

THE FIRST STRIKE.

Boston Letter to the Hartford Post.

The first strike among our working people, I think, was at Dover, N. H., in 1827 or 1828. The Coconeo works were established in 1820, and the operatives were almost entirely American girls, who deemed that weaving and spinning were better than farming, and became "factory girls" on the erection of the works at Dover Falls. A small factory up the river was No. 1, and the works at the falls were Nos. 2, 3, and 4, as I believe they are at the present time. Everything went on spinningly and smoothly until the year of which I write. There were exactions on the part of the corporation that the independent spirit of the fair spinners and weavers could not brook. A rule was made that the great gates should be shut at bell ringing, and those who were late should go through the counting room passageway to be marked for reduction of pay, largely disproportioned to the delinquency. This gave great offense, other measures awakened opposition, and on a fine morning the mills were idle. Every operative was out, leaving the overseers to run them alone. They met at some convenient square, and, forming a procession, with a band, and bearing the American flag, they paraded the town, under a leader whom I very well knew a year later, and a stalwart manly guard of one for their protection. The corporation came down at once, the offensive rules were withdrawn for the time, and everything went on harmoniously. But these arose, again, threats of war between James F. Curtis, a new agent, and Mill No. 2. He was not a fortunate selection for the office, as he had been a sea Captain, and endeavored to introduce ship's discipline among his crew of girls. It would not work, and a general irritation prevailed. The climax was reached when he ordered the windows of No. 2 to be nailed down. This was done, over night, and in the morning, when they found out what had been done, and one of the loom girls had fainted, their anger knew no bounds. A strike in that mill was the consequence. I saw the excited crowd from an upper window opposite, and such a clatter of tongues has not been heard since Babel. Agent Curtis was sent for, and went among them, angry at first, but that bird wouldn't fight, and he came down to coaxing, begging them to return, arguing the necessity for the nailing down, which excited them the more, until he compromised the matter by allowing the windows to be opened part way. Other inducements were given and they returned to their work, but during the altercation with him they had spotted his black coat with cotton locks until he looked like a new description of leopard.