

The historian of German economics, Wilhelm Roscher, characterises Thünen's method as follows: "Thünen's abstraction has really a great resemblance to the experiments of the natural philosopher. In actual practice every economical fact comes about by the co-operation of many and various factors. Thünen then isolates in his mind that factor the peculiar nature of which he desires to investigate. He considers all other factors to be for the time at rest and invariable, and he inquires how a change of more or less in the factor under examination would act. This procedure he considers to be the very kernel of his writings. The results may be incomplete, but they are never erroneous. Also they can be completed by gradually submitting all the other factors to the same process, which points to a number, indeed to an immeasurable number, of investigations; as when with the use of a more powerful telescope nebulous masses are resolved into groups of stars, revealing at the same time new nebulae."¹

Thünen has been compared with Ricardo in England, whose writings benefited similarly by his practical, but much more one-sided, experience as a banker. Both thinkers were influenced by the writings of Adam Smith, but Thünen does not seem to have been acquainted with Ricardo's writings till he had independently and from a different side arrived at a similar theory of rent.

The love of calculation and of mathematical formulæ in dealing with matters which can only in a forced

¹ Wilhelm Roscher, 'Geschichte der National-Oekonomie in Deutschland' (München, 1874, p. 882).