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How ridiculous you look!

BY C. W. LATTIN

This print published in 1911 pokes fun at two rather accentuated styles over a 50-year period. The huge skirt of 1861 and the enormous hat of 1911 are comparatively ridiculous.

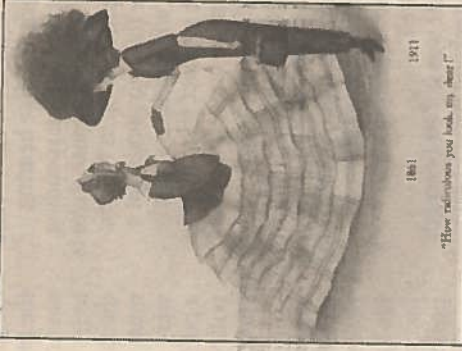
Or are they?

How frequently we hear the old cliché "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder". It was Shakespeare who said "There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so". However, Oscar Wilde mused that "Those who become too modern soon find themselves quite old fashioned."

Styles, they are ever changing. One thing I've come to appreciate over time is that no style is really any better than any other style when it comes to the fine arts, architecture, the decorative arts, music, fashion etc. It's all in the eye of the beholder (personal taste).

The high school student with the spiked purple Mohawk hair may look ridiculous to some but to others he may be an outstanding example of the style. We've all heard people say "Well I know what I like," and that's what it all comes down to.

No doubt every style has its good and not so good examples. Because styles and fashions are



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always changing they give us a historical perspective on the times in which they were popular.

Now here is where I want to clarify a description which is often misunderstood, that being, Victorian. Queen Victoria, crowned in 1837, reigned until her death in 1901. Consequently, when the term Victorian is used it usually connotes something which is very fancy or overly decorated. Indeed some Victorian things were just that, but not all. Let's not confuse style and period of time.

For example, our Greek Revival County Court House completed in 1858 is

unquestionably Victorian. Right across East State Street is the Gothic Revival Albion First Presbyterian Church erected in 1874. Both are good examples of their style and both are Victorian. Although their appearances are totally different.

In this same historic district other Victorian styles include: Norman Revival, Romanesque Revival, Second Empire, Italianate, Eastlake, Queen Anne and Colonial Revival.

If there is to be one underlying principle through all these Victorian styles it can easily be summed up in one word which is eclectic. Webster defines this as: "Selecting what appears to be best in various doctrines, methods or style — composed of elements drawn from various sources."

Yes, Victorians borrowed and borrowed heavily, often times from antiquity. Those who have attended out local cemetery tours know that obelisks dating from the 1840's are copies of ancient pagan monuments going back 4000 years B.C. The Victorian eye was attuned to the best from the past. They appropriated it and reconstituted it for their own usage. Is that so ridiculous?