



CHAPTER 14: On Clothes

My DEAR COMRADES,

Man has been described by some one as "a Clothes-wearing animal." It could not be intended, by that expression, that he is the only animal that wears clothes, for there are few creatures that walk the earth around him, or dwell in the sea beneath him, that are not as usefully and as becomingly clad as he is – most of them much more so. Still, he is the only creature on this planet who has any choice in the character of his outer covering, or in the manner of putting it on and taking it off, which things I suppose, taken together, do constitute a Clothes-wearer in the sense that animals generally are not.

Clothes may, from their all but universal use, be considered as an absolute necessity to our race. There are few people, even of those nations counted most barbarous, that do not affect some kind of apparel, however simple and crude it may be. The purposes served by the Clothes-wearing habit are of a very varied character. To begin with:

1. Clothes may be regarded as a mark of civilisation. The fact that any tribe, of any race, found in any part of the globe, not wearing Clothes, is considered to be a proof of their savage state, pure and simple. One of the first things by which converts to civilisation express the change that has transpired, whether in the forests of Africa, the jungles of India, or elsewhere, is to get into some form or other of dress. Indeed, many of these Aborigines measure the height to which they have risen in the scale of civilisation, by the quantity and costliness, to say nothing of the ridiculous fashions, of the Clothes they are able to carry about with them. Something of the same kind often follows the Salvation of the lowest and most vicious outcasts. One of the immediate results of their coming to Christ is their appearance in decent clothing; and it is wonderful too, how the most degraded can and do fix themselves up within a few hours. Literally, they are soon found, like the man in the Gospel, "Sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in their right mind."



2. Clothes safeguard and promote proper feelings of decency. They are essential to modesty and chastity, in the present condition of human life. Of course, Clothes can be so shaped, and so worn, and, alas! they often are, as to have the very opposite effect. The tendency of a good deal of dressing, in these days, is, beyond question, strongly in that direction. A great many of the fashions that prevail in what is known as "society," are, I think, more suggestive of indecent thoughts and feelings than is the semi-nudity of the native races that range the trackless forests of Darkest Africa, or of the lower castes who dwell in the cities and villages of India.

Whether or not Clothes were worn before the Fall, is a controverted question, upon which I will not enter; but if they were not instituted before that event, they became a necessity for the maintenance of right and pure feelings immediately afterwards.

3. Clothes serve as a protection from the consequences of those changes in the weather, which are so unfavourable to health and vigour. The animals, as a rule, are made for one climate only: hence, one kind of dress, with the little variation required by the succession of the seasons, serves their purpose. But, having to pass from country to country, man needs many changes of covering. If he is to live, in any reasonable comfort, under the burning suns of the tropics at one time; on the fringes of the North Pole at another; and midway between them both at another, he must be able to change and adapt his outer garments to each.

4. Clothes are useful for signifying social distinctions. There are differences in the positions, duties, and powers of mankind. Some object to these differences, and contend that all men ought to be on one level. But at present it is not so. Indeed, it is just the reverse, and society being constituted with these distinctions, it seems to be very desirable that we should, with the least possible trouble, be able to discover what the position and condition of those around us may be. Clothes are useful for this purpose. They serve:

(a), To mark out the caste or position of individuals.

You can form some opinion as to the position, occupation, and general circumstances of those you meet, but do not know, by the Clothes they wear. This is useful, and,



while it is often abused, tends to maintain the proper order and distinctions which are necessary for the conduct of business and the relations between the sexes.

(b) Clothes serve to distinguish the servant from his master, the maid from her mistress, one trade from another, and mark out those placed in lawful authority over us. You do not want anyone to instruct you whether a man is a policeman, a soldier, a sailor, or a Salvation Army Officer; and when you go into a Court of Justice, neither friend nor usher is needed to tell you which is the Counsel, or which is the Judge. Their Clothes impart the information. Just so, Clothes mark out the rank of Officers in the Armies and Navies of the world, Officials engaged in State functions, and other persons of distinguished Condition.

Salvationists are Clothes-wearers. We are great at Clothes – indeed, we have a style of dress that we call Uniform, which, in style and appearance, is all our own. We reckon that this dress saves us from certain serious evils, and serves several very useful purposes.

1. Uniform is a public witness to our Lord, an avowal of our devotion to His cause, and of our willingness that all the world should know the fact.
2. It is an open declaration of the renunciation of evil, and of our determination to be out and out for God, and to live and die for the Salvation of men.
3. Uniform makes opportunities for usefulness.

By it men can recognise the Salvationist as the servant and messenger of God, and are often led to converse with him. If the Uniform does occasionally lead those who hate religion to indulge in ridicule, it will, at the same time, afford the wearer an opportunity of proclaiming to them the mercy of God through Jesus Christ.

But necessary and useful as the Clothes-wearing habit may be, like other things that are good in themselves, it can be so far abused as to be the means of doing much harm. This is just what has happened; and the material, shape, and general character of Clothes have become sources of temptation to a large part of the human race.



Indeed, they can be counted on as among the most fruitful causes of evil with which poor human nature has to battle.

For instance, Clothes may easily become the means of fostering and feeding the pride and vanity of the human heart. Introduced in consequence of the sin of our first parents, and on that account to be regarded as being really marks of disgrace, it is curious to contemplate the extent to which they have come to be gloried in by their posterity.

It is not probable that Clothes were originally intended to disfigure or be out of harmony with the human form. On the contrary, it is perfectly natural to suppose the opposite. But that in the present day they should have come to foster the vanity, occupy the time, and involve the foolish expenditure of energy and money that we see around us, is one of the most convincing evidences the human race affords of the fact, that man is, indeed, a fallen creature. What scandalous waste and misery result, for instance, from the ambitions rage of one set of people to be as finely dressed, or, if possible, more finely dressed, than another! What a mockery and a farce, in the eyes of the Angels, the religion of many professing Christians must appear, when they are seen in their places of worship bedizened with every conceivable form of worldly fashion, ostensibly worshipping the God who has pronounced some of His most biting denunciations upon their adornments!

"In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their tinkling ornaments about their feet, and their cauls, and their round tires like the moon,

"The chains, and the bracelets, and the mufflers,

"The bonnets, and the ornaments of the legs, and the headbands, and the tablets, and the earrings,

" The rings, and nose jewels,

"The changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping pins,



" The glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods, and the veils.

"And it shall come to pass, that instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle a rent; and instead of well-set hair baldness; and instead of a stomacher a girding of sackcloth, and burning instead of beauty."

The Army Uniform saves those who adopt it from all this, while, at the same time, it enables them to make a good and modest appearance at an immeasurably less cost than the fashionable world around them.

As I said at the beginning of this Letter, the Uniform is a preacher. It makes people think about God and Godliness. If it is right for the Salvationist to proclaim Salvation from sin and separation from the world, with his tongue, it cannot be wrong for him to declare it by his dress.