

RAT-SKINS FOR GLOVES.

Manufacturers Claim That They Are Never Used for Such Purposes.

We are still being taught to feel what respect we can for rats, on account of their skins being used, very largely used, for gloves. This venerable fiction was revived lately in the correspondence columns of a lively contemporary, and was at once contradicted by a practical glover at Grenoble, principally on the score that rat-skins were not large enough for the purpose. Still the statement was adhered to, objection being taken that not one but many skins might be used in making one pair of gloves. The Grenoble workman wrote again, saying that 30,000 skins passed annually through his hands, so that he had some authority to speak upon the subject, and he protested that, to a practical man, the thing was quite absurd, and, for another thing, the skins were not only not valuable because of being so thin, but were actually too thin to be of any value. Still the statement was maintained, and the testimony of two authoritative works on natural history and three encyclopedias—all, we suppose, unanimous in affirming that rat-skins are very largely used in glove-making—was triumphantly appealed to, although, by the way, the titles of these volumes were not quoted.

It is of no use to put up encyclopedias or works on natural history as a defense upon a point of manufacture when people actually engaged in the work assault them with a flat denial. Rats are very interesting in narratives of animal sagacity, which is as near an acquaintance with them as most people desire, and their skins, like those of moles, are delicate to a degree, and the nap delightfully soft and fine. Mole skins make fine waistcoats, and have been made up, with some perseverance, into mantles for ladies, and doubtless rat skins might, with considerable pains, be similarly utilized.

There was, some years ago, an ingenious individual of Liskeard, Cornwall, who exhibited himself in a dress composed from top to toe of rat skins, which he had been collecting for three years and a half. The dress was made entirely by himself; it consisted of hat, neckerchief, coat, waistcoat, trousers, tippet, gaiters and shoes. The number of rats required to complete the suit was 670. The tippet or boa was composed of the pieces of skin immediately round the tail of the rats, and was a very curious part of the dress, containing six hundred tails, and those none of the shortest.

This proves the possibilities of rat-skins, but very remote possibilities for all that. Gloves may have been so made as curiosities, but not commercially. We meet with statements in books to the effect that rat hunts are regularly held in Paris sewers, and the privilege of gathering the slaughtered animals on these days sold by the authorities, but the Prefect of the Seine knew nothing about it, and wrote to S. William Beck saying so. We have statements, also, both in books and papers, that rat-hides are generally used in making the thumbs or thumb-gussets of kid gloves, and we have our largest glove manufacturers quite unaware of the circumstance. Hard facts against book statements—which wins? —Draper's Trade Journal.

VILE OPIUM DENS.

The Extent to Which They Flourish in San Francisco.

The number of opium dens at present existing in this city outside of Chinatown runs up into the hundreds. The low lodging-houses are alive with them. In certain buildings on Kearney, Bush, Geary, Sutter, Sacramento, Broadway, Stockton, Vallejo and Dupont streets there is scarcely a room which is not equipped with an opium layout. South of Market street, within a stone's throw of the city's main thoroughfare, there are, at the least calculation, three hundred dens resorted to for the purpose of opium-smoking. The Petit House, on Fourth street, where three murders have been committed during the last few years, is a specimen of the others. Within the walls of an opium den all fiends are equal. Colored men and white women lie about the floors inhaling the fumes of the drug until, stupefied, they fall into the opium-smokers' sleep. The majority of loose women who ply their trade on the streets in the southern section of the city have been brought to their degraded condition by the use of opium, or by association with users of it. A policeman tells a story which many of his fellows fully endorse. "I have entered opium dens," he said, "which I can't find language to describe. Young men and women, negroes and whites, all lying about the floors in the most filthy condition. They are like beasts. Diseased, besotted creatures, lacking the strength to get up and eat. Why don't we arrest them, you ask? Well, to tell the truth, it's not much use. They get the stuff in all the jails despite all precautions taken by their keepers."

"Do you believe the vice is on the increase?"
"On the increase? Well, I should say so. Down in this part of the city you find ten dens now where there was one eight years ago."

THE SIGNAL SERVICE.

Reasons Presented to Show Why It Should Be Non-Military.

The condition of the United States signal service bureau, which prepares the weather predictions, has long been a source of anxiety to those who are interested in the several departments of our national science system. The predictions given by the officers of this corps, though of much value, have not appeared, to those entitled to criticize them, up to the attainable degree of perfection. The cost of the bureau is great, though it is even less than the country would be willing to pay for a satisfactory service. The United States spends probable more for this work than all the states of Europe, yet the weather predictions have on the whole been less successful than those in the old world. Although this bureau has been in operation for nearly twenty years, it has failed to develop a set of able meteorologists competent to define the laws of the weather on this continent, and to advance the science of meteorology. Although the bureau has gathered a great body of fact concerning the atmospheric conditions of this continent, it has not succeeded in doing any considerable amount of investigation. This, however, would have been more pardonable if the practical work of predictions had attained the desired end.

The weather bureau developed from the signal service of the United States army. The original object of the corps, as its name indicates, was to serve for the purpose of communicating information between the several parts of an army on the march or in action. As a subordinate part of the machinery employed during our civil war, it did admirable service. If, when it assumed its new duties as a meteorological corps, the officers and men had been transferred to some one of the civilian divisions of the government work, there can be hardly any doubt that the corps would now have the foremost place among the scientific institutions of the country.

The United States is singularly well placed for the development of meteorological science, and the people have a measure of intelligence which well fits them for the ready appreciation of such aids to their life as this branch of learning can afford. Unfortunately, however, the corps was retained in connection with the army. Noble as is the system of an efficient military organization, it is thoroughly evil when it is applied to work such as inquirers are called on to do. Even where, as in the weather bureau, certain parts of their acts must be performed with studious regularity, they can best be done under the conditions of a civilian, and not of a military corps. The military influence is of a necessity penetrative and dominant. If men are soldiers at all, they must be soldiers through and through, in order that the system may be reasonably perfect.

Under the present system of the signal service, the observers are men enlisted in the United States army; they are thereby essentially separated from all the conditions which prevail in the non-military work of the state. Their first duty is not to prosecute natural inquiries, but to obey the commands of their superior officers. The life of an enlisted man in any army is not such as to be attractive to youths of character and ability, and it is therefore not surprising that few men of capacity have sought service as sergeants in the weather service. Thus, while Harvard university has sent more than a score of men to the work of the national and state geological surveys of this country, none of its graduates has sought a place in the lower ranks of the signal service. College officers have hesitated to advise a man to seek such a position, while if the corps was on a civilian basis these chances in life would be extremely attractive to young men of ability. Therefore it seems that the best, if not the only, thing to do, in order to give the desired quality to the signal service, is to transfer it to some non-military division of the government work. —N. S. Shaler in Boston Herald.

Burning Mud.

"A curiosity," said Rev. A. S. Ladd, of Auburn, "that has struck me with much interest is this: A few days ago I visited a friend on Munjoy Hill, Portland, and I was much interested in one fact that my friend mentioned to me, and I think your readers will be somewhat interested also. My friend Mr. Alfred Tuckwell is an Englishman. He has recently bought a new house near the eastern promenade.

"This part of the city has been a common for the pasturing of cows and a playground for children and a sauntering place for lovers until within the last few years. But now it is being rapidly covered with pleasant dwellings and affords some of the pleasantest localities for homes in all the city. Now I come to the interesting incident. In his cellar and in his garden Mr. T. found a large bed of peat of excellent quality. This winter he digs it out of his cellar, and without any drying, mingled with coal, it burns readily and makes an excellent fuel. He dumps his ashes in where he takes his peat out, and when the supply is exhausted he proposes to cement the cellar. He thinks he has enough in his garden to last several years. I am not sure that a Yankee would have thought of burning such mud." —Lewiston Journal.

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