

actual and very unequal distribution of it—having recourse to an original social compact, and to other fictions alike visionary. But if there be truth in our theory, it is just as easy to explain, why the humble proprietor, would no more think of laying claim to certain acres of his rich neighbour's estate because it was larger than his own, than he would think of laying claim to certain children of his neighbour's family because it was larger—or even of laying claim to certain parts of his neighbour's person because it was larger. He is sufficiently acquainted with his own nature to be aware, that, were the circumstances changed, he should feel precisely as his affluent neighbour does; and he respects the feeling accordingly. He knows that, if himself at the head of a larger property, he would have the same affection for all its fields that the actual proprietor has; and that, if at the head of a larger family, he would have the same affection with the actual parent for all its children. It is by making justice come in at the right place, that is, not prior to these strong affections of nature but posterior to them, that the perplexities of this inquiry are done away. The principle on which it arbitrates, is, not the comparative magnitude of the properties, but the relative feelings of each actual possessor towards each actual property; and if it find these in every instance, to be the very feelings which all men would have in the circumstances belonging to that instance—it attempts no new distribution, but gives its full sanction to the distribution which is already before it. This is the real origin and upholder of that conservative