Chapter I

THE HISTORY OF MILLINERY

In millinery, as in everything else, "there is nothing new under the sun." Fashions change, materials alter, seemingly fresh trickeries come and go. But they are modifications of ancient headwear that has owed its being first to necessity, and its survival usually to vanity. Women in the dim past found it necessary to protect their heads from sun and rain. Taking the nearest thing to hand, they threw over their heads a cloth, or couvre-chef as the Normans called it, drawing it down well on to the forehead, and leaving it short at the sides, and so deep at the back that in some cases it rested like a mantle over the shoulders. The modern bridal and confirmation veils are clearly relics of this covering, which stood our Saxon and British forbears in good stead for more than a hundred years.

In the days before, and long after, the Norman Conquest, fashions changed extremely slowly, for the country was too disturbed for anyone to trouble seriously about their mode of dress. The great lady in the baronial castle was practically the only woman who had leisure to give to her clothes, and these she often embroidered sumptuously. But even she indulged in such stitchery only after she had worked an elaborate surcoat for her lord to wear over his armour, and a banner with his armorial bearings, which fluttered above him while she watched him from the castle walls ride out with his followers to the wars. While the men were away she would have little leisure to give to her dress, and probably less heart. As travelling was slow then, it might be months before the warriors returned, and new clothes
would be needed to greet them. So the great lady, feeling the responsibility of the charge of her husband’s property, would turn her attention to his people in the hamlet just outside the castle. She would teach the women to spin, to weave, and to plan, and cut out their materials to the best advantage; to make clothes for themselves and their families, and to complete these outfits maybe with the caps of the day (Fig. 1, a & b) banded with bright colours—green, red, or blue. Such caps are not greatly different from many one sees to-day, and Fig. 1, c, is thought to have suggested the design for the modern police and fireman’s helmets.

Woman’s head-dress has always varied according to her station. In Norman times there was nothing showy or smart about it. No matter whether the lady lived in castle or farmstead, her gown was simple, and her hair, that was coiled closely about her head, was almost hidden beneath the folds of her coloured head-rail, couvre-chef, or wimple, made of silk, cloth, or linen, according to her social position. Portraits of Matilda of Flanders, wife of the Conqueror, show her head covered with a deep wimple falling straight down from beneath her crown. Other wealthy women held this 2½yd. length of fine material in place with an embroidered head-band, and on state occasions when guests assembled at the castle for wedding or other festivities, or the women put on their prettiest clothes to welcome back the soldiers, the soft silk wimples were circled by a band of gold set with jewels (Fig. 2). In summer my lady’s wimple drooped gracefully about her shoulders, but in winter when keen winds flapped the tapestry restlessly against the rough-hewn stone walls of her sanctum, she was pleased to pleat her wimple and drape it round her neck like a scarf, leaving the end to fall over one shoulder towards the back. Worn thus, it was more convenient when she slipped on her long outdoor cloak and drew its hood over her head to protect her from the weather as she went from one part of her draughty stronghold to another, or answered a hasty summons to cure the sick.
Small caps for men and boys, as in Fig. 3, a & b, were worn by early Briton and late Norman alike, while the women as late as Henry I's reign still appeared out-of-doors in summer in a modified cowre-chef of silk pulled down tightly over their heads, and held round the forehead with an embroidered band (Fig. 4), a mode which, singularly enough, persisted in spite of the fact that the hair was no longer worn tightly coiled about the head, but was allowed to fall over each shoulder in a plait, at first simply braided, and later finished with tasselled ends of silk, or with ornamental metal cases.

But while the ladies at Court appeared with their shining braided tresses sometimes of real, and often of artificial hair, hanging down over the front of their high-necked purple dresses and voluminous scarlet mantles, their poorer sisters in the country were content with bright head-rails of coarse linen, while their brother, the shepherd, found that his cloak and hood of unshorn sheepskin, worn with the smooth side innermost, was his best protection during long watches on hill and headland. Meantime the doctor and the better-class civilian in and about the towns might be seen going about their business wearing the Phrygian cap (Fig. 5) or some other pleasing variation of it such as the capuchon (Fig. 6). Country fashions were often quite fifty years behind those set by the wealthy dwellers in the towns. Nevertheless things were improving, for year by year rich stuffs were slowly but steadily coming into Britain from the silk merchants on the Continent, and from the more luxurious though distant markets of Persia, Arabia and India. Traders who brought these tempting wares could show pictures of how they were made up and worn in their native places, and thus an Oriental influence began to make itself felt in European modes. Peace at home also tended to foster the arts and crafts of the people, and clever seamstresses did ample justice to the richness of the velvets, silks, and cloths that they cut with such simplicity and grace.

In Stephen's day plain clothes were most in favour, and ladies and merchants' wives alike wore the simple hooded cloak
when they went out riding, travelling, or marketing. At the open-air markets it must have been a sight, as one writer remarks, to watch the titled dames with their hoods thrown back and their heads held high, as they went from stall to stall selecting the best of the goods while the lesser folk hung around waiting until their betters had been served and they also would be allowed to make a purchase.

When woman discarded her two long betasselled plaits, she again hid her hair beneath a wimple, this time one of fine white linen arranged over a stiffened forehead-strap, and fastened at the sides to a chin-band—a head-dress very similar to those worn by the nuns of to-day.

Richard I’s short reign saw little change made in women’s dress or millinery, though materials were becoming more plentiful, and new ideas came filtering in from the Continent in the train of the foreign ladies attached to the Court. Cloth of gold, for instance, was being received in quantities from the East, and Oriental tunics and turbans brought back by the Crusaders were often to be seen gracing the titled revellers at Christmas masques and revellings. Poorer women plodded along the highway in their straight gowns and plain white wimples, and from the castle keep the men-at-arms kept guard with their heads protected by small caps, or hoods wrapped closely round their heads, and fitting in a very deep collar or cape round their shoulders.

Until after the reign of Henry III fashions changed only with the favoured upper classes living in the towns, the country folk still continuing to wear the wimple, or wrapping their bright hair in hooded cloaks lined with sheepskin, or in hairy hoods made from the skins of wolves killed almost at their doors. Moleskin hats were a luxury furnished by the combined efforts of the native mole-catcher and the local seamstress—often his wife.

In Edward I’s reign my lady donned as her most striking novelty the gorget—a piece of white linen that she wrapped about her throat, bringing up the ends and pinning them to the tightly-coiled hair above her ears, whence the ends either disappeared
beneath a stiff white linen cap, or were drawn up through a
crown-like band of stiff white linen, and fell over the top in softly
trailing folds that shrouded the back or side of the head.

The reign of the second Edward heralded in a notable fashion
that first affected my lord, and later on—my lady of that day,
and incidentally of our own. This innovation was the *liripipe*,
which some dandy first caused to be attached to the hood of his
cloak. It was indeed but an exaggeration of the peak of that
hood, an elongated point that gained and gained in length until
it reached the heels of the wearer, and, becoming a nuisance to
him, was ultimately coiled up and worn about his neck with only
the end left to dangle, or was wound round the head, as the case
might be. By Richard II’s reign the liripipe and hood or *chaperon*
to which it was attached, had altogether left their original places
upon the shoulders of the wearer, and were to be seen in a cap-
like form upon his head (*Figs. 7 & 8*), with the tabbed hood
edges falling like a cockscomb to one side. This fashion, much
affected by the dandies or cockscombs of the time, is the origin
of the cockade of to-day with its pleated edge and circular twisted
centre so familiar on my lady’s tailored hat, on her footman’s
top-hat, and more or less expressed upon the vestments worn by
the Knights of the Order of the Garter.

Women who wore a tall hat over a wimple were exceptions
whom jesters of Plantagenet days thought fit subjects for their
mimiery. Women with a hood open at the neck and short at
the back were in evidence everywhere. Men in high-crowned,
white cloth hats with coloured brims and a long feather held in
place by a jewelled or enamelled buckle (*Fig. 9, a & b*) were to
be seen both strutting the streets in Westminster, and teasing
the girls as they went to market in the fourteenth century. But
women of rank had made themselves extraordinary spectacles,
creatures whose every hair was dragged up tightly into a *crispine*,
or silk net bag sometimes sewn with pearls. Every hair likely
to stray beyond reach of the crispine was shaved from the neck
until this was bare to a level of the top of the ears; in other
cases much of the hair was pulled out—a fate shared also by the eyebrows of the ultra-fashionable dame of the moment. Some women, less foolish, had banished their hair beneath a crimpine and a veil, as in Fig. 10. Others covered their hair with an entire caul or bag of pearl-embroidered gold net (Fig. 11), or masked it as in Fig. 12, or with a turban as Fig. 13. It is a relief to those who detest such artificiality to learn that young girls left their hair to wave down naturally about their shoulders, parting it in the middle and banding it for everyday wear with ribbon, embroidered silk, or garlands of real or artificial flowers, or a plain ring of gold. For hawking, hunting the fox, hare and deer, and such sports wear, a plain dress and jerkin of gay cloth were surmounted by a hood and cape, while for riding a big round hat was sometimes worn by the ladies as an additional protection above the hood.

Every student of millinery and dress should thank good old Geoffrey Chaucer for the picture of life and customs he had given us in his day, for his Pilgrims pass before us clear as cameos. His Wife of Bath astride her horse is seen clothed in her plain wide-sleeved gown, her hips draped in a foot-mantle securely strapped about her feet, her hair invisible beneath a wimple crowned by a hat "as broad as a buckler." When in her native Bath, we are told, her head was wrapped in wimples of fine, though weighty linen, for Chaucer says: "I dorste swere they weyeden ten pound That on a Sonday were upon her head." The Pardoner has on the high-crowned hat of the period, with a handkerchief upon the front of it bearing a supposed representation of the face of Christ; the merchant is wearing his usual beaver hat.

At its outset the fifteenth century gives us no startling new headwear for men. They still retained hats and caps more or less based on the designs of Fig. 14, a, b, c & d, and adopted as their greatest innovation, in Henry IV's reign, a sugar-loaf cap carried high, with its top lopped over to the left side at a rakish angle. Henry V was greeted home from Agincourt by his male
subjects wearing flat solid-looking turbans, befittingly donned, parti-coloured hose, and jerkins with sleeves of extravagant size. His female subjects following the extremes set by their men folks adopted the eccentric, but often pleasing, high-horned head-dress (Fig. 15) from which was hung a silk or linen wimple. This fashion, as may well be supposed, grew little by little out of all bounds, and wonderful indeed must the ladies of the Courts of Henry V and Henry VI have looked, some of them with their heads pushed, as it were, into huge circular diamond-studded cauls or padded bags of stiff gold wire that made their heads appear more than twice the normal size; others with boxes of one kind or another which stood out in 14-in. horn-like projections on either side of the forehead, and were veiled over the top and back with a flowing wimple. The limit, perhaps, was reached by the hennin or steeple head-dress, a fashion of Flemish origin (Fig. 16). This great, black, silk-covered cone, held in place on the forehead by a velvet loop or cross proclaiming the wearer’s status, was bordered round the lower edge with black velvet embroidered in gold thread, and towards the peak supported a veil of gold tissue, gauze or linen. Later still in the history of this fashion, a cylinder blazing with jewels was to be seen veiled with great gauze wings as in our sketch (Fig. 17). Huge heart-shaped erections, mitres, crowns, turbans, boxes or cones figured monstrous on the heads of every Court lady at high festivals, and not until these millinery eccentricities were poorly copied and unwittingly caricatured by less wealthy wearers did the ladies of rank forsake them.

Fig. 18, a, b & c shows some of the simpler caps of cloth, silk, velvet, felt, or beaver, that found favour with men until Henry VIII’s days, when elegant plumed caps, as in Fig. 19, made in bright velvet for preference, and braided in gold, were worn by King, courtiers, and rich civilians alike. A flat cap and coif similar to Fig. 20 was also in fashion, particularly for men, in rough weather.

Pictures of ladies of Henry VII’s time, and of Henry VIII’s wives, have made us familiar with the black silk pyramid or
diamond-shaped head-dress sewn with pearls, or gold on white or a colour (Fig. 20, a); also with the white-lined head-dress worn by Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour, their Maids of Honour, and the courtiers of the time. Catherine of Aragon, whose sad dignified bearing has left a mark on England’s pages for ever, adopted a simpler hood-like covering, as in Fig. 20, b & c. Ladies getting on in years preferred white linen head-dresses arranged more or less in pyramid form over a closely-fitting cap, while in country and town alike the poor chose linen coifs or caps.

Elaborate head-dresses, however, were all very well for ladies of leisure who had opportunities to put them on and ladies’-maids to prepare fresh headgear when such was necessary. But in Tudor England the great new middle class was becoming an important item to be reckoned with. These working women wanted to be well dressed in as easy and expeditious a way as possible, and the elegant and elaborate millinery of the upper classes gave place for them to ready-made hats for every day, and for Sundays to peaked bonnets of the Mary, Queen of Scots order, which still kept a suggestion of their diamond-shaped predecessors. Greater simplicity in dress was also noticeable, the voluminous and heavily embroidered skirts and bodices giving place to plain fabrics not unduly full and almost devoid of ornament. Bonnets were evidently a much-prized present during the girlhood of Henry VIII’s daughter, Mary. On one occasion, we read, that Princess bought six bonnets from the Lady Mayoress of London, who was a milliner; £1 each was paid for the bonnets, which the Princess gave to ladies whom she knew. Fashion, however, was not rigidly in favour of bonnets, for some years later when Mary was crowned Queen of England, she wore a white velvet gown adorned with crimson, and a small cap of gold net over her hair.

History teems with men and women at the end of the sixteenth century wearing the popular high hats adorned with a single feather, a swathe of silk, or twist of material (Figs. 21, 22, 23 & 24). These were seen alike on the heads of men of leisure
and on the merchant and his jaunty apprentice; on women of rank and her humbler sister on the way to church. Queen Elizabeth herself often put on a silk-swathed hat when she journeyed to and fro about the country. Indeed, this good lady did much for millinery, favouring one style and then another to the great joy, no doubt, of her followers of fashion. A picture of the period, for instance, shows her on a white horse reviewing her troops at Tilbury with her red-gold, close-curled periwig topped with a shallow curved hat, bunched with ostrich plumes, and, as we know, portraits of her are many and her headgear varies in them all. In public she was always impressively attired, but in private life and when visiting her courtiers, her millinery was simpler, and in the garden at Hatfield House she might have been seen wearing the limp, shallow-crowned, wide-brimmed hat trimmed with a band of ribbon, that she left behind there, and which now lies under glass in the drawing-room of that mansion, prized by the Cecil family as one of its greatest treasures.

With the coming of James I we have variations of the high-crowned hat for men (Fig. 25) ranging from that with a deep brim at back and front, to the close-brimmed Spanish type be-feathered at the side and back. Poor women went about their work in untrimmed wide hats, while their mistresses covered their high-bunched hair with a plateau-like oddity of silk or straw, or possibly chose a fine straw finished with several ostrich plumes, and in the extreme of fashion donned a small silk hood with a jewelled frontlet.

We all know the beautiful picturesque gowns of the Charles I period, and the simple black silk hood with its ends knotted beneath the chin, that covered my lady's curls when, accompanied by her maid, she went out walking. We are also familiar with the wide-brimmed, high-crowned hats then to be seen on every market woman, and the white linen hood worn at home, with black hat over it, that distinguished the indoor and outdoor headwear of the merchant's wife and elderly daughter. Figs. 26 & 27 show typical Stuart models.
With Cromwell we naturally expect the sober puritanical hats—wide, soft, and almost devoid of trimming—and we get these side by side with traces of the waning glories of previous years. Charles II’s reign gives us glimpses of ladies indoors with curled hair tied up with ribbons, while out-of-doors they trip along Pall Mall in large circular hats with sweeping plumes, rather wider, but not unlike those worn by the gay cavaliers who escort them. Black hoods made their appearance on women’s heads in Samuel Pepys’ day, when the country women in a simpler fashion still knotted a handkerchief over their hair, and when necessary crowned it with a wide straw hat. Comfort and the weather still dictated rather forcibly to the fair sex what they should wear, for until the days of the umbrella the elements had to be reckoned with seriously.

Fig. 28 was a head-dress familiar to every fashionable dame at the end of the seventeenth century. This \( \frac{1}{2} \) -yd. high fontage, or tower of lace, was at first nothing more than a bow of ribbon tied round the hair and finished in front with rather long loops and ends, but it soon aspired to something more important, and to accommodate it the hair was piled up over a wire frame or commode, against which rested the three or four tiers of lace, finished with long lappets hanging from the sides and back on to the shoulders. High-crowned hats were obviously necessary to cover such elaborate coiffures, and Plate 1 shows a typical example banded with silk set in straight bows on the left side.

When Queen Anne came to the throne the fontage had already dwindled in height and width until it appeared more like a cap, over which the ladies threw a black lace or silk fichu or head-wrap. Women of the middle classes might be seen on week-days and Sundays in charming frilled white linen caps drawn over their hair, which was coiled loosely round their heads, and among the better-class women, wide-brimmed, low-crowned hats of many kinds were common. Men preferred above all others a white felt, three-cornered shape (Plate 2), which was often trimmed
Plate IX
with the gold or silver lace, braid, or feathers, that in these days would be considered so effeminate.

From 1760 to 1820 powder and pomatum were used lavishly. Hairdressers and fashion generally might be said to have gone mad, for they piled my lady’s tresses up and up over masses of stuffing, until she appeared twice her natural height. As one writer says: "From being adorned at first with jewellery and ornaments stuck with long, straight feathers, the hair passed on to having petticoats of lace and puffed satin over it, and then on to even wilder extravagances. In some of the prints reproduced in the *Pall Mall Magazine*, we see the hair broadened out well as it ascended, until, on reaching the top (which, by the way, could only have been accomplished with the aid of a pair of steps), it was flattened into a sort of sloping roof, and decorated with wonderful designs in cardboard, blown glass, and steel and gold wires. For example, in one we see a huge garden laid out with at least twenty parterres; a hedge all round, a summer-house at one end, a tree at the side, and, to crown all, a miniature cardboard man in the act of syringing it. Huge vegetables, imitated in wax and other materials, were quite ordinary, while some of the heads were adorned with small models of coaches, carriages, or waggons!"

Over such monstrosities a large hood or *calash*, stiffened with whalebone was necessary to cover the entire head-dress out of doors, and by night a linen nightcap, for, be it whispered, this hairdressing was so elaborate and costly to arrange that it was sometimes left dressed for two or three months at a stretch. One can imagine how some ladies suffered for their vanity and foolishness. The alternative hat for wear on hair piled rather high, but at any rate more naturally, was a tiny flat shape either poised upon the front of the upstanding coiffure or carried in the hand. Young girls left their hair hanging down over their shoulders and wore simple flat straw shapes trimmed with ribbon, or high-crowned hats with drooping brims.

*Plate 3*, showing a ribbon and straw hat or *bonnet*, and *Plate 4*
a model in straw, give one an idea of fashionable millinery around the years 1803 and 1804. Plate 5 shows a hat, of the same period, of silk, the edges of the crown strip being gimped.

Plate 6 depicts an 1810 white silk cased bonnet trimmed with padded flowers, and looking very like the print cottage bonnet of to-day.

In Plate 7 we get a glimpse of smart wear in the time of George IV, when folded silk and tufts of plumes were used with such good effect. This shape, so familiar in the Empire modes of France, is very familiar to the Russian hats lately introduced into this country as novelties for children’s wear. Poke bonnets, lace caps, bows, flowers and jewels all graced the heads of the ladies in the reigns of the fourth George and William. From them we pass naturally to Victorian styles that vary from the silk and lace cottage bonnet of Plate 8 to the flat Leghorn hat of Plate 9, a typical mode of 1862, bound with black velvet, and trimmed with an ostrich feather flat, and streamers of black velvet ribbon.

Thus, from the hats of the past we can see more or less clearly how we derive the ever-changing styles of the present. Season by season Fashion reiterates that she has something absolutely new to give us, but, as students of millinery, we can accept her statement with a smile when we know from which generation of our ancestors she has most probably drawn it.