

Where Do Some Things Come From?

It is not difficult to understand that things made of wood and stone and metal, of which the supply is virtually unlimited, as well as fabrics of cotton, muslin, gauze, and wool, should be turned out as fast as they are wanted. It is comprehensible, too, that such developments of silk and satin and velvet as may hit the humor of the moment should be forthcoming, in a degree commensurate with the requirements of the public; though this is less easy to understand when one reflects that the whole supply is due to the exertions of a finite number of small caterpillars. The multiplication of objects, the material for constructing which is practically unlimited, is tolerably comprehensible; but what seems unaccountable is the extraordinary way in which certain products of nature—animal, vegetable, and mineral—seem to rush into existence on the shortest notice, whenever a demand for them springs up.

How wonderfully accommodating—to take an instance—has nature proved of late years in connection with the increased proclivities of the Seal Tribe, or at any rate that portion of it which furnishes the material that goes by the name of seal-skin! It is only within the last dozen years or so that this particular kind of fur has become furiously popular. It is marvellous to observe how strangely within that comparatively short time, the supply has increased and multiplied also. A few years ago a seal-skin cloak was an uncommon garment, a rarity; whereas, now, during the whole of the autumn and winter seasons, we are so surrounded by all sorts of seal-skin garments—cloaks, jackets, waist-coats, hats, caps, mufflers, tipplets, and the like—that to speak of seal-skins, as if they were some of the blottings and other miscellaneous articles that we might suppose seal-skin to be not merely, as Jacques said of motley, "Your only wear," but your only decorative fabric available for any purpose whatsoever. For, look where one may, it is still seal-skin; seal-skin, seal-skin, everywhere. On the shoulders of ladies; on the breasts of the lords of creation; in the shop-windows; in the drawers which are thrust into our letter-boxes, announcing a consignment of ever so many thousand seal-skin jackets; in the advertisement sheets of the newspapers, from the Times Supplement to the columns of the Exchange and Mart—in which last journal the yearnings of humanity after seal-skin, and its readiness to barter all other property, of whatsoever kind, in exchange for this idolized fur, are more touchingly expressed than in any other—under each and all of these aspects the seal-skin race is continually kept before us.

But the supply with which this phoeal rage is appeased is the marvellous thing. How is it that such supply has suddenly come into existence? Or, was it always there, though there was no demand? Has the genus phoea been wearing sealskin jackets ever since the creation, retaining unmolested their possession of those priceless wares through countless ages; or has this obliging tribe of animals increased in numbers of late years, out of readiness to gratify the caprice of the fashionable world?

Then there are the kids again—what shall we say of the kids? If it be matter of wonder where all the seals come from, how much more wonderful, how stupefying and stunning, is the thought of the myriads of young goats whose existence is absolutely necessary to furnish the gloves of the whole civilized world? Kids! How is it that there exist six yards of ground anywhere, without kids browsing thereon? One would expect that the earth would be teeming and swarming with kids. In every town in England, in France, in Europe, in every meadow of what at least professes to be the skin of kid are exposed for sale; while in the large capitals the number of shops devoted exclusively to the diffusion of kid gloves is almost incredible. Taking Paris and London alone, and occupying ourselves only with a few of the principal thoroughfares, we should find enough of such shops to suggest the existence somewhere of such flocks of kids as would overrun at least all the pasture lands of the civilized earth. How many such shops are there in the Palais Royal, the Boulevards, the Rue de Rivoli, the Rue de la Paix; how many in Regent street, Oxford street, Bond street, the Strand, Chesapeake, and Piccadilly? How many in our great capitals? How many in Australia, how many in New Zealand? If we take the trouble to enter on the field of conjecture which is thus opened out before us, we shall be cast out in imagination on immeasurable unknown prairies where the foot of man has never trod (except to capture kids), and where skipping kids disport themselves in such prodigious numbers that the American herd of buffaloes who took six weeks to pass a man in a ditch at full gallop, would be as an every-day drove in the comparison.

I speak of the supply of the raw material, and not the enormous multiplication and sale of the gloves themselves. When one remembers how many are the occasions of the palest and most delicate tints of gloves, and how lowly a covering as they do a part of the human frame which comes in continual contact with all sorts of objects (yet they become soiled and unfit for use, there is no difficulty in understanding the sale of almost any number of gloves that can be manufactured. It is the multiplication of the kids of whose skins the gloves are made that is the staggering subject of reflection, and it is in connection with this, and remembering how comparatively rare, even in France, Italy, and Switzerland, and other goat producing countries, are the occasions when the traveler encounters kids in any number, that I find myself again and again constrained to ask, O where and O where are your glove producing kids?

It is not a fact that there are more fair-haired children to be seen in this country than there used to be? Any one who can find leisure in the early part of the day to visit those portions of our parks and public gardens where children most resort, will infallibly be struck by the great increase in the number of children whose hair is to be classed as belonging to the groupe of colors which we call "light." Now we know that fair hair has lately been very much the rage, and we also know that various inventions have been published for taking the natural darkness out of the hair, and imparting to it a flaxen or golden shade. The use of such medicaments has, however, always been confined to grown-up people, and in none of the records of the past, of tampering with the natural color of the hair which has been common of late years, have children had any part; so their adaptation to the fashion of the time in this respect would seem to be purely attributable to an obligation on the part of Dame Nature similar to the pettiness of the seals and the philanthropy of the kids.

There was a taste the other day for pug-dogs. Fashion had no sooner issued her mandate on the subject, than behold, in all directions there were pugs! The earth ap-

peared to teem with short noses and black muzzles; and any one who wanted a pug (and chose to pay for it) was straightway provided with one of those fascinating animals. Is there any room for doubt that if phoenixes or unicorns were to become the fashion, they would turn up by the score as soon as wanted?

It is not possible that any one, possessed of any reflective power, and being in the habit of frequenting the various kinds of social celebrations, slavery to which forms the principal occupation of a large portion of civilized society, can have failed to speculate on the momentous question, Where do all the plovers' eggs come from? They appear at all sorts of meals—dinner, wedding breakfasts, show luncheons, picnics, evening-party refreshment tables, ball suppers. In all sorts of forms, too, do they appear; nesting in moss, held in bondage caressingly by succulent jelly, pearly and cool, the golden yolk just suggested through the semi-transparent white. Prodigiously good they are, in whatever shape presented, but prodigiously mysterious also, in their faculty of turning up in enormous quantities in the London season, and then disappearing with equally strange and inexplicable despatch. Very rarely does one encounter these plovers' eggs except during the London season; and as to the plovers themselves, now and then, in crossing a breezy upland, the pedestrian's attention is caught by their shrill, plaintive cry and their rapid flight round and round his head, as they seek to draw him away from the nest which lies close by; but it is only now and then that the plovers are thus met with, and even where they are thick as flies in the London season, they are those innumerable dishes full of their eggs.

And naturally associated with the plovers' egg difficulty is another: I mean the great champagne mystery. The consumption of this beverage is confined to no particular place, nor to any especial season of the year. Always, everywhere, by everybody, this favorite drink is appreciated. One would think that the supply required for this country alone, and during that one period of the year which we call "the season," would exhaust the produce of all the vineyards the champagne districts can furnish. Let the reader consider the Derby Day, or merely take it in conjunction with the Cup Day at Ascot, and then endeavor to form some dimly apprehended notion of the quantity of champagne required. There are those who have seen the champagne dripping through the floors of carriages on Epsom Downs; and even those who have not been favored with that rich experience, but have merely witnessed the ordinary performances during the luncheon hours there, are able to form a tolerably accurate idea of the rate at which champagne disappears on the occasion of those wondrous orgies.

At the Ascot Meeting it is the same story. The same at Goodwood, Doncaster, Newmarket. At all the minor races, at Henley, at every regatta held at Cowes or Rye, or anywhere, and on all those occasions of a more private nature, at which we have just seen the dish of plovers' eggs making goodly appearance, it is again the same. The thought of all the champagne required for England, and then to speak of the still greater quantities needed for the supply of continental capitals, and there not alone for those great festive occasions when royal personages meet together, and are entertained at banquets, balls, and the like, but for all the smaller and snigger meals which come off at restaurants, cafes, hotels, and taverns—and this society as I may say floating in it, becomes distracting.

But there does that same creamy liquor all come from? We all know that we are expected to swallow a great deal in connection with our wine besides the liquid itself. It requires a most remarkable amount of faith to suppose that those small tracts of land which give their name to the more renowned growths of France and Germany can supply all the cellars throughout Europe. An enigma this, which, with regard to other wines, may be looked upon as simply a difficulty; but which, when champagne is in question, culminates in an impossibility.

The milk and cream, again, supplied twice a day to the inhabitants of England, and for the furnishing of which these fresh milk cannot be imported from other countries, are dependent on the resources of the British cows—the enormous daily yield of this article of consumption is a thing not to be thought of without wonder. Summon before the mind the vast area of London and its suburbs, and remember that in every street, square, place, terrace, court, blind alley, throughout its enormous extent, from Highgate and Hornsey in the north to Camberwell and Dulwich in the south, and from Wimbledon and Putney in the west to Rotherhithe, Hackney, Bow, in the east, the clink of the milk-pail is heard twice every day throughout the year, Sundays included. And all this, remember, to be new milk, and so that in addition thereto must be taken into account an entirely separate reservoir of milk set aside for the development of all that mass of cream which is required, at certain times of year, for the supply of the metropolis. What a supply must that be! Think of all the ice-cream sold at all the pastry-cooks' shops besides those which are served up in private houses! Think of all the cream eaten with strawberries, of the cream required for cooking purposes, of the recipes of those great artists who are always directing their disciples to "take a quart of cream," or to "add a pint of good cream," or "now throw in" a pint or so of cream. And besides, what becomes of all this supply of milk and cream when it is no longer wanted in the metropolis? On the 30th of June it is not, the main body of cream-consumers have by that time left London and are dispersed over the world. Do the cows follow them?

A solution of some of the above-stated difficulties might be afforded by supposing the existence—not a very wide stretch of imagination—a wholesale system of adulteration. It is possible to make champagne, for instance, and alas! I fear, milk and cream too, to order; but no manufactory can turn out plovers' eggs to order. And where are the ingredients that supply an unlimited number of sweetbreads, by the way, another huge scale during the London season, and hardly wanted at other times!—All the Year Round.

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Continuation of the text from the previous page, including the end of the 'Where Do Some Things Come From?' article and the beginning of the 'GREAT SAVING OF FUEL' advertisement.