

illegal oaths were administered, riots were produced in various places, houses were plundered by persons in disguise, and a report was industriously circulated that a general rising would take place on the 1st of May, or early in that month."

After references to other places where riots had taken place, the Report continues:—"On the 4th of April riots again prevailed at Stockport; the house of Mr Goodair was set on fire, and his steam-looms were destroyed. On the following night a meeting of rioters, on a heath about two miles from the town, for the purpose, as supposed, of being trained for military exercise, was surprised and dispersed; contributions were also levied in the neighbourhood, at the houses of gentlemen and farmers."

Power-looms were in greater use in Stockport, the place where they began, than anywhere else, and besides those in use by the inventor, other firms to use them were those of Goodair, Marsland, and Hindley. The hand-weavers saw in these machines a fresh menace to their livelihood and a fresh cause of their misery. The trouble was accentuated by the authorities, who employed spies among the working-class, and these spies were naturally anxious to have something to report. There is good reason to believe that they created quite as much trouble as they helped to quell by their services as informers. A Secret Committee was formed in Stockport, and efforts were made to get other towns to start an organised campaign against machinery.

The reference in the Report quoted above refers to the attempt to burn William Radcliffe's factory in Stockport, on March 20th, between 2 and 3 a.m. On April 14th the mob attacked Mr Goodair's house and steam-looms, and broke the windows of Mr Marsland's, Mr Hindley's, and Mr Radcliffe's houses. Nobody was arrested for these disturbances, so that their history is obscure.

The rising on May 1st did not take place, and the disturbances in Lancashire and Cheshire had by this time ended. The only result was that at Chester 28 prisoners were tried, fourteen of whom received the death sentence. Only two, however, were hung, both weavers, for setting fire to houses and stealing.

An Act of Parliament was passed in July, 1812, which increased the penalties for giving or taking illegal oaths, and also gave indemnity to those who within three months confessed to having taken them. After the passing of this Act a large number of people at Stockport purged themselves of having taken illegal oaths.

In 1813 trade improved, and this prosperity continued through 1814, which was looked upon as a year of plenty by the starving weavers of 1816. A diligent weaver in 1814 could earn an average of 16s. 6d. a week, so states a petition of the Stockport weavers. The end of 1815 brought back discharged soldiers and sailors to join the overcrowded ranks of the weavers, and instead of work increasing the demand for weavers' labour fell off. Not only was trade depressed, but wheat rose steadily through the year 1816, till it reached the famine price of 103s. in December.

In the course of the agitation for the repeal of the Corn Laws many meetings were held in Stockport, and there was the famous meeting of operatives in St. Peter's Field, Manchester, on 10th March, 1817, with the object of forming an expedition to appeal personally to the Prince Regent. The people who attended the meeting were called "Blanketeers," as many of them carried blankets, which