was first introduced into this country in the reign of Ed­ward III. ; but though it increased considerably during that prince’s reign, there is abundant evidence of its previous existence. Indeed Mr M'CuIloch remarks,@@1 that “ there are notices in the statute-book of ‘ broad cloths two yards within the list,’@@2 more than one hundred years before the date of the measures adopted by Edward III. for its im­provement to which observation we may add, that scat­tered notices of the manufacture during most of the ten reigns preceding that of Edward III. are to be found.@@3

It is stated by William of Malmesbury, that some Flemish weavers established themselves in the vicinity of Carlisle in the reign of William the Conqueror ; but on some disagree­ment with the people in the reign of Henry L, they were afterwards removed to Pembrokeshire. In the same reign, cloth-weavers are mentioned in the exchequer accounts ; and in the two following reigns they are represented as paying fines to the crown for the privilege of carrying on their trade.@@4

In the reign of Edward I. the office of aulnager of cloth was held for some time by one Peroult le Tayleur ; but he having forfeited it, the office was conferred, by command of the king, on one Pierre de Edmonton, “ if he were fit for it.” These several facts prove the statement of Mr M'Cul- loch, that the manufacture existed ; but beyond that we really know nothing.

In the fourth year of the reign of Edward III., John Kemp, a Flanders cloth-worker, received a license to esta­blish himself in this country. Accordingly he settled, with a number of dyers and fullers, at Kendal in Westmoreland, where his name appears at this day. “ Kendal Green” afterwards became celebrated, as every romance reader knows. It is mentioned by Shakspeare in his play of Henry IV. ; and in the reign of Elizabeth the manufacture was in a most flourishing condition.

During the reign of Edward III. the manufacture seems to have spread itself all over the country. (Rymer’s Foe­dera, vol. i. 195.) Woollen fustians were made at Norwich, baizes at Sudbury, broad cloths in Kent, kerseys in Devon, friezes in Wales, cloths in Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Sussex, and Berkshire, coarse cloths in the west riding of Yorkshire, and serges at Colchester in Essex and Taunton in Devon.

There was also during this reign, and indeed previously to it, much legislation in the mistaken spirit of interfe­rence so common in that age, and since unhappily conti­nued by the operation of sinister interests, for the purpose of regulating the trade. On the plea of the superiority of English wool, the cloth-makers of London had been for­bidden, as early as the reign of Henry II. (1185), to mix Spanish with native wools ; but the circumstance at this distant day only proves two things : 1. that the wool of Spain, like that of Germany in modern times, is absolutely necessary for the production of cloth of good quality ; and 2. that the class connected with the land were at least as powerful as they are at the present day.

The improvement of the cloth manufacture caused a diminution of the exportation of wool, and a duty was levied on the exportation of cloth. Various acts, which would now be deemed extremely vexatious, but which were then intended to protect the trade, were passed relative to the measurement and fulling of the cloth ; and in the year 1357, Blackwell Hall was established by the mayor and common council of London as the cloth-market of the city.

In an exchequer record of the year 1355, published by Misselden in 1623, we find among the exports and imports thc following records of the woollen trade.

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| --- |
| Exports. Wool, 31,651½ sacks L.189,909  Felts, 3665 No 6,073  Cloth, 4774 cloths 9,549  Worsted, 8061 pieces 6,718 |
| Imports.—Cloth, 1832 cloths L.10,922 |

This statement is valuable, as shewing that, in the reign of Edward III. we imported fine cloths and exported coarse cloths, as their respective values in the above table shew.@@5

During the following reigns the same spirit of undue interference ran through the legislation of the period. In the reign of Henry IV. cloths were ordered to be stamped with a seal of lead. In that of Henry VI. cloth-searchers were appointed for every hundred throughout the kingdom, and the exportation of yarn was strictly prohibited. In the same reign we find evidences of the “ reciprocity system,” which has since been revived in the same narrow spirit It was enacted, “ that if our woollens were not received in Brabant, Holland, and Zealand, then the merchandise grow­ing or wrought within the dominions of the duke of Bour- goine shall be prohibited in England, under pain of for­feiture;” and in the following reign the importation of woollens was prohibited. These several facts are chiefly valuable for the inferences which we may draw from them touching the growth of the woollen manufacture. The first-named act shews that, early in the fifteenth century, we were enabled to supply with woollens the very countries whence we derived the manufacture ; and the last-named act affords evidence that the cloth manufactures in the lat­ter part of the same century had become sufficiently power­ful to turn the tide of bad legislation in their own favour.

We have seen that in the reign of Edward III. the high- priced cloths were imported, the manufactures of this coun­try being of a coarser kind ; which however were even then produced under sufficient advantage, considered relatively to other nations, to form a considerable article of export. In the reign of Henry VII. however a change had taken place ; cloths of considerable fineness must have been pro­duced, for we find that, in the fourth year of that monarch’s reign, a maximum was fixed on the price of fine cloth : “ every retailer of fine cloth who should sell a yard of the finest scarlet grained cloth above sixteen shillings” should forfeit 40s. a yard for the same. During this reign the “ merchant adventurers,” who dealt much in manufactures selling the same to foreigners, became a powerful body.

In the following reign the woollen trade was generally in a most flourishing state, and the worsted manufacture especially increased rapidly. Some attempts were made by the crown, through the agency of Wolsey, to inter­fere with the freedom of the merchants ; but we find these men entertaining more correct notions than their rulers. Wolsey is said to have threatened that the king would pur­chase of the manufacturers, open a new mart at Whitehall, and sell to the strangers ; but the merchants told the car­dinal, that the king might buy as well at Blackwell Hall, and that the strangers would gladlier receive their goods there than at Westminster. In this there is good political economy, and it does not appear that the king ever acted on his threat.

At this time one Jack of Newbury was deemed the

@@@1 M’Culloch’s Statistical Account of the British Empire, vol. ii. p. 43.

@@@s Henry III.

@@@3 We may here mention, once for all, that most of the facts respecting the early history of the woollen manufactures are taken from Smith’s Memoirs of Wool, and the works to which he refers. Down to the year 1720, it is perhaps the most accurate record of the subject extant. It is extremely interesting, and is written in a spirit of liberality far beyond the age in which the author lived.

@@@4 Madox’s History of the Exchequer.

@@@s The pound sterling of Edward HI. contained three times as much silver as at the present day.