

CHAPTER XXIII.

LUXURY.

Dick Turpin is blamed—suppose—by some plain-minded person, for consuming the means of other people's living. "Nay," says Dick to the plain-minded person, "observe how beneficently and pleasantly I spend whatever I get!"

"Yes, Dick," persists the plain-minded person, "but how do you get it?"

"The question," says Dick, "is insidious and irrelevant."—*Ruskin.*

One sack sufficed each farmer,
Well used to frugal fare ;
But the lord waxed fat,
And, spite of that,
Might not consume his share.

Then spake that noble landlord,
"My capital is large,
And I'll spend a hunk
On a menial flunk',
To flunkey at my charge."

—*The Clarion.*

This woman, ambitious and vain, thinks to enhance her own value by loading herself with gold, with precious stones, and a thousand other adornments. In order to deck her in braver array the whole nation exhausts itself; the arts groan and sweat in the laborious service; the whole range of industry wears itself out.—*Bossuet.*

There is no country in which the whole annual produce is employed in maintaining the industrious. The idle everywhere consume a great part of it; and according to the different proportions in which it is annually divided between these two different orders of people, its ordinary or average value must either annually increase or diminish, or continue the same from one year to another. . . .—*Adam Smith.*

In this chapter I shall deal with the subject of luxury, and shall endeavour to make clear to you the fact that the luxury of the rich is a direct cause of the misery of the poor.

It is very important that you should understand this matter, for it has been often and grossly confused by the statements of foolish or dishonest men.

It was held for a long time that the rich man in spending his money conferred a benefit upon the poor.

This error has long since been abandoned even by most political economists, and is now only uttered by very ill-informed or unintelligent people.

Amongst these is His Grace the Duke of Argyll, who, in a letter to Mr. John Ogilvey, coolly says:—

But there are at least some things to be seen which are in the nature of facts and not at all in the nature of speculation or mere opinion. Amongst these some become clear from the mere clearing up of the meaning of words such as "the unemployed." Employment in this sense is the hiring of manual labour for the supply of human wants. *The more these wants are stimulated and multiplied the more widespread will be the inducement to hire. Therefore, all outcries and prejudices against the progress of wealth and of what is called "luxury" are nothing but outcries of prejudice against the very sources and fountains of all employment.* This conclusion is absolutely certain.

The italics are mine. The Duke seems to suppose that the people can only live by hiring each other out to labour. He reminds me of Edward Carpenter's Island, "Where the inhabitants eked out a precarious living by taking in each other's washing." The Duke is quite right in saying that the more the wants of the rich are stimulated the more employment there will be for the people. But as that can only mean that the more the rich devour and waste the harder the people will have to work, I fail to see that the "interests" of the people lie in stimulating the idlers to greater gluttony and extravagance. The fact is His Grace, like Master Turpin in John Ruskin's dialogue, quoted at the head of this chapter, has omitted to explain *how the rich get their money*, and from *whom* they get it.

But the Duke of Argyll is not alone in his ignorance. The Press we have always with us, and from Pressmen, writing for large daily papers, I quote three statements, all false and all foolish.

The first is that "luxury of the rich finds useful employment for the poor."

The second that "the expenditure of the rich confers upon the poor the two great blessings of work and wages."

The third that "a rich man cannot spend his money without finding employment for vast numbers of people who without him must starve."

These statements, you will see, all amount to the same thing. The intelligent Pressmen who uttered them supposed that the rich man spent his own money, whereas he really spends the money of other people; that he found useful work for a number of men, whereas it is impossible to find a man useful work in making useless things; and that the men employed by the rich must starve were it not

for his help, whereas if it were not for his hindrance they would all be doing useful instead of useless work.

All the things made or used by man may be divided into two classes, under the heads of necessities and luxuries.

I should include under the head of necessities all those things which are necessary to the highest form of human life.

All those things which are not necessary to the highest form of human life I should call luxuries, or superfluities.

For instance, I should call food, clothing, houses, fuel, books, pictures, and musical instruments necessities; and I should call diamond ear-rings, race-horses, and broughams luxuries.

Now, it is evident that all those things, whether luxuries or necessities, are made by labour. Diamond rings, loaves of bread, grand pianos and flat irons, do not grow on trees. They must be made by the labour of the people, and it is very clear that the more luxuries a people produce the fewer necessities they will produce.

If a community consists of ten thousand people, and if nine thousand people are making bread and one thousand are making jewellery, it is evident that there will be more bread than jewellery.

If in the same community nine thousand make jewellery and only one thousand make bread, there will be more jewellery than bread.

In the first case there will be food enough for all, though jewels be scarce. In the second case the people must starve, although they wear diamond rings on all their fingers.

In a well-ordered state no luxuries would be produced until there were enough necessities for all.

Robinson Crusoe's first care was to secure food and shelter. Had he neglected his goats and his raisins and spent his time in making shell-boxes he would have starved. Under those circumstances he would have been a fool. But what are we to call the delicate and refined ladies who wear satin and pearls, while the people who earn them lack bread?

Take a community of two men. They work upon a plot of land and grow grain for food. By each working six hours a day they produce enough food for both.

Now take one of those men away from the cultivation of the land and set him to work for six hours a day at the making of bead necklaces. What happens?

This happens—that the man who is left upon the land must now work twelve hours a day. Why? Because, although his companion has ceased to grow grain he has not ceased to *eat bread*. Therefore, the man who grows the grain must now grow grain enough for two. That is to say, that the more men are set to the making of luxuries, the heavier will be the burden of the men who produce necessities.

But in this case, you see, the farmer does get some return for his extra labour. That is to say, he gets half the necklaces in exchange for half his grain; for there is no rich man.

Suppose next a community of three—one of whom is a landlord, while the other two are farmers.

The landlord takes half the produce of the land in rent, but does no work. What happens?

We saw just now that the two workers could produce enough grain in six hours to feed two men for one day. Of this the landlord takes half. Therefore, the two men must now produce four men's food in one day, of which the landlord will take two, leaving the workers each one. Well, if it takes a man six hours to produce a day's keep for one, it will take him twelve hours to produce a day's keep for two. So that our two farmers must now work twice as long as before.

But now the landlord has got twice as much grain as he can eat. He therefore proceeds to *spend* it, and in spending it he "finds useful employment" for one of the farmers. That is to say, he takes away one of the farmers off the land and sets him to building a house for the landlord. What is the effect of this?

The effect of it is that the one man left upon the land has now to find food for all three, and in return gets nothing.

Consider this carefully. All men must eat, and here are two men who do not produce food. To produce food for one man takes one man six hours. To produce food for three men takes one man eighteen hours. The one man

left on the land has, therefore, to work three times as long, or three times as hard as he did at first. In the case of the two men we saw that the farmer did get his share of the bead necklaces, but in the case of the three men the farmer gets nothing. The luxuries produced by the man taken from the land are enjoyed by the rich man.

The landlord takes from the farmer two-thirds of his produce, and employs another man to help him to spend it.

We have here three classes:—

1. The landlord who does no work.
2. The landlord's servant who does work for the benefit of the landlord.
3. The farmer who produces food for himself and the other two.

Now, all the peoples of Europe, if not of the world, are divided into those three classes.

In my lecture on luxury I showed these things by diagrams. We will use a diagram representing a community of ten men supporting a figure representing ten men's food. Thus:—

TEN MEN'S FOOD.

All the men represented here by stars are employed in making necessaries, and the figure they support is the amount of their labour.

Now what I want you to clearly understand is that although you take away one of those ten men and set him to other work you do not take him away from the consumption of food. He has still to be fed, and he must be fed by the men who produce food. Suppose, then, that we take away seven of our ten men; that we make one of them a Chief, and six of them the Chief's servants, the figure will be left thus:

TEN MEN'S FOOD.

The burden is the same, *ten men's food*; but the bearers are fewer.

C is a jeweller, and sets diamonds for B. Where does B get the money to pay him? he gets the money from A. It is clear, then, that A is keeping both B and C.

Now we are told upon the authority of Mulhall and Giffen—see Fabian tract, “Facts for Socialists,” price one penny—that the division of the national earnings is as follows:—

	Millions.
Rent	200
Interest	250
Salaries and profits of middle-class	350
Wages of workers	450
	1,250

The population is about 36 millions. The annual income about 1,250 million pounds. One-third of the people take two-thirds of the wealth, and the other two-thirds of the people take one-third of the wealth.

That is to say that 24 millions of workers produce 1,250 millions of wealth and give 800 millions of it to 12 millions of idlers and non-producers.

This means that each worker works one-third of his time for himself, and two-thirds of his time for other people.

This looks bad enough, but it is not the worst. Amongst the 24 millions of the working-classes there are vast numbers of non-producers. There are millions of children and of women who produce nothing, and there must be millions of male “workers” who are engaged in producing superfluities. Canon Girdlestone, in his pamphlet, “Society Classified,” says:—

It has been shown (by Alexander Wylie, in his “Labour, Leisure, and Luxury”) that, even if we give a liberal extension of meaning to the terms “necessaries” and “comforts” of life, so large a proportion as four-elevenths of the entire working population of this country are engaged in producing what, in contradistinction to the above, must properly be classified as “luxuries,” *i.e.*, commodities, &c., such as to healthy minds in healthy bodies are the merest superfluities. And if, as probably is the case, most of these embodiments of the “services” (or, as Dr. Thring calls them, “the stored-up life”) of others are purchased by “non-workers,” and paid for in “money” only, the bad effect of the transaction taken as a whole cannot be trifling or contemptible!

I should very much like to see society classified. If it

were classified, and the number producing necessaries and the number producing luxuries were clearly shown, I think we should find that every adult male now engaged in producing necessaries is supporting about twenty people.

My Lady Dedlock "finds useful employment" for Crispin, the shoemaker. She employs him to make Court slippers for her. Let us examine this transaction.

First, where does my lady get her money? She gets it from her husband, Sir Leicester Dedlock, who gets it from his tenant farmer, who gets it from the agricultural labourer, Hodge.

Then she employs Crispin to make Court slippers, and pays him with Hodge's money.

But if Crispin were not employed making shoes for my Lady he would be making boots for Hodge, or for the children of Hodge.

Whereas, now, Hodge cannot buy boots because he has no money, and he has no money because my Lady Dedlock has taken it.

Or my lady orders a silk ball dress from Mrs. Mantilini. For this also she pays with money earned by Hodge, and meanwhile what kind of an old rag is worn by Mrs. Hodge?

Again, as bearing on this question of my Lady Dedlock's finding useful labour. I quote from a letter on the "Scarcity of Dairymaids," in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Dairymaids are wanted, and dairymaids cannot be found. Then again a northern factor says in *The North British Agriculturist* that he cannot get dairymaids—though he offers £22 a year and board. The writer in the *Pall Mall* asks:—

What would the "Special Commissioner" say about "Life in our Villages" if the £10,000,000 we paid last year for foreign butter, the £4,000,000 for cheese, the £4,000,000 for margarine, and the £4,000,000 for eggs had been kept at home, giving employment to thousands—tens and hundreds of thousands—of our own countrymen and women, instead of foreigners?

Don't you think it would be an improvement if some of the "usefully" employed domestic servants and milliners, weavers, spinners, and flower girls in the pay of Lady Dedlock were set to work to save the £22,000,000 spent on foreign dairy produce, because there are no hands here to produce these needed things?

Let us try to get an idea of the cost of some of those luxuries which the Duke of Argyll defends.

A couple of years back a lady was summoned to the County Court for refusing to pay £90, a year's rent to a furrier for the storage of her furs. The furs were valued at £6,000.

To provide those furs a number of workers, including trappers, hunters, curers, sailors, merchants, and shop-men had been "employed."

Supposing that each of these people was paid at the rate of £2 a week, that means:

The labour of one man at £2 a week for 3,000 weeks. Which means that sixty years of working life had been spent on the furs. Now, taking twenty years as the average duration of a man's working life, we find that an amount of time equal to the working lives of three men had been *lost to the nation* for the sake of an idle woman's vanity.

We read, quite commonly, that at Lady Smalltork's reception the cut flowers used for decoration cost £1,000.

Estimate the average wages of all the people engaged in growing and carrying the flowers at £1 a week, we find that the sum reaches a thousand weeks, or twenty years, that is the equivalent of the whole labour of a man's life spent in finding flowers with which to decorate an idle woman's room for one night.

Take a larger instance. There are mansions in England, Ducal Mansions, which, in building and decoration, have cost a quarter of a million.

Average the wages of all the men engaged in the erection and fitting of such a house at 30s. a week. We shall find that the mansion has "found employment" for 160 men for 20 years. Now while those men were engaged on that mansion they produced no necessaries for themselves. But they *consumed* necessaries, and those necessaries were produced by the same people who found the money for the Duke to spend. That is to say that the builders were kept by the producers of necessaries, and the producers of necessaries were paid for the builders' keep with money which they, the producers of necessaries, had earned for the Duke.

The conclusion of this sum being that the producers of necessaries had been compelled to support one hundred and

sixty men, and their wives and children, for twenty years; and for what?

That they might build *one house* for the occupation of *one idle man*.

If this should meet the eye of His Grace the Duke of Argyll, he will perhaps be able to see that he has made a slight mistake in telling the workers to stimulate the wants of the rich.

There was once a wise man who said the happiness of a people consists not in the abundance of their riches, but in the *fewness* of their wants.

His Grace of Argyll has found us a new reading. The happiness of a people consists in the multitude of their wants.

I should advise the people to devote all their labour to satisfying their own wants; not to stimulating the wants of others. Men cannot exist upon wants; they exist upon food. And it is simple enough, even for a Duke to see, that the more wants a people have the harder will they have to work to supply them. And when one class cultivates the wants and the other class labours to satisfy them, why——?

What a lot of foggy thinkers there are in the world to be sure. Just look for a moment at this pamphlet. It is called "The Functions of Wealth," and is by W. H. Mallock. Here is a pretty sentence:—

That wealth, which is envied by so many, and which is looked upon doubtfully by so many more, so far from being the cause of want amongst thousands, is at this moment the cause of the non-starvation of millions.

Which means that it is the rich idlers who keep the working poor, and not the working poor who keep the idle rich.

Mr. Mallock, in another place—he is explaining that it is an error to think one man's wealth is another's want—says:—

Let us take, for instance, a large and beautiful cabinet, for which a rich man of taste pays two thousand pounds. The cabinet is of value to him, for reasons which we will consider presently; as possessed by him it constitutes a portion of his wealth. But how could such a piece of wealth be distributed? Not only is it incapable of physical partition and distribution,

but, if taken from the rich man and given to the poor man, the latter is not the least enriched by it. Put a priceless buhl cabinet into an Irish labourer's cottage, and it will probably only add to his discomforts; or, if he finds it useful, it will only be because he keeps his pigs in it. A picture by Titian, again, may be worth thousands, but it is worth thousands only to the man who can enjoy it.

Now, isn't that a precious piece of nonsense? There are two things to be said about that rich man's cabinet. The first is that it was made by some workman who, if he had not been so employed, might have been producing what *would* be useful to the poor. So that the cabinet has cost the poor something. The second is that a priceless buhl cabinet *can* be divided. Of course, it would be folly to hack it into shavings and serve them out amongst the mob; but if that cabinet is a thing of beauty and worth the seeing, it ought to be taken from the rich benefactor, whose benefaction consists in his having plundered it from the poor, and it ought to be put into a public museum where thousands could see it, and where the rich man could see it also if he chose. This, indeed, is the proper way to deal with all works of art, and this is one of the rich man's greatest crimes—that he keeps hoarded up in his house a number of things that ought to be the common heritage of the people.

Every article of luxury has to be paid for not in *money*, but in *labour*. Every glass of wine drunk by my lord, and every diamond star worn by my lady, has to be paid for with the sweat and the tears of the poorest of our people. I believe it is a literal fact that many of the artificial flowers worn at court, are actually stained with the tears of the famished and exhausted girls who make them.

It is often asserted that the Capitalist is as necessary to the Labourer as the Labourer is to the Capitalist, and we are asked, therefore,

How are we going to do without the Capitalist?

This question is based upon a confusion of thought as to the meanings of the two terms, Capital and Capitalist.

The Pope in his Encyclical falls into this muddle. He states the Labour Question as "The problem of how to adjust the respective claims of capital and labour."

But to talk about the respective claims of capital and

labour is as absurd as to talk about the respective claims of coal and colliers, or engines and engine-drivers.

There is a vast difference between capital and the capitalist. Capital is necessary; but capitalists are not necessary.

What do we mean by the word capital? There are many definitions of the word. But it will suffice for us to say that capital means the material used in the production and distribution of wealth. That is to say, under the term capital we include land, factories, canals, railways, machinery, and money.

But the capitalist is not capital. He is the person who owns capital. He is the person who lends capital. He is the person who charges interest for the use of capital.

This "capital" which he lends at usury! *He* did not produce it. *He* does not use it. He only *charges* for it.

Who *did* produce the capital? *All* capital is produced by labour. Who *does* use the capital? Capital cannot be used except by labour.

To say that we could not work without capital is as true as to say that we could not mow without a scythe. To say that we could not work without a capitalist is as false as to say that we could not mow a meadow unless all the scythes belonged to one man. Nay, it is as false as to say that we could not mow unless all the scythes belonged to one man and *he* took a third of the harvest as payment for the loan of them.

Instances. There is valuable capital in the British Telegraphs; but there is no capitalist. The telegraph is a Socialistic institution. The State draws the revenues *from the people*, and the State administers the work. In our State Departments, the Municipal Departments, there is much capital, but there are no capitalists. The manager of a mine is necessary, the owner of a mine is not necessary; the captain of a ship is useful, the owner of a ship is useless.

These are undeniable *proofs*, as are the roads we walk on, and the lamps that light our way, that "capital" and "capitalist" are *not* convertible terms.

Mr. Hart, in his pamphlet of Constitutional Socialism, puts the case against the capitalist very clearly. He says:—

The practicability of Socialism can nevertheless be demonstrated by the present practical working of huge institutions in commerce, industry, and agriculture, which are gradually ruining many smaller ones. These enterprises derive their capital either from a gigantic capitalist or from a lot of shareholders, who know nothing about the business themselves, and who simply pay managers and clerks or manual workers to do the work for them. Now, whether there are 8,000 of these shareholders in a country, or 80,000, or 8,000,000, that does not affect the question, which is: Can shareholders find managers to produce, transport, and sell wealth for them? Answer: Yes, as it is being done at present.

Moreover, if it is practical for these managers and their dependents to conduct business in a state of competition, with the risk of being ruined by the intrigues or inventions of their rivals, *a fortiori* would it be practical for such managers and dependents to conduct business when this risk no longer existed, and when they had simply to produce a certain number of goods, according to the demand, and then to transport these goods to shops or stores for sale?

And so much for the question of how can Labour dispense with Capitalists.

One more question, and I may conclude this chapter:—

Will not the spread of Socialistic ideas tend to alarm the capitalist, and so cause him to take his capital out of the country?

Take his capital out of the country! He might take himself out of the country, and he would doubtless take all the portable property he could carry. But the country could bear the loss. Let me quote once more from John Stuart Mill:—

When men talk of the ancient wealth of a country, of riches inherited from ancestors, and similar expressions, the idea suggested is, that the riches so transmitted were produced long ago, at the time when they are said to have been first acquired, and that no portion of the capital of a country was produced this year except so much as may have been this year added to the total amount. The fact is far otherwise.

The greater part in value of the wealth now existing in England has been produced by human hands within the last twelve months. A very small proportion indeed of that large aggregate was in existence ten years ago; of the present productive capital of the country scarcely any part, except farm houses and factories, and a few ships and machines, and even these would not in most cases have survived so long, if fresh labour had not been employed within that period in putting them into repair.

The land subsists, and the land is almost the only thing that subsists. Everything which is produced perishes, and most things very quickly.

Capital is kept in existence from age to age, not by preservation, but by perpetual reproduction.

This threat about the capitalist taking his capital out of the country is a common one. It is always used when workmen strike against a reduction of wages. It was used during the cotton strike, and during the coal strike.

Now just fancy the millowners and the coalowners taking their capital out of the country. They might take some of their machinery; they could not take their mills, nor their mines. The threat is nonsense.

Imagine the landlords and capitalists, the shareholders and dividend-mongers, marching off with the farms, and fields, and streets; the mills and mines; the railways and quarries and canals.

No: let the capitalist go when he will; he must leave England and the English behind him, and they will suffice for each other. It is the capitalist who keeps them apart, paralysing both, and helping neither.

A more idiotic assumption was never made than this assumption that the wasting of wealth by the idle rich is a good thing for the labouring poor. Follow it out to its logical conclusion, John Smith, and assure yourself that the drunkard is a benefactor to the workers because he finds much "useful employment" for the coopers, hop-growers, maltsters and others who are doomed to waste their time in the production of the drink which slakes his swinish thirst.
