ON FURS AND THE FUR-TRADE.*

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The human race differs from most of the other highly organised animals in being nearly destitute of any natural covering to the body. In the latter, the only use of the hair or feathers with which they are clothed is to afford protection against wet and cold. To man has been superadded another motive, namely, the sense of modesty or shame consequent on complete exposure of the person. It is true a very partial covering will suffice to satisfy the wants of this moral feeling, when not strengthened by the physical necessity of protection against cold; but still the feeling itself exists so generally, that the reported want of it in one or two savage tribes, in the lowest state of wretchedness and degradation, can hardly be admitted as detracting from its universality.

In those countries the inhabitants of which made the most rapid advances in civilization, by domesticating the sheep, the goat, and the camel, and betaking themselves to agricultural labour in fixed habitations, the art of obtaining from the animals just mentioned an annual supply of hair or wool, without slaughtering them, would soon be discovered, and with it the method of spinning and

* For the splendid specimens of furs exhibited on this occasion, the Society is chiefly indebted to Messrs. Poland, 21, Bow Lane; and for the stuffed specimens of fur-bearing animals, to the Zoological Society.

weaving them into cloths of various texture, better accommodated to use than skins, and more susceptible of ornament, through the skill of the dyer and of the embroiderer. But all documents of these primitive ages, if such ever existed, have perished; and it would be idle to take up your time by substituting in their place theories, which, however plausible, might be destitute of any foundation.

There is, however, one remarkable fact in relation to the subject now before us, in which all antiquity, as far as it speaks at all, concurs; namely, that the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates and of the Nile, as well as Syria from the sea-coast eastward to the great desert that parts it from Mesopotamia, were occupied by highly civilized nations, subject for the most part to absolute monarchs, and clothed in fabrics of cotton, linen, and wool; while the grassy, treeless plains extending from the Aral sea westward as far as the mouths of the Danube, along he northern border of the Caspian and Euxine seas, and he intervening chain of the Caucasus, were occupied, or ather traversed, by independent tribes of horsemen shepherds, clothed in skins and fur. Under the dreaded name of Scythians, they occasionally forced the passes of the mountains, and ravaged in temporary inroads the plains of Mesopotamia and the valleys of Syria; or, crossing the Araxes between the Aral sea and the Caspian, produced a more permanent impression on the eastern frontiers of Media and Persia. Herodotus records a conquest of the open country of Mesopotamia by the Scythians; an incursion into Scythia, in revenge of this, by Cyrus, in which that monarch lost his life; and an expedition, equally fruitless, across the Dardanelles, by Darius. But, besides these mutually hostile incursions, we may con-

clude, with great probability, that more or less of commercial intercourse took place at the common frontier of the two countries, and that the manufactures of Babylonia were exchanged for the natural productions of the Scythian plains and of the interminable forests on their northern boundary. Horses, cattle, and the finer kinds of furs, would, in all likelihood, form the chief commodities on the part of the Scythian traders. That the latter articles were known and esteemed by the nobles of Babylon, we have very satisfactory proof in the apocryphal book of Judith, and that they were applied to the same purposes that Persian carpets are at present in the same country. It appears from this book, that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Nineveh, having conquered Arphaxad, king of the Medes, sent his general, Holofernes, against the Jews. While he was besieging Bethulia, Judith came out to him, and was lodged in an apartment of his tent, "and her maid went and laid *soft skins* on the ground, which she had received of Bagoas (chamberlain of Holofernes) for her daily use, that she might sit and eat upon them."—(*Judith*, xii. 15.) This passage is the more valuable from the exceeding scarcity of notices in ancient authors respecting the use of furs as an article of state or luxury by the inhabitants of civilized countries. The Jews seem to have been precluded from the use of furs by the enactments of the Mosaic law respecting unclean animals (Levit. xi. 29); the Greeks esteemed them badges of rusticity and barbarism; and among the Romans they seem to have been held in peculiar abhorrence. The Persians, therefore, using this appellation in its largest sense, seem to have been the only civilized nation of antiquity to whom furs were an object of luxury. Ælian, who wrote about the year 110 of the Christian

era, informs us, in his book on animals (περι ζωων, xvii. 17.), that a certain species of mice are found in the district of Teredon, in Babylonia, the soft skins of which are brought by traders to Persia, where they are sewn together into garments remarkable for their warmth. We have nothing to enable us to identify the species of animal here mentioned; but it might very well have been some small creature of the weasel kind, for both Greek and Roman writers were accustomed to call all such by the general name of mouse. Zonaras writes, that Sapor, king of Persia, possessed a tent, made at Babylon, in party-work of different colours, of the skins of animals natives of that country (εκ Βαζυλωνος δερμασιν εγχωριοις ποικιλωτερον ειργασμενη).

Having thus shewn that Babylon had by this time become a mart for furs, where they were made up into pelisses and the linings of tents, I shall now, by the citation of a few authorities, endeavour to shew you the feelings of the Romans with regard to the use of furs.

The poet Ovid, after having spent the flower of his age in the license and luxury of the metropolis of the empire, was banished by Augustus to the frontier fortress of Tomi, on the south shore of the principal mouth of the Danube. Here he passed the last four or five years of his life, occupying and consoling his leisure in the composition of nine books of epistles in verse to his friends in Rome, in which are many striking descriptions of the wild country and rude climate, and of the wilder and ruder tribes of Scythian marauders by whom it was vexed.* During the summer, the wide stream of the river defended the small fortress and its scanty garrison

* Tristia, iii. Eleg. 10; v. Eleg. 7 and 10.

from annoyance; but early in the winter, not only the river but the sea itself to a considerable distance is frozen. Bands of savage barbarians on horseback, or mounted on their creaking waggons drawn by oxen, are then seen crossing the ice. As they approach, you distinguish their long loose trousers; the upper part of their bodies, except the face, buried in fur, their beards and disordered hair matted with ice: the whole open country becomes their prey; the farm-houses are set fire to, the cattle driven off, the people massacred, except the young and robust, who, with their hands tied behind them, are goaded to keep pace with the rapid motions of these mounted savages. As they retire, they surround the petty fortress, and discharge into it, as much from contempt as enmity, a shower of poisoned arrows. Associated with such objects of dread and disgust, no wonder that a hairy cloak appeared to the affrighted poet and his friends at Rome as the very opposite to luxury and civility.

Tacitus, in his interesting treatise on the manners of the Germans, written in the reign of Trajan, having occasion to describe the Fenni, one of the most barbarous and distant tribes, characterizes them in terms of energetic contempt, very inadequately represented by the following translation.* "The Fenni lead the life almost of wild beasts, in a state of foul penury, without arms, horses, or homes: their food is the wild herb, their clothing skins, their resting-place the ground."

The poet Claudian flourished in the reign of Honorius, about the year 390. At this time considerable intercourse, of a hostile or friendly kind, took place between

* Fennis mira feritas, fœda paupertas; non arma, non equi, non penates; victui herba, *vestitui pelles*, cubile humus.—*Germania*, 46.

the Scythian or Sarmatic tribes north of the Danube, and the subjects and government of the Constantinopolitan empire. We meet, therefore, with frequent mention of these tribes in the poems of this writer, which are chiefly panegyrics and satires composed on public occasions. In one of them* he describes a victory obtained over an army of Getæ that had penetrated into the passes of Greece. The furred youth, says he, are mown down, their waggons swim in gore:

Plaustra cruore natant, metitur *pellita* juventus.

In another poem† he speaks of the furred assembly of the Getic chiefs, "*pellita* Getarum curia;" and lastly, in his celebrated satire against Rufinus,‡ the prime minister of Honorius, and the political enemy of his patron Stilicho, after mentioning the Getic body-guard of Rufinus, he discharges all his indignation upon him for assuming the furred dress of these barbarians ("revocat fulvas in pectore *pelles*"), and even venturing to appear on the seat of justice wrapped in fur ("mœrent captivæ *pellito* judice leges"). These passages are interesting on several accounts. They shew us, in the first place, that the manners and dress of the Scythian tribes had undergone no material change for many centuries; in the second place, that the inhabitants of Constantinople had completely adopted the feelings of the Romans with respect to furs being the characteristic outward and visible sign of barbarism; and thirdly, that a man of high rank, either as a compliment to his Scythian guard, or from some motive of singularity or ostentation, had ventured to shew himself to the public, even on the seat of justice, in robes of fur.

* De IV. Cons. Honorii, 466.
† De Bello Get. 481.
‡ In Rufinum, ii. 82.

The passage I have already quoted from Tacitus shews that one of the most remote of the German tribes used the skins of animals as their ordinary clothing; and a still more striking passage, which I shall have occasion to cite by and by from the same author, shews that this custom was common to all those people. Sidonius says the same thing also of the Burgundians. Thus the whole northern and eastern frontier of the Roman empire was covered by nations of warlike barbarians clothed in furs, except where long intercourse with the Roman garrisons had introduced, in some degree, the use of cloth, with other commencements of civilization.

In the 6th century, the defensive resistance of the divided and enervated Romans availed no longer; the barriers of the Danube, the Rhine, and the Rhætian Alps, were forced by the nations of Germany and Sarmatia, in search of plunder or of permanent settlements. Italy, in the reign of Justinian, received for a time a Gothic king, and the confederation of the Franks established themselves in Gaul. The intruders, while enjoying the luxury and conveniences of the countries which they had conquered, retained, however, some of their barbaric tastes, and among others their fondness for furs, though the milder climate to which they had transferred themselves, no longer rendered this species of clothing an article of absolute necessity. While, therefore, they cast aside the coarser skins, and replaced them by the more convenient and agreeable fabrics of Italian and Gallic looms, they sought out the more eagerly for the rarer, richer, and more costly furs, as well for the purpose of ostentatious luxury, as of the warmth which they afforded. Jornandes, who was secretary to the Gothic kings of Italy, and wrote his history of the Goths about the year

552, in speaking of the Suethans or Swedes, describes them as a race who live hardly, but are clothed most richly in furs of a becoming blackness. These are the people, adds he, who transmit, by commerce, through many intervening nations, the skins of sables for the use of the Romans.*

In the rapid sketch that has now been given, I have endeavoured to convey a clear idea of the country which in all ages has been inhabited by people characterised by wearing fur. This material of dress was necessarily imposed on them, while occupying their native plains, by the severe cold of the climate; but when they had established themselves in the milder countries of southern Europe, the habit, at first superinduced by a natural want, was retained, as ministering to luxury and the desire of personal distinction. At the same time, and, indeed, considerably previous, a similar taste had been excited, through the medium of commerce, among the nobles of Persia, many of whom were probably of Scythian or Tartar extraction.

A demand for furs having thus been caused in the Roman empire, chiefly indeed in the western division of it, our next inquiry is into the sources from which this demand was supplied.

We know from Jornandes, already cited, that sable-skins were obtained from Scandinavia and the shores of the Baltic. We also know, from various Greek writers of the middle ages, that there existed a considerable trade in furs from the mountainous countries whence

* Gens Suethans—hi sunt qui in usus Romanorum sapphirinas pelles, commercio interveniente per alias innumeras gentes, transmittunt, famosi pellium decorâ nigritudine. Hi cùm inopes vivunt, ditissimè vestiuntur.—*De Reb. Get.* cap. iii.

flow the Tigris and Euphrates, and which block up the space between the Euxine and Caspian seas. The consumption of Mesopotamia and Persia appears not to have been sufficient to absorb the supply; and large quantities of small furs, under the name of skins of Pontic or Babylonian mice, were obtained through the Greek commercial establishments in the Crimea, or the merchants of Cappadocia. Of these, the principal and the only one which can be identified is the ermine. Julius Pollux informs us, that a particular kind of robe was called Armenian, as being made of the skins of mice caught in that country; and the terms Pontic, Babylonian, and Armenian mice, are used so indifferently by the writers of that age, as to induce some antiquaries, particularly M. Du Cange, in his very interesting memoir on Coats of Arms, printed in the *Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions, &c.*, to suppose that the ermine is the only animal meant by these various expressions. The more ancient writers who mention this creature, call it *Hermelin;* now, this is the Italian adjective *Armellino,* Armenian, scarcely at all changed: whence I think we may fairly conclude, not only that the ermine derives its name from Armenia, but that by far the greater part of the supply required for the princes and nobles of western Europe in the middle ages, was imported from that country by the merchants of Italy. I may here remark, that sables and ermines were sometimes confounded together by the old writers; a mistake which could never occur with regard to the animals themselves, one being nearly black, and the other snow white. It has probably arisen from this: The Tartar name of the ermine, according to Marco Polo, (Purchas, iii. 86—160), is *zibelline,* and that of the sable is *zamboline;* and these similar words may easily be con-

founded by ignorant or careless writers, or by the modern reader who recognises the ermine only by its common name. Thus, in one French metrical romance we find the expression,

Si ot vestu un hermin engolé;

meaning ermine dyed red.* In another French poet of the same age, we have the words,

chappes fourrées
De sobelines engoulées,

in which the author obviously means ermine, it being impossible to dye sable of a red colour.

The ermine is a small animal, and therefore the number of such skins employed to line the full robes and mantles of princes and nobles, when furs were in their highest fashion and esteem, may readily be conceived, as well as the enormous expense attached to the indulgence of this taste. In the account of Stephen de la Fontaine, silversmith and master of the robes to Louis IX. of France in 1251, is the following entry: "For three pieces and a half of velvet in grain, to make a surcoat, a dress-mantle, and a hat, lined with ermines for the king against the feast of the star. For the said surcoat a fur lining of 346 ermines, for the sleeves and wristbands 60, for the frock 336." In all, 742 ermines for a single dress.

The four noble furs of those ages were the sable, the ermine, the vair, and the gris. The three former of these represented the three fur colours admitted into their armorial bearings. Every one at all acquainted with heraldry knows that ermine is represented by a white

* To the same effect St. Bernard says, in his forty-second epistle, "Horreant et rubricatas murium pelliculas, quas Gulas vocant, manibus circumdare sacratis."

ground with black somewhat lengthened spots. These were intended to designate the black-tipped tails of the animal, the skins being sewn together either with the tails on, or the tails were first cut off, and afterwards sewn in rows upon the skins, sometimes alone, sometimes with a little wad of black lambskin on each side of the tail. This arrangement is so obvious, I may say so natural, that it would not have been worth a remark in this place, except for its connexion with the science of heraldry.

The vair was a squirrel,* obtained probably at that time, as it is at present, from the southern provinces of Russia. It has a white belly, and a blue or rather dove-coloured back, on which latter account its colour when blazoned was azure. When these skins, entire, or at least only reduced to square pieces (called in ancient heraldry *pannes*), were sewn together, the result was a varied surface of bluish gray and white in alternate somewhat bell-shaped figures; but as the white of the squirrel's belly is far inferior to that of the ermine, it was the custom, for the more sumptuous kind of garments, to use only the back of the squirrel, and to form the alternate white figures of ermine. This custom of spotting, mixing, and diversifying furs, is supposed by M. Du Cange and others to be of eastern origin; and the tent of Sapor, already mentioned, has been cited as the earliest instance of it, and particularly for that special mode of intermixing the furs called vair. Tacitus, however, describes the same fashion of variegating furs to have been in use among the German tribes long before the existence of Sapor or his tent. His words are these:† — "They wear also the skins of

* Vair is at present the provincial name for a squirrel in Devonshire.— See Marshall's *Rural Econ. West of England*, vol. i. p. 326.

† Gerunt et ferarum pelles, proximi ripæ, negligenter; ulteriores,

wild beasts more negligently on the Roman borders, but more exquisitely prepared by those tribes who, on account of their distance, are ignorant of the refinements introduced by commerce. For this purpose they select the skins of particular animals, and vary them with spots, or with the skins of marine animals,* that inhabit the unknown northern ocean."

Respecting the gris, heraldic antiquaries seem much in doubt. Some suppose it to be only the blue or gray back of the same squirrel, as has just been described by the name of vair. This, however, is not very probable, especially as the common French name of the North American gray squirrel is *petit gris*, little gris, although in size it is equal to the vair. It most probably is the animal called *calaber*, or gray squirrel, in the list of the principal Russian furs drawn up by Dr. Giles Fletcher, embassador to the Czar from Queen Elizabeth.

Charlemagne, who appears to have been a man of plain taste in dress, was accustomed to wear in winter a cloak of otter-skins,† according to Eguinard; but, according to Philip Mouskes, who wrote a metrical life of Charlemagne, he wore a surcoat with sleeves furred with vair and fox.

" A tousjours en iveir si ot
A mances un nouviel surcot,
Fourré de vair et de goupis
Pour garder son cors et son pis.

Octher, a Norwegian chief, who gave an account to

exquisitius, ut quibus nullus per commercia cultus. Eligunt feras, et detracta velamina spargunt maculis pellibusque belluarum quas exterior oceanus atque ignotum mare gignit.—*German.* xvii.

* Probably seals.

† Fiber et lutra, utrumque aquaticum, utrique mollior plumâ pilus.—*Plin. Hist. Nat.* viii. 47.

our Alfred, about the year 890, of his discoveries towards the North Cape, informs us that the tribute paid by the Fynnes to the Biarmes or Sweedes was skins of marterns, reindeers, and bears.—*Hakluyt.*

The martern, martin, or lette, as it is sometimes called, has continued in great esteem from the earliest to the present times. There are two species of it, the common and the pine martin, the fur of the latter of which is by far the best; and some of the darker varieties are not unfrequently mistaken for sable. It has been, indeed, supposed that the real sable was hardly known in the middle ages; and we are certain that some of the writers of this period use the word martin or martern as synonymous with sable.* Thus, Adam of Bremen, speaking of the passion for rich furs, says, "Ad marturinam vestem anhelamus quasi ad summam beatitudinem;" we are as anxious to obtain a garment of marterns as the joys of heaven. Where the word must evidently imply a fur of the finest quality.

The Anglo-Saxons had the same taste for furs as the ether nations of Germanic origin; but the peltry trade of the Italian merchants seems not to have reached the remote island of Britain, whose inhabitants were confined to their native produce, together with probably a few of the richer kinds brought by the Northmen, and other semi-piratical traders from the Baltic: accordingly the list of Anglo-Saxon furs includes little more than sables, beavers, foxes, cats, and lambs.

The era of the crusades appears to have been the time when the luxury of furs attained its height in western

* Si est le champ fait de brodure
De fine *marte sabeline.*—*Jacques Millet.*

Europe; and sumptuary laws issued from time to time, from the sovereigns of France and England, and the princes of Italy, for the double purpose of restraining the general extravagance in this article of expense, and of confining the use of the most esteemed furs to the higher ranks of society. In proof of this we may cite the sumptuary laws of Charlemagne and Philip the Fair, as well as three acts of the English parliament; one passed in the year 1158, in the reign of Henry II., prohibiting altogether, on the plea of preparation for an expedition to the Holy Land, the use of sable, vair, or gris; and two others, in 1334 and 1363, prohibiting any one from the use of furs whose income was less than 100*l.* a-year. These attest at once the extent of the fashion, and the vain attempt to control or regulate it by law. Not only the nobility, clergy, and gentry, but the merchants and opulent burghers, indulged in the fashionable luxury. The ermine was appropriated with considerable strictness to the order of nobility and knighthood; but the gris, or gray squirrel, the martern, and the minever, were also worn by magistrates and officers of corporations, by rich citizens and their wives. The warriors of the first crusade in 1097, led by Godfrey of Bouillon, passed through Constantinople in their way to the Holy Land, and displayed all their sumptuousness in an interview with the then Emperor Alexius Comnenus. Albert, canon of Aix-la-Chapelle, in his account of this interview, describes the splendid vestments of purple, of cloth of gold, of ermine, martern, gris, and vair, which they exhibited on this occasion, being such, says he, as are principally worn by the nobles of France.* Whence we may

* In splendore et ornatu pretiosarum vestium, tam ex ostro quam aurifrigio et in niveo opere harmellino, et ex mardrino, grisioque et vario, quibus Gallorum principes præcipuè utuntur.—*Albert, Aq.* JJ. 16.

conclude, that the four furs above enumerated still bore the highest estimation, and that the sable was considered rather as a rich variety of the martern than a distinct species. The minever at this time begins to make its appearance in the list of furs: it is also called laset, and is the same animal which in later times has been known by the name of mink, a Russian animal of the weazel kind, smaller than the martern, and amphibious, like the otter. This fur continued long a very fashionable edging of robes worn by gentlemen, and in general by the richer of the middle classes of society.

Furs, tournaments, and heraldry, which have a close connexion with each other, lasted in high glory for about three centuries, and then began to decline together. In proportion as fire-arms were introduced, the use of armour ceased. It now became absurd for mailed knights, resplendent in their coats of arms, to shew themselves in the front of battle a conspicuous mark for shot; and the stern compulsion of an improved system of military discipline replaced the men-at-arms and other retainers of the feudal chiefs by hired soldiers, tore down their patrimonial banners, and displayed instead the national flag. Improvements in domestic accommodation attached people more and more to their homes and to in-door social enjoyments. The use of silk* obtained an ascendency over that of fur, as being an article which admitted of being manufactured into an infinite variety of forms and fabrics, and thus better able to accommodate itself to the capricious vagaries of fashion than furs, which, though rich, are always heavy, literally as well as metaphorically; and the colours of which, though harmonious, are wholly incapable of rivalling the brilliant rainbow tints of the dyer.

* Silken velvet and plush were perhaps first invented as an imitation of fur in a richer material.

England, except perhaps in extremely remote times, never produced furs sufficient for its own consumption.* Two commercial events, however, have at different times made London one of the centres of the fur-trade. The first of these was the discovery by Richard Chancellour, in 1553, of the passage by sea to the northern coast of European Russia, and especially that great gulf commonly called the White Sea, at the bottom of which Archangel was afterwards built. Russia was at that time a barbarous country, moderately populous, pressed on the one hand by the Poles, and on the other by the Tartars, and bounded on the east by the Uralian mountains. Its sovereigns, at that time content with the title of Tsar, or duke, reigned at Moscow. The arrival of Chancellour was considered as an important event. The duke invited him to his capital, patronized him, and allowed the company of merchants, by whom he was sent out, to establish two or three trading posts on the White Sea, to have a warehouse at Moscow, and to send out from thence trading parties to the shores of the Caspian and into Persia. Manufactures of silk and of woollen formed the chief exports, and among the imports were furs. Chancellour himself wrote a very interesting though brief account of the country; from which, and from the other official letters of the agents of the company, I have taken such passages as

* Imports into Chester from Ireland in 1430:—

Hides and fish, salmon, hake, herringe,
Irish wooll, and linnen cloth, faldinge;
And *marterns good* be her marchandie,
Hertes' hides and other of venerie.
Skinnes of otter, squirrel, and *Irish hare*,
Of sheepe, lambe, and *foxe*, is her chaffare,
Felles of kiddes and *conies* great plentie.—*Hakluyt*, i. 199.

bear on the subject of our present evening's illustration. From the country stretching from the river Dwina, which runs into the White Sea, northward and westward to the Uralian mountains, were procured sables, marterns, beavers, foxes white, black, and red, minks, ermine, minever, graies, and wolverings; the finest sables and black foxes being procured by tribute from the Samoeds, who live at the mouth of the Oby. Siberia was not yet conquered by the Russians; but from several parts of that extensive country were obtained by barter a considerable number of valuable furs.

Dr. Giles Fletcher, embassador to the Tsar of Russia in 1588, also describes the fur-trade of Russia in the following words:—"Their chief furs are these, black fox, sables, luzernes, dun fox, martrones, gurnestalles or armins, lasets or minever, beaver, wolverin, the skin of a great water-rat that smelleth naturally like musk, calaber or gray squirrel, red squirrel, red and white fox. Beside the quantity spent in the country, there are transported out of the country, by the merchants of Bucharia, Turkey, Persia, Georgia, Armenia, and some part of Christendom, to the value of 4 or 500,000 rubles (the ruble at that time being equal to about 2 oz. of silver). The best sable groweth in the country of Pechora, Momgosorskoi, and Obdorskoi, the worser sort in Siberia and Perm: the black fox and red come out of Siberia; white and dun fox, white wolf, wolverin, and white bear, from Pechora; the best martrons from Siberia, Codam-Morum, Perm, and Cazan; lysernes, minever, and armin, are best out of Galets and Ouglits: the beaver of best sort breedeth by Cola." Of these, the sable undoubtedly held the first rank; for Anthony Jenkinson, one of the agents of the company, having seen the tsar's wardrobe, writes, that

" the crown was lined with a fair black sable worth forty rubles, and his gowns and garments were of rich tissue and cloth of gold, and all furred with very black sables," no other fur being mentioned. Next in rank to the sable were reckoned the lyserne and black fox : what the former of these animals was, I have not been able to find out, but it was evidently a valuable fur; as the presents from the tsar to Queen Mary,* and afterwards to Queen Elizabeth, consisted entirely of sables and lysernes, with some large and beautiful skins not particularised. Foxes, black, white, and russet, martrons, minevers, ermines, and sables, formed the chief furs purchased by the company; and it appears that gray squirrels' and some other smaller furs were imported as private ventures by their servants. But the trade, though it flourished for a time, soon began to decline. A proclamation from the queen † prohibited in England the wearing of any except native furs, and although this, like former proclamations and acts of parliament with the same object, would in vain have opposed the omnipotence of fashion, the taste for furs seems nearly to have become extinct, the prices obtained by the company were in many cases less than they had given for the skins in Russia, and the trade was abandoned.

Some years afterwards, the discoveries in North America, of the river St. Lawrence by the French, and

* Gifts sent in 1656 to Queen Mary by the Tsar of Russia :—

6 timber (240) of sables, rich in colour and hair.
20 entire sables.
30 lusarnes.
6 large and great skins very rich and rare.—*Hakluyt*, vol. i.

† Make not any great provision of any rich furs, except principal sables and lettes; for now there is a proclamation, that no furs shall be worn here but such as is grown here within the realm.—*Letter of the Moscovia Company to their Agents*, 1560.

of Hudson's Bay by the English navigator whose name it bears, opened to the two great maritime nations of Europe a new and almost immeasurable extent of country abounding in fur-bearing animals. The French were the first to avail themselves of this advantage. A powerful colony was settled in Lower Canada, and the possession of water-carriage, by the St. Lawrence and its tributary streams and sea-like lakes, gave them ready access to some of the best fur-ground in that continent; of this they actively and adroitly availed themselves, conciliating the good-will and attachment of the savage tribes, by condescending, with less reluctance than any other European nation, to form domestic relations with them, and to adopt their manners.

The quantity of furs obtained annually by the French during their possession of Canada, was very great; being derived not only from the St. Lawrence, but from the upper part of the Mississippi, on the banks of which river they had fixed forts and trading stations.

The Hudson's Bay Company, incorporated in 1670, was only a private association of a few adventurers, and therefore, independently of the disadvantages of its local situation, possessing neither the capital nor enterprise of the French colony. Its importation of furs, though very considerable, never equalled that of the latter. The conquest of Canada in 1762, suspended for a few years the fur-trade of that province. It recommenced in 1766, chiefly under the management of Scotch traders; but again declined, partly from the rivalry of the Hudson's Bay Company. Obstructed in their endeavours to open a fur-trade with the tribes of native Indians in the country north of Canada, the commercial enterprise of that colony sought out a field for its exertions in the

western wilderness. In 1775, a trader of the name of Jos. Frobisher penetrated to the neighbourhood of Lake Winipeg, which, with other lakes and rivers, fill up the space between Lake Superior and Mackenzie's River. From this country vast quantities of very valuable furs were obtained, to which were also added a considerable number, by intercepting in part the course of the Indian trade with Fort Churchill, one of the stations of the Hudson's Bay Company. A few years after, however, the small-pox broke out among the natives, and sweeping away the greater part of the population, and deterring the remainder from intercourse with Europeans, nearly put an end to the trade in this quarter. Another association was formed in Canada in 1783, calling themselves the North-west Company, which appears to have been a consolidation of the Scotch and other interests, for the purpose of exploring the country which still remained between Lake Winipeg and the Rocky Mountains. Mackenzie was one of the agents employed on this occasion, and his enterprise and perseverance were rewarded by the discovery of the large river which bears his name, and which, with a course in general parallel to that of the Copper-mine River, which had already been explored by Hearne, a servant of the Hudson's Bay Company, empties itself, also like that river, into the Frozen Sea, which forms the northern boundary of the American continent. Jealousies, squabbles, and occasional scuffles between the agents of the two companies, still took place, to their mutual loss; at length an accommodation was brought about, and the furs obtained by the Canadian traders are now disposed of at the annual sales of the Hudson's Bay Company.

After the United States had achieved their independ-

ence, the fur-traders of that country spread themselves along the dubious N.W. line of frontier which separates the territory of the United States from that of the British nation; and the presidency of Jefferson was illustrated by the expedition of Lewis and Clark, who traced up the great Missouri to its principal sources in the Rocky Mountains, discovered on their western slope the feeders of another great river, which they traced to its junction with the sea on the western coast, and to which they gave the name of the Columbia. By both these channels furs found their way to New York; and the most advantageous mode of disposing of a great part of them has been found to consign them to London, in which city is thus concentrated nearly the whole of the North American fur-trade.

While the fur-bearing animals were thus attracting the commercial enterprise of the French and British, from the eastern to the western shore of North America, the same motive and the same results were exciting and rewarding the perseverance of the Russians, and drawing them continually forwards from the Ural Mountains, the western boundary of northern Asia, to the sea of Kamtschatka, which washes its eastern shore. The conquest of Siberia, and its annexation to the Russian empire, took place in 1640, thirty years before the incorporation of the Hudson's Bay Company. The Kuril and Aleutian isles, in the sea that divides Asia from North America, were discovered and taken possession of in 1745, by which the fur of the sea-otter was first introduced into commerce, and which, while rare, obtained incredible prices in the Chinese market. In 1780 the fur-bearing animals had already become scarce in Siberia, while the demand continued undiminished in the Asiatic markets: this led to new exertions;

and when Cook, in the course of his exploratory circumnavigation, was engaged in surveying the western coast of America north of Nootka, he found that the Russians had already, on some points, opened an intercourse for furs with the inhabitants. The sea-otters obtained by the crews of his ships, sold in Kamtschatka, for the Chinese market, for prices which astonished them, and which gave birth soon after to British and American expeditions to the same quarter, and even excited some signs of spirit in the sluggishness of the Spaniards of Monterey and California. The Russians, however, being nearest and in force, and stimulated by commercial jealousy and national ambition, established a colony on the American coast, and now possess the north-western extremity of that continent. Thus the fur-traders of different nations, the one setting out from the western boundary of Asia, and the others from the eastern boundary of America, have traversed these two great continents, and now find themselves face to face on the western shores of America. No new fur-ground remains to be explored; and although the supplies of this commodity may not, for some years, diminish in any very sensible degree, yet it is evident that the summit of the trade has been reached, and perhaps overpassed.

The fur-trade of England is both an importing and exporting one. The imports for our own consumption are blue and white fox from Norway and Iceland, martern and fitch from Germany and France, bears silver and gray, sables, ermines, squirrels, hares, and lambskins,* from Russia; seals from the southern ocean, and chinchilla from South America.

* Of which there are the four following varieties:—black, wavy, from Astracan; black, curly, from the Ukrain; gray, curly, from the Crimea; gray, knotty, from Persia.

The imports, partly for home consumption and partly for re-exportation, are the furs of North America. Several of the smaller animals which were imported from Canada while that colony was in possession of the French, and which formed the *menu pelleterie* of the traders, are found to be no longer worth the trouble and expense of collecting: these were chiefly ermine and squirrel, but considerably inferior in quality to similar skins from Russia. The American furs which are at present brought to London are:

Bears of several species and colours.

The black are used for hammer-cloths, for grenadiers' caps, and other military equipments. (In the United States for coverings of sleighs.)

The russet, or Isabella bear, for muffs.

The silver, or gray.

The white, or Polar bear, for rugs.

Raccoon.

A coarse fur, few of which are brought, and are re-exported to Germany and Poland.

Badger.

Also a coarse fur, exported to the continent.

Wolverine, or quicquehatch.

Also exported to the continent.

Vison, or mink.

Very similar to the Russian mink, but the fur of inferior quality. It is used here, but more on the continent, for trimmings and muffs.

Martin, or martern, or pine martin.

A fur of very general use, here for muffs and trimmings, abroad for the same purposes, and for almost all the uses to which the better kinds of furs are applied. The darkest coloured, from the rocky and woody district of the Nipigon, are the best, and go popularly by the name of sable; but the true sable is not a native of America. The whole-

sale price of skins of first quality is about twenty shillings a-piece.

Peckan, or fisher.

In quality inferior to the mink and pine martin, but twice the size of this latter, and exported to the continent.

Otter.

A warm, rich, and useful skin, consisting of a fine, waved, and shining down, about as fine as beaver-wool, mixed with long coarse hair. Chiefly exported.

Sea-otter.

An exceedingly close, fine fur, jet black in winter, when it is in perfection, exceedingly soft with a silken gloss, interspersed with shining silvery hairs, used a little in England, but chiefly sent to Russia and China. Fine skins even now fetch, at first hand, from 10*l.* to 15*l.* The fur of the young animal is a beautiful brown, like fine velvet, and covered with coarse white hair.

Wolf.

Of this there are several species and varieties, larger than the European, and distinguished in the trade by their colours, gray, white, and black. They are chiefly exported.

Fox.

Of this, also, there are many kinds. The white, or Arctic fox, is now coming a little into use here for muffs and tippets; it is a fine fur, and has nothing of the rank smell of other species of fox.

The silver, or black, and the cross-fox,* are chiefly sent to Russia. The decided taste in Russia is for dark-coloured furs: hence those which are at the same time black and fine are the most costly. The black fox of America, though a far more valuable fur than that of any other American fox, is not comparable to the Russian, the skins of which are popularly said to be

* The cross-fox has a thick long fur, mottled black and white dashed with rust-colour, with certain cruciform markings on the shoulders.

worth their weight in gold, and have actually been sold for 300 or 400 roubles a-piece.

The red fox, a much larger and fuller fur than the European fox, and of a bright rust-colour. It is used here for muffs and trimmings, and a considerable demand exists for them in Greece.

Lynx—wild cat of the traders.

This is a long hoary fur, of no great beauty in its natural state, but, when dyed, meets with a ready sale under the name of *lustered lynx*.

Beaver and musk-rat.

In this country used only by the hatters, but worn abroad as a fur.

Hare and rabbit.

Used chiefly by the hatters, and for common trimmings, &c.

One fur, and one only, is peculiar to England, namely the silver-tipped rabbit of Lincolnshire. This fur is a dark or lighter gray, mixed with longer hairs tipped with white. It is little used in this country, but is readily purchased abroad, especially in Russia and China. In assorting it for these markets, it is, however, necessary to be careful with respect to the colour, for while the Russian will eagerly purchase the dark-coloured skins, he makes no account of the gray ones. The Chinese are equally fastidious, but their taste happens to be the reverse of the Russian. Thus the fur-merchant, to dispose of his commodities to the best advantage, must be familiar with the caprices of fashion on the other side of the globe; I say the caprices, because a few years ago none but dark skins were saleable in China.

The great sales of furs by the Hudson's Bay Company and other parties take place in the month of March, and are attended by many foreign merchants, who select what

suit their purposes, and consign them to Leipsig: here they are disposed of during the great fair in that city, and are hence distributed to all parts of the continent. The chief demand and consumption of furs is now among the nations of Slavonian and Tartar extraction, either inhabiting their native seats, or retaining their original love of furred clothing though settled in countries where the physical necessity for their use no longer exists. Such are the Poles, the Russians, the Chinese, the Persians, the Turks; even under the burning sun of Syria and Egypt, the Bucharians, and the various tribes of independent Tartars. Among the nations of Gothic origin occupying the middle and western parts of Europe, furs are chiefly used in common dress by women and soldiers, and officially by magistrates; from the ermine robe of the sovereign, to the gown of the common councilman trimmed with fitch or martern.

The American furs come in their raw state, that is, merely dried; they are dressed here by treading them with refuse butter, which makes the skin supple and not liable to break or tear: but as this cannot be done without also greasing the hairs, it is necessary, after treading, to turn them for some time in a revolving barrel set on the inside with spikes, and containing chalk, gypsum, or saw-dust, which absorbs the superfluous grease.