

## BONNETS OF MEMORY.

When little "Professor Pokenose" was five years old he was perturbed about bonnets.

"What's bonnets, did I ever see'd one? he demanded to know from an indulgent Granny.

"Bonnets," she informed him, "are in these days dowdy headgear worn by char-ladies, but there was a time" (and memory called upon her to be honest) "when we just adored them."

"Oh! do tell."

So we had "once upon a time" about bonnets.

I was about seven when I realised the potency of bonnets, so mysteriously associated, in the sixties, with virtue, sobriety of conduct, and personal dignity. No woman in our village ever attended church or a funeral in a hat—and in mid-Victorian days we enjoyed the luxury of woe.

### THE BRAVE BONNETS.

On the top of Mama's wardrobe reposed a large flat blue band-box, and in it, wrapped in tissue paper, were two flat gorgeous tartan velvet bonnets, with silver crested brooches studded with amethysts and cairngorms in the border. These our Scottish "mammie" called "bra' bonnets," "and I'll have you to know," she added, "over the wall they would fly 'wi' sma' provocation."

A day came later when these "bra'" bonnets suffered sore degradation. They were ruthlessly mutilated to cover buckram shapes for a little girl's hats which nothing would induce her to wear. She grieved for the disgrace of the spirited headgear, so debonair and picturesque; to be worn with swinging kilts, sporran, scarf, dirk and barbaric jewels. How are the mighty fallen! Poor brave bonnets!

### BONNETS OF CHARACTER.

In our village it was quite easy to estimate character in Church on a Sunday morning by studying bonnets. The gathered silk hood-like gear, with a cosy frilled curtain behind to keep out the draughts, the brim projecting beyond the tip of the nose, the sweet crumpled resigned old face, softened and half hidden by the white border surrounding it. The wearer of this bonnet had met grief by the way, and shrank from further intimacy with it.

The little "cottage" straw, black of course, tied with tidy ribbons under the chin, attracted no attention. Its modest wearer wasn't for interfering with her neighbours' business, she preferred "to keep hersen to hersen."

Cross-eyed Kate had a taste for colour, cockadoodle feathers in winter and garden posies in summer crowned her bonnet. She took a squinting and lively interest in the art of millinery, and in the lives of her kind. On one solemn occasion she was observed to wear the crape "coal scuttle" hired out by the village midwife for tuppence an hour, when she pranced along the pavement carrying to the grave in a blue band-box her little dead illegitimate baby, a sight which convulsed the officiating curate, whose risible faculties were seldom under control.

But it was the Sunday bonnet of Martha (who laundered for the Hall) which excited my curiosity. It was

ample in size, brilliant in colour, with roses dotted in the border, and over each ear titillated a little bunch of wiry black corkscrew curls, which I learned with awe in "dearest secret" and "you won't betray me, there's a dear little gel," were sewn in with the flowers, and reposed calmly, if deceptively, in the band-box from Sunday to Sunday!

### THE AIRY FAIRY BONNET.

The bonnet of bonnets of which I have the most tender and tragic memory came from a magic *modiste* in the Rue de la Paix. A veritable daughter of Eve, laden with *chiffons* from Paris in the sixties, bestowed on me a French-pink arophone bonnet, which was merely an exquisite little flat quilted, airy fairy Marie Stuart cap, to be worn poised on masses of wavy hair, apparently to be wafted away by every breeze that blew. Just a magic vanity of vanities as worn on her golden curls by Her Imperial Majesty the Empress Eugénie.

Martha could not believe her eyes. "Call that a bonnet," she exclaimed; "it ain't nothing but flummery, It ain't meant for this world, them's bonnets as is worn in Paradise." A sufficient excuse, in the opinion of Martha, for passing its wearer through the Gates of Heaven.

Alas! I must hasten to record its sorry fate.

Away in the Lincolnshire fens a great uncle aged ninety-five preached fine sermons, lived on rice puddings and cultivated his garden. I was invited on a visit, and with me went the pink arophone bonnet. I pranked myself out on Sunday, and after church sighted a carpet of forget-me-nots in a dyke over the garden wall. If you have never seen forget-me-nots growing in a dyke in the fens you have missed a lovely sight. I coveted hands full. Through the garden gate we went—"the little French hen" and a hobbledehoy cousin. He, obedient slave, squatted on the bank and leaned over to gather a bouquet. The temptation was overpowering—I put forth a toe . . .

Plop! Splosh!

A face of crimson fury—very unclerical language—garments dripping!

I flew for the gate, but alas! too late. A great wet hand clutched and *scrunched* the dainty bonnet, and a moment later there it lay poised on a bier of cerulean flowers! It was dexterously raised on the point of a parasol but, damp and shapeless, was never again calculated to agitate St. Peter, and attain for its wearer the entrée to the Elysian Fields!

### THE LADY LUCY.

Then there was the "Lady Lucy" bonnet, as worn by my godmother of aristocratic poise, a highly delectable creation, made by the great Madame Tofield, of Bond Street. It was deftly modish, composed of filmy lace with dingle-dangles scintillating with every dignified movement of the head, cosy withal, covering the ears, yet exposing an immaculate parting to view.

I mention this high-class headgear because its replica played a not unimportant part in my nursing career some years later.

When applying for the matronship of a country hospital, I appeared before the Committee in this

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