THREE DAYS' FOREST FESTIVAL ON THE BILTMORE ESTATE.


CHAPTER XV.—After the Thanksgiving Dinner.

The last instalment of this chronicle of the great Biltmore festival—Chapter XIX.—took the writer to the Thanksgiving dinner at the Battery Park hotel, Asheville, and that, C. A. Schendt on the midnight that closed Thanksgiving day, amid sumptuous scenes of enjoyment in extreme contrast to that depicted in an accompanying cut, of a freemason's Thanksgiving, which is race of the soil in the poorer quarters of Asheville and the Biltmore estate throughout western North Carolina. The festivities of Thanksgiving evening at the Battery Park hotel, Asheville, while in no case indecent, had been so thronged in a hospitable sense that most of the participants were dismissed to raise at a reasonable hour Friday morning, and the edict of Forester Schendt, who is of that class whom presidents of our stock companies deplore in their departures, departs the eighth day of the forest festival. It began at the portals of the banks of the river. The other occupants of his carriage, with the exception of the colored driver, discreetly used the ferry boat to cross. The driver of the American Lumberman carriage guided his team nonchalantly down the steep bank and safely out into the swift stream. The writer curtiss his feet under him and watched the rising water apprehensively. His eyes bulged as it passed higher than the sail. A few yards farther the bulge became more pronounced as the waters rose to the level of the boat and the macadam roads were swept over towards the mouth of the river. Still farther, past the middle of the stream, that bulge grew into a grotesque fact which the water or the macadam road was swept away by the current and the ferry was dead. The team was stranded in the middle of the stream and the carriage, which had been driven at a rapid pace, was driven off the edge of the road and up a steep incline to safety.

One of the carriages, with its team, became stalled in the river and had to be assisted from the bank, but, aside from that mishap and the human side, the fording of the French Broad river was one of the most picturesquely interesting features of the three days' forest fair.

CHAPTER XX.—Object Lessons in Good Roads.

At this point in these chronicles a digression may be made in behalf of some of the numerous object lessons acquired during the three days' festival that are not specifically treated of elsewhere. Among these object lessons that were prominently in evidence was one good road.

Except upon the steep mountain sides and through the forest where roads are cut through the trees, such as in the Biltmore estate, there are no good roads in the neighborhood of 200 miles, all macadam. Mr. Vanderbuilt's road work may be said to have revolutionized macadamization to such an extent in western North Carolina, and it was one of the main causes in bringing Buncombe county, in which Asheville and the Biltmore estate are located, to start the system of macadam road construction throughout the country. Specifications used by Buncombe county are almost identical with those used on the Biltmore estate, though it is probable that the county roads are more heavily built on account of the greater traffic that they have to bear. Uniquely, Mr. Vanderbuilt's initiative is what started the movement, and it has its advent at a time when the question of good roads was being agitated throughout the country.

The commissioners of Buncombe county, in the construction of macadam roads among the first in the state, though Mecklenburg county was perhaps the first, and has the highest reputation today, all over the state in fact all over the Union for good macadam roads. The county has been systematically building such roads as fast as it could do so with convicot labor—it has employed no free labor—since some time prior to 1898, perhaps twelve or fifteen years ago. The building of these roads is expensive on account of the grades. The engineers are required to get the grades below an average of 3 percent and are never allowed to exceed 6 percent except on the short hills.

The least cost of building these macadam roads by convict labor is between $2,500 and $3,000 a mile. That is as near as the good roads commission could figure from the returns of the county commissioners. But an estimate on the Vanderbuilt estate with its less heavily built roads is between $2,000 and $2,500 a mile. The average cost might safely be placed between $2,500 and $3,000 a mile. These macadamized roads, on the Vanderbuilt estate especially, are kept in perfect repair, and form a useful object lesson of which advantage has been taken in other and even in distant sections.

CHAPTER XX VI.—Stock Raising.

The whole Vanderbuilt estate has been an object lesson not only in road building but in agriculture and stock raising, a fact which was more or less impressed upon the participants, and specifically by the visit to the Vanderbuilt model dairy. Owning to the importation of blooded hogs the roamback has practically disappeared from the mountains of that section. A decade ago he was practically the only representative there of the pure race. The contributing influence to this end was the fact that he can raise that section a blooded boar at a comparatively small price. At one time the Vanderbuilt blooded hogs were sold at very fancy prices but as they have been bought and bred throughout the country there no longer remains a local market at such figures.

One progressive step in stock raising which is noticeable is the change, in the milk cows. One can hardly find a herd of cattle in western North Carolina that does not include numbers of the Jersey or Alderney breed, a result directly traceable to either Mr. Vanderbuilt's own herd or to his example in breeding blooded stock. Before Mr. Vanderbuilt came to Asheville a good jersey cow was something of a rarity. It was the show piece of the average farm and was exhibited with pride and the details of its cost and performances were enlashed upon. A notable fact since that date is that no one pretends to raise cows in that section for dairying purposes but that his herd is based upon thorough good stock. Many herds through western North Carolina embrace a high percentage of full blooded jersies, Aldernes or some of the other high grade breeds.

The Vanderbuilt estate has exploited extensively the raising of chickens. The poultry show held recently in Asheville included the finest exhibition of chickens ever seen in the south and they came largely from the Vanderbuilt estate. Poultry raisers from all over the state and many good judges from elsewhere declare that if this exhibit should ever be seen anywhere—thoroughbreds and a most varied and extensive exhibit.

Improvements in these matters of course are not altogether due to Mr. Vanderbuilt but are directly traceable to his example and energy. Mr. Vanderbuilt furnished free the services of a thoroughbred jelly bull, and through his good blooded stock was disseminated through that section.

CHAPTER XXVIII.—Titles to the Biltmore Lands.

Titles to the great area now known as the Biltmore estate were acquired largely through stress and active opposition. When George W. Vanderbuilt started his land purchases in North Carolina it was discovered that he was likely to outrun his supply of ready money and it is related (this without violation of the family confidence) that the rest of the family feared that he was spending too much money in that section and sent a committee to investigate. They looked the situation over and concluded that George was not giving his money away. They saw the utility of the proposition, not in entirely unselfish way but as one out of which they could get personal enjoyment and which would afford personal and public advantage and at the same time—

THANKSGIVING MORNING IN WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA—A COLORED FAMILY'S FEAST IN PROSPECT.
tend the usefulness of the valuable object lessons which George W. Vanderbilt had in offering the south.

The titles are generally good but as to many of the tract of tannery lands of the Vanderbilt estate the establishment of Hans Rees' Sons, Incorporated, and the Broad River Tanning Company are the most conspicuous. Hans Rees' Sons, with tannery at Asheville and office at 39 Frankfort street, New York city, are tanners of oak, beech and spruce butts and manufactures of leather. Their Asheville plant, on twenty acres of land on the French Broad river, is considered a considerable investment and is one of the largest tanneries in the south. It is a large buyer of extract and bark procured from the Biltmore estate. The tannery is one of the important commercial factors of Buncombe county and has an extensive domestic and foreign trade. The family of Hans Rees, a son of the founder of the enterprise, is one of the few in Asheville with which the Vanderbilt family is upon cordial terms of social intimacy.

The Broad River Tanning Company's plant, one of the most successful in the south, is located near Brevard, the county seat of Transylvania county, and its postoffice is Pisgah Forest, which is the site of the lumber mill operated under the name of C. A. Schenck & Co. W. F. Decker, resident at Pisgah Forest, is superintendent of the company's plant. It is a large consumer of products of the Biltmore estates. Pertinent to this chapter may be quoted data compiled by the Forest Service relative to the country's consumption and value of tanning materials, the aggregate of tanbark last year being given as $32,205,547, showing a decrease in quantity from the previous year but a marked increase in price. Commenting upon this subject, a lumberman said editorially: "There is an increasing use of extracts, due probably to the fact that they may be more advantageously shipped than the raw material. Of 583 plants reporting in 1907, 123 used tanbark exclusively, 122 extracts exclusively, while 340 used both. Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and West Virginia rank in order in the consumption of bark, consuming 60 percent of the output. There has been a decrease in New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Michigan and an increase in West Virginia and Wisconsin. The most important and interesting feature of the whole subject is the steady increase in tanning extracts. The growing scarcity of bark and native extracts makes necessary the use of chemicals or imported wood extracts. The tannar industry is certain to be continuously affected by the influx of tanning extracts because of the greater ease with which they may be handled."

All of which will be of interest to those who feel an interest in the future commercial prosperity of the Biltmore estate and Dr. Schenck's efforts to continue it as self supporting.

Chapter XXXII.—Some Biltmore Timber.

At the "pink beds" of the Biltmore estate (to this section reference has already been made) and in that vicinity a large part of the timber growth is native forest, in contrast to the neighborhood of the residence of Dr. Schenck, where planting operations have been started in what were old farm fields, some of which is already bearing results. From Asheville west well into east Tennessee, embracing the Great Smoky mountains and Balsam mountains, is doubtless the best of the hardwood timber left east of the Mississippi river. Most of the notable results will probably run in this order: poplar, oak, chestnut. A considerable amount of the hemlock is just coming into the market. Heretofore the price of hemlock did not justify cutting it in the Biltmore forests and shipping it to northern points, and until recently the local demand for hemlock had been practically nil. Pine in central North Carolina was formerly the staple building material and all needed could be bought at $3 a thousand feet. In later years the price in Asheville has doubled, and a considerable local demand for hemlock has arisen for framing materials and this timber, once considered an incumbrance on the land, is now proving to be a valuable asset. Several lumber companies are cutting hemlock regularly and selling it at profitable prices. Considerable ash and some cherry are found. Such cherry as is left is of extra fine quality, but, like walnut, it has been valuable for so many years that long ago it was largely cut out separately. The Biltmore forests at one time grew large quantities of black walnut, but little of that remains, as is the case also with most of the cherry, though of the latter fairly quantities are still to be found. Of other merchantable timber are linn and basswood, with an admixture in small quantities of other varieties. (To Be Continued).