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by  
Robert L. Dabney



## PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN ECONOMY.

THE history of the Christian world shows that there has been a wide-spread sensibility in the consciences of Christians to the sin of indulgence in superfluities. This sensibility has sometimes shown itself in a morbid, and sometimes in a blind, undistinguishing way. Among the mendicant and some monastic orders of the Romish communion, poverty and simplicity of life formed a part of the vows and rules, however little part they may have had in their practice. Among the churches of the Reformation we find the Mennonites forbidding, not only all luxuries of dress, equipage and furniture, but even the fine arts and liberal education. The denomination of Quakers, as is well known, practiced a similar sobriety. A part of the original discipline of the Methodists was to enforce a strict renunciation of all the pomps and vanities of the world. These facts indicate that the conscience of the Christian world has had an extensive feeling of the obligation to moderation and self-denial in the use of wealth, though they may prove that this feeling has not been very well defined nor intelligent.

Several things in the present state of the church induce the belief that there is a strong demand for the discussion and enforcement of the true principles of Christian economy at this day. These circumstances are the great increase of material wealth, and consequently of luxuries, in civilized nations, in consequence of the amazing applications of physics to the arts of production; the obvious and constant progress of genteel society in the style of living; the strong similarity of rich Christians to rich unbelievers in regard to the style of living; and the peculiar demands of God's cause for pecuniary resources in this, the golden opportunity for evangelical effort.

If the attempt be made to settle the principles of Christian self-denial in expenditures, by drawing a line between the part to be appropriated to ourselves and the part to be appropriated.

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to God, we see not where or how that line can be safely drawn. How much revenue has God a right to draw from our possessions? How much is due to us? What general ratio shall be taken for making the division? We can see but one scriptural or rational answer which the Christian can make to these questions: *Our property is purely a trust fund, and the whole of it is to be used for the benefit of the owner.* There is to be no division at all. There is to be no line drawn between God's portion and our portion. All is God's, and all is to be employed for him. Here is the only true and safe starting-point for deducing our practical rules of Christian expenditure.

The idea of a stewardship is a correct illustration of the nature of the tenure by which we hold our possessions. This is plain from the fact that the Scriptures employ it to illustrate our responsibility for all the means of serving God, and our property among the rest. A steward is one who manages property which does not belong to him. This is just the case with us. The property in our hands is literally God's property. He created it. He preserves it. He calls it his own while it is in our hands. "Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills." The most important property of a pastoral people is cattle, and God expressly claims the domesticated cattle, as well as the wild animals which were not appropriated as individual possessions. Now, it is the plainest truth in the world, that the steward is to manage the estate committed to him, not for his private advantage or profit, but for that of the owner. The owner, as a just and benevolent man, will of course allow his steward a competent subsistence out of the estate; but the profits of the property are his, not his servant's; and the general aim with which the whole is managed is to promote his advantage.

But the Scripture likens our relation to God to one far closer and stricter than the steward's. We are ourselves God's property. We belong to him, body and soul, just as truly as the riches which he has lent us. "And *ye* are not your own, for *ye* are bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, *which are God's.*" "Also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant." "Ye also have a Master in heaven." It is a settled rule of law, that a slave can own no property. Whatever he has, and whatever he may acquire, be-

long to the master to whom he belongs, except so far as the master may lend him the use of it. So we, God's slaves, can own nothing. Hence we argue that if all which is, in human language, most essentially our own, our limbs, our faculties, and the fruits of their exertions—if we ourselves, in the very essence that constitutes our being, belong to God, and ought therefore to be employed for his exclusive use, much more does our property, which is only entrusted to us. Our property may be viewed as one class of material and instruments, lent to us, with which to work. Now, of course, if the limbs and faculties, with all the products of their exertions, belong to God, the results of these borrowed tools and materials belong to him by a double right.

The same conclusion follows from all those passages of Scripture in which it is taught that we are to render to God all the service of which our faculties and circumstances admit. We are to employ all the lawful means within our reach, and to exert every nerve, to serve and glorify him. "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things." "And whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." And Christian love is a feeling eminently practical; "for this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments." According to these rules, the only limit to the service we are to render to God is the limit of our strength, means and opportunities. In whatever way it is possible for us to do anything, without sin, whereby the glory of God may be promoted, that thing it is our duty to do. We are to serve God *with all our strength*. Our property is a part of our strength, and therefore we are to serve him with all our property. It is to be noticed, also, that though no Christian acts up to this perfect rule, yet no true Christian desires or aims at any less. No true penitent is satisfied with any imperfection, for imperfection is sin. If, then, there is any part of our property of which it is *impossible* to make any lawful use for the glory of God, that part, and that part alone, we may spend upon ourselves. And where shall that part be found, when there is so much want, ignorance and sin to be relieved, and while there are so many thousand thirsty channels in which benevolence might flow?



It is important also to bear in mind this: it is not enough to be able to say that the use which we make of our property is an innocent one, and has some tendency to promote the glory of God. It is our duty to make the best use of every part of our possessions that is possible in our circumstances. If there was any way within our reach in which our money might have produced more good and more honor to God when we spent it in something innocent, but less beneficial to his service, we have come short of our duty. *We have sinned.* For the only rule allowed us is to serve him "with *all our strength.*" We have no right to waste any part of our efficiency.

The principle that we are to use the whole property entrusted to us for the highest advantage of the owner is surely established by superabundant proof. The steps by which the above reasonings have led us are so simple and short that there can be no hesitation in admitting them; unless hesitation be produced by what is very obvious at the first glance, that the principle now established will condemn the habitual conduct of Christians to a woful extent. How few are there who put their hands into their pockets with a constant and conscientious recollection of their stewardship! How few earn for God! How few look around them amidst the demands of God's suffering cause, or suffering poor, for the strongest claim and the best means of glorifying him with their superfluous wealth! Do we not rather look within, among the idle desires of vanity or self-indulgence, to see which we shall gratify first, thinking we have been very conscientious if we stop to enquire whether it is innocent?

We pass now to some specimens of the manner in which this principle applies. And first: it is proper that we should employ so much of God's property as is necessary in our own sustenance. The servant must be duly fed and clothed, in order that he may be able to work for his master. This expenditure is most strictly an expenditure in God's service, since it results in work done for him. And this justifies us, not only in expending on ourselves what is needful to sustain the body, as wholesome food, raiment, and shelter, but also whatever is truly needed to give the highest efficiency to both body and mind for God's service, and whatever truly promotes the noblest development of our moral qualities. This will include, for instance, that comfort and cleanliness in food and dress, and those recreations and en-

joyments which are necessary to give the greatest firmness to the muscles and most healthy energy to the animal spirits, food for the mind, such as judicious education, good books and useful accomplishments, proper medicines and remedies in sickness, and a wholesome and natural cultivation of those tastes which tend to refine and elevate the moral nature. We believe that neither God's providence nor law has designed that man shall serve him as a dull, over-worked hack, but that the rendering of the highest and best and greatest service is perfectly consistent with man's highest enjoyment of the natural and rational blessings of life. The simple and temperate use of all those enjoyments strengthens man for his work, by promoting the contentment and cheerfulness of his feelings. In one word, it is right to expend on ourselves all that will qualify us to serve God with the greatest efficiency. This is strictly expending God's property in his own service.

If we are asked whether this admission can be extended to an allowance of artificial luxuries and the costly refinements of fashionable life, an answer will be found in this question: Can any way be shown in which they make us more efficient servants of God? Do they promote health? No, they are debilitating. Do they cultivate the mind? No, they dwarf it. Do they promote cheerfulness? They are much more fruitful of care and petty jealousies. Are they necessary to give that respectability among men which extends the influence for good? No. Do they promote that humility, that spiritual mind, which are more essential to usefulness than health or animal spirits? Alas! no. Let an honest conscience answer these questions, and an answer is found for the other.

Second: it is right to employ a part of our Master's possessions in sustaining and rearing the families which he has committed to us. Next to the preservation of our own lives, this is the most obligatory of all uses which we are required to make of the property entrusted to us. God's providence points to us as the proper agents for the sustenance of our own families and the training of our children for usefulness, by placing them nearer to us than to any one else. In sustaining his servants and rearing new servants for his use, we are strictly applying his property to his advantage. And the same remarks made concerning the extent of the provision for our own sustenance and



equipment for service apply to our households. We should expend on them so much as will bring their bodies, minds and hearts to the highest efficiency for God's service that our circumstances will permit. But surely we have no right to mispend our Master's property in providing for our families luxuries, amusements, fineries, or wealth, which add nothing to their energies, bodily, mental or moral, but, on the contrary, produce vanity, effeminacy, envy and self-indulgence, and unfit them to "endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ." That this is the tendency of the refinements and luxuries of fashionable life, especially with the young, whose characters are in a forming state, is too clear to be disputed. Let this single fact testify, that not only in the church, but in the worldly professions, few of the men who make their mark and serve their generation are reared in the lap of wealth. The *useful men*, the workingmen of every community, are usually the sons of poverty or of plain mediocrity. To use God's wealth in bestowing such indulgences is a double dishonesty. It embezzles the trust, and it robs him of the services of our children by disqualifying them for active usefulness. A kindred abuse of the trust is committed by those who stint their children of a thorough education for usefulness because so large a portion of their means is appropriated to selfish indulgences, or more frequently to the schemes of avarice.

Third: a part of the possessions entrusted to us may be rightfully employed in making a reasonable provision for ourselves and those dependent on us against the contingencies of the future. As the parent is charged now with the sustenance of his children, it is proper that he should lay by in store something to keep them from want when he is taken from them by death. How much of God's property may be rightfully retained for this purpose must be decided in each case by its own circumstances. But this much may be said in general, that we are certainly not justified in laying up wealth for our children by any consideration of our obligation to God; for, as experience declares, there is nothing which is so apt to make a young person worthless, both to his Maker and his fellow-men, as a large inheritance. How, then, can we be right in abstracting a large part of that trust which we are bound to use wholly for God's glory, and employing it to destroy the usefulness of one of his creatures? The rule proper to men of large wealth seems to be this: that they

shall set apart for those dependent persons whom they shall leave behind them a comfortable maintenance, and appropriate the rest to the glory of God. Or, if they leave more than this in the hands of their heirs, it should be with the express understanding that those heirs shall take it only as the successors in their stewardship. Where there is a reasonable probability that the heir will not be faithful to this trust, the parent has no right to bequeath him the surplus property above a competency, whether the unfaithfulness of the heir arise from wastefulness or avarice. What would be thought of a steward who, when compelled to take a long journey and to employ a substitute in his trust, should entrust his master's property to a hand known to be faithless? So the steward of God, going that journey from which he will never return, has no right to commit his Master's possessions to faithless hands because those hands happen to be his son's. He should himself appropriate his surplus wealth to its owner's use before he goes hence. There is nothing which more betrays the defective views of Christian men concerning their property than the manner in which they bequeath it. How few are there who remember, in making a will, that the possessions of which they are about to dispose *do not belong to them*, and that the utmost they can presume to do, as Christians, is to appoint successors to themselves in their stewardship? If they wittingly appoint an unfaithful one from their weak partiality, they are themselves unfaithful stewards. How shall they be able to stand up in judgment and "give an account of their stewardship," when its last act has been to place the trust in a defaulter's hands? When the conscience of the church is properly awakened and enlightened on this point, there will be more instances like those rare and honorable ones of which we occasionally hear; when Christians who are entrusted with much wealth will bequeath more of it to pious and charitable uses than to their children.

Those who have any property remaining after these three lawful deductions are made are required obviously, by our principles, to use it in doing good. The particular modes in which wealth may be made to promote the glory of its owner, God, are exceedingly various; and the choice in each case must be left to the conscience of the individual steward. But there will be no danger of serious mistake if the sincere purpose in every case is



to use all our possessions for the highest glory of God. And let the truth be again impressed, that, as we are commanded to love and serve God with *all our strength*, it is not enough to be able to say that the object we have selected for the expenditure of any surplus wealth is innocent and has some tendency to honor God. Our duty is not done till we have conscientiously selected that object by which our expenditure will do the highest honor to God and good to his creatures that are within our reach.

It now requires little argument to show that the whole list of superfluities, fashionable indulgences, and extravagances, is cut off. No Christian, no man, can expend his Master's wealth upon them without committing sin. For we might even admit that a multitude of these extravagances were innocent, that they had some tendency to refine the taste; in a word, we might admit all that the softest luxury could plead in their behalf; and yet, while it is true that there are other ways open, in the providence of God, in which wealth may do a higher good, it is a sin and a waste to spend any of it in superfluities. Who does not know that there are thousands of ways for doing that higher good with wealth in this world of want and ignorance? And the greater the contrast between the beneficence and utility of these works of mercy and the supposed advantages of these selfish superfluities, the clearer is the sin of indulging them. Some may ask, What is superfluity, and what is extravagance? We do not at all dispute that to draw the line between the allowable comforts of life and sinful extravagance, by a general rule fitting every particular case, may be impossible. But it is not at all necessary to draw such a line. All that is necessary is to establish in the consciences of men sound principles on this subject, and in their hearts the supreme love of God. The particulars will then easily take care of themselves.

But it will not be difficult to illustrate the subject by a number of instances, which are clearly on the wrong side of the supposed line, and in which multitudes of wealthy Christians will find themselves clearly condemned. When a Christian man, who has professed to dedicate himself and his all, body, soul and estate, to the highest glory of God and love of his fellow-creatures, passes by the hundreds of starving poor and degraded sinners around him, the thousands of ignorant at home, and the millions of perishing heathen, whom his money might instrumentally rescue

from hell-fire, and sells for a song his safe, strong, comfortable family carriage, and expends hundreds in procuring another, because his rich neighbor is about to outstrip him in this article of equipage; or when he sacrifices his plate and china to buy new at a great cost, because the style of the old was a little past; or when he pulls down his commodious dwelling to expend thousands in building another, because the first was unfashionable; is not this sinful waste? When hundreds and thousands of God's money are abstracted from the wants of a perishing world, for which the Son of God died, to purchase the barbaric finery of jewelry, as offensive to good taste as to Christian economy, jewelry which keeps out no cold blast in winter, and no scorching heat in summer, which fastens no needful garment and promotes no bodily comfort, is not this extravagance? When large sums of money are expended on exotics not half so pretty as a clover blossom nor so fragrant as a common apple-tree flower, whose only merit is that no other lady in town has obtained one, what is this but extravagance? We are deeply convinced that if our principle of self-dedication were honestly carried through the usages and indulgences of fashionable society, a multitude of common superfluities would be cut off. Indeed, we doubt not that the depth to which it would cut, and the extent to which it would convict the fashionable Christian world of delinquency, would be the grand argument against it.

In a word, the awakening of the Christian conscience of the church to the truth, and to its duty, would reduce all Christians to a life of comfortable simplicity, embellished, among those who possessed taste, by natural and inexpensive elegance, and all else would be retrenched. The whole of that immense wealth now sacrificed to luxury would be laid on the altar of religious benevolence, or devoted to works of public utility. The real politeness and true refinements of life would be only promoted by the change. Every useful branch of education, all training by which mind and body are endued with a higher efficiency for God's service, would be secured, cost what it might. Every truly ennobling taste would receive a simple and natural cultivation. But the material luxuries and adornments of life would be sternly retrenched, and Christian society would be marked in dress, in equipage, in buildings, sacred and domestic, in food, and in every other sensuous gratification, by a Spartan simplicity, united with



a pure and chaste decency. Wealth would be held as too sacred a trust to expend any part of it in anything which was not truly necessary to the highest glory of God in the rational and spiritual welfare of his creatures, our fellow-men.

As has been before indicated, every one will perceive that such an application of the principles of Christian economy would bring about a great revolution in the manners of our Christian people. Even well-meaning Christians who are possessed of wealth everywhere allow themselves a vastly wider license and act on far different principles. We shall therefore beg leave to pursue the discussion of this part of the subject farther, and suggest other reasons for carrying our Christian sobriety to the extent indicated.

And first, we strongly urge that some principle far stricter than that on which Christians usually act is imperatively demanded, to remove the reproach of worldly conformity. The external likeness of the church to the world is the bane of our efficiency in saving souls. We profess a difference between ourselves and the unrenewed, as radical as that between light and darkness, almost as wide as that between heaven and hell. But in all the visible and practical concerns which interest the unrenewed heart, we nearly resemble them. Our words say that we believe riches to be vanity and emptiness. Our acts seem to say that we love and seek them as intensely as those do who make them their all and their god. We say in words that "we have here no continuing city," but in act are as eager to adorn our dwellings here as though they were our only home. We profess that we have richer and nobler enjoyments than the pomp of this life, and then swell and rustle with as much pomp as any other human insect of a day. What is the result? The world believes our conduct and not our words, like a shrewd world as it is. Practical skepticism seals their consciences against the teachings of the pulpit. Our worldly conformity gives the lie to all our assertions of nobler principles, of the birth of a new and higher nature, and of the treachery of earthly good. However inefficient the world's conscience may be to control its own sins, it is abundantly acute to perceive the demands of consistency; and men feel that those who have the hopes and principles, those who acknowledge the tremendous obligations to a dying world of brethren, which Christians profess, ought to use their wealth in

a manner utterly unlike the world. When they see us use it on the same selfish and grovelling principles with themselves, the inevitable impression, unacknowledged it may be, in the consciousness of those who were trained to respect religion, but yet potent and blighting in all, is that religion is a "sham." But now let Christians seek and use wealth wholly for God. Let them show by their conscientious simplicity of indulgence and conscientious alms-doings that they have conquered that covetousness which worldly men feel to be *their* strongest passion, and could calmly place their feet upon those indulgences and vanities which worldly men feel to be *their* highest pleasures; and the world will own, with conviction and reverence, that Christianity is a living, a lovely and fearful thing. The world will at least believe that Christians believe that there is a heaven, a hell, and a strict day of account. The world will be convinced at least that Christians believe their perishing fellow-men have souls to be saved, worth a little more than fashionable *éclat*, jewelry and equipage. Men will at least believe that we are earnest in our warnings.

In this connection it may be remarked, that the extent to which the worldly conformity of the church follows on the heels of the advancing luxuries of the world, plainly indicates that something is wrong with us. Every age has added to the wealth of civilized societies, and every generation, nay, every year, the style of expenditures advances. More costly dwellings are built. What were commodious and respectable mansions a few years ago, are now dragged away as so much rubbish; and if Providence permits our much-abused wealth still to increase, the places we now build will be pulled down to make room for the more luxurious palaces of our children. New and unheard-of indulgences are invented. What our fathers regarded as luxuries almost extravagant, we have accustomed ourselves to look upon as ordinary comforts, almost despised for their cheapness. More capricious wants are indulged; more costly articles of adornment are invented. And, as if to repudiate in the most direct and expressive mode every remnant of the obligations of sobriety, *costliness* has become the very element of fashion. Because the ornament is monstrously expensive, in proportion to its true utility, therefore it is sought. Now, let extravagance of expenditure take as enormous strides as it will, the indulgence of Christians follows



close on its heels. No species of adornment, however outrageously wasteful; no imaginary indulgence, however capricious, has become fashionable, but rich Christians have soon proceeded to employ it almost as commonly as the world. Some of the most enormously luxurious dwellings are those occupied by Christian families. The most extravagant finery is often seen on Christian backs. Now, where is this to stop? Do the principles on which Christians now expend God's possessions fix no limit *any where*? If they do not, they must be erroneous. Let us see some line drawn beyond which artificial and imaginary wants are not to encroach on the claims of our stewardship. No such line exists. On the present principles of the church, luxurious expenditure has before it the prospect of indefinite progress. And let it be observed, that those who ride on the flood-tide of extravagance are not merely those inconsistent persons whose piety is under grievous suspicions on all hands, but often they are those who stand fair and are much esteemed in the church. Now, if it shall be objected to the principles here advocated that there will be no limit to their fair and legitimate application till they reduce us to a cynical rudeness of life, the just retort is, that to the opposite principles on which the Christian world usually acts there is no limit. They will admit one extravagance after another, on the plea of usage and the customs of society, and the innocence of the particular indulgence in itself, to the utmost extent to which an apostate world may please to run in its waste of God's abused bounties. Hence it is evident that there must be error in those principles. And let any one attempt to go back and review them, comparing them with the principles of the Bible in order to eliminate that error, and he will find that there is no rational or scriptural stopping place short of the strict rule we have advocated.

Another reason for the application of this strict rule is found in the prevalence of covetousness in the church. Much has been said, and justly said, concerning this sin, and the opposite virtue of Christian liberality, recently. The religious world has rung with denunciations of prize tracts, some of which have proclaimed covetousness to be the master sin of the church. This may be true or untrue. It is sufficient for our purpose to say, what everybody will admit, that it is a sin prevalent and ruinous to a fearful extent. Now, we believe that the great spur to covetous-

ness, in the general, is this custom of fashionable expenditure prevalent in the Christian world. That the fiercest covetousness must usually be the result of prodigality has been clearly seen, at least since Sallust's well known character of Cataline was written, "*Alieni appetens, Sui profusus, ardens in cupiditibus.*" And we suppose that, usually, the craving for gain is the child of a craving to spend. Few examples of the actual miser present themselves, where coin is hoarded and gloated over and loved for its own sake. Money is usually valued inordinately, because men's hearts inordinately desire the supposed style, *éclat*, and distinction of fashionable expenditure which wealth will enable them to attain. But now, could the pulpit and the religious press only succeed in establishing correct sentiments of Christian economy in the public opinion of the religious world; could all useless expenditure in a Christian be set in the same inconsistent and odious light in which cards and dancing are usually regarded by Presbyterians, the sinews of covetousness in the church would be cut. The usual motive to covetousness would no longer exist with any who regarded their good name; because that expenditure could not be indulged for which large wealth is coveted. Were those who made large gains compelled to regard them as gains made for God, the instances of rapacity would be as rare as the instances in which servants and apprentices are found too industrious in earning money for their masters.

The nature of the motives by which luxurious expenditures are prompted, one would think, ought to be sufficient to reveal the inconsistency of all such indulgences in Christians. Very innocent and plausible motives may be feigned, and in some cases may be truly felt; as when men say that they are only filling the obligation of their stations and complying with the demands of genteel society in living expensively. There may be some who persuade themselves that this is their feeling. But it is very plain that the usual motives of expensive living are self-indulgence and sensuality, ostentatious pride, cowardly weakness and dread of the charge of singularity, petty rivalry, and personal vanity. Are these motives which Christians ought to foster? Surely they are utterly at war with the humility and spirituality which our Saviour commands. It is our constant duty to choke them and watch against them; and were expensive living perfectly innocent and free from other objection, the fact that it



ministers to feelings so vile would require us to shun it. The mere fact that it was often the minister of these unholy and contemptible sentiments in other minds should lead us to shun it, though as yet unconscious of their taint. We are told to pray, "Lead us not into temptation." If we would not be hypocrites, our conduct must be conformed to our prayers.

A reference to the views which prevailed in former ages concerning the evil effects of luxury will suggest another consideration. The time was when wise heathens and wise Christians alike looked upon luxury as a vice in itself—a thing which emasculated the hardihood and energy of the character, stimulated all the vices, as tropical heat and moisture force up the vegetation of a wealthy soil, and unfitted man for usefulness. Wise legislators excluded luxury as the bane of commonwealths and as a crime unworthy of manhood. Historians constantly pointed at the luxury which accumulated wealth had provoked as the cause of Persian imbecility, of Grecian decline, and of the downfall of imperial Rome. Senates made repeated attempts to restrain it by sumptuary laws; attempts which were vain indeed, and ill-judged, but which evinced the reality of the evil. The plain, good sense of the olden times pointed out the stubborn fact, which men had not then learned to dodge by a deceitful philosophy, that luxurious expenditures, in wasting the labor of working hands and the products of labor, must be ruinous to public wealth. What has now become of these old-fashioned facts and truths? How is it that a Christian ethics, in a Christian age, professing to be unspeakably purer than all pagan systems, is silent concerning a vice which old pagan Sparta and Rome reprobated? How is it that Christian people indulge, without a whisper of disapprobation or a frown of public opinion, in luxuries more elaborate than those which even a polished Cicero denounced as disgusting and contaminating in the young men of licentious Rome? How is it that it has become proper, and manly, and wise, for the soldiers of the cross, who ought to be girded for the terrific war with "principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places," to soften their effeminate limbs with indulgences which would have been shameful and ruinous in the secular soldier or athlete? It passes our wit to tell! To us, who remember how Paul commanded "to crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts," how he set the example

of "keeping under his body and bringing it into subjection," and how he has charged us "to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ," how every Christian has dedicated himself, professedly, soul and body, to a tremendous conflict, for a stake which is composed of his own soul, worth more than a world, and a world of immortal souls like his; to us it does seem that every indulgence which diminishes the hardihood and self-denial of the man, or unnerves him for the strife, is a crime and a treason, leaving out of view the waste it causes of the material means for carrying on the great cause. Do the fashionable indulgences now common among rich Christians have this effect? Let the fact before referred to give the answer, that the *working men* of the age are usually the sons of simple mediocrity.

And not only are these indulgences objectionable as weakening to the Christian character, but they waste the attention and time of those who love them. He who goes to warfare should not encumber himself with much baggage. The true soldier has no time to provide gorgeous caparisons for his horse and drapery for his own limbs. All that he can take care of is to have his weapons in fighting order. All else is an incumbrance. When Darius and Alexander met at Arbela, the Macedonian phalanx was horrid with brass and iron. The only things which glittered along the sturdy ranks were the deadly points of the pikes and the sword-blades. But the half-armed men and horses of the Persian came sweating under gorgeous draperies of worsted and purple and gold, which swept the earth. Which conquered? Of Frederick the Great, Macaulay says:

"Some young Englishmen of rank proposed to visit Germany as volunteers, for the purpose of learning the art of war under the greatest of commanders. This last proof of British attachment and admiration Frederick politely but firmly declined. His camp was no place for amateur students of military science. The Prussian discipline was rigorous even to cruelty. The officers, while in the field, were expected to practice an abstemiousness and self-denial such as were hardly surpassed by the most rigid monastic orders. However noble their birth, however high their rank in the service, they were not permitted to eat from anything better than pewter. It was a high crime even in a count and field-marshal to have a single silver spoon among his baggage. Gay young Englishmen of twenty thousand a year, accustomed to liberty and luxury, would not easily submit to these Spartan restraints; and the king could not venture to keep them in order as he kept his own subjects in order.

Thus act the children of this world, who are wise in their generation. And thus should act the children of light. They should



be too busy in the service of their king to have a thought for gewgaws, and too anxious for efficiency to burden themselves with superfluities.

But, after all, the most plain and direct reason for strict simplicity of expenditure is found in the fact that God has condescended to make wealth an instrument for promoting his cause, and in the urgent demands of that cause. When we consider the good that money may do, if prayerfully devoted to God's service, and the good that needs to be done, how can any one who professes to aim to love God with all his strength, and his neighbor as himself, waste any portion of it in any thing approaching superfluity? Let those to whom God has entrusted wealth, think how many destitute families there may be within their reach, who suffer acute anxieties and many destitutions from poverty, to whom a little aid would bring unspeakable relief and thankfulness. Let them think how many agencies of good near them, how many Sabbath-schools, how many poor ministers, are crippled by want of pecuniary means. Let them listen to the continual prayer of all our missionary departments for more means. Let them remember the almost countless plans and schemes of beneficence, devised by pious zeal, in which money may promote the glory of God and the good of man. Let them cast their eyes around a perishing world, where hundreds of millions are hurrying, in one generation, to eternal, irreparable destruction for lack of the gospel, and remember that money can be employed as an agency to assist in their rescue, and that their alms-giving can now be borne speedily to any remote and destitute spot on the wide field of death. And then let them ask themselves, with the cry of a perishing world in their ears, and that dread account in their eye where we must answer for having done our utmost for the rescue of our race, whether they have anything to spare for superfluities. Is it enough, when this tremendous destitution stands before us, that we shall be able to say that we have made contributions to all the usual objects of Christian alms-giving, and contributions liberal, according to the public opinion of a perverted and selfish world, while stores of wealth still remain to be wasted on objects which are required by no rational want? No, it is not enough. We have not done our duty till we have looked above and beyond the grovelling standard of self-indulgence, and have exerted the

full efficiency of all that God has entrusted to us, be it units or millions.

Could the church but be brought up to its duty, possessing as it does in all Protestant lands so large a share of the world's wealth, how would Zion prosper? While no true comfort of life would be deducted, and no rational and wholesome enjoyment lost among the rich, while the true dignity and refinement of society would be only promoted; how would the Lord's vineyard flourish? Our missionary boards, staggering under the burdens of perishing millions at home and abroad, would no longer groan for aid, but would thank God and take courage. Instead of crying for means to feed their poor, half-sustained and faithful workmen, with overflowing treasuries they would call for willing hands to approach and employ the bounty of the pious. How many hearts among the poor would sing for joy? How many useful hands and heads would be raised from obscurity and poverty, and made fruitful of good to their fellow men? The church would again advance on her grand mission of evangelism, with a power and speed fulfilling the prophetic vision of the Apocalypse, "an angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to every nation, and kindred, and people, and tongue."

Protestants look upon the Bible as their complete and sufficient rule of duty. Hence our readers may feel that, after representing Christian economy as so strictly binding, and superfluous expenditures for things not in themselves necessarily sinful, as so clearly a sin, we should be able to show that the Bible is not silent on this subject. It is to be observed, however, that the Bible never promised to give a specific precept for every detail of duty. It is a complete rule of life, in laying down principles and precepts which, by clear and easy application, will direct us in all the details of duty. We refer our readers, accordingly, to the scriptural truths from which we set out, and demand if our application of those truths was not fair, easy and obvious. If it was, this is enough. But we are not compelled to fall back on such a reference by any dearth of specific precepts in the Bible. In Luke, xiv. 12, our Saviour expressly asserts the principle, that the rich should refrain from ostentatious and unnecessary hospitalities to their equals, in order to be able to relieve the truly destitute. We see not how one who believes in plenary



inspiration, and who reverences the word of Scripture too much to tamper with its fair meaning, can make this passage anything else than an explicit prohibition of unnecessary expenditure in hospitalities. And this, too, is one of the most generous, graceful and popular modes of expenditure; the form of extravagance which men would regard as most "leaning to virtue's side." 1 Timothy and 1 Peter forbid Christian females to indulge in "gold, pearls, broidered or plaited hair, and *costly* array." A most sensible expositor has well remarked, that the prohibition would of course have been extended to the stronger sex had not the apostles taken it for granted that manliness alone would be a sufficient safeguard against such follies in them. Now, we by no means exalt the letter over the spirit so far as to interpret the apostles as meaning that curled hair would be innocent while braided hair was sinful, or to interpret them as placing obedience to the precept in the shunning of those particular follies there mentioned. But a fair interpretation cannot avoid this conclusion, that the two apostles concur in explicitly forbidding personal adornment with means expensive, either of time or money, as a thing inconsistent with Christian character. We are all aware that an accommodating exegesis has frequently come to the aid of fashionable Christianity in attempting to whittle away the point of the precepts. And among others, a recent writer has politely come to the rescue, in remarking upon the passage from Peter, by representing the gist of the apostle's meaning as this: that Christian wives may wear these follies; he, of course, does not condescend either to allow or forbid things so innocent, and unessential and trifling; but if they wear them, *they must not regard them as their ornaments*. We think it reply enough to ask, *for what* should the good ladies wear them, then? We feel sure that the female mind at least will concur with us in saying, that to forbid the wearing of any costly array *as ornament* will be a very efficient, practical prohibition of wearing it at all. Once compel people to regard it as no adornment, and they will not trouble themselves to put it on. Let the reader also consult 1 John ii. 16.

The remainder of these remarks will be devoted to considering the most common objections which are made against the principles we have advocated, and in justification of expensive habits. In this negative form some ideas may perhaps be introduced

which are of great importance as positive supports of our views.

We are well aware that the prompt objection against what we have said will be this: that if the principles we have advocated were carried out to their fair extent they would cut off everything but the baldest necessities of life and reduce society to a Gothic rudeness. Every man who would be truly consistent must be a Diogenes. The same rule which would forbid the expensive refinements of the most wealthy, if justly applied, would also cut off the cheaper refinements of middle life, and would reduce man to just so much clothing as would cover his nakedness, and that of the coarsest quality which would suffice. The very buttons on the backs of our coats must be cut off and thrown into a missionary box, because they can button nothing. And thus, as our principles prove too much, they prove nothing.

Now, what is all this but an argument to our ignorance and our prejudices? It does not disprove the Scripture rule, but only announces *fear* of it, lest it should cut deeper than the self-indulgence and weakness of the objectors possibly can or will endure. Grant that the rule, when strictly applied, should cut off all the refinements now common in Christian society, it might only prove that society has gone exceedingly far astray from its duty, (a very possible supposition, at least with those who believe in the universal depravity of human nature,) and not that the rule was false. Suppose that those who support this rule in theory, and among others the author of these remarks, should be found unwilling to follow it to the extent of cutting the buttons off the backs of their coats. It might only prove that their conduct was inconsistent with their principles, and not that their principles were wrong.

But a further and entirely satisfactory explanation of the objection will be found by recurring to what was said in defining the allowable and proper subsistence of one of God's servants. In order that he may be fitted to work most efficiently for his Master, that substance should include, not only supplies for his immediate bodily necessities, but all that promotes the most noble and perfect development of the bodily, mental and moral man. Neat and decent apparel, lodging, food, *are necessities of life*, not indeed of animal existence, but of that dignified, rational and moral existence by which God's servant is able to glorify him and



bless his fellow-men. The natural and useful accomplishments of life *are necessities of life*. They are necessary to that highest style of man by which most good is done and most honor rendered to the power of Christianity. And we do assert that the distinction between that sordid manner of life which sacrifices one's usefulness by inevitably incurring constant ridicule, contempt and dislike, and a chaste and strict simplicity, is a distinction perfectly easy to all except those who do not wish to see it. There is an extreme of simplicity in dress and living to which any man of truly respectable qualities may go without incurring inconvenient notoriety as an oddity, and without incurring necessary contempt. This is evident from the Spartan example of many noble men, of whom we may mention John Howard and Chief-Justice Marshall. And we do assert again, that this extreme of simplicity lies far, far beyond the customary style which the average of rich Christians now allow themselves. *There lies the proper line*. Any man whose heart is right can find it.

The objection we have described might be sufficiently removed even by considerations of pecuniary economy. We do not dress in blankets and live in shanties because true economy forbids it. The coarse fabric will become so worn as to admit the assaults of weather and disease so much sooner than the moderately fine and substantial cloth, that it is true economy to wear the latter. It might be possible to live in a shanty of boards; but this shanty would require to be so perpetually patched and renewed that, in the end, it would prove more expensive than a substantial brick house. And again, good taste costs no money when allowed its true, natural and chaste developments. Economy itself having dictated that we shall select for a covering a moderately good cloth, we discover that it is actually less wasteful to cut this cloth into decent and comely shape than to make a clownish botch of it. The parent of six children observes that health and decency and chastity require that his dwelling shall contain a given number of chambers. And when this is determined, he will find that a true architectural taste is perfectly at one with economy. To adopt a chaste and graceful outline for his building, in which every essential element of the construction shall be an ornament, and no ornament shall be superfluous, to protect his materials with good paint, to employ skilful mechanics who will keep out the weather by making good joints, all this is as

necessary to procuring the requisite cubic feet of house room, at the cheapest ultimate cost, as it is to true architectural taste. And anything more expensive than this is as truly a sin against pure taste as it is a sin against Christian economy.

We have thus passed to the discussion of what we had marked down as the second objection: that so stern a simplicity would cut off the indulgence and education of all the refining tastes. This objection proceeds upon the postulate, that wherever our Creator has implanted native and instinctive propensities in us, their very existence shows that there must be some innocent and proper indulgence for them somewhere. Thus: it was he who implanted hunger; there must be, therefore, some indulgence of the appetite which does not partake of the sin of gluttony. It was God who implanted the capacity for feeling indignation; there must be, therefore, such a thing as "being angry and sinning not." If every possible exercise of the propensity had been sinful, a holy Creator would not have implanted it. But surely this does not imply that every indulgence to which the perverted propensity may attach itself is therefore innocent. Is there, then, nothing by which those instinctive and refining tastes for the graceful and beautiful in form, color, and sound may be gratified, except the "costly array" of luxury? If we condemn as sinful waste the employment of a company of foreign musicians, at a cost ten-fold greater than that which would procure the labors and talents of the noblest warriors and statesmen to the nation, or at a price sufficient to feed all the starving poor of a commonwealth, shall we be charged with banishing every indulgence of musical taste when we leave to men the music of nature, of singing birds, and babbling brooks, and sighing winds, the sweet symphony which comes up with the morning breeze from the lowing kine, mixed with the ploughman's mellow song as he lounges fieldward, and the cooing of the dove in the dewy tree-top? Shall we be accused of banishing music when we leave men the inexpensive but sweet domestic concert, the song of praise to God, and the soft harmonies of children's voices? And if we forbid men to waste God's precious treasures in barbaric fineries of dress, or building, or equipage, shall we be accused of robbing them of all that is beautiful in form and tinge, when we leave them the countless beauties of sky, and earth, and sea? No. We admit that a proper cultivation of these



tastes has a true tendency, though, where unaccompanied with better agencies, a most weak and insufficient tendency, to elevate man's soul. But their proper and beneficial cultivation is by the enjoyment of the beauties and harmonies of nature. The artificial and expensive pursuit of the fine arts, as it is seen in luxurious society, tends only to substitute in place of true sensibility a nauseous affectation of taste, concealing a callousness as truly brutal as that of the Vandal. The truest and most wholesome indulgences of taste are those which nature presents to us at least cost. Luxurious indulgences deprave this capacity of our souls as truly as they waste God's property.

Again, in support of expensive living we often hear a great deal said about "the style proper to one's standing in society." And such a style is represented as necessary to distinguish the different ranks in society. The truth lies in just the opposite direction. This is just one of the chiefest social evils resulting from luxury, that it assists in confounding the proper distinctions of society. When expensiveness of living becomes the index of rank and gentility, then whoever can procure wealth, by fair means or foul, claims that rank. Thus, by this very boasted means of keeping up the proper distinctions of society, vulgar and ignorant persons are admitted into the society of the pure and well-informed, and that vilest and most despicable of all aristocracies, an aristocracy of wealth, is introduced. The consequence is, that the coarseness and low principles of the rich bores are diffused through all the circle into which their luxuriousness has introduced them. And an unrighteous standard of admission is erected, which excludes humble worth, and talent, and taste, because united with poverty. But if extravagance were disreputable and were banished from professedly virtuous society, if the rich practiced a simplicity of living equally attainable by all of moderate means, the distinctions of society would necessarily be drawn by some other criterion than wealth. They cannot possibly be drawn by any other so base and injurious.

But let us admit that the principle claimed is correct. Let us suppose that there ought to be gradations of expenditure according to the possessions and social position. The Christian who professes the obligation to use all his property for the glory of God surely ought not to assume any higher grade of expendi-

ture than is really necessary to maintain his social position. Surely he should not expend for this object, granting its propriety, more of God's wealth than is necessary, when so much is needed for the cause of God and our perishing fellow-men. Now let us take, for the sake of example, some one grade of wealth and social standing. Let it be the hundred thousand dollar men. Among this class several will be found who, either from prudence, or covert avarice, or from a sort of very sensible laziness, which is unwilling to be fatigued with pomp, spend far less than the average of their peers. They are not sordid, but they live far within their means and beneath the expenditure of similar men around them. Every large society presents such instances. Now, are these men ostracized by their class? Is their social position compromised? Is there any lack of respect when they enter the society of their equals? Not at all. The fact then proves that a higher grade of expenditure than theirs is not necessary for any social advantage. Why, then, cannot all Christians of a similar grade of wealth stop at their limit of expenditure? Even upon the mistaken grounds upon which we argue, all that goes beyond this is clearly sin. It is waste and perversion of a trust that should have been sacred to noble and blessed ends. All know how far rich Christians, even those whose religious character stands fair, go beyond that line of supposed social necessity as it is drawn by the actual facts of society. Even by this imperfect rule a great dereliction from Christian economy is proved upon the church of this day.

There is another justification for luxury which assumes a profounder air, and proceeds upon pretended grounds of political economy. It is claimed that "luxurious expenditures on the part of those who have wealth are, in fact, beneficent to the community, by encouraging and employing and paying the industry of all who produce those luxuries. "Such expenditure," it is said, "is the legitimate means for distributing again the accumulations of wealth, so that they may circulate for the common good. The rich man, therefore, who, without immoral dissipations, expends a splendid income in splendid living, is fulfilling a public duty." We unhesitatingly assert that he is a public curse. His splendid living may, in one sense, "distribute" coin or bank notes, but it is a whirlpool that absorbs and destroys public wealth, and his luxuries, instead of encouraging



and rewarding industry, only pervert it and misdirect it. We will explain.

It is the most vulgar delusion to suppose that coin or bank notes are public wealth. Every college boy knows that they are only the conventional representatives of wealth. The wealth of the community consists in the productions of the skill and labor of its citizens, exerted on material nature. If a ploughman expends a year's work in raising five hundred bushels of corn, that corn is a part of the public wealth. If an artisan expends a year's work in making a trinket worth five hundred bushels of corn, that trinket is public wealth. If the five hundred bushels of corn are exchanged with a foreign merchant for a basket or two of costly wine, that wine is a part of the public wealth. But if that trinket or wine is bought by some rich citizen for money, the community is no richer than before. The purchaser now has the item of wealth, and the seller has in its stead some coins which are not wealth, but which, being the established representative of wealth, will serve him to produce him some other item of wealth when he pleases. Now let us suppose that this rich purchaser thrusts a hole through his daughter's ear with an awl and sticks this trinket in it, where it is finally lost, or becomes worthless through change of fashion; or that he drinks up this wine at a splendid entertainment, then there is a positive and irreparable loss of public wealth. This item is forever consumed, and has left no equivalent behind it. A year's work of an industrious citizen is consumed. And the skill, industry and time of its laboring citizens are the true wealth of a community, because they alone produce wealth. The money which this rich man paid for the year's work, which has been destroyed, is not a substitute for its value to the community, because the community before possessed both the money and the commodity; now it has only the money. Every luxurious indulgence is therefore destructive of public wealth. As all political economists know, it is *unproductive consumption*. The idea on which the old sumptuary laws were partly founded, that every luxurious expenditure tends to impoverish the country, is a stubborn fact.

Let us look also at "the encouragement of industry" which such expenditures produce. We have said, what none can dispute, that the true wealth of a nation consists in the time, skill and labor of its working citizens. The public welfare, so far as

it is corporeal, consists in an adequate supply of all the objects required by man's actual and natural wants for all the people. A certain total of those objects, such as food, clothing, etc., will be necessary annually to provide for all its citizens. *Now, the only source from which the nation can draw this supply is the annual industry of its own citizens* (unless, indeed, it is engaged in predatory warfare). Some of the articles of that supply may be imported from abroad; but if so, these imports are produced, not with money, but with some product of the nation's own industry. International commerce must always be, in the main, a barter. A certain number of the working hands of the nation must therefore be evidently employed annually in the production of the supply for the natural and necessary wants of the whole people. If too few hands are employed, the supply becomes inadequate, and those who are least able to buy at increased prices suffer want. Now it is very plain, that if many of the working hands of the nation are turned aside from the production of these supplies for real wants, to producing the objects of imaginary and artificial wants, by the seduction of better wages from the rich, the result is an inadequate supply of solid values, and suffering and misery at the other extreme of society. The perversion of industry may result in an increase to the individual laborer in the shape of larger money wages, but the inevitable result to the nation at large is a deficiency of the necessities of life and consequent misery to the laboring class in general. Money fills no hungry stomach and clothes no shivering back of itself. It is only the representative of other things which do. We will illustrate. Let us suppose that the increase of luxury causes the transference of a thousand laboring hands from the production of corn or other actual values which the nation bartered for foreign corn to the production of plate and jewelry. Their wages as farm laborers were fifty cents per day, and their wages as artisans are now one dollar per day. The change has seemed to result in advantage to these thousand laborers, because their wages are better. But the total result is that there is thus much less corn in the nation to feed it, and the price of corn rises, and as many people suffer for bread as were formerly supplied by the industry of these thousand men. And the use of the plate and jewelry produced is wholly an unproductive consumption, a total and irreparable abstraction from the national



wealth, while a large part of this corn, if these laborers had been suffered to continue producing corn, would have been eaten by working men, who would have used their strength in earning wealth in some form. Thus it would have been productive consumption.

The expenditure of money on artificial wants is therefore not an encouragement, but a misdirection of industry. It results, not in the increase, but in the final destruction of portions of the public wealth. Instead of diffusing accumulated wealth for the benefit of the laboring classes, it depresses those classes in general, begets starvation, and enhances the prices of the necessities of life. The artisans who profit at the time by these expenditures of course deny these conclusions, but just as sure as there is truth in political science, or the teachings of history, they are correct in the main.

These remarks explain at once the fact, so often remarked, that in every country the extremes of destitution among the poor are equal to the extremes of accumulation among the rich. The usual results of accumulated wealth must be indulgence in luxury, and luxury begets a misapplied industry and consequent want.

A plain corollary from these truths is this, that all laws of primogeniture, and all legislation which fosters large accumulations in single hands, are hostile to public wealth and the general good of the people. That nation is always most truly rich and prosperous to whom the words of Horace apply:

*"Privatus illis census erat brevis, commune magnum."*

We have here an explanation also for the anomalous evils of English society. In unfolding this explanation we shall illustrate the truth we have attempted to explain. The English are an industrious nation. Their agriculture and manufactures are eminently skilful. Nowhere on earth is science made to do so large a share of the productive work of human hands; and yet, with all this teeming production, England cannot comfortably feed and clothe her people any year. We do not now allude to the effect which her taxation and naval and military expenses may produce, but only to social causes. England is distinguished above all other nations by overgrown private fortunes. The incomes of these fortunes seek channels of expenditure, and the result is that a vast portion of the productive labor of the nation is perverted to the production of supplies for artificial wants.

Her aristocracy have acted upon the mistaken policy of "encouraging industry" by splendid expenditures until the industry of the nation is crushed. Men who ought to be producers of food and clothing, or of solid values to be bartered with other nations for food and clothing, have been seduced, by the offer of better money wages, to expend their labor on ten thousand things which satisfy no actual necessity of any man: on the manufacture of jewelry, and of dress and equipage, on the building of useless palaces, on the enclosing of useless, or partially useful parks, with unnecessary iron railings, on the laborious construction and keeping of pleasure grounds, on the watching of hares and partridges, on the tending of useless horses, dogs and deer, on the driving of unnecessary vehicles, on the rendering of unnecessary menial services, and a hundred other things. Thus, myriads of hands, which ought to be producing the solid supplies for the nation's actual wants, are industrious about nothing. And although personally these attendants may receive better wages, the general result is a waste of national industry and national want.

Let none then attempt to defend expensive living on these grounds. This plea contains one of the most valid reasons against it. The Christian should feel every superfluous indulgence a sin, because its general tendency is to blight the public welfare.

We shall be asked, possibly, "What, then, do you propose? Shall the incomes of the rich be hoarded, from year to year, while they confine themselves to the frugal expenditures of this Christian economy?" We answer, by no means. Let them flow forth freely, and to the last drop; but let it be in the channels of a true and a wise beneficence. Let a reasonable share of our wealth be devoted to the improvement of the agricultural and other resources of the country, with a benevolent regard to the temporal comfort of our fellow-citizens. But above all, let it be expended with boundless liberality in the great labors of evangelism: in printing saving truth, in sustaining teachers and preachers, in diffusing knowledge at home and abroad. Thus will our superfluous wealth employ and reward the industry of multitudes of meritorious men who perform this labor of love, and, unlike the expenditure of luxury, it will not be an *unproductive* industry to which our money will entice them. There



is no labor that is more fruitful of public wealth than evangelical labors, whether in the domestic or foreign field. Every ignorant, degraded man who is enlightened and sanctified becomes at once a producer of material wealth, for he is rendered an industrious citizen. And every heathen community that is evangelized becomes a recipient and a producer of the wealth of peaceful commerce. Thus superfluous riches may be scattered, not to create a devouring vortex of the national wealth, but to become, in turn, the seed of wealth, and to bless our fellow-men and the world with temporal welfare. And above all, an income of praise and a harvest of souls may be collected for the great Giver and Owner: "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen."



