

### Mr. Spurgeon on Clerical Dress.

IT is Shakespeare who tells us:—

"The evil that men do lives after them;  
The good is oft interred with their bones."

Whatever we may be disposed to think of this sweeping assertion, there is no doubt that the better the man the more lasting and injurious will be the influence of his errors. There are few men who have done greater service to the Church of Christ than Martin Luther, yet he injured the cause of the Reformation in many places by the coarse, almost brutal invective that disgraces his controversial writings. A great man of our own day, one whom all lovers of the simple gospel delight to honor as a most eloquent preacher of the truth and the means of saving many souls and quickening religious activity, is Mr. Spurgeon. But Mr. Spurgeon sometimes forgets to exercise the charity he preaches, and outrages the decency, which he as a ruler in the well-ordered house of God should encourage, in his iconoclastic zeal. He manages to bridle his tongue in the pulpit, and cannot be accused of Talmagism there. He must have a safety valve, however, for his ebullitions of vulgar humor, and this is furnished in John Ploughman's talk. John falls foul of clerical attire in general, and in particular of gowns and bands, and thus this character, who is very different from the Spurgeon that evangelical Christians admire, airs his crude opinions and uncharitable wit:

"Among us Dissenters the preacher claims no priestly power, and, therefore, should never wear a peculiar dress; let fools wear fools' caps and fools' dresses, but men who make no claim to be fools should not put on fools' clothes. None but a very silly sheep would wear wolf's clothing. It is a singular taste which makes honest men covet the rags of thieves. Besides, where is the good of such finery? Except a duck in p'ens, no creature looks more stupid than a dissenting preacher in a gown which is no manner of use to him. I could laugh till I held my sides when I see our doctors in gowns and bands, puffed out with their silks and touched up with their little bibs, for they put me so much in mind of our old turkey cock when his temper is up and he swells to his biggest. They must be weak folks indeed who want a man to dress as a woman before they can enjoy his sermon, and he who cannot preach without such milliner's trumpery may be a man among geese, but he is a goose among men."

Now Mr. Spurgeon's first mistake lies in putting such words into the lips of John Ploughman, for your farming population as a rule is a great stickler for clerical propriety. He should have chosen as his spokesman some town or city radical, a weak type of the people's friend, who thinks himself far above his *hired* preacher, while at the same time he asserts that "there's nothing like pride about me, you know." There is a pride that apes humility, the source of which is far from exalted. It was the conceited as well as unkempt Diogenes who planted his dirty feet on Plato's carpets.

When John talks about "us dissenters," he is of course alluding to that most respectable and honored body to which he belongs, that came into existence in 1633 with Mr. Spilsbury as its minister. As Presbyterians continuing apostolic doctrine, order and practice, and representing the established Protestant Churches of many lands, we cannot, even while extending the hand of Christian

fellowship to our Baptist brethren, consent to share such a title. So far from being dissenters ours are the views that have been dissented from. However, let us be charitable in our polemic, and take up the cudgels of truth on behalf of Congregational, Methodist, and even many good Baptist ministers who have not been ashamed to attire themselves in what John calls somewhat confusedly the clothing of fools, wolves and women.

The ploughman's "preacher claims no priestly power, and therefore should not wear a peculiar dress." Now Mr. Spurgeon is a man of logical mind, but John Ploughman violates the law of the syllogism in a way that would do credit to the most unscrupulous of ancient sophists. Extend this piece of admirable reasoning:

All who claim priestly power wear a peculiar dress:

Some dissenting preachers wear a particular dress;

Therefore some dissenting preachers claim priestly power.

If anybody is disposed to return John's epithets of fool, wolf, thief and goose, here is his chance, for a more silly, dishonest piece of argument it would be hard to find. A peculiar dress is the mark—the appropriate distinction—of some profession or position of office or dignity. However, granting that there is question here only of the Christian ministry, why did not John get Mr. Spurgeon, who is doubtless well read in ecclesiastical history, to tell him the connection between priestly power and the gowns that excite his ire? John Chrysostom, the golden mouth, the greatest preacher of the Church, wore a gown. Was he a turkey? Augustine, that noble herald of the grace of God, wore a gown. Was he a goose? What about all the Reformers, Luther, Calvin, Knox, and their colleagues, who swept away the rags of popery? Were they sheep in wolves' clothing? Had they no more sense than to introduce a sacerdotal garment into the pure Church of the Reformation? The innocent gown is no more a symbol of priestly power than John Ploughman's smock frock! What right has John to wear that smock frock? It is a woman's garment to begin with, as its very name indicates. Does he presume to hold himself aloof in agricultural superiority from the wearers of fustian and corduroy, of moleskin and homespun? Who knows what villainous symbolism may be connected with that mystic garment!

John never went to college, for, had he possessed the advantage of a university education, he would have known that the gown is the badge of learning, not of folly. Your genuine pulpit fool, who cuts antics and capers such as might tickle the ploughman's depraved taste and make him laugh more even than the sight of the doctors in their little bibs, is wise not to wear a gown. It would interfere with his exhibitions, and a lack of early familiarity with the graceful flowing robe in student days would prevent his shining in it even in his sober moments. There have been foolish students and foolish ministers, and ministers who, like John Ploughman, have said very foolish things, but no guild of professional fools was ever known to wear a gown. The tendency of that and other articles of Protestant clerical dress is to quench folly by keeping the wearer in mind of his sacred calling.

John is a good Protestant of the pugnacious bull-dog type. He has been seen with a piece of chalk writing in magnificent initials upon the fence "No popery" and "Down with Puseyism." He finds that Romanists, orthodox Greeks, and very High Church Anglicans, whom he