

THOMAS JEFFERSON ON THE LAND QUESTION.

From a Letter Written by Thomas Jefferson to Rev. James Madison, as Reported in Paul Leicester Ford's "Works of Thomas Jefferson," Vol. vii, p. 33.

Fontainebleau, Oct. 28, 1795.*

Dear Sir: Seven o'clock, and retired to my fireside, I have determined to enter into conversation with you. This is a village of about 5,000 inhabitants when the court is not here and 20,000 when they are, occupying a valley thro' which runs a brook and on each side of it a ridge of small mountains most of which are naked rock. The King comes here, in the fall always, to hunt. His court attend him, as do also the foreign diplomatic corps. But as this is not indispensably required and my finances do not admit the expense of a continued residence here, I propose to come occasionally to attend the King's levees, returning again to Paris, distant 40 miles. This being the first trip I set out yesterday morning to take a view of the place. For this purpose I shaped my course towards the highest of the mountains in sight, to the top of which was about a league. As soon as I got clear of the town I fell in with a poor woman walking at the same rate with myself and going the same course. Wishing to know the condition of the laboring poor I entered into conversation with her, which I began by inquiries for the path which would lead me into the mountain; and thence proceeded to inquiries into her vocation, condition and circumstances. She told me she was a day laborer, at 8 sous or 4d sterling the day; that she had two children to maintain, and to pay rent of 30 livres for her house (which would consume the hire of 75 days); that often she could get no employment, and of course was without bread. As we had walked together near a mile and she had so far served me as a guide, I gave her, on parting, 24 sous. She burst into tears of a gratitude which I could perceive was unfeigned because she was unable to utter a word. She had probably never before received so great an aid. This little *attendrissement*, with the solitude of my walk led me into a train of reflections on that unequal division of property which occasions the numberless instances of wretchedness which I had observed in this country and is to be observed all over Europe. The property of this country is absolutely concentrated in a very few hands, having revenues of from half a million of guineas a year downwards. These employ the flower of the country as servants, some of them having as many as 200 domestics, not laboring. They employ also a great number of manufacturers, and tradesmen, and lastly the class of laboring husbandmen. But

*Mr. Ford says in regard to this date: "The true date of this letter is ten years previous to this, Jefferson having written 1795 in place of 1785."

after all there comes the most numerous of all classes, that is, the poor who cannot find work. I asked myself what could be the reason that so many should be permitted to beg who are willing to work, in a country where there is a very considerable proportion of uncultivated lands? These lands are undisturbed only for the sake of game. It should seem then that it must be because of the enormous wealth of the proprietors which places them above attention to the increase of their revenues by permitting these lands to be labored. I am conscious that an equal division of property is impracticable. But the consequences of this enormous inequality producing so much misery to the bulk of mankind, legislators cannot invent too many devices for subdividing property, only taking care to let their subdivisions go hand in hand with the natural affections of the human mind. The descent of property of every kind therefore to all the children, or to all the brothers and sisters, or other relations in equal degree is a politic measure, and a practicable one. Another means of silently lessening the inequality of property is to exempt all from taxation below a certain point, and to tax the higher portions of property in geometrical progression as they rise. Whenever there is in any country, uncultivated lands and unemployed poor, it is clear that the laws of property have been so far extended as to violate natural right. The earth is given as a common stock for man to labor and live on. If for the encouragement of industry we allow it to be appropriated, we must take care that other employment be provided to those excluded from the appropriation. If we do not the fundamental right to labor the earth returns to the unemployed. It is too soon yet in our country to say that every man who cannot find employment but who can find uncultivated land shall be at liberty to cultivate it, paying a moderate rent. But it is not too soon to provide by every possible means that as few as possible shall be without a little portion of land. The small land holders are the most precious part of a state.

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SUFFRAGE QUESTIONS ANSWERED

From the Seattle "Votes for Women."

What is equal suffrage?

It is the right of both men and women to have a voice in the laws that govern them.

Where in the United States do women vote?

In Idaho, Colorado, Wyoming and Utah. [Washington also, now.]

Do the women of these States vote for President?

Yes, for President, Vice-President and Congressmen.

What women vote in the suffrage States?

The mothers and the taxpayers.