

*Vicars at loggerheads with
their bishops over ballet girls*



From the London Correspondent of *Novoye Vremya*

First published in *Novoye Vremya*, St. Petersburg, No. 4293, Wednesday, February 10th (22), 1888.
Translated from the original Russian text republished in *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (CHINESE SHADOWS) IX pp. 24-29.

VICARS OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH HERE are at loggerheads with their own Bishops. And on what a subject, if you please? On the subject of ballet girls. The Bible and the ballet are to be harmonized. The Reverends Haweis and Stewart Headlam, socialists and well-known preachers, stand firm for the right of the clergymen and the clergy in general, to frequent ballet theatres daily, and from the pulpit both praise the character of the dancers. However, the Bishop of London, Dr. Temple is of the opinion that as long as the dancers appear in such short dresses, the clergy should not be so regularly in attendance at ballet performances, as are many vicars, with Stewart Headlam at their head. Headlam — the same who recently led the funeral procession of A. Linnell — took offence at such a reactionary view of his superior. To the Bishop's public rebuke in *The Times*, he replied in an open letter in *Pall Mall*. The dancing girls as a whole also took offence, and defended their outraged honour — in the shape of skirts that were too short — in a similar letter and in the same paper. The Primate of England, the Archbishop of Canterbury, took sides with the Bishop of London, and a brush fire swept the whole of the United Kingdom and has been burning since last September. Nothing can be done! The Primate (something similar to the Metropolitan) has no right to unfrock a pastor. Once a man becomes a clergyman in a Protestant Church, he is going to die one, were he even to marry all the ballet dancers and cut the throats of all his mothers-in-law; he would remain a “reverend” even at forced labour.

Is it possible that God would have created woman's body so that it would be sinful to look at it?

The sermons of Headlam and of Haweis, his Rector and immediate superior, are as touching as they are instructive. With the exception of the “Salvation Army” of General Booth, their congregations are the most fashionable and numerous. It is difficult to choose between the three shows, so original and amazing are they all three. If you go to Haweis — laughter and bravos resound instead of “Amens,” and the lovely sex blushes, but nevertheless listens and laughs. The very cream of the aristocratic orthodox faithful gather there; while at General Booth's, according to his own proud declaration, the dregs of Society are both on the platform and among the public. Now

what is the difference between these gatherings? The “Army” sings about the Christ to the tune of racy songs, while the flock of Haweis listens to the racy sermons of their preacher, with prayer books in their prayerfully folded hands . . . If any among the Russian readers wishes to assure himself of this, let him read the report of any of his sermons in the London *World*. In one of them, the *World* writes:

Both men and women blushed listening to the sermon about the moral superiority of actors and actresses, about the naked inhabitants of the Orient, the half-undressed ladies of the London balls, the naked naiad of the aquarium, the picturesque suits of the bathers at seashore bathing establishments, and about the beauties of the ballet.

Both of the famous preachers, Haweis and Headlam, have transformed their pulpits into oratorical tribunes similar to ancient Athens, where feminine beauty in general, and Aspasia and Company in particular, were defended. In both pulpits the *corps de ballet* is glorified. “Is it possible,” asks the first-named reverend, “that God would have created woman’s body so that it would be sinful to look at it?” (*sic*). In the opinion of the preacher, “a well-shaped ballet dancer would sin in hiding God’s handiwork, and she should, for the glory of God, appear on the stage covered merely by her own personal virtue,” and with nothing else. It is sinful for a pure-minded worshipper of feminine beauty to chime in with the hypocrites who require more garments on the dancers, because this is tantamount to “giving preference to textile fabrics made with human hands, rather than to the body of woman, created by the hand of the Almighty,” *i.e.*, a preference of “Manchester industrialists to the Creator of the heavens and the earth” (*sic*). What logic? . . .

And this is the new turn of affairs in the State Religion of Great Britain, and the reform hatched by its liberal clergy.

A General-Mesmerist in Christian garb.

Drop in now upon “General Booth,” in one of the numerous and enormous halls which they call “prayer barracks” of the Salvation Army, and watch the up-to-date method and ways of that salvation. As you enter, your head will split from the noise of tambourines, rattle-boxes and “divine” hymns, to the tune of the operettas of Offenbach. On the stage — or the platform, if you like — a whole battalion of every rank, from ordinary private and sergeant, to major and colonel in skirts and little hats. A coloured scarf thrown over the shoulder with mysterious signs on it shows to the initiated the rank of the warrior who wears it. Officers of the male sex have scarves also, but are distinguished by the abundance of bright pompons, rosettes and choux made of satin ribbons upon often dirty and worn out uniforms. Negroes, Hindus and other coloured gentlemen show their teeth to the public and roll their eyes to the ceiling. As if bitten by a tarantula or in a fit of St. Vitus dance, this rabble shudders, grimaces and plays the buffoon during the preliminary inner prayer Those praying call the public to Christ, dancing and jumping to the sound of their own traditional rhythms. It is enough to hear such words in their songs as: “My Jesus is a jolly old boy” (*sic*), to become convinced that this army of Christians is electrified not by the name of Christ, but by purely psycho-physiological means, and an awful ex-

citement of the nervous system, and that those among them who are really sincere are miserable psychopaths, while the others are acting under the influence of a temporary intoxication from noise, rapid motion and fancied exultation.

The “General” himself is a fat old man, as healthy as a bull, who started his life as a boy in a slaughter-house, and continued as a butcher clerk. He gets up and raises his hands in theatrical manner, as if blessing the public; in reality he is magnetizing it, befogs it and searches for a nervous subject. Having observed a “suitable person,” he centres upon him all his attention, and then begins a very curious show, for anyone who is familiar with the methods of mesmerizers. The subject soon feels the heavy gaze of the “General” upon him, as if pinning him down, and begins nervously to fidget. If, against expectation, the subject is too weak to be handled all alone, the General forces the rest of the public to act in accord with him. He knows human nature through and through, and plays on it, striking human feelings and nerves like a pianist strikes the keys of the piano. *Nolens volens*, the public, without noticing it, helps him openly, for the sake of momentary fun, as the General loudly declares that here is a man — man or woman — whose heart has been touched by the blessing from on high, but who is yet ashamed to declare it in everyone’s hearing. The wretched victim, feeling 10,000 eyes directed upon him from the crowd, becomes confused, loses his head and, rising, begins slowly to move in the direction of the platform. Like a bird glamorized by the snake’s gaze, the victim moves forward, and is being unconsciously pushed from three sides by an interested public. When at the steps of the stage, he is seized by dozens of the brave warriors’ hands, and is placed in a semi-conscious state before the ramp. From that moment he becomes for the rest of the evening, if not for longer, the property of the “army,” its new recruit.

The victim is forthwith asked publicly to confess his sins for the edification of the other sinners not yet converted. If the “new convert” should become obstinate, or actually not know what to declare publicly, then the members of the chorus throw themselves on their knees and begin to pray for the inveterate sinner (to the tune, let us say, of the appeal of Calhas to Jupiter in the “Beautiful Helen”), so as to touch his heart. . . . It is usually the brain, not the heart of the victim that is touched, and at once there is gathered an abundant harvest of cheques, sovereigns, and occasionally hundreds of pounds sterling.

In one evening last week several dozen proselytes were made, and the treasury received about 11,000 pounds, out of which 10,500 pounds were subscribed by a wealthy soap-maker.

The Salvation Army is a political organisation under the mask of religious striving.

As already stated, the army, with very few exceptions, is made up of the dregs of Society; of repentant, and more often not so repentant, vagabonds, thieves and night-fairies from dark alleys. The General himself told a wealthy lady of my acquaintance, that he must, in order to keep the discipline and to have the army constantly in hand, keep it in a state of constant psycho-physiological intoxication! . . . For this reason, much is allowed to the army and much more yet is forgiven. That much is

obvious, namely, that according to official statistics, wherever a part of the army may be settled, whatever town or community, the number of illegitimate births rises by some 35% in the first year. Such little peccadillos are playing into the hands of the General. They constantly give occasion for new “repentance,” and thus uphold in the warriors the religious flame, which otherwise would have gone out long ago. Abroad, and even in England itself, they believe naively that the Salvation Army is a religious brotherhood (!). Curious aberration! In the United Kingdom alone there are 450,000, and in London 280,000 people belonging to the Army. Not before the XIXth century has passed into eternity, will the Englishmen probably understand their mistake. . . . The Salvation Army is in reality a political society under the mask of religious striving. But this is known but to a few, those who hold the side-wires attached to the basic harness of Booth in their hands. The General holds the reins of the army, and the leaders of the “Sons of the Morning” — members of a society as yet little known — have fastened their invisible threads to his strong traces. So far both are rushing at full speed merely around the vicious circle of their own seemingly special arena, to the great edification of the fanatics. The time will come, when the agile tamer of two-legged animals, known under the comical title of “General,” will release his flock in the name of Christ, and will give it the freedom to subject to fire or sword this or another party. Anarchists and “sons of the morning” congratulate themselves secretly that the “General” is on their side. . . . Yes! No wonder that the New Dispensationists use nothing but Biblical expressions at public meetings, while laughing in the company of friends at the Bible and its teachings, believing in them just about as much as does the Dalai-lama.

RADDA-BAI¹



¹ [All of H.P. Blavatsky’s contributions to Russian periodicals were signed in this manner. We leave it in its exact phonetic transliteration from the Russian. It is uncertain whether H.P. Blavatsky meant the first word to be *Rādhā*, “prosperity,” or “success,” the name of a celebrated cowherdess or Gopī, beloved by Krishna, and a principal personage in the poem *Gīta-govinda*, who was later worshipped as a goddess and regarded as an Avatāra of Lakshmī, as Krishna was of Vishnu; or whether the Russian phonetic form was meant for *rāddha*, which means “accomplished, prepared, ready,” and even “perfect in magical power” or “initiated.” — *Boris de Zirkoff*.]