

John James on the Worsted Industry's Migration to Yorkshire, 1857

(During the eighteenth century the worsted manufacturing industry gradually migrated from Norfolk to Yorkshire as Northern entrepreneurs adopted the new machinery developed for the cotton industry to wool in such centers as Bradford and Halifax. From John James, *History of the Worsted Manufacture in England, from the Earliest Times: with Introductory Notices of the Manufacture among the Ancient Nations, and during the Middle Ages*, 1857, 258-9, 267-9; in J. T. Ward, ed., *The Factory System, Vol. I, Birth and Growth* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1970), pp. 31-34.)

A period has now been approached, the latter half of the eighteenth century, in which our manufactures from wool experienced a remarkable development, especially in Yorkshire. In this interval, the worsted branch of industry seems peculiarly to have flourished, furnishing subsistence to thousands of the poor. But its principal extension took place in the West-Riding of Yorkshire, where in the year 1774, the value of the manufacture amounted to the immense sum of £1,400,000; here also, before the termination of the century, the inventions of spinning machines were first applied to the production of worsted yam, and were destined ere long to produce such a remarkable transformation and growth in all the departments of the trade.

But to return. During the middle of the eighteenth century the manufacturers of Norwich attained the greatest prosperity. The Norwich merchants and tradesmen being energetic and fertile in resources, when one market, or branch of business failed, turned to another. Finding that the monopoly which they had to a great extent enjoyed in the home demand, had, through the competition in cotton goods, vanished, they directed their attention more to foreign markets, and soon by increased exports obtained compensation for the loss they had sustained from this cause. So true it is that monopolies create supineness and sluggishness in commerce, whilst competition stimulates to exertion and prosperity. Between the years 1743 to that of 1763, Norwich reached the palmy, the highest state of its greatness, as 'the chief seat of the chief manufacture of the realm'. Undoubtedly in those times it occupied, as 'the chief seat of manufacture', the position of the present Manchester.

Two places in England then stood distinguished for the excellence of their dyers, London and Norwich, and there most of the fine worsted goods underwent the processes of dyeing and finishing. The workmen of the latter city were pre-eminently known for the beauty and permanence of their dyes. Worsted textures were forwarded thither from all parts of England, to be dyed and finished, thus furnishing employment to a large number of workmen, and increasing the trade of the city....

. . . In the ten years succeeding the year 1750, the production of stuffs waxed greatly in the West-Riding. Throughout many districts, where until lately the making of the coarse cloths of Yorkshire formed the occupation of the majority of the population, the clothiers engaged, with energy, in the comparatively new business of stuff-making. Halifax and Bradford much extended their operations therein, and even at Leeds, the very centre of the clothing country, the weaving of worsteds constituted no inconsiderable portion of its trade. Merchants had in abundance sprung up, who rode from town to town,

and valley to valley, to purchase these goods, which were mostly shipped to the continent of Europe. A new road to wealth had been opened-the farmer either forsook the tilling of the ground to follow altogether the stuff business, or else carried it on as a domestic employment along with the cultivation of the land, and with thrifty habits, was often in an incredibly short time, enabled to purchase his homestead and farm. The art spread into the most remote dells, as well as in the towns and villages of the south-western portion of the Riding. All ranks hastened to learn, in some of its branches, the worsted business -some as sorters, others as combers, more as weavers, whilst the women and children were taught spinning, and for the instruction and employment of the latter, numerous schools for teaching spinning were established. Although the art of making stuffs had been practised in the Riding to a considerable extent since at least the commencement of the century, yet in the interval between the years 1750 and 1760, a new era opened, and from that point the manufacture began to exhibit some indications of that stature and dimensions which, in later days, it has attained. It, year by year, increased. Large quantities of northern made stuffs were shipped to Holland by way of Hull. In the year 1765, about one thousand packs of the produce of Yorkshire and Norfolk looms, were imported at Rotterdam. *To Spain also, and Portugal, Yorkshire stuffs were exported in considerable amounts, and likewise to America by way of Liverpool.

In Norwich, likewise, at the commencement of the reign of George III, the worsted manufacture continued in a vigorous and thriving state. On the failure, to a great extent, as before noticed, of the home demand for Norwich crapes and goods, the stuff merchants cultivated the export trade more than formerly, and now transacted a very extensive business in Holland, Flanders, Germany, Italy, Spain and Portugal, (and through them to the great markets of South America,) where they established agents and correspondents, and employed numerous travellers, as well often taking journies thither themselves....

The East India Company also purchased largely of Norwich goods, such as camblets, and in particular their purchases, owing to the stoppage of French commerce to the East from the war, increased very greatly in the year 1762. But the prosperity of Norwich, soon after the accession of George III, began to decline. This was partly owing to the rapid increase of the Yorkshire manufacture, and partly owing to the war which broke out between England and her American colonies. The merchants, in fear of the privateers, lessened their exports, and commerce became crippled. . . .

** In 1765, the Exports of Manufactures from Wool to Holland, amounted to above £320,000. It is stated, that at this period, serges to the value of £10,000 were sent to Holland from Aberdeenshire, so that the Scotch worsted weavers still to some extent competed with us there.*