

A dressed man, George Orwell

A dressed man

A dressed man and a naked man
Stood by the kip-house fire,
Watching the sooty cooking-pots
That bubble on the wire;

And bidding tanners up and down,
Bargaining for a deal,
Naked skin for empty skin,
Clothes against a meal.

'Ten bob it is,' the dressed man said,
'These boots cost near a pound,
This coat's a blanket of itself.
When you kip on the frosty ground.'

'One dollar,' said the nakd man,
'And that's a hog too dear;
I've seen a man strip off his shirt
For a fag and a pot of beer.'

'Eight and a tanner,' the dressed man said,
'And my life-work is yours,
All I've earned at the end of a life
Knocking at farmers' doors;

Turnips, apples, hops and peas,
And the spike when times are slack,
Fifty years I've tobied it
For these clothes upon my back.'

'Take seven,' said the naked man,
'It's cold and the spikes are shut;
Better be naked here in kip
Than dressed in Lambeth Cut.'

'One tanner more,' the dressed man said,
'One tanner says the word,
Off comes my coat of ratcatcher
And my breeches of velvet cord;

Now pull my shirt over my head,
I'm naked sole to crown,
And that's the end of fifty years
Tobying up and down.'

A minute and they had changed about,
And each had his desire;
A dressed man and a naked man
Stood by the kip-house fire.

1933

THE END