V

COLLARS AND BANDS

NICKS IN COAT LAPELS—THE WHY AND WHEREFORE OF THE WHITE SHIRT FRONT

LET us carry on our work of dissecting the clothes of a modern man, and as we once more survey our subject, we may glance a little higher than heretofore, until our eyes rest upon the collar of

![Image of a man]

**Fig. 32.**—The nicks in the coat and waistcoat.

his coat. This structure passes into the lapels, and at the point of junction there is a curious nick which is repeated in the waistcoat if this be similarly provided with lapels. (See Figure 32.)
There is always a temptation to invent some interesting theory in order to explain the origin of vestiges, and a penny paper, which hardly boasts of scientific accuracy, not long ago informed its readers that the slit in the coat lapel is the outcome of a "unique and beautiful custom among the orthodox Jews," for in former days, when death visited a Jew's household, he cut the lapel of his coat. It was undoubtedly a custom of the Jews to rend their garments, but it does not, on the face of it, seem likely that the practice would have influenced modern costume. It would appear, however, that the slit in the lapel has a much more prosaic origin, and owes its existence rather to a practical requirement than to a sentimental observance. When the collar of a coat is made to stand up, it is absolutely necessary that a piece should
be cut out of the cloth, or the lapel will not lie down. In the exaggerated garment of which we give an illustration (see Figure 33) this need is most manifest; but a moment's thought will show that the provision must be made, even if the collar be small. A trifling experiment will indicate that at the present day the cut is not usually made deep enough to allow of the collar being turned up without disturbing the lapels.

![Diagram of a dress coat showing the "toothpick" on the lapel]

**Fig. 34.**—The "toothpick" on a dress coat.

Another remarkable variation is to be found in the collars of some dress suits. A little point is left on the collar known to tailors as the "toothpick," which runs across the nick into the lapel (see Figure 34). This structure is probably a survival of some particular kind of collar.

It might be pointed out here that the facings and collar that are of silk or velvet represent the lining of the coat which came into view when the collar was
turned down and the lapels turned back. The case is quite similar to that of the cuffs on uniforms, and to be quite consistent, the whole coat should be lined with what is usually used now only as a kind of trimming.

It is but a short step from the features that we have been discussing, to the linen collar and the shirt front. The cutting away of the outer garment to bring the shirt into view is a relic of the time when only those who were very well to do could afford to wear linen, and they showed it, in order to indicate their social position, or at any rate their financial resources. At the same time, the women cut their dresses low so as to show their underlinen; and not content with this, they further, at the end of the thirteenth century, slit their gowns from the armpits to the hips. The openings thus made were laced across, so that the linen garments beneath could easily be seen.

The white shirt has long survived, and in spite of its depreciated value has up to quite recently posed as a badge of respectability. Now at last there are signs that its sway is over, and that soon it will come to be only a garment of ceremony.

The linen collar of to-day is quite a small affair compared with some of its forerunners. An interesting relic is to be seen in the two little linen flaps which we call bands (see Figure 35). These are still worn by preachers in conjunction with the Geneva gown, by barristers, and by Blue-coat boys (see Figure 36), and
we can easily trace their relationship to the collar. Until a few years ago the choristers at Jesus College, Cambridge, wore a peculiar collar which ended in two flaps much resembling bands, and the descent of this from the large structures which were called falling bands is not difficult to trace.

Fig. 35.—Modern bands.  Fig. 36.—A blue-coat boy’s bands.

Fig. 37.—A chorister of Jesus College, Cambridge, showing the collar worn until recently. (From a photograph by the courtesy of Mr. H. Austin Wheaton.)
The portrait of Jan Steen, which we reproduce, shows bands which are less stiff and formal, but of ampler proportions. (See Figure 38.)

Going a little further back, we find the collar that covered the shoulders, such as Milton wore, and which is shown in our picture of John Pym. (See Figure 39.)

Fig. 38.—A stage in the reduction of the bands (portrait of Jan Steen from the Illustrated Magazine of Art).

Fig. 39.—Full-sized bands (portrait of John Pym from the Illustrated Magazine of Art).

At this point we may pause to recall a simple article which is known as a bandbox, but which has been diverted from its original purpose of holding bands, and is now commonly used as a receptacle for hats. Though not itself part of dress, the bandbox furnishes an interesting instance of adaptation to circumstances. It was well suited to contain articles of dress other than those for which it was primarily intended, and
hence it has survived in the struggle for existence. (See Figure 40.)

We must not, however, jump to the conclusion that bands are now only represented by vestiges, for they are still to be seen in their full glory on very small boys (see Figure 41), and the writer recalls a lad of fourteen or so who had reached the dignity of trousers who wore the same kind of collar. As he also had a trencher, or in common parlance, a "mortar-board," it is possible that he was not an isolated survival, but belonged to some school which adopted a special costume.

As linen collars are one of the articles of dress in regard to which the wearer is allowed in a great
measure to follow his own taste, it is not surprising that a great many forms have from time to time been invented. Quite a number are still to be seen here and there, while the development of the more fashionable shapes one from the other would, in itself, form a chapter in the Evolution of Dress. The clerical collar may be singled out, as it fastens behind like the bands, though the reason for this is not at all obvious.

In recalling the great ruffs and expanded collars of Queen Elizabeth's reign, one may be inclined to smile at the lengths to which a fad may be carried, and the curious, not to say monstrous, structures that are its culminations. These, like the huge creatures of by-gone ages, die out, but differ in this respect that they sometimes revive for a time. For instance, only a few years have passed since the collars of ladies' mantles stood up round the back of their heads; but as the collars usually lacked the decoration and colour of the Elizabethan period, they appeared as if they were intended merely to keep the draught from the necks of their wearers, and they did not last for long.