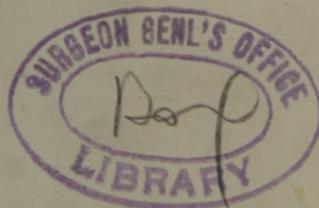


BARTLETT (E)

A vindication of the
Character and Condition
of the
Females employed
in the Lowell mills

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Robert Duncanson

1821

Wm. S. ...
1871

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A

VINDICATION

OF THE

CHARACTER AND CONDITION

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OF THE

FEMALES

EMPLOYED IN THE LOWELL MILLS,

AGAINST THE CHARGES CONTAINED IN

The Boston Times, and the Boston Quarterly Review.

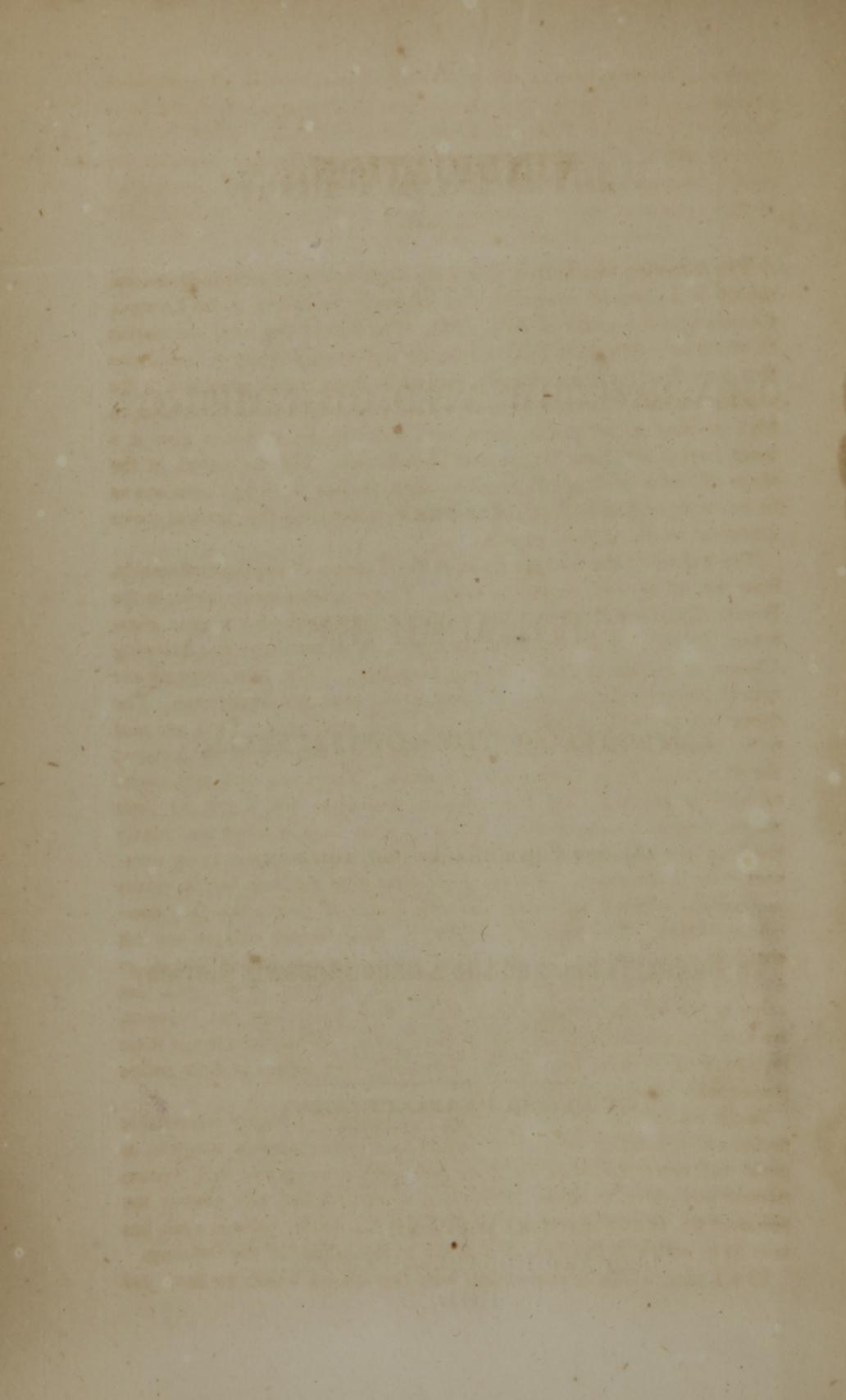
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1841.



VINDICATION.

The following vindication, with some slight and unimportant omissions, mostly of a personal character, was originally published in the *LOWELL COURIER*, in the month of July, 1839. The fact of the local circulation to which its publication in a newspaper necessarily confined it, and the fact, also, that injurious remarks, similar to those which gave rise to the vindication, have recently been repeated, with emphasis and boldness, in high quarters of the public press, have induced the author to give it a more convenient form for general distribution. He has added, in the shape of notes enclosed in brackets, such further facts and opinions as he has been able to collect and to form, corroborating the general views contained in the original papers.

The nature of the charges made in the *Times* will appear, sufficiently, from that of my own replies to them. Those subsequently made, in the *Boston Quarterly Review*, were, so far as they went, of a similar character. In his July No. for 1840, the editor, in an article on the *Laboring Classes*, made use of the following language: "We pass through our manufacturing villages, most of them appear neat and flourishing. The operatives are well dressed, and we are told, well paid. They are said to be contented, healthy and happy. This is the fair side of the picture; the side exhibited to distinguished visitors. There is a dark side, moral as well as physical. Of the common operatives, few, if any, by their wages, acquire a competence. A few of what Carlyle terms not inaptly the *body servants* are well paid, and now and then an agent or an overseer rides in his coach. But the great mass wear out their health, spirits and morals, without becoming one whit better off than when they commenced labor. The bills of mortality in these factory villages are not striking, we admit, for the poor girls, when they can toil no longer, go home to die. The average life, working life, we mean, of the girls that come to Lowell, for instance, from Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont, we have been assured, is only about three years. What becomes of them then? Few of them ever marry; fewer still ever return to their native places with reputations unimpaired."

In the second No. of the "*LOWELL OFFERING*," a highly respectable periodical, consisting entirely of papers upon miscellaneous subjects, in prose and verse, furnished by these *poor girls*, a smart and well written answer was given to these calumnious assertions, and this answer the editor of the *Boston Quarterly*, in his April No. for the present year, has seen fit to notice in the form of a *Letter* to the editors of the *Offering*.

This *Letter*, taken in connection with the extract which we have just

made from the Review, and to which it refers, is, most assuredly, a somewhat singular document. There are two things in it which deserve especial notice. The first is the manner in which the editor speaks of his own previous, offensive remarks upon the character of the factory operatives. These remarks we have just quoted, in his own words. There they stand, as they originally stood; like most of the written words of their author, plain, clear, strong, straight-forward, emphatic, not very readily susceptible, one would think, of any doubtful or double meaning. And how does the editor of the Boston Quarterly Review justify himself in the use of such language? He takes the bull by the horns with a vengeance. He turns deliberately about and denies that he ever made any such remarks. He declares that he never said any such thing. Listen.—“I perceive, ladies,” he says, “that you labor under a slight mistake in regard to me. You seem to have taken it into your heads that I am hostile to you, and have slandered you. If I may be allowed to be my own interpreter, I have had no thought of speaking disrespectfully of you. * * * The passage, which has offended you, I think you must have misinterpreted. I have said nothing against you:” and so on. If the literature of cool impudence and effrontery has any thing in its annals that can beat this, it would be pleasant to see it. Such is the courteous bearing of the redoubtable and gallant editor of the Boston Quarterly Review towards the thousands of intelligent, industrious and virtuous females whom with such wantonness and atrocity he has libelled and maligned!

But this is not the worst of it. In this same letter, and this is the second thing to which I referred, on the very heels of this miserable attempt to deny the manifest and unequivocal meaning of his own words, the same wrong itself is repeated. “Touching the morals of the factory girls,” he says, “I have rarely spoken. I saw some publications in a Boston newspaper some time since, concerning the girls employed in the mills at Lowell. Those publications were not to your credit; and what is worse, they remain to this day uncontradicted. The feeble attempt of a Lowell paper to contradict merely tended to confirm them.”

The *feeble attempt* of a Lowell paper consisted, in substance, of the following vindication. If the facts which it contains do not constitute a contradiction of the publications contained in the Times and the Review, it would be interesting to be informed, by the editor of the Review, what, in his judgment, is necessary to constitute a contradiction. It would be especially interesting to learn, also, wherein this feeble attempt at contradiction tends to confirm the truth of the charges made in the Times. The editor of the Boston Quarterly Review is somewhat famous for the glib facility with which he discourses about truth, right, and eternal justice. His high speculations upon the philosophy and relations of these transcendent moral elements would establish a stronger claim to our confidence, if he should show himself in some degree more mindful of the practical and every day obligations of these sublime virtues.

[From the *Lowell Courier* of July 20, 23, 25, 27, & 30, 1839.]

LOWELL AND ITS POPULATION.

In the *Boston Daily Times** of Saturday morning, July 13, was commenced a series of articles with this caption, "*A Manufacturing Population.*" The series has since been regularly continued—the *Times* of yesterday morning containing the 6th No. These articles have excited here, as their authors probably expected and intended that they should excite, a very general and strong feeling. They demand and deserve an immediate and thorough examination, and such examination they shall forthwith receive. I have waited for the editor of the *Times* to conclude his statements before commencing any reply to them. I have nothing to say at present, about the motives which have governed him in this matter. The character of these will appear from the course which he shall take when the true state of the case is presented to him, and they will become proper subjects of remark. In the mean time, I shall concern myself solely with the statements and observations contained in his papers. The articles are published in a metropolitan newspaper which is very widely circulated, and which has been for a long time very liberally patronized by our citizens. The allegations and charges which they contain are of the gravest character; they are seriously and earnestly put forth; they affect almost the entire population of the second city of our commonwealth, and both the importance of the subject itself, and justice to those who are implicated, require that they should not be suffered to pass unnoticed.

It is in behalf of these that I now speak—it is in their defence that I appear. There are many facts in connexion with their character and condition which it is due to them that the public should understand and know more fully than they now do. These facts in the course of this examination I shall have occasion to state.

Before proceeding to the performance of the duty which I have thus undertaken, it is necessary that I should make one or two preliminary remarks. These refer to my own position and relations in the city, and to the means which I possess of forming sound and correct conclusions. I came to the city at the close of the year 1827. At that time the population was 3500. I have been ever since that time a constant resident

[* It gives me pleasure to bear my testimony, here, to the general excellency of this newspaper. It is managed with industry, good sense and ability, and may justly claim a prominent place among the most efficient advocates of good order and sound morality.]

here. I have been in daily and active intercourse with all classes of our population. My avocations have brought me into frequent and immediate relationship, especially with the great body of the people of both sexes employed in our mills. Every day, and at all hours of the day, I have been a visiter of the corporation boarding-houses. I have no other interest in the manufacturing property than every other citizen has.— My home is here, my business is here, but I have never owned, and I do not now own a single dollar's worth of stock in any incorporated institution in the city, except that of a single religious society. I am under no obligations either to the members or the agents of any of the corporations, excepting such as grow inevitably out of our civil and social relations. They have no property in my free spirit. They have never attempted in any way, directly or indirectly, to control or influence its action or utterance. I have borne my humble part in most of the various and active duties of citizenship among the people where I live. I may say further—not in any tone of self-complacency or of boasting, but in the spirit of conscientious truth and sincerity, that I have watched with some attention, and with great solicitude and anxiety, the influences at work upon the moral, intellectual and physical condition of the population here gathered together. I am no advocate for wrong in any shape. Those who know me need not be told that before all other considerations I put that of the bodily and spiritual good of our race. While I live, I would do what little I may, towards promoting, within the narrow sphere in which I am placed, this chiefest and highest good of humanity. Nothing that in any respect or in any degree tends to counteract and to frustrate this good shall receive either sanction or apology from me. Whenever it shall be made to appear that the best health of the body and the true and highest interests of the mind are injured or put in jeopardy even, by any of the claims of mere property, let the latter be sacrificed wholly and unreservedly. This is my creed, and I shall stick to it on the present as on all other occasions. With these prefatory remarks I proceed to investigate the leading allegations and charges contained in the Times.

The first specific charge is, that the factory girls are required to board in the boarding houses erected and owned by the proprietors of the mills, except in a few instances where they may have relations living in the city, and in some other cases which are not particularized. This is no very grave matter, and I do not understand that even the writer in the Times so regards it. It is partly true and partly false. On some of the

corporations the requisition is made, on others it is, if not in the letter, at least in spirit and in practice, wholly disregarded. Some of the mills are in the midst of private boarding-houses, and of the hands employed in these, large numbers board away from the corporations. The average number of girls employed in the Boott mills is 900. On the 1st of April, there were 236 boarding out of the corporation houses. Others, especially the Merrimack, Tremont, Suffolk, and Lawrence, are quite removed from any private houses, and here nearly all the hands live in the houses belonging to the mills. The character and condition of these houses I shall speak of hereafter.

I now take up the charge to which the second article in the Times is devoted, that the price of board is too low,—that the girls are ill fed. As to the taste and manner in which this assertion is made and amplified by the editor, I have nothing special to say. A very simple and a very short statement of facts is quite sufficient to set this matter in its true light. Here is one. Many hundreds of these girls board in private houses, kept in the neighborhood of the mills, *at the same*, or nearly the same price that is paid in the boarding houses. Now all this is of course wholly a voluntary business on the part of the keepers of these private houses. What inducement have these individuals to keep these houses—and would they do so against their own interests? But this is not all. The rents of the corporation houses average but about four per cent. on their cost, and for a considerable portion of the time during the highest prices of provisions, but a part, and sometimes none of the rent has been demanded. The rent which fell due on March last, at least on one of the corporations, was wholly remitted. Whether this was done at other establishments I have not inquired. Enough has been stated to show that the keepers of the corporation houses can afford to furnish better tables than those of private houses; and that very large numbers of girls do, notwithstanding, find lodging and food in these latter even, which are perfectly satisfactory to them. Are these facts sufficient to disprove the assertion of the Times? I do not say that the diet is universally such as is best for bodily health. That errors in this respect should exist in our boarding houses, as well as every where else, is inevitable. But I have no hesitation, whatever, in saying that these errors are fewer and far less important than are committed in most of the genteel boarding houses and hotels in the country. The food is generally plain, sufficiently substantial in quality and ample in quantity. There is not on some of the corporations, where

more than a thousand girls are employed, a single complaint in a year relating to the quality of food, and whenever a complaint is made, it is most frequently that the table is not supplied with hot bread. All I can do with the assertion that when better and more suitable food is supplied, it must be at the expense of the grocer, baker and butcher, is to say that the assertion *is not true*.—Bankruptcy among the boarding house keepers is *very rare*, and mark this—when it does occur, it is not among those who keep the best houses and set the best furnished tables. I state a fact that is perfectly well known here, when I say that the thrifty, calculating and industrious among the boarding house keepers, those whose rooms are neatest, and whose tables are best spread, pay their bills most promptly and have the largest deposits in the Savings Institution.

I have a few words to say of the people who keep the female boarding houses. Most of them are, to be sure, in moderate or humble circumstances: some of them have seen better days. A few have husbands, but a great proportion are widows—some with small families, and others without. But they are uniformly—almost without exception, women of perfectly correct moral deportment. The enquiries of the agents into their standing and character are careful and particular, and these inquiries must be satisfactorily answered, before they can be admitted into the houses, and the same good character must be sustained or they cannot remain there. These women constitute a remarkably permanent portion of our population. Numbers of them have been here for many years. I have made particular inquiry in relation to this point of only one agent. His mills have been in operation five years. They have been under his care three years. There are connected with them *forty-one* keepers of female boarding houses. Twenty nine of these were in the houses when he took charge of the mills—many of them are the original tenants;—eight have been in the houses two years or more, and four one year. These places, bad as the times have been, are regarded as desirable, and the agent above alluded to has now about forty applicants for them on his books. The small families of some of these “poor widows” are well and respectably educated; the sons of some of them have places in the counting rooms, and their daughters are intelligent, well-bred and accomplished teachers in our public schools. Such are the keepers of the corporation boarding houses.

I now come to the question of the actual health of the manufacturing population, and especially of the female portion of

it. This subject is one of exceeding importance, and it is also one, a certain and satisfactory knowledge of which is surrounded with many difficulties. Mere opinions of medical men or of others must be received with the utmost caution and with many allowances, let these opinions be what they may. On the other hand, the inferences derived from the absolute results of the bills of mortality may be very erroneous if taken without any qualification. It is only by putting together the information drawn from both these sources, and then estimating as fairly and as correctly as possible all the circumstances bearing in any way upon the subject, that we can make any near approximation to the truth. By following this plan, I am very sure that such an approximation can be made, and the result will be found anything but an unfavorable one. I shall first state some facts derived from statistical data, some of which are extraordinary. I have been somewhat conversant with bills of mortality, and I do unhesitatingly aver, that some of the results which I am about to give are unparalleled in the statistics of health and disease. I have only to regret that my materials of this character are not much more full and extensive than they are. Bills of mortality have not been kept for every year; but for a considerable number of years they have been made up with great care and great accuracy, by Dr. J. O. Green, aided by the other physicians and the clergymen of the city. Several of these are now lying before me, and from them I derive the following facts.

More than one half of our population are between the ages of 15 and 30 years, and a great proportion of these are employed in the mills. In the year 1830, the population stood, by an actual census, at 6477; the number of deaths was 114, and of this whole number only *seven* occurred among the persons employed in the mills! In the year 1828, the population was 3500; girls in the mills, 1500. During that whole year, there was not a single death, in the city, among these 1500 girls. I ask those who are versed in the lore of medical statistics to match these two facts. Even if they were picked facts, they would be none the less extraordinary. But they are not picked facts. They are the only ones and they are all of the kind which are contained in the tables before me. If I am now asked whether I consider these results as *average* results—as safe data on which to rest our conclusions as to the degree of health enjoyed by our population, I frankly answer no. I do not believe that the other years would have given such results. They are too extraordinary to be looked for. But they are still of very great value. They show *positively, absolutely, undeniably*, a state

of things wholly and irreconcilably inconsistent with the existence of a feeble, deteriorated and unhealthy population. I know that in 1828, and probably in 1830, girls who had been here at some time during the year, died during the year elsewhere. I know that in making all these estimates, we are constantly to bear in mind the circumstance that a certain number of girls leave the city while sick, and die among their kindred. But the number is easily ascertained, and it is far from being large.

It may be objected that the rate of mortality is not alone and in itself an infallible or even a safe standard of the general health; that the actual number of deaths in any given population, during a given year may be small, while the standard of health is low, and the absolute amount of ill health is very great. I admit that this is very possible and that it sometimes occurs. But it can only be true under peculiar circumstances and within certain very narrow limits. It cannot be true of a large population through a series of years. It can only form an apparent exception to the general law of relationship between disease and the rates of mortality, and careful observation will always enable us to detect these exceptions, and to make, in their favor or on their account, all necessary allowances.

At the beginning of the year 1835, with the assistance of some of the agents and overseers, I procured some data which may aid in shedding further light upon this subject. I use these materials in preference to any which I might obtain at the present time, because there can be no suspicion that they were procured and colored, or distorted for the purpose of bolstering up an argument in any controversy, or for the accomplishment of any particular end other than ascertaining the truth. They have lain, unused, in my drawer, from that time to this. My object was to ascertain, as nearly as I could, from the girls themselves and from their overseers, *the effect produced upon their health, by their occupation in the mill.* To this end, I prepared blank tables, in which was set down, first, the age of each girl in the room, secondly, the length of time which she had been engaged in manufacturing occupations, then an answer to this question—“*Is your health as good, or is it not as good, since you have worked in the mill, as it was before?*” and, lastly, the remarks of the overseer as to the healthy or unhealthy looks and appearances of his several hands. The following are a few of the results of these tables, taken without choice, from among many others of a like character. The first table that I take up is that of a spinning room. The whole number of girls employed in it was 55. Their average age was

18 years and six months : the average time, during which they had worked in the mills, was nearly three years. Of these 55, 41 answered that their health was as good as before, 3 that it was better, and 11 that it was not as good. Of these last the overseer remarks that 6 look well, and that 5 are pale. The following is a summary of the overseer's remark ; "*looks well,*" 25 ; "*rosy,*" 9 ; "*fat,*" 2 ; "*fat and looks well,*" 4 ; "*looks healthy,*" 2 ; "*very healthy looking,*" 2 ; "*fat and rosy,*" 2 ; "*fat and pale,*" 3 ; "*thin,*" 2 ; "*pale,*" 4. The table from a carding room of another mill gives the following results :—Whole number of girls 22 ; average age nearly 23 years ; average time of having worked in the mills 2 years and 9 months ; as well 12 ; better 8 ; not so well 2. Another table made up within the last year, gives these results :—Whole number of girls 36 ; average time of having been in the mill, 23 months ; health as good, 26 ; not as good, 7 ; better 3 ; remarks of overseer—healthy, and tolerably healthy looking, 31 ; not very healthy looking, 5.

[Enquiries similar to the foregoing have been repeated, on an extensive scale, within a few months past. Of twenty-six hundred and ten girls, who returned answers to these questions, one hundred and seventy call themselves better than they were before entering the mills, fifteen hundred and sixty-three call themselves as well, or healthy, or in good health, or in very good health, and eight hundred and seventy-eight not so well, or not quite so well, or not very well. Of these latter, it is important to notice, more than half are marked by their overseers as in good health.]

There is one other important fact, which should be stated here. It is this. Dividing these girls into two classes,—into those who have been at work for a period of time short of the average, and into those who have been at work for a period of time above the average, it is found that the results, in regard to health, are fully as favorable for the latter as for the former. In other words, those who have been longest in the mills are found to be in as good health as those who have recently come from the country. So much for the monstrous assertion of the Review, that these *poor girls*, after an average working life of three years, worn out in health, spirits, and morals, and with impaired reputations, when they can toil no longer, go home to die ! Out upon such abominable trumpery !

It is very true, as is shown by the mean period of time which is spent in the mills, and by the average age of the girls, no greater now than it was five years ago, that these females do not remain permanently here. At the end of a few years, as a general rule, they leave the mills, either for their old homes, or what very frequently happens, for new ones of their own. They leave them, however, not worse but better off than they entered them ; more independent in purse, with their minds quickened and enlightened, and with their manners and morals improved. A very large proportion of the girls, furthermore, excepting those who are some hundreds of miles distant from their homes, leave the mills as often as once a year, on visits to their families and friends. During the hottest part of the summer season, many hundreds of the girls are at their old homes in the country. From one of the oldest establishments in the city, there are now absent, as nearly as can be ascertained, from twenty-

five to thirty girls, who have gone into the country to teach school during the warm season. In connexion with this fact, I will state another somewhat related to it. There are now employed in this same establishment, one hundred and twenty-four girls, who have been school teachers! From this same establishment, *two hundred and ninety* girls attended evening schools during the last winter.

Of nearly two thousand girls, of whom this point was ascertained, the average age was about twenty-three years. In one establishment, where the number employed is six hundred and fifty-seven, the exact mean age was found to be twenty-two years and one quarter, and the average period of time during which they had been employed either in these or in other mills, was found to be three years and three-quarters. In another establishment, where the number employed in a single mill is two hundred and three, the mean age was found to be twenty-two and eighty-five hundredths, and the mean period of work in this or in other mills, four years and twenty-nine hundredths.

That this result, so far I mean as the average age is concerned, does not depend upon the employment of children, or of very young people, may be seen by the statement of another fact. In the establishment first mentioned, of the six hundred and fifty-seven girls, only *eighteen* were under fifteen years of age; while in the latter, of the two hundred and three girls employed, only *one* was under the age of fifteen years;—a girl of most remarkable quickness and skill, who was earning two dollars a week beside her board! It should be remembered that in this respect, there is a wide difference between the condition of the American and the British manufacturing population. From a table contained in Dr. Ure's *Philosophy of Manufactures*, it appears, that of eight thousand two hundred and eighty-nine males employed in forty-three cotton mills in Manchester, twenty-three hundred and thirty-eight were between the ages of nine and fourteen years: and that of eight thousand nine hundred and forty-six females employed in the same mills, fifteen hundred and eighty nine were between the ages of nine and fourteen years.

The average age of the operatives in the mills of Preston and its vicinity, according to a report of Mr Harrison, an Inspecting Surgeon, was, in 1834, fourteen years.]

William Austin, Esq. whose enterprising and philanthropic character is well known and who was formerly superintendent of one of the largest manufacturing establishments in the city, says in a note, dated January, 1835, accompanying some of the above named documents, "So far as my own observations have extended, I am induced to believe that six hundred females out of a thousand enjoy better health in the mills, than they would in any employment, requiring the same hours of labor each day."

I could easily extend these data, and with the same gratifying results; but it is, certainly, unnecessary. They constitute an unanswerable refutation of the wild and unsupported assertions contained in the *Times*. There they are—simple, clear, intelligible, stubborn, unyielding facts, which no sophistry can uproot or destroy, which no empty wind of declamation can overthrow.

In the investigation of this subject thus far, I have avoided

as much as possible any appeal to mere opinion, or to the results of individual observations, too often imperfect, one-sided and prejudiced. Before leaving it, I wish however to say, that the general and comparative good health of the girls employed in the mills here and their freedom from serious disease have long been subjects of common remark among our most intelligent and experienced physicians. *The manufacturing population of this city is the healthiest portion of the population,* and there is no reason why this should not be the case. They are but little exposed to many of the strongest and most prolific causes of disease, and very many of the circumstances which surround and act upon them are of the most favorable hygienic character. They are regular in all their habits. They are early up in the morning, and early to bed at night. Their fare is plain, substantial and good, and their labor is sufficiently active and sufficiently light to avoid the evils arising from the two extremes of indolence and over-exertion. They are but little exposed to the sudden vicissitudes and to the excessive heats or colds of the seasons, and they are very generally free from anxious and depressing cares.

Is the physical condition then, I shall probably be asked, of these seven thousand females, so good, that there is nothing to be complained of, and no improvement to be wished or desired, or attempted? Is there no ill health among them? Are there no causes of disease connected with their situation and occupation? Far be it from me to pretend that every thing is so satisfactory. The bodily health, and the habits, so far as these have a bearing on the health, of the entire female population of the country is far enough from being what it should be. As it is elsewhere so is it here. I wish a more rational and healthy—not a more luxurious or expensive system, of diet was generally adopted, as well in the splendid dining halls of Boston and New York as in the boarding houses of Lowell and Dover. I wish that every girl would consult her health and comfort in providing herself with an umbrella, india rubber over shoes, a warm cloak, woollen stockings and flannel for the winter, instead of sacrificing to her pride in the form of parasols, kid shoes, lace veils and silk stockings. I wish the number of hours devoted to labor could be abridged. This number now averages within a few minutes of twelve. It is the same here as it is in other manufacturing establishments throughout New England. Any change which is made in this matter must be common to them all, and that the progress of intelligence, justice and philanthropy, and the inevitable and irresistible tendencies of labor-saving machinery will ultimately and in due

season, lead to this result, I have no more doubt, than I have in the existence of justice and philanthropy themselves.

The writer in the *Times* could not help seeing, and he knew that nobody else could help seeing, the palpable and glaring absurdity, involved in the alleged fact, that girls should voluntarily and of their own free choice remain subject to all the ills of body and mind which his turbid and distempered imagination had conjured up. To escape this dilemma he attempts to show that there is gradually accumulating here, a permanent factory population, degraded in character, deteriorated and worn out in body, living in a slavish and entire dependence on the mills, and *unable to get away with advantage!* All this is gravely asserted and argued, but a purer piece of fiction was never gendered in the brain of a lunatic. *There is no such class here.* There is hardly such a girl here, unless she has been overtaken with sudden and severe sickness. Those who have been longest and most steadily at work in the mills are quite as healthy as the new comers—and they constitute *the best, the most independent, and the most highly respectable* portion of this part of our population. I assert these things broadly, unqualifiedly, absolutely. There is not a man here conversant with the case who will not confirm them.

I feel unwilling to pass from this subject without an allusion to the care and attention bestowed upon those girls who are here overtaken with serious sickness. These cases are, in their very nature, accompanied with many painful and distressing circumstances. There are but few scenes that can take a stronger hold upon our sympathies than many which are presented to us by some of these extremest cases. In a strange land, and in the midst of strangers; away from the affectionate solitudes and the self-sacrificing offices of domestic love, and with scanty or exhausted resources, the poor sufferer finds herself suddenly arrested in her plans and laid upon the bed of sickness. But nowhere can better substitutes for those wants, which nothing but a home can supply, be found, than are found here; nowhere a readier kindness—nowhere a more liberal charity—nowhere a more devoted attention. This is emphatically true, if she has been here long enough to have formed her connexions with the church or the Sunday school. She then has to interest themselves at once and warmly in her welfare and comfort, beside her overseer and in many cases, his superintendent, her pastor and her Sunday school teacher, and thus in addition to the good offices growing out of her common relations to her employers, she is blessed with the divine charities of a christian love.

There can be no impropriety in stating here, that the agents and directors of the several corporations have for a long time had in contemplation the establishment of an institution where such of the sick as might need or desire it, could receive better care and attention, than it is possible to give them in any private boarding houses; and that quite recently, they have succeeded in obtaining for this purpose the spacious and beautiful mansion erected by the late Mr Boott. The only private dwelling house in the city, which possesses any claims to the character of costly elegance, is thus to be transformed into a *boarding house for the sick*. It should be further stated, in this connection, that all the girls are vaccinated at the expense of the corporations.

[The Hospital has now been open for the reception of the sick, just one year. During that time, there have been received and treated, one hundred and thirty-one patients, and there have been only four deaths; showing a rate of mortality exceedingly small. This institution has had to encounter something of the prejudice which is so generally felt by New England people against hospitals, but this is true to a less extent than might very reasonably have been anticipated. This mistaken and unfortunate feeling is every day becoming less, and there is good reason to believe that the proportion of those who will avail themselves of the many and great benefits of this noble and christian institution will be constantly increasing. As a knowledge of these benefits becomes diffused, this can hardly be otherwise. Spacious and beautiful rooms, well warmed and ventilated, with the best medical attendance and nursing, make up a combination of comforts for the sick, which are not often to be met with even in the best regulated homes of the inmates. For all these accommodations, the charge is only three dollars a week, for females, and no one in the employ of the corporations is shut out on account of her inability to pay.]

I come now, lastly, to a consideration of the intellectual and moral condition of our factory girls. I have no false delicacy that should prevent me from dealing fairly and frankly with this subject, but I cannot consent to quote the language in which the gross and atrocious calumnies of the Times and its correspondent are uttered. It is sufficient that I should state the substance of the allegations made by these writers; and this is, that the actual intellectual and moral condition of the female portion of our population, employed in the mills, is generally and deplorably low, and that the tendencies of the circumstances in which they are placed, are to sink this character still lower.

I regret that any occasion should have existed for this portion of the defence which I have felt myself called upon to make. I regret that charges so scandalous, against such a population, should have been so lightly made. But I enter upon the subject with a most perfect and absolute confidence in the

result. I say here, in advance, with neither hesitation nor misgiving, that no intelligent, right-hearted and unprejudiced man can read the articles in the Times, and the statements which I shall now make, without feeling his bosom swell with indignation at the cruel and audacious aspersions, which are there cast—either through an ignorance that is unpardonable, or a malevolence that is worse—upon this portion of our population.

Before going into the general question of moral and religious character and influences, there is a single, definite point which ought not to be passed over. By a statute of this commonwealth, it is wisely and humanely provided that no person, under the age of fifteen years, shall be suffered to work more than nine months of any year, in a manufacturing establishment, the remaining three months to be passed at school. The writer in the Times says, and these are his words, “this law is evaded by the cruel and mercenary owners of the children, who keep them nine months in one factory, and then take them directly to another, with a lie in their mouths, that the children have had three months schooling, and when the mills are short of hands,” he adds, “the superintendents are not very anxious to ascertain the truth; nor do they care much for the welfare of the children or obedience to the law.” Such is the bold, unvarnished statement in the Times; now what is the truth? The “lie” in the mouths of the parents is of no avail here; in no possible way could such a lie be of any avail—it is a matter with which the parents have nothing, whatever, to do. They are not asked whether their children have complied with the laws. *Every child is obliged to bring, and she does bring it, before she can be admitted into the mill, a certificate from the school teacher—signed by him or her, and sworn to before a justice of the peace,* that the terms of the statute have in her case been truly and faithfully complied with. Did the editor of the Boston Times know this fact when he made the assertion which I have quoted? His remarks, in relation to the superintendents, is as false as that in regard to the parents. No, this law is enforced and obeyed to its very letter. Its administration is rigorous. No pains are spared to carry it into full and universal operation. No want of hands, and what is more, no urgency of entreaty on the part of parents who are directly and oftentimes seriously interested, is suffered to interfere for a moment with its action. During the very hard times of 1837, I had frequent occasion to know of the unflinching severity with which the law was enforced. There were several cases, in which almost the entire support of a small family,

consisting, perhaps, of a widowed mother and one or two young children, was derived from the monthly wages of an elder son or daughter of 13 or 14 years old, and where this support was wholly cut off, at the imperious bidding of the law. In no instance that ever I have heard of, was the law arrested or turned aside from its end.

How shall I go to work to satisfy the readers of the *Times* and of these communications, not personally familiar with the true state of things, of the high standard of morals among the female part of our population? I know of but one method, and that is, avoiding as much as possible all loose generalities, to state all such settled, ascertained, undisputed facts as bear directly upon the question, and then to appeal to the testimony of those persons who have had the best opportunities of ascertaining the truth, and who are at the same time least liable to have their inferences warped, either by passion or prejudice.

Let it be remembered that the great and true question relates to the changes which are wrought in the character of the girls, and to the influences which most strongly act upon this character, while these girls are employed here. We are in no way responsible for causes or results with which we have had nothing to do.

The amount of strictly religious influences will be best and most clearly shown, by the number of accessions to the several churches. The aggregate number of these I am not able to give, from want of the requisite materials. I have been able, however, to procure returns from nine of the fifteen churches in the city. These churches were organized at different times since the origin of the city, and the whole number of persons who have joined them by profession, amounts to 5,559. From eight to nine tenths of these were females, a large proportion of whom were employed in the mills. But even this statement, striking as it is, indicates but a part of the result of these religious influences. Large numbers of females have here become interested in the subject of religion, who have not united themselves to any of the Lowell churches, on account of the shortness of the time during which they intended to remain in the city. One of our clergymen who reports 400 admissions by baptism into his church, since its organization in August, 1833, says that 200, at least, have been converted under his preaching, who have not become members of his church for the reason above stated.

There are now in the city fourteen regularly organized religious societies, besides one or two others quite recently established. Ten of these societies constitute a Sabbath School

Union. Their third annual report was made on the fourth of the present month, and it has been published within a few days. I derive from it the following facts. The number of scholars connected with the ten schools at the time of making the report was 4936, and the number of teachers was 433, making an aggregate of 5369. The number who joined the schools during the year was 3770, the number who left was 3129. About three fourths of the scholars are females. A large proportion of the latter are over fifteen years of age, *and consist of girls employed in the mills. More than five hundred of these scholars have, during the last year, become personally interested in practical piety, and more than six hundred have joined themselves to the several churches.* Now let it be borne in mind, that there are four or five Sunday schools in the city, some of which are large and flourishing, not included in this statement. Let it be borne in mind, too, that a great proportion of these scholars are the factory girls, and furthermore, that these most gratifying results, just given, have nothing in them extraordinary—they are only the common, ordinary results of several of the past years. There has been no unusual excitement; no noise, no commotion. Silently, quietly, unobtrusively, from Sabbath to Sabbath, in these little nurseries of truth, duty and religion, has the good seed been sowing and springing up—watered by the dews and warmed by the smiles of heaven—to everlasting life.

I said, after making some statements in relation to the rate of mortality, during certain years, among our manufacturing population, that these results could hardly find a parallel in medical statistics. I now ask, and I trust that I may do so without any vain boasting or presumption, whether the moral and religious statistics of any part of moral and religious New England can furnish more gratifying results, than those which I have just given. Let us look at them once more. In a population of about 20,000 souls—somewhat less probably than this—there are fifteen religious societies, ten of which have connected with their Sunday schools, in the capacities of teachers or scholars, more than *five thousand individuals.* If to these we now add the scholars and teachers in the remaining schools, we shall have an aggregate of more than *six thousand souls, nearly one third of the entire population—*connected with Sunday schools. This is no place for invidious comparisons, and I will make none; but I may ask with some confidence I think, whether these facts are very compatible with the existence of a corrupt, debased, licentious, and morally deteriorating population.

[Closely connected with this subject of the moral influences acting upon these girls, is that of the character of their overseers. The constant presence and example of the overseer must act powerfully, either for good or for evil, upon the minds and manners of the girls under his charge. I asked one of the superintendents how many of his overseers were members of churches, or connected with Sunday Schools. After making enquiry he sent me the following note.

Dear Sir:—

I employ in our mills, and the various departments connected with them, 30 overseers, and as many second overseers. My overseers are married men with families, with a single exception, and even he has engaged a tenement, and is to be married soon. Our second overseers are younger men, but upwards of twenty of them are married, and several others are soon to be married. Sixteen of our overseers are members of some regular church, and four of them deacons. Ten of our second overseers are also members of the church, and one of them is the superintendent of a Sabbath School. I have no hesitation in saying that in all the sterling requisites of character, in native intelligence and practical good sense, in sound morality, and as active, useful, exemplary citizens, they may, as a class, safely challenge comparison with any class in our community. I know not among them all an intemperate man, nor, at this time, even what is called a moderate drinker.

Yours, truly,

Lowell, May 10, 1841.

I ought to state here, that the above is not given as a singular or picked fact. I have made no similar enquiries in relation to any other of the manufacturing establishments. The same thing is true in regard to the number of girls who have been school teachers, and also to the number who are in the habit of attending evening schools.]

I shall now proceed to enumerate some of the influences which have been most powerful in bringing about these results. Among these are the example and watchful care and oversight of the boarding house keepers, the superintendents and the overseers. The moral police of all the establishments is vigilant, active and rigid. While industry and good conduct are respected and rewarded, no violations of the excellent and judicious rules of the corporations, and no improper or suspicious conduct meet with any indulgence or toleration. It is only by maintaining an unsullied and unimpeachable character that a girl can retain her situation in the mill, and when dismissed for any impropriety from one establishment, there is no possibility of her getting a place in any of the others. But a power vastly more active, all pervading and efficient than any and all of these is to be found in the jealous and sleepless watchfulness, over each other, of the girls themselves. The great body of the girls are as virtuous as the female population of any part of New England; they have an honest and conservative pride in the preservation of their character and respectability as a class; and even if all others who are interested in their welfare should be remiss, there is no danger that they themselves will

forget or neglect the obligations they owe to themselves and to each other. The strongest guardianship of their own character, as a class, is in their own hands, and they will not suffer either overseer or superintendent to be indifferent to this character with impunity. Their censorship is despotic, and no superintendent nor overseer could keep his hands, if he failed to remove an obnoxious or suspected individual, when the finger of censorship had pointed her out.

But there are other good influences which have had a most powerful effect in creating the excellent state of things which exists among these girls: I allude to such as are of a more directly moral and religious nature. The facts in connexion with these subjects have already been given, and these facts are exactly such as might have been looked for. There is not to be found in New England a body of clergymen, more zealous, laborious and devoted to their great duties than our own. By their own personal efforts, in the pulpit and out of it, and through the instrumentality of their teachers in their Sunday schools, an aggregate amount of good influences is brought to bear upon this part of our population, *unequaled*—I have no hesitation in saying it—*in any part of the country*. The relationship which is here established between the Sunday school scholar and her teacher—between the member of the church and her pastor—the attachments which spring up between them are rendered close and strong by the very circumstances in which these girls are placed. These relationships and these attachments take the place of the domestic ties and the home affections and they have something of the strength and fervency of these. Every clergyman and every Sunday school teacher who has been long in the city, will confirm the truth of these remarks.

I have no wish to make any disparaging comparisons between our own female population and that of other places, in town or in country. What the result of a comparison would be, between the Lowell factory girls on the one hand, and the domestic help and seamstresses of the large Atlantic cities on the other—in relation to bodily health, intelligence, independence, and moral character,—no one at all acquainted with the matter can for a moment doubt. I wish however, to make a single remark in regard to the comparative condition of the girls here at work in the mills and that of the same girls at their homes in Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont. It is a very great mistake to suppose that the safeguards of virtue or the temptations to vice are less numerous and powerful, in the country, generally, than they are here. The difference in favor of the

country, so far as its moral condition and influences are concerned, is altogether overrated. Of many towns and neighborhoods in the country, this is most emphatically and indisputably true. Hundreds and hundreds of girls, in leaving the neighborhoods of their nativity, and coming here, are removed from influences that are either negative or positively bad, to those of the most active and excellent character.

The observation and enquiry of every successive year have confirmed in me more and more strongly the opinion, that the aggregate change which is wrought in the moral character and condition of the young females who come here from the country is eminently happy and beneficial. The great preponderance of influence is enlightening, elevating and improving—not darkening, debasing and deteriorating. Their manners are cultivated, their minds are enlarged, and their moral and religious principles are developed and fortified. Hundreds and hundreds of these girls will long live to refer the commencement of their best and highest happiness to their residence in this city.

In estimating the different causes which affect the morals of these females, the price of their labor ought not to be left out of the account. I have no wish to put this down for any more than it is worth. I know that there is no necessary connexion between good character and external prosperity. But, nevertheless, this element is worth something. All other things being equal, a well paid female population will be more virtuous than an ill-paid one. They are more likely to form habits of industry and frugality, they will have more self-respect, and they are removed from many temptations to vice. All these considerations apply with great force to the Lowell factory girls. The average wages, clear of board, amount to about two dollars a week. Many an aged father or mother, in the country, is made happy and comfortable, by the self-sacrificing contributions from the affectionate and dutiful daughter here. Many an old homestead has been cleared of its incumbrances, and thus saved to the family by these liberal and honest earnings. To the many and most gratifying and cheering facts, which, in the course of this examination, I have had occasion to state, I here add a few others relating to the matter now under discussion, furnished me by Mr. Carney, the Treasurer of the Lowell Institution for Savings. The whole number of depositors in this Institution on the 23d July, was nineteen hundred and seventy-six; the whole amount of deposits was \$305,796 75. Of these depositors *nine hundred and seventy-eight are factory girls*, and the amount of their funds now in the

bank, is estimated by Mr Carney, in round numbers, at *one hundred thousand dollars*. It is a common thing for one of these girls to have *five hundred* dollars in deposit, and the only reason why she does not exceed this sum is the fact that the Institution pays no interest on any larger sum than this. After reaching this amount, she invests her remaining funds elsewhere.

These facts have a direct bearing upon another subject, connected very closely with human happiness and morals:— I mean that of marriage. Every thing which favors the formation of marriages, at a suitable time of life, and with proper foresight, tends strongly to the advancement of social happiness and to the strengthening of social virtue. The fear has been felt and expressed, that the great accumulation of females here might act unfavorably upon their prospects of marriage. But I do not think that such is the fact. It is not easy to see how this circumstance can diminish the number of young men in New England, annually married, and if it does not do this, it cannot very well diminish the number of young women. If the chances of those females who are here, are diminished, it would seem to follow, that the chances of their sisters at home must be increased. But I do not believe that even this is true. I do not believe that the proportion of marriages among these girls is less than it is among the aggregate female population of New England. Very many of them find homes and husbands here—and better ones too, than they would have found at home; others find homes and husbands in the country for which they are indebted to the improvement in their character, manners and condition resulting from their residence here. Positive facts are wanting upon this subject, so that I am unable to institute any extensive comparisons between this and other places. I have before me materials for only one. The population of Portsmouth, in 1835, was nearly 9,000: and the number of marriages was 101, making one marriage to about 89 individuals. The number of publishments recorded in the City of Lowell between the 1st of April, 1838, and the 1st of April, 1839, was 288, and of this number 38 only of the females belonged in other towns. This would give us about 250 marriages, and with a population of nearly 20,000, we should have one marriage to less than 80 individuals, making a very considerable difference in our favor. There is another point of view in which the difference between Portsmouth and Lowell is very striking: this consists in the relation between the number of deaths and the number of marriages for a series of years. The whole number of deaths in Portsmouth, during

nine years, was 1241, and the whole number of marriages for the same years was 612, making very nearly one marriage to two deaths. The mortality of Lowell, as nearly as it can be ascertained from the time of its incorporation in March, 1826, to the 1st of April 1839, may be set down at 2350 : the whole number of publishments during the same period amounted to 2784 ! Deducting from this number, for girls not belonging to the city, the sum of 434, which is allowing a larger per cent. than existed for the year in which it was accurately ascertained, and we have *just as many marriages during this period as we have deaths*, showing a difference in favor of Lowell, as compared with Portsmouth, of *two to one*. I do not forget that this result is partly to be accounted for by the great preponderance here of marriageable females, but after all, it is a most extraordinary result, if there is no error in the data from which it is derived. We have here a marriage for every death. Now it will be seen at once, on a little reflection, that the number of deaths, taking the entire population of the globe, *must* inevitably, exceed the number of marriages *by more* than two to one. All that are born must die. There must be just as many deaths as there are births. As it requires two individuals to make a single marriage, even if all who were born were once married, there would then be just twice as many deaths as marriages. It will be seen at once, that the relation in this city, between the deaths and marriages, is, when compared with the average relation, immensely in favor of the latter. From one of the dressing rooms, in this city, where the average number of hands employed is 33, there were in the space of 34 months, 22 marriages.

We have a pretty good right then, I think, to conclude, so far as our data will enable us to form an opinion, that the peculiar circumstances in which our female population is placed, have, at least, no tendency to diminish the number of marriages among them.

[From the first of April 1839, to the first of April 1841, the number of publishments recorded at the city clerk's office was *six hundred and eighty five*, and of these, only *eighty-two* of the females resided out of the city. What will fair minded and honorable men think of the reckless and random assertions of the Boston Quarterly Review, that few of the factory operatives ever marry ?]

I have now finished the task which I allotted to myself at the commencement of these papers. I thought that a large class of our population had been grossly calumniated, and without any reference, whatever, to the motives of the author, I thought that these calumnies should be met and refuted. My opinions have been carefully, honestly and de-

liberately formed; they coincide, substantially, with those of our oldest, wisest, most observing, and most intelligent citizens, and I am quite content that they should be left, without any further illustration or support, to make their way to the convictions of fair and unprejudiced men, whatever attempts may be made to disprove their correctness or explain them away.
