

New Clothes from Old

WHAT would be the feelings of the millionaire, clothed in an expensive suit just made for him by a fashionable tailor, could he know that this same attire is composed largely of the rag débris which covered the back of the tramp who once begged a meal at his back yard?

Yet, outside the homespuns of the South, and the imported tweeds made by the Harris islanders, there is practically no piece of cloth manufactured which is not at least one-fifth shoddy, that is to say, composed of old rags which have been shredded in the "devil," as the machine which performs this office is known, respun, and blended with new yarns.

This is not due to the dishonesty of manufacturers of cloths, but because the amount of wool which is produced annually is not enough to go round. A real suit of wool is practically indestructible. Even in the early days of the nineteenth century good broadcloth cost \$6 a yard; and fathers of respectable families would have two suits, one for working, and one for Sundays, which lasted them during the greater period of their natural lives. About the middle of the century, when the world's population began to increase at a rate previously unknown, the wool supplies fell dangerously short, and certain Yorkshire manufacturers set themselves the task of extracting the woollen yarn from rags. After long and expensive efforts they succeeded in this undertaking. The discovery of a means of extracting the wool revolutionized the clothing industry. It made cheap suits possible. It brought the sewing-machine into existence. It broke down the flourishing business of the "old clothes men," who had grown rich by hawking the discarded wool garments of the rich among their poor clients.

The shoddy industry now gives employment to thousands of hands, and has brought wealth and prosperity into many districts of the cloth-manufacturing countries. There is a world-wide trade in rags, which are collected at various points and shipped mostly to Dewsbury, in England, where millions have been invested in this trade. Old suits,

stockings, underwear, gloves, carpets, and blankets all go into the "devil," to emerge as wool yarn, afterward to be blended with the millionaire's new suiting. "Shoddy" means waste, but nothing is wasted in the "devil's" maw. Besides new wool a valuable oil is extracted, as well as prussiate of potash; while flock for bedding and upholstery is made from the residue. There is a more valuable kind of shoddy made from hard rags, tailors' clippings and strips, old tweeds, and friezes. This article is known as "mungo."