

NELL NELSON ENGAGES IN A FEATHER FACTORY.

NONE OF THE FAIR WORKERS SEEMS ABLE TO EARN MORE THAN \$7 A WEEK AT ANY OF THE CONCERNS.

"When we're late and get locked out we go to the dago shop. Were you ever in a dago's?"

"No."

"Well, you can always tell them by the 'Ladies Entrance.' Some of them are real nice, with beautiful carpets and lace curtains and mirrors on the wall. There's a place over on Madison street where you can get crackers and pop for a nickel. Some of the girls go down-town and shop, but when it rains the police let us wait in the tunnel."

"How long?" I asked.

"Till 9 o'clock. You have to be here at 7:30 o'clock, and if you're late the door is locked and you can't get in till 9."

The above conversation took place in the D. F. D. Company's place on Canal street, where I applied for work Saturday morning. The building is a substantial brick and extends back to the river. The factory is on the third floor and reached by two long flights of stairs that needed sweeping and repairing. I suppose the surroundings were suitable for the business carried on, but they were far from comfortable and wholly uncharming. Overhead were the bare rafters, heavy with dust and festooned with cobwebs. In two of the four brick walls were six or more windows that admitted a fair quantity of light. The front half of the room contained the offices of the concern inclosed in glass partitions, about which were huge bins filled with feathers. There were plums from nearly all the barn-yard fowls and they towered almost to the gloomy

rafters. In the east half of the ware-room were the various work-tables built of scantling and boarded at the sides to keep the fluffy feathers from blowing about. In front of each "feather-board" was a chair or stool about which were three or more boxes or receptacles into which the wing, tail, body, and down feathers were placed by the girls as they sorted them. The machinery that furnished the power filled one corner, where the binders and sizers were at work.

While there was nothing obnoxious about the material and no foulness in the atmosphere, the air was heavy with dust and dirt, and lint-specks from the feathers floated about in little clouds, making respiration painful to the uninitiated. A foreman had charge of the factory, and his disciplin, while firm was just and reasonably kind. The girls worked by the piece, and no unpleasant or unmanly methods were resorted to. The only rule enforced was punctuality. The factory opens at 7:30 and closes at 5:40, allowing forty-five minutes at noon, and all hands are obliged to be prompt.

No unusual provision has been made for the comfort of the girls. Their dressing rooms had nothing but privacy to recommend it, but as much cannot be said of the toilet closet. There was the regulation rust-covered sink, with its soggy wood-work and solitary faucet, and a two-yard crash towel, which the girls take turn in laundering. Owing to the extreme buoyancy of the feathers windows have to be kept closed and the impurities of the air are not often removed.

I assorted feathers with a young girl named Annie. She was an interesting child, with exquisitely modeled arms and pretty little dimpled hands that worked into the pile of "skirt" feathers with almost imperceptible rapidity. She was dressed in an old blue bunting skirt that was ragged and her cotton waist was torn at the side and the sleeves worn to the elbow. Her shoes scarcely protected her feet from the dusty floor, but she said she wore them "to save the others."