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THE SECULAR TRINITY, Part 3

What is the true measure of wealth? In all ages there are those who dedicate their lives to its pursuit. But what is wealth? It may, and often does, translate to money; but there are other ways to gauge wealth. In fact, finding a universal definition of it proves somewhat elusive. Why is that? The answer is that “wealth” is a moving target. By this, I mean that the concept of wealth is both *relative* and *subjective*, depending on the circumstances. A person in the United States who is living under the official poverty line and yet has a cell phone, a flat screen TV, air conditioning, and an SUV, may be considered wealthy relative to the millions of people eking out a subsistent standard of living in some parts of the world. A millionaire may feel impoverished when contemplating the lifestyle of a billionaire.

The idea of wealth is also subjective. For the Wall Street banker, it may consist of a large and balanced portfolio of stocks, bonds, and liquid assets. For the scholar who has spent her whole life in books, it may consist of an immense and detailed knowledge regarding her chosen field of study. For the social worker, it may be measured by the many lives that he has helped throughout his career. And for the grandmother, it may consist of a lifetime of warm and loving memories, which are the dividends of raising a large family.

John Ruskin once said, “There is no wealth but life.” By that, I think he was referring to the miracle of being alive: to play one’s role on the stage of life; to respond to the beauty of life, as well as its tragedies; to share laughter with friends, tears with loved ones; to give freely of oneself; to discover the fulfilment that comes from achieving a worthwhile dream; and to know that one has lived a good life.

But to the altruistic soul, the true measure of wealth is in the giving. Clara Codd was such a person, devoting her life to theosophical work around the world. In her autobiography, *So Rich a Life*, she closes with these inspiring words: “A new age, a new world is being hammered out on the anvil of time, an age in which both war and poverty will cease to be. Do not let us desire in these tremendous times personal comfort and easy living. Let us be willing to forgo much, that the future for which so many of our best youth died, may be secure.”

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