

Is supply the poor
with the necessaries



Is it not then cruelly selfish for the rich to spend on their luxuries what would be enough to supply the poor with the necessaries of life? Reflections such as these have led many benevolent men to give away in charity all their surplus wealth, only retaining for themselves what is absolutely necessary for their subsistence.

Such men deserve all honour for their conduct and for the noble example of self-sacrifice that they set before the world. But the world would hardly be benefitted if everybody followed their example. If all luxury were vanished from the world, mankind would be reduced to the life of savages. They would be deprived of the pleasures of music, poetry, painting, and the greater part of the earth would be converted into mines, ploughed land, and manufacturing cities full of factories, and with no space left for parks, or flower-gardens, or recreation grounds. In a world, nothing would be allowed on the face of the earth that merely gave pleasure, and everything would be estimated by the lowest utilitarian standard. It requires little thought to see that such a state of things would make life intolerable, and degrade men below the even of the brutes. Let us next consider how much truth there is in the opposite view Does a multi benefit the labouring classes more by spending two or three thousand pounds in wages to the labourers who paint the walls and ceilings of his princely mansion, than if were to save the money? The superficial observer sees that the money spent on the decoration of the rooms goes straight into the pockets of a large number of labouring men; whereas the money saved is put into a bank and seems to do no good to anybody but the owner, who presently receives interest from the banker. A moment's reflection, however, shows that money saved and

invested benefits the labouring class as much as money spent on personal luxuries.

Money invested in a railway pays the wages of the workers engaged in the construction of the railway; and money put into a bank is probably lent by the banker to a merchant or manufacturer. Who without such assistance would not have enough ready money to pay all the labourers he wishes to employ. Thus the miser who saves money benefits the labouring population just as much as the spend-thrift who surrounds himself with every kind of luxury. Political economists go a step further, and show that sums of money spent on expensive luxury do not benefit the labouring classes so much as money saved and invested in a company that employs productive labour, and so adds permanently to the wealth of a country.

But this is rather too difficult a question to discuss here. It is enough to have shown on the one hand that all luxury is not an evil, and, on the other hand, that the extravagant man, who squanders his money on expensive luxuries, has no right to regard himself as a benefactor of the poor. We must therefore come to the conclusion that in luxury, as in most other matters, there is a golden mean to be observed.

It is quite right that the poor should seek a higher standard of comfort, and try to secure a moderate amount of luxury for themselves and their families. On the other hand, those rich men who satisfy their excessive love of luxury at the expense of their health and their prosperity, deserve to be severely condemned for their imprudence. But luxury is often something worse than imprudence. A rich man may by continual indulgence in expensive pleasures

come to lose all sympathy with his fellow-men, and excite the bitter hatred of the poor by his ostentatious extravagance. In this way he not only becomes a narrow-minded egotist himself, but also, as far as in him lies, embitters the relations between man and man, and helps to make envy, hatred and malice predominate in the world over kindly feelings, sympathy and benevolence.

Thus in the great battle of life he ranges himself on the side of evil against good.