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AMONG LOWELL MILL-GIRLS: A REMINISCENCE.

THE scenery of the Merrimack at Lowell, while lacking the grandeur of the hill region whence the river issues, has a quiet attractiveness of its own. The slaty cliffs at Pawtucket Falls bear lingering footmarks of aboriginal history, and wear the charm of remembered beauty for those who wandered in childhood and early youth among their overhanging hemlocks and nestling wild flowers, before the picturesqueness of the place was sacrificed to manufacturing exigencies.

The country slopes gently toward the

river in every direction. The principal descent of water at the Falls is about thirty feet perpendicular, after which the stream foams and tumbles over a half mile or so of winding rapids, expands into a smooth, lake-like sheet, and then, joining the slower waters of the Concord, narrows itself again between wooded hills into a less abrupt succession of falls and rapids.

The level between the upper and lower rapids was the site chosen for a town, in the year 1821, by a company of gentlemen who were in search of a spot suitable for the building of cotton mills on an extensive scale. The first of these — the Merrimack Mills — went into operation in the year 1823. The town of Lowell was incorporated in 1826. A city government was adopted in 1836; and in twenty years after the first mills were started, there were twelve manufacturing companies organized, with a capital of between thirteen and fourteen millions of dollars, and employing between thirteen and fourteen thousand persons.

The place was named for Mr. Francis Cabot Lowell, whose improvements of the power-loom were such as to make him practically its inventor, and who was the originator of the cotton cloth manufacture, as now carried on in America. It is interesting to think of the cultivated Boston gentleman in the seclusion of the room he had taken for his work, in Broad Street, perfecting the details of his loom, and at the same time developing plans by which this new branch of industry should be made pleasant and remunerative to his countrymen, but more especially to his countrywomen, whose assistance he looked for in carrying out his project. In this connection arose questions which a man of large-hearted humanity, like Mr. Lowell, could not but weigh with utmost care, as they concerned the well-being of those he meant to employ. While he must have foreseen how immensely the

material interests of the country would be advanced by his enterprise, he could not have regarded it as a public benefaction, nor should we now look upon him as wise and humane in undertaking it, if he had given no thought to the personal good of those who were to carry it on; if, indeed, he had not made that a matter of chief importance in his plans.

Mr. Nathan Appleton, who was closely associated with Mr. Lowell, thus reports the result of their conferences on a point which justly gave them some anxiety:—

“Here was in New England a fund of labor, well educated and virtuous.

“The operatives in the manufacturing cities of Europe were notoriously of the lowest character for intelligence and morals. The question, therefore, arose, and was deeply considered, whether this degradation was the result of the peculiar occupation, or of other and distinct causes. We could not perceive why this peculiar description of labor should vary, in its effects upon character, from all other occupations.”

The “fund of labor,” referred to by Mr. Appleton, meant the younger people of the rural districts, scattered abroad in villages and lonely farm-houses, who were, he says, “induced to come to these mills for a temporary period.” They were chiefly the young women of the land, who had been brought up to earn their own living in the fear and love of God, as their fathers and mothers had done before them. The fertile prairies of the West were already attracting the more energetic young men, but their sisters remained at home, and the family burdens often pressed upon them very heavily. A girl’s opportunities for earning money were few, and the amount received was small for such employments as straw-braiding, binding shoes, dressmaking, and domestic labor. An occupation as easy as any of these, with a larger compensation, could now

be offered her, and the project seemed to promise benefit to all concerned, while it would undoubtedly give the business of the country an unprecedented impetus.

The processes of carding cotton, of spinning yarn, and of weaving cloth, carried on in the old fashion, at the farmer's fireside, were necessary and not disagreeable employments. It was absurd to think that, as employments, their character could be intrinsically changed by the use of machinery, or by the bringing together of numerous worthy young women from country homesteads to pursue them socially in the mills.

The important thing would be, to keep the surroundings of any community thus formed free from all that could be harmful to personal character, and to leave it open in every direction to pure and healthful influences.

So Mr. Lowell probably reasoned; and having assured himself that there was nothing in the cloth manufacture which could be injurious to those who might engage in it, his first care was to place such guards around the every-day life of these young countrywomen of his as they would naturally find in their own homes. The corporation boarding system was to be established upon this idea. The houses were to be rented to matrons of assured respectability, many of whom would bring their own daughters with them, and so would be interested in other daughters who were away from their parents' oversight.

The fullest arrangements were to be made for religious worship, and it was expected that all would attend Sabbath services somewhere.

Boarding-house keepers and overseers were to be held responsible to a superintendent—who of necessity must be a person of character and dignity—for the general welfare of those under their charge; and no immoral person was to be admitted to employment in the mills.

In brief, these young girls were to be assured of an unobjectionable occupation, the privileges and wholesome restrictions of home, and a moral atmosphere as clear and bracing as that of the mountains from whose breezy slopes many of them were to come. Beyond these arrangements, nothing was necessary; their native intelligence and conscientiousness might be depended upon for the rest.

Mr. Lowell died in the year 1817, before a location had been decided upon for the city which bears his name. But he may well be regarded as its founder, since the credit is his for whatever is peculiar in the manufacturing system there established, and out of which the prosperity of the place has grown. The new power-loom had been successfully tested at Waltham, but more room was needed, and a larger water-power; and so on the banks of the Merrimack arose the "city of spindles."

The cotton mill itself, as known in this country, was an original idea with Mr. Lowell. In Great Britain, the weaving, spinning, and so forth were done each as a separate business. His plan, adopted everywhere, was to have the raw cotton taken in from the picker on the lower floor of the mill, ascend in regular order through the processes of carding, spinning, and dressing, and come out of the weaving-room in the upper story, finished cloth.

The whole thing seems to have been comprehensive in its originator's mind: a profitable investment for both labor and capital; the method of cloth-making better systematized; a new industry for American women, offering them an opportunity for self-support with self-respect, the guarded freedom of a home, and a social atmosphere wherein heart and soul might healthfully breathe.

If anything special were done for the education of those employed in the mills, and it is said that Mr. Lowell's family always took a deep interest in the wel-

fare of the young town, it must have been only during the very earliest years of the place. There is no record of anything of the kind, beyond a provision for the children of mill-people who came with their families; which provision the establishment of common schools soon rendered unnecessary. There could have been only evening classes for the girls employed in the mills; and as they worked from twelve to fourteen hours, and were forbidden to have books at their work, much could not have been expected of them. In later years they did manage to do considerable studying, but they paid for whatever instruction they received.

When we talk about "the working-classes," we are using very modern language, which those who formed the great mass of our population forty or fifty years ago would have found it difficult to understand. The term "working-people" was then seldom used, because everybody worked. The minister and the doctor had usually worked with their hands, to defray their college expenses; and they often continued their labors afterwards, to eke out a scanty income. The mistress of a family did her own sewing and housework, or, if it was too much for her, called in a neighbor or a relative as "help." Young girls were glad of an opportunity to earn money for themselves in this way, or by means of any handicraft they could learn, or by teaching the district school through the summer months; all these employments being considered equally respectable. The children of that generation were brought up to endure hardness. They expected to make something of themselves and of life, but not easily, not without constant exertion. The energy and the earnestness through which their fathers had subdued the savage forces of nature on this continent still lingered in the air, a moral exhilaration.

Children born half a century ago

grew up penetrated through every fibre of thought with the idea that idleness is disgrace. It was taught with the alphabet and the spelling-book; it was enforced by precept and example, at home and abroad; and it is to be confessed that it did sometimes haunt the childish imagination almost mercilessly. I know that Dr. Watts's

"How doth the little busy bee  
Improve each shining hour,"

and King Solomon's "Go to the ant, thou sluggard, . . . and be wise," filled one child's mind with a dislike of bees and ants that amounted almost to hatred; they ran and flew and buzzed about her like accusing spirits that left her no peace in her beautiful day-dreams. It was a great relief to see a bee loiter in the air around the flowers, as if he enjoyed the lazy motion. As for the ants,—those little black pagans,—they overdid the business by working just as hard on Sundays as on any other day. It surely was not proper to follow *their* example!

But there is no doubt that human nature is always sufficiently indolent; and probably no one ever grew up to regret having been taught in childhood that waste of time is a sin. Certainly it was the universal prevalence of thrifty and industrious habits that gave our first great manufacturing city its honorable early reputation.

The condition of working-people in our large manufacturing communities, and the present tendencies of those communities, are among the most important social questions of the day. A discussion of these questions forms no part of the writer's purpose; but a sketch of her early experience at Lowell, while it was a young and growing city, may not be without suggestions for those who make our national interests a study.

It is hardly possible to narrate circumstances into which one's own life has been woven, without writing autobiographically; and I may be excused for

using the first person in attempting to describe a phase of womanly toil, "all of which I saw, and part of which I was."

To show how it came about that ten years or more of my childhood and youth were passed at Lowell, it is necessary to go a little back of my mother's removal there, which was not far from the period of its transition from a town to a city.

Pleasant Beverly, one of the oldest and most picturesque of our Massachusetts seaboard towns, holds my infantile memories. All the associations of our family were with the sea, more especially through my father, who had been a captain in the merchant service, during the early years of the century. A happy home, with stories of the ocean echoing around the fireside, and songs of the ocean blending with prayer and hymn in the twilight lullaby, have left the memory of life's beginning like a wild and tender waft of Æolian melody. The seriousness of the earlier Puritanism still brooded over the landscape, and penetrated daily life; but childhood is childhood everywhere, and its light-heartedness only felt the grave contrasts into which it was born as the playful treble might feel the solemnity of the sustaining bass.

"Are we poor, or rich?" was the question over which we innocently puzzled first ourselves and then our parents, when somebody had been spoken of as at one extreme of the social scale. We were sent for our answer to the prayer of Agur, in the book of Proverbs, "Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me;" with the assurance that we were where he wished to be, in the most desirable of earthly conditions.

And, indeed, outside of the larger towns, the extremes of riches and poverty were then seldom seen. Living in the golden mean of general education and of comfort won from labor and

thrift, the average child of the commonwealth had to learn the signification of the words "rich" and "poor" chiefly from English story books.

My mother's widowhood was the occasion of her removal to Lowell. Left without means of maintenance for her large family, the youngest being but four years of age, she bethought herself of the new manufacturing town, which had for some years been wondered about all over the country. Seeing no other plain opening, she decided, in two or three years after my father's death, to go there and take charge of one of the boarding-houses belonging to a new corporation, named for its projectors, the Messrs. Lawrence, of Boston. A good report had come to her of the public schools, where she had reason to believe that her little girls would be at least as well educated as they could be in their native place. But what she had heard of the excellent kind of people who came to Lowell, and of the high standard there in matters of morals and religion, influenced her decision more than all other considerations.

The fact that Beverly was the first place in the country where a cotton-mill had been built had interested the older inhabitants in the subject of manufactures, and may have led my mother's thoughts in that direction. That mill, which was erected in 1788, proved a failure, probably from unsuitability of time and place. Certainly the little sea-fed river could have furnished no adequate water-power. The starting of cotton factories in Rhode Island, soon after, left the one in Beverly stranded as a business enterprise, and the town lapsed into its original quietness, lulled to sleep by wind and wave.

My mother took with her to Lowell only her three or four younger children, the rest remaining among friends, or at occupations they had chosen for themselves.

It was a morning never to be forgot-

ten, when the Salem and Lowell stage-coach came rumbling over the bridge, and up the long main street of the town, turning into our very lane and stopping at our very door, on purpose to take us children off on a journey, the first journey of our lives.

Moving is one of the romances of childhood. We felt as if there were some magic about it. This might be Cinderella's coach that we were riding away in, to some fairy-land of our dreams. Yet the dear old town had never seemed so beautiful to us as it did now that we were leaving it behind. The fishing-schooners at the wharves, the light-houses on Baker's Island far out at sea, our own Bass River, running down with its tidal waters from the inland hills, against which the steeples of Danvers gleamed with a misty whiteness, all seemed beckoning us back; and a little shiver of regret ran through our anticipations, as we rolled over the bridge. But after that, when we had passed through the streets of Salem, closely lined with dignified, reticent-looking mansions, and were out in the open country, everything was invitingly new. How softly the fields slid down from the lap of the hills! greener fields and hills than we had ever seen, untouched by the east wind's chill! What unknown birds sang around us! What strange flowers bloomed by the roadside! Then came the halt for relay on the sunny slopes of Andover, the ride through the farm-lands of Tewksbury, and at last the Merrimack, shining in the distance; and at its side, dropped in a wide-brimmed bowl of hills, the little city that was to be our home.

The romance of our journey came to an abrupt termination before a green door in a red brick block with green window-blinds, the third in a row of four brick blocks, each the exact counterpart of the other. But our childish enthusiasm was not checked; it rooted itself even in the sandy soil of the small

back yard, where we persuaded morning-glories to veil the kitchen windows; and it blossomed afresh with the discovery of harebells in abundance on the cliffs by the river, — the real "bluebells of Scotland," which we had hitherto known only in stories and poems.

With the river itself we claimed comradeship at once, — a companion that overtook us unexpectedly in our rambles, always our playmate and our friend. Its loving, lingering, following ways became dearer to us than the uncertain moods of the sea.

Children are natural explorers, and it was not long before we knew the geography of all the roads winding up and out into the country from the banks of the Merrimack. Vivid as if it were but yesterday, the memory remains to me of one Saturday afternoon holiday, when three little girls of us carried out a long-pondered plan of walking from the lower to the upper bridge, along the brow of the hills on the Dracut side of the river, an excursion of several miles. Beautiful indeed they were, those "fields beyond the swelling flood." It had been a time of rain and freshet, and the April grass was like velvet upon all the sunlit slopes; but an undreamed-of wonder awaited us: at a turn in the road, we caught our first glimpse of mountains. Stretched in a broken opaline chain along the cool northern horizon, softly dazzling and infinitely far away, Wachusett, Monadnock, the Uncannoonucks, by whatever unbaptized names they were known, they glimmered upon our vision like the precious stones in the walls of the New Jerusalem. At a moment like this the universe widens, as if by magic, upon a child's imagination. Henceforth, the mountains were in my world not as boundary-lines upon a map, but as stepping-stones into the splendor of an illimitable realm beyond their peaks; and when, soon afterward, I began to toil at the spindles, with the river rippling past my windows, it brought me

more than its own music and beauty ; it was a messenger from the hills, from summits touched with the radiance of an invisible heaven.

We younger girls entered upon the usual routine of grammar-school study at Lowell, and were nearly prepared for the high school, when it was found necessary that one or more of us should take up our share of the domestic burdens, which my mother had found too heavy to bear alone. I, being larger for my years, and apparently stronger than my sisters nearest me in age, was taken from school and began to work in the mill in my twelfth year.

Before this time, however, we had become well acquainted with the young people around us ; and there was nothing but pleasure in the thought of a working companionship with those we had loved as housemates or neighbors. It was a widening of life to us children, to whom our tradition-haunted corner of Massachusetts had seemed like the centre of the universe, — all this brisk youth and intelligence that poured in upon us from the remotest nooks of New England. It would have taken many journeys to give us as true an idea of our countrywomen as we thus obtained. To grow up with the notion that natural refinement and aspiration after mental and moral development are ever provincially exclusive was, under the circumstances, impossible for us.

A few young girls had followed my mother from our own neighborhood, but most who lived with us were natives of Vermont or New Hampshire or Maine. We found in our bright, breezy, wide-awake boarders a source of perpetual interest. Our Zilphas and Florillas and Dianas and Rosannas seemed to bring down to us the rustling of forest-leaves and the rushing of mountain waterfalls. We used to think "our girls" a choice company ; fancying that no neighbor's household could be quite as pleasant as

our own. But this was a fancy only ; for while there was a natural grouping into families through sympathy of tastes, there was always a large preponderance in the community of intelligent and interesting young women. It could scarcely have been otherwise. The trustworthy, the energetic, and the well trained were more likely than others to go and try a new experience of toil among strangers, whether of their own accord, or by permission of relatives.

The home life of the mill-girls as I knew it in my mother's family was nearly like this : —

Work began at five o'clock on summer mornings, and at daylight in the winter. Breakfast was eaten by lamplight, during the cold weather ; in summer, an interval of half an hour was allowed for it, between seven and eight o'clock. The time given for the noon meal was from a half to three quarters of an hour. The only hours of leisure were from half past seven or eight to ten in the evening, the mills closing a little earlier on Saturdays. It was an imperative regulation that lights should be out at ten. During those two evening hours, when it was too cold for the girls to sit in their own rooms, the dining-room was used as a sitting-room, where they gathered around the tables, and sewed, and read, and wrote, and studied. It seems a wonder, to look back upon it, how they accomplished so much as they did, in their limited allowance of time. They made and mended their own clothing, often doing a good deal of unnecessary fancy-work besides. They subscribed for periodicals ; took books from the libraries ; went to singing-schools, conference meetings, concerts, and lectures ; watched at night by a sick girl's bedside, and did double work for her in the mill, if necessary ; and on Sundays they were at church, not differing in appearance from other well-dressed and decorous young women. Strangers who had been sitting beside

them in a house of worship were often heard to ask, on coming out, "But where were the factory-girls?"

Lowell was eminently a church-going place, and the hush of the old-fashioned Sabbath had there a peculiar charm, by contrast with the week-day noise. The mill-girls not only cheerfully paid their pew-rents, but gave their earnings to be built into the walls of new churches, as the population increased. Their contributions to social and foreign charities also were noticeably liberal. What they did for their own families — keeping a little sister at school, sending a brother to college, lifting the burden of a homestead debt from a parent's old age — was done so frequently and so quietly as to pass without comment. Their independence was as marked as their generosity. While they were ready with sisterly help for one another whenever it was needed, nothing would have been more intolerable to most of them than the pauper spirit into which women who look to relatives or friends for support so easily subsided. Perhaps they erred in the direction of a too resolute self-reliance. That trait, however, is a part of the common New England inheritance; and there was, indeed, nothing peculiar about the Lowell mill-girls, except that they were New England girls of the older and hardier stock.

Amusements were not thought a necessity, in those days; and even if they had been furnished without charge, they might not have been patronized; for these young women had many ways of occupying and entertaining themselves, in their brief hours of leisure. Evening classes of various kinds were formed, which were well attended, and gladly paid for by the pupils, who enjoyed what they learned, as they did other things, the better for having earned it. A desire for knowledge, and the mental activity resulting therefrom, made themselves felt everywhere.

While yet a child, I used to consider

it special good fortune that my home was at Lowell. There was a frank friendliness and sincerity in the social atmosphere that wrought upon me unconsciously, and made the place pleasant to live in. People moved about their every-day duties with purpose and zest, and were genuinely interested in one another; while in the towns on the seaboard it sometimes was as if every man's house was his castle in almost a feudal sense, where the family shut themselves in, on the defensive against intruders. Passing through the streets of my native place, after the first absence of a year or two, the shut-up and swept-up and silent look of everything struck me as something funereal. Possibly there were people in the houses, behind the closed blinds, but they kept themselves invisible. Nothing except the east wind was astir. I appeared to my child-self to be wandering in a dream through

"A land in which it seemed always afternoon;  
A land where all things always seemed the same."

But it was an excellent thing for us growing little ones that we had a foothold by the sea-side, as well as on the banks of the Merrimack. We loved the very pebbles in the still, untraveled lanes and roads of our native town, the very grass that grew by the way-side, with a love such as children naturally have for the one spot of earth — not unmeaningly called Mother Earth — where they were born. And the change from the clatter of shuttles and spindles to that quietness of solitary shore scenery did us more good than we could guess.

We returned often, and made long visits; and when once let loose upon the stretch of picturesque coast known as Beverly Farms, we were like young princesses roaming over their ancestral domain. For our right to the soil was, by inheritance, second only to that of the aboriginal occupants, though we



limited our special claim to the landscape alone.

Never, it seemed to us, was there so wonderful a wood as that which hid a certain familiar homestead from the main road, — a dense entanglement of boughs and bird-carolings above, a fragrant jungle of checkerberry and bayberry and sweet fern and wild roses underneath, penetrated by a single wagon-track, which at a sudden magical turn, always unexpected, brought into view a lovely picture: a gambrel-roofed cottage amid garden-beds, orchards, and many-tinted grain fields, which sloped away from half-inclosing hills toward sparkling distances of sea. Here our great-grandfathers had settled themselves at about the time of the Salem witchcraft, and had combined the toils of the farmer and the fisherman in their hardy lives; here had been the home of our father's boyhood; and here an uncle still lived, whose fruit orchards were the marvel of the neighborhood, and to us the very gardens of the Hesperides. Simple fare and old-fashioned ways harmonized well with the stubborn rocks and untamable wastes of ocean; and the blood tingled proudly in our veins, remembering that we belonged to those who had won from savage nature a home at once so wild and so beautiful.

If an excuse is needed for recurring to the scenery of my childhood, it may be said that with most of us nature is only next to religion and the ties of friendship and kindred as a shaping element of life. Certainly the young girls with whom I toiled had no less enthusiasm for their mountain homes than I for mine by the sea. Our lives thus stood out before one another against a romantic background. Many a dull hour grew brighter as we pictured, for our companions, the haunts of our earliest years.

That children should be set to toil for their daily bread is always a pity; but in the case of my little work-mates and

myself there were imperative reasons, and we were not too young to understand them. And the regret with which those who loved us best consented to such an arrangement only made us more anxious to show that we really were capable of doing something for them and for ourselves. The novelty of trying to "earn our own living" took our childish fancy; the work given us was light, and for a few weeks it seemed like beginning a new game with a new set of playmates. Replacing the full spools or bobbins with empty ones on the spinning-frames was the usual employment given to children. It was a process which required quickness, but left unoccupied intervals of a half or three quarters of an hour, sometimes of a whole hour, during which we were frequently allowed to run home; or, if that was not permitted, we gathered around a merry gray-haired waste-picker in the corner, — an Irishwoman was a rare sight in the mills at that time, — to listen to her funny brogue stories of old Erin; or we climbed into a wide window-seat, and repeated verses and sang songs and told fairy-tales; or some piously-disposed elder girl ranged us in a class, and heard us recite the Shorter Catechism, with which many of us were as familiar as we were with the alphabet. We were always rather petted by these older ones, who had not forgotten their own little sisters at home; and we, in turn, had usually each of us some chosen divinity among them, whom we worshiped from afar for her real or imagined gifts. The object of my especial admiration was at one time a young beauty, who attracted me by her resemblance to a figure on a porcelain mug brought from over the seas, a family heir-loom which had been the delight of my infancy. I never thought of speaking to my idol; she seemed to me as unapproachable as her painted prototype on china, a lady in pink, to whom a stiff gentleman in queue and knee-breeches painfully knelt with a basket of

flowers ; but I watched her light movements and the changes of her transparent complexion with dazzled fascination. My devotion was chilled, however, by the discovery that she was capable of playing with the affections of a very foolish young man employed in the room, whom they called the "third hand."

No child was continuously kept at work in the mills. The rule requiring all under thirteen years of age to go to school three months in the year was strictly enforced ; and parents were advised by the superintendents not to put their children to work at all, under that age. It did not often occur to us that we were having a hard time ; but confinement within brick walls and the constant mingling with many people is not good for children, however willing they may be to assume grown-up cares. Childhood is short enough, at best ; and any abridgment of its freedom is always to be regretted. Still, it used to be thought that a little girl was pretty well grown up at thirteen. We were never unkindly treated. We had homes and careful guardianship ; none of us knew what real poverty meant ; and everything about us was educating us to become true children of the republic.

Charlotte Elizabeth's stories were then among the most popular Sunday-school books, and we read them with deep interest. The cruel hardships of children in the collieries and factories of Great Britain we silently wept over, wishing we might do something to relieve their miseries. Later, Mrs. Browning's *Cry of the Children* wrung our hearts with a like pity for sufferings we could with difficulty understand, though the oldest and the youngest of us often wearied of the long work-day, and of the continuous moan and clatter of machinery, and could well echo the imploring call, —

"O ye wheels,  
Stop, be silent for to-day!"

But the unillumined darkness of those

poor English children's lot seemed as remote from us as what we had read of heathen nations that sacrificed their little ones to idols ; and some of us may have wondered why missionaries were not sent to England as well as to India.

However, there was so little of child labor at Lowell during those distant years that, except as a fact of my own experience, it is scarcely worth while to speak of it at all. It is the story of the young women who worked in the mills which is more especially to be related. Their life in their boarding-houses has been touched upon ; the details of their various occupations need be only incidentally given.

Remuneration for work was generally proportioned to its difficulty, and those most anxious to earn money rapidly undertook the hardest. More was usually earned at weaving than in any other way. Two dollars a week, exclusive of board, was rather a large average of the wages received by those who worked by the week. Weavers, who usually worked by the piece, could earn much more than this. And among them were some who did double or treble work, increasing their earnings accordingly. There were always "spare hands" in the different rooms, those who were learning, and who were glad to supply any place made vacant for a time by illness or other cause of absence. The price of board was one dollar and a quarter a week, and the rent rates of the corporation boarding-houses were proportionably low.

Work in the "dressing-room" was liked for its cleanly quietness ; and here, also, one might have wider spaces of leisure. A near relative of mine, who had a taste for rather abstruse studies, used to keep a mathematical problem or two pinned up on a post of her dressing-frame, which she and her companions solved as they paced up and down, mending the broken threads of the warp. It has already been said that books were

prohibited in the mills, but no objection was made to bits of printed paper; and this same young girl, not wishing to break a rule, took to pieces her half-worn-out copy of Locke on the Understanding, and carried the leaves about with her at her work, until she had fixed the contents of the whole connectedly in her mind. She also, in the same way, made herself mistress of the argument of one of Saint Paul's difficult Epistles. It was a common thing for a girl to have a page or two of the Bible beside her thus, committing its verses to memory while her hands went on with their mechanical occupation. Sometimes it was the fragment of a dilapidated hymn-book, from which she learned a hymn to sing to herself, unheard within the deep solitude of unceasing sound.

Not unfrequently a girl was going on with the study of French, or of one of the ancient languages, begun in some country academy, and would get excused from her work for an hour twice or thrice a week, to recite to a teacher outside. Others, again, after having earned extra money enough, went to some private school in the city for three or six months; sometimes paying for their board, meanwhile, by domestic assistance performed in their landlady's house. Many taught school in their native districts during the summer months, and came to the mills to work only in the winter. The ranks of the primary and grammar school teachers in Lowell were frequently replenished from among the mill-girls. A leading clergyman of the place, one not given to jesting or exaggeration, was at one time asked, by a person interested in the establishment of good common schools in the Western States, how many competent teachers he thought could be furnished from the young women employed in the mills. He replied without hesitation, "Probably about five hundred." This proportion will not seem large to those who were intimately acquainted with Lowell

working-girls, but it suggests one fact which must not be overlooked, — that among these thousands there were hundreds who cared little for books or for study; who were simply working on, as they would have done at the family sewing, or at any household toil at home; who were preparing an outfit, perhaps, for a little cottage of their own, which somebody was building for them, back among the hills; or who were merely putting something by for themselves against a rainy day. Yet the studious ones were often also the most domestic; for in those days all girls were taught whatever they would need to do as women, — house-work first and most thoroughly.

But, whatever their tastes, there was mutual tolerance, when sympathy was lacking. No one was thought better for her fondness for literary pursuits, or worse for her indifference to them. Goodness of character was the one attainment universally honored and emulated. There, as everywhere, those sympathetic beings whose life it is to do kindnesses were the best beloved; and among so many, opportunities were never wanting. And they who had always a cheering word for the lonely or depressed were pretty likely to be the first called into service when a sick girl needed a watcher, no matter on how dark a night or in how distant a part of the city. These sisters of charity were usually persons well known in their widely differing sects for the earnestness of their Christian consecration.

The church life in many parishes was like that of a family. Ministers who came to Lowell and remained were attracted by the wide opportunity for self-denying usefulness; and their ministry and that of the members of their congregations to one another was a united work. If a girl was homesick at her boarding-house, at the church or Sunday-school she could always find friends, and something to do for others.

The young mill-girl was often herself a Sunday-school teacher, and was likely to have in her infant-class the children of her pastor or of her mill-superintendent; whence arose relations of mutual confidence and esteem. The religious spirit was unquestionably the most widely pervading influence among the mill-girls. With many it was the inspiration of every effort; all felt its uplifting power.

Among children of the Puritans, the reading of good books was a matter of course. Almost every girl had brought with her, laid beside her Bible in some safe corner of the worn hair-trunk, at least a little Daily Food, with its verse and text for every morning; and miniature gift books, made up of selections from Fénelon, Thomas á Kempis, and other devotional writers, were a fashion of the day. With the Pilgrim's Progress many of us had been from infancy as familiar as we were with the road from our own door-stone to the meeting-house. Christian was an old friend, whose opportunities for travel and adventure we had often coveted, thinking it would be far pleasanter to get up some fine morning and set out on a pilgrimage, than just to stay at home and try in a humdrum way to be good. The older people pored over Baxter and Doddridge, and recommended them to us; but the Saints' Rest and the Rise and Progress could not delight juvenile hearts like Bunyan's Pilgrim and his Holy War.

Milton also had the charm of a great story-teller; and the Paradise Lost, being a religious book, was to be found in most home libraries that contained more than a dozen volumes, a large number for those days. I recall my own earliest acquaintance with the great epic, made in a child's manner, catching at the gorgeous threads of narrative here and there, and skipping all the discussions and dialogues. But it was among a group of Lowell mill-girls that I learned to read it with a better appreciation.

Dean Stanley says that "the study of the most famous authors, even the minute detail, even line by line and word by word, is amongst the most nourishing of mental repasts." It was one of the old fashions in country schools to use some standard poem for parsing exercises: the Task, the Seasons, the Essay on Man, or Paradise Lost; and we reviewed the latter in this way, at a winter evening class. The choice had been left to us by our teacher, and we chose Milton. We often forgot that we were examining the relations of one part of speech to another, lost in the poet's magnificence of language and imagery. The debates of the fallen angels, the arch-fiend's flight across the wastes of chaos, the walls of the luridly splendid palace that "rose like an exhalation," and the picture of the two sinless ones in their yet uninvaded Paradise, even now often seem to blend themselves with the blackboards and writing-desks of a certain well-remembered school-room, as thought goes back to the companion students of those years. Some of us planned the reading of the British essayists together, — it was considered the thing to do in a regular "course," — and it was among my Lowell workmates that I became acquainted with Macaulay and Carlyle. The latter had a small audience among us, yet proportionably as large as he found in most other communities. Some passages from Hero Worship and Sartor Resartus always come back to me as an echo from those days, when, amidst our toil, we were reminded of "Time, through every meanest moment of it, resting upon eternity;" when our hearts kindled in response to the noble sentiment that embodied the spirit of the religious teachings under which we had been reared: "There is in man a higher than love of happiness; he can do without happiness, and instead thereof take blessedness."

The New England girl, wherever you find her, is a reader; and there can be

no greater mistake than to suppose that there is less taste for standard literature in country towns and villages than elsewhere, if we may judge the present by the past, or the rural districts by those young women who represented them at Lowell. They had read fewer books, perhaps, than those who lived nearer educational centres, but they had read thoroughly and to good purpose. Standard English works were more generally accessible among them than others. These were indeed almost the only books within reach. The young reader had not the thickets of modern miscellaneous literature to lose herself in, and so be turned aside from the trees that bore fruit of known excellence. Not that we were wholly unbeguiled by modern authors, however. While Irving was hardly done writing, while we had Dickens and George Borrow and Miss Bremer to read, and while Mrs. Stowe's first stories were coming before the public, we did not lack a mingling of the agreeable with the useful, which we heartily appreciated.

And there were the poets besides, Bryant's verse, and the earlier songs of Longfellow and Holmes and Whittier, to delight ourselves with; while Burns and Cowper and Scott and Wordsworth had long been dear and honored names to us, as to all the poetry-reading world.

Few girls grow up without some liking for poetry, and ours was as often for the lighter as for the loftier kinds. Slips cut from the "poet's corner" of a newspaper, sometimes the verses of an anonymous author, sometimes of one well known, were frequently seen pasted up and down the sides of the window recess, where a girl sat watching her work between thinking and dreaming. One such I remember, where I used to sit, a very young spinner, refreshing myself alternately with the blue river and the lovely landscape beyond, and with some scrap of poetry upon the wall beside me, which was also another window,

an opening into the unseen. Now and then a breath of roses or a waft of geranium scents came from a neighboring window, where a lover of flowers tended plants that flourished wonderfully in the warm air. It was as if the woodland sweet-brier waved beside me, while birds sang in the boughs above me; for the verses that caught my eye—I could repeat some of them now—hinted of mists that climbed the kalmia-wreathed hillside, of blue distances glimpsed beyond the mountain-tops, of sunset clouds, and palaces built upon their airy bases. No matter how simple the melody, if it breathed of nature or of heaven, it sank into my heart with a blessing.

Far more vivid recollections remain to me, from that early period, of the conscious joy—somewhat too subdued and serious for my years, perhaps—of living in a fresh, beautiful, poetical world, than of any details of the employment that occupied my hands. It was, after all, quite another than the world of my toil that I really lived in. And I am sure, with regard to my companions and myself, that our work never suffered, but was made easier to us, for our improvised escapes of the imagination.

There were also other loop-holes of thought; one of mine was through a lead pencil and a bit of paper. I used to write verses—it had been an amusement to do so almost from babyhood—which my uncritical audience, composed chiefly of my mother and sisters, dignified with the name of poetry. Of course I felt flattered, and went on with my harmless rhyming. It took the place of brisker juvenile pastimes from which I was debarred, during those first years of toil among shafts and pulleys and flying spindles.

This propensity for scribbling having shown itself to be somewhat contagious among us younger ones, a motherly elder sister devised a plan for making a mutual entertainment for us out of it. She started a little paper, in which our

stories and verses were collected, having been dropped very privately by us into a box, of which she held the key. It was great fun to us to listen to the semi-weekly evening reading, and guess at the carefully concealed authorship.

Our little journal was called *The Diving Bell*; and we were not critical enough to perceive any incongruity between its title and its motto:—

“T is here young mind her untried strength shall  
prove,  
And onward, upward, she 'll forever move.”

Certainly we felt delightfully free to plunge or soar at will; our thoughts made amusing ventures in almost every direction.

The manuscript file of *The Diving Bell*, twelve numbers, yellow and thumb-worn, is still in existence. It is not unlikely that it was the germ from which the *Lowell Offering* blossomed. For, at about this time, a group of young mill-girls, of whom the elder sister just mentioned was one, formed themselves into what they called an Improvement Circle, the object of which was the writing and reading of their own literary compositions, with mutual criticism. An enlarged Improvement Circle grew out of this; and from the material there collected, the first numbers of the *Lowell Offering* were made up and published.

Opportunity for study was by many of us more eagerly desired than anything else. This I, for one, found after a few years at a lighter employment, in the “cloth-room,” where the work was clean and quite noiseless, occupying the few of us who were needed to do it not more than eight hours a day. Here we might use books while waiting for the cloth from the mills, which was to be measured and recorded. And here, besides reviewing several English studies, some of us struck boldly into the German language, having found an enthusiastic native teacher, under whom we conquered the gutturals and the dif-

ficult irregular conjugations, wrote exercises in the queer “Deutsch” characters, and, beginner-like, fearlessly attempted translations from Jean Paul, from Goethe, and from Schiller.

One little group studied Moral Science under our pastor’s direction, with Wayland’s treatise on the subject for a text-book; and still another group—I mention only the classes of which I was a member; there were many besides—were learning something about botany, having for a guide a lady from Rhode Island, whose book was afterward somewhat used in the schools. Our botanical researches led to many excursions into the fields, and we gained thus not only a tolerable knowledge of the flora of the Merrimack Valley, but many a life-giving breath of air from forest and hill, that sweetened the long, close working-day.

A mill-girl’s studies had to be of a desultory kind, but they were usually pursued with an eye to something more systematic in the future. Those who worked fewer hours earned less money than others; but there were many who cared far more for knowledge than for money. The spirit of accumulating for the sake of accumulation was by no means general. While there were uses enough for all that any of us could earn,—while there were some who had needs involving the comfort of dear ones at home, for whom they would have been willing to toil night and day, nearly all would have been thankful indeed for a working-day only ten hours long. Time—time of our own, time to read and study in, to do what we pleased with—was dreamed of as the greatest of possible luxuries. The world looked so much larger when there were long hours of sunshine out under the open sky to see it by!

Yet life never seemed contracted, for during the day there was much to think about, and the winter evening always held something pleasant to anticipate.

Lyceum lectures were in those days listened to for instruction more than for entertainment, and many distinguished persons came to lecture at Lowell, who spoke to crowded audiences, two thirds of which must usually have been working-girls.

Mr. Emerson came over from Concord,—it may have been several times; one time I especially remember, because some of us were eagerly expecting to find out what “transcendentalism” meant. A bewildered discussion followed as to whether we had understood, or only imagined we understood, what the lecture was about. We were sure we had had a glimpse of something grand beyond us, though nobody could tell exactly what.

We often heard the Brook Farm community talked of, and were curious about it, as an experiment at air-castle building by intellectual people who had time to indulge their tastes. The strong home ties which held most of us were our centripetal attraction. They gave us a purpose which we felt it no sacrifice to concentrate our energies upon, in the clearness of which a project like this was subdued to a far-off visionary glimmer, that only faintly reached our path. Perhaps we were conservative,—they say that woman naturally is so; perhaps we cared too much for what was already ours, to desire pullings-down and reconstructions; and perhaps some of us dimly felt, with Aurora Leigh, that

“Your Fouriers failed,  
Because not poets enough to understand  
That life develops from within.”

Whatever influence stirred the country deeply, moved us also. In the anti-slavery reform, especially, many were intensely interested. Petitions for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia grew to yards in length, as they circulated through the mills. With some of the older ones, the question now and then pressed close, whether it was right to be at work upon material

so entirely the product of slave labor as cotton. But since the cloth woven from it was supposed to be worn by the most zealous antislavery agitators, the question was allowed to pass as one too complicated for us to decide.

At one memorable time the “free-soil” movement brought the poet Whittier to the city, to edit a paper in the interest of that cause during a political campaign. Not very many of us knew or cared enough about party issues to sympathize with the protest occasionally heard from the lips of a masculine acquaintance, that it was “too bad for those free soilers to be trying to break up the whig party.” That the poet of the Merrimack, already for years hailed as such by the popular heart, was with us for any purpose was reason for delight and mutual congratulation. Our faith in the man was as great as our enthusiasm for the minstrel, and we were predisposed to believe in any cause he might engage in, as a wise and worthy one.

We who wrote for the Offering sometimes met Mr. Whittier at the literary circle, which held semi-weekly meetings at the rooms of its editor, a townswoman of his. The words of appreciation and encouragement he gave our youthful efforts can never be forgotten. It was an era in our lives; to some, the beginning of a life-long friendship. Mr. Whittier wrote his impressions of Lowell in several brief essays, since brought together, with papers on other subjects, in his collected prose works.

The Lowell Offering was a good deal spoken of in its day, and perhaps deserves a few words here. It had its origin, as has already been said, in a literary circle formed among the mill-girls, but the idea of printing the papers read at these meetings did not occur to the girls themselves; probably they did not think what they wrote of sufficient value. The suggestion was made to them by a gentleman who undertook

the first management of the little magazine. It began its life as a regular periodical in April, 1841, and continued in existence five years, during which time it attracted much attention, more probably in England than in our own country.

A volume compiled from its contents, and entitled *Mind Among the Spindles*, was printed by Mr. Knight, in London; and another volume, called *American Factories and their Female Operatives*, incorporating large extracts from the *Offering*, was published by Dr. Scoresby, of Bradford, England, as a record of his personal observations, and with the hope of giving mental stimulus to those employed in British manufactories.

Miss Martineau, having received the bound volumes of the *Lowell Offering*, a joint gift from three of its contributors bearing with her the Christian name of Harriet, writes thus in her letter of acknowledgment:—

“In my respect for labor I am a true republican; and nothing vexes me more in American writings than to see any question whatever about this, any jealousy about station or dress as determined by labor, any need of self-assertion on the part of factory-girls, etc.

“It strikes me that the *Offering* improves as it goes on; that the short reflective articles are better, and the tone of all freer and richer. You can scarcely imagine the pleasure to me, an invalid prisoner, confined to the sofa, of reviving the images of American life; of seeing again, as I read, the New England farm-house or cottage, the mill or the village church. I thank you heartily for this pleasure.”

Elsewhere, Miss Martineau speaks of the impression left upon her by the mill-girls of Waltham, as she saw them when visiting this country many years before:—

“Twice the wages and half the toil would not have made the girls I saw happy and healthy, without that culti-

vation of mind which afforded them perpetual support, entertainment, and motive for activity. Their minds were so open to fresh ideas as to be drawn off from thoughts of themselves and their own concerns.”

During the last three years of its life, the magazine was written, edited, and published by mill-girls. From its editorials, we find that prominent educators and philanthropists had become interested in it, as suggesting what might be done by and for women in various ways. I did not myself write for the *Offering* until it was in its third year, and previous to that time I knew only one or two of its contributors, most of them being older than myself, and residing in another part of the city. I looked up to these unknown *Offering* writers as wonderfully wise and mature, and I think I was not altogether mistaken. Certainly others thought so, too, for distant newspaper critics insisted that the papers in the little magazine must be the work of “Lowell lawyers.” My own crude verses had been given to another magazine of the kind in our more immediate neighborhood, which magazine afterwards was incorporated with the *Offering*. The whole number of contributors to the *Offering* is mentioned as about seventy. Great latitude was permitted in choosing subjects, the only restriction being against the admission of anything “sectarian.” From Miss Martineau’s letter one can judge what the themes usually were,—memories of home-life, work, and the thoughts and fancies which came to the worker at her toil.

To a girl of active mind and ready expression, writing was almost a necessity; for the hours passed in the midst of monotonous noise, which drowned the sound of human voices, brought with them a sense of isolation such as one feels in the loneliest wilderness. One’s thoughts had to be accepted for company; the only alternative was blank



solitude. It was often, therefore, a real pleasure to try to put reflection or fancy into form.

Most of the contributions were probably written by way of recreation. It is not likely that the magazine was ever, so far as money goes, a paying investment to anybody. As an outgrowth of these mill-girls' life, it was "its own excuse for being;" and its name, *The Offering*, indicates what it was to its writers, — a handful of flowers tended during moments of leisure, and gathered and given for the simple pleasure of giving. It was discontinued for want of pecuniary support, but its five years of life were long enough to remind the world that working and thinking may and do go on together.

One of the pleasantest things the *Offering* brought its contributors was the meeting, previously alluded to, in the editor's parlor, where some of the accepted articles were read before publication, and where the writers were introduced to one another and to guests invited in for the evening, persons of literary taste in the city, or strangers whose interest in the place and the people had brought them there from long distances.

Lowell was one of the towns a foreign traveler in New England usually visited, as a matter of course. Charles Dickens came there in 1842, and made a report of his observations in the *American Notes*. The contrast between life in Lowell and in the great manufacturing towns of England he speaks of as the contrast "between the good and evil, the living light and deepest shadow." To the latter he alludes as "those great haunts of desperate misery," which the British nation ought "to purge of their suffering and danger." He mentions three things about the mill-girls at Lowell which he thought would strike his countrymen as remarkable: that some of them had pianos in their boarding-houses, that they subscribed to circulat-

ing libraries, and that they published a magazine among themselves, filled with original articles, — statements which he supposed might even seem "preposterous" to many of his English readers.

Mr. Dickens was pleased with his visit, and writes, —

"I solemnly declare that from all the crowd I saw in the different factories that day I cannot recall or separate one young face that gave me a painful impression; not one young girl whom, assuming it to be matter of necessity that she should gain her daily bread by the labor of her hands, I would have removed from those works, if I had the power."

He afterwards adds a paragraph which contains the one significant fact in the life of the Lowell mill-girls: —

"There is no manufacturing population in Lowell, so to speak; for these girls come from other States, remain a few years in the mills, and then go home for good."

And so it was. The girls always looked upon their life in the mills as a temporary one. The idea of remaining there beyond a brief period of years came to very few in the shape of a possibility.

In an *Offering* editorial this paragraph occurs: —

"One of our contributors, upon being asked to furnish a story of factory life, replied, 'I never think of factory life as distinct from other life, or of factory operatives as distinct from other laborers. We are just like others. We come here and stay awhile, and then go back to the little world, or little out-of-the-world, from which we came. Our hopes, fears, joys, and sorrows are those to which all are subject.'"

This feeling, that they were at work in the mills for a little while, only to accomplish some special purpose, gave them contentment, without any sacrifice of independence. Rumors of intended reduction of wages would often bring

rumors of intended "strikes;" but the quiet, steady-going ones formed a large majority, who gave no aid or sympathy to violent measures, and the murmur of disaffection soon died away. What reason had these young girls for nursing a sense of injuries, with all New England beckoning them back to their native hills, to the homes that were missing them, and that would overflow with rejoicing when the absent sister or daughter should see for herself that it was no longer worth while for her to stay away?

Mr. Dickens said very truly of Lowell that there was no "manufacturing class" there. In a country like ours, "classes," in the Old World sense, cannot exist; the use of the word in that way is an absurdity. The woman who must support herself may take up, at different times in her life, a dozen different employments. She cannot be named for them all, without receiving as many prefixes as are given to a royal infant at its christening.

To the appellation "mill-girl," or "factory-girl," there is no objection, as indicating an occupation for the time being. The word "operative," however, may be objected to, as dehumanizing. An operative is not necessarily a person; it may mean a wheel, or a shaft, as well; and it is not good for us to think of men or women merely as part of the machinery they tend.

The young girls at work in the Lowell mills certainly were not "a class." If any one had wished to study New England women in every variety, excepting that of the small minority reared in affluence, — some even of these, however, occasionally strayed thither, through reverse of fortune, — nowhere else could a better opportunity have been found. Coming to their work neither unintelligent nor uninstructed, all that they worthily accomplished beyond that work was the outgrowth of tastes and aspirations born with them, and

brought with them from their homes, but here rekindled and strengthened by congenial associations. Whatever was remarkable in their life was due to the womanhood it represented; and the roots of that womanhood were fed by the keen intelligence and deep religious faith of the country's earliest settlers.

These young women have been spoken of as chiefly farmers' daughters, and perhaps they were the most vigorous among us, in body and mind. But others were children of clergymen or physicians, or of men of business, left orphans, or deprived in various ways of pecuniary support. In the simple life of the country, hamlet people are drawn together by their mutual needs; they cannot afford to classify themselves as to their daily callings; and at Lowell there was a closer personal contact and a larger mutual need. Most of the young women there had grown up without any idea of the social distinctions which paradoxically creep even into republican communities, when they become old enough or rich enough. They met, with sincere sympathy, on a common ground of toil and aspiration.

With the report of the taste for reading and study among the mill-girls, and particularly after the publication of the *Offering*, the mistaken impression went abroad that a paradise of work had at last been found. Romantic young women came from a distance, with rose-colored pictures in their minds of labor turned to pastime, which were doomed to be sadly blurred by disappointment.

Certainly we mill-girls did not regard our own lot as an easy one, but we had accepted its fatigues and discomforts as unavoidable, and could forget them in struggling forward to what was before us. The charm of our life was that it had both outlook and outlet. We trod a path full of commonplace obstructions, but there were no difficulties in it we could not hope to overcome, and the effort to conquer them was in itself a

pleasure. There was many a bright spot in our life, but its chief illumination came from the wider regions into which it opened and led. Our toil was lightened by many uplifting influences: the freshness of nature about us, beautiful friendships, and the lofty inspirations of religion, influences that shape the permanent possessions of life for us all.

Those middle years of the century were full of stimulus. Vistas opened in every direction. New horizons were lifting themselves. The untrodden peaks, the unpenetrated forests, the prairies untraversed, were all around, just far enough off to give scope to the most inclosed landscape. There was boundless breathing-room for everybody. There were the hopes and possibilities which are more to the imaginative seeker than attainment. The simple phrase, "the far West," was like a talisman, rich with suggestions and beckonings. All these influences were as an atmosphere surrounding the toiler, in which soul and body were free to move,—an atmosphere that poured in at the mill-windows, invigorating those who went forth to new experiences.

The later history of that busy girlhood at Lowell it would be well-nigh impossible to unwind, so closely has it become wrought into the home life of the nation. There were those who became teachers, missionaries, artists, authors. There were those who returned to the quiet life of daughter or sister in the farm-house on the mountain-side. Many more were married, and are the mothers of the men and women who inhabit our wide continent to-day.

It is more than thirty years since I knew much of the working-girls in the Lowell mills. I have written only what I remember, what others can substantiate. It is but an outline, which might be filled in with pages of matter equally to the point. There are always as many views of a situation as there are per-

sons to fill it; and some, doubtless, did not enjoy, but only endured, their life at the looms or spindles. To me, having had most of the time, it is true, the advantage of living in my mother's house, my childhood and youth at Lowell are among my pleasantest early memories, and I count the years spent there among the most valuable years in my life.

The world's workers, however humble their toil, are a more honorable company than its idlers. Refined employments, when pursued without inspiration, are no more elevating than coarser ones; for occupations, like bodies, receive their value from the soul that animates them. We have all seen how the homeliest labor may be glorified by a great motive, or by that sympathy of toiler with toiler, through which the human flower comes often to its richest perfection in lowliest situations.

To be identified with those who have won from a commonplace industry the means of making themselves and others happier, wiser, and better is reason for gratitude not unmixed with pride. But they who now accept the contingencies of factory labor, and through it find way to a worthy human development, deserve far greater credit than those who made similar efforts at the same kind of work, amid pleasant companionships, and stimulated by mutual aspirations after mental cultivation and moral excellence. No credit, indeed, can be deserved for having made only a fair use of good opportunities.

Foreigners, with paralyzing caste-ideas crushed into them, now form a large proportion of those employed in cotton-mills: and this makes the toil of the New England woman there every year more difficult and more disagreeable. For her the prospect is not encouraging. But the members of a republic like ours owe it to one another that every kind of useful labor shall be held respectable, and also that the moral sur-

roundings of the laborer shall be so looked after that he or she may be able to keep both work and personality worthy of respect.

With especial emphasis, in a Christian republic, should womanhood mean sisterhood. Every woman among us owes every other woman who is seeking an honorable maintenance at least such sympathy as she would wish for herself, in like circumstances.

A truism is a truth gone to seed, and perhaps this one is ripe for replanting: that the only just standard by which the worth of any woman's life can be measured is to be found, not in the more or less favorable accidents of her condition, nor yet in the visible amount of labor she may or may not have accomplished, but in the loyalty of her womanhood to the most ennobling instincts and principles of our common humanity.

*Lucy Larcom.*