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Historic Hangovers in Style
by Winnifred Cannon and Helen Greene

"There's nothing new under the sun"—not even in clothes styles. You may read that a plaid or a feather is the latest thing, but Caesar wore checks and his soldiers flipped feathers around on their helmets.

Take an ordinary thing like a hat, for example. Away back in the beginning it seems to have been patterned somewhat on architectural lines. Many hats showed a striking resemblance to domes and spires of Gothic architecture. What can men expect of those eccentric creations women call hats when they have such an origin?

The feather that is perched coquettishly over the left eye was first brought into vogue by the Roman warrior. He wore it on the left side of his helmet so that it wouldn't interfere with the stroke of his sword. This style is just a matter of custom with the modern man.

The ribbons that hang over feminine curls in back, were used once upon a time to draw in the crown of the hat to fit the head. The little bows of silk ribbon on the inside of men's hats indicate the performance of a similar duty.

Cuffs on current coat styles are carefully planned, often being given a prominent decorative position. In days gone by, the cuff was folded back in a nonchalant manner to show off the amount of embroidery or the rows of lace that the individual's wealth could supply. It seems that man was made with a streak of vanity in him. The buttons that often adorn the sleeves were once used to fasten up the tight sleeve that was the fashion. Now they have lost their usefulness and represent one more historic hangover in our styles.

Buttons used to figure largely in men's clothing. Some of them still have survived though they have lost their former importance. Men's tail coats have at the back two buttons whose position has been a mystery to many. During the gallant days when men dashed about on horses, these buttons ably held up the tails of the coat from coming in too close contact with the flanks of the horse.

It was also horse-back riding that prompted the slit to be made up the back of the overcoat. That slit is now for the convenience of walking, but previously it allowed the tails of the coat to fall on each side of the horse when the rider had mounted.

An oddity of men's coats that few have thought to question is the small cut out between the collar and lapel. It used to be "the" thing for men to wear their collars turned up, and the nick was to enable the lapel to lie smoothly. Though the nick has remained, it is not large enough to permit this protective gesture without pulling the lapel up too. A striking difference between men's and women's coats is the direction of buttoning, the former to the right, the latter to the left. The most plausible explanation is that men always kept their right hand free, either to draw a sword for protection or to grasp an implement in the quest of a livelihood. Women kept their left arm free in which to carry a baby.

As a temporary measure the cuffs of trousers were turned up to protect them from getting muddy, and they were turned down again when the wearer walked on "high ground." This permanent cuff on trousers is now purely ornamental.

Stripes down the sides of the dress trousers revert back to the days when trouser legs were so tight that they had to be unbuttoned down the side. Soon these buttons were hidden beneath a stripe and when the buttons were taken away, the stripe remained.

The first dress was merely a shawl, a good sized one, we hope, which was probably something on the order of the Greek toga. In due time it was sewn up the two sides, and thence it has traveled through a series of styles, which would amaze our Greek ancestors.

The apron, now worn only in the kitchen and whisked out of sight the minute an outsider approaches, was considered an essential part of a fine lady's garb in the seventeenth century. In many countries today it is a necessary part of the costume.

The open work that decorates many shoes today dates back to the most primitive type of shoe. A piece of leather was placed under the foot and drawn up over the toes and sides of the foot by a cord. The rather bulky folds of leather that resulted were cut out merely for convenience.

In the time of Queen Anne, ladies wore their night dresses, or night gowns as we know them, into the street. Though every means was taken to abolish it, this fashion seems to have come into vogue more strongly and has persisted quite definitely. Resultant is the elaborate and expensive evening gown, but even with these creations, women are employing filmy night gowns once more for evening wear.

Ornaments can be traced from almost every corner of the earth and from almost every period of history. Beads have been the delight of women ever since the beginning of time and they are one kind of rare objects to survive all history.

Rings came from Rome where they were used as insignias of rank. The selection of the third finger of the left hand as the ring finger was first made because it was believed that the blood vein from the heart lead to this finger. The more practical reason is that this finger is least used of any and therefore the rings receive little wear.

The indispensable safety pin that everyone "sticks" by was evolved from an ornamental pin of years hence. At first it fastened under the chin of a lady, but its sphere of action was extended to a position in the back of the waistbands, where it occupied itself with the duty of keeping blouse and skirt together in a thoroughly respectable manner. From there it migrated to the top of the head and replaced the straight hat pin. Even today this bit of crooked wire has moved to a place of greater importance. Where would babies of today be without this simple device to retain their modest bits of clothing?

Fashions are daily culminating out of the past and it's no wonder, for two thousand years of ideas should produce something to suit this modern generation. The smart new styles of today were probably dug out of the trunk, but they satisfy the best of us and who could ask for more?