

III.

The blessings which the society of St. Vincent de Paul showers upon the individual and upon the family, are diffused abroad upon human society in general : for society is not in reality a matter apart from the individuals of whom it is composed. The good done to any portion, interest therefore the whole of the society, and re-acts with benign influences for the well being of the great social body.

But, on the other hand, from the disease that attacks partially any individual member, there spring forth diseases that soon afflict the whole body : social diseases. Then the whole of society languishes and suffers ; it is seized with a general restlessness and fever that spread themselves everywhere and yet have their seat nowhere. Sometimes it is seized with frightful convulsions that presage its restoration to a healthy life, or its final destruction.

These great social maladies spring from three sources : from material misery, from moral misery, and from the antagonism of the social elements which is but the result of the other two combined.

Let us examine, consecutively and in detail, each of those three social evils, that by an exact knowledge of the danger, we may be able to point out that sure and efficacious remedy which such a danger demands.

Material poverty. In a social aspect, the evil of poverty becomes a vast and hideous sore. We sometimes hear it called *pauperism*. I detest the expression ; it savours of ambition, it exhibits the frigid accuracy of science rather than the picture of a bleeding wound. Let it pass, however, for the name is of little moment after all. But those who look upon poverty either as a social cancer, that must yield to resources of art, or as a problem which true science has declared itself powerless to solve, are mistaken as to the real essence of the matter.

Pauperism is neither a cancer nor a problem, as they fancy. In the order of nature, since the first sin, poverty is a necessary consequence of the diversity, and variety of the talents, capacity, qualities, defects, and even of the chances, that Providence distributes at will. Man must serve man, and be served by man ; and without the promptings of want, the painful but indispensable task of social service would never be carried out. In the supernatural order, pauperism is neither a cancer nor a problem ; it is a grace,