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## Just Little Things

Our younger friends and our magazines—the magazine *Esquire* for men is one of the most interesting you can pick up—remind us of the moral cowardice our conservatism in apparel conceals. We are inhibited, that's what. When we bought our first vest, forty years ago, we weren't inhibited yet and that waistcoat was to our real taste. It was mauve, brown-checked mauve if you will believe us, an excellent bit of wool. But we had to discard it after all, because too late we observed that in Oklahoma at that period only gamblers likely to be tinhorns wore vests that contrasted with their coats. Our business was teaching. It is the same with every man our age, when it comes to clothes they just won't go to town; when you see us on the Escolta, our suits are all white drill and we cut them all the same way—it is the utmost of our courage to change over, evenings, to the doublebreasted white coat from the old-time mess jacket.

Our children and their children cultured in an era of color have it all over us in courage about clothes, and the good shops in town enable them to obey that impulse and be nonchalant under all chromatic circumstances. For our children and their children know color when they see it, and have color responses and know how to satisfy them. With us a drab age passes, may we only live to see an evening gathering of folk dressed up where the men are not all clichés in sombre black. Think of the personal discretion that was exercised by the Founding Fathers in this sort of thing. There was personality in every get-up, even in carriages and harness.

Tailors were not tyrants then, men who fought for liberty spurned even the tyranny of the waxen thread and made their tailors tailor them to their own free fancy. Now it has all come back again, and a good thing it has.

You can do wonders at the good shops now, by way of dressing, if you have courage. In one shop we have seen fifteen varying styles in golf shoes all in a single showcase: some white, some white and black, some russet, but most of them brown, and distinguished from one another by other details. Some had the seams outside, some inside; and some had very broad toes, others tended to be pointed; while some were capless, others featured this reinforcement. Anyway, there they were, color and all—a shoe exactly to your character for the asking. It was the same with shirts, personality plus in color, cut, and fabric. And to think we have to stick to white because of our ill luck with that first vest! But probably the suspenders rack roused our imagination really to run riot.



Wide braces, narrow braces, silken and lisle, and besides the first class workmanship, color, color, color. And which braces would we select, please? Well, let's see now—have you anything in white? (We hoped they didn't have white braces, then we were going to screw up our courage and buy what we really wanted, but they had 'em after all).

There was a black pair of braces relieved with rows of diminutive dots in old rose. We liked them. Then there was another pair, black too, with white ladder stripes. We liked them. Then there was a pair pairing

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white with blue, a very chaste white and a very alluring blue if you see what we mean, and this blue was crossed with rows of white stars. We liked these braces too, but inhibition still asserted its thrill and our purchase was the white pair. Such cravenness, no wonder the younger generation takes no stock in ours! Younger men outfit themselves at such a shop every day, and get a real kick out of defending their own taste; it is getting so they have almost as much fun at this business of dressing as femmes themselves do, and nearly as much liberty of choice.

Take even underwear. In our youth it was short and thin of summers, long and thick of winters. But only in winter could you have the one-piece outfit, a concession almost from the pulpit itself, for sake of more warmth; in summer when warmth was not a factor, it was almost in the Book of Common Prayer that your undershirt be one piece, your drawers another. (Many said under-drawers, and you come upon the redundancy yet, though we believe no *over*-drawers were ever claimed to have been made). Well, while we were deciding to buy white braces, in came a younger man in flannels with purple tie—came in too, quite as if he owned the world and could sell it to you all tied up with a purple cord, possibly relieved with yellow. He was returning some underwear he had taken on approval, and he bravely said he didn't like the style. He took some more on approval, his mirror would tell him what to do about it.



And there you are, taste even down to underwear! There you have the psychic of an age in which 40,000 persons a year die, in motor accidents in America alone, besides all the many thousands that are injured and mugged up. Think if it happened to you, and your trousers were torn and there for the gaze of vulgar onlookers and the hospital crew picking you up was your plain cotton underwear! Would your face be red? A younger-generation face, yes. But our blushes would be for any underwear that was not very plain and very white. After our courageous friend had gone out with a selection of a spiderweb gray undershirt paired with some bullion-yellow drawers, we quietly eased over to the underwear counter and whispered for some whites, a furtiveness that clung to us until we had the package safe home. Thank goodness and perhaps Hollywood for a generation that is as conscious of color as it is unconscious of prudery. It should really get somewhere when all of us oldsters die off and leave empty the executive desks where our performance has been as questionable as our taste, and more so our courage, in what the well dressed man should wear.

● In the dark victorian age that spanned our youth, you got the facts of life from the Institute of the Hired Man whose soiled groves lay back of the barn, or maybe you got them in barracks. Souls were recognized Sundays and prayermeeting nights. Little was known about them (is more known now?), but they did require periodical saving at Revival Meeting, a process by no means infallible during intervening periods when the eloquence of the revivalist had ridden away on a mustang. Despite all this however, we have come to the point where we could be brave in a bathing suit—if we could swim and had excuse for it—and what riots of cut and color are these enticing raiments. But shorts, for example, that we should all wear. Though here too you have wild chances of expressing your personality, we never can. We are conscious of our knees. In our adolescence, when you were about 10 years old and could keep up your older brother's pants when they were cut down for you, you grew out of knees—it was never manly to show them again, and the inhibition somehow sticks. Then socks. If not for inhibitions, what couldn't we do with today's socks. But we are conscious of our ankles, so the blaze of color in the socks display must be foregone, we limit our choice to white wool socks. White! Forever white! White and its purity, nonsense! White and its cowardice, we say! White and its white liveredness!

You see, when we were young the body was not a

very clean proposition. You never mentioned it as such, and you only dealt with it hygienically Saturday nights: *body* was not a polite word and where men and women and girls and boys were together it was never used. It gets out of men's clothes into women's to say it, but this bashful obsession about the body—legs and arms were limbs in those sallow days, and boys believed girls shed their feet when they let down their skirts—but those Coney Island bathing suits of the nineties with bloomers below the knees, arms beyond the elbows, and the blouse well down over the bloomers' more essential half, were not a concession to style. Girls felt they had to dress that way, which indeed was a very bold way, because the body was not quite nice and should ever be covered from view.



Such was the generation that produced the World War and the Versailles treaty, and now flounders along producing endless chains of depressions by way of efficiency. At bottom, it was a generation too conscious of its deficiencies even to clothe itself as its judgment willed. Could any generation be worse, or do worse? Believe it or not, the better dressed generations coming on, our children and their children, are better generations in fact, *yea de facto* and *de jure*. Thanks for the white underwear.

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