

LUXURY

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Luxury by Emile de Laveleye

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LUXURY.

BY

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LUXURY.



CHAPTER I.

THE QUESTION AT ISSUE.

IN the 18th century people held long and lively discussions on the subject of Luxury. To-day we do not discuss it so frequently; we are content with indulging in it to excess.

Is luxury useful? This is the question we need to decide. I have read somewhere, no matter where, a saying which seems to me exactly to sum up the discussion. A financier and an economist of the last century held entirely different opinions on this subject.

“I maintain, for my part,” said the financier, “that it is luxury which upholds States.” “Yes,” replied the economist, “just as the executioner’s rope upholds the hanged man.” I agree with the economist. The philosophers of old times and the fathers of the Church alike condemned luxury in the strongest terms, and they were right in so doing. It is pernicious to the individual, and fatal to society. Primitive Christianity reprobated it in the name of charity and of humility; political economy condemns it in the name of utility, and right in the name of equity.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT IS LUXURY?

FIRST let us make it plain what we understand by luxury. M. Baudrillart, in his excellent book, "Histoire du luxe," does not trouble to seek a definition. He takes for granted that every one knows what it means. I do not quarrel with him for this, but we shall be none the worse for a little precision.

I understand by a luxury anything which does not answer to our primary needs, and which, since it costs much money to buy, and consequently much labour to produce, is only within reach of the few. The extreme of luxury is that which destroys the