

# PECULIAR CUSTOMS OF THE QUAKERS.

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## CHAPTER I.

### SECTION I.

Dress—Quakers distinguished by their dress from others—great extravagance in dress in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—this extravagance had reached the clergy—but religious individuals kept to their ancient dresses—the dress which the men of this description wore in those days—dress of the women of this description also—George Fox and the Quakers springing out of these, carried their plain habits with them into their new Society.

I have now explained, in a diffusive manner, the Moral Education and Discipline of the Quakers. I shall proceed to the explanation of such customs, as seem peculiar to them as a Society of christians.

The dress of the Quakers is the first custom of this nature, that I purpose to notice.

They stand distinguished by means of it from all other religious bodies. The men wear neither lace, frills, ruffles, swords, nor any of the ornaments used by the fashionable world. The women wear neither lace, flounces, lappets, rings, bracelets, necklaces, ear-rings, nor any thing belonging to this class. Both sexes are also particular in the choice of the colour of their clothes. All gay colours such as red, blue, green, and yellow, are exploded. Dressing in this manner, a Quaker is known by his apparel through the whole kingdom. This is not the case with any other individuals of the island, except the clergy; and these, in consequence of the black garments worn by persons on account of the death of their relations, are not always distinguished from others.

I know of no custom among the Quakers, which has more excited the curiosity of the world, than this of their dress, and none, in which they have been more mistaken in their conjectures concerning it.

[35]In the early times of the English History, dress had been frequently restricted by the government.—Persons of a certain rank and fortune were permitted to wear only cloathing of a certain kind. But these restrictions and distinctions were gradually broken down, and people, as they were able and willing, launched out into unlimited extravagance in their dress. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and down from thence to the time when the Quakers first appeared, were periods, particularly noticed for prodigality in the use of apparel, there was nothing too expensive or too preposterous to be worn. Our ancestors also, to use an ancient quotation, "were never constant to one colour or fashion two months

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[Footnote 35: See Strut's Antiquities.]

to an end." We can have no idea by the present generation, of the folly in such respects, of these early ages. But these follies were not confined to the laity. Affectation of parade, and gaudy cloathing, were admitted among many of the clergy, who incurred the severest invectives of the poets on that account. The ploughman, in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, is full upon this point. He gives us the following description of a Priest

"That hye on horse wylleth to ride,  
In glytter ande gold of great araye,  
'I painted and pertred all in pryde,  
No common Knyght may go so gaye;  
Chaunge of clothyng every daye,  
With golden gyrdles great and small,  
As boysterous as is here at baye;  
All suche falshed mote nede fell."

To this he adds, that many of them had more than one or two mitres, embellished with pearls, like the head of a queen, and a staff of gold set with jewels, as heavy as lead. He then speaks of their appearing out of doors with broad bucklers and long swords, or with baldrics about their necks, instead of stoles, to which their basellards were attached.

"Bucklers brode and sweardes longe,  
Baudryke with baselards kene."

He then accuses them with wearing gay gowns of scarlet and green colours, ornamented with cut-work, and for the long pykes upon their shoes.

But so late as the year 1652 we have the following anecdote of the whimsical dress of a clergyman. John Owen, Dean of Christ church, and Vice-Chancellor of Oxford, is represented as wearing a lawn-band, as having his hair powdered and his hat curiously cocked. He is described also as wearing Spanish leather-boots with lawn-tops, and snake-bone band-strings with large tassels, and a large set of ribbands pointed at his knees with points or tags at the end. And much about the same time, when Charles the second was at Newmarket, Nathaniel Vincent, doctor of divinity, fellow of Clare-hall, and chaplain in ordinary to his majesty, preached before him. But the king was so displeased with the foppery of this preacher's dress, that he commanded the duke of Monmouth, then chancellor of the university, to cause the statutes concerning decency of apparel among the clergy to be put into execution, which was accordingly done. These instances are sufficient to shew, that the taste for preposterous and extravagant dress must have operated like a contagion in those times, or the clergy would scarcely have dressed themselves in this ridiculous and censurable manner.

But although this extravagance was found among many orders of society at the time of the appearance of George Fox, yet many individuals had set their faces against the fashions of the world. These consisted principally of religious people of different denominations, most of whom were in the middle classes of life. Such persons were found in plain and

simple habits notwithstanding the contagion of the example of their superiors in rank. The men of this description generally wore plain round hats with common crowns. They had discarded the sugar-loaf hat, and the hat turned up with a silver clasp on one side, as well as all ornaments belonging to it, such as pictures, feathers, and bands of various colours. They had adopted a plain suit of clothes. They wore cloaks, when necessary, over these. But both the clothes and the cloaks were of the same colour. The colour of each of them was either drab or grey. Other people who followed the fashions, wore white, red, green, yellow, violet, scarlet, and other colours, which were expensive, because they were principally dyed in foreign parts. The drab consisted of the white wool undyed, and the grey of the white wool mixed with the black, which was undyed also. These colours were then the colours of the clothes, because they were the least expensive, of the peasants of England, as they are now of those of Portugal and Spain. They had discarded also, all ornaments, such as of lace, or bunches of ribbands at the knees, and their buttons were generally of alchymy, as this composition was then termed, or of the same colour as their clothes.

The grave and religious women also, like the men, had avoided the fashions of their times. These had adopted the cap, and the black hood for their headdress. The black hood had been long the distinguishing mark of a grave matron. All prostitutes, so early as Edward the third, had been forbidden to wear it. In after-times it was celebrated by the epithet of venerable by the poets, and had been introduced by painters as the representative of virtue. When fashionable women had discarded it, which was the case in George Fox's time, the more sober, on account of these ancient marks of its sanctity, had retained it, and it was then common among them. With respect to the hair of grave and sober women In those days, it was worn plain, and covered occasionally by a plain hat or bonnet. They had avoided by this choice those preposterous head-dresses and bonnets, which none but those, who have seen paintings of them, could believe ever to have been worn. They admitted none of the large ruffs, that were then in use, but chose the plain handkerchief for their necks, differing from those of others, which had rich point, and curious lace. They rejected the crimson sattin doublet with black velvet skirts, and contented themselves with a plain gown, generally of stuff, and of a drab, or grey, or buff, or buffin colour, as it was called, and faced with buckram. These colours, as I observed before, were the colours worn by country people; and were not expensive, because they were not dyed. To this gown was added a green apron. Green aprons had been long worn in England, yet, at the time I allude to, they were out of fashion, so as to be ridiculed by the gay. But old fashioned people still retained them. Thus an idea of gravity was connected with them; and therefore religious and steady women adopted them, as the grave and sober garments of ancient times.

It may now be observed that from these religious persons, habited in this manner, in opposition to the fashions of the world, the primitive Quakers generally sprung. George Fox himself wore the plain grey coat that has been noticed, with alchymy buttons, and a plain leather girdle about his waist. When the Quakers therefore first met in religious union, they met in these simple clothes. They made no alteration in their dress on account of their new religion. They prescribed no form or colour as distinguishing marks of their

sect, but they carried with them the plain habits of their ancestors into the new Society, as the habits of the grave and sober people of their own times.

## SECTION II.

But though George Fox introduced no new dress into the Society, he was not indifferent on the subject—he recommended simplicity and plainness—and declaimed against the fashions of the times—supported by Barclay and Penn—these explained the objects of dress—the influence of these explanations—dress at length incorporated into the discipline—but no standard fixed either of shape or colour—the objects of dress only recognized, and simplicity recommended—a new Era—great variety allowable by the discipline—Quakers have deviated less from the dress of their ancestors than other people.

Though George Fox never introduced any new or particular garments, when he formed the Society, as models worthy of the imitation of those who joined him, yet, as a religious man, he was not indifferent upon the subject of dress. Nor could he, as a reformer, see those extravagant fashions, which I have shewn to have existed in his time, without publicly noticing them. We find him accordingly recommending to his followers simplicity and plainness of apparel, and bearing his testimony against the preposterous and fluctuating apparel of the world.

In the various papers, which he wrote or gave forth upon this subject, he bid it down as a position, that all ornaments, superfluities, and unreasonable changes in dress, manifested an earthly or worldly spirit. He laid it down again, that such things, being adopted principally for the lust of the eye, were productive of vanity and pride, and that, in proportion as men paid attention to these outward decorations and changes, they suffered some loss in the value and dignity of their minds. He considered also all such decorations and changes, as contrary both to the letter and the spirit of the scriptures. Isaiah, one of the greatest prophets under the law, had severely reproved the daughters of Israel on account of their tinkling ornaments, cauls, round tires, chains, bracelets, rings, and ear-rings. St. Paul also and St. Peter had both of them cautioned the women of their own times, to adorn themselves in modest apparel, and not with broidered hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array. And the former had spoken to both sexes indiscriminately not to conform to the world, in which latter expression he evidently included all those customs of the world, of whatsoever nature, that were in any manner injurious to the morality of the minds of those who followed them.

By the publication of these sentiments, George Fox shewed to the world, that it was his opinion, that religion, though it prescribed no particular form of apparel, was not indifferent as to the general subject of dress. These sentiments became the sentiments of his followers. But the Society was coming fast into a new situation. When the members of it first met in union, they consisted of grown up persons; of such, as had had their minds spiritually exercised, and their judgments convinced in religious matters; of such in fact as had been Quakers in spirit, before they had become Quakers by name. All admonitions therefore on the subject of dress were unnecessary for such persons. But many of those,

who had joined the Society, had brought with them children into it, and from the marriages of others, children were daily springing up. To the latter, in a profligate age, where the fashions were still raging from without, and making an inroad upon the minds and morals of individuals, some cautions were necessary for the preservation of their innocence in such a storm. For these were the reverse of their parents. Young, in point of age, they were Quakers by name, before they could become Quakers in spirit. Robert Barclay therefore, and William Penn, kept alive the subject of dress, which George Fox had been the first to notice in the Society. They followed him on his scriptural ground. They repeated the arguments, that extravagant dress manifested an earthly spirit, and that it was productive of vanity and pride. But they strengthened the case by adding arguments of their own. Among these I may notice, that they considered what were the objects of dress. They reduced these to two, to decency, and comfort, in which latter idea was included protection from the varied inclemencies of the weather. Every thing therefore beyond these they considered as superfluous. Of course all ornaments would become censurable, and all unreasonable changes indefensible, upon such a system.

These discussions, however, on this subject never occasioned the more ancient Quakers to make any alteration in their dress, for they continued as when they had come into the Society, to be a plain people. But they occasioned parents to be more vigilant over their children in this respect, and they taught the Society to look upon dress, as a subject connected with the christian religion, in any case, where it could become injurious to the morality of the mind. In process of time therefore as the fashions continued to spread, and the youth of the Society began to come under their dominion, the Quakers incorporated dress among other subjects of their discipline. Hence no member, after this period, could dress himself preposterously, or follow the fleeting fashions of the world, without coming under the authority of friendly and wholesome admonition. Hence an annual inquiry began to be made, if parents brought up their children to dress consistently with their christian profession. The Society, however, recommended only simplicity and plainness to be attended to on this occasion. They prescribed no standard, no form, no colour, for the apparel of their members. They acknowledged the two great objects of decency and comfort, and left their members to clothe themselves consistently with these, as it was agreeable to their convenience or their disposition.

A new æra commenced from this period. Persons already in the Society, continued of course in their ancient dresses: if others had come into it by conviction, who had led gay lives, they laid aside their gaudy garments, and took those that were more plain. And the children of both, from this time, began to be habited from their youth as their parents were.

But though the Quakers had thus brought apparel under the disciplinary cognizance of the Society, yet the dress of individuals was not always alike, nor did it continue always one and the same even with the primitive Quakers. Nor has it continued one and the same with their descendants. For decency and comfort having been declared to be the true and only objects of dress, such a latitude was given, as to admit of great variety in apparel. Hence if we were to see a group of modern Quakers before us, we should probably not find any two of them dressed alike. Health, we all know, may require alteration in dress. Simplicity may

suggest others. Convenience again may point out others; and yet all these various alterations may be consistent with the objects before specified. And here it may be observed that the Society, during its existence for a century and a half, has without doubt, in some degree, imperceptibly followed the world, though not in its fashions, yet in its improvements of cloathing.

It must be obvious again, that some people are of a grave, and that others are of a lively disposition, and that these will probably never dress alike. Other members again, but particularly the rich, have a larger intercourse than the rest of them, or mix more with the world. These again will probably dress a little differently from others, and yet, regarding the two great objects of dress, their cloathing may come within the limits which these allow. Indeed if there be any, whose apparel would be thought exceptionable by the Society, these would be found among the rich. Money, in all societies, generally takes the liberty of introducing exceptions. Nothing, however is more true, than that, even among the richest of the Quakers, there is frequently as much plainness and simplicity in their outward dress, as among the poor; and where the exceptions exist, they are seldom carried to an extravagant, and never to a preposterous extent.

From this account it will be seen, that the ideas of the world are erroneous on the subject of the dress of the Quakers; for it has always been imagined, that, when the early Quakers first met in religious union, they met to deliberate and fix upon some standard, which should operate as a political institution, by which the members should be distinguished by their apparel from the rest of the world. The whole history, however, of the shape and colour of the garments of the Quakers is, as has been related, namely, that the primitive Quakers dressed like the sober, steady, and religious people of the age, in which the Society sprung up, and that their descendants have departed less in a course of time, than others, from the dress of their ancestors. The men's hats are nearly the same now, except that they have stays and loops, and many of their clothes are nearly of the same shape and colour, as in the days of George Fox. The dress of the women also is nearly similar. The black hoods indeed have gone, in a certain degree, out of use. But many of such women, as are ministers and elders, and indeed many others of age and gravity of manners, still retain them. The green apron also has been nearly, if not wholly laid aside. There was here and there an ancient woman, who used it within the last ten years, but I am told that the last of these died lately. No other reasons can be given, than those which have been assigned, why Quaker-women should have been found in the use of a colour, which is so unlike any other which they now use in their dress. Upon the whole, if the females were still to retain the use of the black hood and the green apron, and the men were to discard the stays and loops for their hats, we should find that persons of both sexes in the Society, but particularly such as are antiquated, or as may be deemed old fashioned in it, would approach very near to the first or primitive Quakers in their appearance, both as to the sort and to the shape, and to the colour of their clothes. Thus has George Fox, by means of the advice he gave upon this subject, and the general discipline which he introduced into the Society, kept up for a hundred and fifty years, against the powerful attacks of the varying fashions of the world, one steady, and uniform, external appearance among his descendants; an event, which neither the clergy by means of their sermons, nor other writers, whether grave or gay, were able to accomplish during the fifteenth and

sixteenth centuries, and which none of their successors have been able to accomplish from that time to the present.

### SECTION III.

The world usually make objections to the Quaker-dress—the charge is that there is a preciseness in it which is equivalent to the worshipping of forms—the truth of this charge not to be ascertained but by a knowledge of the heart—but outward facts mate against it—such as the origin of the Quaker-dress—and the Quaker-doctrine on dress—doctrine of christianity on this subject—opinion of the early christians upon it—reputed advantages of the Quaker-dress.

I should have been glad to have dismissed the subject of the Quaker-dress in the last section, but so many objections are usually made against it, that I thought it right to stop for a while to consider them in the present place. Indeed, if I were to choose a subject, upon which the world had been more than ordinarily severe on the Quakers, I should select that of their dress. Almost every body has something to say upon this point. And as in almost all cases, where arguments are numerous, many of them are generally frivolous, so it has happened in this also. There is one, however, which it is impossible not to notice upon this subject.

The Quakers, it is confessed by their adversaries, are not chargeable with the same sort of pride and vanity, which attach to the characters of other people, who dress in a gay manner, and who follow the fashions of the world, but it is contended, on the other hand, that they are justly chargeable with a preciseness, that is disgusting, in the little particularities of their cloathing. This precise attention to particularities is considered as little better than the worshipping of lifeless forms, and is usually called by the world the idolatry of the Quaker-dress.

This charge, if it were true, would be serious indeed. It would be serious, because it would take away from the religion of the Quakers one of its greatest and best characters. For how could any people be spiritually minded, who were the worshippers of lifeless forms? It would be serious again, because it would shew their religion, like the box of Pandora, to be pregnant with evils within itself. For people, who place religion in particular forms, must unavoidably become superstitious. It would be serious again, because if parents were to carry such notions into their families, they would produce mischief. The young would be dissatisfied, if forced to cultivate particularities, for which they see no just or substantial reason. Dissentions would arise among them. Their morality too would be confounded, if they were to see these minutiae idolized at home, but disregarded by persons of known religious character in the world. Add to which, that they might adopt erroneous notions of religion. For they might be induced to lay too much stress upon the payment of the anise and cummin, and too little upon the observance of the weightier matters of the law.

As the charge therefore is unquestionably a serious one, I shall not allow it to pass without some comments. And in the first place it maybe observed that, whether this

preciseness, which has been imputed to some Quakers, amounts to an idolizing of forms, can never be positively determined, except we had the power of looking into the hearts of those, who have incurred the charge. We may form, however, a reasonable conjecture, whether it does or not by presumptive evidence, taken from incontrovertible outward facts.

The first outward fact that presents itself to us, is the fact of the origin of the Quaker-dress, if the early Quakers, when they met in religious union, had met to deliberate and fix upon a form or standard of apparel for the Society, in vain could any person have expected to repel this charge. But no such standard was ever fixed. The dress of the Quakers has descended from father to son in the way that has been described. There is reason therefore to suppose, that the Quakers as a religious body, have deviated less than others from the primitive habits of their ancestors, rather from a fear of the effects of unreasonable changes of dress upon the mind, than from an attachment to lifeless forms.

The second outward fact, which may be resorted to as furnishing a ground for reasonable conjecture, is the doctrine of the Quakers upon this subject. The Quakers profess to follow christianity in all cases, where its doctrines can be clearly ascertained. I shall state therefore what christianity says upon this point. I shall shew that what Quakerism says is in unison with it. And I shall explain more at large the principle, that has given birth to the discipline of the Quakers relative to their dress.

Had christianity approved of the make or colour of any particular garment, it would have approved of those of its founder and of his apostles. We do not, however, know, what any of these illustrious personages wore. They were probably dressed in the habits of Judean peasants, and not with any marked difference from those of the same rank in life. And that they were dressed plainly, we have every reason to believe, from the censures, which some of them passed on the superfluities of apparel. But christianity has no where recorded these habits as a pattern, nor has it prescribed to any man any form or colour for his clothes.

But christianity, though it no where places religion in particular forms, is yet not indifferent on the general subject of dress. For in the first place it discards all ornaments, as appears by the testimonies of St. Paul and St. Peter before quoted, and this it does evidently on the ground of morality, lest these, by puffing up the creature, should be made to give birth to the censurable passions of vanity and lust. In the second place it forbids all unreasonable changes on the plea of conformity with the fashions of the world: and it sets its face against these also upon moral grounds; because the following of the fashions of the world begets a worldly spirit, and because, in proportion as men indulge this spirit, they are found to follow the loose and changeable morality of the world, instead of the strict and steady morality of the gospel.

That the early christians understood these to be the doctrines of christianity, there can be no doubt. The Presbyters and the Ascetics, I believe, changed the Pallium for the Toga in the infancy of the christian world; but all other christians were left undistinguished by their dress. These were generally clad in the sober manner of their own times. They observed a medium between costliness and sordidness. That they had no particular form

for their dress beyond that of other grave people, we learn from Justin Martyr. "They affected nothing fantastic, says he, but, living among Greeks and barbarians, they followed the customs of the country, and in clothes, and in diet, and in all other affairs of outward life, they shewed the excellent and admirable constitution of their discipline and conversation." That they discarded superfluities and ornaments we may collect from various authors of those times. Basil reduced the objects of cloathing to two, namely, "Honesty and necessity," that is, to decency and protection. Tertullian laid it down as a doctrine that a Christian should not only be chaste, but that he should appear so outwardly. "The garments which we should wear, says Clemens of Alexandria, should be modest and frugal, and not wrought of divers colours, but plain." Crysostom commends Olympias, a lady of birth and fortune, for having in her garment nothing that was wrought or gaudy. Jerome praises Paula, another lady of quality, for the same reason. We find also that an unreasonable change of cloathing, or a change to please the eye of the world, was held improper. Cyril says, "we should not strive for variety, having clothes for home, and others for ostentation abroad." In short the ancient fathers frequently complained of the abuse of apparel in the ways described.

Exactly in the same manner, and in no other, have the Quakers considered the doctrines of Christianity on the subject of dress. They have never adopted any particular model either as to form or colour for their clothes. They have regarded the two objects of decency and comfort. But they have allowed of various deviations consistently with these. They have in fact fluctuated in their dress. The English Quaker wore formerly a round hat. He wears it now with stays and loops. But even this fashion is not universal, and seems rather now on the decline. The American Quaker, on the other hand, has generally kept to the round hat. Black hoods were uniformly worn by the Quaker-women, but the use of these is much less than it was, and is still decreasing. The Green aprons also were worn by the females, but they are now wholly out of use. But these changes could never have taken place, had there been any fixed standard for the Quaker dress.

But though the Quakers have no particular model for their clothing, yet they are not indifferent to dress where it may be morally injurious. They have discarded all superfluities and ornaments, because they may be hurtful to the mind. They have set their faces also against all unreasonable changes of forms for the same reasons. They have allowed other reasons to weigh with them in the latter case. They have received from their ancestors a plain suit of apparel, which has in some little degree followed the improvements of the world, and they see no good reason why they should change it; at least they see in the fashions of the world none but a censurable reason for a change. And here it may be observed, that it is not an attachment to forms, but an unreasonable change or deviation from them, that the Quakers regard. Upon the latter idea it is, that their discipline is in a great measure founded, or, in other words, the Quakers, as a religious body, think it right to watch in their youth any unreasonable deviation from the plain apparel of the Society.

This they do first, because any change beyond usefulness must be made upon the plea of conformity to the fashions of the world.

Secondly, because any such deviation in their youth is considered to shew, in some measure, a deviation from simplicity of heart. It bespeaks the beginning of an unstable mind. It shews there must have been some improper motive for the change. Hence it argues a weakness in the deviating persons, and points them out as objects to be strengthened by wholesome admonition.

Thirdly, because changes, made without reasonable motives, would lead, if not watched and checked, to other still greater changes, and because an uninterrupted succession of such changes would bring the minds of their youth under the most imperious despotisms, the despotism of fashion; in consequence of which they would cleave to the morality of the world instead of the morality of the gospel.

And fourthly, because in proportion as young persons deviate from the plainness and simplicity of the apparel as worn by the Society, they approach in appearance to the world; they mix with it, and imbibe its spirit and admit its customs, and come into a situation which subjects them to be disowned. And this is so generally true, that of those persons, whom the Society has been obliged to disown, the commencement of a long progress in irregularity may often be traced to a deviation from the simplicity of their dress. And here it may be observed, that an effect has been produced by this care concerning dress, so beneficial to the moral interests of the Society, that they have found in it a new reason for new vigilance on this subject. The effect produced is a general similarity of outward appearance, in all the members, though there is a difference both in the form and colour of their clothing; and this general appearance is such, as to make a Quaker still known to the world. The dress therefore of the Quakers, by distinguishing the members of the Society, and making them known as such to the world, makes the world overseers as it were of their moral conduct. And that it operates in this way, or that it becomes a partial check in favour of morality, there can be no question. For a Quaker could not be seen either at public races, or at cock fightings, or at assemblies, or in public houses, but the fact would be noticed as singular, and probably soon known among his friends. His clothes would betray him. Neither could he, if at a great distance from home, and if quite out of the eye and observation of persons of the same religious persuasion, do what many others do. For a Quaker knows, that many of the customs of the Society are known to the world at large, and that a certain conduct is expected from a person in a Quakers habit. The fear therefore of being detected, and at any rate of bringing infamy on his cloth, if I may use the expression, would operate so as to keep him out of many of the vicious customs of the world.

From hence it will be obvious that there cannot be any solid foundation for the charge, which has been made against the Quakers on the subject of dress. They are found in their present dress, not on the principle of an attachment to any particular form, or because any one form is more sacred than another, but on the principle, that an unreasonable deviation from any simple and useful clothing is both censurable and hurtful, if made in conformity with the fashions of the world. These two principles, though they may produce, if acted upon, a similar outward appearance in persons, are yet widely distinct as to their foundation, from one another. The former is the principle of idolatry. The latter that of religion. If therefore there are persons in the Society, who adopt the former, they will come

within the reach of the charge described. But the latter only can be adopted by true Quakers.