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MOURNING

COLOURS ASSOCIATED WITH MOURNING—WIDOWS' WEEDS
—PERENNIAL MOURNING

THE ceremonies connected with death and burial are no exception to the rule which we have laid down, that on solemn and important occasions primitive customs and costumes are most commonly to be met with. The making of clothes from bark has come to have a special significance in the case of races which no longer adopt this in everyday life. The Kayans of Borneo now ordinarily wear smart foreign stuffs which they get from traders; but when they go into mourning they discard these garments, and return once more to the old native garment of bark cloth. The putting on of sackcloth is no doubt a similar custom, and dishevelling of locks is also in keeping with it.

Among the many curious customs connected with funeral rites which survive in civilized countries, the adoption of some kind of mourning dress is very general. Sombre black has come to be associated in our minds with mourning, but other colours are used
among other nations, and even in this country. The drapery with which the hats of the hired mourners at a child's funeral are veiled are white instead of black. White ostrich feathers may appear on the horses' heads, and white adorns their trappings. Royalty is still privileged to have a special mourning colour—purple is used at state funerals, and grey is looked upon as half-mourning.

In China white is the colour used instead of black, and other Oriental nations wear yellow. In modern Egypt, at a funeral, the women, whether relatives or servants of the deceased, are distinguished by a strip of linen or muslin bound round the head and tied in a single knot behind. This stuff is usually of a blue colour. The women of ancient Egypt, as shown on the walls of tombs, wore a similar bandage round their head. Excessive mourning is now becoming a thing of the past, and there is no need now for such laws as were made at the end of the fifteenth century to restrict extravagance in mourning attire. Nowadays men may follow the custom observed by those in the army and those who wear Highland dress of putting a black band round their arm. At the most they wear black clothes and put a wider band round their hats. Among women it is only widows who wear a special costume. It is not a becoming one, though sometimes a smartness is imparted to it that is a little out of keeping with the idea of mourning. Now a widow's dress is called weeds, though this
term at one time signified the whole of any woman’s costume.

For the origin of the widow’s veil we must go back to mediæval times, when the dress of widow ladies was similar to that of the convent. It was the custom of elderly ladies whose husbands had died to become what is called vowesses, and to go into seclusion. A relic perhaps of the practice is to be found in the kind of prejudice which still exists in the minds of some people against second marriages. The white cuffs of the widow recall those of the nurse, and similar ones are used by some members of the legal profession as part of their mourning.

When dealing with military costume we shall find that signs of mourning, when once adopted, have in some cases never been wholly abandoned. There are similar vestiges like those found in the dress of public schools, and there has been a suggestion of the same thing happening in the Navy.

In connection with the hired mourners or mutes at funerals, now so solemnly habited in black, it may be interesting to recall that the old Roman mimes, of whom we have seen that Punch was originally one, were employed at funerals to imitate the language and manners of the deceased.