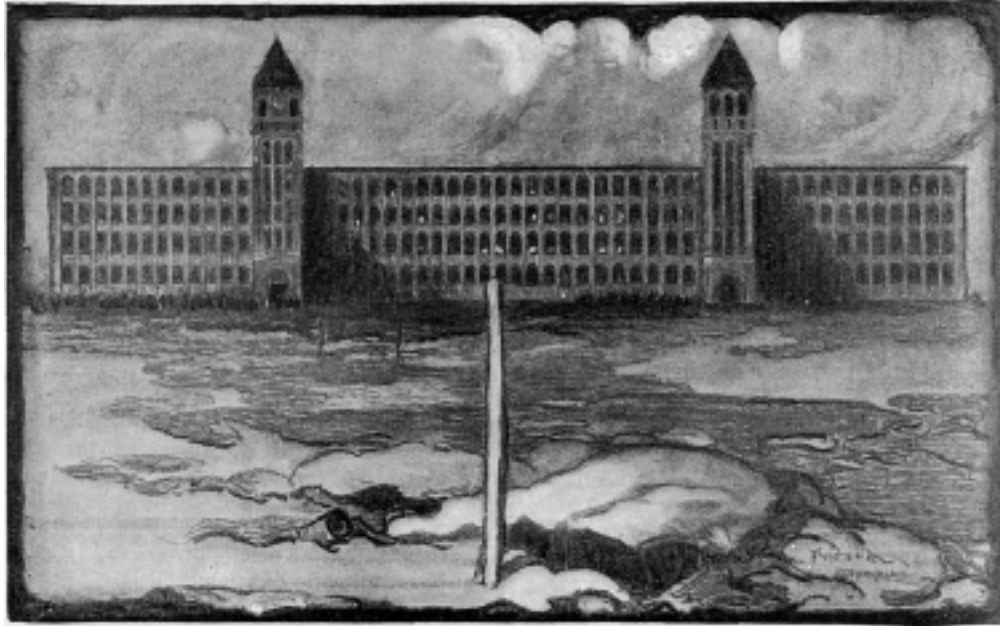


"MIGHTY MILL—PRIDE OF THE ARCHITECT AND THE COMMERCIAL MAGNATE."

"Charnel house, destroyer of homes, of all that mankind calls hallowed; breeder of strife, of strike, of immorality, of sedition and riot."



THE WOMAN THAT TOILS.

Experiences of a Literary Woman as a Working Girl.

BY MARIE VAN VORST.

ILLUSTRATED BY G. ALDEN PIERSON.

[Miss Marie Van Vorst is the daughter of the late Judge Van Vorst, once actively interested in the breaking up of the Tweed ring, Chancellor of the State of New York, President of the Century Club and founder of the Holland Society. Miss Van Vorst has written several successful novels containing interesting pictures drawn from her experiences of the factory life she has studied so conscientiously. The following account of these experiences themselves is the fourth of a series of five articles secured by this Magazine, of which she has written two, and her sister-in-law, Mrs. John Van Vorst, three.—EDITOR.]

THOSE who are familiar with the healthy type of the decent workmen of the West and East must draw their distinctions as they consider this same class in the South. The Southern mill hand's face is unique, a fearful type, the perusal of which is not pleasant nor cheerful to the character reader, to the lover of humanity nor to our prophets. Watch them as they defile: men with felt hats drawn over their brows; women, sunbonneted or hatless; children, barefooted, bareheaded, ragged, unwashed.

In the early morning the giant mill grows active. Hear it roar, shattering the still-

ness for half a mile! It is full now of flesh and blood, of human life and brain and fibre: it is content! Triumphantly during the long day it devours its tithe of body and soul.

Behind lies the village, destitute of life during the hours of work; condemned to the care of a few women, the old, the bedridden and the sick—of this last there are plenty.

Around Columbia, South Carolina, there lie five mills and their respective settlements, Excelsior, Granton, the Calcutta, the Cortland and the Principal City. Each of these mills boasts its own so-called "town." When

the mill people are free on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, they are too exhausted to do anything but turn into their hovels to sleep. At best they board a trolley and betake themselves to a distant park which, in the picturesque descriptions of Columbia, reads like an Arcadia, but is in reality desolation.

The mill hands are not from the direct section of Columbia. They are strangers brought in from "the hills" by the agents of the company, who go through different parts of the country describing, to the poor whites and hill dwellers, work in the mills as a way to riches and success. Filled with dreams of gain, with hopes of decent housing and schooling for their children, these immigrants leave their distant communities and troop to the mills. They are picturesque, touching to see. They come with all they own in the world on their backs or in their hands; penniless. They are hatless, barefooted, ignorant; innocent for the most part, and hopeful! What the condition of these laborers is, after they have tested the promises of the manufacturer and found them empty bubbles, can only be understood and imagined when one has seen their life, lived among them, worked by their sides, and comprehended the tragedy of this population—a floating population, going from Granton to Excelsior, from Excelsior to Cortland, hither and thither, seeking better conditions. They have no affiliation with the people of the town; they are looked upon as scum.

In my simple work garb I leave Columbia and take a trolley to the mill district. I have chosen Excelsior as the best for my purpose. Its reputation is most at stake; its prospectus dazzling; its annals effective.

Before the trolley has come up to the stores Excelsior has spoken—roared, clicked forth so vibrantly, I am prepared to feel the earth shake. Mighty mill—pride of the architect and the commercial magnate; charnel house, destroyer of homes, of all that mankind calls hallowed; breeder of strife, of strike, of

immorality, of sedition and riot—buildings tremendous,—you give your immutable faces, myriad windowed, to the dust heaps, to the wind-swept plains of sand.

This is the largest mill in the world and looks it! a model, too, in view of architecture. I have read in the prospectus that it represents \$1,750,000 capital; possesses 104,000 spindles; employs 1,200 hands, and can, with crowding, employ 3,000. Surely it will have place for one more, then! Its grandeur impresses me as it rises, red-bricked, with proud, straight towers toward its centre. On one side, Christianity and doctrine have constructed a church: a second one is being built. On the other side, at a little distance, lies Granton, second largest mill.

There is no entry for me at the front of the mill, and I toil round to the side; not a creature to be seen. I venture upon the landing, and make my way along a line of freight cars. A kind-faced man wanders out from an unobserved doorway—a gust of roar follows him! I hasten to ask him for work.

"Well, thar's jest plenty of work, I reckon! Go in that do'; the overseer will tell you."

Through the door, open behind him, I catch glimpses of an enormous room. Cotton bales lie on the floor, stand along the walls, and are piled in the centre. Leaning on them, handling them, lying on them, or slipping like shadows into shadow, are the dusky shapes of the black negro of true Southern blood. I take advantage of my guide's kind face to ask him if he knows where I can lodge.

"Hed the measles? I'd take you-all to bo'd at my house ef you ain't 'fraid of measles. Thar's the hotel." (He points to what at the North would be known as a brick shanty.) "A gyrl can bo'd thar for \$2.25 a week. You won't make that at first."

With extreme kindness he leads me into the roaring mill, past picturesque black men and cotton bales: we reach the "weave room." An overseer comes up to me. He talks with me politely and kindly. He asks me simple and few questions, and engages me promptly for work



THE FORMER BACKWOODS HOME
OF A MILL HAND.



"THE SOUTHERN MILL HAND'S FACE IS UNIQUE, A FEARFUL TYPE

that "evening," as the Southerner calls the hours after midday.

"You can see all the work and choose a sitting or a standing job." This was an improvement on Pittsburg and Lynn.*

With Excelsior as my future workshop I leave the mill to seek lodging in the mill village.

The houses, built by the corporation for the hands, are from five to six minutes' walk from the palace-like structure of the mill proper. They are all exactly alike. Painted in sickly greens and yellows, they rise on stilted elevations above the malarial soil. In regard to the number of rooms only has the architect catered to individual taste. There are "four- or six-room cottages." In one of the first houses the single wholesome sight I see during my experience meets my eye. Human kindness has transformed one of the dwellings into a kindergarten. A pretty Southern girl, a lady, stands surrounded by her little flock. The half-dozen emancipated children who are not in the mills are refreshing to see. There are very few: the kindergarten flags for lack of little scholars.

*See EVERYBODY'S MAGAZINE, September and October, 1902.

I accost the teacher. "Can you tell me any decent place to board?" She is sorry, regards me kindly with the expression I have grown to know—the look the eyes adopt when a person of one class addresses her sister in a range lower. Indicating a shanty opposite:

"Mrs. Wright lives there in that four-room cottage: she is a good woman."

Through the door's crack I interview Mrs. Wright, a pallid, sickly creature; gowned, as are most of the women, in a calico garment made all in one piece. She permits me to enter the room, which forms (as do all the front rooms in a mill cottage) bedroom and general living-room.

Here is confusion incarnate—and filthy disorder. The tumbled, dirty bed fills up one-half the room. In it is a little child, shaking with chills. On the bare floors are bits of food, old vegetables, rags, dirty utensils of all sorts. The house has a sickening odor. The woman tells me she is too ill to keep tidy—too ill to keep boarders. "I only been here four months," she says. "Sick ever since I come, and my little girl has 'fevernaygu.'"

I wander forth, and a child directs me to a six-room cottage: "a real bo'din' house."



THE PERUSAL OF WHICH IS NOT PLEASANT TO OUR PROPHETS."

I attack it and discover the dwelling where I make my home in Excelsior.

From the front room of this dwelling a kitchen opens. Within its shadow I see a negro washing dishes. A tall woman, taller than most men, angular, white-haired, her face seared by toil and stricken with age, greets me: she is the landlady. At her skirts, catching them and staring at a stranger, wanders a young child—a blue-eyed, clean little being; the room beyond, too, is clean. I draw a breath of gratitude.

"Mrs. White?"

"Yes, this is White's bo'din' house."

"Can I find lodging here?"

She looks at me: "Yes, ma'am, you kin. I've got a lot of gentlemen bo'ders, but not many ladies. I got one bed up aloft; you can't have it alone neither, and Jetty's mother is sick up there too. Nuthin' ketchin'; she come here a stranger; the mill was too hard on her; she's ben sick fo' days."

I make a quick decision and accept half a bed, and leave her for the present, to return to Columbia and fetch back with me my bundle of clothes.

When I return at noon it is dinner time. I

go upstairs with my bundle, and see for the first time my dwelling place in this shanty.

A ladder-like stair, leading directly from the kitchen, takes me into the loft. In it there are three sagging beds, covered with calico comforters. Around the bare walls hang the garments of the women who share the room with me. Poor, miserable clothes—a shawl or two, a coat or two, a cotton wrapper, a hat; and on one nail the miniature clothes of Jetty. I put my bundle down and descend, for Mrs. White's voice summons me to the midday meal. The nourishment provided for these thirteen-hour-a-day laborers is as follows: On a tin saucepan there is a little salt pork, and on another dish a pile of grease-swimming spinach. A ragged negro hovers over the food; the room is full of the smell of frying. I cannot eat. I say that I have had something to eat in Columbia, and start out to the mill.

I do not see my friend of the morning, the overseer, in the "weave room"; indeed, there is no one to direct me; but I discover, after climbing the stairs, a room of flying spools and more subdued machinery, and it appears that the spool room is this man's especial charge. He consigns me to a stand-

ing job. He points to a set of revolving spools, and secures a pretty young girl of about sixteen, who comes cheerfully forward and consents to "learn" me.

Spooling is not disagreeable, and the room is the quietest part of a mill. In Excelsior the room is, of course, enormous,—light and well ventilated, although the temperature, on account of some quality in the yarn, is kept at a point of humidity far from wholesome.

"Spooling" is hard on the left arm and the side. Heart disease is a frequent complaint amongst the older spoolers. The fact that there are more children than young girls, more young girls than women, proves the simplicity of this task. The cotton comes

palm, she joins together the two loosened ends—one from the little distaff and one from this large spool, so that the two objects are set whirling in unison and the spool receives all the yarn from the distaff. Up and down this line the spooler must walk all day long, replenishing the iron grooves with fresh yarn, reknitting broken strands. This is all that there is to "spooling." It only demands alertness, quickness, and a certain amount of strength from the left arm common to young women and children.

The little girl who teaches me spooling is fresh and cheerful and jolly. She lives at home. I am told by my subsequent friends that she thinks herself better than anybody else. This pride has caused her to



"A SERVITUDE BEGINNING AT TEN YEARS OF AGE."

from the spinning room to the spool room, and as the girl stands before her "side," as it is called, she sees on a raised ledge, whirling in rapid vibration, some one hundred huge spools full of yarn, whilst below her, each in its little case, lies a second bobbin of yarn wound like a distaff.

Her task controls machinery that never stops except in case of accident.

She detaches the yarn with one finger of her right hand from the distaff that lies motionless in the little iron rut before her. With her left hand she seizes the revolving circle of the top of the large spool in front of her; she holds this spool steady, overcoming the machinery for the moment not as strong as her grasp; this demands a certain effort. Still controlling the agitated spool with her left hand, she detaches the end of yarn from the spool with the same hand, and, by means of a patent knotter harnessed around her

assume neat clothes, and a sprightliness of manner that is refreshing. She does not hesitate to evince her superiority by making sport of me. Instead of giving me the patent knotter, which would have simplified my job enormously, she teaches me what she calls "the old-fashioned way," knotting the yarn with the fingers. I have mastered this slow process by the time that the overseer discovers her trick and brings me the harness for my left hand. She is full of curiosity about me; she asks me every sort of question, to which I give the best answers that I can. By and by she slips away, leaving me under the care of a truly kind, sad little creature in a wrapper dress.

This little Maggie has a heart of gold.

"Don't you-all fret," she consoles. "That's like Jeannie: she's so *mean!* When you git to be a remarkable fine spooler she'll want you on her side, you bet."



THE "HOTEL" WHERE A GIRL CAN BOARD FOR \$2.25 A WEEK.

"What at the North would be known as a brick shanty."

She assists my awkwardness gently, while unquestioned she tells me her simple story.

"My paw he married ag'in; and me step-mother 'peared like she didn't care fer me; so one day I sez to paw, 'I'm goin' to work in the mills'—an' I lef' home all alone and come here." After a little—"When I say'd good-bye to my father, 'peared like he didn't care neither. I'm all alone here. I bo'ds with that girl's mother."

During the afternoon the gay Jeannie returns and presents to me a tin box. It is filled with a black powder. The little creature fills her mouth with it and keeps it under her tongue. It is *snuff!* They all take it, old and young, the smallest children even. Their mouths are brown with it; their teeth are black with it. The air of the room is white with cotton. These little particles are breathed into the nose, drawn into the lungs. Lung disease, pneumonia and consumption are the never-absent scourge

of the mill village. The girls expectorate to such an extent that the floor is filthy. The little girls practise spitting and are adepts at it.

Absorbed with the novelty of learning my trade, the time goes swiftly. But interest and excitement do not prevent fatigue, and from 12:45 to 6:45 is interminable. Even when the whistle blows we are not all free—Excelsior is behindhand with her production, and those whom extra pay can beguile stay on.

At White's, supper is ready, spread on a bare board running the length of the room—a bare board supported by saw-horses. The seats are boards also, a little lower in height. They sag in the middle threateningly. One plate is piled high with fish—bones, skin and flesh

in an odorous mass. Salt pork graces another platter, hominy another.

I slip into my seat at the table in the centre of the sagging board and find Mollie beside



A TYPICAL INTERIOR.

"On the bare floors are bits of food, old vegetables, rags, dirty utensils of all sorts."

me, on the other side the girl from Excelsior with the pretty hair. The host, Mr. White, honors the head of the table, and "grandmaw" waits upon us. Opposite are the three men operatives, flannel-shirted and dirty. These latter are silent for the most part, and bend over their food, devouring the unpalatable stuff before them. If they were not so terribly hungry they could not eat it.

Mollie, my elbow-companion, is full of news and chatter and becomes the leading spirit of the meal.

"I reckon you-all never did see anything like the fight to the mill to-day."

She arouses at once the interest even of the dull men opposite; they pause in the plying of their knives and forks to listen.

"Amanda Wilcox tol' Ida Jacobs a lie about Bill James; say'd he'd ben spo'tin' her down to the Park on Sunday. Well, sir, the whole spinnin' room was out to see what they-all'd do at noon, and they jest rushed for each other like's they was crazy; they both of them spit right into each other's faces, they did so; and arter that yer couldn't git them apart. Ida Jacobs grabbed Amanda by the ha'r, and Amanda hit her plump in the chest with her fist. They was suttently like to kill each other of the men hadn't jest parted them; it took three men to part 'em."



A HOME IN THE "HILLS."

After supper the men went out on the porch with their pipes, and we to the sitting-room, where Mollie, the story-teller, seated herself in a comfortable chair, her feet outstretched before her. She made a generous lap, to which she tried to beguile little Jetty. Mrs. Jones had disappeared.

"You-all come here to me, Jetty."

Jetty toddled across the floor to the girl, who lifted her tenderly into her ample lap. The big awkward creature, scarcely more than a child herself, uncouth, untutored, gained, on a sudden, dignity and a grace maternal.

In one corner of the room where we sit stands a sewing machine, in another an organ. They are bought on the instalment plan, and for an organ some of the girls pay as high as \$100 in monthly payments of \$4 at a time.

White is a courteous host. His lodgers occupy the comfortable seats, while he, perched on the edge of a high-backed chair, converses with us, not lighting his pipe until urged, then deprecatingly smoking in little smothered puffs. White evidently thinks Massachusetts shoe hands a grade higher in the social scale than South Carolina mill girls, because, having been witness to my morning and evening ablutions on the back steps, he says:

"Now, I am goin' to dew the right thing by you-all; I'm goin' to fix up a wash-stand in that there loft." Again:—

"You-all must have had good food whar you come from; your skin shows it; 'tain't much like hyar 'bouts; why, I'd know a mill hand anywhere if I met her at the North Pole—salla—pale, sickly."

White continues:—"I worked in the mill fifteen years; and I ain't got no use for mill work. Now I sell sewing machines and organs to the mill hands all over the country; I make \$60 a month and *I touch all my money*. It's the way to do. A man don't feel no dignity unless he handles his own money, if it's ten cents or ten dollars." He then explains the corporation's method of paying its slaves. Once in two weeks is pay-day. A woman has then worked one hundred and twenty-two hours. The corporation furnishes her house, there is the rent to be paid; there are also the corporation stores from which she has been getting her food and coal and whatever gew-gaws the cheap stuff on sale has tempted her to purchase. Coupons are issued by the mill owners



"SHE MURMURS IN HER DREAMS,

Indicating a maturity, a seriousness greater than she has yet shown.

" ' OH, MY GOD! ' "

It is a strange cry—call—appeal. It rings solemn to me as I lie and watch and pity."

which are as good as gold. They are good at the stores, good for rent, and the worker's time is served out in pay for this representative currency. This is, of course, not obligatory, but many of the operatives bind themselves to it.

White himself, mark you, is emancipated! He has set himself free; but he is still a too evident, although a very innocent, partisan of the corporation!

"I think," he says, "that the mill hand is *meaner* to the corporation than the corporation is to the mill hand."

"Why?"

"Why? They're always striking for shorter hours and better pay. What's the use of these hyar mill-hands tryin' to fight corporations? Why, Excelsior is the biggest mill

under one roof in the world; its capital is over a million; it has 24,500 spindles. The men that run these mills have got all their stuff paid for. They can shut down and not feel it. Why, these hyar people might just as well fight against a stone wall."

The wages of these people, remember, pay White for the organs upon which they cannot play and the machines which they cannot use. His home is a mill corporation house; he makes a neat sum by lodging the hands. He has fetched down from the hills Mollie, his own niece, to work for him; he perforce *will* speak well; I do not blame him.

Rather early I bid them all good-night and climb the attic stairs to my loft.

Close to an old trunk I sit down with a slip of paper on my knee and try to make a

few notes. No sooner have I begun to write than the big awkward form of the landlady's niece slouches into sight. Sheepishly she comes across the room to me—sits down on the nearest bed. Mollie's costume is typical—a dark cotton wrapper whose colors have become indistinct in the stains of machinery, oil and perspiration. She boasts no coquetry of any kind round her neck and waist, but her headdress is a tribute to feminine vanity! Compactly screwed curl-papers, dozens of them, accentuate the hard, unlovely lines of her face and brow. Her features are coarse, heavy and square, but her eyes are clear, frank and kind; she has an appealing, friendly expression. One elbow sinks in the bed, and she cradles her crimped head in her large, dirty hand.

"My, ef I could write as fast as you-all I'd write some letters, I reckon."

Without the window through which she gazes is seen the pale night sky and in the heavens hangs the thread of a moon. "Ain't it a pretty night?" she asks me. Its beauty cannot change this room and the crude forms, but it has awakened something akin to sentiment in the breast of this young savage.

"I don't guess ever any one gits tired of hearing *sweet music*, does you-all?"

"What is the nicest music you have ever heard, Mollie?"

"Why, a gui-taar an' a mandolin. It's so sweet! I could set for hours an' hyar 'em

pick." Her curl-paper head wags in enthusiasm.

"Up to the hills, from whar I cum, I uset ter hyar 'em a-serenadin' of some gyrl, an' I uset ter set up in bed and lis'en tel it died out—it wan't for *me*, tho'!"

"Didn't they ever serenade you?"

"No, *ma'am*; I don't pay no 'tention to spo'tin'.

"Say, I reckon you-all didn't never see my new ha-at?" It was brought, done up with care in paper. She displayed it, a round white straw hat, covered with roses. At praise of it and admiration the girl flushes with pleasure.

"My, you *dew* like it? Why, I didn't think it *pretty, much*. Uncle Bob done buy it for me."

This shall crown Mollie's hair freed from the crimpers when the one day of the week, Sunday, comes! Not from Sunday till Sunday again are those hair-crimpers unloosed.

Here into our discourse, mounting the stairs, comes the pale mother and her little child. This ghost of a woman, wedding-ringless, who calls herself Mrs. Jones, can scarcely crawl to her bed. Mollie's bed is close to mine. The night toilet of this girl consists in her divesting herself of her shoes, stockings and her cotton wrapper, then clad in all the other garments she wears during the day, she turns herself into bed, night-gownless, unwashed.

Mrs. Jones undresses her child, giving it



"SANITATION, THERE IS NONE."

"Refuse not too vile for the public eye is thrown into the middle of the street in front of the houses."

very good care, I must confess. It is a tiny creature, small-boned and meagre. Every time I look over at it it smiles appealingly.

My mattress is straw and billowy, the bed sheetless, and under the weight of the cotton comforter I try to compose myself. There are five of us in the little loft. My bed-fellow is peaceful and lies still, too tired to do anything else. Directly in front of me, blatant and insistent, an electric light shines through an open window; behind this the Excelsior clock glares in upon us, its giant hands, going round and round, seeming to threaten the hour of dawn, frightening sleep, and mocking the short hours which the working woman might claim for repose.

What spirit deeper than her character has hitherto displayed stirs in the mill girl in the bed next to me? Possibly the tragedy of her youth. At all events, whatever burden is on her, her cross is too heavy! She murmurs in her dreams, in a voice indicating a maturity, a seriousness, greater than any she has yet shown.

"Oh, my God!"

It is a strange cry—call—appeal. It rings solemn to me as I lie and watch and pity.

Over me the vermin have run riot. When it seems that flesh and blood must succumb, and sleep, through sheer pity, takes hold of me, a stirring begins in the kitchen below which in its proximity seems a part of the very room we occupy. The landlady, Mrs. White, has arisen; she is making the fire. At a quarter to four Mrs. White begins her frying; at four a deep blue ugly smoke has ascended the stairway to us. This smoke is thick with the odor of bad grease and bad meat. Its cloud conceals the bed from me; so permeating is it that the smell of fried food clings to everything I wear and haunts me all day. I can hear the sputtering of the saucepan and the fall and flap of the pieces of meat as they are dropped into the pan to fry.

This preparation continues for an hour. Long before five the clock of Excelsior rings and the cry of the mill is heard waking whomsoever is lucky enough to be asleep. Mrs. White calls Mollie. The girl murmurs and turns; she rises reluctantly, yawning, sighing,

lifts her scarcely rested body, and puts on her stockings and shoes and the dirty wrapper. Her hair is untouched, her face unwashed, but she is ready for the day!

At half-past five we have breakfasted and I pass out of the house, one of the half-dozen who seek the mill from our doors. We fall in with the slowly moving, straggling file that has a common direction, receiving additions from each tenement as we pass. Beside me limps a boy of fourteen, in brown earth-colored clothes.

He is so thin that his

bones threaten to pierce his vestments. He has a slender visage, of a frailness that I have learned to know as representing the pure American type of people known as "poor white trash," and with whose blood has been scarcely any admixture of foreign element. His attitude and gait express his frauded existence. Cotton clings to his clothes; his shoes, nearly falling off his feet, are red with clay stains. I greet him; he is shy and surprised, but returns the salutation and keeps step with me. He is "from the hills," an orphan, perfectly friendless. He boards with a lot of men. He works from 5:45 to 6:45; he has three-quarters of an hour at noon; he has his Saturday afternoons and his Sundays free; he makes fifty cents a day; he has no education, no way of getting an education; he is almost a man, crippled and condemned. At my exclamation when he tells me the sum of his wages he looks up at me and a faint likeness to a smile comes about his thin lips: "*It keeps me in existence,*" he says in a slow drawl. He used just those words.

As we come into the spooling room from the hot air without the mill seems cold. I



A TYPICAL REAR.

"The general drainage is performed by emptying pans and basins and receptacles into the back yards."

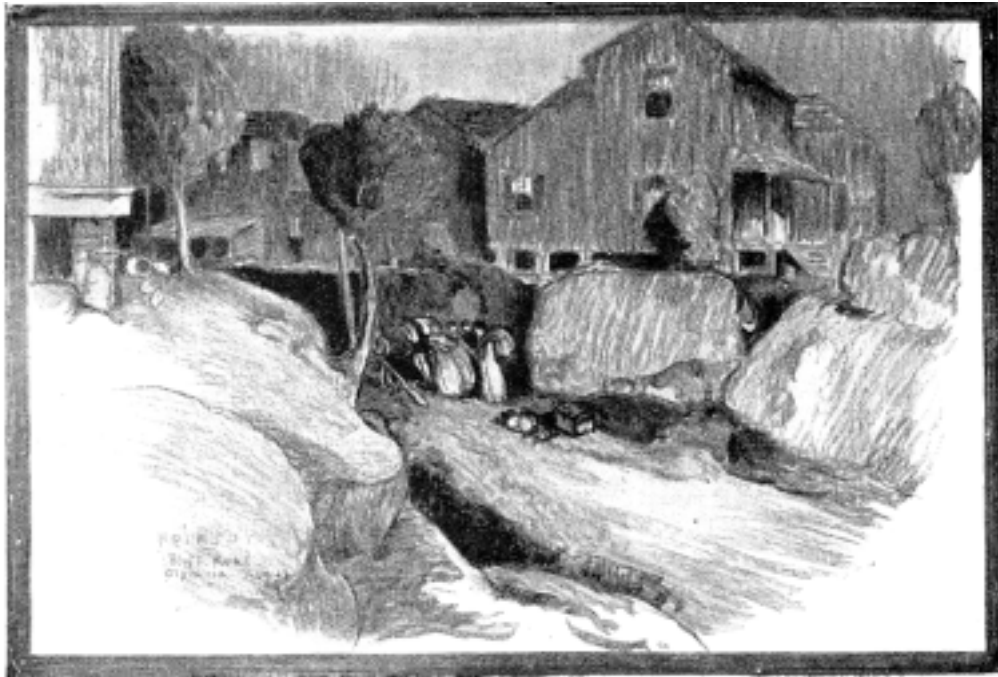
go over to a green box destined for the refuse of the floors and sit down waiting for work. On this day I am to have my own "side": I am a full-fledged spooler. Excelsior has gotten us all out of our beds before actual daylight, but that does not mean that we are to have a chance to begin our money-making piecework job at once! "Thar ain't likely to be no yarn for an hour to-day," Maggie tells me.

Across the room at one of the "drawing-in frames" I see the figure of an unusually pretty girl with curly dark hair. She bends

tell the change as yellow unhealthfulness creeps up her cheeks and the red forever goes. She has chosen a sitting-down job, thinking it easier. I see her lean back, put her hands about her waist and rest, or try to, after she has bent four hours over her close task.

I had seen her apply for work, and had seen, too, the man's face as he looked at her when she asked: "Got any work?"

"We've got plenty of work for a good-looking woman like you," he said with significance, taking pains to place her within his sight.



"FROM SAND-HEAP TO SAND-HEAP TO ESCAPE THE SLOW OR QUICK DEATH."

to her job in front of the frame which she runs; it has the effect of tapestry, of that work with which women of another class amuse their leisure. "Drawing-in," although a sitting job, is considered to be a back-breaker. The girls are ambitious at this work, for they make good wages.* They sit close to their frames, bent over, for twelve hours out of the day. This girl whom I see across the floors of Excelsior is a beauty. She is a new hand from a distance. This is her first day. She has color. Excelsior will not leave those roses unwithered: I can fore-

* A good drawer-in makes \$1.25 a day.

The yarn comes in. Maggie flies to her spools and leaves me to seek a distant place far away from her.

Many of the older hands come without breakfast, and a little later tin pails or paper parcels appear. These operatives crouch down in a Turkish fashion at the machines' sides and take a hasty mouthful of their unwholesome, unpleasant-looking food, eating with their fingers, more like animals than human beings. By eight the full steam power is on, to judge by the swift turning, the strong resistance of the spools.

In speaking of the settlements it borders

on the humorous to use the word sanitation, for there is none. Refuse not too vile for the public eye is thrown into the middle of the streets in front of the houses. The general drainage is performed by emptying pans and basins and receptacles into the back yards, so that as one stands at the back steps of one's door one breathes the filth of half a dozen shanties. To walk through Granton (which the prospectus tells us is well drained!) is to evoke nausea; to *inhabit* Granton is an ordeal which even habit cannot rob of its severity.

The settlers, habitants of dwellings built by finance for the purpose of rent solely, are celebrated for their immorals—a rough, lying, bad lot; nevertheless, in some respects they are simple, direct and innocent, and display the qualities we have always been taught are enviable: a lack of curiosity, for the most part, in the affairs of others, a warm Southern courtesy—and human kindness. I found them degraded because of their habits, and not of their tendencies; whatever may be their natural instincts, born, nurtured in this environment, they have no choice but to fall into the usages of poverty and degradation.

A job at Granton was no more difficult to secure than was spooling at the other mill. I applied one Saturday noon, when the mill was silent and the operatives within their doors asleep, leaving the village as deserted as it is on a workday.

By this time I was most thoroughly a mill girl—in appearance, at least; my clothes were white with cotton, my hair far from tidy, fatigue and listlessness unassumed in my attitude. I told the overseer I had been a “spooler” and did not like it: wanted to spin. He listened silently, regarding me with interest. “Don't learn spinning,” he said decidedly. “I am head of the ‘speeding’ room—I'll give you a job in my room on Monday morning.”

The speeding room is second only in noise to the weave room. Conversation must be entrancing and vital to be pursued here. The speeder has under her care as many machines as her skill can control.

My teacher, Minnie, ran four sides, seventy-six speeders on a side; her work was regulated by a crank that marked the vibrations. To the lay mind the terms of the speeding room can mean nothing. This girl made from \$1.30 to \$1.50 a day, controlling in all seven hundred and four speeders. These

she had to replenish and keep running, cleaning all the machinery gear with her own hands, oil the steel, even bend and clean under the lower shelf, and come into contact with the most dangerous parts of the mechanism. The speeder watches her ropers run out; these stand at the top and back of the line. The ropers are refilled and their ends attached to the flying speeders by a quick motion. The yarn from the ropers is wound off to the speeders. When the speeders are full of yarn they are detached from the nest of steel in which they whirl and are thrown into a handcar which is pushed about the room by the girls themselves. Bessie had been at her work for ten years, entering the factory at eight. She was tall, raw-boned, an expert, deft and capable, and, as far as I could judge in our acquaintance, thoroughly respectable. She had a sweet, gentle face, and was courtesy and kindness itself.

“What do you think about all day?” I asked her.

“Why, I think about books, I reckon. There ain't nuthin' I like so good as readin', when I ain't tyrd.”

“Are you often tired?” And this question surprises her. She looks up at me and smiles: “Why, I'm most always tyrd. I read novels for the most part; like to read love stories and about fo'ran travel.”

Think of it! If she does not succumb to the overseer, she may find some mill hand who will contract a mill marriage with her, a marriage little binding to him and which will give her children to give in time to the mill. This is the realism of her story. But she reads books that you, too, may have read; she dares to dream of scenes, to picture them—scenes that you have sought and wearied of.

She continues: “I'm very fond of fo'ran travel, only I ain't never had much occasion for it.”

“I hate the mills,” she goes on simply.

“What would you be if you could choose?” I venture to ask. She has no hesitation in answering:

“I'd love to be a trained nurse.” Then (turn about is fair play in her mind, I suppose) she asks:

“What would you-all be?”

And ashamed not to well repay her truthfulness I frankly respond, “I'd like to write a book.”

“I *dee-clare*.” She stares at me. “Why,

you-all is ambitious. Did you ever write anything?"

"A letter or two."

She is interested and kindles, leaning forward. "I suttently ain't so high in my ambitions," she says appreciatively. "Wish you'd write a love story for me to read," and she ponders over the idea, her eyes on her snowy, flying speeders.

"Look a hyar, got any of your scrappin's on writin' hyar? Ef yer don't mind anybody's messin' with your things, bring your scrappin's to me an' I'll soon tell you ef you can write a book er not," she whispers to me encouragingly, confidentially, a whisper reaching farther in the mills than a loud sound.

I thank her and say, "Do you think that you would know?"

"Well, I guess I would," she says confidently. "I ain't read all my life sence I was eight years old not to know good writin' from bad. Can you-all sing?"

"No."

"Play sweet music?"

"No."

"I jest love it," she enthuses. "Every Saturday afternoon I take lessons of a teacher on the gee-tar. It costs me a quarter."

"There ain't much flowers here in Granton," she says again. "'Taint no use to try to have even a few 'raneums; it's so dry; ain't no yards nor gardens nuther."

Musing on this desolation as she walks up and down the line, she says: "I dew love flowers, don't you?"

Over and over again I am asked, by those whose wish is, I suppose, to prove to themselves and their consciences that the working girl is not so actually wretched, that her outcry is not so audible: "The working people are happy? the factory girls are happy, are they not? don't you find them so?"

Is it a satisfaction to the leisure class, to the capitalist and employer, to feel that a woman, poorly housed, ill-fed, in imminent moral danger, every temptation rampant, every barrier down, over-worked, over-strained by labor varying from ten to thirteen hours a day, by all-night labor and distraction of body and soul, *is happy?*

Do you *wish* her to be so? Is the existence *ideal?*

I thank heaven that I can say truthfully

that of all who came under my observation not one who was of age to reflect was happy. I repeat, she is brave and courageous, but the most sane and hopeful indication for the future of the factory girl and the mill hand is that she rebels—dreams of something better, and will in the fulness of time stretch out toward it.

Moving, ambulant population! tramping from hill to hill, from sand-heap to sand-heap to escape the slow or quick death, to prolong the toiling, bitter existence. It takes a great deal to wake in these inexpressive, indifferent faces illumination of interest.

At what should they rejoice? They have no time to think, even if they know how. All that remains for them in the few miserable hours of relief from labor and confinement and noise is to seek what pastime they may find under their hand. We have never realized, they have never known, that their great craving and their great need—given the work that is wrung from them and the degradation in which they are forced to live—is a craving for amusement and relaxation. Amusements for this class are not provided: they *can* laugh; they rarely do. The thing that they seek is distraction. They rarely want to read; they do not want to study; they are too tired to concentrate. I heard a manufacturer say: "We gave our mill hands everything that we could to elevate them—a natatorium, a reading library, and these halls fell into disuse." I ask him now, through these pages, the questions which I did not put to him then as I listened in silence to his complaint. What time would he suggest they should spend in the reading-room, even if they have learned to read? They rise at four; at a quarter before six they are at work. The day in winter is not born when they start their tasks; the night has fallen long before they cease; in summer they are working into their evenings. They tell me that they are too tired to eat; that all they want to do is to turn their aching bones upon their miserable mattresses and sleep until they are cried and shrieked awake by the mill summons. Therefore they solve their own questions. Nothing is provided for them that they can use, and they turn to the one thing that is within their reach—animal enjoyment, human intercourse and companionship. They are animals, as are their betters, and with it, let us believe, more excuse.