

# THE SINGLE TAX REVIEW

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Throughout the World.

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## LAND HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN COLONIES.

*(For the Review)*

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*(Concluded)*

NEW YORK.

Ever since the Half-Moon anchored at Manhattan Island in 1624, New York has been the scene of scandalous land-jobberies, land grants to favorites, feudal manors, rent wars, huge speculative deals and swindles, and today stands as the highest monument of the colossal wrongs of our inherited land-holding system. From 1626 to 1664, New York was a province of Holland. During that time an effort was made on the part of the great landholding class of that country to establish in New York Lordships resembling those of Holland. To accomplish that end, in 1629 the College of nineteen Lords high in the councils of the government, adopted a Charter of Privileges for Patroons who desired to found colonies in New Netherland. "Everyone who would emigrate on his own account was promised as much land as he could cultivate. But few farmers were expected to emigrate without aid, as the country people were subordinate to their landlords. They could not vote and had not the experience in government required for planting a State on the principle of equality." Therefore the landlords planned to establish Manors in New York. Bancroft gives their plan in this language: (1, Vol. 2, p. 42) "He that within four years would plant a colony of fifty souls became a Lord of a Manor or Patroon, possessing in absolute property the lands he might colonize. Those lands might extend sixteen miles in length; or if they lay on both sides of a river, eight miles on each bank, stretching indefinitely far into the interior; yet it was stipulated that the soil must be purchased of the Indians. Were cities to grow up, the institution of their government would rest with the patroon, who was to exercise judicial power." The directors and agents of the West India Company immediately appropriated to themselves the most valuable portions of the territory.

One of the largest domains purchased from the Indians under the provisions of the Charter of Privileges was that of Kiliaen Van Rensselaer, a Holland

Lord who had grown rich by polishing pearls and diamonds. His tract extended north and south of Albany 24 miles on both sides of the Hudson river and 48 miles into the interior. It made an area of 1136 square miles comprising nearly three counties. Other exploiters and patroons were members of the Chamber of Amsterdam. These were Jonas Witsen, Hendrick Hamel, Samuel Godyn, Samuel Blommaert, John del Laet and Michael Pauw. Pauw bought Staten Island and all the land now occupied by Jersey City and Hoboken. Godyn and Blommaert bargained for the two lower counties of Delaware. The rest appropriated large tracts in New York. The feudal possessors acquired a title to all the important trading points where the natives resorted for traffic; thus "to the humble emigrant, the monopoly of commerce was aggravated by the monopoly of land."

The powers granted to the West India Company were monstrous. It was clothed with exclusive rights in the domains of the Dutch on the coasts of America. It might make treaties, maintain courts of justice, and employ soldiers in the name of the States General of Holland. Note that it takes soldiers and courts to make titles to land and all forms of special privilege secure. In every colony in which the people were to be held subordinate to the landholding class, the courts, army and church were under the control of the land-lords. This has always been the case and is no less the case today. Governors were to be appointed and their instructions ratified by the States General of Holland. The purpose of the Dutch West India Company was at first commercial; but its charter expressly provided that it was to advance the colonization of the fruitful and unsettled parts of the wide domain intrusted to it. "While the directors of the Company were clothed with vast powers, the settlers insisted on applying the principles of self-government which they had learned in their native towns." The impress given to the colony by this first generation in showing the spirit of independence even under the heel of greedy governors and in the midst of large landed estates was never quite outgrown. Like the laboring settlers in other colonies, they had to battle constantly for the meagre rights they enjoyed. A burgher government was conceded to New Amsterdam with the condition that the sheriff should maintain the privileges of the West India Company. But without giving the details it suffices to say that "the mode in which the country was then governed under the Dutch was intolerable. Immigrants were to receive as much land as they could cultivate if they paid one-tenth of the produce as a quit-rent."

While the Dutch were forming a huge land monopoly and growing rich trading with the Indians, the English became jealous of this growing power in the New World and sought to extinguish it. Accordingly in 1664 a force was sent to demand the surrender of Manhattan and its forts. As the river was blockaded, and as the Dutch were unprepared to offer strong resistance even under the arbitrary rule of Peter Stuyvesant, they surrendered. The Duke of York, brother of the English King, had been given a patent granting him all the lands and rivers from the Connecticut river to the Delaware Bay.

Thus at the surrender of the Dutch, he became the Lord Proprietor of the whole region and his authority was acknowledged.

The patent issued to the Duke of York authorized him to make all laws and to carry on the government as he saw fit. In no other colony was arbitrary power so distinctly recognized. These laws were known as "The Duke's Laws." They provided for religious tolerance, courts, town offices, and certain rates of taxation. For the government of New York city, a Mayor and Council were established. None of the old Patroons was disturbed in their holdings. But Staten Island, which had reverted to the West India Company, was taken by the English. New Jersey, a part of the Duke's territory, was given to Lord Berkley and Sir George Cartaret who in turn "divided it among speculators, who as a body, had gain and not freedom, for their end." For twelve years New Jersey was in an unsettled condition with no laws or administration of law. Attempts were made by two sets of proprietors to appoint commissions to govern, but on account of the confusion and disputes about land titles, they were rejected by the people. Finally East and West Jersey united into one province and came under the governor of New York though it retained a separate legislature.

By 1691, wealth already was a claim to distinction and certain families began to assume eminence and influence. The phrase "The party of aristocrats" was applied to those who opposed Leisler as Governor. The question of revenue was the first for each Governor to meet; and it gave rise to constant collisions with the Assembly (elected by the freeholders) both in the mode of raising it and the control of its expenditure. All through history the raising of revenue has led to untold wrongs and dissensions.

By 1710, land began to promise large returns from its rise in value. Speculators were reaching out for large tracts. "Councilor Bayard under Governor Fletcher took to himself a grant belonging to the Mohawks as large as one of the middle counties of England without paying a reasonable quit-rent." Robert Livingston secured a grant for several thousand acres on the Hudson to which was added enough in 1715, by George I, to include most of what is now Dutchess and Columbia counties. This was the Lordship or Manor of Livingston. It is a territory about fifty miles long and twenty wide, or about 1000 square miles. Clergymen were members of combinations such as would now be known as Indian rings and land rings. Dominie Godfrey Dellins, the Dutch pastor at Albany, was charged with fraudulently securing deeds from Red men for vast tracts. Pinhome, a member of the council, obtained patents for a piece of land fifty miles long and two miles on each side of the Mohawk river. Peter Schuyler was one of several who at first was interested in buying these lands, but withdrew from the transactions on account of the frauds practiced.

"The vast domain of the Iroquois continued to offer temptations; and Governors and officials of various grades, and capitalists large and small, grasped for a share of it, until only scanty reservations remained to the original owners."

No sooner were the lands monopolized by the few, than the same symptoms of disease appeared in society as in all past history under the same condition. Governor Hunter reported in 1716 that he could not "say that the inhabitants increase as in the neighboring provinces, where the purchase of land is easier. Great numbers leave Long Island yearly to plant in the Jerseys and Pennsylvania." In 1720 the population was reported to be but 27,000 whites and 4,000 blacks. The total population of all the colonies was 434,000. It can readily be seen that this sparseness of population proves that the streams of emigration are always in the direction of free lands and away from land monopoly.

Labor being scarce, to secure it the same plan was adopted in New York as in Virginia. Ireland and England were searched for those poor creatures who robbed of their lands were unable to pay their way to New York. These were made to sign contracts to work for a period of years without pay on the plea that their condition was greatly bettered by being brought to America, also to repay the expense of transportation. These indentured slaves however did not have to serve as many years as they did in Virginia. Also Governor Hunter entered upon a large scheme to introduce laborers into the province. He secured 10,000 pounds from the English government to pay the transportation of the poor from German districts known as the Palatinate where the French had ravished the country. About 3,200 were brought over. They were planted in five villages about 100 miles up the Hudson, three being on lands belonging to the Livingstons' and two on royal lands on the west side. They were to produce tar and turpentine. But trouble soon began. It was claimed that the money promised to them was not paid; that the land was barren, and that enough food was not provided. The Palatines organized a strike, and Governor Hunter went among them with troops to subdue them and enforce his contracts. The Palatines appealed to England but did not receive much sympathy. Lord Clarendon used the same stock argument that is used today regarding distressed laborers. He said, "that every person who will work, man or woman, may earn eighteen pence sterling a day. In a new country a livelihood is easily gained." The Indians offered the Palatines land in Schoharie county on easy terms and thither many of them soon removed and made a new settlement. Others found homes in the Mohawk valley.

At this early date a land caste was growing up in New York State. All the great land owners were intermarrying within the sacred circle of the aristocracy to perpetuate their own political power. When Governor Hunter retired, Peter Schuyler, the most prominent New Yorker at the beginning of the eighteenth century, became president of the Council and acting Governor. His second wife was a daughter of Petrus Van Rensselaer. "Several branches of the Schuyler family intermarried with the Hamiltons, Livingstons, Van Cortlands, and other influential families, and continued very strong in social and political position for a long period." Many notable names on the roll of New York are descendants of Lewis Morris. His eminence during this period



was due solely to his ownership of large estates in New Jersey as well as in New York. He became Governor of New Jersey. A relative of his became Chief Justice of New York, and was also a large land holder.

The Governors appointed by the Duke of York all openly proceeded to make a fortune in New York by land deals, large salaries, and restrictions to trade. William Burnet, son of the distinguished bishop of that name, followed Hunter as Governor. He married a daughter of Abraham Van Howe, a prosperous Dutch merchant and member of the Council. His chief measure was the prohibition of trade between Albany and Canada in Indian goods, to hold the Indian trade for New York and away from the French. This of course favored his father-in-law and indirectly himself. Though not a lawyer, he exercised the powers of chancellor to the court of Chancery. One of his decrees affected the estate of Phillipse, speaker of the Assembly. This was seized as an occasion to express the general cry that this court's violent measures had ruined some persons and driven others from the colony; that "its extraordinary proceedings and exorbitant fees countenanced to be exacted by the officers thereof are the greatest grievances and oppressions this colony hath ever felt." (History of New York. Ellis H. Roberts.)

Governor Burnet was so antagonized by the Assembly that he was glad to be transferred to Massachusetts. Then came two years of the grasping Governor Crosby. "He sought to derive all available profits out of the colony." His salary was 1,500 pounds a year and his fees for trips to Albany were as high as 400 pounds. Also for a trip to London to oppose a bill unfavorable to the sugar trade of the colony, he got 750 pounds. As remedies for trade depression he recommended subsidies to shipbuilding, a transfer of some of the taxes from trade to legal documents, while he condemned "too great importation of negroes and convicts." These recommendations remind one very much of those made by the nabobs in our Congress and our "able financiers" for the past ten years to encourage our merchant marine, and the tinkering of our tariff schedules to suit its beneficiaries. This same Crosby "destroyed deeds which fell into his hands for land in Albany, and he aimed to overthrow the old patents on Long Island in order that in the readjustment, he might get gain in fees and perhaps also in land. Crosby's Manor, covering vast tracts of land in the upper part of the Mohawk valley, proves that his greed brought rich and ripe fruit into his lap."

A fact abundantly proven in history, is that the suppression or censoring of the public press or the freedom of speech, has usually been by the privileged or land holding class. Also to show that most of our freedom was obtained before the Revolution, I wish to relate this instance in our history that settled the question of freedom of the press. So intolerable were the acts of Governor Crosby that John Peter Zenger, publisher of the *New York Journal*, stated fearlessly in his paper, "We see men's deeds destroyed, Judges arbitrarily displaced, new Courts erected without consent of the legislature, by which it seems to me trials by juries are taken away when the Governor pleases and men of known estates denied their votes." For publishing these plain truths,

Zenger was arrested and imprisoned on the charge of libel and while in jail all paper and ink were denied him. For his attorney he had Andrew Hamilton, of Philadelphia, a Quaker and a master of a glowing and powerful eloquence. He said at the trial, "The practice of informations for libels, is a sword in the hands of a wicked King and an arrant coward, to cut down and destroy the innocent." In conclusion he asserted the principle underlying the case in these words: "It is not a case of a poor printer, nor of New York alone which the jury is now trying. No. It may in its consequences affect every freeman that lives under a British government on the soil of America. It is the cause of liberty; the liberty both of exposing and opposing arbitrary power in these parts of the world at least, by speaking and writing the truth." The jury promptly rendered a verdict of not guilty. Hamilton was the hero of the hour. Freedom of speech had a new birth, and the spirit of the case and the sympathy it drew forth were prophetic of the liberty which on this continent was beginning to dawn. This case marked a complete change in theory and practice. It was a new guiding principle in affairs, the creation of a bulwark for the people which rulers and courts must forever regard.

As the eighteenth century advanced, other land scandals arose. About 1736 Captain Laughlin Campbell brought over 423 Scotch Highlanders whom he planned to make his vassals. He received a grant of 30,000 acres near lake George. But many came at their own expense and would not consent to become bonded servants to Campbell. They said that they came to America to be relieved from serving their Lords in Scotland and would not serve another here. But those whose expenses were paid by Campbell, became his indented servants. At this time Governor Clarke was at the head of state affairs. He claimed a share in the Campbell lands and the large fees he was receiving. To offset this, Mr. Livingston, then in the Assembly, offered to appropriate seven pounds to every seventy families of the poor of these emigrants. In 1743, Governor Clarke returned to England with a fortune estimated at 100,000 pounds or in present values nearly \$2,000,000. He was followed by Admiral George Clinton who like Clarke, "took every means to gather in fees to increase his fortune by operations in lands." He amassed about 80,000 pounds.

The Iroquois about this time began to grow restive under the pressure of the greed and fraud of the land speculators. The savage could no longer endure the land robbery. Not only were the Red men cheated out of their lands by the New York authorities, but they were also brutalized by the English and French in "securing the services of these barbarians to scalp their white enemies, while each in turn was loudest to denounce the shocking barbarities of such tribes they failed to secure in their own service. Nearly every important massacre in the history of North America was organized and directed by agents of one of these governments. (H. H. Jackson, "A Century of Dishonor.") In 1722 as high as 100 pounds was offered in New York for an Indian scalp. The whites scalped Indians also. According to Helen Hunt Jackson, the whites taught the Indian how to scalp. This is the civilizing

method the land pirates used with the untutored savage. Patents to lands always stated that the leading aim of the whites in dealing with the Indian was to Christianize him. But instead, he was treated with such shocking atrocities that the savage has rarely been able to parallel them.

At the close of the French and Indian war, two controversies arose among the aristocrats of New York. In the founding of Columbia College by a lottery in 1746, the Episcopalians of the colony took the most active part. In this it was alleged that the Governor was showing this sect too much favor. Members were chosen to the Assembly to check this tendency. The opposition was among the Presbyterians, and their chief leaders were the four Livingstons then in the Assembly. Through alliance by marriage with the Schuylers and the Jays, and by its wealth, the Livingston family held a preeminence rarely equaled in this country. The favored party was supported by Philip Verplanck of the Cortlandt Manor, the Van Rensselaers and other relatives and personal friends. As in Virginia, one division of the landlords was expressing the popular cry of independence of the royal authority, while the other division upheld it and was receiving all the favors for their loyalty. The lines were thus already drawn which deepened and broadened into the great struggle for American landlord independence.

To show that land is and always has been the great lever of power held by kings and the ruling class by which they exploit the people, it is well to touch upon another controversy that arose in the colony at this time over the independence of the courts against the executive power. The Assembly sought to compel the appointment of judges of the Supreme Court with terms lasting during good behavior; but the Governor insisted that their commissions should be at the pleasure of the appointing power. This was a radical difference between the people and the royal authority. The question was, should the judges be mere creatures of the King? The Lords of Trade in England declared that the life term "tended to lessen the just dependence which the colonies ought to have upon the mother country." So popular was the life tenure that jurists could not be found in New York who would accept places on the bench at the executive pleasure. To fill a vacancy, a Chief Justice, Benjamin Pratt, was imported from Boston with a commission "during His Majesty's pleasure." The Assembly then refused to pay such judges. Whereupon, to carry his point, the Governor paid Pratt out of the quit-rent from the vast tracts of uncultivated lands of the King. Thus the will of the people was thwarted and through the quit-rent were virtually taxed to pay the appointed judges.

The vast estates which fell to the patroons and were continued in their families, and those of the Schuylers, Cuylers, and the manors owned by the Van Rensselaers, Livingstons, Phillipses, Johnsons, Cortlandts, and others, constituted the alienating and malodorous feature of this colony. They were the center of almost feudal power. They interfered with the settlement of the thrifty small farmer. They stunted all progress and the growth of everything but the growth of a dangerous and cocktail-drinking aristocracy.

Their Manor-houses were the seat of courtly hospitality for their caste in summer, while in winter the same set usually "spent their time in New York where they contributed to give that city the reputation of gaiety and display, and devotion to recent London fashions."

It is the popular belief, and it is commonly taught in our public schools, that the American Revolution was brought about and fought by the discontented, tax-ridden yeomen and townsmen who wished to have a voice in how they should be taxed. As developed from the historical evidence, no greater misconception of fact could be imagined. While the colonies were taxed heavily and unjustly, the burden of paying them fell mostly upon the big planters and the rich landholders who could afford the taxed luxuries. The Revolution was not a sudden outburst of public indignation, though a few events had inflamed the public mind so that a declaration of war would not be a shock and bring about a loud protest. The Revolution had been brewing for more than a hundred years. Holders of great stretches of fertile estates became imbued with a full sense of their influence and power and began at an early time to defy Royalty that attempted to infringe upon that power or impose burdens upon them without their consent. By giving away lands, Royalty constructed the very strongholds that would some day be its equal in strength and influence, and battle with it for supremacy. It was the land-ruling class of America against the land-ruling class of England that actually stood behind every move of the Revolution. Morris financed it, Washington led the armies, Jefferson drew up the Declaration of Independence to appease the demands of an evolving democracy, and the Continental Congress, dominated by the land lords from Virginia, Pennsylvania and New York, declared war and appointed the officers. But the poor man from field and shop sacrificed his life for what he was told was his emancipation from the oppression of a sordid King. The weak, deluded, landless man has always been the tool in the hands of powerful land-kings to accomplish their selfish designs. The Revolution was an evolutionary step to something better; but does anyone believe that when the poor soldier returned home his condition was changed, or that he could satisfy his wants and enjoy life more than before? Some were given lands confiscated from the Tories. These no doubt had increased opportunities; but how about those who were still renters on the great Manors and plantations? Were they not precisely where they were before the great struggle? We had freedom of speech, of press, of religion before the Revolution. Were men any more free than they were before thousands fell on the field of battle? In fact, did they not have the same masters as before, and did not these masters now have full control of the government?

After the Revolution we witness the inauguration of the first President, an owner of about twenty thousand acres of Virginia's best soil and a land speculator in the Northwest territory. His oath of office was administered by Robert R. Livingston, owner of the Livingston Manor of 1,000 square miles and Justice of the Supreme Court of New York. Washington's first cabinet appointees were with one exception large land holders. General



Knox was a book-seller in Boston before the war. But John Jay, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, Edmond Randolph, and James Madison were all owners of large estates. Knox resigned with Hamilton to engage in land speculation. This was an age over which the royal atmosphere still hung. A semi-monarchical distinction was paid to Washington. Such ascriptions were heard as, "Long Live George Washington," or "God bless your reign." Much of this was due, doubtless, to Washington's mode of life. His residence in New York where the government was first located, was in a spacious house on Broadway near Bowling Green in the fashionable quarter. "There was more richness of style among New Yorkers than either Philadelphia or Boston could boast. The style maintained by President Washington was rich and elegant; ostentatious, perhaps, as regards equipage, for he had the Virginian's taste for fine horses with the best of a Virginian's means for gratifying it. The state carriage, with its body of hemispherical shape, cream-colored, and tricked out with dainty devices of little cupids supporting festoons, was the wonder of the town; especially on state occasions, when it was drawn by six blooded horses. The pomp of this turn-out was enhanced by footmen and outriders in livery. He held a levee every Tuesday afternoon from three to four at which paraded a "starched assembly" of the rich "who were bent upon winding up executive ceremonials" to as near royalty as a jealous democracy would permit. "His usual dress on these occasions consisted of a suit of black velvet, a pear-colored waistcoat, knee and shoe buckles of silver, dark silk stockings, and yellow gloves; upon his left side he wore a dress sword, a cocked hat was under his arm, his hair was powdered." Washington, however, was as genuine a man as ever came from his Maker's hand; an American to the core, a sincere patriot, believing in the future grandeur of this Republic, the gratitude of his fellow countrymen being his only reward. But who will dare say that the radiance and lustre of his name would have been less had he lived in an age free from land monopoly, or if he had discerned the dire results that are as sure to come to the country in which he played the star role in founding, from land monopoly, and his large influence had stamped his protest upon it and thus given to us a nation in which land could never be controlled by the few? Instead of this, however, the first President courted those who could surround him with dazzling prodigality and ceremonies bordering on the extravagance and pomp of the courts of Europe. Who were present at Lady Washington's Friday evening entertainments which history relates were the occasions when assembled "all the beauty, talent, and social distinction the little capital could bring together"? Who were the elegant throng of belles with their hair high on their heads, rustling in gowns of satin and taffeta, and accosted by beaux bepowdered and decked out as brilliantly as beetles"? The German Palatines or Scotch Highlanders, purchasers of farms on which a quit-rent had to be paid to the ruling nabobs, surely were not there.

In forming the State of New York after the Declaration of Independence John Jay was made chairman of the committee to draft the Constitution.



In March 1777, Jay presented the constitution he and his colleagues had drafted. "It provided for a government by the people, but the aristocratic ideas still prevalent and embodied in Jay's declaration that the men who owned the country ought to govern it, appeared in a property qualification for the ballot which restricted the right of suffrage."—(Tuckerman's Life of General Schuyler.) The convention appointed John Jay, Chief Justice; Robert R. Livingston, Chancellor; Robert Yates and John S. Hobart, judges of the Supreme Court; and Egbert Benson, Attorney-General. The Governorship alone was thrown open to popular election by the land owners. George Clinton was chosen Governor and Pierre Van Cortlandt, Lieutenant Governor. All of these were large land owners.

So we see that it was the land kings that fought the Revolution, that wrote the Declaration of Independence, that drafted the Constitution brim full of monarchialism and the powers to protect land-vested interests.

After the Revolution New York witnessed the wholesale grabbing of the Tory lands and controversies over them. A strong policy of confiscation had been enforced against the loyalists. In the Mohawk valley "only one third of the inhabitants remained when peace was declared. A meeting at Fort Plain declared that the persons who went away or were banished because of their Tory sympathies, "shall not live in this district on any pretense whatever. Other rural districts took similar action. The Sons of Liberty called a meeting in New York City and advised all Tories to leave town inside of five days. The Legislature in 1784 passed an act disfranchising all who had adhered to the British government during the war. Soldiers who were in the American army took up their land bounties. Baron Steuben received a quarter of a township from the legislature for his services. Purchasers of large tracts began to adopt the plan of selling farms to hardy pioneers who would break roads and start homesteads to add value to the adjacent wilderness, although the rule was only to grant leases.

The commonwealth treated its vast domain with reckless prodigality. In 1791 a law was passed with a view to attract settlers, authorizing the commissioners of land office to sell any of the public lands at their own discretion. These commissioners were Governor Clinton, Lewis A. Scott, Aaron Burr, Girard Baucker, and Peter T. Curtenius. They sold 5,542,173 acres for \$1,030,433; and of this vast domain Alexander McComb secured 3,635,200 acres. For much of this only eight pence an acre was paid. The Governor was charged with having an interest in some of these purchases, but McComb made affidavit that Clinton had no interest in them. A legislative investigation was ordered but the commissioners were sustained by a vote of 35 to 20. This scandal is one of thousands to show how our land system will tempt men in office to abuse a public trust.

It is difficult to get a full history of the land deals of this region famous for its exploitation. The historian truly says: "The imperial domain of New York was improvidently administered from the first. The vast estates secured by the Patroons under the Dutch were so located as to become very

valuable as population grew. The grants by the English Royal Governors to themselves and their favorites included more of the choice lands. Speculation by these large landowners and by others caused them to seize vast tracts for small consideration, but under the name of purchase. The Indians gave up without knowing the consequences." "By a grant from King George III, Sir William Johnson added to his former possessions a domain which made him, next to William Penn, the owner of the most extensive estate on this continent." At the close of the Revolution, the state owned over 7,000,000 acres out of 30,476,800 acres in the state, while the population was then but 233,000. Thus it can be seen that land monopoly in New York was an early factor interrupting development. The evils of the concentration of lands in a few hands were many; the benefits were to individuals. The Patroons insisted upon their rights to feudal service and the permanent title to the farms which they permitted others to work. The Lords of Manors preferred to lease their lands and sold grudgingly. Thus the vast tracts occupied by industrious and thrifty farmers, increased in value by cultivation, improvement, and by the growth of population. Tenants on long leases were in a worse condition; they had no title to the houses they had built or to the farms they had cultivated; they were bound by a feudal tenure on which by the merest technicality the landlord might enter into possession and the laws would give to him the fruits of their labor.

In 1812 an effort was made in the legislature to limit the claims of the Patroons and to define the rights of their tenants, but it came to nothing. The irritation continued and was aggravated from year to year, not simply with reference to lands held under feudal tenure, but to leases and contracts and mortgages on estates held by absolute ownership without recognizing any superior to whom any duty is due, or what is known as alodial tenure.

In 1836 the people of Chautauqua County were disturbed by rumors that the liens given by them to the Holland Land Company were to be enforced. When they heard this they went to the land office of the company in a mob and destroyed its records. A threatened attack on the land office in Batavia was prevented by arms.

The landlord difficulties were more grave on the Van Rensselaer estate. It covered 1,136 square miles comprising nearly all of Albany, Van Rensselaer, and Columbia counties. In 1839 a dispute arose over the back rents between the farmers on the estate and the two sons who had just come into possession as heirs. Their father had allowed the rents to accumulate on account of hard times and the poorness of some of the farms. The back rents amounted to \$400,000. The Will gave the eastern portion to William and the western, to Stephen. The back rents were to apply to the payments of the father's debts. This meant the early collection of these rents. But that would work a hardship on the farmers. To secure the money the sons tried to enforce their right to one fourth of the sales of products in case the farmers tried to avoid payment of the rent. This created much excitement among the tenants. A mass meeting was held which appointed a committee to visit

Stephen and adjust the matter equitably. But, as usual with the landholding class, he refused to see them, and by letter declined to sell the lands and made no offer to settle on any other terms than an immediate payment of the rent. This produced a widespread resentment and a general determination to resist the collection of all rents. During the summer writs of ejectment were sued out in the supreme court and given to the Sheriff to serve on the tenants in Albany County. A few were served, but the under sheriff was warned not to proceed in his work, and that night his horse and wagon were injured so he could not use them.

In December the Sheriff with 500 armed men set out for Reidville where he found the road blocked by 1500 of the farmers who forced him to withdraw. Governor Seward, later in Lincoln's cabinet, was asked for troops, but he instructed the sheriff to sue out attachments for contempt and warrants for persons who resisted him. But these the Sheriff was unable to serve. Then the Governor ordered the Troy and Albany militia to go with the Sheriff to serve the warrants. They were also met by 500 horsemen who blocked the way. These and more troops overawed the mob and the Sheriff served his writs and made his arrests. But all this did not settle the dispute. The Governor in his message suggested legislation to meet this situation and said very truly, "The tenures by which the tenants held their farms were regarded as inconsistent with modern institutions. They had become odious to those who held them, were unfavorable to agricultural improvements, and were opposed to a sound policy." A commission was appointed by the legislature to adjust this rent difficulty. After a long series of hearings, both sides making certain recommendations to which the tenants assented and the landlords refused to be bound by, efforts were suspended without gaining a single point. The legislature took no further action and the agitation went on steadily, resulting in more disorder and bloodshed.

Governor Wright, who followed Seward, made the rent-war a topic of discussion in his message of 1845, reciting that organized bands disguised as savages and bearing arms, had defied the officers of the law and interfered with its execution; that lives of unoffending citizens had been sacrificed. He declared that the sympathies of the people favored the commutation of rents and fee-simple titles, but that the present duty was the assertion of the power of the State to preserve order. He recommended the enactment of severe laws to prevent and punish agrarian outrages, and they were promptly enacted. Of course this was done by the landholders in the legislature who did not wish to yield to the demands of the farmers in their rights to the use of the earth for fear that they too would lose the privilege of taking rent without labor. In spite of all this severe class legislation, violence and riots were repeated and a Sheriff killed. Governor Wright issued a proclamation of warning, and then called out the militia in sufficient force to put down the disturbances. Many arrests were made, over fifty convicted and imprisoned, and two sentenced to death. These last two were commuted to life imprisonment. Then in 1846, the Governor recommended the taxation of incomes

from rent and the limitations of leases to five or ten years. Next the grievances of the tenants were carried into politics and the Constitutional Convention of 1846 set limits to leases and definitely abolished all feudal tenures. The anti-renters in 1846 gave their support to John Young for Governor. After his election, he said public policy would be served by mercy to those imprisoned. He therefore gave full pardon to all the tenants imprisoned and also recommended that the State should bring suits to test the validity of the titles of the big landlords.

Private litigation was abundant and was attended with many aggravating incidents. The Court of Appeals in 1852 held that no agreement could make the tenants pay rent in case of transferring titles in fee-simple, and therefore that all reservations of quarter-sales were illegal and void. This decision went far to sustain the position of the tenants, and practically ended the anti-rent movement. Here are thirteen years of warfare over an injustice that can be traced back to the system instituted by the Holland Lords. And the injustice does not end here. Even today a large part of the residents of Albany are paying rent to the heirs of the Van Rensselaers. They will not sell their property, hence users of those lots are compelled to pay rent on present values. Is this condition of ownership clogging the wheels of progress or not? Why did not Massachusetts have a rent-war? The riddle is easy. The most stupid can answer it. Everyone had enough land to make a comfortable living without paying rent. Everyone was his own landlord. Everyone was a lord proprietor, the owner of his home.

Turning back, let us review the most conspicuous land monopolist in New York's history. In November, 1783, shortly after the close of the Revolution, a German youth of twenty years, son of a butcher, had earned fifteen guineas in England in his brother's piano factory and was now ready to sail for the New World. When within a day's journey of the American shore the vessel bearing this youth became ice-bound and remained so for two months. But this seeming bad luck was the turning point to the future of this young man. On this same vessel was a German fur dealer who imparted freely to this youth the secrets of the craft. The young man became thoroughly imbued with the idea of embarking in the fur business as soon as he could get some practical experience. His vessel landed at Baltimore in March, and he proceeded to New York by land to see his brother Henry Astor. This brother had preceded John Jacob Astor several years and was getting rich in trading in cattle and in the butcher business. Young John Jacob was not long in finding a place with a Quaker furrier where he worked two years till he mastered a knowledge of the business and laid up a little money. By 1786, with the aid of his brother, he began the fur business for himself. He bought, cured, beat, packed, and sold his skins. He made excursions into the country, buying skins from house to house. He soon made his first shipment to London, going himself and getting acquainted with the dealers he was to trade with in the future. At the same time he became the New York agents for his brother's pianos made in London. On return, he swung out a



sign bearing the words, "Furs and Pianos." His fur business in a few years spread all over New York State and the great lakes. By 1796 he figured in the City Directory as "Fur Merchant, 149 Broadway." He had neither expensive tastes nor wasteful vices. "His luxuries were a pipe, a glass of beer, a game of draughts, a ride on horseback, and the theatre."

At that day the fur trade was exceedingly profitable. When a beaver skin bought in western New York for a dollar's worth of trinkets could be sold in London for six dollars, and those six dollars could be invested in English cloth and cutlery and sold in New York for ten dollars, it may be readily seen how rapidly profits grew. No sooner had he laid by enough money, than he fitted out a vessel to import tea. At this early date the tea business paid enormous profits. Tea that cost 37 cents a pound in China paid a duty of 75 cents a pound. An ordinary cargo of \$200,000 paid a duty of \$400,000, making the cargo after it passed our custom-house worth \$600,000. The profit also was at least 50 per cent of the original cost, or \$100,000. This added to the \$600,000 made the cargo worth \$700,000. At that time to those who could furnish a good bond, the Government gave importers from nine to eighteen months to pay duty on imports. Thus "the East India merchant, after his ship had made one voyage, had the use of government capital to the extent of \$400,000 on an ordinary cargo of a China-ship." This \$400,000 was enough to send two more vessels to China which could make two trips within eighteen months, thus giving the owner the use of four times \$400,000 before he had to pay the first cargo's duty. Is this not a striking example of government paternalism? By paying a dollar and thirty cents a pound for this tea, did it raise the wages of the poor man or offer "protection" to him against the "pauper labor of Europe"? Did it stop the influx of thousands of foreign pauper emigrants to bid for the jobs of the American laborer at lower wages? Did it? Has a tariff tax ever been one of justice to the greatest number? Has it not always been a system of taxation by which the few fatten at the expense of the many?

We have all heard much of the closeness or rather the meanness of this remarkable man. Truth compels us to admit that he was not generous except to his own kindred. "To get all he could, and to keep nearly all that he got—those were the laws of his being."—(James Parton, *Famous Americans*). Such is the comment on John Jacob Astor by the historian. He once tried to make his best captain pay \$500 for a chronometer which he had authorized the captain to buy for one of his vessels, claiming he had promised to pay it. The captain resigned. But at a later time when Astor was about to lose \$700,000 worth of property in China, this captain was appealed to by him to go to China to save this property. He went, and "by a series of bold, prompt, and skillful measures" rescued it and made it yield a profit. Mr. Astor acknowledged the value of the services with a show of gratitude, "but he not only did not compensate him for his services, but he did not even reimburse the small sum of money which the captain had expended in performing those services." Astor was then worth ten millions. Other instances of this same trait of character are recorded by his biographers.



The reader may ask, "Did the fur and tea business make Astor so absurdly and enormously rich?" A careful inspection of his history shows conclusively that the great bulk of his riches were attained through his real estate manipulations. Few successful men gain a single million by legitimate commerce or trade. But this indomitable little German managed, in the course of sixty years, to accumulate \$20,000,000, of which, probably not more than two or three millions were the fruit of his mercantile pursuits. "It was his sagacity in investing his profits that made him the richest man in America. When he first trod the streets of New York in 1784, the city was a snug, leafy place of 25,000 inhabitants situated at the extremity of the island, mostly below Cortlandt Street. In 1800 when he began to have money to invest, the city had more than doubled in population and had advanced nearly a mile up the island. Now, Astor was a shrewd calculator of the future. No reason appeared why New York should not repeat this doubling game and this mile of extension every fifteen years. He acted upon this supposition and fell into the habit of buying lands and lots just beyond the verge of the city. One little anecdote will show the wisdom of this proceeding. He sold a lot in the vicinity of Wall street, about the year 1810 for \$8,000 which was supposed to be somewhat under value. The purchaser, after the papers were signed seemed disposed to chuckle over his bargain. "Why, Mr. Astor," said he, "in a few years this lot will be worth \$12,000." "Very true," replied Astor, "but now you shall see what I will do with the money. With eight thousand dollars I buy eighty lots above Canal Street. By the time your lot is worth \$12,000, my eighty lots will be worth \$80,000," which proved to be a fact.

His purchase of the Richmond Hill estate of Aaron Burr was a case in point. He bought the 160 acres at \$1,000 an acre, and in twelve years the land was worth \$1,500 a lot. In the course of time the island was dotted all over with Astor land,—to such an extent that the whole income of his estate for fifty years could be invested in new houses without buying any more land. "His land speculations," says Parton, "were by no means confined to the little island of Manhattan. Aged readers cannot have forgotten the most celebrated of all his operations of this kind, by which he acquired a legal title to one third of Putnam county, New York. It was a tract of 51,102 acres, being a part of the estate of Roger Morris and Mary, his wife. By adhering to the King of England during the Revolutionary war, they forfeited this estate to the State of New York. They fled to England and the State sold their lands in small parcels to honest Whig farmers. In 1809, more than 700 families were living on this land and relying upon the titles which the State had given. Mr. Astor discovered that Roger and Mary Morris possessed only a life interest in this estate, and that, therefore, it was only that life interest which the State could legally confiscate. The moment Roger and Mary Morris ceased to live, this property would fall to their heirs with all the improvements thereon. After a most thorough examination of the papers by the leading counsel of the day, Mr. Astor bought the rights of the heirs, in 1809, for 20,000 pounds sterling, or about \$100,000. At that time Roger

Morris was no more; and Mary was nearly eighty. She lingered, however, for some years, and it was not till after the peace of 1815 that the claims of Mr. Astor were pressed. When at length the great millionaire stretched out his land to pluck this large ripe fruit, the consternation of the farmers living on the land may well be imagined. A great clamor arose against him. "Upon first rumor of his claim in 1814, commissioners were appointed by the legislature to inquire into it. These gentlemen finding the claim more formidable than had been suspected, asked Mr. Astor for what sum he would compromise. The lands were valued at \$667,000, but Astor replied that he would sell his claim for \$300,000. The offer was not accepted, and the affair lingered. In 1818 Mary Morris being at the point of death and the farmers being in constant dread of ejectment, the commissioners were again appointed to look into the matter. Again Mr. Astor was asked upon what terms he would compromise. He replied January 19, 1819, in part thus: "In 1814 a similar proposition was made to me by the State, when I offered to compromise for the sum of \$300,000, which considering the value of the property in question, was thought very reasonable; and at the present time the property being more valuable than it was in 1814, I am willing to receive the amount I then stated, with interest on the same." The legislature were not yet ready to compromise. It was not till 1827 that a test of the case was made before a jury in a trial. The most eminent counsel were employed on the part of the State,—Daniel Webster and Martin Van Buren among them. Astor's cause was entrusted to Emmet, Ogden, and others. The efforts of the array of counsel employed by the State were exerted in vain to find a flaw in the paper upon which Astor's claim mainly rested. Mr. Webster's speech on this occasion betrays both that he had no case and that he knew he had not. "It is a claim for lands," said he, "not in their wild and forest state, but for land the intrinsic value of which is mingled with the labor expended upon them. It is no every-day purchase, for it extends over towns and counties, and almost takes in a degree of latitude. It is a stupendous speculation. The individual who now claims it has not succeeded to it by inheritance; he has not attained it as he did that vast wealth which no one less envies him than I do, by fair and honest exertions in commercial enterprise, but by speculation, by purchasing the forlorn hope of the heirs of a family driven from their country by a bill of attainder. By the defendants, on the contrary, the lands in question are held as a patrimony. They have labored for years to improve them. The rugged hills had grown green under their cultivation before a question was raised as to the integrity of their titles." A line of argument such as this would appeal powerfully to a jury of farmers. Its effect, however, was destroyed by the single observation of one of the opposing counsel: "Mr. Astor bought this property confiding in the justice of the State of New York, firmly believing that in the litigation of his claim his rights would be maintained."

The historian says, 'It is creditable to the administration of justice in New York, and creditable to the very institution of trial by jury, that

Mr. Astor's most unpopular and even odious cause was triumphant." But he does not say a word to discredit the system of land tenure which made it possible for a lynx-eyed old German to step in with his millions and take advantage through a faulty title not only of 700 families who in all justice were entitled to these lands, but also of a State which instead of being the sovereign authority to adjust differences between its subjects, must suppliantly yield to the power of land sovereignty.

But the Astor estate is illustrative of the astounding economic phenomena that menaces both the stability of government and the solidarity of society. It is the tremendous increases of values to lands in centers of large populations. Lots that were worth but a few thousand in John Jacob's time are now worth upwards of five millions of dollars, and the end no one dares to predict. On and on and on these values are climbing as each ocean liner disgorges its thousands of land-hunting emigrants. In a letter to the writer in 1908, President Purdy of the Tax Commission of New York city says: "The highest price said to have been paid for a piece of property in the City of New York was that for the southeast corner of Wall Street and Broadway, which sold for about seven hundred dollars a square foot." At that price a lot 50 by 150 feet in that location is worth \$5,250,000. Assuming that this lot was of the same value as the one sold by Mr. Astor on Wall Street in 1810 for \$8,000, in the 98 years that have lapsed to 1908 this lot has been gaining by the influx of population at the rate of \$53,490 per year, or 668 per cent. per annum. This is the river of wealth that has been flowing into the pockets of such owners as the Astors on their lucky investments on Manhattan Island. Not only has the owner of these New York city lots received all this gain to his holdings made by the community, but also has been receiving enormous rents raised at the end of each leasing period on the increased valuation. By this rapidly multiplying process, the few who bought there first have been able to realize such an enormous income that they have outrun all later buyers in increasing their holdings till it is estimated that now the city is owned by two per cent of its population. A system that works such an injustice to the teeming millions who are utterly helpless and have no hope of ever being able to acquire land in this and other metropolitan cities, is one based on no higher moral law than piracy or highway robbery. The masses make the values to land, and by our system, the few holders control values and wax enormously rich.

"The American city," says Brand Whitlock, "is a modern economic phenomenon, in its rise and growth and development the last wonder of the world. In 1790 but 3.3 per cent of the whole American population dwelt in cities. In 1830 the percentage had grown to 6.7, in 1860 to 16.1 per cent, and with the industrial impulse that followed the Civil War, populations increased so rapidly that today 40 percent of our people live in the cities." And he says, "In the present century it is estimated that New York and Chicago must ultimately shelter populations of nearly 50,000,000, with corresponding increases in smaller towns." With this estimate before us,

what will be the income to the holder of the Wall Street lot whose value is now \$5,250,000, when New York shelters 25,000,000 people? That will be over five times the present population and of course the lot will be over five times its present value and will yield as many times its present income in ground rent. Counting this rent at four per cent of the valuation, which is low, the present income on the Wall Street lot is \$210,000 annually. Five times that is \$1,050,000. It would require a building with a thousand rooms on such a lot to bring the rent to \$1,005 a year for each room just to pay rent on the ground and not allow anything for the rent on the building itself. These figures border on the ridiculous and should excite in the present generation an interest coupled with alarm, an interest that should cause a widespread demand to lay the axe of the law at the root of this evil tree.

In the report of the Commissioners of Taxes and Assessments of New York City for the year ending September 30, 1907, the following almost astounding comparisons are made: "The value of land today in the city of New York is so enormous that it is hard to realize its amounts without comparisons. The assessed value of land alone exclusive of improvements in the City of New York is greater than the assessed value of all the real estate, improvements included, in the State of Pennsylvania, and nearly twice as great as the value of all the real estate, including improvements, in the State of New York outside of the city. The assessed value of the land of six square miles of Manhattan in the neighborhood of Central Park is greater than the assessed value of all the real estate of the State of Missouri." From this it must follow that the American people must pay as much rent for the use of six square miles of the less valued portion of that island as the whole people of Missouri pay for the use of the 68,735 square miles in their State.

This same report shows that this property of such tremendous value is gradually gravitating into fewer and fewer hands. On page 62 is a table which shows that in 1899 the "number of pieces assessed" was 113,127; in 1903, 106,783; in 1907, 100,368. In less than ten years the number of separate owners grew 12,759 less. On page 56 of the same report we find that the assessment valuation for all of Manhattan Island for 1906 was \$4,105,352,281; for 1907, \$4,391,970,951, or an increase of \$286,618,670 in one year. This is \$13,028,121 increase in value on an average for each square mile, and on every lot in the city on an average of \$3,392. Is this not getting rich by magic? Simply eat and sleep 365 days and draw nearly ten dollars a day on one lot with no outlay, aside from the nominal taxes. Buy a lot for a few thousand, go to sleep thirty or forty years and wake up twice a millionaire. That is earning money, isn't it? Are we going to let this ruinous process go on till we reach the "Hooligan" state in England, the serf condition in Russia, or the peasant degradation in Ireland? No end is more sure, if this pernicious system is continued. There are signs of its rapid approach now. The population on Manhattan Island is concentrating more and more. In 1907 there was a population of 100,492 to each square mile on an average, while on the dense East Side the number piled up and wedged in reached the staggering



figure of 400,000 to the square mile. What must be the appalling condition of human beings living in such a relation to the earth from which all must draw their living? Think of the superlative advantage which the middleman holds over the supplies that must daily reach this desperate multitude. Think of the constant bidding for jobs and the consequent lowering of wages because of the fierce competition. Think of the tenements wreaking with "the fetid air, contagious diseases, suffocating heat in summer, sunless rooms, and nerve-wracking brawls and shrieks from the struggling mass. Think of 'promiscuous mixing of all ages and sexes in a single room—thus breaking down the barriers of modesty and conducing to the corruption of the young, and occasionally to revolting crimes.'"—(Robert Hunter, *Poverty*). Think of the exhaustion and inability to work brought on by hunger, rags, sickness, long hours in sweat-shops, sleeping in sub-cellar with thirty or forty unfortunates in poisonous air, and all forms of debauchery. Think of the pauperism, crime, immorality, sexual perversion, drunkenness, and many other forms of degradation caused and abetted by this indecent overcrowding. Think of the children that come into the world amid such vile surroundings, the appalling infant death-rate, and the wild gangs they form which roam the streets and whose play, as Hunter says, is to steal, to destroy, even to kill. Probably no other city in the world has so many dark rooms and other unsanitary conditions as New York. Over 300,000 families live in interior rooms in which there is never a ray of sunlight. In the First Ward, near the Battery, fourteen times as many people die from tuberculosis, in proportion to population, as in a certain ward adjoining Central Park.

All of our large cities have a vagrant, drifting class forming the vice districts, or slums. Here we find a most promiscuous mass of wretched humanity. There is no family. All except the immigrant who is there by necessity, are single men and women. The children are often illegitimate. Here are the cigarette, morphine, and opium fiends, the hobo, the dull-witted, degraded negro, and the petty sneak thief. Here flourish the saloon with its free hot lunches, barrel-houses with free whisky, dime museums with immoral pictures and exaggerated monstrosities, brothels, and low lodging houses, dens and dives of the vilest kind.

But the poverty slum is not the only sign of a demoralizing social system. The very cause that produces a slum of the poor in all its hideous aspects is father to another social offspring with as many and alarming characteristics. It is the slum of the over-rich; of a debauched aristocracy. While this slum is devoid of the rags, filth and high death rate of the poverty slum, yet it is equally as deep in moral degeneracy and perversion as its social relative. The districts in which this slum flourishes are not so well defined, nor so glaringly under the public eye. Yet while under cover and behind silken tapestry, enough has crept into the lime-light of the public gaze and scrutiny of the careful observer to know that this slum is filled with the degeneracy of a profligate and flagrantly vile set of spendthrifts and violators of every moral and statute law. Here is the dry-rot of leisure and idleness; here dwell the



parasites of production. Their regard for all men outside their exclusive ranks is solely for exploitation, for more wealth, for passion, for a round of pleasure without end. Altruria is not in their geography; nor is there a flower of sympathy in their garden of revelry. Their philosophy is that some were born for a life of ease, to have and to spend, while the commonality were born for a life of work, want and worry.

(The End.)

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## THE LATIFUNDIUM.

By **BALDOMERO ARGENTE.**

*(Translated for The Single Tax Review by M. J. Stewart.)*

[The accomplished translator of this article seems to have sacrificed to literalness something of euphony—something perhaps of clearness. Many of the English phrases that render faithfully the Spanish of the original will strike the reader of the **REVIEW** as obscure, and many others as unusual. But little or no attempt has been made by the editor to alter the translator's phraseology which is allowed to stand.—Editor **SINGLE TAX REVIEW.**]

On the occasion of the debates which took place in the Senate (of Spain) about a year ago on the bill to abolish municipal import duties upon food-stuffs, the president of the Ministerial Council sketched the general lines of the rules which should direct the action of Spanish liberalism in economic affairs, recognizing that in this field there are substantial differences between the conservative and liberal parties—whether in regard to the freedom of trade and commerce, or in regard to the continuance of the idea of property on its progressive evolution, resisted throughout the centuries by the conservative elements and won by the democratic factors, which has to adjust itself to the alterations in juridical ideas and in social conditions. In the exposition of these duties of liberalism in relation to economics Senor Canalejas pronounced a word, alluded to an evil for whose denunciation the time was ripe—the latifundium, the “great estate.”

Canalejas was the first militant Spanish politician of the present day to discuss as a most urgent problem of our country the depopulation by the existence of great estates, and who threw into the Parliamentary arena the

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[**TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.**—This is a good specimen of the work of the accomplished translator of “Protection or Free Trade?”; who is as anxious to win over support from organizations outside our ranks as he is firm in upholding the Single Tax faith in its purity against all opponents. There are not six countries in all the world with more Croasdale Single Taxers today than Spain: but of all these there are none of more use today than the three or four who at the outset decided to abolish the sin of land monopoly in their beloved country. Of these, Baldomero Argente is only one of the best known, and consumed as ever by the spirit of Garrison the Abolitionist.—**M. J. STEWART.**]