



FUR AND THE FUR-TRADE. I.



"VOYAGEURS DES BOIS,"—CANADIAN FUR-HUNTERS.

At the present season of the year, when fur forms so beautiful and agreeable an addition to our customary out-door attire, a succinct account of the Fur-Trade may be acceptable to our readers. It contains so many lively and exciting details that while reading the various authorities necessary to our brief compilation, we have been tempted to pause, under the impression that the details belonged rather to fiction than to truth. That any set of men, accustomed to the usages of society, more or less civilized, should voluntarily abandon the comforts derived therefrom, and wander through wildernesses and sterile plains, the companions of wild beasts, or of men almost equally wild, does indeed seem strange. Yet it is not the less true. At this present moment there are many Englishmen, and a still greater number of Scotchmen, living in the remotest wilds of North America; hundreds, nay even thousands of miles distant from any regular town. They are not driven thither by disgrace; they are not influenced by that love of glory and national honour which excite the soldier or the sailor; they do not, like Humboldt and Bonpland, Audubon and Richardson, contend with hardships for the sake of extending the bounds of scientific knowledge; they are actuated by the same feelings as the merchant and the trader; they work for worldly wealth. The persons here alluded to are the agents and clerks of the fur-companies, and their office is to collect from the Indian fur-hunters the skins of fur-bearing animals, many of which being killed at a distance of three thousand miles from the regular European towns, the hunters could not forward the skins were it not that the agents of the companies are stationed at forts or posts, established at various parts of the interior of the continent. A system of barter is thus set on foot, the European agent giving blankets, guns, and other articles, in exchange for furs, the dealings being often conducted more particularly by

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a rude class of men, who are half Indian, half European. The details of this system are full of that which, were they not undeniably true, we should term romance; and it is our purpose to present a view of the subject in this and a succeeding Supplement. But in order to give more completeness to our object, we shall rapidly review the usages of society, in respect of wearing fur-dresses, usages which have given rise to the mode of life hinted at above.

SECTION I.

USE OF FURS FOR GARMENTS. VARIETIES OF FURS.

RESPECTING the first use of furs for clothing, Beckmann says:—"Men first ventured on the cruelty of killing animals, in order that they might devour them as food, and use the skins to shelter themselves from the severity of the weather. At first these skins were used raw, without any preparation, and many nations did not till a late period arrive at the art of rendering them softer and more pliable, durable, and convenient. As long as mankind traded only for necessaries, and paid no attention to ornament, they turned the hairy side towards the body, but as the art of dressing skins was not then understood, the flesh side must have given to this kind of clothing, when the manners of the people began to be more refined, an appearance which could not fail of exciting disgust: to prevent which the Ozolæ inverted the skins, and wore the hair outwards." From the time when, for appearance-sake, the hairy side of a furred skin was worn externally, may be dated; the use of furs in the sense which we now apply to the term. The custom was not universal, however, even in Imperial Rome, for Juvenal, when speaking of a miserly person, says,— "To guard himself against the cold, he does not wear the costly woollen clothing of the luxurious Romans, but the

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