

ELLEN MONROE, *Letter to the Boston Bee* (1846)

Ellen Monroe's letter to the *Boston Bee* predates the Seneca Falls women's rights convention by two years, but expresses the same feminist spirit of protest. Monroe argued that women not only endured oppressive factory conditions, but also were deprived of the right to self-assertion and autonomy. In the letter, Monroe lists her specific grievances about gender inequality. Why does she believe that the assumption that men "protect" women is false? How was the term "She Devils" used?*

Sir—

I have observed that it is a common practice, among Editors, to fill their papers with advice to women, and not infrequently, with ill concealed taunts of woman's weakness. . . .

It may be, that most women are so dwarfed and weakened, that they believe that dressing, cooking, and loving . . . make up the whole of life; but Nature still asserts her rights, and there will always be those too strong to be satisfied, with a dress, a pudding, or a beau, though they may take each in turn, as a portion of life. I speak not now of the distinguished of either sex; they form a bright relief in the otherwise dark picture. Neither do I suppose that there are no exceptions, perhaps many, to the general rule. But to the generality of men, let the question be put. Are you not, thousands of you, as effeminate as the veriest woman of them all? You talk of your manliness; where is it? "Alas, echo answers where." You boast of the protection you offer to women. Protection! from what? From the rude and disorderly of your own sex—reform them, and women will no longer need the protection you make such a parade of giving. Protect them, do you? Let me point you to the thousands of women, doomed to lives of miserable drudgery, and receiving a "compensation which if quadrupled, would be rejected by the man-laborer, with scorn"; are they less worthy of protection because they are trying to help themselves? Because they have little inclination and less time to lisp nonsense? . . . If you would have the manliness you talk of, seek to raise those poor women from their oppressed, and too often degraded, condition; if you will not do it, go on in your old course, but prate no more of your manliness.

Bad is the condition of so many women, it would be much worse if they had nothing but your boasted protection to rely upon; but they have at last learnt the lesson, which a bitter experience teaches, that not to those who type themselves their "natural" protectors," are they to look for needful help, but to the strong and resolute of their own sex. May all good fortune attend those resolute ones, and the noble cause in which they are engaged. "*She Devils*" as some of them have been elegantly termed by certain persons, calling themselves men; let them not fear such epithets, nor shrink from the path they have chosen. . . . They are breaking the way; they shall make it smoother for those that come after them, and generations yet unborn shall live to bless them for their courage and perseverance. If we choose to sit down in our indolence, and persuade ourselves that we can do nothing, let us not censure those who are wiser and stronger than we are. It has been said that men and women are "natural enemies," which I do not believe; but if a running fight must be kept up between the two, let women have half the battlefield and fair play. The time may come when both parties will learn that they can be much better friends, when they have more equal rights. . . .