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WEAVING.—No. I.
A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF ITS HISTORY.

Since the introduction of the power loom, towards the end of the last century, so great has been the improvement made in the various processes of weaving, that it has almost become a new art. Previous to that time little had been done to assist the weaver in the drudgery of plain weaving, or to relieve him of the tedious labour he was compelled to undergo, in the arrangement of his loom, for the production of any new pattern or design. Certainly the fly shuttle had been invented, and by its means the efficiency of the hand loom had been exceedingly increased, still the work had to be done without the assistance of any motive power, and in the production of figured goods an amount of labour was required that can scarcely be imagined by the weaver of the present day.

From about the middle of the sixteenth century the history of weaving becomes clear, and its advancement can be traced with some degree of certainty. But previous to that time little is known, practically, concerning it. That the art had been practiced from the most remote times cannot be doubted. Not only is frequent allusion made in the Old Testament to the "loom," the "weaver," and "fine linen," thus showing that the ancient Egyptians excelled in the art of weaving—an art and science they carried to a high degree of perfection, but the numerous remains of mummy cloths afford ample proof of their skill. It cannot be supposed that other nations did not also know and practice the art, to a more or less extent; but it is probable that the superior skill of the Egyptians may have been imitated by them, and particularly so in the southern parts of Europe.

At the invasion of England by the Romans, it has been said that Julianus Caesar found the native Britons entirely ignorant of this art, but this statement has been refuted, from the circumstance that pieces of coarse cloth have been found, with other remains, in ancient British barrows.

The Romans established an imperial factory at Winchester for the manufacture of cloth for the use of their army, and this is perhaps the earliest record of the existence of the art in Britain. In the eleventh century the weavers must have become of considerable importance, for they formed themselves into guilds or corporations, and had royal charters bestowed upon them. In the reign of Richard the First, a law was passed for regulating the sale of cloth, and Edward the Third was particularly anxious to encourage its manufacture, as is thus related by Speed in his history of that king:—

"So that when he found that the industrious Dutch, by their manorial labours, grew to so great a strength and opulence that their friendship bred rivalry in pious monarchs, he, like a father, regarding the public weale of his country, ordained that all clothworkers who would repair hither out of foreign parts, and exercise their trades, should have free access and succour privileges. By which invitation, as veicts many were drawn, so was it that the principal cause of advancing that honest, best, and most beneficial trade in the kingdom, to the great enrichment, strength, and honor thereby appointed the noble son to Lee, that he might learn the art of frame-work knitting. Lee also continued his labours, and in 1658 he composed his "art" and published it. He presented the queen with a pair thus produced, which she accepted, with many compliments for the "ingenious and admirable texture," but neither patent nor money were forthcoming to do honour to the inventor."

The death of Lord Husson and his son, Lee met with neglect, and fell into a deep melancholy. He was afterwards induced to go to France to work some other plans, which had not been successful. But he succeeded, the assassination of the king, Henry IV., taking place at the time, quite destroyed Lee's prospects, and he died in Paris of a broken heart. This occurred in the year 1610.

Mr. Felkin, in his "History of the Hosiery and Lace Manufactures," which is indeed, gives a most interesting account of Lee's life and misfortunes.

The distinguishing feature of Lee's invention is, that it is complete in itself, and emanated from one brain only. There is, perhaps, no other instance of a machine as perfect as that invented by Lee, which he applied to the manufacture of silk stockings. It was at first applied to wool, and by its means the whole art of knitting was revolutionized, and that it led the way to the grand inventions employed in the hosiery and lace manufactures, it is a fact that commands admiration and sympathy for its inventor.

Towards the end of the reign of James I., silk thread was introduced on a large scale into England by Mr. Burlamach, a London merchant, and it rose so rapidly to such importance, that 1690 the throwers of London were licensed under the title of the "masters, Wardens, Assistants, and Companions of Silk Throwers," and it is to this body we are said to have owed the large number of London above 40,000 men, women, and children.

It was in 1679 that M. de Guinnes, an officer in the French Academy of Sciences, produced a model loom, which he termed an "engine for weaving linen cloths without the aid of a workman." The shuttle is shown to be carried through the warp by being inserted into the end of a lever, and a corresponding lever meeting it half way in the shed of the warp receives it, and delivers it on the other side of the cloth. The invention is valuable only on account of its being the first known attempt for weaving without power. In the "Introduction to the Abridged Specifications Relating to Weaving," by Mr. Woodcock, a full account is given of the apparatus, of which we shall hereafter give an illustration.

In the year 1765, in consequence of the revolution in the manufactures of cloth, weavers, manufacturers, and artificers, were compelled to fly from France, and it has been computed that nearly a million of the inhabitants left, of which number about 70,000 made their way to England and Ireland. They brought with them their particular skill in the various arts, the manufacturing industry of this country reaped such important advantages that it would be difficult to overestimate their influence or extent.

In the commencement of the following century Mr. Crockett established a silk-thrashing mill at Derby, and he, from some cause the attempt proved unsuccessful. Shortly afterwards, in the year 1718, "Mr. Crockett, of Manchester (Greaves)," in a petition to the Queen by a merchant of London, introduced a more perfect mode of silk-thrashing, which he had surreptitiously obtained in Italy. He presented a petition for the machinery, Sept. 9, 1718, and in this petition he states, "That by constant application and endeavours for many years past, the author of such machinery, and the number of agents and workmen, both here and in foreign parts, I have, at very great expense and hazard, found out, designed, and brought into use the manner of making the three capital engines, or acts of working tools, called in Italy 'I' ingagatore,' or 'incurvatore,' and 'tiltto,' and the finest raw silk, with the second to spin it, and with the third to twist it into oramine silk.'" As we are told of those days, he built a mill at Derby, near to the site of Crockett's, which was long considered one of the wonders of England. Compared with modern mills it was a humble
affair, and has long since been converted into a corn mill. At the expiration of Lombe’s patent in 1731, he applied to Parliament for a renewal or extension of it. From the national importance of the trade, it was not allowed, but a grant of 14,000l. was made to him, in consideration of the services he had rendered the nation. This was on condition that a complete set of working models should be supplied to the Government for the information and instruction of the public in the processes of throwing. The models were deposited in the Tower of London; but there is reason to believe that they were wilfully destroyed some thirty or forty years ago. Some slight portions of them have been saved, and are now in the Patent Office Museum, Kensington. They consist of a reel, one or two spindles, with bobbins and flies, and a portion of the “sledging” rail, with “sledging” blocks or pieces, as the middle bearings of the spindles were formerly called.

In 1733, John Kay, a native of Bolton, took out a patent for his invention of the fly shuttle. He had previously invented the method of making the reed of thin slips of metal instead of slips of reeds. These two inventions, alone, are perhaps the most important ever made to the loom. Mr. Bennett Woodcroft, in his “Brief Biographies,” records that the Yorkshire men first used the fly shuttle, but they would not pay for its use, and they formed a company called a “Shuttle Club” to cover each others’ costs when persecuted.

In 1746, Kay and Stoll applied a “tappet shaft” to the “Dutch loom,” by which means it could be worked without the use of treads, &c. To Kay, also, is attributed several other most valuable inventions, amongst which may be mentioned the machine for making cards, as used for carding cotton, which is now in the Patent Office Museum, Kensington, and the wheel shuttle used in narrow goods looms. It is difficult to conceive the persecution this ingenious man met with. When at Bury he attempted to make improvements in spinning machinery, but his house was broken into, and all his goods destroyed, whilst he himself narrowly escaped with his life. He ultimately went to France, where he died in poverty, but no stone tells where he lies.