

THE MAN AND THE TOWN.

MR. J. J. COLMAN, M.P., AND NORWICH.

TWO HUNDRED years ago, we have it on the authority of Macaulay, Norwich was "the first English manufacturing town," and it might have continued to occupy this position had not machinery destroyed the art which it owed to the Huguenot exiles. That the commercial importance of Norwich has survived the decline and fall of its weaving trade, that it should now number over 100,000 inhabitants, as compared with 40,000 at the beginning of the century, is largely due to an industrial enterprise which lavish advertising has made famous throughout the English-speaking world. The family of which Mr. Jeremiah J. Colman is to-day the head must be regarded, indeed, as the chief resurrectors of a city that at one time was fast hastening to decay.

Whether one approaches Norwich in a railway train from London or a river-launch from Yarmouth, one of the first objects of attention is a great pile of buildings surmounted by the name of Colman. No part of these buildings is older than forty years, but the great business which is carried on there was founded as far back as 1814 by a Colman who, in illustration of the fondness of Norfolk people for Biblical characters, also bore the Christian name of Jeremiah. This Jeremiah Colman was a prosperous miller of Norwich when he decided to take three nephews into partnership, and add to his flour-milling the manufacture of mustard and starch at Stoke Holy Cross, a village four miles from Carrow. It was to the united efforts of these three brothers that the sure and rapid growth of the undertaking was due. The eldest, James, of whom the present head of the firm is the son, took charge of the manufacturing processes on which the success of the business primarily depended, while his brother directed affairs in the London office. At the end of forty years, when "J. J.," as he is called throughout Norwich, was twenty-four, and beginning to take an important part in the business of the firm, it was deemed advisable to

remove the works at Norwich in order that full advantage might be taken of the transport facilities afforded by the new Eastern Counties Railway. Accordingly in 1854 choice was made of Carrow as the site for the new buildings, and a fresh impetus was given to the growth of Norwich.

On entering the works from Conisford, which has been a busy highway by the side of the Wensum from the time of the Engle chiefs, my first thought is of the parable of the mustard-seed. This great aggregation of mills and wharves, warehouses and workshops, with the large colony of cottages close at hand, is not, indeed, entirely the product of a grain of mustard-seed. Starch, cornflour, and "blue" are also produced here in great quantities. But mustard is the staple industry which occupies most of the 2200 men, women, and children now at their daily work, and feeds the six or seven thousand people directly dependent upon them. It is for the making of mustard that engines of many hundred horsepower, driving many scores of different machines, are constantly kept going. It is from a grain of mustard-seed that the celebrity of the Carrow Works—which have a river frontage of the best part of a mile, and cover twenty-five acres of ground—has sprung. With the growth of the Carrow Works, it must also be observed, under the direction of Mr. J. J. Colman, the mustard-seed has been grown on an increasing area of East Anglia. It is also grown in the neighbourhood of Selby, in Yorkshire, and large quantities are imported from Holland. Of late years some effort to cultivate the plant has been made in California, but the American seed appears to be deficient in strength and quality. There are two kinds of seed in use at Colman's works, known as "white" (*Sinapis alba*) and "brown" (*Sinapis nigra*). The fine art of mustard-making consists in the proper blending of both seeds. The brown seed has the pungency and is the more expensive; the white seed is almost

tasteless, but by its capacity for fermentation, enables a little of the brown to "go a long way." It is by the judicious combination of the two varieties that the proper colour of mustard is obtained. In

kilns for a very short time together. In order that it may be freed from dirt or other extraneous matter, the seed is next passed through machines with fine sieves, and is then ready to be crushed into

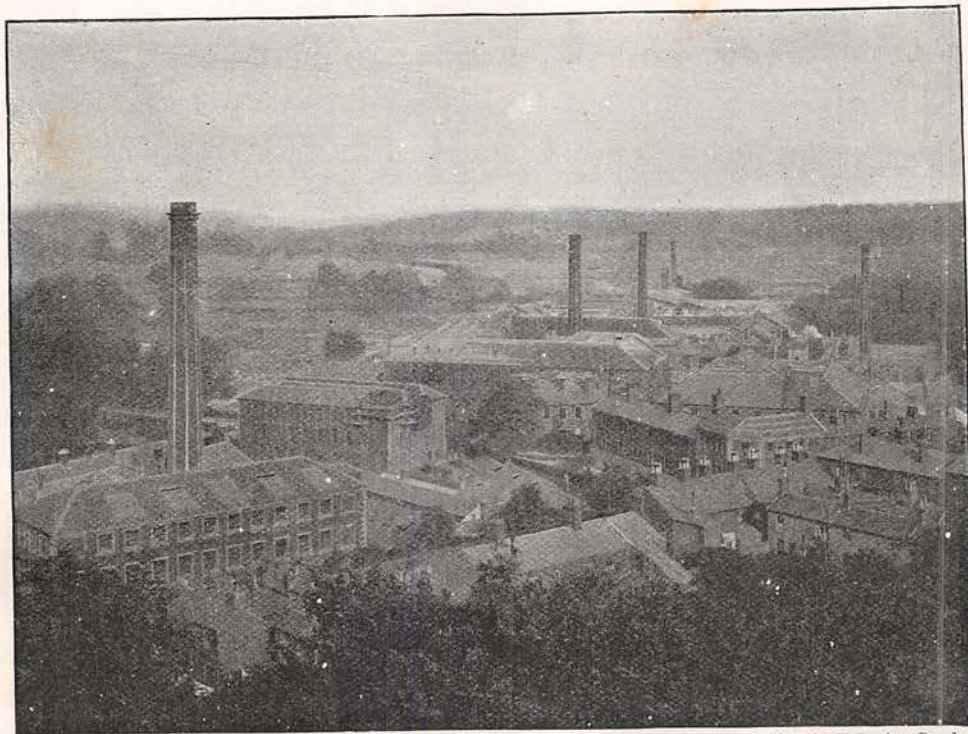


Photo by Valentine, Dundee.

CARROW WORKS, NORWICH.

the earlier part of his career, I believe, Mr. Colman did not disdain to devote a great deal of attention to these two seemingly small points.

As showing the nature of the great business Mr. Colman has built up at Norwich, let me describe briefly the many processes through which mustard passes before it is dispatched by trains of the Great Eastern Railway or by Norfolk "wherries," which convey it along the river to Yarmouth, where the firm has large warehouses for the temporary storage of goods for export. When the seed is received from the growers, it has first to be dried and cleaned. It is dried in kilns, the task of turning over the seed being, I am told, a very trying one for the workmen. I can well believe it as I struggle through a cloud of dust, which inflates the nostrils and moistens the eyes. Mr. Colman has been careful so to arrange matters, however, that the men shall work at the

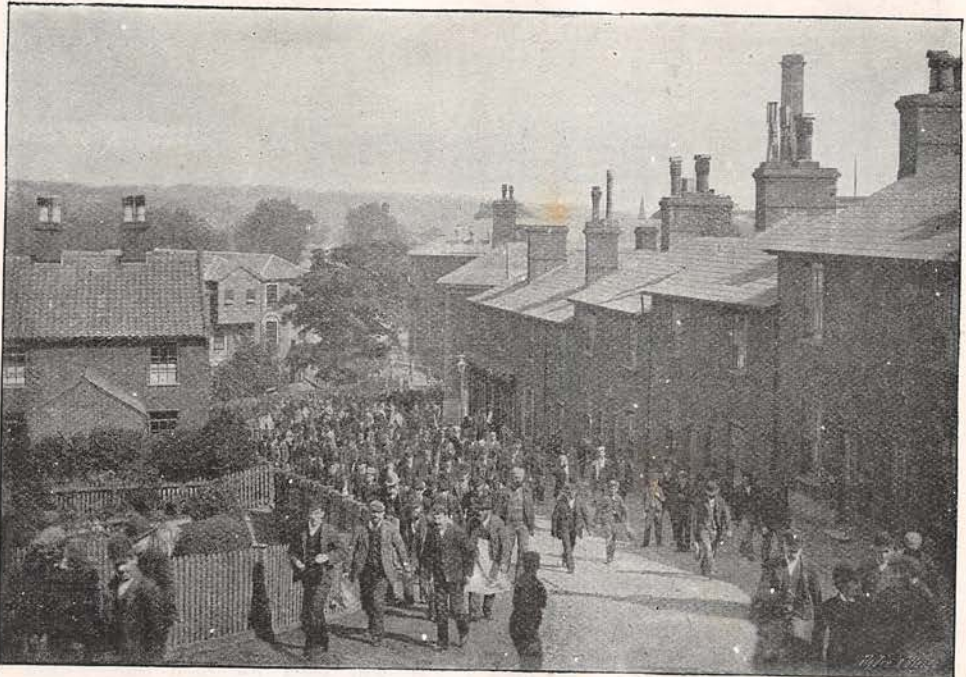
powder. This is accomplished by two processes. In the first the seed passes from one floor to another through great rollers, driven by machines whose reverberation seems to shake the iron girded wall. On the lower floor the rough work performed by these engines is completed by rows of mechanical pestles or "pounders," which reduce the broken seeds into a mixture of flour and husk of a green hue. To separate the husk from the flour, sieves are employed made of silk lawn, with perforations finer than the eyes of small needles. These sieves, by the way, still give employment to a few women in that decayed centre of the silk industry, Spitalfields. The mustard emerges from the sieves in a golden shower, the almost invisible dust from which brightens the clothes of the workpeople. It has now obtained all possible purity and beauty, but the pungency of the mustard has to be considerably reduced by the mixture of

wheat flour before it can be ready for consumption. Over two thousand sacks of wheat are ground every week in the mill, the flour being mixed with the mustard and coloured by the addition of farina.

The packing of the mustard and the other products of the Carrow Works, the manufacture of the tins and boxes and the printing of the labels, are industries in themselves. In the tin-shops, the packing-rooms, the coopers' factories, and the printing departments I witnessed in actual operation that minute division of labour and almost complete independence of the outer world by means of which Mr. Colman has developed the undertaking into what it is to-day. In one or two packing-rooms, for instance, several hundred boys—in the actual manufacture of the mustard only men are employed—are engaged simply in filling and labelling canisters. The boys work in batches of six, and each boy has his particular task. One boy weighs the mustard, another holds the canister and closes it when full, the third gums a label which the fourth boy puts on, and so on. It is astonishing to witness the dexterity the boys have acquired in their several tasks, each batch being able to deal with 2500 canisters in the day. The boys' working day begins at half-past eight, and

they leave as soon as they have finished a fixed amount of work, which is generally about half-past five. The importance of the packing department, it should be mentioned, proceeds from the fact that by far the greatest quantity of mustard is retailed in penny tins containing one ounce.

In the course of my peregrinations through the buildings I was greatly impressed by the cleanliness and good order that were everywhere observable. Mr. Colman, I was told, is constantly supervising the arrangements of everything with a view to the comfort and health of the workpeople. The buildings are lighted entirely by electricity—generated on the premises—and painted with asbestos paint. A doctor receives a salary from the firm and resides on the premises, in order that any case of accident or sickness may have immediate attention. There are great kitchens where food is prepared for the employés, and fine dining-rooms in which their meals can be taken. This commissariat department may, indeed, be regarded as a remarkable illustration of the collectivist principle: the men and women employed in the Carrow Works can obtain a breakfast for a penny and a dinner for twopence or threepence at



DINNER-HOUR AT CARROW WORKS.

Photo by Valentine, Dundee.

which the most enterprising caterer would stare in amazement. There are also reading-rooms in which the leisure of the intervals for meals can be spent.

The schools Mr. Colman has established for the free education of the children of the workpeople deserve a word to themselves. In all respects they compare favourably with the best elementary schools in the country. There are now some seven hundred scholars in attendance, including

convinced that these schools assured the firm of a constant supply of good, steady, and intelligent workmen.

Other institutions Mr. Colman has been instrumental in establishing within the gates of the Carrow Works are thrift clubs and savings banks, schools of technique for the workmen, and of cookery for their wives, a dispensary and a lending library, an orchestral band and a fire-brigade. He has provided a gymnasium and a

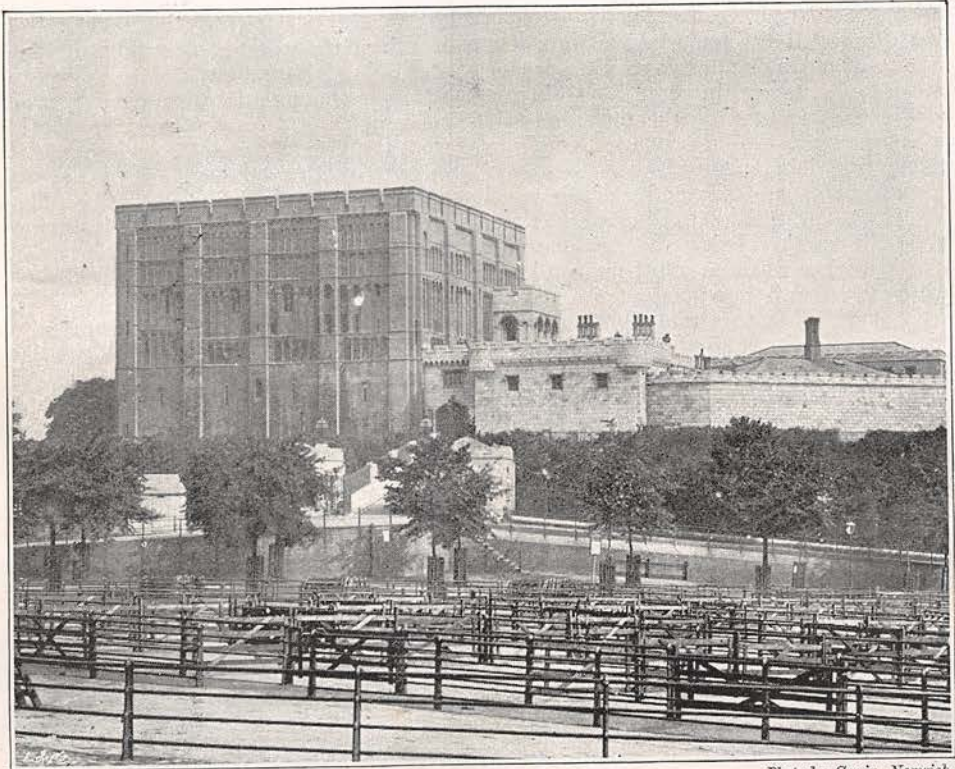


Photo by Gavin, Norwich.

NORWICH CASTLE.

the infants in a kindergarten. In addition to the code subjects, the boys are taught drawing, modelling in clay, ironwork, gardening, and bee-keeping; and the girls cookery and domestic economy. In the evening the pretty school-buildings are occupied by classes for men and lads. Of course, with the extension of free education as a matter of legal right, these schools are not the boon they once were; but although the State would now relieve him of the charge, Mr. Colman has thought fit to continue to make himself responsible for the schooling of the little ones at Carrow. He was long since

recreation-ground, and, largely owing to his encouragement, the firm has flourishing cricket and other athletic clubs. Speaking of cricket, it must be mentioned that the Colmans have throughout the country a traditional connection with the national game. The three nephews of whom I have already spoken were of a family which numbered eleven sons. The brothers were all enthusiastic cricketers, and, forming a team in themselves, they frequently played against the clubs of Norwich and the district.

It will thus be seen that, although Carrow is an integral part of Norwich, the

people who obtain their living there almost form a colony unto themselves. It is a colony, however, in which Norwich people generally take a strong and kindly interest. As the stranger soon discovers, they are as proud of it in its way—as an example of Capital and Labour dwelling together in amity, as a great industrial organisation existing in what is no longer regarded as a great commercial centre—as they are of their Cathedral and their Castle, their ancient Guildhall and Grammar School, the spacious Market-place, and St. Andrew's Hall. Mr. Colman has been the more successful in carrying into effect his many ideas for the good of the business and the welfare of its employés, because he has resided so much right at the gates of the works. This course can have involved little sacrifice, however, on the part of himself or his family, for Carrow House, although so close to the smoke of tall chimneys and the roar of machinery, is one of the pleasantest of residences. It has beautiful, well-wooded grounds and glass houses, in which the cultivation of the vine and various choice plants has been brought to a high state of perfection. In the corner of the grounds are the remains of an old abbey and priory. The priory consists of ruins, but a very small part of which were visible till the accidental discovery of a Norman column in 1881 led Mr. Colman to have systematic excavations made. The abbey Mr. Colman has had very skilfully restored, and the ivy-covered walls, with fine carved doors and oak ceilings, now form a fine memorial of the mediæval era. For many years past Mr. Colman has been collecting every book or pamphlet he could lay his hands upon written by Norfolk men or having a Norfolk subject. This Norfolk library, which now numbers over five thousand volumes, has been housed in Carrow Abbey, and arranged for the convenience of such persons as may wish to consult it.

The walls of the rooms are covered by the finest works of Crome and other distinguished Norfolk painters. Mr. Colman's ancestors have belonged to Norwich or its neighbourhood for several hundred years, and in his local patriotism he has proved himself worthy of them.

Spending much of his time at this residence, Mr. Colman has been able to keep in close touch with the affairs of the firm and its employés, on the one hand, and with the general interests of Norwich, on the other. Mrs. Colman, too, assisted in later years by her daughters, has been able to supplement in various ways—such as in securing the provision of cheap and comfortable lodgings, when necessary, for the workgirls—the efforts of her husband for the well-being of the people employed at the works. His sons have, moreover, grown up with a familiar regard for Carrow and all that pertains thereto, and two, Russell James and Alan C., have been taken into partnership. The first-named inherits his grandfather's enthusiasm for cricket, and is captain of the Carrow First Eleven, admission to which is esteemed a signal proof of prowess with the bat or ball.

That Mr. J. J. Colman has been for twenty-three years in succession one of the members for Norwich is sufficient proof of the hold which he has gained upon the respect and esteem of the citizens, when the Tory proclivities of the town are taken into account. He has also been both Mayor and Sheriff of Norwich, and as he could not be induced again to accept the Shrievalty, his son Mr. Russell James Colman was in 1892-93 chosen in his stead. Yet it does not appear that in the affairs of Norwich itself Mr. Colman has ever courted popularity or sought favour; the position he occupies in Norwich has been accorded to him simply in recognition of the substantial service his business ability has rendered to the town.

FREDERICK DOLMAN.



Photo by Elliott and Fry, Baker Street.

MR. J. J. COLMAN, M.P.