

Dr Thomas Manton on Dress

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Dr Manton in discoursing upon Titus ii. 11-14 (vol. 16) takes occasion to speak of sobriety in dress, and concludes with the following considerations: -

1. Consider, curiosity in clothes argues deformity of mind; a godly, serious, humble Christian is above these things. Therefore, how can we choose but think that a man or woman hath vanity in; his heart that is so clothed with it upon his back? Look, as plasters argue a wound or sore, so do these exotic and vain attires argue a wound and blot in the soul; that there is pride, vanity, and levity there. Clemens Alexandrimus: observes that the, Lacedemonians (heathen) permitted only harlots and infamous women, and common prostitutes to go in gorgeous attire. Clothes, then, are the flag and ensign which pride hangs out, and the nest of wantonness.
2. To be proud of clothes is to be proud of our own shame. Before sin came in man did not need a garment. Look, as the sun is adorned with light it needs no trimming and ornament, so man in innocency was adorned with grace, and needed no other robe; but when he sinned, he needed garments. So, then he that is proud of his clothes is but proud of the rags with which his wounds are bound up. Clothes are a memorial that we were once disobedient to God. Shall a thief be proud of his shackles, or a malefactor of his brand or mark on his forehead? This is a time of mourning, not of triumph; therefore, God at first clothed Adam with skins, an habit that becomes mourning. We shall not need these things in heaven, clothes are only there in use where sin is.
3. Consider that habit (dress) makes not the man. A horse is not chosen by his trappings, but by his strength and swiftness; the trappings are things external that conduce nothing to his goodness, so man is not to be valued by his habit, it is but the excrement of silk worms; not by the ornaments of the body, but the endowments of the mind. And, therefore, if you would excel others indeed, you should excel them in grace and virtue. Alas! many are but dung finely dressed; the hidden man of the heart, that is the man. Grace is the best dressing, and that which is never out of fashion, by these men are valued. The more wise and excellent men are indeed, the less curious in their apparel. Cato, that had been consul at Rome, never wore apparel that exceeded one hundred pence. Let great ones be known by their modesty of apparel.

4. Consider, when you are most gorgeous, the beasts excel you.

Croesus, king of Lydia, being gorgeously arrayed, asked Solon if ever he had seen a more beautiful spectacle. He answered, "Yes, sir, I have seen peacocks, and pheasants, and other birds." And, Matt. vi. 29, Christ takes notice of this, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of the lilies. The draughts and colours of nature are more beautiful than art. Therefore, neither delight in bravery (finery) nor envy in it, when thou seest the bravery of others, thou hast a fairer flower in thy garden.

5. Think often of Jesus Christ hanging naked upon the cross, who was stripped of his garments to satisfy for thy excess. Oh! shall we again put him to an open shame, as if he died in vain? Say, shall pride live when Christ died to subdue it, and mortify it, and to expiate for it?