

ANCIENT INVENTIONS

Every now and then it is discovered that some extremely 'modern' invention is in reality exceedingly old. For example, the safety pin, far from being a novelty or even of recent origin, is decidedly ancient—a fact made certain by the finding of a great many such pins, fashioned exactly like those of to-day in old Roman and Etruscan tombs, dating back to a period a good deal earlier than the birth of Christ.

The safety pin, in truth, was an article of common use in Italy long before the Roman Empire attained the height of its glory. Some of them were exactly like those of to-day, utilising the familiar principle of coiled springs and catch (says the 'Scientific American'), but the material of which they were made seems always to have been bronze. They took on a development, however, far more remarkable than our modern safety pins, many of them being quite large affairs, ten inches or so in length and hollow, as if designed to be attached to the gown in front and possibly contain something or other—conceivably flowers. Not infrequently they were ornamented with gems.

Another ancient invention was the collar stud. It is true that the ancient Romans did not use buttons to fasten their garments, but for this very reason safety pins were more urgently required; and the latter seem to have been supplemented by studs of bronze, which were in shape exactly like those of to-day. Of course, people in those times were no collars; but the little contrivance in question was utilised in other ways. Probably—and indeed the assumption is not a rash one—it had in that early epoch the same habit as now of rolling under a piece of furniture on slight provocation for the purpose of eluding observation and pursuit, with the usual perversity of inanimate objects.

Of all modern inventions none seems to belong more typically to the present day than the so-called McGill paper fastener—the small brass contrivance used to fasten a number of sheets of paper together. Yet, though it has been patented, it was well known more than two thousand years ago, being used by the soldiers of Rome as an incidental of their costume. The rest of thin copper worn by the ancient legionary was fastened to a strip of cloth, for lining, with a series of little bronze clamps exactly like the paper fastener in question.

The Smithsonian Institution at Washington has got together a very interesting collection of such ancient inventions. Among other objects belonging to the same category are thimbles many thousand years old. They are of bronze and their outer surfaces show the familiar indentations for engaging the head of the needle. Indeed, these thimbles are much like modern ones, barring the fact that they have no tops to cover the end of the finger. For that matter, however, many thimbles of to-day are topless.

The women in those days had bronze bodkins, made just like those in use now, and for toilet purposes they employed small tweezers of a pattern that has not been altered in two thousand years. To hold their hair in place they had not hit upon the notion of bending a wire double, but they used for that purpose straight bronze pins made exactly like modern hatpins, with big spherical heads. It is from this early type of hairpin, in truth, that the hairpin of to-day is derived. Mayhap the ancient Roman virago, when aroused to rage, plucked an improvised dagger from her back hair and employed it vigorously.

In the collection referred to are a number of fish hooks, not less than three thousand years old, obtained from ancient Swiss lake dwellings. They are of bronze and in shape are exactly like the most improved modern fish hooks. They have the same curves and the same barbs with a similar expansion at the top of the shank for the attachment of the line. Barring the metal of which they are composed, they might have been made yesterday. Other curios from the old Etruscan tombs are strainers, ladles, spoons and knives of bronze. Such articles, as well as bronze daggers and other weapons and utensils, were cast more commonly in moulds that were carved out of hard stone, a pair of stones being required to produce the object, which was afterwards polished and otherwise elaborated. Among the most interesting of the contrivances for the toilet is a fine tooth comb of ivory, which in shape is precisely like the fine tooth combs of to-day.

Of course, the gentleman of ancient Rome was obliged to shave himself, unless he chose to wear a beard, and for this purpose he used a razor which must have made the operation decidedly severe. It was not at all like modern razors, but (as shown by a specimen in the

Smithsonian collection) was of bronze and somewhat like a small sickle, very broad in the moon shaped blade and with a handle rigidly attached.

It is well known that the ancient Romans knew how to place one metal with another. They made and some of them (like Cicero) wore false teeth. The manufacture of glass was entirely familiar to them, and that they knew the modern method of mending broken pots by means of rivets has been shown by the discovery of many pieces of pottery thus restored. It seems rather surprising that they did not acquire the art of printing with movable types, inasmuch as they came so very near it. They had wooden blocks carved with words in reverse, by means of which they stamped words on pottery while the latter was yet unbaked and soft.

Every Roman gentleman had a latchkey which fitted the door of his dwelling. It was attached to a finger ring, so that it could not be easily lost and would always be ready for convenient use, no matter what the hour or condition of the owner.

Naturally, the Roman damsel or matron had to have something in the way of a looking glass, and it is odd to find that her hand mirror was precisely of the most fashionable modern shape. It was of polished bronze, because the art of silvering glass to make it serve as a reflector was the unknown. At that epoch people must have had a much less vivid idea of what they looked like than they have nowadays, and it is easy to imagine that a looking glass such as one may buy in 1907 would have been worth a considerable fortune in Rome two thousand years ago.

Securing Lion Cubs

To steal a litter of lion cubs is not so difficult a feat as might be supposed. In the heart of the deepest, darkest tangle of cone, thorn, and bush-rope, the lion mother has worked a clearing and scratched and gathered a nest of leaves and grass upon which to bed her young. Here the yellow babies lie, huddled and mewling, or sprawling over one another in sullen play, while the anxious mother, fawning close beside her magnificent lord and master, lies, chin on forepaws, eyes closed, and ears alert and twitching. Not in the wide world, it would seem, was family ever so protected. And yet, safely hidden in a thicket to leeward, where no wind can carry the strong human scent, recognisable to almost every warm-blooded creature except man himself, the trapper is hard at work. Beside him is a pair of Kaffir hunters, with their guns and repeating rifles, and hour after hour the men sit silently until the lion parents, unsuspecting of impending danger, depart to hunt for their meal. Often as a preliminary, the male lion lowers his nose toward the ground and emits that terrifying, reverberating bass roar that strikes panic to the heart of all living things within earshot, and startles them to a betraying flight—the very object of the roar, it is supposed. The crack of a dried twig sounds sharply; scarcely more than as if waited by a sudden breeze the brush and bushes rustle and part, and with kingly head uplifted and nostrils scenting, the magnificent monarch steps, soft-padded and noiseless, through the thicket, followed by his regal spouse. One hour, two, and even three may pass before the lions have struck down their buck; and the kidnappers, making sure only that the formidable beasts have gone, move to their robbery. On hands and knees, creeping and crawling as only experienced hunters can, noiseless and ever ready for sudden attack, the men progress through the maze of cane and vine and bush until they come to the thicket where the young ones lie asleep. They may be kittens, with eyes scarcely more than open, and may be picked up and ragged before they can stagger away on tiny legs; or they may be four-week old whelps, lively and frisky, showing their inborn hatred of man by spitting and trying to scratch when picked up in arms. Four, five, even six young lions may be gathered up in this way to be borne to the nearest station and raised in captivity, while out of the depths of the jungle, deep into the night, roll the rumbling challenges of the bereaved parents.

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