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EXTRAVAGANCE

SUPPORTED ON THE

Principles of Policy and Philosophy.

Le Superflu, chose très nécessaire.

VOLT. Mondain.

L O N D O N.

Printed for the Truellers, No. 14, Red-Lion-Street,
Clerkenwell.

[Price 2s.]

L U X U R Y

NO POLITICAL EVIL.

THE influence of Luxury on the prosperity of States, gives rise to one of those questions, on which most men have something to say ; but wherein they generally disagree.

If to acquire a just idea of Luxury, with respect to bodies politic, were a matter of mere curiosity, one would not dream of treating on a subject, which so many writers have handled already, and to little purpose ; but the reasoning which may be established on this head is of the utmost importance.

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tance. It interests the prosperity of States, and, of course, it is the duty of a good citizen to throw all the light upon it he can.

There is one striking observation that occurs upon this subject; though in theory the common opinion is against it; in practice, the world is for it: though moralists inveigh against it, wise statesmen have encouraged it. If Luxury be a vice, and cause those disasters so often imputed to it, why have not some measures been taken to suppress it? But if, on the contrary, it be a necessary resource, without which every thing would languish, we cannot place this truth in too clear a view, lest any unforeseen, any impolitic attack upon it should destroy that source, on which the opulence of the State, and public welfare, depend.

Where there is a certain extent of empire, the genius and labour of a numerous people are able to effect wonders; and it is the chief interest of such a State to encourage labour and industry to the utmost.

Nature facilitates this object, by that diversity she has scattered in her productions;
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by the wants she has laid man open to; by the faculty she has endowed him with, and by the desire she has implanted in him, for all kinds of indulgences, consistent with his being.

The legislature, then, after the most sacred assurances to the artificer, that he shall enjoy the whole fruits of his labour, ought to leave *him* to the full scope of his abilities, and the consumer to the luxuriance of his fancy; without any other restriction, than to prohibit the purchase of foreign productions, and that only in certain cases, very maturely considered, and more seldom restrained than is commonly thought necessary.

Certain assurances that every one shall receive the price of his labour is so capital a condition, that, without it, emulation would die away; and the hope of obtaining by our labour sufficient to gratify our wishes, is another condition equally capital, without which there would scarce be any emulation at all.

Could we suppose a state where luxuries are prohibited, men would be, in a great
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measure, idle; for our natural wants consuming less than our labour will produce, if other incitements did not actuate the industry of the people, the progress of the State would stand still, when it might otherwise be carried to a great extent; for, though the leisure hours of the people might be employed in securing their territory from the encroachments of an enemy, yet, these being completed, time would hang heavy upon their hands; and, as excess of plenty would embarrass, and men are not fond of working without a prospect of personal advantage, they would limit their productions to the bounds of consumption, and, being forbidden the enjoyment of indulgences, they would work no more.

But if, among a numerous people, the workman be left to the full scope of his industry, and the consumer to the luxuriance of his fancy, the mind will unfold, and arts will multiply; every inclination be animated, and the State, if not checked in its progress by a defect in its constitution,

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tion, will stretch to the utmost extent of prosperity.

For the arts, whether useful or frivolous, create, without intermission, a variety of indulgences, many indeed of a short duration, but which leave with us such a wish for their continuance, as to become afterwards a kind of want. Hence, a spirit of industry is kept up; hence, an abundance of every thing we wish; hence, a numerous population. This chain of effects brings wealth, brings strength, brings lasting felicity to an empire.

Wealth results from this chain of effects, by the quantity of materials produced; and strength, by the number of men these materials support.

But, with respect to a numerous population, we must advert to observation, and reason from the superintendence of Providence, which is particularly careful of every species of animals, increasing or diminishing the species, in proportion to the quantity of provisions among them, and the uses to which they are appropriated. Beasts of prey, that prowl the deserts for subsistence,
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and which, being of a carnivorous kind, men use not for food, are slow breeders, and very few in number; such are, the lion, the tiger, and some others: but graminivorous animals, that live upon the spontaneous productions of the earth, such as the sheep, the swine, the hare, and many others, are fast breeders, and multiply exceedingly; for these would live even without the assistance of man. Where there is plenty of food, the animal race will multiply surprisingly, witness the great increase of vermin in a granary full of corn. And as it is with animals of an inferior class, so it is with man. One man and one woman might, in the nature of things, have thirty children; but, in general, they might have ten, five males and five females. At every generation, then, was mankind propagated to the utmost, they would increase in number five times; so that, in a very short space of time, a nation might become exceedingly populous. Now, it is the difficulty of procuring food, and obtaining the necessaries of life, that checks this propagation. A very wise interference of Providence!—Hence it is,

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is, that, in the brutal creation, the lioness does not breed so fast as the hare, it requiring a large tract of country to supply the former with food; and hence it is, with the human species, in tribes of savages, who live by hunting, and require an extensive district to furnish them with provisions, that propagation does not take place in so great a degree as in civilized societies, where, by the genius and industry of man, a few acres of ground are rendered sufficient to support a family.

As the wealth, then, and strength of a country depend, in a great measure, upon its population; and as population increases or diminishes in proportion to the provisions of life; would it not be wise to encourage husbandry, as well as manufactures, and cultivate the country to the utmost?

But to return to my subject. Though man is formed to live upon the spontaneous productions of the earth, a thirst for Luxuries is natural to him; and without such a thirst, societies could neither flourish nor exist. Without a desire for Luxuries, our intellectual faculties would be a disadvantage

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tage to us ; we should languish away our hours in stupidity, occupied only with the momentary want ; and that being, destined by nature to unite itself with its fellow-creatures in embellishing the earth, would wear away its days in solitude, lost in the forests with the lower class of animals. It is the idea alone of improving our situation, and adding to our happiness, that urges us to the trouble of thinking ; and to no other object could our understanding be applied.

The views of creation take place with certainty ; they produce their effects infallibly. Though man, in the midst of unfavourable circumstances that weaken or check the exertion of his faculties, be still, through the favour of Providence, in a situation to preserve his existence, without any other care than that of gathering the provisions that are scattered round him ; and though this may suggest to him an idea of being in solitude ; yet the Author of all that breathes has not left him at liberty to withdraw himself from the purposes for which he was created. That active spirit, that intellectual faculty, that power of completion with

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which he is endowed, will not suffer him to shut himself up in the narrow sphere of absolute necessity. It rests not with him to reject his benefits, when he perceives the means of procuring them. His first attempts make him sensible of a want of union with other men ; and this is the origin of all societies.

As a thirst then for indulgences or Luxuries, or a wish to render life more comfortable than nature bestows it, is the first cause of societies, so it is the very soul and support of them. The more raging this thirst is, the more men study to reap advantages from one another, and from every thing about them. The mind quickens ; the means of every individual increase, and these means are the sinews of the body politic.

What strength would a society of naked savages have, reposing in a thicket, living from day to day by hunting, and on wild fruits ; changing their place of abode, as they exhaust the district, possessing only a bow, a few arrows, and perhaps a tomahawk,

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hawk, and having no time to spare from the search of their daily food?

Such a society cannot derive an advantage even from numbers; the mode of each man's living requiring a great extent of ground. Now, independent of that check to population, occasioned by fatigue and scarcity of food, incident to such a state of life; it is evident, that if families here increase, they will be obliged to divide and separate at great distances from each other, in order to procure provisions; and presently becoming enemies, by contention for an object so essential as food, they will fall on one another furiously. Such is the picture the uncivilized part of the world presents us.

The savage, however, who makes use of a bow, has already stepped over the first boundaries of his nature. This instrument is a convenience, by which he extends his primitive power, and facilitates the execution of his designs. It is a species of Luxury. This savage, without any assistance, could supply his wants, before he had a bow. He who makes use of a carriage, well hung, to convey himself without fatigue where
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his affairs call him, acts no otherwise than he who employs a weapon to obtain his prey, without being at the trouble of running after it.

A little reflection will be sufficient to shew the effects which a desire to render life comfortable has, upon the strength and power of a nation.

Once a society of men, weary of wandering and living in the open air, begins to erect cabbins for their defence against the injuries of time, and of course to fix their abode, it is easy to conceive that this first idea of convenience will give birth to a thousand others. The same inclination that produces one, leads them to covet more. When they can store provisions, they wish to collect them. They sow grain about their dwellings, raise vegetables, and breed different kinds of animals, both for food and for labour.

In this state their substance increases; they have time upon their hands; are more sedentary, and communicate a great deal together. By such communication they catch ideas from each other, and what they

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already possess furnishes them with means to carry their ideas into execution. Families increase, in consequence of their ease; and where there is sufficient extent of territory, the society is continually spreading. Each individual applies his genius to facilitate his labour. The discoveries of some, become a benefit to others; and, with the aid of these inventions, the labour of a few supplies the wants of many.

Such as are unemployed in husbandry will not straggle wide in search of new lands to cultivate. Attached to each other by the ties of friendship, parentage, and habit, they will continue with their brethren, and seek, by their genius and industry, to repay those who furnish them with subsistence.

Whilst then a people, living strangers to Luxury, and confining themselves to the first simple gifts which Nature bestows, living naked, without any settled habitation, without agriculture, continues ever, while it so exists, in the same state of weakness, indigence, and stupidity; a more active people, studying to improve their situation,

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tion, becomes daily more and more enlightened, and are constantly gathering strength and wealth, so long as moral causes do not impede their progress. Hence then occurs the following plain reasoning.

The idea of building a house, and that of raising plants for food, are dictated by that natural instinct, which leads man to profit by his genius, employing it to procure himself conveniences. From these first ideas flow a thousand others, as a consequence of the same principle, and altogether produce the formation of great societies and their power. Hence arise arts, manufactures, trades, and all the luxuries of life, that constitute the strength and power of a nation.

To reason closely, gilded ceilings, bronzes, porcelain, are, in fact, no more Luxuries than shoes or stockings. In Poland, in Hungary, and in some parts of Scotland, the peasantry, in common, cover not their feet or legs with any thing; whenever they do, it is by way of dress, as white gloves are worn by us. Men and women there take long journeys barefooted, even at times when the country is covered with snow.

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fnow. All is relative. Shoes, to a person who never wore any, are a very *troublesome* superfluity. A precious vase upon a chimney-piece, is an *agreeable* superfluity. Ornaments that decorate the house, the clothes, or the furniture, of the rich, are perhaps less superfluities to them, than the money would be with which they purchase them, if they had no other use to convert it to.

It is idle to talk of one thing being more a Luxury than another. All superfluities are Luxuries; and what is not immediately necessary, is superfluous; of course, every thing that is not essential to our existence, is a Luxury. He, who, not finding himself at ease, when sleeping on the ground, contrived to weave the first mat of rushes for his repose, consulted his indulgence as much as he who since composed the bed of down. They each made use of those materials they could get. It was circumstance only that prevented the one, as well as the other, from accomplishing the object of his wishes.

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If I may, without Luxury, cover myself with a sheep-skin, merely cut and made into a form to fit me, and enable me to use my limbs; if I may, also, without being reproached with Luxury, carry my ingenuity further, and make me a coat with the wool of this animal, coarsely spun; do I deserve to be called luxurious, if I spin this wool finer, weave it better, and clothe myself with a better kind of stuff? I make use only of my abilities and my understanding to answer my intentions in the best manner possible, which is to clothe myself conveniently and comfortably. As soon then as I am allowed to make use of art, be it ever so little, to procure me any one enjoyment; upon what principles would they prohibit my employing all the art, of which I am capable? Would they alledge that Luxury consists in cleverness of execution?

And, if I may, without Luxury, make use of the wool, a part of one animal, I may, equally, without incurring reproach, employ the parts of any other animal, or any thing convertible into clothes, whether it be goats-beard, flax, cotton, or silk.

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These materials bear all the same rank in nature; and when I can obtain them, I may indifferently use them as I please; one is, in itself, no more a Luxury than another. The same may be said of every thing I use. The materials of which a thing is made, are no more a Luxury than the thing itself. Gold and lead, diamonds and flints, are productions of the earth intrinsically equal. My choice only is reprehensible or not, according as the qualities of the materials I use, answer or not answer my intentions. In considering things absolutely, there is no other rule to go by.

If, then, useful inventions, and those that are merely pleasurable, partake (as is evident they do) of the same principle; if all things that are not immediately necessary, are Luxuries, it is ridiculous to condemn either this or that; a manufacture of the most trifling article is not without its advantage to the state, as it tends to create that disbursement from which the state draws its resources, and employs a number of hands.

He that would have the most frivolous toy, or the most useful piece of furniture,

cannot acquire either one or the other, but by his own labour, or by paying for the labour of a workman. If he makes the thing himself, whether it be useful or frivolous, he must be precedently provided with subsistence, or supply, for his other necessary wants, during the time he is at work. If he borrows the assistance of another, he must feed, and supply the wants of that other, during the time he employs him, or give him an equivalent for his trouble. In both these cases, no time is employed that is subtracted from necessary want. The two inhabitants are supported, the taxes are paid, and the produce of this labour, be it of what kind it will, equally augments the stock of national wealth. Unnecessary things bear a price, as well as things of use.

Further, it generally happens, that, in the fabrication of a frivolous thing, the maker gets a living; which perhaps he could not otherwise do; and the purchaser an enjoyment, which he would not otherwise have. Besides, in making this bauble, the artist, perhaps, exercises a talent, which, one day or other, may be applied to more useful purposes.

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purposes. The toyman, for example, who makes dolls of *papier maché* to-day, shall, if required, make instrument-cases, and boxes of the same materials to-morrow. He knows how to set about it.

Let us suppose, for a moment, that superfluities or unnecessary things were prohibited or unknown; and let us suppose, which is by no means the truth, that every man had ground to till. In this case, the active man, who, by the fruits of his labour, would be in a situation to procure himself superfluities, but having no such desire, and not knowing what to do with the product of his labour, would work no longer. The man also whose profession it is to make superfluities, cultivates as much ground as supplies him with food; and *he* works no more. Here now are two inhabitants merely supported in a contrary hypothesis; and how is the state affected by the change? Cultivation is not so extended, and the value of those superfluities, which would otherwise have been made, is lost; for, the natural wants of man consuming less than his labour will produce, if his spare time

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be not employed in necessary articles, the benefit of his time must be lost to society.

It is the same in gratifications, from which we draw nothing substantial; such as dancing, music, public exhibitions, and the like. Suppress these pleasures, and let the men who are thus employed, busy themselves in cultivation; what then? Those before employed in husbandry would not have occasion to work so much; consequently there would be no more hands employed in cultivation than before; nor any greater quantity of productions; and society, at the same time, would have fewer arts, and less enjoyments.

Government might certainly, in many cases, employ the time and industry of the people, in a more advantageous manner to the state, than by suffering them to labour for the produce of unnecessary things: but, if Government has no employ to set them about, (and the time must come when Government cannot employ every individual unengaged in husbandry or necessary business), or if Government does not employ them, after men have provided for their

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natural wants, if superfluities are prohibited, they will be idle. On the contrary, if Luxuries are encouraged, whatever be the object on which these men employ their spare time, it cannot but turn to the advantage of the nation, since the object they covet must be acquired by work.

Work, if I may use the expression, is a second creator. Without the form which this gives to matter, almost all that infinity of productions, with which the earth teems, would be lost to us. Surrounded with a thousand possible benefits, we should wear out our days bereft of all.

A nation can no way multiply its possessions, be rich or powerful, nor can it any way be prosperous, but through the labour of the people. The great object, then, in administration, is to encourage and reward industry. No matter what the object be that incites it. Not even trifles can be produced, but by that useful labour which adds to the strength of a state. There would be no musicians, mountebanks, or makers of toys, unless men gained a livelihood by such professions. These men must be fed, and they are

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are fed by the labour of others, in return for the amusements they afford. Provisions therefore produced by these objects do not exist the less, because the objects are frivolous; and as provisions cannot be produced, but by cultivation of land, it follows, that musicians, mountebanks, &c. are proportionally instrumental to cultivation. Like the minstrels of old, who were employed by lords of manors to divert the copyholders whilst they were at work for them. As music enlivens the spirits, and encreases activity, where is the impropriety of one man's saying to another, on condition that you will pipe to me whilst I am employed, I will do your work as well as my own. Without such an incitement, a man would abate in his exertions, and he would work only for himself. Besides, these men so fed, and these provisions that feed them, may be otherwise employed, as circumstances may require; and it is no small advantage to a state, to have a number of men in reserve; for, by the doctrine before advanced, plenty of provisions naturally increases population; and as occasional inclination to spend money

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money in amusements, idle as it may appear, encourages work, this work multiplies provisions, promotes population, and augments the wealth of individuals; so that society not only has a reserve of men to answer particular purposes, but the public taxes are more cheerfully paid; for if a man's taxes amount to ten pounds, his contribution is less felt, if he possesses sixty pounds, than if he possessed only thirty.

We are too apt to annex the idea of Luxury to articles which indulge a sensual gratification, to things of ornament and magnificence, to the delicacies of the table, and certain peculiar indulgences; but this is begging the question. I have already proved, that whatever is not immediately necessary to our existence, is a Luxury; and if a Luxury is not condemnable in one case, it is not in another; I speak now, as to Luxuries in general; there may be indeed certain species of Luxuries that may injure the morals of a community, and to this the Legislative power should advert; but this is no argument for condemning Luxuries in the gross, since it is by Luxury alone that any state can exist.

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We do not reflect, that when the first necessities of life are supplied, man is in want of things that give pleasure, as much as any other; and that these articles which refresh him, are, probably, less superfluous than a great number of inventions that are merely useful. The wine a man drinks can, perhaps, less be dispensed with, than the watch in his pocket. That which pleases, interests as much as that which is useful. There is no dissipation or corruption in this: both are equally good in their place. A gold enamelled box, which a variety of arts combine to embellish, is not, indeed, so useful as a clock; it is equally useful, however, with a rose or a tulip, whose form and richness of colouring enrapture the eye. Pleasure is a real good. Nature would make us sensible of it, and with this view, she has taken care to adorn her works. Was the earth without flowers, without verdure, to produce only fruits, would human beings, in its dreary surface, robbed of the odoriferous perfumes and enchanting scenes of spring, lose nothing? Would they have nothing to regret?

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Those who declaim against Luxury seem wilfully blind. They call nothing Luxuries, that is of any standing; this censure falls only on modern inventions and refinements; they cannot be made to see, that what they permit as useful and allowable, is of the same nature with that they condemn; nor will they reflect, that such things as escape their censure now, were, at the time they were first made, and, according to their principles ought to be, as much classed among Luxuries, as things they now proscribe. They will not see that the modern improvements they condemn, are the natural consequence of perfection in the arts, and the progress of the mind and taste.

Men have always carried Luxury to the highest pitch they could. Want of means, or knowledge, was the only thing that stopped them. If we build our houses more magnificently, ornament them more superbly, and make them more convenient than was done five hundred years ago, it is, because we have found out, that it is better so to do, and because the progress of arts enable us to do it. It is on the same principle

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eiple, that we widen our streets, and pave them better.

Say not, that Luxury is injurious to a people: cast your eyes over the face of the world, and take the nations in review. Those people where you find the greatest Luxury, are the most powerful. England, France, Italy hold, doubtless, the first rank in Europe, and these are the countries where Luxury reigns in her greatest glory. What renown for power and grandeur did the ancient people of Asia, so famous for their Luxury, acquire? Asia, even now, in spite of the destructive effects of those governments that are there established, preserves still a degree of Luxury. How much does it eclipse both Africa and the greatest part of America, whose unfortunate inhabitants are acquainted with scarce any thing beyond the first necessities of life!

It may be objected, that a thirst for Luxuries, in augmenting the desires and expences of each individual, necessarily augments the price of labour throughout all classes of men; that, of course, the state is under a necessity of paying higher salaries to its of-

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ficers, and encreasing its pensions ; and that such a surcharge of expence, undermining it by degrees, must end in its ruin. This is easily answered. That a desire for Luxuries increases the price of labour, is very true ; but this increase of price does not arise from an augmentation of our desires and wants, but from an increase of wealth brought about by the encouragement thus given to industry, and that spur to work, which is the source of almost all our riches. If then, through the existence of Luxury, Government is obliged to pay a greater price, it has also more resources to pay it from. Its expences and resources are proportioned to each other, and the State gains by Luxury, in becoming more happy and more powerful.

In reasoning from facts, on a principle of politics, we must take care not to attribute to Luxury, evils which flow only from a defect in that government, where such facts are observed. The pretensions of officers in any state, can never force it to pay greater salaries than it is capable of doing, or than its natural means will admit of. An economy

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nomy founded on reason, and modified by circumstances, should preside over the public expences. It is not necessary that for a hundred sheep there should be fifty shepherds ; nor that an impolitic financier, prodigal of the public money, should be at liberty to tax the people at his will to support those shepherds. That Luxury favours the prosperity of States is evident ; but this is, provided the constitution of the government there established, does not destroy its useful influence.

It has been said, that Luxury renders men venal, robs them of their public spirit, and disposes them to become slaves. This I deny. Men never sell themselves, but when there are proper purchasers. Suppress the abilities of the corrupter, and they will continue uncorrupted in the midst of the greatest Luxury. On the contrary, whoever has many favours to bestow, and is in possession of great power, will turn them to his advantage, whether men are luxurious or not. It is not Luxury that corrupts mankind ; they are naturally corrupt from disposition, and when so disposed, would as soon devote

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themselves to another for a mere livelihood, as for great sums of money. Sp. Mælius in Rome aspired to the throne. He gained one half the people by the corn he distributed; and had it not been for the activity of the Senate, who discovered this project, the Romans, so jealous of their liberty, would have lost it from that hour.

The same reasoning will hold good among ourselves. If the vices of administration did not, by secret pensions and other rewards, enable gentlemen to purchase their seats in parliament, there would be no seats to be purchased. Time was, when we were obliged to court gentlemen to represent us, and even pay them for their attendance; but since a corrupt system of politics has introduced venality into parliament, the very electors themselves will not give their votes without a reward.

Public spirit seldom gives way in the members of a State, but when men derive no advantage from such spirit; and we do not renounce liberty, but when we despair of preserving it. It is not Luxury that gives birth to these unfortunate dispositions: they
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arise from a constitution of government, where the rights of the people and the prince are all combined for the common interests of both.

It is an error, therefore, to reproach Luxury with gradually gaining such an ascendancy over minds, that are more constrained by obligations, or by necessity, to be thus corrupt, than from any natural inclinations. If men devote themselves to the service of others, it is because they are so circumstanced that they cannot avoid it. Should it be urged, that the unnecessary expences we enter into, lead us into such situations; I do aver, that these extra expences are ultimately owing to the constitution of a State. Spending of money, through mere ostentation, can never be general, but in a country where the law bends under the powerful, and is strong only against the weak; where favour decides all; where we cannot hope to obtain any thing, through equity, merit, or reason solely; and where money chiefly opens the gates to honours, to dignities, and to high offices. We see, then, that it is not Luxury that rules, even
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when we give the greatest way to it; we are led on by very different motives, by views of vanity, ambition, and fortune, and even, in many cases, by the simple view of supporting the situation we are in. Where men are respected according to the appearance they make, they will endeavour to make the best appearance they can.

In Switzerland and Holland, we nowhere see that ridiculous extravagance, resulting from a sumptuous outside, with poverty and misery beneath it. Expences there are more judiciously distributed. And why? Men are not there formed of a different nature. They have not a finer discernment in that which truly constitutes their happiness; and if we estimate the general expence of the whole inhabitants of these countries, we shall find that each spends in conveniencies, in superfluities, in short in luxuries, a good deal more than do those people whom we think we are justifiable in reproaching with being extravagantly luxurious. The good conduct of the Swiss and the Dutch in this matter, is cleared up by the political constitution of their countries.

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No degree of despotism is there known. Offices are not venal. The rigor of the laws, and the determination of appointments, are not in proportion there to credit, and the reputation of being rich. A man may become poor among them, without any danger to his safety or his advancement. In whatever place it be, where other manners reign, with another form of government, it would be idle to attempt a reformation of those manners, by the voice of exhortation, until a change took place in its political constitution.

But men, say the adversaries of Luxury, enter thus into expences they cannot afford. Who can determine this? What is more fluctuating, or more unknown, than the fortunes of individuals? What is more variable than the use made of these fortunes? You tax a man with Luxury for running into certain expences, because you suppose his circumstances will not admit of them: they *do* however admit of them, of course they must be more considerable than you imagine; or, perhaps, the man saves it in some articles, to spend it upon others, and thus puts himself in a situation to gratify himself

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himself in those objects you condemn. When a man enters into expences of Luxury, the fact proves, that, for the moment, he is enabled to do it. He is certainly without reproach, if his expences do not tend to injure his fortune. If they do, it is not his desire for Luxuries that ought to be condemned, but his misconduct. He would be equally to blame, if he hurt his fortune by any other expences, or even idleness. Such steps would equally reduce him to the situation of those who ruin themselves by Luxury; because, in such a case, a man is more expensive than he ought to be. His fault is, not spending his money upon any particular object, but spending, in the whole, more than he can afford. But this, though an injury to himself, is not so to the state, on which the present question only hangs.

As little as we are accustomed to consider things in a general way, we know that one individual cannot injure his fortune, nor render himself reprehensible for his expences, without enriching, or at least giving bread, by this means, to other individuals. We know that these expences, what-
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ever they are, being entered into in society, go, if I may so express myself, merely from the left-hand to the right, and do no injury to the body politic.

There is no doubt, but that the gratifications of Luxury, as far as they tend to injure individuals, may, with some foundation, be condemned from the pulpit, and by such writers as undertake to advise mankind for their private good*. Luxury, disproportioned to a man's fortune in life, is certainly blameable; nay, though proportioned to his fortune, it is still reprehensible, when the expences it leads him into, and the indulgences he gives way to, carry him beyond the proper bounds of decency and moderation.

But what is vicious in these two cases, does not interest the body politic, and is not injurious, but to those individuals on

* Such is the Author of a tract that has run through many editions, called, *The Way to be Rich and Respectable*; containing, among other things, a variety of estimates of family expences, adapted to every one's circumstances, shewing, how comfortably people may live upon a little with œconomy.

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whom such censure justly falls. Policy, which sees nothing but in the aggregate, is not affected by any small number of particular inconveniences. She does not feel the folly of a citizen, whose Luxury has ruined his affairs, and provoked the public censure. She finds in a general spirit of Luxury, a principle to encourage labour, and in labour, a fund of riches and enjoyments, without end; from whence result the power of the State, and the happiness of its subjects. Luxury, says Melon *, is an idle term, which would banish every operation of policy and commerce, it carrying with it false, vague, and confused ideas, whose abuse tends to check industry in its source.

A spirit of Luxury, continually labouring to create new pleasures and furnish new conveniences, begets indeed a great many frivolous things; but how seducing soever this desire for frivolous things may be supposed, we have no reason to fear that it will so invade a whole nation, as to make them madly neglect the useful and truly conve-

* Political Essays on Commerce, chap. 9.

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nient, in order to dedicate their whole time, pains, and industry, to procure themselves trifles. We shall never see a person deprive himself of bread to purchase baubles for his chimney-piece; nor go without shoes, to adorn himself with lace. Trifles have no attraction, but with people who know no want.

The wretched situation of numbers abounding in wealth and indulgences, militates against Luxury, and leads us to consider it as debauchery. We become angry, to see whole families languishing under the want of necessaries, whilst others are squandering their substance in pleasures, trifles, and ostentation. Why, say we, should man, standing by birth upon a natural equality, experience so different a lot? Our sensibility shakes our judgment. We severely reproach the wealthy with their enjoyments, as if these enjoyments were taken from the subsistence of the poor; and as if the poor would not feel equal distress, were the rich to bury their treasures. Whilst we are touched with commiseration for the unfortunate, who groan under the scourge

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of poverty, we should not suffer our feelings to shut our eyes against the injustice of those who complain.

The prosperity of a State necessarily depends upon right of property. If the enjoyment of the fruit of my industry, if my savings, my acquisitions are not secured to me in the most sacred manner, so that they are fully and wholly at my own disposal, my emulation dies away, and I should cease to work, where I reap no profit. Whatever use the owner may make of his revenue or his gains, he does not enjoy it at the expence of another. If he hoards, his property is of no use to any one but himself; if he spends, that is to say, if he indulges himself in Luxury, then, every agent he employs for his gratifications, receives part of his fortune, in the sums of money he pays. In distributing his income thus, he is far more beneficial to the State, than if, forgetting himself, he should dispose of it in acts of beneficence. These men on whom his liberality would fall, would consume it, without producing any thing; whereas the
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produce of those who worked for him, would continue after the consumption of their pay, and be of some value.

Besides, in the latter case, the state would contain every where men versed in the practice of the arts, instead of useless men, who know not how to turn their hands to any thing. Emulation, diffused among workmen, animates their industry; a variety of inventions springs from their efforts; the mind gathers knowledge and powers; progression takes place; and society gains in a thousand ways, by the concurrence of so many effects.

But the utility of Luxury in men of property, is not confined to the emulation spread among workmen, who have only to depend upon their labour. A desire for Luxuries begets a love of property, makes a man attentive to the preservation of his wealth, puts him upon the search of means to improve his income, excites others to the same by his example, and will not suffer any order of men to vegetate in idleness. Without such a spur as a desire for Luxuries occasions, many, perhaps, sensible
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of no want, would sleep over their wealth, and turn it to little or no advantage.

What is it that supports this country but its Luxuries? Were sumptuary laws established, or the superfluities of life taxed so high, as to render men of small fortune unable to procure them, Government would defeat its own views, and the interest of the national debt would be unpaid. Were we to consider well the vast sums of money which the Luxuries of life bring into the Public Treasury, it would soon shew the impolicy of any step towards their extinction. Half the revenues of this country arises from duties on articles not immediately necessary to the existence, or even the happiness, of the people, such as wine, spirits, beer, tobacco, tea, sugar, glass, china, pictures, wheels, post-chaises, men servants, newspapers, and a thousand others that could be very well dispensed with. But on the encouragement of Luxuries, the riches of a kingdom depend; it not only enables a state to provide for its internal defence, to extend its territories, and augment its commerce; but, contrary to a received

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ceived opinion, it tends to increase population, as I have already shewn, and in which the wealth and strength of a nation has long been allowed to consist.

But, after all, What is the inconvenience attending Luxury, that it is so much decried? I have corn and wine, more than I can consume. Their quantity puts me to an expence to keep it. It is a superfluity that encumbers me. I exchange it for a superfluity I wish for, the enjoyment of which rewards my labours, and stimulates my emulation. How, then, would you have me dispose of this superfluity? Give it to the indigent, who are in want of sustenance? I do so; but, instead of giving it to an idle pauper, one without talents, and whom charity has rendered of little use to society, I give it to persons who, relying upon trade or industry for support, have no occasion to stoop to others for their bread. They eat it without humiliation. They have earned it. It is their own. Besides, in giving it to such people, I serve the State, by the taxes their labour produces,

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whilst, at the same time, I am serving *them*.

Luxury is accused of decreasing population; that Luxury, which supports so many families, which invites so many workmen to marry, by the ease they acquire in exchange for their industry. Let us turn our thoughts, for a moment, to the negroes, to the savages of Louisiana.—Luxury does not devour these people; and yet, are they numerous? On the other hand, how populous was Spain under the dominion of the Moors, and yet what people were ever more brave, or more luxurious?

So far from Luxury's depopulating a State, if there be any thing to fear from it, it is that it will introduce an enormous population. It is the fate of sublunary things to fall away by the very causes that promoted their progress. The sources of the prosperity of a State corrupt it in the end, where a prudent administration does not direct and conduct its course. Emulation, produced by Luxury, and by the security of property, gives birth to a prodigious

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ous abundance, and from this abundance springs a still more prodigious population; the number of the human race in a country being always in proportion, as was before observed, to the productions which that country furnishes for the use of man. Of course, if no steps are taken to prevent an excess of population, it becomes an evil.

For where the inhabitants are too numerous, every other interest, except that of obtaining a livelihood is silent; all progress in the sciences, the fine arts, and even the more mechanical ones, stops; no one thinks either of glory, honour, or happiness; every one looks about to support existence; and to obtain the means, all methods are judged right. Necessity compels it. Men become crafty, subtle, and fraudulent. The mind is enervated, as the spirits relax: and a nation, which had raised itself to the highest degree of power and happiness, is no more, by a natural concatenation of causes and effects, than a nation exceedingly numerous, sordid, wretched, and low. Excess of population has brought China to this fatal point.

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It is in this sense, only, that we can say with reason, that Luxury is dreadful : but here Providence steps in again, and frequently interposes. May it not be owing to an interference of the Creator, that wars are kindled between neighbouring powers, as much to thin the number of the human species, as for other purposes ? If so, a long war may, in the end, benefit a state, which excess of population might otherwise ruin. May not the great number of people that are carried off in Turkey by the plague, be an effect of the wisdom of that same Providence, who thus wisely provides against the too great increase of the species, that might there arise from a plurality of wives ? May not their doctrine of predestination, which forbids them to fly from the pestilence, tend also to this end ? May not emigrations also have the same tendency ? But this is diving into causes beyond our reach to fathom : all that is necessary to our present purpose is, not to meet misfortunes half way, but to act as consummate prudence shall direct, and leave the event to Heaven.

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There are doubtless proper remedies to moderate excess of population, so as to prevent any evil arising from Luxury. The States of Switzerland lend out their troops to foreign nations, for hire ; for that country being improved to the highest degree of cultivation, after retaining a sufficient number of hands to keep it always in this condition, and for the support of every manufactory, they deem it political, from the great surplus of inhabitants, to allow their troops to go into foreign services, lest an excess of population should prove injurious to the nation. These troops, by stipulation, may be recalled by the States on any emergency, which secures their internal defence. But how far is the rest of Europe from having any thing to dread on this account ! Would to God it was threatened with it !— Before Luxury can injure a people, it must lead them to the very height of prosperity, and it must appear that no previous steps have been taken, to render this prosperity lasting. Let us not hesitate then, to encourage Luxury, in spite of the evil which a course of time may draw with it. We think

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ourselves justifiable in taking little or no account of a future evil, which the actual situation of things place at an infinite distance; which a thousand new causes may dissipate for ever, and which can only be the result of a very long prosperity; for the blessings of which, it is wise to run an uncertain chance of a subsequent injury.

The Luxury of a town is an incontestible proof of the opulence of its inhabitants. Luxury, spread to the smallest hamlets of a kingdom, is a certain sign that such kingdom enjoys the greatest abundance. Luxury ever takes its level from the public prosperity. It is its thermometer. In vain do our desires lead us to enjoyments that present themselves, when our circumstances will not permit us to embrace them. Our expences are always confined to things within our reach. It is either my own property, or the property of others who entrust me, that I consume.—In both these cases, it is ever some existing property which enables me to purchase a Luxury. If I exceed my means, my part is soon played. The dissipation of my fortune is immediately succeeded

ceeded by want and humiliation. Thus where Luxury reigns, there is certainly a degree of opulence proportionable to the extent of it. The aggregate of means may be greater than the consumption, but it cannot be less. Whatever exceeds an individual may run into, he consumes only things that exist, and things which would be consumed by others, if they were not by him.

Why, then, be alarmed at Luxury, and consider it as a scourge, since a people cannot give way to it, but in proportion to their means? Is it not consonant to reason, to indulge, where it can lawfully be done? Wealth would be of little or no advantage, were we forbidden to enjoy the comforts it brings. We spend only in Luxuries, that which Government leaves, and, when its necessary wants are supplied, ought to leave. What inconveniencies, then, can a State feel, by its subjects expending that in the comforts and indulgences of life, which it has no right to take from them, and which it could not take, without injuring itself?

That Luxury has been declaimed against for many ages, I allow, *sevius armis luxuria,*

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ria, is an old reproach. But men, however they may applaud invectives against it, have ever given into it, and to the utmost of their power. That good sense, with which nature has endowed them, keeps them from following, in practice, the errors of speculation. In all ages, men have indulged themselves in Luxuries, fearless of the dangers they annexed to such a proclivity. Nay, though since the time of Juvenal, Luxury has extended itself from Italy, to France, to England, and to Germany, these countries, almost deserted in many places of old, are now very powerful States. Thus it appears, in opposition to all opinions, that the happiness and prosperity of men depend upon the indulgences of life, and that Luxury is by no means a political evil. "That which nature loves," says Young, "is necessarily good." We do not consider, that every fetter with which we shackle either trade or industry, is a step towards circumscribing public prosperity. What object would trade and industry have, if it was not for Luxury? Should you observe an empire falling into decay in some parts of which Luxury reigns, attribute

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attribute not its ruin to the expenditure of individuals; but extend your view further, and you will find it owing to exorbitant taxes, to tyranny, to that want of perception in policy, which discourages labour, and every where obstructs the resources of power.

A spirit of Luxury may corrupt and disgrace individuals. We have given it the term of *dissuasor honesti*. A love of riches will do the same; but does it follow that riches are prejudicial to a State? Woe be to them whose desires are not bounded by reason and honour! They deserve every censure; but call not *that* a vice, which centres wholly in the person abusing it. Will you, like Mahomet, prohibit the use of wine, because this salutary drink intoxicates the intemperate?

The expenditure of Government is the only thing whose excess can be detrimental to the State; because the taxes Administration is obliged to levy, and which must be paid, exceeding the proportion which the general circumstances of the people can answer without affecting them, rob them of

their necessary means of support, or of increasing their income, and is, therefore, a general discouragement. Whereas the expences of individuals, as excessive as they may be with respect to themselves, are always confined to a certain circle; so that the populace in general are not affected thereby.

If Luxury had a destructive effect, what would be the present state of things? Men, for some thousands years, have indulged themselves in it, as far as they could. Their eagerness to do so, never gives way, but when their means fail them. Though we, at this day, inveigh so bitterly against these excesses, we see not among us such men as Lucullus and Apicius *. The most superb buildings of the present age, do not reach the magnificence of the palace of Semiramis, and our most studied entertainments do not equal those of Cleopatra. Neither London nor Paris know, either in common life or in public pleasures, such refinements as were in general use in Babylon, Athens, and Rome, at the time of their splendour.

* Romans famed for Luxury.

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Even our ancestors, as they grew wealthy, those ancestors of whose simplicity we boast, were as fond of magnificence and splendor as the Greeks and Romans.

In this country, people of moderate fortune, in common life, covered their tables with a great variety of dishes. Cloaths were rich to that degree, that, according to an ancient Chronicle, commencing in 1400 and ending in 1477, valets, in imitation of their masters, and the lower class of people, indifferently wore doublets of silk and velvet.

The Author of an English Tract, called *a Plan of Trade*, which ran through five editions in a very little time, proposed, as a means of augmenting the trade of this country, to send missionaries to the Negroes and Savages of America, not to propagate the faith, but to induce them to clothe themselves, and inspire them with a taste for Luxuries. His idea is, that if we could once bring them to adopt our customs, they would apply themselves more to work, in order to gratify their new desires; that they would unite themselves more together, multiply and become rich; that, of course,

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there would be among them, a greater number of people in a situation to buy, and whom we might furnish with a variety of articles. No one can deny this way of reasoning to be just, and that the effects which such a plan promises, would take place, could we bring the Savage nations to adopt our manners. Every one also must allow, that Savages could not follow our modes of dress, build themselves houses more commodious than their present cabbins, and furnish them with conveniences, without such novelties being to them Luxuries; though, at the same time, these additional comforts and conveniences should not exceed those of our common peasantry. In fact, Savages *have* reached these improvements; and as the Luxury into which they have entered, begins to enrich them, by inducing them to work, which is the source of all riches, how should Luxury have a contrary effect among us, where the force of this reasoning is much greater; as, with us, work of all kinds is more readily entered into, and meets with more encouragement, than

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than among a people just emerging from the primitive state of Nature?

Let us suppose, for a while, that the greatest part of Luxuries was abolished, and let us consider the effects of such a change. Men thenceforth would content themselves with cabbins, whose construction would require no art, and these would be very scantily and very clumsily furnished. They would clothe themselves in skins, and would have no utensils, but such as are immediately necessary.—From the moment they were restrained in this point, half the inhabitants would be reduced to look out for new resources; and those who have estates in land, embarrassed with their incomes, would be at a loss how to spend them. The arts being abandoned, an infinite quantity of different materials would become of no value. Commerce would cease between country and country, between town and town; ships of trade would be useless, and neither business nor interest would urge men to travel; of course, roads would be neglected, and fall to ruin; communications would be obstructed; correspondence would cease; and, as in former

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mer times, it would be a great undertaking to go forty miles to see a friend.

From this failure in the arts, from this failure in communication, ignorance and barbarism would undoubtedly spring. Hence, also, those who are employed in husbandry, having fewer resources, and less knowledge, would attend less to their business, and their harvest, of course, would be smaller. Each district, thus confined, and limited to its own resources, would decline under the intemperance of seasons, and famine, as in ancient times, would stalk abroad.

The nation, almost reduced for provisions to the harvest of the year, and having neither money in store, nor any other wealth, would not be in a situation to pay for any thing but in kind or in labour. Hence the State would be under a necessity of demanding the personal service even of landholders, and hence would follow, as substitutes for them, the servitude or vassalage of the lower class of men, employed by the landholders, for want of responsible men to occupy their lands. This obligation of personal

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sonal service would deprive the State of a standing army, and consequently reduce its fate, in time of war, to the hazard of a single battle.

In tracing the inevitable consequences of an extinction of Luxury, we should find ourselves in the situation of our ancestors, during the feudal system; when the lord's rents were paid in labour, and military services were performed in person. Wars were then carried on rather by excursions than regular campaigns; a single defeat decided the fate of the vanquished, and ignorance and barbarism were complete. Now, an extinction of Luxury, whether brought on by wars, by continual disasters, or by prohibitory laws, would equally produce the same effects. It would destroy emulation, put a stop to industry, annihilate wealth, and bring a country into the same situation, as would a poverty, caused by the ravages of a continual intestine war, or the vices of a bad administration.

The history of other countries, besides our own, will shew the superiority of strength and power, which Luxury, and its offspring,

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offspring, the arts, give birth to in a nation. Cæsar, with a small number of troops, in ten years subjected the Gauls, a brave and disciplined people, but who lived in the greatest simplicity, and consequently were not wealthy, or acquainted with the value of the arts. The Romans, then masters of Gaul, carried Luxury from Italy into this new province. The country became rich and flourishing. The barbarians from Germany and the North, attracted by the opulence of these Gauls, poured in upon them like a deluge. But these being as simple and as little luxurious as the ancient Gauls, they were repulsed and kept back for three hundred years, without being able to obtain any other establishment than as subjects of the empire; nor could they find a sovereignty there, till after they had taken up the arts and manners of the Romans.

Administrations are apt to think, that they have only to lay taxes upon the inhabitants of a country, to oblige them to work. This was the spirit of that device, which the council of finances established by the regent of France in 1717, took for a coat of arms,

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viz. a plough furrowing a field, with the motto, *secat et auget*. But in this Governors are mistaken: for, if they only leave cultivators in possession of means sufficient to carry on their husbandry and pay their taxes, they discourage them, and in a little time taxes are not paid at all. To enable them to pay a tax, and to add to it from year to year, if occasion requires, care must be taken to put no check to industry; which cannot be avoided any other way, than by leaving such persons a residue of their gains, at their own disposal, after the tax is paid, in order to sweeten their toils, reward their labour, and encourage them to proceed. Not only justice and humanity require this, but policy. The productions of the earth are always in proportion to labour and industry. The husbandman however takes no pains, but as he hopes to reap a profit by his labour. What he consumes himself of the produce of his lands, is not all that interests him. His views are chiefly turned to the profits he shall otherwise gain. To make a man work his whole life, merely to support his existence, would be as bad as condemn-

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ing him for life to the galleys, or putting him on board the ballast lighters at Woolwich.

Perhaps it may be said, that we ought to contract the sphere of our wants. Diogenes taught us this. We enrich ourselves, according to him, in proportion as we learn to do without a great number of things. When it shall be even true, that abstinence, with respect to the happiness of individuals, is equally gratifying with enjoyments, and that we shall gain more, by saving ourselves the trouble of acquiring or preserving, than we should lose by renouncing the advantages of possession, this philosophy will not be less irreconcilable with public interest; which requires that a State should be able to make itself respectable abroad as well as at home.

In a nation accustomed to live upon a little, the wants of the State are almost the same, and cost as much as in a nation where superfluities are admitted. Among the most luxurious people, as well as among those who are least so, soldiers and sailors, employed by the State, are paid nearly alike; that is to say, at as low a rate as possible, so

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as to afford them existence. The same works require the same quantity of materials; and if the conductors of public undertakings are better paid by a luxurious people, the assistance such a people derive from the arts which flourish among them, counterbalances the extraordinary sums paid, and, upon a calculation, renders the expence less to them, than it would be to a less luxurious, and of course a poorer nation, though paying smaller sums of money. A nation, then, whose individuals contract their expences, and abridge their consumption, advances as much to the public wants, as a nation whose individuals live with less frugality. Hence it is, that among a people who mortify themselves, by denying themselves indulgences, the public expences cannot be adequate to the wants of the State, without being excessive in comparison to the wants of individuals; and that the excess of these public charges prevents such a nation providing for the wants of the State, agreeable to the necessity of circumstances; and consequently the State must continue

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weak, contemptible, and subject to the invasion of the first aggressor.

It will probably be objected, that the charges of the State, though excessive in proportion to the wants of individuals, not being in reality heavier than they reasonably ought to be, a head of a family contributes more easily to its support, when he spends little upon himself and family, than when he spends a great deal. To give strength to this argument, it must first be proved, that men, who scarce wish for any indulgence, will exert themselves, and increase their labour, without any other object than a very distant advantage, derived from the benefits the State acquires, and which is not very sensibly felt by individuals. He who spends but little, comforts himself with an easy life, which, in his opinion, compensates for the loss of every other enjoyment. It is not in human nature, to exert itself, and undergo fatigue, without a prospect of reward. This is a principle I have already explained, and which should not be lost sight of.

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Let us admit, for a moment, contrary to all likelihood, that among a people living a rigid life, where Luxury is unknown, patriotic zeal, carried by education even to heroism, encourages them cheerfully to supply the public wants, though exceeding in a great disproportion the personal wants of the contributors. Even under this supposition, a nation, with manners so respectable, would still want solid stability. A State cannot always foresee its necessities. Accidental, unthought-of wants arise. Suppose there is a sufficient store of arms, ammunition, and artillery. An enemy, in the course of an unfortunate war, destroys the magazines. Fire consumes them. A thousand accidents may exhaust them. In such a case, then, what resource would a people have, that had reduced themselves to this simple life we have been speaking of? None. They would not repair such losses with that convenient expedition which the inhabitants of a country could, who, accustomed to enjoy an ample superfluity, have stores of materials of every kind. As they generally consume more than is necessary,

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they can easily spare, in a case of distress, sufficient to supply the necessities of the State. And that which to each would be little or no deprivation, when collected from a whole community would prove an essential assistance. On the contrary, in a country whose inhabitants consume but little, there is but little reserve among individuals; and, as the inhabitants of this country confine their consumption almost to things immediately necessary, they have nothing to spare. Thus, in such unfortunate and unexpected cases, which defeat all foresight, a nation who contracts its expences to the utmost, would find itself ill provided, and without means of defence. Whatever zeal, whatever courage we may suppose it to have, it cannot avoid, in the end, being conquered and destroyed.

Again, Luxury is charged with corrupting the manners, degrading the soul, stifling of virtue, introducing a thousand vices, and, by such effects, working the ruin of States. It is said, also, by the opposers of Luxury, that the present race of men are not equal to what their ancestors were, and that the

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human species is degenerating. Now it is two thousand years that this language has been held, and yet the experience of twenty centuries, which has given the lie to such declarations, has not been able to stop their mouths.

History, by no means, confirms such an opinion of Luxury. Let us look back and run through the last five centuries. From the year 1280 to the present time, Luxury has not ceased to be prevalent in France (I point to that country, as we seem to draw our manners, as well as our fashions from thence;) and at certain periods, in this interval of time, with more profusion, than at this day. Since this, however, the French monarchy has certainly not diminished its grandeur. No revolution has happened, for five hundred years past, in any part of Europe, that we can, with any shadow of truth, attribute to a depravation of manners occasioned by Luxury. If we except the taking of Constantinople by the Turks, and the expulsion of the Moors from Spain, events whose real cause, like those of all other public events which we attribute to the

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the effect of Luxury upon manners, have no relation to it whatever; if we except, I say, these two cases, the principal states that have divided Europe for five hundred years past, continue still to divide it, with little difference in their boundaries, notwithstanding a very great degree of Luxury was introduced into some of these States before this epoch, and has continued there ever since. Where then is the devastation caused by Luxury? And since, in spite of its effects, for so long a space of time, these great empires have nearly preserved the same extent of territory, how can we maintain that a spirit of Luxury alters the manners, so as to be prejudicial to the preservation of States? And it is even observable, that the most powerful of those empires are those where Luxury has reigned the most.

It has been often said that corruption of manners overthrew the Roman power; and it has been very wantonly said. Rome began to give way to Luxury one hundred and fifty years before the Christian æra, yet, in spite of a very corrupt form of government established among the Romans by Augustus, the empire

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empire supported itself, without any diminution, three hundred years after the birth of Christ. It continued to exist in the west till the end of the year 476, and in the east under the name of the Grecian Empire, to the year 1453. This duration, reckoning from the introduction of Luxury into Rome, is a space of 1600 years. How absurd is it then to quote empires as seated upon ruinous foundations, which subsisted for so long a time! The notion that Luxury was destructive to the Roman power, took its rise from considering the revolution in Rome, under Julius Cæsar, as the termination of the Roman empire. No such change, however, took place in its form of government then, as had frequently done before, since the time of Romulus.

Besides, if Luxury could ever be supposed to have injured the Roman power, which I cannot any way admit, the example will not hold good at present. The Romans were a warlike people, insatiate for extent of empire, which could only be acquired by the sword. Indulgence, therefore, to a warrior, may naturally be supposed to enervate his arm,

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arm, and make him less fit for enterprize, than when inured to danger and fatigue. So great was their thirst for dominion, that no boundary would serve them, but that of the whole world. They were a people bred up to arms, and from a savage state, labour-ed to overrun the whole globe. Luxury, to such a people, might counteract their designs; for growing less hardy and resolute from indulgence, the barbarians from the north poured in upon them, and destroyed them. The complexion and system of the times is very different now. *Tempora mutantur, et nos mutamur in illis*. Future ages may as well say, that it was the luxury of the English that lost them America. As the dismemberment of the Roman empire was chiefly owing to their vast extent of territory, too remote from its seat, and too populous to be controlled at such a distance; so was the separation of North America from us. It were idle to suppose, that such an extent of country, so well peopled, and at so great a distance, would continue long subject to the control of this island. Had not the event taken place now,

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it would certainly have done so in less than half a century. But, to return to my subject, territory is, at this day, in a greater number of hands; states are more divided, nations more civilized, and that hardy roughness of former ages, is not so necessary now. If a State has a sufficient soldiery to bear its part in the scale of Europe, in proportion to its extent of domain, it requires no more. It is not the system of modern States to aim, as did the Romans, at extent of territory by conquest. Their wish is only to enrich the country they at present possess, to render themselves as powerful as their nature and situation will admit of, and to defend themselves from encroachments; and if, at any time, they stand in need of assistance, neighbouring States are ready to lend their aid, in order to preserve a balance of power, lest any one State should become too powerful for the rest. As things, therefore, now stand, any enervation of savage strength, any softness of manners brought on by Luxury, is so far from being injurious to States, that it renders them more civilized, more friendly, and more conformable

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to that mildness of disposition, with which Providence hath humanized mankind.

On a supposition that the attraction of indulgences opening the bosom to desire, disposes men to neglect their duty, and deadens the voice of conscience, we should expect to find less virtue in a country where Luxury predominates, than where the people live a more simple life; for, under this idea, we must suppose that in a nation living in a simple manner, there are fewer objects capable of inflaming desire, and consequently fewer occasions where a wish for gratification carries men beyond the bounds they ought to keep. But the fact is not so.

Let a nation live either splendidly or poorly, it is equally exposed to those disorders which desire draws after it. Passions derive their strength more from the disposition of the heart, than from the variety or value of those things that inflame them. Envy, jealousy, ambition, vanity, all the affections of the soul that give birth to desire, are alive to small objects, when great ones do not present themselves. There was nothing rare, or of any great value in Lacedæmon.

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demon. The people there coveted trifles. Tarpeia, in the early time of Rome, that is to say, at the time when Rome was poor, delivered up the capital to the enemies of her country, for an object that would not here tempt any person of her rank.

All is comparative. What is nothing in one circumstance, is every thing in another. A Negro Prince sets as great a value on the feathers that encircle his head, as does the Mogul on the diamonds that decorate his throne.

Luxuries do not inflame desire, nor make us exceed the bounds prescribed, but when we covet or regret them, from a motive independent of the pleasures attached to the enjoyment. What is the motive that leads us to wish immediately for the means of living luxuriously? The ambition of surpassing or equalling the situation of our fellow-citizens; of eclipsing them, and thus obtaining a certain degree of credit; it is the fear of falling into contempt, and too often the danger that arises from not appearing opulent. I am sorry to say it, but it is the misfortune, in the present age, to

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rate men, not so much by their intrinsic merits, as by the appearance they make in life; and as most people covet the esteem of the world, they, as I said before, endeavour to make the best appearance they can, though, in order to make such appearance, they spend more than they can afford. We covet not the favours of fortune, merely for the pleasures of indulgence, but for the gratification of displaying our wealth, and in many cases, for the prospect of encreasing it. The covetous man, who sacrifices his honour, his repose, his every thing to the encrease of his riches, and who is then prodigal of these same riches in luxurious expences, is scarce ever a sensual man. Vanity is the only thing that animates him, or the greedy hope of adding to his wealth, encreasing his power, and gaining authority. It is not Luxury, but the semblance of it.

Vanity acts upon the mind, in proportion to the object this passion has in view, and not according to the means we employ to gratify it. Thus, wherever vanity springs, it has the same influence whether its object be trifles,

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trifles, or things of greater magnitude. Now, in whatever manner a nation lives, as soon as it admits of property, there will necessarily be differences in fortune, and in the expences of individuals, and, of course, on account of these differences, vanity and desire will take a certain lead in such a nation, whether it be less luxurious or more so. Don't we observe, in villages, that a very little expence which one inhabitant enters into more than another, in order to support his family, creates as much jealousy and longing, as the eclat of the greatest Luxury can excite in an opulent capital? Among the peasantry, he who possesses a little flock of sheep, and a cow or two, is thought rich by his companions and townsmen, who look upon him with an envious eye, and who covet his happy situation, as much as others do the wealth and splendor of those above them.

The more, dignity, rank, and distinction take place in polished nations, whatever system they follow with regard to Luxury, the greater is the degree of desire common to all. However true it may be, that where
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Luxury is unknown, temptations are fewer; the nation which prohibits indulgences, is not, on that account, free from covetousness or venality; for by an effect constantly proceeding from the nature of man, his desires, when he is able only to exercise them on a small number of objects, actuate him more eagerly, than when he can exercise them on a greater number.

It does not appear, then, that our manners would improve by a voluntary contraction of our wants; nor that we should expect more virtue in a country whose inhabitants live hard, than in one where they lead a more comfortable life. Among both one and the other, passions rise from the same basis, and are actuated by the same, or equal incitements.

If we cast our eyes over the different nations that cover the earth, and look back to what history teaches us of past ages, we shall discover more outrageousness, more rebellious actions, and, in general, manners less civilized, in times when the conveniences and indulgences of life were never coveted, than in those where they were
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most studied. Reason teaches us this. A desire for indulgences leads to dissipation, and induces men freely to communicate with each other. By this communication, the mind, accustomed to wandering, is less susceptible of strong passions; and the necessity of studying continually to please those with whom we communicate, habitually serves to soften the temper and polish the manners. All these circumstances prove that men, in an opulent nation, enjoying their opulence, are naturally more mild, moderate, and less disposed to commit crimes of any magnitude.

Let us examine into the lower class of people in our own country. Those who compose it, have no superfluities, nor have they any wish to obtain them. They are absolutely so much out of their reach, that they never think of them. Now, what are the manners of these people? Let us compare them with the manners of those who live at their ease, who have already, in a certain degree, tasted the sweets of Luxury, and who, with a view of encreasing their enjoyments, are strongly tempted to encrease
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their fortune. May we not say, and with truth too, that the manners of the middle class of people, exceed in goodness those of the lower class?

Our attributing to Luxury such a change of manners as is injurious to public prosperity, rises from want of discernment. We do not properly distinguish between those manners that are sufficient to form the happiness of society, and those which rigid rectitude prescribes. Our ideas of civil morality are far from being precise, and we are too apt to confound it with that which is speculative. There is, however, in matters of policy, a great deal of difference between the two.

Speculative morality tends to guide us by a pure and disinterested love of rectitude; or to detach us from temporal things, by directing our views to those which are eternal. Considering actions in themselves, independent of all relation to society, and connected only with the rules of perfection, it will not admit of any deviation. What I call civil morality, which has no object but to sweeten and secure the commerce of
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men among themselves, and to maintain good public order, requires not a strict observation of all its precepts, but admits of every relaxation consistent with the peace and prosperity of Society. In judging, then, of the manners of a people, by the principles of speculative morality, we shall find that a spirit of Luxury in certain persons, too worldly-minded to be sensible of the value of perfect purity, weakens the practice and authority of some of its doctrines. But, in judging of manners by the principles of civil morality, we shall see nothing pernicious in these relaxations, suggested by a spirit of Luxury, whilst they trouble not the harmony of society, or impede the motion of its springs.

In fact, the political machine rolls on, without embarrassment, notwithstanding these irregularities. Why then should we be in pain about them? They are attended with no bad consequences; and the cause which produces them produces also a thousand important advantages. But this is saying too little. Without a spirit of Luxury among the people, as I have already observ-

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ed, society would not only languish, but even be annihilated. Luxury is the tie that unites men together. Of what use then are all our invectives against it? To what purpose is it to rail at a thing which cannot be dispensed with?—There are great inconveniences attending the necessity of eating; and yet the most eloquent pen cannot induce us to refrain from this necessity, but we eat on still, and must eat whilst we live.

Vainly will you pretend to make a distinction between Ease and Luxury. Where will you draw the line? How will you determine it for every class of men, and for every individual in each class? You have no principles capable of guiding you in this matter. Scarcely shall you point out the essentials for one or two classes of people, but you will find yourself obliged to renounce the task, and confess, that in things made use of by men, there are, in fact, but two kinds, *Luxuries* and *Necessaries*.

Principles of virtue are, doubtless, necessary in a nation. Vices lead to its ruin. A State cannot subsist, nor have any power, but by an attention to the duties of society.

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All the vices, however, and all the virtues do not equally interest the preservation of an empire. All social obligations are not so strict, as to admit of no extension. There are even violations, and very common ones, that no way attack the public prosperity. A system of morality adopted by a numerous people, is not, in all its points, equally essential to every individual. The well-being of a little nation requires a stricter obedience to some certain precepts, which, without any bad consequences, may be neglected by a great number of people in a nation more considerable.

The object of men uniting in a *State*, is very different from that of men uniting in a *Cloister*. The attention of the first is directed to the present life; their view is to render their time here easy, tranquil, and pleasant: the other think only of a future life, and study to secure their happiness hereafter. These last cannot impose too severe a discipline; whereas the first prescribe and obey rules which tend to their temporal interest, leaving every individual to judge

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for himself, with respect to his eternal interest, according to his conscience.

Severity, or restraint of manners, and domestic regularity, are certainly very praise-worthy. Far be it from me to depreciate the merit of these virtues! But comfortable and profitable as they are to those who observe them, with regard to the prosperity of a kingdom, they have not that importance that is attributed to them. When once the principles of probity and honour are so generally practised and respected in a nation, as to secure the common good, morality has done all that policy requires. It must look to other sources for the happiness and power of a people. Now, what are these sources? Physical means; the unfolding and exertion of the faculties both of mind and body; ingenuity in the arts of peace and war; capacity in business; an enlightened patriotism, that is to say, a spirit of policy. From these it is that public prosperity is principally derived. These are the objects to which a good citizen should direct his attention. Their importance

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ance will draw every other necessary after them.

There have, indeed, existed some small nations, who, though given up to a voluntary or constrained poverty, have nevertheless performed some great exploits in war; but we must not conclude, that, to be as illustrious as them, we should live as they did. It must be observed, that their success was not owing to their poverty, but to the enthusiasm of their virtues, produced by the education they received; to the attention they gave to their affairs; to their application to the use of arms; and that their poverty was an obstacle which they had the greatest difficulty to surmount. We must observe also, that their rivals were not very powerful; that, for the most part, they lived as hard as their enemies, and that where the conquerors and the conquered led the same kind of life, it is not in the manner of living that we must look up for the cause of victory.

Besides, triumphs in war do not prove the good morals of a people. The Buccaneers who made the new world tremble,
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and who, in the rashest enterprizes performed prodigies of valour, were banditti. The Tartars, who conquered China, were robbers. What was Pizarro and his associates who conquered Peru? They subdued and massacred an inoffensive people, habituated to the practice of social virtues. To conquer, it is sufficient to know the art of war better, and employ it better than the enemy. Nothing is more foreign to the purity of manners. It is not in camps, in the midst of licentiousness and military barbarity, that we learn to regulate them.

We quote often the Romans and the Spartans; as if the Romans were powerful during the time they lived hard; and as if the Spartans, otherwise surrounded than they were, would have been able, in keeping up their poverty, to have rendered themselves formidable to their neighbours, or even to have preserved themselves.

Every time that these old examples are brought to prove that a disposition to spend money, and a desire for various enjoyments are prejudicial to a State, as tending to the extinction of virtue; how is it that so striking

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striking an observation is not, in some degree, a check to us? The people of Greece did not cultivate the arts, give into magnificence, or study pleasure so much as the Athenians, and yet the history of the Athenians furnishes more renowned sayings, more glorious actions, and more illustrious achievements, both public and private, than that of the Spartans, of whose severity in living, so much boast is made.

Among the illustrious men of Plutarch and Cornelius Nepos, there are six Lacedemonians and fifteen Athenians. To these may be added Socrates and Plato, of whom Plutarch and Cornelius Nepos are silent, they having been neither commanders of armies, nor public ministers; though they are not less illustrious on that account. Among the six Lacedemonians are Pausanias and Lyfander, who, though able men, and renowned for valiant exploits, were far from being good men.

The manners of the Spartans, though brilliant in certain respects, were, in general, very bad. Enthusiasm carried them beyond
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all example; but sober reason condemned them.

Good morals, considered only as they respect society, and without any view of a life to come, like civil morals, are of greater value, in proportion as they render men happy on this side the grave. Morals, or manners, in this light, are better or worse, as they encrease or diminish the happiness of the people. This is the touchstone by which we should judge of them.

The Spartans were brave and valiant, inflamed with the love of their country and of liberty; but they were perfidious, ungrateful, envious, arrogant, eager to rule, unjust, inhuman, and often mean. Their society yielded them neither comforts, pleasure, nor security. Such is the idea we are taught to conceive of this people from ancient history.

But let us not revert to former ages. All there is too much enveloped in obscurity. The facts of those times, as far as they concern us, stand single, and are few in number. They cannot be sufficiently known in their detail, nor as they relate to the causes of the misery or prosperity of those nations

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to which they belong, so as to give any countenance to political systems at this day. We ought not to form our ideas on such uncertain grounds, lest fatal errors should be the consequence.

Modern times afford us facts more certain and conclusive. We inhabit a kingdom, and we have neighbouring States, where Luxury has a long time reigned. We see not Sparta in Italy, in France, or in England; and yet, are these countries less illustrious, in war or in peace? To look back but two hundred years, have they not produced renowned generals, celebrated writers, able ministers, enlightened magistrates, and very distinguished inventors and artists? What bravery, what abilities, what greatness of soul, what fortitude, what ingenuity, what disinterestedness, may we not trace, in this space of time, among the inhabitants of these countries; such as would do honour to ancient Greece, or ancient Rome! How many noble and brilliant actions are lost in the crowd, of which we are still ignorant!

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tion. Inculcate the principles of honour, justice, and virtue, by a good education; support them, not on false or confused notions, but upon sound and clear ideas; let your pupils be well inspired with this great maxim, *N'usurpe point et respecte-toi*, a maxim more precise than the ancient proverb so well known, *Do not to others what you would not have them do unto you*; take care, by your form of government, to make it the common interest to keep up to this principle, and you will acknowledge that the enjoyments of Luxury, innocent in themselves, will never corrupt a purity of manners.

The influence of education is all-powerful. Religions are propagated and supported by instruction. Give a free flight to literature; encourage the liberty of the press; let no constraint stifle the voice of those men, who, devoted to study, reflect for mankind, and enrich the world with the fruits of their genius; and all the reformatations necessary for the public good, will break out, one after another, without confusion, and without trouble. Should error get hold of

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some minds, and extend itself, by means of such liberty of the press, a thousand opposers would, by that same liberty, rise against it. The fun of criticism and discussion will dissipate every cloud, and nothing will gain an establishment, which does not bear the seal of reason and of truth.

In short, whatever may be said of the influence of Luxury on the manners of the people; as men associate only to procure themselves enjoyments, and, as the attraction to such enjoyments is the sole source of the power and happiness of society, it must be consulted, though the morals of the Public were, in some measure, to be affected thereby. If temporal utility be merely considered, such morals as are consistent with a spirit of Luxury are sufficiently good; since society cannot exist without Luxury, any more than without morality; and as societies, the support of which is the sole end of civil morality, have not only existed for many ages, but have been more happy, more numerous, and more powerful, in proportion to the degree of Luxury among them, where the nature of their govern-
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ment has not frustrated the advantages derived from this source.

Upon the whole, in countries where Luxury is predominant, we see a vast number of towns, an infinite population, good order existing, and nature embellished to the utmost; on the contrary, in those new climates, where the industry of man, still enveloped, leaves him but little exertion for superfluities, the best soils are but boundless deserts. Nature presents but a shapeless scene; her riches are thinly scattered, and lost in the confusion, while the human species, small in number, wandering in the forests, submitting to the inclemency of seasons, and often pining under the horrors of want, is, in its happiest moments, obliged to contend with every animal for subsistence.

Though a spirit of Luxury has been commonly accused as the scourge of States, an examination of its effects has given me a very different idea. An extinction, or even a great diminution of Luxury, would, in my opinion, bring on misery, barbarism, and an immense depopulation; and in a com-

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mercial State, like ours, involved in a vast national debt, the interest of which can be paid only by its Luxuries, total ruin. On the other hand, free Luxury, under a well-ordered government, appears to me to be attended with plenty, wealth, and public happiness. These ideas, too much unknown till now, strike me with their importance. I have ventured to declare them, and if these best intentions may, in any degree, recommend a work, mine has a claim to the attention of every thinking man.

Careful and diligent as I may have been; like other men, I am not secure against illusion. I hope, however, I am entitled to indulgence. When a man thinks himself able to destroy a fatal opinion, he is commendable in the attempt; nay, he is not allowed to be silent.

*Si quid novisti rectius istis
Candidus imperti. Si non: his utere mecum.*

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