

Leslie Madeline

The Factory Boy



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*"Trust in the Lord and do good... and verily thou shalt
be fed."
David.*

CHAPTER I.

THE SILVER DOLLAR

TAKE a cup of porridge, Johnny, dear. It's too cold to go to work without something warm."

Johnny looked in the bowl which stood on the hearth, near a few smouldering brands, and shook his head as he answered, – "I'm not very hungry, mother. There's only enough for you and Ella." Then without another word he hurried away, for the factory bell was ringing; and he knew that he must not be late.

Poor little Johnny! How he shivered as he shuffled along that frosty December morning! He could not pick up his feet, as the boys say, and run; for his shoes were much too large for him, and the heels were so worn that it was only by shuffling that he could keep them on his feet. He had scarce a quarter of a mile to go; but cold and hungry as the child was, it seemed a long way to him. He could not help wishing he were a baby like Ella, and could lie in bed all day, with his dead father's coat thrown over him to keep him warm.

It was early yet; and few people were stirring except the men, women, and children who were hurrying to enter the factory before the bell ceased to toll. Johnny hurried, too, for he remembered the scolding he had received the day before for being five minutes too late, and was just crossing the railroad

track when his toe hit against something, which he stooped to pick up.

It was a silver dollar; but he did not know it. He had never seen one. He thought it was a temperance medal, like what he had seen strung around the boys' necks.

His eyes shone with pleasure; he had often wished for a medal, and he determined that when he reached the factory he would thread a piece of yarn through the hole and wear it outside his jacket.

The place where Johnny worked was a stocking factory. His part was to wind the skeins of yarn upon the long spools, from which the men and large boys wove it into stockings.

He had forgotten about his hunger now, and was tying a knot in the string he had put through the dollar, when a young woman came toward him.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

He held up the medal, saying, eagerly, "I found it."

"It's a dollar, a silver dollar, Johnny."

"Oh, goody!" cried the boy; "now I can have some new shoes. I thought it was a Father Matthew's medal; but I'd rather have a dollar. Oh, I'm so glad!"

The woman looked in his pale face, and couldn't help saying, as she did so, —

"Are you hungry, child?"

"Not very."

"What did you have for breakfast?"

His lips quivered, but he knew by her kind face that she was a friend; and he told her the whole story of his mother's long sickness; and how they had grown poorer and poorer, until there was nothing now but what he earned.

"I knew Ella would be hungrier than I," he said, looking the woman full in the face with his clear blue eyes; "and so I didn't take the porridge."

"Wait a minute; you sha'n't go to work so," was all she said; and then she was off through the door, down the long steps in a hurry.

He pulled his stool close to the small wheel, on which was a large skein of fine yarn, and began to turn it with his foot, when the woman came back, bringing a small basket.

"Here, Johnny, eat this and this," giving him a buttered biscuit and a piece of cold meat; "and carry the rest home. There is enough for you, your mother, and Ella, to have a good dinner."

Poor Johnny was dumb with astonishment. He could scarcely realize that all this was for him; but as the woman waited to see him eat, he pulled the hard silver dollar from his pocket and held it out to her.

"No! no!" she exclaimed; "give it to your mother. She'll know what to do with it, I dare say."

That was a happy day for Johnny; almost the happiest he had ever known. He had begun it by giving up his own comfort for that of his mother and sister, and by-and-by God sent him friends to care for him.

CHAPTER II.

KIND FRIENDS

ONALD MILES was the name of the Superintendent of the stocking factory. He had just married a young wife, and brought her to live in one of the new houses near the mill. She was a Christian woman, who tried to follow her Master, and do good wherever she had opportunity. She took a class in the Sabbath school, and told her husband she meant to have some scholars from the factory. Two or three times she had noticed Johnny running up the steps, and thought, "that boy is too small for such work." You can imagine, then, how she felt when she heard his simple story.

In the evening Johnny and his mother were eagerly talking over the various events and scenes of the day when Mrs. Miles opened the door and presented herself before them.

"I feel sure," she had said to her husband, "that the child told me the truth. His eyes were too honest to deceive; but still I mean to go this very day and see for myself. Why, they have nothing to eat and are on the very verge of starvation!"

"I wish, Johnny," Mrs. Talbot was saying, "that the dollar was ours; and then you should have a pair of shoes; but it is not, and we must contrive some way to find the owner."

The room was very poor, but clean as hands could make it. On

the floor in the corner was a straw bed, between the windows, a long chest, and near the fire three small wooden stools standing before an old rickety table.

Mrs. Miles soon convinced the poor woman that she was a friend; and, before the visit was ended, she found that though one was very poor, and the other comparatively rich, there was one tie which bound them together, — they both loved Christ, and looked forward to living with him forever in heaven.

When she rose to go she said to Johnny, —

"I'll take the dollar with me, and ask my husband what shall be done to find the owner, and I'll see about the work for you right away. Why," she added, with a smile, "I can earn a dollar a day closing socks; and I never was called smart with my needle; so keep up good courage. Better days are coming for us."

"But I've tried a great many times to get work," answered the poor woman, shaking her head. "They always told me there was none."

Mrs. Miles gave her head a little toss, as much as to say, "No one need tell me that story." Then she laughed as she exclaimed, —

"Well, if I can't get work for you, I'll bring you mine. You need it more than I do. Now don't cry, — it will hurt your eyes; but say your prayers and go to bed. I'll be sure to come again soon."

When she shut the door, Mrs. Talbot began to cry; but these were happy tears, which brought relief to her overburdened heart. Then she said to Johnny, —

"Let us kneel down and thank God for sending us such a friend."

"O mother!" exclaimed the boy, when they arose from prayer; "wasn't that bread and butter nice? I never tasted anything so good."

"Yes, dear; and when your father was alive we had bread and butter every day."

The next morning, when the little boy went to his work, he looked all about for his kind friend; but he did not see her until he had been dismissed for dinner. He was passing along the sidewalk, when he heard a tap on the window of a house close by, and, looking up, he saw Mrs. Miles beckoning to him. She had a bundle rolled up in a towel, which she told him to give his mother, and tell her she would have company in the evening.

And true enough, just as Ella was safely in bed, there was a knock at the humble door, and Mrs. Miles walked in, followed by her husband.

Johnny had never seen this gentleman except in the factory; and then he looked very grave as he talked with the men or with merchants who came from the city. Now it was very different. His young wife had told him a pitiful story about the widow; and he came prepared to help her.

"So you were lucky to-day, Johnny, and found a dollar," he began, taking the silver piece from his pocket. "I have made inquiries for you, and can find no one who claims it; so I think you may keep it with a good conscience."

Johnny's eager face expressed his thanks.

"What would you like to buy with it?"

"A pair of shoes, sir."

"Well, come on to the shoe-store."

"Yes," said the lady, with a smile; "and while you are gone, I'll give Mrs. Talbot a lesson in closing the seams of the stockings."

CHAPTER III.

THE NEW BOOTS

As they walked together toward the store, Mr. Miles became as much interested in his young companion as his wife could have wished. The child discovered so much intelligence, and had evidently been so well trained, that the superintendent fully agreed with Mrs. Miles, that it was a pity he should not have a chance to go to school.

When they reached the store, the gentleman said, laughing, — "Show us your best goods, now; we want a pair of stout brogans, such as you can warrant will turn water."

"For him?" asked the merchant, nodding his head toward Johnny.

"Yes, for him. You see he needs them badly enough."

"Boots would be better."

"Ah, yes."

Mr. Miles's eyes began to twinkle. He had a happy thought; and so he put Johnny's silver dollar, which he had been twirling by the string, into his vest pocket, and began to examine carefully one pair after another of the boots laid out for him on the counter.

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