

THE ORIGIN OF SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROGRESS.

(A Lecture delivered at Napier by the Very Rev. Theophilus Le Menant des Chesnais, S.M.)

PART I.—ON THE ORIGIN OF SOCIETY.

SOCIETY is a collection of individual men, having the same origin, living under the same laws, and tending to the same destiny. This definition is admitted by all. The only difficulty is to ascertain, What is the origin and obligation of the laws which unite together the various members of the State? In order to be perfectly clear and accurate, we shall first state the system of rationalists, and afterwards we shall explain the Christian theory on the origin of society. Rationalists affirm the autonomy or absolute independence of human reason. "Man," they say, "is the Master of his Destiny. By nature he is essentially free, and cannot accept any other obligations but those which he is pleased willingly to impose upon himself. If anyone has any authority over him, it is simply because he has given it to them, by a spontaneous abdication of his natural freedom and independence." Rousseau, in his *Contrat Social*, says that man by his own free will creates the just and the unjust. (*Contrat Social*, c. VI.) He adds that, "A perfect State would be that where all the rights, principles, and liberties of every individual man would be protected by common agreement and united efforts; a model society would be that in which everyone agreeing with everyone, one and all would maintain their independence, in order ever to remain as free as possible." "*Une forme d'association, qui défende et protège de toute la force commune, la personne et les biens de chaque associé, et par laquelle chacun s'unissant à tous, n'obéisse pourtant qu'à lui-même, reste aussi libre qu'auparavant.* (*Contrat Social*, c. VI.) According to Rousseau's theory, everything emanates from the individual man, every social institution, every regulation of the State depends entirely upon the will of every one, and the general will of all, and no one is obliged to submit to the laws of the State except he choose, and find it expedient to do so. In spite of all laws, say rationalists, if I am by nature absolutely free and independent, and my own master, I can never entirely abdicate my liberty, and I shall always preserve the right to do what I like; to give up my liberty would be suicide; and I can no more cease to be free than I can cease to exist. It is true that, pressed by his adversaries, who affirmed that his system opened the gate to perpetual revolutions and changes, Rousseau replied that, "When the people have spontaneously and freely delegated and communicated to the State their authority, they cannot take it back." "*Lorsque le peuple a délégué le pouvoir il ne peut le reprendre.*" But Rousseau here is illogical; for if power come from the people, the people who have given it can change it, or take it away altogether, whenever they please. If a private individual cannot give up his liberty without being guilty of suicide, neither can the people—composed of individual men—abdicate its freedom. The universal suffrage now existing is the consequence of Rousseau's theory—but who does not see that the universal suffrage of to-day may be changed to-morrow. The men who are nominated to-day to carry out certain measures may be replaced to-morrow by men holding quite different views, who will destroy everything their predecessors had established. As M. Gambetta said in the Legislative Assembly:—"Universal suffrage cannot abdicate its own rights; it is the collection of the wills of the people, every moment one will dies, and is replaced by another whose views are quite different. The universal suffrage can no more abdicate its sovereignty than every citizen can abdicate his liberty of thought." "*Le suffrage universel ne peut pas plus abdiquer sa souveraineté que le citoyen ne peut abdiquer sa liberté.*" (M. Gambetta, April 5, 1870.) Rationalism is essentially a rebellion against the authority of God. Man takes the place of God, and pretends to be his own master. He is the sovereign lord of all things. He is in this world simply to enjoy himself. He makes all other creatures instruments of his own happiness. How, I ask you, can a man who believes in such a theory give up his inclinations, and sacrifice himself to submit to another? Who has a right to dictate to him? Who has the power to control him? A superior authority could do so. But how can a man who admits of no authority but his own be brought to submission? Let us suppose that we have hundreds, thousands, millions of such men. How would it be possible to govern them? What would become of the world? With the rationalistic theory no social peace is possible, no order, no law. With man bent upon the gratification of what he calls his legitimate aspirations, there is no difference between good and evil. Might is right, and the strongest is justified to crush and oppress the weakest. In a society where all men are equal by right of nature, and have the same right to gratify their passions, the destiny of every one would be in proportion to his attractions; and when two or more men having the same attractions would be an obstacle to one another, the weaker of the two would have to yield to the stronger, for, according to the system of Rousseau, it would be madness to sacrifice our own pleasure for the sake of another, if we can succeed in obtaining what we desire by any means whatsoever. If Freethinkers formed the bulk of society men would be continually fighting and tearing one another to pieces, and those who would be successful in destroying their opponents would enjoy themselves according to their desires, without paying the least attention to the sufferings of others. Let us see now what Christianity teaches us concerning the Origin of Society. The Christian doctrine on this point may thus be briefly summarised: Man comes from God, and is to return to God from whom he comes. The various societies in the midst of which he lives have also God for their author. It is by the union of intellects and wills under the guidance of legitimate authority, that society promotes the interests of every private individual, and of all men in general. Every legitimate power is from God. All those in authority are the representatives of God, and in whatever they command in harmony with God's Will they must be obeyed as God Himself. There are three principal societies on earth;—the Religious Society, the Civil Society and the Domestic Society; or, if you prefer Homē, the State and the Church. Firstly, the

Domestic Society. The end of the domestic society is to perpetuate the human race. Parents are the head of this society. They are the visible representatives of God; they are to bring up their children, according to God's will, for a three-fold end. First, that they may be useful and exemplary members of the State; consequently, parents are obliged to give their children such instruction as may fit them for the requirements of the State. They are obliged to inspire them with a true patriotic spirit, a sincere love for their native land, and the country they inhabit, and a great esteem for, and submission to, all civil rulers, in whatever they justly prescribe. Secondly, parents having received their children from God, are to bring them up for God. They are to teach them how to know, love and serve Him. They are to inspire them with a great hatred of evil, and an ardent love of virtue, an humble submission to Christ and His Church, to the end that they may lead virtuous lives on earth and be admitted one day by Jesus into heaven with the Holy Angels and Saints. Children on the other hand, are to be taught to love, honour and obey their parents, as God Himself whom they represent, in whatever they tell them, which is not evidently contrary to His will and His Divine Son. By means of the domestic society God rules over every home. Secondly, the Civil Society. In the first place, let us examine what is the origin of the State authority.—The Church inspired by Christ, teaches that civil power is from God either mediately or immediately, but particular forms of Government are left to no man's pleasure. The germ of the State undoubtedly existed in the family in primeval times. When families were multiplied, social organisation became necessary to maintain the equilibrium among the various families, to protect the lives and property, and defend the privileges of all the members of every individual family in particular and of all in general. Every civil society when legitimately established must be considered as a Divine institution. All civil rulers duly appointed must be obeyed in everything that is not evidently contrary to the Divine law, whether they be personally good or bad, Christian or heathen. However, the authority of civil rulers is limited by God's will. If Civil Rulers were to command that which God forbids, or to forbid that which He commands, as, in so doing, they would be acting without authority—to listen to them, would be to become partaker of their rebellion against God, an accomplice of their wrong. In such a case passive resistance is not only a mere right, but an imperative duty. No right appertaining to civil rulers is violated, no injury is done them, by encroaching upon a domain which was not their own.—They have not acted as legitimate superiors. It is no contempt of them to disregard their command in order to remain faithful to God whom civil rulers, as well as the least of their subjects, are obliged to acknowledge as their Lord. But no violent measures are permitted by private authority. The only thing to be done is to protest against the usurpation of the rights of God, or the violation of His law, and silently turn to God by prayer and ask for His divine assistance. If some Catholics have held in this respect dangerous doctrines and committed grave crimes—they were by no means the result of Catholic principles. (See "Catholic Church and Christian State," by Joseph Hergenrother.) The civil power. What is now the authority of the State? As far as the material aims of life and the well-being of society are concerned the civil authority is second to none. It is the highest of its kind. The mission of the State is—1st, to promote material prosperity; 2nd, to maintain peace; 3rd, to protect life and property; 4th, to enforce obedience to the laws; lastly, to give to all, the liberty and facility to serve God according to their conscience. Statesmen are to devote themselves to the people, and the people are, for the sake of God, to esteem, honour, and defend their civil superiors. By means of the civil society God rules over every nation. Let us now turn to the Church. Both the spiritual and temporal power, the Church and the State come from God; both are indispensable to mankind and appointed to work together in peace, mutually aiding one another. But the end of the Church, or religious Society, is distinct from that of the State. It is, 1st, to teach mankind the laws of God; 2nd, to administer to all the sacraments; 3rd, to defend the truth when it is attacked, and to assist all men to reach their eternal destiny, and obtain the reward prepared for them in heaven, if they are faithful in fulfilling their various duties. So long as it is not denied that, this life is to be referred to a future life; so long as the immortality of the soul, and the final destiny of man beyond the grave, are maintained, and so long as it is conceded that the aim of the Church is to prepare and direct mankind for this destiny, it must likewise be conceded, that in questions relating to the higher end, eternal salvation, the civil power must be subordinate to the spiritual, even as the end of one is subordinate to the other. (Catholic Church and Christian State, II.) Christian rulers should look upon the Church as a safe-guard of the welfare and prosperity of the State, and always honour and help her. Spiritual matters alone are directly subject to the Church, but in so far as temporal matters are opposed to the supernatural end, or are necessary for its attainment, the Church has to correct and guide the civil power, when it turns aside from the right paths of Divine Law and endangers religion. The Church cannot abolish the laws of temporal rulers but she can declare them dangerous to salvation and warn her children to remain loyal to God and true to their faith. How could the Church guide us safely to salvation, if she could not warn us against whatever may endanger it? By means of the spiritual society all souls are united with God, and with one another, God rules over all nations; all obey His law, keep His commandments, and try to promote His glory. Home, the State, and the Church are the three golden chains which unite men to God and God to men. Such is the Christian idea of society—far different from the idea of Rousseau and other rationalists, who, by making society depend exclusively upon the people, deprive it of every character of stability, and expose it to perpetual variations and changes, and throw open the door to every possible disorder. But let us study more completely the mission of the three great human societies. Man cannot find his happiness in himself or in any earthly thing. God alone can make him truly happy. Religion is to lead men to God. In every society the spiritual order is the foundation of all. Imagine a society