

"NEW MORAL WORLD"

. . . SERIES. . .

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No. 2.

# SHAKERS AND SHAKERISM.

BY THE EDITOR.

**PRICE THREEPENCE.**

MURDOCH & Co., 26, PATERNOSTER SQUARE, LONDON, E.C.  
CLARION NEWSPAPER Co., 72, FLEET STREET, LONDON, E.C.

1896.

## SHAKERS AND SHAKERISM.

*Mother Ann.*

**A** SWAMPY high road, leading out of Manchester, little more than a century ago; a rough, uneducated woman pursued by a brutal and cowardly mob; a rain of blows from clubs felling the woman to the ground; a rain of kicks from heavy boots compelling her to rise and continue her weary course; these constitute the beginnings of a movement of our own times, which, more than any other, breathes the spirit of primitive Christianity, and, more than any other, beacons forth to all of us who are tempest-tossed on the sea of Competition, the practical possibilities of the Communist life.

A century later, and we read from the pen of a not altogether sympathetic University Professor: "It is safe to say that considerably over one hundred, possibly two hundred, Communistic villages have been founded in the United States, although comparatively few yet live. There are perhaps from seventy to eighty communities at present (1886) in the United States, with a membership of from six to seven thousand, and property the value of which may be roughly estimated (in our currency) at five or six millions of pounds." This large sum was won not by Stock Exchange gambling, not by financial trickery, not by mining royalties and ground rents, not even by that system of competitive industry which destroys all that is unselfish in human nature, or by that higgling of the market wherewith a man economises his purse, but squanders his soul; but it was gained by honest and brotherly industry, taking the only form which honest and brotherly industry can take, the form of a pure Communism

which required from every one according to his capacities, and assigned to every one according to his needs. And for three-fourths of this work and three-fourths of these results, though of all results the pecuniary are the least important, the poor hunted and bemired woman of the Manchester high road is directly responsible.

Round her, as round the Buddha and round the Christ, a halo of legend has already grown. *Datur haec venia antiquitati*, says the Roman historian, *ut, miscendo humana divinis, primordia urbium augustiora faciat*, and he instances the subsequent greatness of his own city as consecrating the stories of the miraculous that soon clustered round her birth. Yet in the case of this woman it may well be that the soul was given the power to master and enthrall the bodily cerement which enveloped it, and that the enthusiasm of the inner nature could sustain apart from physical means the outward shell of its physical environment. Once, we are told, she was dragged off by a mob and locked up in a solitary cell, so small that she could not straighten herself in it, and there it was deliberately purposed to starve her to death. For fourteen days the door remained unopened, and save that at night a faithful disciple filled the bowl of a tobacco pipe with wine and milk, and inserted the stem through the key-hole, she received no food, and yet came forth with renewed vigour and undiminished strength. And, as with the Christ, so it proved with her, that her foes were those of her own household. "One of my brothers," she writes, "being greatly enraged, said he was determined to overcome me; so he brought a staff about the size of a broom-handle, and came to me as I was sitting in a chair and singing by the power of God. He beat me over the face and the nose with the staff, till one end of it was much splintered. I sensibly felt and saw the bright rays of the glory of God pass between my face and the staff, and I did but just feel the blows. He continued beating, until he was so far spent that he called for drink. He then began again with the other end of the staff, and I felt my breath like healing balsam which healed me, so that I felt no harm from the strokes." And here, in her own words, is yet another story of what she had to endure. "At another time, in the evening, I was informed by a friend that there