

others and should not excel: if it is not part of our religion and of God, then it is not of value to us. In my experience—and that is not a very lengthy one—I have marked the change in feeling that has come over the nations in regard to this marriage question. When I was a lad it was very unusual for a man to take to himself a wife without the sanction of religion. All the marriages of Old England had to be celebrated in the Established Church, and a record was kept of them there, and of the posterity issuing from that marriage, and when these died, their death also was recorded, so that there was an unbroken chain of genealogical evidence in that respect often of immense value for legitimacy and other purposes. But by and by the spirit of religious liberty, as it was called, began to spread. It is but a hundred years ago, or a little over, since Methodism was established—the now dominant, or next to dominant religious organization of Christendom. It began in a small way; but it increased and spread abroad; it multiplied its converts, its ministers and its chapels; it became a potent factor, in a political sense, in the nation, and it was necessary that political parties should conciliate and cater to this increasingly wealthy religious organization; and when the Methodists wanted marriages performed in their own, instead of going to the Established Churches, their power and influence, the influence of wealth and numbers, their power as a political factor of the nation, gave them favor in the eyes of the ministry and the legislature. By and by they were allowed the privilege of marrying in their own churches and chapels, and by their own ministers. And as it was with this body, so it was with the smaller bodies, the satellites thrown off

and revolving around the great planets of religious organization in that country. And then as this so-called religious liberty increased in spirit, skepticism began to grow in the minds of many in regard to religious doctrines. There were thousands of people that had no more faith in Methodism than in the Established Church, or in Catholicism. They had more faith in Tom Paine, and Voltaire, and Rosseau, and such men as Ingersoll, and their liberty made it appear plausible to them that there was no necessity to go to any church, or seek the aid of any minister, or have any religious ceremony in connection with their own marriage or the marriage of their families. So provision was made for this ever increasing host of skeptics, and finally it was decreed that marriage was nothing but a civil contract, not needing the service of a minister, or the sanction of religion, but requiring simply that it could be entered into after due notion was given, in a public place and not before a worshiping assembly. In such cases marriage was entered into as "a civil contract," and when this stage was reached, inasmuch as it was but a civil contract, "only this and nothing more," the next step of necessity was, that it could be dissolved. Where is there a contract of this nature that cannot be dissolved? If I am engaged by an employer we can dissolve the engagement whenever either of us is dissatisfied. And so this feature was applied to marriage; the laws of divorce were introduced, and that which was once considered discreditable, difficult and expensive, and would have been sounded from one end of the land to the other as such, became common and unworthy of remark.

Thus the bonds of society are