

"Cordwainers' Song," 1844

(Tune—"My Bible Leads to Glory")

The cause of labor's gaining,
The cause of labor's gaining,
The cause of labor's gaining,

Throughout the town of Lynn.

Chorus

Onward! onward! ye noble-hearted working men;
Onward! onward! and victory is yours.

Arouse the working classes, &c.
Unite the free cordwainers, &c.
Let JUSTICE be our motto, &c.
Come, join us, all true hearted, &c.
Our prices are advancing, &c.
The WOMEN, too, are rising, &c.
New members daily join us, &c.
Our victory is certain, &c.
We'll *stitch* our SOLES still closer, &c.
Let all protect free labor, &c.
There'll soon be joy and gladness, &c.

Constance, "On the Art of Shoemaking," 1845

Great was his genius, and *inventive* thought!
Who first the curious *shoe* so nicely wrought,
Before this trade, others must soon retreat;
None will forego, this covering for their feet.
Without her shoe, what lady would be *seen*?
Take them away, what woman could be *Queen*?
Even the *Chinese* skill, in all the arts;
Will find this competition in these parts.

The town of Lynn in history is found:
Let all her sons be proud to have her named,
The very rocks with legions, rife are crowned;
And all the place with romance, still abound.

The lack of knowledge *see*, we cannot plead;
Our public schools give all the chance to *read*,
And learned men and great, with *faces* wise,
Will from the land of shoes, henceforth arise.

And now the Awl and Needle are combined,
Ladies your talent show, with intellect refined;
Though *men* still take the lead in politics and shoes,
Yet, when they ask our aid, oh! let us not refuse!

But help them in this work, with willing heart and hand,
And let not man be left alone, within this happy land;
Yet when we own this claim, (let not despotic sway,)
Arouse the woman's wrath, (and that *old* term, Obey.)

A Reporter's Account of Lynn Women's Mass Meeting During the Great Strike, 1860

. . . About noon, the procession from Lynn, consisting of about 3,500 men, preceded by a brass band, entered the village green, escorted by 500 Marbleheaders. The sight from the hotel steps was a very interesting one. Four thousand men, without work, poor, depending partially upon the charities of their neighbors and partially upon the generosity of the tradesmen of their town, giving up a certainty for an uncertainty, and involving in trouble with themselves many hundreds of women and children, while to a certain extent the wheels of trade are completely blocked, and no immediate prospect of relief appears. Their banners flaunted bravely. Their inscriptions of "Down with tyranny," "We are not slaves," "No sympathy with the rich," "Our bosses grind us," "We work and they ride," "No foreign police," and many others of like import, read very well and look very pretty, but they don't buy dinners or clothing, or keep the men at work or the women at home about their business. By this strike \$25,000 *weekly is kept from circulation in Lynn alone*, and who can say what the effect will be on the storekeepers, dealers in articles of home consumption, if such a state of drainage is kept up for any great length of time? . . .

The most interesting part of the whole movement took place last evening, and will be continued tonight. I refer to the mass meeting of the binders and stitchers held by the female strikers at Liberty Hall. . . .

There are two classes of workers—those who work in the shops and those who work at home—the former use the machines and materials of the bosses, while the latter work on their own machines, or work by hand, furnishing their own materials. It is evident that the latter should receive higher pay than the former, and the report not having considered this fact, was subjected to severe handling. The discussion which followed was rich beyond description—the jealousies, piques and cliques of the various circles being apparent as it proceeded. One opposed the adoption of the report because, "the prices set were so high that the bosses wouldn't pay them." Cries of "Put her out," "Shut up," "Scabby," and "Shame" arose on all sides; but, while the reporters were alarmed, the lady took it all in good part, and made up faces at the crowd. The Chairman stated that, hereafter, Pickleemoonia boots were to be made for three cents a pair less, which announcement was received with expressions of dismay, whereupon he corrected himself, and said they were to be three cents higher; and this announcement drew forth shouts and screams of applause. "There, didn't I say so?" said an old lady behind me. "You shut up," was the response of her neighbor; "you think because you've got a couple of machines you're some; but you ain't no more than anybody else." At this point some men peeped in at the window—"Scat, scat, and put 'em out," soon drove them away, and the meeting went into a Committee of the Whole, and had a grand chabbering for five minutes. Two ladies, one representing the machine

interest, and the other the shop girls, became very much excited, and were devoting themselves to an *exposé* of each other's habits, when the Chairman, with the perspiration starting from every pore, said in a loud and authoritative tone of voice: "Ladies! look at me; stop this wranglin'. Do you care for your noble cause? Are you descendants of old Molly Stark or not? Did you ever hear of the spirit of '76? [Yes, yes, we've got it.] Well, then, do behave yourselves. There ain't nobody nowhere who will aid you if you don't show 'em that you're regular built Moll Starks over agin.'" [Cheers, clappings, &c.] . . .

A proposition to march in the procession was the next topic which drew forth discussion. Some thought that proper minded women would better stay at home than be gadding about the streets following banners and music. To this there was some assent, but when a younger girl asked the last speaker what she meant by talking that way, when everybody in Lynn knew that she had been tagging around on the sidewalk after the men's processions the last week. . . .

Some of the statements were quite interesting. A Mrs. Miller said that she hired a machine on which she was able to make \$6 per week—out of that she paid—for the machine, \$1; for the materials, \$1.50; for her board, \$2; for bastings, \$1;—making \$5.50 in all, which left her a clear profit of only fifty cents a week. One of the bosses says, however, that if a woman is at all smart she can make \$10 per week with her machine, which would be clear \$3, sure. In fact, from remarks which were dropped around I judge that Mrs. Miller's estimate is rather low. The leading spirit of the meeting, Miss Clara Brown, a very bright, pretty girl, said that she called at a shop that day and found a friend of hers hard at work on a lot of linings. She asked what she was getting for them, and was told *eight cents for sixty*. "Girls of Lynn," said Clara, "*Girls of Lynn*, do you hear that and will you stand it? Never, Never, NEVER. Strike, then—strike at once; demand 8½ cents for your work when the binding isn't closed and you'll get it. Don't let them make niggers of you; [Shame, there are colored persons here.] I meant Southern niggers:—keep still; don't work your machines; let 'em lie still till we get all we ask, and then go at it, as did our Mothers in the Revolution."

This speech was a good one; it seemed to suit all parties, and they proposed to adjourn to Tuesday night, when they would have speeches and be more orderly. Canvassing Committees were appointed to look up female strikers and to report female "scabs." And with a vote of thanks to the Chairman, the meeting adjourned to meet in Lyceum Hall. . . .

Textile Operative William Shaw's Testimony on Child Labor in Pennsylvania's Textile Mills, 1838

. . . The greatest evils known are, first, the number of hours of labor, and the number of young children employed. Has worked in four different factories in nine years; in John P. Crozier's, nearly three years; Samuel

Riddle's, nearly two years; Joseph Dean, nearly two, and Jonathan Hatch, nearly one year, and now at Jos. Fleming's; is twenty-six years old. At Fleming's, about fifty persons employed; about eighteen females; about four children under twelve years old; about fifteen under eighteen years old. The proportion of children varies in different establishments; has known more than one-fourth to be children under twelve years of age; under twenty years, would include, in many cases, three-fourths; not many are apprenticed; they are usually hired to employers by parents and guardians. The hours vary in different establishments; in some I have worked fourteen and a-half hours. I have known work to commence as early as twenty minutes past four o'clock, in the summer season, and to work as late as half an hour before eight, P.M., an hour and a-half allowed for breakfast and dinner, when the hands all leave to go to dinner—children and all; the ringing of the bell was the notice to begin, and docking wages the penalty; the foreman rings the bell and stops the machinery. In the cities, the engineer rings the bell and stops the machinery.

The period of labor is not uniform; in some cases, from sun to sun. It is most common to work as long as they can see; in the winter they work until eight o'clock, receiving an hour and a-half for meals; an hour and a half is the entire time allowed for going, eating and returning; and that time is often shortened by the ringing of the bell too soon.

The labor of the children is, in some cases, excessive—in others it is not. The children are employed at spinning and carding. The question of excessive labor is more upon the kind of work; carding is the hardest work; their work is regulated by the operation of the machinery, at carding; and they must stand during the whole time; considers twelve or fourteen hours labor excessive at either branch for a child. I have known children of nine years of age to be employed at spinning—at carding, as young as ten years. Punishment by whipping, is frequent; they are sometimes sent home and docked for not attending punctually; never knew both punishments to be inflicted; generally the children are attentive, and punishments are not frequent. The carder, or person having charge of the children, inflicts the chastisement.

Boys and girls work together; no attention is paid by the manufacturer, or others in the factory, to the personal cleanliness of the children. Rules, sometimes printed, are posted in some of the factories, for the government.

The children are tired when they leave the factory; has known them to sleep in corners and other places, before leaving the factory, from fatigue. The younger children are generally very much fatigued particularly those under twelve years of age; has not heard frequent complaints of pain; more of being worried; has known the children to go to sleep on arriving at home, *before* taking supper; has known great difficulty in keeping children awake at their work; has known them to be struck, to keep them awake.

The children *are* more healthy when they first enter the factories, than afterwards; they lose colour, loss of appetite, and sometimes, not frequently, complain themselves; has known them to be compelled in some instances, to quit the factories, in consequence of ill health, particularly

females. Boys quit frequently to go to trades; has known no deformity produced by the labor.

Parents are favorable to a reduction of hours; I think no attention is paid to education during the time they are employed in factories, except what they receive from Sabbath schools, and some few at night schools, when they are in an unfit condition to learn; the children attend Sabbath school with great reluctance; many will not attend in consequence of the confinement of the week.

No particular attention is paid to morals; the boys and girls are not kept separate in the factories; they have different water closets; generally separated only by a partition; obscene language is frequently used; not often by females; profane language is frequently used; care is seldom taken to prevent these things; if their work is done, it is all that is required; girls and boys work together and talk together; no pains are taken to ventilate factories; sometimes the windows are nailed down; sometimes fifty are employed in one room; in small factories, as few as ten; has never known a thermometer to be kept in the rooms; in the winter they are generally kept too cold. The machinery is propelled in the city by steam, in the country by water. In the carding room, the air is frequently filled with flyings. The only instance of a contagious disease being generated in a factory, was near Baltimore, some years ago, when the yellow fever broke out in the factory of the Messrs Buchanan's, when it was not in the city. The superintendents are generally careful in their language, not to set a bad example.

The wages of children are not regulated by the number of hours they labor; I have known some to get no more than fifty cents per week; I have known some to get as much as \$1.25; the common rate is \$1.00; oftener less than greater; most of the children are boys.

Amelia, a Woman Worker, Protests Lowell Wage Slavery, 1845

. . . For the purpose of illustration, let us go with that light-hearted, joyous young girl who is about for the first time to leave the home of her childhood, that home around which clusters so many beautiful and holy associations, pleasant memories, and quiet joys; to leave, too, a mother's cheerful smile, a father's care and protection; and wend her way toward this far famed "city of spindles," this promised land of the imagination, in whose praise she has doubtless heard so much.

Let us trace her progress during her first year's residence, and see whether she indeed realizes those golden prospects which have been held out to her. Follow her now as she enters that large gloomy looking building—she is in search of employment, and has been told that she might

From "Voices from Lowell," 1845, in Philip Foner, ed., *The Factory Girls*, 1977, pp. 135-138, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977).

here obtain an eligible situation. She is sadly wearied with her journey, and withal somewhat annoyed by the noise, confusion, and strange faces all around her. So, after a brief conversation with the overseer, she concludes to accept the first situation which offers; and reserving to herself a sufficient portion of time in which to obtain the necessary rest after her unwonted exertions, and the gratification of a stranger's curiosity regarding the place in which she is now to make her future home, she retires to her boarding house, to arrange matters as much to her mind as may be.

The intervening time passes rapidly away, and she soon finds herself once more within the confines of that close noisy apartment, and is forthwith installed in her new situation—first, however, premising that she has been sent to the Counting-room, and receives therefrom a Regulation paper, containing the rules by which she must be governed while in their employ; and lo! here is the beginning of mischief; for in addition to the tyrannous and oppressive rules which meet her astonished eyes, she finds herself compelled to remain for the space of twelve months in the very place she then occupies, however reasonable and just cause of complaint might be hers, or however strong the wish for dismissal; thus, in fact, constituting herself a slave, a very slave to the caprices of him for whom she labors. Several incidents coming to the knowledge of the writer, might be somewhat interesting in this connection, as tending to show the prejudicial influence exerted upon the interests of the operative by this unjust requisition. The first is of a lady who has been engaged as an operative for a number of years, and recently entered a weaving room on the Massachusetts Corporation: the overseers having assured her previous to her entrance, that she should realize the sum of \$2.25 per week, exclusive of board; which she finding it impossible to do, appealed to the Counting-room for a line enabling her to engage elsewhere but it was peremptorily refused. . . .

But to return to our toiling Maiden,—the next beautiful feature which she discovers in this *glorious* system is, the long number of hours which she is obliged to spend in the above named close, unwholesome apartment. It is not enough, that like the poor peasant of Ireland, or the Russian serf who labors from sun to sun, but during one half of the year, she must still continue to toil on, long after Nature's lamp has ceased to lend its aid—nor will even this suffice to satisfy the grasping avarice of her employer; for she is also through the winter months required to rise, partake of her morning meal, and be at her station in the mill, while the sun is yet sleeping behind the eastern hills; thus working on an average, at least twelve hours and three fourths per day, exclusive of the time allotted for her hasty meals, which is in winter simply one half hour at noon,—in the spring is allowed the same at morn, and during the summer is added 15 minutes to the half hour at noon. Then too, when she is at last released from her wearisome day's toil, still may she not depart in peace. No! her footsteps must be dogged to see that they do not stray beyond the corporation limits, and she *must*, whether she will or no, be subjected to the manifold inconveniences of a large crowded boarding-house, where too, the price paid for her accommodation is so utterly insignificant that it will not ensure to her