

CHAPTER II

Of Production, or of the formation of our Riches.

IT is so true that we cannot reason justly while the sense of words is not well determined, that it is very important in political economy, to know what we ought to understand by the word production, in the language of this science. This question, which in itself is not without difficulty, has been still much perplexed by the spirit of system and prejudice. It has been treated of by many able men, at the head of whom we should place Turgot and Smith. But, in my opinion, no one has thrown so much light on it as Mr. Say, the author of the best book I know on these matters, although he leaves still something to be desired.

All the operations of nature and of art resolve into transmutations, into changes, of *form* and of *place*.

Not only we never create any thing, but it is even impossible for us to conceive what it is to create, if we understand by this word to make something of nothing; for we have never seen any being whatsoever arise from nothing, nor return to it. Hence this axiom, admitted by all antiquity, "*nothing comes from nothing, or returns to nothing.*"* What then do we do by our labour, by our action on all the bodies which surround us? Never any thing, but operate in these beings changes of form or of place, which render them proper for our use, which make them useful to the satisfaction of our wants. This is what we should understand by—to produce: It is to give things an utility which they had not. Whatever be our labour, if no utility results from it it is unfruitful. If any results it is productive.

It seems at first, and many likewise believe it, that there is a more real production in that labour which has for its object the procurement of first materials, than in that which consists in fashioning and transporting them; but it is an illusion. When I put seed in contact with air,

*It is very just. I shall believe in the possibility of a creation, when any body shall show me one, or even an annihilation.

water, earth, and different manures, so that from the combinations of these elements results wheat, hemp, or tobacco, there is no more creation operated, than when I take the grain of this wheat to convert it into flour and bread, the filaments of this hemp to make successively thereof thread, cloth, and habiliments; and the leaves of this tobacco to prepare them so as to smoke, chew, or snuff them. In both cases there is a production of utility, for all these labours are equally necessary to accomplish the desired end, the satisfaction of some of our wants.

The man who draws fish from the depths of the sea is no more a creator than those who dry and salt them, who extract the oil, the eggs, &c. &c. or transport these products to me. It is the same with those who dig in mines, who convert the mineral into metal and the metal into utensils, or furniture, and who carry these instruments to those who want them. Each adds a new utility to the utility already produced, consequently each is equally a producer. All equally study the laws, which govern the different beings to turn them to their profit; all employ, to produce the desired effect, the chemical and mechanical forces of nature. What we call her vegetative force is not of another nature, it is but a series of elective attractions, of true chymical affinities with all the circumstances of which we are undoubtedly not acquainted, but yet know how to favor them by our labours, and to direct these in such a manner as to render them useful.

It is then erroneously that they have made agricultural industry a thing essentially different from all the other branches of human industry, and in which the action of nature intervenes in a particular manner; accordingly they have always been greatly embarrassed to know precisely what they should understand by agricultural industry, taken in this sense. They have comprised therein fishing and hunting. But why not likewise comprehend the industry of erratic shepherds? Is there so great a difference between raising animals to nourish ourselves, and killing or taking them ready raised to nourish ourselves in the same manner. If he who extracts salt from sea water, by exposing it to the action of the rays of the sun, is a producer, why should not he who extracts the same salt from the water of a fountain, by means of the action of fire, and that of the wind, in buildings of graduation, be a producer also? And yet what specific difference is there between his manufacture, and all those which yield other chymical products? If we rank in this productive class him who extracts minerals from the earth, why not also comprehend him who extracts metals from these

minerals? If one produces the mineral the other produces the metal, and where shall we stop in the different transformations which this matter undergoes, 'till it becomes a piece of furniture or a jewel?—at what point of these successive labours can we say, here we cease to produce, and do nothing but fashion? We may say as much of those who seek wood in forests, or turf in hogs, or who collect on the shores of the sea or of rivers the useful things which the waters have deposited there. Are they agricolists, fabricators, or carriers? And if they are all these at the same time, why are they more producers under one of these denominations than under the two others? Finally, to speak only of culture, properly so called, I demand that it be precisely determined who is the true producer, the agricolist by excellence, he who sows or he who reaps; he who ploughs, or he who fences; he who conveys manure into the fields, or he who leads the flocks to fold in them? For my part I declare that they all appear only as so many different workmen, who concur in the same fabrication. I stop here, because one might propose to the partisans of the opinion I combat a thousand questions, as insoluble as these, in their system. When we set out from a false principle difficulties arise in crowds: perhaps this is one of the great causes of the obscure, embarrassed, and almost mysterious, language which we remark in the writings of the ancient economists. When ideas are not precise it is impossible that expressions should be clear.

The truth is simply, that all our useful labours are productive, and that those relative to agriculture are so like the others, in the same manner as the others, for the same reason as the others; and have in this nothing particular. A farm is a real manufactory; every thing is operated there in the same way, by the same principles, and for the same causes. A field is a real utensil, or, if you please, a store of first materials, which any one may take if it yet belongs to nobody; and which must be bought, rented, or borrowed, if it has already an owner. It does not change its nature, whether I employ it in the raising of grain, in bleaching linen, or for any other purpose. In every case it is an instrument necessary to produce a desired effect, as a furnace, a hammer, or a vessel. The only difference between this instrument and every other, is that to use it, as it cannot be removed, we must go to it, instead of its coming to us.

Once again, agricultural industry is a branch of manufacturing industry, which has no specific character which separates it from all the others. Would you so generalise this term as to extend it to all the

labours which have for their object the procurement of first materials? it is then certain that agricultural industry is the first in date and the most necessary of all, because it is necessary that a thing should be procured before it can be applied to use; but it is not for that reason exclusively productive, for most of its productions must yet be further wrought before they become useful to us; and moreover we must then comprehend in agricultural industry, not only that of hunters, fishers, shepherds, miners, &c. but also that of the rudest savages, and even that of all those beasts which live on the spontaneous productions of the earth, since these are first matters which these creatures procure for themselves; in truth, they are immediately consumed, but this does not change the thesis. Certainly these are singular agriculturists, and singular producers.

Will it be insisted that agricultural industry shall be restrained to agriculture, properly so called?—then it is not the first in chronological order, for men are fishers, hunters, shepherds, and mere vagabonds, in the manner of brutes, long before they are agriculturists. It is not even the only industry productive of first materials, for we employ many for which we are not indebted to it. Doubtless it is always very important, and is the principal source of our subsistence, if not of our riches; but it cannot be regarded as exclusively productive.

Let us conclude that all useful labour is really productive, and that all the laborious class of society merits equally the name of productive. The truly sterile class is that of the idle, who do nothing but live, nobly as it is termed, on the products of labours executed before their time, whether these products are realised in landed estates which they lease, that is to say which they hire to a labourer, or that they consist in money or effects which they lend for a premium, which is still a hiring. These are the true drones of the hive, (*fruges consumere nati*) unless they render themselves deserving by the functions which they discharge or the knowledge which they diffuse; for these are, also, useful and productive labours, although not of an immediate utility in relation to riches;—we will speak of them hereafter.

As to the laborious class and that immediately productive of our riches, as its action on all the beings of nature always reduces itself to the change *of form or of place*, it naturally divides itself into two, the manufacturers comprising agriculturists, who fabricate and fashion, and merchants who transport, for this is the real utility of the latter. If they did nothing but buy and sell,—without transporting, without

retailing, without facilitating any thing,—they would be nothing more than incommodious parasites, gamesters, stock-jobbers; of the one and the other of whom we shall shortly speak; and we shall quickly see how much light our manner of considering things throws on the whole progress of society. We must now explain a little more fully in what this utility consists, our only production which results from all labour well understood; and to see how it is appreciated, and how it constitutes the value of whatsoever we call our riches.