

claim it as his, before he had gathered in his harvest. There is no original and inherent right enjoyed by one more than another, to any particular portion of the soil; and hence, perhaps, that celebrated apophthegm, which, some years ago, was the popular cry of a certain party in France, "*La propriété c'est vol.*" But though the right of property is not inherent, like some others enjoyed by man, it is easy to see how, in various ways, it may be acquired. It probably arose at first, as, in some cases, it arises still, from undisturbed possession for a time; and was strengthened and established by labour expended, and improvements wrought. As the child, who, by much exertion of his feeble arms, has dragged a seat to a snug corner near the fire, thinks he is entitled to claim that seat as his own, because of the labour he has put forth to improve its position; and his claim being for some time allowed, is at length, by tacit consent, left in undisturbed possession of it; so the man, who has prepared a field for cultivation, removed the rocks that impeded the operations of the husbandman, smoothed its inequalities, hedged it in, and cut a channel for its superfluous waters, would be acknowledged, by all around him, to have a better right to that field than any other person; and, after he has possessed it for a length of time, to deprive him of it would be felt to be an obvious act of injustice. As Society advanced, and a regular government was established, land hitherto unappropriated might be conveyed and held by various tenures, and the right transferred from one to another, by the well understood process of buying and selling.

I consider the origin of property a very curious speculation. I am neither lawyer nor political economist enough to follow it out in all its details. Permit me to express a hope, that some member of this Society, who has made it the subject of his study, will take it up and fully investigate the philosophy of it in all its bearings. Some of our friends of the long robe, I trust, will act upon this suggestion; and I hope I shall not be thought to have overstepped the proper limits of my duty in throwing out this hint for their consideration.

I have occupied so much time with the preliminary parts of