

# Baron de Laune Anne- Robert-Jacques Turgot

*Reflections  
on the Formation and  
the Distribution  
of Riches*

**Baron de Laune Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot**

# **Reflections on the Formation and the Distribution of Riches**



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[Introductory Note by Du Pont de Nemours, in the *Éphémérides* for Nov. 1769, p. 12.]

*We have long begged the Author of the following work to let us have it to enrich our Periodical. He was never ready to consent, because he had not given the last touch to the exposition of his reflections; because, throwing them on paper, three years ago, very hastily and for a particular purpose, he approaches the subject in a manner which seems to him not sufficiently direct; because, as a consequence, he has been obliged sometimes to repeat himself; and because it seems to him that thereby he gives occasion to objections which could easily have been forestalled if the subjects had been presented in a more systematic fashion. It is the Author himself who has so severely criticised his performance, whenever we have spoken to him about it; and we doubt not that he would really have been quite capable of giving it a higher degree of perfection. Yet as important occupations, from which he cannot be released, leave him too little leisure for it to be possible for him to reckon upon the time which would be necessary to arrive at what would satisfy himself; and since, even in the condition in which the reflections now are, they seem to us to compose a Work that is very interesting, very fruitful, and very worthy of the important subject of which they treat; we have insisted upon his giving us permission to place them in our Collection; and he has finally granted to friendship the sacrifice he had always refused to our arguments.*

# REFLECTIONS on the formation & the distribution of riches,<sup>[1]</sup> by Mr. X.

## S1

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*Impossibility of Commerce upon the supposition of an equal division of lands, wherein every man should possess only what was necessary for his own support.*

If the land were so distributed among all the inhabitants of a country that each of them had precisely the quantity of it necessary for his support and nothing more, it is evident that, all being equal, no one would be willing to work for others. No one, besides, would possess anything with which to pay for the labour of another; for each, having only as much land as he needed to produce his subsistence, would consume all that he had gathered, and would have nothing that he could exchange for the labour of the others.

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*The above hypothesis has never existed, & could not have continued. The diversity of soils & the multiplicity of wants lead to the exchange of the products of the land for other products.*

This hypothesis can never have existed, because the lands have been cultivated before they have been divided; that very cultivation having been the sole motive for division and for the law which assures to each his property. Now the first who have cultivated have probably cultivated

as much ground as their forces permitted, and consequently more than was necessary for their support.

Even if this state could have existed, it could not possibly have been durable; each man, as he got from his field nothing but his subsistence, and had nothing wherewith to pay the labour of the others, could only supply his other wants in the way of shelter, clothing, etc., by his own labour; and this would be almost impossible; *every piece of land by no means producing everything.*

He whose land was only fit for grain and would produce neither cotton nor hemp would be without cloth wherewith to clothe himself. Another would have a piece of land fit for cotton which would not produce grain. A third would be without wood wherewith to warm himself, while a fourth would be without grain wherewith to feed himself.

Experience would soon teach each what was the kind of product for which his land would be best adapted, and he would limit himself to the cultivation of that particular crop, in order to procure for himself the things he was devoid of by means of exchange with his neighbours; and these, having in their turn made the same reflections, would have cultivated the crop

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best suited to their field and abandoned the cultivation of all the others.

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*The products of the land require preparations long & difficult, in order to render them fit to satisfy the wants of man.*

The crops which the land produces to satisfy the different wants of man cannot serve that purpose, for the most part, in the state in which nature gives them; they must undergo various changes and be prepared by art. Wheat must be converted into flour and then into bread; hides must be tanned or dressed; wool and cotton must be spun; silk must be drawn from the cocoons; hemp and flax must be soaked, peeled, and spun; next, different textures must be made from them; and then they must be cut and sewn into garments, foot-gear, etc. If the man who causes his land to produce all these different things and uses them to supply his wants were himself obliged to put them through all these intermediate stages, it is certain that he would succeed very badly. The greater part of these preparations demand an amount of care, of attention, of long experience, such as are only to be acquired by working continuously and on a great quantity of materials. Take for example the preparation of hides; what labourer could attend to all the details necessary in this operation, which lasts several months and sometimes several years? If he could, would he be able to, for a single hide? What loss of time, of space, of material, which might have served either at the same time or successively to tan a great quantity of hides! But even should he succeed in tanning a single hide, he only needs one pair of shoes; what shall he do with the rest? Shall he kill an ox to have this pair of shoes? Shall he cut down a tree to make himself a pair of sabots? One might say the same thing concerning all the other wants of each man, who, if he were reduced to his own field and his own labour, would