

THE MYSTERY OF DRESS

BY A A REES.

"And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed"—Genesis ii. 25

"And were not ashamed." Wherefore this qualification? It is to imply that nakedness and shame were not originally linked together—that is, that God did not constitute their union, and even reason tells us that artificial clothing was an after-thought, for if God made man perfect, as he did all the other creatures, why should he, unlike them, need any supplement to his skin? No, he was not ashamed, because he was not self-conscious. Like the herds and the flocks, he knew not that he was naked, and so was no more ashamed of being as God made him than they were. In a word, he knew neither good nor evil within or without, and therefore could not make any distinction between being naked and being clothed. But sin "opened his eyes"—that is, it created self-consciousness, and he knew what he did not know before, "that he was naked"—naked in body and in soul. But why should he be ashamed of this twofold nakedness? As to his body, it was unchanged, but his soul being now possessed by self-consciousness, and sin being the object of that consciousness, beheld a bad and guilty conscience, which passed from his soul to his body, made him ashamed, prompted him to hide his bodily shame by wearing manufactured clothing, and the shame of his soul by hiding from the presence of God. But neither of these rudimentary coverings were sufficient. An apron of fig-leaves could not cover the naked body, nor could a screen of leaves cover the naked soul. God's voice soon tore off these flimsy pretexts, and, after conviction and sentence, he supplied "coats of skin" for their bodies, and a promise of redemption for their souls.

Moreover, alas! all Adam's sons and daughters come into the world with the same conscious twofold nakedness and shame, which they endeavor to hide by artificial clothing and self-righteousness for the soul, and until God's voice pursues and arrests them, they are complacent with their double invention, whether their clothing be the aprons of savages, or the manufacture of Parisian milliners and tailors, and whether their religion be

the fetishism of Africa or the pseudo-Christianity of Europe. When, however, the questions reached the covered and sleepy conscience, "Adam where art thou?" "Who told thee that thou wast naked?" the self-righteous covering is torn and scattered to the winds, and the soul stands out in conscious nakedness and shame, while fashion is contemptuously discredited as the shameful development of primeval fig leaves. What, now, can cover the soul's nakedness, not only from the eye of the conscience, but also from the eye of God? The answer is, nothing but Christ. When the conscience sees Him as the perfect response to every Divine claim, all guilt and shame disappears, and God can be confronted, not only without alarm, but with full assurance.

Man is not now, however, as he was in Paradise—innocent, ignorant, naked and shameless, but "knowing good and evil," self-conscious, sinful, and yet not ashamed, if a Christian, because Christ is the all-sufficient answer in the conscience to confessed and repented sin. Furthermore, in proportion as conscience is cultivated and developed, so is the sense of moral guilt and bodily shame; hence children and savages with a rudimentary conscience are but little sensible of the difference between right and wrong, and of the difference between being naked and being clothed. Behold, then, the vile origin of dress, and consider the monstrous preposterousness of being proud of it. As well might a convict be vain of his glittering and clanking tatters, the very badge of his crime and punishment, as men and women be vain of their clothes, which, besides being the badge of their infamy, is the plundered skin, hair, wool and feathers, of innocent creatures, and a necessary evil in an unredeemed body, a partially sanctified soul, and a changed atmosphere. Oh, happy day! when self-consciousness shall be replaced by an absorbing contemplation of God,—when the new heaven and the new earth shall take the place of this blighted and disorganized creation, and when, as the result of Christ's victory over death, the redeemed body, like His, shall leave its grave-clothes beneath the soil, and step forth incorruptible, glorified, and not ashamed.