

H A T

HAT, a covering for the head, worn by the men in most parts of Europe. Those most in esteem are made of the pure hair of the castor or beaver; for they are also made of the hair or wool of divers other animals, and that by much the same process.

Method of making HATS. To make the beaver-hats, they tear off the long and short hair from the skin, with knives suitable to the occasion: after which they proportion the quantity of the several sorts of beaver-hair, by mixing one third of the dry castor to two thirds of old-coat, which is a term for a skin that has been worn some time by the Indians of America; who catch and sell them to the Europeans. The hair, so mixed, is carded and weighed out into parcels, according to the size and thickness of the hat intended. The stuff is now laid on the hurdle, with an instrument called a bow, resembling that of a violin, but larger; whose string being worked with a small bow-stick, and made to play on the furs, they fly, and mix themselves together, the dust and filth at the same time passing through the chinks. Instead of a bow, some hat-makers use a scarce of hair, through which they pass the stuff. Thus hats are formed of an oval figure, ending with an acute angle at the top: with what stuff remains, they strengthen them where slenderest, yet designedly make them thicker in the brim near the crown, than towards the circumference, or in the crown itself. They next harden the stuff, so managed, into more compact flakes, by pressing down a hardened leather upon it. This done, they are carried to the bason, upon which laying one of the hardened hats, they sprinkle it over with water, and mould it; and the heat of the fire, with the water and pressing, embody the stuff into a slight hairy sort of felt; after which, turning up the edges all round over the mould, they lay it by, and proceed with another; which being in like manner reduced to the same consistence and form, they are both joined together, so as to make them meet in an angle at top, making only one conical cap. The next process is to remove the hat to a trough, resembling a mill-hopper, which is a copper kettle filled with water and grounds, kept hot for the purpose; and, after being dipped in the kettle, the hat is laid on the sloping side, called the plank. Here they proceed to work it, by rolling and unrolling it

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again and again, one part after another, first with the hand, and afterwards with a small wooden roller, taking care to dip it from time to time, till at length, by thus fulling and thickening it four or five hours, it is brought to the dimensions intended. In this violent labour, the workmen usually guard their hands with thick leather, which they call gloves. The hat thus wrought into the form of a conical cap, is reduced into proper shape on a block of the size of the intended crown, by tying it round with a string, called a commander; after which, with a bent iron, called a stamper, they gradually beat down the commander all round, till it has reached the bottom of the block, and what remains at the bottom below the string forms the brim. In this station it is set to dry, and afterwards singed, by holding it over the blaze of a fire, made of straw, or shavings: it is then rubbed with pumice-stone, to take off the coarser nap; then rubbed over with seal skin, to lay the nap still finer; and, lastly, carded with a fine card, to raise the fine cotton, with which the hat is to appear when finished: then fitting it to the block, they tie it, cut round the edges, and deliver it to the dyers. (See DYEING.) The dye being completed, the hat is dried by being hung in the roof of a stove heated with a charcoal-fire; and, when dry, it is stiffened with melted glue, or rather gum-senega, which is smeared over the hat with a brush, and rubbed in with the hand. Then, having spread a cloth over the steaming bason, which is a little fire-place raised about three feet high, with an iron plate laid over it, exactly covering the fire, the hat is laid upon the cloth, with the brim downwards, the cloth being first sprinkled with water, to raise a strong steam, to force in the stiffening. When it is moderately hot, the workman strikes gently on the brim, with the flat of his hand, to make the joinings incorporate and bind so as not to appear, turning it from time to time, and at last setting it on the crown. And when it has been sufficiently steamed and dried, it is put again on the block, brushed, ironed, well smoothed, and fitted for lining.

Hats make a considerable article in commerce: England supplies Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Germany, with extraordinary quantities of them; and as our manufacturers have the reputation of making the best hats in Europe, their importation is prohibited.

HATS are also made for womens wear, of chips, straw, or cane, by plating, and sewing the plats together; beginning with the centre of the crown, and working round till the whole is finished. Hats for the same purpose are also wove and made of horse-hair, silk, &c.