The Yorkshire woollen and worsted industries, from the earliest times up to the Industrial revolution

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PREFACE

The present volume had its origin in a thesis written in 1911 for the Honours School of History in the University of Leeds. In that work my attention was confined to the Yorkshire textile industry in the eighteenth century, but the award of the Rutson Research Scholarship (1911) and of a Fellowship (1912) by the University of Leeds made it possible to devote much time to the earlier history of the industry. The substance of the first three chapters was submitted for the M.A. degree (Leeds), and that of the greater part of the book was presented as a thesis for the degree of M.Com. (Birmingham) in 1914. Since then the thesis has been largely rewritten and considerably expanded.

In the following pages I have attempted to sketch the history of the Yorkshire woollen and worsted industries from the earliest times of which there is documentary evidence down to the eve of the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I have traced the expansion of the local manufacture, and described its many vicissitudes, its organization at various stages, its markets, its relation to the State. But in all things the coming of the Industrial Revolution has been my stopping-place. The building of the modern mills, the final capture of the worsted trade from East Anglia, the victory over the West of England clothiers, and other results of the coming of la grande industrie are left untouched. My reason for stopping at this point was that to carry the story on to the present day would make the volume too long. Further, on commencing my researches I found a number of scholars at work on the period 1760–1900. One was specializing on the Bradford trade after 1760; another was studying the textile trades, 1750–1850; the Hammonds were promising a volume on the town labourer, and Mantoux had already published La Révolution Industrielle (1906). Dr. Clapham had written
on the migration of the worsted industry from East Anglia (Economic Journal, 1910), and his Woollen and Worsted Industries (1907) provided a standard work on the present position of those industries. The old books, such as James's History of the Worsted Manufacture (1857), had given intimate pictures of some aspects of the 'great change', and special topics such as the Factory Acts and trade unionism had been thoroughly discussed by recent writers. Thus the modern period had plenty of followers already at work, and it would have been unwise to go over ground so well trodden already. Yet there was a distinct gap in the history of the woollen manufacture waiting to be filled. Writers on the Industrial Revolution have generally begun with a sketch of industrial society about 1607, but have made little effort to trace the rise of that society, contenting themselves with a few quotations from Young and Defoe. Further, in their references to the woollen industry of the eighteenth century writers have conveyed the impression that Yorkshire was, and had been for centuries, insignificant as a producer of cloth. This idea, due possibly to Macaulay's gloomy picture of the North of England in his famous third chapter, is incorrect. My aim, therefore, has been to tell a story which ends with a detailed picture of the eighteenth-century industry, to link up the fourteenth century with the eighteenth, to throw light on to the events of the Tudor and Stuart periods, and finally to give the Yorkshire industry its proper place in relation to that of East Anglia and the West of England.

The work is based chiefly upon information gleaned from printed materials of the last two centuries, and from manuscripts covering the whole period from the thirteenth century to the eighteenth. Some of these documents are housed in the British Museum and Public Record Office, but a large amount of matter has been obtained from papers found in various parts of the West Riding, chiefly in the hands of local authorities and the cellars of solicitors' offices. The student of Yorkshire history is fortunate in that many manuscripts of