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EDITORIAL

MODERN FARMING.

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THEORIES are not always to be judged exclusively by the past. While the past illumines the present, the present gives to history a new significance that cannot be overlooked without danger to society. A recent writer on land problems furnishes an illustration to the point. Says he:

“It is said that history repeats itself, and in no particular direction does this seem to be truer than in the history of land tenure in every civilized nation. First comes the seizing of the land, then its gradual organization into holdings large and small, the absorption of the small holdings by the large, and the consequent creation of vast estates. These exist for such a time as the resisting power of the nation allows, then they are forced into fragments under pressure from the toiling millions who wake to the injustice of the monopoly of what in the beginning belonged to all.”

This theory is true in so far as it applies to ancient and medieval land holdings; but it is unsound when applied to the present ones. It takes no account of the underlying difference between ancient and modern farming wrought by mechanical progress—a difference which makes impossible the reversion of large land holding back to a fragmentary one. Ancient and medieval lands were absorbed by physical force. The Roman patrician and the Feudal lord added them to their domains at the point of the sword. The modern farm is absorbed by the competition that arises from the use of modern agricultural machinery. This new force compels the large farm, for without the large farm, machinery is unprofitable; and, without a large farm, the farmer cannot survive. He sells out to his competitor. Absorption is the result.

It follows from this difference that modern large farming and land holding have behind them a force that binds their many acres together in a manner that could not have been the case in ancient and medieval times, for then machinery did not exist. Because of this difference, fragmentary farming and land holding tend to

become obsolete, making a reversion to them impossible without a retrogression that is dangerous to society. Thanks to machinery the tendency of modern times is toward large farms and large holdings, just as in industry, owing to the same cause, the tendency is toward large capital and large capitalists. Both tendencies are making for Socialism.

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