

author hurls his invectives against poverty, ignorance, and misery; he could not have chosen three classes which have a more numerous representation in the world, and hence from the first he was assured of a large following. The poor, the ignorant, the miserable are the ubiquitous, I might almost say indispensable, ingredients of every state, of every society. They are ever ready to follow blindly the banner that leads to wealth and distinction, and, as a consequence, eagerly embrace any movement which has for its object, avowed or disguised, the overthrow of the existing state of things. This is a lamentable, though none the less certain, fact, and of this fact Victor Hugo, whether designedly or otherwise I know not, took advantage in the composition of *Les Misérables*.

The whole work is a satire on society; it is more, — it is an indictment against society for alleged wrongs perpetrated on its individual members; the trial takes place before a prejudiced tribunal and jury — popular opinion, — and the evidence brought forth is one-sided and false. Victor Hugo charges society with degrading men by pauperism, women by hunger, and children by having them brought up in ignorance, and he holds that society owes support to the first, protection to the second, and education to the third. Hence the apology which he makes for writing this book "As long as there exists in the world ignorance or misery, books of the nature of the present one are useful." Judged by their effects, their utility is of a rather doubtful character.

Let us see how Victor Hugo supports the terrible accusation that he lays at the door of society. He takes particular cases, produces partial witnesses, and hence arrives at false conclusions. The romance rests upon the sufferings of Jean Valjean, who, Victor Hugo would have us believe has been condemned to spend nineteen years on the galleys for stealing a loaf of bread to keep himself from starving. Thus society is represented as condemning a man for an act of which he was not morally guilty, and as branding him with the infamous name of *convict*, a

stain which, so Hugo says, years of penance could not, or at least, did not efface.

Now the grave error of such a charge against society is at once apparent. Such a case of extreme hardship and injustice as that of Jean Valjean happens, if at all, very rarely, and then rather by accident than through design. Yet the poet treats it as an everyday occurrence, and he unsparingly administers the lash to society for every individual circumstance in which any member suffers. This is unfair even on the admission that society is responsible for the general existence of misery and destitution in the world. But no such admission can be allowed; hence the charge is not only unfair, but it is unjust and false in every particular.

It was well said that "misery is the outcome of our own shortcomings."

Society places within easy reach of everyone the means by which he may support his family, if not in elegance, at least in comfort. She furnishes him with the necessaries for the protection of his wife and the education of his children.

Of course he is not expected to sit idly by with his head between his hands and growl and grumble because the good things of the world are not his. He must be up and doing. But if he neglect to avail himself of the opportunities offered, why should society be blamed for the consequent suffering? If, through his indifference or absolute perversity, his family be raised in poverty, hunger, and squalor, why should society be held responsible? To arrive at such a conclusion is absolutely unwarranted by the facts of the case, and yet it is upon these premises that the author of *Les Misérables* bases his charge against society.

Mr. Hugo falls into another grave error — an error common to writers of his stamp. He carefully avoids any reference to the *cause* of the many social evils which he so violently attacks. Hence he cannot, or at least he does not give any solution of the various knotty and troublesome problems of modern socialism. He suggests no means by which these evils might be remedied or redressed. He contents himself with affirming