

The History of Gloves

THE present learned and curious dissertation is compiled from the papers of an ingenious antiquary, from the "Present State of the Republic of Letters." Vol. X. P. 289.

The antiquity of this part of dress will form our first inquiry; and we shall then show its various uses in the several ages of the world.

It has been imagined that gloves are noticed in the 108th Psalm, where the royal prophet declares, he will cast his *shoe* over Edom; and still farther back, supposing them to be used in the times of the Judges, Ruth iv. 7, where the custom is noticed of a man taking off his *shoe* and giving it to his neighbour, as a pledge for redeeming or exchanging anything. The word in these two texts usually translated *shoe* by the Chaldee paraphrast, in the latter is rendered *glove*. Casaubon is of opinion that *gloves* were worn by the Chaldeans, from the word here mentioned being explained in the Talmud Lexicon, the *clothing of the hand*. But are not these mere conjectures, and has not the Chaldee paraphrast taken a liberty in his version?

Xenophon gives a clear and distinct account of *gloves*. Speaking of the manners of the Persians, as a proof of their effeminacy, he observes, that not satisfied with

covering their head and their feet, they also guarded their hands against the cold with *thick gloves*. *Homer*, describing Laertes at work in his garden, represents him with *gloves on his hands, to secure them from the thorns*. *Varro*, an ancient writer, is an evidence in favour of their antiquity among the Romans. In lib. ii. cap. 55. *de Re Rustica*, he says, that olives gathered by the naked hand are preferable to those gathered with *gloves*. *Athenæus* speaks of a celebrated glutton who always came to table with *gloves* on his hands, that he might be able to handle and eat the meat while hot, and devour more than the rest of the company.

These authorities show that the ancients were not strangers to the use of *gloves*, though their use was not common. In a hot climate to wear gloves implies a considerable degree of effeminacy. We can more clearly trace the early use of gloves in northern than in southern nations. When the ancient severity of manners declined, the use of *gloves* prevailed among the Romans; but not without some opposition from the philosophers. *Musonius*, a philosopher, who lived at the close of the first century of Christianity, among other invectives against the corruption of the age, says, *It is shameful that persons in perfect health should clothe their hands*

and feet with soft and hairy coverings. Their convenience, however, soon made the use general. *Pliny* the younger informs us, in his account of his uncle's journey to Vesuvius, that his secretary sat by him ready to write down whatever occurred remarkable; and that he had gloves on his hands, that the coldness of the weather might not impede his business.

In the beginning of the ninth century, the use of *gloves* was become so universal, that even the church thought a regulation in that part of dress necessary. In the reign of *Lewis le Debonnaire*, the council of Aix ordered that the monks should only wear *gloves* made of sheepskin.

That time has made alterations in the form of this, as in all other apparel, appears from the old pictures and monuments.

Gloves, beside their original design for a covering of the hand, have been employed on several great and solemn occasions: as in the ceremony of *investitures*, in bestowing lands, or in conferring *dignities*. Giving possession by the delivery of a *glove* prevailed in several parts of Christendom in later ages. In the year 1002, the bishops of Paderborn and Moncerco were put into possession of their sees by receiving a *glove*. It was thought so essential a part of the episcopal habit, that some abbots in France presuming to wear *gloves*, the

council of Poitiers interposed in the affair, and forbad them the use, on the same principle as the ring and sandals; these being peculiar to bishops, who frequently wore them richly adorned on their backs with jewels.

Favin observes, that the custom of blessing *gloves* at the coronation of the kings of France, which still subsists, is a remain of the eastern practice of investiture by a *glove*. A remarkable instance of this ceremony is recorded. The unfortunate *Conradin* was deprived of his crown and his life by the usurper *Mainfroy*. When having ascended the scaffold, the injured prince lamenting his hard fate, asserted his right to the crown, and as a token of investiture, threw his *glove* among the crowd; intreating it might be conveyed to some of his relations, who would revenge his death. It was taken up by a knight, and brought to Peter king of Arragon, who in virtue of this glove was afterwards crowned at Palermo.

As the delivery of *gloves* was once a part of the ceremony used in giving possession, so the depriving a person of them was a mark of divesting him of his office, and of degradation. The Earl of Carlisle, in the reign Of Edward the Second, impeached of holding a correspondence with the Scots, was condemned to die as a traitor. Walsingham, relating other circumstances

of his degradation, says, "His spurs were cut off with a hatchet; and his *gloves* and shoes were taken off, &c."

Another use of *gloves* was in a duel; he who threw one down, was by this act understood to give defiance, and he who took it up, to accept the challenge.

The use of single combat, at first designed only for a trial of innocence, like the ordeals of fire and water, was in succeeding ages practised for deciding rights and property. Challenging by the *glove* was continued down to the reign of Elizabeth, as appears by an account given by Spelman of a duel appointed to be fought in Tothill Fields, in the year 1571. The dispute was concerning some lands in the county of Kent. The plaintiffs appeared in court, and demanded single combat. One of them threw down his glove, which the other immediately taking up, carried it off on the point of his sword, and the day of fighting was appointed; this affair was however adjusted by the queen's judicious interference.

The ceremony is still practised of challenging by a *glove* at the coronation of the kings of England, by his majesty's champion entering Westminster Hall completely armed and mounted.

Challenging by the *glove* is still in use in some parts of the world. In Germany, on receiving an affront, to

send a *glove* to the offending party is a challenge to a duel.

The last use of *gloves* was for carrying the *hawk*, which is very ancient. In former times, princes and other great men took so much pleasure in carrying the hawk on their hand, that some of them have chosen to be represented in this attitude. There is a monument of Philip the First of France still remaining; on which he is represented at length, on his tomb, holding a *glove* in his hand.

Chambers says that, formerly, judges were forbid to wear *gloves* on the bench. No reason is assigned for this prohibition. Our judges lie under no such restraint; for both they and the rest of the court make no difficulty of receiving *gloves* from the sheriffs, whenever the session or assize concludes without any one receiving sentence of death, which is called a *maiden assize*; a custom of great antiquity.

Our curious antiquary has preserved a singular anecdote concerning *gloves*. Chambers informs us that it is not safe at present to enter the stables of princes without pulling off our gloves. He does not tell us in what the danger consists; but it is an ancient established custom in Germany, that whoever enters the stables of a prince, or great man, with his gloves on his hands, is

obliged to forfeit them or redeem them by a fee to the servants. The same custom is observed in some places at the death of the stag; in which case if the *gloves* are not taken off, they are redeemed by money given to the huntsmen and keepers. The French king never failed of pulling off one of his *gloves* on that occasion. The reason of this ceremony seems to be lost.

We meet with the term *glove-money* in our old records; by which is meant money given to servants to buy *gloves*. This probably is the origin of the phrase *giving a pair of gloves*, to signify making a present for some favour or service.

Gough in his "Sepulchral Monuments" informs us that gloves formed no part of the female dress till after the Reformation; I have seen some so late as in Anne's time richly worked and embroidered.

There must exist in the Denny family some of the oldest gloves extant, as appears by the following glove anecdote.

At the sale of the Earl of Arran's goods, April 6th, 1759, the gloves given by Henry VIII. to Sir Anthony Denny were sold for 38*l.* 17*s.*; those given by James I. to his son Edward Denny, for 22*l.* 4*s.*; the mittens given by Queen Elizabeth to Sir Edward Denny's lady, 25*l.* 4*s.*; all which were bought for Sir Thomas Denny of

Ireland, who was descended in a direct line from the great Sir Anthony Denny, one of the executors of the will of Henry VIII.