Mending Wool Hats and Blankets by Felting

Charles G. Leland, 1896

Selected pages from A Manual of Mending and Repairing.

A historical repair chapter on shaping a wool patch and joining its edges to a worn felt hat or blanket.

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TO MEND HATS, BLANKETS, AND SIMILAR FABRICS BY FELTING

Wool, as is well known, if put into a pair of shoes, will pack or settle into a solid felt sole if the shoes are worn. This felt is like cloth. The same can be done by rolling it like dough on a board with a roller. Lay the cloth or hat to be mended so that the felt to be made can be worked into it. Then take fine wool and clean and roll it thoroughly, working it into the edges. It may happen many a time to a man without a needle to succeed in mending garments in this manner.

Waterproof glue or adhesive, such as is fully described in the chapter on Indiarubber, may be added to facilitate the adhesion of the felt to the cloth or felt ground. There is a peculiar art or knack of working moistened felt into the edges of cloth, and of ironing or pressing them down so as not to show, which can, however, be soon acquired. In this way cloth may be glued upon cloth with very good effect. The extraordinary tenacity and fineness of the adhesives now made, be it specially observed, renders mending of this kind (which was impossible a generation ago) now perfectly possible. I advise those who doubt this to get a piece of cloth and experi-

ment for themselves. The patch may not be invisible, but it will look better than if botched with a needle. Felt, however, can easily be repaired to perfection.

Large pieces of stuff can be made by rolling slightly gummed wool, which fact many men do not know, even when living in the wilderness, where wool or hair may be abundant. Nothing is so common as to see shepherds in utter raggedness where the very shreds of wool left by their sheep on the thorns would clothe them, with a little industry. The quality, durability, and fineness of felt depend on the quality of the wool, and the care and skill of the operator. Many of the cheap cloths known as shoddy are really felts.

Felt is easily formed, because under certain conditions it seems to have a strange tendency to form itself. The reader knows that a string in the pocket, subjected to our every movement, will inevitably tangle and knot itself up in the most mysterious manner; and so the fibres of wool, if rubbed together, twine and bind themselves into most intimate union. I earnestly advise all who expect to live where sheep are plenty, and tailors or seamstresses few and far between, to experiment in felt-making, and, if possible, learn from a hatmaker how it is done. There was at one time in New York a factory where strong, serviceable suits of felt cloth were made, and these, consisting of coat, waistcoat, and trousers, were sold at retail for five dollars, or one pound—I myself having seen them.

When a piece of cloth is thus adjusted or applied to fill a hole or mend a rent, the edges may be either

simply gummed and adjusted, or they may be treated with a mixture of felt or cloth-dust and gum. In this case, before the adhesive is *quite* hard, yet after it has ceased to be soft, lay over the patch a piece of cloth of exactly the same kind, and press it with a warm flat-iron. (*Vide* Invisible Mending of Garments, Laces, or Embroideries.)

In most cases a torn woollen garment may be very well restored by carefully sewing a piece into the hole, or by uniting the edges with long stitches. Then make a paste of felt or dust, or short, fine threads of the same cloth, with indiarubber cement, and work it over the surface. With practice this can be done so neatly as to quite conceal the mending. Pass an iron over the whole. When indiarubber cement cannot be obtained, glue mixed with one-fourth glycerine can be used.

Ammonia combined with wool forms a solvent which is also a cement. I have not experimented with it.