

THE LOWELL OFFERING.

A LETTER FROM MISS MARTINEAU.

YOUR interest in this Lowell book can scarcely equal mine; for I have seen the factory girls in their Lyceum, and have gone over the cotton mills at Waltham, and made myself familiar on the spot with factory life in New England; so that in reading the "Offering," I saw again in my memory the street of houses built by the earnings of the girls, the church which is their property, and the girls themselves trooping to the mill, with their healthy countenances, and their neat dress and quiet manners, resembling those of the tradesman class of our country. My visit to Lowell was merely for one day, in company with Mr. Emerson's party,—he (the pride and boast of New England as an author and philosopher) being engaged by the Lowell factory people to lecture to them, in a winter course of historical biography. Of course the lectures were delivered in the evening, after the mills were closed. The girls were then working seventy hours a week, yet, as I looked at the large audience (and I attended more to them than the lecture) I saw no sign of weariness among any of them. There they sat, row behind row, in their own Lyceum—a large hall, wainscoted with mahogany, the platform carpeted, well lighted, provided with a handsome table, desk, and seat, and adorned with portraits of a few worthies; and as they thus sat listening to their lecturer, all wakeful and interested, all well-dressed and lady-like, I could not but feel my heart swell at the thought of what such a sight would be with us. The difference is not in rank, for these young people were all daughters of parents who earn their bread with their own hands. It is not in the amount of wages, however usual that supposition is, for they were then earning from one to three dollars a week, besides their food; the children one dollar (*4s.3d.*); the second-rate workers two dollars, and the best three; the cost of their dress and necessary com-

forts being much above what the same class expend in this country. It is not in the amount of toil; for, as I have said, they worked seventy clear hours per week. The difference was in their superior culture. Their minds are kept fresh, and strong, and free by knowledge and power of thought; and this is the reason why they are not worn and depressed under their labors. They begin with a poorer chance for health than our people, for the health of the New England women generally is not good, owing to circumstances of climate and other influences; but among the 3800 women and girls in the Lowell mills when I was there, the average of health was not lower than elsewhere; and the disease which was most mischievous was the same that proves most fatal over the whole country—consumption; while there were no complaints peculiar to mill life. At Waltham, where I saw the mills, and conversed with the people, I had an opportunity of observing the invigorating effects of MIND in a life of labor. Twice the wages and half the toil would not have made the girls I saw happy and healthy without that cultivation of mind which afforded them perpetual support, entertainment and motive for activity. They were not highly educated, but they had pleasure in books and lectures, in correspondence with home; and had their minds so open to fresh ideas, as to be drawn off from thoughts of themselves and their own concerns. When at work they were amused with thinking over the last book they had read, or with planning the account they should write home of the last Sunday's sermon, or with singing over to themselves the song they meant to practise in the evening; and when evening came, nothing was heard of tired limbs and eagerness for bed, but, if it was summer, they sallied out, the moment tea was over, for a walk, and, if it was winter, to the lecture-room, or to the ball-room for a dance, or they got an hour's practice at the piano, or wrote home, or shut themselves up with a new book. It was during the hours of work in the mill that the papers in the "Offering" were meditated, and it was after work in the evenings that they were penned. There is, however, in the case of these girls, a stronger support, a more elastic spring of vigor and cheerfulness, than even an active and cultivated understanding. The institution of factory labor has brought ease of heart to many; and to many occasion for noble and generous deeds. The ease of heart is given to those who were before suffering in silent poverty, from the deficiency of profitable employment for women, which is even greater in America than with us. It used to be understood there that all women were maintained by the men of their families; but the young men of New England are apt to troop off into the West, to settle in new lands, leaving sisters at home. Some few return to fetch a wife, but the greater number do not, and thus a vast over proportion of young women remains; and to a multitude of these the opening of factories was a most welcome event, affording means of honorable maintenance, in exchange for pining poverty at home. As for the noble deeds, it makes one's heart glow to stand in these mills, and hear of the domestic history of some who are working before one's eyes unconscious of being observed or of being the object of any admiration. If one of the sons of a New England farmer shows a love for books and thought, the ambition of an affectionate sister is roused, and she thinks of the glory and honor to

the whole family, and the blessing to him, if he could have a college education. She ponders this till she tells her parents some day, of her wish to go to Lowell, and earn the means of sending her brother to college. The desire is yet more urgent if the brother has a pious mind, and a wish to enter the ministry. Many a clergyman in America has been prepared for his function by the devoted industry of sisters; and many a scholar and professional man dates his elevation in social rank and usefulness from his sister's, or even some affectionate aunt's entrance upon mill life, for his sake. Many girls, perceiving anxiety in their fathers' faces, on account of the farm being incumbered, and age coming on without release from the debt, have gone to Lowell, and worked till the mortgage was paid off, and the little family property free. Such motives may well lighten and sweeten labor; and to such girls labor is light and sweet. Some, who have no such calls unite the surplus of their earnings to build dwellings for their own residence, six, eight, or twelve living together with the widowed mother, or elderly aunt of one of them to keep house for, and give countenance to the party. I saw a whole street of houses so built and owned at Waltham; pretty frame houses, with the broad piazza, and the green venetian blinds, that give such an air of coolness and pleasantness to American village and country abodes. There is the large airy eating-room, with a few prints hung up, the piano at one end, and the united libraries of the girls, forming a good looking array of books, the rocking-chairs universal in America, the stove adorned in summer with flowers, and the long dining-table in the middle. The chambers do not answer our English ideas of comfort. There is there a strange absence of the wish for privacy; and more girls are accommodated in one room than we should see any reason for in such comfortable and pretty houses. In the mills the girls have quite the appearance of ladies. They sally forth in the morning, with their umbrellas in threatening weather, their calashes to keep their hair neat, gowns of print or gingham, with a perfect fit, worked colors or pelerines, and waistbands of ribbon. For Sundays and social evenings they have their silk gowns, and neat gloves and shoes. Yet through proper economy,—the economy of educated and thoughtful people,—they are able to lay by for such purposes as I have mentioned above. The deposits in the Lowell Savings' Bank were, in 1834, upwards of 114,000 dollars, the number of operatives being 5000, of whom 3800 were women and girls. I thank you for calling my attention back to this subject. It is one I have pleasure in recurring to.

There is nothing in America which necessitates the prosperity of manufactures as of agriculture, and there is nothing of good in their factory system which may not be emulated elsewhere—equalled elsewhere, when the people employed are so educated as to have the command of themselves and of their lot in life, which is always and everywhere controlled by mind, far more than by outward circumstances. I am, &c. H. MARTINEAU.