

THE ABERDEEN COMBWORKS.

Reference was made by our London correspondent, in his letter in yesterday's paper, to an article on "The Making of Combs," by Mr A. I. M'Connachie, in this month's number of the "World's Work." Dealing more particularly with the Aberdeen Combworks, Mr M'Connachie says—

Combmaking was revolutionized about 1828. There are no manufactures of the present day more indebted to genius and machinery than that of combmaking. The most ingenious method invented by Lynn in that year at once displaced the simple saws which till then cut out the interstices between the teeth—that and nothing more. Lynn's machine saved much loss in material, for it made an end of wasteful sawing by cutting combs singly. The new process was aptly called twinning—two combs being cut from the same piece of horn, the teeth in the first stage being interlocked. A new era had dawned in combmaking, and among the few who at once realized the momentous change was an Aberdonian, the late Mr John Stewart, the father of Sir David Stewart, whom many citizens of Aberdeen still remember as a man of singular energy and vigour of character, not only as the founder of the Combworks, but largely engaged in developing north-eastern traffic both by rail and sea. He commenced business in Edinburgh in 1825, but five years later Mr Stewart came to Aberdeen, establishing a manufactory there "with all the latest improvements." Step by step the business developed till in 1899 the Aberdeen Combworks Company, Limited, was incorporated, with a capital of £500,000, swallowing up several smaller concerns. The chairman of the board is Sir David Stewart of Banchory, whose fellow-citizens honoured themselves by electing him Lord Provost of Aberdeen; thereafter Queen Victoria created him a knight, and the University of Aberdeen conferred the honorary degree of LL.D. A year or two ago, also, the board of directors of the Great North of Scotland Railway appointed Sir David Stewart their chairman. His two sons, Mr Douglas Stewart and Mr William Stewart, are the managing directors of the company.

One of the secrets of the marvellous success of the Aberdeen firm lies in the fact that their machinery has never been allowed to become antiquated; indeed, many of their finer machines are their personal invention, and some of them are not to be seen outside their own works. The great Aberdeen firm has effectually demonstrated that the day of small combmaking companies is now almost at an end, but foreign competition, especially from France, Germany, and America, is exceedingly keen. As economy in production must never be lost sight of, many labour-saving machines have been introduced from time to time, some of them so human-like in their action that they appear endowed with the power of thinking. Yet the staff of 40 hands which found employment in 1830 is now represented by about a thousand. That great increase does not, of course, represent the growth in production—for by the improvements in machinery the efficiency of each worker is more than quadrupled. The works cover an area of several acres, the main portion of the manufactory being a four-storey building with a frontage of 325 feet to Hutcheon Street. While combs are, of course, the staple production, not a few other articles are turned out, including cups, tumblers, spatulas, spoons, tobacco and snuff boxes, etc. Varieties and qualities of combs are almost endless; at the present moment one can have choice of about 20,000. The annual output of combs is about 25,000,000.

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