

are entitled to the highest commendation. There seems to be among them a general anxiety to excel in personal deportment, neatness of attire, and proficiency in military acquirement. The fidelity with which the various duties that devolve upon them are performed entitles the members of the force, with inconsiderable exceptions, to our special approbation."

## XXXIV.

GENERAL CHARLES STETSON AND  
THE ASTOR HOUSE.

ORIGIN OF THE ASTOR HOUSE. — NEW YORK AROUND THE ASTOR. — GENERAL STETSON AND THE ASTOR. — THIRTY YEARS OF HOTEL LIFE. — MR. JONES THE BAGGAGE MAN. — ROOM NUMBER ELEVEN THURLOW WEED'S NEW YORK HOME. — MR. WEED'S EARLY CAREER. — SECRET OF HIS POWER. — HUMANE. — AN INCIDENT. — PERSONAL. — MR. WEBSTER AT THE ASTOR HOUSE. — AN INCIDENT. — MR. WEBSTER'S BIRTHDAY. — BALTIMORE NOMINATION. — MR. WEBSTER AND GENERAL TAYLOR.

## ORIGIN OF THE ASTOR HOUSE.

This celebrated hotel stands on the site where its founder lived during the greater part of his active business life. In the year 1824 John Jacob Astor surrendered his house to his son, William B. John G. Costar resided on the block, and his house formed the corner of Barclay Street and Broadway. David Suydam, the famous flour merchant, resided on the block. Michael Paff, who was a companion of Mr. Astor across the Atlantic, kept his celebrated picture gallery on the corner of Vesey Street and Broadway. The resolution to build a hotel that should bear his name Mr. Astor kept a secret. He quietly purchased lot after lot until he owned the whole block, Mr. Costar's house alone excepted. Mr. Costar was rich, liked the location, and refused to sell.

Mr. Astor made a proposition to Mr. Costar, that each should name a friend, the two should choose a third, and they should estimate the value of the property. To the sum named, Mr. Astor agreed to add twenty thousand dollars. This proposition was acceded to, and the land became Mr. Astor's. In 1836, on the 1st of June, the Astor House was thrown open to the public. It was then in the extreme upper part of New York. It soon became the most famous hotel in the nation. It has always been the centre of travel and trade. The omnibuses and street cars, connecting with all the ferries, places of amusement, and railroads, start from the Astor. The great rotunda is high 'change daily for the eminent men of the nation. Political societies, clubs, benevolent organizations, and great corporations hold their meetings at this hotel.

#### NEW YORK AROUND THE ASTOR.

When this hotel was opened, in 1836, all New York was below the hotel. Trinity Church was the centre of the city. The Fulton Street Dutch Church was so far up town, that people residing in lower New York could not reach it with comfort. Mr. Astor was generally censured for putting his hotel so far away from the residences of the people. There were then but two hotels above the Astor—the American, where Lafayette was entertained, on the corner above, and the Washington, which stood where A. T. Stewart's down-town store now stands. Any one who looks, will see that the City Hall has a marble front and a free-stone rear. No one supposed the city would ever reach above the City Hall, and the economical Dutch

saved the difference between brown stone and marble. On Barclay Street there was but one store, and that was a grocery, that stood on the corner opposite St. Peter's Church. All Park Place, and from the Astor to Chambers Street, and from Broadway to Greenwich, and from Barclay to Canal, was occupied by the aristocracy, and the houses were occupied by the rich and well-to-do merchants of the city. The ultra fashionable dwelt round St. John's Park. Trade, starting from the Battery, hugged the East River to Chambers Street. Pearl Street contained the stores of the solid merchants of the city. Beekman Street was the limit of the up-town dry-goods trade. The city above Fourteenth Street was a cornfield. Straying from Canal Street up town, the houses growing more and more scarce, ended with Union Square. It was then no square, but an enclosed common. It was beyond the lamp district; the old leather-heads, who guarded the city, never went beyond the lamps: people who walked in that dark locality had to look out for themselves. Where Cooper Institute and the Bible House stand there was a common, without improvement; no omnibuses ran in the city, and there were no street cars. The Astor House was away up town, and there was no place to go to. The churches, hotels, and places of amusement were down town; a single railroad track was laid from Chatham Square to Yorkville, and steam was used above Fourteenth Street. The great avenues in the western part of the city lie in the region then known as Chelsea. This was as much in the country as the Elysian Fields now are. City schools took a holiday, and went to Chelsea to take the air. Trade drove the Episcopal

Theological Seminary from down town: a farm in Chelsea was presented to the institution by a Mr. Moore. It was so far into the country, that it was doubtful whether any student could ever find it. Bishop Hobart laid the corner-stone of the present buildings. He congratulated the friends of sacred learning that the seminary was beyond the reach of trade for a century at least. It is now far down town, on Twentieth Street, below the Ninth Avenue: business has overtaken it and outrun it. It sends its unwelcomed din within the rooms of the student. It has swept away already the beautiful park of St. John. It is making rapid strides towards this college.

GENERAL STETSON AND THE ASTOR.

Thirty-two years ago Mr. Stetson became proprietor of this hotel. He was then a young man; but his promise as a hotel-keeper was manifest, and his ability had reached the ears of Mr. Astor. While on a visit to New York, Mr. Stetson took a fancy to the Astor House. Things did not work smoothly with the proprietors, and the owner of the house was not satisfied. Mr. Stetson received a note one day from Mr. Astor, requesting him to call upon him. Measuring the young man from foot to head for some time, the old merchant said, "I understand you want to do some business with me, young man." Mr. Stetson very coolly replied, that he understood that Mr. Astor wanted to transact some business with him; that his confidential clerk had written him a note, asking him to call, but if Mr. Astor had no business, he would bid him good morning, as he had but a short time to remain in the city. The independence of the young man rather pleased the old

merchant, and he said, "Sit down, young man; don't be in such a hurry. What are you going to do, young man?" "I am going to get my living, and get it by hotel keeping." "And you think you can keep my hotel—do you?" "Yes," said the young Napoleon, "I can keep any hotel in the city. I will keep a hotel, not a tavern." "And what is the difference between a tavern and a hotel?" said Mr. Astor. "Just the difference between what your hotel is and what you wish it to be. A tavern keeper knows how to go to market, and how to feed so many people at a public table. A hotel keeper is a gentleman who stands on a level with his guests." The young man proved to be one after Mr. Astor's own heart. He made terms with him. Mr. Stetson said he was penniless, with nothing but his honor, and he wanted Mr. Astor to furnish him with funds sufficient to buy out the proprietors, and put the hotel in complete running order. "And how much money will you want?" said the old man. "I may not want more than one thousand dollars, I may want twenty; but I will not take the house unless I can draw on you for fifty thousand dollars if I need it. I will buy the lease if it costs me twenty thousand dollars, and put the house in perfect order if it costs me twenty thousand more." "Fifty thousand dollars is a great deal of money," said Mr. Astor, "and I have no security." "Yes, you have; you have my honor, and the promise that I will keep what you want—a first-class hotel." The rigid terms were acceded to. Thirty years ago, at two o'clock, on the 12th of July, the papers were passed, and Mr. Stetson became the proprietor of the Astor House.

## THIRTY YEARS OF HOTEL LIFE.

Mr. Stetson is still connected with the Astor. He can be seen daily in the corridors of the hotel, in the ripeness of mature life, welcoming, with a manly, hearty frankness, his friends beneath his roof. He has never sunk the man in his business. He has been the bosom companion and friend of the most eminent men of the land; intelligent, large-hearted, and well informed, and is a genial companion. The Astor has been the home of all the eminent men of America. Mr. Stetson has more of the unwritten history of the country in his possession than any other man, and he knows more of the private history of the leading men of the country than any other person. His liberality and generosity are unbounded. His gifts to the poor have been constant and large. During the war he kept open house to officers and men, and gave the stewards of the hospitals the free run of his kitchen. His honor is untarnished, and his reputation without a stain. When cruelly wronged by others, and the earnings of his life were swept away by the fraud of associates, no one doubted his integrity. The owner of the Astor House came to him, and said, "Mr. Stetson, your load is too heavy; pay us no rent till we call for it, and give yourself no trouble about it." And they bore the load till Mr. Stetson could carry it. Great commercial convulsions roar past the dwellings of hotel keepers as well as others, in disastrous times which make the stoutest merchants stagger. The same proprietors, though they could have entered advantageously to themselves, and taken possession, yet came forward and made a liberal

arrangement with a company by which the profits of the lease could be restored to Mr. Stetson and his family. Mr. Stetson's mantle seems to have fallen on his sons. The elder keeps the hotel in Central Park. He must have character and skill, or the commissioners would not have intrusted that important house to his keeping. When the splendid hotel at Long Branch was reared, no name was considered more fitting for it to bear than that of Stetson. It has been kept with great success for two seasons by Charles, Jr., in connection with his uncle James. The younger son made a brilliant record in the war, and by his personal heroism more than once saved the fortune of the day. And though only a captain, he has led a brigade to battle. He has now taken the Astor House, and has full charge of its immense business.

## MR. JONES, THE BAGGAGE-MASTER.

On entering the hotel, a quiet gentleman was for many years seen sitting near the baggage. He sat there more than thirty years. He is about sixty years of age. He has a quick ear, a sharp eye, and a ready step. He came to the hotel before Mr. Stetson. This gentleman was Mr. Jones, the baggage-master. He had charge of all luggage that came or went. Everything was under his direction. Give Mr. Jones the key of your room, your checks, or your order, and you could eat your meals in quietness. No trunk got on the wrong coach, no bundles were left behind, if Mr. Jones had charge. He handled the trunks of nearly all the great men of the nation. Belles and dames of distinction in the New World and in the Old

knew him. He saw millionnaires reduced to penury, merchant princes fail, and the proud ones become lowly. He had no salary during the long term of thirty years. All his pay was from the voluntary contributions of the house. At the close of the day's duties, Mr. Jones changed his attire, put on a fashionable overcoat, and with cane in hand set out for his brown-stone house in upper New York. He lived near Fifth Avenue. His house was elegantly furnished, and he lived in fine style. Mr. Jones picked up and saved, by carrying trunks up and down the hotel stairs, the snug sum of seventy-five to one hundred thousand dollars. His relatives, connected with the old Astor, had a fine start, and some of them have made fortunes. To see Mr. Jones in the cars, in his spruce array and blithe manner, one would take him to be a well-to-do down-town merchant.

While I write, the remains of Mr. Jones are being carried to their long home. He reached the full age of seventy years. He was always at his post; courteous, attentive, prompt, faithful, he discharged his duties with acceptance. He could answer any question about routes, teams, and trains that any one could ask. He was honest and trustful, and a gentleman of the old school. He was intimate with the prominent men of two generations. Van Buren knew him. He called up the trunks of Taylor and Buchanan. Pierce and Lincoln treated him with respect. He was a man after Mr. Webster's own heart. General Grant confided in him, and he could claim Admiral Farragut as his friend. Beloved, respected, and honored by all, he passed away in a moment, in the ripeness of age, and amid the general sorrow of his friends.

ROOM NUMBER ELEVEN THURLOW WEED'S NEW YORK HOME.

One of the most famous rooms in the Astor is No. 11. It is on the parlor floor, near the ladies' entrance. It consists of one room and a small ante-room. Save the President's room at the White House, no room in America has had a greater influence on the political destinies than room No. 11. This is the room occupied by Thurlow Weed. He has occupied it for a term of years. Men of mark in the nation and in the world, cabinet officers and foreign ministers, eminent civilians, governors of states and territories, with members of Congress, when in New York find their way to No. 11. In that little room Presidents have been made and destroyed, foreign embassies arranged, the patronage of the nation and state distributed, and the "slates" of ambitious and scheming politicians smashed. Mr. Weed has long been the Warwick in politics. He is eminently practical, keen, and far-sighted. He looks for success, and when his party follows his lead it generally triumphs. Without office, emolument, or political gifts to bestow on his friends, he has more influence with the politicians of the land than any man in America. He has great gifts as a writer. His short, sharp, telling articles, signed T. W., attract universal attention.

He is a marked man about the Astor. He never walks through the corridors but he attracts attention, and the universal inquiry is, Who is that gentleman? He walks generally alone, with a soft, cat-like tread, his head inclined on one side, and as if in great haste. His tone of conversation is low, like one trained to

caution in his utterances, lest he should be overheard. He is tall, with a slight stoop. He carries an air of benevolence in his face, and looks like a man of letters, and would easily be mistaken for a professor, or a doctor of divinity. His modesty and activity are marvellous. He is seldom at rest, but comes and goes like one driven by an impulse that is irresistible. He takes the evening train, and is back to business the next morning. He walks into the dining-room, and before you can say, "There is Thurlow Weed," he has eaten and gone. While he sits at his breakfast at the Astor, he reads the telegraph that announces his arrival in Albany. A message comes to him in cipher. He takes the midnight train for Washington, and before the press can announce his arrival, he is back to his old quarters.

#### MR. WEED'S EARLY CAREER.

He took to the daily press as some boys take to the sea. He has great tact in editing a paper, and is one of the best letter writers in the land. He has travelled much, and his correspondence from foreign lands, and from different parts of our own country, is a model of terseness, raciness, and spirit. He appeared to the public as an editor in Rochester. He bought out a half interest in a small paper. The Anti-masonic excitement was then raging. He admitted an article into his weekly, denouncing the arrest and death of Morgan. He wrote an editorial on the same subject. The publication of these articles brought a storm of indignation upon him that sunk his little craft. Mr. Weed thought it not fair that his partner should suffer. He bought out his interest, moved the concern to Albany, and set

up an independent paper. He formed an intimate connection with Governor William H. Seward, now Secretary of State. The two constituted a mighty power in the political world, which continued for over thirty years, controlling the destiny of the state, and dividing its patronage. It was the general impression that Mr. Weed earned the laurels and Mr. Seward wore them. Mr. Seward is very fond of his cigar. In old stage times he generally rode with the driver, that he might enjoy his favorite Havana. While riding one day, the driver eyed the quiet, silent gentleman for some time, and thought he would find out who he was. Addressing himself to Mr. Seward, he said, "Captain, what are you?" "Guess," was the reply. "A farmer?" "No." "A merchant?" "No." "A minister?" "No." "Well, what then?" "Governor." "Governor of what?" "Of this state." "I guess not." "Inquire at the next tavern." Driving up, Mr. Seward asked the proprietor, "Do you know me?" "Yes!" "What is my name?" "SEWARD." "Am I Governor of New York?" "No, by thunder! THURLOW WEED is."

#### SECRET OF HIS POWER.

Mr. Weed has held long political rule. He has talent, tact, industry, and shrewdness; more than all, he has heart. To all dependents, however humble, he is considerate. There is not a boy or man on the great lines from New York to the lakes who does not know and love him. A conductor said, "Mr. Weed could send a glass vase to Galena by the boys, and not have it broken." He pays liberally for all favors, and has a peculiar way of attaching persons to himself. To the