

**ESSAYS ON AMERICAN SILK,
AND THE BEST MEANS OF
RENDERING IT A SOURCE OF
INDIVIDUAL AND NATIONAL
WEALTH**

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JOHN D'HOMERGUE & PETER STEPHEN DUPONCEAU

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ON

AMERICAN SILK,

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WITH

Directions to Farmers for Raising Silk Worms.

BY

JOHN D'HOMERGUE,

Silk Manufacturer,

AND

PETER STEPHEN DUPONCEAU,

Member of the American Philosophical Society, held at Philadelphia, for promoting Useful Knowledge.

Knowledge is Power, and Information is Capital.

Report Coma. of Congress on American Silk.

Philadelphia:

JOHN GRIGG, No. 9, N. FOURTH STREET.

1830.

PREFACE.

The cultivation of the mulberry tree and the raising of silk worms have, for some years past, engaged in a remarkable manner the attention of the people of the United States. In every part of the country this important branch of agriculture is more or less attended to. Societies of various kinds have been established for its promotion. With the same views, acts of incorporation have been granted by the state legislatures*, and the national government themselves have not thought this object unworthy of their special patronage. The works of foreign authors on these interest-

* An act was passed on the 9th of February last by the legislature of the state of Delaware "to enable Everest Manry (an Italian) to introduce the production and manufacture of silk into that state." By that act a company was to have been incorporated with a capital of \$50,000. Nothing, however, was done under it, and it appears that the scheme has entirely failed. The same legislature also passed a resolution exempting from taxation all lands employed in the growth of white mulberry trees with a view to the raising of silk, for ten years from the time of planting the trees, and promising a silver medal worth five dollars to every person planting and bringing to perfection within the state two hundred mulberry trees within five years from May 1, 1829.—This was probably intended in aid of the company above mentioned.

The house of representatives of Tennessee, on the 27th of Nov. last, passed several resolutions to encourage the culture of mulberry trees and raising of silk worms. I have heard of other states having taken similar measures, but have no certain information on which I can rely.

ing subjects issue in translations and abridgments from our presses; Manuals, and even periodicals, are published by American authors, all tending to produce the same result—the introduction of silk as a profitable object of culture into this country.

Notwithstanding these simultaneous efforts, we do not find that, except in the increase of mulberry trees and propagation of silk worms, they have yet produced any of the effects that might have been expected from them, and we are not nearer to manufacturing silk than we were before. Sewing silk, indeed, has been made for upwards of seventy years, and still continues to be made in the state of Connecticut and in some other parts of the Union; but this silk is of so inferior a quality, that it not only cannot be exported abroad, but cannot even find a cash price in our markets. It is disposed of in barter among the farmers, and is acknowledged not to be fit to compete with the same article imported from Europe, with which we still continue to be supplied. The reason of this is not in the want of ingenuity of the females, who, it is understood, exclusively attend to this manufacture, (for who ever taxed the Americans, male or female, with want of ingenuity?), but to their ignorance of the art of preparing this precious material, an art which can only be acquired by experience and practice, and which must be taught by a person skilled in it. Such persons are not to be obtained from foreign countries without the greatest difficulty. The sovereigns of Europe themselves have not been able to procure them without great sacrifices and considerable rewards.

It is also to be remarked that even if sewing silk could be made in this country, not only equal, but superior, to that which is imported from Europe, it would still be a losing business, because it is a well known fact, that the refuse of the cocoons, those which are called *imperfect*, and which

cannot be employed to any other purpose, are alone in other countries put to that use, while the silk of the good cocoons, when properly prepared, commands a high price even as a raw material; England and France purchase it in large quantities, particularly from China and Italy. France raises it at home, but by no means sufficiently for the consumption of her manufactures. Her annual importation of that article in the raw state is immense*. Her exportation of manufactured silk, according to a sensible American writer, (Mr Vernon of Rhode Island), is not less than five hundred millions of dollars; besides, says the same author, a much larger saving to the French nation from the quantity that she consumes at home†.

While the nations of Europe are at such pains and expense to procure the raw material, which they manufacture at home with immense profits, we, who are in possession of an extensive country, in every part of which that same material may be produced without stint or measure, and which may be said in that respect to be inexhaustible, are contented to purchase the manufactured articles, with which we might be supplied by only applying our own industry to our own produce, from those nations to whom nature has denied that produce, or bestowed it only upon them in small quantities compared to their wants. In this

* From a late statement of count Lesteyrie to the society of domestic economy at Paris, it appears that the value of raw silk used annually in France amounts to one hundred and twelve millions of francs, of which only fifteen or sixteen millions value is of French production, so that France pays nearly one hundred millions of francs (*twenty millions of dollars*) annually for foreign silk.—See National Gazette, Dec. 7, 1829.

† A Methodical Treatise on the Cultivation of the Mulberry Tree and Raising of Silk Worms, &c. abridged from the French of M. De la Brousse, with notes &c. By William H. Vernon. Boston. Hillard Gray & Co. 1828. Page 11.

manner we expend annually the millions that we might make. Let me be permitted to enter here into some details.

The records of the treasury department inform us that in the year 1821 manufactured silks were imported into this country to the amount of \$4,488,924, and in 1825, by a gradual increase, to that of \$10,271,527, making in the course of five years more than *thirty-five millions of dollars*, of which about eight millions only were exported, leaving twenty-seven millions to be consumed at home and to be *paid for*. It appears, however, from the same documents, that, owing probably to the general stagnation of commerce, the importation of silks has lately suffered diminution, since during the year which ended on the 30th of September 1828 their importation amounted only to \$8,433,553, of which \$1,274,461 were exported; but in the same year the exportation of broad stuffs from this country amounted only to \$6,414,665, leaving a balance against us of about two millions: among these last importations there is an item of \$608,709 in one year of *raw-silk*. This remarkable fact, extracted from the treasury report, is recorded in Hazard's Register of Pennsylvania, October 10, 1829*.

It was, no doubt, the consideration of this state of things which induced the national government, in the year 1826, to give that strong impulse to the culture of silk in this country, of which we see the effects in the attention which is paid to it throughout the Union. But the efforts which are now making will soon spend themselves, unless they are directed to some profitable end. The people

* It is not probable that all this raw silk is consumed at home; it is rather to be supposed that part of it is exported. We know of some having been sent to Vera Cruz; a considerable quantity, however, is employed in this country by fringed-makers and others, who import or purchase it at high prices.

will at last get tired of planting mulberry trees and raising silk worms, if they can find in it no advantageous result. The late administration has raised a spirit which must be profitably employed, otherwise it will quickly vanish, and when called may not appear again. The government has encouraged the people of the United States to plant mulberry trees and raise silk worms, and the people have done it. They have now a right to ask, what shall we do with these things ?

It may not be improper to review here the course which was taken by the national legislature in the session of 1825-6. On the 29th December 1825, Mr Miner, of Pennsylvania, moved that the general subject of the culture of silk should be referred to the committee on agriculture, and that they should inquire "whether any legislative provisions were necessary or proper to promote its production."*

The committee, on the 2d of May following, made a report which is replete with interesting facts. They did not fail to bring into view the large quantity of manufactured silks imported into this country, compared with the small amount of the exportation of broad stuffs. They stated what is very true, that silk might be raised with facility in every part of the United States, and showed by facts that in several parts it was already raised of a superior quality in considerable quantities. The question now presented itself—what was to be done further to encourage the raising of that article ? It seems the answer was obvious : make it the interest of the cultivators to pursue that branch of industry, and let them alone. They had already produced silk of a fine quality. The committee had seen *beautiful* specimens of sewing silk made out of it in Connecticut. It

* See Appendix A.

was not instruction, therefore, that they stood most in need of, so far as it respected the raising of that article ; what they chiefly wanted to know was how to make it profitable to themselves ; for if the whole territory of the United States were covered with the most beautiful cocoons, they could be of no kind of use without the means of employing them. The first question therefore to have been examined was, what should be done with the cocoons after they were raised ?

The committee seem to have thought that nothing was so easy as to manufacture silk, if a sufficient quantity could only be obtained, and that the art could be learned by books, if their contents should be properly condensed into a small volume. On this supposition they recommended that the secretary of the treasury should be directed to prepare a *Manual*, containing the best *practical* information that could be collected on the growth and *manufacture* of silk, and to lay it before congress at their next session.

The *Manual* was prepared and laid before congress on the 11th February 1828, and six thousand copies of it were ordered to be printed. Nothing, however, has resulted from that publication. Sewing silk continues to be made in Connecticut, as it has been for seventy years before ; but no improvement appears even in the manufacture of that article, which is still disposed of in the way of barter, as it was before, but cannot command a cash price in the markets. This is not extraordinary, as sewing silk, such as is imported from Europe, cannot be made without the use of complicated machinery, which is here entirely unknown ; nor can it be made even with the use of those machines, unless it is first properly reeled from the cocoons, and made into what is called raw silk, which is also an art to be learned from those who have long practised it. A few reeling machines have been imported from Europe ; but there being no persons who knew how to