

**EARLY HISTORY OF
LAND-HOLDING
AMONG THE GERMANS**

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Early history of land-holding among the Germans by Denman W. Ross

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DENMAN W. ROSS

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PREFACE.

THIS volume is the result of an investigation into the early history of land-holding among the Germans. The investigation was begun in the year 1875, and it has been continued, with occasional interruptions, since then.

The collections of early records were, most of them, read through. Passages bearing upon the subject of the investigation were noted. They were then carefully classified; passages establishing certain facts being grouped together. A general theory was then formed, to bring the facts thus collected into a natural order and relationship. This theory is now offered to readers and students for their consideration.

In order to reach a just judgment of the theory, three inquiries should be made:— 1. Are the passages of the records, which are described or referred to, correctly interpreted? 2. Have any passages in the records been overlooked, which are inconsistent with the theory offered? 3. Are the facts which have been ascertained well arranged and fully described?

Although much labor has been spent, during a long period of time, in order to reach a truthful, consistent, and lucid statement, the result is still unsatisfactory to the writer, in many respects. It will be unsatisfactory to the reader also, without doubt. An entirely satisfactory statement still remains to be made. Perhaps it may never be made. The records are in many cases inconsistent; and in regard to certain points we have no records whatever; nor is there much chance of any being discovered.

Nevertheless, we believe that it will always be possible to advance in the knowledge and understanding of our subject. Perhaps the time may come when we shall no longer be able to gather new facts, though such a time must still be far off; but the time will never come when we can make an exhaustive general statement, which will involve no error of any kind. It will always be possible to make a more simple, a more lucid, a more truthful statement. It must be remembered that we advance in science not so much by presenting new views as by correcting old ones. In other words, we advance not so much by establishing our theories as by modifying them. Absolute truth is far away from us, and unattainable. The most we can do is to approximate towards it; and we do this by giving up the statement of to-day for another, which will bring facts a little more nearly into their true and natural relationship. We advance in this way very slowly, but surely;

having always something new to say involving the best of what has been said.

Consistently with this idea, we hope, after some years, to rewrite this book, or to write another book upon the same subject; to exclude all that has been said amiss, to include all that has been rightly said, and many things besides which ought to have been said. Instead of creating many things, we will perfect one if we can. As Balzac tells us in one of his letters, "Il faut refaire, recorriger, mettre tout à l'état monumental."

CAMBRIDGE, June, 1883.

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THE EARLY HISTORY
OF
LAND-HOLDING AMONG THE GERMANS.

THE life of the early Germans, considered from Pastoral life. an economic point of view, was pastoral rather than agricultural. Agriculture was resorted to more or less; at first from time to time, and afterwards regularly; but the wealth of the people, and their chief means of subsistence, consisted of live-stock, and the land was used, most of it, as pasture-ground for flocks and herds (1).

The freemen settled neither in villages nor isolated farmsteads. in towns, but apart from one another in isolated farmsteads, — *Einzelhöfe*, the Germans call them (2).

The extent of pasture ground which the free- Pasture ground. man occupied round about his farmstead was determined by the number of his flocks and herds. As among the Latins, the *pecuniosus* was also *locuples* (3). If a man owned much stock, he occupied a great deal of land. If he owned a little stock, a small amount of land was enough for him. There was plenty of land; so every man occupied as much as he wanted. The ani-