

day appointed the young lady appeared, and, blushing behind her grandfather's chair, she was in ecstasies as she heard him say, "It is all right. You may get married. Come and see me the morning you are married. Come alone, and I will make you a present." She kept the appointment, and received a check of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

HIS LIBERALITY.

For vagrants, street begging, and miscellaneous calls, Mr. Astor had no ear. His gifts, however, were munificent, and constant. He sent William to Europe to perfect himself in travel. He gave him permission to spend just as much money as he chose. He was absent a year. To a personal friend he expressed surprise that William should have spent so little. "He spent only ten thousand dollars," said the old man. "I thought he would certainly spend fifty thousand dollars."

Attached to his house on Broadway, above Prince, was a narrow alley leading to his kitchen. This kitchen was as large as that of a hotel. A supply of beef and bread was always kept on hand for the poor. Families known to be needy, who were cleanly in person, orderly in their behavior, who came and went quietly, were daily supplied with food. He kept a regular account of the disbursements in this matter, as much as if he were keeping a hotel.

For any service rendered he paid a liberal compensation. To his agent, Mr. Smith, who had the full charge of all his real estate, he paid a salary of five thousand dollars, and gave him the use of an elegant house on Fourteenth Street, well furnished, and contracted to pay this sum during Mr. Smith's natural life.

ASTOR LIBRARY.

His munificent gift of three hundred and fifty thousand dollars to found a Free Library for the City of New York is well known. The founding of that library was one of those incidental things that occasionally turn up. A member of the bar called on Mr. Astor, to see if he would subscribe towards a Free City Library. A plan to establish such an institution had already been mapped out. He took time to consider the proposal, and announced his determination to found the library himself. He chose the site to benefit a friend, whose property would be enhanced in value by that location. He purchased a large amount of real estate in the vicinity of the library, on part of which he built an elegant residence for his son William, and left the remainder to enlarge the library, which has been done.

THE MORLEY LEASE.

In the closing part of the last century, Trinity Church leased to one Mr. Morley two hundred and forty lots of land, in the location now known as the vicinity of Spring Street and Varick. Mr. Morley, failing to keep the conditions of the lease, it reverted to Trinity. Aaron Burr was then a member of the legislature. He was appointed chairman of a committee whose business it was to examine into the affairs of Trinity Church. That corporation can legally receive an income from its property of twelve thousand dollars. Holding a property valued by no one at less than fifty millions, and exceeding probably a hundred millions of dollars, it is difficult to conceive how the vestry can keep their

income down to the legal mark. No investigation was made by Mr. Burr's committee, but Burr came into possession of the Morley lease. On it he obtained thirty-eight thousand dollars from the Manhattan Bank. The murder of Hamilton so incensed the people, that Burr had to flee from the country. He sold his lease to Mr. Astor, subject to the Manhattan Bank mortgage. He received from Mr. Astor about thirty-two thousand dollars. Mr. Astor immediately re-leased the property in lots. The Morley lease was to run until 1867. Persons who took the Astor leases supposed that they took them for the full term of the Trinity lease. Mr. Astor was too far-sighted and too shrewd for that. Every lease he gave expired in 1864, leaving him the reversion for three years, putting him in possession of all the buildings and improvements made on the lots, and giving him the right of renewal. When the fact was discovered, the lessees tried to buy from Mr. Astor the three years' reversion. He was offered as high as a thousand dollars a lot. He refused all offers except in one case, which I shall notice in another place. Returning from his exile, Burr attempted to regain possession of the property that he had sold to Mr. Astor. The attempt was futile. The legal instruments that secured the property were too carefully drawn, and Burr abandoned the contest, and died in poverty. This property was a great source of wealth to Mr. Astor.

HOW HIS WEALTH WAS LEFT.

The amount of Mr. Astor's wealth has never been known outside of his family. Much of it was never included in his will. He dreaded a lawsuit growing out of the settlement of his estate among his heirs, and he prevented it by taking the matter into his own hands. The property left to his children and relatives he deeded to them outright before his death, making the consideration in each case one dollar. For this sum he sold the Astor House to William, and other property equally valuable he sold for the same sum. There could be no contest when the property was bought outright. By the sales, much of the most valuable part of his property was not named in his will at all. He owned valuable real estate in other lands, the titles to which were recorded abroad. He made a valuable donation to his native village, which he held in fond remembrance till he died. His property has been estimated at various sums, by persons equally capable to judge. None place it lower than fifty millions of dollars, some carry it up as high as one hundred and fifty millions. During the last few years of his life he added, from the accumulations of his property, five hundred thousand dollars every six months in codicils to his will.

MR. ASTOR AT EIGHTY-ONE.

To the close of life he was a man of business, careful and jealous of his mercantile honor. On Prince Street, just out of Broadway, he built a one story fire-proof brick building, where he transacted his immense

business. A Mr. Pell, a coach-builder, had his establishment on the corner of Wall Street and Broad. He was a great friend of Mr. Astor. When Mr. Pell made a fashionable coach, Mr. Astor generally took a ride in it to try the springs. This was in the humble days of Mr. Astor's mercantile career. As Mr. Astor increased in wealth their paths diverged, and after a while they saw nothing of each other. The son of Mr. Pell took one of the Astor leases, and when he found that it expired in '64, he went down to the office to see if he could not purchase Mr. Astor's three years' interest in the lease. William gave him a gruff and decided refusal. "We don't want to sell," was his laconic answer. As the young man was going out, some one stepped up to him, and quietly whispered, "See the old man. Come to-morrow at precisely eleven, and you will find him in." The young man said nothing, but went away, and returned the next day a little before the hour. It was very cold, and he took a seat by the fire in the outer office. Promptly on the time Mr. Astor came in. He walked very slowly, doubled up, leaning on the head of his cane in a stooping posture, taking short steps, so that he rather scuffed along than walked. He sat down and warmed himself, and then turning to young Pell, he said, in a pleasant tone, "Young man, what can I do for you?" The request was made. He immediately and decidedly replied, "We don't wish to sell those reversions, young man. But what might your name be?" The young man replied, "It is Pell." "Pell — Pell" — said Mr. Astor, "I used to know a man by that name once; he was a dear friend of mine, but I haven't seen him for a great many years." "Yes," said Mr. Pell, "that

man was my father." "Your father? Why, he used to give me rides in his coaches. How I should like to see him!" For a moment Mr. Astor was young again. "You shall have the lease, young man. Go home, have the papers drawn, come here at eleven o'clock precisely, on Thursday, and I'll sign them. But don't put in any consideration." The young man was prompt, so was Mr. Astor. "Have you got the papers?" said the merchant. "Did you put in the consideration? Well, let it be one hundred dollars. Have you got the money about you? Well, no matter, Bruce will keep the lease till you come and pay. I've given you two thousand dollars, young man. Don't you buy any more, for I shan't do it again. You tell your father that I remember him, and that I have given you two thousand dollars."

HIS RELIGION.

In religious belief Mr. Astor was a Lutheran. He was an elder in the church located on Nassau Street, near John. Here he worshipped till the house was sold and pulled down. He seldom attended church after that, stating that he was sold out of house and home. Rev. Mr. Labough was his pastor. Mr. Astor was afflicted with a complaint that made it difficult for him to sit long at a time. To a clergyman he said, "Men think me a heathen. I cannot sit in church. I have a painful disorder that prevents me." The first Mrs. Astor, the mother of his children, was a member in full communion of the Grove Street Baptist Church. She was a woman of great business tact, high principles, and strong common sense. Her house was always open to ministers of religion.

HIS CLOSING HOURS.

Mr. Astor lived in a style becoming his wealth and position. He purchased the block on Broadway, opposite the site now occupied by the Metropolitan Hotel. His house was large, and furnished in princely style. His apartments were adorned by costly works of art, and the richest plate was displayed on his table. He had servants and attendants, some of whom came from foreign nations. His dinners were princely. He dressed in good taste, was fluent in speech, very intelligent, met all comers with a genial smile, and was prompt and decided in all he did. It was a pleasure to do business with him. The closing weeks of his life were passed at his country-seat at the foot of Eighty-eighth Street, on the East River. Under the old trees on his lawn, and in his splendid mansion, he dispensed an elegant hospitality to his friends. He had traced, with great interest, the career of the young clerk whom he would not allow to work for him on the Sunday many years before. He knew well that the hour of dissolution was approaching. He sent for his former clerk, now an eminent minister of religion in the city. The party who had charge of the door did not know that the minister had been sent for by the dying merchant. Thinking the minister wanted money, he closed the door upon him, and would not allow him to enter. The dying wish of Mr. Astor was not gratified, and what he wished to breathe into the ear of the man of God was buried with him in his coffin. In appearance, Mr. Astor was of medium height, quite stout, with a full German face, radiant with intelligence and kindness.

In social life he was modest and unassuming, but in trade an autocrat in bearing. He died in the city of New York on the 25th day of March, 1848. A marble bust in the Astor Library preserves his benign features. A small engraving, quite imperfect, is the only representation of the great merchant that now exists.