

there is in the most mundane commodity. I confess that for years I have regarded a shirt as a shirt; something which convention demanded that I should wear; a boon to my laundry in providing a vent for an insatiable taste in practical joking. Who does not know the indescribable glee of donning a clean shirt in haste only to find two buttons missing? Who has not spent many pleasant minutes in dissecting the cemented front of a "boiled shirt" from its back? Who has not chuckled at the sudden discovery of quite unsuspected and cleverly hidden pins? As an article of apparel and as the motif for subtle humour, the shirt is hard to beat. But as the subject of a talk . . . ?

Well, having heard one from Auckland on Thursday, I am now definitely adding this to the shirt's list of accepted virtues. When the speaker started by rattling off a number of, to me, quite new jokes about the shirt, its history, and present application, I feared that humour was going to prove over-predominant. My fears were quite groundless, however, and the speaker ably proved himself the possessor of the most intimate knowledge as to the origin and life history of the shirt. This history he gave in excellent style, both matter and delivery being quite beyond reproach. Some of the details in this talk were so interesting that I purpose mentioning only a few of those which have stuck in my memory. Before I do that, however, I cannot refrain from quoting what was, to my mind, a very apt remark early in the talk. The speaker mentioned that naturally Adam was the first wearer of a shirt, and that

for material he favoured what is now artificial silk in the raw state!

IN tracing the shirt's history up to 1931 the speaker claimed kinship for the shirt in the skins of animals, coats of mail, and the lace ruffles of the various generations of our ancestors. Whenever one feels inclined to point the finger of accuracy and say "That was the first real shirt," one is assailed by doubt. There are, however, definite dates for the first "commercialised" shirt, and the first "machine-made" shirt. It appears that a certain Mr. Rodgers, in the year 1836, went to London to learn the tea trade. Being a bachelor and without female relatives in the metropolis, he soon suffered from want of Someone to make him a shirt. Very naturally, necessity being the mother of invention, this gave him an idea. He rightly concluded that there were others like himself in similar predicament. Why not therefore employ pauper labour to make up shirts and sell these, via the drapers, ready-made?

Although the speaker did not say so, it is possible that Rodgers also felt that there might be a market among those husbands and brothers who, like the soldiers in the song, would "sooner sleep on thistles" than the kinds of shirts their wives and sisters made. Be that as it may, the venture was not really a success. Drapers, proverbially short-sighted as a class, felt that the sale of shirts would materially affect the sale of their piece cloth. Just why this should have prevented their keeping the trade "in the family," as it were, by catering for both

home-made and ready-made partisans is not clear. In 1845 came the first sewing machine—imperfect in many details, but a sewing machine none the less. The American rights were bought by a man in Cheapside—Thomas, I think, was the name given—and the machine-made shirt became "an *fait accompli*." Collars detachable from the shirt were also invented in America—this time by the wife of a blacksmith! Thus the speaker gradually brought us to the present day, passing in review the various materials which have proved popular.

Arising out of this, his reference to the 4½ million pounds sterling profit made by a British firm in artificial silk (the product of wood pulp) gives food for thought. If this wave of popularity continues and increases, how will the world's forest supply stand the strain? In our own New Zealand factories, the care exercised by our manufacturers, both as regards the articles themselves and the employees maintained, was ably explained. As the speaker rightly remarked at this stage in his talk, Thomas Hood's doleful "Song of the Shirt," deploring the unhealthy factory conditions of his time, might well be revised in view of modern progress in this direction.

I NOTICE that the talk was entitled "The Tale of a Shirt and Pyjamas." Time seems to have precluded reference to the latter upstarts in the world of night apparel. While their life story cannot be so interesting, owing to the comparative brevity of their ancestral tree, still, I hope the speaker will deal

with the second section of his scheduled talk at some further date, when I shall listen with interest.

WITH the completion of the fourth week since the inception of "The Voice of Michael," I feel it not out of place to pass in review what has been done. During these four weeks I have criticised some two dozen talks, dialogues, lectures and plays, chosen at random from the four main stations. In the course of these I have certainly not spared the speakers, although such criticisms as I have offered are intended to be constructive and not destructive. The page seems to have been accepted with interest and some appreciation. The wish may be father to the thought, but I fancy there has been noted improvement in recent talks, and shall feel gratified, if I may, with all modesty, in some slight way identify myself with this improvement. The thought, at least, will spur me on to further effort.

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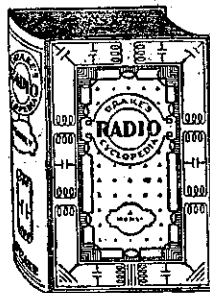
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