

Chapter II - The Colonial Period

A STUDY of the relation of the woman wage earner to the factory system in this country involves some preliminary inquiry regarding her share in the work done under more primitive methods of production. Industrially we were a backward nation and, for a considerable time after our political independence had been secured, we remained economically dependent upon England. At the close of the first decade of the nineteenth century development of our manufacturing industries had scarcely begun.

A detailed survey of the field of employment for women during this earlier period is impossible because of the scarcity of records. Moreover, such a study would be on the whole unprofitable. It has, however, seemed justifiable to present the following body of material dealing with the employment of women during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, because though somewhat fragmentary, covering a considerable period of time dealing with a large and miscellaneous group of occupations, and confined chiefly to a single section of the country, it is believed to contribute to an understanding of the relation of women to the later industrial system.

Our primary interests during this early period were agriculture and commerce, and there was very little field for the industrial employment either of men or women. Such manufactures as were carried on in these early centuries were chiefly household industries and the work was necessarily done in the main by women. Indeed, it would not be far wrong to say that, during the colonial period, agriculture was in the hands of men, and manufacturing, for the

most part, in the hands of women. Men were, to be sure, sometimes weavers, shoemakers, or tailors; and here and there women of notable executive ability, such as the famous Eliza Lucas of South Carolina,¹³ managed farms and plantations.

It is of interest to note, too, in this connection that in the case of land allotments in early New England, women who were heads of families received their proportion of planting land; and in Salem, Plymouth, and the Cape Cod towns women could not get enough land. Although spinsters did not fare so well, it is a matter of record that in Salem even unmarried women were at first given a small allotment. The custom of granting "maid's lotts," however, was soon discontinued in order to avoid "all presedents and evil events of graunting lotts unto single maidens not disposed of."¹⁴In accordance with this ungalant decision, the "Salem Town Records" show one "Deborah Holmes refused Land being a maid but hath four bushels of corn granted her . . . and would be a bad presedent to keep house alone." In 1665, in Pennsylvania, 75 acres of land were promised to every female over fourteen years of age, and while this does not mean that the management of the lands was necessarily in their hands in many cases this must have happened.

But although daughters and wives often helped at home with what was rather rough work, cutting wood, milking, and the like, and the girl in service did similar "chores," it was not customary to employ women to any large extent for regular farm work. This was, of course, in contrast to the practice in England and on the Continent, where women, at this time, were regularly hired as reapers, mowers, and haymakers. An early account of Virginia says with regard to this point that "the women are not, as is reported, put into the ground to worke but occupie such domestique employments as in England. . . . Yet some wenches that are not fit to be so employed are put into the ground."¹⁵ It seems, therefore, clear that, with the exception of such cases as have been reported, the work on the farms was done by men.

Women on the other hand, were, for the most part engaged in the domestic cares of the household, which included at that time the

¹³See Harriott Ravenel, "Life of Eliza Pinckney."

¹⁴These details are found in Professor Herbert B. Adam's interesting study in the "Johns Hopkins University Studies," First Series, vols. is-x, "Allotments of Land in Salem to Men, Women and Maids," pp. 34, 35.

¹⁵Hammond, "Leah and Rachel" (London, 1656). Reprinted in Force, *Tracts*, iii.

manufacture within the home of a large proportion of the articles needed for household use. And besides the occupations of a domestic kind, there were, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, various other employments open to them which it may be worth while to notice without attempting to apply the classification growing out of the more complex organization of the present day. An attempt will be made, therefore, to give a brief account of all gainful occupations in which women were engaged without attempting to classify them.

One of the oldest of these was the keeping of taverns and "ordinaries." In 1643, the General Court of Massachusetts granted Goody Armitage permission to "keepe the ordinary, but not to drawe wine,"¹⁶ and throughout this century and the next the Boston town records show repeated instances of the granting of such licenses to women. In 1669, for example, "Widdow Snow and Widdow Upshall were 'approved of to sell beere and wine for the yeare ensuinge and keep houses of publique entertainment'," and there are records of the granting of similar permissions to other women on condition that they "have a careful and sufficient man to manage the house." Such licenses were granted most frequently to widows, but occasionally to wives. Thus the wife of Thomas Hawkins was given permission to sell liquors "by retayle" only because of "the selectmen consideringe the necessitie and weake condition of her Husband."

Shopkeeping was another of the early gainful employments for women in this country. The "New Haven Colonial Records" contain a most interesting account of a woman shopkeeper who flourished for a time during the first half of the seventeenth century, and then became involved in serious difficulties because of her method of systematic overcharging. In 1643 an indignant customer appealed to the court, charging that he had "heard of the dearnes of her commodities, the excessive gaynes she tooke, was discouradged from proceedinge and accordingly bid his man tel her he would have none of her cloth." He asked the court to deal with her "as an oppressor of the commonweale" and offered ten specific charges; among them, "that she sold primmers at 9 pence a piece which cost but 4 pence here in New England" and that "she sold a peece of cloth to the two Mecars at 23s. 4d. per yard in wompom, the cloth cost her about 12s. per yard and sold when wompom was in great request."¹⁷ It is of interest that Higginson refers to this employment for women in

¹⁶"Massachusetts Colonial Records," ii, 46.

¹⁷"New Haven Colonial Records," i, 174-176, 147.

asking patronage for “sister Wharton’s two daughters to help forward their shop-keeping”; and, he adds significantly that they “are like to continue as ancient maids I know not how long, Sarah being 25 or 26 years old!”

Other kinds of business attracted women in this same period. The raising of garden seeds and similar products seems to have been a common occupation.¹⁸ Women were sometimes shrewd traders and, often, particularly in the seaboard towns, venturesome enough to be speculators. An interesting example of the way in which women along the coast sometimes risked their savings is to be found in an old memorandum of one Margaret Barton which belongs to the year 1705 and is preserved in the Boston Public Library’s collection of manuscripts. This woman, who claimed to have served a full apprenticeship in the trade of “chair frame making” and to have worked at it for a time, seems to have made quite a fortune for those days in “ventures at sea.” She was, however, a rather disreputable person, for the “Boston Selectmen’s Records” show that she was “warned out of town,” and her testimony may not be altogether reliable.

Among the other gainful employments for women in this period which were not industrial might be mentioned keeping a “dame’s school” which, though a very unremunerative occupation, was often resorted to.¹⁹ There were, too, many notable nurses and midwives; in Bristol a woman was ringer of the bell and kept a meeting-house, and in New Haven a woman was appointed to “sweepe and dresse the meeting house every weeke and have 1s. a weeke for her pains.” The common way, however, for a woman to earn her board and a few pounds a year was by going out to service. But it should be noted that the domestic servant in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was employed for a considerable part of her time in processes of manufacture and that, without going far wrong, one might classify this as an industrial occupation. A servant, for example, who was a good spinner or a good tailoress, was valued accordingly, and advertisements in eighteenth-century newspapers frequently mention this as a qualification.

¹⁸See, for example, advertisements in the *Boston Evening Post*, January 25, 1745; *Boston Gazette*, April 19, 1748; *New England Weekly Journal*, March 10, 1741.

¹⁹There is a record of a woman keeping such a school in New Haven before 1656. See Blake, “Chronicles of New Haven Green,” p. 184; and see also Sewall, “History of Wobum,” p. 52, for a further note on such work.

There remain, however, a number of instances, in which women were employed in and were even at the head of what might, strictly speaking, be called industrial establishments. A woman, for example, occasionally ran a mill, carried on a distillery, or even worked in a sawmill. The "Plymouth Colony Records" note in 1644 that "Mistress Jenny, upon the presentment against her, promiseth to amend the grinding at the mill, and to keep morters cleane, and baggs of come from spoyleing and looseing." At Mason's settlement at Piscataqua, "eight Danes and twenty two women" were employed in sawing lumber and making potash.²⁰In 1693 a woman appears with two men on the pages of the "Boston Town Records" "desiring leave to build a slaughter house." But all of these seem to have been unusual employments.

There were, however, a great many women printers in the eighteenth century, and these women were both compositors and worked at the press. Several colonial newspapers were published by women and they printed books and pamphlets as well. Women were also employed in the early paper mills, where they were paid something like the equivalent of seventy-five cents a week and board.

Although there is no doubt of the fact that women were gainfully employed away from home at this time, such employment was quite unimportant compared with work which they did in their own homes.

In considering minor industrial occupations within the home we find that a few women were bakers²¹ and some were engaged in similar work, such as making and selling of preserves or wine.²² But the great majority of women in this group were employed in the manufacture of textiles, which in its broadest sense includes knitting, lacemaking, the making of cards for combing cotton and wool, as well as sewing, spinning and weaving.

Some women must have found knitting a profitable by-employment. Knit stockings sold for two shillings a pair, and occasionally for much more. One old account book records that "Ann" sold a "pare of stockens for 16s." Sewing and tailoring were standard occupations and were variously remunerated, — one woman made "shirts for the

²⁰Weeden, "Social and Economic History of New England" i, 168; and see p. 310 for note of a woman who bolted flour for her neighbors.

²¹See, for example, Felt, "Annals of Salem," ii, 152; and see also the mention of Widow Gray in *Boston News Letter*, January 21, 1711.

²²*The New England Weekly Journal*, July 5, 1731, advertises a shop kept by a woman for the delusive sale of preserves and similar products.

Indians” at eight-pence each, and “men’s breeches” for a shilling and sixpence a pair, and in addition to this work of tailoring she taught school, did spinning and weaving for good pay, managed her house, was twice married and had fourteen children.²³

Spinning and weaving, the processes upon which the making of cloth depended, absorbed a great deal of the time of the women and girls of the period. This work was not uniformly organized according to any one industrial system. In the seventeenth century, the work was household industry; the raw materials were furnished by the household and the finished product was for household use; but so far as any part of it was marketed or exchanged at the village store, the system became closely akin to handicraft. The commodity that was exchanged or sold belonged to the woman as a true craftswoman, the material had been hers and the product, until she disposed of it, was her own capital. When the article was sold directly to the consumer, as frequently happened, even the final characteristic of handicraft, the fact of its being “custom work,” was present.²⁴

With the expansion of the industry, especially in the latter half of the eighteenth century, a considerable part of the work was done more in the manner of what is known as the commission system. As yarn came to be in great demand, many women were regularly employed spinning at home for purchasers who were really commission merchants. These men sometimes sold the yarn but often they put it out again to be woven and then sold the cloth.

The most important occupations for women, therefore, before the establishment of the factory system, were spinning and weaving. It is impossible to make any estimate of the number of women who did such work, or of their earnings, of the proportion of homespun which went to market, or of what part of it, even when exchanged by the husband, was manufactured by the wife and daughters. But it is quite safe to say that spinning for the household was a universal occupation for women, and that the number of those who used this, and later, weaving also, as a “gainful employment” was very large.

Every effort was made to encourage children as well as women to engage in this work. As early as 1640, a court order in Massachusetts

²³See Temple and Sheldon, “History of Northfield,” p. 163.

²⁴This discussion of industrial systems follows in the main Bücher’s analysis in his “Industrial Evolution” (Wickett’s translation), Chap. IV; and the introductory chapter in Unwin, “Industrial Organization in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” in which Bücher’s interpretation is related to the industrial organization of today.

directed an inquiry into the possibilities of manufacturing cotton cloth, "what men and woemen are skilful in the braking, spinning and weaving what course may be taken for teaching the boyes and girles in all towns the spinning of the yarne." A similar order in 1656 called upon every town to see that the "woemen, boyes and girles spin according to their skill and ability." In the same year Hull recorded in his *Diary of Public Occurrences* that "twenty persons, or about such a number, did agree to raise a stock to procure a house and materials to improve the children and youth of the town of Boston (which want employment) in the several manufactures."

There is, in short, no lack of evidence to show that it was regarded as a public duty in the colony of Massachusetts to provide for the training of children, not only in learning, but in the words of one of the old court orders in "labor and other employments which may be profitable to the commonwealth."

This experiment in Boston, of which John Hull made record in 1656, was the prototype of many attempts in the following century to make children useful in developing the cloth manufacture. In 1720, the same town appointed a committee to consider the establishment of spinning schools for the instruction of the children of the town in spinning, and one of the Committee's recommendations was a suggestion that twenty spinning wheels be provided "for such children as should be sent from the alms house"; while a generous philanthropist of the time erected at his own expense the "Spinning School House," which ten years later he bequeathed to the town "for the education of the children of the poor." There was much enthusiasm over the opening of this school, and the women of Boston, rich and poor, assembled on the Common for a public exhibition of their skill while an "immense concourse assembled to encourage them."

In the latter half of the eighteenth century, more persistent efforts were made to further the cloth-making industry, and much interest was manifested in the possibility of making children useful to this end. Two Boston newspapers announced in 1750 that it was proposed "to open several spinning schools in this Town where children may be taught gratis," In the following year the "Society for Encouraging Industry and Employing the Poor" was organized with the double purpose of promoting the manufacture of woolen and other cloth, and of employing "our own women and children who axe now in a great measure idle."

The Province Laws of the session of 1753-54 provided for a tax

on carriages for the support of a linen manufactory which, it was hoped, would provide employment for the poor. The preamble of the law recites that the "number of poor is greatly increased and many persons, especially women, and children, are destitute of employment and in danger of becoming a public charge."

Although this scheme did not realize all the hopes of its promoters the policy was not abandoned. In 1770, Mr. William Molineux of Boston petitioned the legislature to assist him in his plan for "manufacturing the children's labour into wearing apparel" and "employing young females from eight years old and upward in earning their own support;" and the public opinion of his day commended him because, in the words of a contemporary, "The female children of this town are not only useful to the community but the poorer sort are able in some measure to assist their parents in getting a livelihood."

It was claimed that, as a result of the work of the spinning schools, at least three hundred women and children had been thoroughly instructed in the art of spinning and that they had earned a large sum as wages. Domestic industries became increasingly important during this period, and children as well as women were employed in the various processes of manufacture carried on in the household. The report of Governor Moore of New York in 1767 to the Lords of Trade, said with regard to his province, "every home swarms with children who are set to spin and card."

Spinning, however, for some time before this had been an employment which was fairly steady and remunerative. The "Salem Records," for example, show that in 1685, one John Wareing was loaned money "to pay spinners." In the eighteenth century, as the cloth manufacture developed, there was "an increased and reasonably steady demand for yarn, so that the earnings of women spinners were by no means inconsiderable for those days. In some localities women were paid eight cents a day and their "keep" for spinning. In the Wyoming Valley, six shillings a week seems to have been the standard wage of a good spinner.

The best idea, however, of what home work in the different processes of cloth manufacture meant to the individual, can probably be gained by a study of some extracts from two old memorandum books, one belonging to the seventeenth and the other to the eighteenth century. The first of these is from an old account book of a Boston shopkeeper which has been preserved in the manuscript collections of the Boston Public Library and which records to the

credit of Mrs. Mary Avery during the years 1685-89, the following items:

	£	s.	d.
By 2 yard $\frac{1}{2}$ of buntin att	?	?	?
By yard $\frac{1}{2}$ of ditto att 14 <i>d.</i>	0	3	3
By 3 yards $\frac{1}{2}$ of half thick Kersey att 3 <i>s.</i> 3 <i>d.</i>	0	10	6
A coverlid	1	0	0
By 16 yards of druggett att — and a broom 3 <i>d.</i>	1	17	7
By 20 yds. black searge at 4 <i>s.</i> 6 <i>d.</i>	4	10	0
By 20 yds. searge at 3 <i>s.</i> 6 <i>d.</i>	3	3	4
By 3 yds. of buntin at 3 <i>d.</i>	0	3	3
By 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ yards searge at 3/8	3	7	10
By a hatt 5-6	0	5	6
By 53 yds. of cotton and linnin at 2-9	7	5	9
By $\frac{1}{2}$ doz. of ? a carpett 30	2	14	0
By 7 hatts att 5-sd	1	16	9
By 4 yds. searge att ?	2	4	0
By 2 ditto at ?	1	10	0
By 4 yds. black searge	0	18	0
By searge	8	19	4 $\frac{1}{2}$
By 34 yds. searge at 3 <i>s.</i> 6 <i>d.</i>	6	7	6
By 24 yards searge at ?	6	0	0

It should be said with regard to this account of Mrs. Avery that two or three of the entries are in her husband's name, which may mean either that they worked together or that he merely acted for her.

The illegibility of some of the entries makes it impossible to state accurately the sum total of Mrs. Avery's credit account during these years, but fifty pounds would seem to be a very safe estimate. There is, moreover, every reason to believe that this is a fairly typical account and that such work was commonly done by women throughout this period. Other account books for the same period show similar credits and the book from which Mrs. Avery's account is quoted records the names of several other women and the payments made to them for the same kind of work, although no record compares with hers in interest.

The eighteenth century account which is selected as of special interest, is one taken from the credit side of a merchant's book for

Table 3: ACCOUNT OF THEODORA ORCUTT

1781.	£	s.	d.
<i>September (1780 ?). By spinning 11 Runs at 7/4—3 runs 7d.</i>	0	9	1
<i>February 11. By spinning 4 Runs for handkerchiefs</i>	0	2	4
<i>March 2. By spinning 8 Runs linen yarn at 7d.</i>	0	4	8
<i>“ By spinning 5 Runs tow yarn</i>	0	2	8
<i>“ 6. By spinning 1 Run fine tow yarn at 7d.</i>	0	0	7
<i>“13. By spinning 2 Runs woolen yarn</i>	0	1	4
<i>April 8. By spinning 13 Runs tow yarn at 8d.</i>	0	6	11
<i>“ By spinning 14 Runs linen yarn</i>	0	9	4
<i>“ 29. By spinning 9½ Runs fine tow yarn at 8d.</i>	0	6	4
CARRIED FORWARD	0	3	3

1781 and shows the earnings for the year of a “spinner,” Theodora Orcutt²⁵, who was probably, judging from her purchases, a wife and mother.

This account of Theodora Orcutt is especially interesting because it shows how many different kinds of yarn had a marketable value at this time, and how much women must have earned by trading the product of their labor at country stores, as well as “by selling it directly to the professional weavers and the small “manufactories.”

Another interesting example of the way in which women exchanged the cloth which they made to purchase other articles is the list of goods which one Susannah Shepard of Wrentham tendered in part payment for a chaise. The contract and the credit were as follows:²⁶

“Agreed with Mrs. Susannah Shepard, of Wrentham, to make her a chaise for £55, she finding the harness, the wheels, leather for top and lining, remainder to be had in goods, at wholesale cash price, of her manufacture.

”(Signed) STEPHEN OLNEY.”

PROVIDENCE, November 13, 1795.

²⁵Temple, “History of Whately,” pp. 71, 72. “A ‘run’ of yarn consisted of 20 knots. A ‘knot’ was composed of 40 threads, and a thread was 74 inches in length or once round the reel. A ‘skein’ of yarn consisted of 7 knots. An ordinary day’s work was 4 skeins when the spinner carded her own wool; when the wool was carded by a merchant she could easily spin 6 in a day.”

²⁶See Bagnall, “Textile Industries of the United States,” i, 173-174.

Table 4: ACCOUNT OF THEODORA ORCUTT - *Continued*

1781			£	s.	d.
		BROUGHT FORWARD	2	3	3
May	13	By spinning 2 Runs fine thread for stockings at 8 <i>d.</i>	0	1	4
"		By spinning 4 Runs tow yarn at 8 <i>d.</i>	0	1	4
"		By spinning 3 Runs coarse tow yarn at 4/ (O.T.)	0	1	7
"		By spinning 3 Runs coarse linen yard at 6 <i>d.</i>	0	1	6
June	19	By spinning 8 Runs fine yarn for Lawn.	0	8	0
"		By spinning 22 Runs coarse linen yarn at 6 <i>d.</i>	0	11	0
"	24	By spinning 2 Runs linen yarn at 8 <i>d.</i>	0	1	4
July	5	By spinning 10 Runs tow yarn at 4/ (O.T.)	0	10	4
"	9	By spinning 3½ Runs tow yarn at 4/ (O.T.)	0	1	10
"	11	By spinning 10 Runs tow yarn at 6 <i>d.</i> (O.T.)	0	5	0
"	25	By spinning 3 Runs fine linen yarn at 8 <i>d.</i>	0	2	0
"		By spinning 2 Runs coarse linen yarn at 6 <i>d.</i>	0	1	0
"		By spinning 2 Runs fine tow yarn at 8 <i>d.</i>	0	1	4
"	31	By spinning 1 Run fine tow yarn at 8 <i>d.</i>	0	0	8
August	24	By spinning 19 Runs coarse linen chain.	0	9	6
September	11	By spinning 9 Runs coarse tow yarn.	0	1	0
"		By spinning 2 Runs sent to Miss Graves & By spinning 4 Runs tow by Do 8 Runs tow.	0	6	5
		TOTAL	4	8	5

Received of Mrs. Shepard on account of chaise.

	£	s.	d.
$5\frac{1}{2}$ yards of thick-set at 4s. 8d.	1	5	8
$2\frac{1}{2}$ yards of velveret, at 4s. 8d.	0	10	8
$2\frac{3}{4}$ yards of satin bever, at 4s. 8d.	0	12	10
1 yard & 2 nails of carpeting, at 3s.	0	3	$4\frac{1}{2}$
13 yards carpeting	1	18	$7\frac{1}{2}$
2 handkerchiefs	0	7	0
	4	18	2

There was, too, at this time no small amount of spinning and weaving done by women as custom work. In one New England community, near Northfield, Massachusetts, a weaver by the name of Olive Moffatt, who was a descendant of the early Scotch immigrants, was famous for such work. She was employed by most of the well-to-do families in town, and for many years her loom was considered indispensable for wedding outfits. Her linsey-woolsey cloth was considered inimitable for evenness of texture; and no one else in town could weave such patterns of linen damask. She also understood perfectly how to color fine lamb's wool yarns a beautiful shade of red with madder. The use of logwood on indigo was common enough, but a "good red" like Olive Moffatt's was difficult to obtain. Her earnings must have been very considerable for that period for she charged six pence and seven pence a skein for fine linen thread and three pence a skein or eight pence a "run" for fine woolen thread. In general the work of women spinners became more profitable after the early "manufactories" were started, but an account of these primitive establishments and of their women spinners is reserved for the succeeding chapter.

In England, weaving was a man's occupation, but "spinning and the preliminary processes of cleaning, carding and roving were conducted in the early times by the women and children"²⁷. In this country, although professional weavers seem to have been most frequently men, yet it is clear that weaving was not an uncommon occupation for women even in the early days.²⁸ As the cloth manufacture developed, it became a very important one, and, as a later

²⁷Chapman, "The Lancashire Cotton Industry," p. 12

²⁸An extract from an old account book, for example, shows a credit to "Sarah Badkuk (Babcock) for weven and coaming wistid," Weeden, i, 301; see also *ibid.*, ii, 855. Mrs. Holt's receipt for £1 5s., 11d., for spinning is a relic in Bailey,

chapter will show, it continued to give employment to a great many women well into the nineteenth century.

It is perhaps scarcely necessary to say by way of summary, that the gainful employment of women in different processes of manufacture in their own homes,²⁹ was common enough in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In so far as the early spinners and weavers furnished their own material and disposed of their own product as custom work, they were true craftswomen, belonging to a system that has not survived to any extent in modern industry. When the product was disposed of at a country store, one of the essential elements of handicraft, "custom work," was lacking. But under whatever system they worked, these "women in industry" were an important factor in the industrial life of the period.

As the gainful employment of women during this period grew so largely out of their household duties, such training as they received for their work was, in a sense, part of their general education. Although girls as well as boys were apprenticed when they were very young, the girl's indenture, unlike that of the boy, failed to specify that she was to be taught a trade. Early laws provided for the binding out of the children of the poor, and in some towns where the custom of bidding off the poor prevailed, children were put to live "with some suitable person" until they were fourteen, at which age they were to be bound until they became free by law, but it was especially specified that "if boys [they be] put to some useful trade."³⁰ The poor law of Connecticut provided that poor children whose parents allowed them to "live idly or misspend their time in loitering" were to be bound out, a "man child until he shall come to the age of twenty-one years; and a woman child to the age of eighteen years, or time of marriage."

The girl's indenture seems to have been for the most part a mere binding out to service. She was trained doubtless to perform the do-

"History of Andover," p. 578. In the Moravian settlement in Pennsylvania, the light weaving was entirely "woman's work" (Bagnall, i, 27), and Virginia cloth was described as "Having been made of cotton and woven with great taste by the women in the country parts." Bishop, "History of American Manufactures," i, 343.

²⁹Two other household manufactures of which mention might be made here, are the making of lace and the manufacture of the hand cards used for combing cotton and wool; that is, the preparing the fiber for spinning. Both of these industries, however, will be referred to again in a later chapter.

³⁰Capen, "Historical Development of the Poor Law of Connecticut," p. 55.

mestic tasks of the housewife, and sometimes it was agreed that she was to be taught "the trade, art, or mystery of spinning woollen and linen" or knitting and sewing as well. Her indenture might require, too, that she was to be "learned to read," which was again unlike that of the boy, who was also to be taught writing and occasionally even "cypering." The Province Laws of Massachusetts which provided that poor girls as well as boys were to be bound out contain the provision that "males [be taught] to read and write, females to read as they shall respectively be capable." It is of further interest with regard to the training of girls and boys that the General Court of Massachusetts desired that boys as well as girls be taught how to spin and that both girls and boys who were set to keep cattle in the various towns,³¹ should "bee set to some other impliment withall, as spinning up on the rock, knitting, weveing tape."

It seems clear, however, that although girls were called apprentices during the colonial period, this did not mean that they were consciously given any industrial training.³² But it should, perhaps, be repeated that the ordinary experience of the girl in the colonial household tended to make her skillful in spinning and probably in weaving as well, so that she received preparation for the two most important occupations of that time without any specialized training or the serving of a formal apprenticeship.

In concluding this discussion of the employment of women during the colonial period, some reference must be made to the attitude of the public opinion of that day toward their work. The early court orders providing for the employment of women and children were not prompted solely by a desire to promote the manufacture of cloth. There was, in the spirit of them, the Puritan belief in the virtue of industry and the sin of idleness. Industry by compulsion, if not by faith, was the gospel of the seventeenth century and not only court orders but Puritan ministers warned the women of that day of the

³¹See "Massachusetts Colonial Records," i, 294; ii, 9.

³²Attention may be called in passing to the fact that after two hundred and fifty years the opportunity of an apprenticed girl has increased very slightly. An industrial census today shows a very considerable number of girl apprentices, but the great proportion of them are in dressmaking or millinery shops where they are general service girls, learning only what will make them temporarily useful in the shop and not what is necessary to make them dolled workers in the trade. See, for example, the Bulletin "Sex and Industry," issued by the Massachusetts Bureau of Labor in 1903, which showed (p. 210) that only eighty-seven girls were serving any apprenticeship except in dressmakers' and milliners' shops. The number of apprenticed boys was 5,320.

dangers of idle living.³³ Summary measures were sometimes taken to punish those who were idle. Thus the "Salem Town Records" show (December 5, 1643) "It is ordered that Margaret Page shall [be sent] to Boston Goale as a lazy, idle, loytering person where she may be sett to work for her liveinge." In 1645 and 1646 different persons were paid "for Margaret Page to keep her at worke." Among the charges against Mary Boutwell in the "Essex Records," 1640, is one "for her exorbitancy not working but liveinge idly."

Perhaps the best expression of the prevailing attitude toward the employment of women at that time is to be found in one of the Province Laws of Massachusetts Bay for the session of 1692-93. The law ordered that every single person under twenty-one must live "under some orderly family government," but added the proviso that "this act shall not be construed to extend to hinder any single woman of good repute from the exercise of any lawful trade or employment for a livelihood, whereunto she shall have the allowance and approbation of the selectmen . . . any law, usage or custom to the contrary notwithstanding."

It is not, therefore, surprising to find that, in 1695, an act was passed which required single women who were self-supporting to pay a poll tax as well as men.³⁴ That this attitude was preserved during the eighteenth century, the establishment of the spinning schools bears witness. There was, however, the further point that providing employment for poor women and children lessened the poor rates, and the first factories were welcomed because they offered a means of support to the women and children who might otherwise be "useless, if not burdensome, to society."

The colonial attitude toward women's work was in brief one of rigid insistence on their employment. Court orders, laws, and public subscriptions were resorted to in order that poor women might be saved from the sin of idleness and taught to be self-supporting.

³³See Winthrop's reference to the sermon of a Boston minister in 1636 in "History of New England," i, 186.

³⁴"Province Laws," 1, 213: "All edngle women that live at their own hand, at two shillings each, except such as through age, or extream poverty . . . are unable to contribute towards the publick charge." Men, however, of sixteen years or upwards were rated "at four shillings per poll."