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SECTION—I

ARTICLES, MESSAGES, PREFACES ETC.

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RELIGION AND PRIEST BE BROUGHT UNDER PROPER CONTROL

By

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While at Belgaum I heard of the movement started by some of the Parsis in Bombay to found an association, the prime object of which shall be the abolition of priesthood as a caste. The object of such a body has only to be stated for the vast majority of the young educated people of India to accept it with alacrity. I do not feel called upon to discuss the ways of the Parsi Mobeds. But my Parsi friends may rest assure that the Hindu priestly classes stand in no way superior ethically, educationally or otherwise to the average member of the Parsi priesthood.

A Clog on the wheel

The counts in the indictment against the hereditary Hindu priests are numerous and appalling. He is a clog on the wheel of our civilization. Man is born, he weds, becomes the father of a family and then in time dies. All along the priest shadows him like an evil genius. Deviation from draconian rules prescribed by him according to the *Shastras* and *Smritis* of his own making is punished with a terror which 99 per cent are unable to withstand. Ostracism or casting out man from Society is the weapon fashioned by the Devil himself. This the priest wields with ruthless, relentless and inexorable vigour. I must admit the officiating Brahmin is a miserable specimen of humanity as a rule. He knows it just as well as we do. He practises the shame of being a middleman between the unseen powers and the helpless man and makes a living by it. Philosophers may well ask, is this class reprobate at heart ? But whatever be the answer to the question this parasite living upon and eating into the vitals of Society can no longer be permitted to function without check or control. We in India might take a leaf out of the English reformation and bring both the religion and the priest under proper control and prevent its rank and wild growth.

A heroic task

There is also a great necessity for effective legislation against superstitious practices prevalent among the masses. They find their support in the priest. Wasteful offerings to gods and goddesses, long mourning and multiple ceremonies at births, deaths and marriages, insensate caste dinners are some of the senseless and meaningless practices in which the priest delights. Be it an occasion of joy like wedding or sorrow like death, it is equally availed of by the priests, many of whom pray, as one of the Parsi correspondents, has excellently shown, in order to be able to prey on their victims. I say the Catalogue of the evils of priesthood is really appalling. Its final eradication can only be kept in view as an ideal but we cannot start a month too soon in initiating our righteous campaign. I cordially welcome the measures concerted by some of the leading Parsis. It is really surprising how much priest-ridden the Parsi community is. It has been estimated by some Parsi friends that for one year after his death, a dead Parsi is economically a heavier burden on the poor family than a living one. A Parsi newspaper recently gave the instance of a man who while living could hardly afford an aluminium tumbler. But when he died the priest insisted that a silver goblet should be employed in his funeral ceremony. I quote this to show that with their keen practical wisdom the Parsis have very appropriately taken the lead in initiating measures for ridding India of the evil of priest-craft and I have no doubt that all enlightened Hindus, Mahomedans and Christians will join this heroic and noble task of cleansing priestdom, the weight of which they are certainly far less fitted to bear than their Parsi brethren".[1]

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[1] The Bombay Chronicle, dated November 8, 1929.