

OUR BEAUTIFUL FURS, AND WHERE THEY COME FROM.

PART I.

FROM many a chat I have had with girls concerning the beautiful furs they were wearing, and from the errors generally exhibited in such matters, I thought of writing these little articles, and I trust they may be of some help.

Many of the young people I have conversed with never appear to have given a thought to the enormous amount of slaughter annually required, and the consequent great privation to the sable hunters, to procure them those handsome and warm coverings our girls enjoy so much.

Now a sable skin is of no value except caught in winter, which means long and exhausting tracks, through many inches of snow and deep snow-drifts. The fur when caught in early spring is valueless; although the animal may still be retaining his winter coat, the skin thus procured, when dressed, would shed all its hair. An ordinary skin is considered to be worth from £1 to £6; but if it should be of the best quality it will fetch from £12 to £15. It takes two skins to make a lady's fashionable tie, and you can have a one skin tie which is very pretty; perhaps a hint or two will be useful in the selection of a sable fur if you buy one. Firstly, see that the skin exhibits a watering appearance, and above all look for whitish hairs sparsely scattered all over the fur; they are not very observable, so you require to examine the fur well, because this is an important matter, as a dyed fur of any other animal could not display these sparse hairs. So if a fur be ever so like in colour, if it does not possess this peculiarity it is not sable.

We have to thank our sable hunters also for our nice water-colour and oil brushes.

Now it takes twelve sables to make one of those beautiful Victoria fur boas with four tails, and a cape three or four times the quantity, and will cost at a furrier's from £25 to £50 15s.; you can get a good boa for £7 7s.; three skins will go to one muff, placing the largest and best in the middle.

THE SKUNK (*white-backed*).

ALTHOUGH this is not so expensive a fur, great dexterity is required in procuring the animal, for it has to be killed at one stroke before it has time to defend itself in its natural way, as, like most of this genera, when irritated it emits an unpleasant odour, so much so that the skin would be destroyed, and everything it comes in contact with. The white-backed skunk, as it is more rare, is consequently more valued. Although a nocturnal animal, according to Darwin, conscious of its powers, it roams by day about the open plains, and fears neither dog nor man. Skunk muffs are much worn at the present day; it takes about four animals to an ordinary muff, and a good collarette three skins, so you see what a quantity of little animals one lady can wear about her.

THE STOAT OR ERMINE.

It is generally called ermine in its winter dress and is a valued fur. Ladies now wear the skin in the shape of an opera or travelling hood. The animal changes its colour from brown to white in the autumn, the tip of its tail only retaining its colour; but in the more northern parts of its habitat, the stoat invariably assumes the well-known white winter dress which constitutes the valuable ermine of commerce. In the highlands of Scotland these changes take place, but not always so in England; you may find it in Durham and Northumberland, and not in Lincolnshire, while in Cornwall and Hampshire it is almost unknown; this change from dark to white has given rise to much discussion; but, in spite of all that is said, there is little doubt that the change is really due to the

necessity of the colour of the animal being adapted to its natural surroundings. The British fur is not so valued as those obtained from more northerly regions, the importation of ermine into England at one time, I think about 1834-5, was 104,000 skins. It would take about six skins to make a muff, and twelve or more to make an opera hood, so the destruction yearly is enormous.

THE SEA BEAR OR FUR SEAL.

Now we come to one of the most valued and favoured skins of this and other countries, but it appears that very few people know from which animal this beautiful fur comes. It is generally supposed that the common seal (*Phoca*) furnishes all the furs, but that is not the case. The family *Octariae*, or eared seals, but not all of those, because some are called hair seals, and do not possess that underclothing of soft fur called seal skin. But the sea bear, really the smallest of the genera, is the seal which furnishes us with that valuable article of commerce, the under fur, from which the long hairs of the outer coat have been removed. The way they do this is very simple, the inner layer of skin being shaved away with a sharp knife, causes the long hairs, which are deeper rooted than the under fur, to fall out.

There are nine known species, of which five are hair seals, four fur seals, and they are up to this date included in the single generic title *Otarid*, the sea lions or hair seals being the largest of all. Fur seals when young are black, but they become lighter with age. The best skins are offered by young males and females. The northern sea bear, as shown in the accompanying illustration, is distinguished at first sight by its short and straight face; in profile this animal measures eight feet in length, so it would take four or five skins to a cloak, and cut into two for a cape.

The otarid are easily distinguished from the



THE SABLE.



THE STOAT OR ERMINE IN WINTER DRESS.