

THE ATTITUDE OF SOCIETY TOWARDS RELIGION.

SOCIETY, what is it? There are three senses in which we may accept the word. First, there is what is called "good society:" a small coterie of more or less distinguished persons who move in an exalted social sphere, and exclude all who are below them from their company. Secondly, there is a larger meaning of the word, which is rather a set of thoughts than a set of people,—the general standard and temper of the educated mind of the day, its intellectual and moral aspiration. In this sense society is less regarded as a community than as a code of social maxims which pervade that community, or which are assumed to control it or to be made by it. Thirdly, there is a technical sense of the word,—that which is opposed to democratic ideas; as, for example, the present attitude of society in France *versus* the pulling-down principles of the Republic. That the French government is republican is accidental; but the essential characteristic of the present French Republic is its warfare against the force called society.

Of the first kind of society—"good" society—we may take the English aristocracy as an example. The difference between the English and the French aristocracy—between the Court of St. James in London and the Faubourg St. Germain in Paris—is that the former has no political enmity with the people, while the latter simply abhors the Republic. The "fortified refuge of antique bigotries," as a French writer somewhat savagely calls "the Faubourg," contains, no doubt, as "good" society as is to be found anywhere in Europe; but it is unfortunately "at daggers drawn" with France. English "good" society, though politically energetic, has the same political sympathies as have the commonalty. Where the sympathies part company is in a hundred social grooves, of which we shall have occasion to speak presently. But, as an example of "good" society, in regard to birth and education, and in regard to the emulations of public life, the English "upper ten thousand" may fairly vie with the "gentlemen" of any country north or south of the equator.

Of the second kind of society,—that imperium of ideas which pervade a more or less intelligent community,—we may say that it has three distinct phases,—the religious, the political, the conventional. We will speak now of the conventional phases only; of what are commonly understood by "social canons." These canons are comprehensive of elementary principles, as to behavior, morality, propriety. They include also minor canons upon taste in regard to a great variety of detail. A man who dares to act

outside such accepted canons is regarded as eccentric or culpable. He must be a man of surpassing genius or effrontery to be pardoned for such a heinous offence. And so imperious is the habit of obedience to such canons that a man naturally accepts it as inevitable. More than this, he feels excused from being original in himself, on the ground that he would be affecting superiority. This contentment with the "is," this enslavement by the "is," rules a man exteriorly and interiorly. Social canons become the swathing-bands of a man's lifetime. The tradition of obedience to the whole imperium of conventionalism, in its most comprehensive and despotic sense and sway, is the most powerful rule of life, because it is the most constant life of life, and is the covert and the apology of all weakness. Society becomes responsible for wrong principles, wrong conduct, in the millions who are the slaves of its canons; but who don't realize that what is absurdly called society is a combination of selfishness and vanity? And thus men live and die, mere cogs in a conventional wheel, to wake up in a future state and to apprehend that their cowardice was not the least ridiculous feature of their careers.

Thirdly, that sense of society which is embodied in such a formula as "government by the high born and the wealthy," or "society, the enemy of democracy," is the theory of the forces of accidental prosperity *versus* that of the forces of popular will. We all know that, in these days, there is a declared war by vast masses—we might almost say by whole nations—against what used to be the chief governing force,—society. We are not drawing a distinction between conservatives and liberals, for a liberal is no more necessarily a revolutionist than a conservative is necessarily a Catholic, but between those sections which love the old Christian order and those sections which try their best to pull it down. The transference of the governing forces from the higher orders to the lower orders is unhappily allied, even in the oldest Catholic countries, with enmity towards the Christian religion. And the reason of this alliance—paradoxical as it sounds—is not that revolutionists have a hatred of religion, but that society, in the old sense, had a love of it. Let us attempt an explanation of this paradox.

Society, in its old-fashioned Tory sense, always insisted on religion as the backbone of its power, as the prerequisite of all staidness and obedience. In other words, society allied itself with religion, using it as its strongest auxiliary. Even in the days of Louis XVI., just before the revolution, French society affected to be sternly Catholic, though French society was rotten to the core. Now this alliance of proud society with the hypocrisy of religion—for, in high circles, religion was half hypocrisy—led French democrats to detest the affectation of religion as a cloak for social

tyranny, social pride. Hence it has come to pass that we almost always find French democrats full of contemptuous dislike for "le clericalism," not because they first hate religion, but first hate society which cherishes it. The same truth holds good in modern Italy. The Italian nobles or *grandees* have always allied themselves with the Church as the most powerful of machines for preserving order; and though, for the most part, they have been conspicuously "good" Catholics, they have, historically at least, been social tyrants. Italian democrats now recoil from Catholicity because Italian aristocrats have cherished it. "Odi odioque sum Romanis" might be altered, in the case of Italian democrats, to "I hate Roman Catholics because Roman Catholics have hated me." As in France so in Italy, the new democracy is anti-Catholic from spite against society, not against religion.

Thus, in the different meanings of the word "society" to which we have referred,—aristocratic, conventional, legislative,—we find plenty of causes to account for the opposition with which religion is greeted by revolutionists. It is no use to shut our eyes to the obvious truism that "le clericalisme" is understood to mean tyranny. We know, of course, that the misconception is ridiculous, but the knowledge does not help us to the remedy. We have to face the growing prejudice that "religious and social tyranny are combined in the minds of the upper classes." Society, in the old-fashioned sense of the word, has itself solely to blame for this prejudice. The Church cannot be held to be culpable. The only weakness of (some) ecclesiastics has been in permitting high society to import its social canons into religion. It was bad enough that society should be worldly. But society has made religion worldly too. We know how such grave prelates as Bossuet and Fénelon have spoken of this fashionable desecration. The tyranny of the French nobility before the great revolution was rendered all the more odious by their hypocrisy; and the high dignitaries of the Church were invited by the king's court to throw the mantle of their respectability over Versailles. The high dignitaries were not to blame for the invitation, for they simply declined it and resented it; but the tyranny of this old régime had no more repulsive characteristic than this seeking to veil vices by religion.

That the old régime was as criminally tyrannical as the new régime is wildly licentious no student of French history can gravely doubt. It is probable that modern socialism, in its anti-Christian sense, as well as in its anti-aristocratic sense, was begotten primarily of the stings of a perfectly natural resentment against aristocratic exclusiveness and complacency. Political socialism was probably born of wounded vanity—we might almost say of wounded self-respect—and religious socialism

was twin offspring of the same spirit; while revolutionary democracy means no more than indignation at the presumption, the absolutism, of *grandees*. All this is rather a sentiment than a principle; but it has its apology in *facts*. Aristocratic pride was a fact. Hypocrisy in high places was a fact. Fearful crushing of the poor was a fact. Vile robbery of the poor was a fact. Horrid worldliness, cold selfishness, brutal egotism, were facts that met the eye at every turn. And all such facts are associated in the socialistic French mind with the using of religion as a class-weapon. It is true that, in France, political socialism is almost dead, because there is no longer class oppression; but religious socialism has survived its twin brother, because the tradition of the old hypocrisy still lives. Frenchmen know that their bitterest tyrants *were* Catholics, and so they cannot forgive their religion. The misconception, as we have said, is sheer fatuity. It is an illusion of the feeling, not of the brain. But French society was the parent of the illusion, and religion has been made to suffer through society.

The same kind of accusation, though in lesser degree, might be brought against Italian society. Lord Lytton, in his romances about Italian class struggles, has not overpainted historic facts. The feudalism has died out, but the old spirit remains, tempered by the discretion of self-interest. Between the higher classes and the commonalty in Italy there is about as much sympathy, as much clanship or unity, as between the planets and a row of street lamps. What is called etiquette is pushed to a point which paralyzes the pulses of human nature. Separateness, exclusiveness, are social dogmas. They are the "de fide" obligations of "good" society. This is shown in a hundred little ways. Let us take one little way as an example. The Roman magnates have private chapels in their big houses—not chapels, but small sitting-rooms set apart—for the celebration of the Holy Mysteries at their convenience. Though scores of churches were hard by, within three minutes' walk, the *grandees* must have mass said in their own houses. This is carrying class privilege a long way. A man might as well have an aristocratic dispensation from every obligation of holy penance as have mass said in one of his own private apartments because he is too exclusive to "go to church." A venerable Roman dowager, eighty-four years of age, said ten years ago, in Rome, to the present writer: "There is a chapel in our palace; but I would rather not hear mass at all than set an example of lazy piety and class privilege." But so it is grandly ruled that a wretched room is set apart for the perfectly easy (and aristocratic) hearing of mass, and that for about twenty-three hours out of every day in the year the domestic sanctuary is left alone, unvisited.

This is one of the foibles of "good society." Religious privi-

lege—that most odious of class vanities—is supposed to increase their excellencies' dignity, and the chaplain is a sort of butler *in spiritualibus*, who is, of course, nobody, because not a grandee. All this does outside harm to religion. Saint-Simon, the first typical French socialist who thought to utilize religion as his ally, was at least wiser than those who throw up religious class privilege as a barrier between themselves and their countrymen. And here let a point be noted, which is kindred in its injuriousness with the magnificent isolation of domestic chapels. It is a prevailing custom throughout Christendom to say to "the man with a gold ring" (as St. James with holy irony has expressed it), "sit thou here in the best place;" but to say to the man in the smock frock, "sit thou anywhere, or nowhere." This custom of giving the rich people the best places in every church because they have the money to pay for them, while leaving the poorer classes to sit anywhere because they have not sixpence or a shilling, is another of society's scandals which do harm to religion without bringing any real gain to any class. Ought not the best seats to be allotted to the poor, and the back seats to be allotted to the rich? A church is the poor man's palace. Rich people have their luxuries at home. And as all that the rich desire is exclusiveness, let the back seats be priced instead of the front ones, and the rich worshippers will be sure to prefer them. "To the rich the gospel is preached" is hardly a faithful rendering of a divine assurance. The rich come flaunting gayly to the best places, as though humility was intended solely for the lower orders. Let the rich be humbled *only* in the churches! The "needle's eye" was not pleasant to the "camel;" but as we know what has been said upon that subject, it would be well to teach the lesson in God's house.

Society, in most ages, in most towns, in most villages, has set up religious privilege as a protection against the commonalty, while affecting to prize religion for its Catholicity. This is as true of the Anglican and the various Protestant "churches" as it is true of most Catholic communities. Thus, in England, dissent was mainly begotten of the arrogance, the cold worldliness, of the patrons of the Establishment. The splendid ease of Anglican bishops and deans, the refined comforts of the beneficed or superior clergy, excited hearty disgust among the people, who saw plainly that religion was chiefly used as a profession, as the most comfortable and respectable of callings. A thousand meeting-houses sprang up in all parts of the land as a protest against the stiffness of Churchism, and as a relief from the dry bones of Erastianism. The dissenting minister was at least a man without pretension; he was not waiting for a fat living or a cathedral canonry, and he had a warmth in his ministrations which was certainly homely

if not cultured, and which had some touch of heart and of nature. Dissent came to abound, not from dislike to dogma, but from hatred of coldness and religious pride. The upper classes were Anglican. That was quite enough reason why the lower classes should wish to be something else. And so it is in London at this day; and so it is in all the large towns. The commonalty separate themselves from Anglicanism because Anglicanism has no sympathy with the commonalty. Yet it may be replied that the mere coldness of Anglican services was enough to drive the poor man from the churches, especially as the poor are shoved back from the good seats and forced to take refuge under the galleries. Cardinal Newman has said that the remembrance of Anglican services always made him "shiver and shudder;" what then must be the impression on the masses of the poor, who have to "shiver and shudder" on wooden benches? Now English "society" is to blame for this creation of dissent, through the driving of all warmth out of Anglicanism. Society in England has made religion quite as cold as are its own personal sympathies with the commonalty; and the commonalty have retorted by making a religion of their own, which they have evidently as much right to do as their superiors. Society, however, pretends to look down upon dissent as the religion of the uncultured, the low-conditioned; forgetting that its own pride, wretched formalism, shallow dogmatism, were the veritable progenitors of all dissent. Weak and compromising as was Anglicanism from the first, utterly illogical and invertebrate, the Church of England might have gathered the poor under its wing had society done its duty in Christian spirit. But cold formality in church services, *plus* demarcations in class; pewed up ease for respectable worshippers, *plus* draughty seats for the poor; and, speaking generally, isolation in the upper classes, *plus* desolation in the lower, these were the odious comparisons which filled England with dissent, and which have now left the Church of England to the comfortable. We need not look to theology—as it is understood in England—for the solution of the varieties of creed. Society has been responsible, if not for all the varieties, at least for the bitter feelings, of sectarianism.

If from Anglicanism we turn to Catholicity, we find society responsible in precisely the same way for a good half of the faults of the revolutionists. The Catholic religion cannot possibly beget dissent; its only possible alternative is infidelity; and so when the people become disgusted with society they fall back on a ferocious antagonism. Now, has society done its duty in any Catholic country in regard to the ingratiation of the commonalty? It has not. Neither naturally nor religiously has society done its best for either the wants or the aspirations of the masses. Society holds aloof.

Society, like St. Simon Stylites, sits upon the top of a pillar, but, unlike him, refuses to come down. Society either patronizes or ignores. It either helps in a way which gives offence, or else it declines to help at all. It carries its miserably narrow canons into every department of duty, into every atmosphere and groove of daily life. When in church it turns its back on the commonalty, and when out of church it does not even do that. Society is so cold in its attitude to the commonalty that it freezes up its life-blood—not by contact, for it does not touch it, but by presenting such a front of remoteness and of disesteem that the commonalty naturally “shudders and shivers.”

Why is it that the Popes, in their periodical encyclicals, have to lament always such a vast social decadence? To what causes are we to attribute the spread of the social maladies known as liberalism, free thought, and modern thought? It is clear that the blame must lie somewhere. We have to account for the fact that, even in Catholic countries, Catholicity may be mocked with impunity; for the fact that in non-Catholic countries Catholicity does not make its full way; for the fact that most governments, both Catholic and non-Catholic, legislate as if there were no Holy See. Is this the fault of the Catholic religion? It would be simply idiotic to say so. Is it the fault of the Catholic hierarchies? Here again common sense cries “absurd.” Is it the fault of the Catholic attitude of Catholic writers, of Catholic scientists, of the Catholic controversialists of any country? No human being could say that this is so. We have the admission of the huge majority of men of thought in all more or less Christian countries that “if there be any true Christianity it is the Catholic.” Whose fault is it then that the only true religion does not conquer the hearts of all Europe? We answer the fault is society's. And here we may be accused of being ourself democratic, if we take the part of democracy against society. Be it so. Every true Catholic is a democrat. Democracy, in a wrong sense, is revolution; but democracy, in a right sense, is Catholicity. The ideal of Catholicity is the ideal of the family, in which blood-relationship unites all. That is the whole of what is implied by “Catholic democracy,” whether its civil governments be absolute or republican. The form of the civil government is accidental, the principle of the Catholic family is essential. What sort of a Catholic family have we got throughout Europe in any sense in which the words can be used? Instead of society playing the part of the legitimate natural guardian of the lower or humbler orders of the people, society uses the people as it uses the soles of its boots, to keep it out of the mud of vulgar contact. Does society set an example of the virtues of modesty, of charity, of self-sacrifice, of tender sympathy? It sets an exam-

ple of vanity, of niggardliness, of self-indulgence, of the most supercilious disregard of inferiors. Does society live as carefully, yet as generously, as it can, that it may benefit a greater number of the needy? It lives, on the contrary, ostentatiously, while underpaying every hireling who works for it. Does society consider delicately how much rest, how much peace of mind, how much opportunity of improvement in leisure hours it can afford to its retainers, its dependents? Well, in England domestic servants are treated with much less natural sympathy than is shown to gentlemen's slaves in the Southern States. Does society busy itself about the hard lives of the working classes? about the millions of the unemployed or the overemployed? about the hundreds of thousands of seamstresses who are forced to work all through the night for a pittance so vile as to lead to crime? or about the hundreds of thousands of the sick and suffering who lie groaning, perhaps foodless, at its very doors? Society gives a cheque—which it knows will be misused—and, having done this, says, "What a saint am I!" Society cares only for the masses of the people just so far as the masses supply its wants, and would serenely obliterate the whole world of "nobodies," save only that if it did so where would be society?

The middle class take their cue from the highest class; and the lower middle take their cue from the upper middle; and so, half the vices, the hollowness, the fatuity, which are born of this impostor, society, descend downwards, and corrupt even the lowest class, who become, very naturally, revolutionists.

To attempt to separate religion from the natural order; to suppose that the people are to be made perfect by precept, by being preached at, talked at, written at, is about as wise as to suppose that a young gentleman will be a devoted son because his father always supplies him with a handsome Bible. Example is the only way by which the rich can teach the poor; and sympathy is the whole soul of education. But example and sympathy being just the two things that are wanting, the humbler classes are embittered and vitiated. The beautiful exceptions to the rule serve only to make the rule more easily and painfully demonstrable. A unit here and there has no more effect on the masses than one drop of rain on a parched field. We have to consider the whole world as made up mainly of the working classes, *plus* a sprinkling of the exotic called society. We have to remember that education, of all kinds, good and bad, is sown broadcast in every town, in every village. We have to estimate the forces, not only separately but sympathetically, which are at work from three distinct copious founts, known as religion, free press, free politics. These forces, always at work, have not one guiding helmsman, not one recognized authority which is obeyed, because the people are eclectic as

to their own authorities. Free thought has done away with authority, religious, political, even social. Modern thought is free thought, with a more abundant pretension of systematizing the vagaries of opinionism. Liberalism is the temper or disposition with which free thought or modern thought is cherished. Speaking naturally—that is, leaving Catholicity out of the question—there exists no adequate force of any kind in the world which can compete with these “popular” forces. One force there might be, and only one, and that would be the force called society. But society has killed itself. By its contempt for the lower orders it has made the lower orders its enemies; and by demoralizing its own self it has demoralized the lower orders, so that it can have no influence over the victims of its own example. Let us take three very obvious illustrations. Religiously society has set an example of worldliness which has converted the commonalty into scoffers. Socially society has set an example of selfishness which has converted the commonalty into haters. Intelligently society has set an example of loose reasoning which has converted the commonalty into freethinkers. The voluminous issue of works designed mainly to upset religion; the constant printing of articles aimed purposely at revelation; the complacent patronage of novelties intended to dig at the very roots of all that has been esteemed venerable by the whole world—the whole pagan world as well as the whole Christian world; these are some of the indulgences of modern society which have now ripened social revolution. Perhaps the very cruellest thing which society has done is the permitting, even the patronizing, of the onslaughts on revelation, which *was* the sole comfort of the poor. Even that comfort is now to be taken away. Society could not be content with merely neglecting the poor, it must pass on to destroy its religion. It has done so. Religious free thought is now as rampant in the cottage or in the hovel, in the workshop, in the market-place, in the tap-room, as it is in the best houses of London or Paris, or in the pages of some fashionable magazines. Society could not be quite happy till it had uprooted the sole joy of the humble classes, whom it regarded as uneducated, so it has done its very utmost to educate them in infidelity by permitting, even patronizing, infidel writings.

In this arraignment of society it is obvious that we are speaking only of what society *seems* to be to the whole world. As was said at the beginning, the imperium of social canons is so despotic over the votaries of fashion that each separate unit is engulfed in the huge ocean of vanity, selfishness, folly. A man is said to be “in society” when he associates with a type of persons who make exclusiveness—not eclecticism—their god. And this exclusiveness necessarily leads to such a worship of social gods as to remind one

of a Jossman before his idols. We have all read of the childish nonsense called court etiquette, which was the religion of Louis the Sixteenth's servile nobles. We have laughed at the account of his majesty getting out of bed, under the observation of court dignitaries of high degree; one page putting on the right slipper and another page putting on the left slipper; the royal right leg being stockinged and gartered by one gentleman and the royal left leg being stockinged and gartered by another gentleman; the day shirt, wrapped in a piece of white taffetas, being presented by a prince of the blood; and the bedstead on which his majesty had lain being bowed to or courtesied to by grandees. And all this unmanliness, this shameless puerility was the main religion of that fantastic aristocracy which carried its impertinence to its inferiors to such a point as to finally merit the guillotine. Now it is the tendency of the human mind to judge things by extremes, to conclude that what leads to the contemptible must spring from contemptible principles; hence the revolutionary party abhor every kind of rank, of social status, of liveried dignity, or plumed office, and this as much in the religious as in the civil order of life, as much in ecclesiastics as in laymen. We cannot blame them. Society has made rank to mean exclusiveness, influence to mean tyranny or impertinence, wealth to mean selfishness and ostentation, religion to mean the best seats in churches, charity to mean cheques given to a committee, sympathy to mean attending public meetings, piety to mean fondness for pretty ritual. Society is transfigured in abstractions. It is rapt in an ecstasy of the ideal. It never reaches any ideal which it proposes; but it looks upward too much to look downward. So that the commonalty, being left wholly to themselves, and seeing nothing to be admired in their superiors—except their round incomes and pleasant houses—proceed to evolve their own religion, their own literature, their own politics, their own Bradlaugh representatives in Parliament, and thus greatly shock society, which cannot conceive how it can be possible that the people can have such low tastes. Society having done its best to misuse every gift, and to adore itself for its splendid misuse, is quite angry with the common class which cannot bend the knee in homage to what it knows to be an imperium of shams.

That the commonalty have no rights save such as the laws can afford them, while society—which makes the laws—has divine rights, is one of those hideous fallacies which, though never put into writing, really govern half the conduct of society. Let us take one familiar example. There is a saying which is in the mouths of rich people continually: "The undeserving poor deserve no help; we should distinguish between the deserving and the undeserving; indiscriminate charity does harm." Now, without

stopping to question the justice of this view, but rather admitting that there is some common sense in it, let us ask, how is it that we hear so much of the "undeserving poor" but positively nothing of the "undeserving rich?" Dare any man refuse to dine with a rich man on the ground that he does not deserve his riches? Does any man ever purpose to take a fortune from a rich man on the ground that he drinks far too much champagne? Or does any one refuse to call on the Duke of Fitzbattleaxe on the ground that he is the idlest of inutilities? If, then, undeservingness is not accounted a sufficient reason for withholding fawning flunkeyism from the rich, why should undeservingness be accounted a sufficient reason for leaving a poor mechanic to starve? It will be observed that we are not pleading either for or against the claims which relatively are made by the two classes; we are merely holding up to scorn the shameless fallacy of society, which can only *punish* undeservingness in the poor. Again, if a man who is "in society" is frightfully extravagant, and keeps a hundred tradesmen waiting to their ruin, he is only said to be a little "too fast;" but the very people who eat his dinners, with the full knowledge that he is bankrupt and is bringing bitter misery on other people, would speak with horror of the poor mechanic who got tipsy on a shilling which belonged by prior right to a creditor. Again, if a man who is "in society" has the cunning to increase his wealth by speculations which are impoverishing to the humbler classes, he is esteemed to be a sharp or brilliant man; but the same sharp or brilliant man would give an employee into custody if he abstracted a single shilling from his purse. These examples will suffice to show the "moral theology" of society, which is so sublimely discriminating of the "deserving poor." As a matter of course the same looseness of "moral theology" travels downward through the middle and lower classes, so that it may be said that society is half responsible for the moral fallacies, for the personal cruelties, for the hard selfishness of the trading orders, who simply take their superiors for their patterns. And we are therefore justified in the assertion that the attitude of society is an attitude which is opposed to religion, inimical both to the doctrines and to the sentiments of the exquisite philosophy of Catholicity. If the world which is not "in society" were to frame its indictment or even its defence against society, the plea might be formulated as follows: You, society, are at the top of the tree and we are on the lower branches or on the ground. You shake off your rotten apples, so that they may fall on our heads, but you keep all your best fruits for yourselves. Your hypocrisy does not teach us to honor religion, which you use as a mantle of respectability; nor does your selfishness inspire us with an indomitable aspiration to

be wealthy in order that we may be good. Your loose moral theology has permeated all the social strata with the falsest conception of true honor, making a conventional justice to take the place of a divine charity which *should be* the fountain of every virtue. Your affectation of high manners is but heartless complacency, which enables you to snub the toiling mob; your superior education only perfects you in the science of keeping others at a convenient, remote distance. You set us the example of living gorgeously and delicately, so that we may be made to realize the shocking character of "Dives;" and, as to "Lazarus," well, perhaps you treat him as "undeserving," that he may enjoy "Abraham's bosom" all the more. You live up to your incomes to teach us economy; you dine exquisitely to teach us self-denial; you have six coronets on one carriage to demonstrate the vulgarity which is the unavoidable accident of high position; and you powder your servants' heads so as to show us that barbarism is the natural extreme of civilization. When in church you take the best seats for yourselves, so that we may see the sanctuary through the maze of your bright toilets; and on coming out of church you invite one another to luncheon, so that we may appreciate the true rendering of a counsel which we have mistaken, but which ought properly to have been translated in this way: "When thou givest a feast, ask the rich only to eat with you, but do not inquire whether the poor have sufficient dinner." You make your servants work all day and half the night that they may be perfected in the virtue of holy industry; and you lounge idly in carriages, not to save time in doing good or as being bent upon various charitable enterprises, but solely that you may teach the commonalty how much more healthy it is to walk, and how much more manly, and even womanly, it is to work. You do not care one button for any class but your own, so as to inspire us with holy horror of worldly pride; and you indulge in every midnight dissipation so as to teach us the virtue of regular hours. Meanwhile, the working world has to wait upon your pleasures, and to try to imitate the serenity of your minds. We will not add to the indictment, for were we to speak the whole truth, even *we* might possibly sin against charity.

Playful as all this is, and perhaps wildly superlative, it represents very nearly the sentiment of the revolutionists towards the class which is known as society. The mere fact that such a sentiment is highly colored—three-fourths being figure and one-fourth judgment—does not exonerate society from the charge of having begotten a contemptuous, a revolutionary repugnance. We have been considering all along—from certain tokens and certain accidents—what is the attitude of society towards religion, and we have spoken only what society *seems* to be to the world, not of the

individual merits of its members. Were it not in bad taste, it would be delightful to give the names of certain members of the English aristocracy—of certain high, Catholic members of society—whose example is as near perfection in the way of modesty and true nobility as the example of the majority is detestable. And it is true to add that where such example is manifested, the commonalty most profoundly appreciate it. There is one English nobleman whose delicacy of politeness and of modest, personal sympathy with the humblest, is a model for society to copy. But then society will not copy it. Society cannot copy it. Society is too grooved in its vulgar apprehensions to become magnanimous, modest, or real. A Redemptorist Father once observed to the present writer: "I should imagine that everybody goes through purgatory, because of the ineradicable selfishness of the human heart." And then, alluding to English magnificoes, he added, with an irony of which he was obviously himself quite unconscious: "We must not forget, when thinking of their salvation, that with God all things are possible." Yet such matters are too high for our present consideration. We are speaking only of usefulness in this world; and it must be owned that if there were no such thing as society the world would not be one whit the worse.

Oh, most shocking, plebeian view of society! Not the least in the world! It is not against the institution—society—that any sane man would raise his voice, any more than against the planetary system, because it takes precedence of tallow candles. It is against the cowardice of society, the unmanliness of society, the desperate thoughtlessness and selfishness of society, that every earnest man ought to protest. Society is unreal; because affecting to be pyramidal it is really abysmal in example. Consider the powers of wealth, the influence of rank, the force of example in the lofty! If society would spend just one-half of the time and one-half of the personal energy which it devotes to the cultus of mere fashion in evolving sober schemes for the elevation of "inferiors," and in practically putting them into execution, it is not too much to say that human miseries would be halved and social revolution would die out. The human mind is so constituted that it is convinced through its sentiment much more than it is convinced through its judgment. Now the only perfectly beautiful sentiment in the world is the sentiment of the Catholic faith. The sentiment of society is its exact opposite. If you wrote out in parallel columns the ideal of Catholic sentiment and the ideal of the sentiment of society, you would find that society is the mocking ape of every grace which, theoretically, makes Catholicity requisite. This is the *picture* of society, its *mise en scène*, before the eyes of the commonalty, the people, the vulgar. The individual mem-

bers of society are not to be confused with what is understood by "society." Society is an institution and an ideal. As an institution it must necessarily exist. As an ideal it must necessarily create itself. And its creation of its own ideal is also necessarily the creation of an infinity of good or harm in its inferiors. Here is society's responsibility. If it only injured itself, that would be its own affair; but in injuring the whole world it has a double responsibility, both as to this world and the next.

AMERICAN FREETHINKING.

Resolutions of the American Freethinkers' Convention, at Watkins Glen, N. Y., August, 1882.

IT is singular that American freethinking has made no original advance since the days of Thomas Paine. This results partly from the natural limitations of the system (if so chaotic a medley as free thought deserves the name), and partly from the unmetaphysical character of the American intellect. A practical people by eminence, we deem it loss of time and "brain-power," to speculate about questions which reason tells us must be settled, if at all, by facts and historical evidence. Revelation is simply a question of fact, to be proved, as all facts are, by competent testimony.

It is clear that to confuse the fact and record of revelation with the nature of its contents, is to be guilty of a sophism. Yet this is what Paine did, and what Ingersoll is doing. If I receive a letter from you, that fact stands by itself, and is not at all modified by the contents of the letter. The confusion which ensues from not keeping these two ideas separate, runs through all the answers and rejoinders which have wearied the readers of Ingersollian controversy. Even so acute a thinker as Judge Black allowed himself to be dragged by Ingersoll into all sorts of Biblical difficulties—the meaning of ancient Jewish sacrifices, for example. The simple question should be insisted upon: Is the Bible a divine revelation? as, to doubt whether Omniscience and Omnipotence *can* reveal himself, is irrational.

Once the decks are cleared of all geological, chronological, and philological rubbish, the action is short and decisive. The imme-