Bedford, Worcester, Nottingham, and several other towns were actively employed in the weaving of cloth; but it was in the reign of Edward III. that the art became really understood in England, which had until then been content to export a great quantity of wool to the Continent, leaving to the Flemings the profit obtained by its manufacture into cloth. The following extract from the old historian Fuller will explain what took place with regard to the cloth manufacture. "At length," he says, "the king and State grew sensible of the great gain the Netherlands got by our English wool; and this good king resolved, if possible, to bring the trade to his own countrymen, who yet were ignorant of that art, knowing no more what to do with their wool than the sheep that wore it, as to any artificial or curious drapery; their best cloths being then no better than freizes, such was their want of skill in their makings. But soon after followed a great alteration, and we shall enlarge ourselves in the manner thereof.

"Unsuspected emissaries were employed to go into the Netherlands, who wrought themselves into familiarity with such Dutchmen as were absolute masters of their trade, but not masters of themselves, being either journeymen or apprentices. These bemoaned the slavishness of those poor servants, whom their masters used rather like heathens than Christians; yea, rather like horses than men: early up, and late in bed, and all day having hard work, and harder fare (a few herrings and mouldy cheese); and all to enrich the churls their masters, without any profit to themselves.

"But oh! how happy would it be for them, if they would but come over into England, bringing their mystery with them, which would provide their welcome in all places."

Thus persuaded, many Dutch servants did come. Their departure (being picked here and there) made no sensible vacuity, but their meeting together amounted to a considerable fulness. Happy the yeoman's house into which one of these Dutchmen did enter, bringing industry and wealth along with him: such as came in strangers, soon after went out bridegrooms, and returned sons-in-law, having married the daughters of their landlords, who first entertained them; yea, those yeomen in whose houses they harboured soon became gentlemen, gaining great estates to themselves, and honour to their estates."

The following fact will testify to the importance of the sheep to the peasant in the mountains of Savoy. Nearly every part of the dress of a Savoyard peasant is produced from his own little flock. He dresses the wool himself, his wife or daughter spins it, and then the yarn is woven into cloth by the village weaver. The holiday coats are generally dyed blue, but those of every-day wear are of a less expensive colour. As they have plenty of black sheep in Savoy, they mix their wool with the wool of the white sheep, and, spinning them together, produce a sort of greyish-brown cloth without the expense of dyeing. In another part of the Alps, the Grisons took their name from their custom of wearing grey cloth similarly manufactured.

For a long time Saxony had the pre-eminence in the manufacture of the finest kind of broadcloth, especially that of a blue colour. "Blue Saxony cloth" became proverbial for its excellence; but the town of Leeds and several other places in England can not only vie with any Continental manufacture, but indeed surpass the best efforts of the foreign loom.

Sheep-shearing time, when the farmer receives in the heavy fleece the reward of the care bestowed during the past twelve months upon his flock, has always been regarded, even from very ancient times, as a festive season. In one of the best country books ever written for boys, Mr. Thomas Miller, the author, speaking on this subject, says,

"Pleasant, too, was sheep-washing and sheep-shearing time: such a dreamy bleating beside the brooks and about the barns, as the sheep and lambs answered each other from the wattled fences in which they were confined to keep them separate. Rare fun was it to us to pull and drag at some great, fat, heavy sheep, and, drawing it towards the water's edge, shove it in, and perhaps ourselves with it, while the sheep-washer stood ready to souse the moving mass.