The Parable of Barefoot Christians, by Hugh Price Hughes

I arrived in the city of EVERYWHERE early one morning. It was cold, and there were flurries of snow on the ground. As I stepped from the train to the platform, I noticed that the baggage man and the redcap were warmly attired in heavy coats and gloves, but oddly enough, they wore no shoes. Repressing my impulse to ask the reason for this odd practice, I went to the station and inquired the way to the hotel. My curiosity, however, was increased by my discovery that no one in the station wore any shoes.

Boarding the streetcar, I saw that my fellow travelers were likewise barefoot; and upon arriving at the hotel I found that the bellhop, the desk clerk, and all the residents were void of shoes! Unable to restrain myself any longer, I asked the manager what this strange practice meant.

"What practice?" said he. "Why," said I, pointing to his bare feet, "Why don't you wear shoes in this town?"

"Ah, said he, "that is just it. Why don't we?"

"But what is the matter? Don't you believe in shoes?"

"Believe in shoes, my friend! I should say we do! That is the first article of our creed – shoes. They are indispensable to the well-being of humanity. Such frostbite, cuts, sores, and suffering those shoes prevent! It is wonderful!"

"Well, then, why don't you wear them?" I asked, totally bewildered.

"Ah" he said thoughtfully, "That is just it. Why don't we?"

Though considerably nonplussed I checked in, secured my room, and went directly to the coffee shop. There I deliberately sat down by an amiable-looking but barefoot gentleman. Friendly enough, he suggested that we look around the city after our meal.

The first thing we noticed upon emerging from the hotel was a huge brick structure of impressive proportions. He pointed to this with pride. "You see that?" said he "That is one of our outstanding shoe manufacturing establishments!"

"A what?" I asked in amazement. "You mean you make shoes there?"

"Well, not exactly," said he, a bit abashed. "We talk about making shoes there, and believe me, we have one of the most brilliant fellows you have ever heard. He talks most thrillingly and convincingly every week on this great subject of shoes. Just yesterday he moved the people profoundly with his exposition of the necessity of shoe-wearing. Many broke down and wept. It was really wonderful!"

"But why don't they wear them?" said I insistently.

"Ah, that is just it. Why don't we?"

Just then, as we turned down a side-street, I saw through a cellar window a cobbler actually making a pair of shoes. Excusing myself from my friend, I burst into the little shop and asked the shoemaker how it happened that his shop was not over-run with customers.

"Nobody wants my shoes," he said. "They just talk about them."

"Give me what pairs you have ready," I said eagerly, and paid him twice the amount he modestly asked. Hurriedly I returned to my friend and offered them to him, saying, "Here, my friend, one of these pairs will surely fit you. Take them, put them on. They will save untold suffering."

"Ah, thank you," he said, with embarrassment, "but you don't understand. It just isn't being done."

And coming out of the city of Everywhere, over and over and over that question rang in my ears; "Why don't we? Why don't we? Why don't we?"