LOOM AND SPINDLE; OR, LIFE AMONG THE EARLY MILL GIRLS; WITH A SKETCH OF "THE LOWELL OFFERING" AND SOME OF ITS CONTRIBUTORS

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Loom and spindle; or, Life among the early mill girls; with a sketch of "The Lowell Offering" and some of its contributors by Harriet H. Robinson

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HARRIET H. ROBINSON

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Trieste

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LOOM AND SPINDLE

OR

Life Among the Early Mill Girls

WITH A SKETCH OF

"THE LOWELL OFFERING" AND SOME OF ITS CONTRIBUTORS

BY

HARRIET H. ROBINSON

AUTHOR OF "WARRINGTON PEN PORTRAITS," "MASSACHUSETTS IN THE WOMAN SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT," "THE NEW PANDORA," ETC.

Jane Knight
(i.e. Mrs W.S. Robinson)

INTRODUCTION

BY THE

HONORABLE CARROLL D. WRIGHT

"Work is a shame to none; the shame is not to be working." — HESIOD

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INTRODUCTION.

WHENEVER the history of economic conditions in this country shall be written, the author will express his gratitude for all works giving the details of especial epochs and phases of industrial life. Among them he will find no more interesting experience than that attending the entrance of women to the industrial field. The author of "Loom and Spindle" contributes something more than her personal experiences at Lowell during the early years of the textile factories, — she contributes an inside view of the workings of a new system of labor, which had been transplanted from England, and which originated with the application of power to spinning and weaving.

The attractions of good wages and comfortable environment were the inducements held out by American manufacturers at Lowell to secure a class of operatives which should bring success to their experiment. The prejudice against mill operatives, as shown by investiga-

tions in England, would otherwise have delayed the establishment of the factory in America; that is, the factory as controlled by a central power. With the attractions offered, it was natural that the women of New England should accept situations as weavers, spinners, etc., in the great textile works; but they brought with them their educational and religious training; and, as they were grouped together, it was natural also that they should continue the cultivation of their minds, especially under the broadening influences of mental contact. It is this aspect of the factory system to which Mrs. Robinson has addressed herself. It was an experience in which she took part; she saw it all, and was a part of it. She, with her associates, chief among whom were Harriot F. Curtis, a writer who attained an enviable position, the Currier sisters, Mrs. Chamberlain, Eliza Jane Cate, Harriet Farley, the sculptress Margaret Foley, Lydia S. Hall, Lucy and Emmeline Larcom, Sarah Shedd my first teacher, and others, who became well known in literary, benevolent, and other walks in public life, gave character to the early factory days in New England, which are usually referred to not only as unique in their features, but for the purpose of supporting the idea that modern conditions are not as

attractive, and that there has been a thorough deterioration not only in the people employed in factories, but in their home-life. Something of this note is sounded in the last chapter of this book; yet it must be recognized that the factory system has been and is a power in civilization, — a factor in developing it, in truth.

The factory girl of the early period was not degraded through her employment or her surroundings. She stepped out of factory life into professional or semi-professional occupations. She was succeeded by a class originally beneath her, the members of which have in their turn graduated from the factory, and stepped into higher callings. This process has been repeated, the destiny of the factory being ever to reach down and lift people up out of lowly into higher conditions. This gives the surface appearance of deterioration, when the real fact is that through the factory the lower orders, so far as mental capacity is concerned, are being constantly elevated. The author sees this, yet naturally cannot help regretting that the heterogeneity of the factory population — natives coming from many lands, with differing social ideas, with little or no training, with few opportunities for advancement, with low earning capacity, and with varied languages —

has changed the atmosphere of the factory community. The human lives involved are worth more in this atmosphere than they were in the cloddish labor out of which they have risen.

"Loom and Spindle," valuable as it is for its details of economic history, for the inspiration which comes from studying the lives and characters of noble women, teaches the lesson which the author and her associates taught, — that whatever is honest in employment is in the service of God. Their lives emphasize the fact that the modern system of industry has exercised a wonderful influence in securing intellectual stimulation, and in dignifying every honest calling.

CARROLL D. WRIGHT.

WASHINGTON, *May*, 1898.

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