

THE CENTENARY

OF A WOOLLEN MILL

AN EPISODE

AND A HISTORY

MARZOTTO

1836 / 1936

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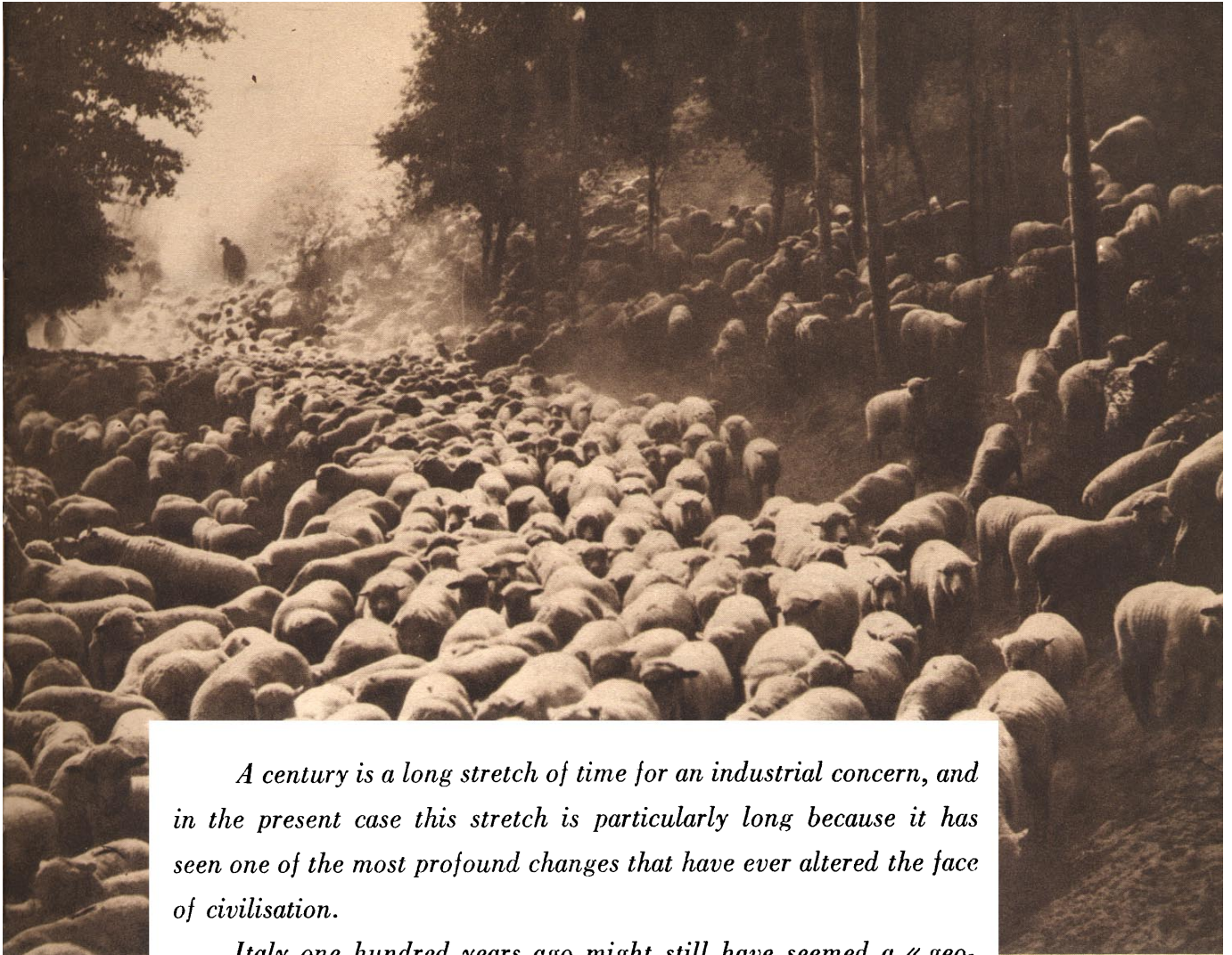
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*A century is a long stretch of time for an industrial concern, and in the present case this stretch is particularly long because it has seen one of the most profound changes that have ever altered the face of civilisation.*

*Italy one hundred years ago might still have seemed a « geographical expression » to those who had neither mind nor soul to look ahead. Frontiers, custom houses and police vigilance divided the various regions, each of which bore its own name and had its own interests, and there was the immediate weight of foreign domination over a region which, besides being one of the largest, was also one of the richest in glorious memories. The arts and industries were, if anything, in a bad state, using ancestral methods in large part and bereft in many cases of the power and fame of our forbears. In the textile industries the big inventions were ensuring world primacy for England, where, however, the prevalence of mechanical labour had occasioned violent outbursts. The aurora of what came to be called the « machine age » had, in reality, already appeared, although Italy lagged behind because of political conditions. The difficulties increased rather than decreased and, in particular, a serious fate threatened*

*the small provincial industries whose constant motive power consisted of the patience and tenacity of men, qualities which were offering less and less resistance to the overriding progress of others and to the obstacles of local conditions.*

*The world still seemed immense. Distances were enormous even in this small European continent. The first railways aroused more curiosity than confidence. The carts and mules that had served medieval trade were still the most important means of transport on land just as sailing vessels were on the sea. Trade was carried on with the paucity of available means; it was with great difficulty that raw materials and products enlarged the bounds of their circulation.*

*At a distance of a century all this seems as remote as the history of Greece and Rome. The world is a throb of machines, a torrential roar of works. On a globe grown smaller one seems to see workers from opposite shores of oceans exchange the raw material and the finished product from hand to hand as though on the threshold of one and the same factory. The distances have disappeared. What was at first a manner of speaking, a metaphor for indicating speed — flying — is now actual fact, a reality in fantastic development. The mysterious waves of the air have become lightning messengers of the word. Action has its wings and vibrates about the world as in a bundle of nerves of a human organism.*

*Never probably in the history of mankind has a space of a hundred years wrought so much change in life.*

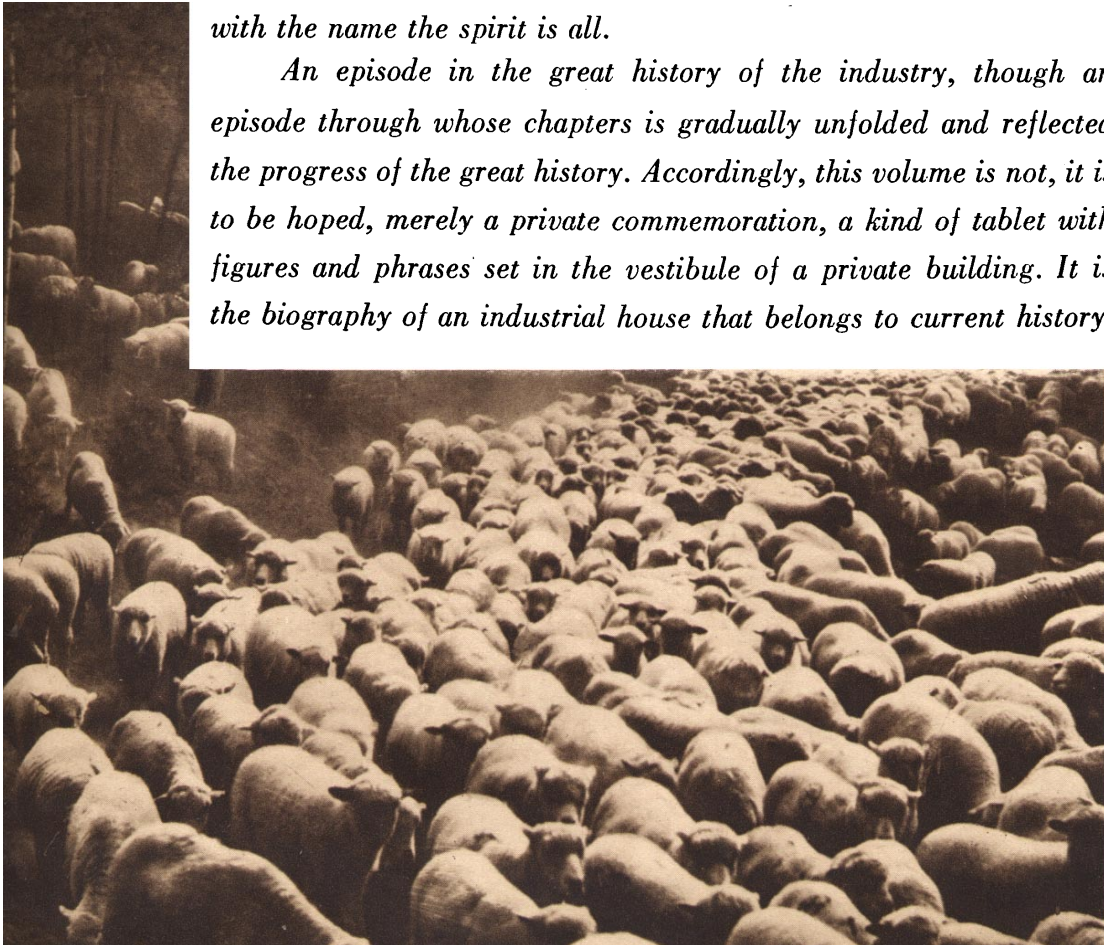
*It is this prodigious space that has seen the expansion of the industrial activity of the House which is to-day celebrating its cente-*



nary, looking back with emotion, looking about with pride, and looking forward with faith; not the centenary of its foundation — this dates farther back — but of its will to live and to win, which is the soul of action. Its advent occurred at a time when an old village tradition seemed at the point of death, when a centuries-old tree crashed with a dull thud of dried branches. A shoot, however, was left in the ground, a young branch which was still capable of budding; and out of that branch grew the tree under whose foliage thousands of families are to-day gathered together. From the foot-hills of Vicenza to the plains of Lombardy machines and men sing the song of victory and hope even in the greyest hours. Steel parts scintillate; expert hands watch in rhythmic certainty the speed of the contraptions, while orders, instructions, piece goods and yarns leave the silent offices and the vast warehouses for the four quarters of the earth.

Everything is changed except the name and the spirit. Through the century the business has been handed down from father to son without dispersion or intermixing. In 1836 a Marzotto, refusing to despair, re-animated in his modest abode the last of the surviving looms of the town: in 1936 a Marzotto manages four factories. And with the name the spirit is all.

An episode in the great history of the industry, though an episode through whose chapters is gradually unfolded and reflected the progress of the great history. Accordingly, this volume is not, it is to be hoped, merely a private commemoration, a kind of tablet with figures and phrases set in the vestibule of a private building. It is the biography of an industrial house that belongs to current history.





*The art of woolmaking, of which this episode is a part, was and must once more become one of the glories of laborious Italy. Therefore the glance cast on the march of a particular branch of endeavour is extended to the horizon of the art and takes in the broad features of its nobility and grandeur. There is legitimate pride in saluting, as in a room on whose walls hang the majestic portraits of illustrious forbears, the Italians of the past who in almost every part of Italy made a national boast and an economic power of the wool industry.*

*From thence we came and from thence we would also, with a will steeled by obstacles, draw our omen, just as it is propitious and pious, when paying tribute to memories, to associate home with country.*



## FIRST PART



Valdagno and its  
Social Welfare  
City

**I**T was a sad year a century ago in Valdagno. For some time the centuries-old wool industry had been wearing out its modest energy. The slow measured beat of the looms, which used to rise above the more continuous noise of the chalk mills, seemed to wane like the beating of a tired heart, and little by little silence invaded the narrow streets and the ground floors of the humble dwellings like the chill which gradually pervades the members of a dying body.

This lugubrious picture is not overdrawn when it is considered that Valdagno, like the other districts of the Vicentino region, was ravaged by cholera. The victims were many and the discouragement after the terror was great. Industrious energies were relaxed and trade came to a standstill. Death, careering through Life as in the gruesome fantasia of Hans Holbein, stopped the shuttle in the hands of the surprised weaver. The valley was closed in by the mountains and

hemmed in by the Terror. Then with the decline of summer and contagion it seemed useless to the last woolmakers of the depopulated district, who were the heirs to a centuries-old tradition, to carry on that small industry, which still remained almost a family affair and which once outside the outlets of the valley encountered much keener competition.

The small property owners, of which there were many because the middle class and not a few artisans and peasants owned their own plot of land, limited their efforts to tilling the soil and marketing the products thereof. The plot of land was a jealous possession. The inhabitants were rooted to the soil — from the pastures on the mountains dominating the valley, from the fields on the slopes of the hills surrounding it, to the cultivations of the flattening land, among the thinned woods and the frequent stony patches in that rocky basalt structure; they belonged to the earth and it to them. The wise ones, who consider things with calm detachment, said that this love for the soil was also harmful, for the men took liberties with the Agno, a river which still flows with the impetus of a mountain course to the town which bears its name. They cultivated too close to its banks and invaded its bed, denying it room to expand in the flood seasons. And the Agno, grown lusty with the Spring and Autumn rains, after having gnawed the crumbling dykes at the base, surged over them. But the men of the place reclaimed every sod with its plant, with its green enamel, with its symbol of certain bread even in hard times.

The bread was not always certain, however. That calamitous year brought to mind other and not far remote calamities; for example, the terrible famine of 1814/15. The Napoleonic Empire collapsed with a feeble echo in that corner of Italy, and the continuous rains of a cold summer and the premature frost of the autumn ruined every hope of the farmers in the valleys of the Vicentino region and the highlands of the Seven Communes. To anyone to-day it is impossible to imagine the consequences of such a misfortune. At that time, by reason of the almost complete impermeability of the various

districts, this misfortune developed into a catastrophe, of which certain descriptions that have been handed down are positively stupefying. « The people » writes an historian of Vicenza, « indeed many families, are reduced to a state of crazy stupidity. They do not speak or answer one's questions. They sit on the ground eating grass and take no notice if one gives them alms. In short, within the memory of living man, there is no record of a famine that has produced effects of this kind, which are fraught with still graver consequences, and from which may the Lord in His mercy preserve us ».

Count Pietro Bissari, a man known for his fervid imagination and his promptness of action, having been appointed chairman of a relief committee, was five days at Valdagno, where he found the distress greater than anywhere else. He roamed about the valleys and mountains, reporting, among other things, the fearful spread of pellagra, a hideous disease once fairly common in Lombardy. « They were reduced to eating the seed corn and so the fields remained unsown » he relates. There was no lack of compassionate people who gave of their best, but the need was greater than the means available to alleviate it, and Bissari thereupon called for money and provisions from the capital of the province. He suggested a greater measure of relief, the building of a road from Valdagno to Recoaro (which was started shortly afterward) to provide work for the unemployed; a larger cultivation of potatoes, which then were almost a novelty; and also the use as food of Icelandic lichen, which grew on those mountains and of which a certain Dr. Marzari had already pointed out the nutritive value.

This of the lichen was really a singular episode. A new vegetable was added to the list of means of sustenance. The plant was gathered in large quantities and its praises were widely sung. Kitchens were set up in public places; lichen soup, which had the advantage of requiring little seasoning, was prepared in the open and sold — to remove the humiliating impression of charity — for a few centesimi to the inhabitants and offered free to the more needy. This lichen,

which to-day, if only for the sake of curiosity, might very well again be the object of culinary experimentation, was looked on with distrust when it first appeared in the public cauldrons, then appreciated, and afterward, when the famine had passed, abandoned, a victim of the repugnance which men feel even for the beneficent witnesses of their drearier vicissitudes.

Meanwhile Austria had come back, promising peace to the population, to which the French Government had been (amid continuous



A Street of old  
Valdagno

clangs of glory) the representative of uncertainty, of war and of those innovations, often coupled with abuses, which many did not need or appreciate and of which they exaggerated the inconvenience.

But Austria was worse. She stifled the spirit of enterprise that had aired the opening years of the century and hampered all action with bureaucratic red-tape and police interference; she re-took, in short, with mortifying suspicion, that part of Italy in whose interests she had been lavish enough in the times of Maria Theresa and Joseph II.

The weavers of Valdagno had worked for some time in supplying clothes to the Napoleonic army in Italy, just as centuries before they had helped to clothe the Venetian militias; and when Napoleon, even

in this matter, sacrificed the Italians to the French, these industrious and tenacious valley dwellers still had the advantage of brisk trade and of belonging to a big State to help them navigate their small industrial boat along the broad current. This current dried up with Austria. Distances increased, so to speak, between district and district; apathy succeeded stagnation; and to crown all, the Imperial troops, even those recruited in Italic territory, were clothed by Austrian woolmakers.

Thus, by degrees, the owners of the small mills in Valdagno became discouraged. There were eight of them during the Napoleonic period, the largest of which employed about one hundred hands, men, women and children. One of these owners, whose mill was hardly of the largest, was Luigi Marzotto, who had founded his business with the birth of the new century and employed about eighty people. His output ranged from some two-thousand yards in the better years to a trifle over eight-hundred yards in the lean years. The machinery was limited to hand looms; the fulling was done by men as in the time of the Romans; production was generally to order, and sales, though on a small scale, were comparatively safe. This trade fell off, however, in the years that followed.

Another industry that helped the town to live was the chalk industry. The chalk was quarried in the mountains above Recoaro and used as manure. Luigi Marzotto, alongside his cloth factory, also had his mill for grinding chalk. Buyers came from neighbouring towns, even from Verona; and on certain days a string of haulage carts spreading a veil of white powder was to be seen along the valley road. It was, however, an industry without a future, like that of the visitors who came to take the waters of Recoaro.

From the end of the seventeenth century, when the therapeutic virtues of that spring, of which the peasants had up to then been aware in their unthinking empiricism, had been scientifically established and publicised, there had been a fairly considerable stream of visitors during the summer. These visitors found in Valdagno com-

fortable inns, decent private accommodation, three pharmacies, doctors of repute (Valdagno had a tradition of capable and studious doctors) and a circle of families of sufficient gentility to give rise to conversazioni and entertainment. Without attempting to emulate the international and literary glories of the Lucca waters, Recoaro in the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth was able to boast of a celebrity that extended beyond the confines of Italy, and



The Valley of the  
Agno: *Recoaro a  
Century ago*

Valdagno benefited by it. But afterward inns were built in Recoaro itself and visitors preferred to stay near the waters. The flow of visitors to Valdagno abated, although it did not cease altogether, and in any case the whole valley benefited by the summer movement. There is a tablet on the wall of a building in Colombara, in front of Trissino just before reaching Valdagno, which records the residence, in August 1879, of Queen Margaret, who had come with her ten-year-old son, the future Victor Emanuel III, to take the waters of Recoaro.

Between the spring and the civic centre of the valley there arose a place of entertainment to which the Anglomania of the times gave the name Vauxhall after the famous amusement park on the banks



of the Thames. Foreign names were in fashion and seemed to give an air of boldness to provincial life. The kiosk or pavilion in the parks of the stately villas was known as a Kaffehaus and even up to yesterday the social hall in pleasure resorts and watering places invariably bore the name of Kursaal. Customs of by-gone days, like the use of the word « Kulm », which had ousted the Italian « vetta » (mountain top); and also Vauxhall on the road between Valdagno and Recoaro has passed away, although the excellence and the fame of the waters remain and the summer clientele has not deserted them. For over a century, however, this clientele has rarely stopped at Valdagno but has sought accommodation at Recoaro. During the first half of the last century one of the Marzotto's perceived the change in time and set up as an hotel-keeper in Recoaro.

But the founder of the wool-making fortunes of Valdagno in that desperate year of pestilence and neglect believed in work and the future. He had started the mill in 1800 when he was twenty-seven years old, and he was now sixty-four (born January 11, 1773). To some people this would mean old age. Luigi Marzotto, who came of good stock inured to the pure and sturdy climate and used to regular and constant action, did not feel old. For that matter, there is no general standard by which age can be measured. Each life has its own development; a man may be old at forty and look with envy at the sixty years of another man of simple habits and hardy constitution. Work, far from wearing out the body, is the conserving force of body and soul. The thought of death does not occur to a man whose waking thought is the day's task and who trustingly prepares the warp for the days to come.

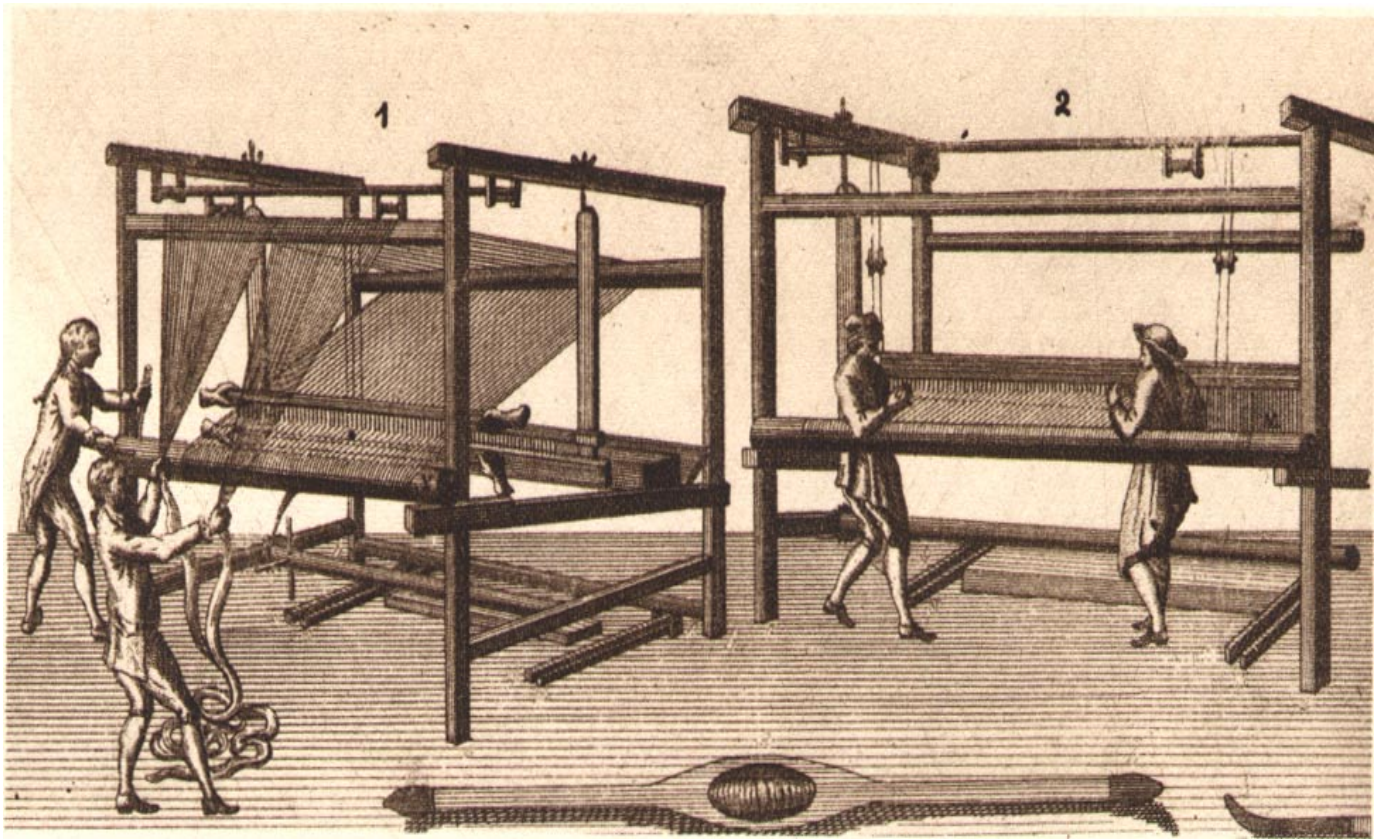
This is not to suggest that Marzotto entertained ambitious schemes. The times precluded them. But the looms were waiting in the penumbra, whence here and there came a glint from the wood parts burnished by use, so picturesque that they seemed to be a detail from a Flemish painting. And the workless weavers looked toward the master. Why not, he reasoned, carry on, now that others were giving

way, leaving free a field which seemed to have become ungrateful? There was in reality little to do, but there was no reason why this little should be left undone. Work had to be found for these men, women and children in order to enable them to earn their bread. One had to go ahead trusting in oneself and God.

To the strong, good springs from the roots of evil. The lean years would pass. It augured well that just then they had begun to extract lignite from Mount Pulli, a short distance away — output subsequently reached 25 thousand tons a year — and drilling for petroleum was also attempted. The mountain still makes its contribution toward the economic independence of Italy. Once more the measured beat of the looms was heard amid the buzzing of the chalk mills. And in that act of faith, in which the centuries resumed their course, was born — and is to-day commemorated — the fortune of the Marzottos and of Valdagno.



Valdagno a Century ago: a Gentleman's Villa



Panorama of Val-  
dagno from the  
valley, with the  
Pasubio in the  
background

**A**UTUMN is full of joyous days and blue sky and sun in the narrow valley open to the South. The leaves on the trees of the fields and, in the first part of the valley, on the vintaged vines, die a golden death. Remote, however, are the times of the Bacchic glories when the vineyards at Selva di Trissino matured the grapes dear to Gian Giorgio, the poet and count who was so proud of his unfortunate poem, « Italy liberated from the Goths » and sent his delicate wine (« the only one of its kind », according to him) to that gourmet Paul III. The Pope's butler, Sante Lancerio, who wrote a book on Italian wines and noted down the fine bottles — and sometimes the fine women — during the journey of the Holy Father in France, does not name it. But Count Trissino knew that His Holiness liked the wine of Selva and he received the official thanks with great satisfaction.

To anyone who, knowing the history of Vicenza and its surroundings, had struck the highroad leading to Valdagno in that Autumn of 1836, the journey would easily have been crowded with memories. Under the Venetian dominion Valdagno had been one of the eleven



The Valley of the  
Ago: *The Castles of Bellaguardia and La Villa*

major vicariates and, with its name indicative both of place and river, easily had the better of Trissino. It was called the Valley of Trissino in the days when the feudal lords of that name ruled the place and filled it with the noise of their doings. But men and their turmoil pass, while places and rivers remain for ever.

There were the Trissinos with their castles, one of which, hard by Valdagno, exists no longer, while the other, perched on the hills of Paninsacco, above Maglio (the etymologists say this place-name is derived from the Latin *Pani Sacrum*) is a complete ruin; and, later, the sumptuous Renaissance villa in the small town of Trissino — a white patch of buildings and a darker patch of trees on the promontory that overlooks the first part of the valley. Opposing the Trissinos there were the Pileos of Montecchio Maggiore with their castles of Bellaguardia and La Villa, restored by the La Scala family of Verona but now gloomy remains, on the hills of the left bank of the river. The Trissinos were Ghibellines, while the Pileos were Guelphs. And there were the Maltraversos, higher up, on the rock above Montebello. Of common occurrence were raids by armed bands, violent assaults and fiery resistance, as when, in the second half of the thir-



The Valley of the  
Ago: *Trissino*

teenth century, Niccolò Bagaleri of Bologna, who had been elected «podestà» of Vicenza, marched up the valley against the Trissinos, the Vivaros, and Egano of Arzignano, who had fortified themselves in the castle of Valdagno.

The common folk shut themselves up in their hovels and trembled at their misfortune, and the hand of the weaver was less sure at his honest woof among those ribald designs of potentates.

How many historical storms have burst over this sorely-trying valley! It was overrun by the barbarians when the Peace of Rome collapsed; courageous young men left the Vicentino region the year of Pontida's solemn oath to found the Concordia against Barbarossa; the valley resounded with the name and terror of Ezzelino; the soldiers of the Paduan Overlords appeared to guard the castles; other soldiers appeared, at times under the ensign of the Scaligeris, at other times bearing the Snake emblem of the Viscontis; and too often there was plundering and oppression. The Lanzknechte of Emperor Maximilian showed their sinister visages after the valley had already enjoyed for a century the «Pax tibi» of the Lion of St. Mark; and they were led by Leonardo Trissino, who had been banished for

homicide and had fled to the Imperial Court. And in the wake of the Lanzknechte there came rape and violence, and then the pest.

The common folk, shut up in their hovels, waited for the clouds to lift and for their ill-fortune to pass. The hope of bread today and better times tomorrow lay between the loom and the altar.

With the establishment and consolidation of the Serenissima (Venetian Republic) the world seemed quiet, with occasional short interruptions, for four centuries to the valley dwellers. Every year, on St. Martin's Day, the new delegate, who had jurisdiction over the whole of the valley, arrived in Valdagno from Vicenza. The Trissinos vainly persisted in reclaiming their feudal rights. The people were now able to demand justice and protection of their rights and when, finally, their patience wore out and gave place to anger, Niccolò Trissino fell in Valdagno with his throat cut by the people's wrath.

The pike and the arquebus yielded to the loom, that force of the weak consecrated by millenniums.

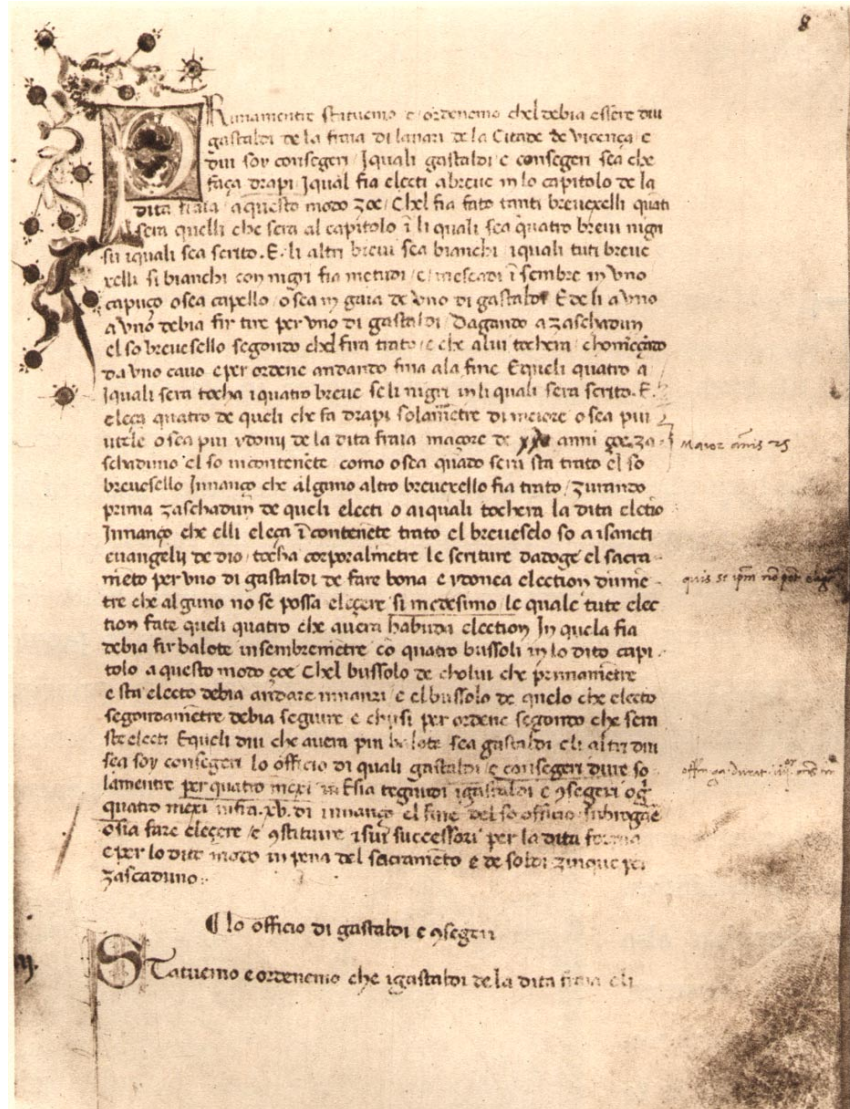
**T**HE loom. Since when have men woven in Valdagno?

From time immemorial, might very well be the reply; because since the time when man took to living in houses, the female of the species has always had to make the dough for the bread, spin the wool and weave the cloth. In some places more than in others, however, weaving expanded beyond domestic necessities to provide the necessities of others, following the development of the principle of the division of labour as circumstances and convenience dictated. Weaving enlarged its activities in the towns that radiated more energy and had greater commercial possibilities. This extension also took place, however, in districts which were situated nearer to the sources of supply of the raw material, where the wool was within hand's reach. Upper Vicentino, particularly the mountainous district known as the Seven Communes, was rich in flocks, and the prosperous industry of sheep-



Shearing in June:  
*Miniature from  
the Grimani Bre-  
viary*

A Page from the By-laws of the Woollen Guild of the Vicentino Region



rearing caused the art of wool-making to flourish. There is a record in Vicenza of the existence of a corporation or guild of weavers and sellers of «centoni» (ordinary and military cloths) and probably also of tailors; and undoubtedly some of these centoni were woven in the valleys dominated by the high-lying pastures.

With the rebirth of civilization after the tenth century, home industries became more enterprising and, slender and sturdy as young shoots, displayed the first signs of that industrial character which centuries later they were definitely to assume. But few incunabula of industry have survived to permit us to learn the details of this pro-

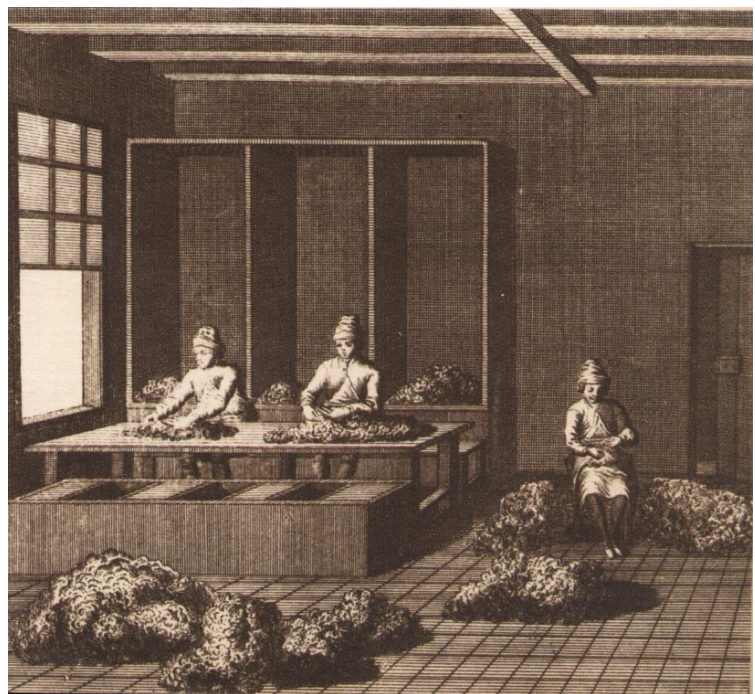


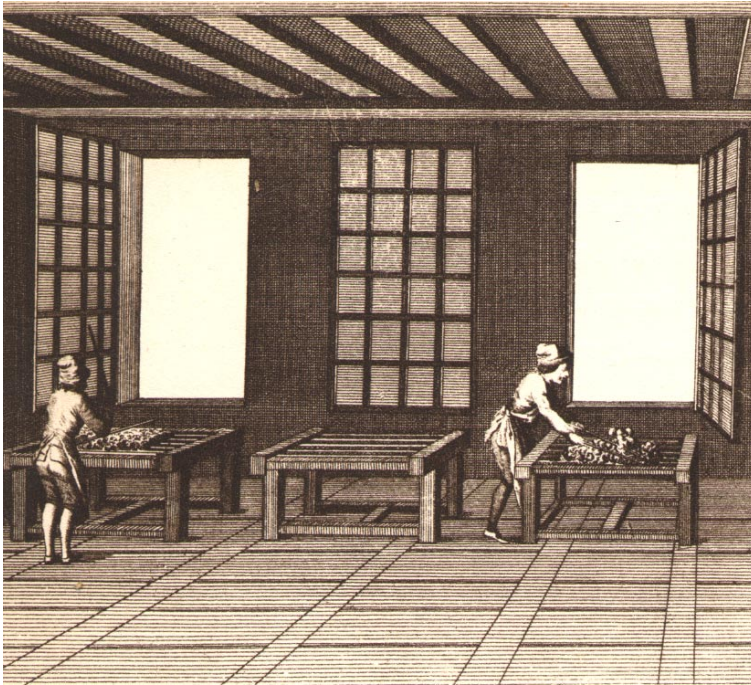
gress. There are beginnings of men's works and vicissitudes that resemble the processes of vegetable growth beneath the soil and in the sap of the trees. On a certain day the sods begin to show signs of green and the buds open. For the resurgent industries that day was the time when enterprisers and traders joined forces to form corporations in the by-laws of which they embodied their organizing principles. The industries had been in existence for ages, although neither in these by-laws, nor in the copious notes handed down by historians, nor in the records of municipal enactments, is there any trace of their flourishing progress.

The history of the woollen industry of Valdagno toward the end of the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance is bound up with that of the woollen industry of the Vicentino region and of the boroughs under the jurisdiction of Vicenza. During the time of changing dominations and savage partisan strife which made trade insecure and when there were no unions of producers and merchants to face the difficulties and bear the losses, the woollen industry in Valdagno was limited to the needs of the valley, outside trade being negligible. When Vicenza became a province of the mainland of the Venetian Republic and work and trade were able to develop under more peaceful conditions, the city of Vicenza strictly dominated the towns and the citizens the mere town-dwellers or « villani », as the inhabitants of the minor towns not surrounded with a defensive wall (which was a mark of superiority) were then called without any idea of disparagement.

The city first had the corporations in which were grouped the arts and trades, from the doctors and the notaries, who were the élite, to the barbers and the butchers; and each corporation had its by-laws which

The Woollen Industry at the end of the Eighteenth Century: *Beating and Mixing the Wool*





The Woollen Industry at the end of the Eighteenth Century: *Sorting*

it imposed on the arts and industries of the countryside. The countryside was, in effect, dependent on the social life of the city, which was really an advantage, since discipline meant protection and unity signified strength.

Naturally, the city took the lion's share, and the centralising of power there was often felt as

an embarrassing, and sometimes oppressive, constraint. The records of the woollen industry of Valdagno in those days mostly consist of the protests to which this state of things gave rise. The first protest of which there is trace is one made in 1416. Valdagno, Marostica, Schio and Lonigo appealed to the Venetian Government against the tyranny of the *Fraglia* (the name by which the corporations of Venetia were usually known) of the city of Vicenza, claiming respect for their «legal privileges and old customs». These privileges and customs, which were cited as authorities consecrated by time, attest that in Valdagno and in the other places identified with the protest the art of wool-making with an industrial tendency had comparatively remote origins. Undoubtedly, cloths had been produced for trade a long time and the industry had developed sufficient importance for customs to have been born and developed to a point where they took on force of law. Further proof is seen in the need already felt for political guarantees and privileges officially recognized both by the municipal authorities of Vicenza and by the Scaligeris, or rather by the Viscontis, who showed themselves more ready to win the affections of the new subjects, and also by the Venetian Republic.

Now that the industry was developing, its very prosperity rendered the «villani» intolerant of excessive restraint and ready to fight for privileges and customs which, in fact, represented personal liber-

ties in contrast with the general discipline too strictly interpreted, too partial, and too profitable to the woollen interests of the city.

Above all, there was one restriction to which Valdagno and the other places did not intend to submit — that which prohibited the manufacture of wide cloths, the finer and more costly types, in the production of which the gain was undoubtedly larger, not to mention the enhanced reputation and credit accruing. Outside of Vicenza and in all the towns under the domination of the woollen Fraglia only narrow cloths could be made, the slight margin of profit on which was determined by the straits of the purchasers. It was only with great difficulty that Venice was prevailed upon to lift this restriction in favour of the « walled towns » like Marostica and Lonigo. Valdagno, like Schio (which had unavailingly requested permission to « wall » itself in order to obtain the privilege), Malo, Thiene, Piovene (including the Seven Communes with Asiago at the head, where only the most inferior cloths, significantly called « frateschi » — monkish —, were made) was not walled, and its insistence was to no purpose. Whatever the skill of its workers or the initiative of its enterprisers, Valdagno had to resign itself to making narrow cloths for people of narrow means. It was with extreme difficulty that they managed to limit the production of the wool-makers of Vicenza to broad widths, thus preventing them from competing with their brothers « villani » in the production of narrow widths.

There was a plausible explanation of this fact. (Men have always been full of ingenuity in inventing and advancing plausible explanations in circumstances much less persuasive than these). One of the undeniable advantages of the corporative system was the possibility of supervising the quality of the product. It was upon the quality of its wares that an industry depended for its credit and commercial fortunes, especially when, as in the case of the woollen industry, it encountered competition everywhere. This supervision, it was said at Vicenza (as, for that matter, they asserted in Milan, Florence and elsewhere where similar dissensions between dominating



The Woollen Industry at the end of the Eighteenth Century: *Beating* (A) - *Carding* (B-C) - *Oiling* (D) - *Opening* (E) - *Warehouse*

city and dependent districts were general), could be exercised with ease and certainty in the provincial capital, which was the seat of the governing and investigating organs of the *Fraglia* and, at most, in the walled towns, which were more populated and more « governed ». It would have been exceedingly difficult, so ran the argument, to exercise this supervision in the smaller towns where it would have been necessary to maintain officers of the corporation, or send them frequently, to ensure the standard quality of the production, involving an expenditure and an administrative — one would say bureaucratic nowadays — structure out of proportion to the results. Frauds occurred just the same in *Vicenza* in spite of the severe penalties and the fact that the corporation inspectors were fully empowered to enter the shops and houses of enterprisers, operatives and merchants, and search, examine, measure, investigate and, if necessary, make seizures. What would have happened in the many small towns of the *Vicentino* region in which wool was manufactured if the manufacture were extended to broad widths?

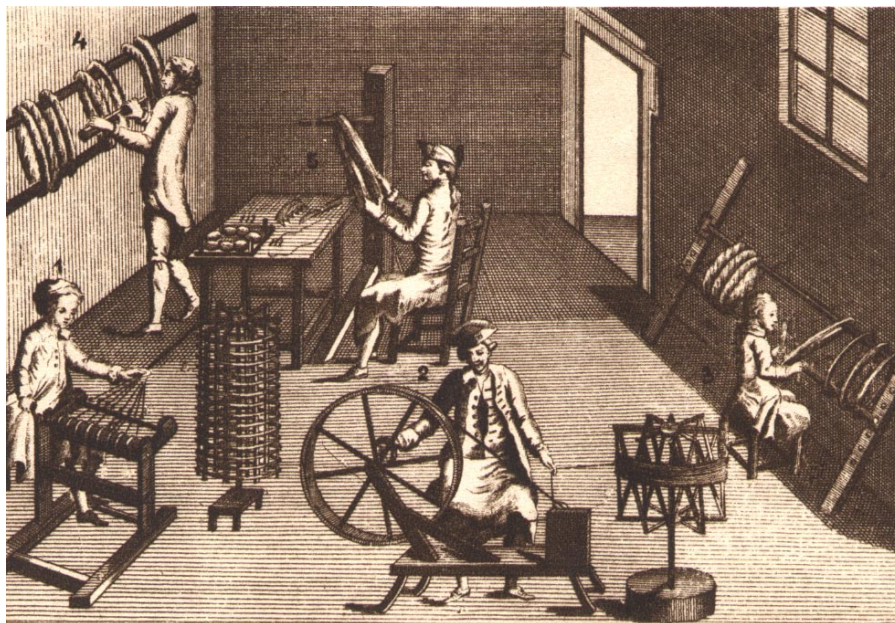
This subject is expressly mentioned in the fifteenth century by-laws of the *Fraglia* — reproduced by Mr. Zanazzo in his interesting study on « *The Woollen Industry in Vicenza* ». « Considering that it is in the interest of evident and manifest public utility », so reads a paragraph from these by-laws, « that the cloths be well made and that the few who work outside the city may not bring the industry into disrepute, since industry cannot be carried on in the small towns as accurately as in the city; and considering the impossibility of installing administrators or investigators in a small woollen town with only one or two mills producing wide cloths, we hereby resolve

and ordain that no person in any town or place of the Vicentino region, save in walled places, shall make, or cause to be made, wide cloths, under penalty of twentyfive lire for each piece and confiscation of the cloth, such fine to be distributed as to a third to the accuser or discoverer, a third to the municipality of Vicenza, and a third to the corporation ».

The supervision of wide cloths covered every detail — from the quality of the wool to the colours used in the dyeing; whereas strict supervision of the narrow cloths was unnecessary, because by reason of their low price it was an easy matter to satisfy a clientele that counted for little in establishing the reputation of an industry.

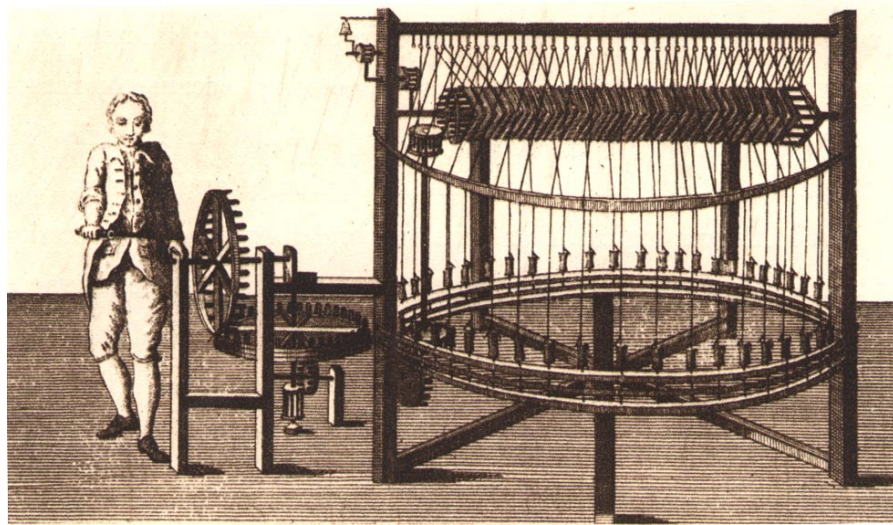
All this was logical. But there was probably some exaggeration as to the difficulty of exercising supervision, and in any case renunciation of acquired rights was imposed. The fact that Valdagno, like Schio and other places, protested meant that at one time wide cloths had been made there, and made well and with profit to judge by the eagerness displayed to manufacture them once more.

Nor was the severity of corporative discipline limited to this restriction. Everything was centred in Vicenza, which caused considerable



The Woollen Industry at the end of the Eighteenth Century: *Small skein-winder for the preparation of the thread (1) - Reeling after the twisting (2) - Examination and packing of the skeins (3-4-5)*

rable hardship to the outlying towns on account of the bad roads and the slow journeys (to cover the distance between Valdagno and Vicenza, some twenty miles, with a light carriage, meant the loss of a whole day). The wool of the district, for example, could only be sold in the capital. The shepherds of the Seven Communes had to descend to the distant plains and betake themselves with their loads



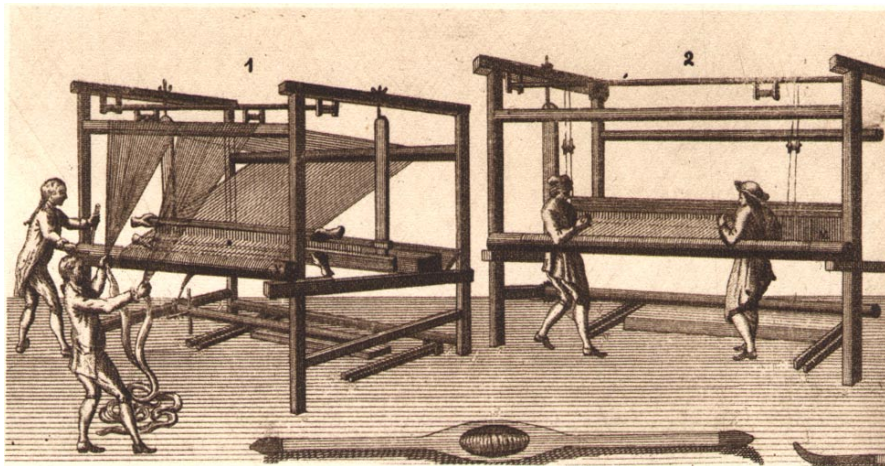
The Woollen Industry at the end of the Eighteenth Century: *Laying the warp*

of wool to a specified place in the city. The weavers of the countryside had the wool near at hand and could not buy it; they saw it loaded on wagons and leave for the city, and had to go after it and buy in competition with the more shrewd city buyers. The latter, when buying up the supplies, manipulated prices in their own favour, and the sellers returned to their mountains or to their cabins on the plains with little money and plenty of resentment. There were even restrictions, which sometimes amounted to actual prohibition, on the temporary emigration of frontier flocks to the grazing lands of the territory which at that time and for five centuries afterward was called the Tyrol; or permission was granted with the prohibition — save in exceptional cases — to sell the wool there.

This monopoly of the raw material, on which a town duty was also levied, placed the provincial cloth manufacturers at a disadvantage, of which they complained to the Venetian authorities. Venice

often received complaints of this kind and attempted to settle the disputes. Although the complainants occasionally received justice, as often as not Venice sided with the defendants and gave heed to the claims of the city. It was a case of discipline at all costs, even though it meant bruising the shackled limbs of the «disciplined»; and after all, Vicenza was Vicenza and the political value of the city was much greater than that of the small towns, walled or not walled. Naturally, the burden was lightened to a certain extent by smuggling. Part of the wool was sold clandestinely in the mountains and valleys where the watchful eye of the official of the *Fraglia* and of the provincial government failed to penetrate.

Twice a year the rector and the administrators of the *Fraglia* had to proclaim anew their rules and decrees in the towns subject to their jurisdiction. Twice a year, in February and July, the enterprisers and the weavers gathered together in the main square of *Valdagno* to listen to the reading of the rules, especially the prohibitions and penalties, with the addition of information and admonitions born of the moment. They felt it a good thing to be united, these men who were sparsely scattered among the towns and villages between the Alps and *Bacchiglione*, from *Asiago* to the *Madonna of Mount Berico*, above *Vicenza*, to whom, as the patron saint of wool-makers, they had just erected, in 1438, a lofty temple under the



The Woollen Industry at the end of the Eighteenth Century: *Attaching the chain to the loom (1) - Knotting the threads of the chain (2)*

broadest of skies and dominating the broadest of horizons. But it was a salutary procedure to try to get even with the overbearing «brother» citizens of the corporation by buying wool direct from the owners of the flocks or from smart importers, while laughing up their sleeves every now and then at the resounding bans.

Moreover, considering that the city, with a view to strengthening its industrial position, encouraged immigration both from the countryside and from other Italian States, and even from other parts of Europe, especially Germany, granting exemptions and privileges and, actually, after a certain length of stay, the possibility of being entered on the rolls of the nobility of Vicenza (wool-making was considered a noble art at that time), more than one inhabitant of Valdagno, sure of himself and in need of elbow-room, went to the capital to conduct his business.

Some names remain in the shade of the fifteenth century registers. There could not have been many, however. The majority of the inhabitants remained true to Valdagno and helped the town to



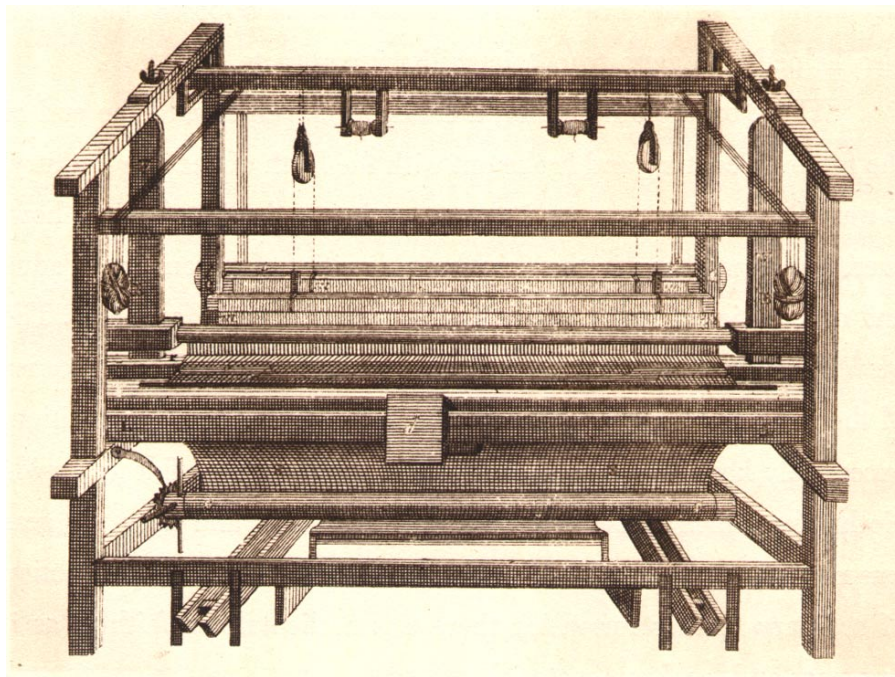
The Sanctuary of the Madonna of Mount Berico, Patron Saint of Woolmakers in the Fifteenth Century



share in the glories of the woollen industry, which had its hey-day for Italy in general and for Vicenza in particular in the fifteenth century.

Although cloth mills were very numerous in Italy and in some cities constituted the greatest, if not the sole, industrial force, Valdagno held its modest place among the crowd and together with the neighbouring places succeeded in producing some thirty-thousand pieces annually. The manufacturers managed to get the obligation to take the wool directly to the city abolished and to have it sold within the bounds of the district, although on condition that it was first offered to the city buyers. This was a distinct economic advantage and helped to accelerate production. They also obtained the right to forward the cloths directly to Venice, from whence they were shipped to the East. Five centuries ago the East was in normal times a good market to the valley of Valdagno; it is even more so today with production at a much higher level.

This right, naturally, was not acquired without fierce resistance on the part of Vicenza, who wanted the cloths to be taken there for



The Woollen Industry at the end of the Eighteenth Century: *Hand loom*



The Woollen Industry at the end of the Eighteenth Century: *Looms*

sale, especially at the Fair of San Martino, even though it meant that the goods would have to pass through the valley once more along the road to Campogrosso and the Vallarsa to reach Rovereto in the German Empire. It is known that cloths from Valdagno and Schio were taken to Venice in 1425, but it is also recorded that in 1444 certain merchants on their way to Venice with their loads of cloths were arrested on a warrant from Vicenza and the cloths confiscated. This time, however, the Serenissima intervened energetically in defence of the subjects of Valdagno and Schio and ordered them to be released and their property restored. Which incident undoubtedly helped to confirm and establish that freedom of trade to which the city members of the Fraglia were so obstinately opposed and which also helped Valdagno to obtain military contracts.

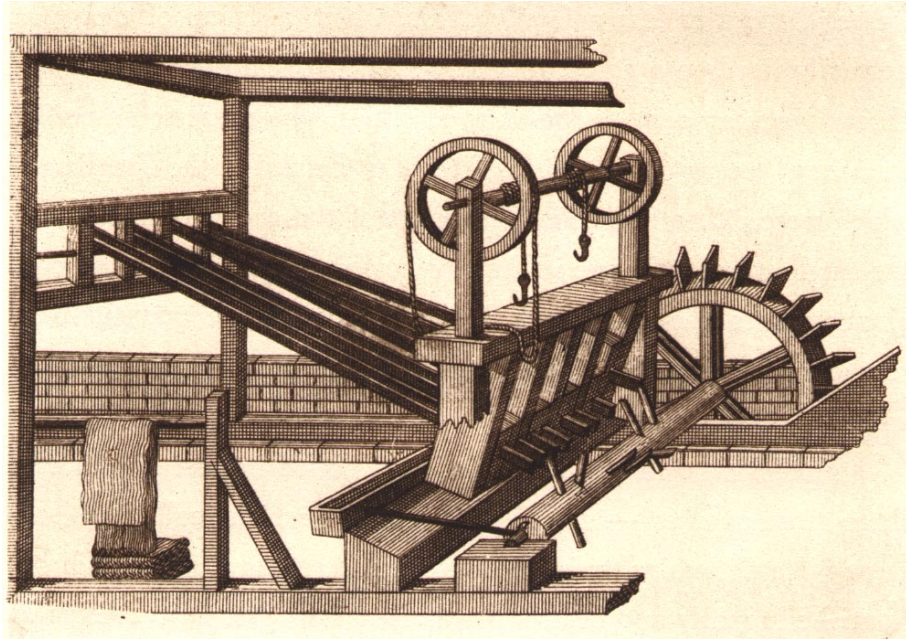
When, on the other hand, a crisis developed toward the end of the fifteenth century and broke out with the birth of the new century, it was Vicenza that saw her industry go into a decline (which, however, was slower than in the neighbouring cities of Verona and Padua and other cities of Italy), while Valdagno probably suffered less. The blow of changed fortunes was felt less severely in Valdagno because of the more modest proportions of its industry. Foreign competition, excessively keen and triumphant in the production of fine and wide cloths, for which wool from over the mountains and over the seas was needed, was incapable of causing serious harm to the production of ordinary textiles for which there was a clientele as faithful as it was poor and local raw material sufficed.

The industry went ahead adapting itself to the times with that peaceful tenacity to which force of habit gives that of resistance, when the absence of any considerable measure of ambition allows of the position being adjusted to circumstances, thus staving off surprises that might become catastrophic. It is clear that where an industry was still more or less a family affair, where a group of men who normally lived on a patch of land were dependent on a patient and shrewd man, an acute judge of possibilities, who possessed a certain number of looms (which still had to bear the seal of the *Fraglia* and which were either located in the house of the owner or lent out to the single weavers for use in their homes), it is clear that under such circumstances the crisis and the depression, while quantitatively restricting production and reducing its tempo, could not bring about wholesale collapse and ruin.

Moreover, with the decline of the woollen industry in *Vicenza* there arose another — the silk industry — which really had been one of the determinants of the wool-making setback. This industry flourished rapidly and became a source of new prosperity. Actually, the fame of the *Vicenza* silks surpassed that achieved by the woollen cloths of the district, and extended throughout Europe. Even in the valley of the *Agno* the new industry was started and carried on in a modest way for quite a long time. Silk partly substituted wool in that part of trade the fortunes of which depended on prevailing fashion; but even in trade which was not affected by the vagaries of fashion there was risk of loss through a quantitative or a qualitative decline in the raw material.

A qualitative decline set in the *Vicentino* region and other parts of Italy according as foreign competition triumphed; at least the inferiority of the native product seemed to stand out in a comparison with foreign wools. And there was also a reduction in quantity, for example, when the *Seven Communes* lost the «*pensionatico*», that is the privilege of bringing their sheep down from the mountains to winter in certain pastures of the plains; something like the plateau

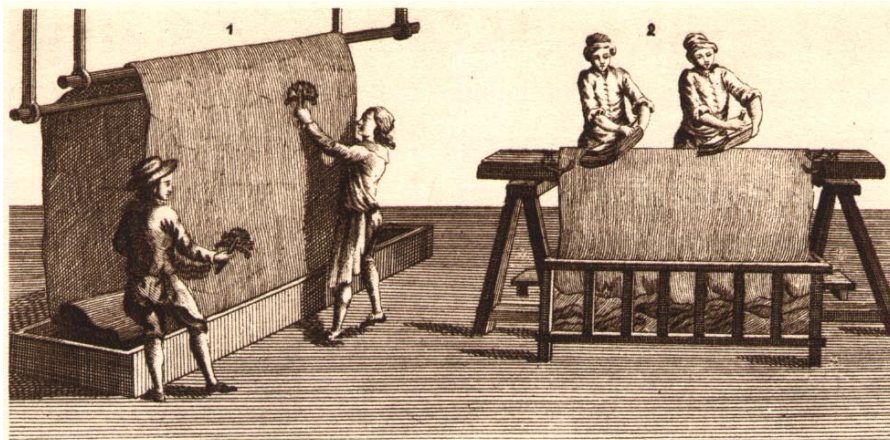
of the Puglie was for many centuries to the flocks that descended the mountains of Abruzzo with the first chilliness and the first rains of September along the cattle tracks, the « green roads » called « tratturi ». At that time there were 135,000 sheep in the Seven Communes alone: in the seventeenth century there were little more than



The Woollen Industry at the end of the Eighteenth Century: *Hammer fulling machine driven hydraulically*

80,000 in the whole of the Vicentino region. To the difficulties of wintering, there must be added, as being one of the causes of the reduction, the greater extension, especially in later times, of the area of land placed under cultivation and the growing tendency to raise cattle other than sheep, as also the increasing abundance of the better quality foreign wools.

The relative diminution in local raw material could not, however, have been the sole cause, at least up to the first half of the past century, of the decline in the industry, especially as in that period of the nineteenth century, according to reports of authoritative writers such as Fedele Lampertico and Jacopo Cabianca, flocks still abounded. In 1827 there were 160,000 sheep in the Vicentino region, which figure had fallen to little more than 80,000 by 1859. According to statistics compiled by these two writers, the number of sheep



The Woollen Industry at the end of the Eighteenth Century: *Teasing with vegetable teasels (1) - Cutting (2)*

in the territory of Valdagno was 5,598. The complete decline of the sheep-rearing industry occurred later, due in great part to unavoidable causes, one of which of a comforting nature, namely, the revival and expansive force of the woollen industry, which entailed a vast consumption of the best raw material.

Valdagno continued to work during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as did Schio, which had also woven cloths for centuries and which in the eighteenth century won the right to make wide cloths and had the good fortune to give hospitality to an enterprising Venetian patrician, Niccolò Tron, who had been to England to study the progress of the woollen industry and had brought back workmen and experts. He started his mill in 1739 with 44 looms and 500 operatives, and other manufacturers received advice and assistance from him. Between 1760 and 1770 there were 50 mills



The Woollen Industry at the end of the Eighteenth Century: *Disentangling (3) - Folding before pressing (4)*

employing 2,500 workmen, where cloths were made after the French, the Dutch and the London manner (the « londrini »). Unfortunately, foreign fashions and types prevailed, and the production was mostly imitative. Nevertheless, there was a fair export trade, especially with Germany, and sales were made also in the eastern markets.

At the same time the woollen industry in Valdagno developed along more modest lines — the yearly output was 470 « mezzetti » of cloth, or about ten-thousand metres. While Schio had fifteen-hundred looms in the Napoleonic period, in Valdagno the eight mills with their few hundred hands maintained a position of mediocrity, at which the return of Austria, followed by the loss of all Government protection and military contracts and by increased taxation, dealt a blow that might have proved fatal but for the courageous obstinacy of Luigi Marzotto, who began to make new history for the woollen industry of Valdagno.

**A** very modest beginning: 12 workmen and capital amounting to 2,000 lire. The chalk mill was more important; it carried on for half a century longer, and for more than twenty years still maintained its predominance.

Looking at the balance sheets of that period and comparing them with those of today, it is hard to repress a smile; a smile, however, of sympathy, as when one reads the notes of a governess recording the slow growth of a child.

Balance sheets? There is an eloquent note of six years later on the large yellowed folios covered with fine handwriting and revealing the use of a system of accounting with a family air about it: «No regular yearly balance sheets were drawn up in these first years as the assets were few and progress was slow, which, for that matter, was easily ascertained without any great effort of accounting». Between '42 and '45 the sum of 3,750 lire was spent on machinery — a trifle over 1,000 lire a year! And it was an effort.

But the small ship was already under the guidance of a first-class pilot.

Toward the end of 1839, three years after that fateful 1836, Luigi Marzotto, who was getting on for seventy, surrendered the reins of the small business to his sons, not because he had lost that moral vigour which he had shown in the moment of general abandonment, but because the sons were grown up and it was necessary to allow them a free hand. In 1840 assets amounted to almost 36,000 Venetian lire owned by the three brothers Francesco, Gaetano and Giovanni, the father having retained an annuity which five years later

he commuted for a lump sum. For two years the management was in the hands of Francesco, and in 1842 — another important date for the fortunes of the House and the woollen industry — it was taken over by Gaetano.

Gaetano succeeded the founder of the business as the first author of its spectacular rise, as the unforgettable man who placed the new

20 Luglio 1845

*Attivo*

Saldaia unidivisa valutata nel 1842	
impres. di costruzione di fabbriche	42000
Lavori di riparazione ed aggiunte nei	
edifici non impresi in bilancio	
mobili di mercurio	3750
macchine appartenenti ad aziende	3750
capitale in cassa e in banca	25449
parte a s. Lorenzo di Palermo	18000
Impieghi in Palermo	5300
in Napoli	5000
	<u>101449</u>

*Passivo*

Francesco Frattolito di Palermo	970
Geo. Sabbatani	4000
Francesco Frattolito netto a saldo	5000
di cui cambiali	6449
Conto Banco di Sicilia	525
Conto Banco di Napoli	1150
Quanto di Palermo	925
Parte	2171
Carlo Rocco Frattolito	2651
Don. S. Giovanni	1000
Don. S. Giovanni	2625
Alfonso detto detto	10000
Passività sul conto	
debito conto di 21900.17	
debito pagato	13492
Summa di Passività	740817
Passività sulla cassa	
debito conto di 10329	
debito pagato	7244.57
	3084.43
	530415
	5645732
	5645732
	4449760

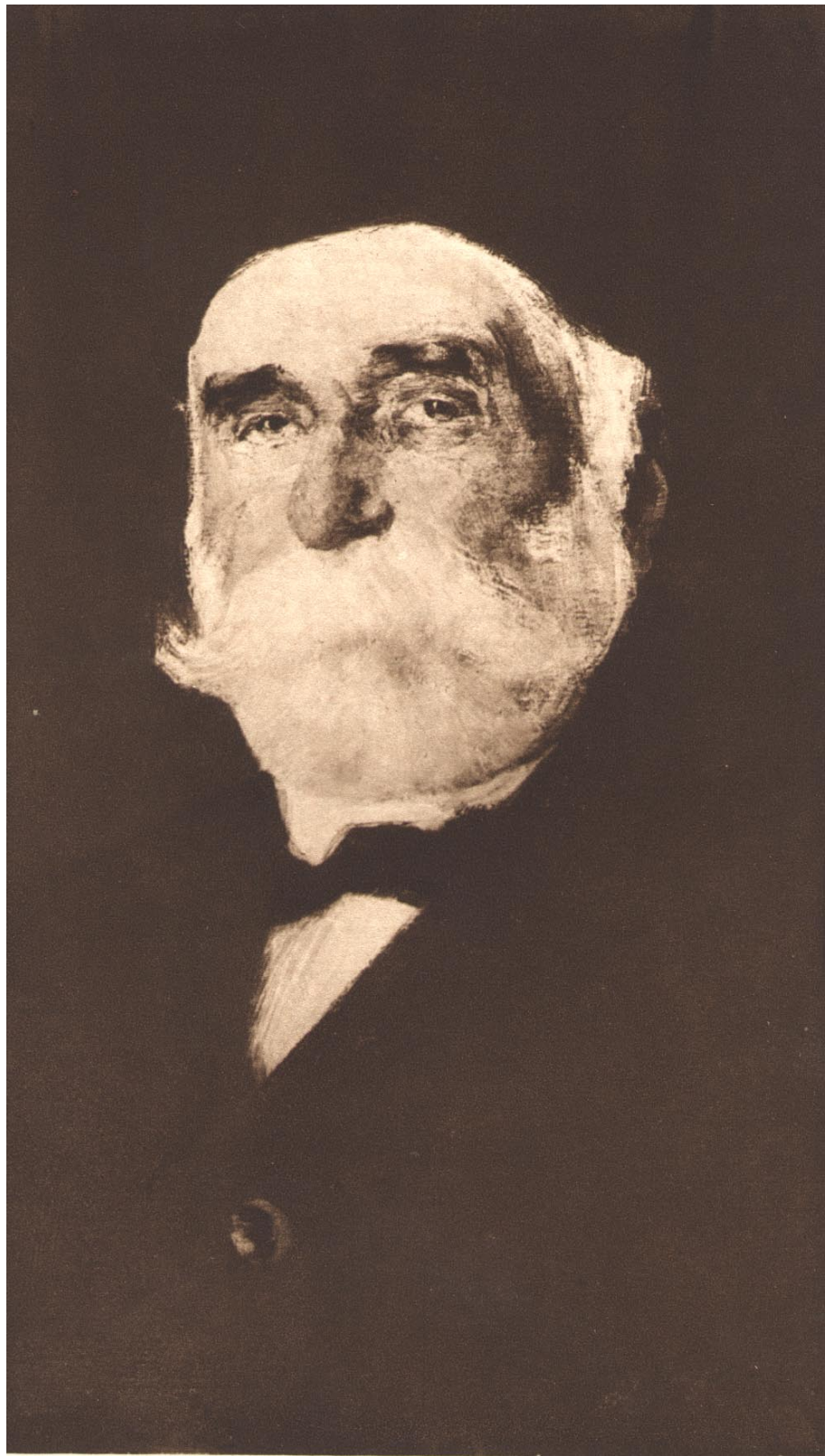
Indicamento il conto dei due fratelli  
Sabbatani e Giovanni Frattolito essendo  
stato per trattato il padre

Per questo bilancio si deduzione del  
partito di 12000 in mille che  
non avendo non figuravano più  
nella parte attiva essendo esportati  
fuori. Furono pure completati  
del guadagno fatto nelle vendite  
del campo e dato a Francesco.

Lo stato il 1845 si può dire che  
la fabbrica non ha né diminuito  
né aumentato il conto di Palermo  
rispetto al bilancio fatto il 16 Gen: 1846  
pagando i debiti, e considerando il commercio  
del capo in tutto spaziale.

A Page from the  
Old Accounts  
Book





GAETANO MARZOTTO (1820-1910)

edifice on the soundest of foundations, the ingenious and patient builder to whom fate, with open hands, accorded a green old age. His father had lived 86 years: he lived 90. These men were themselves buildings with exceptionally solid foundations.

«His very appearance» says Vittorio Trettenero, who has written of the rise of the House of Marzotto on the basis of wide information and with telling eloquence, «was that of an exceptional man. Tall, with a robust complexion, grave deportment, a characteristic head with a scrutinising gaze from slightly peering eyes underneath dark bushy brows, sparse hair, and signs of will and energy in the pronounced features». (Let us suppose that semi-baldness gives sometimes a sort of Caesarian air). «Harsh, stern and taciturn, but not repulsive or surly. His rough manners proceeded from a barely tamed native unruliness, from intolerance at being thwarted in the carrying out of his work, but they hid a great heart. Silence is an ingredient of wisdom and was singularly appropriate in a man who preferred action to words».

This portrait is alive with its frank relief, which recalls that of a condottiere, with a trait more human and nearer to our spirit in that great heart hidden beneath his abrupt manners — the manners of a captain who has decades of will power in front of him straining to grasp victory and, when once grasped, to defend it and make it greater and more fruitful. It would, indeed, be a good thing for modern usage to portray the life of a captain of industry after the manner in which Machiavelli, with evocation and imagination, portrayed Castruccio degli Antelminelli. Unfortunately, modern men of letters have other things to attend to and cannot, like women, break away from other types of captains — those who specialize in massacres.

And yet industry is a special kind of warfare where audacity counts when it is grafted on the trunk of prudence; audacity alone may bring off the coup, but it will be a stroke of fortune and not nearly so praiseworthy. Industry is first constructive, then aggressive. Behind the rapidity of action of a great warrior there lie centuries of

his nation's preparatory arming, a slow force brought to maturity by a genius of a solar nature. The raw materials of a creator of industry are days and years and the resulting product is a life that cannot be forced because its strength lies in the harmony of its development. Overdoing things is often synonymous with undoing them. He has, so to speak, to create a past in order to open up the possibilities of the future and seize them with sure hands. In this sense he may be likened to a statesman rather than to the head of an army — to a statesman who, for long years, which to the unthinking might seem obscure and inert, prepares first the capacity to win and then the years of victory.

« Assets few and progress slow » he notes down. But every step was on solid ground and the will to go forward was strong, because he did not lose his patience. He reached '48 with modest figures; and that year there was a halt because of the revolution. In '49 his gain came from the ground chalk business. « The woollen mill » he writes, « is unprofitable because of the smallness of the capital invested ». It was like a Spring with little sun. The crops, the peasants would say, were behind. But the soil was good, the ploughing had been well done, and the seed was of the best. The yearly balance-sheet figures began to rise, slowly, with a certain regularity, and comparisons with previous years' results already began to show indications of a good harvest. The figures were getting into the hundreds of thousands. The annexation of Venice to the new Kingdom of Italy demolished the tombstone of the Austrian humiliation. It was now possible to reach out to broader horizons in an aura of brighter hopes. Improvements were innovated in the system of production, and eyes were turned, not with envy but in a hardy spirit of emulation, toward Rossi of Schio, that master of industrial sagacity who with his wide experience and great acumen has done so much for the Italian woollen industry.

« 1869. Production was less in this year on account of the long interruption of work necessitated by the removal of the turbine and

of the whole mill into new premises; another cause of the reduced figure was the very cheap prices of wool and consequently of woollen products». Assets, however, now exceeded 600,000 lire, and the opposite page showed family expenditure as being kept within the same narrow limits. There was no ostentation to retard progress. The standard of living remained the same. The enlargement was in the manner of working not in the manner of living. The mill was enlarged at a momentary sacrifice of production and increased economic power was reflected in the more spacious rooms. Gone were the years when a cart drawn by an ass — later a horse — was used to buy the wool and sell the cloth and when, on certain Saturdays, the family had to pawn its valuables to find the wherewithall to pay the workmen. The winning of the long battle called for the dedication of the entire family to what was to assume giant proportions — the mill. The name of Marzotto is now not merely a sign or a tag denoting ownership: it is a patent of nobility.

The present was pregnant with the future.

The 30 workmen of 1842 had risen to 400 by 1876. Gaetano Marzotto had an assiduous co-operator in his brother Giovanni, but the commanding energy was his; and when Giovanni withdrew from the business and died after having been at his side for more than forty years, he was able to fall back on his sons — first the eldest, Luigi, who died prematurely in 1895; then the second, Vittorio Emanuele, who soon revealed his aptitude to take the helm. Fate continued to be kind to the family, for this son inherited the virtues of his father in addition to his fortune.

Meanwhile the town had grown about the mill; the population had doubled since the time of the great crisis. Civic life took on enhanced importance, and in the deliberations of the municipality, and later in those of the Province and in Parliament, the wisdom, the experience, and the consciousness of civic and national duty of Gaetano Marzotto were revealed in a clear, calm and, where necessary, generous manner. He felt the call of country with the same simplicity



VITTORIO EMANUELE MARZOTTO (1858-1922)

that was felt when the educative action of the best men of the Risorgimento was at its height. In '48 he had been one of the Secret Committee, and the memory of that period, to which even the misfortunes added beauty, kept him devoted to Italy with a balanced understanding of the developments and dangers of years which were full of anxiety. He belonged to that class of men who see politics as a dutiful complement of their own activities and not as a career, men who contribute with their experience, gained on the basis of hard and lasting facts, and have an instinctive repugnance for turgid words that pass often leaving troublesome traces of their passage.

The son also inherited this attitude. A perusal of some of the statements made by him in speeches delivered during the four Parliaments when he represented the valley shows that common sense and clear practical intelligence maintain their « actuality » even after events of such importance as to change the face of social and political life. « We wish for the gradual rise of the working and farming classes » was a phrase that his opponents could deride as expressing platonic suggestions and resolutions. But considering the times no statement could have been more precise and courageous, as the following, which struck at the sterile and substantially anarchic neutrality of the ruling powers in connection with the prevailing social strife: « The intervention of the State is necessary and must consist of wise legislation designed to settle foreseeable clashes, safeguard capital and protect labour so that every citizen may know the remuneration upon which he can count as a result of his economic effort and labour. If intervention is necessary to regulate relationships between private individuals, it is all the more so when services which are essential organs of national life are in question ». It was the hard common sense of a worker living among workers that opposed the opinion « the normal state is co-operation » to the class hatred preached by the socialists. To understand this normality, however, it was necessary to know, so to speak, the essence of the basic conditions of labour and to perceive by intuition the truth of the harmony above the

contingencies of disputes; the «concordia discors» in which the discordant facts must be led back and subordinated to living concord under penalty of the common ruin.

In his last speech, in 1913, he pleaded for «a group — *fascio* was the word he actually used, dimly portending the near future — of fervid aspirations and firm wills». Two years afterward, when the European war broke out, the word became the symbol of a parliamentary group, and after the war it assumed the historical importance and attained the fortunes which all the world knows. The sturdy representative of the woollen industry of Valdagno had anticipated the future.

Then Vittorio Emanuele Marzotto retired from political life and lived the days of anguish and mortifying impotence, when mad disorder reigned throughout the country. The tidal wave of anarchy washed the walls of his mill also, but the walls were solid and the heart was sound.

Vittorio Emanuele Marzotto had given all the warmth and limpidity of his spirit to the mill since when, a young man, he had submitted not only to paternal discipline but, in a greater degree, to the domination of the flattering though imperious reality represented by the rise of the House of Marzotto. He was twenty-one years old when he obtained permission from his father to set up a wool-spinning mill at Maglio di Sopra, which was at once a subsidiary force and capable of subsisting by its own efforts. He had been abroad in countries where the industry was well advanced, and he observed, studied, and returned with his head hot with daring intentions, to differ from his father, to whom his youthful impetuosity did not seem altogether free from risks.

It was a psychologically interesting difference, affording a glimpse of personages that, within the less spectacular circle of industrial life, reflected attitudes and happenings of the greater historical personages they resembled. Gaetano Marzotto, now on his way to old age, had taken over the small manufactory from his father who,



The Marzotto  
Woollen Mill in  
1890

rather than yield as the others had done, had kept it in operation in order to preserve the centuries-old woollen tradition of Valdagno, and had turned it into a great undertaking with balance sheets that bore witness to constant progress, truly a remarkable performance to crown the life of a man. One is always a trifle jealous of one's creation and the long record of shrewd dealing conduces all the more to a fear of errors. Ideas which have worked well in practice for long years and gained experience with the passage of time have become something of a set habit. What need, therefore, to change? — even though change meant keeping abreast of the times. Fear of risk is common to persons who have suffered in order to construct and have known hard times and fought against difficulties rather than against risks; and, urged to consider proposals for improvement, are apt to reply that « the better is the enemy of the good », because with them, in most cases, prudence has somehow grown at the cost of initiative.

Vittorio Emanuele Marzotto, on the contrary, was convinced of the necessity to dare, to substitute audacity for prudence, because timidity and slowness represent imprudence. It was not enough for the firm to be prosperous in the present; the foundation of future prosperity had to be laid. It was not enough to satisfy the customers;





The Woollen Mill  
to-day: *Weaving*

they had to be taught to demand more, and they had to be offered this more before they applied to others, especially to the foreigner, for it. Foreign competition had to be faced, and the only loyal way of doing so was to use to the full the means at the disposal of this competition. Machines, machines...! The father shook his head. There was no point in undertaking too much. The son insisted. The clash of opposing wills was not the obstinate irremediable contention between one who understands and one who does not. The son had the greatest esteem for the paternal acumen, of which there was eloquent testimony in the progress made in the mill, now employing hundreds of hands, and in the continuous movement of wools and cloths that took the valley road. The father, at bottom, appreciated his son's attachment to the undertaking that had been the ambition of his life and constituted his legitimate pride. He knew that the torch would be handed on to sure hands. The difference therefore merely turned on the estimate of the tempo.

The son resorted to expedients. He urged that a machine should be brought over by way of experiment. The machine arrived and was found to work well. It was operated on trial alongside the other machines and outdistanced them. Thus, by degrees, the persuasive efforts of the younger man got the better of the reluctance of the



The Woollen Mill  
to-day: *Spinning  
and combing de-  
partments seen  
from the entrance*

older man, who for that matter was too well versed in his business not to see the advantage and too much of a father not to be inwardly proud of his son's industrial talent.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the two factories employed more than 1,700 workmen, and even before the turn of the century yearly production exceeded seven million lire. A hydro-electric plant was set up near Recoaro to supply the power, and another even bigger station was soon in course of erection. A careful watch was kept on foreign innovations in order not to be left behind. And the father, weighed down with years, gradually left the management of the business to the son, while still remaining a valid adviser and becoming an increasingly proud spectator of the brilliant energy of the son, who although now in his fifties still kept to that youthful rhythm that had been the revelation of his industrial talent.

The death of Gaetano Marzotto, which took place in 1910, occasioned a division of the estate among the heirs. Vittorio Emanuele had to give up the spinning mill at Maglio, which had been his creature, and was left with the Valdagno establishment, the capital structure of which was notably weakened by the splitting up of the estate. The impairment of the capital was, however, merely a stimulant to him. The mill was enlarged, equipped with a spinning-



GAETANO MARZOTTO, SON OF VITTORIO

room of its own and new machinery, and worked at full capacity. The lost ground was very soon regained and output exceeded all records. A few years later the war broke out, but even the difficulties of the war period failed to check the growth of the business. Vittorio Emanuele was sure of himself and gave of his best. And the memory of Gaetano Marzotto blossomed in the well deserved fortune of his successor, whose sound advice was sought by industrial undertakings and whose energy was expanding in other fields. Strong like his father and grandfather — even in this detail he kept up the family tradition — a kind fate seemed to have many years of useful work and industrial victories in store for him, when — Mr. Tretteno records — he fell «a victim of a grim snare one evening in the Autumn of 1921».

Mortally wounded, the sturdy body whose sixty-four years seemed far remote from the threshold of old age, struggled for months against the inevitable, sustained by the unbeaten soul; then, in the Spring of 1922, he departed this life with calm resignation. In eleven years he had, by forcing the pace, done the work of a lifetime. From the sumptuous house he had built, which was ever open to friends and to the arts, he could hear the throb of the machines in the adjacent factory, mighty and regular, impetuous and harmonious, significant of the future. And beside the deathbed, where his wife's care had been a miracle of indefatigable devotion, the consciousness of the grand ancestral performance penetrated the mind of his son, strong and ready, who bore the name of his grandfather, a good omen in that hour of change of command.

How Gaetano Marzotto kept the promise given, more with his eyes than with his tongue, when his father died, could be told primarily by talking about him. But while it is easy to give the dead their meed of praise, it is another matter to praise the living, especially when the person in question is of too manly a nature to wish it. Moreover, a person's eulogy is usually pronounced at the close of his life's work; memories are then willingly evoked, details filled in,

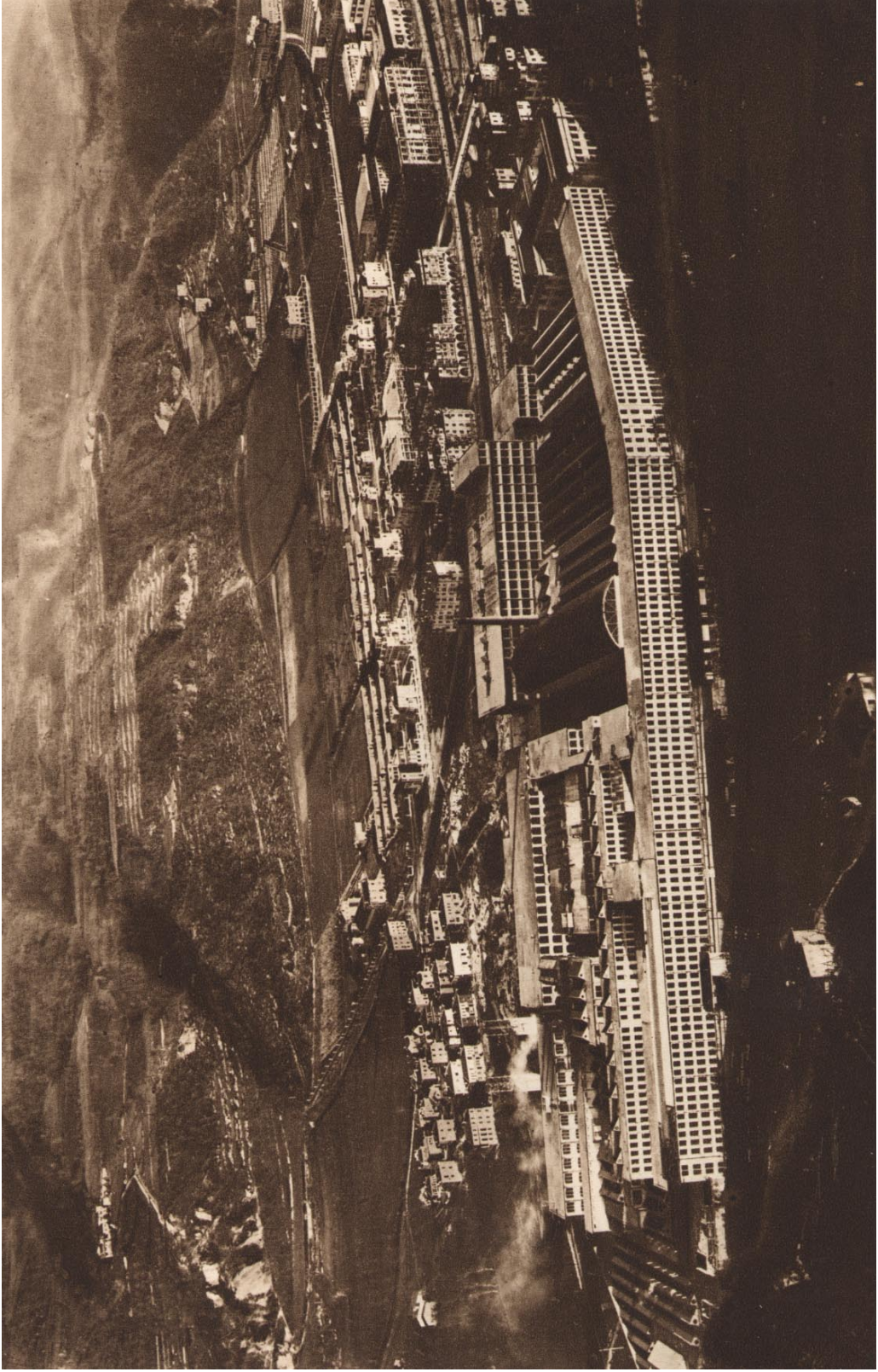
and the eulogy seems to achieve dignity from the colour of the past. But when life is at its fullest and the voluptuousness of recompense lies in its achievements; when pulsating energy seems impatient of delays and has such a thirst for the future that it has not time to look behind, there is something distasteful in «posing» for a panegyric; in much the same way as when princes of times gone by, proceeding to take over the command of armies in the field or to learn at first hand the conditions and needs of subjects, tolerated with a bad grace the bombastic greetings of civic orators and sometimes cut them short more or less rudely.

A century of direct and undivided responsibility lives in the brevity of his conversation, in the promptness of his decisions, in the imperturbability of his judgment, in the rapidity with which he gives orders, in the intentness with which he listens and in his adroitness in dividing things to be done between to-day and tomorrow according to their immediate degree of urgency. His brain to the matter in hand and his ear to the person speaking, easily and without distraction; and an idea of the value of time which somehow compels the visitor to express himself concisely and clearly, without embarrassing him. Not the haste that savours of confusion, but the celerity which introduces order into movement, even when the movement seems vertiginous. When giving commands he is at the same time performing an act of obedience to the dictates of the great work which has been entrusted to him by three generations of constructors and which imperiously governs his thought and action. It is impossible to command well unless there is subservience to a higher command. Nothing gives a more humiliating impression of servility than the authority of a lazy master; work and creation imply discipline, the discipline that binds the general just as much as the rank and file.

But when the day's work is over, when the door of the executive's office closes and that of the hospitable house opens, a cordial urbanity illumines the hours of rest in the rooms adorned with numerous works of art, and the feeling of another tradition, more

intimate and more gentle, prevails — the frank life of the family, the genteel womenfolk, the children smiling at a smiling father. Although no longer the small house with the chalk mill on the ground floor, but the spacious gentleman's mansion, there is the same sound domestic life which solaced the old ones in their hard work and which of itself constitutes the most delicate welcome.

But the man is chiefly reflected in his work, and of this it is permissible to speak admiringly without appearing indiscreet and with that emphasis and sharpness of outline which figures add to the words.



WEAVING FACTORY - EAST SIDE

