

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY  
THE DANCERS, SHAKERS,  
AND JUMPERS.

---

PART I.



---

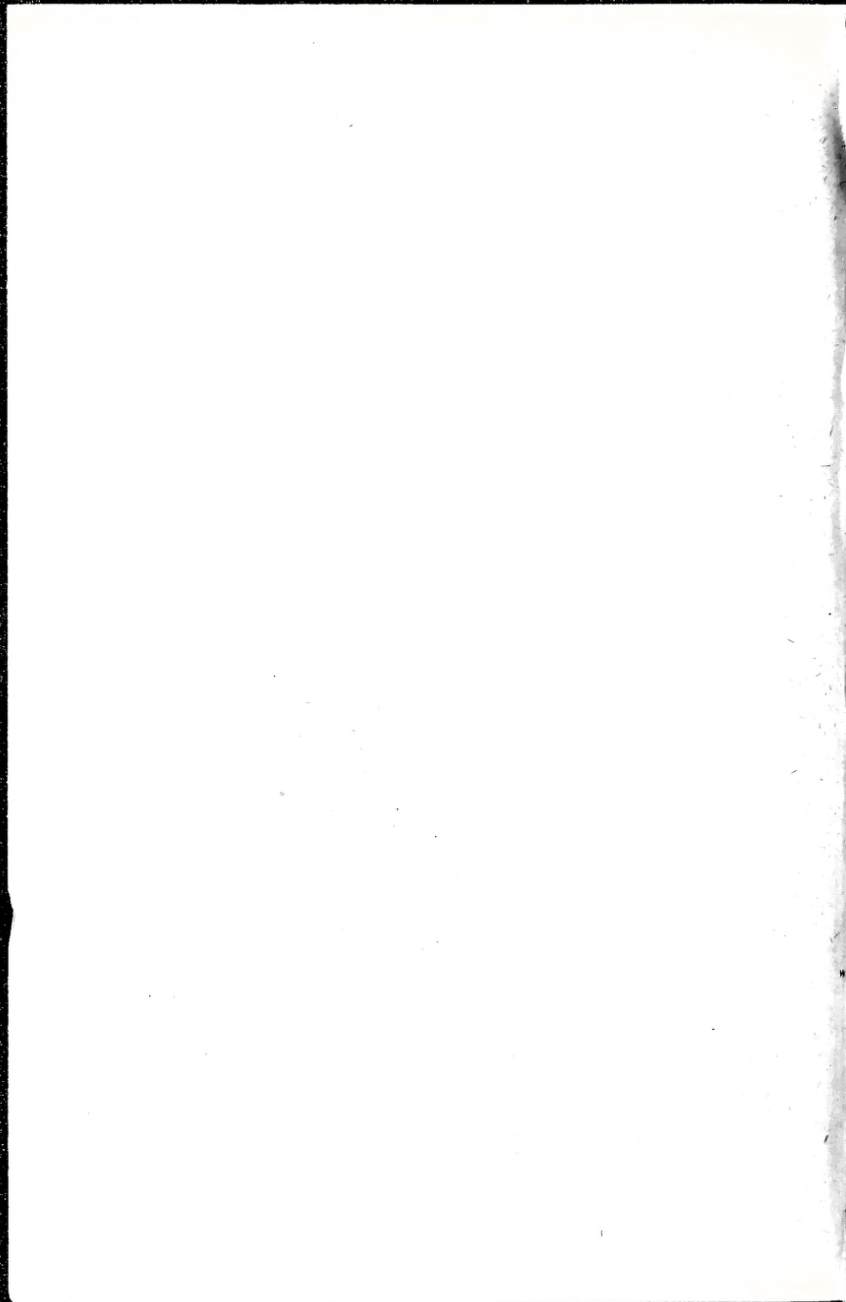
BY  
SALADIN.

[REPRINTED FROM "THE SECULAR REVIEW."]



LONDON :  
W. STEWART & Co., 41, FARRINGDON St., E.C.





## THE DANCERS, SHAKERS, AND JUMPERS.

---

IF "God made man," he must have made him for his amusement; and surely much amusement he must have got out of the featherless biped. No six-year old child sailing his boat—a cocoa-not shell with a paper sail—can derive therefrom more real fun than Jehovah must surely derive from the antics of the little two-pronged nothings he has placed in this region of the universe. To man alone Deity has given unlimited potentialities in the way of being absurd, and an intense capacity for being unhappy. Deity has a curious knack of making joyous nobodies and melancholy sages. 'Arry the yokel's cup overflows with delight because he is graciously permitted to eat bread and cheese and swing on a gate; while Thomas Carlyle, James Thomson, and William Maccall have cups that overflow with bitterness and misery because they have bad hepatic arrangements and will not take Cockle's pills. This sort of thing is a very curious farce, and I often fancy the Father, Son, and Ghost open their three mouths which are one, and hold their six sides which are two, and laugh at the earth till all heaven rings.

If God had made man sane, he would not have got half the fun out of him he has got. True, the fun which Deity must have had over man's mad crusading and inquisiting and covenanting and flagellating, and so forth, has been no joke to man himself; but that is, of course, a small matter, so that God be glorified. But I do not suppose that Sarah has got a better laugh since the day she laughed at the angel who brought her the gestation message on the plains of Mamre than she has,

from time to time, got at earth's poor little two-footed Jacks-in-the-box dancing for Godsake.

Ever since man dropped his tail, and how long before that I know not, he has had a tendency to dance for the love of God. On the plains of ancient Phœnicia and Carthage there were mad dances to please the heaven overhead; and the ancient Greeks and Romans, in their religious rites, danced to the glory of Mars and Cybele; and heaven looked down and hell looked up at earth and her little pigmies indulging in saltatory gambols and sexual riot. Poor amusement for a God! and yet good enough for a God that could originate such a daft and miserable ninny as man. And the best of the joke is, this daft ninny has always been under the infatuated impression that nothing in existence is so important as he is, that Gods have ever been devising plans and kicking worlds round for him—yea, that God himself came down here and had nails hammered into him to prove his great interest in mankind. If God would come down, or the Devil come up, and make man sane, it would be much more to the purpose. "Redeem" him, indeed! Surely the Gods have better work on hand, and know their own business best. As a proof that they do not think him worth redeeming, they, up to the date of our going to press, never have redeemed him. They get more amusement out of him as he is. If he would only learn his own place, consequence, and importance in the universe, it would take the conceit out of him. He and his vaunted "immortal soul" are only a link in the chain of cosmos, and all the links are alike strong—the man driving in the carriage and pair and the fly crawling upon the pane. Gods will come down to get crucified for him of the carriage when they think it worth while to come down and get crucified for him of the pane. The flies that lit upon the gore of Cæsar, as he lay dying at the base of Pompey's pillar, are now where the dead are who fell in the battle of Marathon. Their record is alike in the archives of the universe, and they are both of alike importance in the purposes of Cosmos and Fate. In the long day of Eternity the last barrowful of litter wheeled out from the cavalry stables, and the last batch of heroes, gashed and

gory, buried in the desert sands of the Soudan, will be alike remembered.

But back to our dancing. As far as Christianity was concerned it had much pleasure in tracing back its Terpsichorean piety to King David, who danced a jig naked before the Lord and the ladies,\* and insulted his wife because she ventured to reprove him for his holy levity. The cripple that had lain at the Beautiful Gate of the temple came next to David as a great exemplar of pious hornpipes. It is on record that he performed the triple function of "walking and leaping and praising God."† Indeed, some went so far as to assert that Christ himself was rather partial to a good sanctified Highland fling, and quoted triumphantly the words attributed to him by the writer of the third Gospel: "Rejoice ye in that day and leap for joy."‡

Even the Book of Job§ was dragged in to favour the light fantastic toe; for therein is there not tall talk about the morning stars chanting a rondel and all the sons of God jumping out of their skins? And, again, assuming that a person cannot shout, but he must jump also, the dancers for Godsake had recourse to a passage in the Book of Ezra.¶ Several other passages in Holy Writ were relied upon to defend the propriety of a good holy jump.

On through the centuries, more or less, went the jumping for Godsake, till, in the thirteenth century, it got somewhat serious. A number of children took to it as a pious recreation, which they seemed to prefer to the salutary but profane leap-the-frog and skipping-rope. Religious manias were no respecters of persons; they seized old and young, the dotard with one foot in the grave and the child with one foot in the cradle. An army of child crusaders, as I have shown in another paper|| set out for Palestine, and a child army of Religious Dancers are said to have danced all the way to Armstadt from Erfurdt in Prussian Saxony. Arrived at Erfurdt, the dancers fell down exhausted, many of them died, and many who survived retained till the end of

\* 2 Samuel vi. 16, 20. † Acts iii. 8. ‡ Luke vi. 23. § Job xxxviii. 7. ¶ Ezra iii. 11. || See Saladin's pamphlet, "The Crusaders."

their days traces of the fearful exertions they had put forth when acting under the influence of a religious mania which had filled them with wild zeal and bereft them of reason. Less than half a century after a number of the unco guid, under a direct out-pouring of the Holy Spirit, took to footing divine jigs on a bridge at Utrecht. The Holy Spirit, however, did not care to sustain the bridge, under the weight of his prancing devotees, so it broke down under their pressure, and many of them were drowned—to them it was graciously permitted to dance into glory through the waters of the Rhine.

But it was not till the year 1374 that Europe fairly looked up to her God, adored him and kilted her coaties and danced like daft. It can hardly be said of the holy fanatics, as of the witches in Alloway Kirk, that—

“ They cuist their duddies to the wark,  
And linket at it in their sark ;”

although, according to the Second Book of Kings, his majesty Davie the First of Israel had “linket” before the Lord without his “sark,” and, peradventure, even without his garters. Following in his wake, Germany in particular began to indulge in high jinks for Godsake, and we stop not to inquire whether the Christian Teutons danced *minus* their shirt and garters ; for we are creditably informed that they danced till they lost their reason, and shirt and garters count as nothing to a fanatic doing a schottische for the Lord till he tumbles down in exhaustion and foams at the mouth in delirium. The principal scene of the dancing for Godsake was Aix-la-Chapelle and its vicinity ; and from far and near the saints came there for their pious jig.

Round and round, hand in hand, in great circles, with the hymns of pietists and the fury of devils, whirled the Lord’s anointed. At least, the Lord never said they were not his anointed, and he allowed them to whirl till not infrequently they whirled their very life out and left their corpses among the feet of their still desperately-dancing companions in godliness. It was a case of turn your partner, ladies’ chain, cross over, half-right and left, gallop, and set to partners in the kingdom of heaven.

Of all the buffoons that ever existed subjectively or objectively to the human imagination, humanity's god is the most grotesque. The religions of the past will be the best pantomimes for the children of the future. The pantomime at Drury Lane shall yet be dancers of 1374 at Aix-la-Chapelle. But Covent Garden will beat it hollow with poor old Jehovah flying about like a gate on a windy day, between the prayers of Gordon on the one hand and those of the Mahdi on the other. The grand transformation scene will be 10,000 devout Mussulmans who had fallen by bayonet and Gatling disporting themselves among the houris of Paradise, while 10,000 Christians who had fallen by spear and Remington rifle will be ushered into heaven with wings and nightshirts, and the gods in the gallery will cry: "I say, Bill, let us give three b——, b—— cheers for them there bloomin' coves who died for the ladies, and a b—— groan for them blokes who died for the wings!"

God, or *x*, or *vousmevois*, or whatever you like to call him, her, or it, enjoyed the religious dancing immensely, if we are to judge from the fact that he, she, or it, never tried to stop it. The votary of saintly strathspeys and holy hornpipes was wont to fall down rigid and yelling with the cramp, with some particular muscle sticking up as large as your fist and as hard as a brick. The approved way of assisting your yelling neighbour was to give his rigid muscle a heavy kick or stamp with your foot. It must have been extremely interesting to take an aim at the hard lump on your neighbour's calf, and give it a hearty kick, just as a means of grace! We have it on the authority of Milton that they praise deity "who only stand and wait;" but how effectively they must have served him who rattled their boot-toes off their brother's shins!

To waltz with Araminta Jones or some other interesting sylph for your partner, although frivolous, is well enough in its way; but to dance with Jehovah-Jireth for a partner, as the dancers at Aix-la-Chapelle did in 1374, was quite another matter. In the celestial redowa it was absolutely essential that, by phrenzy, you should shut yourself up from the world and feel that you were dancing with God. Through all time, if ever you wanted

to have much to do with God, it was necessary to be more or less demented ; but to actually have the honour of dancing with God it was necessary to lose your reason. You had to become unconscious of whether you were dancing upon the street or upon the clouds. Many imagined themselves floundering in a sea of blood, in which the only way to escape drowning was by mad jigs and tremendous hornpipes. Others, with their feet battering the ground, and their eyes turned up in phrenzy, beheld the heavens opened, and the whole fauna of the divine menagerie capering round the Great White Throne, upon which sat Jehovah, the Wombwell or George Sanger of the exceptional wild beasts mentioned in the Apocalypse. Others beheld Mary of Bethlehem seated upon a divine sofa, with the child Jesus upon her knee, but without seeing anything anachronistic in a child nearly 1400 years old, or recognising that there was anything suspicious about girls who bear babies to ghosts.

On, rapidly, from Aix-la-Chapelle as a centre, spread the dancing madness through Holland, Belgium, Austria, and Italy. The magistrates of Liége, in the interests of the dancers, issued an edict to the effect that only broad-toed shoes were to be made, and that sharp-pointed shoes were to be utterly abolished. Peradventure the sharp-toed shoes were voted a nuisance by the brother whose shins were kicked in the manner to which we have alluded ; and peradventure some direct revelation from Omnipotence concerned itself with the affairs of snip. The God who in Mosaic times concerned himself so much with fringes, and skirts, and candle-sticks was likely skilled enough in bootmaking to appreciate the difference between broad toes and narrow ones. Several towns found it necessary to interdict the manufacture of red-coloured garments, the sight of which was considered inflammatory of the phrenzy of the dancers, from which we make the interesting inference that these pious dancers were somehow allied to mad bulls, to whom, as is well known, a red rag is particularly odious.

And yet the dancers for Godsake were not so mad after all. At least one little touch of sanity remained—they hated the Beetles, and tried to squash them, just as the *Secular Review* does now. Wherever the Dancers



went the Beetles fled before them like chaff before the wind. At the sound of the pious music and holy yells every Beetle got upon his hind legs, and, without waiting to say his *ave* or his *credo*, ran for his life. And this was because the clergy had, seeing their craft in danger, ventured to allege that the Dancers were possessed of the Devil. The Dancers of the celestial strathspeys were, naturally enough, incensed that these celestial strathspeys should be mistaken for infernal hornpipes. The Beetles, however, persisted, and got hold of some of the maddest of the Dancers, that they in their case might exorcise the evil spirit. The jumpers for the Lord were surrounded by a ring drawn with chalk, and there were book and candle, and salt and rowan, and the *pater noster* repeated backwards; but the Devil, if he were there, cared for none of these things, and the Dancers leapt over the chalk line and knocked the Beetles heels overhead for their attempts to upset the jigs of the Lord and his anointed one. And so matters went on merrily; and let us hope that, from looking down upon the earth, heaven was both amused and instructed.

But the full fury of the dancing mania was reserved for Cologne and Metz. Never wilder zeal was manifested in the days of the Crusaders or the Flagellants. The young and the old of both sexes, and of all ranks, were seized with the epidemic convulsions and danced promiscuously in the streets, putting forth preternatural exertions till fagged and flagging nature could bear the stress no longer, and the dancer sank down exhausted, and sometimes never rose again. Pimps and panders, and black-legs and black-guards, and murderers and prostitutes, finding that the Dancers were popular, joined them, feigned the convulsions, practised the leaps into the air, and danced with the best, till at length the whole concern developed into a huge orgie of lust and devilry, which the civil government of the Rhenish cities had to suppress with the sword.

The curious fact in regard to the Dancers is that, although by their dancing they glorified God, yet they considered the irresistible impulse to dance a serious affliction. They looked round for the source from which the affliction sprang, and, as was usual with

Christians, they determined that the Jews had a hand in the matter. Indeed, they went so far as to insinuate that the Jews had instilled an insidious poison into the food and into the wells of Europe, and had thereby succeeded in driving hundreds of thousands of Christians mad. To the honour of his Holiness the Pope, be it said that here he interposed and proclaimed the innocence of the house of Israel from the charge brought against them. But the papal interposition could not stay the butchering knife of religious and racial hate, and in many places the Jews were massacred, but particularly in Mayence and its vicinity. Incidentally I may mention that while the dancing was going on in its greatest fury the fearful text, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," was powerfully insisted upon, and under its sanction vast numbers of aged and helpless women were burnt to death. The religious fanatic murdered the Jews, and danced his maniac break-down in the glare of the fire, whose hiss and roar mingled with the shriek of agony of women perishing at the stake.

So much for the benign influence of the heavenly father's Holy Word in securing the peace, happiness, and welfare among his children upon earth. So much for the amusement the host of heaven must have got out of the farcical follies of the poor puppets that butchered and burned and danced for the love of God. And heaven's amusement at earth's follies is not by any means over. From the human aspect, these celestial amusements must ever be dashed and mingled with tragedy and pain. But with the non- or super-human it may be different. Stabbing Jews, burning women, and dancing maniacal break-downs may in the past have been a source of much satisfaction to the God who "made all things for his own glory." But man has simply changed the manner, not the matter, of his insanity. God is now "glorified" by seeing hundreds die of destitution, and tens of thousands taking to prostitution to escape destitution, while in the world there is enough and to spare for all. We are told in the Psalms that "he that in heaven sits shall laugh," and we predicate that he will burst into the thunderous roar of a divine guffaw when he sees the Mahdi and his flamens pitting themselves in a praying match against

Canterbury and York and Little Bethel, while, in the debateable ground between, the bayonets of the Staffordshire regiment rasp against the spears of the Baggara Arab. And Canterbury's prayers to the value of £15,000, and York's prayers to the value of £10,000, are impotent against a dusky savage clothed in a handkerchief round his loins. Gordon lies dead in the dust of Khartoum, Earle is shot, Stewart expires in fever and agony, and Burnaby gasps out his life in the rift of the broken square.

O England of the nineteenth, laugh not at Germany of the fourteenth century. You dance not, it is true ; but you are quite as ludicrously interesting to any intelligence that is sane. Will mankind in the future never evolve to a level in which they will turn back the pages of history till this hour, and laugh at the record of your Black Army at home and your Red Army abroad—at the old State comedy of the Black-Beetle praying for the Red Herring ?

Gradually the fury of the outbreak of 1374 died away. But, about forty years later, the mania again burst out with fever heat, its centre this time not being Aix-la-Chapelle, but Strasbourg. There was one strongly-marked point of difference between this and the preceding outbreak. As we have seen, the Dancers of 1374 were fiercely hostile to the clergy and the officers of the Church. Not so the Strasbourg Dancers. Instead of the monks having to run for their lives, they established themselves in the local religious buildings, and said masses for the Dancers. The saltationists themselves were grateful for the masses, and were seized with what was a source of profit to the Church—a faith in the efficacy of shrine cures.

The patron-saints of the Dancers were St. John the Baptist and St. Vitus. St. John was connected with dancing through the dancing of the daughter of Herodias costing him his head, which at her request was cut off and laid upon a plate ; but how St. Vitus came to be connected with dancing has never been satisfactorily accounted for. St. Vitus was a young Sicilian who suffered martyrdom by decapitation, under Diocletian in 303. His church and that of the Baptist were the two

churches in the greatest vogue among the Dancers, and in each of them many miraculous cures were said to have been effected. In consequence, a certain malady which is unfortunately too well known goes under the name of "St. Vitus' Dance." How far an exceptional prevalence of this affliction (*chorea Sancti Viti*) was at the root of the Dancing Mania is a legitimate subject for historical and pathological investigation. It is well known that fear or terror is conducive to this disease, and ever-recurring war, plague, and pestilence, and the preternatural awe superinduced by religion, may have predisposed the then inhabitants of Europe to this frightful malady. Worms in the alimentary canal have also been set down as a source of St. Vitus' Dance, and the unwholesome food then partaken of would be sufficient to account for the presence of intestinal worms. The disease is also accelerated by the repulsion or drying up of cutaneous eruptions, and the festering and unhealthy state of the skin of mediæval Europe is notorious. These few facts enumerated, added to an intense religious fanaticism and fear, may in themselves be sufficient to account for the phenomenon of the Dancing Mania.

"Dancing for Godsake is over long ago, and why do you bother with it?" queries the historical sciolist. I reply: "Dancing for Godsake is not over long ago; we have still among us on this terrene ball the Shakers and the Jumpers, lineal descendants of the Dancers' spasmodical fanaticism." Devotion is not a matter of the head; so let it go to the other somatic extremity, and be a matter of the heels. It might be amusing to behold a mutilated Jumper worship the Lord with two wooden legs; but I have been in Spurgeon's Tabernacle and seen the Lord worshipped with more than a thousand wooden heads, and that, to me, is quite as amusing. It matters very little to the blockhead—and I should say it matters still less to the blockhead's god—whether the blockhead worship with the upper end of him that is covered with felt or the lower end of him which is covered with ben leather. Moreover, worship from either end or both is good enough for any god I have yet heard of. Instead of drawling and praying with my felt end, I should prefer dancing with my ben leather end, espe-

cially if my partner in the waltzing worship were Miss Araminta Jones.

Readers of ecclesiastical history are, of course, acquainted with the *Camisars*, or French prophets, a sect that originated at Dauphiné in 1688. No previous dancers were ever madder than they. They might have danced their jig much longer, but that they heard the voice of divine inspiration bid them take up arms against the State. The voice of inspiration got them on the ice, but did not trouble to get them off it: they came into collision with the king's troops, and were overpowered and mercilessly put to the sword. The mere handful that escaped sought refuge in this country, which they reached in 1706. They found England could produce fools not inferior to those of France, and they made converts, the principal of whom was a gentleman of the name of Lacy, Sir Richard Bulkely, and Dr. Emms. This Dr. Emms was an unfortunate proselyte. He died December 22nd, 1707, and, alas for the *Camisars*, they had staked their reputation as a sect that the learned Doctor would come to life and walk out of his grave on May 25th in the same year. During the time between December and May, with the faithful and with the sceptic alike, the expectancy and excitement were intense. On May 25th guards were placed at the grave to see that Dr. Emms got through his resurrection properly. Loudly the faithful invoked Dr. Emms to get up; but Dr. Emms would do no such thing; and, strange to say, he has not got up even till the present hour. This refusal on the part of Dr. Emms to leave his grave got the sect pretty well jibed out of existence. And if, on a certain occasion, a guard as wide-awake had been set to watch a certain grave in Jerusalem, a certain party, who, of course, got up, would have refused to rise, and this Christian superstition, which has cost humanity rivers of tears and oceans of human blood, would, at its very inception, have been wiped off the face of the earth.

The *Camisars* had received their death-blow; but, as they ascended, their mantle fell upon a section of the Quakers, and Shakerism was the result—a kind of thing produced by tying Dr. Emms and William Penn together by the coat-tails. The founders of the Shakers were

James Wardley, a tailor, and Jane, his wife. It was at Bolton, in 1747, that Wardley recognised that his awful mission included not only the making of men's pantaloons, but the saving of their souls.

Flashing through between the goose and the scissors were portent, miracle, vision, and revelation, and he left alone the stitching of waistcoats and basted himself on to the Lord and him crucified. But an ordinary orthodox Lord, sitting at the right hand of a thing with no right hand, or left one either, was too stale for this mighty one, who threw down the needle of the snip and took up the sword of the spirit. True, this Son was sitting at the dexter fist of this Father of the same age as himself; but, according to tailor Wardley and his wife Jane, Jesus was sitting in heaven quite uneasily, just as a person does who sits down accidentally upon an ant-hill. In fact, according to Wardley, Jesus was busily preparing to take a fly down to earth, even as a cock takes a fly down from his perch in the morning. In other words, Wardley proclaimed the immediate Second Coming of Christ and the advent of the Millennium.

The sword of the spirit, in the puissant hand of this tailor, clove asunder the joints and marrow of a good many. They hailed him of the lap-board as a special prophet of God, and stood with their hand shading their eyes, looking up into the clouds for the advent of Jesus. But Jesus had something better to do than to come fluttering down heels over head from heaven to please Wardley and his idiots. The carpenter of Nazareth refused to oblige the tailor of Bolton.

But, if Jesus would not come, he must just leave it alone. Wardley and his followers were not to be dismayed by a trifle of that kind, and they went on with their Shakerism. "Sometimes," we are told, "after assembling together and sitting a while in silent meditation, they were taken with a mighty trembling, under which they would express the indignation of God against all sin. At other times they were affected, under the power of God, with a mighty *shaking*; and they were occasionally exercised in singing, shouting, or walking the floor under the influence of spiritual signs, swiftly passing and re-passing each other, like clouds agitated by a mighty

wind." Their enemies called them *Shakers* in derision ; but they did not object to the epithet, and accepted of it as an appropriate one.

The rather awkward delay of the Lord in his Second Coming, and, in place of the Millennium, the fact that men were cutting each other's throats as usual, did not tend to augment the influence of Shakerism. But, in 1770, although the Lord did not come, the Lady did, in the shape of Anne Lee, of Manchester. This glorious Anne, the morning-star of the Shakers, was the daughter of John Lee, a blacksmith, and the wife of Abraham Stanley, another blacksmith. She at once leapt into the position of the recognised leader of the sect. To her were applied the titles of the "Elect Lady" and the "Mother of the Elect;" and, whether she was actually the Mother of the Elect or not, it was gravely whispered that she was the mother of one or two that she had no business to be the mother to. But far be it from me to dim the auriole on the resplendent brow of a she-saint. To those who had the presumption to address her as Anne Lee she drew herself up to her most holy height, and remarked, by way of correction: "I am Anne the Word." Some persons there were who hinted that "I am Anne the Harlot" would have been a good deal nearer the mark; but, of course, it is very wrong for carnally-minded people to take note of the peccadilloes of saints.

"Anne the Word," she-blacksmith and *λογος*, was in constant communication with the kingdom of heaven and the other kingdom; and, like the apostles on the day of Pentecost, she spake with tongues. She was a good deal addicted to gin, and it was, possibly, when under the influence of this spirit that her gift of tongues was most miraculous. I myself vouch that I have seen gin, and whiskey too, for that part of it, inspire a number of old women with a remarkable gift of tongues—one that would have put the Pentecostal babblement completely in the shade.

But, tongues or not tongues, "Anne the Word" first got into prison for blasphemy, and next into a madhouse as a lunatic; and thus to the holiness of saintship she was enabled to add the glory of martyrdom. It has

often occurred to me that a lunatic asylum, rather than a cross, would have been the fitting haven for a certain predecessor of "Anne the Word;" but I will allow Pontius Pilate and the rest of them to know their own business. She who was "the first spiritual parent in the line of the Covenant" died in 1784 and went to Jesus, having waited in vain for Jesus to come to her flopping down through the clouds, with the voice of the archangel and a holy tin whistle. So much for Shakerism and the kind of persons that are capable of founding a new religion.

*Every Thursday.*

*Price Twopence.*

## THE SECULAR REVIEW:

A JOURNAL OF AGNOSTICISM.

EDITED BY SALADIN.

Order of your Newsagent, or send direct to the Publishers—W. STEWART & Co., 41, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.

### RECENT PAMPHLETS.

A Reply to Cardinal Manning, by Saladin ...	...	0	1
The Crusades, by Saladin ...	...	0	1
The Covenanters, by Saladin ...	...	0	1
Christian Persecution, by Saladin ...	...	0	1
The Flagellants, by Saladin ...	...	0	1
The Iconoclasts, by Saladin ...	...	0	1
The Inquisition, Part I., by Saladin ...	...	0	1
The Inquisition, Part II., by Saladin ...	...	0	1
The Dancers, Shakers, and Jumpers, Part I., by Saladin		0	1
The Dancers, Shakers, and Jumpers, Part II., by Saladin		0	1
The Persecution of the Jews, Part I., by Saladin ...		0	1
The Persecution of the Jews, Part II., by Saladin ...		0	1

London: W. STEWART & Co., 41, Farringdon Street, E.C.