

THE ARMS AND ARMOUR AT ARMOURERS' HALL.

Read to the Society at Armourers' Hall, March 25th, 1911.

BY

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AMONG the various arms and armour possessed by this company are two things which from recent events may be of special interest to us.

These are a suit and a locking gauntlet, the work of Jacobi Topf, of whom we have heard so much lately. I may premise by saying that this armourer, of whose work, and payments to whom there is some record in the municipal archives at Innsbruck, where he lived, appears after 1565 to have ceased to work or be paid until the year 1572, when his name again occurs in his own country, where he held the honourable post of armourer to the Archduke Ferdinand of the Tirol. This gap in the accounts of him appears to have been filled up by the discovery that he was then in England and master workman superintending the Almain armourers working at Greenwich. These armourers, or their predecessors, came over from Germany in the reign of Henry VIII, whose friendship with the Emperor Maximilian contributed to the immigration of large numbers of skilled craftsmen from the Continent. Some of these settled for good in this country and became in time with slightly modified names good citizens of London, obtaining either naturalisation or permission for denization. The late Mr. Browning of this worshipful company was one of the prominent mem-

bers of the Huguenot Society, thanks to the publications of which body we are able to learn the source of some of our flourishing trades and handicrafts. The armourers were among these, and with the sword cutlers and some other professions the country of their adoption no doubt was benefited.

Jacobi Topf, during his stay here, turned out several suits of fine armour for the chief men of the day. Lord Chancellor Hatton had three suits made by him, the Earl of Leicester two, if not three, and besides the many noblemen for whom Topf worked, Sir Henry Lee, Master of the Armouries to Queen Elizabeth and James I, and after 1587 Knight of the Most Noble Order of the Garter, had three suits built for him by Topf. Of the first of these unfortunately no traces exist, but of the second this Company possesses a locking, or, as it sometimes is absurdly called, a forbidden gauntlet.

It would perhaps be well to say a word or two on the locking gauntlet. It is difficult to imagine how the term "forbidden" came to be applied, for if there was one thing more than another most exact, it was the equality in weapons of the competitors at tournaments.

As a matter of fact, a tournament generally consisted of three classes of encounters. First, the joust, in which, after 1440, it was almost universally the rule for the two riders to pass left arm to left arm on opposite sides of the tilt or barrier. Second, foot combats, in which a certain number of blows with axe, sword, spear, etc., were to be given. Third, the tourney, in which the knights were divided into two bodies and separated by a lane formed by two ropes stretched

across the lists. When the ropes were cut the two bodies of horsemen rushed together and with blunt, pointless swords or with wooden maces they hammered each other. For this part of the sport the locking gauntlet was allowed and generally used. The finger portion was prolonged so that it could, after grasping the weapon, be fastened to the wrist by a turning-pin. When this was fixed the sword grip or the mace grip was held. The quillons prevented the sword being driven back, the pommel prevented it passing forward.

We find in almost all the suits made by Topf locking gauntlets as well as manifer or mitten gauntlets for the left hand, which only had to hold the reins. These gauntlets would have the same scheme of ornament as the suits to which they belonged.

Being tied to the saddle was forbidden, and unless the rider dismounted in public as did the Earl of Warwick, it might not be seen, but with regard to the sword anyone could see if it was not handled in a fair and proper fashion.

An armet of the same suit is in the Tower of London, and a burgonet with its buffe and complete armour for the legs is now in the Nordiska Museum at Stockholm. The third suit (or enough of it to cover a figure from top to toe) is in this historic hall. I may say that the three suits of Sir Henry Lee were originally in his, and now my, house, Ditchley. But in 1718 people did not give £2,000 for bits of a suit, nor did people think they had made a bad bargain if they received such a sum. In fact, in that same year the owner of these and many other suits, having built himself a new house, evidently thought the armour was in the way, so it was sold to

the village brazier after the leather linings of the suits and the saddles had been cut up to tie up the apple trees. The money received for 14 cwt. 1 qr. 21 lbs. of armour at 10s. the cwt. was £7 4s. 6d. Whether the brazier got much more for what he sold again I do not know, but it shows how times change. About this time we find a Swedish Count Bielke having his portrait painted in the second Lee suit, which had been made some 140 years previously.

Other suits, or portions of suits, by Jacobi Topf are to be seen at Lord Hothfield's at Appleby, at the Earl of Pembroke's at Wilton, two if not three suits in the Tower of London, one in the Wallace Collection, and one of the Hatton suits at Windsor Castle.

I have perhaps dwelt too long on Topf, but the specimens of his handiwork in this hall are the chief objects with which there is a personality. For Sir Henry Lee, in a letter of 1590, mentions the Company as a "poure compane" (poverty was no sin even in those days), but he adds of the Company, "fewe deserve more to be cherished," and that applies to the Armourers and Brasiers to-day.

I know that this is neither the time nor place to talk of politics or commerce, but being at the eve of an All-British Week (so I am told), there is a curious piece of information in Sir Henry Lee's letter. He mentions that the late Secretary had been much solicited by a gentleman of "Sropshire," where it grew, to use English iron for armour. Accordingly Sir Henry had two similar breastplates made, one of the native metal, another of "Hungere iron," as the Inspruck metal was loosely called. Then with two pistols loaded alike (but we do not know at what range), he

fired at the breastplates. The English one was pierced and its wooden support torn. The foreign plate stood the test. Sir Henry advised the continuance of use of foreign metal.

The tests of armour seem to have been conducted by the makers; who refused to try the stuff after it had been polished or glazed, as it was called.

In the Verney family memoirs we are told of a man who tested his armour with a bullet and as much powder as would cover it in his open hand. But again no range is mentioned. La Noue said the pistol should be pressed against the enemy's body below his breastplate, and that 3 yards was the effective range only. Of course, the powder of those days was very poor, and probably cuir bouilly or leather boiled in oil and moulded to suitable shapes was as safe as metal.