

IV.

ALEXANDER T. STEWART.

HIS EARLY LIFE. — ACCIDENT OF SUCCESS. — NOT WELL INFORMED. — MR. STEWART IN HIS DOWN-TOWN OFFICE. — HIS SHREWDNESS AND TACT. — HIS HOME ON FIFTH AVENUE. — ACCESS TO MR. STEWART NOT EASY. — MR. STEWART AS A MASTER.

MR. STEWART was born in Ireland. His home was a humble one. He inherited a good constitution, was gifted with energy and indomitable perseverance, blended with great shrewdness. His education was fair. Two pious Scotch women interested themselves greatly in his welfare. They hoped to see him in the pulpit. For the sacred profession he made some preparations. It is said that even now, amid his immense business, he keeps up his classical readings. He has been heard to say, notwithstanding his conceded success in mercantile life, he has doubts whether he had not mistaken his calling, and would not have done better in some other sphere. In 1825 he studied the languages, under the tuition of a celebrated actor. He then looked towards teaching as a means of livelihood, and perhaps had not abandoned the idea of entering the sacred profession.

He married, quite early, a Miss Cornelia Church, of New York, abandoned his literary pursuits, and became a trader in a small way. A little sum of money was left

him by a relative in Ireland. He set up store in a small room nearly opposite his present down-town establishment. His shop was a little affair, only twelve feet front. It was separated from its neighbor by a thin partition, through which all conversation could be heard. The store stood on what is now known as 262 Broadway. He tended shop from fourteen to eighteen hours a day. He was his own errand boy, porter, book-keeper, and salesman. He kept house in the humblest style. He lived over his store; and for a time one room served as kitchen, bed-room, and parlor. His bed was hidden from view, being enclosed within a chest or bureau. As Mr. Stewart attended to the store, so Mrs. Stewart attended to the work of the house. The increase of business demanded assistants. These he boarded, and to accommodate them more room was required. So he added to his single room. He afterwards kept house in chambers on Hudson Street, his income not warranting the taking of a whole house. His style of living was very plain in his furniture and table. Hardly a laborer among us to-day would live as plainly as Mr. Stewart lived when he began his public career. But Mr. Stewart always lived within his income, whatever that income was.

THE ACCIDENT OF SUCCESS.

Mr. Stewart began business when merchants relied upon themselves. It was not easy to obtain credit. Banks were few and cautious. Bankruptcy was regarded as a disgrace and a crime. Traders made money out of their customers, and not out of their creditors. To an accident, which would have swamped

most men, Mr. Stewart is indebted for his peculiar style of business and his colossal fortune. While doing business in his little store, a note became due, which he was unable to pay. A shopkeeper, with a miscellaneous stock of goods, not very valuable, in a store twelve feet front, had little to hope from the banks. His friends were short. He resolved not to be dishonored. He met the crisis boldly. His indomitable will, shrewdness, and energy came out. He resolved not only to protect his note, but protect himself from being again in such a position. He marked every article in his store down below the wholesale price. He flooded the city with hand-bills, originating the selling-off-at-cost style of advertising. He threw his handbills by thousands into the houses, basements, stores, steamboats, and hotels of the city. He told his story to the public; what he had, and what he proposed to sell. He promised them not only bargains, but that every article would be found just what it was guaranteed to be. He took New York by storm. He created a furore among housekeepers. The little shop was crowded with suspicious and half-believing persons in search of bargains. Mr. Stewart presided in person. He said but little, offered his goods, and took the cash. To all attempts to beat him down, he quietly pointed to the plainly-written price on each package. He had hardly time to eat or sleep. His name became a household word on every lip. Persons bought the goods, went home, and examined them. They found not only that they had not been cheated, but had really got bargains. They spread the news from house to house. Excited New York filled Mr. Stewart's shop, and crowded the

pavement in front. Long before the time named in the handbill for stopping the sale, the whole store was cleaned out, and every article sold for cash. The troublesome note was paid, and a handsome balance left over. Mr. Stewart resolved to purchase no more on credit. The market was dull, cash scarce, and he was enabled to fill up his store with a choice stock of goods at a small price. In that little shanty on Broadway he laid the solid foundation of that colossal fortune which towers to the height of thirty millions.

HIS STYLE OF BUSINESS.

Though Mr. Stewart sells goods on credit, as do other merchants, he buys solely for cash. If he takes a note, instead of getting it discounted at a bank, he throws it into a safe, and lets it mature. It does not enter into his business, and the non-payment of it does not disturb him. He selects the style of carpet he wants, buys every yard made by the manufacturer, and pays the cash. He monopolizes high-priced laces, silks, costly goods, furs, and gloves, and compels the fashionable world to pay him tribute. Whether he sells a first-rate or a fourth-rate article, the customer gets what he bargains for. A lady on a journey, who passes a couple of days in the city, can find every article that she wants for her wardrobe at a reasonable price. She can have the goods made up in any style, and sent to her hotel at a given hour, for the opera, a ball, or for travel. Mr. Stewart will take a contract for the complete outfit of a steamship or steamboat, like the *Europa* or the *St. John*, furnish the carpets, mirrors, chandelier, china, silver ware, cutlery, mattresses, linen, blankets, napkins,

with every article needed, in any style demanded. He can defy competition. He buys from the manufactories at the lowest cash price. He presents the original bills, charging only a small commission. The parties have no trouble, the articles are of the first class, they save from ten to twenty per cent., and the small commission pays Stewart handsomely. He furnishes hotels and churches in the same manner. He could supply the army and navy as easily as he could fit out a steamship.

NOT WELL INFORMED.

The late William Beecher told me that Mr. Stewart bought many goods of him when he first set up for himself. One day Mr. Stewart came into his store, and said to him, privately, "Mr. Beecher, a lady came into my store to-day and asked me to show her some hose. I did not know what the goods were, and I told her I did not keep the article. What did she want?" Mr. Beecher pointed to a box of stockings that stood before them. The young tradesman looked, laughed, and departed.

IN HIS DOWN-TOWN OFFICE.

He attends personally to his own business. His office is a small room in his down-town store. No merchant in New York spends as many hours at his business as Mr. Stewart. He is down early, and remains late. Men who pass through Broadway during the small hours of the night may see the light burning brightly from the working-room of the marble palace. He remains till the day's work is closed, and everything is squared up. He knows what is in the store, and not a package escapes his eye. He sells readily without

consulting book, invoice, or salesman. He has partners, but they are partners only in the profits. He can buy and sell as he will. He holds the absolute management of the concern in his own hands. His office is on the second story, and separated from the sales-room by a glass partition which goes half way to the ceiling. Here he is usually to be found. Else he is walking about the store, with a quiet tread, as if his foot was clothed with velvet,—up stairs and down stairs, all around, with a keen, quick, vigilant eye, searching in all places and all departments, taking in everybody and everything as he passes.

ACCESS TO MR. STEWART NOT EASY.

It is difficult to gain access to the princely merchant. Any man who has run the gauntlet once will not be fond of repeating the experiment. On entering the main door, a gentleman stands guard, who says, "What is your business, sir?" You reply, "I wish to see Mr. Stewart." "Mr. Stewart is busy; what do you want?" "I wish to see him personally, on private business." "Mr. Stewart has no private business. You cannot see him unless you tell me what you want." If the guard is satisfied, you are allowed to go up stairs. Here you are met by sentinel No. 2,—a large, full-faced, bland-looking gentleman,—who is Mr. Stewart's confidential agent, though at one time one of the judges of our courts. He examines and cross-examines you. If he cannot stave you off, he disappears into the office, and reports your case to his chief. Probably Mr. Stewart will peer at you through the plate glass. If he does not consider you of consequence enough to

invite you in, he turns away, shrugging his shoulders, and sends a snappish refusal by the guard. If otherwise, you enter, and face the lion in his den. His whole manner is hard and repulsive. He is of the average height, slim, with a decided Hibernian face; sandy hair, nearly red; sharp, cold, avaricious features; a clear, cold eye; a face furrowed with thought, care, and success; a voice harsh and unfriendly in its most mellow tones. He could easily be taken for his book-keeper or porter. He meets you with the air of a man who is impatient from interruption; who wishes you to say your say and be gone. He lives wholly by himself. His wife has borne him no children; he has probably not a bosom friend in the world. Some men find their pleasure in dress, in dissipation, in drinking, in amusements, in travel, in parties, theatres, operas. Stewart finds his in hard work. Business is his idol, his pleasure, his profit. He revels in it. Approaching his eightieth year, he is indomitable, persevering, and enterprising as when he commenced trade.

STEWART AS A MASTER.

He is a hard master, and his store is ruled by despotic law. His rules are inexorable, and must be obeyed. His store is regarded as the hospital for decayed merchants. Nearly every prominent man in his wholesale store has been in business for himself, and failed. All the better for Mr. Stewart. Such a man has a circle of acquaintances, and can influence trade. If he failed without dishonor, he is sure of a position in Mr. Stewart's store. No factory is run with more exactness. No package enters or leaves the store without a ticket.

On one occasion Mr. Stewart himself left directions to have a shawl sent up to his house, which Mrs. Stewart was to wear at a soirée. He forgot to place a ticket upon the package, and to the imperious law of the store the shawl had to yield. He regards his employees as cogs in the complicated machinery of his establishment. A New York fireman is quite as tender of his machine. The men are numbered and timed. There is a penalty attached to all delinquencies. It takes all a man can earn for the first month or so to pay his fines. He is fined if he exceeds the few minutes allotted to dinner. He is fined if he eats on the premises. He is fined if he sits during business hours. He is fined if he comes late or goes early. He is fined if he misdirects a bundle. He is fined if he mistakes a street or number. He is fined if he miscounts the money, or gives the wrong change.

HIS SHREWDNESS AND TACT.

He has always kept in advance of the age. During the last twenty years he has ruined himself, in the estimation of his friends, a hundred times. He bought the site for his down-town store against their most earnest expostulations. It was too far up town. It was on the shilling side of Broadway. No man could do a successful business there. The price paid was exorbitant. The proposed mammoth store would be the laughing-stock of the age, and would be known as "Stewart's Folly." As usual, he relied on his own judgment. He believed the investment to be a good one. He told his friends that it would be the centre of trade; that on the dollar side or on the shilling side

of the street he intended to create a business that would compel New York and all the region round to trade with him. He is not a liberal man, but his donations to public objects are princely. Tax-gatherers, national, state, and county, say that no man pays his assessments more fairly or more cheerfully. If he is hard, he is just. He keeps his contracts, pays what is nominated in the bond, and no more.

HIS HOME ON FIFTH AVENUE.

He is a shrewd buyer of real estate. He has purchased more churches than any man in the city. He buys when the church is crippled, and gets a bargain both in price and location. His stable on Amity Street was for many years the celebrated Baptist church where Dr. Williams officiated. The Dutch church on Ninth Street wanted a purchaser. Several appeals were made to Mr. Stewart. He had bought odd lots in that neighborhood. When the purchase of the church was complete, it was found that he had the lease of the entire block, and on it his mammoth up-town store now stands. Lafayette Place, once a fashionable locality, was occupied by saloons, restaurants, gambling-houses, and houses for boarding. Governor Morgan had a residence there which he wanted to get rid of. Stewart took compassion on him, and bought the place. Persons wondered what Stewart wanted of that great house, in that out-of-the-way spot. Shortly after, Dr. Osgood's church was for sale, on Broadway. After it had been in the market a long time, Stewart became the purchaser. It was found that the church lot joined

the Lafayette Place lot, making a magnificent site, running from street to street, for a huge store.

The leading desire of fashionable New York is to get a double house or a double lot on Fifth Avenue. Such accommodations are rare, and fabulous prices are paid for land or dwelling. On the corner of Fifth Avenue and Thirty-fourth Street stood a famous house, occupying, with the garden, three lots of land. It was built by a successful sarsaparilla man. It was the largest in New York, built of brown stone, as gorgeous and inconvenient as an Eastern pagoda. It cost fabulous sums. It was large enough for a hotel, and showy enough for a prince. It was burnished with gold and silver, and elaborately ornamented with costly paintings. It was the nine days' wonder in the city, and men and women crowded to see it at twenty-five cents a head. The owner failed, and the house passed out of his hands. It became a school, with no success.

One morning the residents of the avenue were astonished to see a staging built up against this famous pile, reaching to the roof. They were more astonished when they learned that this gorgeous pile was to come down; that its foundations were to be dug up; that a marble palace was to be erected on that site that would make all Shoddydom red with envy; that its furniture, statuary, paintings, and adornments would exceed any house on the continent. Many lessons are taught by the career of Mr. Stewart. It is worth while, on a fine morning, to pause on the Broadway pavement, and watch the small coupé that drives up to the curbstone, drawn by a single horse; to mark the occupant, as with

a light tread and buoyant step he comes from the carriage and enters his store. He is an old man, but looks like a young one. He began life penniless, and has rolled up a fortune greater than that ever before collected by any one man. His mercantile career has been an upward one; his whole life a success. He has earned the title he wears. He is the autocrat of New York merchants.

V.

A SHODDY PARTY.

ITS BRILLIANT OPENING. — ITS FAILURE.

ONE of the citizens of New York was a hatter. He earned a very good living at the business. His wife made vests for a fashionable tailor. She made them well, and by her industry added very much to the comfort of the household. By one of those sudden turns of fortune which overtake men in this city, the man found himself in possession of quite a sum of money. He abandoned hatting, and his wife gave up making vests. He bought a house in an up-town neighborhood. His wife proposed an entrée into good society by giving a large party. The hatting and tailoring acquaintances were to be ignored. They had no others. A new order of associates was to be made through the party. Had these people understood the way of doing things in New York, they would have gone to Brown, of Grace Church, paid him a handsome fee, and he would have stocked their parlors with all the company desirable. Instead of this, they took the Directory, selected five hundred names, among whom were some of the most prominent of our citizens, and sent out invitations, right and left, for an evening named. No expense was spared to make the occasion a great one. The house was gaudily furnished. The

ladies — mother and daughter — were expensively and fashionably attired. The table was laid by one of the first caterers. Dodsworth was engaged for the music. Waiters were called in, dressed in the clerical garb of black and white. The hour came on, but not so the guests. No excuses came. In nothing are the New Yorkers more skittish than about the acquaintances they form and the parties they attend. They will give all they are worth for a ticket to a ball, party, reception, or for a levee where great folks are to be, but they will not accept miscellaneous invitations, though there is plenty to eat. The persons who got up this party were unknown. Strings of young men drifted by the house during the evening. Brilliantly lighted, it attracted general attention. But the bell was silent, and the steps deserted. The curious could see anxious persons peering through the cracks of the blinds at the passers by, supposing themselves unobserved. At a late hour the gas was turned off. During the whole evening the parlors were deserted, the splendid table untouched, and the family, late at night, turned to their couches, with feelings better imagined than described. The candidates for fashionable society were sadly disappointed.

VI.

MRS. BURDELL-CUNNINGHAM.

MRS. CUNNINGHAM AS A HOUSEKEEPER. — AS A WIDOW. — HER MARRIAGE. —
HER DAUGHTERS.

THE noted premises, 31 Bond Street, in this city, were occupied by Dr. Harvey Burdell. He was a dentist, lived in good style, and was reputed to be a man of wealth, and a gentleman. He had a housekeeper in the person of Mrs. Cunningham, to whose character and position he was no stranger. He had known her from her youth. She was reputed to be clever, and to have talents. She was poor, with no visible means of support, and with grown-up daughters on her hands. She kept house for Dr. Burdell, and entertained such company as she chose to receive. She lived in luxury, and passed her summers among the gay and fashionable at Newport and Saratoga. One morning the murdered form of Dr. Burdell was found lying upon the carpet in his office, weltering in his blood. The family who occupied the upper part of the house were absent. Men of political distinction had rooms over Dr. Burdell's apartments. They came in at eleven o'clock at night, and all was still. There was no noise or outcry; no struggle heard during the night. All eyes turned in search of the murderer. The public voice cried for justice. Every ear was alive to the