

The Love of Money

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1862

The Love of Money has always been in more or less disrepute with moralists. They have almost universally assigned to it nearly the lowest place in the scale of human affections. We say of human affections, for it is one which distinguishes man from all other animals, however intelligent. 'You call me dog,' said Shylock to the Christian merchant; 'hath a dog money?' Phrenologists have indeed laid down that all the propensities—combativeness, destructiveness, philoprogenitiveness, alimentiveness, love of life, &c.—are 'common to man with the lower animals;' but we are surprised that they have not discovered a peculiar protuberance on the outside of the human head corresponding with a peculiar propensity for money inside it. It is the more to be regretted that they have not ascertained the locality of this organ, since a claim has been set up on behalf of the lower animals to a close relationship to the human family. If a bump of philargyiveness or philonomismativeness could be shown on the human head, a conspicuous absence of this manifestation on the cranium of the former would enable us to disprove the connection, to the satisfaction at least of believers in phrenology. It would not, however, enable us, without further inquiry, to determine whether the love of money, which distinguishes us from the brutes, places us above or below them in moral character. To satisfy ourselves on this point, we must begin by inquiring what this thing 'Money,' of which men, and men only, are so fond, consists of. Sir Robert Peel's celebrated question 'What is the meaning of that word, a pound, with which we are all familiar?' was answered by himself in terms to the effect that a pound of money is a fixed quantity of gold or silver. But this answer, though highly appropriate to a discussion on the currency, is irrelevant to our present inquiry, whether money is a good or an evil; and whether the love of it is a good or a bad quality in mankind. Sir Robert Peel very justly ridiculed the definition given by one writer on the currency of a pound, as 'a sense of value in reference to currency as compared with commodities.' Yet in practical life this is really something like what men generally mean and want by money. They mean so much goods; so much of the commodities for sale in the market of the world. A pound to a 'navvy,' for instance, is so much beer and tobacco; to his mother it is so much tea and sugar. But these two cases are sufficient to show the extreme difficulty of pronouncing any moral judgment whatever upon the love of money, considered as a general human propensity; for the love of tea and sugar is universally admitted to be in itself an innocent affection, while the love of beer and tobacco is often condemned as combining two most pernicious desires. The love of money is really only a phase for the love of a vast number of different things, which may be good, bad, or indifferent, regarded from a moral, religious, aesthetical, political, or medical point of view, but which are alike in one respect—namely, that they are all to be had for money, and are not to be had without it. As Solomon said, 'A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry; but money answereth all things.' The love of money is that universal desire for wealth from which political economists have deduced a theory of commercial values, along with several important truths respecting the conditions of industrial energy and prosperity. Everybody wishes for some kind of wealth, and money is convertible into every other kind; and therefore everybody loves money for some purpose or other, from which we get the laws of competition, prices, wages, profits, and rent. Yet this general principle of pecuniary interest or love of riches by no means explains all the phenomena of the economic world. For it is, as we have said already, only a single expression for a great variety of wants, wishes, and tastes, which are not always the same from age to age, or from country to country, nor felt alike by every individual in any one age or country, and which, moreover, lead to very different consequences as regards the nature, amount, and distribution of wealth, and as regards the material as well as the moral welfare of human society.

That disease of language which metaphysicians call the realism of the schools still infests many of the terms and phrases which philosophy must employ. A host of different things are alike in some one respect, and a common name is given to them in reference to the single quality or circumstance which they have in common. It is simply a name for their common feature, but it puts their numerous differences out of sight and out of mind, and they come to be thought of in a lump as one sort of thing. Those moralists, accordingly, who feel themselves the better for heartily denouncing the general principle of the love of money or pursuit of wealth with which political economy sets out, confound, in their horror of a mere abstraction, the love of health, cleanliness, decency, and knowledge, with sensuality, avarice, and vanity. And perhaps political economists have not escaped

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a bias from their own phraseology, and are apt to imagine in their scientific discussions a much fuller explanation of the complete phenomena of wealth, and a much closer approximation to the complete philosophy of the subject, than lies within their province as commonly circumscribed by themselves at present.

It is obvious that the love of money includes a demand for various things, the production of which variously affects both the material interests of the consumers and the quality and distribution of the revenue of the whole community. It includes a love of pictures, toys, jewellery, plate, furniture, clothing, opium, soap, bibles, brandy, and, in short, everything in the International Exhibition, and many things not exhibited there. It includes a love of eating and drinking, both in moderation and in excess; of literature and science; of architecture; of the fine arts; of indolence and ease, and of business and sport of foreign travel, and of a country house; of music; of charity, sensuality, cruelty, and power; of horses and dogs. It expresses sometimes a desire for the comforts of an old bachelor, and sometimes an inclination for matrimony; and when it takes the latter direction, it means with one young lady love in a cottage, and with another a palace without love; in one man it is fortunehunting in another, a disinterested attachment to Miss Aurora renniless. The disciples of Malthus know how to discriminate between the economic consequences of these diverse matrimonial tendencies, and the important differences of their influence on the price of beef. Napoleon III. seems to behold in money the sinews of war; his friend Mr. Cobden connects it with commerce and peace. The poor man's love of money is a different feeling from the rich man's, and, accordingly, the writer of this essay never throbs with the emotions which must animate the breasts of Baron Rothschild and Lord Overstone. The American Southerner worships in the almighty dollar the giver of African slaves; the negro slave of Brazil adores it chiefly as the purchaser of liberty. The wealth which is coveted by men in the East is not that which is most prized by the men of the West. An Indian Rajah's chief wealth is a plurality of wives, personal attendants and elephants, and a load of gold trappings on both his elephant's body and his own which, not exclusive of the wives, would be more than an English duke or prince could bear. An old writer gives an account of a religious ceremony which he witnessed in Turkey, at which 'Prince Mustapha a boy of eleven years old' was so overloaded with jewels, both himself and his horse, that one might say he carried the value of an empire about him.' That is to say, the wealth which, in the hands of English capitalists, would have made a whole territory prosperous, and been distributed in wages through many hundred families, was concentrated upon making one small Turkish child vain and uncomfortable. And the oriental lust for jewels not only has effects upon the economic condition of the world which merit the attention of the political economist, but it has also, in a great measure, sprung from the absence, for many ages, of the conditions essential to general prosperity, and the accumulation of wealth in really useful forms. Wherever insecurity has long prevailed, a spirit of hoarding must exist, with a desire for that sort of wealth which contains much value in a durable and portable form, and which is easily hidden, easily removed, and none the worse for being buried for months or years in the ground. It is probable, therefore, that the love of gold chains and jewels for which the European Jew is remarkable has a European as well as an Asiatic origin, being inherited from his persecuted, plundered, and usurious ancestors in the middle ages, who found it necessary to pack their wealth into the smallest possible compass.

The existence of security, banks, and paper currency, have long exterminated from England that curious animal the genuine miser, with his treasure in a strong box, doing no good to anyone. Dr. Johnson, talking of misers to Boswell, said, 'A man who keeps his money has, in reality, more use of it than he can have by spending it. Why, sir, Lowther, by keeping his money, had the command of the county, which his family has lost by spending it.' But an English millionaire does not keep his money to himself, as the ancient miser, whether he spends it or not. If he saves it, instead of locking it up or carrying it about on his body, he puts it in a bank, and the banker's customers make use of the wealth he does not himself consume.

But when we say that the form of the love of money which displays itself in a love of dress, ornaments, and jewels, is almost confined to the men of Eastern countries, we must be understood as speaking of men in the narrowest sense, and as making no allusion in that comparison to the ladies of the two hemispheres. Women have everywhere their own peculiar notions of the value of money; and a world of either men alone or of women alone would contain a very different assortment of articles of wealth from that in the great mundane shop for both sexes which exists. With most species of animals, the male is more gorgeously dressed than the female; but so it seems to be with the human species generally, only in its less civilized forms. For we may perceive, with the growth of European civilization, a marked decline in the taste of men for the display of

wealth on the body. A mediaeval baron was much more expensively got up than his wife or daughter. Even in the last century the toilette of a gentleman was nearly as elaborate and splendid as that of a lady. Now, a gentleman thinks he makes a smart appearance with a flower in his button-hole, at an assembly at which the ladies are blazing with diamonds. It might be an instructive inquiry how far this difference in the desire for wealth is traceable to a radical difference in the natural mental constitutions of the sexes, and how far to restraints which confine the ambition of women in general to paltry objects, leading them to waste their time in hunting husbands, while men hunt seats in parliament, and foxes. Addison remarks, in the 'Spectator,' that 'One may observe that women in all ages have taken more pains than men to adorn the outside of their heads.' Perhaps one reason for this is, that men have in all ages prevented them from taking so much pains to adorn the inside. While we are on the subject of dress as one of the equivalents of money, and one of the objects of its pursuit, we may make a remark upon that singular revolution of the human mind through which it has come to be thought, by all men of a certain rank, in the Western world, becoming to attire themselves every evening in black from head to foot, as if for a funeral; and by most men, of all ranks, in that civilized region, becoming to clothe themselves in the dingiest hues all day long. The male apparel which is the last product of civilization appears to display a remarkable mixture of good sense and bad taste. The mistake made by the ladies of our time seems to be that of aiming at show and accomplishing waste; while the mistake of the gentlemen is that of aiming at plainness and accomplishing gloom.

Many other illustrations might be given of the curious turns taken by the fancy for clothing, as one of the uses of money. In the north of Ireland, for example, it is common to see a girl on the road with a smart bonnet, an extensive petticoat, and a gay parasol carried in the usual manner, but with a pair of shoes not upon her feet, but in her hands. Five-and-twenty years ago such a girl would have no more minded the effect of the sun on the skin of her face, than she now minds the effect of the earth on the skin of her foot; and five-and-twenty years hence it may be safely predicted that such a girl will not only think it advisable to wear her shoes on her feet, but will discover that they really hurt less there, when one is used to them, than the stones upon the road. At the same time, we must admit that the shoemakers of mankind and of womankind, too, we presume have left nothing undone to perpetuate a prejudice against their own particular production, and to weaken the force of the love of money for the sake of obtaining it. There is, again, in the inventory of modern wealth, and among the civilized uses of money, another article of dress of so obvious and simple a character that many persons may naturally suppose that it descends from the most remote antiquity. Yet, some centuries ago, all the wardrobes in England did not comprise a single night-dress for lady or gentleman, king or queen. Take again, another institution of the modern dressing-room the bath. There is a history of civilization in the Tale of a Tub. There is a letter to the old 'Spectator,' on the effects of the love of money, in which the writer says that it is to that we owe the politician, the merchant, and the lawyer; 'Nay,' he adds, 'I believe to that also we are indebted for our 'Spectator.'" We are not prepared to explain the various motives which inspire the pens of authors. Did Shakspeare write for money? Did rope? Did Dr. Johnson? Did Lord Macaulay? Does Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton? We are concerned at present with the motives of consumers rather than producers; and one thing at least is clear, that it is highly to the credit of the former to elicit such productions from the latter, and that the love of money in the modern world is to a great extent the love of good, elevating, and instructive objects a love which meets with its return. New desires for health, decency, knowledge, refinement, and intellectual pleasures, have, in fact, revolutionised production. The antithesis to modern wealth is not so much poverty as a different kind of wealth. The change is more remarkable in the quality than in the quantity. No inconsiderable part of human wealth, it is true, still consists of the means of unhappiness rather than of happiness, and of the gratification of vice rather than of virtue. On the whole, however, there is a transformation in the moral character of wealth, and of the desires involved in the general love of money. For the most part, instead of representing wickedness, brutal delight, and idle pomp, or conquest, tyranny, and plunder, the wealth of Europe represents peace, culture, liberty, and the comfort of the many rather than the magnificence of the few. Where man's treasure is, there his heart is also; and the treasures of modern civilization seem to us to show as remarkable an improvement in the moral as in the intellectual and physical condition of society. 'Riches,' said Milton, 'grow in hell;' for even in his time much of the wealth that grew on earth bore many marks of being the property of bad and unhappy beings. But we may venture now to ask those well-meaning persons who, without regard to time and place, and without discrimination between good and evil, repeat ancient warnings against the love of money and the pursuit of wealth, whether they mean to praise dirt under the name of poverty, and whether they think idleness better than industry, ignorance better than science and art, and barbarism better than civilized progress? To political economists, on the other hand, we venture to suggest the cultivation of a department of

the philosophy of riches which has never been scientifically investigated. The laws which regulate the value of the supply forthcoming from producers have been almost exhaustively developed in political economy; but the deeper laws which regulate the demand of the consumers, and which give the love of money all its force and all its meaning, have never yet received the regular attention of any school of philosophers.

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