Economics

I. I once heard him discuss the subject of estate management in the following manner.

“Tell me, Critobulus, is estate management the name of a branch of knowledge, like medicine, smithing and carpentry?”

“I think so,” replied Critobulus.

[2] “And can we say what the function of estate management is, just as we can say what is the function of each of these arts?”

“Well, I suppose that the business of a good estate manager is to manage his own estate well.”

[3] “Yes, and in case he were put in charge of another man's estate, could he not, if he chose, manage it as well as he manages his own? Anyone who understands carpentry can do for another exactly the same work as he does for himself; and so, I presume, can a good estate manager.”

“I think so, Socrates.”

[4] “Is it possible, then, for one who understands this art, even if he has no property of his own, to earn money by managing another man's estate, just as he might do by building him a house?”

“Yes, of course; and he would get a good salary if, after taking over an estate, he continued to pay all outgoings, and to increase the estate by showing a balance.”

“But what do we mean now by an estate? [5] Is it the same thing as a house, or is all property that one possesses outside the house also part of the estate?”

“Well, I think that even if the property is situated in different cities, everything a man possesses is part of his estate.”


“Of course; some in fact possess many.”

“Shall we include their enemies in their possessions?”

“It would be ridiculous, surely, if one actually received a salary for increasing the number of a man's enemies!”

[7] “Because, you know, we supposed a man's estate to be the same as his property.”

“To be sure--meaning thereby the good things that he possesses. No, of course I don't call any bad thing that he may possess property.”

“You seem to use the word property of whatever is profitable to its owner.”

“Certainly; but what is harmful I regard as loss rather than wealth.”

[8] “Yes, and consequently if a man buys a horse and doesn't know how to manage it, and so keeps on getting thrown and injuring himself by trying to ride it, the horse is not wealth to him, I presume?”

“No, if we assume that wealth is a good thing.”

“It follows that land is not wealth either to a man who works it in such a way that his work results
in loss.”

“To be sure: even land is not wealth if it makes us starve instead of supporting us.”

[9] “And the same will hold good of sheep, will it not? if a man loses through ignorance of sheep farming, his sheep too will not be wealth to him?”

“I think not.”

“It seems, then, that your view is this: what is profitable is wealth, what is harmful is not wealth.”

“Quite so.”

[10] “That is to say, the same things are wealth and not wealth, according as one understands or does not understand how to use them. A flute, for example, is wealth to one who is competent to play it, but to an incompetent person it is no better than useless stones.”

“True—unless he sells it.”

[11] “We now see that to persons who don't understand its use, a flute is wealth if they sell it, but not wealth if they keep it instead of selling.”

“Yes, Socrates, and our argument runs consistently, since we have said that what is profitable is wealth. For a flute, if not put up for sale, is not wealth, because it is useless: if put up for sale it becomes wealth.”

[12] “Yes,” commented Socrates, “provided he knows how to sell; but again, in case he sells it for something he doesn't know how to use, even then the sale doesn't convert it into wealth, according to you.”

“You imply, Socrates, that even money isn't wealth to one who doesn't know how to use it.”

[13] “And you, I think, agree with me to this extent, that wealth is that from which a man can derive profit. At any rate, if a man uses his money to buy a mistress who makes him worse off in body and soul and estate, how can his money be profitable to him then?”

“By no means, unless we are ready to maintain that the weed called nightshade, which drives you mad if you eat it, is wealth.”

[14] “Then money is to be kept at a distance, Critobulus, if one doesn't know how to use it, and not to be included in wealth. But how about friends? If one knows how to make use of them so as to profit by them, what are they to be called?”

“Wealth, of course, and much more so than cattle, if it be true that they are more profitable than cattle.”

[15] “Yes, and it follows from what you say that enemies too are wealth to anyone who can derive profit from them.”

“Well, that is my opinion.”

“Consequently it is the business of a good estate manager to know how to deal with enemies so as to derive profit from them too.”

“Most decidedly.”

“In fact, Critobulus, you cannot fail to notice that many private persons have been indebted to war for the increase of their estates, and many princes too.”

[16] “Yes, so far so good, Socrates. But sometimes we come across persons possessed of knowledge and means whereby they can increase their estates if they work, and we find that they are unwilling to do so; and consequently we see that their knowledge profits them nothing. What
are we to make of that? In these cases, surely, neither their knowledge nor their property is wealth?”

[17] “Are you trying to raise a discussion about slaves, Critobulus?”

“Oh no, not at all: I am referring to persons of whom some, at any rate, are considered men of the highest lineage. I observe that there are persons skilled in the arts of war or peace, as the case may be, who are unwilling to practice them, and the reason, I think, is just this, that they have no master over them.”

[18] “What, no master over them, when, in spite of their prayers for prosperity and their desire to do what will bring them good, they are thwarted in their intentions by the powers that rule them?”

[19] “And who, pray, may these unseen rulers be?”

“No, not unseen, but open and undisguised, surely! And very vicious rulers they are too, as you yourself must see, if at least you regard idleness and moral cowardice and negligence as vice. [20] Aye, and then there is a set of deceitful mistresses that pretend to be pleasures—such as gambling and consorting with bad companions: even the victims of their deception find as time goes on that these, after all, are really pains concealed beneath a thin veneer of pleasures, and that they are hindering them from all profitable work by their influence over them.”

[21] “But there are other men, Socrates, whose energy is not hindered by these influences, in fact they have an eager desire to work and to make an income: nevertheless they exhaust their estates and are beset with difficulties.”

[22] “Yes, they too are slaves, and hard indeed are their masters: some are in bondage to gluttony, some to lechery, some to drink, and some to foolish and costly ambitions. And so hard is the rule of these passions over every man who falls into their clutches, that so long as they see that he is strong and capable of work, they force him to pay over all the profits of his toil, and to spend it on their own desires; but no sooner do they find that he is too old to work, than they leave him to an old age of misery, and try to fasten the yoke on other shoulders. [23] Ah, Critobulus, we must fight for our freedom against these tyrants as persistently as if they were armed men trying to enslave us. Indeed, open enemies may be gentlemen, and when they enslave us, may, by chastening, purge us of our faults and cause us to live better lives in future. But such mistresses as these never cease to plague men in body and soul and estate all the time that they have dominion over them.”

II. The word was now with Critobulus, who continued thus:

“Well, I think you have told me quite enough about such passions as these, and when I examine myself I find, I think, that I have them fairly well under control; and therefore, if you will advise me what I should do to increase my estate, I don't think those mistresses, as you call them, are likely to hinder me. So do not hesitate to give me any good advice you can: unless, indeed, you have made up your mind that we are rich enough already, Socrates, and think we have no need of more money?”

[2] “Oh, if you mean to include me, I certainly think I have no need of more money and am rich enough. But you seem to me to be quite poor, Critobulus, and at times, I assure you, I feel quite sorry for you.”

[3] “And how much, pray,” asked Critobulus, laughing, “would your property fetch at a sale, do you suppose, Socrates, and how much would mine?”

“Well, if I found a good buyer, I think the whole of my goods and chattels, including the house, might readily sell for five minae.1 Yours, I feel sure, would fetch more than a hundred times that
sum.”

[4] “And in spite of that estimate, you really think you have no need of money and pity me for my poverty?”

“Yes, because my property is sufficient to satisfy my wants, but I don't think you would have enough to keep up the style you are living in and to support your reputation, even if your fortune were three times what it is.”


“Because, in the first place,” explained Socrates, “I notice that you are bound to offer many large sacrifices; else, I fancy, you would get into trouble with gods and men alike. Secondly, it is your duty to entertain many strangers, on a generous scale too. Thirdly, you have to give dinners and play the benefactor to the citizens, or you lose your following. [6] Moreover, I observe that already the state is exacting heavy contributions from you: you must needs keep horses, pay for choruses and gymnastic competitions, and accept presidencies; and if war breaks out, I know they will require you to maintain a ship and pay taxes that will nearly crush you. Whenever you seem to fall short of what is expected of you, the Athenians will certainly punish you as though they had caught you robbing them. [7] Besides all this, I notice that you imagine yourself to be a rich man; you are indifferent to money, and yet go courting minions, as though the cost were nothing to you. And that is why I pity you, and fear that you may come to grief and find yourself reduced to penury. [8] Now, if I ran short of money, no doubt you know as well as I do that I should not lack helpers who would need to contribute very little to fill my cup to overflowing. But your friends, though far better supplied with means to support their establishment than you, yet look to receive help from you.”

[9] “I cannot dispute this, Socrates,” said Critobulus, “but it is time for you to take me in hand, and see that I don't become a real object of pity.”

At this Socrates exclaimed, “What, don't you think it strange, Critobulus, that a little while ago, when I said I was rich, you laughed at me, as though I did not even know the meaning of riches, and would not cease until you had proved me wrong and made me own that my possessions were less than one-hundredth part of yours, and yet now you bid me take you in hand and see that you don’t become in literal truth a poor man?”

[10] “Well, Socrates, I see that you understand one process by which wealth is created--how to create a balance. So a man who saves on a small income can, I suppose, very easily show a large surplus with a large one.”

[11] “Then don't you remember saying just now in our conversation, when you wouldn't give me leave to utter a syllable, that if a man doesn't know how to manage horses, his horses are not wealth to him, nor his land, sheep, money or anything else, if he doesn't know how to manage them? Now these are the sources from which income is derived: and how do you suppose that I can possibly know how to manage any of these things, seeing that I never yet possessed any one of them?”

[12] “Still we held that, even if a man happens to have no wealth, there is such a thing as a science of household management. Then what reason is there why you should not know it?”

“Exactly the same reason, of course, that a man would have for not knowing how to play on the flute if he had never possessed one himself and had never borrowed one to learn on. [13] That is just my case with regard to estate management; for never having possessed wealth myself, I have not had an opportunity of learning on an instrument of my own, and nobody has ever let me handle his, until you made your offer. Beginners, I fancy, are apt to spoil the lyres they learn on; and if I attempted to learn to manage estates by practising on yours, possibly I might spoil it
entirely for you."

[14] “Ah, Socrates!” rejoined Critobulus, “I see you are eager to avoid giving me any help towards lightening the weight of my troublesome duties.”

“Not at all, not at all,” said Socrates, “I am all eagerness to tell you all I know. [15] Suppose that you had come to me for fire, and I, having none by me, had taken you to some place where you could get it; you would not, I think, have found fault with me: or, if you had asked for water, and I, having none myself, had brought you to some other place for it, I feel sure that you would not have found fault with me for that either: or, suppose you wanted to learn music with me and I directed you to persons far more skilled in music than I am, who would be grateful to you for taking lessons with them, what fault could you find with me for doing so?”

[16] “None, if I were fair, Socrates.”

“Well then, Critobulus, I will direct you to others far more skilled than I in the things you now seek to learn from me. I confess that I have made a point of finding out who are the greatest masters of various sciences to be found in Athens. [17] For observing once that the same pursuits lead in one case to great poverty and in another to great riches, I was filled with amazement, and thought it worth while to consider what this could mean. And on consideration I found that these things happen quite naturally. [18] For I saw that those who follow these pursuits carelessly suffer loss, and I discovered that those who devote themselves earnestly to them accomplish them more quickly, more easily and with more profit. I think that if you would elect to learn from these, you too with God's favour would turn out a clever man of business.”

III. “Socrates,” exclaimed Critobulus on hearing this, “I don't intend to let you go now, until you have proved to my satisfaction what you have promised in the presence of our friends here to prove.”

“Well then,” said Socrates, “what if I prove to your satisfaction, Critobulus, to begin with, that some men spend large sums in building houses that are useless, while others build houses perfect in all respects for much less? Will you think that I am putting before you one of the operations that constitute estate management?”

“Yes, certainly.”

[2] “And what if I show you next the companion to this--that some possess many costly belongings and cannot use them at need, and do not even know whether they are safe and sound, and so are continually worried themselves and worrying their servants, whereas others, though they possess not more, but even less, have whatever they want ready for use?”

“What is the reason of this, then, Socrates? [3] Is it not simply this, that the former stow their things away anywhere and the latter have everything neatly arranged in some place?”

“Yes, of course, arranged carefully in the proper place, not just anywhere.”

“Your point, I take it, is that this too is an element in estate management.”

[4] “Then what if I show you besides that in some households nearly all the servants are in fetters and yet continually try to run away, whereas in others they are under no restraint and are willing to work and to stay at their posts? Won't you think that here too I am pointing out to you a notable effect of estate management?”

“Yes, of course; very much so.”

[5] “And that when men farm the same kind of land, some are poverty-stricken and declare that they are ruined by farming, and others do well with the farm and have all they want in
abundance?”
“Yes, of course; for maybe some spend money not on necessary purposes only but on what brings harm to the owner and the estate.”
“Perhaps there are such people. [6] But I am referring rather to those who haven't the money to meet even the necessary expenses, though professing to be farmers.”
“Now what can be the reason of that, Socrates?”
“I will take you to these too; and when you watch them, you will find out, I fancy.”
“Of course; that is, if I can.”
[7] “Then you must watch, and try by experiment whether you are capable of understanding. At present I observe that when a comedy is to be seen, you get up very early and walk a very long way and press me eagerly to go to the play with you. But you have never yet invited me to see a drama of real life like this.”
“You think me ridiculous, don't you, Socrates?”
“You think yourself far more so, I am sure. [8] And suppose I show you that some have been brought to penury by keeping horses, while others prosper by doing so, and moreover glory in their gain?”
“Well, I too see and know instances of both; I am not one of the gainers for all that.”
[9] “The fact is you watch them just as you watch the actors in tragedy or comedy, not, I suppose, to become a playwright, but for the pleasure of seeing and hearing something. And perhaps there is no harm in that, because you don't want to write plays; but seeing that you are forced to meddle with horses, don't you think that common-sense requires you to see that you are not ignorant of the business, the more so as the self-same horses are both good to use and profitable to sell?”
[10] “Would you have me break in colts, Socrates?”
“Of course not, no more than I would have you buy children to train as agricultural labourers; but horses and human beings alike, I think, on reaching a certain age forthwith become useful and go on improving. I can also show you that husbands differ widely in their treatment of their wives, and some succeed in winning their co-operation and thereby increase their estates, while others bring utter ruin on their houses by their behaviour to them.”
[11] “And ought one to blame the husband or the wife for that, Socrates?”
“When a sheep is ailing,” said Socrates, “we generally blame the shepherd, and when a horse is vicious, we generally find fault with his rider. In the case of a wife, if she receives instruction in the right way from her husband and yet does badly, perhaps she should bear the blame; but if the husband does not instruct his wife in the right way of doing things, and so finds her ignorant, should he not bear the blame himself? [12] Anyhow, Critobulus, you should tell us the truth, for we are all friends here. Is there anyone to whom you commit more affairs of importance than you commit to your wife?”
“There is not.”
“Is there anyone with whom you talk less?”
“There are few or none, I confess.”
[13] “And you married her when she was a mere child and had seen and heard almost nothing?”
“Certainly.”
“Then it would be far more surprising if she understood what she should say or do than if she made mistakes.”

[14] “But what of the husbands who, as you say, have good wives, Socrates? Did they train them themselves?”

“There's nothing like investigation. I will introduce Aspasia to you, and she will explain the whole matter to you with more knowledge than I possess. [15] I think that the wife who is a good partner in the household contributes just as much as her husband to its good; because the incomings for the most part are the result of the husband's exertions, but the outgoings are controlled mostly by the wife's dispensation. If both do their part well, the estate is increased; if they act incompetently, it is diminished. [16] If you think you want to know about other branches of knowledge, I fancy I can show you people who acquit themselves creditably in any one of them.”

IV. “Surely, Socrates, there is no need to go through the whole list. For it is not easy to get workmen who are skilled in all the arts, nor is it possible to become an expert in them. Pray select the branches of knowledge that seem the noblest and would be most suitable for me to cultivate: show me these, and those who practise them; and give me from your own knowledge any help you can towards learning them.”

[2] “Very good, Critobulus; for, to be sure, the illiberal arts, as they are called, are spoken against, and are, naturally enough, held in utter disdain in our states. For they spoil the bodies of the workmen and the foremen, forcing them to sit still and live indoors, and in some cases to spend the day at the fire. The softening of the body involves a serious weakening of the mind.

[3] Moreover, these so-called illiberal arts leave no spare time for attention to one's friends and city, so that those who follow them are reputed bad at dealing with friends' and bad defenders of their country. In fact, in some of the states, and especially in those reputed warlike, it is not even lawful for any of the citizens to work at illiberal arts.”


“Need we be ashamed of imitating the king of the Persians? For they say that he pays close attention to husbandry and the art of war, holding that these are two of the noblest and most necessary pursuits.”

[5] “And do you really believe, Socrates,” exclaimed Critobulus on hearing this, “that the king of the Persians includes husbandry among his occupations?”

“Perhaps, Critobulus, the following considerations will enable us to discover whether he does so. We allow that he pays close attention to warfare, because he has given a standing order to every governor of the nations from which he receives tribute, to supply maintenance for a specified number of horsemen and archers and slingers and light infantry, that they may be strong enough to control his subjects and to protect the country in the event of an invasion; and, [6] apart from these, he maintains garrisons in the citadels. Maintenance for these is supplied by the governor charged with this duty, and the king annually reviews the mercenaries and all the other troops ordered to be under arms, assembling all but the men in the citadels at the place of muster, as it is called: he personally inspects the men who are near his residence, and sends trusted agents to review those who live far away. [7] The officers, whether commanders of garrisons or of regiments or viceroys, who turn out with a full complement of men and parade them equipped with horses and arms in good condition, he promotes in the scale of honour and enriches with large grants of money; but those officers whom he finds to be neglecting the garrisons or making profit out of them he punishes severely, and appoints others to take their office. These actions,
then, seem to us to leave no room for question that he pays attention to warfare.

[8] “As for the country, he personally examines so much of it as he sees in the course of his progress through it; and he receives reports from his trusted agents on the territories that he does not see for himself. To those governors who are able to show him that their country is densely populated and that the land is in cultivation and well stocked with the trees of the district and with the crops, he assigns more territory and gives presents, and rewards them with seats of honour. Those whose territory he finds uncultivated and thinly populated either through harsh administration or through contempt or through carelessness, he punishes, and appoints others to take their office. [9] By such action, does he seem to provide less for the cultivation of the land by the inhabitants than for its protection by the garrisons? Moreover, each of these duties is entrusted to a separate class of officers; one class governs the residents and the labourers, and collects tribute from them, the other commands the men under arms and the garrisons. [10] If the commander of a garrison affords insufficient protection to the country, the civil governor and controller of agriculture denounces the commander, setting out that the inhabitants are unable to work the farms for want of protection. If, on the other hand, the commander brings peace to the farms, and the governor nevertheless causes the land to be sparsely populated and idle, the commander in turn denounces the governor. [11] For, roughly speaking, where cultivation is inefficient, the garrisons are not maintained and the tribute cannot be paid. Wherever a viceroy is appointed, he attends to both these matters.”

At this point Critobulus said: [12] “Well, Socrates, if the Great King does this, it seems to me that he pays as much attention to husbandry as to warfare.”

[13] “Yet further,” continued Socrates, “in all the districts he resides in and visits he takes care that there are ‘paradises,’ as they call them, full of all the good and beautiful things that the soil will produce, and in this he himself spends most of his time, except when the season precludes it.”

[14] “Then it is of course necessary, Socrates, to take care that these paradises in which the king spends his time shall contain a fine stock of trees and all other beautiful things that the soil produces.”

[15] “And some say, Critobulus, that when the king makes gifts, he first invites those who have distinguished themselves in war, because it is useless to have broad acres under tillage unless there are men to defend them; and next to them, those who stock and cultivate the land best, saying that even stout-hearted warriors cannot live without the aid of workers. [16] There is a story that Cyrus, lately the most illustrious of princes, once said to the company invited to receive his gifts, ‘I myself deserve to receive the gifts awarded in both classes; for I am the best at stocking land and the best at protecting the stock.’”

[17] “Well, if Cyrus said that, Socrates, he took as much pride in cultivating and stocking land as in being a warrior.”

[18] “Yes, and, upon my word, if Cyrus had only lived, it seems that he would have proved an excellent ruler. One of the many proofs that he has given of this is the fact that, when he was on his way to fight his brother for the throne, it is said that not a man deserted from Cyrus to the king, whereas tens of thousands deserted from the king to Cyrus. [19] I think you have one clear proof of a ruler's excellence, when men obey him willingly and choose to stand by him in moments of danger. Now his friends all fought at his side and fell at his side to a man, fighting round his body, with the one exception of Ariaeus, whose place in the battle was, in point of fact, on the left wing.”

[20] “Further, the story goes that when Lysander came to him bringing the gifts form the allies, this Cyrus showed him various marks of friendliness, as Lysander himself related once to a
stranger at Megara, adding besides that Cyrus personally showed him round his paradise at Sardis. [21] Now Lysander admired the beauty of the trees in it, the accuracy of the spacing, the straightness of the rows, the regularity of the angles and the multitude of the sweet scents that clung round them as they walked; and for wonder of these things he cried, ‘Cyrus, I really do admire all these lovely things, but I am far more impressed with your agent's skill in measuring and arranging everything so exactly.’ [22] Cyrus was delighted to hear this and said: ‘Well, Lysander, the whole of the measurement and arrangement is my own work, and I did some of the planting myself.’ [23] ‘What, Cyrus?’ exclaimed Lysander, looking at him, and marking the beauty and perfume of his robes, and the splendour of the necklaces and bangles and other jewels that he was wearing; ‘did you really plant part of this with your own hands?’ [24] ‘Does that surprise you, Lysander?’ asked Cyrus in reply. ‘I swear by the Sun-god that I never yet sat down to dinner when in sound health, without first working hard at some task of war or agriculture, or exerting myself somehow.’ [25] “Lysander himself declared, I should add, that on hearing this, he congratulated him in these words: ‘I think you deserve your happiness, Cyrus, for you earn it by your virtues.’”

V. “Now I tell you this,” continued Socrates, “because even the wealthiest cannot hold aloof from husbandry. For the pursuit of it is in some sense a luxury as well as a means of increasing one's estate and of training the body in all that a free man should be able to do. [2] For, in the first place, the earth yields to cultivators the food by which men live; she yields besides the luxuries they enjoy. [3] Secondly, she supplies all the things with which they decorate altars and statues and themselves, along with most pleasant sights and scents. Thirdly, she produces or feeds the ingredients of many delicate dishes; for the art of breeding stock is closely linked with husbandry; so that men have victims for propitiating the gods with sacrifice and cattle for their own use. [4] And though she supplies good things in abundance, she suffers them not to be won without toil, but accustoms men to endure winter's cold and summer's heat. She gives increased strength through exercise to the men that labour with their own hands, and hardens the overseers of the work by rousing them early and forcing them to move about briskly. For on a farm no less than in a town the most important operations have their fixed times. [5] Again, if a man wants to serve in the cavalry, farming is his most efficient partner in furnishing keep for his horse; if on foot, it makes his body brisk. And the land helps in some measure to arouse a liking for the toil of hunting, since it affords facilities for keeping hounds and at the same time supplies food for the wild game that preys on the land. [6] And if husbandry benefits horses and hounds, they benefit the farm no less, the horses by carrying the overseer early to the scene of his duties and enabling him to leave it late, the hounds by keeping the wild animals from injuring crops and sheep, and by helping to give safety to solitude. [7] The land also stimulates armed protection of the country on the part of the husbandmen, by nourishing their crops in the open for the strongest to take. [8] And what art produces better runners, throwers and jumpers than husbandry? What art rewards the labourer more generously? What art welcomes her follower more gladly, inviting him to come and take whatever he wants? What art entertains strangers more generously? [9] Where is there greater facility for passing the winter comforted by generous fire and warm baths, than on a farm? Where is it pleasanter to spend the summer enjoying the cool waters and breezes and shade, than in the country? [10] What other art yields more seemly first-fruits for the gods, or gives occasion for more crowded festivals? What art is dearer to servants, or pleasanter to a wife, or more delightful to children, or more agreeable to friends? [11] To me indeed it seems strange, if any free man has come by a possession pleasanter than this, or has found out an occupation pleasanter than this or more useful for winning a livelihood.

[12] “Yet again, the earth willingly teaches righteousness to those who can learn; for the better she is served, the more good things she gives in return. [13] And if haply those who are occupied
in farming, and are receiving a rigorous and manly teaching, are forced at any time to quit their lands by great armies, they, as men well-found in mind and in body, can enter the country of those who hinder them, and take sufficient for their support. Often in time of war it is safer to go armed in search of food than to gather it with farming implements.

[14] “Moreover, husbandry helps to train men for corporate effort. For men are essential to an expedition against an enemy, and the cultivation of the soil demands the aid of men.

[15] Therefore nobody can be a good farmer unless he makes his labourers both eager and obedient; and the captain who leads men against an enemy must contrive to secure the same results by rewarding those who act as brave men should act and punishing the disobedient.

[16] And it is no less necessary for a farmer to encourage his labourers often, than for a general to encourage his men. And slaves need the stimulus of good hopes no less, nay, even more than free men, to make them steadfast. [17] It has been nobly said that husbandry is the mother and nurse of the other arts. For when husbandry flourishes, all the other arts are in good fettle; but whenever the land is compelled to lie waste, the other arts of landsmen and mariners alike well-nigh perish.”

[18] “Well, Socrates,” replied Critobulus to this, “I think you are right so far. But in husbandry a man can rely very little on forecast. For hailstorms and frosts sometimes, and droughts and rains and blight ruin schemes well planned and well carried out; and sometimes well-bred stock is miserably destroyed by an outbreak of disease.”

[19] “Well,” said Socrates in reply,2 “I thought you knew, Critobulus, that the operations of husbandry no less than those of war are in the hands of the gods. And you observe, I suppose, that men engaged in war try to propitiate the gods before taking action; and with sacrifices and omens seek to know what they ought to do and what they ought not to do;

[20] and for the business of husbandry do you think it less necessary to ask the blessing of the gods? Know of a surety that right-minded men offer prayer for fruits and crops and cattle and horses and sheep, aye and for all that they possess.”