SOCIETY AND MISERY.

THAT there exists in this world misery and hardship is a fact of daily experience to each and every one of us. No matter in what state of life, high or low, rich or poor, the pangs of affliction and misfortune accompany in divers forms our course through time, and even in our final moments, with a last and most determined effort, lend their forces to hurl us into the uncertain depths of an eternal destiny.

Various as are the forms in which affliction and sorrow cross the path of man, just as variously is their origin interpreted by him, but least of all do we find him attribute the responsibility for human misery to the frailty and evil inclinations of his own nature, and few there are who trace its source to the sin of Adam, the first frail member of our sinful race, foremost to cause, and first to feel the effects of, human woe and sufferings.

Among the many malcontents who are ever striving to excite a movement against the existing state of things, and who taint their native atmosphere with loud-mouthed revolutionary utterances, calculated to arouse the minds of the ignorant, there are not wanting those of higher talents who, through some petty self-interest, a morbid desire for notoriety, or an erroneous conception of the true relation of things, prostitute those talents in an attempt to prejudice the minds of men against the present order of things by falsely arraigning society and its laws as the author of human misery and sin.

Foremost among these we find in the present century two French writers, Eugene Sue and Victor Hugo, especially the latter, the central figure in modern French literature, who, in his chief work, *Les Misérables*, in form a novel, but in reality a satire on the social condition of man, makes a violent attack upon society as the cause of all the evils that befall its individual members. This man, even in youth, unable to discuss dispassionately the suffering of others, when he had himself experienced its pangs by expatriation and misfortune, became a relentless foe of what he supposed to be the cause, that is, the present state of society and its mode of dealing with its citizens, and he gives utterance to his sentiments in the most forcible manner in the above-mentioned novel.

He begins this book with a violent outburst against society, and justifies its existence in words to the following effect: "As long as there exists, by the facts of our laws and customs, a social condemnation, which creates artificially in the midst of our civilization a hell, and which complicates by a human fatality that destiny which is divine; aslong as the three problems of the age, the degradation of man by pauperism, the fall of woman through hunger, and the mental atrophy of the child through ignorance, are not solved; as long as, in certain quarters, social asphyxia is possible; and, from a point of view still more elevated, as long as there exists on earth ignorance and misery, books of the nature of the present one will be useful." Thus he proclaims his doctrine, which makes society and its laws the source of all the evils of man, and which calls for the abolition of the proletariat, as the cause of misery and social degradation.

The effect of books of this nature, needful though Hugo may think them, were they written daily till the crack of doom, would be to augment, rather than diminish, the miseries of humanity. His doctrine has been long since judged and condemned. He tries to make away with individual responsibility, and in its place to substitute social responsibility. Because ignorance and misery exist in society he tries to undermine society as the cause of them. To its abuses he attributes the poverty of men and the degradation of women. By society he says man is held down, and if born in obscurity, he cannot, by any energy of his own, resist the social tide, and over-step the limits of his poverty. So, impelled by prejudice, he hesitates not to give assertion, not only to gross exaggeration, but to open and notorious falsehood. As long as woman will be led by vanity and the desire for pleasure, into sin and corruption, can society prevent her degradation? He seeks to remedy the misery of man by the removal