



INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITIONS.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

WHEN the Great Exhibition of 1851 was first put in motion, its promoters knew little of the probable success of such a display—of the extent to which it would be supported by exhibitors or visited by the public. They could only be encouraged by the records of certain exhibitions which had been merely national in character and design. They were fed upon statistics, more or less reliable, which sometimes led them to hope, sometimes to despair. They had to overcome the apathy of many supporters, and to check the wild enthusiasm of others. Their administrative mechanism—with the exception of the Society of Arts—was all new, and it creaked and occasionally stuck fast, until all the parts settled down in their appointed places, and were smoothed by action and hard work. They had set themselves a difficult and novel task. They wished to attract exhibitors from the remotest corners of the earth, and to provide a palace for them—a temple dedicated to the worship of trade—without the aid of a government grant. They met with assistance where they least expected it, and opposition where they expected assistance. They had to feel their way, step by step; to send out travelling commissioners to solicit aid in the great centres of industry; to appoint committees and then teach them their duties; and to do thousands of things, unfortified by precedents and in doubt as to results. The world was all before them where to choose, and they confined themselves to no nation and to no class. Never was such a broad appeal made to the trading instincts of mankind. It seemed as if the country, conscious of its own strength, was anxious to enter into an industrial contest with the whole world. Wherever any handicraft was practised, any package shipped, any bill of exchange drawn, the challenge was sent. Some thought the appeal was too broad, and even dangerous. The doctrine of free markets, notwithstanding the recent partial abolition of the corn-tax, was not as popular then as it is now, and our tariff, instead of being pared down to thirty-five articles, including varieties,

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