

## WEALTH

Everybody knows in a rough and ready way what wealth means. But if asked to give a definition of what is and what is not wealth they would find themselves badly mixed up. The meaning is not so simple as at first appears. Wealth has been correctly defined as "any natural object that has been secured, moved, combined, separated, or in other ways modified by human exertion so as to fit it for human needs or desires." This definition covers all the things that are real wealth and excludes those which are not. Those who have given this matter no attention think of wealth as something very large, but a cigarette paper or a lead pencil are just as much wealth as a ship or a factory.

All wealth is made by labor applied to land or the products of land. Land itself is not wealth, but is the source from which all wealth is drawn. Human beings are not wealth, although in the days of chattel slavery slaves were regarded as wealth, just as land at the present time is regarded as wealth.

Paper money is the representative of wealth, but is not wealth in itself, any more than a title deed to land is wealth. The ownership of money gives a claim to wealth, just as the title deed gives a legal claim to land, but an increase in the number of notes or title deeds does not increase the wealth of the community. An increase in crops, cattle, houses, ships and such things does increase the wealth of the community.

If a thousand dollars in paper currency are destroyed, the owner of the currency has lost his claim to a thousand dollars' worth of wealth somewhere in the community, but no real wealth has been lost. If a house or boat worth a thousand dollars is destroyed, both the owner and the community suffer a loss of real wealth. Wealth is a tangible thing, something that can be seen or handled.

Skill or ability is not wealth, though they may be the means of producing wealth. The work of some artists, as actors and singers, and also the work of doctors, teachers, and others, does not produce any wealth. These people give services by which they earn and receive wealth in return. Gambling produces no wealth, but simply transfers wealth from one to another. The subject is very wide, and there may be a few border-line cases which the above definition does not quite fit. Such cases occur in most forms of human activity, but for all practical purposes the theory here given is correct.

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