long, for his sisters got him a place at the mill when he was not quite twelve. From this time, he worked steadily till he was fifteen, and then his mother tried to apprentice him to a trade. It is a hard thing for a lad without father or friends to get into the over-crowded, jealousy-guarded trades, and it was a year before the boy had his chance. And then—poor little patient worker—after six months' apprenticeship, he was told that he could not go any further. The "boss" was not a hard man, he was impressed, indeed, with Edward's perseverance and simplicity; and he came himself to see the mother, and tell her the truth. Edward could not remember more than one machine, one kind of tool, at a time, and when he went on to another, he forgot how to use previous tools and machines, and spoiled the work. The real reason was never told to the boy himself; the "boss," agreed with his mother to make lack of bodily strength the pretext for dismissing him. His self-respect was not hurt; but he went sadly back to the mill. I never heard him complain except once, just after this, when he told me, gravely, that he liked the work at the shop so much better than mill work, because "it occupied his mind so much more."

With all this plentiful lack of intelligence, he yet could read after a fashion, and write a plain, round hand, and he had a great fondness for music. His first savings went toward a violin; but the family was still so poor that all the money was needed at home, and, after the precious violin was bought, it was a year or so before he could again save enough to take a few lessons upon it. He did not learn very easily, but was infinitely patient; and night after night he practised delightedly on his poor little instrument.

"Edward ain't like most boys; he never runs at night," said his mother, "jest stays in, and plays his fiddle till bedtime. He's the best child I've got, if he ain't very bright." This was her euphemism to express her son's limitations. But, as her own horizon was not large, and she had much besides to trouble her, the familiar fact of Edward's mental drawbacks might well

be forgotten. Jim had grown up "wild"—not brutally so, but unreliable and drunken; and the eldest daughter was deceived and then abandoned by a worthless lover. The poverty of the household was great, for Edward and one sister were the only steady workers, and there were nine mouths to feed. And, besides that, it seemed as if the mother were becoming discouraged by her wayward children, and as if moral misery and degradation were creeping steadily into the household.

Edward was then about eighteen. He had been in my Sunday-school class for a year or so, and, though I had taught the Gospel to him as to the others, I had always doubted whether he had understood anything of it, really. I had views, then, on the intellectual quality of faith, and these bright young lads of mine were all so different from Edward that I cannot say I thought much about him in teaching the lessons. He listened with the most dignified attention, but I never liked to ask him questions, for I knew he could not answer them, and did not embarrass him before the class. We were having special services for the school that year, and I urged the class, as a whole, to attend. I was rather surprised, however, to see Edward coming to meeting after meeting, and I could hardly understand it when, after a week or two, I found that the lesson one Sunday, affected and interested him very much. I am ashamed to say that I hesitated about speaking to him after the session was over. His limitations, his surroundings, the pitiful inadequacy of his life, were opposed to all my ideas concerning strong, intellectual, powerful Christianity. I hesitated, but my heart, I am thankful to say, got the better of me, and I was glad that it had when I heard his very quick response to my somewhat embarrassed questioning.

"Yes, Miss Ella, I've been trying to do what God says a long while. Do you think I could be a Christian, Miss Ella? because I'd like to say I was a Christian, before people, if I could be one."

That was about all he knew. We tried not to confuse or discourage him, and only asked him necessary questions. He went before the elders of the church, a little timidly, but sure it was all right, since I told him to go; and he seemed, to them, to know what he was doing. But still, I felt a trifle nervous when he was baptized and made his confession of faith. I thought of that miserable, unhappy home of his, and the total lack of helpful influence around him, and the weakness of the lad himself, and I wondered if he truly understood what it meant to be a Christian.

I found out very soon. Three of my scholars joined the church at that time. The other two were ordinary, intelligent lads. Their religion was also ordinary—real, but negative. In Edward, the church had gained a member of a different stamp. He commenced at once, toilsome as it was to his half-educated eye and brain to read his Bible. Even his beloved violin was neglected. Week after week, in the class, he began to answer Bible questions and to quote Bible verses. He didn't always get them right, and he couldn't always read the lesson straight; but beside the halting, imperfect mind one could see the soul growing up, straight and strong. It was like a miracle, it opened all our eyes to the divine possibilities of the Gospel. Edward was utterly unconscious of himself or of us; he only wanted to know more of the only book he could understand. His straightforward simplicity shamed us all. The bright boy of the class (who had rather pitted him) was moved to do what he had never done before—read the Bible—for "I'm ashamed to let Ned get ahead of me," he said. And when Edward read aloud, stumblingly, in his turn, there never was so much as a smile, not even when he read, concerning Judas, "And after he had received the soap, Satan entered into him." Such a mistake as this, however, was rare, and he literally read his Bible until he knew how it ought to be read, and learned many verses by heart.

The first effect of the Gospel upon such a transparent, child-like soul was to illuminate it, the next to shine through it to others. He began to bring his brother to the services. How he did it no one knew, nobody else had any influence over Jim whatever. But Edward soon brought him regularly and looked so happy as he ushered him in that everybody sympathized. And the faithful love had its reward; Jim, repentant and sincere, came before the elders of the church to confess his faith; and he was asked the manner of his conversion, his simple answer, "It was my brother, sir," touched every heart that heard. I think Jim would have slipped and fallen out of the fellowship of the church, once and again, afterward, but for that simple faith and love that flowed unflinchingly from his brother toward him, and kept him steady through his temptations, till he turned out a manly Christian, after all.

When Jim joined the church, Edward began to hold family worship, and that humble service, with its faltering prayers, its childish, reverent reading, was a lesson that settled my intellectual theory of Christianity, once

for all. The Gospel entered into that poor house with its full power and blessing. The poor disgraced sister, with her child in her arms, learned that a new life might be hers, as Edward sought out the promises for her in his little Bible. He brought her to the church, and she was welcomed into it. Then his mother came, and then another sister. Till all, except the younger children, were gathered in. And every one of them, when questioned had the same answer, "It was Ned who made me want to be a Christian." After his own people came a fellow-worker in the mill; then a friend of Jim's, and so on. Wherever his life touched another's there his influence began. His speech was halting, his mind weak; the cup was small, but the Gospel overflowed from it. His simple Christianity was so loving and comprehensive that it was a message to everybody. You couldn't evade it; you couldn't argue with him; he had no opinions of his own, and no words except the words of the Bible.

As time went on and he learned more about his one book it became an education to him and reacted on his mind, so that I could see that he really thought more, and was able to reason about elementary everyday matters. But he never progressed very far. I remember our clergyman's amusement when, one night, after the prayer-meeting, he shook hands with Edward, as usual, and the latter said, beaming;

"I'm very glad to see you here, Dr.—"

The Sunday-school superintendent, one day, spoke to the school of having heard a well-known hymn whistled in the streets of a foreign city once, and how it had cheered him, and added:

"I love to hear the music of a hymn floating out among the sounds of business, and the noise of the world. It does every heart good that hears it. Whistle the old hymns, boys!"

That was enough for Edward. One of my scholars, who was a clerk in the mill offices, told me next Sunday that Edward had whistled "Rock of Ages" hour after hour all week long, and couldn't be induced to stop. And once, when some tracts were handed him for distribution, he wasn't content with giving one to each fellow-workman, but went straight to his employer, and gave him one, too. I quaked when I heard that, for the employer was not a man to whom I should have liked to offer a tract. However, no evil results followed. And a month later, Edward's wages were actually raised!

I am glad to say, indeed, that Edward's days of hunger and forlornness are behind, in the past. This year has been a happy and important one for him. The family have moved into a new house, and are established as respectable people. Jim and three girls are working steadily, so that Edward could afford, without extravagance, to give his mother, out of his wages, a rocking chair and a picture for the parlor as her Christmas gift. He has a new violin, and has become a prominent member of the Sunday school choir, and he plays his beloved instrument correctly and well. Best of all to him, he has been asked to lead the Christian Endeavor meetings in his turn. The clergyman said he knew no one in the church more fit than Edward for such a duty. And if you could hear his short prayers, all in the words of Scripture, and yet coherent in petitions and their praise; if you could see the simple reverence and dignity with which he presides over the little meeting, you would, I am sure, agree with the minister.

Edward always refreshes me. He always helps me. When I get worried over a theological tangle, I think of his simplicity, and I remember that theology isn't essential to salvation or everyday usefulness. When people lament over the decline of the gospel, I think of this living example in which it has brought forth, with such thoroughness, every fruit that can be desired. When I become lazy, I look at Edward with his infinitesimal powers, going on cheerfully, and "bringing forth an hundredfold," and I am ashamed into activity. And in the hope that Edward may do some one who reads this small part of the good he has done me, I write this inadequate history of him, which has only the one merit of being absolutely true.—The Independent.

The Captain's Miracle.

"Git out of here, boys," said the old sailor; "yer know all o' my yarns ez well ez I know 'em myself. I've got no more to tell yer."

But the boys knew well that the old seaman did not mean what he said. That was just a form of modesty, as some girls when asked to sing or to play on the piano blush and say they are out of practice, all the time intending to grant the request.

Our boys sat still on the warm sand in the shelter of Sam's cabin, and waited for the story.

"Yon promised to tell me about a miracle your father worked on the Mediterranean Sea once, Uncle Sam," said Guy, coaxingly.

"I never said he worked a miracle, bo'n," answered the sailor, reprovingly; "only God Almighty does that."