

“The most curious wives,” says Stowe, “now made themselves ruffs of cambric, and sent them to Madame Dinghen to be starched, who charged high prices. After a time they made themselves ruffs of lawn, and thereupon arose a general scoff, or by-word, that shortly they would make their ruffs of spiders’ webs.” Mrs. Dinghen at last took their daughters as her pupils. Her usual terms were from four to five pounds for teaching them to starch, and one pound for the art of seething starch.⁶⁷ The nobility patronised her, but the commonalty looked on her as the evil one, and called her famous liquid “devil’s broth.”

To keep the ruff erect, bewired⁶⁸ and starched though it be, was a troublesome affair—its falling a cause of agony to the wearer.

“Not so close, thy breath will draw my ruff,”

exclaims the fop. The tools used in starching and fluting ruffs were called setting-sticks, struts, and poking-sticks: the two first were made of wood or bone, the poking-stick of iron, and heated in the fire. By this heated tool the fold acquired that accurate and seemly order which constituted the beauty of this very preposterous attire. It was about the year 1576, according to Stowe, the making of poking-sticks began. They figure in the expenses of Elizabeth, who, in 1592, pays to her blacksmith, one Thomas Larkin, “pro 2 de lez setting-stickes ad 2s. 6d.,” the sum of 5s.⁶⁹

We have frequent allusion to the article in the plays of the day:⁷⁰—

“Your ruff must stand in print, and for that purpose, get poking-sticks with fair long handles, lest they scorch your hands.”⁷¹

⁶⁷ Endless are the entries in the Gt. W. Acc. for washing, starching, and mending. The court laundress can have had no sinecure. We find “le Jup de lawne operat’ cum stellis et aristis tritici Anglice wheateares” (Eliz. 42 & 43), sent to be washed, starched, &c. A network veil “sciss’ totum desuper cum ragged staves” (Leicester’s device, *ibid.* 29 & 30). A “diploid” (doublet) of cutwork flourished “cum auro et spangles” (*ibid.*), and, more wonderful still, in the last year of her reign, she has washed and starched a toga “cum traine de la lawne operat’ in auro et argento in forma cal. larum pavorum,” the identical dress in which

she is portrayed in one of her portraits.

⁶⁸ “Eidem pro un ruff bon pynned sup’ le wier Franc’ eū rhet’ aur’ spangled, 70s.”—Eliz. 42 & 43.

⁶⁹ Gt. W. Acc. Eliz. 33 & 34.

⁷⁰ “B. Where’s my ruff and poker?

“R. There’s your ruff, shall I poke it?

“B. So poke my ruff now.”—*Old Play*, by P. Dekker, 1602.

Autolyceus, among his wares, has “poking-sticks of steel.”

“Poked her rebatoes and surveyed her steel.”—*Law Tricks*, 1608.

⁷¹ Middleton’s comedy of “Blurt, Master Constable.”