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Nature's Aristocracy

Jennie Collins

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NATURE'S ARISTOCRACY

Legacies of Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers

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NATURE'S ARISTOCRACY

or

Battles and Wounds in Time of Peace

A PLEA FOR THE OPPRESSED

Jennie Collins

Edited and with an introduction by Judith A. Ranta

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS

Lincoln and London

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or, Battles and Wounds in
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Acknowledgments

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Jennie Collins wrote *Nature's Aristocracy; or, Battles and Wounds in Time of Peace: A Plea for the Oppressed* at a time when questions about the meaning of work and about relations between labor and capital were being passionately debated. During the headlong post-bellum expansion of American industry, people struggled to understand the changing workplace. One journalist wrote in 1869, “It is becoming more and more plain, and being more and more freely admitted, that this fundamental question of the rights of labor, and its just relations to capital, is crowding other issues aside, and, with the financial issue, promises very shortly to usurp the chief and most intense thought of the time” (“Labor Question”).

In response to her era's tumultuous pressures, Collins created a varied text that can be difficult to categorize because it encompasses multiple genres. On the one hand, it is autobiographical, drawing upon her decades of employment in such working-class occupations as textile mill operative, domestic servant, and garment shop tailoress. *Nature's Aristocracy* reflects as well Collins's achievements as a labor rights orator and activist described by a contemporary as “the chosen champion and apostle of the Eastern Workingwomen” (“Visitors”). The text also includes fictionalized narratives of workers' experiences, so it occupies a middle ground between fiction and nonfiction. While it is the first attempt by a U.S. author of any class background or gender to produce an extended overview of working-class life, *Nature's Aristocracy* appears to have been modified and even distorted in places by its editor, Russell H. Conwell (1843–1925). Nonetheless, animated by a profound concern for the
working poor, Collins produced a groundbreaking book on the perennially vexed problem of class in America.

**Biographical**

Jane “Jennie” Collins was born in 1828 in Amoskeag, a New Hampshire factory village now part of Manchester. Although in adulthood she was usually known as Jennie, her given name was Jane. Collins’s early life is shrouded in some mystery. Records of her birth and forebears have apparently not been preserved, so her exact birth date and parents’ names are unknown. Even Ellen R. Robson, a friend who had known Collins for twenty-five years preceding Collins’s death, contended that “whether she [Collins] had or had not a family . . . she never said” (“In Memory”).

Several obituaries note that Collins had often claimed Spanish and Scottish descent, “her small figure and dark face being the legacy of the one blood, and her great energy and indomitable will the gift of the other” (“Obituary: Jennie Collins, the Friend”; “Obituary Record”). Her “Spanish” ethnic characteristics, unusual for an early nineteenth-century New Englander, may have contributed to her empathy for marginalized groups such as slaves and fallen women. After her father died of consumption when she was two years old, Collins’s mother either passed away soon after or was unable to care for her three children, so Collins was sent to live with her Quaker grandmother. Robson asserts that Collins “passed her girlhood in one of the mill towns on the Merrimac” (“In Memory”).

Following her grandmother’s death, fourteen-year-old Collins was obliged to support herself. Although the biographical writings contend that she worked first in Lawrence, Massachusetts, and later in Lowell, she may have begun working closer to home in the mills of Amoskeag or Manchester. As reflected in *Nature’s Aristocracy*, the hardships of mill work made a deep impression on her while threatening her fragile health. Sometime in the 1850s she became a nurse and domestic in the family of Judge John Lowell of Boston. While one newspaper writer claims that Collins “sought a position as nurse in a rich family, ‘wishing,’ as she said, ‘to see what kind of an affair life was to the rich,’” it seems just as likely that she wanted
to avoid further exposure to unhealthy mill conditions (P., L.C.). About 1860 she began working in Boston garment shops as a vest maker, first for a firm located in the Old State House and then, from 1861 to 1870, for Macullar, Williams & Parker, a manufacturer and retailer of men’s and boys’ clothing.

In her scant free time, Collins took advantage of evening classes and other educational and cultural opportunities, which led her to believe that she possessed talents beyond those needed for the factory and shop. She studied history and politics and, according to one nineteenth-century journalist, was recognized by her co-workers and employers for “her vivacity and the excellence of her understanding, and her faculty of earnest discussion of the subjects in which she was interested” (“Obituary: Jennie Collins,” *Boston Morning Journal*). One such subject was slavery, to which Collins early assumed a fervent and outspoken opposition. She was chosen to lead an evening class on English history and also taught children of deceased Civil War soldiers (“Collins, Jennie”). In their spare time, Collins and her garment shop mates conducted charitable work aiding Union soldiers.

In 1868 Collins began speaking publicly on labor and women’s concerns, as well as on behalf of political candidates. She was the only woman to speak at a meeting of the Ward Eight Grant Club in Boston, where she advocated the election of Ulysses S. Grant, Charles Sumner, and William Claflin (“Political”). Moreover, one obituary contends that Collins was first to urge that women be allowed into the halls of the state legislature (“Jennie Collins Dead”). Also in 1868, she made her first important public address during a debate in Boston’s Washington Hall, where she “advocat[ed] woman’s rights from the working woman’s standpoint in such a plain, beautiful and yet masterly way that she carried her audience by storm” (“Obituary: Jennie Collins, the Friend”). Her fame soon began to spread. In the next several years she spoke at many labor and women’s events, often to great acclaim, promoting such causes as the eight-hour day, child labor reform, and improved wages and working conditions for women. In April 1869 she became one of three provisional directors of the Boston Working Women’s League.
Due to her renown as a feminist and labor rights leader, Collins was invited to address the January 1870 convention of the National Woman Suffrage Association.

Collins began speaking on Boston Common in the summer of 1870, but her gatherings met with opposition. As a *Boston Daily Advertiser* reporter observes, “It is said that some of the politicians, whose hostility she had aroused, complained to the aldermen and the meetings were discontinued” (“Obituary: Jennie Collins, the Friend”). Thereafter Collins committed more of her energy to charitable endeavors, although she continued lifelong to speak, write, or act on behalf of the causes she cherished, especially women’s suffrage and labor rights. Never marrying, she was able to dedicate herself wholly to her work, forming many enduring friendships, particularly among women. During the later years of her life, Collins lived in the home of Mrs. Eveline J. (Damon) Pillsbury, a widow, and Pillsbury’s brother.

On July 25, 1870, Collins established Boffin’s Bower, a charity aiding Boston’s poor and working women. To support her work, she obtained donations from large employers of women, such as her former workplace Macullar, Williams & Parker, and from other sources. She devoted herself to such efforts even though she knew, as she wrote in *Nature’s Aristocracy*, that philanthropy does not change the system responsible for poverty and workers’ oppression (49–50). Boffin’s Bower provided several comfortable rooms where working women could relax and enjoy reading material, a piano, an employment bureau, meals for those in need, and limited lodging. Recreational programs and instruction in such skills as machine sewing were offered. Margaret Allen observes that in founding and managing Boffin’s Bower, Collins pioneered in settlement house work before college-educated women entered the field in the 1880s (105).

In November 1870 Collins published her only monograph, *Nature’s Aristocracy*. The writing of this book, which must have spanned some considerable time before the founding of Boffin’s Bower, offers evidence of what one journalist called “the feeling which she acknowledged [in the later 1860s] of adopting a literary rather than
a philanthropic career” (“Obituary: Jennie Collins,” *Boston Morning Journal*). Collins’s literary ambitions were shared by many factory women, such as those who wrote for the *Lowell Offering* (1840–45) and other such workers’ periodicals. As an occupation requiring few material resources and pursued successfully by poor women, including Lydia Sigourney, Harriet Jacobs, and Lucy Larcom, authorship appealed powerfully to factory women.

In her speaking, writing, and philanthropic work, Collins drew strength from Spiritualism, an enormously popular grassroots religious and social movement that was an offshoot of Christianity. Spiritualists embraced the occult belief that the dead can communicate with the living through specially gifted—often female—mediums. Many Spiritualists supported labor and women’s rights, which made the movement especially attractive to women and the working classes. Ann Braude contends in *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*, “Spiritualism became a major—if not the major—vehicle for the spread of woman’s rights ideas in mid-century America” (57).

Collins’s obituary in Boston’s *Banner of Light*, a major Spiritualist paper, suggests how important Spiritualism was for her. The anonymous writer recalls that Collins had visited the office in 1872 and confided that “she was unquestionably a spirit-medium, and was ‘told by the angels’ to enter upon the special mission in which she was engaged” (“Decease”). In *Nature’s Aristocracy*, Collins hints at her capacity as a medium, contending that through her text’s composition “the shades of the hungry, toil-killed, and heart-shattered men and women shall tell their tales to the world in death, as they told them to me in life” (11). Collins also suggests her sense of divine mission when she encourages her readers to undertake charitable visits to poor people’s wretched homes, as she herself had done and would continue doing. Her narrator advises readers not to fear, “resting assured that God has called you to a noble work, and will not leave you without protection” (24). Her sense of possessing a spiritual mission allowed Collins to overcome fears. According to Braude, “With the encouragement of spirits, women did things that they themselves believed women could not do. . . . Spirit presence
helped women overcome internal doubts as well as external sanctions” (83). Collins’s Spiritualist beliefs thus strengthened her to step outside her social position as a working-class woman to become a labor leader, author, and manager of a charity.

Collins continued contributing prolifically to newspapers and other periodicals, as well as publishing annual reports of Boffin’s Bower activities. On July 20, 1887, she died at a friend’s home in Brookline, Massachusetts, of the respiratory ailment that had long afflicted her. She is buried in Walnut Hills Cemetery, Brookline, where the epitaph on her simple grave marker reads (in part): “Jennie Collins / The Working Girls’ Friend / And / Founder of Boffin’s Bower.”

SIMPLE TALES OF REAL LIFE:
A CRITICAL DISCUSSION OF THE TEXT

Collins structures Nature’s Aristocracy loosely around the argument that nineteenth-century U.S. society has developed unnaturally, deviating from the ideals set forth by the nation’s founders, who had taken steps to prevent the development of a corrupt aristocracy like those left behind in Europe. The authors of the U.S. Constitution, for instance, attempted to limit the development of an American aristocracy by forbidding the use of titles of nobility (see Article I, Section 9). Nonetheless, by the mid-nineteenth century, in Collins’s view, a moneyed aristocracy has gained an ascendancy that stifles many citizens’ aspirations and abilities. People possessing special virtues and talents—that is, natural aristocrats—can be found in all social strata, but their paths are often thwarted by what Collins calls “the usurping line of money-kings” (154).

In her treatment of the concept of nature’s aristocracy, Collins contributes to an ongoing American discussion about class and wealth, responding to arguments advanced by prominent leaders and intellectuals such as Thomas Jefferson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Theodore Parker. With her deep roots in working-class communities, Collins also draws from the oral and written traditions created by workers themselves. Going back at least to the 1830s, American mill workers and other laborers had produced prose, fic-
tion, poetry, songs, and many kinds of protest writings to express their experience and concerns. Throughout the nineteenth century, workers in major industrial communities published their own periodicals. As a worker and especially as a labor activist, Collins would have been well acquainted with these literary traditions.

Phrases such as “nature’s aristocracy,” “natural aristocracy,” and “nature’s noblemen” appear quite commonly in late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writings on both sides of the Atlantic. These terms usually denote an inborn superiority of character, intellect, or physical appearance not attributable to the possessor’s familial inheritance. With the founding of the United States, “nature’s aristocracy” and similar terms took on new connotations.

For Thomas Jefferson and other early Americans, the new republic offered unprecedented opportunities for nature’s aristocrats to gain the opportunities and power they deserved. Influenced by Aristotle’s recommendation that society be governed by an aristocracy of the most virtuous, Jefferson formulated his own ideas about natural and pseudo-aristocracy in letters exchanged with John Quincy Adams and in his *Autobiography*, all published in several editions before 1870. Writing to Adams, Jefferson “agree[s] . . . that there is a natural aristocracy among men. The grounds of this are virtue and talents.” He admits, however, that “there is also an artificial aristocracy, founded on wealth and birth, without either virtue or talents” (“To John Adams” 223). In his autobiography, Jefferson further explains his objections to artificial aristocracy, contending that “an aristocracy of wealth, [is] of more harm and danger, than benefit, to society” (36). Instead, Jefferson hopes to promote “the aristocracy of virtue and talent, which nature has wisely provided for the direction of the interests of society, and scattered with equal hand through all its conditions” (36–37). He considers such an aristocracy “essential to a well-ordered republic” (37). In his home state of Virginia, Jefferson successfully proposed laws changing patterns of inheritance and spreading public education, which he believed “laid the axe to the foot of pseudo-aristocracy” (“To John Adams” 225).6

Similarly, in her first chapter Collins shows how nature has scattered her nobility among all social groups. She contends, however,
that rather than Jefferson’s “well-ordered republic,” the United States more nearly resembles a haphazardly constructed building, much in need of “rebuilding” (13). During the Civil War, Collins writes, when soldiers from various regions of the United States became acquainted, “they found everywhere the same great gulf between the rich and the poor which the founders of the nation had hoped to cover with the laws against titles and hereditary aristocracy” (186). She shows that those natural aristocrats born among the poor and laboring classes often find it quite impossible to escape the quagmire of poverty and wretched working conditions.

Ralph Waldo Emerson further developed the notion of an American aristocracy of nature. In 1836 he began composing and delivering a lecture, “Natural Aristocracy,” published posthumously in 1884 under the title “Aristocracy,” assigned by his executor. Emerson herein argues that although people prefer to believe that human virtues and talents are passed from one generation to another, in fact nature, personified as a capricious feminine power, chooses to disperse her gifts among individuals of all social strata (33). Money, power, and family name are meaningless to her. Although human institutions such as governments can err in their choice of favorites, “Nature makes none [mistakes]” (36). Authentic natural “aristocracy is the class eminent by personal qualities” (38).

While Emerson acknowledges the economic disparities among various social groups, admitting that he “know[s] how steep the contrast of condition looks; such excess here and such destitution there,” he minimizes the significance of these contrasts. He assures the reader that “the revolution of things . . . is sure to bring home the opportunity to every one” (46). He thus brushes aside the hardships and impediments to class mobility that so distress Collins. In Nature’s Aristocracy she shows again and again that opportunities are more often denied to poor people than brought home to them.

While Collins lacks Emerson’s optimism regarding social conditions, she shares the Transcendentalist veneration for nature and nature’s God. In her conception of nature, which is invoked rather than explained in Nature’s Aristocracy, Collins draws from Transcendentalism and even more from Spiritualism. In the foundational Tran-
scendentalist essay, “Nature” (1836), Emerson contends that nature restores our humanity. The narrator explains, “The tradesman, the attorney comes out of the din and craft of the street, and sees the sky and the woods, and is a man again. In their eternal calm, he finds himself” (13). Emerson argues that truth, beauty, and other virtues originate in nature, while suffering results when people lose touch with nature. Collins likewise looks to nature for the correction of social evils. As her narrator remarks, “In a true and natural state of society there would be no paupers who deserved charity” (143). Although she does not specify just how a “natural state of society” might be attained, Collins echoes the Transcendentalists' hopeful faith in nature’s essential goodness.

Spiritualist conceptions of nature, given Spiritualism’s widespread popularity among working-class people, probably influenced Collins’s thinking even more than Transcendentalism. In terms that almost replicate some of the central ideas of Nature’s Aristocracy, Messer-Kruse argues that “among Spiritualism’s most cherished beliefs was its view that all of nature, and, indeed, all creation, was harmonious. Human suffering and injustice, therefore, was the effect of the operation of human institutions or customs that subverted the natural order” (16). Collins apparently also believed in such underlying harmony, although she wrote much more clearly and viscerally of society’s troubles.

The first chapter of Nature’s Aristocracy establishes nature’s authority and abhorrence for inherited, unnatural aristocracy. The narrator explains, “Nature hates every aristocracy but her own, and she is ever at work trying to restore to the throne her own line of nobles, which the dollar and family pride have deposed” (13). Although nature possesses unquestionable authority, people “will not go to Nature and learn of her” (163), so she is not always successful in seeing her chosen aristocrats placed in suitable positions. Current social conditions, Collins argues, often see “these branches of the royal line defeated and disheartened by the never-ending persecution of the arrogant-wealthy” (15). In her suggestion that the solution to these problems lies in human efforts such as “practical co-operation between the laborer and the capitalist,” women’s suf-
frage, and labor organizing, Collins rejects Jefferson’s faith in “a well-ordered republic” and Emerson’s confidence in “the revolution of things” to rectify class oppression (207).

As several of her contemporaries observe, Collins was much more influenced by Theodore Parker, who was a reformer as well as a Transcendentalist. According to Margaret Allen, Collins greatly esteemed Theodore Parker (114). Rachel Ray similarly observes that Parker “was the man after her [Collins’s] own heart, to whom she reverently listened, while the great truths of religion and humanity, the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, which he preached, sank deep into her soul” (401). In *Nature’s Aristocracy*, Collins includes Parker among the natural aristocrats who like herself had overcome obstacles while rising to prominence. As she writes, “Theodore Parker in his early life, while picking berries to purchase his first Latin Grammar, and working at odd jobs to obtain the rudiments of an education, . . . showed unmistakable evidence of his natural ability” (168). Besides identifying with his youthful struggles, Collins must have been inspired by his social-reform sermons, such as “A Sermon of the Perishing Classes” (1846) and “A Sermon of Poverty” (1849).

Parker’s willingness to challenge Bostonians’ hypocrisy inspired Collins to comparable courage. In “A Sermon of the Perishing Classes,” Parker exposes the terrible plight of the city’s poor, declaring, “This class of men are perishing; yes, perishing in the nineteenth century; perishing in Boston, wealthy, charitable Boston; . . . and perishing all the worse because they die slow, and corrupt by inches” (203). Collins as well is not afraid to expose the corruption of wealthy Bostonians, as when her narrator remarks that the word “charity” “is applied to anything and everything which a rich man may do to gain praise” (142).

But Collins departs in her own way from Parker’s example. Whereas he pleads—however passionately—on behalf of the poor in the aggregate, Collins’s mission is to make them individuals. Tired of being only another of the faceless lower class, Collins insists upon her own and her characters’ subjectivity. In chapter 1 when discussing her purposes in writing *Nature’s Aristocracy*, Col-
lins explains that she intends to adhere “always to the simple tales of real life which have occurred within the limit of my personal acquaintance” (15). The text’s grounding in Collins’s “personal acquaintance” with people she has known in “real life” ensures that her own subjectivity and as much of her characters’ individuality as can be conveyed through the narrative remain central. *Nature’s Aristocracy* allows the little-heard voices of poor women to be represented, such as the aggrieved mill weaver contemplating an impending strike who tells Collins, “I have come near to the conclusion that it is better to stay out and starve in the sunshine than to work and famish in those musty shades [i.e., in the mills]” (137). The weaver thus expresses her determination in the face of limited, disagreeable options.

The curious subtitle of *Nature’s Aristocracy* sounds less curious when considered in light of Civil War memories and the writings of Collins’s contemporaries. In chapter 11, “Among the ‘Strikers,’” Collins links the subtitle’s first part, “Battles and Wounds in Time of Peace,” to labor struggles. Referring to the 1859 Lynn, Massachusetts, shoemakers’ strike, Collins writes, “Then came a hard-fought battle, such as sometimes startle communities in time of peace, and in which there are more wounded and killed than there are in time of war. It was labor against capital” (125). Writing in the wake of the Civil War’s turmoil and carnage, Collins works to elicit support for labor causes by arguing that they are as urgent as those that prompted the war. She also insinuates that what appear to be times of peace are just the opposite for workers caught in the war between capital and labor.

The image of industrialism’s march, with its consequent class stratification, as a kind of war is found in the work of other mid-nineteenth-century U.S. writers. The narrator of Rebecca Harding Davis’s novel *Margret Hoth: A Story of To-Day* (1861), set in the Indiana woolen mills, takes the reader into these “vulgar American” scenes, imploring,

I want you to go down into this common, every-day drudgery, and consider if there might not be in it also a great warfare.
Men and women, lean-jawed, crippled in the slow, silent battle, are in your alleys, sit beside you at your table; its martyrs sleep under every green hill-side. (6–7)

Theodore Parker’s “A Sermon of the Perishing Classes” views with alarm the condition of Boston's poor. At several points, Parker compares their plight to a battle or war. His narrator asks, “What shall become of the children of such men [i.e., the poor]? They stand in the fore-front of the battle, all unprotected as they are; a people scattered and peeled, only a miserable remnant reaches the age of ten!” (203–4). Collins employs the war metaphor, as does Davis, in order to represent the experiences of individual contestants in the battle.

*Nature's Aristocracy* conveys not only Collins's views, however, but also those of the editor who contributed to the text. Evidence has not been found to reveal whether the publisher or Collins herself chose Russell H. Conwell to serve as editor. Collins’s warm dedication of the book to Conwell’s wife, Jane (Jennie) P. Hayden Conwell (1844–1872), suggests that the women were friends, so Russell Conwell may also have been Collins’s friend. Indirect but compelling evidence suggests that Conwell made significant changes to Collins’s text. Betty T. Bennett in her essay on editing the work of Mary Shelley argues that “editors . . . are indeed critics who influence the reading of an author and a text” (84). Conwell served as the kind of editor, in Bennett’s terms, “who ‘corrects’ the idiosyncrasies of an author” (89).

Even without a named editor, a published book represents a collaborative effort to some degree since the publisher contributes to its creation. Many textual scholars now consider published texts less in terms of an individual author’s intentions and efforts than as social productions, involving collaborators, editors, publishers, etc. David Greetham explains that “social textual criticism . . . denies the automatic priority traditionally given to authors’ intentions, preferring instead to regard textual creation and transmission as a collaborative, social act” (9). For Collins’s book, the populist press of Lee and Shepard made an especially suitable publisher. In *Lee and Shepard,*
UNP: Annie / Collins / front matter / page xxi

Publishers for the People, Raymond L. Kilgour contends that they “were more concerned with social and political causes than with literary refinements,” seeking “to please the average reader” (v). Given Collins’s concern with social conditions that weighed upon common people, she made a good choice in publishing with Lee and Shepard.

Russell Conwell also made a likely candidate for editor, given the ways in which his background and interests resonated with Collins’s. His father had been an abolitionist whose house had served as a way station on the Underground Railroad (Persons 367). Like Collins, Conwell had been raised in poverty and had worked his way through school. William C. Higgins contends that “his [Conwell’s] experience and taste of the bitterness of poverty aroused in him a burning sympathy with the poor” (79). Furthermore, according to Higgins, while Conwell was living in the Boston area in the 1860s and early 1870s, “he often made political speeches, and was the especial favorite of the workingmen” (83). Also during this period, he freely gave legal advice and assistance to “any deserving poor person” (Higgins 80–81). He earned a law degree but also worked as a schoolteacher, journalist, editor, author, lecturer, and finally a pastor and the founder of Temple College (now Temple University), Philadelphia. He lived and worked in the Boston area in the 1860s and early 1870s, when he must have made Collins’s acquaintance.

In biographies of Conwell, no mention is made of Jennie Collins or his editing of Nature’s Aristocracy. Publisher’s advertisements, however, give Conwell an unexpectedly large measure of credit for the book. Lee and Shepard published Nature’s Aristocracy simultaneously with Conwell’s first book, Why and How: Why the Chinese Emigrate, and the Means They Adopt for the Purpose of Reaching America (1870). In an advertisement for Nature’s Aristocracy appended to Why and How, Lee and Shepard present Collins’s book as published “uniform with” Conwell’s and as coming “from the pen of Colonel Russell H. Conwell.” Describing him as “so well known as an orator and lecturer” and “the most fascinating word-painter of the day,” Lee and Shepard evidently hoped to boost sales of Collins’s book by linking it with him (284).
Although Collins was well known as a labor orator and lecturer in her own right, Lee and Shepard’s advertisements neglect to mention this. Since she was a working-class woman possessing little formal education, Lee and Shepard evidently considered her achievements less significant than Conwell’s. The advertisement indicates little of the quality of Collins’s writing, briefly characterizing *Nature’s Aristocracy* as “so interesting a volume” and, in terms that suggest the titillation to be derived from Collins’s discussion of working women’s seductions, “a thrilling book” (284). At the back of *Nature’s Aristocracy* (1870), a corresponding advertisement for *Why and How* stresses Conwell’s achievements, contending that he “as a lecturer and writer has won a most enviable reputation” (323).

Despite Collins’s and Conwell’s shared interests in the poor and oppressed, he apparently exercised a heavy hand in editing *Nature’s Aristocracy*. While circumstantial evidence strongly suggests that Collins’s words were altered by Conwell, direct evidence—such as “authors’ working manuscripts and printer’s-copy manuscripts,” which Joel Myerson contends often exist for canonical American authors—in Collins’s case has apparently not been preserved (357). I have not been able to locate any of Collins’s manuscripts or personal writings. Since she was a working-class woman with a dubious past as a labor agitator, records of her life and writing were likely considered less important for preservation.\(^7\)

The nature of Conwell’s editorial contribution is implied in a review of *Nature’s Aristocracy* appearing in the *Revolution*. Disappointed in the book, the anonymous reviewer writes, “Instead of her [Collins’s] quaint, crisp, powerful expressions, we have every thing toned down, smoothed, and the corners rubbed off, until with its little stories of good men and women it reads like an old-fashioned Sunday-school book. In truth, it has been not the work of Jennie Collins, but of those she called in to assist her” (“Book Table”). The *Revolution’s* other contents reveal that Collins was well acquainted with its editors, such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who had invited Collins to address the January 1870 convention of the National Woman Suffrage Association, so they may have known more of the details of *Nature’s Aristocracy*’s creation.
A comparison of Collins’s journalistic contributions with the text of *Nature’s Aristocracy* shows that there is some truth to the *Revolution* reviewer’s claims. Collins’s periodical writings address some of the topics found in *Nature’s Aristocracy*. Since these pieces were either unedited or little edited, they may well come closer to representing Collins’s own voice. At least they suggest that Collins’s unmediated literary voice differed from that of *Nature’s Aristocracy*. Writing to the *Commonwealth* in October 1870, Collins sketches factory women’s typical experience, a subject similarly treated in chapter 11, part 2 of *Nature’s Aristocracy*. The *Commonwealth* piece reads in part as follows:

She [the factory operative] eats in a crowd; she goes to work in a crowd; she passes the day in another crowd. She has no yesterday; no to-morrow. She looks forward to no time; but the moment the hand of the clock points to 12, she runs down stairs. The same experience is repeated day after day. . . . In the afternoon she carries up her cloth to the desk, thinking how soon she will have money to pay the last of her doctor’s bill. Neither her employer nor their hard-hearted agent see the look of despair upon her face as she reads a written notice informing her that her wages, after a certain date, will be “reduced ten per cent.” Her first thought is to go elsewhere, but the black flag is raised against her. The slave was pursued by the bloodhounds in the Southern swamps; the “discharge” pursues the operative—more civil, but it amounts to the same thing. On the whole, she makes up her mind to stay where she is. . . . Saturday she has earned for the week $4, working eleven hours per day. When she hears of a death she wishes it was herself. (“Mrs. Child”)

Here Collins provocatively argues that factory working conditions are just as much an evil as southern slavery. Mill operatives are not even allowed to express discontent by resigning, since the black-list holds them in a captivity little different from that imposed on
slaves. This passage’s most intense and graphic terms—“hard-hearted agent,” “black flag,” “bloodhounds,” “Southern swamp”—do not appear in the corresponding passage of *Nature’s Aristocracy* or indeed anywhere in the text. While Collins does liken mill work to slavery at several points in *Nature’s Aristocracy* (see pp. 121, 123, 126), these passages lack the intense imagery of the *Commonwealth* piece. Since it appeared in print just prior to the November 1870 release of *Nature’s Aristocracy*, Collins may have been trying to publish material that she knew Conwell had expunged from the text.

Likewise, in a letter to the *Revolution* published January 13, 1870, Collins comments on factory life generally and, more specifically, on the 1869 factory women’s strike against the Cocheco Manufacturing Company of Dover, New Hampshire, for imposing a wage reduction:

> Before the operative puts on her apron, she is obliged to go to the counting-room and sign a contract, one of the most despotic codes that was ever issued in a free country, called a regulation paper. . . . As the corporations have boarding-houses for their operatives, poverty has driven large numbers of them back to those living tombs. . . . Allowing that stock was low in the market, no reduction was made in the salary of the agent and the supernumeraries (the dry pumps). The men [mill management] in the factories produce nothing. If the stock is low in the market why not let the men and women share the consequences equally. . . . Fifteen years ago a similar strike took place in Manchester, N.H. They appointed a committee to wait on the agent. He refused to meet them, but instead, sent the mayor out to read the riot act, but the women were afraid of the bullets from the cotton chivalry, so they went back [to work]. Fifteen years have elapsed, the working women have the platform and tongues to use, and no man now dares to come into an orderly meeting and read the riot act. We working women will wear fig-leaf dresses before we will patronize the Cocheco Company. (“New England Factories”)
Comparing these statements to passages in *Nature’s Aristocracy*, especially chapter 11 part 7, which addresses the Dover strike, and chapter 11 part 2, reveals that Collins’s most vivid *Revolution* terminology (“one of the most despotic codes . . . ever issued in a free country,” “living tombs,” “dry pumps,” “bullets from the cotton chivalry,” “fig-leaf dresses,” etc.) is missing entirely from *Nature’s Aristocracy*. As the *Revolution* reviewer argues, Collins’s “quaint, crisp, powerful expressions” do indeed seem to have been “rubbed off” from *Nature’s Aristocracy* by Conwell and/or unnamed others who assisted Collins (“Book Table”).

Why would Conwell have altered Collins’s words? His own writings offer some clues. In his book about Boston’s Great Fire of 1872, Conwell praises Collins’s humanitarian efforts aiding poor women but adds that she was “sometimes misguided, and at others too enthusiastic” (History 186). In the nineteenth century, the word “enthusiastic” connoted something closer to “fanatical” or other such terms describing overly emotional people lacking good judgment.

In another of his books, *Woman and the Law: A Comparison of the Rights of Men and Rights of Women before the Law* (1875), Conwell argues at length against some of the ideas expressed in *Nature’s Aristocracy* but without mentioning Collins’s name or the title of the work. He contends, for instance, that women’s suffrage—one of Collins’s most cherished causes—would not cure social evils or even help women. Conwell also reveals his displeasure with some of women’s ways of speaking and behaving. In one passage, Conwell’s narrator objects to the “folly, bordering on great sin,” of women’s penchant for “idle gossip” and “reading trashy novels” (60). His exasperated narrator asks, “Is there culture in slang phrases?,” implying that women are more prone to using such slipshod language (61). Editing *Nature’s Aristocracy*, Conwell was able to “correct,” or in some measure compensate for, Collins’s injudiciousness and unkempt slang expressions.

Not only was Collins’s writing female writing, but it also had its roots in working-class folkways. While Conwell had experienced poverty and at times worked on behalf of poor laboring people, his life experience differed in important ways from Collins’s. Whereas
she had entered the mills by age fourteen, Conwell had attended Wilbraham Academy, Yale College, and law school in Albany, New York. After working on his family’s farm in childhood and in a hotel during his year at Yale, he never again held anything resembling a working-class job (Persons 367). As a teenager, Conwell had traveled to Europe, earning his passage by laboring on a cattle steamer (Bjork 5). While his experience reflects his pluck and intelligence, it also owes much to his privilege as a white male, privilege beyond the reach of a working-class woman such as Collins. Conwell’s experience had distanced him from the harsh working conditions that were so familiar to, and vexing for, Collins. His more extensive formal education had taught him the value of considering questions and issues in a calm, disinterested manner and in standard (non-slang) language.

Reports of Collins’s speeches given near the time of the publication of *Nature’s Aristocracy*, as well as other newspaper pieces written by her, also suggest that Conwell moderated the rhetoric of Collins’s book. Having heard Collins speak about working women’s problems at the National Woman Suffrage Association Convention in January 1870, the newspaper columnist “Olivia” (Emily Edson Briggs) writes,

In the obscurest place on the platform sits the genius of the convention, Jennie Collins, the factory girl of New England, with her sad, hungry face. You can only remember the eyes, which look as if there was something fierce and awful behind them ready to spring out and bite. . . . She painted the hideous lives of the 48,000 factory girls of Massachusetts. Her presence breathed the print of the nails. She made you hear the whir of the machinery. . . . Miss Collins abused General Grant, abused the Republican party, but the audience was under her spell and did not raise a dissenting voice. A young girl in the audience spoke loud enough to be heard by those around her, “Isn’t she a frightful woman?” It was the savage looking out of the New England factory prison. (143, 145)
To some middle-class white Americans, such as Briggs, Collins's views and manner of speaking were perceived as frightening and “savage” (although Briggs does acknowledge the power of Collins’s presence and oratory). Another newspaper writer similarly observes that Collins’s “first efforts were crude and sharp-edged, with that element of fierceness that is so apt to repel cultured people” (“Boston”).

These journalists’ views reflect the era’s incipient social Darwinism, which considered poor people mental and physical inferiors who deserved their lives of hard labor and confinement. Collins’s crudity, savagery, and ferocity thus served as markers of, and grounds for, her inferior social standing. Moreover, Collins’s dark coloring may have evoked for Briggs images of Native American “savages.” Collins's work may be fruitfully compared with the writings of nineteenth-century Native American women discussed in Cari M. Carpenter's *Seeing Red: Anger, Sentimentality, and American Indians*, “who were met not only with these stereotypes of ‘savage’ rage but with social proscriptions against female anger” (2). Not only was Collins’s anger a dangerous female anger, but it was the even more fearsome rage of the oppressed working classes.

For genteel writers such as Briggs, it is almost as though Collins were speaking a foreign language. And in a sense she was. As a worker and labor reformer, Collins had been steeped in the often fiercely angry traditions of labor reform rhetoric, with which many middle-class Americans would have been unacquainted. Written by a Lowell factory worker and labor activist, Amelia’s “Some of the Beauties of Our Factory System—Otherwise, Lowell Slavery,” published in Lowell in 1845, resonates interestingly with Collins's *Commonwealth and Revolution* pieces quoted above. Amelia writes,

She [the factory woman] soon finds herself once more within the confines of that close noisy apartment [her mill workroom], 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! . . . for in addition to the tyrannous [sic] and
oppressive rules which meet her astonished eyes, she finds herself compelled to remain for the space of twelve months . . . 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. . . . they [the mill management] may [author’s emphasis] deign to bestow upon them [the workers] what is in common parlance termed, a “regular discharge;” thus enabling them to pass from one prison house to another. Concerning this precious document, it is only necessary to say, that it very precisely reminds one of that which the dealers in human flesh at the South are wont to give and receive as the transfer of one piece of property from one owner to another. (5)

Likening factory work to slavery, northern writers such as Amelia and Collins hoped to elicit the support of the many antislavery New Englanders. For Amelia the regulation paper consists of “tyranous [sic] and oppressive rules,” while for Collins it is “one of the most despotic codes . . . ever issued in a free country.” Both writers draw from a tradition of fervid labor discourse. David S. Reynolds argues that beginning in the 1840s American labor reformers developed “a fiery rhetoric filled with grotesque imagery aimed at unmasking ‘idle’ and ‘depraved’ aristocrats” (81). Amelia and Collins attempt to show that the mills, often touted as beehives of invigorating industry, actually resemble something more like prisons or slave plantations. With this unmasking, writers such as Amelia and Collins hoped, for one, to motivate middle-class citizens to join them in working for reform.

Although Conwell apparently muted some of the intense rhetoric of Nature’s Aristocracy, the text still retains some strong expressions of anger. Collins’s narrator voices indignation at those who oppress the poor, while she humanizes the poor by presenting sympathetic, often sentimental stories of their lives and struggles. Like the nineteenth-century women’s texts discussed in Linda M. Grasso’s Artistry of Anger: Black and White Women’s Literature in America, 1820–1860, Nature’s Aristocracy contributes to “public expressions of
anger [that] inform the larger culture that the individual or group are human beings of consequence who are seeking attention, respect, and equal rights and privileges” (12). Collins works to counteract her society’s tendency to denigrate laboring people as less intelligent, less virtuous, and thus less deserving of respect and justice.

In *Nature’s Aristocracy*, Collins’s anger spares neither sex. She holds a special disdain for wealthy mill owners who hide their exploitation of workers behind charitable efforts, such as the founding of rest homes for aged and ill laborers. Her narrator avers, “It is dreadful to think that when a man gives back to his victims, in a provision for ‘an institution,’ a part of the sum of which he deliberately robbed them, he is to be lauded to the skies as an example of mortal perfection” (143). Collins employs a combination of sarcasm, as seen in this passage and others, and sentimentality in the text’s “tales” similar to that found in the nineteenth-century Native authors examined by Carpenter. As Carpenter writes, “Alice Callahan, Pauline Johnson, and Sarah Winnemucca each employ a sentimentality in which sarcasm and irony mark anger” (127). For Collins, the sarcasm of calling some well-to-do men “example[s] of mortal perfection” is a way of pulling them down from a height of false superiority from which they wrongly look down upon laborers.

Collins just as often vents sarcastic anger at privileged women. In chapter 2, “The Beggars,” her narrator describes how domestic servants work in the early morning preparing breakfast and sometimes feeding the poor who come around begging, while “the puny house-dolls . . . lay above stairs sleeping in down and damask” (22). Such pampering renders these women not only physically weak but also ignorant of important realities, such as the poverty in their midst. Collins’s narrator chides them, “Ah, ye drawing-room beauties and afternoon belles, ye cannot see the phases of life which the kitchen-girl sees” (21). While exposing the “belles’” heartlessness, Collins’s irony reverses the social positions of these women, placing the “kitchen-girl” in a place of superiority vis-à-vis the “belle” who ordinarily looks down on her.

These angry passages raise the question of whether such writing would not more readily alienate middle- and upper-class readers than
elicit their support for labor causes. This leads to the deeper question of who exactly was Collins's intended audience. Some contemporary reviewers assume that Collins's book was meant primarily for readers like herself. As a *Lowell Daily Citizen and News* writer avers, *Nature's Aristocracy*’s “free, flowing style . . . is calculated to interest the general reader, and especially the large class who claim the honorable title of laborers” (“Jennie Collins's Book”). While the anger passages must have particularly gratified working-class readers, the text's sentimental “tales” seem more targeted to middle- and upper-class readers, who would presumably identify with the characters’ sensitivity and refinement. The text lacks a clear sense of its intended audience, possibly a result of Conwell’s editorial contribution.

*Nature's Aristocracy* alternates angry rhetoric with the more covertly persuasive strategies of sentimentality. Mary Louise Kete’s work on sentimentality in literature has identified some of its components. Sentimentality’s overriding concern, Kete argues, is with “express[ing] the utopian impulse to abolish boundaries and expand community” (545). In her sentimental tales of the suffering poor, Collins strives to reconnect these people to the community that has debased and exploited them. She thus works to heal the “broken bonds” that along with “lost homes, [and] lost families” are Kete’s “three signal topics of sentimentality” (545).

Collins employs sentimental diction and rhetoric to evoke sympathy for her subjects. Her narrator compares the poor tailoress Annie Masdon to a flower, drawing from the floral imagery so popular in the nineteenth century. In an extended metaphor, Collins writes that Annie Masdon

> was born a flower; and her sweet disposition, delicate feelings, fine discernment and mental liveliness were a part of her constitutional nature. . . . Like the flowers, she ever looked upward, and from her humble position saw more of heaven than did thousands who could look down upon her. (59)

With such images of beauty and innocence, Collins counters the genteel perception of poor women as coarse and dissolute. In a
striking reversal of the expected, she shows that the tailoress’s abject social position affords her spiritual advantages compared to those “who could look down upon her.” Collins thus challenges readers who have scorned such women to change their views and welcome the world’s Annie Masdons into their community.

Collins works especially hard to humanize sentimentally the despairing women assailed by the temptations of prostitution. In the story of the fallen “shop-girl,” Wellie Wallace, Collins employs sentimentality’s special rhetorical trope, the apostrophe. According to Kete, apostrophe, or “direct address to an abstraction or one to an absent person,” is the quintessential feature of sentimental literature, one that “dramatizes the existence of multiple registers of imagined reality” (545). In commenting on her formerly refined coworker’s fall into a life of sin, Collins’s narrator interrupts the narrative to address Wellie’s absent presence numerous times. The narrator interjects near the beginning, “Dear Wellie, how I loved you! . . . what a halo of holy light seemed to surround you wherever you went!” (37). Collins thus brings Wellie closer to the reader, who might previously have preferred to maintain distance from such a woman. By unreservedly displaying her love for Wellie, Collins also demonstrates that a working-class woman like herself is capable of refined sentiment.

Collins’s sentimental strategies probably owe more to the popular British novelist Charles Dickens than to anyone else. Several periodical writers remark on her admiration for Dickens, her favorite author (“Jennie Collins Dead”). Collins named her charity “Boffin’s Bower” after the home of the poor but virtuous Mr. and Mrs. Noddy Boffin in Dickens’s Our Mutual Friend (1865). An article appearing in the Woman’s Journal explains that Collins chose the name as “an appreciation of the great novelist and his labors in the behalf of the poor” (“Boffin’s Bower”). During a visit to England, according to one journalist, Collins “laid a wreath . . . on the bust of Charles Dickens in Westminster Abbey as her tribute to his memory” (“Without Ostentation”). Collins held an annual service at Boffin’s Bower to commemorate Dickens’s death and to honor his work.

Buy the Book
Not only did Dickens write with great sympathy about the poor, but he also engaged in benevolent work on their behalf, such as helping to found and manage the Home for Homeless Women in London. Such efforts must have been inspiring for Collins. She expressed some of her appreciation when she lectured in Boston’s Music Hall in September 1870, not long after Dickens’s death, “on Charles Dickens as a labor reformer.” According to a brief newspaper account, “She [Collins] was certain that Mr. Dickens would have defended the laboring men in the measures which they are taking in this country against their employers. No more striking example of what is occurring today can be found than his description of ‘hard times’” (“Jennie Collins’s Lecture”). She alludes to Dickens’s novel *Hard Times* (1854), which indeed shows great concern for oppressed mill workers. As reported, however, Collins curiously overlooks the novel’s unflattering representation of the labor activist, Slackbridge. Despite Collins’s experience as a labor leader, *Nature’s Aristocracy* frequently assumes, in accord with much of Dickens, that individual acts of Christian charity, rather than social reforms, offer the surest remedy for poverty and other social ills. For instance, she relates in chapter 13 the story of the wealthy Pennsylvania banker who through his personal attention and charity transforms the lives of some poor neighbors. Her admiring narrator exclaims, “What more could man do?” (165).

Collins often viewed her writing and charitable work through the lens of Dickens’s fiction, particularly his sentimental characterizations. In *Nature’s Aristocracy*’s chapter “The Beggars,” Collins’s representation of stray children pressed into begging by a corrupt adult owes much to such scenes in Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* (1838). She later penned a newspaper article entitled “‘Little Nell’: An Appeal for Something to Do, Which Should Be Answered” after the heroine, Little Nell, of Dickens’s *Old Curiosity Shop* (1841). Dickens’s sentimentality is most often associated with characters such as Little Nell, who embody youthful innocence, purity, and love.

In his work on sentimentality in Dickens, Fred Kaplan argues that such characterizations are intended to evoke and strengthen in readers what many Victorians believed were humanity’s “in-
nate moral sentiments” (4). Rooted in eighteenth-century moral philosophy, the belief in moral sentiments sprang from a view of human nature’s essential goodness. Dickens thus hoped that such protracted sentimental scenes as the death of Little Nell, one of his most famous scenes, “would stir the world’s conscience as well as its fears. The suppressed and the exploited would benefit” (Kaplan 50). In “Little Nell” Collins presents a case from Boffin's Bower who she believes “is a perfect prototype of 'Little Nell.’” She recounts the experience of an orphaned adolescent girl selflessly struggling to support her four younger siblings. After their landlord evicted the family, Collins wrote this article hoping that a reader would offer “a situation” for the eldest girl. Like Dickens’s representation of Little Nell, Collins hoped that her sentimental account of these poor children’s undeserved suffering would activate the moral sentiments of her readers, who would offer assistance.

Dickens’s sentimental representation of the death of Little Nell influenced the equally well-loved sentimental scene of Little Eva’s death in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin, or, Life among the Lowly* (1852). Both novels contributed to Collins’s sentimental treatment in *Nature’s Aristocracy* of the death of the orphaned cash girl, Viola, who as she expires expresses wishes to receive in heaven a mother, nice clothes, and a doll (54). Collins thus attempts to touch the hearts of female readers who have possessed such advantages and persuade them to extend their sympathies to orphans such as Viola. In her representations of children’s suffering, Collins shares in Dickens’s view “that fictional presentations of the deaths of children had extraordinary corrective potential. Such deaths appealed powerfully to the moral sentiments . . . because they seem against ‘nature’ and ‘human nature’” (Kaplan 50). In such scenes as Viola’s death and her representations of child mill workers, Collins reveals the unnaturalness of society’s treatment of poor children and its great need for correction.

Besides advocating individual acts of benevolence, *Nature’s Aristocracy* proposes two “remedies” for “some evils . . . resulting from the unnatural condition of society”: “practical co-operation between the laborer and the capitalist, and . . . woman’s suffrage”
On the whole, Collins devotes much less attention to remedies for workers’ oppression and related social ills than she gives to representing these problems. Such indefiniteness was common among nineteenth-century reformers. As Timothy Messer-Kruse contends in his study of nineteenth-century labor and other reform movements, *The Yankee International: Marxism and the American Reform Tradition, 1848–1876*, “They [American radicals] approached the problems of labor with a clearer sense of what was wrong with the mushrooming industrial order than of what particular remedies and strategies would work to counter these evils” (43). Collins thus leaves her identification of “remedies” to *Nature’s Aristocracy*’s conclusion, where she does not specify how they would work, although she briefly addresses cooperation and woman’s suffrage as solutions earlier in the text.

Cooperative or worker-owned factories and stores had been established with varying degrees of success in the United States as early as the 1830s. Workers thereby believed that, according to Steven Leikin, they “could end wage labor and their exploitation by middlemen through economic institutions of their own design” (321). The kinds of large-scale industries in which Collins worked, namely textile and ready-made garment production, were more difficult to make cooperative because they required larger initial investments of capital than laborers possessed.

In chapter 11, Collins seems to have recognized this when she proposes cooperation as a solution. In her brand of cooperation, workers do not own the factories but instead share the profits with the capitalist-owners. This “fair division of the profits” is, she contends, “nothing more than simple justice” (141). This seems to be what Collins means by the “practical co-operation between the laborer and the capitalist” proposed at the conclusion of *Nature’s Aristocracy*, although she does not specify what was “practical” about it (207). Leikin explains that cooperation was often viewed by nineteenth-century Americans as a pragmatic solution. As he writes, “Cooperation’s appeal to working men and women rested in its often perceived practicality” (321). Collins does not explain how capitalists would be persuaded to share their profits with workers,
although she seems to assume that her writing of *Nature’s Aristocracy* would contribute to moving them by the force of its sentimentality and anger to act upon “simple justice.”

Collins devotes her final chapter to a cause she championed throughout her life, women’s suffrage. While arguing that the vote was even more important for laboring women than for their more privileged sisters—a view not often heard in suffrage literature, Collins also treats such related subjects as “Woman’s Sphere” and an appreciation of Margaret Fuller’s life and work. Collins’s stance on women’s rights was a complex one comprised of what today’s feminists would consider progressive and conservative elements. On the one hand, she argues that “women as a class” are not “the mental equals of the men as a class” (195). Yet she maintains that there are exceptional women who possess intelligence or physical strength equal to men’s and that these women should not be barred from any position held by men.

The most distinctive feminist contribution of *Nature’s Aristocracy* is its emphasis on working women’s need for the vote. Collins employs an argument much like that advanced in Sojourner Truth’s famous “And Ar’nt I a Woman?” speech (1851), which shows that not all women were sheltered in—or confined to—woman’s sphere. Collins’s narrator contends, “The factory-girl, who enters upon her work when ten or twelve years of age, . . . must work as hard and do her task as well as a man, or, like him, be discharged, without ceremony or apology” (203). While the mill woman is obliged to fend for herself in the public arena, she lacks the means to influence the laws and customs that govern so much of her life. Although she is “treated in every respect like a man” (203), Collins argues that she needs the franchise to obtain some of men’s privileges, such as higher wages. *Nature’s Aristocracy* thus contributes to our understanding of laboring women’s contribution to, and stake in, the women’s rights and suffrage movements.
NOTES

1. There is no full-length biography of Collins. The major biographical sources are Collins’s obituaries and recent sketches by Hoxie and Buhle.

2. See entries for Jane Collins in U.S. Census Bureau, Federal Census, 1860, Massachusetts, Suffolk County, Boston, Ward 8, p. 454; U.S. Census Bureau, Federal Census, 1870, Massachusetts, Suffolk County, Boston, Ward 8, p. 77; U.S. Census Bureau, Federal Census, 1880, Massachusetts, Suffolk County, Boston, E.D. 710, p. 27. When Collins was young, Amoskeag was part of Goffstown, New Hampshire. Sources examined in the search for Collins’s parents’ names and her exact birth date include Goffstown NH, Town Clerk, Town Records, 1749–1843, unpublished manuscript; Goffstown NH, Town Clerk, “Records of Marriages, Births, and Deaths, 1774–1925,” ms; George P. Hadley, History of the Town of Goffstown, 2 vols. (Concord: Rumford, 1922–24); Manchester NH, “Town Records, 1806–1868,” ms.

3. Although Collins’s obituaries assert that she began working at age fourteen, in Nature’s Aristocracy she writes that “the factory-girl . . . enters upon her work when ten or twelve years of age” (203). From Jennie Collins, Nature’s Aristocracy; or, Battles and Wounds in Time of Peace: A Plea for the Oppressed. (Subsequent page references from this text will appear in parentheses. The page numbers refer to this volume.) Since Collins was born in the factory village of Amoskeag NH, she might well have begun working there before age fourteen. An entry appearing in James O. Adams, Directory for the City of Manchester, New Hampshire (Manchester: Printed at the American Office, 1846), “Collins Jane, S. C. [Stark Corporation] b. [boards] 76, Elm st.,” may relate to Jennie Collins (29).


6. J. R. Pole contends, however, that in the postrevolutionary period, “to Jefferson it was already clear that virtue and talent could lie concealed in ex-

7. Collins’s or Conwell’s correspondence is not found in Lee and Shepard, *Business Records* (1860s–1906), American Antiquarian Society (Susan M. Anderson, assistant curator of manuscripts, American Antiquarian Society, e-mail message to author, Feb. 27, 2008), and there are no documents or correspondence concerning Jennie Collins in *Russell Herman Conwell, Papers, 1862–1972*, Temple University Library, Special Collections.


9. The author thanks Steven F. Kruger for first suggesting this idea.

**WORKS CITED**


“Book Table.” *Revolution*, Jan. 26, 1871: [12].


“The Labor Question.” (Boston) Banner of Light, Sept. 18, 1869: 5.


A Note on the Text

Jennie Collins's text is reproduced from the only edition, which was published in late 1870 by Lee and Shepard of Boston, Massachusetts, and by Lee, Shepard, and Dillingham of New York, New York. The title page is dated 1871, although 1870 is the copyright date, and most published reviews of the book appeared in late 1870 and early 1871. The text as presented here is nearly the same as Collins's, retaining nineteenth-century word spellings and usage. The only changes have been the standardization of capitalization in chapter headings and the correction of a few apparent spelling and punctuation errors. Collins's original notes appear as footnotes within the text of Nature's Aristocracy, while the editor's notes follow the conclusion of Collins's text. Abbreviations of state names and other words have been spelled out. The reformatting of the text has caused the inevitable loss of the original text's topical running titles.
NATURE’S ARISTOCRACY

or

Battles and Wounds in Time of Peace

A PLEA FOR THE OPPRESSED
To Mrs. Jennie Hayden Conwell,
whose sympathy for the oppressed, kindness to the poor, and lively interest in all that concerns the welfare of woman has been so often shown in words and deeds, the author would affectionately dedicate this volume.
Preface

Duty has often called, and in this book I try to respond. I have attempted but little, and whether that has been accomplished the impartial reader shall determine.
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