CHAPTER SIX: THE BERET

If you are labouring under the delusion that the beret is merely a small round felt hat with a closely fitting headband, then my primary aim must be to disillusion you as quickly as possible. In the previous chapter I referred to the fact that the off-the-face hat lent itself to very wide variation, yet the scope in design afforded by the beret is just as extensive.

The word tam o'shanter has almost disappeared from millinery jargon; not because the hat itself is no longer worn, but because it has become quietly incorporated into the beret family. This indeed, is a pointer to the extent to which the millinery world is dominated by Paris.

It would be easy to define the beret as a hat made either from a felt beret hood and moulded on a crown shape, or made in strip felt from a pattern. The great majority of berets, whether products of the factory or of model millinery, are in fact, so made, but there are also many berets in wool, silk, velvet and strip straw which are made on a wooden or sparterie foundation.

The Beret in Strip Felt. Without any doubt, this beret is a very simple hat to make. It consists only of two pieces, a tip and a shaped sideband, both of which are cut to pattern from a strip of felt and machined together. The real test lies not in making the hat, but in its arrangement after being made. It offers almost unlimited opportunities for the creative mind and therefore will form a test, not of purely technical millinery
skill, but rather of the student's powers of artistic expression. Strip felt is obtainable in most colours from any wholesale millinery suppliers. It is sold in pieces, or "strips", as they are known to the trade, usually 44 in. to 48 in. in length and 16 in. to 18 in. in width. Only fur felt should be used; in fact, the more reputable suppliers sell only this kind. Avoid wool felt altogether; it is usually too thick to work with and, even if a thin strip is found, the material thickens and becomes matted when steamed and pressed.

Make a paper pattern for the tip on the lines shown in fig. 27. No pattern to scale has been given for the tip, as the method by measurement is equally as accurate. Describe, on any reasonably smooth piece of packing paper, a circle of $8\frac{3}{4}$ in. radius. Using a ruler, draw a pencil line from the centre to the edge to establish the back mark. From the edge and parallel to this radius, draw two lines $5\frac{1}{4}$ in. long, each at a distance of $1\frac{7}{8}$ in. from either side of it, and cut up each line with the scissors. These lines mark the position of two darts which will be made in the tip for the purpose of shaping the beret.

Only half of the pattern for the shaped sideband is shown; this is reproduced, against a measured background, inside the jacket, and is shown, in diagram form, in fig. 28. There is no need to reproduce the full pattern as the halves are identical. Fold a piece of smooth paper in half and crease the fold sharply. Using the folded edge as a base draw a parallel line at a distance of 10 in. Measure off the width of 20 in. shown in the diagram and then reproduce, in actual measurement, the guide lines which are shown drawn to scale. Mark each 2 in. distance with a heavier line to assist in planning the outline. Each line is separated from the next by a distance of 1 in.

Plot the outline of the half pattern by marking on the paper, points which correspond to the places of intersection of the scale lines and pattern in the illustration. The more guide marks which are made the easier it will be to draw the outline; therefore make a distinct dot on each successive square. When the entire half pattern has been plotted on the squared paper, join the dots with a free-hand pencil line. Keep the line curving where necessary; there is only one straight line, which is the back seam. Pin together the two halves of folded paper and cut
Fig. 27. Plan of the beret tip

Fig. 28. Pattern of half sideband to quarter scale

Pattern measures 20" × 10", each small square = ½"
along the pencil line through both thicknesses. Unpin the paper and the pattern is ready for use.

Lay the strip felt on the table, place the tip pattern upon it, allowing a clearance of \( \frac{1}{4} \) in. from either of the two short sides. Pin the pattern, near its edge, to the felt in four or five places and tack a line in the felt around the entire edge of the pattern. Remember to pin down the flap which will form the darts. Make this tack line coincide exactly with the pattern and remember that the smaller the tacking stitches used, the better the circle.

Stitch a tack line in the felt directly beneath each of the two 5\( \frac{1}{4} \) in. cuts, and extend the pencilled radius to the other side of the circle with a ruler to establish the position of the front. Mark this, underneath the pattern, with a tack. Unpin and remove the pattern. Measure a distance of 1 in. from each tack line marking the darts on the edge of the circle. Draw a line with tailor’s chalk, from each of these marks to the top of each 5\( \frac{1}{4} \) in. tack line and sew a tack line along each chalk line. Leaving a \( \frac{1}{8} \) in. turning, cut around the entire tack line marking the shape of the tip.

Pin the pattern of the shaped sideband to the remainder of the material and tack a line completely round the edge of the pattern to mark the shape. Tack in a front mark on the inside of the outer edge (underneath the pattern), remove the pattern and cut the shape out, again leaving a \( \frac{1}{2} \) in. turning around the entire edge.

Take up the tip and pin the darts so that the two tack lines meet on the inside of the fold. Tack each dart, and machine along each tack line. Cut along the folded edge of each dart and press the turnings flat with a hot iron and damp cloth. A corded seam can be made at this stage by machining a row of stitching on each side of the seam. This method of finishing seams and darts, which is used to a great extent by professional milliners, gives a finish to the work and helps to remove the home-made look. Cut turnings away.

Match together the two edges of the sideband marked B in the diagram and join them by machining a line parallel to, and \( \frac{1}{4} \) in. away from the edge. Press open the seam with a hot iron and damp cloth and complete a corded seam by machining a further row each side of the join. Cut away the turnings.

Match tip to sideband so that the back seam of the sideband
Fig. 29. Beret tip and sideband matched, right sides facing

Fig. 30. Headband ribbon stitched in before cutting turnings away

Fig. 31. Finished strip felt beret trimmed with quills

Fig. 32. Finished velvet beret trimmed with feather mount
comes exactly between the darts on the tip. Take care to match the two pieces so that the finished seams on each of them face inwards (fig. 29). Pin and tack tip and sideband together following the tacked outline of both pieces. The two pieces should fit together perfectly; if necessary, bring the tack line slightly inside the original guide line. Machine right round the tack line, and press open the seams with a hot iron and damp cloth.

It is impossible, of course, at this stage to iron the work on a flat surface; the pressing pad technique must be employed here. Hold a pad in the left hand, put the hand holding the pad inside the work and hold the pad against the seam, then press open the turnings on the outer side around the entire edge. This task must be done slowly and thoroughly; hasty work will result in burnt fingers and, ultimately, a faulty line on the outside edge caused by incompletely pressed turnings.

Turn the work inside out to bring the right side on the outside and, commencing at the back, make a corded seam by machining one row on each side of the seam around the outer edge of the hat. The importance of the corded seam has been already stressed and the extra time and trouble involved in making it are well worth while. Do not however, be misled into imagining that this apparently straightforward job of machining is really an easy one. Far from adding the professional touch, the corded seam will, if the machine lines are other than strictly parallel to, and of equal distance from, the seam, actually make the work more amateurish in appearance than ever. Therefore, unless the student is a competent machinist, the corded seam around the outside edge should not be attempted. A useful tip in machining the two rows is to use the small foot of the machine as a guide. If the outside edge of the foot is kept against the seam whilst machining, the line of stitches must be parallel to, and the width of the small foot away from, the seam.

Turn the beret inside out, trim off the turnings and turn it back again. Measure a length of \( \frac{1}{2} \) in. petersham ribbon to the head size required, allowing a \( \frac{1}{2} \) in. turning at each end, sew the ends together and open the turnings. Place the beret on the table, sideband uppermost, and fit the ribbon headband around the opening, the back joins of beret and headband matching.
Adjust the ribbon so that the outer edge of it lies flat and in a circular form and pin it in position (fig. 30). Stitch the ribbon headband to the beret around its outside edge. Cut away the felt turning to about \( \frac{1}{4} \) in. in width and the hat is ready for shaping and trimming.

Fit the beret on a dome-shaped block fitted to its stand, or on a head. The generous size of this hat will permit of its being fashioned into an infinite variety of shapes and styles and the student's success will depend on flair for arrangement. It is worth remembering that this beret may be worn straight or tilted over the eyes, up at the left-hand side or off the face. In any of these positions the angle may be varied greatly; for instance, if the sidesweep style is adopted the angle at which it is worn may vary between the moderate slight tilt and the exaggerated sweep.

If it is desired to reproduce the design illustrated, turn the double thickness of the outside edge over in a fold \( \frac{3}{4} \) in. across at the widest part, the centre of which comes over the right eye. Hold the folded edge and make another fold about 1\( \frac{1}{2} \) in. away from it. This second fold is about \( \frac{5}{8} \) in. deep. Make a third and final fold \( \frac{3}{8} \) in. deep to form an inverted pleat with the previous fold. Catch the folds securely into position with a few stitches and endeavour to make them fall away from a sharp crease at the centre to soft flowing curves at each end. Instead of the quills which, as illustrated, are inset on either side of the pleat, decorative hat-pins tipped with balls in various bright metals or covered with sequins, beads or mother-of-pearl may be used (fig. 31).

**THE BERET FROM A BERET HOOD.** It is necessary, in making this beret, to use a wooden block. These blocks are made in literally dozens of shapes, many of which are made only to meet a sudden and passing demand of fashion and then discarded. If no block is available the easiest course is to refrain from attempting to convert a hood into a hat. It should be mentioned that beret foundations for blocking can be moulded from sparterie; this method is, in fact, used in the most exclusive millinery houses, but since such a task is, beyond any doubt, the most difficult a milliner is called upon to execute, the student is advised not to try it.
Assuming that a suitable beret block is available, and that a beret without pleats or folds is required, the hood should be pulled over the block. The block, if it has a wide tip, will be made in sections which will require assembling inside the hood. These sections, when blocking is complete, must be disassembled in order that the hat may be removed without stretching it.

Instead of securing with drawing pins it is better to use a length of cord or string, made into a loop with a slip knot. Pass the loop over the tip and draw it up as tightly as possible around the “neck” of the block. The amount of fullness to be disposed of will vary according to the size of the hood relative to the shape of the block being used. If there is a lot of fullness to be shrunken away, the cord method will be found far superior to the drawing pin method because, unless the pins are removed at each stage of shrinking, there is a great danger of the felt splitting. Securing the work with a cord enables it to be held and pulled continuously in the steam. Steaming must be very thoroughly done.

When all the fullness has been shrunken away in the steam, iron the work all over, using a damp cloth. Tack in a front mark and, when the work is thoroughly dry, remove it from the block. If no pleats or folds are required, place it on a head at the angle at which it is to be worn, and tack a line around the neck of the shape to indicate the depth required. Cut away the surplus felt at ¼ in. below the tack line, turn the felt under to the tack line and lightly press the headline thus established. Remove the work from the block and stitch in a headlining of ⅛ in. petersham ribbon.

Pleats, if required, should be made before shrinking away the fullness in the hood. Establish them with pins, tack them, steam the hood and press them when ironing the work. Press each pleat well to give it a sharply defined line.

A VELVET BERET. The pattern for the beret in strip felt may be used for making the beret from practically any sort of material. If the material chosen is rather thin, a lining, or foundation as it is called, must be introduced to prevent the shape from collapsing. Silk materials such as taffeta and satin require a lining composed of a double thickness of tarlatan. Thicker materials of woollen texture still require a lining, but usually
only a single thickness of tarlatan is necessary. Thin canvas may be used instead of tarlatan.

The beret which follows is made up from a yard of millinery velvet and its tarlatan lining takes the same amount. This particular velvet is heavier and stiffer than dress velvet and consequently needs only to be lined with a single thickness of tarlatan. The pattern shown in fig. 27 is too large for the velvet beret, but the only modification necessary is for about 2 in. to be trimmed from the outside edges of both tip and sideband. The full size of the pattern could be used but the finished article would, in velvet, be rather flamboyant and would need arrangement by very experienced hands to give it a good line.

Cut the pattern to size as described in the preceding section, reducing the outside edge of both tip and sideband by 2 in. Iron out any creases in the tarlatan and lay it flat on the table. Remove all creases from the velvet by holding it in steam, then lay it on top of the tarlatan, right side up, and smooth it with the hands so that it lies absolutely flat. Both tip and sideband have to be cut on the bias and the pattern must be placed on the material accordingly. Lay the tip pattern in one corner so that the front mark lies on a diagonal line drawn from the corner. Adjust the pattern so that its outside edge leaves a clearance of ½ in. for turnings from either edge of the material. Pin the pattern to the material through both thicknesses, keeping the work smooth and flat. Using small stitches, tack around the entire edge of the pattern and along the dart lines through both velvet and tarlatan. Unpin and remove the pattern and sew in the front mark. Place the sideband pattern in the diagonally opposite corner, once again matching the front mark to the diagonal of the corner and leaving the ½ in. space for turnings from the outside edge of the pattern. Tack the shape of the pattern in the same way as for the tip, tack in the front mark and remove the pattern.

Cut right round the tack lines of both pieces allowing ½ in. for the turnings. Pin, tack and machine the two darts as described in the strip felt beret. Cut along the fold of the darts. Open the seams by lightly pressing with a warm iron. This pressing must be done in the hand and a small pad of velvet should be held directly under the part being pressed. A velvet pad must be used to prevent the pile of the material from being
flattened, or "plushed" as it is called. Refrain from making a corded seam; this method of finishing is unsuited to velvet.

Make a back seam on the sideband by machining the two straight edges together. Press open the seam. Match tip to sideband by laying the sideband on the tip so that the back join, which has just been made, lies exactly between the two darts on the tip, velvet sides facing inwards. Tack both pieces together along the original tack lines. Machine right round the tack line. Using the velvet pad, press the turnings open and reduce them to about \( \frac{1}{4} \) in.

If required, a silk headlining may be fitted for the purpose of covering the tarlatan. Cut a piece of silk to the tip pattern, dab millinery solution around its edge on the wrong side, lay it on the tip of the beret and smooth it lightly in position with the hands to make it adhere. If a complete lining is required the entire work will have to be accordingly arranged, i.e., headlining silk, tarlatan and velvet are laid on the table, the pattern superimposed, and the rest of the work carried out with the three thicknesses instead of two.

Turn the work inside out to bring the velvet on the right side and sew in a headband of petersham ribbon, using once again the method described in the preceding section of this chapter.

Place the hat on a dome-shaped crown block, or, better still, a head, for the purpose of arranging it to the style and shape required. Here, once again, is presented an opportunity for artistic expression. The hat, as illustrated, has a few simple but well-placed folds and pleats; but it is almost impossible adequately to convey by words or measurement how to so arrange the hat. At this point the purely millinery side of hatmaking is left and the ultimate success of the hat, regardless of the skill which has been put into its making, will depend entirely on its arrangement. Bear in mind, when draping the folds, the type of trimming, if any, which will be used and, above all, adapt the shape to conform with the height and build of the wearer.

Folds should be lightly pinned whilst the hat is on the block, using the pins sparingly to avoid marking the velvet. The hat should be tried on the wearer for the effect to be studied and, if necessary, the folds or pleats repinned. When the final adjustments are complete remove the hat and tie tack folds and
pleats on the wrong side in Sylko to match to hold them in position. Remove the pins and replace the hat on the block. Steam thoroughly, running the folds and pleats between the fingers and gently manipulating any dents; this will, in effect, block the hat and cause the material to assume, more or less permanently, the shape arranged. Allow the beret to dry completely before removing it from the block.

For trimming purposes, pins and feathers make very effective decorations; brooches in brilliants form a pleasing contrast to the lustre of the velvet. The hat illustrated is trimmed with a cluster of short, soft feathers in powder blue with a quill, tipped with the same colour, running through the cluster.

If it is found impossible to achieve a satisfactory result by arranging pleats and folds, the beret may be worn either quite flat and slightly forward on the head or tilted on the left side at an angle in much the same way as the old-fashioned tam o’shanter used to be worn. If the hat is worn flat, two quills or ostrich feathers may be stitched across the centre front of the tip; if it is worn tilted at the side the quills may be arranged, with effect, on the upsweep side (fig. 32).

THE STRAW BERET. This can only be made on a wooden or sparterie foundation. So far as the student is concerned the wooden crown block method is, as already stated in the previous section, the only really practical one. Most workrooms include at least one beret block and the following instructions therefore assume that such a block is available. This type of block is specially constructed of three or more pieces which fit together and which can be easily disassembled for the purpose of removing the hat from the block without stretching the headline. The straw is sold by all wholesale millinery suppliers in strip form which is made up into packets containing about 6 to 8 yards, the actual length varying with the thickness of the straw.

Form the beginning of the straw into a rosette by making a running stitch with a No. 7 millinery needle threaded with double “Sylko” to match. This run of stitches should be about 6 in. in length and should be made along one edge of the straw. “Frill” the straw by drawing the thread up tightly, and
it will take the required shape. Tuck the raw end underneath (fig. 33A). Secure the centre of the rosette to the centre of the block with a drawing pin and continue the running stitch, for the first few rings of the spiral, doing a few inches at a time and drawing the thread up after each run to frill the straw so that it overlaps sufficiently to allow the two layers to be stitched together. Do not draw the thread so tightly that the outer edge of the straw becomes fluted. Endeavour to taunt the thread sufficiently to fit the correct circle and assist the process by manipulating the outer edge so that it lies flat. After the first few rings, which admittedly are the most difficult, it will be found that the running stitch can be dispensed with and the outside edge can be slightly stretched and pinned on the block with ordinary pins stuck in vertically. Continue thus until the whole of the tip has been made (fig. 33B).

First making sure that the whole of the tip is securely fastened to the block with drawing pins, back stitch the overlapping edge to the next layer starting from the centre. The stitches should be quite small ones, preferably not longer than \( \frac{1}{16} \) in., and should be made with Sylko. Stitch the entire tip, and, without removing the pins, press lightly, using a damp cloth to shrink any parts which do not lie flat on the block. Press carefully to avoid imprinting the heads of the drawing pins on the straw.

Take up the length of the straw and continue laying and pinning it to the block around the bevel. At this stage the correct line is difficult to maintain, therefore prepare only 3 in. to 4 in. at a time and then stitch together, leaving the pins in place to keep the line of the straw in its correct position and pressing as you go to shape the straw to the block. Keep the iron to hand all the time as the only way to keep the straw spiral even and to achieve a close fit is to pin a few inches, press until all fulness is removed, then stitch; pin a further few inches, press and stitch and so on. Continue in this fashion until the headline marked on the block is reached. Finish off at the back mark on the block by tucking an overlap of about 2 in. underneath and stitching together.

Remove all drawing pins except the one in the centre, steam the hat and thoroughly block it by pressing it all over with a hot iron and damp cloth. When it is quite dry, liberally coat it with
Fig. 33. A. Making the straw rosette

Fig. 33. B. Beret tip made in strip straw

Fig. 34. The finished straw beret in two styles
straw stiffener, leave it to dry again, then sew in a front tack mark and remove it from the block. Place the hat on a dome-shaped block, adjust it to the angle at which it is intended to be worn, pin it in position and tack the headline at the depth required. Remove it from the block, turn the edge to the tack line and stitch in a headlining of $\frac{1}{2}$ in. to 1 in. petersham ribbon. Cut the turning down to the depth of the headlining and the hat is ready to be adapted.

The straw beret affords only a limited field for the designer; its shape is on the small side and the material of which it is made precludes any extravagant use of folds and tucks. If, for instance, the straw itself is coarse and has a patterned weave all that is needed by way of shaping is to catch, with a few stitches, the tip on the right side into a soft fold. A suitable trimming in this case would be a small cluster of flowers or ribbon bows arranged along the fold.

If the hat is to be worn straight, place it thus on the block, pull the tip forward and catch it down to the headband with a few stitches across the front. Here again flowers or ribbons may be used with effect. So modelled, the hat may be worn either straight and slightly forward or, if the wearer is youthful, on the back of the head.

Veiling of a contrasting colour is always an effective additional trimming on these small hats. Be liberal with veiling; attractively arranged it can work wonders with even the most insignificant little straw. The hat, as illustrated, has a face veil which is tied at the back over the hat and lightly stitched in position (fig. 34).