

On some Flemish Weavers settled at Glastonbury,
A.D. 1551.

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ALTHOUGH England has always been a great wool-producing country, in early times the coarser kinds of goods only were manufactured, the best wool being exported, chiefly to Flanders, and thence returned as the finest cloths. To improve our work, some Flemings were invited to settle here by Edward III, by whom, to protect the home trade, both the export of wool and the import of cloth were forbidden. But these settlers being aliens, and not belonging to any English guild, were designedly harassed, and so heavily taxed by the local authorities, that very little success attended their coming. Another attempt was made in the reign of Edward VI, by the Protector Duke of Somerset, who, on the dissolution of the monasteries, having received a grant of Glastonbury Abbey, and always studying how to be in favour with the poor, began to found there in 1551 a colony of weavers, chiefly Flemings—"outlandish, learned, and godly men." He appointed one Cornish, the keeper of the house in Worrall Park, to overlook and assist them, and had just advanced them a loan of £484 14s., when his attainder prevented him from further carrying out the plan. By agreement he had promised to provide them with houses and ground, and other relief towards their living.¹ Each family was to have four acres—enough for two kine—out of Ourwall Park, to be held for three lives—those of the husband, the wife, and one

(1). *State Papers*, Edward VI, vol. xiii. No. 71.

child. If there were no child the provision was to go to the next heir, who should be named by the survivor.² These covenants not being kept for the reason above stated, and the settlers being opposed somewhat by the natives, they soon fell into poverty, when Vallerand Pollan, their Superintendent, was obliged to petition the King for relief, showing that from their having neither houses nor necessary utensils they were in debt £131, and compelled to consume more than they could get, to live unproductively on the money the Duke had advanced them. Upon this the King took up the case, and through his Council sent a letter to Bishop Barlow, Sir John Paulet, Sir John St. Loo, Sir Thos. Dyer, and Alex. Popham, appointing them—five, four, or three of them—to examine into the matter, to “take order” for the proper completion of the settlement.³

At this time there had arrived thirty-four families and six widows, spinsters; the widows, being supposed capable of living three in a house, were treated as two families. Ten other families arrived soon afterwards, thus making the total forty-six. For all these six houses only were ready; twenty-two others, it was reported, could be made habitable with cost, but at the time they had neither roofs, doors, nor windows. Sixteen more were necessary, and towards these there were “certain void rooms where houses had been,” some walls yet standing where “divers could be made” within the late monastery, which would help to lessen the charge of building. There were also reported, as available, some steps of stone and timber in the late Abbey, “save such as may be preserved from further spoil.”⁴ The Commissioners, however, “stayed” the use of these until the pleasure of the Council could be known, reporting that they found the strangers very godly, honest, poor folk, of quiet and sober conversation, and showing themselves ever willing and ready to instruct and teach young

(2). *State Papers*, Edward VI, vol. xiv. No. 13.

(3). *State Papers*, Edward VI, vol. xiii. No. 74.

(4). *State Papers*, Edward VI, vol. xiv. No. 2.

children and others their craft and occupations. They judged, therefore, that the settlement was likely to bring "great commodity to the commonweal" of those parts.⁵

The building operations were at once commenced, but not being pursued with a "diligent and skilled oversight," one Robert Hiet, of Street, was joined with the Superintendent Pollan, to see it better done, and to "compound" with any who would sell a lease; whilst Sir Ralph Hopton, surveyor of the place, was to see that any houses becoming void should be appointed to the strangers. For the houses ready the old rent was to be paid, and for those made ready after Easter, rent was offered from "the next half-year after they should be ready." The park of Worrall ("Our Wall," as Pollan, in his petition, calls it; "O'rwall," as one of the Council writes it⁶),—consisting of about 200 acres, of which sixty were great wood of no use as pasture, the rest, part wood, and part good pasture and low meadow—was found not sufficient to carry two kine to each family; the herbage was therefore given in common, as no other land could be had, and the division left to the Superintendent and the settlers themselves, the rental being £10 per annum, beginning at Michaelmas. Mr. Cornish was "discharged of the said park and all other things within the Abbey that would serve for the usage of the said strangers," and the 140 deer within it were to be bestowed elsewhere. But Mr. Cornish, who had proved "deceitful and false," and had "dealt ill" with his new neighbours, "presented a right" to the keeping of the park, affirming that he had nothing else. Pollan, endeavouring to get rid of him, petitioned direct to the Council, by whom he was upheld, and orders were sent down to that effect; but Cornish persisting, by offering to provide elsewhere for thirty-six families before Lady Day, managed to retain possession and prevent the removal of the deer, and so both parties used the land together for the time. Besides the

(5). *State Papers*, Ed. VI, vol. xiii. No. 74.

(6). *State Papers*, Edward VI, vol. xiv. No. 14.

park, the garden ground of two acres on the "house side" of the church—the "north side" of the late Abbey—was to be allotted to those who had no other garden, and the Superintendent was to have for his dwelling the house behind the church, called the Priory, with some honest stipend for the maintenance of himself and family. Two dye-houses, at a rent of £4 yearly, for dying and calendering their worsteds, were next appointed them, within the Monastery, where the brew-house and bake-house were, on the "south side of the said Monastery, and be-inclosed with a stone wall."⁷ Timber and stone were assigned them at the King's charge, for setting within their houses their looms, cauldrons, and other necessaries for their families—they bearing the charge of setting the same; but it was carefully ordered that this provision should be only for those who were "of the mystery of making worsteds and such like," viz., weavers, dyers, spinners, kymers, &c.

As a supply of ready money was also imperative, an order was sent to Wm. Crouche, "receyptnour" of the Duke of Somerset's revenues in Somerset, to pay to the Superintendent £340, at such times as should be appointed by the Commissioners.⁸ Three hundred pounds were for the community generally to be repaid, and forty pounds for the Superintendent, "in reward towards his living and charge for the year past." They next asked for a further sum of £700, making the debt £1,000; three hundred to be employed to buy wool, five hundred for "oade," "mather," copperas, brassell, alum, and other things for their colours, and two hundred for labour, for payment of loom makers, spinsters, and others working at their occupations. For this they offered as security the bond of their Superintendent and five others—"the best of them," the said five not to leave the realm without the King's license before the debt was paid; and in case of the death of either of the bondsmen, another was to be bound in his place. Defi-

(7). *State Papers*, Edward VI, vol. xiv. No. 13.

(8). *State Papers*, Edward VI, vol. xiii. No. 76.

nite days for repayment in ten years were also named, viz., £100 at Easter yearly, until the whole should be cancelled. With this they begged a remission of the debt due to the Duke of Somerset, as "in consideration of the lack of houses and necessaries promised them," they had been obliged to live upon it; but they offered to pay £130, the value of all the worsted they had made since their coming, that sum to be added to the thousand pounds, and repaid on the eleventh year.

Being thus in debt, they wisely sought all possible advantages to recoup themselves with certain privileges for the maintenance of their "mystery." They all obtained letters of "Denization,"⁹ and asked for a confirmation of their Craft Letters Patent, with the reassurance of their houses, park, and gardens. To have a hall for the examination of the true making of their "sayes" and worsteds, with authority to proceed against offenders according to the custom of other places on the other side of the seas, "where the like mystery is occupied." They desired to choose yearly five persons to be their Warden and Overseers, against whose determinations there should be no appeal; that the like occupation should not be used in any other place in the realm for the space of ten years—not until the King's debt was fully satisfied; to have all materials for their work imported Customs free, but to pay ordinary duty on anything exported; to be allowed to sell their produce "at the best commodity;" to be as free, and to have like liberties in buying wool, and otherwise, as the drapers had; to enjoy the same privileges and liberties as other clothiers and dyers of the realm, and for all taxes to be accounted and treated as Englishmen, and to pay no more than Englishmen. These requests being conceded, they were granted also the use of their own order and discipline in their churches, according to a book called *Liturgia*, a copy of which was sent up to the Council, and Vallerand Pollan, "a man of

(9). *Patent Rolls*, 5th Edward VI, part 4.

great worth, both for learning and integrity," was confirmed in his office of Superintendent.¹⁰

Thus, taking a lesson from the fate of their predecessors, they got themselves naturalized, and incorporated by Royal patent, and so became an English guild—if not entirely free from the spite of jealousy, at least fairly safe from opposition for ten years.

The "great sums" of money demanded, and the trouble the whole matter gave, seemed to some to be more than the experiment was likely to be worth, especially when remembering that the "days were long" for the repayment of the loan. The Commissioners, however, thought otherwise, and considered that whatever was due to them, or whatever sum was expended, all would be very well employed. They reported now, as the result of this confidence and their own care and attention, that the party was diligent and prosperous, careful in bringing up their youth to labour, and so ever willing to instruct the natives, that many could already spin and handle their work as well as their teachers.¹¹

Thus is seen the first use made of the Abbey after the Dissolution. On the death of Edward VI the strangers lost their protector, and on the accession of Mary they quitted England and went to Frankfort. They seem to have left little or no local mark behind them, except, perhaps, an alms dish of latén or rolled brass, bearing a Flemish legend, with Saint George and the dragon repoussé, apparently the work of one of them, a gift for good will and good luck to St. John's Church, wherein it still remains.

It would be interesting now to follow out the influence of this settlement on our manufactures, especially on our western fine cloths; but this would change the subject too much for present space. Two questions, however, attract notice, about which a few words may be added. Strype says of these

(10). *State Papers*, Edward VI, vol. xiv. No. 2.

(11). *State Papers*, Edward VI, vol. xiv. No. 3.

strangers that they made "kersies and cloth of that nature as I conjecture." That is, their occupation being kept a "mystery," they made something about which he knew nothing, and that, as here shown in their own words, was "saye." The old dictionaries give this as a thin sort of silk stuff, or cloth. There was also an inferior stuff, a mixture of silk and wool, called sayette, as we have now satin and satinette. In the time of the Commonwealth the word appears applied to some sort of serge; thus there were sayes, double sayes, "mild" sayes, and serge, of woollen stuff, paying differential duties; and there was also silk saye, which paid the heavy impost of £1 per yard. In the lists of church goods of pre-Reformation times, saye is often mentioned—red, blue, and black. Similar articles are sometimes of velvet and sometimes of saye. There were palls of red saye, vestments of saye, and hearse cloths of saye. If the saye (*soie*) made at Glaston was in any part of silk, in accordance with the then general meaning of the word, this would be the first silk working in England; and so we get from the coming of these strangers the beginning of another local speciality in manufactures.

The other question is the origin of the name Worrall Park, which is derived usually from Weary-all; this, in turn, said to originate from Joseph of Arimathea getting weary thereabouts. The only authority for this piece of simplicity is that an inn-keeper, at some time, told some one the story. Mr. Jones, in a paper on "Topographical Etymology,"¹² has attempted to derive it from *yr allt*, meaning the wood. There were in the park, as already mentioned, sixty acres of wood; but this could hardly be so unique a circumstance, especially in the time of our early ancestors, as to warrant so special a designation. The name, as written in Pollan's petition, is Our Wall; a large *W* being used for Wall. One of the Council writes it O^r Wall, the *r* being placed over the *O*—showing, as customary at the time, that some letter or letters were omitted;

and, like Pollan, he uses a large *W* for Wall, as if it were a separate word. Another writes it O'rwall, with an apostrophe; thus again marking an acknowledged omission—this being also remarkable as a very early instance of the comma used for that purpose. It would seem that the present existing tradition is altogether of recent origin, and that at the time of the dissolution the place was known as O'rwall Park; clearly from Over Wall, the park over the wall—as distinguishing it from the smaller enclosure, the home park, within the ordinary bounds of the monastery. In habitual and daily rapid utterance, as will be quickly discovered on making the attempt, the pronunciation of O'rwall, by a very simple differentiation, as a labial necessity, glides easily and smoothly into Worrall.
