

*Costly Attire*¹

*To the female members of Christian Churches
in the United States of America*

by Adoniram Judson

In raising up a Church of Christ in this heathen land, we have found one chief obstacle in that principle of vanity, that love of dress and display, which has been a ruling passion of the fair sex, as the love of riches, power and fame has characterized the other.

That obstacle became more formidable lately through the admission of two or three fashionable females in the church, and the arrival of several missionary sisters dressed and adorned in that manner which is too prevalent in our beloved native land.

On my meeting the church after a year's absence, I beheld an appalling profusion of ornaments, and saw the demon of vanity was laying waste the female department. At that time I had not maturely considered the subject, and did not feel sure what ground I ought to take. I apprehended also that I should be unsupported and perhaps opposed by some of my coadjutors. I confined my efforts, therefore, to private exhortation, but with little effect. Some of the ladies out of regard to their pastor's feelings took off their necklaces and ear ornaments before they entered the chapel, tied them up in a corner of their handkerchiefs, and on returning, as soon as they were out of sight of the mission house, stopped in the middle of the street to array themselves anew.

In the meantime I was called to visit the Karens,

1. We reproduce this frank expression of Dr. Judson's difficulties in his missionary work because we believe it applies to present conditions. Not only is the love of ornaments often seen among Christians, but even a tendency to imitate the voluptuous fashions of the day, which are no doubt responsible for much actual crime. Oh that there may be among God's dear people such a laying hold by faith of our glorious portion in heaven, now so near at hand, as will set us to "perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). Ed. {of *Help and Food*.}

a wild people, several days' journey to the north of Maulmain. Little did I expect to encounter there the same enemy in those wilds. But I found he had been there before me -- had held sway from time immemorial. On one Karen lady I counted from between twelve to fifteen necklaces, of all colors, sizes and materials. Three was the average. Brass belts above the ankles, neat braids of black hair tied below the knees, rings of all sorts on the fingers, bracelets on the wrists and arms, long pieces of metal perforating the lower part of the ear, and reaching nearly to the shoulders, fancifully constructed bags enclosing the hair and suspended from the back part of the head, not to speak of the ornamental part of their clothing, constituted the fashions and the *ton* of the fair Karenesses. The dress of the female converts was not essentially different from that of their countrywomen.

I saw that I was brought into a situation that precluded all retreat -- that I must fight or give up.

For a few nights I spent some sleepless hours, distressed by this and other subjects. I considered the spirit of the religion of Christ. I opened to 1 Tim. 2:9 and read these words of the inspired apostle: "I will, also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety, not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array." I asked myself, Can I baptize a Karen woman in her present attire? *No*. Can I administer the Lord's Supper to one of the baptized in that attire? *No*. Can I refrain from enforcing the prohibition of the apostle? Not without betraying the trust I have received from him.

Again I considered that the question concerned not the Karens only, but the whole Christian world; that its decision would involve a train of unknown consequences; that a single step would lead me into a long and perilous way. I considered Maulmain and the other stations; I considered the state of the public mind at home. But "What is that to thee? follow thou Me," was the continual response, and weighed more than all. I renewedly offered myself to Christ, and prayed for strength to go forward in the path of duty,

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come what may-come praise or reproach, supported or deserted, successful or defeated in the ultimate issue.

Soon after coming to this resolution, a Karen woman offered herself for baptism. After the usual examination I inquired whether she could give up her ornaments for Christ. It was an unexpected blow. I explained the spirit of the gospel. I appealed to her own consciousness of vanity. I read her the apostle's prohibition. She looked again and again at her handsome necklace -- she wore but one -- and then, with an air of modest decision that would adorn beyond all outward ornaments any of my sisters whom I am addressing, she quietly took it off, saying, "I love Christ more than this." The news began to spread. The Christian women made but little hesitation. A few others opposed, but the work went on.

At length the evil which I most dreaded came upon me. Some of the Karen men had been to Maulmain, and seen what I wished they had not; and one day, when we were discussing the subject of ornaments, one of the Christians came forward and declared that at Maulmain he had seen one of the great female teachers wearing a string of gold beads around her neck.

Lay down this paper, dear sisters, and sympathize a moment with your fallen missionary. Was it not a hard case? However, though cast down, I was not destroyed. I endeavored to maintain the warfare as well as I could, and when I left those parts, the female converts were, generally speaking, arrayed in modest apparel.

On arriving at Maulmain, and partially recovering from a fever which I had contracted in the Karen woods, the first thing I did was to crawl out to the house of the patroness of the gold necklace. To her I related my adventures, and described my grief. With what ease, and truth too, could that sister reply, "Notwithstanding this necklace, I dress more plainly than most ministers' wives and professors of religion in our native land. This necklace is the only ornament I wear. It was given me when quite a child by a dear

mother whom I expect never to see again (another hard case), and she begged me never to part with it as long as I lived, but to wear it as a memorial of her."

O Christian mothers, what a lesson is here before you! Can you, dare you give injunctions to your daughters directly contrary to apostolic commands? But to the honor of my sister be it recorded, that as soon as she understood the merits of the case, and the mischief done by such example, off went the gold necklace, and she gave decisive proof that she loved Christ more than father or mother. Her example, united with the efforts of the rest of us at this station, is beginning to exercise a redeeming influence in the female department of the church.

Dear sisters, having finished my tale and therein exhibited the necessity under which I lay of addressing you, I beg leave to submit a few topics to your candid and prayerful consideration:

1. Let me appeal to the conscience, and inquire, What is the real motive for wearing ornamental and costly apparel? Is it not the desire of setting off one's person to the best advantage, and of exciting the admiration of others? Is not such dress calculated to gratify self-love, and cherish sentiments of vanity and pride? And do not those sentiments acquire strength from indulgence? Do such motives and sentiments comport with the meek, humble, self-denying religion of Jesus Christ? I would here respectfully suggest that these questions will not be answered so faithfully in the midst of company as when quite alone, kneeling before God.

2. Consider the words of the apostle before quoted (1 Tim. 2: 9): "I will, also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with brodered hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array." I do not quote a similar command recorded in 1 Pet. 3: 3, because the verbal construction is not quite so definite, though the import of the two passages is the same. But cannot the force of these two passages be evaded? Yes, and nearly every command in Scripture can be evaded, and every doctrinal assertion perverted, plausibly and

handsomely, too, if we set about it in good earnest. But preserving the posture above alluded to, with the inspired volume spread open at the passage in question, ask your hearts, in simplicity and godly sincerity, whether the meaning is not just as plain as the sun at noonday. Shall we, then, bow to the authority of an inspired apostle, or shall we not? From that authority shall we appeal to the prevailing usages and fashions of the age? If so, please to recall the missionaries you have sent to the heathen, for the heathen can vindicate all their superstitions on the same ground.

3. In the posture you have assumed, look up and behold the eye of your benignant Savior ever gazing upon you with the tenderest love -- upon **you**, His daughters, His spouse-wishing above all things that you would yield your hearts entirely to Him, and become holy as He is holy, rejoicing when He sees one after the other accepting His pressing invitation, and entering the more perfect way.

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