THE STATE

OF THE

SILK-MANUFACTURE

OF

SPITAL-FIELDS.

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OF

Spital-Fields.

ADDRESSED TO THE

MAGISTRATES OF MIDDLESEX;

And submitted to the Consideration of

MASTERS AND JOURNEYMEN.

" Every Regulation which interferes with a Manufacture, is useless, hurtful, dangerous; it unsettles the workman, repels the artist, blunts industry, disgusts the consumer, discredits the seller, and ruins the enterprise."

Roland de la Platiere.

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THE Journeymen Weavers have again announced their intention of applying to the Quarter Sessions for a regulation of the Prices of Work, of some articles in the Silk and Silk-mixed Manufactory. An Act of the Legislature, passed in the year 1773, has given to you, Gentlemen, the power of settling and regulating the Wages and Prices of Work for those branches in the County of Middlesex. The charge entrusted to you is a very important one, in my

opinion, of much greater consequence than you, or the Silk Manufacturers in general, seem to be aware of; and although I conceive the slow poison prescribed by that Act, and fatally administered by your hands, has so far taken effect, as to place the Silk Trade of Spital-Fields beyond the reach of recovery; yet I am induced to call your attention to it, in hope, that a timely administration of antidotes, may rather cause it to die in a slow consumption, than in a rapid decline.

The Act which first placed this power in your hands, was passed in the year 1773, just after the riots in Spital-Fields, which were attended by some peculiar acts of barbarity and atrocity. I can easily imagine, that but for these disgraceful scenes, the Act would never have been passed; and can readily give credit to the assertion, that the Ministers consented to it, for the express purpose of removing the Silk Trade into the Country. A statesman may conceive it but of little consequence, if the nation has but the Manufacture, whether it be near the

metropolis or at a distance, but he should remember that the Silk Manufacture is much more the Offspring of Fashion, than its Sister Manufactures, and consequently requires a proximity to the capital, which they do not. But to you, Magistrates of the County of Middlesex; and to you, Manufacturers, I would observe, that whenever a powerful stream is diverted into a fresh course, its former channel must be left dry. And can you then consent to entail poverty upon those, by whom and with whom, you have gained your livelihood? Can you, Masters, who have enriched yourselves by their assistance, see them on the brink of a precipice, and not put forth a hand to save them from destruction? Can you, Magistrates, be the instruments in the hands of a few, to reduce the many to poverty? Go now to the Work-houses in the neighbourhood of Spital-Fields, and see the effects of some of your late regulations.

Do you see that Woman, with her two Children?—"Pray, good Woman, what is the reason

of your being in the Workhouse?" "Please your Worships, I had the misfortune to lose my Husband, who left me with these two Children. The eldest, who is but ten years old, and myself, we made Persians, and the youngest wound our quills; we just got enough to keep body and soul together, when your Honours, at the request of the Committee, advanced the price of making, from four-pence to five-pence a yard. My Master could make them in the Country for three-pence, and therefore took them all down. My poor dear Man was gone, and as I had never made any thing else, I was forced to come to the Workhouse."—"But sure so small an advance as a penny a yard, could not have obliged your Master to take them all down?"—"So I told him, your Honour, but he said that your Worships had not persuaded his customers to give him two-pence per yard more than they could buy them for of his next door neighbour, who made them in the Country."

"But what brought this grey-headed old Woman here?"—"Your Worships, I made Cotton

Handkerchiefs, for five and forty years, when your Worships, at the request of the Committee, advanced them two shillings, and my Master was obliged to take them all down, they made them so much cheaper at Manchester; he offered me a Silk Work, but I was too old to *larn*."—"But, good Woman, you could not get a living on them!"—"It is true, your Worship, I only made three dozen a week, which came to eighteen shillings; but then, your Worship knows, half a loaf is better than no bread; and eighteen shillings a week is better than the Workhouse."

"But what brought you here, old Man?"—"Your Worships, if you must know, it was you who sent me here; I made Spital-Fields Bandanoes for twenty years, and could make my four to five pieces a week, with ease; it is true, I earned but eighteen shillings to a guinea a week, but then I made both ends meet. However, one night I was at the Jolly Weavers, drinking my half pint, when Tom Dribble, who was fonder of drinking than working, told me

he was just chosen one of the Committee, and advised me to come and complain that my work was not sufficiently paid. I thought if I got a shilling or two a week more, I should know what to do with it, and therefore I went on Saturday night, and found a number more on the same errand, we all had a welcome reception from the Committee, who told us our works were not *living works*, but they would make them so. They took the matter in hand, and the short and the long of it was, that your Worships advanced the price from seven-pence halfpenny to nine-pence per square. I found the advance very comfortable, your Honours, but I had it only for a few weeks, for they made them at Manchester for sixpence a handkerchief; my Master was obliged to take my work down, and I was obliged to come upon the parish."

But I should take up too much of your time to introduce you to the Bombazeen Weavers, the Rosette and Negligee Weavers, the Hard Check Weavers, the Romall Weavers, the Bon-

net Velvet Weavers, the Checked Bandanoe Weavers, and those Cotton Sarsnet Weavers, who have so lately taken up their abode in these said receptacles of Poverty and Wretchedness; especially, as the general answer to the enquiry of what brought you here, would be, "The Committee, with your Worship's assistance, have made our works living works; they have proved such to hundreds in the Country, but they have caused us to live in the Workhouse."

But let us enquire what is meant by a living work? If your Worships will only ask one of the Committee, what work he makes, whatever his answer may be, take it for granted, that is a living work.

"Well, Mr. * * * * * * * * *, what work do you make?"

Your Worship, I make a fifty-four inch bias Shawl, but I assure you it is scarcely a living work; I can only make six Shawls in a

week, working from morning till night, and I don't lose more than two days a week on Committee business. I am only paid Six and sixpence a Shawl, but I am ready to prove at Sessions, that a *two thread Bias ought to be paid the same as a five-thread Satin*, and I am sure your Worships will see it but justice, to settle them at twelve shillings a square."

"Does your Wife weave? What work does she make?"

"At present she makes a slight flowered Sattin, but as she attends to her family concerns, she only makes four and twenty yards in a week, which, at one shilling and sixpence halfpenny per yard, only comes to thirty-seven shillings, which your Worships must allow is not enough for a *Man* to support his family with; and therefore, as she puts rather more than ninety shoots to the inch, I have introduced a clause, that *if slight Sattins exceed ninety shoots, they shall be paid as Gymmet Sattins.*"

"And your Children, what do they do?"

"Your Worship, the youngest is but seven years old, and can only wind a few quills."

"Well, but the elder ones?"

"Why one draws for his Mother, and another for my eldest Son, who is seventeen, and makes a forty-eight Lamm, two and thirty inch Floret. I am ready to prove that he works *twenty hours* out of the *twenty-four*; and though he sometimes gets done two dozen and a half in a week, it only comes to fifty-eight and nine-pence, which, as he does *two men's works*, your Worships will allow is little enough. Indeed, your Worships, when a Floret draws above half, it well deserves two shillings per dozen extra, and I hope your Worships will order it so."

"And then, your Worships, my eldest Daughter, she works like a horse, and can't make above thirty yards of a Toilet Gauze in a

week, which only comes to a guinea and a half. A *Man* may starve upon such a work. I am ready to *prove it deserves two pence per yard advance, at least.*"

If your Worships are not sufficiently acquainted with the nature of living works, in proceeding with your enquiries, you will perhaps find, that of the two apprentices permitted him by Act of Parliament, one makes a Bonnet Velvet, and the other a nine-eight Bias Border; and we will say nothing of the Shags made by his Journeymen, which pay him only eight shillings a week each, for Loom standing.

But to return to our Act of Parliament:—As I wish to comprise what I have to say, in as small a compass as possible, instead of giving my own observations, I shall transcribe the Preamble of an Order in Council, made by Louis the Sixteenth, for a City, in which the Silk Manufacture has reached its highest celebrity. I am sure, if your Worships have never read it, you will not credit it without referring

to the original. It is dated third of September, 1786, and begins thus:

"*Decree of the Council of State, concerning the Communities of Arts and Trades, of the City of Lyons.*

"His Majesty, being informed of the disturbances which have lately arisen in the City of Lyons, and having caused a report to be made to him of the causes which have occasioned them, His Majesty has learnt that the contentions which are renewed incessantly between the Manufacturers and their Journeymen, arise principally from the custom which is peculiar to this City, to fix by general tariffs the prices of labour, whilst it is necessarily variable, and subordinate to circumstances. His Majesty has also seen, with astonishment, that ancient regulations had limited the number of Looms, which the Manufacturers of this City may employ; and that, by another abuse, Women and Children were excluded from the

workshops. His Majesty, convinced *that all these restraints are as contrary to the progress of industry, as they are to the public tranquillity*, has judged that the annihilation of them was the only means of preventing, in the City of Lyons, the renewal of those tumultuous reclamations which have too often troubled the public peace, and called for the sad necessity of punishment." The Decree then goes on to order, "That, from the date of its publication, the Wages of Journeymen, Workmen, and Apprentices, of the City of Lyons, shall be settled between man and man, at a price bargained for betwixt Master Weaver, and Journeyman, according to time, or circumstances, the nature of the work, and the capacity of the workman, &c. &c."

It forbids workmen to form combinations to encrease the prices of work. Orders, that Women and Girls shall not be prevented from working, and allows a Weaver to have as many Looms as he thinks proper.

51

Let us now compare the operation of our Acts of Parliament. The Price of Work is fixed,—By whom?—By the Master and Journeyman, certainly.—No, by the Magistrates at the Quarter Sessions.—How have they obtained their knowledge of the Art of Weaving? Did they serve an apprenticeship to the trade?—No.—Then, perhaps, they learnt it at the University, or studied it when they studied the laws of the land at Lincoln's Inn, or the Temple.—No.—It is the Act of Parliament of 1773, which gives that knowledge to a Middlesex Magistrate, the moment he sits upon the bench, which a Weaver cannot obtain in his life time. Let us take a view of some of its fruits.

PRICES OF WORK.

	In 1804. £	s.	d.	In 1807. £	s.	d.	Advance about
Half-yard Persians	0	0	4 pr yd	0	0	5 pr yd	25 pr c.
Half-yard Sarsnets	0	0	5	0	0	6	20
A 1000-2 Mode	0	0	4 pr ell	0	0	5 pr yd	50
A 1000-6	0	0	11½	0	0	11	20
Hard Checks 26 inches	0	3	3 pr dz.	0	7	6 pr dz.	125
Romalls 34 ditto	0	6	6	0	12	9	90
Rosettes 33 ditto	0	9	0	0	14	0	55
Black Fringes 36 ditto	0	8	9	0	11	3	25
Coloured do. Tabby, ditto	0	9	9	0	13	3	30
Black Fringes 54 ditto	1	3	9	1	11	9	33
Coloured do. Tabby	1	5	6	1	16	9	45
Bandanoes 37 ditto	0	7	6	0	9	0	20
Ditto 54 ditto	1	2	0	1	10	0	33
Damask 32 ditto	0	16	0	1	5	0	55
54 ditto	2	12	0	3	12	6	40
Poplins half-ell	0	0	5	0	0	6½	30

The above Table needs no comment, it speaks for itself. I leave it to you, Gentlemen, to account why the Price of Labour has so much outstripped the advance on the Necessaries of Life. If I am asked, I can give no other reason than that it was your good will and pleasure.

I think, I need only state, that the duty on the Silk, sold at the late East India Company's Sale, amounted to upwards of 100,000*l.* to prove that the Silk Trade is of great importance to the country. Had it been upheld some years back by Government, with a fostering hand, I do not hesitate to say, we might at this moment have been in possession of the greatest part of the Silk Trade of Europe. That that has not been the case is too fatally proved, by the resurrection of Lyons, like a Phœnix from her ashes, and the flourishing state of the Silk Manufactures of Nismes, of Paris, and of Rouen. Our East India possessions *can* furnish us with the raw material *cheaper* than our rivals can *grow* it; and, with proper encouragement, the organ-

zine of the East might, ere this, have supplanted that of Italy and Piedmont*.

Will any one believe, that in the nineteenth century—in a civilized state—in the Metropolis of Great Britain—in the first City of Europe—that laws are in being to prevent a man from bringing up his Children to the trade by which he earns his daily bread. That such, however, is the case, you, Gentlemen, can testify, by stating the clause which forbids a Weaver, under severe penalties, from having more than two apprentices; and can further corroborate it, by the prohibition of the exercise of the trade to any one, not a Freeman of the Weaver's Company; and by the Act of the fifth of Elizabeth, which prevents any one, under penalty of forty shillings per month, from exercising any trade to which he has not served seven years apprenticeship.

* I do not mean to say, that this prohibition is acted upon, as far as regards the Journeymen; the present Court of Assistants are men of much more liberal sentiments, than to condescend to be the executioners of so illiberal a *death warrant*. It would be a libel on them to suppose it.

* I know that this assertion will not gain implicit credit with the Silk Manufacturers, but in reply to the arguments which they may bring against it, I will only observe, that the Silk Worms of Italy were originally of Eastern extraction.

That these clauses are sometimes attempted to be enforced, I am assured, by a Manufacturer in the City, who some months ago had a deputation waited upon him, from the Committee, to inform him, that he employed an *unlawful* Weaver. Upon enquiry, it turned out this *unlawful Weaver* was a poor Woman, Daughter of a Master Weaver. She had been put out to service, but forced to quit on account of bad eyes. Her Brother and Sister, who had served their time to the trade, had taught her to make Persians, to keep her from the Workhouse. I need only add, their application met with all the attention it deserved *.

Our Country has long been celebrated for the encouragement it has held out to the improvement of Manufactures, and the advancement

of the Arts and Sciences. The Silk Manufacture of the Metropolis alone, seems to have had an interdict laid upon its further progression. Its Sister Manufactures could never have reached the astonishing height of their present celebrity, but by the help of Machinery. To the Silk Trade, Machines are but of little moment; for the Act of 1773 has taken away their main-spring, the diminution of the Price of Labour. The Fly Shuttle, the most useful invention of the age, has never lessened the Price of Labour in the Silk Manufacture. The same may be said of the Machines invented in France, by Dardois and others, 20 to 30 years ago, to dispense with a draw Boy, which are at this moment in their infancy in Spital-Fields; where with difficulty they are made to draw sixty Cords, while our rivals, with their assistance, draw some hundreds. When I look at the improvements made in the Cotton and Woollen Manufactures, I blush for the Silk Trade. Silk Manufacturers of London, could you be expected to lay out fortunes in Machinery, when deprived of all

hope of repayment? No, I blame you not. I remember you are forbidden, under penalty of twenty pounds, to have more than two apprentices. I remember you are forbidden, under penalty of fifty, to employ Journeymen out of the districts; to pay them less than the Prices settled by the Magistrates of Middlesex. I remember, that the Genius of Invention scorns to work in chains. In a word, I remember the decisions of the Magistrates, and the Committee of Regulators, and I attach no blame to you.

Let us suppose a Case; a Journeyman by chance, or by native genius (for the roughest flints will often give the most sparks), discovers some improvement in the Weaving Branch; by perseverance, and with considerable expence, he nearly brings his discovery to some degree of maturity. But the volatile spirit of fashion causes his work to be taken down, the greater part of his materials are the property of his employers, they are wanted for other purposes, and

he has nothing left him but regret for his lost time.

But we will suppose that he matures his ideas, and perfects his invention, and it turns out to be of such a nature as *might prove* of general utility. He can reap no benefit from it, but the saving of his labour: he may take out a patent for it, it is true, but of what use would that be to him, the prices of work are fixed by the magistrate, and they cannot alter. However, the desire of rendering assistance to others induces him to exhibit his improvements to his neighbours and friends, they admire and applaud, but they cannot be persuaded to follow his example, because their Tables, Cords, and Brucklees are found them by their masters, and his method would occasion them a Guinea or two additional expence. He then shows it to his employers, they praise his invention, and perhaps may give him a Guinea as a reward for his ingenuity. It is then thought no more of, and the inventor and the discovery both die together.

That this is not a supposition only can be testified by many, and the cause of these fatal effects may with ease be traced to their source.

But it is not the principle only, but also the execution of it that I find fault with. Some of its fruits I have already shown in page 18. Gentlemen, What do you think of that list? What do you think of ordering Twill to be paid *more* than Tabby in one Width and *less* than Tabby in another?—Impossible!—O its impossible is it? I own I should have thought so, but look to page 7 of the Book of Prices, and read, "If any of the Sarsnets are made twilled "instead of Tabby, to be paid extra per yard, "1d." Page 12, "Serges and Chagreens to be "paid more than Mantuas, per yard 1d." Now turn to page 19, and see 27 in. 2 thd. twilled handkerchiefs, 7s. per doz.—27 in. 2 thd. tabby handkerchiefs, 7s. 6d. per doz.; and then say it is impossible. If your Worships had not been men of information, I should have told you that similar causes must produce similar effects, and

that if it deserved more in the one, it must in the other.

But let me ask you, have you never decided questions of the import of some thousands a year, by saying, "*I think no Lady would refuse* "*giving 2d. or 3d. a yard more if she wanted the* "*article.*" If I dared to differ in opinion with your Worships, I should conceive the question to be, not as you stated it, but whether those (who are not Ladies) who buy the articles of the Spital-Field Manufacturers, will give them 5 to 10 per Cent. more than they can buy them for of their neighbours who make them in the country. But I have something to say to the *Committee.*

Regulators, though blame may attach to others, the guilt all lies at your door.

Are you not at this moment breaking the laws of your country by entering into a combination to increase the prices of work?

Are you not at this moment the Committee of General Purposes, and have not the Societies entered into a resolution that none but you shall regulate with the Masters?

Have you not your regular Secretaries for the transaction of public business?

Did you or did you not cause to be printed a hand bill, stating, that your *Committee of Ways and Means* had framed an address, requesting the *Cane Spreaders* to receive *Six Pence from every Loom for the first Cane, and One Penny for every Cane after*? *

Is not this measure acted upon at this present time, which, supposing the number of Looms in the environs of London to amount to 12,000, and the average number of Canes to be one each per month, must produce you a revenue of 600l. a year.

* This measure is again resorted to by the Journeymen, at the present time, to raise the money, to defray the expences of obtaining their proposed Act of Parliament.

Do you not pay yourselves five shillings for every time you are employed on Committee business?

Is not this revenue spent in endeavouring to obtain repeated advances of prices, and have you not sent deputations to other towns in the kingdom to induce them to advance theirs?

Do not your Committees meet at the Queen's Head, Fleet Street, Bethnall Green, and at the Golden Key, Cock Lane, every Saturday night, for the express purpose of hearing and feeding complaints, and consequently creating discontent between master and man?

Deny these charges if you can—you dare not—I am ready to prove every one of them.

What steps then must be taken to arrest the progress of this great evil, as well might we expect a tree to thrive without roots as for the Silk Manufacture of Spital Fields to flourish

without the Plain Trade. It is true those juices which formerly gave nourishment to the whole, may for a short period be made to produce very beautiful buds, but the first chilling blast will inevitably cut them off, and what resources will it have to support the rigours of a severe season!

Magistrates of Middlesex, of you I require nothing but Justice; but Silk Manufacturers of Spital Fields, I call upon you to come boldly forward in defence of your Journeymen. Many of them have worked for you ten, twenty, thirty years; they have served you faithfully, and will you abandon them in the time of need. I know you have been worn out with frequent meetings, I know you have been harrassed with repeated insults, and have consented to exaction which nothing could justify but the fear of appealing to the Magistrates. But it is not for yourselves I call upon you, it is for your Old and faithful Servants. Do not let it be said that you consented to the ruin of the trade. You,

that have determined to let them have their own way, consider, your conduct is just what the Committee would wish: they must show their deluded *constituents* that they do something with the money so illegally extorted from them. Remember the voice of a few who tax the trade in general, to pay themselves for their *lost time*, is not the voice of the Journeymen of Spital-Fields, which, if fear was not predominant, many would come forward and testify.

I am well aware that "Truth seen at a dis-
"tance often makes but little impression, espe-
"cially if he who announces it has nothing else
"to enforce it but the interests of justice, and
"his love of the public welfare," but if you will not listen to my feeble voice, hear what says the famous Author of the Dissertation of the Causes of the Decay of the Trade and of the Population of the City of Lyons, after speaking of the Silk Trade, particularly the Plain Branch, which he stiles the most "important of all," he adds, "Every Manufacture where

"a competition can easily be established,
"must, and will forthwith abandon every
"Country, every City, where labour becomes
"too dear."

0500