



SEWING SILK AND MACHINE TWIST.

THE ORIGIN OF SILK. — MANUFACTORY IN CHINA. — INTRODUCED INTO VIRGINIA. — ATTEMPTS IN THE OTHER COLONIES. — FIRST SILK RAISED IN CONNECTICUT. — BOUNTIES AND STATE AIDS. — THE PROFITS OF THE BUSINESS. — ITS DECAY. — THE REVIVAL OF SILK CULTURE. — THE INTRODUCTION OF MACHINE LABOR. — THE INCORPORATION OF THE MANSFIELD COMPANY. — MACHINE TWIST. — INTRODUCED BY THE NONOTUCK SILK COMPANY, OF FLORENCE, MASS. — INCREASE OF THIS BUSINESS. — PREJUDICE CONCERNING ITALIAN SILK. — ITS EFFECTS. — THE TRUTH IN THE MATTER.

SILK, as is well known, is the fibre from the cocoons, or nests, which insects build for their protection while in the chrysalis condition. The chief supply is, however, derived from the silkworm, a caterpillar which lies upon the mulberry tree, and is classed scientifically as the *bombyx mori*.

The manufacture of silk has been known from the earliest times in China. From there it was introduced into Europe during the middle ages.

At the settlement of the United States, various attempts were made to introduce the culture of silk. At a meeting in London of the company under whose auspices the settlement at Jamestown, in Virginia, was made, held in London in 1620, Sir Edwin Sandys, whose term of office as treasurer had just ended, made an address concerning the affairs of the colony, in which he recommended the culture of mulberry trees, and the raising of silk, saying that the king, James I., had sent a second supply of silkworm eggs to the colony from his own stores.

Though at frequent intervals the authorities suggested the culture of silk, and sought to stimulate it by rewards and bounties, yet in these early days very little attention was devoted to it.

In 1718 this culture, with that of indigo, was introduced into Louisiana by the "Company of the West;" and during the Rev-

olution the chief supply of sewing silk for the upper country was derived from the silk works established in Georgia by the French settlers. The business had been founded there by most liberal appropriations from Parliament and private persons in England. Lands were given settlers upon condition that they planted ten mulberry trees for each acre, and the seal of the founders, with its motto, "*Non sibi, sed aliis*" (not for ourselves, but for others), with the representation of silkworms, expressed at once both the spirit with which the enterprise was undertaken and its object. Skilled workmen from Italy were sent over to superintend and instruct the settlers; but becoming dissatisfied, they destroyed the stock and machinery, and fled into Carolina.

Others were, however, sent over to recommence the business; and in 1734 the first shipment of eight pounds of raw silk was sent to England. The business continued, increasing in proportion to the bounties awarded it, reaching, in 1760, fifteen thousand pounds of cocoons: but when the bounties were discontinued, it diminished rapidly, and in 1790 the last silk was shipped from Georgia.

In Carolina, also, the culture of silk was a somewhat fashionable employment for the ladies during the latter part of the last century.

In Massachusetts fine samples of sewing silk were made in 1790 by Mr. Jones, of Western, in Worcester County. In New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania attempts were also made at an early period to introduce this culture. In 1769 the American Philosophical Society, of Philadelphia, on the recommendation of Franklin, commenced a subscription for establishing a filature of silk in Philadelphia, under the direction of a Frenchman. A Mrs. Wright, a Quakeress in Columbia, Lancaster County, made a good deal of sewing silk in 1770. In the Philadelphia Library Company are preserved samples of a silk dress, for the Queen of England, made from silk raised by Mrs. Wright. They are in the manuscript of Watson's *Annals of Pennsylvania and Philadelphia*.

In Connecticut silk was early produced, and was the subject of legislation in 1732. President Stiles, of Yale College, was earnest and constant in his efforts to stimulate the culture. He commenced by planting three mulberry trees in 1758, and in the library of Yale College is his manuscript journal, in which are recorded his experiments and efforts, extending over a period of nearly forty years. In 1747 Mr. Law, the governor of the state, wore the first

coat and stockings made of New England silk, and in 1750 his daughter the first silk dress made from domestic material.

The state government took an interest in the establishment of the industry, and distributed to every parish half an ounce of white mulberry seed, a variety suitable to the climate, and offered a bounty for the production of mulberry trees and raw silk. In 1760 the Rev. Jared Eliot, of Killingworth, stated, in his *Essays on Silk-growing and Field Husbandry in New England*, that one of the principal cultivators of silk, whose credibility could be relied upon, informed him that he could make a yard of silk as cheap as he could a yard of linen cloth, of eight run to the pound, and that it was then considered "more profitable than any other ordinary business."

In 1789 the town of Mansfield, where the culture appears to have been most successful, and where it has lasted until this day, made about two hundred pounds of raw silk, worth five dollars a pound. The sewing silk made at this period was worth one dollar an ounce.

The Revolution had depressed the business, and extinguished it in some localities; but now it began to excite new attention. In 1793 two hundred and sixty-five pounds were raised; and from this time it increased until the yearly production came to be about three thousand two hundred pounds, at which it remained until a blight in the seasons of 1843-4 attacked the mulberry trees, and, combined with the disastrous results of the *morus multicaulis* speculation, which had spread through the country like a pestilence, caused a distrust, and an almost entire abandonment of the pursuit.

The culture of silk has consequently lain almost dormant, until within quite recent times attention has been again called to it. Its successful introduction into California has again excited interest in the business, and there is no doubt that it can be made a most successful branch of agricultural industry in many different parts of the country.

Before 1828 the silk raised in the United States was all spun by hand upon the common spinning-wheel in use at that time. About this time Edmund Golding came to this country from Macclesfield, England, and settled at Mansfield, Connecticut, expecting to find it, from the reports he had heard, an important place for the working of silk. Though only seventeen years of age, he was an experienced throwster, and, disappointed at finding no opportunity

for employment in the occupation upon which he had relied for his support, he interested some of the residents of the town in his description of the simplicity of the machinery required, and together they resolved to construct it under his direction.

These men were Alfred Lilly, William A. Fisk, Joseph Conant, William Atwood, Jesse Bingham, and Storrs Hovey. Incorporating themselves under the title of the Mansfield Silk Company, they each contributed to the general fund fifty dollars, which was afterwards raised to seven hundred dollars. Having received also a bounty from the state of fifteen hundred dollars, the company appeared for some time to be prosperous; but want of experience and other causes, of which it would be difficult to give an accurate description, led to their embarrassment.

It would seem that the time was as yet premature for the successful establishment of the business, and the partners, their hearts made sick by deferred hope, retired, one after the other, until only two of them remained long enough to retire from it without loss. Very few industrial enterprises in this country have been attended with higher hopes and more utter failure than the various attempts to establish the silk business; but the time has now come when the manufacture is successfully established; and doubtless the period is not far distant when, in the westward march of empire, the United States will succeed to the leading position in this industry.

With the introduction of the sewing machine, it was found that the sewing silk then made was not in all respects suitable for using on it. After spending much time in experiment, the Nonotuck Silk Company, of Florence, Mass., succeeded in producing a machine twist which was found to be exactly the thing needed. The first lot of this new industrial product was made and spooled in February, 1852, and being tried by the Singer Sewing Machine Company upon their machines, was found to be just what they had been desiring to find.

From that time to this the demand has steadily grown, until now there are more than fifty manufactories in the country engaged in its production. Of these the chief one is the Nonotuck Silk Company, who first introduced it. Dating back their record in the silk business to 1838, they have increased with the increase of the silk business, until now they give constant employment to three hundred and fifty hands, and are the largest producers of their special wares, not only in this country, but in the world.

The demand for machine twist is greater in this country than in any other, since the sewing machine, as a purely American invention, has become so much more generally adopted in both factory and domestic use. Yet it is singular that the prejudice in favor of Italian silk should still be so strong, that, though in fact the supply of real Italian silk imported is wholly inconsiderable, almost the entire supply being furnished by American manufacturers, yet they are forced, in deference to this prejudice, to put it up in packages imitating those used in Italy, and to use as trade-marks the names of supposititious Italian firms.

It would seem as though it was time for the American public to free themselves from this childish deference to foreign names, and, becoming aware of the importance of this industry, put the manufacturers no longer under the necessity of thus appearing to be sailing under false colors.

