

CURRENT OPINION

May, 1919

LONDON'S LITERARY TAILOR

H. Dennis Bradley Expresses His Philosophy of Clothes Through the Medium of the Advertizement

A LONDON tailor has revealed anew the possibilities of the advertizement as a medium of literary expression. H. Dennis Bradley, proprietor of an establishment in Old Bond Street, is the new author who, in his advertizements in the *London Nation* and the *English Review*, has expressed an original philosophy of life and clothes. Mr. Bradley's "ads" take the form of epigrams and aphorisms, stories and plays, trenchant bits of social criticism, Whitmanesque prose, and preachments of various types. Often they deal with the perplexities and problems of male attire; but more often they forget to. Instead of advertizing the tailoring business, they merely reveal the piquant personality of H. Dennis Bradley. Here, for instance, are a few of the Bradleyan aphorisms published in the *Nation*:

"When the Profiteer is asked, 'What did you do in the great war, daddy?' he will be able to answer proudly, 'I did well.'"

"It is more logical for sterile spinsters to theorize on love than for childless men to dogmatize on the future of 'our children.'"

"Old men in armchairs have little regard for veracity. We hear them saying, 'We have won the war'; why not 'They'? Or is it an erroneous impression that the young men in the trenches had something to do with it?"

"I do not really like commercialism, but I appreciate caviare and a Rolls Royce. And so I am commercial—occasionally."

"My only objection to business is that it interferes with pleasure."

"Wisdom is negative unless it enables one to appreciate the joy of foolishness."

"Unless handicapped by education, it is not really difficult to become a millionaire if one is unscrupulous, but it impairs the mental and physical digestion."

"Pessimists say, 'The good die young.' Optimists say, 'The Young die! Good!'"

But it is perhaps Mr. Bradley's iconoclastic philosophy of clothes—a philosophy of reconstruction—that entitles him to our profoundest respect. He has openly declared war against the "boiled shirt." Its complete abolition, this new advertizing philosopher believes, should be one of the great benefits of the victory of the Allies. "After all," we

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read in one of his advertizements, "it has been good for us to learn to question many things which we had previously accepted without question simply because we had lost the faculty of criticism."

"Reconstruction implies the questioning mind; the refusal to accept questionable things simply because they have existed long enough to become rather a dull and uncomfortable habit.

"I am sanguine enough to believe that clothes will not escape the reconstruction process.

"In pre-war days, the most rigid, the most stereotyped form of male clothing was evening dress, and when war exigencies made starch unpatriotic a shattering blow was struck at what seemed a cast-iron law.

"The 'boiled' shirt cracked a faint Victorian protest, and disappeared; the tail-coat sought refuge amongst moth-balls, and for a time even the dinner-jacket became shy.

"But now that we are face to face with a new era, now that nations and ideas are in the melting-pot, why should any of the ancient laws of the unimaginative Medes and Persians escape revision? Why, for instance, should we ever meekly return to the tyranny of starch?

"If starch is a food, for goodness' sake eat it; do not plaster it on your bosom and bend it round your neck.

"The war has taught us the value of soft silken shirts and collars; and we shall not return to the Prussianism and the Militarism of the blind, unreasoning 'boiled' shirt without a murmur.

"It is unpleasant to look around the stalls of a theater and attempt to penetrate the mystery of the solemn rows of stiff white cuirasses. What woman, except the virgin Elizabeth, ever wore starch in evening dress? Are we to assume that the mode of man is stiff and the manner of woman is light?

"The starched shirt must go. It must be relegated to the provinces with the white kid gloves."

Mr. Bradley thanks the gods and his Irish blood for his sense of joy. He is an idealistic tailor, a Shaw of a tailor in his scathing attacks on our male attire, a Wells of a tailor in his iridescent dream of what our clothes might be in the future. He is capable of writing a new "Sartor Resartus." He looks forward to a renaissance of color in our clothes. "From my sanctum near the sky," he confesses in the course of a *Nation* "ad," "there are few more depressing sights on a dark gray day than the view I get of a London street. The full drabness of the scene soaks the mind so thoroly that it drowns all thoughts of joy."

"One gazes on London architecture of a highly-mixed and mostly uncheerful order, feels an atmosphere anything but enlivening—an atmosphere that has the

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gift of bringing before the mind's eye all the futility of the past, the hopelessness of the future and the sinister rustlings of the income-tax papers. Seen from these giddy heights, in the street below the gloom is deepened by a moving mass of male humans who infest the scene and add to its misery by dressing like a collection of black beetles.

"Why do we do it? Why have we done it for so long? There was a time when men were not afraid of color; when thought was free in sartorial matters; when a cravat was an event, and a frilled shirt a delicate, foaming affair which deserved, and received, a lifetime's devotion to her art from the artistically-minded laundress. Oh, for a modern Sans-Gêne!

"Color played its proper part in men's lives: from Pepys to Goldsmith, from Grammont to Brummell they reveled in discreet color. Who in the world tore man away from color, and why he permitted himself to be torn away are points which a future historian of the damnable Victorian era should study. Not only in art and in literature but in clothes has it been an era of miserable and gloomy failure.

"And a myth has grown up, a monstrous stupid myth, which whispers drearily that the man who dares to swerve one hair's breadth from the sombre blacks and toneless grays is an effeminate fool, unworthy of the regard of the serious-minded who tread life's stony paths in solemn drab, wear substantial boots and 'sensible' Mackintoshes, whose domestic traditions, whose 'atmosphere' and 'art' are a blend of heavy mahogany sideboards and armchairs, 'classic' efforts of aged Academicians, and, generally, eccentricities of the Great Exhibition Period."

It is the sign of the times that when he sets out to choose his civilian clothes, the demobilized man chooses color, notes this tailor-philosopher in another amusing "ad." Psychologically, he believes, this is only natural. "For too long he has been living in a world of hideous drab, and his whole nature craves for relief. . . . Clothes have an effect on the wearer."

"Just before war broke out we were undergoing a similar reaction against drabness. The season of 1914 had been remarkable for a mild revolution against the dreary old Victorian conventions which bound the male to drabs and grays and blacks; man, possibly influenced by the example of woman, had discovered that, after all, even he could exchange drabness for light, and feel unashamed.

"But in spite of his cravings, it would have been long before the ordinary tradition-hampered man would have dared on his own initiative; he is a timid beast, sartorially, and has to be guided. Therefore, manufacturers were approached and instructed to provide cleverly subdued blendings of rich subtle colors, and the ordinary man did not realize that he was walking the dusty pavement literally in purple and gold.

"All he was aware of was that his garments pleased him and gave him emotions he had never experienced from

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blacks and grays. And, as his taste began to awaken, he found that there were opportunities for individualism in his attire which pleased him. To be able to call for a mixture of russet brown and peacock blue, indigo and purple, or pheasant and violet, and to be conscious that there would be nothing in the finished garment to call for busman's ribaldry, tickled his pride and flattered his nascent artistic sense.

"That was in 1914. . . . Then war came and a world of drab and mud. And for nearly five years Art, Beauty, Joy, and Life have been things of no account.

"Now, after years of this horrible world, this death in life, Youth has returned with a fierce loathing of ugliness, clamoring for color, for brightness, for light and joy."

This matter is one of such tremendous social significance to Mr. Bradley that he has even forsaken the medium of the advertizement and has contributed a striking essay to the *English Review* on "the Garb of Peace." He fights that dreadful enemy—the Great Dress Tradition. He boldly asserts that ugliness does *not* breathe virtue. Man is, sartorially, a timid beast, and feels himself lamentably untrained. "A few nervous excursions into waistcoats, which usually end in the wildest of grays and fawns; a tie or two which suggested that somewhere in the world there was such a thing as sunshine and color; a faint expression of a hope of better times in store in his scarce-seen hosiery—these were the limits of his personal courage in adventuring on new seas." Now, in the general reconstruction, let us cast aside the Victorian conventions of dullness in clothes. Mr. Bradley elucidates:

"Ugliness is not morality; shapelessness is not always chastity; lack of self-respect does not necessarily indicate uprightness, and contempt for appearances does not inevitably imply master-mind.

"Now that the old orders have changed, the old Bastiles have toppled in dishonored ruins, the old absurd tyrannies have been flung contemptuously from their pinchbeck thrones; now that men, with awakened vision, with new ideas and untrammelled minds, are seeking to construct a new future, do not let us clog our bodies with an environment which stifled us for too long.

"We may not go back to the rainbow shades and wonderful stuffs of the bucks and the dandies of olden time—do what we will, we live in utilitarian days—but whatever comes do not let us revert to the hideous hues and shapelessness of the Victorian era. . . .

"Thank heaven! the prices of men's clothes are never likely to rival women's; and men's clothes have one great virtue—that of durability.

"So a drastic and not unhealthy change will come about in the household of moderate incomes, an approximation to the real equality of the sexes; the man will spend more on his adornment, and the woman, of necessity, less. Before the war, where the woman spent four or five times as much on clothes as a man, she will in future have to content herself with

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twice as much, and the world will be a happier and more wholesome spot—if the assumption be true that women dress to annoy other women and to please other women's husbands.

“But whatever problems the immediate future presents, never let us lose the vantage we have gained over the Ghouls of Ugliness and Drabness; never let us forget that we have discovered Color and Beauty and have begun to realize their utility in a utilitarian age.”

