

A Fable's Thin Disguise

INDUSTRY and GENIUS
OR, THE ORIGIN of BIRMINGHAM

A FABLE

1. Context

I
O B_____! in whom, tho' rare, unite
The **Spirit of Industie**, and eke the Ray
Of **bright inventive Genius**; while I write,
Do Thous with Candour listen to the Lay,
Which to fair BIRMINGHAM the Muse shall pay;
Masking, beneath **a Fable's thin Disguise**,
The Virtues its Inhabitants display:
Those Virtues whence their Fame, their Riches rise,
Their **nice mechanic Arts, their various Merchandise**.

2. 'a stalwart blacksmith' [Raymond Mason]

II
On Avon's winding bank, with Flowers besprent,
Whilom ydwelt a thrifty, sober Swain,
On care and labour aye was he intent,
.....
.....
.....
His bags were swell'd with no dishonest Gain;
A hard rough HAND his source of Wealth reveals,
Ne idel Hour he knows, ne Weariness he feels.

III

Hight Industrie was he...

3. 'The Lady of the Arts' [Raymond Mason]

IV
...in Bower of Jessamy
And Roses, mixt with rare and curious Art,
A maiden dwelt, so fair...

.....
.....
.....
A Wit so bright, a Mind with every Part
Of Science so adorn'd...

.....

V
All in clear Conception of her Mind,
The fairest Form of Things depainted were;
And the least Shade of Difference she would find
'Twixt every Object brought into compare:
Grace still distinguish'd her Productions rare
From those of common Artists: **Her nice Hand**
Obedient was to execute, with Care
And elegance, her Fancy's least Command:
Geniae yelep'd she was, admir'd by all the Land.

4. Union of Art & Industry

VII

This happy Union soon produc'd a Race
Of docile Sons, in whom the Mother's Mind,
Her Ingenuity, and matchless Grace,
Shone with the Father's Perseverance join'd.
And now to social Amity inclined,
A Town they builden straight, hight BIRMINGHAM,
Where still their numerous Offspring dwell combin'd;
Whose useful Thewes, **and curious Arts proclaim**
To all th'admiring World, from what rare Stock they came.

Aris's Birmingham Gazette 21.01.1751

The Demise of Brummagem

Brummagem was "a large, well-built, and populous town, noted for the most ingenious artificers in boxes, buckles, buttons, and other iron and steel wares; wherein such multitudes of people are employed that they are sent all over Europe; and here is a continual noise of hammers, anvils, and files." [*English Gazetteer 1751*]

With Matthew Boulton's 'Soho Manufactory' [1761/1762] possible because of the opening up for development of the Newhall Estate [*Petition of Anne Colmore "for making more effectual a Power of Leasing" MS 3375/406582 1746/7*], Brummagem became Birmingham.

Brummagem's 'Industrie' and 'Geniae' were replaced by "Soho! – where GENIUS and the ARTS preside" [Bisset], and the "Palm of Taste" [Bisset] made Brummagem's "rare Stock" into the playthings of capital. 'Geniae' wore blue ribbons, and 'Industrie' "a working fire-engine on his head" to celebrate the coming of age of capital's son.

"At one o'clock all the persons employed in the manufactory assembled within its walls, and were marshalled into regular corps, according to their respective trades, from whence they marched, two by two, preceded by an excellent band of civil and military music. First corps – one hundred young women mostly dressed in white, with blue ribbons. A corps of fifty engineers headed by Perrins in the character of Vulcan, bearing a working fire-engine on his head. Third-six corps of Buttoneers, 50 in each with the ensigns of their respective trades. Fourth – Two corps of Artists employed in the silver-plated and ormolu manufacture. Fifth (and this appeals to me most since I can visualise it happening with some of our distinguished Past Presidents) the workmen employed in the rolling mills, carrying an ensign composed of fillets of rolled metal of various colours, forming festoons, loosely playing, and which had a pretty effect. Sixth— a corps of Moneyers carrying a glass vase, filled with coin." [*Aris's Birmingham Gazette 15.08.1791*]

NOTE: The line "Their nice mechanic Arts..." in 'Industry & Genius' sits well with:

"About this time [about 1773] that ingenious art of copying pictures in oil colours, by a mechanical process, was invented at Soho; and, under the patronage of the above proprietor, was brought to such a degree of perfection as to be taken for originals by the most experienced connoisseurs." [*Stebbing Shaw's 'The History and Antiquities of Staffordshire' 1798*]

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