

JAMES WALLACE PINCHOT (1831-1908), retired from business in 1875. His three children were still very young—Gifford, the oldest, being 10, Antoinette 7, and Amos 2. He may accordingly have been a more constant and influential presence in the lives of his children than was usual in 19th century upper-class families. Able to devote time to making a proper world for his family, he set a strong moral and intellectual example for his offspring.

James seems to have been almost universally liked and admired. The numerous tributes published after his death describe him in terms like: "a gentle, kindly soul, companionable, charitable, sane;" "to the last a man of singularly keen interest in public affairs, of penetrating mind, of great vigor as well as great sweetness of disposition, and of an old-fashioned courtesy which peculiarly distinguished him;" "an American citizen of the best type... admirable alike for his civic virtues and public spirit, for his personal loveliness and unflinching courtesy;" and so on. He was a bookish, unassuming man with strong notions about right and wrong in public life. He was a passionate devotee of the arts and intellectual pursuits, and counted among his frequent associates and friends the actor Edwin Booth (a neighbor in Gramercy Park, New York); artists like Sanford Gifford, Eastman Johnson (with whose family the Pinchots were evidently very close), Jervis McEntee, and Frederic Church; and poets, philosophers, generals, and politicians including William Cullen Bryant, Bayard Taylor, Launt Thompson, William T. Sherman, Charles P. Stone, James Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt the elder, John Jay—the list is endless. His affinity for people like Richard Morris Hunt and Frederick Law Olmsted was natural, for they shared an interest in improving the quality of urban and domestic life; it should come as no surprise to learn that the sons of those three worked together at Biltmore early in their careers.

James belonged to a number of important New York organizations, including the Century Association, the Union League Club, the Players Club, the Grolier Society, and the New York Chamber of Commerce, and to others in Washington, including the Cosmos and Metropolitan Clubs. These were an outlet not only for his artistic, philanthropic, and intellectual pursuits, but were the warp and woof of the social, commercial, and political power that ran New York and much of the nation in the 19th century. Like all good fathers of his class he brought Gifford and Amos, upon their graduation from college, into the organizations, where they early

established acquaintances with the likes of Theodore Roosevelt, Cordell Hull, Elihu Root, Henry L. Stimson and others—all similarly inducted by their fathers, and eventually to play together a major role in national politics. Yet James himself refrained from seeking office or playing a commanding role in his clubs. His popularity and wide contacts made him a natural choice to lobby in Washington for the legislation to accept the Statue of Liberty. But the only club office attributed to him in several decades of yearbooks from all the organizations was membership on the art committee of the Union League Club for 1878-79.

James Pinchot was more active in other ways. He was one of the founders and a principal benefactor of both the National Academy of Design and the American Museum of Natural History, and was reputedly one of the organizers of the first Model Tenement Association in the United States, aimed at improving the living conditions of New York City's poor. He was a member of the Executive Committee for The Statue of Liberty, and an exponent of Franco-American cooperation after the fall of the Second Empire. His abhorrence of wastefulness made him a mainstay of the American Forestry Association, which sought as early as 1875 to halt the reckless despoliation of natural resources in favor of conservative management. With his sons he endowed the Yale School of Forestry, and he established at Milford reputedly the first forest experiment station in the United States (at that time a forest experiment station was concerned chiefly with planting trees; the plantations of the Milford station are still identifiable just south of town, near the Delaware River), to encourage the reforestation of denuded lands. To the town of Milford he gave his former house for use as a library and civic facility, use of parts of Foresters Hall for meetings, land for a cemetery and a design for it prepared at his expense by Olmsted Brothers in 1906, and a number of other contributions. His sense of paternalism was obviously deeper than any mere gesture. In 1905, Yale conferred upon him the honorary degree of Master of Arts for his patronage of the arts and his support of forestry.

James Pinchot gave his children an upbringing that was considerably more than the New York wealthy class' usual round of winter in the city, summer in the country or at the seacoast, tours of Europe, finishing school for the girls and prep school and Ivy League college for the boys, then a generous assist in getting started on a "useful" career. The Pinchot children received all that. But in addition, the family

belonged to a number of wilderness fishing clubs whose membership included the artistic and literary elite of New York City. Their home was frequently host to artists, writers, and statesmen, and they grew up in an atmosphere of heady conversation and concern about public issues.

By example and by instruction, James taught Gifford and Amos to see themselves as more fortunate than the mass of people, and bearing a responsibility to protect and defend the weak from the oppressive. James had become wealthy, but his means of gaining wealth had created no slums, fouled no rivers, corrupted no politicians, wasted no valuable resources, and enslaved no workers. He imbued his sons with the notion that such things were to be avoided, and that people who caused them were pernicious to society. He was no visionary (although the leading Romantics of the day were among his friends); rather, his philosophy was very much the materialistic Utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill, which defined social good as "the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people."

Gifford and Amos adopted the same attitude, to which their careers attest. Having received their life's wages in advance, as they recalled their father telling them, they felt impelled to work them out for what they saw as the general good of the nation. It is little wonder that, with fathers like James Pinchot, the Progressives bore no love for "the malefactors of great wealth," as Theodore Roosevelt branded those who pursued private profit at the expense of public good.

The sense that there was a struggle between right and wrong in the world, and that they were among the select few chosen to defend the masses from the corrupt, is one of the chief inheritances Gifford and Amos received from their father. He provided also the education, trained wit, political and social contacts, and financial freedom that enabled them to become crusaders. But that both had stormy careers marked by bitter conflicts, broken friendships, and an uncompromising pursuit of principles not always shared by others or even always consonant with their own self-interest, was also the legacy of James. He had perhaps insulated them too much from the ordinary world, where there are few absolute answers and compromise is the lubricant of society, where people are not good or evil but mainly just people. He built a house that gazed—benevolently—down upon the village of Milford, but above and therefore separate from it. Grey Towers reflects James Pinchot's view of his place in the world, and his willingness to order his environment as he thought best.