

AN IDYL CONFRONTED: THE NEW ENGLAND MILL GIRLS AND
THE LOWELL FEMALE LABOR REFORM ASSOCIATION

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A THESIS
in
The Department
of
History

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts at
Sir George Williams University
Montreal, Canada

April, 1973



ABSTRACT

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This is a social history of the women of rural New England who journeyed to Lowell, Massachusetts, to work in the cotton mills in the opening years of the industrial revolution in America. The thesis begins with a brief history of the origins of the cotton industry in New England and examines the contemporary mythology surrounding the factory girls who worked in the cotton mills. Deteriorating working conditions in the 1830s and 1840s are discussed. The Lowell Female Labor Reform Association (LFLRA), formed in 1845 by militant mill girls to resist exploitation, is examined. Special emphasis is placed upon the ideology of the LFLRA, the role which this association played within the labor reform movement of the time, and reasons for its failure to survive past 1846.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to my advisor, Professor Steven Scheinberg, who read my manuscript carefully and offered constructive criticism from which I greatly benefitted. A word of thanks is extended to Bob Letsch of the Sir George Williams University Inter-Library Loan Department. His cheerful and efficient assistance greatly eased the chore of collecting both primary and secondary materials for this thesis. The reference librarians at the Baker Library of the Harvard Business School and the Boston Public Library were most helpful when I visited Boston last year to investigate primary sources which could not be borrowed through inter-library loan service. I also benefitted from a discussion I had with Professor David Montgomery last summer. He helped me to focus more clearly on some of my conceptual problems and provided me with valuable suggestions for further research into primary and secondary materials. I owe a special debt to Michael Piva and Michael Sibalis who offered constant encouragement to my efforts throughout the researching and writing of this thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

The period of the 1830s and 1840s witnessed the first significant beginnings of industrialization in America. As factories and cities appeared, rural New England society began to feel the pressures of this new presence. One of the results of industrialization was to create the necessary preconditions for the formation of a new class. But as E. P. Thompson has pointed out, class is not a thing but a relationship.¹ That is, "class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs."²

The industrial wage-earner of this period had grown up in a traditional, rural society with values which were sometimes at variance with his experience as an industrial worker. The principle problem of the social history of the 1830s and 1840s is to explore the process by which the wage-earner learned to adapt traditional ideas and values to the developing industrial society around him and to become a conscious member of a working class which was in the process of creating itself. Thompson has noted that in England it took at least fifty years to make

¹E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 11.

²Ibid., pp. 9-10.

a working class (ca. 1780-1832). Given the delayed beginnings of industrialization in America what one witnesses in the 1830s and 1840s in New England is not the makings but only the beginnings of a working class. It is the purpose of this thesis to examine one group of wage-earners who contributed to the creation and the evolution of the American working class -- the members of the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association (LFLRA).³

This is a social history of the women of rural New England who journeyed to Lowell, Massachusetts, to work in the cotton mills in the opening years of the industrial revolution in America. The study is divided into three main sections. The first section provides a brief history of the origins of the cotton industry in Massachusetts as well as a discussion of the way in which women were recruited to work in the "city of spindles." The second section examines the contemporary mythology surrounding the New England factory girl and the justification by the corporations for the use of female labor in the textile mills. The third and most important section of this thesis discusses the deteriorating working conditions in the 1830s and 1840s which led to an attempt at organized resistance among some female factory workers. Trends in wage reductions and labor intensification are examined for this period. The organization which a group of militant Lowell mill girls formed in 1845 to protest against their deteriorating position as wage-earners, the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association, is then investigated with special emphasis placed upon the role which this

³The word "girls" will be used throughout this study to refer to the women who worked in the Lowell mills in the first decades of the nineteenth century. They were called "girls" by their contemporaries -- hence, the decision to stick with this designation.

association played within the labor reform movement of the time. The ideology of the LFLRA and the problem of class with which the LFLRA member was faced are discussed and reasons for the failure of the LFLRA to survive past 1846 are suggested. Finally an attempt is made to evaluate the attitudes which organized mill girls shared regarding their role as women within nineteenth century New England society.

I hope that this study of the New England woman factory worker provides some fresh insights into the experience of the industrial wage-earner of this period. I also hope that a better understanding of the role which women played in the development of industrial America is reached through a study of this kind. The fact that the women of the LFLRA failed to halt the deterioration of their condition as industrial workers and were forced to give up their organization and to leave the factories should not detract from their importance to the history of this period. For, as E. P. Thompson has noted, there are important lessons to be learned from the "lost causes" and "blind alleys" of history.⁴ The story of the New England mill girl is one such "lost cause."

⁴Ibid., p. 13.

CHAPTER I

LOWELL ORIGINS: "AN IDYL OF WORK"

At the close of the eighteenth century only a few Americans, such as Alexander Hamilton,¹ looked forward to a day when large numbers of women and children would be employed in industrial occupations outside of the home. Though a few spinning establishments were in operation at the turn of the century, a factory system which could produce both yarn and finished cotton or woolen cloth was still in the future. When Thomas Jefferson became President of the United States in 1800, farm women and young girls produced homespun cloth, blankets, towels, sheets, soap, candles and the like in the home. But most manufactured goods were imported from Britain.

However, by the 1820s the textile factory had become a permanent fixture in the American economy. And the farm women, who had in the eighteenth century spun and woven cloth in their own homes, were now employed to tend the machines in the mills at Waltham and Lowell. According to Horace Bushnell, a well-known Congregational minister and theologian of the day, this shift of female labor from the home to the

¹See Alexander Hamilton, "Report on Manufactures, December 5, 1791," in The Reports of Alexander Hamilton, ed. by Jacob E. Cooke (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), pp. 130-31. In this report Hamilton urged that women and children be employed in manufacturing establishments in order to supplement the labor force available for industry. Hamilton noted with approval that "Of the number of persons employed in the Cotton Manufactories of Great Britain, it is computed that four sevenths nearly are women and children; of whom the greatest proportion are children, and many of them of a very tender age." Page 131.

factory represented more than a transference of labor-power from one location to another:

This transition from mother- and daughter-power to water- and steam-power is a great one, greater by far than many have as yet begun to conceive -- one that is to carry with it a complete revolution of domestic life and social manners.²

But before turning to the role which the New England woman would play in America's industrial revolution it is necessary to investigate the origins of the Waltham-Lowell factory system.

Seventeen eighty-nine was a portentous year for future American industrial development. In this year Samuel Slater, a mechanic from one of Richard Arkwright's cotton mills, sailed from England for the United States. Dressed as a farmer to escape the notice of suspicious British customs officials (mechanics were forbidden to leave England), Slater arrived in America with a valuable asset -- his expert knowledge of cotton machinery.

Up until this date Britain had been largely successful in guarding her machine inventions for the production of cotton cloth. But with Slater's escape to the United States the situation began to change. In 1791, Slater was engaged by two Providence merchants, William Almy and Moses Brown, to set up and manage a spinning factory at Pawtucket Falls, Rhode Island.³ The venture was a success and in 1799 Slater built a mill of his own in the same town while still continuing to manage Almy and Brown's factory. These examples served as a spur to

²Quoted in Percy Bidwell, "The Agricultural Revolution in New England," American Historical Review, XXVI (July, 1921), 694.

³Caroline F. Ware, Early New England Cotton Manufacture. A Study in Industrial Beginnings (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), p. 21.

industrial development. As Almy and Brown's and Slater's enterprises expanded, their mills became industrial schools for Yankee mechanics who were able to take advantage of their newly acquired knowledge of Arkwright machinery to set up spinning factories of their own or to work for the few capitalists who were willing to transfer some of their funds into the production of yarn.⁴ Additional knowledge from England continued at the same time to trickle through the British customs barrier. Thus while indignant mercantile interests bemoaned the trade restrictions of the embargo and nonintercourse years, a growing number of spinning establishments began to dot the countryside of the northern states. By 1810, almost 300 spinning mills had been established.⁵

However, despite the proliferation of spinning mills, weaving yarn into cotton was still the job of hand-loom weavers. Hand-loom weaving was too slow to keep up with the production in the spinning factories. In England by this time the power loom was becoming widespread. Without the power loom, American manufacturers could not hope to compete with British manufacturing.

In 1811, Francis Cabot Lowell, a mercantile capitalist from Boston, was visiting the British Isles, ostensibly to regain his failing health. While in Birmingham and Manchester, Lowell decided to study

⁴Ibid., pp. 26-27. Former employees or associates of Almy and Brown set up mills in Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and New York, usually with the financial backing of merchants. In the states of Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Connecticut alone, the firm of Almy and Brown was directly or indirectly responsible for the establishment of twenty-seven mills by 1809.

⁵G. S. Gibb, The Saco-Lowell Shops. Textile Machinery Building in New England, 1813-1949 (New York: Russell and Russell, 1950), p. 7.

the processes for cotton production.⁶ This was not an easy task. British manufacturers were not eager to allow visits to their establishments. However, because of his social credentials, Lowell was able to tour textile factories unhindered. He returned to America with a general model of the power loom embedded in his mind. The British manufacturers had of course been unaware of Lowell's talents in applied mathematics.⁷ Since Lowell's theoretical model was useless without expert mechanical knowledge, he turned to Paul Moody, a practical mechanic from a socially high-ranking family in Newburyport. They combined their skills and reproduced the power loom Lowell had seen in Britain.

Once in possession of the necessary machinery Lowell and a group of merchants from Boston and Salem, who later became known as the Boston Associates, set about creating the first modern American factory in Waltham, Massachusetts. The Boston Manufacturing Company was incorporated on February 23, 1813, with an authorized capital of four-hundred thousand dollars.⁸ The initial investment totalled one-hundred thousand dollars.⁹ These merchants were taking a gamble, especially considering the unsettled war economy in 1813, but they had reason to be optimistic

⁶Frederick W. Coburn, History of Lowell and its People (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1920), p. 138.

⁷Ferris Greenslet, The Lowells and their Seven Worlds (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1946), p. 153.

⁸Ibid., p. 152.

⁹Patrick Tracy Jackson, Lowell's brother-in-law, was the most enthusiastic supporter of Lowell's project. He assumed the position of company manager and contributed \$20,000. Jackson's two brothers contributed \$15,000 which Lowell himself matched. The other initial investors included Israel Thorndike, a Salem millionaire, and his son; Nathan Appleton; Uriah Catting; and James Lloyd. Gibb, Saco-Lowell Shops, p. 9, and Hannah Josephson, The Golden Threads. New England's Mill Girls and Magnates (New York: Russell and Russell, 1967), p. 25.

about this venture. The textile industry was booming in 1813, Francis Lowell and Paul Moody had produced a power loom, and Lowell and the Boston Manufacturing Company's manager, Patrick Tracy Jackson, were shrewd, conscientious businessmen.¹⁰ In addition, these men were a closely knit group on a personal level. Indeed, the Boston Manufacturing Company came very near to being "exclusively a family affair."¹¹ Six of the initial investors were related to Francis Lowell by blood or marriage and the remaining three had been business associates of either Lowell or his relations.

Despite the post-war economic slump, the Waltham experiment was an astounding success. While older forms of cotton production -- the spinning mill and the putting-out system for hand-loom weaving -- were hard hit by conditions after the war, the Waltham enterprise in 1817 "began paying twelve and a half per cent dividends and continued with semi-annual payments of eight to thirteen per cent regularly thereafter, totalling one hundred and four and one half per cent by 1822."¹²

This success was due primarily to a new industrial form based on increased division of labor and mass production. The power loom enabled the company to combine all processes of cotton production -- opening and picking, carding, drawing and roving, spinning, weaving, and bleaching and dying -- under one roof.¹³ Even a machine shop was set up

¹⁰Gibb, Saco-Lowell Shops, p. 9.

¹¹Josephson, Golden Threads, p. 26.

¹²Ware, Early New England Cotton Manufacture, p. 66.

¹³Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor, Sixteenth Annual Report, August, 1885, Publ. Doc. no. 15, "Historical Review of Wages and Prices, 1752-1860" (Boston: Wright and Potter Printing Company, State Printers, 1885), p. 175.

in the basement of the Waltham mill. Lowell's power loom was not delicate enough to produce cloth of fine quality but coarse cotton sheeting, which was protected by the tariff of 1816, could be produced quickly and in large enough quantities to supply the western demand.

By the early 1820s the American economy had revived and the Waltham investors, along with some of their formerly more timid merchant associates, were ready to expand their lucrative business enterprise. Expansion of the Waltham plant was rejected because of its limited water power. Instead, East Chelmsford, a sleepy little farming village on the banks of the Merrimack River, was chosen. It was an ideal site for exploiting water power. For just below East Chelmsford the Merrimack fell in a series of rapids with more than a thirty-foot fall.¹⁴ A canal system, the Pawtucket, had been built in 1793 to facilitate lumbering down to the mouth of the river at Newburyport. Another canal system, the Middlesex, connected this area with Boston.¹⁵

The Boston Associates moved in quickly. The first company, the Merrimack Manufacturing Company, was organized in 1822. It bought out a local undertaking, the Locks and Canals on the Merrimack. In 1825, this canal company was reorganized by the Merrimack Manufacturing Company as a separate canal and machine shop company which took title to all the land and water power not in the Merrimack Company's immediate use. Then for the next twenty years this canal company sold land, furnished power, and constructed machinery and mills and tenements for the various Lowell companies as they were organized under the leadership of the Boston

¹⁴Gibb, Saco-Lowell Shops, p. 64.

¹⁵Josephson, Golden Threads, p. 36.

Associates.¹⁶ By 1845, eleven textile companies had been incorporated in Lowell.¹⁷ By 1850, the Boston Associates had expanded their operations into other areas of New England so that they controlled about one-fifth of all the cotton spindleage in the United States. However this figure is not a true index of the Associates' importance in textiles. While they formed a solid block with all their corporations, their competitors were disunited and, in general, produced a different type of goods.¹⁸ Reinforcing the Associates' control of the cotton industry were their activities in banking, insurance, real estate, and railroads. By the late forties these businessmen controlled about 40 per cent of Boston banking capital, 39 per cent of Massachusetts insurance capital, and 25 to 30 per cent of the railway mileage in Massachusetts.¹⁹

The Lowell enterprise flourished in these years despite adverse tariff legislation in 1833 and the economic slump of 1837. Dividends from Lowell companies were high²⁰ -- averaging well above 7 per cent -- and the existence of eleven companies by 1845 attests to the expansive ability of the cotton industry in this period.

The success of the Waltham-Lowell experiment in the early years was due in part to the technological leap which Lowell's power loom re-

¹⁶Vera Shlakman, Economic History of a Factory Town. A Study of Chicopee, Massachusetts, Smith College Studies in History, Vol. XX (Northampton, Massachusetts: Department of History of Smith College, October, 1934 - July, 1935), p. 36.

¹⁷Ware, Early New England Cotton Manufacture, pp. 301-02. East Chelmsford had become the city of Lowell in 1826.

¹⁸Josephson, Golden Threads, pp. 103-04.

¹⁹Shlakman, Economic History of a Factory Town, p. 44.

²⁰Josephson, Golden Threads, p. 50, and Ware, Early New England Cotton Manufacture, p. 152.

presented. It was due also to the astute business acumen and management skills of such men as Patrick Tracy Jackson, Nathan Appleton, and the Lawrence brothers, Amos and Abbott, who joined the Associates in the 1820s. But a third ingredient -- a cheap but efficient labor force -- was also a crucial factor in the Waltham-Lowell success story.

In 1813, the Boston Associates had been faced with a difficult problem. Who would operate the power loom which Lowell and Moody had invented? Children could not handle the clumsy awkward machinery and adult male labor was predominantly tied to agriculture and therefore unavailable. Although skilled mechanics could be procured to build the machinery and to oversee the general operations, a large supply of cheap, unskilled, but easily trained labor was necessary if the Associates were to realize the profits they expected from their venture. The solution which these businessmen hit upon was to tap the available female labor from the surrounding countryside. Indeed, the sites upon which Waltham and Lowell were to stand were chosen with such a work force in mind. According to Nathan Appleton: "There was little demand for female labor, as household manufacture was superseded by the improvements in machinery. Here was in New England a fund of labor, well educated and virtuous."²¹

Appleton was only partly correct when he stated that household industries were at this time being displaced by the machine. While it is true that spinning mills had begun to take over the function of yarn production, weaving of yarn into cloth, until the establishment of the Waltham-Lowell factory system, was primarily carried on in the home by

²¹Quoted in Charles L. Sanford, "The Intellectual Origins and New Worldliness of American Industry," Journal of Economic History, XVIII (March, 1958), 15.

women, either for home consumption or for sale at a local country store.²² In other production processes, such as the sewing of shoes or of men's ready-to-wear clothing, labor-saving machinery was not available until after the Civil War.²³ In these areas household manufacturing remained important.²⁴ But increasingly during this period as the home market expanded with the growth of urban-industrial centers, these items were produced for sale outside the home, usually through a commission system.²⁵

The whole nature of the New England farm economy began to change from subsistence to commercial agriculture as burgeoning industrial centers became ready markets for farm produce and household manufactured goods. The revolution in transportation reinforced the tendency towards commercial agriculture as the competitive, highly productive western farms became linked to the industrializing East, first by canals and later by railroads.²⁶

Besides effecting the overall economy of New England, industri-

²²In 1810, Albert Gallatin stated proudly that in New Hampshire "every farmer's home is provided with one or more wheels according to the number of females," and "every second house, at least, has a loom for weaving linen, cotton, and coarse woolen cloths, which is almost wholly done by women." Quoted in Helen Sumner, Report on Condition of Woman and Child Wage-Earners in the United States, History of Women in Industry in the United States, Vol. IX (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1910), p. 43.

²³Edith Abbott, Women in Industry. A Study in American Economic History (New York: Arno and The New York Times, 1969), p. 42.

²⁴Bidwell, "Agricultural Revolution," p. 696.

²⁵Ibid., p. 697. A merchant would provide cloth or parts of shoes or straw (for making hats) to the home worker(s). The finished product would many times be disposed of by the same merchant. The worker(s) would receive payment on a commission basis.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 683-702.

alization had a tremendous impact upon the traditional position and economic function of women as home workers. As self-sufficient farming gave way to commercial agriculture and as the textile factories became the chief producers of cloth, farm women were obliged by habit and tradition as well as by economic pressure to find new employment.²⁷ While many women turned to the commercial production of shoes, men's clothing, and hats, some chose to follow their major traditional occupation, the production of cloth. During this period, producing cloth meant working in the factories. Not surprisingly, this shift of female labor from the home to the factories created certain value-conflicts for traditional New England society.

The nineteenth century New England attitude towards work was tied in with the Puritan belief that idleness bred sinfulness.²⁸ While work for women within the protective confines of the home environment or farm community met with the approbation of society, factory work in a distant, foreboding industrial village or city did not. In the first years of the Waltham experiment, the Boston Associates found it necessary to combat New England society's fears of a degraded labor force on the European model as well as to pay homage to the Puritan tradition regarding young unmarried women. In the words of Nathan Appleton,

²⁷Ibid., p. 696.

²⁸Abbott, Women in Industry, p. 56, and Gerda Lerner, "The Lady and the Mill Girl: Changes in the Status of Women in the Age of Jackson," Midcontinent American Studies Journal, X (1969), 5.

the strategy of the Associates was as follows:

It was not perceived how a profitable employment has any tendency to deteriorate the character. The most efficient guards were adopted in establishing boarding houses, at the cost of the Company, under the charge of respectable women, with every provision for religious worship. Under these circumstances, the daughters of respectable farmers were readily induced to come into these mills for a temporary period.²⁹

We might also mention here that the Associates' apparent and no doubt very real wish to diminish New England society's concern over the well-being of its young women was also dictated by practical considerations. Boarding houses were really the only means by which large numbers of workers could be housed and fed as most factory towns of the Waltham-Lowell model were located in pre-industrial villages.³⁰ Moreover, "Under these conditions, it is only to be expected that the Boston businessmen would lay down rules and regulations of conduct such as were expected in the puritan New England society of that time."³¹ Indeed, one French visitor to Lowell, Michel Chevalier, spoke of the strictly regulated but well-guarded lives of the mill girls in Lowell as a logical consequence of "Protestant education" which created a society of extremely disciplined individuals. In Chevalier's opinion, the factory girls' virtuous reputations were "under the safeguard of the public faith."³²

²⁹Quoted in Sanford, "The Intellectual Origins and New-Worldliness of American Industry," p. 15.

³⁰Shlakman, Economic History of a Factory Town, p. 35, and Howard M. Gitelman, "The Waltham System and the Coming of the Irish," Labor History, VIII (1967), 231.

³¹Shlakman, Economic History of a Factory Town, p. 35.

³²Michel Chevalier, Society, Manners and Politics in the United States (Boston: Weeks, Jordon, and Company, 1839), p. 139.

Despite these precautionary measures public opinion regarding the employment of women in factory work was not immediately won over to the employer's point-of-view. According to Harriet Robinson, a factory girl who worked in the Lowell mills in the 1830s and 1840s:

At the time the Lowell cotton-mills were started, the factory girl was the lowest among women...It was to overcome this prejudice that such high wages had been offered to women that they might be induced to become mill-girls, in spite of the opprobrium that still clung to this "degrading occupation." At first only a few came; for, though tempted by the high wages to be regularly paid in "cash," there were many who still preferred to go on working at some more genteel employment...But in a short time the prejudice against factory labor wore away, and the Lowell mills became filled with blooming and energetic New England women.³³

The propaganda of enthusiastic industrialists and their supporters did much to disspell prejudice against the factory system. The Boston Associates were men of commanding political, economic, and social power in New England. Many served the government as elected representatives, consultants, or diplomats. They used their positions of prominence to justify their pursuit of profit in terms of the well-being and prosperity of the nation and were careful to couple their positive statements of the American industrial experience with vivid descriptions of the horrifying alternative of the European model.³⁴

In addition, some proponents of industrialism, who viewed the factory system itself as a positive good, attempted to modify the negative American image of the woman factory worker. Women in industry were described as virtuous guardians of the work ethic while farm women living

³³Harriet H. Robinson, Loom and Spindle, or Life among the Early Mill Girls (New York: Crowell, 1898), pp. 61-62.

³⁴See Sanford, "The Intellectual Origins and New-Worldliness of American Industry," pp. 1-16. According to Sanford, American industrialists were "men with a reforming sense of mission" who were "convinced, on the whole, of an identity between moral and material progress." Page 2.

far from industrial centers were described as "doomed to idleness and its inseparable attendants, vice and guilt."³⁵ In 1824, Mathew Carey, an enthusiastic supporter of industrial development, in addressing the Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture, spoke glowingly of the beneficial effects of factory work upon women:

They contract habits of order, regularity and industry, which lay a broad and deep foundation of public and private future usefulness. They become eligible partners for life for young men, to whom they will be able to afford substantial aid in the support of families... the inducement to early marriages...is greatly increased...and immensely important effects produced on the welfare of society.³⁶

Economic necessity combined with the Puritan work ethic were factors which played directly into the hands of the industrialists. Social prejudices against women factory workers and industrialism per se created certain problems for the industrialist but effective propaganda helped to modify traditional attitudes. And of course the trump card was the relatively high wages paid to mill girls. Taking all these factors into consideration it is not surprising that by the 1820s the mills at Waltham and Lowell as well as in other industrial centers were well-stocked with a reliable work force.³⁷

Wages paid to females were not under a market constraint as were wages paid to skilled males since there was no well-developed market for

³⁵Quoted in Abbott, Women in Industry, p. 57. The quote was taken from the "Petition from Citizens of Pennsylvania, 1820."

³⁶Quoted in ibid., p. 58.

³⁷Not all mill girls were daughters of farmers. According to Lucy Larcom, herself a mill girl and the daughter of a sea captain, the "most vigorous" were farm girls "But others were children of clergymen or physicians, or of men of business, left orphans, or deprived in various ways of pecuniary support." Lucy Larcom, "Among Lowell Mill Girls: A Reminiscence," Atlantic Monthly, XLVIII (1881), 610.

female industrial workers at this time.³⁸ Wages only had to be high enough to attract girls away from the farms and to discourage them from going into competing occupations such as teaching and domestic service. Teaching was usually a seasonal job and the pay-scale was very low.³⁹ Domestic service was unpopular among farm girls who disliked the petty tyrannies of the women for whom they had to work.⁴⁰ Wages for female textile factory workers were high relative to what women could earn in other occupations. However, absolute wages were low vis-à-vis all wages since women factory workers were not in competition with men.⁴¹ Since women were considered secondary wage earners their low wages vis-à-vis men were not considered to be unfair by the standards of the day. And as secondary wage earners they were not expected to work permanently in the mills. At least in the early years it was customary for most girls to work only a few years before returning to their farm community -- usually to marry.

Most of the women who went to work in Lowell were between the ages of seventeen and twenty-four although there were a few younger girls as well as older women employed by the mills.⁴² In 1845, over half of the mill girls came from New Hampshire and Maine; about one-

³⁸Gitelman, "The Waltham System and the Coming of the Irish," pp. 232-33.

³⁹Abbott, Women in Industry, p. 120.

⁴⁰See Sarah Bagley's article, "Tales of Factory Life, no. 1," The Lowell Offering, I (1941), 65-68, in which she describes the trials of "Sarah," a penniless domestic of twelve who escapes from a severe mistress to come to Lowell to become a factory girl.

⁴¹Gitelman, "The Waltham System and the Coming of the Irish," pp. 233-34.

⁴²William Scoresby, American Factories and their Female Operatives (London: Brown, Green and Longmans, 1845), p. 53. See also Massachusetts House Documents, 1845, No. 50, p. 13.

fifth hailed from Vermont while less than one-fifth were natives of Massachusetts. A little less than one-tenth of the girls were from Ireland while the rest were from Canada or were natives of other states. Two girls in the sample were from England; one was from Scotland. Most women worked from three to four years in the mills before returning home or perhaps finding other employment.⁴³

While it is evident from the testimonies of mill girls themselves that they were induced to come to Lowell primarily to earn their own living for a few years and perhaps to help out their family at home as well,⁴⁴ some came also for "the social and literary advantages which a city such as Lowell had to offer."⁴⁵ For Lowell by 1846 was a bustling town with a population of 30,000⁴⁶ which boasted a lyceum, a public library, interesting shops, and many churches with their respective improvement circles, missionary societies, temperance associations and the

⁴³See Henry A. Miles, Lowell as it Was and Is (2nd ed.; Lowell: Nathaniel L. Dayton. Merrill and Heywood, 1846), pp. 162-94. The Reverend Miles conducted a survey of 1527 Lowell mill girls (approximately one-fifth of the female workers employed by the Lowell textile factories) in 1845 to determine their place of birth, number of years of work in the mills, and general health. The tone of Miles' book is definitely pro-corporation. The results of his survey appear fairly credible, though good health among operatives is perhaps overrated. Miles estimated that operatives worked in Lowell on an average of four to five years. But Ray Ginger has pointed out that Miles' estimate may be a bit too high. By computing the distribution of work years for each operative (as per Miles' figures) Ginger discovered that 49 per cent of the 1518 women for whom data was available had worked in the mills less than three years while 60 per cent had worked less than four years. Only 16 per cent had worked more than seven years. It would appear, then, that most women worked from three to four years in the mills. See Ray Ginger, "Labor in a Massachusetts Cotton Mill, 1853-1860," Business History Review, XXVIII (1954), 87.

⁴⁴Larcom, "Among Lowell Mill Girls," p. 603, Robinson, Loom and Spindle, pp. 76-77, Bagley, "Tales of Factory Life, no. 1," pp. 65-68.

⁴⁵Robinson, Loom and Spindle, p. 66.

⁴⁶Charles Cowley, Illustrated History of Lowell (revised ed.; Boston: Lee and Shepard; Lowell: B. C. Sargeant and Joshua Merrill, 1868), p. 134.

like. It has also been intimated by at least one historian⁴⁷ that western migration of young men to the rich farmlands of the West in this period created a sizeable pool of spinster "aunts" who began to choose factory work as an alternative to living with parents or a married sister.⁴⁸ Englishwoman Harriet Martineau, who visited America in the 1830s, was informed that there existed in New England a great number of unemployed and unmarried women because of the exodus westward of so many young men. However, Martineau refused to divulge the exact number quoted to her because the figures were "so incredible."⁴⁹

Unfortunately thorough statistical studies of migration patterns both westward and within New England itself for this period do not yet exist. While it can be shown that in New England white females were in excess of white males,⁵⁰ a state by state breakdown of the female to male ratio does not reveal a definite pattern of either female or male

⁴⁷See David Montgomery, "The Working Classes of the Pre-industrial American City, 1780-1830," Labor History, IX (1968), 19.

⁴⁸This hypothesis does not appear to jibe with the Lowell situation. While a few spinsters or unmarried older women appear to have worked in the mills at Lowell, their number was not significant. Robinson, Loom and Spindle, p. 68.

⁴⁹Harriet Martineau, Society in America, Vol. II (4th ed.; New York: Saunders and Otley, 1837), p. 41, 54.

⁵⁰The proportion of females to males in 1820 in New England was 103.01; in 1830 it was 102.46; in 1840, 101.34; and in 1850, 100.87. The overplus does not appear significant for this period, especially given the downward secular trend revealed from the indices. J. D. B. DeBow, Statistical View of the United States (New York: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1970), p. 49.

excess in the New England population.⁵¹ Obviously other variables existed, to mitigate the female-male discrepancy in population caused by the flow of young men westward, which do not appear in the census figures.

Irrespective of whether the motive for working in Lowell stemmed from pecuniary considerations, a desire for widened "educational" experience, social pressure, or a combination of these factors, women who worked in the mills shared a common, tightly regulated lifestyle which was dictated to them by the owners and supervisors of the corporations. All girls were required to live in company boarding houses which had strict regulations of their own regarding mealtimes, evening curfews, hours of sleep, etc. All girls were expected to attend church

⁵¹The percentages of white females for certain age groups, age 15 to 20 and 20 to 30, in each of four states, Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Vermont are as follows:

	<u>1830</u>	<u>Maine</u>	<u>N. Hamp.</u>	<u>Mass.</u>	<u>Vt.</u>
age 15-20		49.9	49.9	51.2	49.9
" 20-30		50.4	53.7	50.8	51.0
<u>1840</u>					
age 15-20		50.2	49.7	52.1	48.1
" 20-30		49.9	52.0	49.3	51.2
<u>1850</u>					
age 15-20		52.9	50.0	53.4	48.9
" 20-30		50.6	48.4	51.6	48.3

The above percentages were calculated from the raw data contained in the following census reports: Fifth Census; or, Enumeration of the Inhabitants of the United States, 1830 (Washington, D. C.: Duff Green, 1832), pp. 8, 14, 22, 34; Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States, as obtained at the Department of State, from the return of the Sixth Census (Washington, D.C.: Thomas Allen, 1841), pp. 4-5, 8-9, 16-17; The Seventh Census of the United States, 1850 (Washington, D. C.: Robert Armstrong, 1853), pp. 2, 18, 32; Debow, Statistical View of the United States, pp. 52-53, 56.

regularly. Factory operatives were not supposed to gamble, indulge in "ardent spirits," or possess any "habits" which "are or shall be dissolute, indolent, dishonest, or intemperate."⁵² Smoking was not permitted in the factory and could not "be carelessly indulged in the Boarding Houses."⁵³ Employees were considered "engaged" for one year from the date of hire.⁵⁴

Indeed, the whole social fabric of Lowell was dictated by the mill owners. Since the Associates themselves lived in Boston, their agents or managers were the leading men of the community. They "usually lived in large houses, not too near the boarding-houses, surrounded by beautiful gardens."⁵⁵ They were the "aristocrats" of Lowell society. One notch below were the overseers who represented "a kind of gentry."⁵⁶ They had worked their way up to the position of overseer within the factory system and usually lived either in end-tenements or in separate blocks devoted to overseer housing exclusively.⁵⁷ Next came the operatives who were universally known as the "girls."⁵⁸ Lowest in the

⁵²General Regulations, to be Observed by Persons Employed by the Lawrence Manufacturing Company, in Lowell. See Appendix I.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Regulations to be Observed by all Persons Employed by the Lawrence Manufacturing Company. See Appendix I.

⁵⁵Robinson, Loom and Spindle, p. 13.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 14.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

hierarchy were the Irish, "the lords of the spade and shovel."⁵⁹ Contemporary opinion regarding the amount of social stratification or class feeling among these various groups is mixed. At least in the early years, before the first rumblings of discontent in the 1830s, it appears that Harriet Robinson's estimate is quite plausible:

...there was a class feeling, which divided the people, though not their interests. For, as has been said, the corporation guarded well the interests of its employees; and as the mill-hands looked to the factories for their support, they worked as one man (and one woman) to help increase the growing prosperity of the city, which had given to them a new and permanent means of earning a livelihood.⁶⁰

We must keep in mind, however, that such amity among the employees of the corporations was good business as far as the Boston Associates were concerned. As Lowell spawned its own service industries which were in turn committed to the success of Lowell's factories, the company nature of the city became, if anything, more pronounced. As the town grew and prospered the corporations' power grew accordingly. However, as we shall see in a later chapter, the corporations' prosperity in the later years, beginning in the 1830s, became bottle-necked. While the stockholders and salaried employees of the corporations continued to prosper, as well as the service businesses in the city, the operatives' limited participation in this prosperity became much less pronounced. By the 1840s many of the New England factory girls no longer "looked to the factories for their support." Instead, some attempted to organize among themselves to protect their interests. When this attempt failed, many New England girls left the factories for good. However, these developments were in the future.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 15.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 54.

For the time being, during the bright young years of the Waltham-Lowell experiment in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century, American society was more concerned with learning to modify its hostility towards manufacturing than with trying to predict the future. One factor which helped to bring Americans around to an acceptance of an industrializing America was the reassuring image of rosy-cheeked, virtuous young women cheerfully tending the machines in Lowell and in other industrial centers. With obvious satisfaction, the Boston Associates were able to witness the birth and growth of a myth which smoothed their path to profit and power. Indeed, these men were no doubt willing midwives at this birth.

CHAPTER II

THE MYTH OF THE FACTORY GIRL

With the establishment of the Waltham and Lowell mills in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century, young women from rural New England began migrating to those centers to procure industrial employment. These women were in most cases from respectable yet not overly prosperous farm families. At this time the farm population of New England was scattered throughout the north-eastern countryside. Isolated farms and small villages were the rule. New Englanders, therefore, shared a more or less homogeneous culture based on their rural heritage. But with the advent of industrialization, the increased tempo of westward expansion, and the concomitant transportation and agricultural revolutions, rural New England society began to lose its homogeneous character.¹ The burgeoning industrial centers were creating new values, destined to predominate over older rural values.

One set of values pertained to the role of women in industrializing America. According to Barbara Welter, American society in this transition period (1820-1860) expected women to safeguard a pre-industrial set of values against the contamination of the countinghouse and market place. Welter has isolated four virtues which the ideal woman was expected to possess. These virtues, which, taken together,

¹See Percy Bidwell, "The Agricultural Revolution in New England," The American Historical Review, XXVI (July, 1921), 683-702.

Welter terms "the cult of true womanhood," were piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. "Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power."² But Gerda Lerner has stressed that this cult was meant to serve only the women of "leisure."³ It was an avenue through which women of the middle class aspired toward the position of the traditional lady. For the factory girl, however, no such idealized self-image of ladyhood was conceivable. But Lerner is wrong to insist that "In the formulation of values lower class women were simply ignored."⁴ They were not ignored; rather new values were added to those associated with "true womanhood" so as to take account of working class women.

The years 1820 to 1845 saw the formulation of the "cult of the factory girl," which through time has taken on the characteristics of a myth. This myth was not applied to all female industrial workers but focused on those women who lived and worked in Lowell and similar industrial centers where the boarding house system prevailed. These young women (usually unmarried) possessed not only the "true womanhood" attributes of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesti-

²Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," American Quarterly, XVIII (Summer, 1966), 152.

³Gerda Lerner, "The Lady and the Mill Girl: Changes in the Status of Women in the Age of Jackson," Midcontinent American Studies Journal, X (1969), 11. Lerner uses the term "leisure" in a restricted sense: "When female occupations, such as carding, spinning and weaving, were transferred from home to factory, the poorer women followed their traditional work and became industrial workers. The women of the middle and upper classes could use their newly gained time for leisure pursuits: they became ladies." Page 11.

⁴Ibid.

city⁵ but also the additional virtues of cheerful industriousness, independence, intelligence, and intellectual curiosity.

Reinforcing the cult of the factory girl were the idealized conceptions of the environment surrounding the mill girl and the positive role which she and her kind played in the larger, egalitarian-minded American society of this period. These conceptions as well as the cult have come down to us in the form of a myth although in most standard texts dealing with this period, the myth has been presented as "objective" truth.

Lowell, as stated previously, was a conscious creation of a group of Boston entrepreneurs. Until the early 1820s the future city of Lowell was only a small agricultural village snuggling among foothills on the banks of the Merrimack River. By the 1830s red brick factories from five to seven stories high adorned with white belfries were lining the banks of the Merrimack with boarding houses, repair shops, and counting houses nearby.⁶ However, despite this sudden appearance of factory complexes, a rustic atmosphere still prevailed in Lowell -- at least into the 1840s -- to the delight of foreign visitors such as the Reverend William Scoresby of Bradford, England.⁷

⁵Domestic traits were mainly exemplified evenings in the boarding houses -- sewing, washing, nursing a sick friend, etc. Most factory girls professed the intention to marry after a few years work at the mills.

⁶Margaret H. Koehler, "Two Miles of Girls," Yankee, June, 1972, pp. 180-81.

⁷William Scoresby, American Factories and their Female Operatives (London: Brown, Green and Longmans, 1845). Scoresby was mainly interested in comparing the American female worker with her counterpart in England. In his comparison he found his countrywomen sadly wanting. Scoresby's book thus sets up the Lowell girls as models for the English working girl to emulate. His only criticism of the Lowell system was the long seventy-five-hour work week.

Nothing is discoloured, neither houses nor mills nor trees -- the red brick factories and boarding houses, and the other edifices of wood painted in light colours, look as fresh as if just finished; the streets -- dusty enough, indeed,...were not yet black like ours; and the sky, unshrouded by smoke or cloud, was brilliant and clear -- the sun darting down its unobstructed rays with dazzling and scorching power...the trees and plants...were fresh and flourishing...Lowell, large as it has grown, it is yet rural in its appearance, and notwithstanding its being a city of factories, is yet fresh and cleanly.⁸

If Lowell's physical character was "fresh and cleanly," its moral character was pre-eminently "decent." According to Michel Chevalier, Lowell and "its steeple-crowned factories" resembled a Spanish town with its convents except that the "nuns of Lowell, instead of working sacred hearts, spin and weave cotton."⁹ His terse pronouncement on Lowell reflects the prejudices of a cosmopolitan Frenchman and indicates that New England society was still strongly puritan in flavor and attitude: "Lowell is not amusing, but it is neat, decent, peaceable, and sage."¹⁰

For natives of New England, Lowell did not possess the rather chilly atmosphere which Chevalier so pithily described. According to Lucy Larcom, one of the most well-known of the Lowell mill girls, "There was a frank friendliness and sincerity in the social atmosphere" which "made the place pleasant to live in."¹¹ In fact Lowell was made to order

⁸Ibid., pp. 11-12.

⁹Michel Chevalier, Society, Manners and Politics in the United States (Boston: Weeks, Jordon and Company, 1839), p. 142.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Lucy Larcom, "Among Lowell Mill Girls: A Reminiscence," Atlantic Monthly, XLVIII (1881), 600. Larcom was a mill worker from 1835 to 1846. She later became a school teacher in Illinois and then taught at Wheaton College in Norton, Massachusetts. She also edited magazines for children and published three volumes of poetry as well as her autobiography.

for New England girls. They were assured of not only "an unobjectionable occupation" but also "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."¹²

That the bracing outdoor environment made its way through the solid factory gates was corroborated by many contemporary observers of working conditions within the factories. Charles Dickens remarked with approval that he had found green plants on the factory window sills when visiting Lowell in 1842,¹³ and a state legislative investigating committee of 1845 also mentioned the shrubs and plants. The committee viewed such bucolic accoutrements with approval and reported that the plants "were the pets of the factory girls, and they were to the Committee convincing evidence of the elevated moral tone and refined taste of the operatives."¹⁴

In addition to pastoral images of rural life, factories also possessed a low-keyed, evenly-paced work routine to which New England farm girls were already accustomed:

Though the hours of labor were long, they were not overworked; they were obliged to tend no more looms and frames than they could easily take care of, and they had plenty of time to sit and rest...

¹²Ibid., p. 595.

¹³Charles Dickens, American Notes (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1961), p. 85.

¹⁴Massachusetts House Documents, 1845, No. 50, p. 8.

They were not driven, and their work-a-day life was made easy.¹⁵ The overseers, who were in charge of the girls' work performance as well as their "propriety of conduct,"¹⁶ were kindly men, usually married, "of good morals and temperate habits and often exercised a good influence over their help."¹⁷ The matrons of the boarding houses, in most cases widows, were always of high moral standing and served as mother-figures for the mill girls.¹⁸ They provided, in short, a cosy home-away-from-home for the operatives.¹⁹

But what of these mill girls? What made them so special in the eyes of their contemporaries? The concise, admiring statement at-

¹⁵Harriet H. Robinson, Loom and Spindle or Life among the Early Mill Girls (New York: Crowell, 1898), p. 71. Robinson worked in the mills from the age of eleven until her marriage at the age of twenty-three in 1848 to William S. Robinson, and editor-turned-reformer-politician. Subsequent to her Lowell days she became an ardent and active suffragist and published a book on the suffrage movement entitled, Massachusetts in the Woman Suffrage Movement. She also authored a memoir to her husband, Warrington Pen Portraits, and published a drama as well as a book-length poem. She was a member of the first advisory board of The General Federation of Women's Clubs in 1890 and also held membership in the New England Historic Genealogical Society and the Daughters of the American Revolution.

¹⁶Henry A. Miles, Lowell as it Was and Is (2nd ed.; Lowell: Nathaniel L. Dayton. Merrill and Heywood, 1846), p. 14. Miles mentioned in a later passage that the overseers were "among the most permanent residents, and most trustworthy and valuable citizens of the place. A large number of them are members of our churches, and are often chosen as council men in the city government, and representatives in the State legislature." See pp. 141-42.

¹⁷Robinson, Loom and Spindle, p. 72. Robinson and Miles' descriptions of the overseers are very similar. See above, n. 16.

¹⁸The moral uprightness of the matrons is stressed in virtually all the literature used in this chapter.

¹⁹See Robinson, Loom and Spindle, and Lucy Larcom, A New England Girlhood (New York: Corinth Books, 1961), for descriptions of their mothers, who were boarding house supervisors in Lowell, and of the "homey" atmosphere of their respective boarding houses.

tributed to President Jackson when he visited Lowell in 1833 echoes down to us -- "Very pretty women, by the Eternal!"²⁰ -- but the elegant and rather pompous prose description by John Greenleaf Whittier provides a better index of the contemporary origins of the myth of the factory girl:

Acres of girlhood, beauty reckoned by the square mile -- or miles by long measure! The young, the graceful, the gay -- the flowers gathered from a thousand hillsides and green valleys of New England, fair unveiled Nuns of Industry, Sisters of Thrift, and are yet not also Sisters of Charity, dispensing comfort and hope and happiness around many a hearthstone of your native hills, making sad faces cheerful, and hallowing age and purity with the sunshine of your youth and love! Who shall sneer at your calling? Who shall count your vocation otherwise than noble and ennobling?²¹

Indeed, these "flowers" of New England were so refined in manners and general deportment that for the Reverend Scoresby many very nearly approached the "genteel" class of English womanhood.²²

Gentility aside, practically speaking the mill girls, according to Larcom, were graced with an energetic and independent spirit because they represented the best which the "older and hardier stock" of New England society had to offer.²³ And these girls had been taught from a tender age "that idleness is disgrace."²⁴ They did not shirk

²⁰Quoted in Hannah Josephson, The Golden Threads. New England's Mill Girls and Magnates (New York: Russell and Russell, 1967), p. 60.

²¹Quoted in George F. Kenngott, The Record of a City: A Social Survey of Lowell, Massachusetts (New York: Macmillan Company, 1912), p. 17.

²²Scoresby, American Factories, p. 14. Dickens was inclined to agree, commenting that many factory girls "had the manners and deportment of young women: not of degraded brutes of burden." Dickens, American Notes, p. 85.

²³Larcom, "Among Lowell Mill Girls," pp. 599-600.

²⁴Ibid., p. 596.

work. They came over rutted mud paths from as far away as Maine to work a seventy-five-hour week in the mills. Even the doffers²⁵ put in a fourteen-hour work day from five o'clock in the morning until seven in the evening with only one-half hour for breakfast and one-half hour for dinner.

Closely related to the mill girls' independent and industrious natures was their belief in self-help. Larcom stated that most girls came to Lowell in order to better themselves and/or their families although none of them intended to stay at mill work for more than a few years.²⁶ A large portion of their cash wages was often sent home to help pay off a mortgage, provide for needed farm repairs, supply certain luxuries, aid in the support of a widowed mother or of a "drunken, incompetent, or invalid father."²⁷ According to Harriet Robinson, the education of a male member of the family was the primary reason why mill girls relinquished much of their earnings to the family back on the farm:

To make a gentleman of a brother or a son, to give him a college education, was the dominant thought in the minds of a great many of these provident mill-girls.²⁸

²⁵Doffers were young girls from nine or ten years of age whose job it was to replace full bobbins with empty ones. The work was not difficult and very often the doffers had one-half hour of every hour free. Robinson recalled her doffer days with pleasure. "We had very happy hours with the older girls, many of whom treated us like babies, or talked in a motherly way, and so had a good influence over us." Robinson, Loom and Spindle, p. 32. However, Robinson also noted with approval that in 1842 the hours of labor for children under twelve years of age were limited to ten hours per day. See p. 31.

²⁶Lucy Larcom, New England Girlhood, p. 222.

²⁷Robinson, Loom and Spindle, p. 76.

²⁸Ibid., p. 77.

In a few cases, widowed or unmarried women came to Lowell in order to earn their own living and to escape the "charity" of a relative.²⁹

However, most women arriving in Lowell were young, relatively carefree country girls with names like Plumy, Kezia, Elgardy, Leafy, and Lovey. These farm girls many times spoke a strange dialect of broken English and Scotch combined with a Yankee twang. Even their dress was odd -- homespun material of an old-fashioned cut which could have belonged to their grandmothers.³⁰ But under the beneficent influence of the "city of spindles" these girls soon blossomed into the elegant flowers male visitors to Lowell so much admired.³¹ And although they had come to Lowell in order to help out the family back on the farm they had also come to better themselves.

According to Larcom, Lowell was in many ways "a rather select industrial school for young people,"³² though it was the literary and intellectual and not the industrial skills which girls like Lucy Larcom were interested in improving upon in Lowell. In fact we almost forget that most of these girls were working seventy-five hours per week in an

²⁹Ibid., pp. 68-69. There were even a very few unhappy cases of women who came to Lowell under assumed names to escape their husbands. If discovered the law stated that the husband could claim his wife and even trustee her wages. Life -- even in clean and decent and friendly Lowell -- could not have been too pleasant for such women. See pp. 66-67.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 64-65.

³¹It is interesting to note that Harriet Martineau, the only famous female visitor to write of the factory system, failed to comment upon the startling beauty of the factory operatives of Waltham, where she visited, noting only that "All look like well-dressed young ladies." Harriet Martineau, Society in America, Vol. II (4th ed.; New York: Saunders and Otley, 1837), p. 58.

³²Larcom, New England Girlhood, p. 222.

industrial occupation when we read of their intellectual interests and literary pursuits. Dickens himself noted with amazement that the presence of a piano and a circulating library in most of the boarding houses as well as the existence of the Lowell Offering, a magazine written entirely by factory girls, were not usual working class interests or projects.³³

The Lowell Offering, which began publication in 1840 and ran until 1845, grew out of several literary self-improvement societies which were in the beginning sponsored by local churches and were under the direction of ministers. Though only a total of 54 mill girls ever actually wrote for the Offering, it was apparently popular among the 7000-odd girls employed at any one time in Lowell in its first years.³⁴ Most New England girls in this period were avid readers and were familiar with Milton, Dickens, Irving, Stowe, Bryant, Longfellow, Whittier, Scott, and Wordsworth.³⁵ The Offering was well within the tradition of periodicals for women. Its subject matter consisted of "naive stories of happy love, brief essays on moral and religious topics, descriptions of American scenes, occasional biographical sketches, letters, literary reviews, and comments on contemporary writers."³⁶ The Offering achieved fame when Dickens placed his seal of approval upon it:

³³Dickens, American Notes, p. 86.

³⁴The Offering's later unpopularity and lack of support among the factory operatives will be discussed in a subsequent chapter.

³⁵Larcom, "Among Lowell Mill Girls," pp. 604-05.

³⁶Bertha M. Stearns, "Early Factory Magazines in New England," Journal of Economic and Business History, II (August, 1930), 690-91.

Of the merits of the Lowell Offering as a literary production I will only observe, putting entirely out of sight the fact of the articles having been written by these girls after the arduous labors of the day, that it will compare advantageously with a great many English Annuals. It is pleasant to find that many of its Tales are of the Mills, and those who work in them, that they inculcate habits of self-denial and contentment, and teach good doctrines of enlarged benevolence.³⁷

Writing or "scribbling" as it was more popularly called for the Offering could only be sandwiched into the few free evening hours.

However, the literary-minded factory girl was apparently so intent upon improving her mind that she would sneak scraps of paper into the mill -- books were prohibited -- to study at odd free moments when the overseer was otherwise engaged.³⁸

In addition to the Offering and study on the job, factory girls were always in good attendance at the lyceum lectures in Lowell. Emerson, Greeley, and Robert Owen were just a few of the famous personages these girls went to hear. They also picked up on the fads of the times -- the cold water cure, the Graham vegetarian diet, phrenology, and even Mesmerism³⁹ -- and became active in certain reforms which stirred the country, such as the antislavery campaign.⁴⁰ However, most turned a cold shoulder to the Associationists and the Brook Farm experiment, concluding that in such a scheme of things "those who had already contracted the working-habit" would end up doing all the manual labor."⁴¹

³⁷Dickens, American Notes, p. 87.

³⁸Larcom, "Among Lowell Mill Girls," p. 603.

³⁹Robinson, Loom and Spindle, pp. 87-88. Regarding Mesmerism, Robinson remarked that "those of us who had the power to make ourselves en rapport with others tried experiment of 'subjects,' and sometimes held meetings in the evening for that purpose." P. 88.

⁴⁰Larcom, "Among Lowell Mill Girls," p. 607.

⁴¹Robinson, Loom and Spindle, p. 81.

Surprisingly, despite the new interests and activities with which traditional New England girlhood was bombarded, true womanhood traits of domesticity, piety, purity, and submissiveness, were never relinquished. Even the most studious of the mill girls was sometimes also "the most domestic; for in those days all girls were taught whatever they would need to do as women, -- housework first and most thoroughly."⁴² And the girls "were religious by nature and by Puritan inheritance" and apparently did not question the factory regulation that all employees were required to attend sabbath worship.⁴³ In fact they helped to build new churches and cheerfully gave part of their earnings toward missionary work.⁴⁴ Their purity was unquestionable. Richard Cobden upon visiting Lowell, noted in his diary:

am told that a faux pas is scarcely heard of in the course of a year -- & if a female is discovered to be pregnant or if her character should be suspected to be light the others always denounce her and she is removed.⁴⁵

The mill girl's submissiveness to authority or her acceptance of inferiority vis-à-vis males was apparently complete. This is perhaps best exemplified in her willingness to work several years in a factory in order to send a male member of her family off to college.

The set of virtues which have emerged from these pages -- industriousness, independence, self-reliance, intelligence, domesticity, piety, purity, and submissiveness -- were, in the second decade

⁴²Larcom, "Among Lowell Mill Girls," p. 603.

⁴³Robinson, Loom and Spindle, p. 78.

⁴⁴Larcom, "Among Lowell Mill Girls," p. 600.

⁴⁵Richard Cobden, The American Diaries of Richard Cobden (New York: Greenfield Press, 1969), p. 117.

of the nineteenth century, exclusive to boarding house factory girls. A summary of these virtues as expressed through certain behavior patterns and activities impressed even Lucy Larcom:

It seems a wonder, to look back on it, how they accomplished as 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.⁴⁶

It is significant, perhaps, that the unity of experience which Larcom described was also expressed in the pages of Harriet Robinson's book on Lowell, Loom and Spindle, or Life among the Early Mill Girls. Both women wrote of their experiences as mill girls many years after they had left Lowell and factory work and recalled their factory days with pleasure.

Although human memory is apt to enhance the realities of a bygone era, the comments of contemporary visitors to Lowell can serve as a check in this respect. The reminiscences of two articulate factory women and the reportage of visitors, taken together, lead us to the conclusion that, while conditions in Lowell were not idyllic, even in the early years, neither were they terribly harsh or exploitative. We must also keep in mind that foreign visitors as well as Americans, whether factory girls, corporation owners, or politicians, were not incorrect in pointing out the vivid contrast of the Lowell-type factory

⁴⁶Larcom, "Among Lowell Mill Girls," p. 599. Certainly Larcom and Robinson mentioned in their writings that not all mill girls participated in all the amusements and activities available to them. However, the myth which has grown up around the Larcom and Robinson reminiscences as well as the commentaries of distinguished visitors imply heavily that they did.

system and the British Manchester-type system. Dickens' comment that a contrast between the two systems "would be a strong one, for it would be between Good and Evil, the living light and the deepest shadow,"⁴⁷ is indicative of the widely held notion in both America and England that the Lowell factory system was far superior to that which could be found in English industrial cities such as Manchester at this time.

The myth of the factory girl which took form in these years helped to soften the impact of industrialization in America and attempted to explain and justify this process in terms which most Americans could accept. Much was made of the fact that the Lowell factory system did not depend on a permanent factory population. Instead, respectable middle class farm girls were recruited to work in the mills for a few years and made to feel that they were somehow helping to bolster America's self-image as an egalitarian society. Corporation owners were quick to utilize the image of the Lowell factory girl to convince the public of the superior nature of the American factory system. And most Americans were willing to be convinced. Entrepreneurial genius had apparently made certain that the industrial horror of a degraded, brutalized working class would be avoided in America.

We can recognize that the myth of the factory girl at first corresponded, at least in part, to reality. It also proved useful in explaining and rationalizing the onset of the industrial revolution in America. But years passed; the myth lost its grounding in reality. Conditions in the mills worsened and some of the famous Lowell nuns of industry were no longer willing passively to accept the rosy stories

⁴⁷Dickens, American Notes, p. 88.

of the mythmakers. However, these women would discover, much to their chagrin, that myths, once accepted, are difficult to refute.

CHAPTER III

AN IDYL DESTROYED

The Waltham-Lowell factory system did provide a welcome avenue for secondary wage-earner employment in the 1810s and 1820s. New England girls could come to boarding house towns like Lowell and be assured of steady work within an environment consistent with their upbringing. Moreover, towns like Lowell possessed certain cultural and social attractions which could appeal to girls who had grown up on relatively secluded farms or in small rural or coastal villages. However, conditions in Lowell were not as idyllic nor the factory girls as docile as our mythmakers would have us believe, especially after 1834.

In February of 1834, the Boston Associates announced piece rate wage cuts of 15 per cent in the Lowell mills. Eight hundred girls turned out in protest. They even published a proclamation which appealed for signatures from those in the community who were true descendants of the revolutionary tradition. These operatives pledged not to return to work until the impending wage cuts were rescinded. However, within a few days most girls were back at work.¹

In October of 1836, the Associates announced another wage cut in the form of a 5 per cent increase in the cost of boarding which had to come from the factory girls' wages. This time 1,500 girls participated in a turnout, marching through the streets singing to the popular

¹Hannah Josephson, The Golden Threads. New England Mill Girls and Magnates (New York: Russell and Russell, 1967), pp. 231-34.

tune of "I Won't Be a Nun:"

Oh! isn't it a pity, such a pretty girl as I --
Should be sent to the factory to pine away and die?
Oh! I cannot be a slave,
I will not be a slave,
For I'm so fond of liberty
That I cannot be a slave.²

A Factory Girls' Association with 2,500 members was formed during this strike,³ and one woman addressed a group of her fellow workers from a podium. "This was the first time a woman had spoken in public in Lowell, and the event caused surprise and consternation among her audience."⁴ The National Trades' Union, which was in session in Philadelphia, sent messages of support and passed resolutions in favor of the factory girls' actions.⁵ However, as in 1834, the operatives received little support from the community at large,⁶ and they were soon starved back to work. Nothing more was heard of the short-lived Factory Girls' Association.

During the next ten years the corporations continued to slash away at wages, especially piece rate work. The Associates' public reasons for lowering wages varied -- sometimes they explained wage cuts in terms of low prices, unfavorable tariffs, or money crises; other times in terms of the introduction of labor-saving machinery. Sometimes re-

²Harriet H. Robinson, Loom and Spindle, or Life among the Early Mill Girls (New York: Crowell, 1898), p. 84.

³John B. Andrews and W. D. P. Bliss, Report on Condition of Women and Child Wage-Earners in the United States, Vol. X: History of Women in Trade Unions (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1911), p. 12.

⁴Robinson, Loom and Spindle, p. 83.

⁵Josephson, Golden Threads, p. 238.

⁶Howard M. Gitelman, "The Waltham System and the Coming of the Irish," Labor History, VIII (1967), 238.

ductions of wages did tend to compensate for increased technical efficiency but in many cases actual wages in fact were lowered.⁷ While it is apparent that the cotton industry did suffer from recurrent bouts of overproduction and low prices as well as from increased competition within the industry from 1840 onwards, it appears that business practices such as accumulation of reserves for reinvestment or for periodic crises were the main determinants in formulating a policy of steady wage reductions throughout the 1830s and 1840s.⁸

Although wages continued to be reduced, little active protest was evident among mill girls from the depression year of 1837 until the beginning of 1845 when the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association was formed. A small turnout of 50 girls occurred in December, 1842, when the Middlesex mills at Lowell announced a 25 per cent reduction in wages

⁷Caroline F. Ware, Early New England Cotton Manufacture. A Study in Industrial Beginnings (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), p. 269.

⁸See Josephson, Golden Threads, pp. 214-15, and Vera Shlakman, Economic History of a Factory Town. A Study of Chicopee, Massachusetts, Smith College Studies in History, Vol. XX (Northampton, Massachusetts: Department of History of Smith College, October, 1934 - July, 1935), pp. 106-07. Josephson and Shlakman believe that very little cash surplus was held in reserve by the cotton companies to use for machine repairs and new equipment until the 1850s when this could no longer be avoided. When money became tight (business fluctuations were frequent in this period) or costs rose, wages were cut in order to keep dividends high. Dividends of principal cotton companies (those listed on the Boston Stock Exchange) averaged 9.7 per cent from 1837 through 1846. The cotton companies were able to weather the depression of 1836-37 fairly well. However, when the depression dragged on into the early forties dividends of the principle cotton companies averaged slightly less than 7 per cent (1840-1843). From 1844 through 1846 the cotton industry experienced a short-lived boom. Dividends averaged between 14 and 16 per cent. From 1847 onwards, dividends dropped quite steeply, averaging a little more than 5 per cent for the next twelve years. Ware, Early New England Cotton Manufacture, pp. 143-44, 152-53.

but their places in the mills were immediately filled and the striking factory girls were forced to leave Lowell.⁹ By turning to a consideration of real wages and output per worker some of the reasons for this lull in activity will become apparent.¹⁰

During the fourteen year period, 1834-1848, actual hourly earnings for mill girls were decreasing.¹¹ Only in 1834, however, was the wage decline drastic -- the four month average hourly earnings ending in April, 1834, was \$.052; the six month average ending August, 1834, was \$.047. Between August of 1834, and April of 1840, the average hourly earnings fluctuated between the low of \$.047 in August, 1834, and the high of \$.052 in February of 1837, and February of 1839.¹² For

⁹ Andrews and Bliss, History of Women in Trade Unions, p. 69.

¹⁰ Robert Layer's careful statistical study of real wages and output per worker for textile factory workers from 1825-1914 has been utilized for this section of the chapter. Layer chose seven companies for his study, two of which do not concern us as they were formed in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Of the five which Layer studied for our time period -- Dover-Cocheo, Boston, Nashua, Hamilton, and Lawrence -- two were located in Lowell (the Hamilton and the Lawrence). The other three were located in Dover, N. Hampshire, Nashua, New Hampshire, and Waltham. The Boston Associates had a controlling interest in all five companies. Layer's method for measuring the average daily earnings per worker was to divide the total earnings of all workers by the total number of days, or fractions of days, worked by all workers. To compute the hourly earnings he divided the average daily earnings by the number of hours worked per day per worker. The departments chosen were carding, spinning, dressing, and weaving. These four were selected on the basis of the homogeneity which "could be retained without sacrificing important functions in the total manufacture of the companies' products." Robert G. Layer, Earnings of Cotton Mill Operatives, 1825-1914 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), p. 3.

¹¹ See Appendix II.

¹² We should keep in mind that the wage cut of 5 per cent which was announced in October, 1836, and which resulted in the factory girls' militant turnout, does not appear in Layer's figures (see Appendix II) as wages as such were not reduced, but rather operatives were forced to accept a larger boarding house cost which came out of their total wages.

the six month period ending in August, 1840, the average hourly rate declined -- as in 1834 -- sharply falling to \$.045. There was a slight recovery in February of 1842, to \$.048. This recovery was maintained throughout 1842, and in February of 1843, the average remained at the \$.048 level. After February, 1843, wages again declined sharply, reaching a low point of \$.043 for the six month period ending in August, 1843. From August of 1843, to August of 1844, there was a slight recovery to \$.045 but it should be noted that with the exception of August, 1843, this figure of \$.045 represents the lowest hourly rate recorded during the entire period, 1834 to 1848. After August of 1844, hourly rates began to increase slightly from \$.045 in the period ending in August, 1844, to \$.046 in August, 1845, to \$.047 in August, 1846. After 1846, wages continued to increase and in February, 1848, for the first time the April, 1834 high of \$.052 is surpassed.¹³

Using Robert Layer's index of real annual earnings¹⁴ we can see that the sharp decline in wages after 1834, was reflected in an even more drastic decline in real wages. From 1834 to 1837, real wages declined from 107.9 to 77.0 (1844-1846 = base 100). After 1837, however, real wages began to recover despite the continued drop of actual earnings. By 1845, real wages had risen to 102.0 but in 1846, the sharp rise in the cost of living resulted in the first decline of real wages since 1836.¹⁵

¹³Layer, Earnings of Cotton Mill Operatives, pp. 24-25. The February, 1848, figure is \$.054.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 46. Layer calculates his index by converting his own figures of actual money earnings into an index of actual earnings. He then uses the cost of living index compiled by Alvin Hansen in his article, "Factors Affecting the Trend of Real Earnings," American Economic Review, XV (1925), 32, to calculate real annual earnings. See Appendix II.

¹⁵Real wages fell to 95.3.

This decline was of short duration and in 1847, real wages again began to recover and by 1848, real wages were only slightly below the 1834 level.¹⁶

From these statistics it appears that while the secular trend for actual wages was slowly but steadily downward, the secular trend for real wages was progressively upward after 1837. Indeed, according to Layer's figures, real annual earnings rose by over 20 per cent from 1837 to 1845. It is possible that the mill girls recognized that these trends were to their advantage and were, therefore, content to mind their looms and spindles in silence. However, if we look to another trend investigated by Layer -- that of output per worker from 1834 to 1845 -- some of the causes for the mill girls' sudden mid-1840s militancy will be uncovered.

During the period from 1834 to 1845, it is astounding to discover that the output per worker nearly doubled.¹⁷ The period is marked by almost continuous and even increase in output from 64.9 in December of 1833 to 103.9 in November of 1844. The only exception is the decline recorded between October, 1835 (79.9), and February, 1837 (68.7). The period from August of 1838, to April of 1842, is marked by relative stability; the output per worker fluctuated between a high of 82.7 in August, 1839, and a low of 78.5 in August, 1840. After 1842, however, the output per worker increased markedly from 79.5 in February of 1842, to 103.9 in November of 1844. The first four months of 1845 were marked by

¹⁶ Figures are 107.9 for 1834, and 107.8 for 1848.

¹⁷ See Appendix II.

¹⁸ Layer, Earnings of Cotton Mill Operatives, pp. 24-25. After 1847, output increased, finally surpassing the November, 1844, high point in May, 1849 (106.8).

a decline in output per worker to 99.2. But by November of 1845 output rose to 103.0. From November of 1845, to February of 1847, the trend was downward, reaching a low point of 93.4 in February, 1847.¹⁸

It should be noted in conjunction with these findings regarding output per worker, that most factory girls were paid by piece rates rather than by hourly rates. Therefore, decreases in piece rates when coupled with the increased output per worker¹⁹ may lead to the false conclusion that wage rates were relatively stable during the late 1830s and 1840s. In fact, although factory girls were taking home almost the same amount of money in the late 1830s and 1840s as in the earlier period, they were also obliged to work much harder to earn their living. In January, 1845, some of the mill girls organized themselves into the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association. Thereafter, a recurrent complaint to be found in the pages of the Voice of Industry, the association's own press, was that of the hated speed-up and corresponding wage lowering:

It is an ingenious scheme which a few capitalists and politicians have invested to blind the eyes of the people--that, because the operatives receive one eighth more pay in the aggregate for accomplishing one third more labor with the same facilities than they did a few years ago, the price of labor has advanced. The price of weaving a yard of cloth never was lower in this country than at this time. The price for tending, spinning, carding, never was lower, nor the wages of those operatives who work by the week.²⁰

Indeed, in the spring of 1846, at mill number two of the Massachusetts

¹⁸Layer, Earnings of Cotton Mill Operatives, pp. 24-25. After 1847, output increased, finally surpassing the November, 1844, high point in May 1849 (106.8).

¹⁹A large part of the increased output of mill workers in this period was due to labor intensification. However, increased output was also to some extent a function of capital intensification. Ware, Early New England Cotton Manufacture, p. 269.

²⁰Voice of Industry (Lowell), April 17, 1846, p. 2. See also March 13, 1846, p. 2, April 24, 1846, p. 2, and September 11, 1846, p. 3. See February 6, 1846, p. 2, regarding speed-up in Newburyport mills.

Corporation of Lowell, the weavers agreed among themselves to refuse to tend a fourth loom unless adequately compensated for the extra work:

...we will not work under the proposed reduction embracing a fourth loom (except to oblige each other), and receive a cent less per piece...we will not tend a fourth loom unless we receive the same pay per piece as on three, and we shall use our influence to prevent others from pursuing a course that has always had a tendency to reduce our wages.²¹

An operative who broke this resolve would find her name published in the Voice "as a traitor, and receive the scorn and reproach of her associates." As of 15 May 1846, when the action of the weavers was reported, the pledge had been "kept inviolate" by "nearly every job weaver on the corporation."²²

In a later issue of the Voice, an article entitled "Hints to Operatives," contained a warning regarding the dire effects of voluntarily accepting additional work:

Your employers will, as they ever have done, take advantage of this oversight, by and by, "wages will be reduced," and you will be obliged to work harder, and perhaps take a fourth loom (as was tried by one corporation in this city) to make the same wages that you do now with two.²³

Gloomily the author of the article predicted that the time would soon come "when those who labor in the mills will (as is the case with many now) earn barely enough to purchase the necessities of life by working hard thirteen hours a day; recollect that those who worked here before you, did less work and were better paid for it than you are, and there are others to come after you."²⁴

²¹Ibid., May 15, 1846, p. 2.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., September 11, 1846, pp. 2-3.

²⁴Ibid.

Besides increasing the work load of workers, the management of the corporations under the control of the Boston Associates, sought to increase output by offering bonuses to overseers for extra cloth produced in their respective departments. This policy, known as the premium system, was despised by the mill girls who viewed it as a means by which they were exploited in order "to fill up the gluttoned coffer of capital."²⁵ A Manchester girl, an operative in one of the Boston Associates' mills there, wrote to the Voice that:

This premium system is a curse to us; it ought not to be tolerated. I have worked under this plan and know it too well, the base treatment of the overseers, in many instances. Often girls have been so afraid of the "old man" they dare not ask to go out when sick, for they knew he would have a great deal to say. Some girls cannot get off as much cloth as others; such ones are apt to be treated unkindly and often reminded by the "old man" that "Sally and Dolly got off several cuts more the last four weeks. They come in long before the speed starts up and do their cleaning, and if you don't get off more next week, I will send you off." It is sometimes asked, "Why is it that the girls come to the gate before it is opened, if they are not willing to work so many long hours?" The premium is offered, the girls drove up, and they want to keep the "old man" good-natured if possible. I should like to see liberality and generosity from the directors extended to some subjects of misfortune crushed by their machinery.²⁶

Long work days tended to exacerbate the hardships experienced by mill girls who worked under the double tyranny of the speed-up and the bonus-minded overseer. Even the Reverend Henry Miles, who spoke and wrote quite highly of the factory system, was forced rather grudgingly to admit in his book, Lowell As It Was and Is, that the time spent at work per day in the mills -- averaged over the year -- was twelve hours and ten minutes, and that such a figure was to his way of thinking "excessive."²⁷

²⁵Ibid., January 2, 1846, p. 2.

²⁶Ibid., January 8, 1846, p. 3.

²⁷Henry A. Miles, Lowell As It Was and Is (2nd ed.; Lowell: Nathaniel L. Dayton. Merrill and Heywood, 1846), p. 102.

However, the phlegmatic Miles avoided the implications of his statement by assuring the reader that the mill girls' work was "comparatively light." But statistics regarding output per worker in the 1840s and the statements of factory girls themselves found in the Voice reveal that as the work load intensified, the long hours of labor in the mills began to weigh more and more heavily upon the operatives' shoulders.

Lack of leisure time in the busy agenda of a factory girl was a depressing reality in the 1840s. One embittered operative described a typical day in the life of a factory girl as a grinding round of almost continuous toil.²⁸

She has no time in the morning, for she is called from the table to the mill. She has no time at noon, -- thirty minutes only are allowed her to go to her meals -- eat and return to her work. How is it at night? The lamps that have been burning from 30 to 50 minutes in the morning to assist the weary operative to labor before the morning light, -- is [sic] again relighted, and she must toil on until seven and a half, or according to Boston time, within ten minutes of eight o'clock. You would not expect her to go to her boarding house and take her evening meal in less than thirty minutes and according to Lowell time, it would be eight o'clock and still later by Boston time. Now taking into the account, the duties, the operatives owe to themselves in taking care of their clothes, doing their own sewing, knitting and repairing, where do you find their "leisure hours?"²⁹

When mill girls procured employment at any of the Lowell mills, they were obliged to agree to subscribe to certain company regulations. One set of regulations which became a major issue in the 1840s related

²⁸This description presents a vivid contrast to Lucy Larcom's memories of mill life. Cf., above, p. 36, for Larcom's description of the activities pursued by mill girls in their leisure hours.

²⁹Voice of Industry (Lowell), January 16, 1846, p. 2. It was also mentioned several times in the pages of the Voice that Lowell factory clocks were in general set at least 10 minutes behind Lowell clocks. See for instance, Voice of Industry (Lowell), February 27, 1846, p. 3, for a mechanic's report relating to this clock "discrepancy."

to the company's prerogative of contract.³⁰ According to the regulations, a girl when hired agreed to work for twelve consecutive months. If she wished for any reason to terminate her employment with a company she was required to give two weeks notice. If the girl's announcement that she was leaving the employ of the company was accepted gracefully, she was given a "regular discharge."³¹ However, if for some reason -- for instance, failure to have fulfilled a twelve month contract -- the girl's work record was not in order, she was refused a regular discharge. In most cases a failure to receive a regular discharge meant that the girl's name would appear on a blacklist which was regularly circulated among the Lowell mills. The blacklist was a powerful weapon for labor control. Girls who refused to accept wage reductions or tried to foment discontent among other operatives were fired and placed on the blacklist, thus ending their careers in the mills for good.³²

One example of this use of the blacklist is cited for us in the Massachusetts Archives of 1842. In that year seventeen female operatives from the Middlesex Corporation in Lowell petitioned the Massachusetts Legislature complaining that they had been blacklisted because they had quit their jobs in protest against a 25 per cent wage reduction. According to the corporation the operatives deserved to be placed

³⁰See Factory Tracts, No. 1, pp. 5-6, for a discussion of the "tyrannous and oppressive rules" which the corporations imposed upon their operatives, especially that of the twelve month contract. See also Appendix I for examples of company regulations.

³¹It appears that this twelve month clause was interpreted liberally in the early years. However, by the 1840s the twelve month clause was enforced with much more regularity.

³²See for instance Voice of Industry (Lowell), April 17, 1846, p. 2, September 11, 1846, p. 2, and February 12, 1847, p. 3.

upon the blacklist because they had broken the twelve month contract as stated in the company regulations.³³ According to the operatives, however:

...when they gave us official notice that they were going to cut our wages down about Twenty Five per cent, we considered it a violation of the agreement which existed between us, and therefore did not feel bound by an agreement which they had a right to break; for if they could reduce our wages Twenty-five per cent, why not Fifty and still hold us to work twelve months? We therefore quit working for said Company and the consequence to us is as follows. Some of us went to work for other Companies, but these Companies soon received our names and we were immediately turned out. Some of us applied for work where hands were wanted; but were informed that they could employ none of "The turn-outs from the Middlesex," and many who laboured with us have been obliged to leave Lowell and seek their bread, they know not where on account of the persecution carried on against them by the Middlesex Company.³⁴

It was claimed that the blacklist was not exclusive to Lowell. The Voice reported in 1846 that one girl, who had been fired by an overseer in the Merrimack Corporation of Lowell because she had left her loom for a few minutes to wash her hands, was refused a regular discharge. Her name was placed on the blacklist which would circulate in Lowell mills as well as in mills as far away as Manchester and Newburyport.³⁵

At the same time that factory girls were becoming more concerned with the bread-and-butter issues of job security, hours of work, intensity of labor, and wages, work and living conditions were deteriorating. Dr. Josiah Curtis' 1849 report to the American Medical Associa-

³³See Appendix I.

³⁴Massachusetts Archives, 1842, No. 1215. See also Massachusetts House Documents, 1850, No. 153, pp. 4-6, which contains the Minority Report of a committee set up to investigate hours of labor and conditions of work in the cotton mills. In this report the blacklist is referred to as a "dangerous power" in the hands of the corporations.

³⁵Voice of Industry (Lowell), September 11, 1846, p. 2.

tion on the public hygiene of Massachusetts citizens presents some revealing facts regarding the Lowell mill girls. Dr. Curtis found that the mill girls were "as healthy, perhaps, as the aggregate of all other classes."³⁶ However, he also found that "There is not a State's prison, or house of correction, in New England, where the hours of labor are so long, the hours for meals so short, or the ventilation so much neglected, as in all the cotton-mills with which I am acquainted."³⁷ According to Dr. Curtis, poor ventilation in factories and boarding houses was the main cause of disease, especially typhoid fever, among factory girls. He quoted from a paper written by Dr. Gilman Kimball of the Lowell Hospital,³⁸ which revealed that out of a total of 1627 patients, all operatives, who had been treated in the hospital from its opening in May, 1840, until May, 1849, 827 had had typhoid fever. It was Dr. Kimball's opinion that the operatives had suffered from typhoid to a greater degree than the population at large, because of poor ventilation in the factories. As to why deaths were so infrequent -- one death in 20.16 or 4.96 per cent mortality rate -- the Lowell physician believed that the operatives "are taken from a class of individuals better able to withstand disease than those who ordinarily find their way into a similar city institution."³⁹

³⁶Josiah Curtis, "Public Hygiene of Massachusetts but more particularly of the Cities of Boston and Lowell," Transactions of the American Medical Association, II (1849), 519.

³⁷Ibid., p. 518. Sarah Bagley reported to the Voice in 1846 that in the New Hampshire state prison, prisoners were only required to work ten hours per day. In winter, work terminated when darkness fell. Voice of Industry (Lowell), September 11, 1846, p. 3.

³⁸This hospital was subsidized by the corporations and built to serve the operatives' needs.

³⁹Quoted in Curtis, "Public Hygiene of Massachusetts," p. 529.

Boarding houses were overcrowded according to Dr. Curtis and also lacked proper ventilation:

From four to six, and sometimes even eight, are confined during the night in a single room of moderate dimensions...The condition of these sleeping apartments probably would not be endured so passively, did not their occupants first become habituated to unwholesome air in the mills.⁴⁰

Factory girls themselves were vociferous in their denunciation of overcrowding in the boarding houses.⁴¹ Many also complained bitterly of the lack of bathing facilities:

'Tis quite common for us to write on the cover of a band box, and sit upon a trunk, as tables or chairs in our sleeping rooms are all out of the question; because there is no room for such articles; as four or six, occupy every room, and of course trunks and band-boxes constitute furniture for the rooms we occupy...A thing called a light-stand a little more than a foot square, is our table for the use of six. Washstands are uncommon articles -- it has never been my lot to enjoy their use, except at my own expense.⁴²

The overcrowding and poor ventilation in dormitories, when combined with the stifling work conditions in the factories, were not, according to outspoken operatives, conducive to good health.⁴³ When in 1845, six factory girls appeared before a Massachusetts legislative hearing investigating the conditions and hours of factory work, the

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 518. The rooms measured fourteen by sixteen feet. Voice of Industry (Lowell), November 14, 1845, p. 3.

⁴¹Factory Tracts, p. 5. Voice of Industry (Lowell), November 14, 1845, p. 3, May 8, 1846, p. 2.

⁴²Voice of Industry (Lowell), March 26, 1847, p. 2.

⁴³The Awl, the workingman's newspaper of Lynn, Massachusetts, concurred: "Our workshops and sleeping chambers should be better ventilated. Look at Lowell, for instance, six or eight crowded into a single garret bed-room." The Awl (Lynn), March 8, 1845, p. 3.

testimonies stressed the poor health of operatives.⁴⁴ They ascribed poor health to long hours, too short a period for meals, and lack of proper ventilation in the factories. Eliza Hemingway testified that in the weaving room where she worked there were 293 small lamps and 61 large lamps lighted in the evenings. About 130 women, 11 men and 12 children between the ages of 11 and 14, worked together in the same room. She also stated that at least six operatives were absent from work every day because of sickness. Sometimes the figure was close to thirty. Sarah Bagley, who had been an operative for eight and one-half years, testified that her health began to fail after her third year of work in the mills. She had upon occasion been forced to return to her home in New Hampshire during the summer to regain her strength. Judith Payne, who had also worked eight and one-half years in the Lowell mills, had, in the past seven years, lost about one year from ill health.⁴⁵

Evidently Bagley was not the only operative who sought the fresh air of the countryside to recuperate from the noxious atmosphere of the factory. Even Lucy Larcom, author of the "epic" poem, An Idyl of Work,⁴⁶ was forced to admit that a year's sojourn by the seaside with her sister's family restored her health "just when the close air

⁴⁴Only one operative, Elizabeth Rowe, testified that the health of factory girls was generally good. She had worked but sixteen months in the mills while the other operatives had each worked more than two years. Eliza Hemingway had been an operative for almost three years, Celia Phillips for four years, Olive Clark, five years, and Sarah Bagley and Judith Payne, each eight and one-half years. Massachusetts House Documents, 1845, No. 50, pp. 2-6.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Lucy Larcom, An Idyl of Work (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1970).

and long day's work were beginning to tell upon my health."⁴⁷ The Reverend Miles and Harriet Robinson, a mill girl, reported in their books that many factory girls escaped to the country for part of each year,⁴⁸ while the Voice commented that this phenomena was almost universal among mill girls.⁴⁹ It would appear that such "rest" periods were tolerated by the corporations despite their twelve month contract regulations.

In light of the above information it appears quite significant that in 1849 an officer of the Norfolk County Health Insurance Company of Boston considered factory operatives a bad risk. In a letter to one of the agents of this company the officer writes:

Sir, -- We have determined not to take any more applications, especially from the factories. Such places have been the graves of other companies, and we mean to avoid them. From what few policies we have there, we are constantly receiving claims. Doubtless there may be some good subjects there, but, from past experience, it would seem there was not more than a grain of wheat to a bushel of chaff, -- we can't distinguish them.⁵⁰

The picture becomes more depressing when we realize that by the 1840s most factory girls were no longer the proud daughters of respected middle class farmers. Instead, the mills were filled with "poverty's daughters, whose fathers do not possess one foot of land, but work day by day for the bread that feeds their families." Moreover, "many of the operatives of Lowell have no fathers or homes, and many are foreigners who are free to work there according to the mandates of

⁴⁷Lucy Larcom, A New England Girlhood (New York: Corinth Books, 1961), p. 188.

⁴⁸Miles, Lowell, p. 103, and Robinson, Loom and Spindle, p. 73.

⁴⁹Voice of Industry (Fitchburg), September 4, 1845, p. 3.

⁵⁰Massachusetts House Documents, No. 153, p. 18.

heartless power, or go to the poor house, beg, or do worse."⁵¹

It would appear that the renowned virtues of the factory girls were also less in prominence among the operatives of 1845. According to Sarah Bagley:

There are many female operatives here, who have been educated by their parents or under their direction who are now orphans, and are an ornament to the society in which they live. There are a much larger class, who are the children of intemperate parents, who have had no advantages, and who have had little means of improvement. Many of them have been put out to service as soon as they were old enough to scrub or take care of children, and have had no kind sympathy to warm and expand the affections or make them kind and courteous to others.⁵²

Bagley also informs us that operatives "are rapidly verging on infidelity" but hastens to excuse the operatives' lack of religiosity by renouncing the churches which allow the "chief seats" to be taken by men who control the corporations -- the very men who "grind" the operatives into the "dust and have no sympathy with them, and look upon them only as inanimate machines, made to subserve their interests."⁵³ We are not surprised when, in a later issue of the Voice, Bagley informs us that factory girls are never included in the social activities of the "aristocracy of the city."⁵⁴

The following description of the method used to recruit operatives in the mid 1840s as quoted by the Voice from the Cabotville Chronicle helps to underscore the demise of the Lowell "idyl."

⁵¹Voice of Industry (Fitchburg), July 3, 1845, p. 3. Miles' figures for 1845 indicate that slightly less than 10 per cent of the mill workers were Irish. Miles, Lowell, p. 193. By 1840 nearly half of the mill operatives would be Irish. Josephson, Golden Threads, p. 288.

⁵²Voice of Industry (Lowell), May 1, 1846, p. 2.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid., May 8, 1846, p. 2.

Observing a singular looking "long, low, black," wagon passing along the street, we made enquiries respecting it, and were informed that it was what we term "a slaver." She makes regular trips to the north of the state, cruising around in Vermont and New Hampshire, with a "commander" whose heart must be as black as his craft, who is paid a dollar a head, for all he brings to the market, and more in proportion to the distance -- If they bring them from such a distance that they cannot easily get back. This is done by "hoisting false colors," and representing to the girls, that they can tend more machinery than is possible, and that the work is so very neat, and the wages such, that they can dress in silks, and spend half their time in reading. Now is this true? Let those girls who have been thus deceived, answer.⁵⁵

The "deceived" factory girls did indeed answer this question when the most militant of them founded the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association in January, 1845.

⁵⁵Ibid., January 2, 1846, p. 4.

CHAPTER IV

AN IDYL CONFRONTED: THE FACTORY GIRLS ORGANIZE

In the 1830s and 1840s, working and living conditions for mill workers deteriorated. As the factory system changed and work intensified, middle class farm girls began to leave the mills while less fortunate daughters of poverty began to arrive in Lowell in increasing numbers to mind the looms and spindles. But some factory girls in the mid-1840s -- whether "well-born" or "poverty's daughters" -- chose to confront the problems of exploitation rather than to leave the mills quietly or accept their degraded position passively.

The Lowell factory girls, in common with most other men and women workers in this period, lacked a tradition of labor organization. In the spring of 1844, the Fall River Mechanics' Association issued a call to arms in the form of a circular urging the creation of an organization to aid in the "elevation of the Working Classes" upon the premise that the "prevailing system of labor...is at war with the real interest of man's physical, intellectual, social, moral and religious being."¹ This association of workingmen soon discovered that it was necessary to extend special invitations to women workers to attend the

¹"Circular of the Fall River Mechanics," Quoted in J. R. Commons, *et al.*, A Documentary History of American Industrial Society, Vol. VIII: Labor Movement, 1840-1860 (New York: Russell and Russell, 1958), pp. 91, 86.

forthcoming October organizing convention.² A speaker, mechanic S. C. Hewitt, had been assigned by the Fall River Association to tour working class communities in the summer and fall of 1844 to drum up support for a workers' organization. He assiduously sought out women, urging them to organize and to send representatives to the October convention.

Although no women's organizations were represented at the first organizing meeting, Hewitt's appeal must have struck a responsive cord for in January, 1845, fifteen mill girls organized themselves into the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association. Sarah G. Bagley was elected president and Huldah J. Stone became secretary. By March, at the second organizing convention of workingmen, the mill girls' association was reported to have 304 members.³ At this gathering a constitution was adopted which brought the New England Workingmen's Association into being. Article Nine of this constitution specifically provided for the admission of female labor groups on terms of equality: "Female Labor Reform Associations shall be entitled to all the rights, privileges and obligations secured by this constitution."⁴

The newly formed New England Workingmen's Association held its first formal meeting in May of 1845, in Boston. The turnout was disappointing; only thirty delegates attended, many of whom were middle class reformers of the Fourierist (Associationist) or Land Reform vari-

²Philip Foner, History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Vol. I: From Colonial Times to the Founding of the American Federation of Labor (New York: International Publishers, 1947), p. 204.

³Norman Ware, The Industrial Worker, 1840-1860 (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1959), p. 207.

⁴Charles E. Persons, "The Early History of Factory Legislation in Massachusetts," in Labor Laws and their Enforcement, ed. by Susan M. Kingsbury (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1911), pp. 35-36.

ety.⁵ Although it was not yet clear which direction the infant organization would take, there were certain hints that a strictly working class organization was not in the offing. Membership was defined broadly as open to anyone who was "interested in the elevation of the Producing Classes, and Industrial Reform, and the extinction of Slavery and Servitude in all their forms."⁶ Resolutions which were passed were concerned primarily with Association and Land Reform objectives. The major addresses were delivered by Horace Greeley, Albert Brisbane, and L. W. Ryckman, all of whom spoke of the merits of societal organization along Associationist lines. Of the "distinguished" speakers, only the aging Robert Owen spoke of practical and immediate solutions to worker problems by strongly urging a campaign for a shorter work day. Two key offices, that of president and executive committee chairman, went to Associationists, L. W. Ryckman and George Ripley respectively, both of Brook Farm.⁷

Although the reformers seemed to be firmly in the saddle at the May meeting, at least one representative of the working class was not completely satisfied with this state of affairs. William Young, a mechanic and editor of the Voice of Industry, a weekly journal located in Fitchburg and devoted to the "speedy amelioration of the laboring

⁵The attendance of well-known reformers was indeed overwhelming. They included Charles A. Dana, L. W. Ryckman, and George Ripley, of Brook Farm; Horace Greeley and Albert Brisbane of New York; A. J. Wright, Wendell Phillips, William Lloyd Garrison, W. H. Channing, and Marcus Morton, of Boston; Frederick Robinson, of Charlestown; John A. Collins, of the Skaneateles community, New York; and Robert Owen. See Ware, Industrial Worker, p. 209.

⁶Voice of Industry (Fitchburg), June 12, 1845, p. 2.

⁷See ibid., for a summary of the proceedings.

classes,"⁸ issued a warning to reformers in the June 12th issue of the Voice:

There are many belonging to this Association, who are willing to adopt individually the measures proposed by our Fourier friends, but are unwilling to adopt them as a N. England Association. The reason is very obvious -- we should then cut ourselves loose from many good and honest workingmen, who are willing to go with us as fast as they can go and see.⁹

It is apparent, however, that despite Young's reservations at least one group of workers was delighted with the prospect of an organizational structure designed to better the condition of workers. Representatives of the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association were in enthusiastic attendance at the May meeting. Besides presenting a banner to the Workingmen's Association which read "Union for Power -- Power to Bless Humanity," the Association's president, Sarah Bagley, delivered a ringing speech which made it clear that factory girls like herself were determined to organize themselves for their own betterment irrespective of society's social sanctions against women's participation in such associations:

For the last half a century, it has been deemed a violation of woman's sphere to appear before the public as a speaker; but when our rights are trampled upon and we appeal in vain to legislators, what shall we do but appeal to the people? Shall not our voice be heard, and our rights acknowledged here; shall it be said again to the daughters of New England, that they have no political rights and are not subject to legislative action? It is for the workingmen of this country to answer these questions -- what shall we expect at your hands in future?¹⁰

As if reminded by her last sentence that her organization's fate was indeed in the hands of these workingmen she was so boldly challenging,

⁸Ibid., May 29, 1845, p. 2.

⁹Ibid., June 12, 1845, p. 3. Publication of the Voice had begun only three weeks previous to this issue.

¹⁰Ibid., June 5, 1845, p. 2.

Bagley added a piece of humble pie: "We do not expect to enter the field as soldiers in this great warfare; but we would like the heroines of the Revolution, be permitted to furnish the soldiers with a blanket or replenish their knapsacks from our pantries."¹¹

Bagley mentioned at this meeting that the LFLRA had between 400 and 500 members and added that the Association was succeeding in engaging the community's interest in reform. It is also noteworthy that a newly formed women's organization, the Fall River Ladies' Mechanic Association, was in attendance at the convention. That the New England Workingmen's Association was sincere in its promise to include women members on an equal basis with men is revealed by the election of Sarah Bagley and Ruby Hatch of Fall River to its executive committee.¹²

Despite an ebullient and harmonious July 4th celebration at Woburn which was attended by some 200 delegates, mainly from Lowell, Boston, and Lynn,¹³ it was becoming increasingly apparent that before the Workingmen's Association could take on a definite program its internal problems had to be solved. The September meeting in Fall River helped to clarify the issues. While the Brook Farm contingent, led by L. W. Ryckman and Charles Dana, pushed for the passage of a resolution which stated that the ballot box "is the only practical and effectual measure which the workingmen can at present adopt for the defence of their rights,"¹⁴ rank-and-file workers pressed for passage of resolutions

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., June 12, 1845, p. 2.

¹³Ibid., July 10, 1845, p. 2.

¹⁴Ibid., September 18, 1845, p. 2.

advocating consumer cooperatives, reduction of hours, and wage increases. These practical issues had low priority in the minds of the reformers who were seeking "the reorganization of society." Compromise did not appear attractive or possible from either the worker or reformer perspective. A deadlock resulted and the controversial resolutions were held over until the Lowell meeting in October.¹⁵

When the October meeting convened in Lowell the reformers were not present. They had decided that it was impossible to bring workers over to their line of reasoning. Instead these enterprising reformers were by October busily engaged in organizing Industrial Congresses to forward the land reform objectives of George Henry Evans or in forming the American Union of Associationists to proselytize the Fourieristic schemes of Albert Brisbane.

The resolutions which were passed at the New England Workingmen's Convention at the October meeting are indicative of the membership's swing away from the influence of the reformers. Stating unequivocally that "all means of Reform heretofore offered by the friends of Social Reform, have failed to unite the producing classes, much more attract their attention," the convention went on to pass resolutions calling for consumer cooperatives, reduction of hours of work, and wage increases. The ballot was resolved to be "one of the practical and effectual measure(s) which the Workingman can at present adopt for the defence of their [sic] rights." The Voice was chosen as the official organ of the Workingmen's Association "to be owned and supported by the New England Association."¹⁶ Its press was moved from Fitchburg to

¹⁵Ibid., September 25, 1845, p. 2.

¹⁶Voice of Industry (Lowell), November 7, 1845, p. 3.

Lowell. William Young remained as chief editor while Sarah Bagley and Joel Hatch joined Young to form the publishing committee. However, although the New England Workingmen's Association had been spared the fate of non-working class leadership for the next year, the influence of Associationist doctrines, as we shall see later, remained strong. As 1846 progressed, the ideas of the middle class reformers continued to plague and to some extent to cripple the workers' cause.

While the immediate fate of the workingmen's organization was being decided in the May, September, and October conventions of 1845, the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association was preparing itself for battle. Apparently unconcerned with the controversy between reformers and workers within the Workingmen's Association, the women involved in the LFLRA took what they felt they needed from each group. Thus we see clearly stamped upon their organization the influence of reform ideology and strategy as well as of distinctly working class attitudes and tactics. Though the middle class reformer approach would eventually triumph towards the end of 1846, in the intervening time span the LFLRA was rather successful in combining the best of both points-of-view in order to advance their own objectives and goals.

As stated in the preamble of the constitution of the LFLRA, the purpose of the association was to "throw off the shackles which are binding us in ignorance and servitude and which prevent us from rising to that scale of being for which God designed us." Accepting the reformers' attitude that the laborer was "a slave to a false and debasing state of society," the preamble indicated that to change this unpleasant state of affairs adequate leisure time was required to enable laborers to cultivate their minds. Once adequately educated, laborers would

rejoin society as whole human beings who commanded respect from all members of society. Though Article Nine of the constitution stated that the LFLRA disapproved of all "hostile measures" such as strikes and turnouts, if all "pacific measures" proved abortive it would be the duty of every member "to assert and maintain that Independence which our brave ancestors bequeathed us, and sealed with their blood."¹⁷

The Lowell Association was fortunate enough to possess leaders of outstanding ability. Sarah Bagley, the president in both 1845 and 1846, who described herself as "a common-schooled New England factory operative,"¹⁸ had worked in the mills a total of eight and one-half years. She was an able speaker with a magnetic personality.¹⁹ As we shall see, her special skills as editor and speaker won many recruits to the mill girls' crusade for the ten hour day. Huldah J. Stone, the secretary of the LFLRA in 1845 and 1846, appears to have been the organizational genius of the association. Besides serving as secretary to the mill girls' organization, Stone held many important committee posts in the Workingmen's Association and was repeatedly chosen as its secretary. She became correspondent to the Female Department of the Voice and provided many articles for this journal. Both the tireless Sarah Bagley and the equally indefatigable Huldah Stone attended the

¹⁷ Ibid., February 27, 1846, p. 2.

¹⁸ Ibid., May 15, 1846, p. 2.

¹⁹ In reporting the July, 1845, convention of the Workingmen's Association, the Voice correspondent had been struck by Bagley's attractive personality. He described her as "a lady of superior talents and accomplishments and added that Bagley's "refined and delicate feelings gave a thrilling power to her language and spell-bound this large auditory." Voice of Industry (Fitchburg), July 10, 1845, p. 2.

Industrial Congresses as delegates of the LFLRA. They also became enthusiastic members of the American Union of Associationists in 1846.

As the program of the LFLRA developed throughout 1845, it became in effect a four-pronged offensive: propaganda, political agitation, organizational work among mill girls in neighboring towns, and use of hard-nosed trade union tactics against employers. In a militant and fighting spirit, the association published its first Factory Tract in October, 1845, which indicated its determination to resist the erosion of the factory girl's position in New England society:

in the strength of our united influence we will soon show these drivelling cotton lords, this mushroom aristocracy of New England, who so arrogantly aspire to lord it over God's heritage, that our rights cannot be trampled upon with impunity; that we will no longer submit to that arbitrary power which has for the last ten years been so abundantly exercised over us.²⁰

The Factory Tract was not the only method of propaganda utilized by the determined association. The Voice gladly opened up a Female Department as a regular feature of its weekly format in January of 1846. A committee was set up in August of 1845 to expose the untruths of pro-corporation propaganda, and an Industrial Reform Lyceum was established in Lowell by the LFLRA in early 1846 in order to facilitate the spread of general reform information. Fairs and social gatherings as well as improvement circles were also organized with the aim of influencing uncommitted factory workers as well as the community at large.

The Female Department of the Voice -- its motto being "As is Woman, so is the Race" -- was a valuable asset for the LFLRA. In this section the same themes were reiterated week after week: poor working

²⁰Factory Tracts, No. 1, p. 7.

conditions; the need for the ten hour day; the importance of organized resistance against the corporations; vaguely conceived plans for a better society. Another theme was that of women's rights, specifically the idea that women, as the standard bearers of the morality of society,²¹ were dutybound to join the reform movement of the time. Sarah Bagley's introductory remarks on the intended scope and purpose of the Female Department are enlightening:

Our department devoted to woman's thoughts will also defend women's rights, and while it contends for physical improvement, it will not forget that she is a social, moral and religious being. It will not be neutral, because it is female, but will claim to be heard on all subjects that effect her intellectual, social or religious condition. It will make an effort to soften down the prejudices that exist against her as a reformer, and show those who read candidly, that she has a great duty to perform to herself and her race.²²

This comment is a far cry from Bagley's address to the Workingmen's Association in May of 1845, which stressed the girls' intention to remain humble servants in any movement to improve their position.

Nevertheless, the themes of women's rights and the moral guardianship theory were not the main concerns of the LFLRA though they did appear regularly in its writings. Rather, the main thrust of the propaganda work was towards revealing the poor work and living conditions in the factories and urging support for what came to be the labor movement's main objective in 1846 -- the ten hour work day.

²¹See in connection with the moral guardianship theory, Glenda Riley, "From Chattel to Challenger: The Changing Image of the American Woman, 1828-1848 (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1967). Riley concentrates on the role which Sarah Hale had, as editor of Godey's Lady's Book, in the propagation of the moral guardianship theory among middle class women. Godey's was popular among members of the LFLRA and was advertized regularly in the Voice. The Female Department referred to Godey's as an "unrivalled" magazine in the publishing world. Voice of Industry (Lowell), May 29, 1846, p. 2.

²²Voice of Industry (Lowell), January 9, 1846, p. 2.

In the very first months of 1845 the LFLRA had pledged its support of the ten hour day petition campaign which had emerged spontaneously in 1842 among various groups of workers throughout New England.²³ Petitions had flowed into state legislatures from 1842 onwards which requested state governments to pass the necessary legislation to limit hours of work in factories to ten per day. However, it was not until 1845, when the LFLRA took the initiative in the campaign, that any action was taken by a state legislature to investigate the reasons behind the workers' demand for a shorter work day.

In response to petitions which could no longer be ignored, the Massachusetts legislature decided in early 1845 to conduct an investigation of factory conditions within its state. A committee was appointed by the House which was chaired by William Schouler, editor and proprietor of the pro-corporation, Whig newspaper, the Lowell Courier, and part-owner of the Lowell Offering.²⁴ The committee asked representatives for the petitioners to appear before them, specifically requesting that women form the major part of the workers' group. In the words of Schouler: "I would inform you that as the greater part of the petitioners are females, it will be necessary for them to make the defence, or we shall be under the necessity of laying it aside."²⁵ Schouler was

²³The impetus for this campaign came largely from President Van Buren's executive order of 1840 which decreed that government employees would not be required to work more than ten hours per day.

²⁴Schouler made the relationship between the Courier and the Offering explicit when, in 1842, he announced that, while the Offering was written and edited by operatives, the printing and publishing tasks were the responsibility of his paper. Lowell Courier, August 20, 1842, p. 2.

²⁵Voice of Industry (Lowell), September 18, 1846, p. 3.

perhaps surprised when Sarah Bagley, as spokesman for the petitioners, replied that a group of women would be happy to appear before a House committee hearing. Six women and three men testified before the Schouler committee.

The six women represented the petitioners well. Only one of the women appeared to be less than enthusiastic about ten hour legislation. Sarah Bagley and the other four women were insistent about the poor work conditions in the factory and provided relevant data to support their position that twelve to thirteen hour work days were detrimental to health.²⁶ After listening to the testimonies of the mill workers, the committee conducted an investigation of Lowell mills. However, with William Schouler as chairman, the outcome of the investigation was never really in doubt.

The committee decided against legislation for the ten hour day although it admitted that a corporation could be regulated by the legislature which had, after all, incorporated it. While the committee felt that conditions of work were indeed less than perfect, it pointed out that if a ten hour law were enacted for Massachusetts factories, cotton mills in other northern states, which were not similarly restricted, would be at a competitive advantage. It was felt that ten hour legislation would, in effect, "close the gate of every mill in the State."²⁷ The members of the House committee were, moreover, firmly committed to the doctrine of free contract and asserted that "Labor is intelligent

²⁶Cf., above, pp. 52-53, for a description of work conditions in the factories as reported by these women before the House investigation committee.

²⁷Massachusetts House Documents, 1845, No. 50, p. 15.

enough to make its own bargains, and look out for its own interests without any interference from us." As proof of this statement, the committee pointed to "the intelligent and virtuous men and women who appeared in support of this petition, before the Committee." The smug committee even went on to state that "labor is on an equality with capital, and indeed controls it."²⁸

Sarah Bagley insisted that the printed report of the investigating committee had misconstrued the meaning of the workers' testimonies²⁹ and held William Schouler largely responsible for the negative decision regarding ten hour legislation reached by the committee.³⁰ She soon convinced the LFLRA that in order to advance the cause of the ten hour movement, Schouler had to be publicly exposed as a tool of the textile corporations. In April, only a few weeks after the publication of the legislative committee's report, the LFLRA announced the following resolution which was printed in the Voice several months later:

²⁸ Ibid., p. 16.

²⁹ Voice of Industry (Lowell), January 9, 1846, pp. 2-3.

³⁰ Schouler strongly supported the decision of the House committee in his paper. See Lowell Daily Courier, October 8, 1845, p. 2. (The Lowell Courier, a triweekly publication, became a daily paper as of July 1, 1845.) In Schouler's opinion, Miles' estimate that operatives worked, on an average, twelve hours and ten minutes per day, was exaggerated.

"by keeping engaged a number of spare hands, by occasional permissions of absence, and by an allowed exchange of work among the girls, the average number of hours in which they are actually employed is not more than ten and a half. They are out to go shopping, to repair their clothes, to take care of themselves in any occasional illness, to see friends visiting the city, to call on sick friends here; nor are reasonable requests of this kind refused. Many of these girls, moreover, in the course of each year, take a vacation of a few weeks, to return to their homes."

Resolved, That the Female Labor Reform Association deeply deplore the lack of independence, honesty, and humanity in the committee to whom were referred sundry petitions relative to the hours of labor -- especially in the chairman of that committee; and as he is merely a corporation machine, or tool, we will use our best endeavors and influence to keep him in the "city of spindles," where he belongs, and not trouble Boston folks with him.³¹

In October the Voice was happy to announce that Schouler had been defeated at the polls. According to one historian, his defeat was due in no small measure to the LFLRA's efforts to expose his activities as a corporation spokesman.³²

Our neighbor, Schouler, editor of the corporation organ of this city, received a very polite invitation by the voters of Lowell, to stay at home this winter, or, at least, not to go to Boston on their expense...we feel a degree of satisfaction in the defeat of a man who has proved so false to the interests of the workingmen and women of Lowell. The course pursued [sic] by Mr. Schouler in the last Legislature was of the most vacillating character, and enough to destroy the confidence of any community.³³

Schouler was indeed enemy number one in the eyes of the LFLRA. For not only was he a consistent champion of the corporations in the legislature, he was also part-owner of the widely-heralded Lowell Offering. The Offering was a magazine written exclusively by factory girls which began publication in 1840. Most of its pages were filled with the cloying sentimental prose and poetry which was fashionable fare for women writers and readers of this period. Though articles would appear from time to time in its pages which were mildly critical

³¹Voice of Industry (Lowell), January 9, 1846, p. 3.

³²See Hannah Josephson, The Golden Threads. New England's Mill Girls and Magnates (New York: Russell and Russell, 1967), pp. 261-62. It is interesting to note that Schouler was reelected to the legislature in 1847 after the demise of the LFLRA. He subsequently became editor of the Boston Daily Atlas, "the plum of Whig journalism." Page 262.

³³Voice of Industry (Lowell), November 14, 1845, p. 2.

of working conditions in the mills, the general tenor of the Offering was that of praise for an industrial system which supposedly created an environment conducive to cultural, intellectual, and social pleasures. In its early years, Sarah Bagley had written for the Offering but by 1845 the conservative editorial staff was refusing to publish articles prepared by malcontents like Bagley.³⁴ It did not take Bagley long to decide that the pro-corporation Offering had to be discredited if the LFLRA hoped to convince the public of the rightness of its ten hour day cause.

At the Woburn 4th of July meeting of the Workingmen's Association in 1845, Sarah Bagley kicked off an offensive against the Lowell Offering when she bluntly accused it of being a tool of the corporations.³⁵ Harriet Farley,³⁶ the chief editor of the Offering, responded by rebutting Bagley's accusation in an article printed in Schouler's newspaper, the Lowell Courier. A pitched verbal battle resulted which raged on through the pages of the Voice and the Courier and at one point a meeting was even arranged between Farley and Bagley.³⁷ The battle ceased abruptly, however, when in October -- the same fateful month in which Schouler was defeated at the polls -- the Offering discontinued

³⁴ Factory Tracts, No. 1, pp. 5-7.

³⁵ Voice of Industry (Fitchburg), July 10, 1845, p. 2.

³⁶ Farley had fairly close contacts with at least one of the Boston Associates. According to one historian, Farley received a "substantial sum of money for her brother" from Amos Lawrence, one of the textile magnates, in September of 1845. Lawrence was "expressing gratitude for her [Farley's] loyalty without laying himself open to the charge of tampering with the press. That it was so designed cannot be doubted, for if he had merely intended to help her brother he could easily have sent him the money directly, instead of using Harriet as an intermediary." Josephson, Golden Threads, p. 202.

³⁷ Voice of Industry (Fitchburg), September 25, 1845, pp. 2-3.

publication. Farley admitted that the magazine had folded because "the Lowell girls do not support it, we have ever thought more discredit to them than to us."³⁸ Out of a total circulation of fifty-two, only twelve mill girls in Lowell subscribed to the Offering in its last days.³⁹

With Schouler's influence muffled⁴⁰ (at least in the legislature) and its victory over the Offering complete, the LFLRA was free to devote most of its time to the ten hour campaign. It began in December to send out form petitions to neighboring towns "asking the

³⁸Ibid., p. 3.

³⁹Ibid. Although Lowell mill girls were never avid supporters of the Offering (Schouler had had to take over the responsibility for printing and publication in 1842 to prevent it from folding), the international prestige which it possessed hurt the LFLRA's cause. The refusal of the Offering's editorial staff to publish articles which were more than mildly critical of conditions in the factories meant that the LFLRA had little chance of influencing pacesetters of public opinion such as William Ellery Channing, John Greenleaf Whittier, Horace Greeley, Maria Chapman, and Emma Willard (all of whom publicly praised the Offering) to their point-of-view. See Josephson, Golden Threads, p. 188. The fact that foreign notables such as Charles Dickens and Harriet Martineau praised the Offering also helped to implant within the mind and conscience of America the conviction that the picture which the pages of the Offering painted of Lowell and factory life represented reality. The LFLRA felt, therefore, that its attempt to influence public opinion could not be successful until the Offering's monopoly of information regarding conditions in Lowell had been broken.

⁴⁰The LFLRA had not heard the last of Schouler. Unable to find an issue upon which to discredit Bagley's character, Schouler turned to John Cluer, a British weaver who was involved in the Workingmen's Association and who accompanied Bagley on speaking tours to other factory towns. Cluer had a past record of intemperance and bigamy which Schouler exploited. The Voice defended Cluer and a group of Lowell mechanics and workingmen even hired one of their number, Joel Hatch, to investigate Cluer's past in hopes of clearing his name. See Voice of Industry (Lowell), January 23, 1846, p. 2, January 30, 1846, p. 2, February 20, 1846, p. 2, and February 27, 1846, p. 2. However, it appears that Schouler's smear campaign was successful in that it cast some doubt over the movement's leadership. His defeat at the polls in 1845 was, therefore, revenged in 1846.

Legislature to prohibit incorporated companies from employing one set of hands more than ten hours per day."⁴¹ In April, 1846, the Voice announced that almost 5,000 Lowell signatures and 10,000 signatures from other towns had been sent to the legislature in the form of petitions requesting the ten hour day.⁴² However, despite Schouler's replacement as chairman with one Nathaniel Bordon of Fall River, the verdict of the 1846 committee -- this time from the Senate -- was negative. Especially irksome was the fact that Bordon's report had utilized the findings of the Schouler committee in deciding that ten hour legislation was not necessary.⁴³

This second defeat was not enough to convince the LFLRA that it was time to throw in the towel. At the April meeting of the Workingmen's Association in Lowell, the women joined with the rest of the delegates in unanimously adopting veteran labor leader Seth Luther's resolution calling for a determined ten hour campaign:

The Committee recommend agitation by the press; by lectures and tracts on this subject, in all places where manufactories are established; also in all towns, cities and vilages [sic] in N, England where the Ten Hour system is not already established.⁴⁴

Though the Workingmen's Association strongly indorsed consumer cooperatives, it was clear that the main preoccupation of the organization at this time was the ten hour day. It was also clear that Seth Luther's description of the workers as apathetic and degraded was taken to heart by the women of the LFLRA. Indeed, already in the closing weeks of 1845,

⁴¹Ibid., December 26, 1845, p. 3.

⁴²Ibid., April 17, 1846, p. 2.

⁴³See Massachusetts Senate Documents, 1846, No. 81.

⁴⁴Voice of Industry (Lowell), April 10, 1846, p. 2.

the association had been busy proselytizing the workers' cause in Manchester, New Hampshire.

In December, Sarah Bagley travelled to Manchester at the request of women operatives who wished to form a female labor association. She presented the interested women with a constitution which was adopted, followed by the selection of officers. Sixty operatives signed up immediately while many others were reported to be eager to join at the first "favorable opportunity."⁴⁵ In a letter addressed to its sister organization a few days later, the LFLRA made it quite plain that their organizations were intended to restore lost status to the "real producers" of society. In like manner the time had also come for women to demand justice: "too long have our females been treated like as many senseless automatons in the kitchens of the purse-proud aristocrats of our Republic".⁴⁶

In January, 1846, Bagley received another invitation from factory girls -- this time in Fitchburg -- to help them form a society.⁴⁷ By May the Voice reported the existence of two more female labor reform associations, both in Nashua, New Hampshire.⁴⁸ Within the year, Dover, New Hampshire, too, boasted its own female association.⁴⁹ Each of these associations sent delegates to the Workingmen's Conventions and each contributed time and energy to spreading ten hour day propaganda.

⁴⁵Ibid., December 19, 1845, p. 2.

⁴⁶Ibid., December 25, 1845, p. 3.

⁴⁷Ibid., January 9, 1846, p. 3.

⁴⁸Ibid., May 22, 1846, p. 2.

⁴⁹Ibid., July 30, 1847, p. 2.

During this period the LFLRA chapter remained by far the most active despite the proliferation of new associations. In March of 1846, the Lowell association bought the printing press of the Voice from its Fitchburg owner.⁵⁰ William Young was forced to retire from the editor's chair because of ill health in April and for a time a publishing committee consisting of Sarah Bagley, Joel Hatch, and J. S. Fletcher carried on in Young's stead.⁵¹ Then in May the Voice announced that Sarah Bagley would take over the chief editorial reins. In her introductory editorial Bagley hinted at the direction the Voice would take under her leadership.

Our end, aim, and soul's wish, is the improvement of the condition of the laboring masses. The division of labor consequent upon the introduction of machinery, while it has enhanced the general stock of human production, and thereby benefited the general weal, has at the same time entailed terrible calamity -- unutterable woe... The great evil that accrues from the introduction of machinery, and division of labor, is the caste it gives to society. -- Two great principles must be introduced as a basis for the organization of the factory system in this country, or the same results are to flow in here that have caused such crying anguish in the old world. Capital must not be permitted to demand so much of labor. Education of the mass, must be made to possess an individual certainty, past escape.⁵²

Bagley's comments were not, however, solely concerned with "great" principles. Referring to a recent threat made by a corporation agent that he intended to fire individuals involved in the LFLRA, Bagley blasted out a challenge which might indeed have shocked some of the subscribers to the Voice, for it revealed that Bagley subscribed to a primitive version of the class struggle:

⁵⁰ Ibid., April 24, 1846, p. 2.

⁵¹ Ibid., April 24, 1846, p. 2.

⁵² Ibid., May 15, 1846, p. 2.

What! Deprive us, after working thirteen hours, of the poor privilege of finding fault -- of saying our lot is a hard one! Intentionally turn away a girl unjustly persecuted, as men have been persecuted, to our knowledge, for free expression of honest political opinions! We will make the name of him who dares the act, stink with every wind, from all points of the compass. His name shall be a by-word among all laboring men, and he shall be hissed in the streets, and in all the cities of this widespread republic; for our name is legion though our oppression be great.⁵³

Indeed, in this same issue it was reported that a group of tough-minded members of the LFLRA, weavers in the Massachusetts Corporation of Lowell, who had been ordered to take on an additional loom at one cent less per piece, had "kept inviolate" a pledge to refuse additional work without adequate compensation.⁵⁴ It seems that the true womanhood trait of submissiveness was no longer characteristic of at least one militant sector of New England's "blooming" daughters.

However, militancy and spirit were not sufficient building blocks for constructing a viable and lasting labor organization. Bagley's unexplained resignation from the editor's chair in June and her gradual withdrawal from the LFLRA's activities did not help cheer the future prospects of the operatives' organization. John Allen, an outspoken Associationist, replaced Bagley as editor of the Voice. His approach, as indicated in his first editorial, was in marked contrast to that of his predecessors. In fact, the following statement could be interpreted as a veiled attack on both Young and Bagley. "It [the Voice] will endeavor to remove the causes of evil, rather than quarrel with

⁵³Ibid. In September the LFLRA urged all girls fired without regular discharge for whatever reason to report to the Association so that it could institute legal proceedings against the guilty corporation for "conspiracy and libel!" However, nothing more is heard of this bold plan in subsequent issues of the Voice. See Voice of Industry (Lowell), September 11, 1846, p. 2.

⁵⁴Ibid., May 15, 1846, p. 2.

their effects. It will not, therefore, deal in low personalities, in private abuse, in condemnation of individuals, nor in indiscriminate warfare upon classes."⁵⁵

Perhaps more alarming than the change in editorship in June, was the death of the New England Workingmen's Association in the fall. At the Nashua meeting in September the membership of the Workingmen's Association voted itself out of existence. In its place was created the New England Labor Reform League. The preamble and resolutions adopted at the September meeting indicated a shift away from trade union objectives and toward free soil, anti-slavery, and temperance. Women delegates were in good attendance. Huldah Stone served on the business committee and she and two other Lowell women, Mary Emerson and C. N. B. Quimby, were elected to the Board of Directors along with five men. A committee of four women was chosen to investigate the problem of subscription fall-off for the Voice.⁵⁶

The new direction of the Reform League was evidently in accord with the objectives of the LFLRA. Stone presented the report of the LFLRA at the meeting as Bagley was -- significantly -- attending the American Union of Associationists' convention in Boston. The report indicated that the Lowell association was in a process of re-evaluation. Long range and reformist in tone, the report lacked the militant spirit which had been characteristic of the Association in the past.

⁵⁵ Ibid., June 19, 1846, p. 2.

⁵⁶ Ibid., October 2, 1846, p. 2.

It will not be expected by this Convention, that in the three short months, any great or important changes should have occurred in our humble Association. All truly noble and beneficial reforms have ever moved with slow, but sure and permanent steps.⁵⁷

It is interesting to note at this point that the mood of quietude exhibited by the LFLRA at the September meeting was in marked contrast with that of the Manchester women's organization. This association, led by the able and energetic Mehitable Eastman,⁵⁸ came out strongly against the premium system and the common use of irregular discharges to quell discontent. It also insisently endorsed the ten hour day campaign and lashed out furiously at all editors of newspapers hostile to the ten hour day for workers:

We regret, bitterly that there are some acting as Editors, who undertake to make out an inconsistency [sic] in our advocating the Ten Hour System. We think such are afraid of losing 'Loaves and Fishes,' furnished them by their masters.⁵⁹

It is possible that the Manchester organization's attack on unsympathetic editors was also meant for Allen of the Voice. By November, 1846, the Voice was devoting three-fourths of its time to politics. In line with Reform League policy, political candidates were being asked to publish their views on certain issues in the pages of the Voice. But instead of the ten hour day, the chief issues were deemed to be the public sale of lands and the non-alienable homestead.⁶⁰ Evidently readers of the Voice were not impressed with this policy as many of the

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Eastman also served as co-editor of the Voice along with Young from February to September, 1847.

⁵⁹Voice of Industry (Lowell), October 2, 1846, p. 2.

⁶⁰Ibid., October 16, 1846, p. 3, November 6, 1846, p. 3.

2000 subscribers began defaulting in their payments. To patch matters up, Young was asked to return to the editorial chair. Allen himself was only too happy to comply; he was eager to devote more time to lecturing for the American Union of Associationists.

In February of 1847, Young and Eastman took over the editorship of the Voice jointly. In their capable hands, the Voice was able to limp painfully along for a short time. But without the support of the workers Young and Eastman's battle to keep the Voice solvent was a downhill struggle.⁶¹

In the meantime, it was also apparent that the LFLRA was beginning to fade. After September we hear no more of Sarah Bagley. No explanation is provided by the Voice for her absence though it can be conjectured that the strain of the previous ten years and her involvement in the labor movement had undermined her health and forced her to retire.⁶² Despite Bagley's conspicuous absence and the shift in the labor movement's program, Huldah Stone was able to hold the association together for a few more months.

⁶¹The LFLRA gave up its ownership of the Voice press in January of 1847. In September of 1847 editor Young stepped down (for the last time) because of ill health. D. H. Jacques, an Associationist, took over the editorial chair (with Eastman as general agent) and shortly thereafter the Voice was moved to Boston where it became an organ for Land Reform. It was discontinued in April, 1848, and was revived for a short time in the summer months by John Orvis with a new title, The New Era of Industry. In August the paper ceased publication -- this time permanently.

⁶²Most secondary sources speak of Bagley's "nervous breakdown" at this point in her career. However, I have not been able to uncover any evidence which points to this theory. Eleanor Flexner does mention that Bagley surfaced some time later to become the first woman telegrapher in America. Eleanor Flexner, Century of Struggle. The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States (New York: Atheneum, 1970), p. 60.

Not surprisingly, in December the Voice contained the announcement that on the 15th a meeting of the LFLRA would take place in order to elect officers for the coming year as well as to consider adoption of a new preamble and constitution which had been prepared by the LFLRA Board of Directors.⁶³ At this meeting the membership approved the Board's decision to drop the wider reform objectives of the LFLRA and to create an organization with narrower, closer-to-home aims. The new association, ambitiously entitled the "Lowell Female Industrial Reform and Mutual Aid Society," dedicated itself to "the diffusion of correct principles and useful practical knowledge among its members" as well as to "the relieving and aiding of all who may be sick, or in want of the comforts and necessaries of life, or standing in need of the counsels and sympathies of true and benevolent hearts."⁶⁴ Article Two of the new society's constitution set forth an interpretation of the theory of self-help which was particularly designed to prove relevant to women. According to Article Two it was the intention of the Society:

to encourage and assist each other in self-culture, intellectual and moral, that we may be fitted for and occupy that station in society, which the truly good and useful ever should. That we may know and respect our own individual rights and privilege as females, and be prepared, understandingly, to maintain and enjoy them, irrespective of concentrated wealth or aristocratic usages of an anti-republican state of society.⁶⁵

A charitable committee, to be called the "Sisters of Charity," was set up as well as a sick fund. Mary Emerson was elected president and

⁶³Voice of Industry (Lowell), December 11, 1846, p. 2.

⁶⁴Ibid., January 8, 1847, p. 2.

⁶⁵Ibid.

Huldah Stone was, predictably, elected secretary.

Not much is known of the Mutual Aid Society's activities subsequent to its formation though weekly announcements appeared in the Voice throughout 1847 regarding regular meeting place and time. One glimpse is provided in an "Appeal" printed in the Voice in April of 1847, which described a committee's attempts to set up a library for Lowell workers. Mary Emerson's name appeared on the list of committee members.⁶⁶ However, when the Voice, under new associationist leadership, moved to Boston in November of 1847, we hear no more of the society. It is not likely that it survived the difficult depression years of the late 1840s.

The LFLRA's decision to change its course was due to a combination of circumstances, chief among which was the organizational vacuum created by the death of the New England Workingmen's Association. As Norman Ware has pointed out, the decision to reorganize the workers' organization into the New England Labor Reform League meant a new middle class takeover of the labor movement. In January of 1847, as in May of 1845, the labor movement passed again out of working class hands:

The new leadership was not reformist like the old, but philanthropic like that which was to dominate the Ten-Hour movement of the fifties. Among the Boston leaders were: Amasa Walker, Reverend Burton, William A. White, and Dr. Channing. A resolution typical of the new influence was passed for cheap homes for the workers, "the best safeguards against vice, crime, and immorality." Boston was fatal to the New England working-class movements of the period and the convention wound up as a Free-Soil and Anti-Slavery affair.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Ibid., April 9, 1847, p. 3.

⁶⁷ Ware, Industrial Worker, p. 220. As Ware points out, in the February 19, 1847, issue of the Voice it was reported that the League had passed a resolution which read: "American slavery must be uprooted before the elevation sought by the laboring classes can be effected." See Voice of Industry (Lowell), February 19, 1847, p. 2.

The League hobbled along until March, 1848, when it met at Lowell for the last time. Only two general resolutions, which dealt with bettering workers' rights and conditions of labor, were presented. Though attendance was small, Huldah Stone and Mary Emerson were present. Stone, always intent upon finding the silver lining, reported: "Although our numbers were small, still we felt to thank God, and take courage, for the true spirit was with us...Adjourned, sine die."⁶⁸ The heady, hopeful days of early trade union organization among New England mill girls were at an end.

⁶⁸Voice of Industry (Boston), March 31, 1848, p. 2.

CHAPTER V

THE IDEOLOGY OF THE

LOWELL FEMALE LABOR REFORM ASSOCIATION

Two historians have noted that the period from 1840 to 1860 was "preeminently the age of lofty enthusiasms."¹ Present in the minds of many Americans at this time was a strain of vague humanitarianism which colored and conditioned how they perceived their purpose and role within society. Many representatives of the working class were in the 1840s, as in the previous two decades, intensely concerned with what they perceived to be a loss of status within an economic system which was daily becoming more onerous and oppressive to them. As members of the society at large workers were influenced by the social idealism and utopian schemes expounded by mostly middle class intellectuals and professionals. But as members of a group with distinct experiences and interests separate from and sometimes hostile to society at large, workers also were influenced by attitudes and points-of-view exclusive to their own experiences and needs.²

¹John P. Andrews and W. D. P. Bliss, Report on Condition of Woman and Child Wage-Earners in the United States, Vol. X: History of Women in Trade Unions (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1911), p. 53.

²E. P. Thompson's definition of class is useful in this context. According to Thompson "class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs." E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1968), pp. 9-10.

The women who joined the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association in 1845 were members of a society which contained within itself the stress and strain of conflicting class interests. Most of the women of the LFLRA had been born and raised within the dominant middle class culture of early nineteenth century New England. But through their experience as industrial wage earners, these same women came to accept certain attitudes and values which were characteristic of an emerging working class culture. Both middle class heritage and working class experience influenced the way in which LFLRA members perceived their situation and formulated their program. A certain ideological tension and confusion was, therefore, a necessary characteristic of their organization. In accordance with their working class experience, the mill girls fought to protect their status and to improve working conditions through espousal of the labor theory of value, the Revolutionary tradition, and natural rights arguments.³ As bearers of middle class values, they harkened to the speeches of reformers and tended to fall victim to their utopian schemes.

It is apparent from the pages of the Factory Tracts that the LFLRA subscribed to the labor theory of value. In anger and indignation the author of the introduction to the tract asked rhetorically:

shall not the operatives of this country be permitted to speak for themselves? Shall they be compelled to listen in silence to those who speak for gain, and are the mere echo of the will of the corporations? Shall the worthy laborer be awed into silence by wealth and power, and for fear of being deprived of the means of procuring

³See Paul Faler, "Workingmen, Mechanics and Social Change: Lynn, Massachusetts, 1800-1860" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1971). In his study of working class ideology among shoemakers of Lynn, Massachusetts, Faler emphasizes the centrality of the labor theory of value and the Revolutionary tradition in the period 1830-1860.

his daily bread? Shall tyranny and cruel oppression be allowed to rivet the chains of physical and mental slavery on the millions of our country who are the real producers of all its improvements and wealth, and they fear to speak out in noble self-defence?⁴

The same author, perceiving a close relationship between economic and political oppression, urged fathers and brothers of factory workers to protect their daughters and sisters as well as other workers from the "arbitrary power" of the corporations by sending good men to the state legislature. Only in this manner could the worker be assured "those rights and privileges which God and Nature have bestowed upon him."⁵ For workers were "the children of humanity" and claimed the "rights that God has given to all of earth's offspring -- 'the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.'"⁶ The women of the LFLRA, moreover, saw themselves as bearers of the Revolutionary tradition. They expected the men in the labor movement to treat them with the respect which had been accorded the "heroines of the Revolution."⁷

The willful and militant spirit of some of the LFLRA's public statements, which can be linked with working class values and goals, represented only one side of the coin. A strain of pacific religious or moral exultation and faith was also part of the ideological baggage of the LFLRA and indicated the influence of middle class values and goals.

An undercurrent of transcendental ideology stressing peace and oneness with God was characteristic of the LFLRA. At the Workingmen's

⁴Factory Tracts, No. 1, p. 1.

⁵Ibid., p. 7.

⁶Voice of Industry (Fitchburg), September 4, 1845, p. 2.

⁷Ibid., June 5, 1845, p. 2.

Association meeting of October, 1845, for instance, the LFLRA's report contained the following statement concerning the aims of the association:

Its great and leading object is to give the toiler more time to attend to his or her mental, moral and physical wants -- to cultivate and bring out the hidden treasures of the inner being -- to subdue the low, the animal nature, and elevate, ennoble and perfect the good, the true and the God-like which dwells in all the children of the common Parent. -- with this high and holy aim ever in view, we shall go on.⁸

Sharing the middle class reformers' belief in the plasticity of human nature and their faith in man's ability to educate himself out of misery, the LFLRA also stressed the prime importance of educating "the unwillingly ignorant, kept thus by circumstances over which they as yet have no control."⁹ A certain millennial cast to this sense of mission was not uncommon. For example, Vice President Hannah Tarlton reported at the January, 1846, meeting of the Workingmen's Association that the members of the LFLRA would not rest content "until slavery and oppression, mental, physical, and religious, shall have been done away, and Christianity in its original simplicity, and pristine beauty, shall be re-established and practiced among men."¹⁰

It is important at this point to note that the tension generated within the LFLRA by the conflict between middle class and working class values and aspirations was eased by the mill girls' acceptance by mid-1846 of the associationist attitude towards class conflict. According to associationist doctrine, class conflict within a capitalist society was not necessary. If society were reorganized according to the

⁸Voice of Industry (Lowell), November 7, 1845, p. 3.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., January 23, 1846, p. 2.

"scientific" associationist plan, harmony would replace conflict among classes. Representatives from all walks of life would live together in model communities (phalanxes) of about 200 inhabitants. Each person would have a specific role to perform within each community. In the new scheme of things capitalist and worker, intellectual and farmer, preacher and mechanic, would all provide their talents and special skills for the good of the whole miniature society. Property would not be abolished but each sector would receive a just proportion of all wealth produced -- five-twelfths going to labor, four-twelfths to capital, and three-twelfths to talent.¹¹

While it is true that in the first eighteen months of the LFLRA's existence class conflict rather than class harmony was stressed, it appears that after the second defeat of the ten hour day campaign in March of 1846, a subtle shift took place in LFLRA propaganda. This shift, which represented an acceptance of the associationist belief in harmony of interests among classes, marked in fact a significant turning point in the direction of the LFLRA. By stressing harmony of class interests the working class ideological content of the LFLRA was eclipsed. The former tension between working class and middle class values and goals all but disappeared as mill girls were asked to attend the LFLRA-sponsored Industrial Reform Lyceum Lecture Series in the spring of 1846 which featured speakers Adin Ballou of Hopedale Community, John Allen of Brook Farm, and Horace Greeley.¹² The demise of the Workingmen's Association

¹¹Norman Ware, The Industrial Worker, 1840-1860 (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1959), p. 172.

¹²Voice of Industry (Lowell), April 10, 1846, p. 2, April 17, 1846, p. 3, May 8, 1846, p. 2.

in September of 1846, as well as Sarah Bagley's decision to join the American Union of Associationists and then her disappearance from the labor movement altogether also contributed to the fading of LFLRA working class militancy.¹³

Even as the LFLRA was in the throes of capitulating to the reform ideology of the period, it was pushing forward in another direction. Because the membership of the LFLRA was composed exclusively of women, it is not surprising that the organization became increasingly concerned with women's inferior status within society. According to one contributor to the Voice, who signed her article simply "Martha," women "have sufficiently long been considered 'the inferior' -- a kind of 'upper servant.'"¹⁴ Huldah Stone went further and described woman's position as analogous to that of a slave.¹⁵

It was to the Workingmen's Association's credit that it ignored the traditional ban on women's participation in men's organizations and granted the working women's associations full equality within the labor movement. However, Sarah Bagley and other leaders of the LFLRA realized that they could not really work for reform within the narrowly defined parameters of woman's sphere. Rather, a broader definition of woman's sphere needed to find acceptance which accorded women a rightful role in reform activities.

¹³Huldah Stone, who became the LFLRA's guiding spirit after Bagley's departure, was a strong proponent of the associationist harmony of classes doctrine. Her belief in harmony was firmly stamped upon all subsequent LFLRA activities.

¹⁴Voice of Industry (Lowell) May 8, 1846, p. 2.

¹⁵Ibid., March 6, 1846, p. 2.

The inferior role which society traditionally allotted to women was keenly felt by the women of the LFLRA. They recognized that this "inferiority" was the result of historical oppression but rather than ask the masters to free the servants they decided that the servants must free themselves. In order to expand their role, shed their "inferiority," and achieve equality in a male-dominated society, LFLRA women became convinced that their sex had to accept responsibility for improving their intellectual powers. They realized that this decision would not find many enthusiasts among the general public and that, therefore, women had to rely on their own initiative. In this way, the LFLRA became committed to the concept of self-education as the vehicle for self-improvement and hence, greater esteem from society. As one contributor to the Voice advised:

Cultivate a clear, strong, matter of fact way of thinking, and a natural and therefore, conclusive mode of reasoning...Improve the mind by solid reading, such histories as Gibbon, Hume, Goldsmith, and Rollin. Make yourselves acquainted with Chemistry, Geology, and especially those sciences, Phrenology and Electricity, which are calculated to unmask superstitious pretensions, and give you an intimate knowledge of your own nature, and of the constitution of man. Resolve that you will think, reason, judge, love, hate, approve, and disapprove, for yourselves, and, at your own volition; and, not at the dictation of an other.¹⁶

However, as Huldah Stone, the conscience of the LFLRA, made clear, it was women's responsibility to move towards self-improvement as a group, not merely as lone individuals.¹⁷ In effect, self-improvement was in the eyes of most LFLRA women both a means and an end. Besides elevating the overall position of women in society and contributing to

¹⁶Ibid., May 8, 1846, p. 2. Phrenology was considered to be a respectable science at this time.

¹⁷Ibid., March 6, 1846, p. 2.

their own sense of self-worth, intellectually self-improved women would be an added boon to reform movements as they would be in a position to command society's respect and attention. In addition, LFLRA women were quick to assure the public that such self-improved women would continue to find their ultimate sense of usefulness and fulfillment in the home. Tying in all of these themes, one anonymous writer for the Female Department wrote:

The blood of the revolution has not yet been washed from the hearts of our fathers and brothers. We look upon Labor Reform as that which tends to the elevation of our race in general, and to the improvement of the condition of women in particular. The language of this heavenly messenger is, "Give to woman time for intellectual improvement, that she may be prepared to fulfill her mission." Hers it is to train the infant mind -- then if we would have a good government, we must have intelligent mothers.¹⁸

With the collapse of the labor movement in 1847, the LFLRA chose to revise its organization. The Mutual Aid Society which took the place of the LFLRA was forced to give up its precursor's collective reform mission. However, the new society refused to desert the LFLRA's goal of intellectual improvement among its membership. Article Two of the Mutual Aid Society's constitution reiterated the women's desire to improve their position within society through their own efforts -- through self-help. To quote from Article Two, one of the purposes of the Mutual Aid Society would be:

to encourage and assist each other in self-culture, intellectual and moral, that we may be fitted for and occupy that station in society, which the truly good and useful ever should. That we may know and respect our own individual rights and privileges as females, and be prepared, understandingly, to maintain and enjoy them, irrespective of concentrated wealth or aristocratic usages of an anti-republican state of society.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid., November 13, 1846, p. 3.

¹⁹ Ibid., January 8, 1847, p. 2.

Given our twentieth century vantage point it is not surprising to us that the LFLRA and Mutual Aid Society's attempts to improve the position of women within society failed so completely. The women who were active in these organizations (other female reform associations included) represented a tiny fraction of womankind, their organizations were short-lived, and their general acceptance of the desirability of "true womanhood" virtues was an obvious hindrance. Lacking political and economic power and many legal rights, women were virtual wards of a male-dominated society. In the mid-nineteenth century the goal of equality -- even in the limited sense of intellectual equality -- was not within the realm of the possible. Nevertheless, the spade-work had been initiated by women who cannot be glibly classified as either working class or middle class but who exhibited willy-nilly characteristics of both classes in organizational strategy as well as in ideology. It is well to keep in mind that the Seneca Falls meeting which launched the middle class campaign for equal rights for women met in 1848, three years after the formation of the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association. Many of the ideas relating to women's rights which appeared in embryo form in the pages of the Voice would be taken up and expanded and refined by the later women's rights movement(s). We must not forget that the history of the LFLRA offers insights into the history of women per se as well as into the labor movement of the 1840s.

CONCLUSIONS

It is difficult to gauge with accuracy the expectations of the 500 women who joined the LFLRA since most of these members remained silent throughout the two year life of the organization. Certainly, most of the women who came to work in the mills at this time planned on only a few years work in Lowell before returning to their rural homes to marry or to rejoin the family circle. While we may speculate that membership in the LFLRA was for many a kind of personal protest against exploitation, analagous to the spontaneous turnouts of 1834 and 1836, we must also recognize that the very act of participation, both in the New England Workingmen's Association and in the general reform movement of the forties, was an educational experience which tended to modify the outlook and widen the expectations of the most active members of the LFLRA.

The LFLRA member of 1845 and 1846 cannot be classified as either middle class or working class for she had a claim on both worlds. As the daughter of a middle class yeoman farmer, professional, or even mechanic, the Lowell mill girl brought to her factory experience traditions and values inherited from her home community. She believed in the dignity of labor, individual initiative, the value of hard work and thrift, the twin goals of moral and material betterment. As a wage-earner in her own right, the mill girl's work experience modified her vision of the good society and forced her to think in terms of coopera-

tion and organization. Since the two worlds could collide and conflict with one another it was at times a very real problem for the more thoughtful operative. Another perplexing problem for the factory girl was her awareness of the confining parameters of "accepted" sex role behavior and activity in traditional New England society.

The world from which the working women of Lowell sprang had not prepared them for the task of creating viable working class institutions and traditions with which to protect their position against capitalist exploitation. It is to their credit then, that the handful of women who first organized the LFLRA were able to persevere for two long, disappointing years. Beyond enlisting 500 members, the LFLRA was able to win the respect and admiration of the New England Workingmen's Association and to gain haphazard support from the middle class reform movement of the period. The LFLRA was even able to help organize women's reform associations in neighboring factory towns. And when the labor movement collapsed and the middle class reformers began to turn to other issues, the LFLRA retrenched and formed itself into a mutual aid society.

Because the labor movement in America was still in its infancy in the 1840s, much of the ideological underpinning as well as the main goals of the LFLRA were of a middle class cast or mold. Though the leaders of the LFLRA at times spoke of class conflict in society, the general tendency, especially after mid-1846, was to attribute the conflict between capital and labor to temporary aberrations which would be solved within the existing social structure. Step by step amelioration of working conditions and the preservation of a middle class status within New England society were the main goals of the factory women of the 1840s.

It is clear that the Lowell operative of the 1840s was in a defensive position. She saw her former middle class status and respectability being eroded as conditions in the mills worsened to the point where only truly needy women sought employment in the city of spindles.¹ From 1845 onwards a steady exodus of the "better sort" of factory operative got underway as new opportunities in occupations such as teaching began to open up.² Westward migration of New England farm families also tended to siphon off women who accompanied their families to the western territories.³ For the women who remained in the factories or who chose during this period to come to Lowell, a grimmer reality than that which had faced the operative of the 1820s and early 1830s awaited them. Within this context of deteriorating conditions and the concomitant erosion of status, it is understandable that the women of the LFLRA would seek to restore the image of the respectable middle class factory girl.

The LFLRA women joined forces with the New England Workingmen's Association in order to secure the ten hour day for all factory workers. Both working men and women saw the ten hour day as a kind of panacea which would if implemented, result in less onerous working con-

¹Voice of Industry (Fitchburg), June 19, 1845, p. 2.

²By the latter 1840s teachers were beginning to receive wages comparable to those paid to factory workers. See Edith Abbott, Women in Industry. A Study in American Economic History (New York: Arno and The New York Times, 1969), p. 140, and Harriet Robinson, Loom and Spindle, or Life among the Early Mill Girls (New York: Crowell, 1898), p. 86.

³Caroline Ware, Early New England Cotton Manufacture. A Study in Industrial Beginnings (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), p. 230, Norman Ware, The Industrial Worker, 1840-1860 (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1959), pp. 152-53, Hannah Josephson, The Golden Threads. New England's Mill Girls and Magnates (New York: Russell and Russell, 1967), p. 289.

ditions and provide extra leisure hours for intellectual self-improvement. It was felt that an educated worker would be accorded greater respect from a society which stressed individual achievement but no longer held skilled manual labor in high esteem. The LFLRA women were particularly anxious to earn the respect of society through self-education. They hoped that the educated woman would come to be accepted as the intellectual equal of the educated man. The educated woman would, then, by her very existence help to reshape society's attitudes towards woman's proper "sphere."

Thus, the working men and working women within the labor movement of the 1840s found that they could work together comfortably. The desire for self-improvement led logically to the ten hour campaign. Because both the men and women involved in the infant labor movement had no real comprehension of the long-term effects which industrial capitalism would have upon economic growth and social structure and because a solid tradition of trade union organization did not yet exist, concern over bread-and-butter issues such as job security, poor wages, and increasing work loads was not pronounced. Workers at this time were also very much aware of the power of the employer vis-à-vis the employee within American society. An appeal to public opinion through the use of labor newspapers, tracts, speeches, meetings, fairs, and petitions to state legislatures was in reality labor's only viable alternative in the 1840s.

Given the ideological and institutional structure of American society at this time it seems fair to assume that the men and women of the labor movement were bound to fail. The women of the LFLRA were particularly vulnerable. Because of their relatively sheltered exist-

tences before coming to Lowell and their propensity to revert to middle class attitudes or nostrums when confronted with exploitative conditions in the factories, the members of the LFLRA were ill-prepared to combat the problems which confronted them. Though participation in the New England Workingmen's Association helped the factory girls to see their position as workers more clearly, the influence of the general reform movement of the period tended to encourage the LFLRA members to see themselves as harmonizing agents of middle class reform.⁴

The LFLRA was also never able to attract more than a small minority of the women operatives of Lowell to its banner. Only one out of every twenty women working in the Lowell mills in 1845 joined the LFLRA. The sanction against women's participation in such activities and the desire on the part of most to make as much money as possible within a three or four year period before returning home militated against the possibility of attracting many operatives to the LFLRA.

The death of the Labor Reform Association (the offspring of the New England Workingmen's Association) in 1847 created an organizational vacuum which the weak Mutual Aid Society with its former LFLRA members could not hope to fill. The reorganization of the LFLRA into the Mutual Aid Society was an attempt, in part, to keep the new tradition of organization alive on the local level. However, this self-help institution could not have survived the LFLRA by much more than one year. For in 1848 a slump in the cotton industry occurred which

⁴This confusion of identity was never really resolved by the LFLRA. As a result leaders such as Sarah Bagley and Huldah Stone became so involved in Associationist activities by the latter part of 1846 that the work of the LFLRA suffered.

resulted in more downward revisions of wages.⁵ It was at this time that the New England mill girls began to leave the factory towns in droves. From 1848 onwards, the unmistakable trend was the replacement of New England women with the Irish women who arrived in increasing numbers from Ireland after 1848. By 1850 over half of the operatives in the Lowell mills were Irish.⁶

The era of the New England mill girl was at an end. Though needy New England-bred women would continue to work in the cotton mills of towns like Lowell, the mainstay of the labor force would consist first of Irish and then later of French Canadian workers. And by the 1880s eastern Europeans would replace the two previous immigrant waves as the major ethnic groupings within the factory work force. With the coming of the immigrant, the boarding house system died out rather unceremoniously. Corporations turned from collecting boarding house rents to owning and managing tenements. Men and children came to work in the mills, too. With whole families dependent upon the mills for their existence it was not possible to organize successfully among Lowell factory workers for the duration of the nineteenth century.

Once the new source of labor had become available for factory work, the corporation owners and managers were able to breathe a sigh of relief. The mid-1840s had been a worresome time for the textile industry. The New England mill girl, that supposed paragon of docility and servility, had begun in this period to think and act like a member of a working class conscious of itself and of its adversary. The

⁵Voice of Industry (Boston), February 4, 1848, p. 3, February 18, 1848, p. 3., March 10, 1848, p. 2.

⁶Josephson, Golden Threads, p. 288.

spontaneous protests of 1834 and 1836 had given way to vigorous and determined organization and activity in 1845 and 1846. Despite the fact that the women of the LFLRA thought in terms of redeeming lost status, the members had participated as workers in an exploitative industrial system and had banded together to protest against the excesses of a system they could no longer condone.

Although the women of the LFLRA were defeated and eventually left the employ of the factories and no doubt returned to their middle class status of pre-factory days, we cannot dismiss their efforts. More important to us than their defeat has been the process by which the members of the LFLRA came to see themselves as members of an oppressed group within society and how they attempted to deal with their situation. In effect these women were participants in the active process of the creation of the American working class. That they were participants for only a brief period at the beginning of this process does not obviate the contributions which they made. Just as importantly, these women were participants in the self-conscious struggle of nineteenth century women to free themselves from the constraints of the narrow and repressive role which the male-dominated society had allotted to their sex. For the LFLRA women dared to challenge the conventional wisdom of their society regarding woman's place and to demand a wider role within that society.

GENERAL REGULATIONS,

TO BE OBSERVED BY PERSONS EMPLOYED BY THE

LAWRENCE MANUFACTURING COMPANY, IN LOWELL.

1ST. All persons in the employ of the Company, are required to attend assiduously to their various duties, or labor, during working hours; are expected to be fully competent, or to aspire to the utmost efficiency in the work or business they may engage to perform, and to evince on all occasions, in their deportment and conversation, a laudable regard for temperance, virtue, and their moral and social obligations; and in which the Agent will endeavor to set a proper example. No persons can be employed by the Company, whose known habits are or shall be dissolute, indolent, dishonest, or intemperate, or who habitually absent themselves from public worship, and violate the Sabbath, or who may be addicted to gambling of any kind.

2D. All kinds of ardent spirit will be excluded from the Company's ground, except it be prescribed for medicine, or for washes, and external application. Every kind of gambling and card playing, is totally prohibited within the limits of the Company's ground and Boarding Houses.

3D. Smoking cannot be permitted in the Mills, or other buildings, or yards, and should not be carelessly indulged in the Boarding Houses and streets. The utmost vigilance must be exercised to prevent the calamity of fire in the Mills, Pickers, Houses and other buildings, and proper arrangements being made for extinguishing fire, it remains to avert panic and confusion, should such an evil overtake us, by preparing the mind to meet it, and the Watchmen during their watches, may by such preparation, and due vigilance, prevent the necessity of an alarm. Should a fire break out they will observe the regulations in such cases provided,—and send immediately for the Agent, or ring the bell, as may appear most advisable. The Fire Department must be exercised at least once a month.

4TH. The Superintendent of the Manufacturing department will take charge of the Mills as soon as the machinery shall be received, and co-operating with the Agent, will engage such help as may be required, and direct the overseers as regards their employment. He will also direct the Store keeper, and Cloth Room Clerks in their duties, and the Watchmen attached to the Mills under his charge, as well as the overseers of the Repair Shop, and shop hands, as to any work required in such Mills,—will discharge or remove at his discretion, such persons as may be found incompetent, or unworthy of employment. But if it be an overseer, he will report him to the Agent before a final decision on his case. He can issue such orders and rules as may not conflict with these regulations, either verbal or written, as he may deem proper, for the government of the Mills or rooms; will apply to the Agent for such articles as may be wanted; see that due economy is exercised in the appropriation of them, and will evince his acknowledged skill and intelligence in what relates to his responsible charge, and derive the best results from the machinery and number of hands employed. He may require a report of the state of his room from each overseer, on closing the work at evening; and if any doubts of the safety of the Mills shall arise, he will give notice to the Agent, for his government. He will also make a written report to the Agent, on Monday morning, showing the amount in yards and pounds, of the preceding week's work; also the quality and quantity of cotton consumed.

5TH. The Assistant Agent will inspect the Boarding Houses, and report or rectify all infringements of the regulations, and all repairs or alterations required, to the Agent. He will keep the rent books, and collect the rent; will make up the salary and out door pay roll; account for all cash received each Saturday evening, and pay such bills as may have been examined and approved by the Agent, and will attend to paying off in the Mills.

6TH. The Accountant is to examine all bills referring to the Store keeper's books, to know whether the articles charged have been received, will attend to paying off in the Mills when required, make up the pay rolls for the Mills, and with the advice of the Agent, keep the books and records with due accuracy and perspicuity. One of the three gentlemen abovenamed will always be present during working hours.

7TH. The Store keeper will receive and weigh all cotton with the utmost accuracy, number each bale and enter it on the cotton book,—he will attend to delivering the cotton to the Watchmen, and know the quantity on hand. He will also receive and deliver, and measure or weigh, as the case may be, all articles to and from the Mills, and Bleachery and Stores, and will keep a true account of the same, will copy the invoices of cotton, and assist in writing, when required by the Superintendent or Agent.

8TH. The Cloth Room Clerk will, under the direction of the Superintendent, attend to the measures and quality of the cloth, must assiduously guard against mistakes in either, will stamp and see it properly baled and marked, and make returns accordingly.

9TH. The Overseer of the Watchmen will have charge of the Watch, and see that due vigilance is exercised, night and day; he will visit the Mills and shops and wherever fires have been kept during the day, each evening, one hour after closing work, and be sure that all is safe; he will direct the Watchmen and Firemen, see that the cotton is delivered into the pickers, and perform such other duties as may be required from time to time.

10TH. Overseers of Repair shops must use all due economy in the application of materials and stock, and will see that their hands are constantly and advantageously employed; must endeavor to advance their work with diligence and skill, and will be governed by the directions of the Superintendent, in regard to the Mills. When jobs for different Mills, Rooms, and Bleachery, equally urgent, shall be presented, and opinions conflict as to which shall be first performed, they will take the direction of the Superintendent or Agent.

The Overseer of the Wood shop has charge of all repairs in which wood is mostly required, and of all the timber and materials for that purpose. The Overseers of the Filing shop with the assistance of the Smith will have a similar charge of repairs on iron and metals, and of all iron, steel and metals, and materials delivered to his department; and they will keep accounts of the work done, and stock expended, charging the different Mills and Bleachery, as may be.

11TH. The Foreman or Overseers of the Bleaching and Finishing departments will use all due care that those employed under them are attentive to their labor, and that they do not waste the materials in use. They will have the personal attention of the Agent, and will make no alterations without his consent.

12TH. All Overseers must keep the time of those employed under them, and make accurate returns of the same, or of the amount of work performed by them.

REGULATIONS

TO BE OBSERVED BY ALL PERSONS EMPLOYED BY THE

LAWRENCE MANUFACTURING COMPANY.

The overseers are to be punctually in their rooms at the starting of the mill, and not to be absent unnecessarily during working hours.

They are to see that all those employed in their rooms are in their places in due season, and keep a correct account of their time and work.

They may grant leave of absence to those employed under them when there are spare hands in the room to supply their places; otherwise they are not to grant leave of absence except in cases of absolute necessity.

All persons in the employ of the Lawrence Manufacturing Company, are required to observe the regulations of the room where they are employed. They are not to be absent from their work without consent, except in case of sickness, and then they are to send the overseer word of the cause of their absence.

They are to board in one of the boarding houses belonging to the company, and to conform to the regulations of the house where they board.

The company will not employ any one who is habitually absent from public worship on the Sabbath.

All persons entering into the employ of the company are considered as engaged to work 12 months.

All persons intending to leave the employment of the company are to give two weeks' notice of their intention to their overseer; and their engagement with the company is not considered as fulfilled, unless they comply with this regulation.

Payments will be made monthly, including board and wages, which will be made up to the second Saturday of every month, and paid in the course of the following week.

Any one who shall take from the mills, or the yard, any yarn, cloth or other article belonging to the company, will be considered guilty of *stealing*, and prosecuted accordingly.

These regulations are considered a part of the contract with all persons entering into the employment of the LAWRENCE MANUFACTURING COMPANY.

JOHN AIKEN, Agent.

REGULATIONS
TO BE OBSERVED BY ALL PERSONS EMPLOYED IN THE FACTORIES
OF THE
MIDDLESEX COMPANY.

The Overseers are to be punctually in their rooms at the starting of the mill, and not to be absent unnecessarily during working hours. They are to see that all those employed in their rooms are in their places in due season. They may grant leave of absence to those employed under them, when there are spare hands in the room to supply their places; otherwise they are not to grant leave of absence, except in cases of absolute necessity. Every Overseer must be the last to leave the room at night, and must see that the lights are all properly extinguished, and that there is no fire in the room. No Overseer should leave his room in the evening while the Mill is running, except in case of absolute necessity.

All persons in the employ of the MIDDLESEX COMPANY, are required to observe the regulations of the Overseer of the room where they are employed. They are not to be absent from their work, without his consent, except in case of sickness, and then they are to send him word of the cause of their absence.

They are to board in one of the Boarding Houses belonging to the Company, unless otherwise permitted by the Agent or Superintendent, and conform to the regulations of the house where they board. They are to

give information at the Counting Room of the place where they board, when they begin; and also give notice whenever they change their boarding-place.

The Company will not employ any one who is habitually absent from public worship on the Sabbath, or whose habits are not regular and correct.

All persons entering into the employment of the Company are considered as engaged for twelve months; and those who have done so will not receive a regular discharge.

All persons intending to leave the employment of the Company are to give two weeks' notice of their intention to their overseer; and their engagement with the Company is not considered as fulfilled, unless they comply with this regulation.

Smoking within the Factory Yards will in no case be permitted.

The Pay Roll will be made up to the end of every month, and the payment made in the course of the following week.

These Regulations are considered a part of the contract with persons entering into the employment of the MIDDLESEX COMPANY.

JA HES COOK, AGENT.

APPENDIX II¹

Six Month Period Ending ²	Actual Hourly Earnings (in \$) ³	Real Annual Earnings Index ⁴ (1844-46 = 100)	Output per Worker per Day ⁵ (1844-46 = 100)
Apr. 1834 ⁶	.052		68.0
Aug. 1834	.047		69.7
Oct. 1834	.047	107.9	73.7
Feb. 1835	.049		73.6
Apr. 1835	.049		75.1
Aug. 1835	.047		79.3
Oct. 1835	.048	90.6	79.2
Feb. 1836	.051		75.0
Apr. 1836	.051		73.7
Aug. 1836	.049		73.0
Oct. 1836	.050	85.0	71.9
Feb. 1837	.052		68.7
Apr. 1837	.051		69.9
Aug. 1837	.048		75.0
Oct. 1837	.047	77.0	75.3
Feb. 1838	.048		71.7
Apr. 1838	.047		74.4
Aug. 1838	.046		80.0
Oct. 1838	.048	78.0	80.6
Feb. 1839	.052		80.2
Apr. 1839	.050		79.8
Aug. 1839	.048		82.7
Oct. 1839	.050	80.8	82.6

¹The data cited in Appendix II was compiled from Robert Layer's study, Earnings of Cotton Mill Operatives, 1825-1914 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), pp. 24-25, 46.

²Actual hourly earnings and output per worker per day figures are based on data from six-month periods ending at four different points each year unless otherwise specified.

³Ibid., pp. 24-25.

⁴Ibid., p. 46.

⁵Ibid., pp. 24-25.

⁶Four-month period.

Six Month Period Ending	Actual Hourly Earnings (in \$)	Real Annual Earnings Index (1844-46 = 100)	Output per Worker per Day (1844-46 = 100)
Feb. 1840	.051		80.3
Apr. 1840	.049		79.0
Aug. 1840	.045		78.5
Oct. 1840	.045	89.0	80.6
Feb. 1841	.047		80.7
Apr. 1841	.046		78.7
Aug. 1841	.045		79.5
Oct. 1841	.046	87.7	80.4
Feb. 1842	.048		79.5
Apr. 1842	.047		80.7
Aug. 1842	.046		85.4
Oct. 1842	.046	97.5	89.8
Feb. 1843	.048		91.6
Apr. 1843	.045		92.5
Aug. 1843	.043		92.2
Oct. 1843	.045	98.3	94.0
Feb. 1844	.046		96.2
May 1844 ⁷	.046		99.7
Aug. 1844	.045		102.9
Nov. 1844	.046	101.3	103.9
Feb. 1845	.047		99.5
May 1845	.046		99.2
Aug. 1845	.046		102.3
Nov. 1845	.047	102.0	103.0
Feb. 1846	.049		98.9
May 1846	.048		97.5
Aug. 1846	.047		98.3
Nov. 1846	.048	95.3	96.4
Feb. 1847	.050		93.4
May 1847	.050		94.9
Aug. 1847	.049		97.5
Nov. 1847	.051	98.2	94.7
Feb. 1848	.054		93.8
May 1848	.053		99.1
Aug. 1848	.051		103.6
Nov. 1848	.051	107.8	102.7

⁷Seven-month period.

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