

hat made of a shape to imitate an ordinary broad brim of felt—in fact, the least happy form of head-gear known to me;—all this signified a separation from common men, inducing a consciousness of personal superiority, so easily reached by human nature, and an added difficulty in the way of following Him whose will it was to be “made in all things like unto His brethren.”

This Quaker “plainness” is really a serious question for Philadelphia. Plain it is not, nor comfortable, nor cheap, nor fair to look upon. In England its wear would at any rate make one so conspicuous that it would really be to a certain extent a crucifixion of the flesh (if life does not provide enough of that already) — that is, it would be a constant violation of one's native desire to move quietly and unnoticed about the streets. But in William Penn's city the Quaker garb is a sign of respectability, a token that you belong to an old family, may have to do with established businesses, and that conceivably your emigrant founder sailed in “The Welcome.” The fashionable girl in a Philadelphia ball is proud to tell her partner, as he glances at her head, that her grandmother wore a plain cap. The defence for this garb is that it stands conspicuously for Quakerism, that it is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. Have our Friends considered that this sign has all the dangers of those sacraments which we Friends dread on account of their formality and unspiritual externalism, but which are justified on precisely this ground, as an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace?

The real question before thoughtful Friends in Philadelphia is whether a uniform, as uniform, is a good thing for a religious body. Its closest parallels are the monastic habit, the Salvation bonnet, and the priestly garb, which last the “plain” dress is at times mistaken for. An order of men who profess a special sanctity, obey

rules not governing common men, and are devoted for a lifetime to a special work, fitly wear uniform. But Friends, I plead and insist, are none of these. We are common men, common Christians, hobnobbing with the world, living or trying to live as everybody ought to live. There is nothing which other men may do which we may not do. We are not “priests unto God” in any exclusive sense. And to wear a uniform has the fatal effect of separating us from the world of men, among whom we ought to find fellowship, and from whom we ought to gather converts.

A steadily diminishing number of the select is the price paid for being select. Very few join this type of Quakerism. This the leaders of the Yearly Meeting know. They know that they stand defending the battlements of a lost city, that the age has left them behind. They still demand the tonsure of the lower part of the face and the upper part of the coat for appointments to important duties in the church or in the schools under their control; but the garb only reaches one-third of the way down the Meeting-house at Arch street. The two-thirds at the back represent the advancing hosts of the future, the young men, (Philadelphia Yearly Meeting is ruled and managed by the old), and there are signs that the battlement is breached here and there. Already one beard may be seen in the Select Meeting, on the face of a valued minister, whom I hope we may see some day in England. There are at Twe'fth Street and at Haverford, Meetings more free from the danger of ritual: and we may hope that by a real co-partnership between the best of the old and the best of the new, by permitting new ideas their legitimate sphere, by melting rather than breaking the battlements, the admirable material of this unique Yearly Meeting may be made up into new forms, moulded by humility and by Quaker simplicity, by a willingness to be just common men.