

CHAPTER IV.

THE BEST HOLDING OF THE LAND.

IN the present chapter I propose to offer some suggestions regarding that tenure of the land which is best suited to advance the interests of society as a whole.

The first question which arises is this: Shall land be regarded solely as an instrument of production, or shall other aspects of the land be considered by the economist in writing of the tenure of the soil, and by the statesman in dealing with the land as it comes within the scope of legislation? The answer to this question is all-important. Economists generally, though not without many and important exceptions, have been disposed to hold that land should be regarded merely as an instrument of production. Let the soil, they have said, be cultivated in that way, under that system, which will secure the largest aggregate produce for a given amount of labor and capital,

or will secure the required quantity of produce with the least application of labor and capital ; and let us trust to the natural operation of economic forces to bring about the proper division of the produce among individuals and classes. If one system will, as contrasted with any and all other systems, yield a larger amount of vegetable and animal food, of fibre for clothing, and of fuel for warmth, the presumption must be that, by adopting that system, each individual and each class of producers will be the better off, since there is a larger amount in the aggregate to be divided, while the natural operation of the principle of self-interest will effect a distribution at least approximating, in reasonableness and natural justice, that which would be effected under any other, the most favorable, system of production. In a word, no matter what the *position* of the individual member of the industrial society is, *as producer*, he will, *as consumer*, find his true interest in the largest production of wealth.

The reader will recall the similar debate which has long been held over the same question in its application to mechanical industry, especially as developed into what we call a

manufacturing system. Here the English and American economists, almost without exception, — and perhaps we may say also the economists of the Continent, though not without numerous and important exceptions, — have held that the general interest was to be found in the largest production of wealth. Let labor be divided and still subdivided; let occupations become diversified, and industries specialized and localized, as fully as may be involved in the largest possible application of machinery and elemental power, and in the realization of the highest amount of productive efficiency from the mass of productive agents; have no care concerning the position which the mass of laborers shall occupy in the industrial order, whether they shall be hired or self-employed, whether they shall or shall not be individually accomplished in any art which could enable them to earn a livelihood by exertions outside that industrial order; indeed, let it be frankly assumed that they will, in the vast majority of cases, know but a fraction of a trade, being kept at work, for the sake of the highest efficiency, in performing, year after year, but a single operation, involving perhaps but a single motion; have no thought regarding the influ-

ence of such an organization of industry upon the physical, intellectual, or moral condition of the laborer; let him take his place wherever the interests of the largest production assign him, without any reference to the question whether his duties and his surroundings there will tend to the symmetrical development of his powers and faculties, or otherwise.

In a word, accept cheerfully all the incidents of that organization of industrial society which has been described. Doubtless much evil will ensue; but four considerations should suffice to reconcile the social philosopher to this condition, — first, that much of the evil would occur under any organization of industrial society; secondly, that, thanks to the economic harmonies, industrial evils are self-limited and tend to disappear; thirdly, that the gain in productive power, accomplished by the means recited, furnishes a fund with which the individual industrial agent may purchase the means of physical, intellectual, and moral culture which would have been unattainable with a smaller production of wealth, which means of culture, including leisure for social enjoyment and for study, should compensate, and far more than compensate, for the tendency to an incomplete

or one-sided development of the individual; fourthly, that there is a certain virtue in that discipline¹ which is the condition of highly organized industry, enforcing punctuality and precision; that there is a certain virtue in subjection to the authority of an official superior, on the one side, and to the public sentiment of a class or a corps, on the other, which acts most powerfully upon even the most inconstant mind; that there is a certain virtue in direct competition with one's fellows, and in the comparison and criticism of the methods and results of work, which stimulates and quickens even the dullest and least apprehensive.

However much one may take exception, at points, to the arguments by which the modern industrial order of extended and constantly extending competition is defended, the economists generally have, as was said, accepted the principle that, so far as mechanical labor is concerned, society should be organized to accom-

¹ In this connection I should do injustice to the reader, did I not refer to the very striking comparison between the Domestic and the Factory systems of industry, in their respective effects upon the laboring populations engaged, which is conducted by Colonel C. D. Wright in his report on the Factory System, embodied in the Manufacturing Volume of the Tenth Census.

plish the largest production of wealth, without any care respecting the industrial position of individuals, leaving each to seek his own interests as a consumer of wealth, — to recover, that is, through the greater quantities and lower prices of the comforts, decencies, and luxuries of life, whatever he may have lost through the sacrifice of his independence and self-sufficiency as a producer.

Two great classes, however, dissent from this conclusion. The socialists declare that the concentration of manufacturing industry, the minute subdivision, and, by consequence, the extreme specialization of labor, under commercial freedom and unlimited competition; the principle of association, which, if it do not benefit the great capitalists alone, benefits them in a far higher proportion than persons of small means; and, lastly, speculation, whose power to engross the wealth of the community increases with the extent and complexity of the industrial system, — that these causes yoke poverty and progress together; force wages down as production rises; exaggerate the natural distinctions of society, ever making the rich richer and the poor poorer, and fixing an impassable barrier between classes and orders of men.

The protectionists, also, take exception to the proposition that it is the largest production of wealth which, on the whole, best subserves the public interest. The doctrine of protection has no other logical significance than that production should be crossed along certain lines — the lines of nationality — for the purpose of checking the otherwise irresistible tendency to the division of labor, the diversification of occupations, the specialization and localization of mechanical industry.

The protectionist entertains, in common with the socialist, a profound distrust of *competition*, as an agent for returning to the individual member of society, in his capacity as consumer, whatever benefits he may lose through the sacrifice of his advantages as a producer, believing that, on the contrary, competition tends to exert a very unequal pressure upon the several classes of the community, and that unequal competition is a highly pernicious and possibly destructive force.

The protectionist rejects, also, the doctrine of the economic harmonies, holding, instead, the theory that economic injuries, once suffered, tend to remain and to deepen, rather than to be removed by the natural operation of the principle of self-interest.

To prevent, therefore, the undue extension of the principle of competition, the protectionist proposes, as has been stated, to erect barriers along the boundary lines of nationality.¹

For myself, I accept the principle of competition, in its application to all branches of mechanical labor, without any hesitation and without any reserve except as to that class of restrictions which come fairly within the two titles of Factory Acts and Sanitary Regulations, respecting which I cannot but esteem the

¹ Conceding, for the sake of argument, that the advantages of the world-wide extension of the principle of division of labor are more than outweighed by the resulting evils, it will be noted that the theory of protection is palpably weak in the respect that never has anything approaching a serious reason been offered for making industrial units out of existing political units; allowing production and trade to follow the impulses of competition not only without restraint, but actually under encouragement, to the extreme boundaries of empire, however widely these may be spread, though it were from ocean to ocean or pole to pole, yet forbidding them to cross those boundaries, even in the case of the narrowest State. No shadow of a reason has ever yet been given by any protectionist for this equivalency, or, rather, conterminateness, of political and industrial entities, while the antecedent improbability of a sufficient reason being found therefor must, in view of the almost infinite range of conditions under which nations exist, in the respects of area, soil, extension in latitude and in longitude, climate and civilization, be conceded to be little, if anything, less than hopeless.

attitude of the English and even the American economists in the past, and to some extent in the present, as most unfortunate, not only as having been mistaken in point of theory, but as having been the cause of a great part of the jealousy and hostility which the working classes have cherished towards political economy.

But while I accept freedom of production, with all its consequences, throughout the length and breadth of mechanical industry, with the exception indicated, I cannot but feel that there is a great deal of truth in the descriptions which the socialists and the protectionists give of the deleterious effects of extended competition ; and that the economists — or free-traders, if one chooses to regard the terms as interconvertible — have committed a controversial error, to put it on the lowest ground, in disparaging these evils and even denying their existence.

The economic harmonies do not prevail except among populations rarely gifted with intelligence and enterprise. Economic injuries do not tend to diminish and to disappear, but to abide and to deepen, under the natural operation of the principle of self-interest. The rule

“To him that hath shall be given,” expresses a law of wide extent and stringent application throughout the sphere of industry. Competition may become a crushing and destructive force, when it is so far unequal that one class, alert and aggressive, wielding large capitals, and acting in concert or with a common understanding, exerts a continuous, unremitting pressure upon another class, whose members cannot adequately respond to the demand made upon them, in a prompt assertion of their own interests, through change of place or occupation.

This is so clear in principle, and it is so manifest that the working classes have suffered enormous injuries, enduring injuries, through the operation of unequal competition, in that unceasing struggle for economical vantage-ground which is involved in the highly intense organization of modern industry, as it has been described, that the economists have committed a palpable controversial error in disparaging the importance of these considerations, and even denying them any validity whatever. Had they taken upon themselves the task of investigating the effects of imperfect competition, in frank recognition of the too palpable facts of modern industrial society; had they

undertaken to trace the curve, so to speak, which the principle of self-interest describes, under varying conditions, upon the ground of the general good, showing under what circumstances the public and the private interest are coincident, under what circumstances the operation of the principle of self-interest, unrestrained, may become, in a higher or lower degree, prejudicial; and had they been willing to inquire, or even to tolerate the inquiries of others, concerning the means, if any, by which the pressure of an unequal competition may be relieved, — they might have retained the confidence of the working classes, whom they have alienated almost beyond the possibility of reconciliation by their uncompromising reiteration of the dogma of *Laissez faire*.

Our American economists have been the greatest sinners in this respect. Even after Cairnes, the ablest English economist who survived Mill, had frankly confessed that since "human beings know and follow their interests, according to their lights and dispositions, but not necessarily, nor in practice always, in that sense in which the interest of the individual is coincident with that of others or of the whole, . . . there is no security that the economic

phenomena of society, as at present constituted, will arrange themselves spontaneously in the way which is most for the common good;" and even after Jevons, the ablest English economist who survived Cairnes, had declared, in reference to this very subject, that it is futile to attempt to uphold any theory of eternal fixed principles or abstract rights regarding what is simply a question of probability and degree, — our American economists have continued monotonously to repeat the doctrine of the economic harmonies, as if it contained the sum of all truth, and have dealt with every one who presumed to seek to define that part of the field of the general good which fails to be covered by the operation of the principle of self-interest, almost as an economic outlaw.

I do not know that a better instance could be given of the unfortunate effects of the controversial error (looking at it still from the lowest point of view) which the economists have committed in dealing with this question, than by referring again, for a moment, to Mr. George's work.¹

The keynote of that work is found in its

¹ See *ante*, p. 141.

title, "Progress and Poverty." The author, with extraordinary rhetorical skill, grasps all the facts which establish a seeming connection between these two phenomena. To his own satisfaction he finds that "where the conditions to which material progress everywhere tends are most fully realized, — that is to say, where population is densest, wealth greatest, and the machinery of production and exchange most highly developed, — we find the deepest poverty, the sharpest struggle for existence, and the most enforced idleness. . . . The tramp comes with the locomotive, and almshouses and prisons are as surely the marks of material progress as are costly dwellings, rich warehouses, and magnificent churches. Upon streets lighted with gas and patrolled by uniformed policemen, beggars wait for the passer-by; and in the shadow of college and library and museum, are gathering the more hideous Huns and fiercer Vandals of whom Macaulay prophesied."

The cause of this close conjunction of Poverty with Progress is the object of Mr. George's research. Obvious, close at hand, is the influence of the modern organization of industry, — the concentration of capitals, the specialization

of occupations, the localization of manufactures, the intense and unremitting competition of world-wide exchanges.

But the professional economists assure Mr. George that it is not this cause which produces the effect he seeks to explain; that, through economic harmonies, never to be sufficiently admired, the individual industrial agent is protected from all possibility of harm amid the operation of these tremendous forces, and that the laborer will surely recover, as consumer, whatever he may lose as producer.

Shut off, then, by the economists themselves, from finding here the cause of "the association of Poverty with Progress," Mr. George turns to rent as the source of the economic evils he describes; and it is difficult to see how he can be answered by those who stand committed to the dogma of the economic harmonies. He has arrived at his demonstration through a logical process of exclusion; and it is the economists themselves who have thrown out, for his behoof if not on his behalf, the only cause, other than rent, which could reasonably be adduced in explanation of the phenomenon.

To return from this long excursion, the prime question regarding the land, which addresses it-

self alike to economist and to statesman, is this : Shall land be regarded simply as an instrument of production, as we have agreed to consider the organized system of mechanical industry ? Shall we say that it does not matter how much those who actually work upon the soil may lose, of individuality or independence, in their economical position, since they will be sure, as consumers, to make themselves good for any disadvantage which they may immediately suffer, as producers ? Shall we consent to trust to competition alone to effect the distribution of the produce of agricultural labor, as we have, with whatever of misgiving or reserve, accepted it as the agent for the distribution of the products of mechanical labor ?¹ Or must we take some further bond for securing the interests of the producer who works upon the land ? Or, again, are there considerations addressing themselves to the economist or the statesman, which claim priority to the questions relating either to

¹ This view is expressed by Sir James Caird, in speaking of English agriculture : “ *Our agriculture is no longer influenced by considerations of the means of finding employment for surplus labor, but is now being developed on the principle of obtaining the largest produce at the least cost, — the same principle by which the power-loom has supplanted the hand-loom.* ”

the production or the distribution of wealth,— considerations, for example, relating to the consumption of wealth or to the relation of subsistence to population, or considerations relating to good citizenship and the security of the State?

That great numbers of intelligent economists, who willingly accept all the consequences of competition acting upon the most extended system of production in mechanical industry, either hesitate or altogether refuse to regard land as a mere instrument of production, is well known to all students of economics. Nor do these men occupy an illogical position.

In the first place, looking to what are called the rights of property, it is admitted by all sound writers on public policy, that property in land differs markedly and materially from property in capital or in the products of labor. If both species of property are "sacred," to use a familiar phrase, landed property, by almost universal consent, stands lower, much lower, in the hierarchy than property in capital. It would be easy to quote from writers of every school in support of this assertion, but doubtless the statement of Professor Roscher will be accepted as a just summary of the views of the body of publicists:—

“The appropriation of ‘original and indestructible natural forces’ has its basis not so much in justice as in the general good; and the state has always considered itself entitled to attach to the ‘monopoly of land’ which it accorded to the first possessor all kinds of limitations and conditions, in the interest of the common good, and sometimes to consider private property in land in the light of a semi-public function.”¹

If, therefore, the proprietor of land owns it in a somewhat different and a somewhat lower sense than that in which the proprietor of chattels owns them, one class of valid objections to interference by authority with the use of property in chattels may not apply with equal force, or indeed may perhaps not apply at all, to property in land.

This distinction is vigorously asserted by Professor Cairnes, in his essay entitled “Political Economy and Land.”

“Sustained,” he says, “by some of the greatest names, — I will say, by every name of the first rank in Political Economy, from Turgot and Adam Smith to Mill, — I hold that the land of a country presents conditions which separate it economically from the great mass of the other

¹ See Mr. Mill’s remark, *ante*, p. 124.

objects of wealth, — conditions which, if they do not absolutely and under all circumstances impose upon the state the obligation of controlling private enterprise in dealing with land, at least explain why this control is, in certain stages of social progress, indispensable, and why, in fact, it has been constantly put in force whenever public opinion or custom¹ has not been strong enough to do without it.

“And not merely does economic science, as expounded by its ablest teachers, dispose of *a priori* objections to a policy of intervention with regard to land, it even furnishes principles fitted to inform and guide such a policy in a positive sense. Far from being the irreconcilable foe, it is the natural ally, of those who engage in this course, at once justifying the principle of their undertaking, and lending itself as a minister to the elaboration of the constructive design.”

But, again, a wide difference in the degree of advantage which may be expected to result from the application of the subdivision of labor and the aggregation of capitals in agriculture, as compared with manufactures, enters

¹ On the power of public opinion or custom over rent, see *ante*, pp. 47-51.

to justify a very different view of the two cases.

It would be wholly reasonable to admit that the enormous gain in productive power which results from the modern organization of mechanical labor must be accepted as outweighing all the evils incidental to that system, while denying emphatically that the productive power of land in large estates under a single management shows any such excess over the productive power of land when cut up into small farms cultivated by their respective owners, as to compensate for the disadvantages that might be held to result from a less equable distribution of wealth, through the discouragement of frugality, through a more wanton increase of population, or through the merely political loss resulting to the State from the destruction of an independent and self-reliant yeomanry.

That the excess of advantages, productively considered, upon the side of large estates, as compared with what are usually called peasant properties, cannot be very great, is shown by the fact that the existence of such an excess in any degree has been disputed by writers so intelligent and candid as Messrs. Mill, Thornton, and Hippolyte Passy.

Yet, for one, I am willing to accept the conclusion of Sir James Caird, as stated in the following paragraphs:—

“A system is best tested by its fruits. Compared with all other countries, our threefold plan of landlord, farmer, and laborer, appears to yield larger returns, with fewer laborers and from an equal extent of land.

“Our average produce of wheat is 28 bushels an acre, against 16 in France, 16 in Germany, and 13 in Russia and the United States.¹ We show a similar advantage in live-stock, both in quantity and quality. We have far more horses, cattle, and sheep in proportion to acreage than any other country, and in all these kinds there is a general superiority. Our most famous breeders of live-stock are the tenant farmers. The best examples of farming are found in the same class. The improved breeds of cattle, the Leicester and Southdown sheep, and the ex-

¹ The reader will, of course, understand that these figures do not represent the comparative fertility of the lands of the several countries named, or the comparative profits of agriculture. The English product is obtained, as Sir James Caird states in the sentences following, through the application of more labor, the employment of more cattle (furnishing both power and manure), and the use of more machinery, the cost of all which has to come out of the value of the product.

tended use of machinery, manures, and artificial foods are chiefly due to them.

“And the neatness of the cultivation, the straight furrow and the beautiful lines of drilled corn, the well-built ricks and docile horses, exhibit at once the strength and the skill of the laborers.

“If that mode of husbandry which lessens the exchangeable value of bread and meat by an increase of production and supply, is the best for the community, from whom a smaller proportion of their labor is required for the purchase of their food, then our system of subdivision of labor by landlord, farmer, and laborer, the three interests engaged in its production, will stand a favorable comparison with that of any other country.”¹

The reason why the division of labor and the concentration of capital accomplish so much less, relatively, in agriculture than in manufactures, is twofold.

On the one hand, the nature of agricultural operations, the extent of the field over which they are carried on, the varying necessities of the seasons in their order, and the limited applicability of machinery and elemental power,

¹ The Landed Interest and the Supply of Food, pp. 68-70.

preclude the possibility of achieving a gain in this department of activity which shall be at all comparable to that which is attained where hundreds and thousands of workmen are gathered upon a few acres of ground, where machinery the most delicate and the most powerful may be applied successively to every minute operation, and where the force of steam or gravity may be invoked to multiply many fold the efficiency of the unaided man.

On the other hand, there is a virtue in the mere ownership of land by the actual laborer, which goes far, very far, to outweigh the advantages which great capitals bring to the cultivation of the soil. The "magic of property" in transmuting the bleak rock into the blooming garden, the barren sand of the seashore into the richest mould, has been told by a hundred travellers and economists since Arthur Young's day. In his tireless activity, "from the rising of the lark to the lodging of the lamb;" in his unceasing vigilance against every form of waste; in his sympathetic care of the drooping vine, the broken bough, the tender young of the flock and the herd; in his intimate knowledge of the character and capabilities of every field, and of every corner of every

field, within his narrow domain ; in his passionate devotion to the land which is all his own, which was his father's before him, which will be his son's after him, the peasant, the small proprietor, holds the secret of an economic virtue which even the power of machinery can scarcely overcome.

Americans are perhaps likely to overrate the degree in which operations on a vast scale, under a single management, may be advantageously carried on. The stories of the great farms of Illinois and California, and, even more prodigious, of the Dalrymple farms along the line of the Northern Pacific Railroad, are likely to create the impression on the mind of the reader that there is almost no limit to the success of great, even of gigantic, agriculture.

Such cases, are, however, highly exceptional, even in the cultivation of the staple cereal crops and of cotton ; while, as we reach the numberless minor crops, which in their aggregate constitute a large part of the agriculture of the world, the advantages of aggregated capitals diminish rapidly or disappear altogether.

On this point M. Leroy-Beaulieu remarks : —

“The more agriculture develops, the more the exceptional advantage of great operations diminishes. When we have only to do with simple processes, like gathering the wild fruits of the earth, burning or cutting trees and brush to clear the soil, opening the land with improved ploughs, harvesting with machines which in a high degree economize hand-labor; or when, indeed, it is merely necessary to fence in large tracts, leaving the flocks to roam there untended, care alone being taken that they do not stray and that the animals are duly sheared or slaughtered, — under these circumstances large capitals have doubtless a signal advantage. The principle of combination, by avoiding the dissipation of human energy, gives much greater results than a multitude of separate and independent efforts.

“But these conditions are met only in an early stage. They soon disappear. There are scarcely more than two agricultural products which succeed very well in large operations, — the cereals and the raising of cattle.¹ It is

¹ M. Leroy-Beaulieu might perhaps have added cotton; yet the results of Mr. Edward Atkinson's investigations strongly tend to prove that, with free labor, small cotton plantations have an actual advantage.

said, these are the principal products ; but even with these the small and medium can very easily hold their own against the great culture, when once the period of clearing and peopling the ground has passed, while, on the contrary, the great culture, at least the giant culture, can hardly hold its own against the small, as respects all the accessory products of agriculture, the importance of which is continually on the increase. The finer products, without exception, — vegetables, fruits, wine, poultry, butter, cheese, — are better suited to small or medium than to large operations. The importance of the eye of the master upon all the details of production becomes much greater as the cultivating of the soil becomes more intensive and more varied.”

Thirdly, in addition to the question of gross production, we have considerations relating to the distribution of the produce, which may properly enter to affect the mind of the economist or the statesman when dealing with the tenure of the soil.

That the industrial position of the individual agent, — as, for instance, whether producing in his own right and name, by permission of no one, a merchantable product, regarding which

he has only to take the risks of a fortunate or unfortunate exchange, or, in the opposite case, as a candidate for employment at the hands of another, through whose consent only can he obtain the opportunity to take a part in production, and with whom, consequently, he has to make terms in advance of production and as a condition precedent to production,—that the industrial position of the individual agent may powerfully affect the distribution of the produce among those who take part in production ; that the injuries suffered in that distribution by the economically weak should result, more or less extensively, in permanent industrial disability, through loss of health and strength, through loss of constitutional energy or corruption of the blood, through loss of self-respect and social ambition, such disability being as real and as lasting as the disabilities incurred in a railway accident, the laborer, in consequence thereof, sinking to a lower industrial grade, beyond the reach of any reparative or restorative forces of a purely economical origin ; and, lastly, that in the reaction of distribution upon production, the whole community and all classes should suffer, both economically and socially ;—how any one can deny these things, I cannot con-

ceive, although it has mysteriously pleased the economists almost wholly to omit consideration of causes of this nature.

That the system of small holdings reduces to a minimum the difficulties and the economic dangers attending the distribution of wealth, is implied in the very statement of the case. The great majority of those who work upon the land being self-employed, and the produce being their own, without deduction, the question what they shall receive as the fruit of their labor becomes a question of their own industry and prudence, subject alone to the kindness or unkindness of nature in giving the sunshine and the rain in their due season and measure, or the reverse.

The reduction of the mass of those who work upon the land to the condition of hired laborers brings upon each the necessity of finding a master with whom he must make terms precedent to production; of entering into a competition at once with his fellows as to priority of employment, and with the members of the employing class as to rates of wages and forms of payment, for which competition he may be more or less disqualified by poverty, ignorance, and mental inertia, by distrust of himself or by

jealousy of others. The condition of the agricultural laborers of England during the past hundred years shows that the evils portrayed are not merely imaginary.

Fourthly, even more important than the considerations relating to the production and the distribution of wealth, bearing upon the tenure of land, which have been indicated, are certain considerations connected with the Consumption of Wealth.

Under which system of holdings are the forces which determine the uses to be made of wealth likely to be most favorable to the strength and prosperity of the community?

That the ownership of land, in the main, by the cultivating class, promotes frugality and a wiser application of the existing body of wealth, is too manifest to require discussion. The true savings-bank, says Sismondi, is the soil. There is never a time when the owner of land is not painfully conscious of improvements which he desires to make upon his farm, of additions which he desires to make to his stock. For every shilling of money, as for every hour of time, he knows an immediate use. He has not to carry his earnings past a drinking-saloon to find an opportunity to invest them. The

hungry land is, even at the moment, crying aloud for them.

“Day-laborers,” says Mr. Mill, “where the laboring class mainly consists of them, are usually improvident; they spend carelessly to the full extent of their means, and let the future shift for itself.

“This is so notorious that many persons, otherwise well affected to the laboring classes, hold it as a fixed opinion that an increase of wages would do them little good, unless accompanied by at least a corresponding improvement in their tastes and habits. The tendency of peasant proprietors, and of those who hope to become proprietors, is to the contrary extreme, — to take even too much thought for the morrow. They are oftener accused of penuriousness than of prodigality. They deny themselves reasonable indulgences, and live wretchedly, in order to economize.

“In Switzerland almost everybody saves, who has any means of saving; among the French, though a pleasure-loving and reputed to be a self-indulgent people, the spirit of thrift is diffused through the rural population in a manner most gratifying as a whole, and which in individual instances errs rather on the side of excess than defect. . . .

“But some excess in this direction is a small and passing evil compared with recklessness and improvidence in the laboring classes, and a cheap price to pay for the inestimable worth of the virtue of self-dependence, as the general characteristic of a people,—a virtue which is one of the first conditions of excellence in a human character; the stock on which, if the other virtues are not grafted, they have seldom any firm root; a quality indispensable in the case of a laboring class, even to any tolerable degree of physical comfort, and by which the peasantry of France and of most European countries of peasant proprietors are distinguished beyond any other laboring population.”

Fifthly, the influence upon population of a widely popular tenure of the soil was once matter of dispute; but the entire effect of European experience during the past generation has been to corroborate the view that no other state of agricultural economy tends, on the whole, so much to discourage an improvident increase of numbers.

The reasons herefor cannot be better stated than they have been by M. Sismondi:—

“In the countries in which cultivation by small proprietors still continues, population

increases regularly and rapidly, until it has attained its natural limits; that is to say, inheritances continue to be divided and subdivided among several sons as long as, by an increase of labor, each family can extract an equal income from a smaller portion of land.¹ A father who possessed a vast extent of natural pasture divides it among his sons, and they turn it into fields and meadows; his sons divide it among their sons, who abolish fallows; each improvement in agricultural knowledge admits of another step in the subdivision of property.

“But there is no danger that the proprietor will bring up children to make beggars of them. He knows exactly what inheritance he has to leave them; he knows that the law² will divide it equally among them; he sees the limits beyond which partition would make them descend from the rank which he himself has filled; and a just family pride, common to the peasant and the prince, makes him abstain from summoning into life children for whom he cannot properly provide. If more are born,

¹ See *ante*, pp. 13-16.

² This has reference to the principle of “Partible Succession,” widely incorporated into the law of Continental Europe.

at least they do not marry, or they agree among themselves which of several brothers shall perpetuate the family."

The power of population strictly to limit itself, under the impulse to preserve family estates from undue subdivision, by the means adverted to in the closing sentence of the paragraph quoted, is strikingly illustrated by Professor Cliffe Leslie, in the facts which he adduces regarding the population of Auvergne.

In the mountains, it appears, the people cling with remarkable tenacity to the conservation of the inheritance unbroken. The daughters willingly consent to take vows and renounce the patrimony of their parents; or, if they contract marriage, agree to leave to the head of the family their individual shares of the inheritance. It is the same with the sons, of whom some become priests; others emigrate, consenting never to claim any part of the property. One of the sons remains at home, working with the father and mother, and becomes in time the proprietor of the ancestral estate. Thus the principle of equal partition, established by law, is eluded by the connivance of the family, it seldom occurring that the other children assert

their claims, so fully accepted is this usage in the manners of the mountains.

Professor Leslie, after giving the foregoing as the substance of an official report, adds: "The renunciation by the emigrants of their share in the family property certainly shows, if not an extraordinary imperviousness to new ideas, an extraordinary tenacity of old ones; and, in particular, of two ideas which are among the oldest in human society, — subordination to the male head of the family, and conservation of the family property unbroken."

From the "London Times,"¹ I take the following remarkable testimony to the influence of an extensive ownership of land in antagonizing the procreative force, and in winning for improved living, comfort, luxury, and security of condition, what otherwise would be usurped and wasted upon increase of population, with resulting squalor and poverty: —

"Over the greater part of France the standard of comfort and well-being has been increasing ever since the termination of the great war in 1815. The country had been so drained and impoverished by the great wars of Napoleon and by a century and a half of bad government,

¹ January 25, 1883.

that the general misery of the population was indescribable, and the poverty even of the landed proprietors and middle classes was very great. . . . For many years comfort and well-being, and even luxury, have made their way into the households of all classes in France. The standard of living has risen enormously. The habits of saving and thrift have not been neglected. In the art of managing and regularizing their lives, the French people are unrivalled, and the object of every family is to live and to save, at the same time, so as to be able to leave their sons and daughters in as good a position as themselves, at all events, and in a better, if possible. . . .

“Among people with such habits and such views of life, the risk and expenditure attendant upon a large family are naturally regarded with horror. ‘Since two or three children give us sufficient enjoyment of the pleasures of paternity, why,’ the greater number of Frenchmen argue, ‘should we have more? With two or three children, we can live comfortably, and save sufficient to leave our children as well off as ourselves; a greater number would involve curtailment of enjoyments both for ourselves and our children.’”

Without confining myself at all points within strictly economic lines of thought, I have grouped the considerations which lead me to dissent from the opinion of M. Leroy-Beaulieu that if the economic interest which demands the greatest possible production of wealth be found irreconcilable with the moral interest which claims that the greatest number of persons shall be proprietors of land, it is the former which should by all means prevail, the latter which should in all cases give way.

Beyond the considerations which I have felt at liberty to adduce, is the interest of the community in the development of the manhood of its citizens, through the individuality and independence of character which spring from working upon the soil that you own.

“I believe,” wrote Emerson,¹ “in the spade and an acre of good ground. Whoso cuts a straight path to his own bread, by the help of God in the sun and rain and sprouting of the grain, seems to me an *universal* workman. He solves the problem of life, not for one, but for all men of sound body.”

Still, in addition to this, is the political interest which the State has, that as many as may

¹ To Carlyle, March 18, 1840.

be of its citizens shall be directly interested in the land. Especially with popular institutions is there a strong assurance of peace, order, purity, and liberty, where those who are to make the laws, to pay the taxes, to rally to the support of the Government against foreign invasion or domestic violence, are the proprietors of the soil.

I would by no means argue in favor of a dull uniformity of petty holdings. Probably Professor Roscher is right in saying that a mingling of large, medium, and small properties, in which those of medium size predominate, forms the most wholesome of national and economical organizations.

In such an organization each class of estates is a help and strength to every other. The great estates afford adequate field and ample capital for advanced experimental agriculture, by the results of which all will, in turn, profit. They set the standard of "the straight furrow, the well-built ricks, and the beautiful lines of drilled corn," to use the enthusiastic phrase of Sir James Caird.

The multitude of small proprietors, on the other hand, as Professor Emile de Laveleye has well expressed it, serve as a kind of political rampart and safeguard for the holders of large

estates; they offer the laborer a ready resort to the land, a sort of economical "escape," in the failure of mechanical employment; and they provide the nation with a solid body of yeomen, not easily bought or bullied or cajoled by demagogues.

In the medium-sized farms, again, may be found united no small measure of the advantages of both the large estate and the petty holding, the three degrees together forming the ideal distribution of the soil of any country, where both economical and social considerations are taken into account.

What, if anything, should be done by the State to promote the right holding of land? Mr. Thornton's reply to this question is the reply of Diogenes to Alexander: "Get out of my light!" And, indeed, in a country like our own, with vast unoccupied tracts still available for settlement, with a population active, alert, aggressive, both industrially and socially, and with no vicious traditions, no old abuses, perverting the natural operation of economic forces to ends injurious to the general interest, it is only needful that the State should keep off its hand, and allow the soil to be parted as the

unhelped and unhindered course of sale and bequest may determine. But wherever there is a peasantry unfitted for competition, upon purely commercial principles, with a powerful and wealthy class, under a painful pressure of population, there the regulation of the holding of land becomes a proper matter of State concern.

