

1837

Dress of Public Speakers

Lucian Minor

Repository Citation

Minor, Lucian, "Dress of Public Speakers" (1837). *Faculty Publications*. 1310.
<https://scholarship.law.wm.edu/facpubs/1310>

Copyright c 1837 by the authors. This article is brought to you by the William & Mary Law School Scholarship Repository.
<https://scholarship.law.wm.edu/facpubs>

DRESS OF PUBLIC SPEAKERS.

Some writer on elocution recommends to a public speaker neatness, and even elegance of dress. Juvenal says, that in his day, parties litigant selected lawyers not by their learning or eloquence, but by the richness of their attire and the splendor of their equipage. Probably, men only adopted those criteria, because thence a successful practice might be inferred; and success was an obvious, though not unerring, proof of ability. Our own, if not every age and country, would afford this provocative to the satirist's indignation. Let our young lawyers look to it: they may be assured, that whatever their talents or merits, a genteel dress will heighten their effect; and a mean or slovenly one cause them to be underrated. There are instances, of men in rusty clothes who have astonished the hearer by unlooked for strains of eloquence: but these are

prodigies that seldom occur. In our day, as in Juvenal's,

"Rara in tenui facundia panno."

In general, all those prepossessions which the speaker's sleek and prosperous appearance enlists in his favor, are turned into slight, bordering on disdain, by his wearing the livery of want. The world is ever readiest to admire and like, as well as to help those, who do not need help.

Yet I would not have gaudiness, or positive extravagance. Some regard should always be had to the wearer's estate. But if he must pinch, let it be in some other department of expenditure. Let him be cheap in his eating and drinking, and in his amusements. Perhaps no better rule can be laid down, than that of Polonius to Laertes, in Hamlet :

"Costly thy garment as thy purse can buy,
But not expressed in fancy: rich, not gaudy."

Here is what Juvenal says :

* * * purpura vendit
Causidicum, vendunt amethystina : * * *
* * * * *
* * * * *
Fidimus eloquio ? Ciceroni nemo ducentos
Nunc dederit nummos, nisi fulserit annulus ingens.
Respicit hæc primum, qui litigat, an tibi servi
Octo, decem comites, an post te sella, togati
Ante pedes. Ideo conducta Paulus agebat
Sardonycho, atque ideo pluris, quam Cossus agebat,
Quam Basilius. *Rara in tenui facundia panno.*

Sat. VII.

To which, for want of a better, I subjoin the translation of Doctor Badham :

"Purple and violet raiment raise the price
Of your spruce lawyer's credit and advice.
Could Tully come to life, would any now
Two hundred paltry sesterces bestow
For his advice, unless indeed he saw
A diamond glittering on the man of law ?
Has he eight slaves ? A client fain would know,
Ere to his counsel for advice he go...
Do ten attendants in his train appear,
And swings the lawyer's litter in the rear ?
This Paulus saw, and soon with vast applause,
In hired robes and rings he pleads his cause !
Now better paid than Cossus, more admired
Than Basilius, for people soon are tired,
And doubt the eloquence can scarce be sound
Of one that pleads, indifferently gowned !"

L.