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WILLIAM B. ASTOR.

A MAN OF THE OLD SCHOOL. — HIS OFFICE. — MR. ASTOR AS A CITIZEN. —

MR. ASTOR'S SONS. — JOHN JACOB ASTOR, JR.

A MAN OF THE OLD SCHOOL.

MR. ASTOR is the son of John Jacob Astor. To him the fame and fortune of his father have been intrusted. He is about seventy years of age. He is a tall, heavy-built man, with a decided German look, a countenance blank, eyes small and contracted, a look sluggish and unimpassioned, unimpressible in his feelings, taciturn and unsocial. He has his father's ability for acquiring property. His habits are very simple, and mode of life uniform. He rises early, and does his private correspondence before breakfast, which meal he takes at nine o'clock. He lives in Lafayette Place, and usually walks down to his office in the morning. There is nothing about him to attract attention. He would not be distinguished from the crowd anywhere. In church he might be taken for a college professor; on 'change, for a merchant who had very little interest in what was going on. He belongs to a race of merchants, fast dying out in the city, who attend to their own business.

HIS OFFICE,

On Prince Street, just out of Broadway, is a plain, one-story building, looking not unlike a country bank. The windows are guarded by heavy iron bars. Here Mr. Astor controls his immense estate. In 1846, Mr. Astor was reputed to be worth five millions. His uncle Henry, a celebrated butcher in the Bowery, left him his accumulated wealth, reaching half a million. By fortunate investments, and donations from his father, he is now supposed to be worth forty millions. His property is mostly in real estate, and in valuable leases of property belonging to Trinity Church. At ten o'clock every morning Mr. Astor enters his office. It consists of two rooms. The first is occupied by his clerks. His sons have a desk on either side of the room. In the rear room, separated from the front by folding doors, is Mr. Astor's office. It is plainly and scantily furnished, but it is open to everybody. On entering the outer office, Mr. Astor is plainly in sight, sitting at his table. His room is guarded by no porter; no introduction is necessary. You see before you a heavy-moulded, large man, who puts on no airs, asks no questions, says nothing till your business is announced. He hears what you have to say, and in the fewest possible words gives you an answer. To annoy him with a long talk is simply impossible. He is curt and decided, and is as chary of his words as he is of his dollars. He knows every inch of real estate that stands in his name, every bond, contract, and lease. He knows what is due when leases expire, and attends personally to all this matter. No tenant can expend a

dollar, or put in a pane of glass, without his personal inspection. His father sold him the Astor House for the sum of one dollar. The lessees are not allowed to spend one cent on that building without his supervision and consent, unless they pay for it themselves. In the upper part of New York hundreds of lots can be seen enclosed by dilapidated fences, disfigured by rocks and waste material, or occupied as gardens; mostly corner lots. These are eligibly located, many of them surrounded by a fashionable population. They give an untidy and bankrupt appearance to the upper part of the city. Mr. Astor owns most of these corner lots. He will sell the centre lots, but keeps the corners for a rise. He will neither sell nor improve them. Frequently men call, and announce some great improvement in the vicinity of his up-town property. They are about to build a church, or put up some public institution, and ask of him a subscription. He usually gives nothing. He knows that no parties can improve the centre of the block without benefiting the corners. He knows that the improvements will go on whether he gives or not. He leaves the giving to others, while he enjoys the profit.

MR. ASTOR AS A CITIZEN.

He is very unlike his father. He has none of the genial, hearty, and contagious vivacity that marked the elder Mr. Astor. He has none of that love of trade and enterprise of his father. He sits in his office, which has the general air of a house of detention, day after day. His business is with investments. He makes them wisely, and quietly waits for the advance. He is

sombre and solitary, dwells alone, and mixes little with general society. He is liberal on special occasions; gives little to general charity, abhors beggars, and is a man with whom solicitors do not care to waste words. Politicians cannot bleed him. He has answered his father's wishes by additions to the Astor Library, and has never bound himself up with the educational or benevolent enterprises of the day. Business hours over, he locks his desk, and turns from his office into Broadway. He seldom rides. At a given hour, each afternoon, he can be seen joining the up-town throng on the pavement, walking towards his home.

He lives in princely style in a mansion built for him by his father, adjoining the Astor Library. He is very frugal in his living, rarely touching a glass of wine. During the season he gives dinners frequently to his friends, than which none are more elegant in the city. His gold plate, servants in livery, the delicacies of the season, make the Astor dinners a speciality in New York. Mrs. Astor was the daughter of General Armstrong, Mr. Madison's Secretary of War. She is one of the most accomplished and benevolent ladies in the city.

MR. ASTOR'S SONS,

John Jacob, and William B., Jr., do business with their father. The eldest, John Jacob, is a large-framed, heavy-moulded man, resembling his father. William B. is a small, slim man, with raven black hair, resembling his mother. They are rich in inherited wealth, and are rich in wealth that they have accumulated. They live in fashionable style on Fifth Avenue. They are first-class business men. No banker and no clerk in New

York goes more regularly and systematically to business than do these young men. They unite the genial vivacity of their grandfather and the sturdy adherence to business of their father. Every day they can be seen walking down to their business in Wall Street, to which they attend as devotedly as if their support and fortune depended upon it. They are seldom separate, and at the close of business they walk up together with the crowd from Wall Street. Should their father die to-day, they could take his immense business, with which they are well acquainted, and carry it on in the same manner in which it has been conducted since the death of their grandfather. They are very liberal, and have made great contributions to the Union cause during our civil war. John Jacob entered personally into the conflict, became a member of the staff of the commanding general, and was in many deadly conflicts.

JOHN JACOB ASTOR,

The senior brother of William B. Astor, inherited the name of his father. He was an imbecile from his birth. He was tenderly cared for while his father lived. A fine mansion — including an entire block on Fourteenth Street, with stables, grounds, and fine gardens, coaches, horses, and servants — was provided for his comfort. Whoever else was cared for, this son must not be neglected. The whole property of Mr. Astor was charged with this trust. A physician was chosen as his guardian. He lived in the mansion, enjoyed its elegant appointments, had his table furnished, and servants and carriages provided. Under his eye Mr. Astor was quiet and docile as a child. But

he could not be left. In the contract made, the guardian had permission to go to church without his charge. But to all other places — concerts, lectures, theatres, social visits, parties, up town, down town, travelling, or at home — the two were together. Walking a little behind the physician, Mr. Astor could be seen daily in the streets of New York. If disposed to be turbulent, or noisy, or rude, all the physician had to do was to lift his finger, and say, "Astor, be a man!" and he would subside at once. He was not obliged to sleep with Mr. Astor at night, but the door of his room, which connected, was always kept open. Besides the house and perquisites, the physician was paid a salary of five thousand dollars a year.

On the death of his father, William B. Astor thought the compensation too much. He thought the comfort of his brother could be secured without such an outlay. He notified the doctor, who had had his brother in charge for so many years, that he should reduce his salary. The physician resigned, and a new guardian was placed over the brother. The removal of his old friend transformed him. He became wild and furious. Like the man among the tombs, no one could tame him. He smashed the windows, broke up the furniture, destroyed everything he could lay his hands on. He was a man of immense size and great natural strength; and now that he was maddened, he was as furious as a wild beast. In terror the family fled to the old guardian for relief. He refused to return. Out of love for John Jacob Astor, he had for years denied himself every comfort, and been a slave to his son. He had been dismissed from mercenary motives, and

he chose not to renew the engagement. The maddened man could not be controlled. In the lull of his paroxysms he moaned for his old friend. At length the doctor relented. He would go back for a salary of ten thousand dollars, secured to him for a term of years. The bargain was closed. The old eye and the familiar voice subdued the patient, and there was no outbreak afterwards.

XX.

CORNELIUS VANDERBILT.

EARLY LIFE.—MR. VANDERBILT IN HIS OFFICE.—PERSONAL.—AS A RAILROAD MAN.—MR. VANDERBILT ON THE OCEAN.—GREAT GIFT TO THE NATION.

THIS gentleman, known as Commodore Vanderbilt, is one of the self-made millionnaires of the city. He began life a penniless boy. He took to the water early. He began life on his own account by rowing a boat from Staten Island to this city. He took command of a North River steamboat when quite young, and was distinguished at the start for his resolute, indomitable, and daring will. He began his moneyed success by chartering steamboats, and running opposition to all the old lines, up the North River, up the East River, up the Connecticut River, everywhere. Making a little money, he invested it in stocks which were available in cash, and always ready for a bargain. Honorable in trade, prompt, firm, and reliable, he was decided in his business, and could drive as hard a bargain as any man in the city. His custom has been to conduct his business on the cash principle, and never allow a Saturday night to close without every man in his employ getting his money. If anybody was about to fail, wanted money, had a bargain to offer, he knew where to call.