

THE APPAREL OF WOMEN

Tertullian

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Tertullian

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THE APPAREL OF WOMEN

BOOK ONE

THE APPAREL OF WOMEN

CHAPTER 1

If there existed upon earth a faith in proportion to the reward that faith will receive in heaven, no one of you, my beloved sisters, from the time when you came to know the living God and recognized your own state, that is, the condition of being a woman, would have desired a too attractive garb, and much less anything that seemed too ostentatious. I think, rather, that you would have dressed in mourning garments and even neglected your exterior, acting the part of mourning and repentant Eve in order to expiate more fully by all sorts of penitential garb that which woman derives from Eve—the ignominy, I mean, of original sin and the odium of being the cause of the fall of the human race. 'In sorrow and anxiety, you will bring forth, O woman, and you are subject to your husband, and he is your master.' Do you not believe that you are (each) an Eve?

(2) The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives on even in our times and so it is necessary that the guilt should live on, also. You are the one who opened the door to the Devil, you are the one who first plucked the fruit of the forbidden tree, you are the first who deserted the divine law; you are the one who persuaded him whom the Devil was not strong enough to attack. All too easily you destroyed the image of God, man. Because of your desert, that is, death, even the Son of God had to die. And you still think of putting adornments over the skins of animals that cover you?

(3) Well, now—if, in the very beginning of the world, the Milesians had invented wool by shearing sheep, and if the Chinese had woven the strands of silk, and the Tyrians had invented dye and the Phrygians embroidery and the Babylonians weaving, if pearls had gleamed and rubies flashed with light, if gold itself had already been brought forth from the bowels of earth by man's greed, and finally, if a mirror had already been capable of giving forth its lying image, do you think that Eve, after she had been expelled from Paradise and was already dead, would have longed for all of these fineries? She would not. Therefore, she ought not to crave them or even to know them now, if she desires to be restored to life again. Those things which she did not have or know when she lived in God, all those things are the trappings appropriate to a woman who was condemned and is dead, arrayed as if to lend splendor to her funeral.

CHAPTER 2

(1) For those, too, who invented these things are condemned to the penalty of death, namely, those angels who rushed from heaven upon the daughters of men so that this ignominy is also attached to woman. For when these fallen angels had revealed certain well-hidden material substances, and numerous other arts that were only faintly revealed, to an age much more ignorant than ours—for surely they are the ones who disclosed the secrets of metallurgy, discovered the natural properties of herbs, made known the power of charms, and aroused the desire to pry into everything, including the interpretation of the stars—they granted to women as their special and, as it were, personal property these means of feminine vanity: the radiance of precious stones with which necklaces are decorated in different colors, the bracelets of gold which they wrap around their arms, the colored preparations which are used to dye wool, and that black powder which they use to enhance the beauty of their eyes.

(2) If you want to know what kind of things these are, you can easily learn from the character of those who taught these arts. Have sinners ever been able to show and provide anything conducive to holiness, unlawful lovers anything contributing to chastity, rebel angels anything promoting the fear of God? If, indeed, we must call what they have passed on 'teachings,' then evil teachers must of necessity have taught evil lessons; if these are the wages of sin, then there can be nothing beautiful about the reward for something evil. But why should they have taught and granted such things?

(3) Are we to think that women without the material of adornment or without the tricks of beautifying themselves would not have been able to please men when these same women, unadorned and uncouth and, as I might say, crude and rude, were able to impress angels? Or would the latter have appeared beggarly lovers who insolently demanded favors for nothing, unless they had brought some gift to the women they had attracted into marriage? But this is hardly conceivable. The women who possessed angels as husbands could not desire anything further, for, surely they had already made a fine match.

(4) The angels, on the other hand, who certainly thought sometimes of the place whence they had fallen and longed for heaven after the heated impulses of lust had quickly passed, rewarded in this way the very gift of woman's natural beauty as the cause of evil, that is, that woman should not profit from her happiness, but, rather, drawn away from the ways of innocence and sincerity, should be united with them in sin against God. They must have been certain that all ostentation, ambition, and love achieved by carnal pleasure would be displeasing God. You see, these are the angels whom we are destined to judge, these are the angels whom we renounce in baptism, these are the very things on account of which they deserved to be judged by men.

(5) What connection, therefore, can there be between their affairs and their judges? What business can there be between the condemned and their judges? I suppose, the same as between Christ and Belial. How can we with good conscience mount that judgment-seat to pronounce sentence against those whose gifts we are now trying to get? You realize, of course, that the same angelic nature is promised to you, women, the selfsame sex is promised to you as to men, and the selfsame dignity of being a judge. Therefore, unless here in this life we begin to practice being judges by condemning their works which we are destined to condemn in them some day, then they will rather judge us and condemn us.

CHAPTER 3

(1) I am aware that the Book of Henoah which assigns this role to the angels is not accepted because it is not admitted into the Jewish canon. I suppose it is not accepted because they did not think that a book written before the flood could have survived that catastrophe which destroyed the whole world. If that be their reason, let them remember that Noe was a great-grandson of Henoah and a survivor of the deluge. He would have grown up in the family tradition and the name of Henoah would have been a household word and he would surely have remembered the grace that his ancestor enjoyed before God and the reputation of all his preaching, especially since Henoah gave the command to his son Mathusala that the knowledge of his deeds should be passed on to his posterity. Therefore, Noe could surely have succeeded in the trusteeship of his ancestor's preaching because he would not have kept silent about the wonderful providence of God who saved him from destruction as well as in order to enhance the glory of his own house.

(2) Now, supposing that Noe could not have had this knowledge thus directly, there could still be another reason to warrant our assertion of the genuineness of this book: he could have easily rewritten it under the inspiration of the Spirit after it had been destroyed by the violence of the flood, just as, when Jerusalem was destroyed at the hands of the Babylonians, every document of Jewish literature is known to have been restored by Esdras.

(3) But, since Henoah in this same book tells us of our Lord, we must not reject anything at all which really pertains to us. Do we not read that every word of Scripture useful for edification is divinely inspired? As you very well know, it was afterwards rejected by the Jews for the same reason that prompted them to reject almost all the other portions which prophesied about Christ. Now, it is not at all surprising that they refused to accept certain Scriptures which spoke of Him when they were destined not to receive Him when He spoke to them Himself. To all that we may add the fact that we have; a testimony to Henoah in the Epistle of Jude the Apostle.

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CHAPTER 4

(1) Let us assume for the moment that we do not condemn all womanly ornament ahead of time merely because of the fate of those who invented it. Let those angels be blamed only for the repudiation of heaven and their carnal marriage. Let us rather examine the character of these things themselves so that we may learn the reasons why they are so desirable. Female toilet has two possible purposes--dress and make-up.

(2) We use the word dress when we refer to what they call womanly grace, whereas make-up is more fittingly called womanly disgrace. Articles of dress are considered gold and silver and jewels and clothes, whereas make-up consists in the care of hair and of the skin and of those parts of the body which attract the eye. On one we level the accusation of ambition; on the other, that of prostitution. I say that now, O handmaid of God, that you may well know what, out of all these, is proper for your behavior, since you are judged by different principles, namely, those of humility and chastity.

CHAPTER 5

(1) Now, gold and silver, the principal materials of worldly dress, are necessarily the same as that from which they come, namely, earth. To be sure, they are earth of a nobler sort. For, wet with tears of those condemned to penal labor in the deadly foundries of the accursed mines, those 'precious' metals leave the name of earth in the fire behind them and, as fugitives from the mines, they change from objects of torment into articles of ornament, from instruments of punishment into tools of allurements, from symbols of ignominy into signs of honor.

(2) But the basic nature of iron and brass and of other metals, including the cheapest, is the same (as that of gold and silver), both as to their earthy origin and manufacture in the mines, and hence, according to nature itself, the substance of gold and silver is no more noble than theirs. Should, however, gold and silver derive their estimation from the quality of being useful, then certainly the value of iron and brass is higher, since their usefulness has been determined in such a way (by the creator) that they discharge functions of their own more numerous and more necessary for human life, and at the same time lend themselves to the more becoming uses of gold and silver. We know that rings are made of iron, and the history of antiquity still preserves (the fame of) certain vessels for eating and drinking made of brass. It is no concern of ours if the mad plentifulness of gold and silver serves to make utensils even for foul purposes.

(3) Certainly you will never plow a field with a golden plow nor will any ship be held together with silver bolts; you would never drive; golden mattock into the earth nor would you drive a silver nail into a plank. I leave unnoticed the fact that the necessities of our whole life depend upon iron and brass merely mentioning that those precious materials themselves requiring both to be dug out of the mines and forged into their specific form to be of any use whatsoever, cannot even be mined without the use of iron and brass.

(4) From this, then, you must already judge why it is that gold and silver enjoy such high estimation as to be preferred to other materials that are related to them by nature and are much more valuable if we consider their usefulness.

CHAPTER 6

(1) But how shall I explain those precious little stones which share their glory with gold, other than to say that they are only little stones and pebbles and tiny little bits of the selfsame earth? They certainly are not required for laying foundations or for building up walls or supporting pediment or giving compactness to roofs; the only building they seek to erect is this silly admiration of women. They are cautiously cut that they may shine, they are cunningly set that they may glitter, they are carefully pierced so as to hang properly and render to gold a meretricious service in return.

(2) Moreover, whatever love of display fishes up from the seas around Britain or India is merely a kind of shellfish, and its taste is no better than that of the giant mussel. Now, there is no reason why I should not approve of shellfish as the fruit of the sea. If, however, this shellfish produces some sort of growth inside of it, this should be considered a fault rather than a cause for glory. And even though we call this thing a pearl, it certainly must be seen to be nothing else but a hard and round lump inside a shellfish.

There is a tradition that gems also come from the foreheads of dragons, just as we sometimes find a certain stony substance in the brains of fish.

(3) This would indeed crown it all: the Christian woman in need of something from the serpent to add to her grace. It is probably in this way that she is going to tread upon the serpent's head while around her neck or even on top of her own head she carries ornaments that come from the head of the Devil!

CHAPTER 7

(1) The only thing that gives glamour to all these articles is that they are rare and that they have to be imported from a foreign country. In the country they come from they are not highly priced. When a thing is abundant it is always cheap. Among certain barbarians where gold is common and plentiful the people in the workhouses are bound with golden chains and the wicked are weighed down by riches and the richness of their bonds is in proportion to their wickedness. At last a way seems to have been found to prevent gold from being loved.

(2) We ourselves have seen the nobility of jewels blushing before the matrons in Rome at the contemptuous way the Parthians and Medes and the rest of their countrymen used them. It would seem they use jewels for any reason except adornment; emeralds lurk in their belts, and only the sword knows the round jewels lie hidden in its scabbard, and the large pearls on their rough boots wish to be lifted out of the mud. In short, they wear nothing so richly jeweled as that which ought not to be jeweled at all; in this way it is not conspicuous, or else is conspicuous only to show that the wearer does not care for it.

CHAPTER 8

(1) In the same manner, even their servants cause the glory to fade from the colors of our garments. They use as pictures on their walls whole purple and violet and royal hangings which you with great labor undo and change into different forms. Purple among them is cheaper than red.

(2) For, what legitimate honor can garments derive from adulteration with illegitimate colors? God is not pleased by what He Himself did not produce. We cannot suppose that God was unable to produce sheep with purple or sky– blue fleeces. If He was able, then He chose not to do it, and what God refused to do certainly cannot be lawful for man to make. Therefore, those things cannot be the best by nature which do not come from God, who is the Author of nature. Hence, they must be understood to be from the Devil, who is the corrupter of nature.

(3) Obviously, they cannot come from anyone else if they are not from God, because those things which are not of God must be of His rival. And there is no other rival of God except the Devil and his angels. Now, even if the material out of which something is made is from God it does not therefore follow that every way of enjoying these things is also of God. We always have to raise the question of not only whence shellfish come, but what task is assigned to them and where they will exhibit their beauty.

(4) For it is clear that all those profane pleasures of worldly spectacles about which we have already written a special treatise, and even idolatry itself, derive their material from the creatures of God.

(5) But that is no reason why a Christian should devote himself to the madness of the circus or the cruelties of the arena or the foulness of the theater, just because God created horses, panthers, and the human voice; any more than he can commit idolatry with impunity because the incense and the wine and fire which feeds on them, and the animals which are the victims, are God's workmanship, since even the material thing which is adored is God's creature.

(6) Thus, then, with regard to the use of the material substances, too; that use is falsely justified on the basis of their origin from God, since it is alien to God and is tainted with worldly glory.

CHAPTER 9

(1) For, just as certain things which are distributed by God in individual countries or in individual regions of the sea are mutually foreign to one another, so in turn they are considered rare by foreigners but rightfully neglected or not desired at all in their land of origin, because no anxious longing exists there for a glory which is hardly appreciated by the natives. So, it is merely because of this distribution of possessions which God has arranged as He wished that the rarity and singularity of an object which always finds favor with foreigners stirs up a great desire to possess it for the simple reason of not having what God has given to others.

(2) And out of this another vice grows that of immoderate greed—although a possession may be necessary, moderation must be exercised. This vice will be ambition and the very word 'ambition' must be interpreted in this way that from concupiscence encompassing (ambiente) the soul a desire of glory is born—a great desire no doubt, which, as we have said is not approved either by nature or by truth, but only by a vicious passion of the soul. There exist still other vices that are connected with ambition and glory. Thus it is this vice of ambition that has enhanced the prices of things that by doing so it might add fuel to itself also.

(3) For, concupiscence has a way of growing greater in proportion as it sets a higher value upon that which it desires. A large fortune can be lifted out of a little box; a million sesterces can hang from a single thread; one slender neck can be surrounded by jewels worth many forests and islands; two slender lobes of the ears can cost a fortune; and each finger on the left hand puts to shame any money-bag. Such is the power of ambition that one damsel carries the whole income from a large fortune on her small body.

THE APPAREL OF WOMEN

BOOK TWO

CHAPTER 1

Handmaidens of the lord, my fellow servants and sisters, on the strength of the right of fellow servanthship and brother—the right by which I, the very last of you, am counted as one of you—I am emboldened to address to you some words, not, of course, of affection, but paving the way for affection in the cause of your salvation. Salvation, however, and not of women only, but also of men is especially to be procured in the observance of modesty. For, since we are all temples of God because the Holy Spirit has entered into us and sanctified us, modesty is the sacristan and priestess of that temple; modesty will prevent anything unclean or profane from entering, lest God who dwells therein should be offended and leave the defiled abode.

(2) But it is not our object now to speak of modesty which the omnipresent divine precepts sufficiently promulgate and prescribe, but I do intend to talk about something that pertains to modesty, that is, the way in which you ought to conduct yourselves. For, too many women—I trust God will permit me to reprove this very thing by censuring it in all concerned— either in ignorant simplicity or downright dishonesty so conduct themselves as if modesty consisted solely in the integrity of the flesh and the avoidance of actual sin and as if there were no need to care for the externals, I mean about the arrangement of dress and ornament. They go right ahead in their former pursuit of beauty and glamour, showing in their walk the very same appearance as do women of the pagans who are devoid of all understanding of true modesty because there is nothing true in those who do not know God, the Master and Teacher of all truth.

(3) For, if any modesty can be assumed to exist among the Gentiles, it is certainly so imperfect and defective that even though it asserts itself to some extent in the way of thinking, it destroys itself by a licentious extravagance in the matter of dress after the manner of the usual perversity of the Gentiles of actually desiring that of which it shuns the effect. How many pagan women are there who do not desire to be pleasing even to strangers? Who is there among them who does not try to have herself painted up in order that when desired she may refuse? In fact, this is a characteristic of Gentile modesty, not actually to fall, but to be willing to do so, or even not to be willing, yet not quite to refuse. Is there any wonder? All things are perverse which are not from God.

(4) Let those women, therefore, look to it, who, by not holding on to the whole good, easily mix with evil even what they do hold fast. It is your obligation to be different from them, as in all other things, so also in your gait, since you ought to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.

CHAPTER 2

(1) You must know that perfect modesty, that is, Christian modesty, requires not only that you never desire to be an object of desire on the part of others, but that you even hate to be one. First of all, because the effort to please by external beauty does not come from a sound conscience, since beauty we know to be naturally the exciter of lust. Why, then, excite that evil against yourself? Why invite something to which you profess to be a stranger? Secondly, because we ought not to open the way to temptations. For, although by their vehemence—from which God guard His own—they sometimes lead to greater perfection, they certainly disturb the soul by presenting a stumbling block to it.

(2) We ought, indeed, to walk so in holiness and in the total fullness of our faith that we can be confident and sure in our own conscience, desiring that modesty may abide in us to the end, yet not presumptuously relying on it. For, the one who is presumptuous is less likely to feel apprehension, and he who feels less apprehension takes less precaution, and the one who takes less precaution is in the greater danger. Fear is the true foundation of our salvation, whereas presumption is a hindrance to fear.

(3) Therefore, it will be more useful for us if we foresee the possibility that we may fall than if we presume that we cannot fall. For in anticipating a fall we will be fearful, and if fearful we will take care, and if we take care we shall be safe. On the other hand, if we are presumptuous and have neither fear nor take any precautions, it will be difficult for us to achieve salvation. He who acts securely and not at the same time warily does not possess a safe and firm security, whereas he who is wary can truly say that he will be safe. May the Lord in His mercy always take care of His servants that they may happily be permitted even to presume on His goodness.

(4) But why are we a source of danger to others? Why do we excite concupiscence in others? If the Lord in amplifying the Law does not make a distinction in penalty between the actual commission of fornication and its desire, I do not know whether He will grant impunity to one who is the cause of perdition to another. For he perishes as soon as he looks upon your beauty with desire, and has already committed in his soul what he desires, and you have become a sword (of perdition) to him so that, even though you are free from the actual crime of unchastity, you are not altogether free from the odium (attached to it). As for instance, when a robbery has been committed on some man's land, the actual crime is not imputed to the master, but, as long as the estate is in bad repute, he also is tinged with a certain amount of infamy

(5) Are we, then, going to paint our faces in order that others may perish? What about the Scripture which tells us: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Do not seek only your interests, but those of your neighbor'? Now, no utterance of the Holy Spirit should be restricted only to its present matter, but must be directed and referred to every occasion to which its application is useful. Since, therefore, our own welfare as well as that of others is involved in the pursuit of beauty which is so dangerous, it is time for you to realize that you must not only shun the display of false and studied beauty but also remove all traces of natural grace by concealment and negligence, as equally dangerous to the glances of another's eyes.

(6) For, although comeliness is not to be censured as being a bodily happiness, as an additional gift of the divine Sculptor, and as a kind of fair vestment of the soul, it must be feared because of the affront and violence on the part of those who pursue it. This danger even Abraham, the father of the faith, greatly feared because of his wife's shapely form and, untruthfully introducing Sara as his sister, he purchased his life by her disgrace.

CHAPTER 3

(1) Now, let it be granted that excellence of form is not to be feared as if it were either harmful to those who possess it or ruinous to those who desire it or dangerous for those who come in contact with it; let us further assume that it is neither an occasion of temptation nor surrounded by danger of scandal—it is enough to say that it is not necessary for the handmaidens of God. For, where modesty exists there is no need of beauty, since, strictly speaking, the normal use and effect of beauty is wantonness, unless, of course, someone can think of some other good that flows from bodily beauty. Let those women enhance the beauty they possess or seek for beauty they do not possess who think that they bestow upon themselves what is demanded from beauty when they exhibit it to others.

(2) But someone will say: Suppose we exclude wantonness and give to chastity its rightful place. Why should we not be permitted to enjoy the simple praise that comes to beauty and to glory in a bodily good? Let whoever takes pleasure glorying in the flesh see to that. For us, in the first place there can be no studious pursuit of glory, since glory is of its very nature a kind of exaltation and, in turn, exaltation is incongruous for those who, according to God's precept profess humility. Secondly, if all glory is vain and foolish how much more so that which is a glorying in the flesh particularly in us? For, if we must glory in something, let be in the spirit rather than in the flesh that we wish to please, since we are pursuers of things spiritual.

(3) Let us find our joy in that which is really our business. Let us seek for glory in those things in which we hope for salvation. To be sure, a Christian will also glory in his flesh, but only after it has endured torture for Christ's sake in order that the spirit may be crowned in the flesh rather than that the flesh may attract the eyes and sighs of a young man. Thus, a thing that from every point of view is useless to you, you can safely scorn if you do not possess it and neglect if you do possess it.

CHAPTER 4

(1) Holy women, let none of you, if she is naturally beautiful, be an occasion of sin; certainly, if even she be so, she must not increase beauty, but try to subdue it. If I were speaking to Gentiles, I would give you a Gentile precept and one that is common to all: you are bound to please no one except your own husbands. And, you will please your husbands in the proportion that you take no pains to please anyone else. Be unconcerned, blessed sisters: no wife is really ugly to her own husband. She was certainly pleasing to him when he chose to marry her, whether it was for her beauty or for her character. Let none of you think that she will necessarily incur the hatred and aversion of her husband if she spends less time in the adornment of her person.

(2) Every husband demands that his wife be chaste; but beauty a Christian husband certainly does not demand, because we Christians are not fascinated by the same things that the Gentiles think to be good. If, on the other hand, the husband be an infidel, he will be suspicious of beauty precisely because of the unfavorable opinion the Gentiles have of us. For whose sake, then, are you cultivating your beauty? If for a Christian, he does not demand it, and if for an infidel, he does not believe it unless it is artless. Why, then, are you so eager to please either one who is suspicious or one who does not desire it?

CHAPTER 5

(1) To be sure, what I am suggesting is not intended to recommend to you an utterly uncultivated and unkempt appearance; I see no virtue in squalor and filth, but I am talking about the proper way and norm and just measure in the care of the body. We must not go beyond what is desired by those who strive for natural and demure neatness. We must not go beyond what is pleasing to God.

(2) For, surely, those women sin against God who anoint their faces with creams, stain their cheeks with rouge, or lengthen their eyebrows with antimony. Obviously, they are not satisfied with the creative skill of God; in their own person, without doubt, they censure and criticize the Maker of all things! Surely they are finding fault when they try to perfect and add to His work, taking these their additions, of course, from a rival artist.

(3) This rival artist is the Devil. For, who else would teach how to change the body but he who by wickedness transformed the spirit of man? It is he, no doubt, who prepared ingenious devices of this sort that in your own persons it may be proved that to a certain degree you do violence to God.

(4) Whatever is born, that is the work of God. Obviously, then, anything else that is added must be the work of the Devil. What a wicked thing it is to attempt to add to a divine handiwork the inventions of the Devil! We do not find our servants borrowing something from our foes, nor do soldiers desire anything from the enemy of their general. For, it is certainly a sin for you to solicit a favor from the enemy of Him in whose hands you lie. Can a true Christian really be helped by that evil one in anything? If he is, I do not think he will be a Christian for long, for he will belong to him from whom he strives to learn.

(5) How alien are these things to your principles and to your promises—how unworthy of the name of Christian that you bear! To have a painted face, you on whom simplicity in every form is enjoined! To lie in your appearance, you to whom lying with the tongue is not allowed! To seek for that which is not your own, you who are taught to keep hands off the goods of another! To commit adultery in your appearance, you who should eagerly strive after modesty! Believe me, blessed sisters! How can you keep the commandments of God if you do not keep in your own persons the features which He has bestowed on you?

CHAPTER 6

(1) I see some women dye their hair blonde by using saffron. They are even ashamed of their country, sorry that they were not born in Germany or in Gaul! Thus, as far as their hair is concerned, they give up their country. It is hardly a good omen for them that they wish their hair to be flame-colored and mistake for beauty something which merely stains them.

(2) As a matter of fact, the strength of these bleaches really does harm to the hair, and the constant application of even any natural moist substance will bring ruin to the head itself, just as the warmth of the sun, while desirable for giving life and dryness to the hair, if overdone is hurtful. How can they achieve beauty when they are doing themselves harm; how can they make something attractive by means of filth? Shall a Christian woman heap saffron on her hair as upon an altar? For, surely, anything that is normally burned in honor of an unclean spirit, may be considered as a sacrifice to idols, unless it is applied for honest and necessary and wholesome uses for which all of God's creatures were provided.

(3) But the Lord has said: 'Which of you can make a white hair black or out of a black a white?' Thus do they refute the word of the Lord. 'Behold,' they say, 'out of white or black we make it blonde, which is surely more attractive.' Why, you will even find people who are ashamed of having lived to old age and try to make their hair black when it is white. Are you not ashamed of such folly? Trying to keep it a secret that you have reached that age for which you longed and prayed, sighing for youth which was a time of sin, missing the chance to show some true maturity! I hope that the daughters of Wisdom will avoid such foolishness. The harder we work to conceal our age the more we reveal it.

(4) Or does your eternal life depend on the youthful appearance of your hair? Is that the incorruptibility which we have to put on for the reign that is to come—the incorruptibility promised by the kingdom that will be free from sin? Well, indeed, you speed toward the Lord, well you make haste to be free from this most wicked world, you who find it unpleasant to approach your own end!

CHAPTER 7

(1) What profit, again, do you derive for your salvation from all the labor spent in arranging your hair? Why can you not leave your hair alone, instead of at one time tying it up, at another letting it hang loose, now cultivating it, now thinning it out? Some women prefer to tie it up in little curls, while others let it fall down wild and disheveled—a hardly commendable kind of simplicity. Besides, some of you affix to your heads I know not what monstrosities of sewn and woven wigs, now in the form of a cap as if it were a casing for the head and a covering for the crown, now in the form of a chignon at the back of the neck.

(2) I am surprised that there is no open defiance of the Lord's precepts one of which declares that no one can add anything to his stature. You, however, do add something to your weight anyway by wearing some kind of head-dresses or piling shield-bosses upon your necks! If you are not ashamed of your outrageous behavior, then be at least ashamed of covering yourselves with filth, in the fear that you may be putting on a holy and Christian head the cast-offs of hair of some stranger who was perhaps unclean, perhaps guilty and destined for hell. In fact, why do you not banish all this slavery to beauty from your own free head? It will do you no good to seem beautiful; you are wasting your time looking for the cleverest manufacturers of wigs. God commands women to be veiled. I imagine He does so lest the heads of some of them should be seen!

(3) I certainly hope that I, in the day of Christian joy, miserable man that I am, may be able to raise my head at least as high as your heels. Perhaps I will then see whether or not you will arise with your ceruse, your rouge, your saffron, and all that parade of head-gear; whether it will be women painted up that way whom the angels will carry up to meet Christ in the clouds. If these things are now good and are of God, then they will join your rising bodies and find there again their proper place. But nothing can rise but flesh and spirit sole and pure. Whatever, therefore, does not rise in spirit and flesh is damned, because it is not of God. Have nothing to do now with things that are damned; let God see you today such as He will see you on the day of your final resurrection.

CHAPTER 8

(1) Of course, I am now merely talking as a man and, jealous of women, I try to deprive them of what is their own! But are there not certain things that are forbidden to us, too, out of regard for the sobriety we should maintain out of fear we owe to God?

(2) Now, since, by a defect of nature, there is inborn in men because of women (just as in women because of men) the desire to please, the male sex also has its own peculiar trickeries for enhancing their appearance: for instance, cutting the beard a bit too sharply, trimming it too neatly, shaving around the mouth, arranging and dyeing our hair, darkening the first signs of gray hair, disguising the down on the whole body with some female ointments, smoothing off the rest of the body by means of some gritty powder, then always taking occasion to look in a mirror, gazing anxiously into it. Are not all of these things quite idle and hostile to modesty once we have known God, have put aside the desire to please others and forsworn all lasciviousness?

(3) For, where God is there is modesty, where modesty is there is dignity, its assistant and companion. How shall we ever practice modesty if we do not make use of its normal means, that is, dignity? How shall we ever be able to make use of dignity in practicing modesty unless we bear a certain seriousness in our countenance, in our dress, and in the appearance of the entire man?

CHAPTER 9

(1) In the same manner, therefore, you must be intent on curtailing and rejecting all superfluous elegance in your clothing and the remaining lumber of your finery. For, what good does it do to wear on your face an appearance of propriety and temperance and a simplicity that is in accordance with the divine teaching if the rest of the body is covered with a lot of frilly and foolish pomps and luxuries?

(2) To be sure, there is no difficulty in recognizing how close the connection is between these pomps and the business of lasciviousness and how they must interfere with the principles of modesty: such frills adjoined to fancy dress prostitute the grace of true beauty, so much so that, if they are not worn, natural beauty makes no impression and is hardly noticed as if disarmed and altogether ruined; on the other hand, if natural beauty is not present, the supporting aid of fancy dress supplies grace, as it were, of its own power.

(3) Lastly, finery and elegant dress have a tendency to deprive of peace those periods of life which are already blessed with quiet and withdrawn into the harbor of modesty, and to disturb their seriousness by stimulating desires which evidently try to compensate for the coldness of age by the provocative charms of dress.

(4) First, then, blessed sisters, have nothing to do with the lewd and seductive tricks of dress and appearance. Secondly, if some of you, because of wealth or birth or former dignities, are forced to appear in public in overly elaborate dress, as if they had not yet acquired the good sense that is fitting to their age, take heed to temper the evil that is in this thing, lest under pretext of necessity you give rein to unbounded license.

(5) For, how can you fulfill the precept of humility which we profess as Christians if you do not keep in check the use of wealth and finery which so encourage the pursuit of glory? For, glory tends to exalt and not to humble.

(6) 'But,' you will say, 'may we not use what is ours?' Who is forbidding you to use what is yours? No one less than the Apostle who advises us to use this world as if we did not use it. He tells us: 'The fashion of this world is passing away. And those who buy, let them act as though they possessed not.' And why? Because he had previously said: 'The time is growing short.' If, then, he plainly shows that even wives themselves are so to be had as if they be not had, because the times are straitened, what would he think about all these vain appliances of theirs?

(7) In fact, are there not many who do just that, dedicating themselves to be eunuchs and for the kingdom of God voluntarily foregoing a desire which is so strong and, as we know, permitted to us? Are there not some who deny themselves what God has created, abstaining from wine and from dishes of meat, the enjoyment of which provides no particular danger or fear? But they sacrifice to God the humility of their soul in restricting their use of food. Therefore, you have used your wealth and finery quite enough, and you have plucked the fruit of your dowries sufficiently before you came to know the teaching of salvation.

(8) For, we are the ones for whom the times were to run their course to the end; we were predestined by God before the world was created for the extreme end of time; and so we are trained by God to castigate and, so to speak, emasculate the world. We are the circumcision of all things both spiritual and carnal, for in both spirit and in the flesh we circumcise the things of this world.

CHAPTER 10

(1) Of course, it was God who taught men how to dye wool with the juice of herbs and the slime of shells; it had escaped Him, when He bade all things to come into existence, to issue a command for the production of purple and scarlet sheep! It was God, too, who devised the manufacture of those very garments which, light and thin in themselves, are heavy only in their price; God it was who produced such a great amount of gold for the careful setting and fitting of jewels; and it was God, too, to be sure, who caused the puncturing of ears and was so interested in tormenting his own creatures as to order suffering to infants with their first breath; and this, in order that from these scars on the body— it seems as if the latter was born to be cut—there might hang some sort of precious stones which, as is well known, the Parthians insert in their shoes in place of studs!

(2) As a matter of fact, this gold whose glitter you find so attractive is used by some nations for chains, as pagan literature tells us. And so, it is not because of intrinsic value that these things are good, but merely because they happen to be rare. After artistic skills, however, had been introduced by the fallen angels, who had also discovered the materials themselves, elaborate workmanship, combined with the rareness of these things, brought about the idea of their being precious and stimulated the desire on the part of the women to possess them because of their precious character.

(3) Now, if these very angels who discovered the material substances of this kind as well as their charms—I mean gold and precious stones—and passed on the techniques of working them and taught, among other things, the use of eyelid-powder and the dyeing of cloth, if these angels, I say, are condemned by God, as Henoah tells us, how are we ever going to please God by taking pleasure in things developed by those who because of those acts provoked the wrath and punishment of God?

(4) I will grant you that God foresaw all these things and that He has permitted them, and that Isaias does not object to any purple garments, permits the wearing of an ornament shaped like a bunch of grapes in the hair, and finds no fault with crescent-shaped necklaces. Still, let us not flatter ourselves, as the pagans are accustomed to do, that God is merely the Creator of the world and thereafter pays no attention to the works He has created.

(5) Could we not be acting much more usefully and cautiously if we were to presume that all these things have been provided by God at the beginning and placed in the world in order that they should now be means of testing the moral strength of His servants, so that, in being permitted to use things, we might have the opportunity of showing our self-restraint? Do not wise masters purposely offer and permit some things to their servants in order to try them and to see whether and how they make use of things thus permitted, whether they will do so with moderation and honesty?

(6) However, is not that servant deserving more praise who abstains totally, thus manifesting a reverential fear of the kindness of his master? Therefore the Apostle concludes: 'All things are lawful, but not all things are expedient.' It will be much easier for one to dread what is forbidden who has a reverential fear of what is permitted.

CHAPTER 11

(1) Moreover, what reasons have you for appearing in public in fancy dress, since you are automatically removed from the occasions which demand that sort of thing? You do not visit pagan temples nor do you long for the spectacles nor do you keep the holy days of the Gentiles. People only wear fancy dress in public because of those gatherings and the desire to see and to be seen, either for the purpose of transacting the trade of wantonness or else of inflating their vanity. You, however, have no cause of appearing in public, except such as is serious.

(2) You either visit some sick brethren or attend the sacrifice of the Mass or listen to the word of God. Any one of these functions is an occasion of seriousness and holiness for which there is no need of any extraordinary studiously arranged and luxurious attire. And if you are required to go out because of friendship or duty to some Gentile, why not go dressed in your own armor—all the more, in fact, because you are going to those who are strangers to the faith? It is desirable that there be some way of distinguishing between the handmaids of God and of the Devil so that you may be an example to them and they be edified in you; as St. Paul says: 'Let God be glorified in your body.' God, however, is glorified in your body through modesty; hence, also, through dress that is suitable to modesty.

(3) But some of you may object that the (Christian) name should not be blasphemed in us by making some derogatory change of our former style of dress. Well, let us then continue to practice our former vices! If we must keep the same appearance, let us also maintain the same conduct! Then certainly the pagans will not blaspheme the (Christian) name! It is, indeed, a great blasphemy if it is said of one of you: 'Since she became a Christian she walks in poorer garb!' Are you going to be afraid to appear to be poorer from the time that you have been made richer and to be more shabbily clothed from the time when you have been made more clean? In a word, should a Christian walk according to what is pleasing to the pagan or according to what is pleasing to God?

CHAPTER 12

(1) We should certainly see to it that we never give adequate cause to another to blaspheme. Yet, how much more conducive to blasphemy is it if you who are called the priestesses of modesty go around dressed and painted like those who are immodest! In fact, to what extent could one consider those poor, unhappy victims of organized lust to be beneath you? Even though in the past some laws used to forbid them to adorn themselves as married women or as matrons, now, surely, the corruption of our times which is daily growing worse makes it very difficult to distinguish them from the most honorable women.

(2) Yet even the Scripture suggest to us that the alluring display of beauty is invariably joined with and appropriate to bodily prostitution. That powerful city which rules over the seven mountains and over many waters merited from the Lord the appellation of a prostitute and received that name because of the likeness of dress. Surely she sits in purple and scarlet and gold and precious stones; surely those things are cursed without which an accursed prostitute could not have been described.

(3) The only reason why Juda thought that Thamar was sitting (on the cross– road) for hire was because she had painted her face and adorned herself, and thus (because she was hidden beneath her 'veil' and, by the kind of dress she wore, pretended that she was a harlot) he considered her as such, addressed her as such and bargained with her in the same fashion. Thus, we learn that it is our obligation to provide in every way against all immodest associations or even the suspicion of them. For, why is the purity of the chaste mind stained by the suspicion of another? Why is something looked for in me which I abhor? Why does not my garb announce beforehand my character lest my spirit should be wounded through hearing what is said by those who are shameless? Well, it is certainly permitted to you to appear chaste to an unchaste person.

CHAPTER 13

(1) Some women may say: 'I do not need the approval of men. For I do not ask for the testimony of men: it is God who sees my heart.' We all know that, to be sure, but let us recall what the Lord said through the Apostle: 'Let your modesty appear before men.' Why would he have said that unless we should be an example and a witness to those who are evil? Or, what did Christ mean by 'let your works shine before men'? Why did the Lord call us 'the light of the world'? Why did He compare us to a city set on a mountain if we were not to shine in (the midst of) darkness and stand out among those who are sunk down?

(2) 'If you hide your light under the measure,' you will necessarily be lost in darkness and run down by many people. It is our good works that make us to be the lights of the world. Moreover, what is good, provided it be true and full, does not love the darkness; it rejoices to be seen and exults in being pointed out by others.

(3) It is not enough for Christian modesty merely to be so, but to seem so, too. So great and abundant ought to be your modesty that it may flow out from the mind to the garb, and burst forth from the conscience to the outer appearance, so that even from the outside it may examine, as it were, its own furniture—a furniture that is suited to retain the faith forever. We must, therefore, get rid of such delicacies as tend by their softness and effeminacy to weaken the strength of our faith.

(4) Otherwise, I am not so sure that the wrist which is always surrounded by a bracelet will be able to bear the hardness of chains with resignation; I have some doubts that the leg which now rejoices to wear an anklet will be able to bear the tight squeeze of an ankle chain; and I sometimes fear that the neck which is now laden with strings of pearls and emeralds will give no room to the executioner's sword.

(5) Therefore, my blessed sisters, let us think of the hardships to come, and we will not feel them. Let us abandon luxuries and we will never miss them. Let us stand ready to endure every violence, having nothing which we would be afraid to leave behind. For, these things are really the bonds that hold down the wings of our hope. Let us cast away the ornaments of this world if we truly desire those of heaven.

(6) Do not love gold—that substance which caused the very first sins of the people of Israel to be branded with infamy. You should hate that which ruined your fathers, that gold which they adored when they abandoned God, for even then gold was food for the fire.

But the lives of Christians are never spent in gold, and now less than ever, but in iron. The stoles of martyrdom are being prepared, and the angels who are to carry us (to heaven) are being awaited.

(7) Go forth to meet those angels, adorned with the cosmetics and ornaments of the Prophets and Apostles. Let your whiteness flow from simplicity, let modesty be the cause of your rosy complexion; paint your eyes with demureness, your mouth with silence; hang on your ears the words of God, bind on your neck the yoke of Christ; bow your heads to your husbands—and that will be ornament enough for you. Keep your hands busy with spinning and stay at home—and you will be more pleasing than if you were adorned in gold. Dress yourselves in the silk of probity, the fine linen of holiness, and the purple of chastity. Decked out in this manner, you will have God Himself for your lover.