

HAVE WE A LANDED ARISTOCRACY?

The remarkable growth of great landed estates in America—The cause of the movement, and its possible meaning for good or for ill—The parks and country seats of the Vanderbilts, the Webbs, Austin Corbin, the Goulds, the Rockefellers, and other millionaire families.

THERE is no word in the English language so distasteful to a true American as "aristocracy." In every sense it is opposed to all that the American holds as his first and best national inheritance. It grates on his ear, turns his mind against any subject with which it may be connected, and arouses in him the remembrance of a dreaded possibility from which, happily, he and his country have escaped. Still, aristocracy, as a word, is coming into painfully frequent use in the United States. Used first in connection with money, and applied to the class whose only claim to distinction was the power conferred by money, the term has been broadened to apply to the blood as well as to the material possessions of the rich; and in such sense it has found only a significant silence to oppose its claim.

It is only among the possessors of great wealth that a landed aristocracy on this side of the water may be found to be possible. In land the millions of the rich find a natural investment, and such possessions are inherited by their families only as other accumulated property is inherited. No title or rank, of course, goes with the land. It is simply a material inheritance.

The tendency among the rich to possess vast tracts of real estate increases year by year as the century draws to a close. The extent of these holdings is wholly a matter of money; the architectural magnificence of the buildings with which they are equipped, the artistic beauties of the artificial landscapes, the drives and lakes and forests, as well as the game with which such holdings of land are usually stocked—all these are but a matter of money also. It is the art and the skill of the professional landscape gardener and the civil engineer that have produced all this, and the cost of such work is such as only the rich can afford. The same tendency is in evidence all over the Union. The rough mountain lands of North Carolina, the sterile sand hills of Long Island, the worn out farms of New England, and the vineyards and

ranches of the West, are being bought up and consolidated into private parks for the wealthiest men of our great cities.

Social reformers see in these facts cause for alarm. Henry George recently expressed his conviction that a class analogous to the landed gentry of England was forming in this country. He said that during the last ten years the new aristocracy had done more toward monopolizing the land of honest farmers than in any similar period of our history. This opinion is directly against the statement of Professor Francis A. Walker, who, in the census of 1880, set forth that the ownership of land was being diffused in the United States. But the figures by which Professor Walker arrived at his conclusion, Henry George declares, proved the reverse of the statement made, if they proved anything at all. In his "Social Problems" Mr. George points out that not merely is it the manifest tendency of agricultural machinery and the concentration of population in large cities to reduce the proportion of land owners, but that the same great cause which has concentrated the ownership of land in England is operating here. The American farmer of the old type, the cultivator who tilled his own soil, must soon, he asserts, become extinct.

The figures given by the last census, it must be admitted, support this forecast. In 1880, of the farms in the United States, three quarters were tilled by their proprietors; in 1890, not quite two thirds. The proportion of hired farms had in ten years risen from 25 to nearly 34 per cent. At this rate, though it will be long before the homestead owner becomes extinct, the tenants will outnumber him within twelve or fifteen years. The farmer who owns free of incumbrance is already in a minority.

As the cause of this concentration Mr. George holds primarily the rise in the value of land. Small estates have become parts of large estates through purchase, having gravitated, he says, to the possession of the rich, as other possessions that have a money

value gravitate. When the English farmers, two hundred years ago, found that it would be more profitable to sell their land than to hold it, they sold. It was a simple question of money, from Mr. George's point of view; it is a question that is to have a similar answer in this country.

Directly opposed to Mr. George and all his theories in this direction is Professor F. H. Giddings. Occupying the chair of social science at Columbia College, Mr. Giddings has had opportunities to give the subject a thorough and practical consideration. "There is no proof," he says, "that a tendency to concentrate land owning in a few hands has been established in this country as a permanent condition. All statements on that point are established by the most wretched juggling of figures. In every part of the country, except in particular spots, and with the exception of tracts of land that are valuable for special purposes, the values of land have not increased. From the coast of Maine to the Mississippi valley—the only part of the United States with which I am familiar—you may buy good farming lands for less than the buildings on them cost fifteen years ago. I have some land I should like to sell on that basis.

"The improvement of farming lands by city people of wealth is a good thing, and the enlargement and development of gentlemen's estates involves no dangers. I regard it as the means, in time, of ameliorating conditions in both city and country."

Professor Giddings may be right. Many practical advantages obtain in the accumulated holdings, which in smaller estates must be altogether wanting. The destruction of the forests, which went on ruthlessly, in spite of public sentiment, will no doubt cease through the enlightened self interest of the owners of large areas of mountain land. Their preserves, with their corps of watchers to prevent poaching, will also save various kinds of native game from total extinction—a fate which State laws seemed powerless to prevent.

The farmer, who scents a chance to sell an unproductive farm at three times its value, sees nothing but good in the tendency of wealth to value lands for their scenic beauties rather than the qualities of the soil. The architect, the builder, the landscape gardener, and the scientific farmer, all rejoice in a new field for their talents, and it is the profit in the new field, as well as the possibilities offered to gratify their artistic bent, that brings a certain satisfaction. As the work of beautifying progresses on these estates, the artist will discover

fairer landscapes than any in England, because nowhere except in America will it be possible to secure such combinations of rugged and sublime natural scenery with well kept lawns and cultivated woods.

That a landed aristocracy in this country can be nothing more than an aristocracy of wealth, is apparent. The largest landed estates are the possessions of those who have the largest wealth. It is in the nature of things that this should be the case. It is but natural, then, that the Vanderbilts, in person, or those who have inherited through marriage from them, should own the most extensive and magnificent holdings of land in America. Members of this family have outdone all others in the size and splendor of their country seats. Cornelius Vanderbilt is content with the reputation of owning the finest house in New York city and the finest house at Newport. He does not believe in investing in land. But George W. Vanderbilt, the youngest of the sons of the famous family, is making at Biltmore, near Asheville, North Carolina, one of the most remarkable mansions in the world.

Biltmore is on the great continental table land, the highest plain east of the Mississippi, lying between the Allegheny and the Blue Ridge Mountains. Rough mountain land that could be secured for \$2.50 an acre when the young millionaire's agents began making purchases, suddenly doubled in price when it became noised abroad that a Vanderbilt was the real buyer, and then doubled again and again as the certainty of getting good prices increased. It is said that some farmers demanded more than \$250 an acre. Today there is in Biltmore, entirely surrounded by Mr. Vanderbilt's property, a negro shanty whose owner is still holding his land in the hope of getting his price. Thirty thousand acres have been brought into this one estate, all, or most of which, was once owned as small farms. The whole undertaking is on a scale of lavish magnificence. A temporary railroad was constructed to convey building materials to the site of the mansion. The foundation alone is said to have cost \$400,000, the top of a mountain having been cut down to receive it. Immense quantities of rich soil for the gardens were transported by rail from distant valleys and river bottoms. Besides a game preserve, Biltmore is to have the most perfect system of tree culture in America. It is expected that the sale of wood from the cultivated forests will pay the running expenses of the place—a fact which shows that amid all its luxury business considerations are not wholly forgotten.

Similar in magnificence and extent is the winter residence of John Jacob Astor in Florida; and still greater in extent, if not as magnificent in its settlement, is the estate of Dr. William Seward Webb in the Adirondacks. This vast tract of land contains 153,000 acres, and includes a large part of two New York counties.

Last summer Dr. Webb incorporated about 112,000 acres of this great tract, under the name of the Nehasane Park Association. Mr. Edward M. Burns, the manager of the Webb forest lands, says that this was done "in order to facilitate the perpetual holding in a solid body of so much of this land as Dr. Webb should finally decide it desirable to devote permanently to the purposes of a private park and game preserve." Much of the estate will be fenced to confine large game, but thus far only fifteen square miles have been inclosed. Here native game roams wild, while numbers of moose, elk, and deer have been placed within the inclosure for experimental breeding purposes, with a view to the final stocking of the whole park.

In Shelburne Farms, on the east shore of Lake Champlain, Dr. Webb also possesses one of the finest country seats in America. The estate comprises three thousand acres, and twenty eight small farms were consolidated to form it.

Almost as extensive as Dr. Webb's preserve is that of H. McK. Twombly, another son in law of the late William H. Vanderbilt. It contains about a hundred thousand acres adjoining Nehasane Park. Mr. Twombly has also a fine country seat, with several hundred acres of grounds, at Madison, New Jersey.

Other well known preserves in the Adirondacks are W. West Durant's Sumner Park, of fifty six thousand acres, in Hamilton County; the Cutting preserve, belonging to Frank A. Cutting of Boston, and containing nine thousand acres, in St. Lawrence County; and Litchfield Park, the property of Edward H. Litchfield of New York, which includes nine thousand acres in Franklin County.

Blue Mountain Forest, the new park and game preserve of Austin Corbin, president of the Long Island Railroad, is another of the vast estates in which wealth has found investment. This tract, embodying 26,000 acres of land in New Hampshire, is nearly of the size and shape of New York city before its recent acquisition of territory. It includes the farm house in which Mr. Corbin was born; but its owner's principal reasons for establishing it were to preserve American

game from extermination, and to provide a living book on natural history for the instruction of his son. Thirty miles of barbed wire fence were placed around the park, at a cost of \$70,000; it extends over three mountain peaks, one of which is 2,800 feet above sea level. Reindeer from Labrador, wild boars from Germany, moose from Montana, white elk from the Northwest, deer from the Maine forests, partridges from Virginia, and hares from Belgium find here an artificial home. A herd of American bison, which had previously been kept on Mr. Corbin's six hundred acre farm near Babylon, Long Island, has also been turned loose in this preserve.

The estate of the late William Walter Phelps at Tea Neck Ridge, New Jersey, contains 15,000 acres, and extends from the Hackensack River to the Hudson, where it overlooks the northern boundary of New York City. One day, when a Hudson River Bridge is built, Mr. Phelps' place may be a great suburban city as large as Manhattan Island, with a rent roll that will make the original Astor estates look small. The homestead is a series of connected cottages with gables and peaked roofs of quaint design. Sixteen miles of drives cross and recross the estate. There are five miles of tree lined avenues in a single stretch, and over 200,000 large trees, the majority of which were transplanted.

These are, of course, but a few of the great estates held by individuals in different parts of the country. Volumes might be written, too, about the beautiful summer houses and parks of Tuxedo, Lenox, Newport, Saratoga, Lake George, and the Thousand Islands; but places of this kind scarcely come within the scope of this article.

The tendency of urban wealth to find investment in fine country houses and estates may be strikingly illustrated by an imaginary pilgrimage through the hills that overlook the Hudson, stretching northward from the city line of New York. One of the latest additions to this colony of millionaires is the place Mr. William Rockefeller is making on the Pocantico Hills. It is said that twenty years' labor will be required to complete the Standard Oil magnate's plans, which contemplate nothing short of the creation of the finest private park in the United States, if not in the whole world. The house, Rockwood Hall, has cost \$1,500,000, but very much more than this is to be spent upon an elaborate scheme of landscape gardening. The property extends from the hills to the river, where it has a frontage of a mile. Over a

dozen farms and country seats were absorbed to form the tract. One residence that cost \$200,000 to build was torn down because it interfered with the view. A million dollars has already been spent upon the grounds, under Frederick Law Olmsted's direction.

Adjoining this estate is that of Mr. John D. Rockefeller. Although the brothers are next door neighbors, their houses are two miles and a half apart. John D. Rockefeller also owns an extensive and ornate place near Cleveland, called Forest Hill.

Coming back to the banks of the Hudson River, in the neighborhood of Hyde Park, we find Frederick W. Vanderbilt's recent purchase of six hundred acres, formerly the Walter Langdon estate; Clarence Densmore's residence at Staatsburgh, Archibald Rogers' Crumwold Hall, John Jacob Astor's Ferncliff, with its eight hundred acres, and James Roosevelt's Springwood. At Rhinebeck there is one of the most celebrated places near New York—Ellerslie, Governor Morton's home. Here there is a thousand acres under artistic cultivation, part of it farmed by the owner, who takes a great interest in its operation. A quarter of a mile from the house is the largest and finest barn in the country—a building that cost nearly a million dollars. Twice has Mr. Morton seen it burned to the ground, but each time he has rebuilt it on a greater scale. The latest barn is five hundred feet long, and as large as most city blocks.

The late Jay Gould's former home, Lyndhurst, containing a thousand acres, is at least a near approach to a landed estate. With its marble mansion, it cost over a million of dollars. George Gould has a notable summer home at Furlough Lodge, near Arkville, in the Catskills, with two thousand three hundred acres of mountain forest. Part of this is inclosed in a fence of thirty two strands of barbed wire, twenty feet high, within which are preserved herds of elk and deer, besides quantities of pheasants and other small game.

The widow of the late Elliott F. Shepard has a fine place at Scarborough—a residence that cost a million dollars, and twelve hundred acres of land. One of her neighbors is H. Walter Webb, one of the vice presidents of the New York Central, who also owns a very handsome country seat.

Probably the finest residence on Long Island is that of E. D. Morgan on the Wheatley Hills, with its view that reaches from the Sound to the ocean. The seven hundred acres of the estate formerly constituted seven unproductive farms. In the

same locality are the country places of Stanley Mortimer, J. D. Lanier, Elliott Roosevelt, Thomas Hitchcock, Jr., and other New Yorkers. W. K. Vanderbilt's autumn residence at Oakdale, called Idle Hour, is also notable for its extent and equipment.

These instances, which might be added to almost indefinitely, are enough to show that in the vicinity of New York, as about other large cities, large holdings of land are accumulating and growing in magnificence as the individual investments of the aristocracy of wealth. Yet the movement is hardly to be condemned because of a lurking fear that such holdings may be tending toward establishing in America a landed aristocracy. Condemnation, it may be added, would certainly fail to arrest a development that is favored by existing conditions—just as, for instance, it has failed to cause commercial trusts to retire from existence.

It must be remembered that the history of landed properties in this country has thus far been one of constant change in ownership. Rarely has a large estate remained in the same family for more than one or two generations. The conditions here are different from those of England. English land holdings are generally productive. There is a tenantry on every estate that brings in revenue enough to maintain the property. In America, large landed estates are generally unproductive. Their maintenance requires a heavy annual outlay, and makes them possible only to the very rich. As inheritances, without the millions that produced them, they are incumbrances which their possessors would gladly turn into cash.

The question whether they tend to the good or ill of the community has been avoided here. Perhaps the answer to such a query depends largely upon the individuality of the owners. Could they always be held by such men as the late Senator Leland Stanford of California, they would invariably be a blessing. Mr. Stanford's estates, including such tracts as the Palo Alto, of 8,400 acres, the Gridley ranch, of 22,000, and the Vina, of 59,000, have been bequeathed to the support of the great educational institution that bears the name of his dead son. If the word aristocrat means "one who rules because he is the best," as scholars say it should, then this man who accumulated vast estates only to devote them to the people among whom he lived, must be remembered as a "landed aristocrat" in a sense that is unfortunately too rare.

George Montfort Simonson.

THE ANTLERED GAME.

Deer and deer hunting in the Old World and the New—An exciting sport that has been followed in all ages and almost all countries—Illustrated with hunting pictures by celebrated artists.

NO animal has been so famous in the annals of sport in so many lands and so many ages as the deer. Nimrod doubtless hunted him on the plains of Asia; old Greek mythology made him the special quarry of the forest goddess Artemis, whom the Romans called Diana. The medieval barons of Europe found in him their noblest game. It was an arrow aimed at a stag that slew William Rufus, the second of England's Norman kings. The first settlers of America found deer everywhere in the virgin forests where the aborigines had hunted them from time immemorial. Travelers see them on the tropical plains of Africa. Far to the north, under the Arctic circle, the reindeer is the Laplander's most valued possession. Every country of the world has some variety of the family of *cervidae*, except Australia, the island continent where the natural history of the rest of the globe is turned topsy turvy.

The sportsman of today has a wide choice of deer preserves. He may find his game almost anywhere from the wild canyons of the Rockies to the forest clad foothills of the Himalayas. If he does not care for distant travel, he seldom need journey far to enjoy the chase. Even in the thickly settled countries deer have been kept from extinction by restrictive laws, and by the artificial protection of sporting reserves. In England there are still seventeen packs of staghounds which meet for regular hunts; one of them is the queen's, with its kennels at Ascot, and the stags of Windsor for its game. Almost every one of the great English country houses has its herd of red or fallow deer, and it is these half tame animals that are hunted by most of the staghound packs. In Scotland the wild deer of the Highlands give better sport. Among those northern hills the antlered game is king. A wide mountain region has been almost given up to him. Great deer forests—in Scotland even a treeless upland is a "forest"—have been created by the landowners, who have often made wholesale evictions of peasants, and have even dared to bar out

the ubiquitous tourist with wire fences and cordons of watching "gillies." It is a stern fact of business that a tenantry of crofters brings in less profit to the landlord than he can make by turning their farms into waste land and renting them for the hunting season. The process has been going on ever since Dr. Johnson wrote, during his journey through the Scotch mountains:

In Highland glens 'tis far too oft observed
That men are driven out, and game preserved.
It has almost depopulated wide tracts of the northern Scottish counties, just as William the Conqueror depopulated an English district to make the New Forest; but it has made the Highlands the greatest center of deer hunting.

In Scotland, too, deer are still hunted with hounds, as they were in the old time chase that Scott describes:

A hundred dogs bayed deep and strong,
Clattered a hundred steeds along;
Their peal the merry horns rang out,
A hundred voices joined the shout.

In those days, when the hounds had brought the stag to bay—unless the game escaped them, as did the "antlered monarch" of "The Lady of the Lake"—it was the custom for the foremost horseman to dismount, draw his sword or knife, and end the chase with a thrust at the deer's throat or side. This was always looked upon as a dangerous task, especially as a wound from a stag's horn was thought to be poisonous. "If thou be hurt with hart, it brings thee to thy bier," an old rhyme says.

But the most characteristic of Highland sports is deer stalking—a game in which the sportsman matches the keenest powers of human patience, endurance, and skill against the marvelous defensive instincts of the deer. His equipment for the chase is simply a rifle and a suit of dark colored cloth; the task before him, to work his way within range of an animal that is as difficult to approach as any that lives.

"Don't trifle with a deer's nose," says a veteran of the Highlands, in summing up the art and science of stalking. "You may