

**ARISTOCRACY,  
CONSIDERED IN ITS  
RELATIONS WITH THE  
PROGRESS OF CIVILIZATION**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649062164

Aristocracy, Considered in Its Relations with the Progress of Civilization by H. Passy

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**H. PASSY**

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# ARISTOCRACY,

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ITS RELATIONS

WITH



THE PROGRESS OF CIVILIZATION.

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FROM THE FRENCH OF H. PASSY,

MEMBER OF THE INSTITUTE,  
LATE PEER OF FRANCE, EX-MINISTER OF FINANCE, OF COMMERCE AND  
AGRICULTURE, ETC.

WITH NOTES AND APPENDIX BY THE TRANSLATOR.

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*Latifundia perdidere Italiam, et jam vero provinciam.—PLINY.*

Ye friends to truth, ye statesmen who survey  
The rich man's joys increase, the poor's decay,  
'Tis yours to judge how wide the limits stand  
Between a splendid and a happy land.

— The man of wealth and pride  
Takes up the space that many poor supplied;  
Space for his lake, his park's extended bounds,  
Space for his horses, equipage, and hounds;  
His seat, where solitary sports are seen,  
Indignant spurns the cottage from the green.

GOUGHMAN.

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LONDON :

ARTHUR HALL & CO. 25, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1848.

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## INTRODUCTION.

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AMONG the questions which have an important bearing on the welfare of European communities, there is none that has given rise to greater and keener controversy than that which respects the existence and maintenance of an Aristocracy. If there are points upon which the antagonist parties are generally agreed; if, for example, it is mutually granted, that it would be impossible to confide the governmental power to classes destitute of the advantages of independence and education, and that the business of legislation ought consequently to be entrusted to a select body of the nation, these parties are again at issue with respect to the selection of that body, and the rights and attributes which it ought to possess.

The cause of this divergence of opinion is sufficiently obvious. In all periods, opinions have been the offspring of situations and circumstances; and it would be very extraordinary if, in such a case, classes interested in preserving or recovering the immunities and exclusive privileges which their ancestors enjoyed, should be found in accord with other classes, who, after deriving from the pursuits of industry the means of emerging from their original abasement, claim a free participation in all the benefits and distinctions of society. We accordingly see



the opinions referred to marked with all the differences which the past has introduced into interests, positions, traditions and reminiscences. The greater number claim an equality of rights; and whilst they insist, that, leaving to the action of natural causes the care of producing all the superior men needed for the management of the more important affairs of the nation, governments should confine themselves to fixing the conditions of fortune indispensable for the proper exercise of political rights,—the partisans of the aristocratic system maintain, as a thing requisite for the stability of monarchies, that these rights should be perpetuated in the hands of a succession of men always animated by the same sentiments and impelled by analogous interests; and this series of persons it is, by the aid of privilege, by introducing or maintaining inequality in civil society—in fine, by rendering fixed, by confiscating, and concentrating, to the advantage of a favoured caste, a great portion of the property of the soil, that they seek to found and render eternal.

Here we behold a palpable conflict betwixt privilege, and the principle of equal rights:—the natural Aristocracy,—that Aristocracy which is composed of men of superior talents and endowments, whom a successful course of industry, or inherited fortune, has raised above the common level,—is it sufficient for the different requirements of our present state of civilization; or ought we still, to the detriment of the community, to raise up and maintain a factitious Aristocracy? This is the whole problem. Vainly has it been tried to solve it in only considering it, as the majority of previous writers have done, under partial points of view; in this world, a slight portion of good is always found by the side of evil, and the most vicious institutions are found to have something redeeming in them, often even some consequences of an unquestionable utility. Thus we are unable to appreciate any of them with a certainty of arriving at the truth, before having examined them in all their phases, and in their various influences upon the social

system which they contribute to form. It is more especially when the question relates to one of the institutions whose long and powerful influence has penetrated every part of the civil and political life of a people, that such an investigation is indispensable. We must then take a strict account of the motives and causes of its introduction, the changes worked in it by the progress of civilization, and the effects of its continuance on the general well-being; we must ascertain the extent of the advantages which it offers, see if other forms do not present them separated from the evils which we perceive in it, and above all, examine with the most scrupulous attention the facts on which the question rests.

Such is the order and method which I have prescribed to myself in this work, whose object is to consider Aristocracy in its relations with the progress and the requirements of civilization. After having thrown a glance at the causes of its rise in ages of barbarism, and of its decline in more enlightened times, I have examined the spirit and character of the laws necessary for its preservation; I have endeavoured to seize the influence of these laws on the state and progress of industry, of wealth, manners, and on the amount of the population; in a word, on all the elements of the greatness and felicity of a people. Then, inquiring if the services rendered by an Aristocracy really compensate society for the evils attached to the existence of privilege, I have considered the extent of the means of order and stability which may be offered by a system less opposed to natural equity; I have weighed the objections started to the equality of rights; I have established its advantages, and, invoking the aid of facts, I have drawn information from the effects produced in England by an Aristocracy of the soil, and in other countries, especially in France, from a legislation more favourable to a just partition of rights and fortunes. A subject so complicated, which embraces so many interests, and which, besides, gives rise to a multitude of questions of a political and economical order, presented

great and numerous difficulties. If I have not been able to surmount them, I have at least eluded none of them;—theories, maxims, objections, principles, adopted or contested by the two parties, have all been passed in review, discussed, examined, and fathomed as far as my powers would permit, and as much as possible in the most natural order. Let no one, however, expect to find in a work of the limited extent of this, an elaborate mass of details touching the different privileges which Aristocracies or bodies of nobility have enjoyed. Of what use would it have been to point out the different features of the laws whose object was fundamentally the same? What purpose would it have served to ascertain what differences existed between the majorats of Spain or Naples and the entails of France, England, and Germany; or what were the distinctive shades of variety in the customs which regulated the estates of the nobility in the different provinces of the same state? What it was necessary to establish perfectly and clearly was, the spirit, the purpose, and the consequences of that legislation; and in this last respect I have spared no pains in furnishing my readers with information.

There is still one point which may seem to necessitate a particular explanation. It may be a matter of surprise to some, not to find in this Treatise a special examination of the so much agitated question as to the comparative advantages of great and small farms. If I have omitted this question, it is because there seemed to me to be no proper connexion betwixt the size of estates and that of farms. Like all other industries, agriculture depends for its modes and forms, and for its advancement, on a number of causes, among which the state of the sciences and manufacturing arts, the abundance and circulation of capital, and the amount of the population, hold the most important rank. Like all other industries, if it prospers under laws favourable to the protection of property and persons, to the free use of capital, of lands, and of individual enterprise, it