

VII

SHOES AND STOCKINGS

EARLY FOOT-GEAR—THE ORIGIN OF THE CLOCK—A MODERN
IMITATION OF TATTOOING—GAILY COLOURED GARTERS

MANY persons still go barefoot, so that ancient as foot-gear may be, the stage preceding its adoption is even now represented. Moreover, sandals, which are very primitive, have been much in use of recent years, and have especially been worn by children.

If we turn to ordinary boots and shoes we shall not find many obvious points about them which lead up to their history. Still we shall see in the case of a large number that in places where one piece of leather laps over another, it is perforated with rows of holes which form a kind of simple ornamentation. (See Figure 64.)

The perforations do not go through the boot or shoe, and in a Roman example in the British Museum, which is much more highly decorated, there are two thicknesses of leather, of which the outer one only is pierced. (See Figure 65.)

In many cases, however, the Roman shoe was truly of open work. It consisted of but one thick-

ness of leather, and from this, large pieces were cut out so as to make a kind of lattice. Several examples of this kind of shoe are exhibited at the British Museum, and we give an illustration of one of these, which is in a very fair state of preservation. (See Figure 66.)

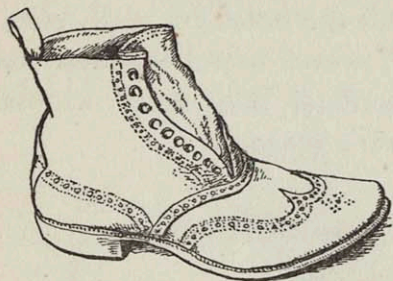


FIG. 64.—A modern boot decorated with perforations made in the leather.

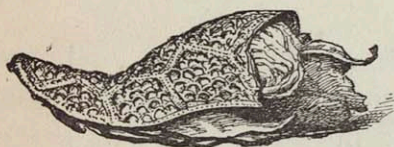


FIG. 65.—An ornamented Roman shoe, of two thicknesses.

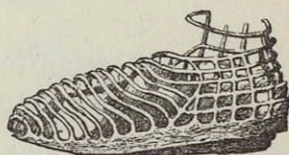


FIG. 66.—A Roman shoe of open-work leather.

It seems very probable that the ornamentation on our modern shoes is a survival of the open work which was in favour with the Romans, especially as even then the apertures did not always expose the foot. In pre-Roman times in this country there were perforations in some of the shoes which were useful rather than ornamental, and one type (of which a specimen figured by Fairholt is preserved by the

Royal Irish Academy) has survived until recently, if it is not to be found to-day, in Scotland and Ireland. This shoe was made of raw hide (see Figure 67), and the holes, it is said, were intended to allow the water to pass through when the wearer was crossing morasses. An examination of the figure will, however, show that the holes are really slits, and it would appear that however useful they may have proved in the way described, they were originally made for quite a different reason.

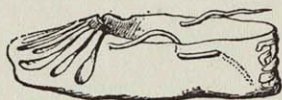


FIG. 67.—A hide shoe of pre-Roman type from Ireland (after Fairholt).

The most primitive kind of shoe would doubtless be a piece of hide placed under the foot and brought up over the toes and round the heel. It would make a rather unprepossessing bundle, and there would be awkward puckers where the hide was gathered up. If the superfluous material at the toe were cut away, we should have a slit in every case where there had previously been a fold. This state of affairs is exactly what is to be seen in the Irish shoe, where the strips of leather that are left are held in place by a thong. In an ingenious way, apparently with the help of the same lace, the difficulty of securing a fit at the heel has also been got over. The result is a

very neat shoe indeed, though in reality it is only the original flat piece of hide.

One of the most perfect instances of vestiges, as Sir George Darwin points out, is afforded by top boots. In their original form, still to be seen in our streets on sewer men, the boots were made to come above the knee, but fashion decreed that the top

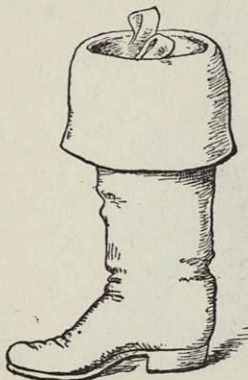


FIG. 68.—The original top boot with the upper part temporarily turned down.

should be turned back (see Figure 68), and so it came about that the inside became visible, as did also the tags, with the help of which the boots were pulled on. When the outside of the boots was blacked it would form a distinct contrast to the inside, which remained brown, and in modern top boots the difference in colour has been in many cases greatly accentuated. Indeed, the upper parts are made of different leather, and as ordinary coat cuffs are now incapable of being turned down, the tops of the

boots are immovable and cannot be turned up. It is curious, however, that the tags at the sides are still represented and sewn to the boot so as to be quite useless, while new tags placed inside the boot now do their duty. (See Figure 69.)

Socks and stockings are, at the present time, the most usual coverings for the lower parts of the legs,

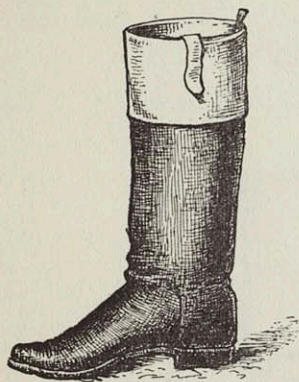


FIG. 69.—A modern top boot in which the upper part can no longer be turned up.

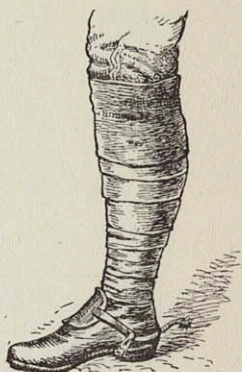


FIG. 70.—Puttees.

and there is at least one vestige which remains in their structure that has an interest for us. Before we consider this, however, we may look at another means of protecting the lower extremities which tells of more primitive conditions. The leg bandages so commonly worn by our regular soldiers and volunteers are the case in point. (See Figure 70.) These appear to have been immediately derived from the Indian Army, and their name—"puttees"—is evidence of this; but such an arrangement is very

widespread, and was that generally adopted in this country in Anglo-Saxon times. Our illustration is taken from an illuminated manuscript prepared for St. Aethelwold for use at Winchester, which was completed between the years 963 and 964 A.D. Banded stockings are common on representations of Anglo-Saxons, but according to Fairholt the example

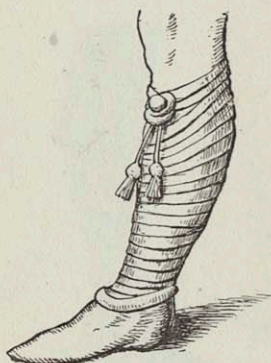


FIG. 71.—Leg bandages of a royal personage at the end of the tenth century (after Fairholt).

given shows them to greater advantage than does any other known. The figure in question is dressed in royal costume, and the bandages, which are of gold, are fastened just below the knee with a knot from which hang tassels. (See Figure 71.)

It has been thought that leg bandages were originally derived from the haybands which peasants wrap round their legs, and the writer has seen it stated that ostlers in this country still perpetuate the Anglo-Saxon fashion, though he has never met with

an actual instance. The pffiferari who some years ago used to play on bagpipes and other primitive instruments in our streets, wore leg bandages or loose linen stockings, and these were cross-gartered with bands which held in place a simple sandal made of a piece of leather.

The vestige in modern stockings to which allusion

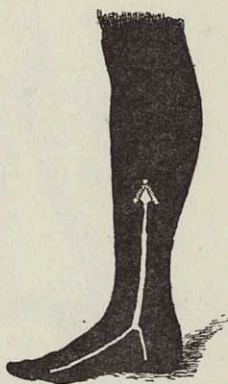


FIG. 72.—A stocking with clocks.

has been made is very often present, and takes the form of the ornament which we know as a “clock.” The name signifies a gusset, and in modern socks and so on, which are woven or knitted all in one piece, no such arrangement is to be found. Stockings, however, like those at first worn by Queen Elizabeth, and used at least by American settlers until the year 1675, were made up from pieces of cloth. In these there would be seams down the sides, and it is possible that where the ornamental lines meet in

Figure 72 there may have been a gusset. In any case, it is evident that the intention of the clock was to hide the side seams.

Of recent years, when ladies have most sensibly adopted short skirts, the clock has developed into a series of embroidered patterns which cover the front of the foot and ankle. The parentage of these is

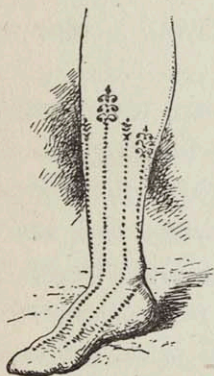


FIG. 73.—An embroidered stocking showing the further evolution of the clock (date 1900).



FIG. 74.—An open-work stocking of 1905.

quite evident from the shape, which is shown in Figure 73.

This ornamentation has been carried still further, though it is not produced in the same way. The patterns, instead of being embroidered, are the result of perforations, or, in more technical language, "open-work," and the background which shows up the design is no longer the material of the stockings, but the skin of their fair wearers. (See Figure 74.)

be seen in the dress of acrobats. We shall allude to these again.

Garters when visible on men's legs become very ornamental, and one in use now, merely as a decoration, gave its name to the celebrated Order of Knighthood, among the insignia of which it is still to be found. At the present day garters are hidden, and there is a tendency for them to be replaced by more comfortable straps or "suspenders," but those which ladies wear still retain their gaudy character. In this connection an interesting ceremony may be mentioned, which is carried out in Haute-Vienne on the day of St. Eutropius. All the girls of the neighbourhood troop to the church dedicated to the saint at St. Junien-les-Gombes, and each damsel hangs her left garter on the cross hard by, which becomes so smothered with garters of different colours that when seen from a short distance it looks as if it were covered with flowers.

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